

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last year, the Credentials Committee of Louisville Regional Baptist Association has reviewed a number of constitutions, for churches seeking to become members of the association, which raised questions with respect to Baptist polity. These questions have primarily centered on the role and responsibilities of the congregation, pastor or elder(s), or deacons. In order to develop consistent parameters for the work of the Credentials Committee, the committee asked the Administrative Committee to address the parameters question(s). This report is the Administrative Committee's response to the Credentials Committee and recommendation to the Executive Board for approval.

Submitted by The Baptist Polity Committee:

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## **CHURCH POLITY**

### **DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In matters of church polity, Baptists historically have believed in and practiced a congregational form of church government. It is believed that each local church is independent and autonomous, which means it is free to govern its own affairs without outside interference from other churches or boards. Baptists have also believed that in a congregational form of government, the authority delegated to a local church by Christ rests with the congregation as a whole, not just with its leaders or boards.

The 1963 Baptist Faith and Message makes the following statement concerning the New Testament Church; “This church is an autonomous body *operating through democratic processes* under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation, members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.” The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message says; “Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ *through democratic processes*. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its Scriptural offices are pastors and deacons.”

How do we understand the phrase “democratic processes”, or more to the point of our discussion at hand, how have Baptists historically understood “democratic processes”? It is interesting to note that in Baptist confessions, the phrase “democratic processes” or even the word “democratic” does not show up until the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message. However, historically, Baptists have a lot to say about “democratic processes” in church government. B.H. Carroll called the church a “pure democracy”, and says the following concerning the church;

“Indeed it is the only one in the world. There is no disbarment of franchise on account of race, education, wealth, age, or sex. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, bond or free, man or woman or child. All its members are equal fellow-citizens, and the *majority decides*. It is of the people, for the people, by the people. *This democracy* receives and dismisses its members, *chooses or deposes its own officers*, and manages its own affairs.”<sup>1</sup>

The Charleston Baptist Association stated the following concerning the church in 1774;

“A church thus constituted has the keys, or *power of government, within itself*, having Christ for its head, and his law for its rule. It has the power and privilege of choosing its own officers, Acts 6:3, 13:2, exercising its own discipline, Matt. 18:17, and of administering the Word and ordinances, of the edification and comfort of its members, Acts 2:46. All which, with every other act of discipline, each distinct church may exercise, without being subject to the cognizance of any other church, presbytery, synod, or council whatever, I Cor. 5:12, Matt. 18:17. Churches being vested with such power ought to use it with prudence lest they dishonor Christ and his cause or wound their fellow members, I Cor. 10:31, Rom. 15:2. To guard against which, church business should be debated deliberately with humility and moderation; that if possible, the

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<sup>1</sup> B.H. Carroll, Distinctive Baptist Principles

members may be unanimous in all their determinations. Nevertheless, when this unanimity cannot be attained, a majority of the male members may determine, and the minority ought peaceably to submit. This appears not only from that general rule, Eph. 5:21, 'submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God', but more clearly from II Cor. 2:6, 'sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was 'inflicted of many', which many supposes a majority; in the original its *hupo ton pleionon*, 'by the more', the greater or major part, which plainly points out a decision by a majority."<sup>2</sup>

Putting aside the issue of women not being able to vote, what is clearly seen is the idea of "democratic processes". The members of the church have the final say in matters of church business.

W.B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, says the following about the church:

"The government of a church is sometimes called *democratical*, that is, a *government by the members of the body*. And so far as the mode of administering the laws of Christ is regarded, this is a proper term. For, in the account given of the first churches, each one managed its own affairs within itself, by the voice of its own members, not amenable to any other church or body of churches."<sup>3</sup>

"The government of a church his sometimes called independent. And this must necessarily be so, if the *democratical* form be its mode of government. But this is true only as the relation of one church to all the others is regarded. The power of a church derived, not original, delegated, not transferable. Its power is then necessarily dependent upon him from whom it is derived, and therefore, restricted to those objects which he commands them to accomplish, and within those bounds which he prescribes. Unless, then, there is, in the character of the church, authority to transfer its power to some other body, it may not so transfer it. Now, so far as I understand the New Testament, I see no authority given to a church of Christ to transfer its power or authority to any other church or body of men on earth. The New Testament knows nothing of a confederation of churches by delegates, with authority to enact any rule of the churches represented. It is a stranger to associations, synods, conventions, or general councils having authority over churches."<sup>4</sup>

"As churches stand related to each other, they are parts of a great whole, and the more they are conformable to the will of Christ the nearer in affection and harmony will they be to one another. But in point of government they are wholly independent of each other. In the exercise of their freedom as the servants of Christ, they will find ample scope for all their powers in the study and application of the laws of their King. In the church, the members, as brethren in Christ, all on a footing. In this sense, *the church is a*

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<sup>2</sup> *A Summary of Church Discipline*, By the Baptist Association in Charleston, South Carolina, 1774; Reprinted in *Polity*, Edited by Mark Dever.

<sup>3</sup> *The Gospel Developed Through The Government And Order Of The Churches Of Jesus Christ*, 1846; Reprinted in *Polity*, Edited by Mark Dever.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

*democratical assembly*, in which the rights of each member are respected, and by a popular vote, all business is regulated.”<sup>5</sup>

Again, we see an understanding of “democratic processes” in which each member of the church has a voice concerning matters of business. Johnson later talks about the great responsibility that rests on each member to be involved in the business of the church and it is a responsibility that members can not shake off.

In a statement of faith, the Green River Association of Warren County, KY, said the following about the church;

“We believe Christ is the great head of the church and that the *government thereof is with the body.*”<sup>6</sup>

S.H. Ford of Paducah KY preached a sermon before the West Union Baptist Association in September of 1852, and said the following concerning the church;

“*Democratic in its government*, with no exofficio rulers, with a perfect parity among its ministers and members.”<sup>7</sup>

The idea of democratic processes is something that Baptists have understood to be part of a congregational form of government. It is clear that democratic processes meant that all members of a particular local not only had the right, but the duty to participate in the business of the church. This includes the election of officers.

Baptists have always been clear that there are only two offices in a New Testament church found in Scripture. These two offices are the office of an Elder, or Pastor, and the office of Deacon. You will find some early Baptist advocated a plurality of Elders in the local church, and some saying only one is needed. In fact when you look at early circular letters written in many associations it is not uncommon to find Elders of local churches being mentioned and even writing some of the circular letters. The Tates Creek Baptist Association in KY, formed in 1793, said that one preacher and two elders might constitute a church.

One thing most early Baptists were clear on is the fact that there were not two kinds of Elders. In other words, “Ruling Elders” and “Lay Elders”. Most rejected the idea of Ruling Elders. They viewed the Elders as having equal rights and authority. As to the number of Elders in a local church, this was considered to be of minor importance. William Williams, one of the four founding professors of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary said this concerning the number of Elders and Deacons in a local church;

“Minor circumstantial may vary, while the essential, substantial form is retained. There may be but one Elder to a church instead of a plurality, or but one or two Deacons instead

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Statement of faith, Green River Association, Warren County, KY, June 1800

<sup>7</sup> *Past and Future of the Baptist Churches*, Sermon preached in September 1852 before the West Union Association in KY.

of seven, but the number belongs to the circumstantial; it is the office that is the essential thing.”<sup>8</sup>

“In reference to government in general, it is conceded, perhaps universally, that a system which is founded upon the *principle of self-government*, in which *all authority emanates from the people and is in the hands of the people*, is the best, if they have sufficient intelligence and virtue to conduct so good a system. But it is admitted, as before shown, that this was the kind of government instituted by the apostles, and in the infancy of the church.”

Authority emanating from the people, this seems to be the very essence of democratic processes in the thinking of early Baptists. At the heart of this was the right of church members to elect their Elders and Deacons. In other words, Elders and Deacons were not a self-perpetuating office. The members of the church had a say in who served in these positions, and the Elders and Deacons were answerable to the congregation. Here is what Williams had to say concerning the choosing of the officers in the early church;

“These officers, elders and deacons, *were chosen by popular election*. In the case of the deacons this is evident. As to the elders, Scripture is silent, but in this case, this very silence is significant, since in every voluntary society, and a church is such, *popular election is the normal rule* and need not be expressly stated, but any other mode would require express teaching, and there is none such.”<sup>9</sup>

J.L. Reynolds, an early Southern Baptist leader had this to say about the election of Elders and Deacons;

“A Careful examination of the Scriptures has thus led us to the conclusion, that Christ has provided for his churches only two classes of officers, bishops, or elders, and deacons. *These officers are chosen by the people*, and derive all their authority, under the Great Head of the church, from the consent of the governed.”<sup>10</sup>

Reynolds later said the following concerning the advantages of Scriptural church polity;

“Upon such a church, Christ has conferred the *prerogative of self-government*, under his laws. It is the right and duty of a church to interpret these laws for itself, and to declare what it considers the will of Christ to be, with reference to doctrines, ordinances, moral duties, the terms of communion, and church order, and to govern all its members accordingly, to receive persons to fellowship and to expel offenders, and to *choose its own officers*.”<sup>11</sup>

“It therefore, excludes every such thing as a provincial or national church, the aggregation of churches, and the centralization or consolidation of church power. It is

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<sup>8</sup> *Apostolical Church Polity*, William Williams, 1874, Reprinted in *Polity*, edited by Mark Dever.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *Church Polity or The Kingdom of Christ*, J.L. Reynolds, Reprinted in *Polity*, edited by Mark Dever.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

distinguished from all churches established by law, by asking no aid from the civil ruler, and denying to him all right to interfere with its concerns. It differs from these systems by the principle that *all church power resides in the church, and not in its officers*, and resides in each church directly and originally by virtue of the voluntary compact of its members, under its divine charter. In fine, it is distinguished from all other systems by the principle that every individual is personally responsible for his religious acts and exercises, that no infant is born a member of the church, nor can be made such by any ecclesiastical rite, personal piety being insisted on as an indispensable qualification for membership.”<sup>12</sup>

The Philadelphia Baptist Association, organized in 1707 and which was the first Baptist association in America, gave the following answer to a question submitted by one of the churches;

Question: What course to take in the choosing of a ruling elder in the church?

Answer: We answer that a church wanting ruling elders or deacons as in other cases should set aside a day apart and by fasting and prayer, seek the guidance and direction of God, and *unanimously pitch upon one or more of their brethren* to act upon trial in the office of ruling elder or deacon.

It is clear that regardless of how many Elders or Deacons a church decided to have, these leaders were to be elected by the local church in which they would serve. The congregation as a whole had a say in who would lead them in ministry in the local church.

Early Baptist confessions of faith speak about some of these same issues when it comes to a New Testament Church. In article 13 of John Smyth’s Short Confession of Faith, it says this about the local church;

“That the church of Christ *has power delegated to themselves* of announcing the Word, administering the sacraments, appointing ministers, disclaiming them, and also excommunicating, *but the last appeal is to the brethren or body of the church.*”

The first London Confession of Faith in 1644 says this in article 36;

“That being thus joined, every church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, *to choose to themselves* meet persons into the office of pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in His Testament for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of His church, and that none other have power to impose them, either these or any other.”

The Second London Confession of Faith in 1689 says this in chapter 26, paragraph 8;

“A local church, gathered and fully organized according to the mind of Christ consists of officers and members. By Christ’s appointment *the officers to be chosen and set apart by the church as called and gathered*, are bishops (otherwise called elders) and deacons. It is their special responsibility to arrange for the carrying out of what the Lord has ordained,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

and to use the powers entrusted to them for the execution of their duties, and such arrangements are to continue in the church until the world ends.”

Sam Waldron in his exposition of the 1689 Confession of Faith says this concerning paragraph 8;

“The essential features of this appointment are two: election and ordination. The word ‘election’ is used, however, only with the greatest reservation. To modern ears an election connotes several things which clearly deviate from the Word of God. There is no Scriptural instance in which two or more men compete with each other for votes in order to be elected to office in the church. There is no basis for the idea that election is an act of sovereign and autonomous authority or that it is the ultimate source of power in the church. Again, this idea is completely contrary to the Scriptural idea. We have no Biblical right to vote for whomever we please. The term “election” is used only to epitomize what is meant by the Confession when it asserts that calling to an office in the church must be *“by the common suffrage” of the church itself.* (Common Suffrage is the original language of the confession) No one may be appointed to any office in the church *without the consent of the church itself. The elders of the church itself may not appoint a man to be an elder without the consent of the church.* No supposed higher authority may do this, whether that authority is a bishop, a denomination or a pope.”<sup>13</sup>

The Philadelphia Confession of faith of 1742, which is essentially the 1689 Confession, states the same thing concerning the officers of the church.

The New Hampshire Confession of Faith of 1833, which is the basis of the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message, does not mention democratic processes or the choosing of officers. It only lists the officers of a church as elders and deacons. The 1925 Baptist Faith and Message has the same wording as the New Hampshire Confession of Faith.

The 1963 Baptist Faith and Message introduces the language “democratic processes” and this language is carried over to the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message.

It is clear that our early Baptist forefathers understood that “congregational” and “democratic” meant that every member in the church had the right and responsibility to participate in the governing of the church. This includes the right and responsibility to choose its own officers in accord with Scripture. The situation where you would have elders in the church, not chosen by the congregation, and not answerable to the congregation would have been unthinkable to most early Baptists.

The type of church government that sets up elders not chosen by the congregation and not answerable to the congregation, nor answerable to any outside authority, is a hybrid form of church government. It is not Presbyterian, because there is no session to which the congregation can appeal. It is not Baptist or congregational, because the congregation has no say in appointing elders and the elders are not answerable to the congregation. In essence what you have are Baptist Popes. When an elder goes bad, a member of the congregation has no recourse but to leave the church.

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<sup>13</sup> *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, Sam Waldron, pg. 322-323

When it comes to “democratic processes,” historically the issue is not the number of elders or deacons in a local church, but the issue is the involvement of the congregation in choosing its officers. In the words of W.B. Johnson;

“The Christocratic form of government does not treat the members of the churches as mere machines, but as rational, moral beings, the free exercise of whose powers is required in ascertaining and performing their duty, upon high and noble principles of truth and righteousness. It makes provision, therefore, for the exercise of the voluntary, independent, *democratical principle*, as has been shewn in the second chapter of this work. The noble principle of equal rights is also wisely maintained and guarded, in perfect consistency with enlightened and entire submission to the authority of the king in Zion. This form of government is, then, adapted most fitly to the development of the gospel, as a scheme of salvation by grace, and for securing union between the dissevered parts of His kingdom, who will ‘gather together into one all things in Christ’.<sup>14</sup>

W.B. Johnson also had this to say about starting a church;

“When a Church is formed, the enquiry touching the order which she is to adopt, should not be, what are the usages of other churches? But, what are the laws and ordinances which Christ has appointed for the government of His churches? And, if, in the adoption of these, there be departure from the usages of other churches, the enquiry should not be, what will those churches think of such measures? *But, are they right? Are they taught in the Word of God.*”<sup>15</sup>

“Are they taught in the Word of God?” This is the bottom line for Baptists historically. The scope of this inquiry was only limited to the historical understanding of “democratic processes”, but what we must understand is that behind the historical understanding is a deep conviction held by our Baptist forefathers that their view of church government was rooted and grounded in the plain teaching of the Word of God. To quote W.B. Johnson one last time;

“That they are the subjects of one Master to be governed not by their own opinions, or the opinions of others, but by the laws of Christ. In all their enquiries, their judgments, their acts, the question must not be, how feelest thou? How thinkest thou? *But, how readest thou?*”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Gospel Developed Through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ*, W.B. Johnson, 1846, Reprinted in *Polity*, edited by Mark Dever.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

## **PARAMETERS OF BAPTIST POLITY**

According to the *Constitution and By-laws* of the Louisville Regional Baptist Association, churches seeking to join the association must “present evidence of their orderly constitution as a Baptist church” (VIII: 2). This constitution must reflect the standards of the Associational Statement of Faith:

*This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation, members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. (1963 BF&M)*

### **Autonomous Body**

The local church is governed by the Lordship of Jesus Christ as reflected in Scripture. The local church is not controlled by the local association, state convention, or Southern Baptist Convention. However, the local church must meet the standards of an association or convention to qualify for membership in that association or convention.

### **Democratic Processes**

Baptists practice congregational polity. The local church is a self-governing body that does not receive direction from outside the local church, as in an episcopacy or presbytery. The congregation of the local church, as a whole, has the right and responsibility to affirm the decisions and/or decision makers in the local church. However, the purpose of church business meetings is not to micro-manage every facet of the church’s ministry. The church does not practice pure democracy, ruled by majority, without submitting itself to the Word of God and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

### **Members are Equally Responsible**

Baptists believe in the priesthood of all believers. All true followers of Christ have direct access to God through the mediatory work of Christ. They are filled with the Holy Spirit, bear the marks of regeneration, and are called to be Christ’s representatives on earth. Church members are given various spiritual gifts to fulfill their corporate role as the body of Christ, so they have equal responsibility for the overall operation of the church. Church discipline is one example of the church’s responsibility as a congregation.

### **Scriptural Officers are Pastors and Deacons**

The pastor fulfills the role of the elder/overseer/bishop as described in Scripture. Some Baptist congregations maintain a plurality of elders, whether lay elders or pastoral staff. The elder(s), while given the responsibility to lead the church, are held accountable by the congregation.

Deacons are chosen by the local church to be servants of the church. While they lead the church through exemplary service, they are not called to be a board of directors for the church.

Both pastors (elders) and deacons are elected by the local church congregation (directly or indirectly), and are accountable to the congregation.

## **A Biblical Basis for “Congregationalism”**

The recognized form of church government within Baptist Churches is congregationalism. A church that is congregational means that no person or organization from outside can mandate something for or upon them. Congregationalism relies on the clarity of God’s Word and work of the Holy Spirit to lead each individual church to understand who should be recognized as members and leaders, what should be believed, and what should be done. This means that no elder, pastor, group of elders or deacons, board, presbytery, synod, convention, or a conference has the final word. Rather, the entire congregation holds in trust under God, the responsibility for the last word. To gain a clearer understanding, an appeal to the Scriptures is the true source for understanding congregational polity. Four specific matters are cited in the New Testament as examples for congregationalism.

1. Matters of conflict between Christians. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus told of a conflict between brothers:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen {to you,} take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17)

The final appeal is made to “the church,” the whole local congregation. As the early church got started and a problem developed over the distribution of the congregation’s resources, the apostles made an appeal to the entire church.

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. (Acts 6:1-5)

In verse 2 the church body was involved in choosing seven men to address the issue. The apostles provided leadership by handing over this responsibility to the congregation. So, in matters of conflict between Christians, the congregation as a whole is the final authority held out in Scripture.

2. Matters of Doctrine. The New Testament letters were primarily written to congregations (except Philemon and the pastorals) providing instruction on their

responsibilities. The Galatians were to exercise judgment and discernment concerning whether what was being preached was the true gospel. They were to judge those who claim to be messengers of the good News with what they already knew to be the gospel (see Galatians 1:1-9).

In writing to Timothy and the church in Ephesus, Paul makes it clear that they are not to tolerate false teaching. In II Timothy 4:3, he blames those who “to suit their own desires... gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.” The congregation is guilty for tolerating false teachers. In basic doctrinal definition, the congregation as a whole has the final word held out in Scripture.

3. Matters of Discipline. Paul appeals to the whole Corinthian congregation to take action. In I Corinthians 5:5,7,11, and 13 we read:

I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus... Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are {in fact} unleavened... For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one... But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

They had accepted an immoral brother into their fellowship and were tolerating his lifestyle. This was a matter the entire congregation was to take action on. They were to exercise church discipline. The whole church is the final court of appeal as holds out in Scripture.

4. Matters of Church Membership. The Bible says in II Corinthians 2:6-8,

Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

Previously, the congregation had taken action to exclude this immoral brother from their fellowship. The discipline seemed to have worked. Now Paul writes to the entire congregation urging the repentant man's readmission into the church. Paul could do nothing more than encourage, because in matters of church membership, the congregation as a whole must have the final word.

Does this mean that congregationalism is democracy? In some ways, the demos, the people, make decisions, however, the church is also to work together at both trying to understand God's Word as well as following the direction of the leadership. The

congregation needs to trust that God gives particular people gifts to serve as church leaders. Likewise, the leaders need to respect the congregation and recognize that decisions need to be made together.

**A Response to the Question Raised By  
The Credentials Committee  
Of  
Louisville Regional Baptist Association**

**Question:**

***In light of the responsibility of the Credential Committee's responsibility to examine a church's application for membership in Louisville Regional Baptist Association, what criteria can the Committee use to fairly determine the acceptable parameters of Baptist polity?***

**Response:**

Article VII of the Association's Doctrinal Confession states, in part:

*A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.*

*This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.*

In light of our doctrinal affirmation and in response to the question from the Credentials Committee, Louisville Regional Baptist Association affirms the following:

1. Baptists consistently have affirmed congregational polity as the most accurate reflection of New Testament church order.
2. Baptists have maintained the equal right and responsibility of every member of the congregation, recognizing Jesus Christ as Head of the church, to participate in the: call and dismissal of its Scriptural leaders, determination of its policies and the parameters of its ministries and policies, formation of its doctrinal statement and church covenant, maintenance and administration of church discipline, and other matters that deal with congregational life and mission.
3. Any polity that removes those rights and responsibilities from the members of congregation and places it the hands of an individual or group with little or no accountability, either direct or indirect, to the congregation has moved away from the Baptist understanding of New Testament church order toward an episcopal or presbyterian modification. Such a modification, in our view, does not qualify a church for membership in Louisville Regional Baptist Association.
4. The New Testament affirms that the Scriptural office of pastor has been given to the church "to equip the saints for the work of ministry [and] the building up of the body of Christ, [Ephesians 4:12]" through the sound proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Spiritual life of the church. Similarly, the New Testament affirms that the Scriptural office of deacon has been given to the church to administer ministries that ensure the welfare of the congregation. Any statement of polity that diminishes or overstates the role of the Scriptural

offices of pastor or deacon should be viewed as a deficient statement. Though it may not disqualify a church from membership, the Credentials Committee is encouraged to counsel the church toward a healthier statement for those offices.

5. That a church chooses to use the term elder or bishop rather than pastor does not, in and of itself, reflect a non-baptistic modification of church polity. In the New Testament, these terms are often used interchangeably to describe the same role and function within the life of the congregation.
6. A thorough-going study of Baptist polity is commended to all our churches as a means of renewing the vigor of the Baptist witness, the unity of each congregation, and the fellowship of our Association.