

Peoples Evangelical Congregational Church

Bylaws

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Article I. NAME

The name of this Church is **Peoples Evangelical Congregational Church** (“Peoples Church” or “the Church”), located in **Ashburnham, Massachusetts**.

Article II. MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Peoples Church is to love God, love others, and make disciples of Jesus Christ, all to God’s glory (Matt 22:37-38; Matt 28:19; Isa 43:7).

We accomplish this mission through worship, sharing the Gospel, studying and obeying God’s Word, celebrating baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and enjoying fellowship with one another (Acts 2:42-47). We recognize that our mission can only be accomplished through faith in Christ and the power of Holy Spirit.

Article III. POLITY

Peoples Church is Congregational in its polity and denominational affiliations, meaning that we govern ourselves with God and the Bible as our standard. Emphasizing historic Evangelical Congregationalism, the Church is affiliated with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference.

Article IV. STATEMENT OF FAITH AND CHURCH COVENANT

Statement of Faith

- We believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the only inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God written.
- We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father; Son; and Holy Spirit.
- We believe in the deity of Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
- We believe that for salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
- We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling power and fullness the Christian is enabled to live a godly life in this present sinful and broken world.
- We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost: the saved unto the resurrection of life; and the lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
- We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in Christ.

Church Covenant

Holding firmly to our statement of faith, believing that God has called us together and united us in fellowship, we covenant before Him that we shall seek to present the Gospel both here in this community and to the uttermost parts of the earth. We ask the Lord’s blessing as we pray that we may be instrumental in the spreading of the Gospel.

MEMBERSHIP

A. CONSTITUTION

1. At the adoption of the by-laws, all persons who are members of the Church will continue to be members.
2. Any person who professes faith in Jesus Christ, whose life has shown the fruit of someone who has been born again (John 3:5), has been baptized (Matt 28:19) [or has made arrangements for baptism], and has been prepared for membership, may, with the approval of the Elders, be admitted to membership.
3. Transfer members may become members of the Church upon approval of their letters of transfer from another Bible-believing church by the Board of Elders.

B. ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

The primary purpose of membership is to actively participate in fulfilling the Mission of the Church, as stated in Article II of these bylaws.

An ACTIVE MEMBER is defined as one who:

1. participates in fulfilling the purpose of the Church to the best of the individual's ability;
2. lives a life that is consistent with that of a Christian, using the Bible as the standard;
3. attends Church services on a regular basis, attempting to adhere to the scriptural principle of "not forsaking the public gathering of worship" (Hebrews 10:25);
4. serves in the Church in some way according to their God-given gifts and abilities.

Members who are shut-in, or unable to attend regular worship services due to infirmity or other reasonable explanation, may remain active members even if they cannot meet all of the requirements listed above. In these cases, it is necessary for the leadership and the congregation to minister to these individuals in a more private setting.

C. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

The Board of Elders is responsible for the yearly monitoring of the membership status of Church members. In the discipline of members, Elders must handle each situation prayerfully, with grace and truth, recognizing that all people are created in God's image and deserve respectful treatment.

1. INACTIVE MEMBERS

This category is intended for those who have drifted away from the church. It places the leaders of the church on notice that additional spiritual care may be required, including, but not limited to, the following considerations:

- a. If a member is not fulfilling the requirements of an ACTIVE MEMBER (see definitions above), the Board of Elders may move the member to inactive status;
- b. An INACTIVE MEMBER is not eligible to vote on Church and Ministry decisions;
- c. If it is determined that an inactive member is fulfilling the requirements of an ACTIVE MEMBER, the Board of Elders may move the member's status back to active.

2. CHURCH DISCIPLINE and SUSPENDED MEMBERS

This section is intended to fulfill the obligations of the Church body under the biblical prescription laid out in scripture:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. *[Matthew 18:15-17 NIV]*

- a. If, on the credible testimony of at least two members, a member is accused of unrepentant conduct which is inconsistent with biblical principles, the Elder Board will investigate the matter. If the investigation finds basis for the allegations, faithful efforts are to be made to reconcile the member with the law of Christ as set forth in the Holy Scripture. These failing, the Board of Elders may, providing due notice has been given to the member and a hearing before the Church has been offered to the member, recommend suspension or removal from membership. Removal or suspension from membership requires a two-thirds vote by the Church body.
- b. After the Church has placed a person on suspended status, he or she may be re-instated by recommendation of the Elder Board and a vote of the Church body.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." *[Matthew 18:21]*

- c. A suspended member is not eligible to vote on Church or Ministry decisions.

Article V. THE GOVERNING OF THE CHURCH

A. SUBMISSIVE TO THE LORD

We proclaim God as our King and Lord of our church. In all church decisions we submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He reveals truth to us through Scripture. Every decision is made prayerfully with the Scripture as our foundation for wisdom and truth. In all that we do, we seek to bring glory and honor to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

B. GOVERNED BY THE ELDER BOARD

The Elder Board consists of the pastor(s) and all those elected to be elders by the congregation. God calls certain people to the role of leadership in the church, and the church places in the hands of these leaders the governance of the church (I Tim 5:17; Acts 14:23). Each member of the Elder Board is called to be obedient to Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they oversee God's church.

C. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

As a congregational church, the members of the Church assembled at a scheduled business meeting or special meeting of the Church vote* on the following matters:

1. hiring or dismissing of a pastor (2/3 vote);
2. election of officers and ministry team leaders;
3. removing an elder from the board (2/3 vote);
4. amending or repealing the bylaws (2/3 vote);
5. approving the annual budget and any midyear changes to the budget;
6. approving any capital expense;
7. approving policies;
8. any item in a special meeting called by the Senior Pastor, the Elders or five (5) adult members of the congregation;
9. any other item that the Elders believe should be decided by a congregational vote.

* Simple majority vote, unless otherwise noted.

Article VI. OFFICERS

A. PASTOR

The office of Pastor is not subject to annual election, but continues for that length of time as is mutually acceptable and beneficial for the spiritual growth of the Church and community.

1. The Pastor carries the title of Elder and is a voting member of the Elder Board. He may call a meeting of the Elder Board or any ministry team and may call the Church together for special business meetings.
2. The Pastor must be in a committed relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, must be called by God to pastor His church, must be dedicated to prayer and ministry of the Word, and must meet the qualifications for Elder and Overseer set forth in Scripture (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9).
3. The Pastor arranges and conducts all the worship services of the Church. Guest speakers must have the approval of the Elder Board.
4. The Pastor must subscribe without reservations to the Statement of Faith and the Mission Statement of the Church.
5. The Pastor performs all the scriptural and necessary duties of his office, preaches the Word, administers the ordinances, tenderly cares for the Church, and organizes and develops its membership for the best possible service (Ephesians 4:11-13, I Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28, II Timothy 4:1-5).
6. The Pastor is accountable to the Elders for all ministry activities.
7. The Pastor may terminate his service by giving a notice of at least thirty days. The Church may terminate his service by a 2/3 vote at a special business meeting. The Pastor is likewise to be given a notice of termination at least thirty days in advance. Once notice is given by the Pastor or the Church, the Board of Elders will determine roles and procedures during the transition time.

B. ELDERS (3 year Term)

1. QUALIFICATIONS

a. 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (NIV)

b. Titus 1:6-9

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (NIV)

2. SELECTION

- a. Elders must be nominated by the Nominating Committee from the membership of the church and approved by a vote of the congregation at the annual meeting or another business meeting of the church.

3. DUTIES

- a. provide spiritual leadership of the Church, which primarily includes prayer and ministry of the Word (Acts 6:3-4);
- b. establish priorities, policies, plans, and courses of action for implementing the stated objectives and voted decisions of the Church (Acts 6:1-6);

- c. interview and vote on applicants for membership and present them to the congregation;
- d. oversee the shepherding, teaching, and discipline of the membership (Acts 20:17, 28);
- e. regularly examine the membership rolls and designate each member's status;
- f. assist the Pastor in the administration of the ordinances;
- g. minister to and pray for the sick, as well as to those with other needs, and represent the Church by laying on of hands (James 5:14);
- h. oversee and provide guidance to all the ministries of the Church (Acts 6:1-6);
- i. decide on issues not reserved for congregational vote;
- j. approve hiring of all staff other than Pastor;
- k. review the annual budget as presented by the Finance Ministry and make necessary adjustments to that budget before presentation at the October business meeting for a congregational vote;
- l. elect a Chairperson from one of the members of the Elder Board (including the pastor) within one month of the Annual (January) business meeting. The Chairperson will preside over the Board meetings as well as all business meetings of the Church;
- m. review candidates for officers, ministries, and committees submitted by the Nominating Committee, and present a final list to be voted on by the congregation at the Annual (January) business meeting. Election is decided by majority vote of the congregation.

4. COMMISSIONING

Elders are commissioned by prayer and the public laying on of hands during a Sunday service following their election. Re-elected elders need not be re-commissioned. Those elected are to actively serve on the Elder Board for a term of three (3) years.

5. QUORUM

A quorum necessary for conducting business consists of a majority of the Elders.

C. DEACONS (One Year Term)

A Deacon is a church member designated by the Church to be a servant who carries out the practical ministries of the Church. In the broad sense, every church member is a deacon (Greek: *servant*), but, as a specific biblical title, the Deacon is required to help meet physical needs of individuals. The foundation for the understanding of deacons is taken from Acts 6:1-6. Deacons must meet the qualifications set forth in I Tim. 3:7-13. Each Deacon will be commissioned by prayer and the laying on of hands by the Elders.

Responsibilities include the following:

1. visit the sick and infirm;
2. oversee the Deacons Fund, which is designed to help people meet their material needs, such as a medical payments, heating bills, rental fees, etc., based on the identification of those in need by the Pastor and Elders;
3. coordinate the delivery of meals to those in need;
4. perform any other duties delegated by the Elders.

D. HONORED ELDERS

An Honored Elder is a *Deacon emeritus*. There are those within our church family who have served faithfully the office of Deacon for many years and have been conferred a special designation by the Church. These people are not involved in active leadership in the Church, but should be looked to as examples of service and commitment to the Lord. The leaders in the Church are encouraged to seek their counsel because of their godliness, experience, and wisdom.

E. CLERK

The Clerk is elected by the Church for a term of one (1) year and has the following responsibilities:

1. keeps record of all business meetings of the Church;
2. calls the Annual (January) business meeting;
3. is accountable to the chairperson of the Elder Board;
4. maintains all membership records and church statistics;
5. secures maintenance of all official and legal church documents, papers, and records.

F. TREASURER

The Treasurer is elected at the Annual (January) business meeting, and serves for a term of one (1) year. The Treasurer collects all moneys given for the maintenance of the local Church. The Treasurer is not a member of the Finance Ministry, but will be accountable to that Ministry.

G. ASSISTANT TREASURER

The Assistant Treasurer is elected for a term of one (1) year, assists the Treasurer as needed, and is accountable to the Treasurer. In the event of the absence or incapacity of the Treasurer, upon direction of the Finance Ministry, the Assistant Treasurer will temporarily assume the duties of the Treasurer.

Article VII. MINISTRY TEAMS AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

A. MINISTRY TEAMS

Each ministry team is led by someone who has been selected by the Nominating Committee and voted on by the congregation. Team leaders should meet the scriptural qualifications for Deacons found in I Tim 3:8-13, but they are not considered members of the Deacon board. The team leader is responsible for choosing and leading a team of people in accomplishing that ministry's goals. Each ministry team is accountable to the Elder Board. These ministry teams may be activated or deactivated by the Elder Board at any time.

1. LOCAL OUTREACH (One Year Term)

Prayerfully coordinates efforts to reach the community for the sake of Jesus Christ with the purpose of sharing His message and making disciples.

2. NURSERY (One Year Term)

Oversees the ministry to infants, toddlers and preschoolers during services and other events, and enlists the help of volunteers.

3. FINANCE (Three Year Term)

Consists of members of the Church elected to a term of three (3) years, with the following responsibilities:

- a. This ministry prepares and presents the annual budget to the Elder Board for a vote. After the approval of the Elder Board, the annual budget is presented to the congregation for a vote.
- b. They are faithful stewards in tracking the finances of the church and keeping the congregation apprised of the Church's financial situation.
- c. They may arrange for the raising of funds for any special project of the Church.
- d. The ministry appoints one (1) of its members as Purchasing Agent for the Church. The Purchasing Agent oversees all purchases made on behalf of the Church.

4. ALTAR (One Year Term)

Oversees the adornment of the sanctuary and maintains the necessary supplies.

5. HOSPITALITY (One Year Term)

Oversees the purchasing and serving of food and drinks following each worship service, as well as other church events, and enlists others to participate and help with the ministry.

6. TECHNOLOGY (One Year Term)

Oversees all computers, website, sound, and projection services.

7. BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS (One Year Term)

- a. provides for the care, use, maintenance, and repair of all Church properties and equipment, including the parsonage;
- b. assists the Finance Ministry in the preparation of the annual budget;
- c. secures contracts for any necessary work that are submitted to the Finance Ministry and Congregation for approval.

8. MISSIONS (One Year Term)

Oversees the promotion and support of US and foreign missionary endeavors by recommending a proposed budget to the Finance Ministry, and stimulating concern within the Church for all missionary activities.

9. CHILDREN AND YOUTH (One Year Term)

Oversees the discipleship of those in our church family who are in high school and younger.

10. WORSHIP (One Year Term)

Consists of the worship leader, musicians, and the Pastor. Other church members may also be selected as members of this ministry team. This team is called to lead the congregation in worship with the goal of bringing glory to God. The Worship Ministry provides for musical worship at the services of the church, recommends a budget for the following year, and arranges for the services (and compensation, if necessary) of musicians and/or vocalists.

B. SPECIAL MINISTRY TEAMS AND COMMITTEES

These do not meet on a regular basis but perform a very important task within the church, namely, recommending to the congregation candidates who will serve as leaders, officers and ministry team members.

1. NOMINATING COMMITTEE (One Year Term)

Consists of three (3) members appointed annually by the Elder Board, in addition to the Pastor and one Elder Board member. It is the duty of this committee to prepare a list of officers and team leaders, submit it to the Elder Board for approval, and then to present the approved nominations to the congregation.

2. PULPIT SEARCH COMMITTEE

Consists of five (5) members appointed when needed by the Elder Board. They are responsible for seeking a candidate to fill a vacancy in the office of Pastor and are responsible for all temporary arrangements to fill that office until a candidate is selected.

As soon as a pastoral vacancy occurs, it is reported to the area representative of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference to seek his advice and guidance. The committee works in cooperation with the Conference in order to be well informed concerning all candidates to be recommended to the Church.

The selection of a candidate requires a two-thirds vote of all members present and voting at a meeting duly called for this purpose. A favorable vote of the Church constitutes a call.

In the call, the terms of the relationship are stated and agreed upon between the candidate and the committee. The committee develops all financial arrangements in cooperation with the Finance Ministry. The Pastor, the Church, and the Conference should receive a copy of the call.

In order to terminate the relationship, a one (1) month notice should be submitted by either party – Pastor or Congregation. Dismissal of a Pastor requires a two-thirds vote of all members present and voting at a meeting called for that purpose.

Article VIII. SAFEGUARDS

A. DELINQUENT OFFICERS AND MINISTRY TEAM MEMBERS

Any duly elected Church Officer or Committee/Ministry Team Member who fails to attend to the duties expected after all efforts have been made to encourage him/her to do so, automatically forfeits his/her position. The Church or ministry team is then required to find a replacement.

B. LEGAL CONTRACTS

Should it become necessary for the Church to enter a legal contract involving the borrowing or expenditure of sums of money, upon specific vote of the Church, the following are considered as authorized to carry out the decision of the congregation: the Treasurer and the chairpersons of Building and Grounds, Finance, and the Elders.

C. VOTING

Only the votes of active members of the Church are considered at any Church meeting. At any ministry meeting, only the votes of those ministry members are considered. At a church business meeting there must be a quorum of 10 members in order to transact business. On a ministry team meeting a quorum consisting of the majority of ministry members is required for a vote.

Article IX. SERVICES AND SACRAMENTS

A. WORSHIP SERVICES

Public services are held on Sunday and at such other times as the Elders determine.

B. THE LORD'S SUPPER

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is administered on the first Sunday of each month, except as the Board of Elders otherwise determine, and is offered to anyone in attendance who has professed faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

C. BAPTISM

The ordinance of baptism is administered to individuals who have professed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and have a desire to be baptized according to the Lord's command (Matt 28:19). Each baptism must be approved by the Elders and each baptismal candidate must meet with the pastor in preparation for the baptism. The preferred mode of baptism is by immersion (dunking), unless the Elders agree that it is not possible in a given situation. We accept as members of the Church people who have been baptized as infants or as believers, regardless of the mode of baptism (i.e. immersion, sprinkling etc.) Regarding infants, the practice of dedication is encouraged for parents who desire to raise their children under the instruction of the Lord.

Article X. MEETINGS

A. SCHEDULED BUSINESS MEETINGS

There are three (3) scheduled business meetings held each year: one in January (Annual Meeting), one in April, and one in October. At the January meeting, annual reports are presented and officers elected. In addition, the Elders are to announce the dates of the next three business meetings of the church. During the October meeting, a proposed budget for the following year is presented to the congregation for a vote. At any of these meetings, any other business as authorized by the bylaws may be conducted.

Notice of each meeting is prepared by the Clerk and read at the morning service on the two (2) preceding Sundays. Church business may be transacted at each meeting if notice, in writing, has been given to the Clerk two (2) weeks in advance, by the Pastor, by the Elders or by any five (5) adult members of the Church in good standing, and if the business has been specified in the notice of the meeting. In the case of extenuating circumstances, the Elders may change the date of the meeting and are to provide due notice to the church.

B. SPECIAL MEETINGS

Special meetings of the Church are arranged by the Clerk whenever a written request is filed by the Pastor, the Elders or by five (5) adult members of the Church. This request must specify the date of the proposed meeting and its objectives. The call of the meeting, in which the objectives are specified, is to be read from the pulpit at a morning service before the date of the meeting. Any action not specified in the call cannot be transacted during the special meeting.

C. QUORUM REQUIREMENTS

At all business and special meetings, ten (10) adult members of the Church constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

D. MODERATOR

All meetings of the Church are conducted by the Chairperson of the Elders, or if he is absent, another person (preferably an elder) appointed by the Elders.

E. MEETING CONDUCT

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are compelled to honor Him in the way that we treat one another and conduct ourselves in all of our church meetings. Therefore, in all meetings of the Church, we strive to *“keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (Eph 4:3), as we follow the guidelines set forth in Ephesians 4:29-32:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Article XI. AMENDMENTS

These by-laws may be amended or repealed by a two-thirds vote of the active and voting members present at an Annual Meeting or special meeting of the Church. An amendment may be proposed only at the request of the Pastor, the Elders or five (5) adult members of the Church. The request must be filed with the Clerk and included in the notice of the meeting.