

# Bylaws of Southwest Evangelical Ministries



Bylaws Updated and approved: January, 2009

## **ARTICLE I - Organization**

Southwest Evangelical Ministries is a self-governing, independent non-denominational, church who earnestly desires to follow our divine savior Jesus Christ.

## **ARTICLE II - Beliefs**

The Eternal, the Creator of the universe, gave us the Old and New Testament Scriptures, the Bible, as His instruction book for mankind. Each person is responsible for living by the Bible as he or she understands it. The Father sent His Son as a sacrifice for the justification and salvation of mankind. The church is the body of Christ and that Christ is the active, living head of the Church. He works through a diversity of believers and groups of believers according to His will. No man or group of men has jurisdiction over another's eternal salvation.

Each person is responsible for studying the Bible, living by it and working out his or her own salvation with his or her Maker. Christ gave the church the job of helping in this process in a great many ways. This assembly is but one of many local assemblies of believers that comprise the Church of which Christ is the Head.

## **ARTICLE III - Purpose and Mission Objective**

### **Section A - Ministry Purpose Statement**

1. The purpose of this church shall be:

- a. To proclaim in fullness the Gospel of Jesus Christ worldwide.

- b. To present salvation unto the lost.
- c. To promote, praise and worship God and oversee places of worship and be their covering.
- d. To teach, edify, lead, guide, disciple, unify, and protect the Body of Christ.
- e. To establish and oversee charters, departments, institutions, offices, and be their covering.
- f. To license, and to oversee ministers of the gospel and be their covering.
- g. To Administer Church discipline
- h. To perpetrate all the above until the return of Christ.

### **Section B - Mission Objective and Vision**

1. **Mission:** It is the mission of Southwest Evangelical Ministries to represent the body of Christ as described in the Old and New Testaments, to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as led by the Holy Spirit, to bring the unsaved to Jesus Christ; to build up the body in principles of communion and Godly living, to have a vital part in missions here and abroad, and to strive toward unity in the Body of Christ.
2. **Vision:** Our vision is to make all members into ministers of Christ using their spiritual gift in service for all. But as we develop methods, means, and programs to accomplish this end, we must also expect the death of the vision. We must not doubt in darkness what God has shown us in the light, for God will accomplish this vision plus any other visions He gives us in His own time.

### **ARTICLE IV - Practices**

The writing of extensive doctrinal statements encourages people to study statements, rather than study the Bible. In order to make fellowship easier, we list the following practices which are held by most of those attending our congregation, but we do not insist that these practices are essential for salvation:

- We meet on the Sabbath at 12:00 noon for singing and 1:00 p.m. for our main service.
- Assembly meetings are private, but all men, women and children—whether they are believers or not—are welcome to attend our services as long as they are willing to conform to these practices.
- When a person repents and dedicates their life to Christ, we baptize him/her by immersion and have the hands of the brethren laid on that person to ask for the imparting of the Holy Spirit. When a person attending believes they have a valid conversion experience by some other method or sequence, we acknowledge that the

Bible does record some exceptions to this, and that issue must be worked out between the believer and God.

- Food described as unclean in Leviticus 11 should not be brought to any assembly meal nor served to other members without their approval.
- Drunkenness, theft, fighting, inappropriate sexual contact, smoking or the use of mind-altering drugs at any assembly meeting or other event are not permitted because they are a danger to those attending and a bad example to everyone.
- People attending services and activities of the assembly agree not to attempt to sue the assembly or any member of it in a government court but will use the procedure found in Matthew 18:15-17.
- Membership in the local assembly is available to those who regularly attend more than 25 times per year and who will publicly acknowledge that they have committed their lives to God. Such membership is not a "recognition of conversion", but a commitment to serve in the local assembly.
- People who are disruptive to assembly meetings, who continually attempt to teach false doctrine or who openly practice sin may be removed as members and/or barred from attending according to the procedure given in Matthew 18:15-17.

## **ARTICLE V - Governance**

The Holy Spirit guides the affairs of the church of the living God, giving authority to those appointed to oversee, lead, and guide in administering the affairs of the Church. We therefore claim the right to be governed under the Headship of Jesus and His authority over the Church, and reject all claims by the civil government to Headship or sovereignty over this Church.

**1. PERSONNEL:** None of the Assembly leaders may appoint a person to a position. All appointments must be by the approval of all who will be in authority over him. Positions are not filled by voting for a person, but through a consensus of the leadership; is this person the right one for this position and is this God's will? All positions must be filled from within the local Assembly. They must earn the right to hold a position by living a Christ like life, meet the Biblical qualifications for the position, and completed the required training program.

We will not appoint people to positions of leadership to keep them involved. Men who are Biblically qualified, tested, and approved will be appointed to leadership positions who serve as examples to those in and out of the assembly. 1 Timothy 5:22.

The assembly will not advertise for workers or ask for volunteers. Only God can see people's desires and motives so only He can make the correct choices for our leaders and workers. We must always ask God to supply all our needs, including our needs for Shepherd/Elders, staff,

and Ministers of Mercy.

**2. QUALIFICATIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ELDERS:** The New Testament makes no distinction between elders, shepherds, and overseers, therefore the following qualifications are for all three. The qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. The lists are quite extensive and overlapping, involving some 25 or so qualifications. In this publication we will not make an extensive coverage of them, but summarize the requirements.

To restore the New Testament assembly we must have trained leaders who meet the qualifications God has established. Not just anyone can be an elder. Only those who meet God's qualifications can do God's work in God's way. Therefore, men who are well known or successful business men, but who do not follow God's Word or His methods must not be placed in leadership positions.

### Qualifications

**a. Good Reputation:** The elders must be men of good reputation, who are blameless, that is, no one can point a finger at them and say, "You wronged me and have not made it right." They must have a good reputation among non-Christians, and be known for their honesty, reliability, dependability, and faithfulness.

**b. Family Man:** The elder must be a one-women man, above reproach in his marital relationship as well as in all other male-female relationships. His children must be obedient, well behaved, and under authority. Problem children indicate a problem marriage. If a man does not have a good relationship with his wife and children he will not be effective in leading a flock of God.

Marriage is a covenant which can only be broken by death. Therefore, divorce disqualifies a man from holding the position of elder or deacon in the assembly. A man who is divorced and remarried in God's sight has two wives. Much has been written on divorce and remarriage, but we must follow what God has written, not what man has to say on the subject. Divorced men can find forgiveness and a place of service and ministry within the assembly, but they must not be assigned the function of an elder or deacon.

**c. Christian Character:** He must be a man of high character, who is self-controlled and not given to anger. He is patient, and not proud. He must not be addicted to anything of the world, such as television, rock music, drugs, work, etc.

**d. Financial Freedom:** He does not love money, therefore he has no interest in get rich schemes, or pursuing dishonest gain. He is hospitable, sharing with those in need. He is an example of one who walks by faith. He knows that God is his supplier, therefore he does not go into debt, but is content with what God has provided.

**e. Able to Teach:** He knows God's word and is able to instruct others so they in turn can be examples of the Christian life style. Only through God's word can the assembly be protected from false teachings. The shepherd must be able to detect false doctrine and be able to correct, rebuke, and lead his flock in the right direction.

f. **Maturity:** He must not be a recent convert. Pride has caused the downfall of many men and assemblies. The leaders must be spiritually mature, under authority, teachable, and able to lead without becoming proud.

g. **Dependable:** When things go wrong he holds fast to God's word and is able to correct and deal with trouble makers. "Holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict those who contradict him. For there are also many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for dishonest gain's sake." Titus 1:9-11. WEB

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ELDERS

a. **Strengthen the Weak:** All new believers are spiritual infants and therefore are weak, just like newborn infants. They need the milk of God's word, encouragement, and constant care. Also there are those who have been Christians for many years who have not grown to maturity. Shepherds cannot bottle feed all the new born believers, so they must oversee that others in the flock are actively caring for and helping these weak brothers and sisters.

b. **Heal the Sick:** The elders must learn how to identify the type of physical sickness a person has. Is it a sickness unto death, or for chastisement, or for the glory of God, or is the person's illness due to an attempt to manipulate other people? Prayer can then be made accordingly. Anointing and praying for the ill is a very important part of the shepherd's work.

c. **Bind Up the Injured:** Because of the decay of society there are many badly injured people. Their injuries are from mental, physical, and sexual abuse by others. Children are hurt by parents, wives by husbands, and employees by employers. But the greatest damage is caused by our own sins which brings God's condemnation and discipline upon ourselves. People are reluctant to accept responsibility for their own sins. The assembly leaders must, by example and teaching, lead the flock to accept responsibility for their own faults, mistakes, and sins.

d. **Bring Back the Strays:** Christians are likened to sheep for they both are likely to stray from the flock and the shepherd's care. Christ is our Chief Shepherd and the caretakers of the flock must always be aware of His voice, following His guidance. An important part of their ministry is to teach the flock to hear only the voice of Christ, and not be distracted by a false Christ, false prophets, and false teachings.

e. **Search For the Lost:** Christ leaves it up to the individual to either accept Him or reject Him as Lord and Savior. Salvation is a choice made by us. Those who call upon the name of the Lord are saved, but how can they call if they have not heard? It is the responsibility of all Christians to tell the lost about Christ so they can call upon Him. An important element in the elder's work is training the believers to present Christ to others.

## ARTICLE VI - Teachings

All teaching in the Assembly must help the members to grow mighty in spirit. Fights and

arguments over theological questions, meaning of words, prophecy, etc will not be allowed. Titus 3:9-11. Teaching materials used in the Fellowship Groups must be approved by the Elders, for some materials being sold for small groups is based on humanism and others are unbecoming and indecent in content.

### **ARTICLE VII – Baptism**

Baptism is the burial of a repentant sinner into Christ and his resurrection to a new life. (See Romans 6). Therefore, we accept only immersion as a means of baptism.

### **ARTICLE VIII – Amendments and Procedures**

A 75% majority of voting Elders is required to amend the SWEM's Bylaws.

### **ARTICLE IX – Confidentiality**

1. **Protecting Confidences** - The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 16:28; 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13; 28:13; James 5:16), and encourages people to seek needed counseling (Prov. 20:19; Rom. 15:14). Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of this church, all members are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, the Ministers and Elders shall carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling and/or conversations, subject to the following guidelines.
2. **Guidelines** - Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when the Minister and Elders believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:
  - a. When a Minister or Elder is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other Minister or Elders in this church or, if the person attends another church, from the Minister or Elders of that church.
  - b. When the person who disclosed the information or any other person is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene
  - c. When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to institute disciplinary proceedings or seek the assistance of individuals or agencies outside this church; or
  - d. When required by law to report suspected child abuse.

## ARTICLE X - Church Covenant

We, the members of this church, do covenant together, God helping us:

1. That as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul (I Peter 2:11), avoid every kind of evil (I Thess. 5:22).
2. That we will 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 (Eph. 4:31-32), love one another deeply, from the heart (I Peter 1:22).
3. That, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Gal. 6:10).
4. That we will remember our leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you (Heb. 13:7).
5. That we will submit to the loving oversight and discipline of the members and officers of this church (I Peter 5:5, Heb. 13:17).
6. That we will give a sum of money in keeping with our income (I Cor. 16:2), not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver (II Cor. 9:7).

May the God of peace, Who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory forever and ever (Hebrews 13:20-21). - Amen -

## Policies

**Southwest Evangelical Ministries hereby sets forth the following policies in order to establish accountability, responsibility, and a standard of excellence that is pleasing unto our Lord. I Peter 1:7**

God loves us and wants the best for us. These policies represent God's best for the Assembly and its members. Their purpose is to prevent problems within the Assembly and as a guide to the members. Also, our God is jealous who wants our worship of Him to be holy, that is separated from the things of the world. These policies are to prevent mistakes before they happen.

Christ prayed fervently for the unity of all His followers through all time to come. But Christ also warned of false prophets, false teachers, faithless shepherds, broken trusts, wolves in sheep's clothing scattering and devouring the flock. He warned of the broad gate and way filled with multitudes pressing on to destruction, and the narrow gate and way where few ascend to life.

We will build in vain if we lose our love for all men and our intense zeal to help save all men, If we abandon our continuous effort to bring about the unity of all Christ's followers, the unity for which Christ prayed, our prayers, our ministry, our labors, will be in vain.

Many assemblies are building in vain. They are building on the sands of human philosophy and man's strength. When conflict and troubles come, their house will not stand. We must let



God build us on the Rock which is Christ. "Unless Yahweh builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Psalm 127:1. Only then will our work survive the testing winds, rains, and floods.

The church is not a building made of brick and wood, but a spiritual building consisting of an assembly of believers in Christ. The test of our success, is not large church buildings filled with people, but the development of maturity in our members. This is God's work not ours, for it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. As we work for God we must do everything without complaining or arguing, so we may become blameless and pure children of God, without fault in this crooked and deprived generation, in which we are to shine like stars as we hold out the Word of life. See Philippians 2:13-15.

We must heed Paul's warning to the assembly at Rome. "Now I beg you, brothers, look out for those who are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them. For those who are such don't serve our Lord, Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent." Romans 16:17,18. The trouble makers we are to keep away from are:

- \* Those with conflicting philosophies, who love the world rather than God. 1 John 2:15-17.

- \* Those with hidden expectations, who have not given their expectations to Christ. We are His servants, not masters of our own fate. Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-33; 17:7-10.

- \* Those who are disloyal to Christ, who reject authority. Christ is the head of this Assembly and those who reject His authority will reject the teachings of this Assembly. 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

- \* Those with moral impurity. The Christian life is pure and holy. Matthew 5:27-32; 2 Peter 2:13f.

- \* Those with unkept vows. God will destroy their work. Ecclesiastes 5:4-6; Malachi 2:10-16.

- \* Those who are trouble makers. We are instructed to avoid them. Romans 16:17,18. We must make sure our policies are based on God's principles, not on human wisdom, and that we do not compromise God's standards.

"Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths. Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil." Proverbs 3:5-7.

**A VISION:** Our vision is to make all members into ministers of Christ using their spiritual gift in service for all. But as we develop methods, means, and programs to accomplish this end, we must also expect the death of the vision. We must not doubt in darkness what God has shown us in the light, for God will accomplish this vision plus any other visions He gives us in His own time.

**GOD'S WORD:** The Bible is God's Word, therefore it is to be held in deep reverence and awe, for it is the "power of God for salvation for everyone who believes." Romans 1:16.

**PURITY:** Our aim is increased purity of our members rather than increased attendance. We will not compromise our message or policies to gain members. We will accept the "weak in faith" without condemning them and help them to grow to become mighty in spirit. Romans 14:1-15.



**COMMITMENT:** Although salvation is free, the Christian life is not. As the members grow they will be asked for greater sacrifices and commitments to Christ and His cause. Luke 14:33; Philippians 3:7-11.

**PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS:** Our emphases is on better spiritual food, not bigger program. A proof of our love for Jesus is how we feed His sheep. John 21:16,17.

**TEACHING:** All teaching in the Assembly must help the members to grow mighty in spirit. Fights and arguments over theological questions, meaning of words, prophecy, etc will not be allowed. Titus 3:9-11. Teaching materials used in the Fellowship Groups must be approved by the Elders, for some materials being sold for small groups is based on humanism and others are unbecoming and indecent in content.

**BAPTISM:** Baptism is the burial of a repentant sinner into Christ and his resurrection to a new life. (See Romans 6). Therefore, we accept only immersion as a means of baptism.

**MUSIC:** Music is a very important part of the Assembly worship. As with anything that is important, Satan will use it to cause problems and divisions in the assemblies. From the early history of the assembly there have been fights and arguments about music; use of instruments, type of music, etc. Rather than choose what we personally like in music we must choose what God likes and approves of.

Since God is the author of harmony and melody we must not use music that lacks harmony and melody in our worship of God. Both rock music and jazz are sensual and addictive. They are the music of rebellion and immorality and their beat is used by worshippers of Satan to call up the evil spirits. Therefore, rock music and any contemporary music using a rock beat must not be used in any meeting or worship service.

Is the message of the music true to the Bible? Is it teaching humanism and half truths? Is it reverent toward God or does it place man on a level with God? Humanism emphasizes the love of God while downplaying His holiness. It focuses on social causes rather than man's need for brokenness and repentance, and it glorifies man's accomplishments apart from God's grace. This lie must not be allowed in our worship of God.

**HOLIDAYS:** Our desire is to worship only the one true God in heaven. Therefore all symbols, rites, and ceremonies from pagan backgrounds will not be used in any of our meetings or worship services. This includes Easter eggs, Christmas trees, Santa Clauses, all symbols and activities connected to Halloween, etc.

**SPORTS:** We believe that love for one another cannot be shown in games of competition where the purpose is to win over an opposing party. Therefore we will not take part in league games or any activities that require intense competition. This includes Bible Bowl meets, contests between Fellowship Groups, and summer camp activities that require competition and rivalry. These reward a few winners and punish many for not being winners. This grieves the Holy Spirit and is not God's way of working.

**POLITICS:** Although the assemblies may not back an individual politician, we will take an active interest in politics. We will urge our members to vote, to become precinct committeemen, and to become members of their school board. As school board members and precinct committeemen, Christians can have a powerful influence for good in our nation.

We will not take part in picketing or blocking abortion clinics, but we will take an active part in supporting the Pregnancy Crises Centers and educating the public about the very grave and serious consequences of abortion.

**FAMILIES:** We aim to build strong families, therefore we will teach fathers how to be the spiritual leader, wives to be submissive, and children to be under authority. Failure in these areas will prevent members from being given greater responsibilities and ministries.

**MARRIAGE:** Marriage is a covenant that can only be broken by death. Therefore, we do not accept divorce as a solution to family problems. Divorced people who come to us will be given help, encouragement, and instruction in rebuilding their marriage. Members having marital problems must take the Marriage Rebuilding Course.

**WEDDINGS:** We will not take part in unscriptural marriages. We will not perform weddings for a divorced member while their former spouse is living, nor for a believer with an unbeliever, nor for nonchristians who come to the assembly to be married.

**COUNSELING:** Great care must be observed in counseling others, especially a man advising a woman, that they do not fall into temptation. "Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you also aren't tempted." Galatians 6:1. Assembly leaders should not spend large amounts of time in personal counseling, but when required there should be two counselors together. Most problems should be dealt with in the Fellowship Groups. Wives seeking counseling should ask their husbands who should then go to the Elders for advice.

**PERSONNEL:** None of the Assembly leaders may appoint a person to a position. All appointments must be by the approval of all who will be in authority over him. Positions are not filled by voting for a person, but through a consensus of the leadership; is this person the right one for this position and is this God's will? All positions must be filled from within the local Assembly. They must earn the right to hold a position by living a Christ like life, meet the Biblical qualifications for the position, and completed the required training program.

We will not appoint people to positions of leadership to keep them involved. Men who are Biblically qualified, tested, and approved will be appointed to leadership positions who serve as examples to those in and out of the assembly. 1 Timothy 5:22.

The assembly will not advertise for workers or ask for volunteers. Only God can see people's desires and motives so only He can make the correct choices for our leaders and workers. We must always ask God to supply all our needs, including our needs for Shepherd/Elders, staff, and Ministers of Mercy.

**ACCUSATIONS:** Immediate action will be taken when a member and especially a leader is accused of sin or wrong doing. Problems do not go away and failure to take immediate action will result in greater problems. If the accused person is found innocent, then the one guilty of gossip and slander will be disciplined. 1 Timothy 5:19,20.

**DISCIPLINE:** Leaders of the assembly who are guilty of immorality, theft, etc, will be immediately dismissed from their position. Any leaders and members guilty of breaking the law will be turned over to the law. All leaders who sin will be publicly rebuked per 1 Timothy 5:20. They will be urged to repent, make restitution if necessary, return to the

assembly, and become active in its activities.

**GOSSIP, BAD REPORTS:** We will not allow anyone to share a bad report. The leaders will continually teach the members how to tame the tongue, how to examine self, exhort others, and restore offenders. Members are urged to be transparent in their Fellowship Group meetings, but the members must not repeat what they hear to others.

**ADVERTISING:** We will not advertise the Assembly but rather let others praise us. Proverbs 27:2.

**FINANCES:** God is our supplier, therefore we will not go into debt or use any fund raising projects. Members who do not support the assembly will not be appointed to a leadership position. Philippians 4:19.

**CRITICISM:** We accept criticism as a means to clarify and deepen our message. Proverbs 15:10, 31-33.

**OPENNESS:** The members must never complain among themselves or to outsiders about Assembly policies or actions. If there is a problem or misunderstanding they must talk to those in authority. If a person is having problems with his ministry, he must bring it to the attention of the leaders. If the problem involves those in authority over him, then he absolutely must follow the instructions of Matthew 18.

We must work as a team. To be effective all parts of your body must cooperate with all the other parts of your body. The same is true in the assembly. If you are a "hand" you must work with all the other parts of the body and if you as a "hand" have been injured or have cramps and cannot do your ministry, you must let others know so they can help you.