

PROPOSAL TO INCREASE CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATION

OVERVIEW

As we've been discussing in our recent Elder forums, the Board has been investigating ways to increase congregational participation in important church matters and in member voting. Our congregational form of governance assumes that the entire body will participate in making our important decisions. As with most larger churches these days, it is increasingly difficult to have the majority of our membership attend and vote at our congregational meetings. In fact, our current quorum for a meeting is only 10% of our membership and attendance is usually not much more than that. The Board is proposing an amendment to our Bylaws that will increase the required quorum to be 25% of our membership and will also make it easier for all members to participate by allowing for written ballots to be cast on Sundays during our worship services when most people are here. The proposed change includes informational meetings in advance to allow the congregation to discuss and help shape the final motions to be voted on.

PURPOSE FOR PROPOSED CHANGES

The first purpose of this proposed Bylaw change is to enable greater congregational **participation** in church matters by allowing members to vote on motions by written ballot cast in person on the meeting Sunday while they are here for worship. We would anticipate that the worship service on that day would include a segment highlighting any such church matters (e.g., our annual financial report, budget, officers nominated, etc.) along with any other ballot issues. In this way, the entire membership that is present for worship will be able to then vote without the need to be physically present at another meeting later in the day or on a different day.

The second purpose of the change is to encourage greater member "**ownership**" of approved actions such as the budget, appointment of officers, pastoral hiring, etc. Under our current system, important actions are affirmed by only a very small percentage of the body. For example, when an annual budget is approved by only 200 people, this may not create the broad sense of responsibility on the part of the overall body to support that budget through regular giving. This proposed change will engage the vast majority of the congregation in approving budgets, hiring pastors, etc.

The third purpose is to ensure that motions and Bylaw changes reflect the **will** of the congregation by making certain that the voting congregation is sufficiently representative of the total congregation. Remarkably and unacceptably, under our current Bylaws, a very small percentage of the congregation could make a major decision or a change to our Bylaws. For example, if only 10% of our 2000 members attend a meeting, then it takes only 101 votes to pass a motion or only 134 votes to change our Bylaws. The Elders feel strongly that major decisions should be made by the majority of the members.

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SUMMARY OF PROPOSED CHANGES

The key proposed changes to our current Bylaw are:

- 1) Change “business meeting” to “congregational meeting ” to better reflect the nature, scope and spiritual significance of our meetings
- 2) Change notification requirement from “bulletin boards” to “written public notice” to reflect 21st century communication methods
- 3) Change the quorum from 10% to 25% for Annual and Special Meetings and to call for Meeting by Petition
- 4) Change what appears to be three voting age classes and set a uniform voting age of 18 for all matters
- 5) Establish the process to enable the use of written ballots:
 - Voting eligibility is for members in good standing who are present and cast a written ballot on the day of the meeting
 - All proposed motions will be published at least 21 days before a scheduled meeting
 - Informational meeting(s) which explain the motions and which also solicit member feedback on these motions will be held at least 21 days before the scheduled meeting
 - The motions are then finalized by the Elders based on the member feedback received and published at least 7 days before the meeting
 - Voting by 25% of our members is required for a quorum
- 6) Enable Meetings to be either part of weekend worship services or as a stand-alone meeting

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CURRENT BYLAW

Article 9: Meetings

Section 9.2: Business Meetings

1. The annual business meeting shall be held within 60 (sixty) days after the end of the fiscal year on a day to be determined by the Board of Overseeing Elders.
2. The annual business meeting shall be held for the purpose of electing officers and committee members, of receiving the annual reports of the officers, boards, and committees of this church, approving the annual budget, and for the transaction of such other business as is proper to come before said meeting.
3. Notice of the annual business meeting, stating the place and time, shall be posted by the Clerk in a conspicuous place near all the principal entrances of the church buildings at least seven days prior to the meeting.
4. Special business meetings may be called at any time by the Senior Pastor, Moderator, the Chairman of the Overseeing Elders, the Overseeing Elders, or by written request of a quorum of the active members of this church. Notice of such meeting and the object for which it is called shall be given from the pulpit at least one week in advance of the date of the meeting and said notice shall be posted on the church bulletin board seven days in advance of said meeting. The above notice may be waived provided that each church member is notified of said meeting at least one day prior to such meeting.
5. Qualifications of Voters: All matters pertaining to the purchase, sale, or mortgaging of property shall be voted on only by active members who are 18 years of age or older. On all other matters, members who are 16 years of age or older are entitled to vote.
6. Quorum and Voting: Ten percent (10%) of the church members, in good standing, qualified voters, shall constitute a quorum at all congregational meetings. A majority of such members present and voting on any particular matter, in a regularly or properly called meeting, at which a quorum is present, shall be required to decide any questions presented unless these Bylaws specify otherwise. All officer, board and committee elections shall require a two-thirds majority for election. Voting shall be by secret ballot if requested by any church member. In no event shall more than a two-thirds vote of members present be required for the approval of any matter coming before a duly called Corporation meeting, with the exception of Article 3: Statement of Faith (see Section 14.2).

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“MARK UP” VERSION OF PROPOSED CHANGES

Article 9: Meetings

Section 9.2: Congregation Meetings

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2. The annual congregational meeting shall be held for the purpose of electing officers and committee members, of receiving the annual reports of the officers, boards, and committees of this church, approving the annual budget, and for the transaction of such other business as is proper to come before said meeting.

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3. Notice of the annual congregational meeting, stating the place and time, shall be by written public notice at least seven days prior to the meeting.

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Deleted: be posted by the Clerk in a conspicuous place near all the principal entrances of the church buildings

4. Special congregation meetings may be called at any time by the Senior Pastor, Moderator, the Chairman of the Overseeing Elders, the Overseeing Elders, or by written petition signed by not less than twenty-five (25) percent of the membership. Notice of such meeting and the object for which it is called shall be given from the pulpit or by written public notice at least one week in advance of the date of the meeting.

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5. Duly Constituted Meetings: Meetings may be held as part of the regular weekend services or as stand-alone meeting. Meetings held during weekend worship services shall be called to order during the first service of the weekend and recessed at the conclusion of that first service, if there are multiple weekend services. The meeting shall be reconvened and recessed at each subsequent service. The meeting will be adjourned at the end of the final weekend service.

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6. Qualifications of Voters: All matters shall be voted on by members in good standing who are 18 years of age or older.

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7. Quorum and Voting: At least twenty one (21) days prior to an Annual or Special Meeting, the Elders shall prepare drafts of the articles to be brought before the meeting and shall give written public notice of an “informational meeting” conducted by the Elders. The purpose of the informational meeting shall be to provide the Members with necessary information on what is being proposed and to have the opportunity to discuss and provide input to proposed articles. After the informational meeting(s) the Elders shall determine the final form of the articles to be presented. The final articles shall be published at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting date. Final articles shall be voted on without amendment.

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To encourage broad participation, Members’ votes to approve or not approve the final articles may be taken by written ballot cast on the day of the meeting or in person at the meeting.

Twenty five percent (25%) of the church members in good standing shall constitute a quorum for all congregational meetings. A majority of such members voting on any particular matter, in a regularly or properly called meeting at which a quorum is present, shall be required to decide any questions presented unless these Bylaws specify otherwise.

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CLEAN VERSION WITH PROPOSED CHANGES

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