

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Military Street Baptist Church

Houlton, ME USA

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Military Street Baptist Church is to help people experience the extraordinary life of Jesus Christ by sharing His life-changing love with our community, the nation, and the world as *changed lives, changing our world on purpose.*

ARTICLE I: NAME AND PRINCIPAL OFFICE

The name of the church is **Military Street Baptist Church (MSBC)** also known as **The Church on the Hill**. The church maintains its principal office and building in the town of Houlton, ME USA.

ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

The purpose and vision of Military Street Baptist Church is to influence our community and the world with the hope and Good News of Jesus Christ, to bring new believers into His kingdom, and to assist them to grow to be more like Him. This is accomplished through the ministries of a church that is relevant to the daily life of ordinary people as directed by God's Word, (the Bible), and the Holy Spirit.

ARTICLE III: ACCOMPLISHING THE PURPOSE

Military Street Baptist Church seeks to fulfill its calling in Christ through five purposes:

- Celebrating God's presence in **worship**.
- Communicating God's Word through **mission / evangelism**.
- Incorporating God's family into our **fellowship**.
- Educating God's people through **discipleship**.
- Demonstrating God's love through **ministry** for the building up of the Body of Christ.

These five purposes are derived from the following key Bible passages:

The Great Commandment: Mark 12:30-31, Jesus said, "*And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.*" The second is equally important: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" *No other commandment is greater than these.*"

The Great Commission: Matthew 28:19-20, "*Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*"

- "I am with you" is worship. Enjoying the presence of God is a part of worship.
- "Baptizing them" is fellowship. Baptism identifies you with our church family.
- "Obey all the commands" is discipleship. Doing what God says helps us grow.
- "Teach them" is ministry. Teaching is one of many ways we can serve others.
- "Go and make disciples" is mission/evangelism. This is the driving force of the church.

ARTICLE IV: STATEMENT OF BELIEF

A living Christian faith must be continually evaluated. This statement of belief is not to be regarded as complete or infallible. It is the purpose of this statement to summarize the Christian teachings we believe. **Here's what we believe:**

1. ABOUT GOD

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He eternally exists in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God in "Tri-unity."

2. ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Jesus was incarnated as fully God and human, born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin, death, and the devil. He is the only way to peace with God now and "no one comes to the Father" but by Him. He is the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again someday to earth to reign as King of kings, and Lord of lords.

3. ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son of God. He is present in the world to make people aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He is called the Comforter, and the One called alongside Christians to provide followers of Jesus Christ power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance and motivation in doing what is right. At salvation He gives every believer spiritual gifts, and seals us as a child of God. As Christians, we seek to live under His control and guidance daily, inviting Him to continually fill us with Himself.

4. ABOUT THE BIBLE

The Bible (the Old and New Testaments) is God's Word to us. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth and authority for Christian belief and living. Because it is inspired by God, it is the truth without any mixture of error.

5. ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS

People are made in the image of God to be like Him in character to partner with Him in co-dominion over the earth. People are the supreme object of God's creation. Although every person has tremendous potential for good, all of us are born in a condition called "sin" and marred by an attitude of disobedience and independence toward God. This condition separates people from God and causes many problems in life culminating in death.

6. ABOUT SALVATION

Salvation is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer and way for forgiveness and reconciliation can anyone be saved from sin's penalty of death and eternal separation from God. When we believe in our hearts, confess with our lips, and turn from our self-ruled life to Jesus through faith we are saved by His grace. Eternal life begins the moment we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior into our life.

7. ABOUT ETERNAL SECURITY

Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the true believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. Followers of Christ are sealed to the day of Redemption by the Holy Spirit of God. If we have been genuinely saved, we cannot "lose" it. Salvation is maintained and secured by the grace and keeping power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian.

8. ABOUT ETERNITY

People were created to exist forever. Death entered God's creation through Adam's sin. God desires that none would perish, but we will exist either eternally separated from God by our sin or eternally with God by believing and receiving His forgiveness and salvation as purchased by the shed blood of Christ on the Cross. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence.

9. ABOUT THE CHURCH

There is one true universal Church, referred to in Scripture as the "Body of Christ," composed of all those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Bible commands believers to gather together regularly to devote themselves to worship, witnessing, prayer, teaching of the Word, ministry and fellowship. Baptism and communion are observed as the ordinances established by Jesus Christ, reminding us of Whose and who we are in Him. Service to the Body of Christ and outreach to the world are accomplished through the development and faithful use of our God-given talents and spiritual gifts, as we commit to being disciples of Jesus who make more disciples of His.

The local expression of the church is realized wherever God's people meet in obedience to this command. Members are to work together in love and unity, under the watch-care and guidance of the appropriate leadership, with the ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ in communion with Him and His mission in this world.

10. ABOUT FAITH, PRACTICES, AND DIFFERENCES IN INTERPRETATION

The Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. Military Street Baptist Church leaves room for honest differences of opinion as to biblical interpretation on those teachings *which are not essential to salvation*. Military Street Baptist Church recognizes that it cannot bind the conscience of individual members in areas where Scripture is silent or does not provide clear direction. Each believer is to be led in those areas by the Lord, to Whom he or she alone is ultimately responsible.

ARTICLE V: AFFILIATION

Military Street Baptist Church is an autonomous entity and maintains the right to govern its own affairs independently of any denominational control. While we are not subject to the control of any other ecclesiastical body, we recognize and sustain the obligations of mutual counsel and cooperation, which are common among churches of like mind. Recognizing the benefits of cooperation and association with other churches in world and local missions, our church voluntarily affiliates with and supports the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA), the American Baptist Churches of Maine (ABCOM), and the Southern Aroostook Baptist Association (SABA), as well as various other organizations that share and support the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith. Our church retains full power and authority to develop and implement or terminate affiliations with these or other organizations to facilitate achievement of the mission of the church as we “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” for the glory of Jesus Christ.

ARTICLE VI: MEMBERSHIP AT MSBC

1. BECOMING A MEMBER OF MSBC

The difference between “attenders” and “members” can be summed up in one word: Commitment. Being a member at MSBC says “I’m on the team and ready to be faithful.” At MSBC we never ask our members to do more than the Bible clearly teaches. We only expect our members to do what the Bible expects every Christian to be and do. These responsibilities are spelled out in the Membership Commitment.

Membership at MSBC is open to anyone who meets all four of the following requirements:

- You must have become a Christian by inviting Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of your life.
- You must have been baptized after you became a Christian (or agree to be baptized by immersion through MSBC). Exceptions to immersion may be negotiated if physical challenges are prohibitive.
- You must agree with the general beliefs, purpose, and strategy of MSBC, discovered by attending the required membership class.
- At the time of becoming a member, a membership commitment must be signed.

While membership in a local church is a key tool God uses to mature us, church membership is not required to be a Christian or to go to heaven. You can enjoy some of the benefits of MSBC without being an official member. Provision is made for those who are “regular attenders” and “friends of the church,” with encouragement toward membership as a key indicator of commitment.

2. PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERSHIP:

Only members of the church, eighteen years of age and older, may participate in congregational votes including voting at business meetings, voting on the church budget in person and not by proxy, voting to call or dismiss the Lead Pastor, voting to amend the Constitution and By-laws, and voting on decisions regarding the purchase of real estate. Only members can be an Elder Board member, deacon, or lead a ministry.

3. MEMBERSHIP STATUS CHANGES

Membership at MSBC represents your commitment to express your faith in the context of our church family. If your commitment to MSBC changes (because you move away, move to another church, cease to participate or contribute at MSBC, or die) your membership status will change. Membership status will be reviewed by members of the Staff Team and Diaconate Team as detailed in the Elder Board policy manual.

Should termination of membership be required, this action is not taken lightly. Termination will be pursued as a last resort under the discretion of the Diaconate Team and Elder Board after a sincere and active effort to bring about reconciliation and restoration of the member, and prayerful consideration of the consequences to the member and to the church. Termination of Church membership shall require a consensus (90%) of the

Diaconate and Elder Board. Procedures for the dismissal of a member shall be according to Matthew 18:16-17. Restoration to membership will be handled similarly.

ARTICLE VII: GOVERNANCE AND MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

Military Street Baptist Church is gift-based and member empowered. Church governance is performed by the Elder Board which discerns overall ministry direction and provides oversight of the people, resources and mission of the church. The details of this work can be found in the Elder Board Policy Book available in the church office. Day-to-day ministry is overseen by Staff and volunteer leaders under the direction of the Lead Pastor. (Romans 12:4-6, 1 Peter 5:1-2, Ephesians 4:12). As such, we are determined to be guided by the Holy Spirit and the truth of Scripture.

1. SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

The Head of Military Street Baptist Church is Jesus Christ. As His church, we seek to reflect His priorities in all we do and how we accomplish it. No decision is ever made that would knowingly contradict any of Christ's teachings. In addition, through the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we endeavor to discern God's will for us as a church. Whenever we implement a plan, we monitor our effectiveness while prayerfully exploring the next step God is showing us.

2. SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The ideal leader is, like Jesus, humble and servant-like in spirit. Leaders at all levels do not see their role as "lording it over" those in their charge. Instead, they desire to serve the church with their gifts and to build a functioning, fruitful Christian community. Members of the church sense this servant-leadership in action and likewise esteem those in leadership. Whether as a leader or a follower, everyone in the church is submitted to Jesus Christ, and we each strive to consider others as more important than ourselves. "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves*" (Philippians 2:3). The spirit of cooperation and appreciation is one of the unique features of ministry of Military Street Baptist Church and is one of God's greatest blessings to our church family. It is a fragile gift, however, and any person desiring to become a member should value and protect it.

3. THE LEAD PASTOR

The Lead Pastor is primarily responsible for the spiritual life of the church and oversees day-to-day ministry. For extended absences the Lead Pastor may appoint a designee. When there is no active Lead Pastor, the Elder Board will select an interim to serve in this capacity. It is the Lead Pastor's responsibility to-

- Provide Biblical vision, direction, and teaching for the congregation;
- Oversee the day-to-day ministry of the congregation and administration of the church, abiding by professional ethics such as that shown in the "Covenant and Code of Ethics for Professional Church Leaders of the American Baptist Churches in the USA."
- In collaboration with the Staff and volunteer leaders, enlist, encourage, enable, and empower the ministries of the church "to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the Body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- Staff the church as the Elder Board deems necessary to help administrate its affairs.
- Have access to all boards, teams, and committees as an ex officio member.
- Shall remain in ministry at the church as long as the church, pastor, and the Lord see fit. Should a recommendation of transition or complaint arise regarding the pastor's performance or fulfillment of the call, the issue should be brought to the Elder Board to discern appropriate action.
- When new pastoral leadership is required, the Elder Board shall activate a Pastoral Search Committee to prayerfully seek out whom the Lord has for leading the church. Upon the Board's recommendation and the congregation's 90% or above vote of approval, a pastor will be installed.

4. THE ELDER BOARD

The Elder Board is elected by the church membership and is responsible for oversight of the mission and ministry of the church. This oversight covers the wholeness of church life (spiritual, administrative, and programmatic).

The primary role of the board is to love and follow Jesus by serving God's mission that is uniquely lived out through this local body of Jesus Christ. This mission is commonly expressed as, "Changed lives, changing our world on purpose." The board's service to this mission is a God-given role and a fiduciary duty.

The board governs primarily through general policies and not in response to specific individual circumstances. Day-to-day operation of church ministry is delegated to the Lead Pastor as detailed in the Board Policy Manual. This governance approach will allow the Elder Board to focus the majority of its time and effort on longer-term planning of next steps in pursuing the church's mission.

4.1 Selection of Elder Board Members

Scripture gives evidence of the first elders being appointed by the founders of the church. By this example, it is implied that the existing spiritual leadership of a church should be intimately involved in the process of selecting elders to ensure selection based on spiritual rather than superficial qualifications. Therefore, the following protocol is followed in the selection of Elder Board members for MSBC:

- At least four weeks prior to the annual meeting the congregation will be notified regarding number of open Elder board positions. Members and regular attendees of the church are invited to bring potential candidates to the attention of the Elder Board.
- The Elder Board reviews with prayerful consideration the candidates and at least two weeks before the Annual Meeting or specially called business meeting presents to the congregation a list of nominees, the number based on all vacancies.
- The nominees are individually voted on by the church membership by secret ballot during the Annual Meeting or specially called business meeting and must be approved by 90% of those voting.

The primary consideration for selecting Elders should be the person's character, maturity in Christ, gifts, capability and chemistry with the rest of the Elder Board.

4.2 Number of Elder Board Members

The Elder board will consist of nine members. This includes the Lead Pastor, an Associate Pastor if one is on staff, and members of the church.

4.3 Term of Elder Board Members

Pastor members of the Elder Board serve without term limits. Other Elder Board members shall serve terms of three years. If approved by the Elder Board, an Elder Board member may succeed himself or herself for only one consecutive term. After serving two consecutive terms, an Elder Board member must vacate his or her position for at least one year before being re-elected to another term.

4.4 Staggered Terms

Not including the pastoral members, there shall be staggered terms of office for Elder Board members so that one-third of the members shall be up for election each year (or if the number does not evenly divide by thirds, the board shall be divided as close to thirds as possible). Elder Board members who are elected to fill a vacated position shall finish that term and may consecutively serve up to one more full term.

4.5 Removal of Elder Board Members

The Elder Board may terminate an Elder Board member from his or her position when, in the considered judgment of the Elder Board, the Board member has committed misconduct or neglect of duties.

Termination of an Elder Board member from the Elder Board shall require a unanimous vote of a of the remaining Elder Board members. The Elder Board member under investigation will not cast a vote.

4.6 Resignation of Elder Board Members

Elders are expected to make every effort to fulfill a minimum three year term of service. We understand that there are occasions when life demands, illness, stress, and/or other personal issues outside of an individual's control may interrupt his or her ability to fulfill a heartfelt commitment.

In the event that an Elder believes he or she is unable to fulfill his or her term of service, that Elder will confer with the Lead Pastor for prayerful counsel to attempt to resolve the conflict. If the conflict cannot be resolved and the Elder decides to resign from the Elder Board, the resignation will be accepted in the spirit of support and care, with focus on helping the resigning Elder seek God's direction for the next phase of his or her life and ministry.

4.7 Vacancies

Elder Board vacancies will be filled through election by the members of the church at the next Annual Business Meeting. At the Elder Board's discretion, an Elder Board vacancy may be filled at a specially called business meeting.

5. OFFICERS

MSBC shall have a President, Vice President, Clerk, and Treasurer. MSBC may have, at the discretion of the Elder Board, such other officers as may be appointed by the Elder Board. The President and Vice President will be selected from elected Elder Board members. Other officer positions may be selected from any church member including Elder Board members. Officers shall be elected by the Elder Board and disclosed to the church membership during the Annual Meeting. If a vacancy occurs during the term of office for any elected officer, the Elder Board shall elect a new officer to fill the remainder of the term as soon as practical. All officers shall serve one-year terms. Officers shall remain in office until their successors have been elected. Officers may serve consecutive terms without limit.

6. MINISTRY LEADERS

Lay ministry leaders are members who have been gifted by God and called to lead others in a specific ministry (e.g. music ministry, drama, children's and youth ministry). All ministries fall under the oversight of the Lead Pastor and Elder Board with the church Staff acting in an advisory and resource capacity.

7. CHURCH STAFF

Military Street Baptist Church employs a paid staff selected on the basis of their giftedness and passion for their area of ministry. The staff supports the strategies and priorities determined by the Elder Board. The Lead Pastor and the Elder Board are responsible for recruiting and hiring of new staff. The Lead Pastor oversees and directs the work of the staff. The Lead Pastor is responsible for monitoring staff performance and conducting performance reviews for staff members in accordance with Elder Board Policy. The Lead Pastor is responsible and accountable to the Elder Board for his and staff performance.

The paid church staff manages the day-to-day affairs of the ministries of the church. Their paid status makes it possible for them to devote themselves fully to the goals and objectives of the church, and to serve as resources to the lay leaders of the church.

ARTICLE VIII: REVISIONS

This document was drafted by faithful but fallible people. Should the Spirit of God point out the need to revise this document in any way, the suggested revisions will be submitted to the Elder Board for their consideration.

The Elder Board retains the authority and responsibility to make non-material, minor revisions to the Constitution and By Laws ministry philosophy, or overall structure and governance (e.g., rewording, clarification of ideas considered to be confusing, added scriptural support) for the sake of clarity; and to make material changes as necessary to ensure that they remain current and relevant in view of the dynamic nature of practices and ministries at MSBC. These non-material, minor revisions will be reported to membership at the next annual meeting and ratified by vote by the membership. Proposed significant and material changes to the Constitution and By Laws will be published for review by the membership a minimum of two weeks prior to the vote on the matter by the general membership.