

Bylaws for City of Refuge of Columbia

A South Carolina Baptist Nonprofit Religious Corporation

Adopted: December 14, 2025

The Preamble to the Church Bylaws

We, the membership of City of Refuge of Columbia (hereinafter referred to as City of Refuge), Columbia, SC, declare and establish these bylaws to preserve and secure the principles of our faith and govern the body in an orderly manner.

This church has affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the South Carolina Baptist Convention, and the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.

The purpose of this church shall be to propagate among all people the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to provide opportunities for worship, training, spiritual growth, and service. This church recognizes the Bible is God's word to His people and is inerrant.

The mission of City of Refuge is to *Call* all people to Jesus (Eph. 2:1-10), *Connect* them to his greater family (Eph. 2:11-22), and *Commission* them out as kingdom citizens (Eph. 3:7-12).

Our mission is lived out through our values of Practiced Presence, Celebrate Discipleship, Gracious Justice, and Kingdom Unity.

Article 1: Principal Office

Organization: City of Refuge of Columbia

Organized: 12/06/2022

Constituted: 12/06/2022

Articles of Incorporation dated: 12/14/2025

Physical Address: 4918 Brickyard Road, Columbia, SC 29203

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 30640, Columbia, SC 29230

Website: <https://www.colacityrefuge.org>

General Email Address: colacityrefuge@gmail.com

Social Media Addresses: <https://www.facebook.com/colacityrefuge>

Section 1: Nonprofit Organization

City of Refuge is organized exclusively for religious purposes, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

No part of the net earnings of City of Refuge shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its members, trustees, officers, or other private persons, except that the corporation shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes mentioned above. No substantial part of the activities of the corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the corporation shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Article 2: Statement of Faith

City of Refuge abides by the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, we affirm The Gospel Coalition's Statement of Faith, The Baptist Faith and Message (2000), and The Nicene Creed. A summary of our basic and most crucial doctrinal teachings are as follows:

1. **THE SCRIPTURES.** The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. (Matt. 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21)

2. **THE NATURE OF GOD.** There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; John 1:1-3; 4:24; Acts 1:7-9)

3. **MAN AND SIN.** Man was created by the special act of God, in His own image, and is the crowning work of His creation. In the beginning, man was innocent of sin. By his free choice, man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (Gen. 1:26-28, 2:4-7; Acts 17:26-31; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:10-18, 23; Eph. 2:1-22)

4. **SALVATION.** Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual perfection through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed. (John 1:11-14; 3:3-21, 36; Acts 4:12, 16:30-31; Rom. 6:1-14; Phil. 2:12-13; Rev. 21:1 to 22:5)

5. **THE CHURCH.** 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. (Matt. 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11, 21; 5:22-32; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)

6. THE ORDINANCES. Christian baptism is conducted with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming. (Mark 14:22-26; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21; 11:23-29)

7. LAST THINGS. God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord. (Mark 8:38, 9:42-49; John 14:1-4; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 5:1 ff.; Rev. 20:11-22:17)

8. EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS. It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rom. 10:13-15)

9. GENDER: We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary sexes together reflect the image and nature of God. Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person. (Gen. 1:26-27)

10. MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY. We believe God's plan for human sexuality is to be expressed only within the context of marriage, that God created man and woman as unique biological persons made to complete each other. God instituted monogamous marriage between male and female as the foundation of the family and the basic structure of human society. For this reason, we believe that marriage is exclusively the union of one genetic male and one genetic female. (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-6; Mark 10:6-9; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9)

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of the church as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the church members and the community, it is imperative that anyone employed by the church abide by and agree to this Statement on Marriage and Sexuality and conduct themselves accordingly.

11. SANCTITY OF LIFE. We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image. All human life, from conception to natural death--including pre-born babies, the aged, and the physically or mentally challenged--holds immeasurable value and dignity. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life. (Gen. 1:26-27, 9:6; Ps. 139; Matt. 9:36, 14:14, 18:1-6)

12. REDEMPTION AND RESTORATION: We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. (Matt. 18:15-17)

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of the church.

(In order to maintain consistency within the fellowship and community, only those activities, events, and gathering that affirm the doctrinal stance of the church may utilize church facilities and resources.)

Article 3: Statement of Final Authority

Our Statement of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself is the sole source of what we believe, which is the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and proper conduct of mankind. For purposes of City of Refuge's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our Elder Team is our church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's application. (2 Tim. 3:14-15; Titus 1:9; Jude 3)

Article 4: Membership

Section 1: Qualifications

The New Testament presents a picture of definable groups of people, who, once committed to the Lord, identified themselves with and committed themselves to a particular local body (Acts 2:42-46; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 8:1; Phil. 1:1; Acts 11:26).

To qualify for membership in this church, a person must be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ through faith by the drawing of the Holy Spirit to the message of the gospel. Each member must agree to affirm and abide by the Statement of Faith (See Article 2) and not hold any settled convictions contrary to them, and each member must promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Membership Covenant (See Appendix 1).

Section 2: Admission

To be admitted into church membership, applicants must complete all sessions of the Seeking Refuge Classes/Lunches and an assessment of a person's qualification for membership in an interview with at least one member of the Elder Team.

After all these qualifications are met and approved by the Elder Team, the applicants must sign the Membership Covenant, and they will be affirmed as members at the next business meeting.

Section 3: Active and Inactive Designation

To properly reflect the church's membership, two (2) church rolls will be maintained by the Church Clerk; to be updated periodically and reported to the church at a business meeting.

1. Active members: All members who are currently involved in the church's activities, functions, and worship services demonstrate their active status by their regular fellowship with the church and their giving of their time, spiritual gifts, and monies, as able.
2. Inactive members: Members who have become inactive due to moving from the Church's ministry area and not having joined another church, or members who have failed to attend regularly and give of their time, spiritual gifts, and monies, as able. Inactive members may be reinstated by personal request at a regular church service and resume their attendance upon recommendation by the Elder Team at a business meeting. Inactive members will be notified when they are removed from the Active Roll, and all voting privileges will be suspended for those on the Inactive Roll.

Section 4: Duties and Privileges of Membership

All church members must affirm and abide by the Statement of Faith. In addition, the responsibilities of membership are as follows:

1. Protect the unity of the church by acting in love toward other members, by refusing to gossip, and by following the leaders. (Rom. 15:5; 1 Pet. 1:22; Eph. 4:29; Heb. 13:17)
2. Share the responsibility of the church by praying for its growth, inviting the unchurched to attend, and warmly welcoming those who attend. (1 Thess. 1:2; Luke 4:23; Rom. 15:7)

3. Serve the ministry of the church by discovering individual gifts and talents, being equipped to serve by pastors, and by developing a servant's heart. (1 Pet. 4:10; Eph. 4:11-12; Phil. 2:3-4,7)
4. Support the church's testimony by attending faithfully, living a godly life, and regularly giving. (Heb.10:24, 25; Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 16:2)

Section 5: Voting Rights

Every "Active" member, 18 years or older, will have the opportunity to vote on the following:

1. Approval of the Annual Church Budget (2/3 vote)
2. The purchase or sale of real property. (2/3 vote)
3. Incurring debt (2/3 vote)
4. Church merger, dissolution, or the disposal of all or substantially all church assets (4/5 vote)
5. Amendments to the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws (2/3 vote)
6. The calling or removal of the Lead Pastor (4/5 vote)
7. The calling or removal of elders and deacons (2/3 vote)

The voting process regarding any motions pertaining to these six categories shall be by secret ballot. These ballots shall remain in the secure file for seven years, at which time they shall be properly destroyed.

There shall be no provisions for absentee or proxy ballots.

Section 6: Membership Transfer and Termination

Membership shall be terminated for the following reasons:

1. Death
2. Transfer of membership to another Baptist Church
3. Proof of membership in a church of another denomination
4. Being on the Inactive Membership roll for at least one year
5. Personal written request of the member
6. Exclusion by church vote (See Section 7 & 8)

Section 7: Purpose of Discipline

Formative discipline is inherent in the preaching, teaching, and exercise of other ministries in the church. When formative discipline fails due to sin, corrective discipline is then necessary. Corrective discipline is for the good of the church and the member who has sinned. It is never to be entered into lightly or quickly. The goal of corrective discipline is always restorative, that is, the goal is always the salvation and holiness and good of the one being disciplined.

Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the church, shall be subject to the admonition of the elders and the discipline of the church. A violation of the Statement of Faith, as determined by the Elder Team, is cause for discipline.

The purpose of such discipline should be:

1. For the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined; (Heb. 12:1-11; Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:5; Gal. 6:1)
2. For the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to them; (1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:20; Heb. 10:24-25)
3. For the purity of the church as a whole; (1 Cor. 5:6-7; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 21:2)
4. For the good of our corporate witness to non-Christians; (Matt. 5:13-16; John 13:35; Acts 5:10-14) and,
5. Supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy character. (Deut. 5:11; John 15:8; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:12)

It is desirable in the case of public sin that a confession be made before the church in a special-called business meeting, so that the church can freely extend forgiveness. Such public confession is especially necessary in the case of elders and deacons. (1 Tim. 5:19-20; Gal. 2:11-14)

If the exclusion of the member best serves the church's welfare, the church may dismiss the member by a two-thirds vote in a special-called business meeting.

Section 8: Discipline Process

Church discipline can include admonition by the Elders or congregation, removal from office, and excommunication (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Consistent with Matthew 18:15-17, church discipline shall proceed as follows:

1. If a member (the restorer) has firsthand knowledge of another member (the offender) in sin, they should go privately to the offender and seek to restore them to fellowship with the Lord and His church. If the offender repents, the matter is over, the member is restored. (Matt. 18:15)

If the offender does not repent:

2. The restorer shall take one or two other members to again confront the offender with their sin and again seek to restore them to fellowship and obedience. If the offender repents, the matter is over, the member is restored. (Matt. 18:16)

If the offender does not repent, the members who went to the offender shall advise the Elder Team of what has transpired. If the Elders are satisfied that all actions have been scripturally undertaken and that the offender is indeed in a state of unrepentant sin, then the Elders shall inform the offender of the next step.

If, in the Elders' view, the offender remains unrepentant, then:

3. At a special-called business meeting, the Elder Team shall inform the church body of the offender's sin and refusal to repent. The entire Church shall be encouraged to go to the offender and seek to restore them. If the offender repents, the matter is over, the member is restored. (Matt. 18:17)

If the offender does not repent, the offender will be informed by the Elder Team of the next step:

4. At a special-called business meeting, the Elder Team shall inform the church body of the offender's continued refusal to repent. Upon a two-thirds vote, the offender's name shall be removed from the membership roll and the offender will be excluded from the ordinance of Communion.

Any member who is currently undergoing church discipline will not be able to withdraw their membership until the process is completed.

Section 9: Discipline Restoration

Any person whose membership was terminated because of discipline may request restoration of membership through an appeal to the Elder Team. After an appeal has been made, the Elder Team will recommend the person be restored to membership if they believe that the offender has demonstrated, by their attitude and actions, true repentance and is once more seeking to live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ.

Upon recommendation from the Elder Team to the church body, membership may be restored. A recommendation for restoration from the Elder Team will be brought to the church during a business meeting whereby a two-thirds vote of the members present can accept and approve the restoration request.

Article 5: Meetings

Section 1: Worship

The church shall hold regular meetings for worship, teaching, training, outreach, and fellowship at such times and places as determined by the Elder Team of City of Refuge.

Section 2: Ordinances

Baptism: A candidate for baptism is one who:

- Receives Jesus Christ as Savior by personal faith
- Professes Him publicly
- Indicates a commitment to follow Christ as Lord.

Baptism: Baptism shall be by immersion in water, and in some cases by sprinkling with water, and administered by the pastor or the pastor's designee. Baptism is an act of worship and may occur during any worship service. (Mark 1:9-11)

Communion: Communion is a symbol of obedience where members of the church body, through the partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, commemorate the death of Jesus Christ and anticipate his second coming. (Matt. 26:26-29)

The Elder Team bears responsibility for administering communion, and the deacons/Communion Team bear responsibility for preparing communion.

The observance of Communion takes place on the first Sunday of each month and at other times as determined by the Elder Team.

Section 3: Business Meetings

Regular business meetings are convened at least once a quarter unless otherwise agreed to by this church.

Moreover, an Annual Business Meeting will be held during the fourth quarter of the calendar year. The Annual Business Meeting will serve as the regular business meeting of the fourth quarter of the year. The exact date will be determined by the Elder Team.

All business meetings will be guided by Christian courtesy and conducted according to parliamentary procedure. All motions, unless otherwise presented, are subject to discussion. All decisions will be made by simple majority vote unless otherwise stated in these Bylaws.

Section 4: Special Meetings

The Elder Team may call a special-called business meeting at any time, for any purpose, by giving notice to the members according to Section 5 of this Article.

Any votes presented at a special-called business meetings require a two-thirds vote of the active members of City of Refuge present and voting unless otherwise specified in these Bylaws.

Section 5: Notices

Notification of membership meetings will occur using any of the following reasonable methods of calling a membership meeting:

1. Distribution of written material to the congregation in attendance at a weekend service
2. Announcement of the meeting in a church program, bulletin, or newsletter
3. Oral announcement to the congregation at a weekend service
4. Church website and available forms of electronic communication
5. All notices are at least two weeks in advance of the discussion /vote

Section 6: Quorum

A quorum shall consist of those active members 18 years and older present and voting at a meeting duly noticed and called for the transaction of business.

Section 7: Voting

Any vote requiring a two-thirds vote or higher requires the use of secret ballots.

There shall be no provisions for absentee or proxy ballots.

Section 8: Rules of Order

The rules contained in the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order shall guide the church in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with the articles, these Bylaws, state law, biblical teaching, or any special rules of order the church may adopt.

Section 9: Emergency Bylaws Action

In anticipation of or during an emergency defined in this section, the Elder Team may: (1) modify lines of succession to accommodate the incapacity of any director, officer, employee, or agent; and (2) relocate the principal office or designate alternative principal offices.

During an emergency defined below, unless emergency bylaws provide otherwise: (1) notice of a meeting of the Elder Team need be given only to those directors, officers, employees, or agents it is practicable to reach and may be given in any practicable manner, including by publication; and (2) one or more officers of the church present at a meeting of the Elder Team may be deemed to be directors for the meeting.

Church action taken in good faith during an emergency under this section to further the ordinary affairs of the church: (1) binds the church; and (2) may not be used to impose liability on a director, officer, employee, or agent.

An emergency exists for purposes of this section if a quorum of the Elder Team cannot readily be assembled because of some catastrophic event.

Church action taken in good faith under this section to further the affairs of the church during an emergency binds the church. A director, officer, employee, or agent is not liable for deviation from normal procedures if the conduct was authorized by emergency powers provided in this article.

Article 6: Elder Team

Section 1: Plurality of Leadership

The New Testament model of church organization and authority is not given to just one Lead Pastor or minister, nor is it solely by the democratic rule of the congregation. Scripture states that authority from leadership is through a plurality of elders affirmed by the church and accountable to God. The Scriptures teach that when the Church supports the elders, both the Church body and the individual Christian will flourish. Some elders may be vocational, and some may be lay elders, but all must be continually seeking the best for the church and its members. (Acts 14:23, 20:28, Titus 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1-2)

Section 2: Biblical Qualifications

The Elder Team shall be comprised of a plurality of at least two men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9, and who affirm the Statement of Faith and abide by it. Only men may serve as elders in accord with 1 Tim. 2:12; 3:2.

At least one-third of the Elder Team must consist of those who receive no financial compensation from the church. No elder shall hold the office of deacon during his tenure. Those elders not receiving compensation from the church will be called “lay elders” for the purpose of these Bylaws. Although biblically and functionally, there is no difference among the elders.

Section 3: Duties

The elders shall seek the mind of Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the word of God as they undertake the work of shepherding God's flock. Consistent with the Statement of Faith, the elders shall teach and exhort; refute those who contradict the truth; pray for the sick; care for the church's members; and devote themselves to prayer, to the government of the church, and to ministry. The elders shall provide oversight of the congregation and lead the church to fulfill its ministries. (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; Jas. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)

The elders shall provide broad oversight to the ministry, financial management, and resources of the church, which include:

1. Support and maintain the mission and vision of City of Refuge Church.
2. Make decisions relating to personnel issues for church employees including hiring, termination, compensation, and benefits. (The Lead Pastor or his designee will provide daily supervision of church personnel.)
3. Develop and submit the annual church budget for congregational approval.
4. Oversee the creation and maintenance of a policy manual.
5. Oversee the creation and maintenance of comprehensive financial policies.
6. The Elder Team carries authority for budget revisions equaling no more than 10% of the annual church budget.
7. The Elder Team must approve all bylaw amendments prior to presenting them to the congregation for final approval.

8. The Elder Team has authority of all matters related to the operation and ministry of City of Refuge except for those congregational matters outlined in Article 4, Section 5.

Section 4: Election and Service

Scripture gives evidence that the first elders were nominated by the founders of the Church. (Acts 14:23) Following this example, the existing spiritual leadership of the church must be intimately involved in the process of selecting elders, ensuring the process is based on spiritual qualifications.

The term of office for a lay elder will be three years, and the lay elder, in consultation with the Elder Team, has the option of remaining on the Elder Team for an additional three years or stepping down from the office of elder.

After serving two consecutive terms (or a total of six years), the lay elder must take a one-year sabbatical before being considered to return to the Elder Team. After taking a one-year sabbatical, the lay elder can be appointed again by congregational vote and approval.

If the Elder Team has a vacancy, or if the Elder Team determines that additional elders are necessary, the following process will be followed:

1. The congregation will be given a list of biblical qualifications and responsibilities no less than 10 months before the Annual Business Meeting.
2. The congregation will be given one month to submit the names of male members for consideration.
3. The Elder Team will review the list of submitted names and interview each candidate and spouse, if married. Each candidate will be given prayerful consideration.
4. The Elder Team will provide the names of newly selected elder candidates no less than six months prior to the Annual Business Meeting in order to give the congregation time to vet the elder candidate(s).
5. Elder candidates will be subjected to congregational vote at the Annual Business Meeting, and if approved by a two-thirds vote of the active membership of City of Refuge, new elders will begin their duties on January 1 of the upcoming calendar year.

While all ordained staff ministers will meet the qualifications of an elder, the Lead Pastor and Elder Team will determine the staff members service on the Elder Team.

Section 5: Vacancies

An elder's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder should be dismissed should express such concern to the Elder Team. And, if need be, only afterwards, the Elder Team shall bring the concern to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matt. 18:15-17 and 1 Tim. 5:17-21. Any elder may be dismissed by two-thirds majority vote of the active members of City of Refuge at a special-called business meeting.

A violation of the Statement of Faith can be cause for dismissal.

An active elder may resign from the Elder Team by submitting a written resignation to the Elder Team.

If a vacancy occurs, the Elder Team will follow the process as outlined in Article 6, Section 4.

Section 6: Meetings and Quorum

A minimum of six meetings of the Elder Team will take place each year at a location chosen by the Elder Team. In extreme circumstances, phone or video attendance will be permitted.

A quorum of the Elder Team consists of a simple majority (50% + 1) of the Team present and voting. All decisions will be made by simple majority vote unless otherwise stated in these Bylaws. No proxy votes will be allowed.

Section 7: Elder Screening

All paid and lay elders are required to submit to screening procedures that may include identification verification and criminal background checks. Any information obtained during the screening process shall be considered highly confidential and shall be kept in a sealed file and stored in a locked cabinet indefinitely with access limited to those identified by the Elder Team.

Article 7: Professional Pastoral and Support Staff

Section 1: Staff Overview

- Lead Pastor
- Other Pastoral Staff
- Support Staff

Section 2: Lead Pastor

A Lead Pastor shall be called by the church and will serve until the relationship is dissolved at the request of either the Lead Pastor or the church. In either case, at least a thirty-day notice shall be given of resignation/termination of the relationship, unless otherwise mutually agreed, with both the Lead Pastor and the church seeking to follow the will of God and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The Lead Pastor shall be an elder of the church and meet all the requirements laid out in Article 6.

The Elder Team will serve as the mediating body if disagreement or conflict arises between the Lead Pastor and any member. Should the removal or discipline of the Lead Pastor become necessary, a two-third vote of the Elder Team will be necessary to bring the issue before the church. A four-fifths vote of the active members of City of Refuge will be required to terminate the Lead Pastor at a special-called business meeting. (1 Tim. 5:19-22)

Section 3: Lead Pastor Function

The Lead Pastor is considered an employee of the church and is the administrative leader to all church staff and employees of the church. He shall serve as a voting ex-officio member of all church ministry teams and groups. He may call a special meeting of the Elder Team, and any church team, group, or organized body. The Lead Pastor may call the church into a business meeting with proper notice. The Lead Pastor shall be the spiritual leader of the church and plan and conduct all worship of the church or arrange for a substitute when he is absent. He shall minister to the spiritual needs of the total membership. (Acts 14:23; 20:28-32; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)

Section 4: Lead Pastor Selection Process

A Lead Pastor shall be chosen and called by the church whenever vacancy occurs. A Lead Pastor Search Committee shall be chosen by the Elder Team. The Lead Pastor Search Committee shall be representative of the congregation by gender, age, and length of membership in the church.

The Lead Pastor Search Committee and Elder Team shall bring the name of only one prospective Lead Pastor at a time for consideration by the church, and no nomination shall be made except by the committee. Election shall be at a special-called business meeting and be available to all active members over 18 years of age. An affirmative vote of four-fifths or higher of the active members of City of Refuge is a favorable vote to call the candidate.

If a favorable vote is not reached, the Search Committee shall be instructed to seek out another pastoral candidate and the meeting shall be adjourned without debate.

If it seems appropriate, the Search Committee can present a non-approved candidate to the congregation for another vote.

Upon accepting the call to pastor City of Refuge, the Lead Pastor and his wife shall become members of City of Refuge.

Section 5: Interim Lead Pastor Selection

Should the Lead Pastor position become vacant, the Elder Team will continue to act on behalf of the church regarding all administrative functions. The Elder Team will elect by majority vote a temporary Elder Team leader.

Section 6: Other Pastoral Staff

Additional pastoral staff may be secured to administer the Mission/Vision/ Strategy of the church as needed. The Lead Pastor and Elder Team will be responsible for securing qualified ministers to fill these roles. Compensation shall be specified by the Elder Team as approved in the Annual Church Budget.

Additional pastors shall meet the same qualifications as the Lead Pastor, and their duties and process of removal shall be the same.

Section 7: Support Staff

Consistent with the Statements of Faith, support staff may be hired and terminated by the Elder Team. Compensation shall be specified by the Elder Team as approved in the Annual Church Budget. Support Staff should agree to and abide by the Statement of Faith and be members of the City of Refuge.

Termination procedures for all staff are addressed in the policy manual. The Elder Team has the final authority on all situations related to terminations, taking into consideration proper labor law actions as required.

Section 8: Staff Screening

All candidates for ministry, including administrative or support staff positions, are required to submit to screening procedures that may include identification verification and criminal background checks. Any information obtained during the screening process shall be considered highly confidential and shall be kept in a sealed file and stored in a locked cabinet indefinitely with access limited to those identified by the Elder Team.

Article 8: Deacons

Section 1: Deacon Qualifications

The office of deacon is described in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 (cf. Acts 6:1-7). The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, men and women who satisfy the qualifications stated in 1 Tim. 3:8-13, affirm and abide by the Statement of Faith, are giving of themselves in service to the church, who possess gifts of ministry, and who are called to further service and care for the church's members. The number of deacons shall be determined by the needs of the church and the call and qualifications of men and women in the church. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons.

Section 2: Election and Service

If a diaconal role arises, or if there is a diaconal vacancy, the following process will be followed:

1. The congregation will be given a list of biblical qualifications and responsibilities no less than 10 months before the Annual Business Meeting.
2. The congregation will be given one month to submit the names of male or female members for consideration.
3. The Elder Team will review the list of submitted names and interview each candidate and spouse, if married. Each candidate will be given prayerful consideration.
4. The Elder Team will provide the names of newly selected deacon candidates no less than six months prior to the Annual Business Meeting in order to give the congregation time to vet the deacon candidate(s).
5. Deacon candidates will be subjected to congregational vote at the Annual Business Meeting, and if approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the active members of City of Refuge, new deacons will begin their duties on January 1 of the upcoming calendar year.

The term of office for a deacon will be two years, and the deacon, in consultation with the Elder Team, has the option of remaining on the Diaconate for an additional two years or stepping down from the office of deacon.

After serving three consecutive terms (or a total of six years), the deacon must take a one-year sabbatical before being considered to return to the Diaconate. After taking a one-year sabbatical, the deacon can be appointed again by congregational vote and approval.

Section 3: Duties of Deacons

Deacons shall advise and assist the elders in any service that shall support and promote the ministry of the word, new and existing ministries of the church, and the care of the members of the congregation. The deacons may be organized in the most fitting way to accomplish the mission of the church. Thus, the ministry of deacons may involve several diaconal committees. There is no requirement that the deacons meet as a committee of the whole.

The responsibilities of deacons do not include preaching, teaching, or spiritual oversight, which are the responsibilities of the elders. Deacons exercise a ministry of service, not a ministry of spiritual leadership. Although they may teach and preach in contexts in which they are not

infringing upon the oversight duties of elders (Acts 6-7:53; Titus 2:3), the responsibilities of deacons include the following:

1. The ministry of mercy is a particular responsibility of deacons. They shall see that the sick, the sorrowing, the aged, and the infirm receive spiritual and physical comfort.
2. Deacons shall attend to the accommodations for public worship. Deacons may assist in providing for the elements during the Lord's Supper.
3. Deacons shall attend to the normal care and maintenance of church properties.
4. Deacons shall attend to the welcoming and greeting ministries of the church.
5. Deacons of Finance shall attend to the budgeting process and administer the disbursement of the monies of the church.
6. At the Elder Team's recommendation, the church may recognize deacons to serve in other specific capacities as needs arise in the church.

Section 4: Vacancies

A deacon's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal.

An active deacon may resign from the diaconate by submitting a written resignation to the Elder Team.

Any two members with reason to believe that a deacon should be dismissed should express such concern to the Elder Team and, if need be only afterwards, to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matt. 18:15-17 and Article 6, Section 5. Any deacon may be dismissed by a two-thirds majority vote of the active members of City of Refuge at a special-called business meeting.

A violation of the Statement of Faith can be cause for dismissal.

If a vacancy occurs, the Elder Team will follow the process as outlined in Article 8, Section 2.

Section 5: Deacon Screening

All candidates for the diaconate are required to submit to screening procedures that may include criminal background checks. Any information obtained during the screening process shall be considered highly confidential and shall be kept in a sealed file and stored in a locked cabinet indefinitely with access limited to those identified by the Elder Team.

Article 9: Church Officers and Other Leaders

Section 1: Church Officers

The leadership structure of City of Refuge is based upon the nature of the church as revealed in Scripture and the necessary legal requirements for a recognized religious organization. The intentional design of the church's leadership structure accommodates simplicity, growth, unity, and biblical teaching.

The primary offices of this church shall be Lead Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Trustee, Moderator, Clerk, and Treasurer, whose election, tenure, and duties shall be as provided for in the Bylaws and considered corporate officers of the church.

All officers of the church shall be members of the church.

Section 2: Officers' Functions

Moderator – Shall preside at all Church business meetings consistent with the guidelines for a presiding officer in the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order.

Clerk – Is responsible for recording minutes of business meetings, preserving historical records, correspondence to membership, and preparing annual information for the association, state convention, and Southern Baptist Convention.

Treasurer – Shall receive, deposit and payout, according to financial policies, all monies, and other funds of the Church, always keeping an itemized report of receipts and disbursements.

Trustees – The Elder Team will serve as Trustees and shall, at the direction and discretion of the church, hold legal title to church property, sign all contracts/documents as approved by the church, and keep the official copies of the church Incorporation, Bylaws, and Policies and Procedures documents.

Other Major Leadership Positions – The Church shall have such other officers, ministry leaders, or task other leaders as the Holy Spirit may direct to carry out the purposes of the church.

Section 3: Vacancies

Vacancies may be filled at any time of the year. Vacancies and unexpired terms may be filled by members of the Elder Team. An unexpired term should not disqualify a member for re-enlistment or re-election.

Section 4: Enlistment, Election, and Rotation

Moderator/Clerk/Treasurer – Shall be appointed by the Elder Team annually and serve a one-year term. Each may serve up to five consecutive terms before being off for at least one year.

Section 5: Officer/Leadership Qualifications

Officers/Leadership shall be members of City of Refuge.

Characteristics defined in Scripture serve as the basis for officer/leadership qualifications (Luke 22:22; John 12:26; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Pet. 5:2-5).

Section 6: Resignations and Removals

Any officer or leader may resign by a written notification to the Elder Team at any time.

During an annual review or before re-enlistment, the individual, the Elder Team, or assigned staff member may evaluate the continuance of service, considering biblical qualification, and any personal factors that might affect service.

The removal from office of any officer or leader may occur for:

1. Physical incapacitation
2. Spiritual or moral issues
3. Doctrinal issues
4. Failure to fulfill responsibilities of the office.
5. Failure to fulfill the Mission, Vision, and Values of City of Refuge
6. Violating the Statement of Faith

Matthew 18:15-17 serves as the basis for implementing dismissal by the Elder Team.

The process of resignation or removal for an officer shall be the same as an elder as outlined in Article 6, Section 5.

Section 7: Officer and Leader Screening

All officers and leaders are required to submit to screening procedures that may include criminal background checks. Any information obtained during the screening process shall be considered highly confidential and shall be kept in a sealed file and stored in a locked cabinet indefinitely with access limited to those identified by the Elder Team.

Article 10: Indemnification

Section 1: Definitions and Proceedings

It is the intent for the church to carry coverage for indemnity unless the named party exceeds authority or is guilty of reckless or willful misconduct in ministry, in accordance with existing insurance coverage based on church liability.

Agent

Any person designated as a trustee of City of Refuge or listed in the Articles of Incorporation of City of Refuge of Columbia.

Proceeding

Any threatened, pending, or completed action or proceeding, whether civil, criminal, administrative, or investigative.

Expenses

Include, without limitation, all attorneys' fees and any other costs incurred in defense of any claims or proceedings against an agent because of his position or relationship as an agent and all attorneys' fees, charges, and other expenses incurred in establishing a right to indemnification.

Section 2: Successful Defense

Insofar as an agent of the church has been successful in defense of any proceeding or the defense of any claim, issue, or matter therein, the agent shall be indemnified against expenses actually and reasonably incurred by the agent in connection with the claim.

Section 3: Good Faith Conduct

Agents must act in good faith, in a manner he believes is in the church's best interests, and with such care, including reasonable inquiry, as an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would use in similar circumstances.

Section 4: Insurance

The Elder Team may adopt resolutions authorizing the purchase and maintenance of insurance on behalf of any church agent against any liability asserted against or incurred by the agent in such capacity, whether or not the church would have the power to indemnify the agent. The church shall have no authority to purchase and maintain such insurance to indemnify any church agent who violates State or Federal laws.

Article 11: Mediation of Disputes

Section 1: Disputes

City of Refuge will follow the biblical formula for the redemptive resolution of disputes as found in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 6:1-11. Members must pursue every effort to live at peace and resolve disputes in private.

Section 2: Church Conflict

It shall be the practice of this church to emphasize to its members that every reasonable measure will be taken to resolve conflict using the principles of Matthew 18. The use of biblically based and legally binding Christian mediation is required if parties cannot settle their disputes using this guideline.

Section 3: Agreement Procedures

Should circumstances arise that result in a member becoming a liability to the church's welfare, the church will exercise every reasonable effort to resolve the problem in a spirit of Christian kindness and forbearance. If the exclusion of the member is determined to serve the church's welfare best, the church may take action at a special-called business meeting for this purpose. (See Article 4, Sections 7-9.)

Section 4: Petitions

A member may create a petition to gain attention to a grievance or concern.

The petition must state the grievance or concern, be dated, and include a signature line for each member.

Active petitions require the signatures of one-third of the active membership.

The Elder Team shall receive petitions meeting these requirements for activation.

Article 12: Licensing, Ordaining, and Commissioning

Section 1: Licensing and Ordaining Ministers

Licensing – When a man announces to the church that he feels the call to the ministry, the Elder Team may recommend him to the church and may, by a majority vote, license him to the ministry.

Ordaining – The church shall observe the following procedures when asked to ordain a man called to serve as a Baptist church lead pastor or ordained staff pastor.

1. The church will express its approval by a two-thirds vote of the active members of City of Refuge at any regularly called church business conference.
2. The Lead Pastor shall organize a council to examine the candidate concerning his fitness for the ministry. Upon receiving a favorable report, the church shall proceed with the ordination.

Note: Licensing is a designation indicating the candidate is a minister for tax purposes and complies with federal income tax reporting and withholding rules.

Section 2: Commissioning Missionaries

Church members called by God to the work of missions may be presented at any regular business meeting to be commissioned as missionaries by the church with a majority vote of the active members of City of Refuge.

Article 13: Annual Responsibilities

Section 1: Accounts and Records

The fiscal year and church year of City of Refuge begins on January 1 and ends of December 31 of each year.

The church shall have an annual budget to serve as the guide for the financial operation of the church. The budget presentation to the church at the Annual Business Meeting shall include discussion and vote.

Section 2: Policy and Procedures Manual

The Elder Team shall authorize the creation and maintenance of a policy and procedures manual.

Section 3: Inspection of Records

A copy of the Incorporation, Bylaws, and Policies and Procedures of City of Refuge will be available in the church office for viewing by church members.

Every active City of Refuge member, in good standing, has the right to inspect all records, reports, and documentation of every kind, except that which is deemed confidential, which can include meeting minutes from Elder Team Meetings. Due to the Elder Team's responsibility to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:1-2), the sensitive nature of the pastoral and shepherding concerns that are discussed during Elder Team Meetings will be considered confidential.

No copy of viewed reports of documents will be allowed to leave the church office. This includes digital and/or photographed copies.

Section 4: Auditing Procedures

The Elder Team shall ensure an annual audit is conducted.

Section 5: Political Activities

To maintain the exemption from Federal Income Taxes, the church and other religious organizations must comply with the requirements of Section 501(c)3 of the tax code. One of these restrictions is that the church does not participate or intervene in any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate running for public office or any one political party. The church is not to engage in substantial efforts to influence legislation by way of any lobbying process. If a church wishes to have political personalities attend and speak to the congregation, it is suggested to have equal representation of both political parties. The same is true for any political brochures offered to the congregation. This applies to local, state, and national political campaigns and personalities.

Section 6: Conflict of Interest

All reasonable efforts will be made to avoid the appearance of a conflict-of-interest involving church staff, church leadership, and church volunteers. This includes involvement with current and potential vendors and bidding organizations. All staff and members must refrain from participating in, or influencing, any decision, ministry, or church action in which the individual or family member is materially affiliated. Potential areas of conflict should be disclosed to leadership prior to finalizing agreements, decisions, or church action.

Article 14: Property

If at any time the church considers altering its denominational affiliation, if the decision is by less than a four-fifths vote of those active members of City of Refuge at a properly called business meeting of the church, all church property will remain with the part of the congregation that agrees to continue to use the property for the purpose for which it was purchased and has been to that time maintained.

Article 15: Article of Dissolution

Section 1: Vote to Dissolve

In the event that the Elder Team of City of Refuge determines that there is reasonable cause to dissolve City of Refuge of Columbia as a corporate entity, the Elder Team shall recommend dissolution to the general members at a special-called business meeting for the express purpose of dissolving the church. Notice of the meeting shall be given two weeks in advance.

At least four-fifths of the active members of City of Refuge must vote in the affirmative to approve the dissolution of the church.

Section 2: Dissolution Guidelines

Being organized and incorporated, City of Refuge of Columbia operates as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization under the United States Internal Revenue Code. In the event of dissolution of City of Refuge of Columbia, the assets thereof shall be liquidated and distributed for payment of all outstanding debts and obligations; remaining assets shall be distributed to the Columbia Metro Baptist Association for the purpose of Kingdom work.

No church asset(s) shall be distributed to any member, officer, or staff of City of Refuge of Columbia, or any other individual.

Article 16: Amendment to the Bylaws

Section 1: General Procedures

Any of these Bylaws may be amended, altered, or repealed by a two-thirds vote of the active members of City of Refuge at any special-called business meeting, provided the Elder Team receives and approves the amendments, alterations, or repeals, and presents them to the church thirty days before being offered for a vote.

Section 2: Amendment Styles

All amendments shall be made by striking through the original amendment and noting the change in capital lettering.

The bottom of each page that contains an amendment must have a notation of the last revision date.

New bylaws/amendments need a complete reprint of the document annually with a footnote on each page showing the current edition.

Section 3: Notifications and Reviews

Upon approval of amendments by the Elder Team, a church business meeting shall occur to present such modifications no less than 30 days before the time for a congregational vote.

Section 4: Presentation and Vote

A vote on approved amendments shall occur in a special-called business meeting following a questions and comments presentation no less than 30 days prior to the congregational vote. A two-thirds vote of the active members of City of Refuge present shall constitute acceptance of amendments.

Section 5: Documentation Distribution

New documents or sections of amended documents, properly footnoted, shall be available in the church office.

Appendix 1: Membership Covenant

A member of City of Refuge Church must understand and joyfully embrace the following commitments to other members of the church:

1. **Repentance & Faith:** I am a sinner, saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. I have repented of my sins, receiving God's forgiveness and the gift of His Spirit, and trust in Christ alone for my salvation. (Acts 2:36-39; Mark 1:15)
2. **Participation in Church Life:** I commit to participating in the rhythms of City of Refuge, to the extent to which I am able – regularly attending meetings and training (leadership and service) with the covenanted City of Refuge family. (Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Thess. 5:14-22)
3. **Commitment to One Another:** I commit to practicing the humble and sacrificial attitude of Jesus by valuing, honoring, and caring for those within the covenanted family of City of Refuge. (Rom. 12:9-16; Phil. 2:1-8)
4. **Discipleship & Stewardship:** I commit to pursuing the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and the practice of spiritual disciplines while honoring God with the resources He has graciously given me. This includes sacrificially, generously, and cheerfully giving of my time, finances, talents, and other resources to the Lord through City of Refuge. (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 5:1-21)
5. **Relationship with Pastors:** I affirm the acting pastors and will honor and pray for them, submitting to their authority as the shepherds and overseers of City of Refuge as we collectively sit under the authority of Jesus Christ. I also commit to watch over their lives and their teaching, making sure they remain in step with the gospel. (1 Tim. 5:17-21, Gal. 1:6-9)

In all these things, we rely on the grace of God and the power of His Spirit, having embraced mission, vision, and core values of City of Refuge.

Commitments from Elders to Members

- To submit to King Jesus as the chief Shepherd of the church
- To oversee and carry out the ministry of the Word and prayer
- To proactively and consistently shepherd the members of City of Refuge Church
- To mutually submit to one another as an Elder Team
- To protect against false doctrine
- To affirm and recommend elders to the member body for affirmation
- To affirm and recommend deacons to the member body for affirmation
- To affirm and receive members into our covenanted body
- To steward the resources of City of Refuge church for the Kingdom in a transparent manner
- To carry out the commitments of the member body listed below as a faithful member

Commitments from Members to Each Other and the Elders

- To gather with the church on a consistent basis
- To engage in authentic, Christian community
- To engage in missional disciple-making efforts
- To pursue knowing and loving Jesus
- To care for other members and bear each other's burdens as one's own
- To pursue unity among the diverse members of the body
- To steward personal resources in a Kingdom manner
- To submit to the leaders of the church as they follow Jesus
- To hold leadership accountable for actions and teachings that are contrary to the gospel