

**Governing Documents for the Local Church:  
Underlying Principles and Concepts**  
*Introduction: Definitions, Reasons and Rationale*

1. What are governing documents (definitions)?
  - a. The constitution.
  - b. The bylaws.
  - c. Differences and the rationale of separation
  
2. What are the driving philosophies of governance in respect to written documents?
  - a. Governing documents are unnecessary and even ungodly.
  - b. Governing documents are absolutely necessary as the instrument of protection, preservation, and prevention.
  - c. Governing documents are good and prudent instruments for healthy community, but are not the ultimate safeguard..
  
3. Why have governing documents (our rationale)?
  - a. Imitation (Ephesians 5:1; Deuteronomy) – God communicated and structured the nation and the church using written words.
  - b. Jesus, Himself, is the Word and used words to instruct, warn, provide direction and order (John 1:1; Matthew 28:20).
  - c. Because we are broken and sinful, we need instruments to clarify, preserve, protect, prevent, etc. (consider the many instructions/warnings of Scripture).
  - d. Order comes from clarity of expression (not in tongues, cf. 1 Cor. 14:40).
  - e. Governing documents will not ultimately protect against abuse, but when used by faithful people, they are instruments of good.

4. Why have governing documents (reasons)?
  - a. To express shared values and convictions.
  - b. To safeguard those values and convictions.
  - c. To clarify expectations.
  - d. To standardize practices.
  - e. To provide guidelines for processes.
  - f. To provide an agreed upon basis for resolving conflicts or making key decisions.
  - g. To guard against abuses, including abuse of authority.
  - h. To provide restraint and accountability.
5. What are possible problems or pitfalls with governing documents?
  - a. They can become too restrictive (inhibiting healthy change, growth, development, etc.)..
  - b. They can promote a legal mindset (2 Corinthians 3:6).
  - c. They can become a source of or even empower contention.
  - d. They can be neglected or ignored.
  - e. They can become *the* hope for health or *the* ground for resolution (as opposed to Scripture).
6. How do we overcome these pitfalls and problems?
  - a. We commit ourselves to the gospel and work to proclaim it and guard it.
  - b. We devote ourselves to the Word and to prayer as a people.
  - c. We seek to understand our own hearts and anticipate the pressure points.
  - d. We appoint godly leaders who meet and maintain biblical qualifications.
  - e. We review, revisit, instruct, and implement.
  - f. We commit ourselves to upholding and speaking truth in love when issues arise.
  - g. We labor for personal humility and fight the temptations of pride.