

Ten Elements Every Church Document Needs

Pull out your current bylaws and work down this list. If you cannot find an item in under two minutes, mark it missing, because that is how long a member or an attorney will look. Article numbers refer to the CBA model bylaws.

Church _____

Reviewed by _____

Date _____

#	ELEMENT, AND WHY IT MATTERS	ARTICLE	HAVE	NEED
1	Legal name, location, and corporate status. The name on the deed, the name with the state, and the name on the sign must match.	I	☐	☐
2	Purpose and statement of faith. What the church exists to do and what it believes, including which edition of the confession.	II, III	☐	☐
3	Who holds authority. Congregational government, autonomy, and who signs for the corporation.	V	☐	☐
4	Membership: how in, how out, who votes. Including a voting age and an honest way to handle inactive members.	VII	☐	☐
5	A written discipline process. Steps in order, notice to the member, a chance to be heard, and a clause for resignation mid-process.	VIII	☐	☐
6	How a pastor is called, and how the relationship ends. Thresholds, secret ballot, notice, who may call the meeting, severance.	X, X-A	☐	☐
7	Business meetings: notice, quorum, and thresholds. The numbers a moderator needs, gathered in one place.	XV	☐	☐
8	Money and property controls. Two counters, separated duties, an annual review, and a raised vote for real property.	XVI, XVII	☐	☐
9	Indemnification, insurance, and a dissolution clause. Protection for the people who serve, and a destination for the property.	XIX, XX	☐	☐
10	An amendment article, and one dated master copy. How the document changes, and which copy is the real one.	XXI	☐	☐

TWO THINGS TO REMEMBER

Not following your own bylaws is worse than having bad ones: anyone can pull them up and say we were not supposed to do this. And **the less you have in your bylaws, the better off you are.** Operational detail belongs in a policy manual, where one majority vote can change it.

YOUR FIRST MONTH

Elect a special committee, not the pastor. Read your amendment article out loud in the first meeting. Fill out one worksheet. And revise while the church is at peace: a church in conflict cannot do this work, because every clause becomes a proxy for the fight.

BEFORE YOUR CHURCH ADOPTS ANYTHING

Send the draft to the **Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions** for review; they keep staff who work with churches on governing documents and incorporation, and that review is available to Alabama Baptist churches. Have **your own attorney** review anything touching incorporation, property, employment, or liability. Call the **CBA office** and we will help make the connection.