

**CONSTITUTION**  
**of**  
**FIRST SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**Cottonwood, Arizona**

We acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church and is its final authority and the Holy Bible is His inspired, inerrant message to us. With that truth in mind we establish this constitution and its related by-laws to preserve the principles of our faith, the liberties of each member, the freedom of action of this body. This constitution shall serve as a guide in the governing of this church body and our relationship with other churches.

**ARTICLE 1**

**Name**

This body shall be known as First Southern Baptist Church of Cottonwood.

**ARTICLE 2**

**Purpose**

The purpose of the church is to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

- 1) EVANGELISM/MISSIONS – To share the good news of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible in our community and throughout the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Peter 3:9).
- 2) EDUCATION – To help members develop toward full Christian maturity and train them for effective ministry. To promote personal spiritual growth and discipleship through Bible teaching (Ephesians 4:11-13; Matthew 18-20; 2 Timothy 2:2).
- 3) WORSHIP- To participate in public worship services together and to maintain personal daily devotions (John 4:24).
- 4) MINISTRY/SERVICE – To serve unselfishly, in Jesus’ name meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those in our church, community and in the world (1 Peter 4:10-11; Matthew 25:34-40; 2 Thessalonians 5:11; Galatians 5:13).
- 5) FELLOWSHIP – To encourage, support and pray for each other as members of the family of God, and to share our lives together (John 1:7; Acts 2:44-47; Hebrews 10:23-25; Romans 15:5-7; John 13:34-35)

**ARTICLE 3**

**Statement of Faith**

The Holy Bible as the inspired, inerrant word of God is the sole authority for our faith and practices. An acceptable summary statement of our faith is the Baptist Faith and Message adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in May, 1963, and as subsequently revised by the same body.

**ARTICLE 4**

**Affiliation**

This church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of any denominational control. Recognizing, however, the benefits of cooperation with other churches

in world missions, this church voluntarily affiliates with the Southern Baptist Convention in its National, State and local expressions.

Should this church decide that it will no longer exist as a Southern Baptist Church, or decide to disassociate itself from the Southern Baptist Convention, control of all its real property and improvements thereto, shall be conveyed, temporarily, to the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, an Arizona non-profit corporation. The Arizona Southern Baptist Convention shall try to establish a Southern Baptist Church in this location with the assets. If this is not successful, at the end of two (2) years, permanent ownership shall be transferred to the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention.

All internal groups and ministries created and empowered by the church shall be under the oversight of the pastoral staff with final accountability and arbitration before the church unless otherwise specified by church action.

If this congregation ever ceases to be a viable church, the members of this church shall have no claim to property, and they shall be entitled to no assets.

## **ARTICLE 5**

### **Church Covenant**

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, and the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of and use of destructive drugs; to abstain from drunkenness; to shun pornography; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure reconciliation without delay.

We moreover engage that when we move from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

## **ARTICLE 6**

### **Membership**

#### *Section 1 - Determination*

An autonomous Baptist church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, this church shall determine its own membership.

#### *Section 2 - Candidacy*

Any person may offer himself as a candidate for membership in this church. Each candidate shall be presented to the church for membership at any regular church service in one of the following ways:

- A) By profession of faith and baptism.
- B) By promise of letter of recommendation from another church of like faith and doctrine.
- C) By acceptance of personal statement of prior conversion experience and baptism in a church of like faith and doctrine when no letter is obtainable.

#### *Section 3 - Approval*

The church body must approve each candidate's membership. Should there be any dissent as to any candidate, such dissent shall be referred to the pastor and the deacons for investigation and the making of a recommendation to the church within thirty (30) days. A unanimous vote of those members present and voting shall be required to elect such candidates to membership.

#### *Section 4 - Rights of Members*

Church members, with the exception of children under sixteen (16) years of age, are entitled to vote at all elections and on all questions submitted to the church in conference, provided the member is present at the meeting at the time of the vote.

#### *Section 5 - Discipline*

It shall be the practice of this church to emphasize to its members that every reasonable measure will be taken to assist any troubled member. The pastor, other members of the church staff, and deacons are available for counsel and guidance, based upon the principles found in the word of God. The attitude of members toward one another shall be guided by a concern for redemption rather than punishment.

Should some serious condition exist which would cause a member to become a liability to the general welfare of the church, the pastor and the deacons will take every reasonable measure to resolve the problem in accordance with Matthew 18. If it becomes necessary for the church to exclude a member, a 2/3 vote by secret ballot of the members present at a business meeting is required. The church shall notify the excluded member in writing of the action. All such proceedings shall be permeated with a spirit of Christian kindness and forbearance.

Upon evidence of the excluded person's penitence and spiritual reformation, the church may restore to membership any person previously excluded. This shall be done by vote of the church, after the person requests restoration.

*Section 6 - Removal*

Members shall be removed from the church's membership roll only in the event of one of the following:

- A) Dies or is presumed dead.
- B) Unites with another church.
- C) Desires such action.
- D) Is excluded by official church action.
- E) Can not be located for 1 year.

Such action shall be noted at the next regularly scheduled business meeting.

*Section 7 - Inactive Membership*

An inactive membership list shall be kept of members who do not attend or support the regular activities of the church for a period of one year (12 months). An inactive member shall have no voting rights and for practical purposes will not hold the normal privileges of membership. Any member who by action indicates a breaking of fellowship with the church body shall also be placed on the inactive membership list upon request of the pastor and deacons and approval of the church body by majority vote. An inactive member may resume his active membership by personal request to the membership and subsequent resumption of attendance at regular worship services of the church.

**ARTICLE 7****Officers***Section 1 – Summary*

The Biblical offices in the church are elders and deacons. In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions under this constitution of clerk and treasurer. All officers must be members of this church prior to assuming their responsibilities.

*Section 2 – Elders*

The elders shall be comprised of not less than three men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in I Timothy 3: 1–7 and Titus 1: 6–9. A majority of the active eldership shall be composed of church members not in the regular pay of the church, and no elder shall hold the office of deacon during his tenure. Subject to the will of the congregation, the elders shall oversee the ministry and resources of the church. In keeping with the principles set forth in Acts 6: 1–6 and I Peter 5:1–4, the elders shall devote their time to prayer, the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and shepherding God's flock.

The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as elders. This recognition shall be reaffirmed by the church triennially. After an elder, other than the pastor(s), has served two consecutive three-year terms, he may only be elected to the office of elder after at least one year.

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 elders and, if need be, to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the

instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15–17 and I Timothy 5:17–21. Any of the elders may be dismissed by a two-thirds vote of the members at any members’ meeting of the church.

The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions. The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

The elders may establish ministry positions or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The elders may also propose funding for new paid staff positions. The membership shall give final approval for any candidate to fill the position of pastor(s). The scope and approval of job descriptions for any staff position shall reside in the hands of those with hiring authority for that position. The elders shall have primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, and evaluation of staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to another staff member. The elders shall elect a chairman of elders’ meetings and shall also elect one of their number to serve as moderator of members’ meetings. For purposes of compliance with the nonprofit corporation laws of the State of Arizona, the elders shall elect one of their number to serve as the president of the corporation.

### Section 3 – The Pastor

The pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2, above, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. His call shall not be subject to the triennial reaffirmation or to the term limitation set out in Article 7, Section 2, for elders.

He shall preach on the Lord’s Day, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office, or as set forth in the constitution. In the absence or incapacity of the pastor the elders shall assume responsibility for his duties, any of which can be delegated.

### Section 4 – Deacons

The office of deacon is described in I Timothy 3: 8–13 and Acts 6: 1–7. The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, men who are giving of themselves in service to the church, and who possess particular gifts of service. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons. They shall be elected to one term lasting for a maximum of three years and may only be elected to another term after one year.

Deacons shall care for the temporal needs of members, attend to the accommodations for public worship, and encourage and support those able to help others and those with gifts of administration. Each year the elders, after consulting with the deacons, shall present to the church an itemized budget at a regular members’ meeting. This budget shall be presented for

discussion at that time and called up for a vote at the following members' meeting. No money shall be solicited by or on behalf of the church or any of its ministries without the approval of the elders and deacons. The deacons shall disburse a fund for benevolence. The deacons, with the agreement of the elders, may establish unpaid administrative positions or committees of members to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities in the church.

#### *Section 5 – Clerk*

It shall be the duty of the clerk to record the minutes of all regular and special members' meetings of the church, to preserve an accurate roll of the membership, and to render reports as requested by the pastor, the elders, the deacons, or the church. The clerk shall be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation to serve a term of one year. In the absence or incapacity of the clerk the elders shall appoint a member to perform the duties of the church clerk. For purposes of compliance with the nonprofit corporation laws of the State of Arizona, the clerk shall serve as the secretary of the corporation. The church clerk shall ensure that dated copies of the most recent revision of this constitution shall be available for all church members.

#### *Section 6 – Treasurer*

The treasurer, who shall not be an active elder, deacon, or paid church staff member, shall ensure that all funds and securities of the church are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories as appropriate. The treasurer shall also be responsible for presenting regular reports of the account balances, revenues and expenses of the church at each members' meeting. The responsibility may be delegated with the approval of the elders. The treasurer shall also ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept in books belonging to the church, and that adequate controls are implemented to guarantee that all funds belonging to the church are appropriately handled by any officer, employee, or agent of the church. The treasurer shall render to the elders annually, or whenever they may require it, an account of all transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the church. All reports and records are open to inspection by any member of the church upon appointment with the Treasurer and in the company of an elder. The treasurer shall be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation to serve a term of one year.

## **ARTICLE 8** **Elections**

#### *Section 1 – Principles*

The process for church elections shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following principles: Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, should be an integral part of the election process; Nominations should proceed with the support of the elders; All candidates for church office should be treated with the grace, kindness, and honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members; The election process shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration that is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### *Section 2 – Selection of Officers*

The election of officers shall be held at a members' meeting of the church. Names of nominees to serve as elders, deacons, clerk, or treasurer shall be presented by the elders at the previous members' meeting (providing that previous meeting occurred at least eight weeks prior), and the

election shall proceed as directed by the moderator. The elders should seek recommendations and involvement from the general membership in the nomination process. Any member with reason to believe that a nominated candidate is unqualified for an office should express such concern to the elders. Members intending to speak in opposition to a candidate should express their objection to the elders as far in advance as possible before the relevant church members' meeting. The moderator shall declare elected all men receiving a 75% majority of all votes cast for the office of elder. For all other offices, the moderator shall declare elected all persons receiving a simple majority of all votes cast; abstentions will not be considered as votes cast. The persons elected shall assume their respective offices upon election, unless another date has been specifically designated.

### *Section 3 – Calling of the Pastor*

In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. Notice of the nomination of a man to be elected to membership and called as pastor (which shall include, if necessary, election to membership of his wife if he is married) must be given at two Sunday morning services following the nomination, prior to the vote at a members' meeting.

## **ARTICLE 9** **Indemnification**

### *Section 1 – Mandatory Indemnification*

If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the elders determine that the person acted (a) in good faith, (b) with the care that an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, and (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, and the person had no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful.

### *Section 2 – Procedure*

If a quorum of two-thirds of the elders is not available for an indemnification determination because of the number of elders seeking indemnification, the requisite determination may be made by the membership or by special legal counsel appointed by the membership.

## **ARTICLE 10** **Dispute Resolution**

Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian Church (see, e.g., Matthew 18: 15–20, I Corinthians 6: 1–8), the church shall require its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without reliance on the secular courts. Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles to resolve disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or pagan and whether individuals or corporate entities.

**ARTICLE 11**  
**Church Meetings**

Regularly scheduled worship services shall be on each Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and each Wednesday evening. All services shall be under the direction of the pastor or whomever the church designates. Any permanent changes to the schedule must be approved by a church vote.

Church members meetings shall be held at least quarterly. Quorum shall consist of active resident members, except as otherwise noted differently in this constitution, in attendance at a properly called meeting.

Eligible voters at any meeting shall be as set forth under the “Rights of Members” in the Membership requirements of this constitution.

Any special called members meeting shall be announced at two (2) consecutive services with details regarding the purpose of the meeting, one (1) week prior to the special meeting.

Robert’s Rules of Order may be utilized at all meetings.

**ARTICLE 12**  
**Amendments**

Proposed changes in the Constitution shall be published and made available to all church members at all regular Sunday worship services two (2) Sundays prior to a regular members’ meeting. Amendments or changes must be ratified by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of members present in a regular members meeting. Regular worship services and regular members’ meetings are considered those which are approved by the church members or announced to the church body in advance.