



S O J O U R N

Book of Church Order

Adopted April 2019
Last Updated June 20 2023

NOTE: For a chronological history of changes to the *Book for Church Order (BCO)* from 2023 to present, see the list below. The following amendments to the *BCO* were adopted by the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders in:

February 2023: 2.5, 2.6, 4.3, 6.5, Section 7 (*entire*), Section 8 (*entire*), Section 9 (*deletion, subsequent sections renumbered*), 9.1, 9.3, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7, 9.10, 9.11

June 2023: 1.4, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5

Contents

Preamble	4
Corporate Worship	5
Elder Candidacy & Ordination	7
Particularization	10
Church Discipline	12
Financial Practices	15
The Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders	16
Decisions to Amend or Clarify Doctrinal & Directional Documents	20
Appeal Process	23

I. Preamble

1.1 Jesus Christ has been given all authority in heaven and earth, and He reigns as Head over His Church, which He purchased with His own blood (Matthew 28:18, Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22, Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:12). All authority in the Church derives from Jesus and is exercised on His behalf.

1.2 The Scriptures are always the ultimate and inerrant court of appeal (Psalm 18:30, 119:89, John 16:13-15, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21). In matters of doctrine, an appeal to Scripture will always be the first resort. In accordance with our creedal and confessional standards, we acknowledge the preeminence of Scripture.

1.3 We submit to all those principles regarding church order which are clearly required by Scripture, or required by deductions from Scripture understood through good and necessary consequence. For the rest, we desire to operate in terms of a sanctified Christian prudence, with all things done in good order and biblical decency. At all times, we seek to reflect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Psalm 133; Ephesians 4:3, 13).

1.4 Wherever a body of baptized Christians are associated for worship and carrying out Christ's commission to disciple the nations, a local church exists. The elders of each local church have primary responsibility to govern its affairs under the Lordship of Christ and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Local elders are accountable to the Lord, their local congregations, and the broader ecclesiastical Body for their life and doctrine. While this Body is the global and historic Church (The Body of Christ), for the sake of practical accountability, elders of Sojourn churches are accountable to the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.

1.5 Christ is the Head of one Body, the Church universal, consisting of the elect saints of all ages who share the one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Sojourn Houston churches covenant together to give visible expression to our unity in Christ, benefit from the gifts and wisdom of others within the Body, increase our effectiveness in fulfilling the mission of the Church, and grow the Church up into maturity, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4).

1.6 This *Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order (BCO)* defines the binding structure and key values of our partnership together as a family of churches. As of its first ratification, this BCO does not provide detailed procedures for every foreseeable action. Rather, it outlines values that guide us and procedural direction for crucial points of decision.

II. Corporate Worship

2.1 Corporate worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other, but before all else, a meeting of the triune God with His chosen people. God is present in corporate worship not only by virtue of the Divine omnipresence but, much more intimately, as the faithful covenant Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ said: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Corporate worship has as its aim the building of Christ's Church by the perfecting of the saints and the addition to its membership of such as are being saved, all to the glory of God. The essential elements of weekly corporate worship are the ministry of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.

2.2 The ministry of the Word through preaching and liturgy is essential to the life and health of the church. Preaching should always be Christ-centered, calling all in attendance to repentance and faith under the Lordship of Christ. The pulpit shall be reserved for pastors and pastors in training.

2.3 Baptism is a sacrament ordained for the admission of a person into the Church. Sojourn Houston grants freedom to the elders of each congregation to discern who to baptize, when to baptize, and how to baptize. Sojourn churches may practice either paedobaptism or credobaptism.

2.4 The Lord's Supper (or Communion, or the Eucharist) was ordained by Christ as a ritual of covenant remembrance unto God and His Church, for the sealing and communication of covenant benefits, and for the spiritual nourishment of the Body. Through bread and wine (or juice), common means of sustenance and enjoyment, the Church eats and drinks of the sustaining work of Christ by faith.

2.5 Sojourn Houston churches are required to meet minimum liturgical standards for Lord's Day worship. We believe corporate worship is an act of covenant renewal initiated by God, and the process of covenant renewal is a sacrificial process (Genesis 8:20-9:17; Genesis 15:8-18a; Exodus 24:4-11; 34:15; Leviticus 2:13; 24:1-8; Numbers 18:19; 1 Kings 3;15; Psalm 50:5; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15, 18; 9:20; 12:24; 13:20). Under the New Covenant, God draws us into His presence by way of the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, our liturgy is ordered and sequenced like a covenant renewal ceremony. The three elements of cleansing, consecration, and communion correspond to three types of sacrifices under the Old Covenant (purification, ascension, and fellowship offerings). Accordingly, Sojourn Houston liturgies shall include, at minimum, weekly confession and absolution, weekly prayer and instruction, and weekly Communion. Each weekly gathering of each local church shall be held in a single location and be open to as many covenant members and visitors as possible.

2.6 Sojourn Houston churches are free to contextualize their liturgy. We encourage each congregation to thoughtfully and prayerfully determine a sermon length, communication style, and liturgy appropriate for their context. In discerning a contextually appropriate liturgy, churches may submit a request to the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders for an exception to the minimum liturgical standards as outlined in §2.5.

III. Elder Candidacy & Ordination

3.1 Candidates for eldership, shall be nominated by the sitting elders of their local church and vetted by the Sojourn Houston elders at large. The candidacy process shall be administered by the local elders.

3.2 The minimum standards are as follows:

3.2.1 Candidates must have undergone a season of proven qualification in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

3.2.2 The candidacy process must be at least six months in duration from the date of their first introduction as a candidate to the Sojourn Houston elders.

3.2.3 Candidates shall complete a common curriculum, to include theological exams. Local churches may add content to the common curriculum, but they are not permitted to remove content.

3.2.4 Candidates shall be presented to the congregation at a meeting of the members. Members are to be given no less than six weeks following the presentation of the candidates to bring forward charges or accusations regarding each candidate's qualification.

3.3 A standing committee shall be formed with the responsibility of helping and at the pleasure of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders to "keep a close watch on ourselves and on the teaching" called the "Pastoral Assessment Committee".

3.3.1 The Pastoral Assessment Committee shall be staffed by no fewer than two staff elders, filling the role of chairman and clerk of this committee, and shall be elected from among qualified candidates, both from and by the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders, through ordinary nomination process, to terms not to exceed 5 years. Member(s) at large may also be elected, as determined by the vote of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.

3.3.2 The Pastoral Assessment Committee shall not have the authority to ordain elders, which authority is retained by the local council of elders, but shall instead have the following delegated authority and responsibility, subject to appeal by a majority of the Assembly, intended to facilitate the communal action of the Assembly:

3.3.2a) To create, update, maintain, and oversee the administration - locally or otherwise - of character, theological, and practical ministry evaluations and/or examinations for prospective elder candidates, insofar as those evaluations

and/or examinations are in full agreement with and expediently supportive of the governing documents of Sojourn Houston, and do not place unnecessary or unbiblical restraint or hindrance on the ordination process of elders of the church.

3.3.2b) To make non-binding judgments regarding the ordination of prospective Sojourn Houston elders, based upon the Sojourn Houston governing documents, which judgments will serve as recommendations for or against the ordination of a prospective elder to the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders. The Assembly shall continue to serve as the adjudicating body for questions of ordination in keeping with BCO 3.1, and the local council of elders shall continue to be the body with authority to ordain elders in keeping with BCO 3.1, 3.2, and 3.5.

3.3.2c) To serve as the primary court responsible for investigating charges brought against any elder or council of elders with respect to doctrinal error, moral failure, or failure to submit to the Sojourn Houston Family of Churches Church Covenant, in order to determine whether formal charges should be brought before the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders for adjudication.

3.3.3 While it is appropriate that the Pastoral Assessment Committee be asked to give interpretation of our governing documents when needed, and may at times serve to support members of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders in the preparation of motions for doctrinal changes or position papers, the Ordination Committee shall have no authority to change or modify in any way the doctrines or practices outlined in the adopted governing documents given above apart from submitting motions to the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders through the ordinary rule of order.

3.3.4 The elders of a local church may vote at any time to remove one of their local elders from their position on the Pastoral Assessment Committee. In the event of this happening, or in the event of a resignation, if there are at least two remaining members on the Pastoral Assessment Committee, the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders may choose to wait until the next normal election to replace the departing member of the committee. If such an event results in less than two remaining members on the committee, a replacement shall be elected at the soonest possible subsequent meeting of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders, no new business may be raised, and any unfinished business shall be tabled until the committee once again has at least two duly elected members.

3.3.5 All overtures and meeting minutes from meetings of the Pastoral Assessment Committee shall be made publicly available within 30 days of their sharing with the

members of the Pastoral Assessment Committee, and no later than 45 days after the meeting in question.

3.4 All candidates shall sign the Sojourn Houston Family of Churches Church Covenant. Signed covenants should be submitted to the Clerk prior to being brought before the Sojourn Houston Assembly for ordination (see 3.3.2c).

3.5 If there are no disqualifying charges or accusations, the candidate shall be ordained by the local council of elders of the congregation in which he is to serve. If the local church is non-particularized, at least one other Sojourn Houston elder will be in attendance for the laying on of hands.

IV. Particularization

4.1 “Particularized” Sojourn Houston churches have three or more elders, which must include at least one lay elder, unpaid by the church.

4.2 “Non-particularized” Sojourn Houston churches have fewer than three elders and/or fewer than one lay elder.

4.3 Non-particularized churches shall be assigned one or two provisional elders from amongst the Sojourn Houston eldership at large, such that non-particularized churches sit under the oversight of a provisional committee of at least three elders. The appointed elders shall represent Sojourn Houston, being drawn from particularized Sojourn Houston churches, and they shall give oversight to the non-particularized church alongside its elders, until the date of its particularization. All major decisions shall be subject to approval by the appointed elders, including budgets, budget amendments, benevolence requests, staffing, property/location decisions, and church discipline. The Congregational Representative Committee shall approve provisional elders.

Provisional Elders serve on behalf of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders. Expectations of Provisional Elders are as follows:

- To advise the non-particularized church’s pastor(s)
- To connect the pastor(s) with resources
- To oversee the leadership identification and development at the non-particularized church
- To be familiar with the context of the non-particularized church
- To oversee discipline in the non-particularized church
- To oversee finances in the non-particularized church
- To relationally care for the pastor(s) and connect them with care resources
- To meet with the pastor(s) on a regular basis (monthly)
- To provide feedback to the pastor(s)
- To be known by the members of the non-particularized church as a provisional elder
- To affirm and communicate updates regarding the non-particularized church and pastor(s) to the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders
- To assist with preaching at the non-particularized church, if needed
- To communicate with the Covenant Members of the non-particularized church, if needed
- To receive charges against the pastor(s)

The Provisional Elder serves the non-particularized church as a *voting* representative of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders. Thus, for any non-particularized church, any matter that requires a vote at the local level requires the vote of the provisional elder(s) alongside the local pastor(s). This includes decisions pertaining to:

1. Decisions of compatibility with the Sojourn Houston governing documents
2. Excommunication

3. Hiring of Staff
4. Termination of Employment
5. Receiving a Covenant Member
6. Ordination of Elders
7. Annual budgets and financial commitments
8. Heresy and false teaching
9. Sunday Gathering and liturgy

4.4 In the event that a Sojourn Houston church loses its particularized status, the church will again be appointed elders in keeping with §4.3.

V. Church Discipline

5.1 In addition to Word and Sacrament, we believe church discipline is a mark of a true church. The principles and practices outlined below reflect Sojourn Houston's ecclesiological standards, which are separate from civil laws. Our ecclesiological standards are in no way intended to supersede or nullify the laws of relevant civil authorities.

5.2 The Word of God must be properly taught, but it must also be obeyed (Romans 2:13, James 1:22). Holiness is a priority within the Church because the Church represents God to the world. The Church is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession" (1 Peter 2:9-10). Thus, church discipline is an exercise in love. Closely related to the biblical word for "disciple," church discipline is a culture of accountability, growth, forgiveness, and grace that ought to permeate the Church. The end sought is restoration and healing. When members of the Church respond to rebuke with sustained and characteristic unrepentance, church discipline becomes increasingly formal, involving the elders of the congregation. Ultimately, this process may culminate in the formal removal of an unrepentant member of the church.

5.3 The local elders of each Sojourn Houston church have jurisdiction over the members of their respective congregations. Members are subject to the discipline procedures outlined in Matthew 18:15-22 and 1 Corinthians 5, and the elders are expected to take reasonable measures to protect the privacy/anonymity of the member(s) under discipline. Sins requiring excommunication are behavioral, serious, and unrepentant. These include but are not limited to: gross sexual misconduct, teaching doctrine contrary to biblical orthodoxy, divisiveness, and financial impropriety.

5.4 Understanding that every discipline case is unique, requiring prayer, wisdom, discernment, and discretion on the part of the elders, Sojourn Houston congregations shall nonetheless observe the following procedural guidelines for church discipline:

- 1) The elders shall involve the member's immediate community (i.e. the Neighborhood Parish or some equivalent structure) in the ongoing call to repentance.
- 2) Throughout the duration of the discipline case, the depth of elder involvement and the pace of the discipline process shall be subject to change as deemed appropriate by the local elders.
- 3) Should the elders determine that the member under discipline exhibits characteristic unrepentance, he/she shall be informed in writing of the following steps:
 - a) The congregation shall be notified that the member in question is under church discipline, and a general explanation as to the nature of the sin will be

given. The congregation shall be instructed to join the elders in a call for repentance.

b) Six weeks after the congregation is notified, if the member under discipline persists in unrepentance, he/she shall be excommunicated.

5.5 The local elders of each Sojourn Houston church shall determine when and how to readmit an excommunicated member into the fellowship of the church (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). The congregation shall be called to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love for such a member (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). When one Sojourn Houston church determines to excommunicate a member, the member shall be excommunicated from all Sojourn Houston churches.

5.6 Should a church discipline case arise within a church plant (a non-particularized church), the temporarily appointed team of elders (see §4.3) shall assist the elder(s) of the church plant in observing the procedural guidelines outlined in §5.4.

5.7 The discipline of an elder shall follow the same procedural guidelines outlined in §5.4, with the following exceptions:

1) A charge or accusation against an elder shall not be publicly admitted without at least two witnesses to the sin in question (1 Timothy 5:19-21). Cases may be discreetly investigated on the basis of the testimony of one witness.

2) As a member of the congregation, the elder under discipline shall be given the opportunity to repent. However, the local elders and/or Sojourn Houston elders at large may nonetheless deem it necessary to revoke his status as an elder. If the elder under discipline is a vocational elder (paid by Sojourn Houston or a Sojourn Houston church), his employment may also be terminated.

3) An elder guilty of sin that is not immediately disqualifying shall be given a six month probationary period for investigation and repentance.

4) An elder accused of teaching doctrine contrary to Sojourn Houston's *Confession of Faith* shall be subject to a six month probationary period for investigation and correction. Should the elder persist in holding to doctrine(s) contrary to our shared *Confession of Faith*, he shall be removed as an elder.

5.8 The discipline of an elder within a church plant (non-particularized congregation) shall follow the same procedural guidelines outlined in §5.4 and §5.7. However, the discipline process shall be administered and overseen by the local and appointed elders (see §4.3).

VI. Financial Practices

6.1 Sojourn Houston churches shall pursue financial transparency with one another. There should be nothing hidden from the Sojourn Houston elders at large. At minimum, each church shall stand ready to share annual budgets and balance sheets with the Sojourn Houston elders.

6.2 Sojourn Houston churches shall pursue financial transparency with their respective members. Under certain circumstances, it may be prudent to withhold specific financial information, if only for a time, but this should be the exception to the rule. The local church budget is a tool for discipleship, and exposing our members to the budget requires financial transparency.

6.3 Each Sojourn Houston church shall form a Financial Stewardship Team (FST), responsible for giving guidance to the congregation's finances. All FST proposals are subject to elder approval. For particularized churches, the FST shall be comprised of no less than five members and no more than two elders.

6.4 For church plants (non-particularized churches), the FST shall be initially comprised of the local and appointed elders (see §4.3) until a team of no less than three lay members is assembled. This team of lay members must be assembled prior to the church's first official Sunday Gathering, though major decisions remain subject to elder approval.

6.5 Sojourn Houston shall form an FST to oversee its centralized budget. This team shall be comprised of the treasurer (see §7.3.3) and no less than two other elders, deacons, or members at Sojourn Houston, representing no less than two congregations.

VII. The Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders

7.1 The Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders (hereafter, "Assembly") is the deliberative body that is composed of all ordained elders of Sojourn Houston churches.

7.2 The Assembly shall meet regularly for the purpose of transacting business on behalf of Sojourn Houston as a deliberative body. These meetings shall be ordered according to the latest edition of Rober's Rules of Order, unless and until otherwise superseded by this Book of Church Order. Quorum is reached when 25% of active members of the Assembly are present.

- 1) All meetings of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders are considered open meetings, unless the business to be addressed is to be addressed privately or in an otherwise limited fashion in accordance with Scripture.
 - a) "Open meeting" is defined as publicly posted, at least one week in advance, with an identified seating area for non-members.
 - b) Meetings shall be moderated such that inasmuch as it is feasible, any items that need to be discussed in a closed capacity in accordance with biblically-required discretion, should be saved until the end, for a portion of the meeting which non-member guests will be dismissed, or referred to a special, closed session at a later time.
 - c) Any guests present at a meeting of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders who are not members of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders are considered non-speaking observers unless otherwise determined by the decision of the Assembly, such as identification to a particular administrative role, or unless directly addressed by one of the members of the Assembly, subject to the rule of order.
- 2) All proposals shared with the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders shall be made publicly available within 30 days of their sharing with the members of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders. Recorded minutes shall be approved by vote at the subsequent stated meeting of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders, and approved minutes shall be made publicly available within 30 days of their approval.

7.3 In accordance with gifting and availability, certain men shall be elected to assist the Assembly by serving as officers filling the role of chairman, clerk, and treasurer, and other member(s) at large, as determined by the vote of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders. No one who holds office in the Assembly ought to usurp authority therein, or to receive any official

titles of spiritual preeminence, except such as are employed in the Scriptures. The roles of these officers are outlined as follows.¹

1) The chairman has all authority necessary for the preservation of order, and for the proper and expeditious conduct of all business before the court, and for convening and adjourning the court according to its own ruling. In any emergency, he may by circular letter change the time or place, or both, of the meeting to which the court stands adjourned, giving reasonable notice thereof. The chairman, or in case of his absence the last chairman present or the oldest elder longest a member of the court, shall ensure that all meetings are opened and closed with prayer, he shall ensure that each stated meeting is opened with a sermon, whether given by himself or by another member of his choosing, and he shall, at meetings where elections are being held, hold the chair unless and until a new chairman is chosen. The role of the chairman is:

- a) To schedule and announce all meetings
- b) To serve as the chair (or 'moderator') presiding over all meetings of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders in accordance with the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order, unless and until otherwise superseded by this Book of Church Order. For example, the chairman is responsible²:
 - i) To remain impartial during debate. The chairman must relinquish the chair in order to debate the merits of a motion and may not chair the meeting again until after a vote has been taken or the motion has been disposed of.
 - ii) To vote only to create or break a tie (or $\frac{2}{3}$ for matters requiring a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote). One exception to this rule is that the chairman shall vote on any vote taken by ballot.
 - iii) To introduce business in proper order per the agenda.
 - iv) To recognize speakers.
 - v) To determine if a motion is in order.
 - vi) To keep discussion germane to the pending motion.

¹ It may be helpful to refer to the Robert's Rules of Order section on "Officers and minutes," found here: <http://www.rulesonline.com/rro-10.htm> to answer questions for which this section is silent.

² This list is borrowed from a PDF put out by the national PTA, which may be helpful for all elders to review regarding the duties of the moderator: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wZMqwUmVR8gY-w5JyDCODtoXMLBIPhsT/view?usp=sharing>

- vii) To maintain order.
 - viii) To put motions to a vote and announce results.
- c) It is within the authority of the Assembly to appeal (with a second) and overturn (with a simple majority) any ruling of the chairman.
 - d) It is within the authority of the Assembly, by a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote, to suspend the rules so as to take away from the chairman the authority to preside during all or part of a given meeting, and to appoint (with a simple majority) an interim chairman until a replacement is elected through the ordinary nomination process.
- 2) It is the duty of the clerk, besides recording transactions, to preserve the records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required. Such extracts under the hand of the clerk shall be evidence to any ecclesiastical court, and to every part of the church. The role of the clerk is:
- a) To assemble and distribute the meeting agenda, including any unfinished business from the previous meeting.
 - b) To keep a register, or roll, of the members and to call the roll when required.
 - c) To maintain a list of all standing and special committees and request timely updates at stated meetings as appropriate.
 - d) To accurately record, submit for approval, and maintain records of the decisions made by the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.
 - e) It is within the authority of the Assembly to appeal (with a second) and overturn (with a simple majority) any action of the clerk.
 - f) It is within the authority of the chairman to remove the clerk from his role at any time due to failure to perform his duties as clearly outlined in this Book of Church Order and to appoint an interim clerk until a replacement is elected through the ordinary nomination process.
- 3) It is the duty of the treasurer to serve as the chairman of the Sojourn Houston Financial Stewardship Team, to preserve the records of all transactions and proceedings carefully, to grant extracts from them whenever properly required, and to compile and distribute an annual financial report for the previous fiscal year to all members of the Assembly at the first stated meeting of the Assembly in the following fiscal year.

- a) It is within the authority of the Assembly to appeal (with a second) and overturn (with a simple majority) any action of the treasurer.
 - b) It is within the authority of the chairman to remove the treasurer from his role at any time due to failure to perform his duties as clearly outlined in this Book of Church Order and to appoint an interim treasurer until a replacement is elected through the ordinary nomination process.
- 4) Members may be elected to serve as officers-at-large with functions and responsibilities as clearly stated upon their election, which may include assisting one of the three officers in the fulfillment of his task, or other functions determined by the chairman or by the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.

7.4 Officers shall be selected from among qualified candidates, both from and by the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders, through ordinary nomination process, to a term not to exceed one year, with elections taking place as the first order of business at the first scheduled meeting of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders on a given year, followed by an immediate transition of office, if applicable, effected upon the result of the vote as announced by the chairman, objections notwithstanding. Officers of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders may be elected to any number of successive terms. The elders of a local church may vote at any time to remove one of their local elders from serving in their role as officer, or to prevent him from running. In order to serve as an officer, members must have served as an elder for no less than three years.

7.5 Sojourn Houston staff members shall report to the officers of the Assembly, as appropriate, and from among the officers, a direct supervisor shall be appointed. The chairman shall have the authority to hire and fire centralized staff, though all budget implications shall remain subject to the approval of the Sojourn Houston FST and Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.

7.6 Each Sojourn church shall appoint one elder to represent their congregation on a Congregational Representative Committee (CRC). Subject to the appointment and ongoing approval of the local elders, the CRC term of service is indefinite. Churches shall at all times have no more and no less than one Congregational Representative.

7.7 The CRC shall meet regularly for the purpose of (1) fostering unity among the Sojourn Houston churches, (2) advising the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders on topics related to doctrine and/or direction, and (3) serving as a decision-making committee as delegated by the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.

VIII. Decisions to Amend or Clarify Doctrinal or Directional Documents

8.1 Sojourn Houston churches are aligned doctrinally and directionally in accordance with the following documents:

- 1) Doctrinal documents: The Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith is comprised of the Nicene Creed, The Gospel Coalition COnfession of Faith, and the Acts 29 Doctrinal Distinctives
- 2) Directional documents: The Sojourn Houston Family of Churches Church Covenant, the Sojourn Houston Membership Curriculum, and this Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order

8.2 If a member of the Assembly believes that the Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith misrepresents Scripture or fails to adequately articulate doctrinal convictions, or if a member wishes to advocate for a modification to one of the documents listed in 8.1.2, an amendment may be proposed to the Assembly, and shall only be adopted by a $\frac{2}{3}$ supermajority vote of the Assembly.

- 1) With regard to doctrinal decisions affecting Sojourn Houston at large, non-particularized churches are permitted one vote per local elder and no more than 2 votes. Particularized churches are permitted up to four votes, representing the opinion of the local council of elders. If a local council consisting of more than four elders reaches a split decision, the minority opinion shall be overrepresented according to the following percentage thresholds:

≥15%	1 vote
≥35%	2 votes
≥65%	3 votes
≥85%	4 votes

For example, a 9-1 vote (≥85%) shall be considered unanimous, an 2-8 vote (≥15%) shall be represented as a 3-1 congregation vote, and a 6-4 vote (≤65%) shall be represented as a 2-2 congregation vote.

8.3 The process for proposing amendments to documents outlined in 8.1.1 and 8.1.2 is as follows:

- 1) An active elder or group of elders shall prepare a written overture proposing an amendment to the document(s) in question and shall send it to the Clerk for distribution, in writing, to the whole assembly.

- 2) The Clerk shall distribute the written overture, in writing, within two (2) weeks of receipt from the submitting elder. Over the course of these two (2) weeks, the Clerk shall share this overture with the Chairman, and he or the Chairman may make non-binding recommendations to assist the submitter with respect to content and formatting. After receiving these recommendations, the submitter may choose to withdraw his overture, act on these recommendations, or to leave his original proposal unchanged. In any case, the Clerk shall distribute the written overture within two (2) weeks of receipt, unless otherwise authorized (i.e. to amend the initial proposal or to delay distribution), in writing, by the submitting elder.
- 3) Distribution to the elders does not ensure that a motion will be taken up by the Assembly at a given meeting.
 - a) A minimum of 60 days notification is required prior to the Assembly taking up motions that involve amending the documents outlined in 8.1.1 and 8.1.2
 - b) Motions to amend the documents outlined in 8.1.1 and 8.1.2 require a second to be taken up for deliberation and decision. Accordingly, it is wise (though not required) to consult with fellow elders prior to submitting to the Clerk for distribution.
- 4) After a motion is seconded and the motioning elder is recognized by the Chairman, he shall be given no more than 30 minutes to present his argument. The time limit for debate will be set at 60 minutes, and will follow an alternating order of members speaking for and against. In accordance with the rule of order, the motion may be, at any time, insofar as it accords with the rule of order, be called to question (voted upon), tabled, sent to committee, or voted upon, or any other in-order recourse for a raised motion. Extension of debate may be granted by a majority vote of the Assembly; a motion to end debate while there are still members who wish to speak requires a $\frac{2}{3}$ supermajority vote.
- 5) Amendments to the documents listed in 8.1.1 and 8.1.2 require a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote of the Assembly. Voting on doctrinal matters will be done in person with a verbal or physical assent. Abstentions are not appropriate for elders present; if an elder persists in abstention, his shall be considered a "no" vote. If an elder is unable to attend the meeting, he may write in his vote by submitting it, in writing, to the clerk no later than the calling of the vote in question; however this submission does not count toward the quorum.
 - a) If a proposal succeeds, the amendment is adopted. The clerk shall oversee the integration of the amendment into the document in question and present the newest version of the document in question with the minutes for their approval at the next stated meeting of the Assembly.
 - b) If a motion proposing amendment to a document listed in 8.1.1 or 8.1.2 fails, that proposal (and those substantially the same) may not be taken up by the Assembly for 12 months without a majority of the Assembly voting to hear such a motion.

8.4 Any elder may raise a motion requesting that the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders adopt a statement or position paper clarifying a theological, a philosophical, strategic, and/or ecclesiological topic. These motions process shall follow that found in section 8.3, with the exception that only a simple majority vote is required when such a topic does not contradict the doctrinal standards outlined in 8.1.1.

- 1) A position paper will be assumed not to contradict our doctrinal standards as outlined in 8.1.1 unless an elder raises a motion in the course of deliberation that such a contradiction exists. Such a motion requires merely a $\frac{1}{3}$ minority to pass, at which point, the paper will require a $\frac{2}{3}$ supermajority vote for its adoption.
- 2) If a statement or position paper is approved by the Assembly, the Clerk shall append the statement or position paper as an appendix to the Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith.
- 3) If a motion proposing the adoption of a statement or position paper fails, that proposal (and those substantially the same) may not be taken up by the Assembly for 12 months without a majority of the Assembly voting to hear such a motion.

8.5 Approved Sojourn Houston statements and position papers shall supersede all local congregation statements and position papers. Where there is conflict, local congregations shall be expected to amend their statements and/or position papers accordingly.

IX. Appeal Process

9.1 Any sitting Sojourn Houston elder may appeal an eligible decision made by any local church's council of elders or by the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders and her committees. A list of eligible decisions may be found in §9.2. Elders ordained after an eligible decision is made are not allowed to appeal said decision.

9.2 Eligible (appealable) decisions include:

- Decisions of compatibility with the Sojourn Houston Governing Documents (Family of Churches Church Covenant, Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith, Book of Church Order, Membership Curriculum & Covenant)
- Excommunication
- Hiring of Staff
- Termination of Employment
 - Appealable: termination for competency, cultural/philosophical fit, moral failure, etc.
 - Non-appealable: finance-driven layoffs or downsizing
- Receiving a Covenant Member
- Ordination of Elders
- Annual budgets and financial commitments large enough to impact Sojourn Houston at large
- Heresy and false teaching

9.3 To initiate an appeal, a Sojourn Houston elder shall submit a "Notice of Appeal" to the clerk. Only a sitting Sojourn Houston elder may submit an appeal, but said appeal may be submitted on behalf of current or former Sojourn Houston elders or churches. The "Notice of Appeal" must include the name of the church in question, the specific decision being appealed, the parties to which the appeal pertains, and a summary statement of the grounds for appeal. The "Notice of Appeal" must be submitted within 30 days of the elder submitting the appeal being notified of the decision in question. This statute of limitations may be waived through a majority vote of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.

9.4 Any Sojourn Houston elder may file a "Notice of Appeal" for inaction or negligence, provided the failure to act or make a decision falls under one or more of the categories listed in §9.2.

9.5 Upon receiving a "Notice of Appeal," the clerk shall forward the appeal by email to the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders within 2 weeks. In order for an appeal to appear on the next meeting agenda, the appeal must be seconded via email by another sitting elder within 2 weeks of receiving the appeal. Local elders who are appealing their own church's decision must secure a second from a congregation other than their own.

9.6 The appeal having been seconded, it will be placed on the agenda of the next scheduled meeting of the Assembly of Elders as the first order of business, provided that the appeal is seconded at least 30 days prior to the next meeting. If the appeal is seconded less than 30 days prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Assembly of Elders, it shall be placed on the agenda of the subsequent scheduled meeting.

9.7 Any sitting elder may propose a special hearing of the appeal (a hearing occurring on a date other than the date of a previously scheduled meeting of the Assembly of Elders). Special hearing proposals shall be approved by a majority vote of the Sojourn Houston Elders.

9.8 The appealing elder(s) shall submit a "Written Appeal" to the Sojourn Houston Elders no fewer than 60 days prior to the scheduled hearing. The "Written Appeal" shall include (1) a summary of the situation or event, (2) a formal argument concerning the alleged injustice or failure under appeal, and (3) a proposed remedy should the decision be overturned. The "Written Appeal" should include Biblical references and/or references to the Sojourn Houston Governing Documents (Family of Churches Church Covenant, Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith, Book of Church Order, and Membership Covenant).

9.9 In response to the "Written Appeal," the elder(s) accountable for the decision under appeal may submit a "Written Defense" of the decision no fewer than 30 days prior to the scheduled hearing. The "Written Defense" shall attempt to address the concerns communicated within the "Written Appeal."

9.10 The Appeal Hearing shall begin with a brief summary of events lasting no more than 10 minutes. The appealing elder(s) will then be given no fewer than 20 minutes to present the appeal. The elder(s) accountable for the decision under appeal shall appoint a representative to present a rebuttal defending the decision lasting no more than 30 minutes. The chairman by default will moderate the appeal hearing, unless through a majority vote of the Assembly of Elders a substitute moderator of the appeal is proposed and voted in. In the event that the chairman is being appealed, a substitute moderator must be appointed by majority vote of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders to oversee the hearing.

9.11 Following the rebuttal, a vote shall be called for by the moderator. The appeal vote must obtain a 3/4 vote of the Sojourn Houston Elders in order to overturn a decision made by the party or parties in question. The minimum number of Sojourn Houston elders physically present to conduct a vote is 25%. Particularized congregations are permitted up to four votes, representing the opinion of the local council of elders. If a local council consisting of more than four elders reaches a split decision, the minority opinion shall be overrepresented according to the following percentage thresholds:

≥15%	1 vote
------	--------

≥35%	2 votes
≥65%	3 votes
≥85%	4 votes

For example, a 9-1 vote (≥85%) shall be considered unanimous, an 2-8 vote (≥15%) shall be represented as a 3-1 congregation vote, and a 6-4 vote (≤65%) shall be represented as a 2-2 congregation vote. The elder(s) accountable for the original decision under appeal shall be rendered inactive for the purpose of this vote. Elders ordained after the decision being appealed was made are permitted to vote.

9.12 Following a hearing, no subsequent appeals shall be granted for the decision in question unless by majority vote of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders. Likewise, in the event that a "Notice of Appeal" is not seconded by another Elder, no subsequent appeals shall be granted for the decision in question. Additionally, subsequent decisions made in congruence with the main decision of the appeal are not eligible for appeal, unless by majority vote of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders.

9.13 If an appeal succeeds and a local decision is officially overturned, the elder or church in question will be assigned an Oversight Committee to audit the decision making process and, if necessary, the council of elders. This committee will consist of at least 3 Sojourn Houston elders from other Sojourn churches and shall be appointed at the conclusion of the hearing. The Oversight Committee shall make a good faith attempt to coordinate with the church under review. Any elder who signed the original appeal shall be ineligible from serving on the Oversight Committee. The Oversight Committee shall submit their findings and recommendations to the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders within 12 months of the Appeal Hearing. In cases in which decisions are deemed irreversible by the Oversight Committee, the Oversight Committee shall have the freedom to recommend other reasonable and pertinent remedies.

9.14 The Oversight Committee recommendations shall only be enforced following a majority vote of the Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders. The elder(s) accountable for the overturned decision shall be rendered inactive for the purpose of this vote.