

# CHURCH POLITY

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

### I. DEFINITION OF A LOCAL CHURCH

- A. Baptists And Independents: A group of professing Christians in a given locality who have organized themselves for the purpose of doing the will of God.
- B. Presbyterians: A number of professing Christians, with their children, associated together for divine worship and godly living, agreeable to the Scriptures, and submitting to the lawful government of Christ's Kingdom (Book O Church Order - 4.1).

### II. ENTRANCE INTO THE LOCAL CHURCH

- A. Some Independents: Only a credible profession of faith in Christ. No more requirements to enter the local church than the universal church.
- B. Baptists: Belief in Christ and baptism by immersion. Some Baptists require baptism by immersion in their particular Baptist church or denomination.
- C. Presbyterians: A credible profession of faith in Christ, water baptism and a testimony before the Elders.

#### D. POINTS TO PONDER

1. A church is not where two or three are gathered, but there must be organization with officers who build the local church according to the Bible.
2. A church is not a building but it is people. It is not a place where we go to be entertained but we go to worship God and be equipped to do the ministry.
3. A church is not a social gathering of people like the Kiwanis Club but people gathered to do the will and work of God under the Lordship of Christ.
4. The word church is from the Greek word ekklasia which means "called out ones" (ek and kaleo). The word "church" is used of the universal church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) and the local church (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thes. 1:1). The local church as nearly as possible should be a reflection of the universal, church. While there is no perfect local church, every church should be made up of true believers, especially if the congregation votes on spiritual matters.

### III. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE LOCAL CHURCH

- A. The organization of the early church had officers (elders and deacons) (Acts 14:23, Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). The organization was mainly patterned after the synagogue worship and developed in a gradual manner. In Acts 6 servants, possibly deacons, were chosen and appointed to relieve the Apostles of many duties. Acts 8:1 tells us that persecutions caused the Christians to leave Jerusalem and more churches were needed in outlying areas. There arose, therefore, the need of elders (Acts 11:30).
- B. At first the early church gathered daily (Acts 2:46) but apparently, as the church grew numerically and spread through the Roman Empire, it became a practical necessity to meet at an appointed time – Sunday, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Although we cannot definitely prove it, probably most of the meetings were at night because the slaves and others had to work all day, for Sunday was not a recognized holiday for either Jews or Romans.
- C. The early church in Jerusalem met in the temple and in homes (Acts 2:46). We may conclude the early church was not opposed to meeting in a building, but when persecution came they were forced out of the temple and into homes. After this there is no mention of a church building for over 200 years. Therefore, we may conclude that a building is nice but not necessary to a proper functioning of a local

church.

- D. Church meetings were organized and regulated (1 Cor. 14:26-28; 14:34-35, 40).
- E. The church exercised discipline on its members (1 Cor. 5:13; Rom. 16:17).
- F. The church took care of the sick and widows (1 Tim. 5:9, 10).
- G. The church collected money for the Lord's work (2 Cor. 8, 9; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).
- H. Churches wrote letters of commendation.

#### IV. POINTS TO PONDER

- A. Why is the local church necessary?
  - 1. God ordained it.
  - 2. It is the basic unit for all the Lord's work.
  - 3. It is still the most practical way to get the task accomplished.
  - 4. It is the primary place to carry out church discipline, teaching of God's Word, and the observing of the Sacraments.
- B. What about para-church organizations outside the local church?
  - 1. They are necessary only if the local church is not doing a particular ministry.
  - 2. They are helpful in crossing denominational lines.
  - 3. They must always be an arm of the church.
  - 4. Whenever a local church or churches do the ministry, the para-church organization should move out.

#### V. CONTRASTING THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

	<u>Universal Church</u>	<u>Local Church</u>
A. Christians	Includes all Christians (Eph. 1:22,23). Acts 8:1).	A. A group of organized (Rom. 16:1,
B. Christians and their but no guarantee all	Only Christians belong to this body (Eph. 5:25-27).	B. Should include only children (1 Cor. 1:2) are regenerate (1 Jn.
2:19).	C. Perfected forever positionally in constantly exhorted Christ (Heb. 10:14).	C. Not perfect and are to Christian growth (1 Cor. 1:11; Phil.
3:12, 13).	D. Held together by Christ whose mutual consent and building we are (Eph. 2:19-22). agreement, hopefully	D. Held together by certain articles of from the Bible.
E. withdrawn because of sin	No Christians ever excluded (Jn. 17; Eph. 1:4, 7, 13).	E. Fellowship (2 Thes. 3:14; 1 Cor.
5:13).		