

Questions and Answers from First Free's ByLaws Q&A, July 13, 2020

1. **Question:** A "quorum" at 10% seems to be a low threshold, especially considering the current size of our membership; should we consider a higher percentage, like maybe 25 to 30%?

Answer: The threshold should probably be no higher than 30%. Others were in favor of this revision, and the quorum minimum struck them as odd as well.

2. **Question:** Regarding the "Resignation of Members" – no specific language about how former members are pursued and queried is defined after they leave the church in the bylaws. Should some kind of language be incorporated that would make this response be consistent from year to year and Elder Board to Elder Board? This would help standardize the process when members leave the church, and could assist with reconciliation if it's needed.

Answer: This activity could be viewed as ministerial in its approach, and not one to be specifically handled by the Bylaws since it's not operationally prescriptive in nature – and not fundamentally requiring a vote by the congregation if revised. This could be addressed by something like the Elder nomination process, which is a document that's put together by the Elder Board, and revised as needed – with a 30 day notification of the congregation required.

3. **Question:** Regarding voting for Elders: as written currently, there's only the binary choice of "Affirm" or "Decline". It seems like it might be useful to have an "Abstain" option, since it's likely that some may not know the candidate well enough to vote either way. Could something like this be considered?

Answer: This seems appropriate, and will likely be incorporated. A ballot filled out as "Abstain" would not technically count as a vote.

4. **Question:** Concern expressed regarding the length of the term of the Treasurer being only one year - would it make sense to revise the length of the term to 2 years , similar to an Elder's term? This is an important position that needs consistency from year-to-year.

Answer: One year is the default for all Officers in the church. Specifically lengthening the term of the Treasurer (or any church Officer for that matter), may

mean the significant reduction in candidates willing to accept being considered for the position in the first place.

5. **Question:** Regarding the Deacons, and the process by which they're appointed, and specifically the number of Deacons / ministries that they're placed over - shouldn't there be more definition of these important positions in the Bylaws? There's no specific language regarding the Deacon roles or ministries beyond those defined for the standing committees.

Answer: While being important to define the roles of Deacons at church, the mission of specific ministries and the approach to providing leadership fluctuates. It may be that there's Staff positions allocated for discipleship, or a particular ministry may not need specific Deacon-level leadership, depending on the work that God is calling the Church to do. The approach in the bylaws gives the Elder Board some flexibility to see what ministries need discipleship, and respond accordingly depending on the mission of the Church.

6. **Question:** Would you be willing to share the Elder Nomination Process document?

Answer: Absolutely.

[Proposed Elder Nomination Process](#)

7. **Question:** Article 5, section D - please explain the change to a 3/4ths majority vote? There are some votes (like the annual budget, for example) which are operational issues that the Church absolutely needs to accomplish, and this high threshold may negatively restrict operational capability for the church, especially for critical functions.

Answer: This is an attempt at getting to a majority and achieving unity. 100% is likely unrealistic, but a 75% threshold allows some flexibility for folks to disagree. If there is more than 25% in disagreement, then it might illustrate that there's a fundamental problem with how the issue is being addressed. This is in many ways, a call to prayer, thoughtful consideration and unity – and not towards a simple majority “winning” a particular issue.

8. **Question:** For meetings and motions - it seems problematic that a motion needs to be submitted to elders prior to being able to bring before the congregation. We

are a church polity, and this seems to be in direct conflict with our organizational structure as a Free Church.

Answer: The basic intent of this revision is a desire for order, and allowing time to consider nominations or motions that come from a specific individual in the church body - and make sure that God is leading us all in a direction together. The language is specific that the Elder Board must respond to the motion, in order to establish a line of communication, regardless of whether or not a motion is approved to forward for congregational vote. Additionally, in Article 5, Section A, specific provision is made that a Special Meeting must be called if 10% of the Members have submitted a petition to the Church Secretary.

9. **Question:** (Comment made) It would be a beautiful thing that if there were some day in the future where the definition of Senior Pastor in Article 9 doesn't use a possessive male pronoun, and uses a neutral one instead.
10. **Question:** (Submitted via email) What is the rationale regarding changing the threshold for Elder Board discretionary expenditures from \$25K to \$10% of the budget to be approved without congregational approval?

Answer: The budget always fluctuates from year to year, and even more from decade to decade. This allows some flexibility to be tethered to the annual budget. There was a consensus that the Elder Board has been voted in by the congregation, and that there were enough checks and balances in effect to limit the concern of inappropriate expenditures. Replacing the Sanctuary Building boiler was used as an example where it could easily cost more than \$25K to replace, was also outside the purview of the Facilities Team budget, but was something that shouldn't need a specific congregational vote to be able to get accomplished.

11. **Question:** (Submitted via email) Are we okay with the Senior Pastor also being the Chair of the Elder Board? Or the Secretary? Nothing in the Bylaws prohibits this. It would be a rare situation, of course, where the pastor wants to be the Chair or Secretary and the other elders nominate him to fill that role. Just wondering if we're okay with this option or if we want to prohibit that possibility for any reason.

Answer: Language will likely be incorporated to prohibit this.

12. **Question:** (Submitted via email) Suggestion: Article VIII, Section A: I was confused by the use of the word "memberships". I would propose this wording: "The Chair shall not be counted in quorum requirements for all meetings except meetings of the Elder Board."

Answer: Language similar, if not identical to this, will be incorporated.

13. **Question:** (Submitted via email) Article X, Section C: voting at congregational meetings is still restricted to paper ballots. In light of the current pandemic and future unknowns, do we want to add wording that allows for voting of the membership by another mechanism, if it is deemed necessary? We otherwise will be limited to voting only when physical meeting is allowed, or voting by paper mail-in ballots.

Answer: The reference to "paper" in "paper ballots" will be omitted.

14. **Question:** (Submitted via email) Article IX. Section B The removal of: "The Elder Board shall regularly review the performance of the Senior Pastor and, where appropriate, shall report the results of the performance review to the members of the Church at the annual meeting." Maybe the above was moved to somewhere else in the bylaws and I am missing it. If so, you may disregard the following comment. If not, I would suggest that an annual review, for the senior pastor and all staff is a good healthy and beneficial process for the staff, and I would encourage you not to stop that process.

Answer: This language was moved to Article VI: Elder Board, Section A: "General Authority and Responsibilities" since this task is a responsibility of the Elder Board as it relates to all staff, and not just the Senior Pastor.

If you have further questions, join us at next Monday's Q&A, July 20th at 7 pm or submit your questions to elders@firstfree.com. Documentation of the proposed bylaw changes can be found [here](#).