DISPUTE RESOLUTION POLICY

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1 PURPOSE OF POLICY

The elders within the local church have responsibility to lead the church in making decisions on a range of matters, including matters of theology, church governance and discipline, membership, and the appointment of leaders. A plurality of elders brings with it a plurality of viewpoints and experiences which may at times lead to disagreements in decision-making. Thus, to maintain stability and unity, principles for managing disputes and disagreements are important in the life of the church.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.
(1 Corinthians 1:10)

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church…
(Matthew 18:15-17)

…So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question…The apostles and elders met to consider this question…Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided…
(Acts 15:2, 6, 22)

1.1 This policy sets out Eastside's approach to resolving disputes and disagreements between elders and pastors. This includes both disagreements as part of formal decision-making, and between individual elders and pastors, where such disagreements can impact on the unity of the church.

1.2 Eastside believes that the Lord Jesus expects that the local church is led by a plurality of elders. Inherent in this is a belief that the collective wisdom of the plurality of elders is greater than the wisdom of an individual. This means that each elder needs the humility to freely share, but also warmly submit to the decisions made. This ultimately reflects a trust in the Lordship of Jesus and is good for the unity of the church.

1.3 The prevailing Biblical principle is the achievement of unity and stability, but this is not intended to act to exclude a plurality of viewpoints. Where disagreements cannot be resolved amongst the disputing parties, the congregation has the role of ultimate decision-maker.

2 Application

2.1 This policy applies to (1) formal disagreements between elders and/or pastors, and (2) informal disagreements or disputes, that have, or could have, an impact on the unity or stability of the church.

2.2 This policy sets out general principles for decision-making and dispute resolution.

2.3 This policy also includes specific processes for resolving disputes where unanimity is required. Decisions that require unanimity are:

2.3.1 Any decision where the Constitution or another policy explicitly require a unanimous decision.

2.3.2 Any decision listed in Schedule 1 of this policy.

2.3.3 Any decision to add an item to Schedule 1 of this policy.

2.4 This policy is not intended to establish how decisions are made. Instead, it is focussed on the resolution of disputes.

3 Guiding Principles and Actions

General Principles for Decision-Making

3.1 For matters not requiring unanimity, the following principles apply:

3.1.1 Decisions can be made by general agreement of pastors and elders and are not required to proceed to a vote. However, at any time, a pastor or elder can request a formal vote on any such matter. A decision will be considered passed if voted for by the majority of the Council of Elders. Where there is an even number of voting pastors and elders, a 'majority' vote means more than 50% of the voting pastors and elders.

3.1.2 Where a pastor or elder disagrees with the general agreement or majority vote of the remaining pastors and elders, they shall support the outcome.

3.1.3 Elders, pastors and their families, out of love for Jesus and the church, must not discuss disagreements with individuals outside of the Council of Elders and their families. However, this is not intended to preclude sharing in a professional, mentoring, counselling or similar context.

3.2 Where unanimity on a decision is not achieved, an individual elder or pastor can request for the decision to progress to dispute resolution. The decision to progress to dispute resolution must be passed by the majority of the Council of Elders.

3.3 If a decision not requiring unanimity proceeds to dispute resolution, the following tools are available (listed in descending order of preference):

3.3.1 Reconsideration of the decision at the following elders' meeting.

3.3.2 Seeking of advice and wisdom from other individuals (agreed to by a majority of the Council of Elders), before reconsideration of the decision at the following elders' meeting.

3.3.3 Organising a forum for discussion and/or prayer with the congregation before reconsideration of the decision at the following elders' meeting.

In seeking to resolve the dispute through these tools, elders and pastors are to act in good faith. Regardless of which tool is used, once the decision has been considered a second time, the general agreement of vote of the majority of the Council of Elders will be final.

3.4 For the sake of unity and stability, elders and pastors who disagree with the final decision are encouraged to continue in their position. However, in the following situations, an elder or pastor should step down:

3.4.1 Where they cannot in good conscience continue to serve alongside the other elders and pastors.

3.4.2 Where they cannot in good conscience accept a matter of primary or secondary theological importance that has been approved by the members.

Where a pastor or elder does step down due to a disagreement, they and their families, out of love for Jesus and his church, must not discuss their disagreement with individuals outside the Council of Elders and their families except where in a professional, mentoring, counselling or similar context.

3.5 In determining the outcome of a vote by the Council of Elders, any elder or pastor absent from the meeting shall be included in the total count unless subject to discipline or on extended leave.

Decision Requiring Unanimity

3.6 For decisions requiring unanimity, all the general principles listed in Clauses 3.1 to 3.4 apply. However, where a unanimous decision cannot be achieved after applying one or more tools in clause 3.4, the decision is to be presented to the members for a vote, either at a General Meeting or Special Members Meeting.

3.7 If a unanimous decision is achieved through a vote of the members under Clause 3.5, the decision will be considered final.

3.8 Any pastors or elders who disagree with the decision of members under Clause 3.5 are encouraged to continue in their position. However, where they cannot in good conscience continue to serve alongside the other elders and pastors, they should step down from their position.

Disputes Amongst Individuals

3.9 Where there is professional or personal dispute amongst elders or pastors, they should seek to resolve it as soon as possible, acting in good faith and good conscience. In resolving it, the following hierarchy should be adopted:

3.9.1 Resolution amongst themselves.

3.9.2 Resolution with the support of others.

3.9.3 Present the matter to the remaining elders for consideration and advice.

3.9.4 Present the matter to the remaining elders for a decision.

3.10 If any elder or pastor feels aggrieved by a decision made by the elders under Clause 3.9.4, they may ask for the matter to be brought to the congregation for discussion or membership for a vote. However, the decision to present the matter in this way needs to be passed by majority of the other elders and pastors. If the decision is approved, it will be treated as decision to present a decision to the members for a vote under Clause 3.6.

3.11 Any pastors or elders who disagree with the decision of other elders and pastors under Clauses 3.9.4 or 3.10, or the members under Clause 3.6, are encouraged to continue in their position. However, where they cannot in good conscience continue to serve alongside the other elders and pastors, they should step down from their position. Where a pastor or elder does step down due to a disagreement, they and their families are encouraged not to discuss their disagreement with individuals outside the Council of Elders and their families, outside of a professional, mentoring, counselling or similar context.

4 Relationship to Constitution and Other Policies

4.1 To the extent of any inconsistency between this policy and the Constitution, the latter prevails, except as required by law.

4.2 Where any other policy requires unanimity in decision-making, these decisions shall be subject to Clauses 3.5 to 3.7 of this policy. Similarly where any other policy establishes an alternative process for resolving disputes, this is to be followed first before application of this policy.

4.3 Further decision-making requirements for elders and pastors may be set out in a Code of Conduct agreed to by the Council of Elders.

4.4 Any breaches of this policy are to be handled in accordance with the issue / incident requirements of the Risk and Compliance Policy.

Schedule 1 – Decisions Requiring Unanimity

Date of Revision	
Approved by	
Description of Change	

Table 1 sets out decisions that require unanimity. Note, this does not preclude the Constitution or any other policy requiring other decisions to be unanimous.

Table 1 – Decisions requiring unanimity

No.	Decision
1	Decision to nominate a person as an elder to the congregation for consideration and vote
2	Decision to modify the process under the Appointment Policy for appointing an elder where the candidate is a former elder or pastor at Eastside
3	Decision to renominate an elder and present to the congregation for consideration and vote
4	Decision that a new pastor is needed
5	Decision to tentatively offer the position of pastor to a candidate
6	Decision for a pastor to pass probation
7	Decision for a pastor to not pass probation
8	Decision to renominate a pastor and present to the congregation for consideration and vote