

Table 1:
**PRIORITY AMONG GOVERNING DOCUMENTS
 IN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES**

Note: *When attempting to resolve any question of church administration in a congregational church (a church that functions independently of a religious hierarchy), relevant provisions in the following sources of authority generally are applied in the following order of priority.*

DOCUMENT	ORDER OF PRIORITY
charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the highest order of priority • its provisions take priority over any other source of authority • start with the charter when attempting to resolve a question of administration; if it doesn't address the matter, then proceed on to the next order of priority until an answer is found
constitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the second highest order of priority • takes priority over all other sources of authority except the charter, assuming that it is made superior to the bylaws either by express provision or by a greater voting requirement to amend
bylaws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the third highest order of priority • takes priority over all other sources of authority except the charter and constitution (assuming the constitution is made superior to the bylaws)
state nonprofit corporation law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the fourth highest order of priority • its provisions generally apply only if the church has not provided otherwise in its charter, constitution, or bylaws (including rules of parliamentary law adopted by the bylaws) • state nonprofit corporation laws ordinarily make a few provisions mandatory despite a bylaw or charter provision to the contrary
resolutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the fifth highest order of priority • resolutions can provide guidance in the event that the charter, constitution, bylaws, parliamentary law, and applicable state nonprofit corporation law do not address an issue
parliamentary procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the sixth highest order of priority (assuming that a specific body of parliamentary procedure has been adopted)