

Constitution Of Bethany Congregation

*“Giving diligence to keep the unit of the spirit in the bond of peace.”
(Eph. 4:3)*

While we are closely connected, through a common faith and hope, with the United Church of Christ wherever it may be found, we consider ourselves justified, on our part, in view of the free institutions of our blessed American homeland, in governing ourselves as a church and, for the welfare and progress of our congregation and its future development, to adopt a new church constitution which is in accordance with the word of God, and not in conflict with the laws of our state and nation, and which we regard as suitable for our purpose (Heb. 10:23-25).

In the interest of our church and of harmony in the congregation we have therefore, in a regular and public meeting of the congregation and in the sight of God duly considered and accepted the following ordinance and articles and acknowledge our acceptance.

CONSTITUTION

NAME, CONFESSION and PURPOSE of the CONGREGATION

Article 1

The name of this church shall be Bethany United Church of Christ, located in Tioga, Hancock County, state of Illinois. This church was first organized on October 13, 1857 and was incorporated on June 19th, 1984 as a non-profit organization in the state of Illinois.

Article 2

By “United Church of Christ”, we understand that fellowship which acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the word of God and as the sole and infallible guide of faith and life, and we accept the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as it is found in the symbolic books of the United Churches of Christ, in so far as they agree; in their points of difference, however, we rely only upon those passages of Holy Scriptures which have a bearing on the subject, making use of the conscience which prevails in the United Church of Christ.

WHEREAS: God did recognize to set forth in creation natural differences in male and female for Divine purposes (Matt. 19:4-6a), and

WHEREAS: These differences do not negate the promises of God to either male or female, but rather, all who are in Christ are understood as heirs to all God’s promises and are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3: 27-29), and,

WHEREAS: We as members of a Christian congregation seek to be in accord with the Holy Scripture, it’s evident meaning and spirit, and with the constitution of the apostolic church (Article 26, Paragraph 1 of the Constitution) , and thereby wish to follow the Lord’s understanding of all God’s children as one, unified in Christ Jesus,

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BE IT RESOLVED: That any and all gender references in the Constitution of Bethany United Church of Christ shall be considered all-inclusive, that is included female, as well as male, regardless of those references' genders and should be changed and/or understood to that effect.

Article 3

The purpose of this church organization is and shall remain the common edification and growth in godliness and in the knowledge of the word of God. This is to be accomplished by means of song and prayer and especially through the preaching of the pure and unadulterated word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as contained in the Holy Scriptures, that is, in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, and also through the administration and use of the sacraments, of holy baptism and holy communion, and according to the words of intuitions of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE HOLY SACRAMENTS

Article 4

We regard holy baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments which our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted and ordained for his Church and we consider it as a privilege and a duty of every Christian to take part in them. Since both members of this congregation should not withdraw from these solemn celebrations of the Church without necessity, nor make a private ceremony out of them.

Article 5

The members of this congregation should not postpone the baptism of their newly born children without good reason, and may select for their children, truly believing persons as sponsors, who will with the parents of the child, expressly and plainly acknowledge in the ceremony of baptism their faith in the Apostolic Creed or Statement of Faith of United Church of Christ, and who will also take upon themselves the obligation of giving Christian training to the child to be baptized.

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Article 6

Holy Communion is to be celebrated in the church at least four times during the year. Private communion may be served any time during the year to sick and shut-ins, who so desire. This church will practice open communion.

CONFIRMATION

Article 7

Confirmation takes place once every year, about Easter time, in the church in the presence of the congregation, preparatory instruction by the pastor shall be a minimum of 52 hours.

Only such persons are eligible who:

1. Are either in their thirteenth year of age, or eighth grade
2. Have the necessary knowledge of Gospel truth
3. Possess a disposition in harmony with it

The examination in regard to these requirements and the decision accepting persons for confirmation rests with the pastor, together with the church council. On the Sunday preceding confirmation the pastor must have a public examination of the confirmands in the presence of the congregation.

ADMISSION of NEW MEMBERS to the CONGREGATION

Article 8

Persons who desire membership in this congregation shall be admitted after first applying for membership to the pastor or a member of the Church Council, then after adequate instructions and becoming familiar with this Constitution, shall be received into active membership at a regular worship service. Church membership is open to all ages, tongues, and races without regard to color.

CONSTITUTION

CALL, ELECTION, QUALIFICATIONS, DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION, DISCHARGE or RESIGNATION of the PASTOR, HIS DUTIES and RIGHTS

Article 9

This congregation has and retains the exclusive right to call and elect its pastor and its church council, the members of which are also trustees for the congregation; and this right can never be transferred to an individual or to a smaller group in the congregation. This election takes place publicly in the church on a date announced at least on two proceeding Sundays, and also at a fixed time of day. Only the active members present have the right to vote, which is to be done by ballot. The majority decides; in case of a tie, the president casts the deciding vote. Only sick persons may vote by proxy. Absent members consent to the result of the election.

Article 10

The pastor to be called and elected must possess the following qualifications:

1. He must show before his call an election that he is an ordained/licensed pastor of the United Church of Christ or any Protestant main line denomination, or intends to become such. (Amended 2010)
2. At the beginning of his ministry he must plainly and openly in the presence of the assembled congregation acknowledge in all sincerity his acceptance of the principles of faith and life announced in articles two and three and must solemnly pledge himself to maintain this constitution in every particular, and promise that he will not violate, but enforce it and that he will administer his teaching and ministry faithfully with the help of God and in accordance with the word of God.

Questions concerning these matters should be put in the presence of the assembled congregation by the pastor who installs him. Only under these conditions can a pastor enter upon and discharge his duties as a pastor of this congregation.

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Article 11

The pastor is elected by the congregation for an indefinite period and his services with the congregation can be terminated by the congregation only when he has evidently persistently neglected or ignored the obligations assumed at his installation (Article 9 and 3), or when old age or lingering illness make it impossible for him to perform his important ministry in the congregation in a worthy and effective manner.

Only—what God may graciously prevent—when guilty of open vice or crime may the pastor be discharged immediately and without the customary three month notice.

Article 12

If the minister desires to leave the congregation he shall notify the church council of this at least three months previously, giving his reasons therefore in writing. If he wishes to leave the congregation before the end of the three months, he shall make such applications through the church council to the congregation, with a decision made by a majority vote.

Article 13

It is the sacred duty of the pastor:

1. To discharge the important and responsible duties of his office as an ambassador on behalf of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), to the glory of his Lord and for the benefit and blessing of the church entrusted to him (2 Tim. 4:2, Titus 1: 7-9), and shall especially be a model for the congregation in discreet and exemplary conduct in love (1 Cor. 13), and shall maintain the seriousness and dignity of a minister—all this in the power of God, which will not be lacking in faithful watchfulness and in response to fervent prayer.

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2. If possible, he will visit the members of the congregation once or twice in the course of the year and exercise Christian discipline in connection therewith, seeing to it that everything is being done decently and in a way befitting a Christian congregation.

3. He shall conduct the public services of worship, administer the sacraments and perform all the duties of his spiritual office and take upon himself all the duties that belong to the work of a Christian pastor.

4. He shall keep accurately the church records entrusted to him. These are: (a) the register of baptism, (b) of marriages, (c) of deaths, (d) the number of communicants.

5. Besides the regular Sunday Services he shall preach also on the following festivals and holidays: Christmas, and Good Friday.

6. If a pastor should be absent (excluding vacations), for more than twenty-four hours, he shall leave word with the church council as to where he can be reached.

Article 14

In accordance with a divine ordinance (1 Tim. 5:18, Gal. 6:6, 1 Cor. 9:11), the pastor will receive his salary from the congregation, as agreed to in the call contract.

Article 15

Another minister shall be allowed to speak in the church only with the consent of the pastor of the congregation and the church council.

Article 16

The pastor is a member of all committees and organizations of this congregation and should be notified of all its schedules and meetings.

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NECESSARY QUALIFICATIONS, ELECTION, INSTALLATION, ORGANIZATION, JURISDICTION and DUTIES of the MEMBERS of the CHURCH COUNCIL or TRUSTEES of the CONGREGATION

Article 17

The affairs of this congregation are to be conducted by a church council consisting of the pastor and five council persons. (Amended 2008)

1. The council persons, who are also trustees of this congregation, are duly elected by the congregation by ballot for a term of three years, with the exception of the pastor, who is a continuous member of the church council, according to the Article Eight and the method explained in this paragraph. Before the members of the church council are elected the pastor shall read in the meeting of the congregation, with due explanation, in the name of the Lord, such passages of the Holy Scripture which are appropriate as a guide and admonition for the voting members. If a member of the church council resigns, the vacancy is to be filled in the next meeting or a special meeting of the church council, and be voted on at a special meeting of the congregation.

2. Only such members of the congregation are eligible as members of the church council who: (a) have reached the age of at least twenty-one years (Amended 1991) and have been a member of this congregation for at least one year, and (b) have not only a blameless reputation, but are also, by their life and conduct, proving themselves to be believing and living members of the United Church of Christ according to 1 Tim. 3: 8-11; Acts 6: 1-6.

3. On the Sunday following their election the new members of the church council shall be solemnly installed by the pastor in a public service according to the order provided in the Book of Worship. No member is to succeed himself for one year, who has served a full three year term. (Amended in 1999)

a. The chair person shall conduct deliberations and discussions in the meetings of the congregation and cast the deciding vote when there is a tie.

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b. The recording secretary shall accurately and faithfully enter all proceedings and resolutions of the meetings of the church council and the congregation into the minute book provided for this purpose, which, together with the other written documents of the congregation (except the church records, which are to be kept by the pastor) he shall keep in a safe place. He shall also keep a list of all members of this congregation, according to the church records.

c. The treasurer shall receive all offerings and all other contributions for church purposes and shall give satisfactory bond upon demand of the church council. Upon request of the church council he shall render an account of his transaction at least once a year which is also to be announced to the congregation. Payments of money may be made by him only upon approval of the church council.

Article 18

The church council shall meet before every meeting of this congregation. The council shall meet monthly and a special meeting may be called upon motion of one council member.

The church council is responsible for the inner and outward development and progress of this congregation and shall therefore make and enforce its decision in the name of Christ. In order to take valid action at least four members of the church council must be present at the meeting. The majority vote of the entire church council is decisive. If, however, the action of the church council is in regard to matters mentioned in the following Article (19), it must be approved and accepted by an absolute majority of the members of this congregation before it can take effect. Nevertheless, the church council is always responsible to this congregation for its administration of the church property.

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Article 19

The members of the church council are the sole administrators of all property which the church may not possess or purchase in the future. They are to administer the property of the congregation carefully, on behalf of the congregation, to close contracts concerning it, to pay out and raise moneys, to give a receipt for them, to sign documents, represent this congregation in the courts, and in general to perform and carry out any acts which this congregation, as owner, would itself have to perform. The members of the church council may and shall do all of this, however, only in the name of the congregation and according to its valid resolutions and instructions, never arbitrarily or according to their own judgment. For this reason this congregation is responsible for all necessary expenses and shall duly compensate the members of the church council for money spent in the interest of this congregation.

At the same time the congregation authorizes the church council to incur necessary expenses to the amount of \$1,000 without further instructions.(Amended 1992)

Article 20

The task of the church council also includes:

1. First of all, watching over it and over this congregation that the purity of Christian teaching and Christian living is maintained, and offenses are avoided and existing ones removed. All this shall be accomplished through the exercises of the Christian church discipline.

2. Keeping order in public services.

3. Considering the Christian education of the young people and promoting it in every way possible. They shall therefore also have the supervision over the confirmation school.

4. The care for the poor and unfortunate in this congregation.

5. The preliminary steps for the election of the pastor and their church workers.

6. The church council is also authorized by the congregation to receive, in the manner prescribed in Article Eight, such Christians as apply for

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membership in the congregation through the pastor, and also to exclude from membership such members as transgress against the pure Christian teaching and true Christian living and conduct and who, in spite of repeated fraternal admonition, cannot be persuaded to show repentance or a better life, but rather undermine the good reputation and honor of this congregation or create dissensions among the members.

Article 21

The annual meeting of this congregation shall take place on the third Sunday in January.

In the January meeting there shall be submitted to the congregation a financial statement covering the past year, a Secretary's report and a Pastor's report covering everything of importance and interest to the congregation which may have transpired during the past year.

All special meetings of the congregation shall be called by announcements from the pulpit on two successive Sundays before the day of the meeting.

Article 22

During the meeting of this congregation valid action requires a majority of the voting members present. Absent members consent to the decisions of those present.

No members of the congregation shall be absent from the meeting unnecessarily or without good reason.

In the meetings of this congregation, which shall be opened and closed by song and prayer conducted by the pastor, the president shall maintain vigorously the order and dignity of the gathering. For this purpose he may, if it seems desirable to do so, cause the names of the voting members of the church as well as this Article (22) to be read at the beginning of the meeting, or request persons who are not members of the congregation to leave the room.

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In the meeting only one person may speak at a time, and he only after he has expressly been given the floor by the president. Those desiring to speak will make this known by rising.

Anyone who conducts himself in a rough and discourteous manner, or in a general way in opposition with the word of God, may be called to order by the president, and shall, if he refuses to yield after being called to order three times, be considered as being excluded himself from membership in the congregation, and shall, upon request of the president, leave the meeting immediately.

The DUTIES and REQUIREMENTS of CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Article 23

We consider the following to be the essential requirements and duties of a member of this congregation:

1. That he shall have been admitted to the Universal Christian Church by Holy Baptism and have a sincere desire and an earnest purpose to be saved on the foundation of the faith confessed in baptism, Jesus Christ besides whom no other foundation can be laid.

2. That he fully acknowledges his acceptance of the principles expressed in Article two and three of this constitution.

3. That he make regular and diligent use of the means of grace, the word of God and the holy sacraments.

4. That he seriously endeavor to lead a Christian life in the sight of God and men, abhor sin and shame and all works of the flesh, Gal. 5: 19-21, 1 Cor. 5: 8-11, 6: 9-10, and avoid them through the grace of God.

5. That he readily submit to the ordinances of the congregation, as herein determined, and as they may determine, and as they may determine for the future, and, where he may have erred, accept admonition in Christian brotherly love on the part of the church council and his associates in the grace of God, and submit to Church discipline (Article 24).

6. That he contribute and cooperate in meeting the expenses of this church, and the church at large.

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7. That he does not refuse to have his children educated and trained in the Christian religion.

8. That a member who for a period of two years, in spite of spiritual care, has not attended church worship, participated in communion, or contributed to its support, may, by vote of the church council, be removed from the membership role and be placed on a inactive role. If, after the expiration of one year, the relationship remains unchanged, the name may be dropped from the inactive role by further vote of the council. Any change in membership status should be preceded by a visit or letter to the member.

Those who are unable on account of evident poverty to do as defined in Paragraph 6, but who otherwise live up to the requirements of this Article, shall nevertheless be regarded as regular members of the congregation. Voting members are those who have been confirmed or received instruction and confess their faith before the congregation, and fulfill their duties as members.

This congregation recognizes the cause of missions as very essential and as one which concerns every true Christian, and therefore expects an active participation in it on the part of all its members.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Article 24

Every member of the congregation is under obligation to give due attention to the welfare and good reputation of the congregation and the salvation of individual members, and to work to this end. In order that this may be done in a fruitful and effective manner the divine institution of Church discipline according to the following requirements:

1. Such church discipline shall be exercised only in the spirit of the Lord and his Gospel and with the aim of reconciling the transgressors with their Lord and Savior and with their brethren; of avoiding offenses and removing those which may exist; of sanctifying the congregation and its members and cleansing them more and more from all defilement of the flesh and spirit, to the end that there may be revealed among the members of the congregation in every way a life of faithful obedience toward the Lord and his Gospel.

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2. Offenses not generally known shall be brought to the attention of the church council only when those committing them, after private admonition on the part of one or more members, show no repentance or desire to lead a better life.

3. Members who transgress the purity of Christian teaching or Christian life and who are indifferent toward the admonition of the church council and cannot be persuaded thereby to show repentance and desire for a better life shall be excluded from the congregation, 2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; Matt. 17: 15-17.

4. Cause for excluding a church member are serious sins, such as blasphemy, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, falsehood, violence, an unforgiving spirit, disrespect toward the Lord's Day, the public service of worship, the Holy Sacraments, etc.

5. Least of all may sins like those mentioned in paragraph four, which exclude from the kingdom of God and bring disgrace upon the church, be suffered in the life of the pastor, or that of the members of the church council, and in such cases they shall be discharged from their respective positions.

6. If a member of the congregation has any complaint to make against the pastor or member of the church council, this must be done in the way prescribed by St. Paul (1 Tim. 5:19) and either oral or written and signed notice must be given in a meeting of the church council, so that all causes for dissatisfaction may be fully considered and justly disposed of in a Christian spirit.

Article 25

All officers or appointees of the church shall be shown respect by asking their permission before interfering with or intruding upon their duties.

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RELATION of EXCLUDED MEMBERS to the CONGREGATION

Article 26

Every member of the congregation who has been excluded from membership according to the provisions of Article 24 and Article 20, paragraph six, or who voluntarily excludes himself from membership, thereby loses all rights of membership, and all claim to the property of the congregation, which is and remains indivisible for all time.

SCHOLARSHIP

Article 27

That the Bethany United Church of Christ shall offer to any of its members, young men or women who choose the ministry or work in the missions as their life work, a \$4,000 college scholarship at the rate of \$1,000 per year for four years. That those wishing to use this scholarship should submit a written request to the Church Council 60 days prior to the need of funds. This is not to exceed two requests per year.

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH AMENDMENTS TO THIS CONSTITUTION MAY BE MADE

Article 28

Changes and additions to this constitution may be made only:

1. When they are plainly in harmony with a clear word of God, its evident meaning and spirit, and with the constitution of the apostolic church.
2. When two-thirds of the voting members present ask for such a change and/or addition.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever, Amen.

This constitution was adopted unanimously in a meeting of the Bethany congregation of the United Church of Christ on January 4, A.D. 1987

CONSTITUTION

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