

MODEL CONSTITUTION
FOR LOCAL COVENANT CHURCHES
COUNCIL FORM

PREAMBLE

(An historical statement from the Preamble of the Constitution and Bylaws of the Evangelical Covenant Church as adopted by the Evangelical Covenant Church in 2001 and amended in 2003.)

“The Evangelical Covenant Church is a communion of congregations gathered by God, united in Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey the great commandment and the great commission. It affirms its companionship in faith with other church bodies and all those who fear God and keep God’s commandments.

“The Evangelical Covenant Church adheres to the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation regarding the Bible. It confesses that the Holy Scripture, the Old and the New Testament, is the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. It affirms the historic confessions of the Christian Church, particularly the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, while emphasizing the sovereignty of the Word of God over all creedal interpretations.

“In continuity with the renewal movements of historic Pietism, the Evangelical Covenant Church especially cherishes the dual emphasis on new birth and new life in Christ, believing that personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the foundation for our mission of evangelism and Christian nurture. Our common experience of God’s grace and love in Jesus Christ continues to sustain the Evangelical Covenant Church as an interdependent body of believers that recognizes but transcends our theological differences.

“The Evangelical Covenant Church celebrates two divinely ordained sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Recognizing the reality of freedom in Christ, and in conscious dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit, we practice both the baptism of infants and believer baptism. The Evangelical Covenant Church embraces this freedom in Christ as a gift that preserves personal conviction, yet guards against an individualism that disregards the centrality of the Word of God and the mutual responsibilities and disciplines of the spiritual community.

“The Evangelical Covenant Church has its roots in historical Christianity, the Protestant Reformation, the biblical instruction of the Lutheran Church of Sweden, and the great spiritual awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These influences, together with more recent North American renewal movements, continue to shape its development and distinctive spirit. The Evangelical Covenant Church is committed to reaching across boundaries of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, age, and status in the cultivation of communities of life and service.

“The Evangelical Covenant Church, in order to accomplish its mission and purposes, has formulated and adopted this Constitution and Bylaws. The Constitution recognizes that the highest constituted authority of the Evangelical Covenant Church is the convention of delegates known as the Annual Meeting, which alone can adopt and amend the Constitution and Bylaws. The Evangelical Covenant Church shall be governed by this Constitution and Bylaws, its Articles of Incorporation, and all applicable laws.

This document, which is in harmony with the above preamble, is the Constitution and Bylaws of the _____
Evangelical Covenant Church of (city), (state/province).

ARTICLE I

Name

The name of this church shall be the (local name if any) Evangelical Covenant Church of (town and state/province).

ARTICLE II

Affiliation

The church is a member of the Evangelical Covenant Church and its Conference and is pledged to work in harmony with the Covenant and its decisions and to support its program, policies, and institutions.

ARTICLE III

Confession of Faith

The church believes in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.

ARTICLE IV

Purpose

Section 1. The purpose of this church shall be to unite Christians in fellowship for spiritual development, for the winning of persons to Christ, and for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to serve one another, this community, and the world through Christian education, home and world mission, and the institutions conducted by the Evangelical Covenant Church and its local regional conferences.

Section 2. In order to achieve this purpose, the church, in the unity of the Spirit, shall use the gifts that God has given it and the means of grace which God has placed at its disposal: the Word of God, baptism, and Holy Communion.

ARTICLE V

Membership

Membership in the church is granted on application to those who through faith in God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, have been born anew to a living hope, have been baptized according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to live a Christian life, and promise to support the total ministry of the church and to share its fellowship and obligations.

ARTICLE VI

Officers

The officers of the church shall be a chair, a vice-chair, a secretary, a financial secretary, and a treasurer.

ARTICLE VII

Church Council

Section 1. The general administration of the church shall be vested in a body known as the Church Council. In circumstances or where law requires action(s) by "Trustees" the council shall be known as "the Board of Trustees" and the members of it as "Trustees." The council shall also serve as a board of deacons to supervise the spiritual life of the church, as stated in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

Section 2. The council shall consist of the officers of the church (chair, vice-chair, secretary, financial secretary, and the treasurer) and other members as specified in the bylaws. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member of the council.

Section 3. The council shall organize itself in a manner specified in the bylaws.

ARTICLE VIII

Congregational Business Meetings

Section 1. Congregational business meetings shall be held at stated intervals, but not less than semiannually. The annual congregational meeting shall be held as near the first of the year as feasible. At the annual meeting, written progress reports shall be submitted by the pastor and by each committee of the church. Audited financial reports shall be submitted by the treasurer for the church and each of its organizations. Officers of the church and council members for the ensuing year shall be elected by ballot. The church budget shall also be submitted for action.

Section 2. Notice of all congregational business meetings shall be mailed to members not less than two weeks prior to the meeting and shall include the date, time of the meeting, and an annotated agenda of business to be transacted.

ARTICLE IX

Property

In the event of schism within the church, from which we earnestly pray God to spare us, the title of all church property, real or personal, shall remain with the group which abides by this constitution, as determined by the executive board of the conference. In the event of dissolution, the property and all assets of the church shall become and be the property of The Evangelical Covenant Church and the Conference.

ARTICLE X

Amendments

Amendments in harmony with this constitution and the Model Constitutions for Local Covenant Churches and not in conflict with Covenant principles and policies may be adopted by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting in an annual meeting of the congregation, providing the proposed amendment was presented in written

form at the preceding annual meeting. Articles IX and X may be amended only with the approval of the executive board of the regional conference.

BYLAWS – COUNCIL MODEL

ARTICLE I

Membership

Section 1. Admission into membership.

a) Application for membership. A written application for membership shall be placed with the pastor or the enlistment chair of the council. The applicants should complete a course in the inquirers' classes, after which they shall appear before the council to give a confession of their Christian faith, according to Article V of the constitution. When the council has reviewed their applications and received their testimonies favorably, their applications shall be submitted to the next congregational business meeting for action.

b) Transfer of membership. Applicants from other Christian churches shall submit letters of transfer, when available, to the pastor and/or the enlistment chair of the council, who shall act upon the applications according to the requirements of paragraph a) of this section.

c) Reception of new members. Applicants who are voted into the membership of the church shall be welcomed at the next service of Holy Communion and make public confession of their Christian faith, as outlined in A Covenant Book of Worship.

Section 2. Children of members.

Children of the members of the church and its constituency shall be nurtured under its spiritual care. When they have reached confirmation age, they shall receive instruction from the pastor(s) in the Word of God, Christian doctrine, and the history of the church, using the confirmation material of the Covenant Church. Following confirmation, they may apply for church membership as outlined under Section 1, paragraph a), of this article.

Section 3. Responsibility of membership.

All members of the church shall assume the responsibilities and obligations placed upon them by the Word of God and the church. They shall, through their witness by life and word, consecrated service, prayer, and financial support further the cause of Christ in the local church, regional conference, and the Covenant.

Section 4. Discipline.

a) Negligent members. Members who willfully neglect their duties or fail to attend services of the church regularly or to contribute to its support according to their means shall be admonished by the council. If this admonition is not heeded, they shall be dealt with as erring members.

b) Erring members. Any member known to err in doctrine or conduct shall be counseled according to the procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-18 and Galatians 6:1. Any member having knowledge of such error shall, in the spirit of Christian love, seek to restore the brother or sister. If he or she fails to heed the counsel of the council, the error shall be brought before a congregational business meeting. Discipline

shall then be administered in the spirit of Christ with due regard for the welfare of the individual as well as the church.

c) Dismissal of members. Dismissal of a member under paragraphs a) and b) of this section must be acted on by the church, which alone has the authority. A two-thirds vote of those present and voting at a congregational business meeting is necessary for such action.

d) Forfeiture of rights. A member who has been properly dismissed from the church, or has withdrawn membership, has forfeited all rights and privileges of membership in the church.

Section 5. Transfer of members.

Members who move to another community should soon thereafter identify themselves with the local Covenant church. If there is not a Covenant church, they should identify themselves with some other evangelical Christian church. Application for transfer of membership shall be made in writing to the pastor, who shall issue the transfer to the church with which a member is uniting. Withdrawal of said membership shall be reported through the council to the next congregational business meeting, where it shall be made a matter of record.

Section 6. Removal of membership.

Request for withdrawal from membership in the church shall be made in writing to the pastor or the council. After careful consideration the council may present a recommendation for withdrawal to a business meeting of the church.

Section 7. Non-member friends.

Non-member parish friends shall be enrolled by the church as a part of its total constituency. The church and its pastor shall serve them in all their spiritual needs, and they shall be encouraged to consider this as their church home. They shall be kept informed of the activities of the church.

ARTICLE II

Pastor(s)

Section 1. Qualifications.

The pastor(s) of the church shall meet the New Testament requirements of their office (1 Timothy 3:2-7) and be members of the Covenant Ministerium and follow the Rules for the Ordered Ministry of The Evangelical Covenant Church. They shall by virtue of call be members of the church.

Section 2. Duties.

The pastor(s) shall devote themselves to the service of the church, preaching and teaching the Word of God, administering the sacraments, and faithfully giving themselves to pastoral work. They shall provide the church with an accurate record of their pastoral acts and present a written report to the congregational annual business meeting. They shall practice good administrative procedures and cooperate with the church council. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member of the council and all committees of the church.

Section 3. Cooperation.

The pastor(s) shall, both in word and precept, work in harmony with the Covenant, the regional conference, and other Covenant ministers.

Section 4. Call.

The pastor(s) shall be called at a regular or special congregational business meeting, the purpose of which shall be announced two weeks in advance. The pastor(s) shall be nominated by a pastoral search committee. This committee shall be elected by a congregational business meeting. It shall be representative of the congregation and have five (5) to nine (9) members and shall work closely with the regional conference superintendent. The pastor(s) shall be called by ballot with a two-thirds vote required for a call. The call shall be for an indefinite period of time with a minimum of six weeks notice required by the church or the pastor(s) for termination of pastoral duties.

Section 5. Charges against a pastor.

Charges against a pastor shall be submitted in writing to the church council, charging a pastor with indiscretion, immorality, doctrinal error, unethical behavior, or disloyalty to the Covenant (Matthew 18:15-18). If in the judgment of the church council there is substance to the charges, the case shall be referred to the regional conference superintendent. The superintendent shall confer with the Covenant executive secretary of the ministry. These two officers shall confer and determine the order of responsibility in pursuing the matter according to the Rules for the Ordered Ministry of The Evangelical Covenant Church.

ARTICLE III

Officers

Section 1. Qualifications.

Officers of the church shall be members in good standing who are active in the support of the total ministry of the church, financially, and otherwise.

Section 2. Duties.

- a) Chair. The chair shall preside at all business meetings of the church and meetings of the council. Care shall be taken to confer with the senior pastor in preparing the agenda for such meetings, and shall utilize the counsel that the pastor can give by virtue of his or her training, experience, and calling. The chair shall be responsible for the leadership of the church services in the absence of the pastor.
- b) Vice-Chair. The vice-chair shall assist the chair, and during his or her absence assume that office and its duties.
- c) Secretary. The secretary shall keep and preserve the minutes of all the congregational business meetings of the church and meetings of the council, and shall conduct and preserve all official correspondence as shall be delegated to the secretary. The secretary shall also be responsible for the official seal and documents of the church.
- d) Financial secretary. The financial secretary shall receive, record, and transmit to the church treasurer all funds contributed to the church.
- e) Treasurer. The treasurer shall be responsible for all funds committed to him or her and shall make disbursements as authorized by the church or the council. The treasurer shall also present a written report

of the receipts and expenditures to each regular meeting of the council and to each congregational business meeting.

Section 3. Election and tenure.

At the annual congregational business meeting, the chair, vice-chair, secretary, financial secretary, and treasurer shall be elected for terms of one year and shall serve not more than three consecutive terms. Any officer who has served the term limit will be eligible for re-election to that office after a lapse of one year.

ARTICLE IV

Church Council

Section 1. Qualifications.

Members of the council shall be members in good standing who are active in the support of the total ministry of the church, financially, and otherwise.

Section 2. Size, composition, election, and tenure.

- a) The council shall consist ofmembers, both men and women, not including the senior pastor, who is an ex-officio member.

- b) Those members shall include the five (5) church officers who shall be elected annually to their specific offices (chair, vice-chair, secretary, financial secretary, and treasurer) in accordance with Article III, Section 3, and other members who shall serve for terms of three (3) years in such a manner that the terms of approximately one-third of the members shall expire each year. They shall not serve more than two consecutive terms.

Section 3. Organization.

Following the annual congregational business meeting the council shall convene to appoint from its own number chairs for the administrative committees.

Section 4. Duties.

The council in its administrative responsibility in cooperation with the pastor shall fulfill the functions defined by the constitution and bylaws, including the following:

- a) Supervise church membership, including recommendations relative to reception or removal of members.

- b) Assist the pastor in nurturing the spiritual life of the church and in the service of communion as planned by the pastor, in cooperation with the worship chair.

- c) Establish administrative and program policies in conformity with the spirit of the church constitution.

- d) Evaluate the total church program on a continuing basis.

- e) Plan and recommend the annual budget and stewardship opportunities for the church.
- f) Review and approve the schedule of the church activities and personnel.
- g) Appoint administrative committee members and church workers as defined by the bylaws for the administrative committees, as the council may deem appropriate.

Section 5. Administrative committees.

Implementation of policies and programs established by congregational or council action may be accomplished through the following administrative committees:

- a) Worship and Music Committee.
- b) Evangelism and Enlistment Committee.
- c) Fellowship and Service Committee.
- d) Education, Discipleship and Personnel Committee.
- e) Mission Committee.
- f) Social Action Committee.
- g) Stewardship and Properties Committee

Council members shall serve as chairs of the committees to which they are appointed and assume responsibility for directing all congregational activities which fall within that functional category, in cooperation with pastor(s).

ARTICLE V

Committees

Section 1. Executive committee.

The executive committee, consisting of the church chair, the secretary, and the treasurer, together with the senior pastor of the church, shall strive to promote effective working relations and communication in the church. The committee shall have no legislative power, but shall function in an advisory capacity to the council, unless specific responsibilities shall have been assigned to it by the council or the church.

Section 2. Nominating committee.

The nominating committee shall consist of not less than three (3) members who shall be elected at a business meeting at least three (3) months prior to the annual meeting. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member of the committee. After being convened by the church chair, committee members shall elect their own chair and secretary. The responsibility of the committee shall include the following:

- a) Prepare a ballot for the annual meeting of the congregation listing at least one qualified candidate for each office to be filled.
- b) Confirm the willingness of each candidate to serve before listing his or her name on the ballot.

c) Present a complete ballot to the annual meeting of the congregation. This shall constitute completion of the committee's assignment, unless given specific responsibilities at said annual meeting.

Section 3. Pastoral relations committee.

The pastoral relations committee shall consist of the members of the executive committee and shall meet at least semiannually in keeping with the program and purpose of the Covenant Commission on Pastoral Relations as adopted by the Annual Meeting.

Section 4. Special committees and task forces.

Special committees or task forces for specific purposes may be appointed by any duly constituted business meeting of the congregation or by the council according to need, but shall be automatically terminated at the next annual meeting unless specifically extended by said annual meeting.

ARTICLE VI

Meetings

Section 1. Public services.

Public services shall be conducted regularly on Sundays and, when deemed appropriate, on weekdays for worship, the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and prayer.

Section 2. Celebrating the sacraments.

The sacrament of Holy Communion shall be celebrated monthly or as determined by vote of the church. The sacrament of baptism shall be celebrated in keeping with Covenant policies and according to the needs of the constituency.

Section 3. Congregational business meetings.

Congregational business meetings shall be held regularly not less than semiannually, as specified in Article VIII of the constitution. Special congregational business meetings may be called by the chair of the church in consultation with the senior pastor or by the council.

Section 4. Church council and administrative committee meetings.

Regular meetings of the council shall be held not less than monthly. Administrative committees, special committees, and task forces shall meet not less than at a frequency specified by the council. Special meetings of the council, the executive committee, the administrative committees, and the task forces may be called by their respective chair.

Section 5. Organizational meetings.

Meetings and activities of the organizations of the church shall be planned and conducted regularly under the direction and supervision of the council.

ARTICLE VII

General Provisions

Section 1. Quorum.

- a) Twenty-five percent of the membership, but not less than ten members, present and voting at a congregational business meeting properly called shall constitute a quorum.
- b) The quorum for the council, committee, and task force meetings shall be a majority of their respective memberships.

Section 2. Rules of order.

All business meetings of the church and of the boards, committees, and organizations of the church shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order.

ARTICLE VIII

Amendments

Amendments to these bylaws not in conflict with the constitution or with the Model Constitutions for Local Covenant Churches may be adopted at any regular congregational business meeting or at a special business meeting called for that purpose by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting, providing that such amendments have been presented in writing to the executive committee of the church and at a preceding regular congregational business meeting.