

Constitution - Update and Revision (DRAFT 1-4-04)

THE CHURCH

First Church of the Brethren, Springfield, Illinois, a Religious Corporation, registered with the State of Illinois, hereto referred to in this document as "The Church."

The Church is the "Body of Christ" and exists to carry on the work which Christ began while with us on earth. The Church is, therefore, divine in mission and purpose. The Church is one organism through which Christ works for the redemption, healing, and saving of individuals.

The Church is a fellowship of believers with Christ as the Head.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Based on the two Great Commandments: Mark 12:29-31: "You shall love the Lord your God" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

1. Meaning of Membership

According to the New Testament, life in Christ means life in the body of Christ. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), so that we, "though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12: 5). Membership in a local fellowship of believers, the congregation, is the way in which we affirm and live out our membership in Christ's larger body, the church universal. In our interrelatedness with other Christians in the local church, we experience the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit, we discover ways to be faithful to our covenant with God and each other, and we're able to support one another in carrying out our common calling as the people of God. So it was in the house churches of the earliest Christians; so it is in the life of God's people today.

From the time of its beginnings, the Church of the Brethren has affirmed the importance of church membership and sought ways to make church membership more meaningful. It is appropriate, therefore, for the congregation and its members to reflect on their mutual accountability to one another. On the one hand, the congregation has a covenantal responsibility to care for its members, to encourage growth in freedom and discipleship, to help members discover their gifts and find ways to serve, and to provide ministries which respond to both spiritual and physical needs. On the other hand, each member has a covenantal responsibility to participate regularly in the life of the congregation, to seek counsel of the church in living out the way of Christ, to challenge the church to greater accountability to its calling, to respond to opportunities to serve in the congregation and beyond, and to contribute to the church's ministries in every way possible.

We encourage all members of the church to be faithful in church and Sunday School attendance; to be faithful stewards to the church; to participate in the rites and ordinances of the church [communion, love feast, baptism, laying on of hands, anointing]; and to commit their talents and time to the work of the church. All members are encouraged to grow spiritually stronger as they seek to be faithful to the vows they have made.

At the heart of our calling as members of Christ's body is the summons to follow Christ as his disciples. Christians do not live for themselves but are called to seek first the kingdom of God, to risk themselves for Christ's sake, and to take up the way of the cross. To accept and practice the costly grace of radical discipleship is no easy task. In the community of faith, however, we find courage and strength to live out our discipleship in solidarity with others.

2. Entering Into and Renewing Church Membership

Membership in the local church is open to all persons who by their own act of faith say yes to God's offer of new life in Christ and accept the vocation of the covenant community, as taught and practiced by the Church of the Brethren. One of the responsibilities of the congregation is to reach out to all persons, to share with them the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and to invite them to enter into the life of Christ's body. When persons respond to this invitation, the church shall take steps to prepare them for membership. Part of this preparation shall consist of classes of sufficient length on the meaning of church membership. Such classes offer an opportunity for persons to explore the faith and history of the wider Christian community, to study the particular story and distinctive emphases of the Church of the Brethren, and to become familiar with the life and expectations of the congregation they are entering. In addition to providing church membership classes, the congregation may choose to identify persons who will serve as sponsors of new members to assist in their orientation into the life of the church. In whatever ways the congregation chooses to prepare persons for membership the pastor or minister has a key role to play here.

When persons seeking membership have completed their period of preparation, they may be received into the church in one of three ways:

- a. Confession of faith and baptism by trine immersion as practiced by the Church of the Brethren.*
- b. A letter transferring membership from another congregation of the Church of the Brethren or of another Christian denomination.*
- c. Reaffirmation of faith and renewal of the commitment to membership made at an earlier time in another congregation.*

The congregation will then confirm its acceptance of and commitment to the new member.

The sequel to entering into membership is the renewing of membership. Only as we regularly renew our covenant with God and one another does that covenant function in a vital way. Historically, Brethren worked at renewal of membership through an annual visit by the deacons to the homes of members to reflect on the health of each person's relationship with Christ and the church-and through the love feast which traditionally followed that visit. Whether through its practice or through other models to calling one another to accountability, the congregation shall provide its members with annual opportunities to examine their faith and calling and to renew or reaffirm their relationship with the church. As a part of this process, members may be invited to make specific commitments related to their participation in the life and work of the church.

3. Membership Classification

Members shall be classified in one of three ways for statistical purposes and reported accordingly on annual forms:

- a. Members. Members of the congregation shall consist of those persons who have been received into the church by baptism, letter, or reaffirmation of faith, and who choose to continue their membership when the congregation invites them to examine and renew the covenant relationship.*
- b. Associate Members. Associate status may be granted to other categories of persons:*
 - (1) Temporary residents, such as students and winter residents who participate in the life of the congregation on a seasonal or short term basis, and who continue to hold membership in another congregation in the community of their permanent residence.*
 - (2) Former members who have moved to a new location in which there is no Church of the Brethren, and who wish to continue a relationship with the Brethren at the same time*

that they become members of another Christian community.
 (3) *Persons who are actively participating in congregational life, but have yet to become members.*

c. *Separated Members. Separated members consist of those persons who were received into the church as members, but who no longer participate in the church's life or carry out the commitments expected of members, and who for three years fail to respond to invitations to reaffirm or renew their relationship with the congregation.*

4. Membership Termination.

Membership in a congregation may be terminated in one of the following ways:

- a. Death
- b. Transfer of membership by letter. A letter of transfer is the property of the congregation and shall go from the granting to the receiving congregation. Either the letter or accompanying note should indicate whether the member for whom the letter is being sent is a member or separated member.
- c. Withdrawal. This action is taken at the request of the individual.
- d. Removal. The congregation may act to remove a person's name from the list of members when:
 - (1) A member has joined another church, but failed to request a letter of transfer.
 - (2) The congregation determines that all attempts at reconciliation have failed.

CHURCH COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING

The Church Council Business Meeting is the final authority and governing body within the local congregation; it is The Church in business session. The congregation in business meeting shall hear reports and evaluate past accomplishments, study present conditions, plan the future program of the church, record the voice of the congregation on current issues where Christian witness is urgent, and provide opportunity for sharing and coordinating differing points of view. The business meeting shall also elect officers, adopt budgets, rule on policy and organizational matters, and authorize church officials to act on behalf of the congregation. All members and associate members shall be eligible to vote in church council business meeting. All voting shall be by ballot unless present council desires otherwise.

The Church Council shall meet at least one (1) time per calendar year during the final quarter (Oct. Nov. Dec.). Other Church Council Meetings may be called at any time during the year, by the Church Board, as needed. A notice of two (2) weeks prior to the scheduled date of the Council Meeting shall be made to the members.

ORGANIZATION

Church Council: All Members and Associate Members

- Church Board
- Nurture Commission
- Stewardship Commission
- Witness Commission
- Executive Committee
- Deacon Ministry

I. Composition of Church Board

- A. Ten (10) elected members serving two year terms.
- B. The Pastor is an ex-officio member without vote.
- C. If a commission chairperson is unable to attend a board meeting, another commission member should function in their place.

- D. Quorum will be one-half the elected members.
 - E. The Church Clerk will serve as secretary of the board when appointed.
- II. Composition of Commissions
- A. Membership of each commission will be three (3); the chair, and two others. Commissions have the power to create short-term committees and to recruit individuals for specific tasks.
- III. Commission Formulation
- A. The Pastor, and the Church Board Chairperson are ex-officio members of all commissions. The following will be ex-officio members of the named commission:
 - 1. Stewardship Commission: Treasurer and Financial Secretary
- IV. Composition of Deacon Ministry
- A. Membership of the Deacon Ministry will be 4-7 members, each serving a three (3) year term. Deacons may serve a second consecutive three year term. No deacon will serve more than six consecutive years without a one year break.
- IV. Election by Church Council
- A. Treasurer, every three (3) years.
 - B. Financial Secretary, every three (3) years.
 - C. Church Board Members, two-year terms (renewable for 2nd two-year term).
 - D. Deacons, three-year terms (renewable for 2nd three-year term).
 - E. Persons to fill any board position left vacant.
 - F. Persons to fill any other elected church offices left vacant.
 - G. One delegate to Annual Conference. A two (2) year term.
 - H. Two delegates to District Conference serving two (2) years. The Pastor and Church :Board Chair shall be delegates by virtue of their office.
- V. Tenure of Office
- A. Church Board members may be elected for two successive two year terms; however, after one year off the church board, they may serve again.
 - B. The Church Treasurer and Financial Secretary may be elected for successive three-year terms.
 - C. Deacon Ministry members may be elected for two successive three year terms; however, after one year off they may serve again.

JOB ANALYSIS

The Church Board:

1. To act as the official governing and administrating body for the church between council meetings.
2. To carry out council action.
3. To act as planning, coordinating and reviewing board of all church activities.
4. To help prepare the business for the council meetings.
5. The board may constitute or authorize short-term committees to carry out specific assignments and ministries. When the specific assignment is achieved the committee shall be dismissed.

6. To present to the Stewardship Commission and Financial Secretary a request for all benevolent giving to be included in the budget.
7. To oversee the reception and distribution of special gifts (non-budgeted).

The Church Board Chair:

1. To preside at all meetings of the church board
2. To prepare agenda for business in advance.
3. To lead the church board in growing spiritually.
4. To cooperate with the pastor in attending and helping all regular commission meetings.
5. To act as a spokesperson for the board before council meetings.
6. To preside over all council meetings.
7. To urge all commissions to be mindful of their responsibilities for the coming year.
8. Is an ex-officio member of all commissions.
9. By virtue of office, is a delegate to the district conference.
- 10. *Will oversee the filling of vacancies of elected and appointed positions and the preparation of ballot for church council action.***

Church Commissions and Executive Committee:

The Nurture Commission:

The Nurture Commission is responsible for fostering the spiritual life of the congregation through education, fellowship, worship and music. This includes recruiting church teachers, providing curriculum, planning special study groups, assisting with worship planning, musical programs, special services (such as love feast, communion, etc.), planning fellowship meals and events, organizing funeral dinners, etc.

The Witness Commission:

The Witness Commission is responsible for directing the congregation's witness to the community and world through evangelism, missions, social action, and ministry to the needy. This commission coordinates special gift appeals to the wider church, oversees special ministry programs (like holiday meals ministry), interprets the work of the Church of the Brethren through outreach ministries (Illinois and Wisconsin District, General Board, Pleasant Hill Village, Camp Emmanuel, Emergency Disaster Fund, Association of Brethren Caregivers, On Earth Peace, etc.), and works with community agencies which provide for the poor of our community.

The Stewardship Commission:

The Stewardship Commission is responsible for the care, protection, and maintenance of church property. They also oversee the purchase of products and services which enable the church to meet its mission. The Stewards plan and assist with fundraisers, every-member enlistments for

the purpose of securing pledges for the annual budget or special projects, coordinate stewardship education, work with the treasurer and financial secretary to see that congregational income and expenses are recorded and disbursed.

Each commission shall have three members. Each commission shall prepare a tentative budget for its ministry and program areas which will be reviewed by the stewards commission and the church board.

Along with the responsibilities herein listed, additional duties and instructions may be assigned to the commissions by the board when deemed to be in the best interest of the congregation. The activities of the commissions are subject to review by the board and regular reports shall be made to the board.

The chairperson of each commission, along with the church board chairperson and vic chairperson shall comprise the executive committee.

Executive Committee:

The executive committee shall have the power to act on behalf of the church board when the board is unable or unavailable to meet. The executive committee shall meet regularly with the pastor for review, evaluation and pastoral support. The committee shall prepare a tentative budget for the pastor's salary and compensation which will be reviewed by the stewardship commission and the church board.

The Deacon Ministers: elected by council for three (3) year term.

Deacon responsibilities may include, but not be limited to:

1. Shepherding a small group with regular visits and personal contacts.
2. Assisting the pastor with crisis situations.
3. Assisting with rites and ordinances.
4. Being on call in the pastor's absence.
5. Extending welcome to and follow-up with new attendees.
6. Assisting with membership instruction.
7. Meeting on a regular basis with the pastor.

The Financial Secretary: elected by council for three (3) year term.

1. Collect all church moneys.
2. Deposit all moneys in bank.
3. Keep a confidential record of commitment giving.
4. Issue quarterly reminders to members.
5. Give treasurer a weekly record of all moneys collected and deposited in bank.

6. Ex-officio member of Stewardship Commission.

The Treasurer: elected by council for three (3) year term.

1. Keep all records of church moneys paid out on all bills approved by church board and church council.
2. Maintain budget figures for commissions as has been approved or set up.
3. Sign all checks unless otherwise instructed by Stewardship Commission.
4. Furnish monthly statements of income and expenses to pastor, church board, financial secretary, and membership at-large.
5. ***Keep all legal instruments and documents.***
6. ***Report regularly at church board meetings.***
7. Ex-officio member and of stewardship commission and church board.

The Pastor:

1. Spiritual Shepherd of the Church.
2. Meets with church board, commissions, deacons, and elected officers.
3. Works with the congregation and inspires them to serve in the Kingdom's work.
4. Organizes and educates the congregation to serve in evangelism, visitation, counseling, leading in worship, preaching, etc.
5. Ex-officio member of the church board and commissions of the church.
6. Makes regular reports to church board and congregation.
7. Serves as a delegate to the Illinois and Wisconsin District Conference.

The Church Clerk: appointed by church board.

1. Keep minutes of all church council and church board meetings.
2. Keep church membership records in cooperation with the pastor.
3. Issues and receives letters of church members in cooperation with the pastor.
4. Ex-officio member of the church board without vote, unless a current board member.

Amendments:

Any portion of this constitution may be amended at any church council meeting by a 2/3 vote of those present, provided that said amendments have been posted in writing at least 30 days before action is to be taken.