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A FORM FOR

CONSTITUTION

and/or

By-Laws

FOR A LOCAL CHURCH OF
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Willis Elliott

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This form has been written in harmony with the Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ; and we would urge that the local church, in writing its own constitution and/or by-laws, take cognizance of the same instruments.

**A FORM FOR A
CONSTITUTION AND/OR BY-LAWS
FOR A LOCAL CHURCH OF THE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

ARTICLE I. NAME

1. The name of this church shall be
of the United Church of Christ located in
State of

ARTICLE II. PURPOSE

1. The avowed purpose of this church shall be to worship God, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the Sacraments; to realize Christian fellowship and unity within this church and the Church Universal; to render loving service toward mankind; and to strive for righteousness, justice, and peace.

ARTICLE III. POLITY

1. This church shall be a part of the United Church of Christ and it shall sustain that relationship to the United Church of Christ described in those portions of the Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ adopted July 4, 1961 relating to local churches.

2. The government of this church is vested in its members, who exercise the right of control in all its affairs, subject, however, to Laws of the State of relating to (corporations not for profit or ecclesiastical corporations).

ARTICLE IV. FAITH AND COVENANT

Faith—This church acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of man. It acknowledges as brothers in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make

1975

NOTICE OF REVISION

In view of the stand taken by the United Church of Christ at the 1963 Denver General Synod with regard to "open churches," the Committee for a Local Church Constitution and/or By-Laws unanimously agreed to add the following statement to Article V (Membership) of A FORM FOR CONSTITUTION AND/OR BY-LAWS FOR A LOCAL CHURCH OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST:

Page 5 Article V, paragraph 1. Immediately following the first paragraph, "... Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior," insert,

"In accordance with the gospel covenant which binds into a unity 'faithful people of all ages, tongues and races,' membership is open to all without regard to race or color."

WSE addition

Revision
April 1964

ways of the Lord, made known and to be made known to us. We hold it to be the mission of the Church to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in all the world, while worshipping God, and striving for truth, justice, and peace. As did our fathers, we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us. We pray for the coming of the kingdom of God, and we look with faith toward the triumph of righteousness and eternal life.

ARTICLE V. MEMBERSHIP

1. Membership in this church shall be open to any person who has been baptized, has been confirmed, or has made public confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. ~~1/13/2017~~

2. Members shall pledge themselves to attend the regular worship of the church and the celebration of the Lord's Supper; to live the Christian life; to share in the life and work of the church; to contribute to its support and benevolences; and to seek diligently the spiritual welfare of the membership and the community.

3. Any member may, on his own request, be granted a letter of transfer. If wishing to join a body not in fellowship with this church, he may be dismissed with a certificate of church membership.

If, because of change of faith or for other reasons not involving unchristian conduct, a member requests in writing to be released from his membership obligations, the church shall patiently endeavor to secure his continuance in its fellowship; but failing in such effort, the church may grant the request and terminate his membership. Such a request shall be approved by the Senior Pastor and the Council, and the Secretary and/or Clerk shall issue the appropriate letter of release.

4. A member whose address has long been unknown or who for a period of two years, in spite of spiritual care, has not attended the church's worship or contributed to its support, may, by recommendation of the Board or Committee of Fellowship and vote of the Council, be removed from the membership roll and placed on a conditional list. If, after the expiration of a year, the relationship remains unchanged, the name may be dropped from the conditional roll by a further vote of the Council.

5. If a member persistently breaches his covenant vows, the Elders and/or Deacons, after due notice has been given to him, a hearing

before the Council has been offered him, and faithful efforts have been made to bring him to amendment in accordance with the law of Christ, may censure him, or suspend or terminate his membership.

ARTICLE VI. GOVERNING BODY

1. The governing body of this church shall be the membership assembled in church meeting. The vote of a majority of members present at the meeting shall be the action of the church. A quorum shall consist of% of the members. (Do not make this percentage too large.)

ARTICLE VII. COUNCIL

1. The Council shall be the executive body of this church. It shall be composed of the Pastor or Pastors, the Elders and/or Deacons, the Trustees, and the Members-at-Large. One-half of its members shall constitute a quorum.

2. The Council shall organize itself each year, electing a Chairman (President), a Vice-Chairman (Vice-President), a Secretary (Clerk), and a Treasurer; and shall form such boards or committees as will serve to further the purpose of the church. (NOTE: The following are suggested:

- Worship
- Christian Education
- Stewardship
- Fellowship
- Evangelism
- Christian Social Action
- Finance
- others
-
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3. If the church is part of a pastoral charge composed of two or more churches, the members of the Council shall be members of a Joint Council to which shall be committed the common interests of these churches.

4. Elders and/or Deacons, Trustees, and Members-at-Large shall be elected by majority vote cast at a church meeting. They shall be elected for years. In order to provide continuity, not more than

..... of each office should become vacant in any one year. (Note: Each church should have at least two Elders and/or Deacons and two Trustees and two Members-at-Large.)

5. Nominations shall be made for the offices of Elders and/or Deacons, Trustees and Members-at-Large by a committee appointed each year by the Council or Elected by the church at a previous annual meeting. Public notice of such nominations shall be given from the pulpit or by bulletin or letter at least two weeks before the election. Other nominations may be made from the floor at the meeting at which the election is held.

6. When elected, the Elders and/or Deacons, shall be publicly ordained to or installed in their respective offices. Trustees and Members-at-Large shall be installed.

7. Vacancies on the Council shall be filled by the Council for the unexpired terms.

8. The Council shall be the policy-making body and shall transact the business of the church, make provision for the determining and raising of the current expense budget as well as for our Christian World Mission and benevolences, and provide for the auditing of financial accounts and for the adequate support of the staff. It shall keep a complete and accurate record of its proceedings, be the custodian of all church records, and report to the church at its regular and special meetings. All acts and deliberations of the Council are subject to the will of and revision by the governing body. (NOTE: In some states it is advisable to define as legal trustees all members of the Council).

9. The Council shall instruct the proper officers on all fiscal matters, including the payment of bills; with monthly review by the Council.

10. The Council may authorize any extraordinary expense if funds are available; but if borrowing exceeds \$....., it must receive the approval of the church.

11. In addition to the stated boards or committees the Council shall appoint such other committees as it may deem necessary.

12. The Council shall meet at least once every month for the transaction of such business as may properly come before it. (Meetings normally should include prayer and study and should emphasize policy deliberations.) Special meetings are subject to the Chairman's call.

ELDERS AND/OR DEACONS

13. Elders and/or Deacons are members of the church elected by the church and ordained to or installed in their office. They shall assist and support the Pastor in the spiritual affairs of the church. They shall provide the elements for the Lord's Supper and, when invited by the Pastor, shall aid in their distribution. They shall have jurisdiction in matters of discipline except in the case of the Pastor. Elders and/or Deacons shall take heed to the high calling of their office, guarding faithfully all the spiritual interests of the church, maintaining order in the house of God, visiting the sick, and ministering to the edification and comfort of all.

TRUSTEES

14. Trustees are members of the church elected by the church and installed in their office. They shall have the care and custody of the property of the church as a sacred trust, whether real or personal, in accordance with the provisions of the Articles of Incorporation and this Constitution and By-Laws and under direction of the Council. (Churches desiring to do so may commit this authority to the total membership of the Council.)

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

15. Members-at-Large are members of the church elected by the church and installed in their office. They should be such persons as can assume leadership in the various boards or committees of the Council.

ARTICLE VIII. PASTOR

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Pulpit Committee, appointed by the council, to seek a candidate for a vacancy in the office of Pastor.
2. As soon as a pastoral vacancy occurs, it shall be reported to the Conference Executive.
3. In filling a vacancy or in securing supply ministers for the period of vacancy, the Pulpit Committee may seek the counsel of the Conference Placement Committee.
4. The Pulpit Committee may request the Conference Executive to secure relevant information about any minister whom it wishes to consider for the vacancy.

5. Any minister may confer with the Conference Executive concerning a pastoral vacancy. At the minister's request, his name shall be submitted by the Conference Executive for consideration by the local church committee.

6. The Pulpit Committee shall present to the church the name of the candidate it recommends to fill the vacancy. A favorable vote of the church constitutes a call.

7. In the call, the terms of the relationship shall be stated, including the agreement of the church to participate in the Pension Fund of the United Church of Christ, the Ministers' Health Insurance Program, and other terms agreed between the candidate and the Committee. The minister, the church, the Association, and the Conference Executive shall each receive a copy of the call.

8. When a minister accepts a call to this church, the church and he shall join in requesting the Association to arrange for a service of installation or recognition. A report of this service shall be signed by the proper officer of the Association and by the Conference Executive, and copies shall be sent to the Secretary of the United Church of Christ and to the Council for Church and Ministry.

9. The Pastor shall be elected for an indefinite period. In order to terminate this relationship, three months' notice shall be given by either party. The procedure shall be in accordance with the Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ.

10. When either party decides to terminate the relationship, the termination shall be by action of the Church Council, and notice of such termination shall be sent by the Chairman of the Council to the Conference Executive and to the Association for appropriate action.

11. Brotherly discipline of the Pastor shall be in conformity with the Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ.

12. The church may at its discretion choose an Associate or Assistant Pastor(s).

ARTICLE IX. CABINET

1. The Cabinet shall consist of the Council representatives and duly elected representatives of the church organizations. The purpose of the Cabinet is to coordinate and promote the entire program of the church. It shall meet at least quarterly and be subject to the call of the Council. (NOTE: In the event that a Cabinet is not desired, its

functions shall be performed by the Council, with the Members-at-Large serving as representatives of the organizational life of the church.

ARTICLE X. PROPERTY

1. *For incorporated churches*—The church may in its corporate name sue or be sued, acquire by purchase, gift, devise, bequest or otherwise and own, hold, invest, reinvest or dispose of property both real and personal for such work as the church may undertake and may purchase, own, receive, hold, manage, care for and transfer, rent, lease, mortgage or otherwise encumber, sell, assign, transfer and convey such property for the general purposes of the church; it may receive and hold in trust both real and personal property and invest and reinvest the same and make any contracts for promoting the objects and purposes of the church.

For unincorporated churches—The Board of Trustees in the church name may sue or be sued, acquire by purchase, gift, devise, bequest or otherwise and own, hold, invest, reinvest or dispose of property both real and personal for such work as the church may undertake and may purchase, own, receive, hold, manage, care for and transfer, rent, lease, mortgage or otherwise encumber, sell, assign, transfer and convey such property for the general purposes of the church; they may receive and hold in trust both real and personal property and invest and reinvest the same and make any contracts for promoting the objects and purposes of the church.

2. Upon dissolution of the church, its assets and all property and interests of which it shall then be possessed, including any devise, bequest, gift or grant contained in any will or other instrument, in trust or otherwise, made before or after such dissolution, shall be transferred to (your) Conference of the United Church of Christ. (This is not required by the General Synod, and we want to make it plain that the United Church stands firmly on Article 21 of the Constitution but under the Internal Revenue Service regulations, if there is not a specific disavowal that the assets on dissolution will be distributed to the membership, the church will not qualify as an exempt organization. See Internal Revenue Code Sec. 501 (c) (3) and the regulations thereunder.)

ARTICLE XI. CHURCH MEETINGS

1. The Annual Meeting of the church shall be held in the month of At this meeting, the Council, the officers of the church, the Pastor(s), and all church organizations shall submit their annual reports in writing.

2. Special church meetings may be called by the Council or by a petition to the Council signed by not less than percent of the members. The Council shall call such meetings within three weeks from receipt of the petition, and adequate notice of such meeting shall be sent to the membership by the Secretary (Clerk).

ARTICLE XII. RULES OF ORDER

1. *Robert's Rules of Order* shall be the parliamentary authority for all matters of procedure not specifically covered by this Constitution and/or By-Laws.

ARTICLE XIII. AMENDMENTS

1. Amendments to this Constitution and/or By-Laws may be made at any duly called church meeting by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the members present, public announcement of the text of the proposed amendment(s) having been made two weeks prior to the meeting.

COMMENTARY

1. The term "Constitution and/or By-Laws" means that churches will variously designate their ordering instrument(s).

2. Whenever possible, the committee has followed the nomenclature of the United Church of Christ. Instances are "church" instead of "congregation," and "Council" instead of "Consistory" or "Official Board."

3. For one office our two heritages have two words, "Elder" and "Deacon." Furthermore, some churches divide this function into two offices. Thus the term "Elders and/or Deacons."

4. The executive authority in the local church is in a single body, expressing the truth that the spiritual and the temporal are inseparable.

5. In the article on membership no provision is made that either the Elders and/or Deacons or the whole membership shall vote upon receiving a person into membership in the church. Some congregations will undoubtedly want to provide for such a vote either by the congregation as a whole or by the Elders and/or Deacons, since this is the traditional way. However, it might be considered that if the church belongs to Christ, what group of members has a right to vote to bar anybody from membership? Anyone who acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and wishes to share in the fellowship of the church ought to be eligible for membership.

6. Many churches may not wish to permit underage members to vote.

7. For churches in process of formation or of re-examination of their order, this form may prove of value as representing a confluence and a projection of our two streams of historic experience.

8. Church order is no goal in itself, for order in the Christian church is a servant of freedom in Christ. "All things should be done . . . in order" (I Cor. 14: 40) for the avoidance of unnecessary waste and grief, thus freeing the church to its essential ministries.

9. Because church order is functional, every structure is tentative; and each local church should from time to time take a courageous look at its form. In addition to the present instrument, a church may wish to examine the constitution and/or by-laws of other churches.

10. Democracy, in the church as in the surrounding culture, is a prudential steering between tyranny and anarchy. The governance

of God cannot be equated with it, nor the discovery of God's will with any human ordering principle. Rather, it lies above and under and beyond, "that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of man but in the power of God" (I Cor. 2: 5).

THE COMMITTEE

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