



# Constitution Confusion

GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS  
FOR CONGREGATIONS



Part I Overview: Governing documents and the Model Constitution for Congregations

Part II Making the Constitution your own: Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions

OVERVIEW: A  
Church in  
three  
expressions

ELCA Churchwide

ELCA Synod

ELCA Congregation

# OVERVIEW: Congregation Governance

Incorporation

State NFP Law (Title 15; Article B)

ELCA Constitution (9.25)

# OVERVIEW: Governing Documents

Articles of Incorporation

Constitution

Policies

# OVERVIEW: Constitution

Required sections:  
“must be used  
without alteration  
or amendment.”

# Sections of the constitution

## \*Preamble

1. Name and Incorporation
2. \*Confession of Faith
3. \*Nature of the Church
4. \*Statement of Purpose
5. \*Powers of the Congregation
6. \*Church Affiliation
7. \*Property Ownership
8. \*Membership
9. \*Rostered Minister
10. Congregation Meeting

# Sections of the constitution

- 11. Officers
- 12. Congregation Council
- 13. Congregation Committees
- 14. Organizations within the Congregation
- 15.\*Discipline of Members and Adjudication
- 16.\*Amendments
- 17.\*Bylaws
- 18.\*Continuing Resolutions
- 19.\*Indemnification
- 20.[\*Parish Authorization]



# Preamble

▶ We, baptized members of the Church of Christ, responding in faith to the call of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, desiring to unite together to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and carry out God's mission, do hereby adopt this constitution and solemnly pledge ourselves to be governed by its provisions. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

# Chapter 2: Confession of Faith

- Triune God
- Jesus as Lord
  - The Word proclaimed in Law & Gospel
  - The Word proclaimed in Scripture (inspired by God)
- Creeds
- Augsburg Confession
- Book of Concord

*This congregation confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scripture and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.*

# Chapter 3: Nature of the Church

- Under rule and authority of Lord Jesus Christ
- Ecumenical (seeks Christian Unity)
- Three Expressions – each is Church
- Global fellowship (LWF)

# Chapter 4: Statement of Purpose

- ▶ Worship
- ▶ Proclaim
- ▶ Carry our Great Commission
- ▶ Serve
- ▶ Nurture
- ▶ Manifest Unity



# Chapter 5: Powers of the Congregation

- ▶ Congregation Meeting
- ▶ Delegation to Council
- ▶ Call or terminate call
- ▶ Approve budget
- ▶ Amend Constitution
- ▶ Acquire, hold & sell property
- ▶ Elect to council and synod assembly



# Chapter 6: Church Affiliation

- ▶ Defines relationship with ELCA and Synod
- ▶ And process for termination of relationship

# Chapter 7: Property Ownership

- ▶ Congregation owns and controls its property
- ▶ At closure, property goes to synod
- ▶ Defines when congregation may retain ownership in cases of disaffiliation

# Chapter 8: Membership

- ▶ Baptized
- ▶ Confirmed
- ▶ Voting
- ▶ Associate
- ▶ Seasonal

Council is responsible for approving and maintaining membership



# Chapter 9: Rostered Minister

- ▶ ELCA Roster or Full-Communion
- ▶ Responsibilities of Pastor/Deacon
- ▶ Termination of call
- ▶ Bishop's responsibility

# Chapter 10: Congregation Meeting

- ▶ Timing
- ▶ Quorum
- ▶ Notification



# Chapter 11: Officers

- ▶ Four officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer)
- ▶ Officers serve same office in congregation and on council

# Chapter 12: Council

- ▶ Number of members, terms, election
- ▶ Responsibilities
  - ▶ Financial, Property
- ▶ Planning & Oversight
- ▶ Relationship with Rostered Minister
- ▶ Example to congregation
- ▶ Promote Christian behavior

# Chapter 13: Committees

- ▶ Four standing committees
  - ▶ Executive, Nominations, Mutual Ministry, Audit
- ▶ Call committee
- ▶ Others determined by congregation or council

# Chapter 14: Organizations

- ▶ Congregation has oversight and sets policies and goals

# Other Chapters

- ▶ 15 Discipline
- ▶ 16 Amendments
- ▶ 17 Bylaws
- ▶ 18 Continuing Resolutions
- ▶ 19 Indemnification
- ▶ 20 Parish – only required if in a parish



# Thank you

Upper Susquehanna Synod Constitution Committee

Model Constitution for Congregations

<https://www.elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions>