

Constitution and By-Laws

**St. Mark's
Lutheran Church
Williamsport, Pa.**

Constitution and
By-Laws
OF
ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN
CHURCH
OF WILLIAMSPORT, PA.

As adopted April 1, 1918
and amended to
January 19, 1955

CONSTITUTION

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost:

We, members of the Church of Christ, forming a Congregation under the style and title St. Mark's Lutheran Church of Williamsport, Pa., unite in the establishment of the Constitution hereinafter following, as a statement of common rights and a covenant of mutual duties as Christians, in order to sustain by the labor and gifts of love the pure Word and Sacraments as God's only appointed means for saving the lost and for edifying His people; and to maintain a discipline which shall aid in securing purity of doctrine, righteousness of life, and the peace and growth of the Church.

ARTICLE I.

Of the Doctrinal Basis

Section 1. This Congregation receives and adheres to the canonical books of the Old and New Testament as the revealed Word of God and the only rule of faith and life, and to the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, especially the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, as a correct and faithful exposition of the Divine Word, to which rule and confessions all instructions in the Church, the schools and family shall be conformed, and by which all questions of doctrine shall be decided, and with which all books of worship and instruction in the Congregation shall accord.

Sec. 2. It shall be in union with a Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, whose doctrinal basis is in accordance with Article I, Section 1, and Article IV, Section 1, of this Constitution.

ARTICLE II.

Of the Members

Section 1. This Congregation shall consist of the Pastor and other members of the Church of Christ, who have been baptized and admitted to the Lord's Supper, and who unite themselves as one communion under this Constitution, by accepting the same and conforming to the duties it enjoins; and also such baptized members of their households as have not yet reached the years of separate responsibility, and are subject by God's ordinance to their control, as parents or guardians.

Sec. 2. All these members, so far as their years and spiritual fitness allow, have a right to the means of Grace, provided for in the Congregation, and to the faithful observance toward them of the duties which Pastor, officers and other members of the Church owe one to another.

Sec. 3. It is the duty of all members of the Congregation to be steadfast in the Baptismal Covenant, and if they be parents or guardians, early to bring the children under their care within the same, presenting them for Holy Baptism, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to urge their attendance upon the catechetical instruction of the Pastor, and their preparation for the rite of Confirmation and the Lord's Supper. As they grow in years they are to grow in the knowledge and grace of God, diligently to study Holy Scripture, and use devout books which accord with it, to seek the light and aid of the Holy Spirit and all other needful gifts, by fervent prayer to examine themselves to receive the Lord's Supper faithfully, and, if possible, whenever it is celebrated, and regularly to use the ordinances of public, family and private devotion. They should be temperate in all things, should love

and aid each other, especially the needy and distressed, and should care for the souls and bodies of men everywhere. They should avoid all false teachers, and love, reverence, pray for, and heartily sustain faithful ministers; and should in all things be conformed to the mind and example of our most blessed Master and Saviour.

ARTICLE III.

Of Congregational Meetings

Section 1. Every member of this Congregation who has attained the age of twenty-one years, who has communed within the year and is a regular contributor, in accordance with its plans of local support and general beneficence, shall be entitled to take active part in all its meetings and to vote at all its elections.

Sec. 2. The Congregation shall hold an Annual Meeting at which the necessary elections of members of the Church Council shall be held, the annual reports of the officers of the Congregation submitted and other business transacted.

Sec. 3. Special meetings of the Congregation may be called as follows: (a) By the Pastor with the concurrence of two members of the Church Council; (b) By a majority of the Church Council; (c) At the written request of twenty voting members of the Congregation. All special meetings must be duly announced, together with the purpose for which they are called.

Sec. 4. At stated Congregational meetings any question connected with the welfare of the Congregation may be discussed and information called for from the Pastor, Council or others.

Sec. 5. All Congregational meetings shall be opened and closed with religious exercises.

ARTICLE IV. Of the Pastor

Section 1. Every Pastor of this Congregation must, at his ordination or before his installation, be obligated to the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, namely: the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Catechisms of Luther and the Formula of Concord, and solemnly promise to perform the duties of his office in conformity with the same, as a pure and correct presentation of the doctrine of Holy Scripture. He shall be or become a member of the Synod with which this Congregation is united. He shall sign the Constitution of this Congregation, and faithfully carry out the duties it assigns him.

Sec. 2. It shall be the duty of the Pastor, as the teacher and spiritual guide of the flock, prayerfully to study and to hold and teach the pure truth of God's Word, and to set, in public and private, an example of unfeigned holiness, sound judgment and propriety. He shall conduct the public service of God's House on the Sundays and other festival days of the Church; shall permit no one to occupy the pulpit of whose soundness in the faith, confessed by the Lutheran Church, there is reason to doubt; shall carefully give instructions to the young, and all others needing it, in the Catechism; shall be diligent in the Catechisation of the young on the Lord's day; shall watch over the Sunday School, shall confirm those, who, having been duly instructed, give satisfactory evidence that they are earnestly desirous of being faithful followers of Christ. He shall baptize publicly, except in special cases, and all private baptisms shall be publicly announced. He shall administer the Lord's Supper publicly, and also in private to

members, unable from age or sickness, to come to the House of God. He shall be active in the work of a Pastor, most of all among the poor, the sick, the sorrowing and all those whose spiritual estate demands his special care. He shall perform the marriage ceremony in strict accordance with the laws of the State and of God; shall earnestly urge and carry out the discipline; shall promote all wise plans of Christian beneficence and effort; and shall labor to prevent all deadness and fanaticism, all schism, heresy, separation and alienation in the Congregation.

Sec. 3. It shall be the duty of the Pastor to preside at all meetings of the Council and the Congregation, unless he is temporarily unwilling for special reasons to do so, in which case the Council or Congregation shall call one of their number to preside at the said meeting.

Sec. 4. Any member of the Congregation having charges against the Pastor shall first proceed according to Matt. 18: 15, 16. If the matter cannot thus be settled it shall be laid before the Church Council in writing; and if the Council shall deem the charge or charges of sufficient importance, it shall select a suitable member from its own number to preside, and proceed to an investigation, furnishing the Pastor accused with a copy of the charges made, and allowing him a hearing, at which the witnesses for and against the charges shall be heard; and if the charge or charges prove to be well founded, and the Council so decide, it shall report the case to the President of the Synod to which the Congregation belongs, to be disposed of in accordance with the Synodical Constitution. An appeal from the action of the Church Council may be taken to the Conference or Synod, in the manner prescribed in the Synodical Constitution.

Sec. 5. The Pastor shall keep a record of his ministerial acts in a book to be provided by the Congregation and to remain its property. He shall make a full record of the Baptisms, infant and adult, of Confirmations, of the times of Communion, and the number of Communicants, with a complete list of the same, of persons received from other Congregations, and of persons honorably dismissed, of persons excommunicated and of the time of their restoration, and of marriages, burials, and other items which he shall deem of importance in the history of the Congregation. All these shall be so recorded that, if necessary, they be available as legal evidence.

Sec. 6. When there is a vacancy in the Pastorate, the Council shall inform the President of Synod, or of the Conference, as the Synodical Constitution may determine, and solicit his advice; shall see to the supply of the pulpit, and shall nominate, after prayerful consideration, a candidate who is eligible according to Article IV, Section 1, and who has the necessary gifts, bodily and spiritual, purity of Christian character, sound judgment and personal activity.

Sec. 7. When a Pastor has been elected by a majority of two-thirds of the legal voters present at a special meeting called for such election, a written call, in the name of the Congregation, shall be sent him by the officers of the Congregation, in which the support guaranteed him shall be specified.

ARTICLE V.

Of the Church Council

Section 1. The Church Council is primarily the executive aid of the Pastor in the work of Christ for and in the Congregation. It may have assigned to it any duties in keeping with this object and with the divine and unchangeable duties and rights of

the people and the Pastor. Its members must be regular communicants, of good and established repute for personal character, wisdom and energy. They shall be publicly installed on the Sunday following their election.

Sec. 2. The Church Council shall consist of Trustees, and Deacons of the Church elected and qualified in accordance with the by-laws.

Sec. 3. The Trustees shall be the legal representatives of the Congregation, and as such shall have charge of its deeds and other important documents, and perform such duties as may be assigned to them by the Church Council.

Sec. 4. The duties of the Church Council are of such a nature as to leave the Pastor, as nearly as may be, unobstructed time and energy for the directly spiritual part of his official work, and also to aid him in that work by their counsels and co-operation. They shall attend to the collection and disbursing of all moneys given by the Congregation for all purposes, including current expenses, the relief of the poor, and for the objects of Christian beneficence; shall see that the Pastor has a sufficient salary and that it be promptly paid; that the House of God be kept in repair, and in a condition fitting the Sanctuary of the Most High; that it be opened and prepared for public services at the times appointed, and that proper sextons and others of like functions be provided; that strangers or occasional attendants be courteously received; that it be not diverted to any uses alien to its character; that the proper vessels and elements be provided for the Sacraments; that its property be secured to the Congregation in conformity with the law, and be placed under the proper regulations; and that in common with all its members, yet pre-eminently they, be

ready to take part, especially at the call of the Pastor, in the visitation and care of the sick, the needy, the bereaved and the distressed, and in the maintenance of pure discipline and a holy life in the Congregation, most of all by being themselves examples of all good works.

ARTICLE VI.

Of the Sunday School

Section 1. Inasmuch as the care of the young is one of the most important duties of the Congregation, the religious education of the children of the Church shall be provided for, not only at home, but by the maintenance of a Sunday school, which shall be under the control of the Congregation, and its constitution and acts subject to the Congregation's discipline and direction.

Sec. 2. The Pastor of the Congregation shall be ex-officio the Superintendent of the Sunday School and, with the Church Council and Teachers and Officers, shall constitute an Association which shall elect Assistant Superintendents, Teachers and all other Officers necessary to the proper management and greatest efficiency of the School.

ARTICLE VII.

Of Discipline

Section 1. The Congregation is not only to acknowledge the obligations of the Word of God as a guide of life and a corrector of evil, but is faithfully to use it in discipline for these ends. The discipline of the Church must be purely moral and spiritual, and in no case can pass beyond the withholding of her recognition, fellowship and communion from offenders.

Sec. 2. Violations of the Divine commands shall be followed, according to Matt. 18: 15-17, by instruction warnings and exhortation by a member to whom the wrong is known, or by the Pastor, first privately, then before witnesses. This failing in its proper effect, the case shall be laid before the Church, as represented in the Church Council, or in the congregational meeting, and if the offender persistently refuses to hear the Church, he shall be excluded from the Congregation till there be credible evidence of true penitence and reformation. The charges against a member shall be given to him in writing; he is entitled to be present through the whole actual procedure against him, and has the right of being heard and producing testimony in his own defense. The exclusion and restoration shall be publicly announced. Questions of appeal from the decision in the discipline of the Congregation shall be referred to the Conference or Synod, in accordance with the Constitution of the Synod with which the Congregation is connected.

ARTICLE VIII.

Of By-Laws and Amendments

Section 1. By-Laws not in conflict with the letter or spirit of this Constitution, the laws of the United States, or of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, may be made by the Congregation, to provide for the conducting of all matters whose general principles and methods are defined in the Constitution, but whose details are undetermined.

Sec. 2. Amendments of this Constitution not in conflict with its fundamental principles as defined in Article I, Section 1, and Article IV, Section 1, nor in conflict with the laws of the United States or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, proposed by at least

three legal voters at any regular Congregational meeting, or special meeting called for that purpose, may be made by the Congregation by a vote of two-thirds of its legal voters present. Said proposed amendment or amendments shall be submitted in writing, be duly read to the Congregation at least three months before the time of the meeting at which they are acted on, and notice of the time and place of such meeting shall be announced four successive Sundays on which public services are held, and the proposed amendments posted on the bulletin board at least four weeks prior to their adoption.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I.

Congregational Meetings

Section 1. The Annual Meeting of this Congregation shall be held on the third Wednesday in January at 8:00 o'clock P. M.

Sec. 2. All general and special meetings of this Congregation shall be announced at least twice at services immediately preceding their appointed date, and notice thereof shall be posted on the bulletin board in the main hallway of the Church.

Sec. 3. A statement of the objects of all special meetings of the Congregation must be made in the call therefor, and no other business may be transacted.

ARTICLE II.

Elections

Section 1. At the annual meeting the qualified voters shall elect by ballot two Trustees, to serve for a term of four years and six Deacons, to serve for a term of two years. No candidate shall be eligible for election to a third consecutive full term of the office of Deacon; provided, however, that upon lapse of one year after the end of any term he shall again be eligible to election and re-election for two consecutive terms, and provided further that nothing in this paragraph contained shall make a Deacon ineligible at any time to be a candidate for the office of Trustee.

Sec. 2. Vacancies in the Church Council may be filled for the unexpired term at any Annual Meeting of the Congregation or at any special meeting called for that purpose.

Sec. 3. At all elections a majority vote of the electors present shall be sufficient to elect the candidate voted for, except in the election of a Pastor, when a two-thirds vote shall be required.

Sec. 4. The Secretary of the Church Council shall act as Secretary at all Congregational Meetings.

ARTICLE III.

The Church Council

Section 1. The Church Council shall hold at least one regular meeting every month. The presence of a majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

Sec. 2. At its first meeting after the Annual Congregational Meeting, the Church Council shall organize by choosing a Vice President, a Secretary and a Treasurer, whose duties shall be such as ordinarily devolve upon such officers.

Sec. 3. The Treasurer shall make a monthly report of the finances of the Congregation to the Church Council, and an annual report to the Congregation.

Sec. 4. At the annual meeting of the Church Council the Chairman shall appoint the following Standing Committees, viz: Committee on Property, and Committee on Finance. These Committees shall make monthly reports to the Council.

Sec. 5. The Church Council shall choose the delegate to represent the Congregation at the stated meetings of the Synod and the Conference. The expenses of the delegate as well as of the Pastor to the meetings of Synod and Conference shall be paid by the Church Treasurer.

Sec. 6. The Church Building shall not be used for any purpose except the regular religious services, without the express permission of the Church Council.

Sec. 7. No Clubs or Societies shall be organized in the Congregation without the permission of the Church Council, which shall also have the authority to disband any existing Club or Society, if, in its judgment such action is required for the general good of the Congregation.

ARTICLE IV.

Finances

Section 1. This Congregation adopts the Duplex Pledge and Envelope System, for the purpose of raising the necessary funds required for Current Expenses and Benevolence.

Sec. 2. Every Communicant Member of the Congregation is expected to sign a Pledge Card indicating thereon the amount of his weekly contribution both to the Current Expense Fund and to Benevolence, and to make regular and prompt returns, each Sunday, if possible, by means of the Duplex Envelopes provided for this purpose.

Sec. 3. In the month of December of each year a set of Duplex Envelopes is to be distributed to all the Communicant members of the Congregation. Blank pledge cards for making new or changing former pledges shall at all times be accessible to members.

Sec. 4. All moneys raised and contributed by individual members or by Societies whether for Current Expenses or for Benevolence, shall, as far as possible, pass through the hands of the Church Treasurer.

ARTICLE V.

Amendments

Section 1. Amendments to these By-Laws, not in conflict with the Constitution, may be made at any

Annual Meeting of the Congregation or at any special meeting called for that purpose, by a two-thirds vote of the members present. Proposed amendments shall be read to the Congregation on two successive Sundays preceding the meeting at which they are to be considered and posted on the bulletin board at least ten days.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. Devotional Exercises.
2. Reading of Minutes.
3. Reports of Officers.
4. Reports of Standing Committees.
5. Reports of Special Committees.
6. Unfinished Business.
7. New Business.
8. Adjournment with Devotional Exercises.

