

Constitution of the St. Mark's  
Evangelical

# Lutheran Church

of Williamsport, Pa.



Adopted at a Congregational Meeting  
held Wednesday Evening  
February 10, 1886

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# Constitution and Discipline

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## CHAPTER I.

*Of the Church—Its Name, Doctrine, Duties, Officers, etc.*

Section 1. This Church shall be known by the name of the St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

Sec. 2. This congregation declares itself built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone, and adheres to the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as the standard of faith, and will adhere to such a Synod only as confesses this faith, as long as there is one member left in the congregation adhering to this doctrine.

Sec. 3. The duties incumbent upon this Church are:

(a) To see that the Word of God be preached in its purity, and the Sacraments administered according to the forms of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

(b) To labor for the purity of its members in faith and practice.

(c) To provide adequate religious instruction for the children of the Church.

(d) To give just support to its Pastor.

(e) To provide for the perpetuation of an Evangelical Ministry.

(f) To make provision for its worthy poor.

(g) To assist in spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth.

We, whose names are hereunto affixed, believing that the objects for which the Christian Church was established by Jesus Christ, its Divine Founder and Head, can be secured only in an associated capacity, hereby solemnly form ourselves into a Christian Church, and pledge ourselves, to God and to each other, to be governed by the following

## CONSTITUTION AND DISCIPLINE.

Sec. 4. The officers of this Church shall consist of the Pastor, three Trustees, four Elders and four Deacons.

## CHAPTER II.

### *Of the Officers.*

#### PART I—OF THE PASTOR.

Section 1. The office of Pastor was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. The Pastor must be blameless, etc. (1 Timothy 3:2-7.)

Sec. 2. He must be a member of that Evangelical Lutheran Synod within whose bounds this Church is located. If not a member of the said Synod, upon taking charge of this Church he shall unite with it at the first meeting of the Synod after such connection shall have been formed.

Sec. 3. The duties of the Pastor are principally these:

(a) To give himself to prayer and the study of the Word.

(b) To conduct the services of the Sanctuary and expound the Word of God.

(c) To administer the Sacraments of the Church.

(d) To visit the people of his charge, especially the sick, the fatherless and the widow.

(e) To pay particular attention to all who are yet without, and endeavor to lead them to Christ.

(f) To catechise the children of the Church and those persons who are candidates for confirmation.

(g) To pray with and instruct inquiring souls in the Church, or wherever he may deem it advisable.

Sec. 4. He shall not knowingly grant to a member of another Church any privileges to which such member is not entitled in his own Church.

Sec. 5. The Pastor shall, at the regular annual and semi-annual meetings, give to the congregation informa-

tion of the state of the Church, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.

Sec. 6. Should the congregation become dissatisfied with the life and ministry of the Pastor, which shall be ascertained by a test vote at a regular annual or semi-annual meeting, the relation as Pastor shall terminate within six months thereafter.

Sec. 7. Should the Pastor at any time give cause of offense in doctrine or life (which may God prevent), he shall be dealt with in the following manner:

(a) The Elders or a committee appointed by the Council shall present the matter of complaint, properly authenticated, to him, and if it appear that he is guilty, they shall admonish him to reform.

(b) Should this fail to accomplish the desired effect, then the case shall be reported to the President of the Synod, to be disposed of in the manner provided for in the Synodical Constitution.

#### PART II—OF THE TRUSTEES.

Section 1. No one shall be elected to the office of Trustee who is not a member in full communion with the Church, and who does not bear a good Christian character.

Sec. 2. The Trustees, one of whom shall be chosen annually, shall serve three years, unless deposed for improper conduct or removing out of the bounds of the Church.

Sec. 3. The following duties are required of the Trustees:

(a) They shall take care that the property of the Church is not injured or destroyed, and that the House of Worship and any other buildings belonging to the Church are kept in repair.

(b) That the deeds and other important documents of the Church are carefully preserved.

(c) That the debts of the Church, if any there be, are diminished and liquidated in the manner most consistent with the interests of the Church, and keep correct minutes of all their proceedings, and submit the same to the Church Council at the regular meetings, and aid in the performance of all other duties which are incumbent upon the Church Council.

#### PART III—OF THE ELDERS.

Section 1. The first section of Part II, of the Trustees, shall also be in force with regard to the Elders.

Sec. 2. The Elders, two of whom shall be chosen annually, shall serve two years, unless deposed for improper conduct or removing out of the bounds of the Church.

Sec. 3. The following duties are required of the Elders:

(a) To attend the prayer and other devotional meetings of the Church, and in the absence of the Pastor see that they are conducted decently and in order.

(b) To visit the sick and impart instruction and consolation.

(c) To assist in the government and discipline of the Church.

(d) To endeavor to preserve Peace and Love among the members.

(e) To visit the Sunday Schools, assist in keeping them in successful operation, and in every other way, such as catechising and family instruction, to promote the religious instruction of the young.

(f) To aid in the performance of all other duties which are incumbent upon the Church Council.

#### PART IV—OF THE DEACONS.

Section 1. The first section of Part II, of the Trustees, shall also be in force with regard to the Deacons.

Sec. 2. The Deacons, two of whom shall be chosen annually, shall serve two years, unless deposed for improper conduct or removing out of the bounds of the Church.

Sec. 3. The duties of the Deacons are principally these:

(a) They shall render all necessary assistance to the Pastor in the administration of the Lord's Supper.

(b) They shall collect the alms of the Church and apply them to their specified objects.

(c) They shall aid in such other duties as are incumbent on the Church Council.

### CHAPTER III.

#### *Of the Church Council.*

Section 1. The Church Council, of which the Pastor is *ex-officio* Chairman, shall consist of the Pastor, Trustees, Elders and Deacons, a majority of whom shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Sec. 2. The Council shall annually elect a Secretary and Treasurer, who may be chosen from the members of the Council or the Church.

Sec. 3. The Secretary shall keep a correct record of the proceedings of the Council and all Church meetings, together with a list of the communicants, and see that the official papers of the Church are carefully preserved.

Sec. 4. The Treasurer shall receive from the Deacons and others all moneys belonging to the Church, dispose of them according to the order of the Council or Church and annually, semi-annually, or oftener, if desired by the Council, present a report on the state of the treasury.

Sec. 5. The Council shall have the superintendence of all the temporal concerns of the Church, except when any considerable expense is to be incurred or when a

change of property is contemplated; in these cases the Church shall be called together and the matter be submitted to its decision.

Sec. 6. They shall make all necessary arrangements for the support of the Gospel in their midst, and see that their Pastor receives his salary.

Sec. 7. They shall, after a careful examination, admit to membership such adult persons as they believe to possess the following qualifications.

(a) They must be obedient subjects of the grace of God; that is, either genuine Christians, or satisfy the Council that they are sincerely endeavoring to become such.

(b) They shall have attended a course of religious instruction by the Pastor, and none shall be considered fit subjects for Confirmation or Baptism who have not attended such instruction, unless the Council are satisfied that their attainments are adequate without this attendance.

Sec. 8. They shall admit members in the following manner:

(a) By the Sacrament of Baptism, those who have not been baptized in early life.

(b) By the rite of Confirmation, those who have been Baptized in childhood.

(c) By the Right Hand of Fellowship, those who present a satisfactory certificate of membership from the Church with which they were formerly connected. Those who are unable to procure such a certificate shall be admitted in the same manner if, on examination, they be found to possess the qualifications specified in Section 7.

Sec. 9. All admissions to membership shall be before the Church at a regular or special meeting for worship.

Sec. 10. They shall administer the discipline of the Church on all members whose conduct is inconsistent

with their Christian profession, or who entertain fundamental errors.

Sec. 11. They shall have one regular meeting the last Monday evening in every month. Special meetings may be called at the request of two of its members, or by the Pastor.

Sec. 12. They shall select a delegate to attend the meetings of Synod and Conference.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *Of Church Members.*

Section 1. No person shall be a member of this Church who does not sign this Constitution and Discipline.

Sec. 2. The following are the principal duties of Church members:

(a) To read, study and obey the Word of God.

(b) To attend to secret, family and social prayer.

(c) To attend the public worship and the ordinances of God's House.

(d) To dedicate their children to God and Baptism and train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

(e) To be at peace among themselves and seek to promote each other's welfare and happiness, especially brotherly love.

(f) To separate themselves from the world (in the Scriptural sense of that term) and carefully avoid all conformity to it.

Sec. 3. The members of this church shall not go to Law with each other before a civil tribunal, unless every reasonable effort shall first have been made to settle the difficulty, by the assistance of their brethren.

Sec. 4. They shall neither labor or visit on the Lord's Day, unless it be required in discharging a Christian duty.

Sec. 5. They shall at all times submit to the Discipline of the Church, unless it be manifest that injustice has been done, in which case the aggrieved person may appeal in the manner hereinafter provided.

Sec. 6. Members moving out of the bounds of the Church are requested to apply to the Church Council to procure certificates of dismissal from the Pastor, and to connect themselves with a Church in the vicinity as soon as practicable.

## CHAPTER V.

### *Of Church Meetings for Business.*

Section 1. The regular annual and semi-annual meetings of the congregation shall be held the last Wednesday evening in March, and the last Wednesday evening in September, respectively, when the Church Council shall present a full and correct report of the financial affairs of the Church, which shall be settled up to the time for holding said meetings.

Sec. 2. Meetings may be called by the Pastor, with the concurrence of one member of the Council, by a majority of the Council, or at the request of five regular members of the Church.

Sec. 3. All general meetings of the Church, with their objects, shall be publicly announced two weeks before such meetings.

Sec. 4. Church meetings may be called to order by the Pastor, who may preside until a chairman is chosen. And all congregational meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *Of Elections.*

Section 1. The voters of this Church are all those male and female members who commune within the Church

year (April to April) and who contribute towards the support of the Church and Pastor, according to ability.

Sec. 2. All elections shall be by ballot, and all meetings for elections shall be announced to the Church from the pulpit (or otherwise, if there be no public worship,) two weeks before such elections are held.

Sec. 3. At elections for a Pastor, two-thirds of the votes given shall be necessary for a choice, and should the vote not be unanimous, then the minority shall be solicited to concur with the majority; but at elections for Trustees, Elders and Deacons, and in all other cases, a majority of the votes given shall be sufficient for a choice.

Sec. 4. The annual election for the members of the Council of this Church shall be held on the second Sunday in February. The persons then elected shall be publicly inducted into office the following Sunday, or as soon thereafter as possible, according to the Liturgy of the Pennsylvania Synod. If the Church be without a Pastor, a neighboring brother may be invited to perform this duty.

Sec. 5. All vacancies which may occur in the Council shall be filled by the voters of the Church without delay, by a special election, and the person thus elected shall serve until the regular expiration of the time of the member in whose place he was elected.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *Of the Call of a Pastor.*

Section 1. When this Church is vacant, invitations to preach a trial sermon may be sent to any Pastor in connection with an acknowledged Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the United States.

Sec. 2. Should the Church be satisfied with his life and ministry, which shall be ascertained by an election, they may give him a call to be their Pastor.

This call should be made out in the following manner:

(a) A certificate of his election shall be signed by the officers of the Church.

(b) The amount of salary, or subscriptions and other sources of income, together with the amount of labor to be performed, shall be distinctly stated. These papers, sent or handed to the minister, shall be regarded as a regular call.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *Of the Discipline of the Church.*

Section 1. The Disciplinary powers of this Church is delegated to the Council as the representatives of the Church.

Sec. 2. Everything which is contrary to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, but especially all those manifest sins which, if persevered in, exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven, shall subject the transgressor to discipline.

Sec. 3. The objects of all Discipline shall be:

(a) To reclaim the erring.

(b) To preserve the purity of the Church.

(c) To serve as a warning to others.

Sec. 4. This Discipline shall be administered in the following manner:

(a) By private admonition, as directed by the Saviour. (Matt. 18: 15-16.)

(b) By suspension and excommunication. (Matt. 18-17.)

Sec. 5. When an accusation is made against a member, it shall be handed to the Council in writing, with the charges distinctly specified, and they shall then decide whether a formal trial is necessary.

Sec. 6. The form of procedure to be observed in such cases of trial shall be the following:

(a) The Secretary shall cite the accused to appear before the Council, at a certain time and place, to answer the charges specified in the citation, which citation must be in the hand of the accused at least six days before the trial.

(b) The person preferring the charges shall also be informed of the time and place of trial.

(c) The Council may cite any member of the Church as a witness, and when the case requires it, shall endeavor to procure other witnesses.

(d) The evidence on both sides shall be taken, after which the accused and accuser shall withdraw and the case be disposed of.

Sec. 7. If an accusation be sustained, and the person convicted consider himself unjustly dealt with, he may appeal from the decision of the Council to the Conference or Synod. In such case, however, he shall make known his intention to the Council within two weeks after his conviction.

Sec. 8. In case of appeal, the decision of the Council shall remain in force until revoked by the body to which the appeal is made.

Sec. 9. Every act of suspension or excommunication shall be published to the Church, unless considered unadvisable by a vote of two-thirds of the Council. If a member be convicted of a private wrong, or of a secret sin; then the case may not be aggravated by making it public, but if it be a matter of public scandal, then proper satisfaction shall be publicly given before the Church.

Sec. 10. When satisfactory evidence is given of repentance and reformation by a suspended or excommunicated member, the Council shall restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.

Sec. 11. Any member who has been twice guilty of the same sin, and has been faithfully admonished, having also professed repentance and promised amend-



ment, but who, notwithstanding, the third time commits the very same offense, shall be suspended, though he or she profess repentance and promise amendment, and shall be restored only when he or she shall have complied with the provisions of Section 10 of this Chapter.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *Of Miscellaneous Matters.*

#### PART I—OF BAPTISM.

Section 1. Under ordinary circumstances children shall be Baptized before the Church, and their names be entered without delay in the Church Record by the Pastor or Church Council.

Sec. 2. Parents are the most proper persons to present their children in Baptism, and none shall be allowed to act in the capacity of sponsors who are not in communion with the Christian Church, and not then unless they have adopted, or have under their immediate supervision the children to be baptized.

#### PART II—OF OUR HOUSE OF WORSHIP.

Section. 1. No one shall preach or lecture in the House of Worship belonging to this Church without the permission from the Church Council.

#### PART III—ADMISSION OF MEMBERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS.

Section 1. We will not receive into our communion members of other Christian denominations which we regard as branches of the Church of Jesus Christ, except under the following circumstances:

(a) They must bring letters of regular dismissal from, and of good standing in their own Church.

(b) In case application has been made for such letters and they have been refused, the applicants must satisfy us that the ground of the refusal is not the want

of Christian character. In such cases, however, we will make use of all reasonable means to convince the person or persons to whom application has been made for such letters of the propriety of granting them, before we will receive such applicants into our communion.

(c) Members who have been suspended or excommunicated by other branches of the Christian Church on account of unchristian conduct, we will not receive into our communion, unless they first manifest genuine repentance, by giving to the Church by which they were suspended or excommunicated such satisfaction as is, in our opinion, just and scriptural.

(d) Persons who have lost their membership in other branches of the Christian Church, by neglecting their Christian duties, we will not receive unless they satisfy us that they possess the qualifications for Church membership required by us in our formula of Church Government and Discipline; and further, that they no longer have any connection with their former Church.

#### PART IV—PRAYER MEETINGS.

Section 1. At the close of each weekly prayer meeting the following questions shall be asked:

(a) Are any of our members sick?

(b) Are any of our members in want, so as to need assistance?

(c) Has any member any difficulties in matters of faith and practice?

(d) Is any member living contrary to the Word of God and our Discipline?

## CHAPTER X.

### *Of Alterations and Amendments.*

Section 1. This Constitution and Discipline may be altered or amended as follows: The proposed amendments or alterations shall be read by the Council before

the Church and a time be appointed for their consideration, not less than two weeks after they have been read. If two-thirds of all the voters of the Church adopt the proposed amendments or alterations, they shall become a part of the Constitution and Discipline of this Church.

Sec. 2. But it is expressly provided, that no alterations or amendments shall ever be made in or to this Constitution and Discipline, which would conflict with Section 2, of Chapter I, as long as two regular members are opposed to such a change.

## Order of Business

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1. Prayer.
2. Roll Call.
3. Minutes Read and Approved.
4. Objects of Meeting Stated.
5. Report of Committees.
6. Unfinished Business.
7. Treasurer's Report.
8. Trustees' Report.
9. Pastor's Report.
10. Informal Remarks.
11. New Business.
12. Adjournment.
13. Prayer.