

# Constitution of The First Church in Oberlin, United Church of Christ

Revision adopted on September 15, 2024

## **Article I. Name and Affiliation**

This Church shall be known as The First Church in Oberlin, United Church of Christ. It shall maintain its fellowship with the United Church of Christ.

## **Article II. Mission and Covenant**

Members of the Church have endorsed this statement of mission: As followers of Jesus, we aspire to minister to one another, our community, and the world.

In fulfillment of the mission, members of this Church have also adopted this affirmation of Covenant:

In the love of truth, and in the spirit of Jesus, we unite for the worship of God and the service of humankind.

We seek to know God's will and to walk in God's ways, made known or to be made known to us; to proclaim the gospel to all the world; and to work and pray for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the reign of peace, and the realization of one human community;

And we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and the life everlasting.

## **Article III. Membership**

**Section 1.** All persons who express the purpose to live as followers of Jesus Christ shall be invited into the membership of this Church. Church members promise to participate in the life and mission of this family of God's people, sharing regularly in the worship of God and joining in the work of this Church as it seeks to serve the community and the world.

**Section 2.** Members shall be received after baptism and on confession of faith. Those who have already been baptized and are members of another Christian church may be received by letter of transfer or by reaffirmation of faith. Persons become members by conferring with the Minister and the Witness and Membership Committee and by being publicly received. In special cases it shall be within the discretion of the Witness and Membership Committee to waive public reception.

**Section 3.** Associate membership shall be available for those who wish to retain membership

in a home church in another community while affirming their relationship with First Church. Such associate membership in no way disturbs the membership elsewhere but confers the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of membership in this Church, with the exception of serving as an Officer or on the Executive Council. Associate members shall not be counted on the denomination rolls, and moving from the Oberlin area shall in itself constitute the termination of associate membership.

## **Article IV. Organization**

### **Section 1. Congregation**

- (a) The governance of this Church shall be vested in its members, who, as the Congregation, shall exercise the right of control in all its affairs, depending upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- (b) The Congregation shall be subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body, but it shall recognize and sustain the obligations of mutual counsel and cooperation involved in the free fellowship of the United Church of Christ.
- (c) The Congregation shall call or dismiss the Minister(s) and the Director of Faith Formation.
- (d) Regular Meetings of the Congregation shall be held, at times designated by the Executive Council, to approve the budget, receive the reports of the Standing Committees, and elect the Moderator, the Clerk, the Treasurer, at-large members of the Executive Council, members of the Standing Committees, and Delegates to the Heartland Conference and the Living Water Association of the United Church of Christ.
- (e) Special Meetings of the Congregation shall be called by the Moderator, either at the request of the Executive Council or upon written request to the Moderator signed by at least twenty-five (25) members of the Congregation. The nature of the business to be transacted shall be stated in the announcement, and no business other than that specified shall be considered.
- (f) The time, place, and purpose of duly called Regular or Special Meetings shall be printed in the church bulletin and announced during the worship service on the two preceding Sundays. At any Congregational Meeting, fifty (50) members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. Members present shall have the right to vote. Written ballots shall be used at any Congregational Meeting when requested by a single member.

## Section 2. Ministers

- (a) The **Minister** shall become a member of the Congregation and shall have or obtain ministerial standing with the appropriate body of the United Church of Christ. The Minister shall preach and teach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and in general fulfill the ministerial office. The Minister shall have charge of the services of worship, including responsibility for the selection of hymns and scripture lessons, the leading of the people in prayer, and the preparation and preaching of the sermon. The Minister shall give guidance and support to the educational program and shall serve as chief administrator of the Church and director of the employed staff. The Minister shall be an advisory member of all Standing Committees of the Church.
- (b) An **Associate Minister or Director of Faith Formation** shall become a member of the Congregation and shall, under the direction of the Minister, perform the duties usual to the respective office and those specified in the call. An Associate Minister shall have ministerial standing with the appropriate body of the United Church of Christ.
- (c) When a Minister, Associate Minister, or Director of Faith Formation wishes to resign, written notice shall be given at least sixty (60) days in advance. Should the Congregation choose to dissolve its relationship with a Minister, Associate Minister, or Director of Faith Formation, it shall also give a written notice of at least sixty (60) days.
- (d) In the event of a ministerial vacancy, the Executive Council shall meet with the appropriate representative of the United Church of Christ and shall nominate a Ministerial Search Committee and propose a budget for the search effort. The Search Committee shall be a representative group of no fewer than five (5) but not more than nine (9) members of the Congregation and shall be approved and commissioned by the Congregation. It shall be the duty of the Ministerial Search Committee, in consultation with the appropriate body of the United Church of Christ, to find a suitable candidate for the Minister or Associate Minister of the Church and to present the candidate to the Congregation. The candidate shall be called by the Congregation at a Special Meeting, duly assembled for this purpose, by an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of those members present and voting.
- (e) In the event of a vacancy in the position of Director of Faith Formation, the Executive Council shall ask the Faith Formation Committee to form a search committee, to which the Executive Council may appoint up to three additional members. The Director of Faith Formation Search Committee shall consult with the appropriate body of the United Church of Christ and recommend to the Executive Council a candidate suitable for appointment by the Congregation.

**Section 3.** The **Officers** of this Church shall consist of the **Moderator** the **Clerk**, and the **Treasurer**. The Moderator and the Treasurer jointly shall have the right and responsibility to sign legal documents on behalf of the Congregation; the Clerk shall serve in this capacity when the Moderator cannot.

- (a) The **Moderator** shall chair meetings of the Congregation and the Executive Council.
- (b) The **Clerk** shall keep the minutes of meetings of the Congregation and the Executive Council.
- (c) The **Treasurer** shall be responsible for the receipt, deposit, and disbursement of all funds of the Church. The Treasurer shall submit a written monthly report to the Executive Council and a written annual report to the Congregation summarizing all receipts and expenditures for the year. The Treasurer shall serve on the Finance Committee. With the approval of the Executive Council, the Treasurer may appoint one or more assistant(s), as may from time to time be required or desired. The Treasurer and the assistant(s) shall be bonded.

#### **Section 4. Executive Council**

- (a) The Executive Council shall have the responsibility of articulating and advancing the mission of the Church. The Council shall be accountable to the Congregation. It shall draw upon the resources of the Congregation in fulfilling its responsibilities and shall be aided by the Church's employed staff as well as by the Standing Committees.
- (b) The Executive Council shall be composed of the Minister(s), the Moderator, the Clerk, and six (6) members elected by the Congregation as at-large representatives. Meetings of the Council shall be called (usually monthly) and chaired by the Moderator and shall be open to members of the Congregation, except that the Council may enter executive session by affirmative majority vote on a motion to that effect. All those in attendance shall have voice, but only the Moderator and the six (6) at-large representatives shall have vote. All motions must be approved by a minimum of four (4) members participating and voting. Minutes of the Council meetings, taken by the Clerk, shall be available to any member of the Congregation in the Church office.
- (c) The Executive Council shall select one of its at-large representatives to serve as the Vice Moderator, who shall, in the absence of or at the request of the Moderator, perform the duties of the Moderator, except for signing legal documents.
- (d) Each at-large representative shall act as liaison to one or two of the Standing Committees Representing the Life of the Congregation. The Facilities Committee shall also have a liaison. Liaisons shall attend meetings of their assigned committee, convey information from the Executive Council to the committee and from the committee to the Executive Council, participate in discussion as appropriate, and serve as a sounding board to their committee. Liaisons shall not be working members of their committee, shall have no vote, and shall not be counted as part of a quorum.
- (e) The Executive Council shall have the authority to hire or dismiss the non-ministerial employed staff.

- (f) The Executive Council shall have the authority to act on behalf of the Congregation in all legal and financial matters and shall have general oversight of all the interests of the Church. The Council shall have the right to enter into and oversee leases, contracts, insurance policies, and other legal agreements as deemed necessary for the maintenance, welfare, and continuance of the Church but shall have no power to buy, sell, mortgage, or transfer real property without the consent of the Congregation.
- (g) The Executive Council shall recommend an annual budget, prepared by the Finance Committee, to the Congregation at a Regular or Special Meeting. The Council may approve payment of expenses outside the guidelines of the approved annual budget, provided that they do not exceed 2 percent of the annual budget. Regardless of the source of the funds, the total expenditure for an item or a project not specifically identified in the approved annual budget that exceeds this limit must have the consent of the Congregation.

## **Section 5. Standing Committees**

- (a) **Administrative Committees of the Church** shall be responsible for overseeing the operations of the Church, consistent with the will of the Congregation and the charge of the respective committees. Each committee shall elect its own chairperson and other officers as desired. Each committee shall meet regularly and coordinate its efforts with the Executive Council. With the exception of the Ministerial Relations Committee and the Personnel Committee, each committee shall keep minutes that shall be available to the Congregation and Executive Council, and shall report annually to the Congregation. Each committee is encouraged to recruit such individuals or subcommittees, ad hoc or other, as may from time to time be required or desired.
  - 1. The **Facilities Committee**, reporting to the Executive Council, shall be composed of no more than six (6) members, with the goal of two to be elected each year. The Facilities Committee shall be responsible for preserving and improving the physical plant of the Church in order to meet the Congregation's program needs and to maintain its historic structures, for informing the Executive Council of the financial needs required, and for coordinating the work of the custodial/maintenance staff, volunteers, and/or contractors.
  - 2. The **Finance Committee**, reporting to the Executive Council, shall be composed of the Treasurer, two at-large members of the Executive Council and no more than three members elected by the Congregation. The Finance Committee shall be responsible for preparation of the annual budget, for oversight of the finances of the Church, for review and management of financial reporting as performed by the Treasurer, for investment of financial assets, and for issuing to the Congregation annual reports, including current valuation of all financial assets. In cooperation with the Stewardship Committee, the Finance Committee shall articulate the financial support required to advance the Church's mission.

3. The **Ministerial Relations Committee** shall consist of four members who are recommended by the Minister in consultation with the ministerial staff, if any, and the Moderator and are approved by the Executive Council. The role of the Ministerial Relations Committee is to serve as a constructive liaison between the Congregation and the Minister(s), to provide support and offer counsel to the Minister(s), and to hear concerns of the Congregation which they may share with the Minister(s). Terms of service shall be two years and shall be limited to ~~four~~ two consecutive terms, with the goal of two members to be selected each year.
4. The **Nominating Committee** shall be composed of as many as six (6) members, with three members to be elected each year for two-year terms. The Executive Council shall propose candidates for the Nominating Committee annually. Members shall be elected by the Congregation at the first regular meeting of the Congregation each year, with nominations from the Congregation permissible. In the event of a vacancy on the committee, the Executive Committee shall appoint a replacement to serve until the end of the elected member's term.

The Nominating Committee shall make public its slate of candidates to the Congregation no later than two weeks prior to the date of the Regular Meeting.

5. The **Personnel Committee**, reporting to the Executive Council, shall be composed of the Moderator, two at-large members of the Executive Council (appointed by the Executive Council to a renewable one-year terms), and a member of the Finance Committee (appointed by the Finance Committee to a renewable one-year term). It shall meet at least three times a year to conduct evaluations of the employed staff of the Church, regularly review their job descriptions, and annually review their compensation and benefits, drawing upon the expertise of the committees of the Church. The Personnel Committee shall support the non-ministerial employed staff by hearing their concerns and offering counsel. In the case of a vacancy on the non-ministerial employed staff, the Personnel Committee, in consultation with the appropriate committee, shall recommend a candidate to the Executive Council for approval.
- (b) **Committees Representing the Life of the Congregation** shall be responsible for developing and implementing programs consistent with the will of the Congregation and the charge of the respective committee. Each committee shall normally be composed of no more than six (6) members, shall elect its own chairperson and other officers as desired, and shall meet regularly. Each committee shall make budget requests to and coordinate its efforts with the Executive Council. Each committee shall keep minutes that shall be available to the Congregation and report annually to the Congregation. Each committee is encouraged to recruit such individuals or subcommittees, ad hoc or other, as may from time to time be required or desired.
1. The **Faith Formation Committee** shall be responsible for providing opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn and experience Christ's message of reconciliation and transformation. Recognizing that all persons learn throughout life in a variety of settings, the Faith Formation Committee shall seek to bring persons to a fuller understanding of the Christian faith, its history, its doctrines, and its teachings and to

provide opportunities for that faith to be experienced. The Faith Formation Committee shall work directly with the Faith Formation staff.

2. The **Fellowship Committee** shall be responsible for strengthening the life of and fellowship among Church members, friends, and others within the reach of the Church by offering programs, and coordinating social events and other fellowship activities. The Fellowship Committee shall be responsible for receptions following memorial services.
3. The **Outreach and Service Committee** shall be responsible for challenging the Congregation to act to meet the needs of persons in our community and society at large. The Outreach and Service Committee shall inform the Congregation of needs, opportunities, and developments in the broader community, including denominational issues and matters of world concern. The Outreach and Service Committee shall promote peace and justice locally and globally through social action and benevolence.
4. The **Stewardship Committee** shall be responsible for cultivating the broader values of Christian stewardship, raising funds, and, in cooperation with the Finance Committee, informing the Congregation of the financial needs required to advance its mission.
5. The **Witness and Membership Committee** shall be responsible for encouraging Church members to share the gospel with each other and our immediate and wider community. The Witness and Membership Committee shall develop ways to draw all members into the worship, fellowship, and service of the Congregation. With the Minister, it shall seek to meet members' needs for pastoral care, to welcome and involve visitors in Church life, and to lead the Congregation to attract new members. The Witness and Membership Committee shall maintain the membership list of the Congregation and shall publish it annually, digitally and/or in hard copy.
6. The **Worship Committee** shall work with the Minister and the Director of Music to provide worship services that honor the myriad ways that people worship. The Worship Committee shall support regular and special worship activities and be responsible for music, communion, collection of gifts, ushering, and scheduling liturgists and greeters. The Worship Committee shall oversee the Music Program, recommend to the Personnel Committee persons to fill vacancies on the music staff, and see to the maintenance of the organ and other instruments used for worship.

**Section 6. Rules.** In all matters of procedure in meetings of the Congregation, the committees, and the Executive Council not otherwise provided for, "Robert's Rules of Order, Revised" (latest revision) shall be the parliamentary authority. Executive Council or committee decisions may be made by electronic votes or other written means only if no member of the Executive Council or of the committee requests a meeting to discuss the matter.

## **Article V. Terms of Service and Vacancies**

**Section 1.** Officers, at-large members of the Executive Council, and, with certain exceptions,\* members of Standing Committees shall be nominated by the Nominating Committee and elected by the Congregation. Persons may not serve in more than one elected position at a time, with one exception: Concurrent membership on the Nominating Committee and on one other Standing Committee is permissible. To the extent possible and where not otherwise specified in this Constitution, terms shall be staggered.

**Section 2.** The Moderator and the Clerk shall be elected for terms of two years, beginning in alternate years. The Treasurer shall be elected for a term of one year. Two at-large members of the Executive Council shall be elected each year to three-year terms. Except as otherwise indicated and to the extent possible, two at-large members of each Standing Committee shall be elected each year to three-year terms.

**Section 3.** Persons elected or appointed shall begin their terms at the conclusion of the meeting at which they are elected or appointed and shall serve until their successors are elected or appointed.

**Section 4.** The Moderator, at-large members of the Executive Council, and, with certain exceptions,\* members of Standing Committees may not serve more than two consecutive terms in the same office or on the same Committee. There shall be no limit to the number of terms the Clerk or the Treasurer may serve.

**Section 5.** When a duly elected Officer, at-large member of the Executive Council, or, with certain exceptions,\* member of a Standing Committee cannot fulfill his or her duties or has resigned by letter from office, the Nominating Committee shall present a suitable candidate for appointment by the Executive Council to serve for the remainder of the term.

**Section 6.** Any person appointed by the Executive Council to fill a vacancy shall be eligible for election to two subsequent full terms in the same position.

## **Article VI. Amendments and Dissolution**

**Section 1.** The Constitution may be amended by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members present and voting at any Regular or Special Meeting of the Congregation, notice of such meeting and wording of the proposed amendment having been printed in the church bulletin and announced during the worship service on the two preceding Sundays.

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\* The exceptions are those members not nominated by the Nominating Committee; specifically, members of the Ministerial Relations Committee, Nominating Committee, and Personnel Committee and the two appointed members of the Finance Committee.



**Section 2.** This Church may be dissolved by the affirmative vote of three-fourths of the members present and voting at a Special Meeting of the Congregation called for that purpose, notice of such meeting and proposed dissolution having been printed in the church bulletin, sent by mail to the entire Church membership thirty (30) days in advance of the meeting, and announced during the worship service on the two preceding Sundays. In the event that the Congregation votes for dissolution of this Church, all real estate, properties, goods, monies, and funds belonging to the Church, after payment of any indebtedness, bills, and claims, shall become the property of an appropriate body of the United Church of Christ, subject only to such limitations as may be provided in any bequests or other gifts making up the invested reserves of this Church and to having provided for the preservation of this Church's historic structures.

**Section 3.** This Constitution may be reviewed at any time but shall be reviewed approximately every ten years. A Constitutional Review Committee may be authorized either by the Executive Council or by the Congregation in a Regular or Special Meeting. Members of a Constitutional Review Committee shall be appointed by the Executive Council. The results of the review and any proposed revisions shall be reported to the Executive Council. The text of any proposed revised Constitution shall be made available to the Congregation for consideration two weeks prior to the Regular or Special Meeting at which it is considered. If the revised Constitution is approved, it shall take effect at the end of the meeting.

9-15-2024