

**HOW TO GATHER
AND ORDER
A CONGREGATIONAL
CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

A. VAUGHAN ABERCROMBIE

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"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

-- Matt. 18:20

"Ye know that they which . . . rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: for whosoever will be great among you . . . shall be servant to all."

-- Mark 10:43

PREFACE

This book is written as a guide for any "two or three gathered in the name of Christ" who have determined to become a Church according to the principles of the democratic, or what American Christians for more than three hundred years have called the "Congregational Way" of faith and order.

They have spoken of Congregationalism as a *a way of having faith* because most Churches of this order have respected the right of individual conscience in matters of belief. Each believer has been assured by both the spirit and the form of his Church fellowship that he may hold his faith as dictated by his conscience under God.

Congregationalism has been spoken of as *an order* because, whether in "Churches of Christ", or "Baptist", or "Christian", or "Congregational", or "Disciples", or "Unitarian" Churches, the principle of *government by the consent of the governed* has been the foundation of their polity. Congregationalism is a way of ordering the forms of Church organization and voluntary inter-Church relations, under Christ, "so that things may be done decently and in order . . . in unity of spirit and in the bond of peace".

A Church of the Congregational order begins when a few disciples of Jesus meet and join in a covenant to seek and do and teach the will of God, as known or to be made known; and to walk together as a distinct Church in voluntary fellowship with all other Churches.

We hope that this effort to spell out the details of the Congregational Way will help to gather and maintain Churches worthy of the Pilgrim Fathers who gave this noble heritage of faith and freedom to all democratic Churches.

A.V. Abercrombie
Marco Island, Florida
June 1, 1986

A Congregational Christian Church
Is a gathering of believers
In covenant
Together and with God
To be His children
In spirit and in truth.

A Congregational Christian Church
Is a church of the people,
Under Christ,
Governed by the people,
For the people,
To the glory of God.

A Congregational Christian Church
Is a family of families --
A beloved community
Of memory and hope,
Of mutual helpfulness
And service to others.

A Congregational Christian Church
Is a Church among all Churches
United in voluntary fellowship
To seek, and do, and teach
God's will as known
Or yet to be disclosed.

CHAPTER ONE

Gathering Believers

A classic statement of the democratic or Congregational principles of Church government was made when The Second Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut, ("South Church"), was constituted on February 19th, 1669:

"Some main heads or principles of the Congregational way of church order are those that follow, viz:

"First, That visible saints are the only fit matter, and confederation the form of a visible church.

"Second, That a competent number of visible saints (with their seed) embodied by a particular covenant, are a true, distinct, and entire church of Christ.

"Third, That such a particular church being organized, or having furnished itself with those officers that Christ hath appointed, hath all the power and privileges of a church belonging to it; in special - 1st, to admit or receive members; 2nd, to deal with, and if need be, reject offenders; 3rd, to administer and enjoy all other ecclesiastical ordinances within itself.

"Fourth, That the power of guidance or leading, belongs only to the Eldership, and the power of judgment, consent, or privilege, belongs to the fraternity or brethren in full communion.

"Fifth, That communion is carefully to be maintained between all the churches of

Christ according to his order.

"Sixth, That counsel in cases of difficulty is to be sought and submitted to according to God."

Churches, if they are to live up to this noble standard, must be composed of "visible saints" or, to use another honored word, "believers".

The Boston Platform (1865), following the Cambridge Platform (1648), defined the "saints" as those who "visibly belong to Christ", and who "having attained some knowledge of the principles of religion, and being free from gross scandals, do profess their personal repentance and faith, and walk in obedience to the word . . ."

Another report at the 1865 Council said that if Churches are to be really Churches, ". . . it is necessary, first, that they should be composed of believers, - of those who have begun to love with Christ's love; a love in which they are holy and a brotherhood."

Our Colonial forebears looked upon Church membership as a duty of all believers and their children, or their "seed", as they called them:

"Every believer . . . should be a member of some particular church, that he may honor Christ by his professed conformity to the order and ordinances of the gospel, and that he may have the benefits of visible union and fellowship with the church which is the communion of saints. These benefits are, first a participation in the promise of Christ's special presence with his church; secondly, the increased activity and enjoyment in the Christian life by combining the affections and endeavors of believers, and by inciting each other to love and good works; thirdly, watchful and fraternal help to keep each

other in the way of God's commandments, and to recover by due admonition and censure any that go astray; and fourthly, aid in the Christian nurture and training of their children, that their households may be holy, and their posterity be not cut off from the blessings of the covenant. Should all believers neglect this duty of voluntarily entering into organized Christian fellowship, to which duty they are moved by the impulses of a renewed and holy mind, Christ would soon have no visibly associated and organized church on earth." (Boston Platform)

The above insights of our spiritual fathers are as valid today as in earlier times. Disciples of Jesus, saints, believers, dedicated to the ways of judgment, mercy and faith, still become a Church by their recognition of each other as believers. And, they become a Church by their common agreement to observe Christ's ordinances, and to acknowledge a mutual covenant as members of a distinct Church.

Those who undertake to gather a Church must seek to bring together people not only of independent mind and heart but also those who by their profession and life give evidence that they are disciples of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, since a Church of the Congregational order is a brotherhood in its actual organization, as well as in its spirit, those who compose it should believe whole-heartedly in the principle of government "by the consent of the governed." The nurture of Christlike souls requires freedom to be responsible, and abundant opportunities to take responsibility:

"It is the chief end of man to glorify God, and share his joy; and of the world, to be a place of nurture for souls thus fulfilling their end. The church on earth embraces all

who have begun to glorify and enjoy God, and so is the essential realization of the end of creation; but, being the 'body of Christ', wherein he dwells and whereby he works, it is also the means of its realization . . . Every church must needs embody its essential idea in its organization, and be a brotherhood in form as well as in spirit . . . or its organization will be subtly, or perhaps very openly, counterworking its work. Its very organization should be the birth of a love which annihilates caste, and sense of hierarchy." (from The Boston Council)

Visible saints are the only fit matter, and confederation the necessary form of a "Christian" Congregational Church. The gathering of a Church requires a search for people who believe in Christ, and who also believe in his requirements of equality and mutual responsibility among his disciples.

CHAPTER TWO

Owning A Covenant

A Church of the Congregational order begins, as the Hartford statement says, when a number of believers, under Christ, make a covenant together and with God to be his children in spirit and in truth:

"Second, That a competent number of visible saints (with their seed) embodied by a particular covenant, are a true, distinct, and entire church of Christ." (Emphasis added)

The Boston Platform speaks in detail about the significance of a Church covenant:

"Those believers who dwell together in one place become a church by their recognition of each other, and their mutual agreement to observe Christ's ordinances in one society. Their covenant with Christ to be his disciples and obedient subjects becomes, by that mutual recognition and agreement, their covenant with each other to be fellow disciples and helpers of each other's faith in a distinct Church.

"Different degrees of explicitness in the church covenant do not affect the being of the church, or the duties and responsibilities of its members. The essence and meaning of the covenant are retained where the agreement of certain believers to meet constantly in one congregation for worship and edification is expressed only by their practice of thus meeting, and their actual observance of Christian ordinances. However explicit the covenant may be, it can rightfully express nothing more than a mutual agreement to observe all Christ's laws

and ordinances as one church of Christ; and however informal the agreement, it can mean nothing less."

Most Churches take time to write their covenants so they may be "owned" with dignity by all members at Church meetings and in services of worship, especially those in which new members are received. New-formed Churches, even before they have been formally constituted, often have a Covenanting Service during which each family comes forward and publicly signs the covenant. A simple order for such a service is included at the end of this chapter. Also included is a typical service of reception of members in which there is a place for "owning the covenant".

Many Churches do not actually write a new covenant, but, instead, adopt one of the historic covenants of other Churches. Following is a selection of some famous old covenants, and some exemplary modern ones:

Pilgrims (England, 1602; Plymouth, 1620)

"We covenant as ye Lord's free people, joyned themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in ye fellowship of ye gospel, to walk in all his wayes made known to them, according to their best endeavors, whatever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them."

First Church of Salem, Massachusetts (1629)

"We covenant with the Lord and with one another, and do bind ourselves in the presence of God to walk together in all His ways, according as He is pleased to reveal Himself unto us in His blessed Word of Truth."

Second Church, Hartford, Connecticut (1669)

"Since it hath pleased God, in His

infinite mercy, to manifest Himself willing to take unworthy sinners near unto Himself, even into covenant relations to and interest in Him, to become a God to them and avouch them to be His people, and accordingly to command and encourage them to give themselves and their children also unto Him.

"We do therefore this day, in the presence of God, His holy angels, and this assembly, avouch the Lord Jehovah, the true, and living God, even God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, to be our God and give up ourselves and ours also unto Him to be His subjects and servants, promising through grace and strength in Christ (without whom we can do nothing) to walk in professed subjection to Him as our only Lord and Lawgiver, yielding universal obedience to His blessed will, according to what discoveries He hath made or hereafter shall make, of the same to us; in special, that we will seek Him in all His holy ordinances according to the rules of the Gospel, submitting to His government in this particular Church, and walking together therein, with all brotherly love unto His praise: all which we promise to perform, the Lord helping us through His grace in Jesus Christ."

Modern Covenant for Liturgical Use, (inspired by above Hartford Covenant)

"Since God is pleased to share his life
with men,
To be their Father, and to guide and to
encourage them:

We, therefore, covenant together,
and with God
To be his children both in spirit
and in truth.
We promise by the words of Jesus
and his love,
To seek God's will, according to
the light made known,
Or yet to be disclosed;
To grow in judgment, faith
and charity,
And, in fellowship, to do and teach
our Father's will
To His glory and our own true joy.
Amen. (AVA)

First Church (Congregational), Denver, Colorado (1874)

"We promise to cooperate with the members of this church in the study of that law which Christ taught as supreme: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself'."

Churches of the Congregational Christian denomination have met regularly in National Council by delegates assembled since 1871, and on several occasions these bodies have formulated certain "Statements of Faith", and presented them to the Churches as testimonies and not tests, of what many Congregationalists believe. The 1913 Kansas City Statement of faith is one of the most inspiring of these documents. It has had wide use in Churches as an Affirmation of Faith, and some Churches have used the full text, or parts of it, in writing their covenants:

"We believe in God the Father, infinite in

wisdom, goodness, and love; and in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who for us and our salvation lived and died and rose again and liveth evermore; and in the Holy Spirit, who taketh of the things of Christ and revealeth them to us, renewing comforting and inspiring the souls of men.

"We are united in striving to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures, and in our purpose to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known to us.

"We hold it to be the mission of the Church of Christ to proclaim the gospel to all mankind, exalting the worship of the one true God, and laboring for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the reign of peace, and the realization of human brotherhood."

"Depending, as did our fathers, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we work and pray for the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God; and we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and the life everlasting."

Below is a simple Order of Service typical of those used on Covenant Sundays by Churches in the process of formation:

Call to Worship
Invocation
Hymn of Praise
Responsive Reading
Anthem or Special Music
Scripture Reading
Sermon
Hymn

Service of "Owning of Covenant"
Records of Actions to Date
Verbal reading of Covenant
Signing of Covenant
Doxology
Prayer
Parting Hymn
Benediction

Below is a typical Order of Service of Reception of Members which includes the act of "Owning of the Covenant":

Sentences of Scripture:

What shall I render unto the Lord for
all his benefits toward me?
I will take the cup of salvation, and
call upon the name of the Lord.
I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now,
in the presence of all his people.

Address to those who join the Church by
confession of faith:

Dear Friends, you have come to this
sacred service to take upon yourselves
the obligations of Christ's disciples,
and to make a public confession of
your faith in him, and openly to join
the communion of this Church.

Act of confession of faith:

Having truly repented of your sins, do
you sincerely devote yourselves to the
love, obedience and service of God; do
you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your
Master and Friend, and confess your
purpose to learn of him, to become like
him, and to advance his way of living
in the world; do you accept his words
as the precepts of your life, and his
spirit as your Comforter and Guide,
and, trusting in God's grace to

strengthen you, do you promise to do what you can to promote the peace, purity, and prosperity of his Churches, walking with his disciples everywhere in love, and glorifying him by a faithful life? And do you now cordially unite with this Church and accept its covenant of faith, polity and service; do you promise to pray and work for its upbuilding and its usefulness, to help in sustaining its worship, its activities and its charities; and to live with us in godly fellowship? Do you thus promise? (Each shall answer, I DO.)

Act of confirmation (for those baptized in childhood):

You who in childhood were brought into the Church on the faith of your parents, to be recognized as children of God, and dedicated to his service, do you accept and confirm for yourselves that consecration made for you when you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? (Each shall answer, I DO.)

Act of baptism (for those not baptized):

Will you receive baptism as a symbol of the inward purity of life which you seek, and as a sign that you dedicate yourselves to the service and glory of God? (Each shall answer, I DO, and shall be baptized in the manner prescribed by the church of which he becomes a member.)

Word of blessing:

May our Father God so strengthen each one of you, baptized in his name, that

hereafter you shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Jesus Christ, but that you shall manfully live under his banner, and continue God's faithful sons (and daughters) forever.

Act of reception by letter:

Kindred in Christ, who come acknowledging the vows made when first you declared your faith in him, we bid you welcome. We greet you as fellow workers in his vineyard, as friends who share God's everlasting life. Do you now cordially unite with this Church, and accept its covenant of faith, polity and service; do you promise to pray and work for its upbuilding and its usefulness, to help in sustaining its worship, its activities and its charities; and to live with us in godly fellowship? Do you thus promise? (Each shall answer I DO.)

The owning of the Covenant (congregation rising and participating):

The right hand of fellowship:

We, the members of this Church, welcome you with joy into our communion and fellowship. We pledge to you our sympathy, our help, and our prayers that you may evermore increase in the knowledge and love of God. God grant that loving and being loved, serving and being served, blessing and being blessed, we may enjoy, while we dwell together on earth, the everlasting fellowship of the children of God.

Benediction:

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, world without end, both now and forever.
Amen.

Christians gathered in a Church of the Congregational order are in truth "children of a covenant", and the solidarity of each local Church, and the stability of all agencies of fellowship created by such Churches depend upon the sincerity with which their covenants are made their own.

CHAPTER THREE

Maintaining Public Worship

The early Congregationalists of various denominations spoke repeatedly of two primary duties of the Churches, namely, the duty of worship, and the duty of edification. They considered all churchly obligations secondary to "rendering pure and acceptable worship before the throne of Divine Majesty", and "instruction by precept and example in the Divine Love".

Williston Walker, famous American Church historian, wrote a paper in 1894 on "The Congregational Idea of Worship". He listed four main elements of worship as having been characteristic of early New England Church services: (1) communion with God in prayer; (2) reverent ascertainment of God's will by reading the Scriptures; (3) unfolding of the Gospel to heart and conscience by preaching; and (4) thanksgiving to God by his praise in song. He summarized the history of worship in these Colonial Churches:

"It has been evident, I think, that a two-fold tendency characterized the early New England conceptions of public services . . . a two-fold tendency that flowed forth from a single principle . . . that the Bible should be the test of the services of God. Our fathers strove, on the one hand, to exemplify everything in the worship of the Lord's house which they believed the Scriptures to require. On the other hand, they rejected as without authority all that was merely the prescription of man.

"They sought freedom; but it was a freedom to conform with divine law. They broke the fetters in which public worship was bound; but they were fetters of man's devising. Congregationalism has never lost sight of this

principle. If its history has been one of increasing richness, variety and freedom in the worship of God, it has been because the breadth of the Scriptural injunctions has been increasingly recognized, and because men have seen that the Bible lays down general principles rather than hard-and-fast prescriptions.

"No true Congregationalist can fail to value the freedom in worship which cost the fathers so much to attain, nor can he greatly sympathize with any siren song which, under pretence of increasing aesthetic beauty, would bind public worship in the fetters which the fathers broke. The rigid simplicity of their service is not a necessity; but their rejection of all limitation that is simply the work of man is a principle to be had in perpetual honor."

We find one of the most explicit, and inspiring descriptions of "God's Instituted Worship in the Church" in the Boston Platform:

"1. Believers joined to each other and to Christ in a church are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. The church is therefore spoken of in the Scriptures as the house of God and the temple of his worship.

2. The worship of God in his spiritual temple, the church, includes prayer, the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, the ministry of the word, the sacraments, and the contributions of gifts and offerings for the service of Christ.

"3. Prayers in the church should be grave and earnest, lifting up the thoughts and

desires of the assembly of God; being prompted by the Holy Spirit, they should not be limited by any prescribed and inflexible form, but offered freely, according to the vicissitudes of need and trial, and of joy or sorrow, in the church or in its households; they should be offered for all men, for those who are in authority, for the welfare of the civil State, and for the Universal Church of Christ on earth; and in the matter and manner they should be agreeable to such models as the Scriptures give, and, above all, to that model which Christ himself gave to his disciples, that he might teach them how to pray.

"4. Singing in the church is not for the delight of the sense, as in places of amusement, but for the union of voices and hearts in worship, and for spiritual edification. The Psalms in the Old Testament are sanctioned for this use by Christ and his apostles, and remain in the church forever, to be used in praising God. There is warrant also in the New Testament for the use of hymns and spiritual songs, but not to the exclusion or neglect of the Psalms.

"5. The Ministry of the word in the church is by the reading of the Scriptures, with such exposition as may aid the hearers in their personal and family searching of the same; and also by preaching and teaching, that the truths and principles which God has revealed in his law and in the gospel may be set forth distinctly in their manifestation of the glory and government of God, in their relations to the duties of man and to the salvation of sinners.

"6. The two sacraments of the New Testa-

ment, representing the commemorating through all ages the twofold grace of God offered in the gospel, are to be administered in all churches. Baptism, wherein the purifying element of water signifies and represents the inward washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, should be administered in simplicity, with no vain or superstitious ceremonies. In like manner, the Lord's Supper, wherein believers partake of his body which was broken for us, and of his blood which was shed for many for the remission of sins, is to be celebrated in simple conformity with the recorded words of the institution."

Author's note: Some churches, especially those of the "Baptist" and "Disciples" fellowships, insist on baptism by immersion, adults only. Some churches waive baptism whenever, for reasons of conscience, a new member prefers not to receive it. And most Churches of our order have "open" communion services, where the invitation is given "to all who may wish to partake, whether they be members of this Church, or of any other Church, or of no Church at all".

"7. In the place of those prescribed and definite exactions which were part of God's appointed worship before the coming of Christ, are the free gifts of Christ's disciples to his suffering brethren and to his cause and service. The contribution in the church is not a secular thing adverse to spiritual edification, but is an act of grateful homage to Christ and of communion with his brethren."

New-formed Churches need not delay the beginning of regular worship until they have their own sanctuary and their own ordained minister. The Church member-

ship may appoint any member to lead the congregation in worship. Such informal, laymen-led services are often held in homes, school houses, rented halls or churches. One recently gathered Church began its services of worship in a converted barn.

Material to assist laymen in conducting public worship have been compiled and are available from the various denominational headquarters. Suggestions for sermon subjects, and copies of sermon reprints may be available upon request.

CHAPTER FOUR

Preparing Constitution & Bylaws

We will turn now to a discussion of the third principle of Congregationalism in the Hartford Church list:

"That such a particular church being organized, or having furnished itself with those officers that Christ hath appointed, hath all the power and privileges of a church belonging to it . . ." (Emphasis added)

This power and these privileges, and the actual procedures of a Church's self-government are usually outlined in a written Constitution and Bylaws, which are prepared with the authority of, and adopted by, the membership in duly called Church Meeting. Here again the Boston Platform speaks with wisdom about a Church's power and privileges:

"Church power, under Christ, resides not in any priesthood or clergy, nor in the officers of the church, but in the church itself, and it is derived through the church to its officers from Christ. . ."

"Officers in a church are necessary to its well-being, and to its functions, though not to its existence . . . Church officers, according to the arrangement which the apostles instituted in every church, are of two sorts . . . elders and deacons . . . Other officers . . . are not provided for a church by any precept or example in the Scriptures.

"Yet a church may designate any member or members to some definite work in its behalf, such as the work of a scribe or clerk, or of that of a superintendent or teacher in its Sunday School, or that of a committee for

some inquiry. In such appointments the church institutes no new order of officers, but only distributes among its members certain duties belonging to the brotherhood."

Sister Churches have been always ready to exchange Constitutions and Bylaws for each other's edification. Copies of these are kept on file and are available from denominational offices or may be obtained by direct correspondence between Churches.

In the following pages is a general summary of articles typical of the Constitutions and Bylaws of Churches of the Congregational order. It is included simply to indicate some of the areas of responsibility which a modern Church is apt to want to assign to its members. How these assignments shall be made depends solely on the will of the membership in Church Meeting assembled.

The Articles of Incorporation, in most states, are considered to be the Constitution. The corporate charter as drafted by committee, and after due consultation with a competent legal advisor, is presented to the membership in a properly called Church Meeting for adoption and approval:

Typical Constitution or Articles of Incorporation

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the day of , 19 , by a vote of two-thirds of the members of the Church of , present at a meeting duly called and held for that purpose, the Constitution and Articles of Incorporation of said church were adopted to read as follows, to wit:

ARTICLE I

The name of this corporation shall be Church

of ,

ARTICLE II

The principal place of business, of this corporation shall be in , County,

ARTICLE III

The purposes for which this corporation is formed are as follows:

1. To maintain a center of Christian life and influence in the community and to support the fellowship of the Churches of Christ throughout the world;
2. To do all things and to have and exercise all rights, privileges and powers conferred by law upon a religious corporation.
3. To be permanently and completely an autonomous body, and, while recognizing the expediency and privilege of seeking the advice of other autonomous Churches and associating with them for mutual advantage and service to our fellow men, to remain perpetually amenable to no external ecclesiastical constitution or authority whatsoever.

ARTICLE IV

The members of this corporation shall consist of those persons received into membership in accordance with the Bylaws of the corporation.

ARTICLE V

This corporation shall have no capital stock and shall continue perpetually.

ARTICLE VI

The authority to make Bylaws of this corporation shall be vested in the membership.

ARTICLE VII

The temporal business of this corporation shall be conducted by a Board of not less than , nor more than , trustees, one of whom shall be elected by the board to act as its chairman and another its secretary for terms of one year. Trustees shall hold office three years, and their terms shall be so arranged that at least shall be chosen each year. The spiritual responsibilities of the corporation shall be conducted by a Board of Deacons (or Elders) and a Pastor. The Pastor shall be called by the membership for an indefinite term. Such other Officers, Boards and Committees as may be desired may be designated in the Bylaws.

ARTICLE VIII

The Trustees, Officers, Board and Committee members to be elected by the membership shall be elected at the annual meeting of the Church, which shall be held during the month of each year at the time and in the manner prescribed in the Bylaws.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we the undersigned, being the Chairman and Secretary, and a majority of the Board of Trustees of said corporation, hereunto subscribe our names this day of, 19

Procedures for executing and filing a corporation charter differ in the several states, and any new Church would be wise to request competent legal advice in preparing its own Constitution, or Articles of Incorporation.

The general principles expressed in the Constitution of a Church are applied more specifically in the Bylaws:

Typical Church Bylaws

ARTICLE I - NAME AND DENOMINATION

Sec. 1 Name: The name of this Corporation shall be Church.

Sec. 2 Denomination: This Church shall be identified with the voluntary fellowship of Churches.

ARTICLE II - STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Sec. 1 Purpose: The purpose of this Church is to maintain a center of Christian life and influence in our community and to support the fellowship of the Churches of Christ throughout the world.

ARTICLE III - POLITY

Sec. 1 Polity: The Church, subject to the provisions of its Articles of Incorporation, shall be an autonomous body, having within itself all necessary powers of government and discipline, recognizing the expediency and privilege of seeking the advice of other Churches and associating with them for mutual advantage and service to our fellowmen, but amenable to no ecclesiastical constitution or authority except that of Christ, our Lord.

ARTICLE IV - FAITH *

Sec. 1 Faith: This Church recognizes the right and duty of each member to determine his own beliefs according to the dictates of his conscience. It joins, however, with Churches of like mind in testifying: We believe in the love of God, our father, and in the revelations of that love in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We confess our faith in Him, and will strive to live together in the fellowship and service of the spirit of God. We earnestly desire to

* First Church, Tacoma, Wash.

know our duty as taught in the Holy Scriptures and to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known to us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With loyalty to God and love for all men we will labor for that righteousness which is profitable for the life that now is, and gives assurance for the life everlasting.

ARTICLE V - COVENANT *

Sec. 1 Covenant: Each member admitted into the Communion and fellowship of this Church shall give assent to the following covenant, or to the form of Covenant for Liturgical Use in Sec. 2: We declare our belief in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men. We promise to do the will of God as we now know it or shall hereafter learn it. We recognize in Christ the way, the truth and the life. We confess our purpose of Him, to become like Him and to advance His power in the hearts and lives of men. We recognize the Churches as fellowships of those who love Christ's way and are joined together for mutual encouragement and increased power in working at the common task of building the city of God here and now. We covenant with this Church as our Church; desiring to love its members; being eager to sustain its worship and work; seeking its peace, purity and increase; and promising to do what we can to share its part in transforming the world into the kingdom of God.

Sec. 2 Form of Covenant for Liturgical Use:

Since God is pleased to share His life with men,
To be their Father, and to guide and
to encourage them:

We, therefore, covenant together and with God
To be his children both in spirit and in truth:

We promise by the words and love of Jesus Christ

* First Church, Tacoma, Wash.

To seek God's will, according to the light made
known
Or yet to be disclosed;
To grow in judgment, faith and charity,
And, in fellowship, to do and teach
our Father's will
Unto the glory of His name. Amen. (AVA)

ARTICLE VI - MEMBERSHIP

Sec. 1 Definition of Membership: The members of this Church shall be persons who have been received upon the recommendation of the Pastor and the Board of Deacons (or Elders), and offer public acceptance of the Church Covenant, (a) on presentation of satisfactory letters of transfer from other Churches; or (b) if letters are not available, by reaffirmation of faith; or (c) on confession of faith when external baptism is waived (because of conviction) by the Board of Deacons.

Sec. 2 Reception of Members: Reception of members normally shall take place at regular communion services or at any other worship service.

Sec. 3 Termination: (1) A member in full fellowship may request a letter or recommendation to another Church, and the clerk may send the customary certificate to the place designated and so notify the applicant. (2) The name of a member who has united with another Church without obtaining a letter of recommendation shall be dropped by the Board of Deacons (or Elders). (3) Names of members from whom no word satisfactory to the Deacons has been received for a period of two years may be transferred to an inactive list by action of the Board of Deacons, and shall not be reported as members. Upon their request such inactive members may be restored to the active roll or be given qualified letters of recommendation to some particular Church. (4) Any members wishing

to withdraw from Church membership may do so upon notice in writing to the Board of Deacons signifying their decision to so withdraw.

Sec. 4 Associate Member: Any member of a Christian Church, temporarily living in the community, may on recommendation of the Pastor and vote of the Board of Deacons (or Elders) and by publicly owning the covenant of the Church at any service of reception of members, be admitted into associate membership. Associate members shall have the right of voice but not to vote in Church Meetings. The associate membership of any person may be removed when such a person is no longer a resident of the community.

ARTICLE VII - OFFICERS AND DUTIES

Sec. 1 Church Officers and Duties: (a) **A Pastor or Pastors** shall be chosen and called by the Church whenever a vacancy occurs, and shall have in charge the spiritual welfare of the congregation. While the term of the Pastor shall be indefinite, the Church may at any time by a majority vote at a meeting called for the purpose, request his resignation with the understanding that it will be presented and become effective within (.....) days. Likewise, the pastor shall give (.....) days notice in case he wishes to leave of his own volition.

(b) **A Director or Minister of Christian Education** shall be chosen and called by the Church who shall initiate and supervise the Christian Education program of the Church in cooperation with the Pastor, Board of Deacons (or Elders), and the Board of Christian Education.

(c) **A Moderator** (or President), to be elected at the annual meeting, shall serve for a term of one (1) year. No person shall serve more than three (3) consecutive years as Moderator. He shall preside over all business meetings of the Church and of the

Church Cabinet.*

(d) **A Clerk** (or **Scribe** or **Secretary**) shall be elected for one (1) year and shall keep a record in proper form of all meetings of the Church, and the Church Cabinet. The Clerk shall collaborate with the Board of Deacons in having available an alphabetical list of members with dates of admission, dismissal or death, and a list of baptisms and marriages, making written report at the annual meeting of changes in membership to date, and of such other matters as come within the scope of the office.

(e) **A Treasurer** shall be elected for one (1) year and shall receive and deposit all monies belonging to the Church, the care of which is not otherwise specified. He shall disburse such monies under proper authority of the Board of Trustees. He shall, at the annual meeting of the Church, make a full report of receipts and disbursements of all monies in his charge. He shall submit his books for annual audit prior to each annual meeting. The Treasurer, and all others designated by the Board of Trustees who regularly handle money for the Church, shall be bonded to give assurance of proper protection to the Church, in such amounts as the Board of Trustees may require.

(f) **An Historian**, to be elected annually by the Church, shall keep a record of the principal events in the life of the Church and its members and shall be the custodian of the historical archives of the Church.

ARTICLE IX - BOARDS AND DUTIES

Sec. 1 Board of Deacons or Elders: The Board of Deacons shall consist of (.....) active members elected by the Church. The term of office for each member shall be for three (3) years and one (1) year must elapse before a member may be re-elected. (.....) new members shall be elected each year and any vacancy that occurs

* Called variously "Council" or "Church Committee"

during the year shall be filled by the Church Cabinet for the period until the next annual meeting when a Deacon shall be elected by the Church for the remaining part, if any, of the unexpired term.

The Board of Deacons shall organize annually by electing its Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and such other officers as it may determine. It may delegate the duties of Treasurer to the Church Treasurer in lieu of electing its own.

The Board of Deacons shall be responsible for the spiritual and devotional life of the Church; be the policy-making advisors to the Pastor(s) in his relation to the Church and its spiritual activities; assist in the celebration of the Lord's Supper; visit the sick, and make calls upon members and prospective members; be responsible for receiving and distributing a Deacon's Fund for emergency cases of need; review the membership rolls annually in consultation with the Church Clerk; and provide for pulpit supply whenever required.

(Note: Some Churches combine the personnel and the duties of the Boards of Deacons and Deaconesses in one Diaconate.)

Sec. 2 Board of Deaconesses: The Board of Deaconesses shall consist of (.....) active members elected by the Church and as many honorary members as the Board may desire. The term of office for each member shall be for three (3) years. One (1) year must elapse before a Deaconess is eligible for re-election. (.....) members shall be elected each year and any vacancy that occurs during the year shall be filled by the Church Cabinet for the period until the next annual meeting when a Deaconess shall be elected by the Church for the remaining part, if any, of the unexpired term.

The Board of Deaconesses shall organize annually by the election of its Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and such other officers as it may

determine.

The Board of Deaconesses shall visit the ill and the shut-in; call upon new members and prospective members; arrange for chancel flowers and distribute them to the ill and shut-in; make physical preparations for the Lord's Supper, and arrange for the taking of Communion by the Pastor(s) to the ill and shut-in; and to give whatever aid they can to the Pastor and Board of Deacons in the spiritual activities of the Church.

Sec. 3 Permanent Diaconate: The Permanent Diaconate shall consist of all members of this Church who have ever served as Deacons (or Elders) or Deaconesses.

The Permanent Diaconate is an honorary body without any prescribed duties or responsibilities, but upon the invitation of the Pastor(s) and the Boards of Deacons and Deaconesses, members of the Permanent Diaconate may assist in the work of these Boards.

Sec. 4 Board of Trustees: The Board of Trustees shall be (.....) in number, elected by the Church. They shall serve a term of three (3) years, and shall hold office until their successors are elected. A Trustee shall be eligible for election to not more than two (2) successive terms. or the number necessary to make (.....) members shall be elected each year. Any vacancy that occurs during the year shall be filled by the Church Cabinet for the period until the next annual meeting when a Trustee shall be elected by the Church for the remaining part, if any, of the unexpired term.

The Trustees shall meet regularly at least once a month except during the months of July and August. Special meetings may be called as provided for by the Board itself. The Board shall elect its

own officers and committees and determine its own mode of procedure. A quorum shall consist of (.....) members.

The Trustees shall hold and care for all Church property, and see to it that the monies are expended in accordance with the budget as approved by the Church. They shall have no power to buy, sell, or mortgage, or transfer the real property of the Church, nor to execute promissory notes or other evidence of indebtedness in the name of the Church without a special vote of the Church members at a meeting regularly called; provided, however, the above restriction shall not apply in cases of necessary withdrawal of funds from savings accounts for the use of such funds for the specific purposes for which they are intended, and for which the Treasurer has been authorized to execute in the name of the Church such notes or other evidence of indebtedness as may be required by the Savings Bank or Loan Association to cover the amount of the necessary withdrawal until the end of the six months interest period, whenever such action will be to the ultimate net advantage of the Church.

The Board of Trustees shall keep a careful record of its proceedings, and shall render a full report to the Church at the Annual Meeting and at such times as the Church may, by vote, require.

The Board may authorize expenditures for items not included in the approved budget up to \$..... without prior approval of the Church.

It shall be the duty of the Board of Trustees, upon the nomination and recommendation of the Boards or Committees within whose province any employment of personnel lies, (eg. the Music Committee, as to professional musicians; the Board of Finance, as to Financial Secretary; the Board of

Trustees as to office and custodial personnel; and as to the Pastor(s) and the Director of Christian Education, (as shall be directed by vote of the Church), to employ all paid personnel, to fix their salaries, terms and conditions of employment, and with the advice and consent of the respective nominating and recommending or directing bodies, to terminate their employment.

The Chairman of the Board shall sign in the name of the Church all notes, mortgages, deeds, etc., after proper approval by the Church in Meeting.

Sec. 5 The Board of Finance: (Note: Some Churches assign the functions listed here under Board of Finance to a sub-committee of their Boards of Trustees.)

The Board of Finance shall consist of (.....) members who shall serve for one (1) year. One (1) member shall be appointed by each of the following Boards and Organizations: Deacons, Deaconesses, Trustees, Christian Education, Christian Stewardship, the Women's Association, Men's Brotherhood and the Senior Fellowship. The Treasurer, ex-officio, and (.....) others elected at large by the Church shall complete the membership. The Board of Finance shall elect its own chairman and shall choose the Director of the annual "Every Family Canvass". A quorum shall consist of (.....) members.

It shall be the duty of the Board of Finance to receive the recommendations of the various Boards and Committees of the Church relative to the annual budget, and to present a joint budget to the Church for approval at least twenty (20) days prior to the Every Family Canvass. This Board shall organize and conduct said canvass, and shall continue to canvass the members of the Church until the funds required by the budget have been

raised. It shall be the function of this Board to devise ways and means of increasing the income of the Church to meet the needs of a growing program.

The Board of Finance shall meet monthly with the exception of July and August, and a copy of the minutes of each meeting shall be presented to the chairman of all other Boards and the Church Clerk.

The Board of Finance shall appoint a Financial Secretary, either volunteer, or whose salary shall be provided for in the annual budget. The Secretary shall have charge of the records and accounts of all monies contributed for the support of the Church. The Secretary shall furnish, when requested, subscription envelopes to all members (and families) of the Church, shall render quarterly statements to each subscriber, shall have charge of the collection of subscriptions, and shall submit a financial statement to the Boards of Finance and Trustees monthly and at such other times as the Boards may request. All funds received by the Financial Secretary shall be tabulated, turned over to the Treasurer, and receipt (of deposit) issued for the same.

The Financial Secretary shall be appointed for one (1) year, but may serve successive terms.

Sec. 6 Board of Christian Stewardship: The Board of Christian Stewardship shall consist of (.....) members elected by the Church. Members shall be elected for three (3) year terms. (.....) or the number necessary to make (.....) members shall be elected each year. One (1) year must elapse before a member is eligible for re-election. The Board shall elect its own chairman, secretary and sub-committees.

It shall be the responsibility of this Board, working

