

Decorah Covenant Church Constitution and By-Laws

November 2019

Preamble

"The Evangelical Covenant Church has its roots in historical Christianity as it emerged in the Protestant Reformation, in the Biblical instruction of the Lutheran State Church of Sweden, and the great spiritual awakenings of the nineteenth century. These three influences have in large measure shaped its development and are to be borne in mind in seeking to understand its distinctive spirit.

The Covenant Church adheres to the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation regarding the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. It has traditionally valued the historic confessions of the Christian church, particularly the Apostles' Creed, while at the same time it has emphasized the sovereignty of the Word over all creedal interpretations. It has especially cherished the pietistic restatement of justification by faith as basic to its dual task of evangelism and Christian nurture, the New Testament emphasis upon personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the reality of a fellowship of believers which recognizes but transcends theological differences, and the belief in baptism and the Lord's Supper as divinely ordained sacraments of the church.

While the denomination has traditionally practiced the baptism of infants, in conformity with its principle of personal freedom, it has given room to divergent views. The principle of personal freedom, so highly esteemed by the Covenant, is to be distinguished from the individualism that disregards the centrality of the Word of God and mutual responsibilities and disciplines of the spiritual community."

(The paragraphs above are Historical Statements from the Preamble of the Constitution and Bylaws of the Evangelical Covenant Church as revised in 1957.)

This document, which is in harmony with the above preamble, is the constitution and bylaws of Decorah Covenant Church of Decorah, Iowa.

CONSTITUTION

Article I: NAME:

The name of this church shall be Decorah Covenant Church of Decorah, Iowa.

Article II: AFFILIATION:

This church is a member of the Evangelical Covenant Church and its Midwest Covenant Conference and is pledged to work in harmony with both, supporting their programs, policies, and institutions.

Article III: STATEMENT OF FAITH:

We believe in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.

Article IV **PURPOSE:**

Section 1. The purpose of this church shall be to glorify God and extend the kingdom of God by uniting Christians in fellowship for spiritual development and worship, for the winning of persons to Christ, for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and for service to one another, this community, and the world through Christian education, home and world mission, and the institutions conducted by the Evangelical Covenant Church and its local regional conferences.

Section 2. In order to achieve our purpose, this church, in the unity of the Spirit, shall use the gifts that God has given it and the means of grace which God has placed at its disposal: the Word of God, baptism, and Holy Communion.

Article V: **MEMBERSHIP:**

Membership in this church is granted on application to those who through faith in God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, have been born anew to a living hope, have been baptized according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to live a Christian life, and promise to support the ministry of the church by sharing in its fellowship and obligations.

Article VI: **OFFICERS:**

The executive officers of this church shall be a chair, a vice-chair, and a secretary. The financial officers of this church shall be a financial secretary and a treasurer.

Article VII: **CHURCH COUNCIL:**

Section 1. The general administration of this church shall be vested in a body known as the Church Council. In circumstances or where the law requires action(s) by "Trustees" the Council shall be known as a "Board of Trustees" and the members of it as "Trustees." The Council shall also serve as a board of deacons to supervise the life of the church, as stated in I Timothy 3:8-13.

Section 2. The Council shall elect from themselves the executive church officers as specified in article IV of the bylaws. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member.

Section 3. The Council shall organize itself in a manner specified in the bylaws.

Article VIII: **CONGREGATIONAL BUSINESS MEETINGS:**

Section 1. Congregational business meetings shall be held regularly, but not less than twice a year. Two of these meetings shall be designated as Congregational Meetings. One of these meetings shall be held near the first of October where goals and the annual budget shall be submitted for congregational approval. Another of these meetings shall be held near the first of April where written reports shall be submitted by the pastor(s), staff, and all of the committees of the church. Independently reviewed financial reports shall be submitted by the treasurer for the church and for each of its organizations. Council Members for the ensuing year shall be elected by ballot at the spring meeting.

Section 2. Notice of all congregational business meetings shall be made public not less than two Sundays prior to the meeting and shall include the date, time and place of meeting, and the purpose(s) for which they are called.

*Article IX: **PROPERTY:***

In the event of schism within the church, from which we earnestly pray God to spare us, the title of all church property, real or personal, shall remain with the group which abides by this constitution, as determined by the Executive Board of the Midwest Covenant Conference. In the event of dissolution, the property and all assets of the church shall become the property of the Evangelical Covenant Church and the Midwest Covenant Conference.

*Article X: **AMENDMENTS:***

Amendments in harmony with this constitution and the Model Constitutions for local Covenant Churches and not in conflict with Covenant principles and policies may be adopted by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting in a Semiannual Meeting of the congregation, providing the proposed amendment was presented in written form at the preceding Semiannual Meeting. Articles IX and X of this constitution may be amended only with the approval of the Executive Board of the Midwest Covenant Conference.

BYLAWS

*Article I: **MEMBERSHIP:***

Section 1. *Becoming a Member*

a) Application for membership. A written application for membership shall be placed with a pastor or with any member of the Council. Applicants shall complete an inquirer's orientation to the church, after which they shall appear before the Council or its designees to give confession of their Christian faith, according to Article V of the Constitution. When the applications have been reviewed and applicants' testimonies favorably received, they shall be recommended at the next congregational business meeting for acceptance into membership.

b) Transfer of Membership. Applicants from other Christian churches shall submit with their written applications for membership letters of transfer when available or make a request to the pastor that such be sought. Action then continues according to the requirements of paragraph a) of this section.

c) Reception of New Members. Applicants who are voted into membership of the church shall be welcomed at a regularly scheduled worship service and make public confession of their Christian faith, as outlined in The Covenant Book of Worship.

Section 2. *Children of Members.* Children of the members of the church and its constituency shall be nurtured under its spiritual care. They shall receive instruction from the pastor(s) and adult members of the church in the Word of God, Christian doctrine, and the history of the church. Children who meet the qualifications for membership according to Article V of the Constitution may apply for church membership as outlined under Section 1, paragraph a) of this article.

Section 3. *Responsibilities of Membership.* All members of the church shall assume the responsibilities and obligations placed upon them by the Word of God and the Church. They shall, through their witness by life and word, consecrated service, prayer, and financial support further the cause of Christ in the local church, the community in which they live and work, and the Covenant Church worldwide.

Section 4. Discipline.

a) Irresponsible Members. The Council or their designee(s) shall confer with members who willfully neglect their responsibilities of membership (see Section 3), for the purpose of encouraging such members and to admonish them in the Spirit of Christ, if necessary. If such admonishment is not heeded, the members may be dealt with as erring members (see section 4b).

b) Erring members. Any member known to err in conduct or doctrine shall be counseled according to the procedure in Matthew 18:15-18 and Galatians 6:1: Any member having knowledge of such error shall, in the spirit of Christian love, seek to restore the brother or sister. If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, it is taken to the church council for resolution. If he or she fails to heed the counsel of the council, the error shall be brought before a congregational business meeting. Discipline shall then be administered in the spirit of Christ with due regard for the welfare of the individual as well as the church.

c) Dismissal of Members. Dismissal of members under paragraphs a) and b) of this section must be acted on by the church, which alone has the authority. A two-thirds majority of those present and voting at a congregational business meeting is necessary for such action.

d) Forfeiture of Rights. A member who has been properly dismissed from the church, or has withdrawn membership, has forfeited all rights and privileges of membership in the church.

Section 5. Transfer of Membership. Application for transfer of membership to another Christian church shall be made in writing to the senior pastor, who shall issue the transfer to the church with which a member is uniting. Withdrawal of said membership shall be reported through the council at the next congregational business meeting, where it shall be a matter of record.

Section 6. Removal of Membership. Request for withdrawal of membership in the church shall be made in writing to the pastor or the Council. The council may present a recommendation for withdrawal at a business meeting of the church.

Section 7. Membership Review. The Council shall annually be responsible for a careful review of the membership rolls and will determine and take any appropriate action.

Section 8. Nonmember Friends. Nonmember parish friends shall be enrolled by the church as a part of its total constituency. The church and its pastor shall serve them in all their spiritual needs, and they shall be encouraged to consider this as their church home. They shall be kept informed of the activities of the church.

Article II: PASTORS AND STAFF

Section I. Pastors

a) *Qualifications.* The pastors of the church shall meet the New Testament requirements of their office as specified in I Timothy 3:2-7. They shall be members in good standing of the Covenant Ministerium and follow the Rules for the Ordered Ministry of The Evangelical Covenant Church. They shall by virtue of their call be members of the church.

b) *Duties.* The pastors shall devote themselves to the service of the church, preaching and teaching the Word of God, administering the sacraments, and giving themselves faithfully to pastoral work. They shall keep an accurate record of their pastoral work, provide reports of that work to the Council, and present a written report at one semi-annual meeting of the congregation. They shall practice good administrative procedures and cooperate with the church council and all committees of the church. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member of the Council and committees of the church. Other pastoral staff shall be advisory to the Church Council and ex-officio to the committees to which they are assigned.

c) *Cooperation.* Pastors shall, both in word and precept, work in harmony with The Evangelical Covenant Church, the regional conference, and other Covenant ministers. They shall also be cooperative with other churches in our community and the ministerial organizations available locally.

d) *Call.* Pastors shall be called at a regular or special congregational business meeting, the purpose of which shall be announced two Sundays in advance. Pastors shall be nominated by a pastoral search committee. This committee shall be elected at a congregational business meeting. The search committee shall be representative of the congregation and have from six to nine members who shall work closely with the regional conference superintendent. Pastors shall be called by ballot with a two-thirds majority of those voting required for a call. The call shall be for an indefinite period of time with a minimum of six weeks notice required by the church (at a regular or specially called business meeting) or the pastor for termination of pastoral duties. As long as Decorah Covenant Church receives subsidy from the Midwest Covenant Conference and/or the Evangelical Covenant Church, the call shall be extended jointly by the church and the Conference subject to approval by the Executive Secretary of Church Growth and Evangelism of the denomination.

e) *Charges against a pastor.* Charges against a pastor shall be submitted in writing to the Church Council charging a pastor with indiscretion, immorality, doctrinal error, unethical behavior, disloyalty to The Evangelical Covenant Church, or incompetence. If in the judgment of the Church Council there is substance to the charge, the case shall be referred to the Superintendent of the Midwest Covenant Conference who shall confer with the Executive Secretary of the Ministry of the Covenant. These two shall determine the order of responsibility in pursuing the matter according to the Rules for the Ordered Ministry of The Evangelical Covenant Church regarding discipline, prior to further action by the church.

Section 2. Staff. Support Staff may be hired by the Council upon recommendation from a committee or pastor. All job descriptions must be approved by the congregation prior to hiring.

Article III: OFFICERS

Section 1. Qualifications. Officers of the church shall be members in good standing who are active in the support of the total ministry of the church.

Section 2. Election and Appointment. Executive officers shall be elected by the council from its members as specified in Article IV, section 3. Financial officers shall be appointed by the council annually.

Section 3. Duties.

a) **Chair.** The chair shall preside at all congregational business meetings of the church and at meetings of the church council. The chair should confer with the senior pastor in preparing agendas for such meetings.

b) **Vice-Chair.** The vice-chair shall assist the chair and during an absence assume that office and its duties. The vice-chair shall convene the Pastoral Relations Committee.

c) **Secretary.** The secretary shall record, duplicate, distribute, and preserve the minutes of all congregational business meetings and church council meetings. The secretary shall conduct and preserve all official correspondence as delegated. The secretary shall also be responsible for the official seal and the important documents of the church.

d) **Financial Secretary.** The financial secretary shall receive, record, and deposit into the bank all funds contributed to the church. Records of such deposits shall be given to the treasurer.

e) Treasurer. The treasurer shall be responsible for all funds and shall make disbursements as authorized by the church or the council. A written report of the receipts and expenditures shall be submitted at each regular meeting of the council and at each congregational business meeting.

Article IV: CHURCH COUNCIL

Section 1. Qualifications. Members of the church council shall be church members in good standing who are active in the support of the total ministry of the church.

Section 2. Size, composition, election and tenure.

a) The council shall consist of seven members, both men and women, not including the senior pastor, who is an ex-officio member.

b) *Election.* Council members shall be elected at the summer semiannual business meeting for staggered three-year terms. They shall not serve more than two consecutive terms.

Section 3. Organization. Following the summer semiannual business meeting, the continuing council members and members-elect shall convene to elect, from its members for the following year, executive church officers, for terms of one year. It will also appoint from its own number members to serve on each administrative committee.

Section 4. Vacancies. Vacancies on the church council will be filled by appointment by the council itself to complete the term. Appointments shall be made from a list of persons prepared by the nominating committee.

Section 5. Duties. The council in its administrative and spiritual responsibility shall, in cooperation with the pastors, fulfill the functions defined in the constitution and its bylaws, including the following:

a) Oversee church membership, including recommendations for reception or removal of members.

b) Assist the pastor in nurturing and overseeing the spiritual life and welfare of the church.

c) Establish administrative and program policies in conformity with the spirit of the church constitution.

d) Set long and short range goals and evaluate the total church program on a continuing basis.

e) Plan and recommend the annual budget and stewardship opportunities for the church.

f) Oversee and approve the schedule of church activities.

g) Appoint administrative committee members and church workers as defined by the bylaws for the administrative committees, as the council may deem appropriate.

h) Appoint financial officers as outlined in Article 3, section 2.

i) Represent the congregation in certain staff relationships including: annual appraisal of the ministry of the senior pastor and of other staff, providing godly counsel or discipline as appropriate; annual review and approval of staff compensation, approval of compensation for new staff, and approval of other personnel expenses for any staff member or activity, all subject to overall budget approval; establishment of personnel policies; approval of changes in staff job descriptions and approval of job descriptions for new staff positions; maintenance of current job descriptions for all staff members; and hiring of support staff.

Section 6. *Administrative Committees.* Implementation of policies and programs established by congregational or council action may be accomplished through the following administrative committees:

- a) Worship Committee
- b) Outreach Committee
- c) Fellowship and Service Committee
- d) Christian Education Committee
- e) Stewardship and Properties Committee

At least one council member shall be appointed to serve on each administrative committee and act as liaison between the council and the committee.

Article V: COMMITTEES

Section 1. *Executive committee.* The executive committee, consisting of the executive officers, together with the senior pastor of the church, shall strive to promote effective working relations and communication in the church. The committee shall have no legislative power but shall function in an advisory capacity to the council, unless specific responsibilities have been assigned to it by the council or the church.

Section 2. *Nominating committee.* The nominating committee shall consist of not less than three members who shall be elected at a business meeting at least three months prior to the spring semiannual meeting. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member of the committee. After being convened by the church chair, committee members shall elect their own chair and secretary. The responsibilities of the committee shall include the following:

- a) Prepare a ballot for the spring semiannual meeting ideally listing two qualified candidates for each office to be filled.
- b) Confirm the willingness of each candidate to serve before listing his or her name on the ballot.
- c) Present a complete ballot at the spring semiannual congregational meeting. This shall constitute completion of the committee's assignment, unless given specific responsibilities at said meeting.

Section 3. *Pastoral relations committee.* The pastoral relations committee shall consist of at least four members, including the church chair, vice-chair, and at least one at-large member, and shall meet at least semiannually.

Section 4. *Special committees and task forces.* Special committees or task forces for specific purposes may be appointed at any duly constituted business meeting of the congregation or by the council according to need, but shall be automatically terminated at the next semiannual meeting unless specifically extended at said meeting.

Article VI: MEETINGS

Section 1. *Public Services.* Public services shall be conducted regularly on Sundays and, when deemed appropriate, on other days of the week for worship, the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and prayer.

Section 2. *Celebrating the sacraments.* The sacrament of Holy Communion shall be celebrated regularly as determined by vote of the church. The sacrament of baptism shall be celebrated in keeping with Covenant policies and according to the needs of the constituency.

Section 3. *Congregational business meetings.* Congregational business meetings shall be held regularly, not less than semiannually, as specified in Article VIII of the constitution. Special

congregational business meetings may be called by the chair of the church in consultation with the senior pastor or by the council.

Section 4. *Church council and administrative committee meetings.* Regular meetings of the council shall be held not less than monthly. Administrative committees, special committees, and task forces shall meet not less than at a frequency specified by the council. Special meetings of the council, the executive committee, the administrative committees, and the task forces may be called by their respective chairs.

Section 5. *Organizational meetings.* Meetings and activities of the organizations of the church shall be planned and conducted regularly under the direction and supervision of the council.

Article VII: GENERAL PROVISIONS

Section 1. *Quorum.*

a) Twenty percent of the membership, but not less than ten members, present and voting at a congregational business meeting properly called shall constitute a quorum.

b) The quorum for the council, committee, and task force meetings shall be a majority of their respective memberships.

Section 2. *Rules of order.* All business meetings of the church and of the boards, committees, and organizations of the church shall be conducted according to *Robert's Rules of Order*.

Section 3. *Final Voice.* The congregation reserves for itself final authority in any matter of its choice.

Article VIII: AMENDMENTS

Amendments to these bylaws not in conflict with the constitution may be adopted at any regular congregational business meeting or at a special business meeting called for that purpose by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting, provided that such amendments have been presented in writing to the executive committee of the church and at a preceding regular congregational business meeting.