

Notes on the Revised Constitution
of the
United Church of Christ at Valley Forge

General Comments

1. We have attempted in all Articles of this Constitution to incorporate a clear and positive tone. We are a diverse and welcoming community, committed to faithful stewardship in sharing our thoughts, words, resources and deeds.

2. We have redefined our elected officers, adding provisions for an elected Secretary, and for the appointment of assistants to the Treasurer and Financial Secretary.

3. Church Council, acting on behalf of the congregation, is primarily responsible for policy and governance. It now consists of four elected church officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer), Moderator of the Board of Elders, and six members elected at large. Each at-large member chairs one of the primary standing committees.

4. We have streamlined the structure to allow flexibility in both the size and function of Church Council and standing committees, and to allow for the appointment of temporary task groups for special needs.

5. Where standing committees in the past have been left to select their own representatives to Church Council, now the officers and voting members of Church Council are all elected directly by the congregation.

6. Each of the six at-large members of Church Council has direct responsibility for one of the standing program committees of the Church. With help from a year-round Nominating Committee, they are empowered to staff their committees with any number of Members and Friends they may need.

7. In the relationships of pastors, staff, Members and Friends, we recognize that performance evaluation, mediation and nurturing are distinct functions – and should be supported by separate committees.

Comments, by Article

I-III. The substance of these articles remains unchanged.

IV. The first paragraph comes from the Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

V. The process of welcoming new Members and Friends is essentially unchanged.

5. New language here emphasizes that membership and stewardship go together. Neither has meaning without the other.

6-7. This clarifies how we identify participating Members, nonparticipating Members, and those who choose to participate as Friends. Our goal is to maintain a positive approach to membership while keeping our membership rolls as accurate as possible.

VI. 3-4. New language clarifies the authority to respond to emergency situations.

VII.

2. “Statement of Need” and “Budget” are two very different, and equally important, steps in our planning. In the fall, we approve the “Statement of Need” – which is our declaration of the financial resources we intend to raise to fully fund our mission. Then, at the Annual meeting in January, we adopt our “Budget” – based upon the personal commitments received from each Member and Friend.

4. The provisions for special congregational meetings were revised. Council, on its own, may call a special meeting with appropriate notice to the congregation. In addition, Council must call a special meeting, with notice to the congregation, when petitioned by at least 25 Members. (The number of petition signatures is reduced from 50 to 25.)

8. This revises the method for calling an emergency congregational meeting – when there is not sufficient time to provide formal notice. If an emergency meeting is called, the first question to be decided – now by a majority vote of the Members present – is whether a true emergency exists.

9. This requires that the latest published edition of Robert’s Rules of Order shall be used for the conduct of any formal meeting, which is typical for organizations who do not write their own custom rules of procedure.

VIII. The basic structure of Church Council has been completely rewritten. (See Item 6 of General Comments, above. We have seen this more flexible committee structure implemented in other organizations with success.) Some highlights include:

- voting members of Council to include four officers, the Moderator of the board of Elders, plus the elected chairs of six standing program committees (Worship, Christian Education, Membership, Stewardship, Property, Finance);
- temporary task groups to be created by Council as needed for short term tasks;
- policies and procedures to be written and adopted by each of the six standing program committees, with the approval of Council; and
- an explicit call to encourage diversity in participation, foster safe church practices and to maintain clear and equitable personnel policies.

IX. The work of the Church is carried out, with the guidance of Church Council and the Board of Elders, through six standing program committees, plus the Nominating Committee, the Pastoral Relations Committee, and the Personnel Committee. Some highlights include:

- clarification of the historical and theological roots of the Board of Elders, who have always been ordained when first elected, and who hold office for life;
- renewed emphasis on the vital role of Elders in the spiritual leadership and nurture of the Church;
- eligibility of Friends as well as Members to serve on the six standing program committees and temporary task groups;
- a pattern of shorter, fixed-term, appointments to committee membership, renewable once;
- a Nominating Committee, newly created with the call to actively engage Members and Friends – year round – to advance the mission and ministry of the Church;
- earlier identification and preparation of leaders to be considered for election for each coming year;
- a Pastoral Relations Committee, newly created, to support the pastors and facilitate communications among the pastors, staff and the congregation; and
- a Personnel Committee, newly created, to administer employee evaluations and make recommendations for staff compensation – independent of the roles of the Board of Elders and the Pastoral Relations Committee.

X. The structure and terms of church officers has been revised to enhance the preparation, succession and continuity of leaders. Highlights include:

- creation of the office of Vice President, authorized to act for the President as needed, who should be prepared but not required to succeed the President;
- creation of the office of Secretary, responsible for essential organization documents and church rolls; and
- authorization for appointment by Council of assistants to the Treasurer, Financial Secretary and other officers as needed.

XI. The classifications and credentials of clergy have been clarified to conform to the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry.

XII. Good stewardship of resources includes both the encouragement of support by Members and Friends and the faithful accounting and use of all our resources. This Article includes specific requirements, and should be interpreted, to maintain conformity with “generally accepted accounting principles” as that term is defined by the accounting industry. Informal annual reviews, and periodic formal audits, are an integral part of this process.

XIII. This Article substantively restates the approved requirements for future amendments.

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