

**CONSTITUTION OF  
BETHLEHEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
PORTAGE, WISCONSIN  
February, 2021**

**PREAMBLE**

We, baptized members of the Church of Christ, responding in faith to the call of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, desiring to unite together to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and carry out God's mission, do hereby adopt this constitution and solemnly pledge ourselves to be governed by its provisions. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Chapter 1**

**NAME AND INCORPORATION**

- C1.01. The name of this congregation shall be Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church.
- C1.02. For the purpose of this constitution and the accompanying bylaws, the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation is hereinafter designated as "this congregation."
- C1.03. The seal of this congregation presents the symbol of a five-pointed star and the legend of this congregation.
- C1.04. This congregation shall be incorporated under the laws of the State of Wisconsin.

**Chapter 2.**

**CONFESSION OF FAITH**

- C2.01. This congregation confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- C2.02. This congregation confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.
  - a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
  - b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
  - c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through authors, they record and announce God's revelation their centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.
- C2.03. This congregation accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

- C2.04. This congregation accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this congregation.
- C2.05. This congregation accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.
- C2.06. This congregation accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.
- C2.07. This congregation confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church in God's mission in the world.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

- C3.01. All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this congregation are to be carried out under his rule and authority.
- C3.02. The Church exists both as an inclusive fellowship and as local congregations gathered for worship and Christian service. Congregations find their fulfillment in the universal community of the Church, and the universal Church exists in and through congregations. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, therefore, derives its character and powers both from the sanction and representation of its congregations and from its inherent nature as an expression of the broader fellowship of the faithful. In length, it acknowledges itself to be in the historic continuity of the communion of saints; in breadth, it expresses the fellowship of believers and congregations in our day.

### **Chapter 4**

#### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

- C4.01. The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming and sanctifying activity in the world.
- C4.02. To participate in God's mission, this congregation as a part of the Church shall:
  - a. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
  - b. Proclaim God's saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.
  - c. Carry out Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the

understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.

- d. Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless, and committing itself to their needs.
- e. Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.
- f. Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.

C4.03 To fulfill these purposes, this congregation shall:

- a. Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.
- b. Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry.
- c. Challenge, equip, and support all members in carrying out their calling in their daily lives and in their congregation.
- d. Teach the Word of God.
- e. Witness to the reconciling Word of God in Christ, reaching out to all people.
- f. Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.
- g. Motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation's ministry and the ministry of other parts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- h. Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod, and the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- i. Foster and participate in ecumenical relationships consistent with churchwide policy.

C4.04. This congregation shall develop an organizational structure to be described in the bylaws. The Congregation Council shall prepare descriptions of the responsibilities of each committee, task force, or other organizational groups and shall review their actions. Such description shall be contained in continuing resolutions of the Congregation Council.

C4.05. This congregation shall, from time to time, adopt a mission statement which will provide specific direction for its programs.

## **Chapter 5. POWERS OF THE CONGREGATION**

C5.01. The powers of this congregation are those necessary to fulfill its purpose.

C5.02. The powers of this congregation are vested in the Congregation Meeting called and conducted as provided in this constitution and bylaws.

C5.03. Only such authority as is delegated to the Congregation Council or other organizational

units in the congregation's governing documents is recognized. All remaining authority is retained by the congregation. The congregation is authorized to:

- a. call a pastor as provided in Chapter 9;
- b. terminate the call of a pastor;
- c. appoint or terminate the appointment of associates in ministry in conformity with the applicable policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
- d. approve the annual budget;
- e. acquire real and personal property by gift, devise, purchase, or other lawful means;
- f. hold title to and use its property for any and all activities consistent with its purpose;
- g. sell, mortgage, lease, transfer, or otherwise dispose of its property by any lawful means;
- h. elect its Congregation Council and require them to carry out their duties in accordance with the constitution and bylaws, and
- i. terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as provided in Chapter 6.

## **Chapter 6**

### **CHURCH AFFILIATION**

- C6.01. This congregation shall be an interdependent part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or its successor, and of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This congregation is subject to the discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- C6.02. This congregation accepts the Confession of Faith and agrees to the Purposes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and shall act in accordance with them.
- C6.03. This congregation acknowledges its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America which:
- a. This congregation agrees to be responsible for its life as a Christian community.
  - b. This congregation pledges its financial support and participation in the life and mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - c. This congregation agrees to call pastoral leadership from the clergy roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in accordance with its call procedures except in special circumstances and with the approval of the bishop of the synod.
  - d. This congregation agrees to consider associates in ministry for appointment to other staff positions in the congregation according to the procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - e. This congregation agrees to file this constitution and any subsequent changes to this constitution with the synod for review to ascertain that all of its provisions are in agreement with the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and with the constitution of the synod.
- C6.04. Affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may be terminated as follows:
- a. This congregation takes action to dissolve.
  - b. This congregation ceases to exist.
  - c. This congregation is removed from membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America according to the procedures for discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

d. This congregation follows the procedures outlined in C6.05.

- C6.05. This congregation may terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by the following procedure:
- a. A resolution indicating the desire of this congregation to terminate its relationship must be adopted at a legally called and conducted special meeting of this congregation by a two-thirds majority of the voting members present.
  - b. The secretary of this congregation shall submit a copy of the resolution to the synodical bishop and shall mail a copy of the resolution to voting members of the congregation. This notice shall be submitted within 10 days after the resolution has been adopted.
  - c. The bishop of the synod shall consult with this congregation during a period of at least 90 days.
  - d. If this congregation, after consultation, still desires to terminate its relationship, such action may be taken at a legally called and conducted special meeting by a two-thirds majority of the voting members present, at which meeting the bishop of the synod or an authorized representative shall be present. Notice of the meeting shall be mailed to all voting members at least 10 days in advance of the meeting.
  - e. A certified copy of the resolution to terminate its relationship shall be sent to the synodical bishop, at which time the relationship between this congregation and ELCA shall be terminated.
  - f. Notice of termination shall be forwarded by the synodical bishop to the secretary of this church and published in the periodical of this church.
  - g. As this congregation was a member of the Lutheran Church in America it shall be required, in addition to the provisions in C6.05., to receive synodical approval before terminating its membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- C6.06 If this congregation is considering relocation, it shall confer with the bishop of the synod in which it is territorially located before any steps are taken leading to such action. The approval of the Synod Council shall be received before any such action is effected.

## **Chapter 7.**

### **PROPERTY OWNERSHIP**

- C7.01. If this congregation ceases to exist, title to undisposed property shall pass to the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- C7.02. If this congregation is removed from membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America according to its procedure for discipline, title to property shall continue to reside in this congregation.
- C7.03. If a two-thirds majority of the voting members of this congregation present at a regularly called and conducted special meeting of this congregation vote to transfer to another Lutheran church body, title to property shall continue to reside in this congregation. Before this congregation takes action to transfer to another Lutheran church body, it shall consult with representative of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin.

- C7.04. If a two-thirds majority of the voting members of this congregation present at a regularly called and conducted special meeting of this congregation vote to become independent or relate to a non-Lutheran church body, title to property of this congregation shall continue to reside in this congregation only with the consent of the Synod Council. The Synod Council, after consultation with the congregation by the established synodical process, may give approval to the request to become independent or to relate to a non-Lutheran church body, in which case title shall remain with the majority of the congregation. If the Synod Council fails to give such approval, title shall remain with those members who desire to continue as a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

## **Chapter 8. MEMBERSHIP**

- C8.01. Members of this congregation shall be those baptized persons on the roll of the congregation at the time that this constitution is adopted and those who are admitted thereafter and who have declared and maintain their membership in accordance with the provisions of this constitution and its bylaws.
- C8.02. Members shall be classified as follows:
- a. Baptized members are those persons who have been received by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in this congregation, or, having been previously baptized in the name of Triune God, have been received by certificate of transfer from other Lutheran congregations or by affirmation of faith.
  - b. Confirmed members are baptized persons who have been confirmed in this congregation, those who have been received by adult baptism or by transfer as confirmed members from other Lutheran congregations, or baptized persons received by affirmation of faith.
  - c. Voting members are confirmed members. Such confirmed members shall have communed and made a financial contribution of record during the preceding calendar year.
  - d. Associate members are persons holding membership in other Lutheran congregations who wish to retain such membership but desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation. They have all the privileges and duties of membership except voting rights and eligibility for elected offices or membership on the Congregation Council of this congregation.
- C8.03. Applications for confirmed membership shall be submitted to and shall require the approval of the Congregation Council.
- C8.04. It shall be the privilege and duty of members of this congregation to:
- a. make regular use of the means of grace, both Word and sacraments;
  - b. live a Christian life in accordance with the Word of God and the teachings of the Lutheran church; and
  - c. support the work of this congregation, the synod, and the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through contributions of their time, abilities, and financial support as biblical stewards.

- C8.05. Membership in this congregation shall be terminated by any of the following:
- a. death;
  - b. resignation;
  - c. transfer or release;
  - d. disciplinary action by the Congregation Council; or removal from the roll due to inactivity as defined in the bylaws. Such persons who have been removed from the roll of members shall remain persons for whom the church has a continuing pastoral concern.

## **Chapter 9. THE PASTOR**

- C9.01. Authority to call a pastor shall be in this congregation by at least a two-thirds majority ballot vote of members present and voting at a meeting regularly called for that purpose. Before a call is issued, the officers, or a committee elected by this congregation to recommend the call, shall seek the advice and help of the bishop of the synod.
- C9.02. Only a member of the clergy roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or who has been recommended for it by the synodical bishop may be called as a pastor of this congregation.
- C9.03. a. Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, every ordained minister shall:
- 1) preach the Word;
  - 2) administer the sacraments;
  - 3) conduct public worship;
  - 4) provide pastoral care; and
  - 5) speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming God's love for the world,
- b. Each ordained minister with a congregational call shall, within the congregation:
- 1) offer instruction, confirm, marry, visit the sick and distressed, and bury the dead;
  - 2) supervise all schools and organizations within the congregation;
  - 3) install regularly elected members of the Congregation Council; and
  - 4) with the council administer discipline.
- c. Every pastor shall:
- 1) seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel and strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and abroad;
  - 2) impart knowledge of this church and its wider ministry through distribution of its periodicals and other publications; and
  - 3) endeavor to increase the support given by the congregation to the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America churchwide organizations and of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, ELCA.
- C9.04. The specific duties of the pastor, compensation, and other matters pertaining to the service

of the pastor shall be included in a letter of call which shall be attested by the bishop of the synod.

- C9.05.
- a. The call of a congregation, when accepted by a pastor, shall constitute a continuing mutual relationship and commitment which, except in the case of the death of the pastor shall be terminated only following consultation with the synodical bishop and for the following reasons:
    - 1) mutual agreement to terminate the call or the completion of a call for a specific term;
    - 2) resignation of the pastor, which shall become effective, unless otherwise agreed, 30 days after the date on which it was submitted;
    - 3) inability to conduct the pastoral office effectively in the congregation in view of local conditions, without reflection on the competence or the moral and spiritual character of the pastor;
    - 4) the physical or mental incapacity of the pastor;
    - 5) disqualification of the pastor through discipline on grounds of doctrine, morality, or continued neglect of duty; or
    - 6) the dissolution of the congregation.
    - 7) suspension of the congregation as a result of discipline proceedings.
  - b. When allegations of physical or mental incapacity of the pastor or ineffective conduct of the pastoral office, have come to the attention of the bishop of the synod, the bishop in his or her sole discretion may, or when such allegations have been brought to the synod's attention by an official recital of allegations by the Congregation Council, or by a petition signed by at least one-third of the voting members of the congregation, the bishop shall investigate such conditions personally in company with a committee of two ordained ministers and one layperson.
  - c. In case of alleged physical or mental incapacity competent medical testimony shall be obtained. When such disability is evident, the bishop of the synod with the advice of the committee shall declare the pastorate vacant. Upon the restoration of a disabled pastor to health, the bishop of the synod shall take steps to enable the pastor to resume the ministry, either in the congregation last served or in another field of labor.
  - d. In the case of alleged local difficulties which imperil the effective functioning of the congregation, all concerned persons shall be heard, after which the bishop of the synod together with the committee described in C9.05.b shall decide on the course of action to be recommended to the pastor and the congregation. If they agree to carry out such recommendations, no further action shall be taken by the synod. If either party fails to assent, the congregation may dismiss the pastor by a two-thirds majority vote of the voting members present at a regularly called meeting after consultation with the bishop.
  - e. If, in the course of proceedings described in C9.05.d, the committee concludes that there may be grounds for disciplinary action, the committee shall make recommendations concerning disciplinary action to the synodical bishop who may bring charges, in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the constitution of the synod.
  - f. If, following the appointment of the committee described in C9.05.b or d., it should become apparent that the pastoral office cannot be conducted effectively in the congregation being served by the ordained minister due to local conditions, the bishop



of the synod may temporarily suspend the pastor from service in the congregation(s) without prejudice and with pay provided through a joint churchwide/synod fund and with housing provided by the congregation(s).

- C9.06. At a time of pastoral vacancy, an interim pastor may be appointed by the bishop of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin with the consent of this congregation or the Congregation Council.
- C9.07. During the period of service, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to a supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin and this congregation of Congregation Council. The interim pastor and any ordained pastor providing assistance shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor.
- C9.08. This congregation shall make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations to a former pastor before calling a successor. A pastor shall make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations to this congregation.
- C9.09. When a pastor is called to serve in company with another pastor or pastors, the privileges and responsibilities of each pastor shall be specified in documents to accompany the call and to be drafted in consultation involving the pastors, the Congregation Council, and the bishop of the synod. As occasion requires, the documents may be revised through a similar consultation.
- C9.10. With the approval of the bishop of the synod the congregation may depart from C9.05.a. and call a pastor for a specific term of years. Details of such calls shall be in writing setting forth the purpose and conditions involved. Prior to the completion of a term, the bishop or a designated representative of the bishop, shall meet with the pastor and representatives of the congregation for a review of the call. Such call may also be terminated before its expiration in accordance with the provisions of C9.05.a.
- C9.11. The pastor shall keep accurate parochial records of all baptisms, confirmations, marriages, burials, communicants, members received, members dismissed, or members excluded from the congregation, and shall submit a summary of such statistics annually to the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin. The pastor shall be a member of the congregation that has extended the letter of call. In a parish of multiple congregations, the pastor shall hold membership in one of the congregations.
- C9.12. The pastor(s) shall submit a report of his or her ministry to the bishop of the synod at least 90 days prior to each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly.

## **Chapter 10.**

### **CONGREGATION MEETING**

- C10.01. The annual meeting of this congregation shall be held at a time specified in the bylaws.
- C10.02. A special Congregation Meeting may be called by the pastor(s), or the Congregation Council, and shall be called at the written request of 10 percent of the voting members.

The call for each special meeting shall specify the purpose for which it is to be held and no other business shall be transacted.

- C10.03. Notice of all meetings of this congregation shall be given at the services of worship on the preceding two consecutive Sundays and by mail and/or email to all voting members at least 10 days in advance of the date of the meeting. The posting of such notice in the regular mail, with the regular postage affixed or paid, sent to the last known address of such members shall be sufficient.
- C10.04. 10 percent of the voting members shall constitute a quorum.
- C10.05. Voting by proxy or by absentee ballot shall not be permitted.
- C10.06. All actions by the congregation shall be by majority vote except as otherwise provided in this constitution.
- C10.07. Robert's Rules of Order, latest edition, shall govern parliamentary procedure of all meetings of this congregation.
- C10.08. This congregation may hold meetings by remote communication, including electronically and by telephone conference, as long as there is an opportunity for simultaneous aural communication. To the extent permitted by state law, notice of all meetings may be provided electronically.

## **Chapter 11. OFFICERS AND APPOINTEES**

- C11.01. The officers of this congregation shall be a president, vice-president, and secretary.
  - a. Duties of the officers shall be specified in the bylaws.
  - b. The officers shall be voting members of the congregation.
  - c. Officers of this congregation shall serve similar offices of the Congregation Council and shall be voting members of the Congregation Council.
  - d. If the Congregational Council elects its officers, the president, vice-president, and secretary shall be selected from the elected membership of the Congregation Council.
- C11.02. The Congregation Council shall elect its officers and they shall be the officers of the congregation. The officers shall be elected by written ballot and shall serve for one year or until their successors are elected. Their terms shall begin at the close of the annual meeting at which they are elected.
- C11.03. No officer shall hold more than one office at a time. No elected officer shall be eligible to serve more than three consecutive terms in office.
- C11.04. Appointees are a financial secretary and a treasurer who are both appointed by the Congregation Council. These persons can be members of the Congregation Council. The duties of these positions are explained in the bylaws.

## **Chapter 12.**

### **CONGREGATION COUNCIL**

- C12.01. The voting members of the Congregation Council shall consist of the pastors and not more than 9 members of the congregation including the officers of the congregation. Any voting member of the congregation may be elected, subject only to the limitation on the length of continuous service permitted in that office. A member's place on the Congregation Council shall be declared vacant if the member:
- a. ceases to be a voting member of this congregation or
  - b. is absent from four successive regular meetings of the Congregation Council without cause.
- C12.02. The members of the Congregation Council except the pastor(s) shall be elected by Written (recorded) ballot to serve for 3 years or until their successors are elected. Such members shall be eligible to serve no more than two full terms consecutively. Their terms shall begin at the close of the annual meeting at which they are elected.
- C12.03. Should a member's place on the Congregation Council be declared vacant, the Congregation Council shall elect, by majority vote, a successor until the next annual meeting.
- C12.04. The Congregation Council shall have general oversight of the life and activities of this congregation, and in particular its worship life, to the end that everything be done in accordance with the Word of God and the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The duties of the Congregation Council shall include the following:
- a. To lead this congregation in stating its mission, to do long-range planning, to set goals and priorities, and to evaluate its activities in light of its mission and goals.
  - b. To seek to involve all members of this congregation in worship, stewardship, learning, witness, service, and support.
  - c. To oversee and provide for the administration of this congregation to enable it to fulfill its functions and perform its mission.
  - d. To maintain supportive relationships with the pastor(s) and staff and help them in the fulfillment of their calling, appointment, or employment.
  - e. To be examples individually and corporately of the style of life and ministry expected of all baptized persons.
  - f. To promote a congregational climate of peace and goodwill and, as differences and conflicts arise, to endeavor to foster mutual understanding.
  - g. To arrange for pastoral service during the sickness or absence of the pastor.
  - h. To emphasize partnership with the synod and churchwide units of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as well as cooperation with other congregations, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran, subject to established policies of the synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - i. To recommend and encourage the use of program resources produced or approved by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - j. To seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel.
- C12.05. The Congregation Council shall be responsible for the financial and property matters of this congregation.

- a. The Congregation Council shall be the board of directors of this congregation, and as such shall be responsible for maintaining and protecting its property and the management of its business and fiscal affairs. It shall have the powers and be subject to the obligations that pertain to such boards under the laws of the State of Wisconsin, except as otherwise provided herein.
- b. The Congregation Council shall not have the authority to buy, sell, or encumber real property unless specifically authorized to do so by a meeting of the congregation.
- c. The Congregation Council may enter into contracts of up to \$5,000 for items not included in the budget.
- d. The Congregation Council shall prepare an annual budget for adoption by this congregation, shall supervise the expenditure of funds in accordance therewith following its adoption, and may incur obligations more than \$1,000 in excess of the anticipated receipts only after approval by a Congregation Meeting. The budget shall include this congregation's full indicated share in support of the wider ministry being carried on in partnership with the synod and churchwide organization.
- e. The Congregation Council shall ascertain that the financial affairs of this congregation are being conducted efficiently, giving particular attention to the prompt payment of all obligations and to the regular forwarding of benevolence monies to the synodical treasurer.
- f. The Congregation Council shall be responsible for this congregation's investments and its total insurance program.

- C12.06. The Congregation Council shall see that the provisions of this constitution, its bylaws and the continuing resolutions are carried out.
- C12.07. The Congregation Council shall provide for an annual review of the membership roster.
- C12.08. The Congregation Council shall assist the pastor(s) in the appointment and supervision of the salaried lay workers of this congregation.
- C12.09. The Congregation Council shall submit a comprehensive report to this congregation at the annual meeting.
- C12.10. The Congregation Council shall normally meet once a month. Special meetings may be called by the pastor(s) or the president, and shall be called at the request of at least one-half of its members. Notice of each special meeting shall be given to all who are entitled to be present.
- C12.11. A quorum for the transaction of business shall consist of a majority of the members of the Congregation Council, including the pastor(s) or interim pastor, except when such person requests or consents to be absent and has given prior approval to an agenda of routine matters which shall be the only business of the meeting.

### **Chapter 13.**

#### **CONGREGATIONAL COMMITTEES**

- C13.01. The officers of this congregation and the pastor shall constitute the Executive Committee.

- C13.02. A Nominating Committee of five voting members of this congregation, two of whom shall be, if possible, outgoing members of the Congregation Council, shall be elected at the annual meeting for a term of one year. Members of the Nominating Committee are not eligible for consecutive re-election.
- C13.03. An Audit Committee of three voting members shall be elected by the Congregation Council. Audit Committee members shall not be members of the Congregation Council. Term of office will be three years, with one member elected each year. Members shall be eligible for re-election.
- C13.04. A Staff Support Committee or, in the absence of a staff support committee their duties shall be fulfilled by the Executive Committee, shall be appointed jointly by the president and the pastor(s). Term of office shall be two years, three members to be appointed each successive year. Committee members will hold no other office in the congregation during their term.
- C13.05. When a pastoral vacancy occurs, a Call Committee of five voting members shall be elected by this congregation. Term of office will terminate at installation of the newly-called pastor. The composition of the call committee, after prayerful consideration, should intentionally reflect the makeup of the congregation. There should be a diverse representation of gender, age, and ethnic/racial identity on the committee. All segments of the ministry of the congregation should be represented (Worship, Youth, Education, Evangelism, etc.). They should be strong spiritual individuals who are regular worshipers, prayerful, read Scripture regularly for their personal devotion, and those who share of their God given talents and resources. Beyond these considerations, there should also be a balance of long-term and newer members, people from different elements of the congregation, drawing upon a variety of contributing styles and gifts. This is not an appropriate place to invite an inactive member to become more active. This is also not an appropriate place for the congregation member who has an axe to grind or for a congregation member with an outspoken agenda that may not be in coordination with the mission of the congregation.
- It is advisable to have one congregation council member, who is not the president, sit on the Call Committee as a liaison. The council representative should not have a vote on the Call Committee. The council representative will report back to the Congregation Council on the progress of the Call Committee, but he/she may not violate the confidences of the Call Committee. The chairperson of the call committee will contact the Synod Office in order to schedule a call process orientation for the call committee.
- C13.06. Other congregational committees may be formed as the need arises, by decision of the Congregation Council.
- C13.07. Duties of congregational committees shall be specified in the bylaws.

#### **Chapter 14.**

### **ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION**

- C14.01. All organizations within this congregation shall exist to aid it in ministering to the members of this congregation and to all persons who can be reached with the Gospel of Christ. As

outgrowths and expressions of this congregation's life, the organizations are subject to its oversight and direction. This congregation at its meeting shall determine their policies, guide their activities, and receive reports concerning their membership, work, and finances.

- C14.02. Special interest groups, other than those of the official organizations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, may be organized only after authorization has been given by the Congregation Council.
- C14.03. All organizations of the congregation shall report in writing to the Congregation Council monthly.

## **Chapter 15.**

### **DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS**

- C15.01. Denial of the Christian faith as described in this constitution, conduct grossly unbecoming a member of the Church of Christ, or persistent trouble-making in this congregation are sufficient cause for discipline of a member. Prior to disciplinary action, reconciliation will be attempted following Matthew 18:15-17, proceeding through these successive steps:
- a. private admonition by the pastor(s),
  - b. admonition by the pastor(s) in the presence of two or three witnesses, and
  - c. citation to appear before the Congregation Council.
- C15.02. A member charged with the offense shall appear before the Congregation Council having received a written notice, specifying the exact charges that have been made against the member, at least 10 days prior to the meeting.
- C15.03. Should the allegations be sustained by a two-thirds majority vote of the Congregation Council, and renewed admonition prove ineffectual the council shall impose one of the following disciplinary actions:
- a. censure before the council or congregation;
  - b. suspension from membership for a definite period of time; or
  - c. exclusion from membership in this congregation. Disciplinary actions b. and c. shall be delivered to the member in writing.
- C15.04. The member against whom disciplinary action has been taken by the Congregation Council shall have the right to appeal the decision to the Synod Council. Such right may not be abridged and the decision of the Synod Council shall be final.
- C15.05. Disciplinary actions may be reconsidered and revoked by the Congregation Council upon receipt of:
- a. evidence that injustice has been done, or
  - b. evidence of repentance and amendment.
- C15.06. When there is disagreement among factions within this congregation on a substantive issue that cannot be resolved by the parties, members of this congregation shall have access to the synodical bishop for consultation after informing the President of the

Congregation Council of their intent. If the consultation fails to resolve the issue(s), the Consultation Committee of the synod shall consider the matter. If the Consultation Committee of the synod shall fail to resolve the issue(s), the matter shall be referred to the Synod Council, whose decision shall be final.

## **Chapter 16. BYLAWS**

- C16.01. This congregation may adopt bylaws. No bylaw may conflict with this constitution.
- C16.02. Bylaws may be adopted or amended at any legally called meeting of this congregation with a quorum present by a majority vote of those voting members present and voting.
- C16.03. Changes to the bylaws may be proposed by any voting member provided, however, that such additions or amendments be submitted in writing to the Congregation Council at least 60 days before a regular or special Congregation Meeting called for that purpose and that the Congregation Council notify the members of the proposal with its recommendations at least 30 days in advance of the Congregation Meeting.
- C16.04. Approved changes to the bylaws shall be sent to the synod.

## **Chapter 17. AMENDMENTS**

- C17.01. Amendments to this constitution may be proposed by at least 10% of the voting members or by the Congregation Council. Proposals must be filed in writing with the Congregation Council 60 days before formal consideration by this congregation at its regular or special meeting called for that purpose. The Congregation Council shall notify the members of the proposal with their recommendations at least 30 days in advance of the meeting.
- C17.02. A proposed amendment to this constitution shall:
  - a. be approved at a properly called meeting according to this constitution by a majority vote of those present and voting;
  - b. be ratified without change at the next annual meeting by a two-thirds majority vote of those present and voting; and
  - c. have the effective date included in the resolution and noted in the constitution.
- C17.03. Any amendments to this constitution shall be sent by the secretary of this congregation to the synod. The amendment shall become effective within 120 days from the date of the receipt of the notice by the synod unless the synod informs this congregation that the amendment is in conflict with the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or the constitution of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, ELCA.
- C17.04. Whenever the Model Constitution for Congregation is amended by the Churchwide Assembly, this constitution may be amended to reflect any such amendment by a simple majority vote at a prior meeting of the congregation, provided that the Congregation Council has submitted by the mail notice to the congregation of such an amendment or

amendments at least 30 days prior to the meeting. Following the adoption of an amendment, the secretary of the congregation shall submit a copy thereof to the synod, consistent with C17.03.

## **Chapter 18.**

### **CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS**

- C18.01. The Congregation Council may enact continuing resolutions which describe the function of the various committees or organizations of this congregation.
- C18.02. Continuing resolutions shall be enacted or amended by a two-thirds vote of all voting members of the Congregation Council.



**MISSION STATEMENT OF  
BETHLEHEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
PORTAGE, WISCONSIN**

Bethlehem is a community of Christians committed to serving our Lord, Jesus Christ, not only here in Portage, but also throughout the world, wherever and whenever He gives us the opportunity.

We respond to the Grace of God through spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ in worship, Sunday School, Vacation Church School, Confirmation and Adult Classes; through our service to our neighbors in time of need; and through the way we support and nurture one another with our financial giving and stewardship. We reach our beyond our community as we serve in active participation with the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin in the ELCA.

**Evangelism**

Evangelism is to be incorporated into every ministry of the church to stimulate concerted endeavors to reawaken the spiritually indifferent and to reach others, who are as yet unwon, with the Gospel and attach them to Christ's Church.

We reach out to others through our ministries of:

Christian Education

Worship and Music

Local and Global

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**BYLAWS OF  
BETHLEHEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
OF PORTAGE, WISCONSIN**

**Section I - CONGREGATION MEETING.**

- Item 1. The annual meeting of this congregation shall be held at a time and place to be determined by the Congregation Council, but not earlier than January 15, or not later than February 15, each year.

**Section II - ELECTIONS**

- Item 1. Nominees shall be presented by a Nominating Committee for each vacancy to be filled.
- Item 2. Further nominations may be made by any voting member of the congregation at the annual meeting of this congregation.

**Section III - DUTIES OF THE CONGREGATION COUNCIL OFFICERS AND APPOINTEES.**

- Item 1. The President shall preside at meetings of the congregation and of the Congregation Council, and be responsible for following through on the recommendations of the Congregation Council.
- Item 2. The Vice-President shall preside at meetings of the congregation and of the

Congregation Council in the President's absence. The Vice-President shall be responsible for any duties assigned by the President.

- Item 3. The secretary shall keep accurate minutes of all meetings of the congregation and of the Congregation Council in a volume provided by the congregation, which shall be preserved permanently in its archives.
- Item 4. The Treasurer or other appointed member (as determined by the BLC Financial Controls Manual) shall receive and keep record of all income from contributing members and other sources.
- Item 5. The Treasurer or other appointed member (as determined by the BLC Financial Controls Manual) shall keep the books of account of the congregation and shall receive from the money counters all funds and disburse them on proper orders, making monthly remittance of benevolence receipts to the treasurer of the synod.
- Item 6: Treasurer or other appointed member (as determined by the BLC Financial Controls Manual) will make regular remittance of benevolence receipts to the treasurer of the synod.
- Item 7. The Treasurer or other appointed member (as determined by the BLC Financial Controls Manual) shall make written reports of all financial transactions to the Congregation Council monthly and to the congregation, together with a satisfactory audit, at its Annual Meeting. All financial officers shall give corporate surety, in amounts determined by the Congregation Council for which the premium shall be paid by the congregation. Fidelity coverage provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be deemed a fulfillment of this requirement.

#### Section IV - Reports.

- Item 1. At the annual meeting of the congregation, an annual report of the Congregation Council shall be presented. The pastors, the secretary, the financial secretary, and the treasurer(s) shall submit reports in writing.

#### Section V - Fiscal Year.

- Item 1. The fiscal year of the congregation shall be from January 1 through December 31st. All schools, auxiliaries and organizations of the congregation shall conform thereto.
- Item 2. At the annual meeting the president of each auxiliary organization shall submit a brief report of the activities to be included with the Congregation Council report.
- Item 3. At the annual meeting the treasurer of each auxiliary organization shall render a properly audited report to the annual meeting, or a summary of such reports may be included in the auditors' report.

#### Section VI - Committees.

- Item 1. **Christian Education.** There shall be a committee on Christian Education. The committee on Christian Education shall appoint a Christian Education Coordinator on an annual basis who will be the chairperson of this committee. This committee, in association with the pastor(s), shall oversee the conduct and promotion of the school and the activities of all organizations within the congregation. It shall encourage the use of teaching and worship materials published or approved by the ELCA, and seek to introduce the church's

periodicals and books of family devotion into the homes of the congregation. One of the primary aims of the committee on Christian Education shall be to bring the call to the ministry of the Gospel and to other full-time church vocations to the attention of qualified youth of the congregation.

- Item 2. **Property.** There shall be a committee on Church Property. This committee shall see to the proper maintenance and protection of all property of the congregation, and shall take care that the same is kept in good repair.
- Item 3. **Finance.** There shall be a committee on Finance, of which the treasurer shall be a member ex officio. It shall prepare a draft budget for the succeeding year including this congregation's full indicated share in support of the wider ministry being carried on in its behalf by the ELCA and the synod, and shall submit such draft budget to the Congregation Council for its action and later presentation to a meeting of this congregation. The committee shall exercise oversight of all the financial affairs of the congregation to make sure that they are being conducted efficiently, giving particular attention to the prompt payment of all obligations and to the regular forwarding of benevolence monies to the synodical treasurer. It shall, subject to the approval of the Congregation Council, be responsible for the congregation's investments, and its total insurance program. It shall also provide for annual audits of the accounts of the treasurer and the financial secretary, if there be one, as well as of the accounts of the school and organizations within the congregation.
- Item 4. **Local & Global.** There shall be a committee on Local & Global Ministry. The purpose of this committee shall be to extend Christian compassion and helpfulness to the ill, the aged, the orphaned, the underprivileged, the imprisoned and, in general to persons of all ages in need of aid in body or soul. It shall strive to enlist in these efforts as many as possible of the individual members and organizations of the congregation. This committee shall further have the duty to study social conditions, primarily in the local community, in order to bring the cleansing and healing light of Christian truth to bear upon critical problems through thoughtful Christian discussion of facts and issues.
- Item 5. **Stewardship.** There shall be a committee on Stewardship, of which the treasurer shall be a member ex officio. It shall be the function of this committee to evoke and promote the expression of Christian faith in daily living; to teach the Christian use of money; to diffuse knowledge of the congregation's local, national and world-wide ministries; and to lead all its members to higher levels of proportionate giving for the Lord's work. This committee shall also be responsible for the annual Every Member Visit and other congregational efforts which lead to informed and grateful giving.
- Item 6. **Worship and Music.** There shall be a committee on Worship and Music. It shall assist the Congregation Council in seeing that the services of God's house are conducted regularly and in accordance with the liturgy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, that competent ushers are recruited and trained, and that hymnals and other devotional materials are provided and properly cared for. This committee shall supervise, and strive to advance the welfare and effective service of, the choirs of the congregation. It shall arrange for the care of paraments, vestments and musical instruments and, in consultation with the pastors, the organist and the choir director, it shall furnish music supplies appropriate for the use in the worship of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

## Section VII COMMUNICATIONS

- Item 1. All auxiliaries, committees, and other organizations of the congregation shall report in writing monthly to the Congregation Council and annually to the congregation.

## Section VIII - DECISION MAKING

- Item 1. Wherever possible, decisions shall be made at the committee level and reported to the Congregation Council which shall have the privilege of review and final judgment on all matters. The Congregation Council is encouraged to delegate responsibility for decisions so as to promote congregational participation and responsibility.

## Section IX - ANNUAL BUDGET

- Item 1. The Annual Budget shall be prepared by the finance committee with recommendations from each committee and the Pastor(s). The budget shall then be considered by the Congregation Council and submitted to the congregation for final approval.

## Section X - COUNCIL AUTHORIZATION TO BORROW (1/24/99)

- Item 1. The Congregation Council has authority to borrow up to and including \$20,000 (Twenty Thousand Dollars) without going to the congregation for approval.

## Section XI - MEMBERSHIP

Categories of membership activity shall be Active, Inactive and "Removed."

- A) ACTIVE - Active members shall be all who have a recorded communion and a financial contribution of record in the preceding calendar year.
- B) INACTIVE - Any active member who fails to record both a communion and a financial contribution in a calendar year shall automatically become inactive and may be notified of such change in membership status by the Congregation Council in writing.
- C) "REMOVED" - After three consecutive years an inactive member shall automatically become "Removed" from the church roll. Such change shall be noted by the Congregation Council though notice in writing need not necessarily be given.

## Section XII - RESTORATION TO MEMBERSHIP

Those persons who have been "Removed" from the church roll of this congregation can be restored to Active Membership by:

- A) Making at least one financial contribution of record in a calendar year, and
- B) Receiving Holy Communion (and having such participation in the Lord's Supper recorded) at least once in the same calendar year (as A), and
- C) Speaking with a Pastor of this congregation about restoration to membership.