

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST,  
COLUMBUS, OHIO**

**PREAMBLE**

As a community of faith, the members of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, are called to witness and serve, united by their acceptance of the following mutual covenant:

We covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ and with one another and bind ourselves in the presence of God to live together in all God's ways as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scripture.

We covenant with one another to worship, work, and serve God together so that we may express through our fellowship and our individual lives the love and faith taught by Jesus Christ.

In our commitment and desire to reach out and welcome all those in need of and searching for God's love,

we believe that we are all created in God's image, female and male, and that we are called to love our neighbors as Jesus loves us. We believe we are many members, but one body in Christ, and called to unite all people in God's love. We welcome and affirm all people. We invite those who are seeking God's presence in their lives to join us on our common journey. Our faith community seeks to unite persons of all ages, races, nationalities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, mental and physical abilities, socioeconomic levels, and political and theological backgrounds. Together in our diversity, and being empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit, we will strive to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8).

The church acknowledges that all members have the right of individual interpretation of the principles of the Christian faith and respects them in their honest convictions.

In accordance with the teaching of our Lord, the church recognizes two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion.

**ARTICLE I. NAME**

The name of this church is FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, COLUMBUS, OHIO.

**ARTICLE II. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the church is to provide for the worship of God and the spiritual enlightenment and improvement of the people of God; to further Christian fellowship among its members and among all people; and to promote, through its services and work, the practice of Christian love and discipleship.

### **ARTICLE III. POLITY**

- A. The church is a member of the United Church of Christ and therefore sustains that relationship to the United Church of Christ described in the constitution of the United Church of Christ relating to local churches.
- B. The government of the church is wholly vested in its members, who exercise the right of control in all its affairs subject to no other ecclesiastical body, but subject to the laws of the State of Ohio relating to non-profit corporations.

### **ARTICLE IV. MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in the church is open to any person who is in accord with the faith and covenant of the church, expressed in the Preamble of this Constitution. Members are expected to strive to live the Christian life, to foster diligently the spiritual welfare of their fellow members, to bring a Christian presence to the community and the world, and to their fullest abilities to participate in the worship services of the church and to support its benevolences, work and activities.

Membership may be active, associate, or inactive.

#### A. ACTIVE MEMBERS

All candidates recommended by a called minister and accepted by action of the deacons will be received into active membership at any regular service. Persons become active members by baptism and either confirmation or profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; by reaffirmation of faith; or by letter of transfer or certification from another Christian church.

#### B. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

All candidates recommended by a called minister and accepted by action of the Board of Deacons will be received into associate membership at any regular service. Members of other Christian churches wishing to participate in the life and work of the church may be received as associate members after attestation of membership in good standing of another Christian church. Associate members may not vote in congregational meetings or hold congregationally-elected positions. Associate membership is not meant to affect the associate member's relationship with another church.

#### C. INACTIVE MEMBERS

When a member of the church makes a written or electronic request to a called minister or the Board of Deacons, or when a member has for two consecutive years neither been in attendance at church services nor shared in the life of the congregation by financial support and/or service, the Board of Deacons may move the member to inactive membership status. Inactive members may not vote in congregational meetings or hold congregationally-elected positions. An inactive member may re-instate active membership upon written or electronic request.

#### D. TERMINATION

Active, associate or inactive members will be released from membership and may receive a letter of transfer from the Board of Deacons upon the member's written or electronic request to a called minister or the Board of Deacons.

The Board of Deacons may terminate an inactive member who has been inactive for three or more years, an action to be taken only after contact with the member, if contact is possible.

After the church's faithful, diligent and sustained but unsuccessful efforts to nurture a member's commitment to member expectations, as described in the opening paragraph of this Article, the Board of Deacons may terminate a person's membership.

#### **ARTICLE V. GOVERNANCE**

A. CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The governing body of the church is the membership assembled in a properly noticed Congregational Meeting. Sixty active members constitute a quorum.

B. VOTING

Except as otherwise provided in this constitution, the affirmative vote of a majority of active members present and voting at a properly noticed Congregational Meeting at which a quorum present, is the action of the church.

C. ANNUAL MEETINGS

The annual meeting of the congregation is held on the last Sunday of January of each year. At this meeting, the written annual reports of the Council, each of the elected officers, the Board of Trustees, the Board of Deacons, each of the Commissioners, all church organizations and the ministers will be submitted to the congregation and to the church archives.

D. SPECIAL MEETINGS

Council will call a special meeting of the congregation when Council deems it necessary or when a petition is received at a Council meeting, the petition to be signed by no fewer than thirty active members of the congregation. Council will schedule such a meeting within four weeks of its call or of receipt of the petition.

E. NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Written or electronic notice of meetings, with a summary of any actions to be voted on, will be sent to the members by the Secretary not less than two weeks prior to the meeting.

#### **ARTICLE VI. ELECTED OFFICERS**

The elected officers of the church are the Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer.

- A. **MODERATOR**  
The Moderator is the lead lay officer of the church and Council and presides at Congregational Meetings and meetings of Council. The Moderator undertakes special projects, such as long-range planning, as directed by the Council.
- B. **VICE-MODERATOR**  
The Vice-Moderator assists the Moderator in Council matters as requested by the Moderator, serves as Moderator in the absence of the Moderator, and is the Moderator-elect.
- C. **SECRETARY**  
The Secretary is responsible for the care and custody of records of church membership, baptisms, marriages, deaths, and other ceremonies and details. The Secretary prepares the official records of meetings of the congregation, Council, and the Executive Committee, and transmits the records to the church archives, for which the Council is responsible. The Secretary is responsible for notices of Congregational Meetings, Council and its Executive Committee.
- D. **ASSISTANT SECRETARY**  
The Assistant Secretary is the Secretary-elect and assists the Secretary in the record keeping and notices of the church. The Assistant Secretary serves as the Secretary in the absence of the Secretary.
- E. **TREASURER**  
The Treasurer is the custodian of all funds of the church, except those legally or specifically vested in the Board of Trustees. The Treasurer is responsible for recording and collecting all pledges and moneys to the church, makes all payments from funds as authorized by Council, and keeps separate accounts of funds received for separate purposes. The Treasurer makes monthly reports to Council.
- F. **ASSISTANT TREASURER**  
The Assistant Treasurer is the Treasurer-elect and assists the Treasurer in coordinating the finances of the church except those legally or specifically vested in the Board of Trustees. The Assistant Treasurer serves as the Treasurer in the absence of the Treasurer.
- G. **TERMS OF OFFICE**  
The officers are elected for terms of one year and for no more than two consecutive terms.

## ***ARTICLE VII. COUNCIL***

- A. **MEMBERSHIP**  
The Council is composed of the following voting members:  
Moderator

Vice-Moderator  
Senior Deacon  
One Deacon (chosen by the Deacons)  
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees (chosen by the Trustees)  
Secretary  
Treasurer  
One Member-at-Large  
One Youth Member-at-Large  
Chairperson of the Nominating Committee  
Seven Commissioners and seven Commissioners-Elect as follows:  
    (1) Administration  
    (2) Church Growth  
    (3) Education  
    (4) Justice and Mercy  
    (5) Music, Arts and Heritage  
    (6) Church Vitality  
    (7) House and Grounds

In addition to the voting members, the called ministers of the church are non-voting ex-officio members of Council. At the Moderator's discretion, others may be asked to participate in Council meetings.

The Assistant Secretary, the Assistant Treasurer, Commissioners-Elect, and Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Trustees will vote only when the corresponding Council member (the Secretary, the Treasurer, the related commissioner, or the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees) provides the Moderator notice of an intended absence.

## B. RESPONSIBILITIES

Council is the policy-making body of the church and transacts the business of the church. It determines the current operating budget, including the budget for missions and benevolences, and for raising the necessary funds to support the budget. It is responsible for the care and maintenance of the church's buildings and property; for the time and character of worship and other services; for the music and education programs; for church growth, outreach and missions; and for the fellowship life of the church. It coordinates with the Trustees in the development of long-range planning for the church, its needs, and its missions. Its actions are subject to the instructions of Congregational Meetings. It is responsible for the church archives.

### 1. COMMITTEES

Council organizes itself each year and forms such committees as will serve to further the purpose of the church. Each commissioner proposes the chairpersons of the committees within the commission and the members of those committees, with the approval of Council.

### 2. DELEGATES TO THE WIDER CHURCH AND ORGANIZATIONS

Delegates will be drawn each year by Council, first from the officer-elect positions, to represent the church in meetings or conferences with the wider church and other organizations. Delegates have no power to bind the church to financial obligations or to any definite action unless such power is expressly granted to them in the action of their appointment.

3. USE OF CHURCH PROPERTY

Council controls the use of church property for meetings other than those of the church, and the use of the church or its services for the promotion of any interests or organizations other than the church.

4. DUTIES AND TERMINATION

All persons serving in elected positions are to be regular and faithful in the discharge of their duties. Any individual contemplating an extended absence from the city or becoming unable to perform the proper functions of the position is expected to resign. Council may request the resignation of any individual inactive in respect to the duties of the position. If necessary, Council may declare the position vacant, and proceed to fill the vacancy in the manner provided in this constitution.

C. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1. MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Committee consists of the Moderator, the Vice-Moderator, the Secretary, the Treasurer, the Senior Deacon, and the Chairperson of the Trustees. The Senior Minister and the immediate Past Moderator serve as non-voting ex-officio members of the Executive Committee. The Assistant Secretary, the Assistant Treasurer, and the Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Trustees may attend and vote only when the corresponding Executive Committee member provides the Moderator notice of an intended absence. At the Moderator's discretion, others may be asked to participate in Executive Committee meetings.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

The Executive Committee provides coordination and leadership to Council, including establishing agendas for Council meetings and responding to requests by other church groups and staff related to important issues of the church, if such responsibilities are not otherwise provided for in this constitution.

3. MEETINGS

The Executive Committee meets monthly at the discretion of the Moderator.

D. MEETINGS OF COUNCIL

Council meets regularly on the third Tuesday of each month. By action of Council, the date of a regular meeting may be changed, in which event at least one week's written or electronic notice is given to each member of Council. Nine voting members of Council constitute a quorum.

Council may dispense with regular meetings during the months of July and August of each year, and may authorize the Executive Committee to act on its behalf during these months. Council may authorize the Executive Committee to act on its behalf on specific matters at other times.

Special meetings of Council are called by the Secretary either at the request of the Moderator, or upon the written request of five members of Council. Written or electronic notice of any special meeting will be given by the Secretary before such meeting, stating the purpose of the meeting. If time does not permit written or electronic notice, a reasonable effort will be made to notify personally all members of Council of the meeting.

### ***ARTICLE VIII. COMMISSIONS***

#### **A. ORGANIZATION**

Church activities not assigned to Council, elected officers, Board of Deacons, Board of Trustees, Nominating Committee, or staff are coordinated by the Commissions, whose responsibilities are as follows:

Administration - plan, coordinate, and evaluate the human and financial resources of the church;

Church Growth - promote the growth and development of the church;

Education - further the understanding of the Christian faith and of God's creation;

Justice and Mercy - reach out to and help people in need, foster what is right, seek peace, and effect change for a better world;

Music, Arts and Heritage - encourage the arts in the context of our liturgy and our building and preserve our heritage;

Church Vitality - develop relationships with and enhance fellowship and service among members of the congregation;

House and Grounds - maintain, repair, and improve the church building, furnishings, aesthetics, and landscape.

#### **B. COMMISSIONERS**

The Commissioners are elected from the active membership of the church for one-year terms and for no more than two consecutive terms. The Commissioners are responsible for the coordination of all committees and groups within their respective Commission. Each Commissioner is to coordinate and work with the other Commissioners and Council to bring about the best use of the church resources and to provide good communication with the church membership. Each Commission has a Commissioner-elect to assist the Commissioner and to serve in the absence of the Commissioner.

### **ARTICLE IX. BOARD OF DEACONS**

Fifteen deacons are elected from the active membership of the church, five of whom are elected at each annual meeting to serve a term of three years. The Deacons select a chairperson who is the Senior Deacon, as well as the Deacon representative to Council. The Deacons assist the

ministers in the spiritual direction of the church, including pastoral care, worship, celebration of the sacraments, other special services, and oversight of ushers. The Deacons have additional duties specified under Article IV Membership.

## **ARTICLE X. BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

### **A. ORGANIZATION**

There are nine Trustees. Eight are elected from active members of the church (two each year) for terms of four years, and the Moderator is an additional voting Trustee. The Senior Minister is a non-voting ex-officio member of the Trustees. Five voting members constitute a quorum for Board of Trustees meetings.

The Trustees may appoint from the active members of the church a treasurer and a legal counsel to serve as advisors to the Board of Trustees. Specialized legal counsel may be retained with the approval of Council.

At their first meeting following the annual Congregational Meeting, **members of** the Board of Trustees select from their members a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson who serves in the absence of the Chairperson; and they also select a secretary.

### **B. RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Trustees invest and disburse funds held by them in accordance with the instructions of donors. The Trustees consult with Council prior to authorizing the disbursement of such funds. The Trustees' authority in these matters is final except as legally directed by action taken at a Congregational Meeting. The Trustees hold, invest, and disburse other funds as requested by Council.

The Trustees coordinate with Council in the development of long-range planning for the church, its needs, and its missions, and actively encourage church members to contribute to the endowment funds and to make special gifts for the benefit of the church, its needs or its missions.

The Trustees ensure that adequate insurance for the church and its activities and property is maintained at all times. The Trustees make a financial report to Council at least quarterly and submit an annual financial report to the annual meeting.

### **C. MEETINGS**

The Board of Trustees meets monthly. By action of the Board, the date of a regular meeting may be changed, in which event at least one week's written or electronic notice is given to each member of the Board.

## **ARTICLE XI. NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS**

### **A. NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

The Nominating Committee has ten members. The Chairperson of the Nominating Committee is the immediate Past Moderator unless the individual is unable to serve, and in that case the Vice-



Moderator serves as chairperson. The committee is made up of active members of the church proposed by the Moderator and approved by Council and should reflect the diversity of the congregation. Six members of the committee serve three-year terms, two of whom are selected each year within two months after the annual meeting. Three at-large members serve one-year terms and are selected within two months after the annual meeting.

#### B. NOMINATIONS

Only active members of the church are eligible to be nominated for elected positions. The Nominating Committee makes nominations for Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, five Deacons, two Trustees, Members-at-Large, Commissioners, Commissioners-Elect, and Chairperson of the Nominating Committee. Public Notice of these nominations will be published at least two weeks prior to the annual meeting. Other nominations may be made from the floor at the annual meeting, provided the consent of the nominee was obtained.

#### C. ELECTIONS

At each properly noticed annual Congregational Meeting at which a quorum is present, Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, five Deacons, two Trustees, Member-at-Large, Youth Member-at-Large, Commissioners, Commissioners-Elect, and Chairperson of the Nominating Committee are elected by a majority of active members present and voting.

#### D. VACANCIES

For any position elected at an annual meeting, vacancies may be filled by Council for the period of time until the next annual meeting. Nominations for vacancies may be made by the Nominating Committee and/or from the floor of Council, provided the consent of the nominee was obtained.

### **ARTICLE XII. SENIOR MINISTER**

The Senior Minister is the called pastoral leader of the church and is responsible for the general welfare of the church. The Senior Minister is the spiritual leader and administrator of the church except on those matters which are otherwise specified in the constitution as being the responsibility of Council, Executive Committee, elected officers, Board of Deacons, Board of Trustees, Commissions, or committees. The Senior Minister consults and works with Council and with the appropriate individuals or groups in carrying out these responsibilities. The Senior Minister makes an annual report to the church at its annual meeting.

The Senior Minister, in agreement with the Moderator and Administration Commissioner and in consultation with others as needed, has responsibility on behalf of the church for selecting, hiring or calling, and dismissing staff.

### **ARTICLE XIII. CALLED MINISTERS**

#### A. VACANCY

When any position of a called minister becomes vacant, the Moderator reports it to the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the United Church of Christ or its successors.

**B. PASTORAL SEARCH**

Council appoints a pastoral search committee to select and recommend to Council a candidate for the position of minister. The pastoral search committee consults with Council and others as directed by Council concerning terms of employment, financial requirements of the committee, and other matters necessary or incidental to its task of selecting and recommending a minister. During the search and selection process the committee consults with the appropriate officials of the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the United Church of Christ or its successors to receive counsel and guidance.

**C. CALL**

When the pastoral search committee has selected and recommended a candidate who has been approved by Council, the Moderator calls a properly noticed special Congregational Meeting to consider the recommendation. In the proposed call, the terms of the relationship are stated including compensation, housing and other allowances, pension, health insurance, and other fringe benefits. With a quorum present, the affirmative vote of two-thirds or more of active members present and voting will constitute a call.

**D. DISSOLUTION OF CALL**

A called minister serves until relations with the church are terminated in accordance with the terms of the minister's call or by action taken at a properly noticed special Congregational Meeting at which a quorum is present. By the affirmative vote of two-thirds or more of active members present and voting at the meeting, the congregation may dissolve the call. Notice of termination will be sent by the Moderator to the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the United Church of Christ offices or its successors for appropriate action.

**E. INTERIM MINISTER**

Council may appoint an interim minister when necessary, and during this process consults with the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the United Church of Christ or its successors.

**ARTICLE XIV. PROPERTY**

**A. ACQUISITION**

The church may in its corporate name sue or be sued; acquire by purchase, gift, devise, bequest, or otherwise, and own, hold, invest, reinvest, or dispose of property, real and personal; and may purchase, own, receive, hold, manage, care for or transfer, rent, lease, mortgage, or otherwise encumber, sell, assign, transfer, or convey such property for the general purposes of the church. It may receive and hold real and personal property in trust and invest or reinvest the same and enter into contracts to further the objectives and purposes of the church.

B. TRANSFER

Any real property or any interest therein owned legally or beneficially, to be used or available for use by the church for its Purpose (Article II), may be transferred or mortgaged to secure loans to it only by action taken by the affirmative vote of two-thirds or more of active members present and voting at a properly noticed Congregational Meeting at which a quorum is present.

C. DISPOSITION

In the case of the dissolution of the church, its assets and all property and interests of which it then possesses, including any bequest, gift, devise, or grant contained in any will or other instrument in trust or otherwise, made before or after such dissolution, will not be distributed among the members, but will be distributed to any other affiliated church organization(s) whose objectives and purposes are similar to those of the church as expressed in Purpose (Article II) herein only by action taken by the affirmative vote of two-thirds or more of active members present and voting at a properly noticed Congregational Meeting at which a quorum is present.

**ARTICLE XV. AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS**

Except as otherwise provided in this constitution, any organization which is either a part of the church or primarily dependent upon the church for its continuance will be operated, supervised, or controlled by Council. Its form of organization and any change thereto are subject to approval by Council. No such organization may incur any obligation without approval by Council, and its financial records will be audited periodically as directed by Council.

**ARTICLE XVI. FISCAL YEAR**

The fiscal year of the church is the calendar year.

**ARTICLE XVII. RULES OF ORDER**

Robert's Rules of Order (the current edition) is the parliamentary authority for all matters of procedure not specifically covered by this constitution.

**ARTICLE XVIII. AMENDMENTS**

The Preamble (includes Faith and Covenant), Articles I (Name), II (Purpose), III (Polity), IV (Membership), V (Governance), and Articles XIV (Property), and XVIII (Amendments) may be amended at a properly noticed Congregational Meeting at which a quorum is present by the affirmative vote of two-thirds or more of active members present and voting. All other articles may be amended at a properly noticed Congregational Meeting at which a quorum is present by the affirmative vote of a majority or more of active members present and voting.

Public Notice of such a meeting and the text of the proposed amendments(s) will be given by written or electronic means, bulletin or letter at least three weeks prior to the meeting.

Articles I, II, and III of this constitution constitute the "Articles" as set forth in the laws of the State of Ohio relating to non-profit corporations. Any amendments to these "Articles" are not effective until filed with the Secretary of State of Ohio.