

**MODEL CONSTITUTION
FOR
LOCAL CHURCHES**

**(FOR LOCAL CHURCHES CONSISTING OF A SINGLE CONGREGATION OR
A CLOSELY-KNIT GROUP OF CONGREGATIONS)**

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or a closely-knit group of Congregations}

1. **NAME**
The Local Church is known as
..... Church. (hereinafter called the Church).

2. **GOVERNMENT**
 - 2.1 The Church is constituted of those who have become members in terms of Clause 3 of this Constitution.

 - 2.2 The Church is a constituent Church of the United Congregations Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and acknowledges itself bound by the constitution and the accepted Procedures of the UCCSA.

 - 2.3 In all matters of administration, order and discipline the Church is essentially autonomous, subject to the Constitution of UCCSA and the limitations placed upon it by this Constitution.

 - 2.4 The Local Church in its organisational aspect and form is a corporate body with power to own and hold property (immovable, moveable and incorporeal) in its own name as well as the power to sue and be sued in its own name.

3. **MEMBERSHIP**

The essential conditions of membership of this Church are:
 - Confessions of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour;
 - Belief in One God who has revealed Himself to men as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit;

- Acceptance of the Bible as the record of the Word of God containing all that is necessary for salvation through faith in Christ;
- A simple reliance on Christ for Power to carry out His teaching in daily living;
- Acceptance of the constitution of the Church and a willingness to uphold its honour and extend its witness by the consecration of individual gifts of time, talent and means;
- A desire to glorify God in all things and to seek the extension of His Kingdom in worship, fellowship, witness and service.

The membership of the Church consists of:

- 3.1 All who have been received into Church membership and whose name appears on the Church Roll at the date when this Constitution is adopted by the Church.
- 3.2 New members who may be admitted to membership:
 - On confession of faith in Jesus Christ;
 - On transfer from other recognised Churches by the presentation of satisfactory certificates of transfer or similar credential from the Church of their last communion.
- 3.3 The names of all members are recorded in the Membership Roll of the Church. No name is removed from the Roll except by vote of the Church.
- 3.4 Admission to Membership:
All applications for membership are placed before the Diaconate. On the recommendation of the Diaconate the names are submitted to a Church Meeting. If accepted by the Church Meeting, the new members are received into the Church at a subsequent Communion Service and thereafter their names are placed on the Membership Roll of the Church.
- 3.5 Removal of Members:
Transfer certificates are granted on application to members in good standing who leaves the Church.
- 3.6 Discipline of Members:
Any members may be disciplined or dismissed from membership of the Church on the recommendation of the Diaconate duly confirmed by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present at a duly constituted Church Meeting. All disciplinary measures are in conformity with the Constitution of the UCCSA.
- 3.7 Lapse of Membership:
When members have been absent from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or failed to meet their financial obligations to the Church for a full year, without cause, their membership is regarded as having lapsed.
4. MEETINGS
- 4.1 The Church Meeting:
The Church Meeting is the representative gathering of the Church for worship and fellowship; the admission and dismissal of members; for the reception of reports of Church organisations, the Regional Council and denominational and ecumenical bodies; for the general administration

of the affairs of the Church and for the discussion and decisions on matters pertaining to the service of Christ and the Kingdom of God. It is the Church assembled in order that the Holy Spirit may direct its members in all things, according to the mind of Christ.

4.2 Ordinary Church Meetings:

Church meetings are normally held each month or at such other intervals as the Church may decide. Church meetings to be duly convened are announced at the services of the preceding Sunday.

4.3 Special Church Meetings:

These may be called by the Minister, the Diaconate or at the request of the Regional Council.

Special Church Meetings to be duly convened are announced at the services of the two preceding Sundays prior to the date of the meeting. The notices convening the meeting states fully the purpose for which it is called. No other business is discussed at the meeting.

4.4 Annual Church Meeting:

The Annual Church Meeting is held within three months after the end of the financial year, and to be duly convened it is announced at the services of the two preceding Sundays, prior to the date of the meeting. The following items are included in the Agenda of the Annual Church Meeting: Annual Reports by the Minister, Secretary and Treasurer (who submits financial statements audited by a suitable qualified person or persons), and various Church organisations; Election of Officers and Deacons as required, and such other business as may be approved by the Diaconate.

4.5 General:

4.5.1 The Minister of the Church, by virtue of his office, presides at all Church Meetings except at meetings convened in terms of Clause 5 (iv) of this Constitution, when the chairman of the meeting will be the Minister appointed for this purpose by the Administrative Committee of the Regional Council.

4.5.2 In the event that a quorum is not attained, the meeting is postponed for 8 days and members present at such postponed meeting are competent to deal with the matter before it.

4.6 Voting:

Only Church Members in good standing are entitled to vote.

5. PASTORATE

5.1 Every minister of the Church is to be a fully accredited minister or of the UCCSA, or a minister approved by the UCCSA.

5.2 In calling a minister, or in terminating his services, the Church observes the requirements of the constitution of UCCSA and the Regional Council of which it is a member.

5.3 A minister is to be elected by not less than three fourths of the members present at a Church Meeting convened for that purpose. Voting is by ballot.

- 5.4 A minister has the right to terminate the pastoral tie at any time, provided he/she has given three months' notice, in writing, to the Church Council.
- 5.5 The Church, in like manner, has the right to terminate the services of its minister by a majority vote of the members of a Church Meeting convened for that purpose. Voting is by ballot. The Chairman at such meetings is a minister duly appointed by the Regional Council.
- 5.6 During this notice period, the local church is still responsible for all emoluments, and the minister is required fully to exercise his/her Ministerial Functions.
- 5.7 By mutual agreement between the minister and the local church, the three months' notice and payment of emoluments requirements may be waived.
- 5.8 During a vacancy in the pastorate, a minister duly appointed according to the constitution of Regional Council presides at all Church and Deacons' Meetings.
- 5.9 The minister by virtue of his/her office is a member ex-Officio of all the organisations and committees of the Church.
- 5.10 At the death of a minister the church ensures that the minister's spouse receives the stipend of the minister for three months and permits the continued occupation of the manse for three months.

6. THE DIACONATE

- 6.1 The Church elects from amongst its members deacons.
- 6.2 Deacons serve for a period of three years at the end of which they will be eligible for re-election as the church may determine.
- 6.2.2 Nominations must be submitted to the Church Secretary in writing and voting is by ballot.
- 6.3 The duties of a deacon are to assist the minister in all that concern the spiritual life of the Church, and to administer the affairs of the Church in such a manner as the Church Meeting may decide.
- 6.4 Any deacon may be removed from office on a two-thirds majority vote of a duly constituted Church Meeting.
- 6.5 The Church Council:
The Church Council consists of all deacons plus such members as determined by the Church from time to time. Meetings are held monthly. The Minister presides at such meetings or, in his/her absence, his/her deputy.

The functions of the Church Council are those of the church Meeting, and it acts on the Church's behalf in between meetings. The Church Council makes recommendations to the Church meeting and all decisions are subject to the confirmation of the Church Meeting.

7. CHURCH OFFICE BEARERS / OFFICIALS

The Church continues to exist notwithstanding changes made from time to time in the election of office bearers.

7.1 Church Secretary:

The church elects one of its members as Secretary, who, if he is not a deacon, is a deacon ex-officio. The Church Secretary keeps adequate minutes of all Church – and Deacon’s Meetings in a suitable minute book and fulfils such other duties as are normally expected of a Secretary.

7.2 Church Treasurer:

The Church elects one of its members as Treasurer, who, if he/she is not a Deacon, is a Deacon ex-officio. The Treasurer receives contributions, pays salaries and accounts regularly and keeps proper account books, which are audited annually. The Treasurer prepares an annual financial statement for presentation of the Church Meeting.

7.3 The Church does not pay any emoluments to its officials and members.

8. FINANCE

8.1 A banking account is kept at a registered bank in which all monies received are deposited without delay. At the discretion of the Church, savings or other accounts may be opened with a registered bank or an accredited financial institution.

8.2 All cheques and withdrawals from banking and saving account are signed by at least two persons one of whom is normally the Treasurer.

8.3 All offertory and other monies are checked by at least two deacons after every service and the amount entered and counter-signed in a special book kept for that purpose.

8.4 All payments are by cheque.

8.5 The Church Treasurer, Secretary, two Deacons and three members elected by the Church comprise the Finance Committee of the Church and elect their own Chairperson.

8.5.1 Among other duties and functions of the Committee are the following:

8.5.1.1 To prepare an annual budget for approval by the Church.

8.5.1.2 To raise and administer funds as authorised by the Church.

8.5.1.3 To raise and forward money for special appeals as determined by the Church.

8.5.1.4 To review the stipend of the minister and other employees of the church from time to time and make appropriate recommendations to the Church Council.

8.5.1.5 To ensure the payment of funds in terms of the accepted practises of the Church.

8.5.1.6 The Finance Committee meets monthly and submits its report to the Church Council.

8.6 The financial year of the Church ends on each year.

9. OTHER COMMITTEES

The Church appoints such other Committees as may be necessary to fulfil its objects and functions.

10. PROPERTY

10.1 The Church, by resolution of a duly constituted Church Meeting, may acquire by way of purchase, donation, exchange, lease, and mortgage or otherwise alienate any of its interest.

10.2 The Church, by resolution of a duly constituted Church Meeting, may at any time permit the Church premises to be repaired, altered or enlarged, taken down, and wholly or partially rebuilt, or sanction the erection of any other buildings so as to render the premises more suitable for the fulfilment of the purposes set forth in this constitution.

10.3 All immovable properties hereafter acquired by the Church are vested in three trustees of the Church, namely the Minister or Acting Minister, the Secretary, and the Treasurer of the Church for the time being, who hold them in trust for the Church.

11. UNION WITH OTHER LOCAL CHURCHES

The Church has the right to negotiate a union with another local church, either of the UCCSA or another denomination, and to take all the steps necessary to give effect thereto. Any such union requires a three-quarters majority vote of those present and entitled to vote at a Special Church Meeting convened for the purpose. The proposed union also required the approval of the Synod.

Prior to the formal act of uniting, the Church dissolves itself and, after all liabilities have been met, the property and assets of the Church are transferred to the newly constituted united Church.

12. DISSOLUTION OF THE CHURCH

The Church may, by resolution taken by not less than two thirds of its members at a special church meeting, called for that purpose, decide to dissolve. The Chairperson of such meeting is a minister appointed by the Regional Council of which the Church is a member. The church allows a representative of the UCCSA to be present and participate in such special meeting where the issue of dissolution is discussed.

In the event of the Church, for any reason other than uniting with another local church, being dissolved, the assets of the Church, after all liabilities have been met, vest in the UCCSA.

13. AMENDMENT OF CONSTITUTION

The Church has the right hereafter to make any amendments to this constitution provided such amendments do not conflict with the provision of the UCCSA Constitution, and provided further that the proposed amendments are affirmed by a resolution passed by a majority of not less than three fourths of the members present at a Church Meeting, duly convened for that purpose. All such amendments must be approved by the Assembly or its Executive Committee in terms of chapter 6.5.13 of the UCCSA Constitution.