

# MODEL CONSTITUTION FOR LOCAL CHURCHES

## (FOR LOCAL CHURCHES ORGANISED AS A CIRCUIT)

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{For local churches organized as a Circuit}

#### 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.

#### 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 recognized 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 Deaconate. On the recommendation of the Deaconate, 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 Deaconate 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 Congregational Meeting:  
A congregation consists of all the members attached to a recognized outstation or group of outstations regarded as an entity. The congregation of the Church where the minister resides is called the Central congregation. Meetings of each congregation are held monthly, if possible, and not less than once a quarter. The meeting is preceded by a meeting of the Deacons of the congregation.

The minister presides at congregational meetings when present, and in his absence, the resident deacon-in-charge. The congregational meeting has power to deal with the following:

- 4.1.1 All matters relating to the services of worship, the reception and transfer of members, the normal activities of the congregation, and the maintenance of Church property at that place.
- 4.1.2 The election of its own deacons, Secretary and Treasurer.
- 4.1.3 A quorum for a congregational meeting is ..... members.

#### 4.2 Church Meeting:

The Church consists of all congregations falling under the pastoral care of the minister residing in the place of the Central congregation. The Church meets annually or more often if deemed necessary. The Chairman is the minister, or in his absence or during a vacancy a minister appointed thereto by the Administrative Committee of the Regional Council. Every member of the Church in good standing is entitled to attend and vote. When a Church Meeting is convened, notices are given to each congregation.

The functions of the Church Meeting are:

- 4.2.1. To receive reports on the work of each congregation from the deacon-in-charge, together with reports from the, secretary, treasurer and the Mission Council. Reports of the meetings of the Regional Council are presented to the Church Meeting.
- 4.2.2. To review the work of the whole Church in all its aspects and to plan all matters relating to the maintenance extension and spiritual welfare of the church.
- 4.2.3. To approve the reception and dismissal of all members.
- 4.2.4. The Church Meeting is authoritative in all matters of dispute, discipline and doctrine and where its decisions prove unacceptable appeal may be made to the Regional Council and dealt with in terms of the Constitution of the said Council.
- 4.2.5. The Church meeting is deemed fully constituted when not less than .....% of the congregations is represented.

#### 4.3 The Deacon's Court /Church Council:

The Deacon's Court/Church council consists of all deacons elected by the congregations, which comprise the Church. Meetings are held not less than once a quarter. The Minister presides at such meetings or, in his absence, or during a vacancy, a minister appointed thereto by the Regional Council.

These functions of the Deacons Court are those of the Church Meeting, and it acts on the Church's behalf in between meetings. All decisions of the Deacons' Court are subject to the confirmation of the Church meeting.

#### 5. PASTORATE

- 5.1 Every minister of the Church is to be a fully accredited minister 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.

In the event of the Church Meeting resolving to terminate the minister's services, the Church Council is required to give three months' notice in writing to the minister.

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 organizations 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 Each congregation elects from 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.

6.2.1 Nominations are submitted to the Secretary of the local congregation in writing and voting is by ballot. The appointment of a deacon by a congregation is subject to the confirmation of the Church meeting.

6.3 The duties of a deacon are to assist the minister in all that concerns 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 Deacon's Court / Church Council:

The Deacon's Court/Church Council consists of all deacons elected by the congregations, which comprise the Church. Meetings are held not less than once a quarter. The Minister presides at such meetings or, in his absence, or his/her deputy.

The functions of the Deacons' Court / Church Council are those of the church Meeting, and it acts on the Church's behalf in between meetings. All decisions of the Deacons' Court 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 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.

7.4 Each congregation appoints a local treasurer 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 to 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.

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 practices 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 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 6.6.13 of the UCCSA Constitution.