

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, U.C.C., OF BENNINGTON, VERMONT

ARTICLE I – Name

The name of this church shall be the Second Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ located in Bennington, State of Vermont.

ARTICLE II – Purpose

The avowed purpose of this church shall be to worship God, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the Sacraments; to realize Christian Fellowship and unity within this church and the Church Universal; to render loving service toward humanity; and to strive for righteousness, justice, and peace.

ARTICLE III – Polity

1. This church shall be part of the United Church of Christ and it shall sustain that relationship to the United Church of Christ described in those portions of the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ adopted July 4, 1961, relating to local churches.
2. The government of this church is vested in its members, who exercise the right of control in all the affairs, subject however to the laws of the State of Vermont relating to ecclesiastical corporations.

ARTICLE IV – Faith and Covenant

FAITH: This church acknowledges as its sole head, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of humankind. It acknowledges as brothers and sisters in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own. In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among evangelical Christians, it recognizes two Sacraments – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion.

One expression of faith is:

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and Our God, and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being,
create persons in your own image
and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness
and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will
declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth,
our crucified and risen Savior,
you have come to us
and shared our common lot,
conquering sin and death
and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the Church of Jesus Christ
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages,
tongues, and races.

You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust you
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.

Statement of Faith in the Form of a Doxology of the United Church of Christ

ARTICLE V – Membership

1. Membership in this church shall be open to any person who has been baptized and has either been confirmed or has made public confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In accordance with the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ which recognizes that, in the church of Jesus Christ, God binds together "faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races," the Second Congregational Church of Bennington, Vermont, hereby reaffirms its openness to people of faith, or in search of faith, without regard to age, race, sex, economic condition, disability, or sexual orientation. We invite all to share in the worship, life, leadership and employment opportunities of the church.
2. Active members shall pledge themselves to attend the regular worship of the church; to contribute to its support and benevolences; and to seek diligently the spiritual welfare of the membership of the community.
3. Any member may, on his/her request, be granted a letter of transfer. If wishing to join a body not in fellowship with this church, he/she may be dismissed with a certificate of church membership.

4. The church will welcome as associate members any persons who have made a request to join this congregation and offer gifts of their presence, their talents, and/or their financial support for its ministries of service while maintaining their membership of record in another Christian church. Such associate members shall have full voting rights except in proposed changes to Article Three of this Constitution.
5. The local church is a community of believers. We share a common covenant and commitment to our Lord, the world, and each other. Community, covenant and commitment require constant nurturing, renewal, and support from the Holy Spirit and each other. Association with this community requires participation in its life and support of its programs with personal involvement and/or money. Those who because of ill-health or lack of financial resources cannot participate in those ways are still full members. However, those who, for whatever reason, are able to participate but choose not to shall be put on an inactive list or on a non-resident list by the Deacons. After two years on the list, unless there are good reasons for continuing them, the Deacons may instruct the Clerk to remove them from membership. At any time while they are on one of those lists they will be moved back, at their request, to the list of active members in order to return to active participation or to receive a letter of transfer to another church.

ARTICLE VI – Officers

The Officers of the Church shall be a Moderator, a Vice-Moderator, Clerk, and Treasurer. They shall all be Church Members and shall be elected by the Congregation at its Annual Meeting. In case of temporary absence, illness, or other inability of an officer to perform the functions of his or her office, the Administrative Council shall designate a Church Member to act in the place of the officer for a maximum of two months.

1. The Moderator shall serve a term of one year and shall be eligible for reelection for a second one-year term. He/she shall be Moderator of all meetings of the Church and shall preside over all meetings of the Administrative Council. The Moderator shall be an ex officio member of all Boards and committees.
2. The Vice-Moderator shall serve as Moderator when the Moderator is unable to do so, and shall ordinarily become Moderator when the Moderator has finished his or her final term.
3. The Clerk shall serve a term of one year and shall be eligible for reelection. He/she shall keep a complete record of all affairs of the Church, including membership, transfers, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. When not otherwise provided for, the Clerk will conduct all correspondence authorized in the name of the congregation or the Administrative Council. He/she shall keep on file all official communications and written reports and shall give legal notice of all meetings of the Church and perform all other duties that usually pertain to secretaries of assemblies.
4. The Treasurer shall serve for a one year term and shall be eligible for reelection. He/she shall be responsible to insure that (a) all monies are properly received and disbursed as directed by appropriate officers or bodies of the church, (b) complete records of receipts and disbursements and all appropriate documentation are kept, and, (c) the status of finances is reported monthly to the Trustees and Annually to the church.

ARTICLE VII – Administrative Council and Boards

A. Administrative Council

The Administrative Council shall consist of the Moderator, Vice Moderator, Clerk, Treasurer, and the Chairs of the two Boards and of the Ministries Council. The Moderator shall serve as Chair of the Administrative Council. The Pastor shall be a non-voting member. Members of the Administrative Council must be members of the church.

1. Election: The Moderator, Vice Moderator, Clerk, Treasurer, and Chair of the Ministries Council shall each be elected by the Annual Meeting for a term of one year. The Chairs of the two Boards shall be elected annually by the Boards. To the extent possible, the makeup of the Council shall reflect the diversity of the congregation. After serving two consecutive full terms, members shall be ineligible for reelection until they have been out of office for one full year.
2. Responsibility: The Administrative Council shall be considered the governing body of the church and shall, between meetings of the congregation, have the authority to act for the congregation in all matters except for: the amendment of the Bylaws, the calling or termination of a pastor, the purchase or sale of real property, the adoption of a budget, or actions contrary to specific decision made by the congregation. It shall be the body of the church responsible for policy making and accountability. The Council shall present budgets, nomination slates and other matters to the church, gathered in congregational meeting, with recommendation for adoption or rejection.
3. Meetings: The Administrative Council shall hold meetings as it deems necessary, but at least six times a year. All meetings shall be open to members of the congregation and information about the date, time, location, and major topics to be considered shall be available to the congregation at least a week in advance.
4. Task Forces and Committees: The Administrative Council shall establish Task Forces and Ad Hoc Committees as it deems necessary. There shall be no automatic cutoff for the length any such group can continue, but they shall be expected to dissolve when the task has been completed. All such groups shall be required to operate within the limits of the Bylaws and adopted church policies.

B. Boards.

There shall be two Boards, Deacons and Trustees. The Board of Deacons shall have six members and the Board of Trustees twelve, elected by the congregation for terms of three years, with approximately one third expiring each year. After serving two consecutive full terms, they shall be ineligible for reelection until they have been out of office for one full year. Both Boards shall report to the Administrative Council as requested and, annually, to the congregation. Any Board may assign tasks or duties, within the limits of these Bylaws and church policies, to committees, sub-committees, or task forces. Each such sub-body must be reauthorized at least once each year or it will expire. These bodies normally include non-board members. The Board will inform the Council when such bodies are created, reauthorized, or ended.

The duties of the Boards are:

1. The Board of Trustees shall supervise all business affairs of the Church. It shall be responsible for the use, care, and maintenance of the building and grounds, for coordinating the preparation of the annual budget, for stewardship interpretation and support, and for the Endowment. The Treasurer shall be an ex officio member.

2. The Board of Deacons shall, together with the pastor, minister to the spiritual needs of the Church, provide comfort to the sick and needy, and provide for the administration of the Lord's Supper. It shall secure supplies for the pulpit in the absence of the Pastor. It shall see that worship is adequately supported by ushering, music, and chancel supplies and appointments. It shall promote regular attendance and fellowship among current members, encourage additional persons to join, and take responsibility for dealing with membership standing according to the principles articulated in Article V, parts 1. and 5. It shall have control over the Deacons' Fund and Memorial Funds.

C. Vacancies: It shall be the responsibility of the Administrative Council to fill any vacancies on the Council or Boards until the next regular or special meeting of the church. It shall also have the power, in the case of the prolonged absence or inability or unwillingness of any officer to perform his or her functions, to declare the position vacant.

ARTICLE VIII – Ministries

A. Ministries Council

There shall be a Ministries Council which shall consist of the Chair, who shall be elected by the Annual Meeting, the Coordinators of Program Areas, the Chairs of active Ministry Task Forces or Teams created by the Ministries Council, and four Members at large. The Ministries Council shall meet as often as it deemed needed but at least quarterly.

Responsibilities – The Ministries Council shall coordinate the various ministries of the church, promote mutual support, and minimize duplication in both programs and expenditures. It shall evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of programs. It shall see to it that activities undertaken in the name of the church are within the limits of the Bylaws and church policies. It may create coordinators (in addition to those listed in the Bylaws or created by the Annual Meeting), at large task forces, and teams for meeting needs and acting within the limits of the Bylaws and adopted church policies.

B. Coordinators

There shall be coordinators of such areas as Mission, Child Education, Youth Education, Fellowship, Pastoral Relations, as seen needed by the Ministries Council and confirmed by the Administrative Council. The Ministries Council shall nominate and the Administrative Council confirm persons to fill these positions for terms of three years, renewable for one more three-year term. Coordinators shall encourage individuals or groups having a passion to perform a service in their ministry areas to do so, within the limits of the Bylaws and adopted church policies. Coordinators shall also identify needs within those areas and recruit task forces to meet them. Coordinators will be members of and report to the Ministries Council and, annually, to the congregation.

ARTICLE IX – Pastor

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Pulpit Committee appointed by the Administrative Council, to seek a candidate for a vacancy in the office of Pastor. The Committee shall follow the procedures prescribed by the United Church of Christ for seeking a new Pastor.

2. The Pulpit Committee shall present to the Church the name of the candidate it recommends to fill the vacancy. A favorable vote of the Church constitutes a call. In the call, the terms of the relationship shall be stated, and other terms agreed between the candidate and the committee. The Minister, the Church, the Association and the Conference shall each receive a copy of the call.
3. When a minister accepts a call to the Church, the Church and he/she shall join in requesting the Association to arrange for a service of installation or recognition. A report of this service shall be signed by the proper officer of the Association and by the Conference Executive and copies shall be sent to the Secretary of the United Church of Christ and to the Council for Church and Ministry.
4. The Pastor shall be elected for an indefinite period and in order to terminate this relationship, three months notice shall be given by either party. The procedure shall be in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.
5. The duties and responsibilities of the Pastor to the congregation and of the congregation to the Pastor shall be set forth in a covenant agreed to by both.
6. When either party decides to terminate the relationship:
 - a. If the Pastor decides to terminate the relationship, he or she is to give 90 days notice to the Administrative Council.
 - b. Termination of the relationship by the Church must be at a duly called Church Meeting and by a majority vote. Any severance arrangements should be negotiated by the Pastor and Administrative Council and will also be subject to a vote at a meeting.
 - c. When the relationship has been terminated, notice of such termination shall be sent by the Clerk to the Conference Executive and to the Association Registrar for appropriate action.
7. Discipline of the Pastor shall be in conformity with the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.
8. The Church may, at its discretion, choose an Assistant or Associate Pastor(s).
9. When a former Pastor of the Church continues as an active member, the Church may name him or her a Pastor Emeritus or Emerita. The title shall be one of honor but shall not, of itself, confer on the holder any leadership responsibility. A Pastor Emeritus/Emerita shall be encouraged by the Pastor to contribute to the life and program of the Church in appropriate ways.

ARTICLE X – Meetings

1. The Annual Meeting shall be held no later than the fourth Sunday in January and proper warning shall be given, prior to the meeting date, at least twice from the pulpit on Sundays and at least once in each regular Church publication. At this meeting the annual reports of the various boards and officers shall be presented, officers elected, the budget for the calendar year adopted, and such other business transacted as may be specified in the call or authorized by the Bylaws. All reports made at the Annual Meeting shall be in writing and for the preceding calendar year.
2. Special Meetings shall either be called in the manner specified for the Annual Meeting or by a first class mailing sent to all active members at least one week before the date, upon request of the Pastor or of the Administrative Council or on written application by five members of the church.

ARTICLE XI – Quorum

The members present shall constitute a quorum.

ARTICLE XII – Dissolution

Any dissolution of the Second Congregational Church of Christ located in Bennington, State of Vermont, shall be by a vote of two-thirds of the total number or members on the Clerk's list of Active Members of the church as of the date of the vote at a Special Meeting called in accordance with the provisions of Article I, Section 2. above. In the event of such dissolution, its assets are to be distributed to the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ or its successor and, if so voted, other organizations organized and operated exclusively for educational, charitable, or religious purposes.

ARTICLE XII – Amendments

These Bylaws may be amended at any meeting by a majority of all members present, the proposed amendment having been submitted in writing to the Moderator and circulated among the members of the Church at least two weeks before being voted upon. Proposed amendments may be submitted by a Council, a Board, or by written and signed request by ten active members.

Stewart E. Allen, Chairman
Frederick A. Burt
Milton Pinsker
R. Marshall Witten
Claire Williams, Secretary

Adoption, amendment and revision history:

Accepted as amended by unanimous vote, March 23, 1966
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