

# **Constitution First Covenant Church Omaha, Nebraska**

Adopted December, 1999

## **PREAMBLE**

The Evangelical Covenant Church has its roots in historical Christianity as it emerged in the Protestant Reformation, in the biblical instruction of the Lutheran State Church of Sweden, and in the great spiritual awakenings of the nineteenth century. These three influences have in large measure shaped its development and are to be borne in mind in seeking to understand its distinctive spirit.

The Covenant Church adheres to the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation regarding the Holy Scriptures, the Old and the New Testament, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. It has traditionally valued the historic confessions of the Christian Church, particularly the Apostles Creed, while at the same time it has emphasized the sovereignty of the Word over all creedal interpretations. It has especially cherished the pietistic restatement the doctrine of justification by faith as basic to its dual task of evangelism and Christian nurture, the New Testament emphasis upon personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the reality of a fellowship of believers which recognizes but transcends theological differences, and the belief in baptism and the Lord's Supper as divinely ordained sacraments of the church. While the denomination comes out of a tradition in which infant baptism has been the primary understanding and practice, the Covenant chooses to respect the biblical positions of both infant and believer baptism equally. The principle of personal freedom, so highly esteemed by the Covenant, is to be distinguished from the individualism that disregards the centrality of the Word of God and the mutual responsibilities and disciplines of the spiritual community.

This document, which is in harmony with the above preamble, is the constitution and bylaws of the First Evangelical Covenant Church of Omaha, Nebraska

## **ARTICLE I NAME**

The name of this church shall be FIRST EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH of Omaha, Nebraska.

## **ARTICLE II AFFILIATION**

The church is a member of The Evangelical Covenant Church and its Midwest Conference and is pledged to work in harmony with the denomination and conference.

## **ARTICLE III CONFESSION of FAITH**

The church believes in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and the New Testament, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.

## **ARTICLE IV PURPOSE**

The purpose of this church shall be to unite Christians in fellowship for spiritual development, for the winning of persons to Christ, and for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to serve one another, this community, and the world through Christian education, home and world mission, and the institutions conducted by the Evangelical Covenant and its local regional conferences.

## **ARTICLE V MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in the church shall be granted on application to those who through faith in God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, have been born anew to a living hope, have been baptized according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to live a Christian life, and promise to support the total ministry of the church and to share its fellowship and obligations.

## **ARTICLE VI OFFICERS**

The officers of the church shall be a chair, a vice-chair, a secretary, a vice-secretary, a financial secretary and a treasurer .

## **ARTICLE VII CHURCH BOARDS**

The general administration of the church shall be vested in the executive board, the board of trustees, the diaconate, and the board of Christian education and discipleship. Each of these church boards shall report to the congregational business meetings of the church. The executive board shall consist of the pastor(s), the chair, the vice-chair, the secretary, the vice-secretary, the financial secretary, the treasurer, the chairs of the other church boards, and the chair of Covenant Women Ministries. The executive board shall coordinate the working of the other church boards. Motions to be presented by the other church boards to the congregational business meetings for action must be first considered by the executive board.

## **ARTICLE VIII PROPERTY**

### Section 1

In order to accomplish the purposes of the church (Article IV), the church shall own and control such property as shall be deemed necessary, and shall also have power and authority to accept and convey title to property, both real and personal, and to receive donations, devises or bequests of real or personal property for the promotion of its work.

### Section 2

In the event of schism within the church, from which we earnestly pray God to spare us, the title of all church property, real or personal, shall remain with the group that abides by the constitution, as determined by the executive board of the conference. In the event of dissolution, the property and all assets of the church shall become and be the property of The Evangelical Covenant Church and the Midwest Conference.

## **ARTICLE IX AMENDMENT**

Amendments in harmony with this constitution and the Model Constitutions for Local Covenant Churches and not in conflict with Covenant principles and policies may be adopted by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting in an annual meeting of the congregation, providing the proposed amendment was presented in written form at the preceding annual meeting. Articles VIII and IX may be amended only with the approval of the executive board of the regional conference.

## **BYLAWS**

### **ARTICLE I MEMBERSHIP**

#### Section 1. Admission into membership

##### a) Application for membership

Application for membership shall be placed with the pastor or a member of the diaconate. Applicants shall appear before the diaconate to give a confession of Christian faith according to Article V of the constitution. When the diaconate have reviewed their applications and received their testimonies favorable, their applications shall be submitted to the next congregational business meeting for approval.

##### b) Transfer of membership

Applications from other Christian churches shall submit letters of transfer, when available, to the pastor and/or the diaconate who shall act upon each application according to the requirements of paragraph (a) in this section.

##### c) Reception of new members

New members shall be publicly received as arranged for by the congregation.

#### Section 2. Children of members

Children of members of the church and its constituency shall be nurtured under its spiritual care. When they have reached confirmation age, they shall receive instruction in the Word of God, Christian doctrine, and the history of the church, using the confirmation material of the Covenant Church. Following confirmation, they may apply for church membership as outlined under Section 1, paragraph (a) if this article.

#### Section 3. Responsibility of membership

All members of the church shall assume the responsibilities and obligations placed on them by the Word of God and the church;. They shall through witness and word, consecrated service, prayer, and financial support further the cause of Christ in the local church, regional conference, and Covenant denomination.

#### Section 4. Discipline

##### a) Negligent members

Members who absent themselves from fellowship of the congregation without just cause shall, after an absence of one year, at the discretion of the diaconate, and upon notice, be designated inactive members. Inactive members, during the year following such designation, may be restored to regular membership status by request through a pastor(s) or the chairman of the diaconate, and by

renewed participation in public worship and in other church activities. Members remaining on inactive status for one year, upon recommendation of a pastor(s) and approval of the diaconate, shall be removed from church membership.

b) Erring members

Any member known to err in doctrine or conduct shall be counseled according to the procedure outlined in

Matthew 18: 15-18, and Galatians 6:1. Any member having knowledge of such error shall, in the spirit of Christian love, seek to restore the erring member. If he or she does not heed this counsel, the matter shall be brought to the attention of the diaconate who shall in meekness and gentleness, seek to restore the member. If this fails, the diaconate shall recommend actions to a congregational business meeting. Discipline shall then be administered in the spirit of Christ with due regard for the welfare of the member as well as the church.

c) Dismissal of members

Dismissal of a member under paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section must be acted on by the church, which alone has the authority. A two-thirds vote of those present and voting at a congregational business meeting is necessary for such action.

d) Forfeiture of rights

A member who has been properly dismissed from the church, or has withdrawn membership, has forfeited all rights and privileges of membership in the church.

Section 5. Transfer of members

Members who move to another community shall be encouraged to identify themselves with a local Covenant church. If there is not a Covenant church, they should identify themselves with some other evangelical Christian church. Application for transfer of membership be made in writing to the pastor(s) who shall issue the transfer to the church with which a member is uniting. Withdrawal of said membership shall be reported, through the diaconate, to the next congregational business meeting, where it shall be made a matter of record.

Section 6. Removal of membership

Request for withdrawal from membership in the church shall be made in writing to the pastor(s) or the diaconate. After careful consideration, the diaconate may present a recommendation for withdrawal to a congregational business meeting of the church.

Section 7. Non-member Friends

Non-member parish friends shall be enrolled by the church as a part of its total constituency. The church and its pastor(s) shall serve them in all their spiritual needs, and they shall be encouraged to make this as their church home. They shall be kept informed of the activities of the church.

## **ARTICLE II SENIOR PASTOR**

Section 1. Qualifications

The senior pastor of the church shall meet the New Testament requirements of the office (I Timothy 3: 2-7) be a member of the Covenant Ministerium, and follow the Rules for the Ordained Ministry of The Evangelical Covenant Church. He/She shall be by virtue of call, a member of the church.

## Section 2. Duties

The senior pastor shall be devoted to the service of the church, preaching and teaching the Word of God, administering the sacraments, and faithfully giving to pastoral work. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member of all boards and committees of the church.

## Section 3. Cooperation

The senior pastor shall, both in word and precept, work in harmony with the Covenant, the regional conference, and other Covenant ministers; provide the church with an accurate record of pastoral acts, and present a written report to the congregational annual business meeting and practice good administrative procedures and cooperate with the church boards.

## Section 4. Call

The senior pastor shall be called at a regular or special congregational business meeting, the purpose of which shall be announced two weeks in advance. The pastor shall be nominated by a pastoral search committee. This committee shall be elected by a congregational business meeting. It shall be representative of the congregation and have five to nine members and shall work closely with the regional conference superintendent. The senior pastor shall be called by ballot with a two-thirds majority of those members present and voting required for a call. The call shall be for an indefinite period of time with a minimum of six weeks' notice required by the church or the pastor for termination of pastoral duties.

## Section 5. Charges Against a Pastor

Charges against a senior pastor shall be submitted in writing to the executive board, charging a pastor with indiscretion, immorality, doctrinal error, unethical behavior, or disloyalty to the Covenant (Matthew 18: 15-18). If, in the judgment of the executive board of the church, there is substance to the charges, the case shall be referred to the regional conference superintendent. The superintendent shall confer with the Covenant executive director of the ministry. These two officers shall confer and determine the order of responsibility in pursuing the matter according to the Rules for the Ordered Ministry of The Evangelical Covenant regarding discipline, prior to further action by the church.

# **ARTICLE III STAFF MINISTERS**

## Section 1. Qualifications

Staff ministers shall meet the spiritual and professional requirements of the office to which they have been called. Full-time staff ministers shall by virtue of call become members of the church. Part-time staff ministers shall be encouraged to become members of the church.

## Section 2. Duties

Staff ministers shall devote themselves to the service of the church according to the specific duties to which they have been called by the congregation.

## Section 3. Cooperation

Staff ministers shall, both in word and precept, work in harmony with the Covenant, the regional conference, and other Covenant ministers. They shall provide the church with an accurate record of their activities, and present a written report to the congregational annual business meeting. They shall practice good administrative procedures and cooperate with the church boards and work in harmony with the senior pastor.

#### Section 4. Call

##### a) Full-time

Full-time staff ministers shall be called at a regular or special congregational business meeting the purpose of which shall be announced two weeks in advance. Staff ministers shall be nominated by a search committee appointed by the executive board and approved by a congregational business meeting, and they shall be called by ballot with a two-thirds majority of those members present and voting, required for a call.

##### b) Part-time

Part-time staff ministers shall be called by the executive board upon recommendation of the appropriate search committee and approved by a congregational business meeting.

#### Section 5. Charges Against a Staff Minister

Charges against a staff minister shall be submitted in writing to the executive board, charging a staff minister with indiscretion, immorality, doctrinal error, unethical behavior, or disloyalty to the Covenant (Matthew 18: 15-18). If, in the judgment of the executive board of the church, there is substance to the charges, the executive board shall determine the disciplinary action.

#### Section 6. Resignation or Termination

Four weeks notice shall be required by the church or the staff minister for resignation or termination of duties.

### **ARTICLE IV OFFICERS**

#### Section 1. Qualifications

Officers of the church shall be members in good standing who are active in the support of the ministry of the church.

#### Section 2. Chair

The chair shall preside at all business meetings of the church and of the executive board. The chair shall confer with the senior pastor in preparing the agenda for such meetings, and shall utilize the counsel that the pastor can give by virtue of his or her training, experience, and calling. In the absence of the pastor(s) and staff, the chair along with the diaconate, shall be responsible for the leadership of the church worship services.

#### Section 3. Vice-chair

The vice-chair shall assume the duties of the chair in his or her absence, and assist in the chair's duties.

#### Section 4. Secretary

The secretary shall keep and preserve the minutes of all business meetings of the church and of the executive board, and shall conduct and preserve all official correspondence as shall be delegated, and shall be responsible for the official seal and documents of the church.

#### Section 5. Vice-secretary

The vice-secretary shall assume the duties in the absence of the secretary, and shall assist the secretary.

#### Section 6. Financial Secretary

The financial secretary shall receive, record, and transmit to the church treasurer all funds contributed to the church.

## Section 7. Treasurer

The treasurer shall be responsible for all funds committed to him or her, and shall make disbursements as authorized by the church or the board of trustees. The treasurer shall present a written report of the receipts and expenditures to each regular business meeting of the church

## **ARTICLE V BOARDS**

### Section 1. Qualifications

Members of all boards shall be members in good standing who are active in the support of the ministry of the church.

### Section 2. Executive Board

The executive board shall consist of the full-time ministry staff, the chair, the vice-chair, the secretary, the treasurer, the financial secretary, chairs of the other church boards, and the chair of Covenant Women Ministries. This board shall report to the congregational business meetings. The board shall not take over the responsibilities of the other boards and committees, except in emergency situations. The responsibility of the executive board shall include the following:

- a) To discuss and deliberate on such matters and problems that arise in the activities of the church, review the programs and ministries of the church, coordinate the work of the church boards, receive reports and recommendations and take action as needed.
- b) To ensure that decisions of the congregation are carried out.
- c) To encourage representatives of various groups and organizations within the church to present concerns and issues to the board for consideration.
- d) To appoint members to all standing committees and give direction to those committees.
- e) To review and coordinate the church calendar.
- f) In event of the resignation or death of an elected officer or board member, to appoint a replacement to serve until the next annual meeting.

### Section 3 Board of Trustees

a) The board of trustees shall consist of 9 members. The chair shall report to the congregational business meetings of the church. The trustees shall direct the financial needs of the church, receive the monthly reports of the church treasurer and the financial secretary, exercise proper supervision over church properties, arrange for adequate insurance coverage for all church properties and for possible liabilities, and arrange for payment of salaries, honorariums, purchases, and all other obligations authorized by the annual budget or the congregation at a business meeting.

b) The board of trustees shall present a budget to the congregation for its actions at the annual meeting of the church. They shall submit a financial report of all assets and liabilities to the annual congregational meeting. The trustees shall have the authority, by their own decision to expend up to \$10,000.00 for maintenance and repair of the church. If in a serious emergency more funds are needed, the trustees must confer with the executive board of the church for authorization to spend more funds. The trustees are not authorized to dispose of or purchase real property for the church except as directed by a duly call congregational business meeting.

c) It shall be the responsibility of the board of trustees to provide the pastors and staff of the church with equipment necessary for the efficient work of the church. They shall reimburse staff for reasonable expenses incurred in the service of the church, according to the church budget. They shall, in consultation with the executive board, annually review the compensation of each member of the church staff in the process of planning the annual budget for the church.

d) The trustees shall, immediately after the annual meeting of the church elect from their own number a chair, a vice-chair, a secretary. They shall organize into two committees:

1. Finance Committee

Responsible for the church budget and finances of the church.

2. House Committee

Responsible for the physical property of the church buildings and grounds

#### Section 4 Diaconate

The diaconate shall consist of 9 members who shall be responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church and assist the pastors in administering the sacraments, and in the absence of the pastors, together with the chair of the church, be responsible for the services of the church. They shall be authorized to receive and administer benevolence and care for the sick and the needy. They shall meet following the annual meeting and organize themselves by electing a chair, a vice-chair, a secretary, and such other officers and committees as may be needed to conduct their work.

#### Section 5 Board of Christian Education and Discipleship

The board of Christian education and discipleship shall consist of 9 members. They shall be responsible for the educational and discipleship program of the church, its curriculum, teachers, counselors, and leaders. They shall meet following the annual meeting of the congregation and elect its own chair, and secretary, and in general organize itself for effective service.

This board shall annually appoint the Sunday School Superintendent and Vice-Sunday School Superintendent who may be re-appointed for another term or terms, but in no case may they be re-appointed for a total of more than three consecutive terms.

### **ARTICLE VI COVENANT WOMEN MINISTRIES**

Covenant Women Ministries shall be a community of women whose purpose is to share Christ's ministry of reconciliation and advance the kingdom of God through worshipping, working, and witnessing in all areas of life, church, home, community, nation and the world. They shall be affiliated with the Central District of the Midwest Conference of the National Organization of Covenant Women Ministries. All women of First Covenant Church shall by virtue of their church membership be a member. The chair of Covenant Women Ministries shall be nominated by its members and shall be subject to congregational approval at the annual meeting.

### **ARTICLE VII COMMITTEES**

#### Section 1. Pastoral Relations Committee

The pastoral relations committee shall consist of the chair of the church and the chair of each church board. The committee shall work toward effective relationships between the congregation and the pastoral staff and evaluate the ministry of each pastor. The committee

shall annually review the compensation of the pastoral staff and recommend adjustments to the budget committee of the board of trustees.

## Section 2. Nominating Committee

a) The nominating committee shall consist of the pastor, one representative each from the diaconate, board of trustees, and board of Christian education and discipleship, and two members at large from the church, to be appointed by the church chair.

b) The nominating committee, after being convened by the church chair, shall elect from its members a chair and a secretary. The responsibility of this committee shall include the following:

(1) Prepare a ballot for the annual meeting of the congregation listing at least one qualified candidate for each office to be filled.

(2) Confirm the willingness of each candidate to serve before listing his or her name on the ballot.

(3) Present a complete ballot to the annual meeting of the congregation. This shall constitute completion of the committee's assignment, unless given specific responsibilities at said annual meeting.

## Section 3 Budget Committee

The board of trustees shall be responsible for preparation of the operating budget. The vice-chairman of the church together with the chairman of the board of Christian education and discipleship, the diaconate, the board of trustees, the Covenant Women Ministries shall be responsible for preparation of the missions (benevolent) portion of the budget. The vice-chairman of the church shall serve as chair of the committee.

## Section 4. Standing Committees

Standing committees shall be under the supervision of and be appointed by the executive board for a term of two years. A member may be re-appointed for an additional two year term. Approximately 50% of each committee shall be re-appointed each year. Vacancies occurring during a term shall be filled by the executive board.

### 1. Missions Committee

The Missions committee shall consist of 5 members and shall organize to carry out the missions program of the church.

### 2. Stewardship Committee

The stewardship committee shall consist of 5 members and shall be responsible for establishing and maintaining an ongoing stewardship program.

### 3. Music Committee

The music committee shall consist of 5 members and shall exercise general oversight of the music program of the church. This committee shall serve as the search committee for the hiring of all part-time music staff and shall conduct an annual review of the church music staff.

### 4. Long Range Planning Committee

The long range planning committee shall consist of 5 members and shall be under the direction of the executive board and concern itself with long range church planning and setting up of recommended goals and objectives.

5. Christian Literature Committee

The Christian literature committee shall consist of 5 members and shall be responsible for selection of new materials for the library as well as for the maintenance and supervision of the library.

6. Hospitality Committee

The hospitality committee shall consist of 5 members and shall be responsible for making arrangements for housing and feeding guests of the church.

7. Endowment Committee

The endowment committee shall consist of 5 members and under the direction of the executive board shall be responsible for the assets in the endowment fund of the church.

8. Auditor(s)

The auditor(s) shall be responsible for an annual audit of the accounts of the church.

9. Memorial Committee

The memorial committee shall consist of 5 members and under direction of the executive board, shall be responsible for designated and un-designated memorials, in keeping with the needs of the church.

10. Special Committees

Special committees for specific purposes shall be approved by any duly constituted business meeting of the congregation or the executive board according to need. A committee shall be automatically terminated at the next annual meeting, unless specifically extended by said annual meeting.

## **ARTICLE VIII MEETINGS**

### Section 1. Public Services

Public services shall be conducted regularly on Sunday and, when deemed appropriate, on weekdays for worship, preaching and teaching of God's Word, and prayer.

### Section 2. Celebrating the Sacraments

The sacrament of Holy Communion shall be celebrated monthly or as determined by vote of the church. The sacrament of baptism shall be celebrated in keeping with Covenant policies and according to the needs of the constituency.

### Section 3. Congregational Business Meetings

Congregational business meetings shall be held quarterly. Special meetings of the congregation may be called by the chair of the church in consultation with the pastor(s) or by the executive board of the church.

### Section 4. Board Meetings

The church boards shall meet at least bimonthly, and more often if necessary.

## **ARTICLE IX ORGANIZATIONS**

Section 1. All organizations within the church shall be organized and conducted in harmony with the church and its purposes. Other organizations may be formed if permission is granted by

two-thirds vote of members present at a business meeting of the church. The constitutions of all organizations shall be ratified by the Executive Board of the church. Their programs, methods of financing and other activities shall conform to the Christian ideals of the church. The members of their executive committees and a majority of the members of the program committee of each shall be members of the church. The senior pastor shall be an ex-officio member of the executive and program committees of all church organizations.

Section 2. Each organization shall present to the annual meetings of the congregation a general report of its activities including a financial statement.

Section 3. Should any organization be found to work contrary to the purposed of the church, such organization may be dissolved by the congregation, upon recommendation of the Executive Board.

## **ARTICLE X GENERAL PROVISIONS**

### Section 1. Quorum

- a) Thirty members present and voting at a congregational business meeting properly called shall constitute a quorum.
- b) The quorum for all board and committee meetings of the church shall be a majority of its membership.

### Section 2. Tenure

The chair, the vice-chair, the secretary, the vice-secretary, the treasurer, and the financial secretary shall be elected annually for a term of one year and shall not succeed themselves more than three-times in the same office. Members of the diaconate, the board of trustees, and the board of Christian education and discipleship, shall be elected by the congregation at the annual meeting for terms of three years each, in such an order that approximately one-third of the terms of three years expire each year. Church officers and board members shall have a one year sabbatical following the completion of their term(s).

### Section 3. Rules of Order

All business meetings of the church and of the boards, committees, and organizations of the church shall be conducted according to the latest edition of "Robert's Rules of Order" newly revised.

## **ARTICLE XI AMENDMENTS**

Amendments to these bylaws not in conflict with the constitution may be adopted at any regular congregational business meeting or at a special business meeting called for that purpose by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting providing that such amendments have been presented in writing to the executive board of the church and at a preceding regular congregational business meeting.

