



The Constitution of
Bethel Lutheran Church
Fergus Falls, Minnesota

As Revised on April 1st, 2019

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**THE CONSTITUTION OF
BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH
Fergus Falls, Minnesota**

**ARTICLE I
NAME**

The name of this congregation shall be Bethel Lutheran Church of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, a congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America.

**ARTICLE II
DOCTRINAL STATEMENT OF FAITH**

1. The Bible, including both Old and New Testaments as originally given, is the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God and is free from error in the whole and in the part, and is therefore the final authoritative guide for faith, doctrine, and conduct.
2. There is one God eternally existent in three distinct persons in one divine essence, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. God the Father has revealed Himself as the Creator and Preserver of the universe, to Whom the entire creation and all creatures are subject.
4. God created Adam and Eve in His image to live in fellowship with Him. They fell into sin through the temptation of Satan and thereby lost fellowship with God. Through their disobedience the entire human race became totally depraved, that is, self-centered sinners who oppose God, and who by nature are unable to trust, fear, or love Him. They are subject to the devil, and are condemned to death under the eternal wrath of God.
5. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, is the image of the invisible God. To accomplish our redemption, He became fully human, being conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man, by His perfect obedience and substitutionary death on the cross, has purchased our redemption. He arose from the dead for our justification in the body in which He was crucified. He ascended into heaven, where He is now

seated at the right hand of God, the Father, as our interceding High Priest. He will come a second time personally, bodily, and visibly to gather the believers unto Himself and to establish His millennial kingdom. He will judge the living and the dead and make an eternal separation between believers and unbelievers. His kingdom shall have no end.

6. The Holy Spirit is a divine person eternally one with the Father and with the Son. His ministry is to call and regenerate repentant sinners and to sanctify believers and preserve them in the one true faith. He guides and comforts the children of God, directs and empowers the Church in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.
7. The knowledge and benefit of Christ's redemption from sin is brought to the human race through the means of grace, namely the Word and the sacraments.
 - a. Through the Word of the Law God brings sinners to know their lost condition and to repent. Through the Word of the Gospel He brings sinners to believe in Jesus Christ, to be justified, to enter the process of sanctification, and to have eternal life. This occurs as the Holy Spirit awakens them to see their sin, convicts them of their guilt of sin, and calls them to repent and believe, inviting and enabling them to accept God's grace in Christ. Each one who thus believes is instantly forgiven and credited with Christ's righteousness. The Word then teaches and guides the believer to lead a godly life.
 - b. In the sacrament of baptism, God offers the benefits of Christ's redemption to all people and graciously bestows the washing of regeneration and newness of life to all who believe. God calls the baptized person to live in daily repentance, that is, in sorrow for sin, in turning from sin, and in personal faith in the forgiveness of sin obtained by Christ. By grace we are daily given the power to overcome sinful desires and live a new life in Christ. Those who do not continue to live in God's grace need to be brought again to repentance and faith through the Law and Gospel. Because the sinfulness of human nature passes on from generation to generation and the promise of God's grace includes little children, we baptize infants, who become members of Christ's believing church through baptism. As they mature they need to come to know that they are forgiven sinners with a sinful nature that opposes God. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, they need to confess their sinfulness and yield to God, and possess for

themselves forgiveness of their sin through Jesus Christ, as they are led from the faith received in infant baptism into a clear conscious personal faith in Christ as their Lord and Savior, and being assured of salvation, rely solely on the finished work of Christ, and the power of the Gospel to live as children of God.

- c. In the sacrament of holy communion, Christ gives to the communicants His body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. He declares the forgiveness of sins to all believers, and strengthens their faith.
8. Eternal salvation is available to every living human being on earth by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This salvation consists of an instantaneous aspect and an ongoing, continual aspect.
- a. Justification is God's gracious act by which He, for Christ's sake, instantaneously acquits repentant and believing sinners and credits them with Christ's righteousness. At that moment, God gives each one who believes a new and godly nature and the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctification. There is no place for human effort in justification.
 - b. Sanctification is God's gracious, continual work of spiritual renewal and growth in the life of every justified person.

Through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit works to reproduce the character of Christ within the lives of all believers, instructing and urging them to live out their new nature. The Holy Spirit enables believers more and more to resist the devil, to overcome the world, and to count themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in and bestows spiritual gifts upon all believers. He calls, empowers and equips them to serve God in the home, in the community, and as part of the Church Universal. The process of sanctification will be complete only when the believer reaches glory.

9. The Church Universal consists of all those who truly believe on Jesus Christ as Savior. Bethel Lutheran Church is an assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. Bethel's confessing membership shall include only those who have been baptized into "the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," confess personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by word and life, and accept the constitution of Bethel Lutheran Church.

10. The Lutheran confessions are a summary of Bible doctrines. We adhere to the following confessional writings: The Apostles' Creed, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism.

ARTICLE III SYNODICAL MEMBERSHIP

This congregation is a member of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and operates in harmony with the Constitution and bylaws of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. In its relationship to the synod, Bethel Lutheran Church practices the congregational form of church government, functioning as an autonomous congregation. The synod serves Bethel Lutheran Church in an advisory, not in a ruling capacity.

ARTICLE IV MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ so that people come to faith in Jesus and live for Him.

ARTICLE V CHURCH MANAGEMENT

1. Christ is the Head of the Church
Through His Spirit, Christ guides the Church by His Word. According to His Word, He has established specific offices to advance the Church's ministry, and He provides the gifts of grace necessary for those offices to function effectively. Among these gifts we especially recognize the office of pastor, and teaching and governing elders for the leadership of the congregation. (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5; Acts 6:2-6; Philippians 1:1)
2. Voting Membership
The voting membership is made up of confessing members who are eighteen years of age or older.
3. Elder Board [see Bylaws for duties of Elder Board]
In keeping with the New Testament model of choosing elders to lead

the congregation, the lead pastor and elders shall constitute the Elder Board, and to this body the congregation as a whole commits its direction.

The Elder Board acts for the church in all matters pertaining to the spiritual and physical affairs of the congregation. As the church's governing body, it may delegate business or ministry functions to various ministry teams.

No organization under the jurisdiction of the congregation shall organize or disband without the approval of the Elder Board. The Elder Board shall consider elections and other matters of primary importance before it is brought to the business meeting of the congregation for discussion and final decision. This shall not negate the congregation's right to amend the agenda by a two-thirds majority vote.

a. Pastor/s

For the office of pastor, the congregation shall call a man who is a true Christian, who accepts the Constitutions of Bethel Lutheran Church and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, who otherwise has the necessary qualifications and is listed on the Church of the Lutheran Brethren clergy roster or has been approved by the Synodical Council, pending formal listing on the clergy roster. The pastor's primary calling, according to Ephesians 4:12-13, is "to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." He is to give particular attention to the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. The pastor/s of the congregation shall be approved for call by the process described in the bylaws.

b. Elders

The office of elder shall be filled by men who have the spiritual qualifications and abilities as designated in the Scriptures (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-3) and are confessing members of the congregation, recognized as men of faith, integrity and maturity. Elders are nominated by the Elder Board and elected by the congregation. Elders are ordained or installed into office by the congregation: ordained if they are new to the office, installed if they have been previously ordained.

4. Officers

a. Chairman

The chairman of the congregation and of the Elder Board shall be one and the same as provided in the bylaws.

b. Vice-Chairman

The vice-chairman of the congregation and of the Elder Board shall be one and the same as provided in the bylaws.

c. Secretary

The congregation shall establish the office of secretary as provided in the bylaws.

d. Treasurer

The congregation shall establish the office of treasurer as provided in the bylaws.

5. Ministry Teams and Committees

a. Facilities Ministry Team

The Facilities Ministry Team shall serve under the general supervision of the Elder Board and shall exercise responsibility for the congregation's physical assets, as provided in the bylaws.

b. Children's Ministries Team

The Children's Ministries Team shall serve under the general supervision of the Elder Board and shall exercise responsibility for all church ministries established for children, birth through sixth grade, as provided in the bylaws.

c. Youth Ministries Team

The Youth Ministries Team shall serve under the general supervision of the Elder Board and shall exercise responsibility for all church ministries established for youth, grades seven through twelve, as provided in the bylaws.

d. Women's Ministries Team

The Women's Ministries Team shall serve under the general supervision of the Elder Board and shall exercise responsibility for all church ministries established for women as provided in the bylaws.

- e. Deacons and Deaconesses Ministry Team
The Deacons and Deaconesses Ministry Team shall serve under the general supervision of the Elder Board and shall exercise responsibility for the congregation's benevolence programs as provided in the bylaws.
- f. World Mission Team
The World Mission Team shall serve under the general supervision of the Elder Board and shall exercise responsibility for all church engagement related to cross cultural missions as provided in the bylaws.
- g. Nominating Committee
The nominating committee shall present a slate of candidates for each office except for the office of elder. Nominations for Elder shall be made by the Elder Board. Such nominations are subject to election by the congregation at its annual meeting as provided in the bylaws.
- h. Audit Committee
The audit committee verifies and reports on the accuracy of the congregation's financial records as provided in the bylaws.

ARTICLE VI PROPERTY AND DISSOLUTION

All property of the congregation shall be deeded to the congregation itself and held in its corporate name. No property of the congregation shall be sold, leased, mortgaged or otherwise disposed of without the same having first been approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the membership in attendance at a business meeting duly called for the specific consideration of the proposal. The chairman, secretary, and treasurer of the congregation shall certify in such conveyance, lease, or mortgage, that the same has been duly authorized and approved by the congregation.

If a division should ever occur in this congregation, which God forbid, the properties and assets of the church shall belong to that part of the congregation which abides by this constitution, whether that part be in the majority or minority. In case the congregation is ever dissolved, the properties of this church shall become the property of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America. This paragraph is unalterable.

**ARTICLE VII
AMENDMENTS TO THIS CONSTITUTION**

This constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present at an annual meeting of the congregation, provided that a motion for amendment shall have been presented in written form and read at the previous annual meeting, provided that amendments shall not conflict with ARTICLE II – CONFESSION OF FAITH, ARTICLE IV – MISSION STATEMENT, or ARTICLE VI – PROPERTY AND DISSOLUTION.

BYLAWS TO THE CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I CHURCH MANAGEMENT

1. Members and Parishioners

a. Members

Members of the congregation shall be classified as, (1) confessing members, or, (2) baptized children of the congregation.

(1) Confessing members:

Confessing members shall have been baptized into “the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” confess personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by word and life, and accept this constitution. They shall not have membership in any secret society or other organization that, in its official statements or rites, asserts that individuals are reconciled to God outside of Jesus Christ and His atonement.

All requests for confessing membership shall be made to the Elder Board, which recommends candidates to the congregation.

Baptized children of the congregation who have become confessing Christians may request confessing membership when they reach confirmation age. Only confessing members of the congregation who have reached the age of eighteen may vote at congregational business meetings.

(2) Baptized children of the congregation:

Children baptized in the congregation and all baptized children of confessing members shall be designated baptized children of the congregation. This status continues until they reach the age of eighteen, or are accepted as confessing members of the congregation; those not requesting adult membership shall become parishioners. The congregation shall diligently guide these children and youth by teaching the Word of God and modeling godly attitudes and behavior. It shall arrange for Sunday school, children’s ministries, youth ministries, pastoral instruction, confirmation and other Christian training programs. These young people shall be made the objects of prayer as the congregation seeks to guide

them to conscious faith, spiritual growth and confessing membership in the church.

b. Parishioners

Baptized children of the congregation become parishioners if they have not been received as confessing members. In addition, the Elder Board may include as parishioners those who wish to call Bethel Lutheran Church their church home. The Elder Board may remove the names of parishioners when they deem it necessary or advisable.

2. Elder Board

a. The Elder Board shall:

- 1) Develop, together with the lead pastor, a shared vision for the congregation's worship and ministry.
- 2) Recommend individuals for membership in the congregation.
- 3) Administer church discipline as set forth in Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 1 Timothy 5:19, and recommend termination of membership when necessary.
- 4) Periodically review and adjust the membership roster of the congregation.
- 5) Recommend the congregational ministry plan and budget for presentation and approval at annual business meeting of the congregation.
- 6) Determine dates and times for the business meetings of the congregation.
- 7) Nominate candidates for election to the Elder Board.
- 8) Assist the pastor at the Lord's Supper, visit the sick and needy, watch over the spiritual condition of the congregation, assist the pastor in the program of evangelism and exercise such supervision that all its activities are in accordance with the Word of God.

b. Pastors

1) Call Process:

The voting membership is responsible for calling the pastor/s of the congregation. A call committee shall be appointed by the Elder Board to conduct the calling process. It shall be made up of five to seven people, reflecting a balance of elders and representatives of the congregation. The call process shall be conducted in harmony with the CLB documents entitled The Pastoral Calling Process and The Pastoral Office Policies of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. The letter of call shall be approved by a minimum of two-thirds of the voting membership at a duly called congregational business meeting.

2) Pastoral Work:

The pastor shall conduct himself and his ministry according to the guidelines set forth in the synodical policy statement entitled, The Pastoral Office Policies of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. He shall follow the Ministerial Acts of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in leading the services and conducting the rituals of the church.

3) Dismissal:

The dismissal of a pastor shall take place upon the recommendation of the Elder Board at a duly called business meeting of the congregation. The dismissal requires approval by a minimum of two-thirds of the voting membership present at the meeting. If dismissed, the pastor shall be provided his current compensation package, prorated for one month per year of former service within the congregation, for a maximum of three months, or until he is placed in another call or other employment, whichever occurs first. If he is living in a parsonage, he is entitled to remain in the parsonage for up to three months.

4) Resignation:

The resignation of a pastor shall be accepted by a simple majority vote of the members present at a duly called congregational business meeting. The pastor's departure from the congregation shall take place within a negotiated period of one to three months.

c. Elders

- 1) Elders are confessing members that are nominated by the Elder Board and elected by the congregation for a three-year term. Following three successive terms the elder must vacate the office for one year, at the end of which he may again be nominated and elected as an active elder.
- 2) The Elder Board shall endeavor to provide one year of training for prospective elders prior to calling them to the office of elder.
- 3) The pastor/s and elders of the church shall seek to strengthen their skills through regular participation in training events, seminars, and classes.
- 4) An elder who violates the responsibilities of his office may be removed from office by applying the following procedures based on Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5:19: An elder or other member of the congregation must bring the charge before the Elder Board, which will review its validity. The elder in question shall have opportunity to answer the charge before the elders. If by a majority vote, the elders concur with the charge, the elder shall forfeit his position and duties, or be allowed to resign gracefully. If the elder feels he has been unfairly treated, he may request that the matter be referred to a duly called congregational business meeting for a vote. His removal from office by the congregation requires approval by a minimum of two-thirds of the voting membership present at the meeting.

3. Ministry Teams and Committees

a. Facilities Ministry Team

The Facilities Ministry Team shall be comprised of the church Director of Operations, a representative appointed by the Elder Board each year, and not less than six confessing members elected by the congregation for three-year staggered terms. The Facilities Ministry Team shall serve in an advisory capacity to ensure the maintenance of the real and personal property of the congregation and assure that appropriate insurance coverage is maintained and advise the Elder Board on matters relating to the options available to meet the real and personal property needs of the congregation. The team chair shall be selected from within the

team and serve until a successor is elected.

b. Children's Ministries Team

The Children's Ministries Team shall be comprised of a representative appointed by the Elder Board each year, not less than six confessing members elected by the congregation for three-year staggered terms, and the Director of Children's Ministries. Team members shall serve in an advisory capacity in shaping and fostering Bethel's children's ministries. The team chair shall be elected from within the team and serve until a successor is elected.

c. Youth Ministries Team

The Youth Ministries Team shall be comprised of a representative appointed by the Elder Board each year, not less than six confessing members elected by the congregation for three-year staggered terms, and the appropriate staff person. Team members shall serve in an advisory capacity in shaping and fostering Bethel's youth ministries. The team chair shall be elected from within the team and serve until a successor is elected.

d. Women's Ministries Team

The Women's Ministries Team shall be comprised of a representative appointed by the Elder Board each year and not less than six confessing members elected by the congregation for three-year staggered terms. Team members shall serve in an advisory capacity in shaping and fostering Women's Ministries. The team chair shall be elected from within the team and serve until a successor is elected.

e. Deacons and Deaconesses Ministry Team

The Deacon and Deaconesses Ministry Team shall be comprised of a representative appointed by the Elder Board each year, not less than six confessing members elected by the congregation for a three-year term, and the appropriate staff person. The team chair shall be elected from within the team and serve until a successor is elected. Team members shall assist the pastors and elders in visiting the sick, shut-ins, and the needy of the congregation. They shall advise the Elder Board on benevolent fund policies and administer the fund.

f. World Mission Team

The World Mission Team shall be comprised of a representative appointed by the Elder Board each year, not less than six

confessing members elected by the congregation for three-year staggered terms, and the appropriate staff person. The World Mission Team shall serve in an advisory capacity in shaping and fostering Bethel's engagement in cross cultural missions. The team chair shall be elected from within the team and serve until a successor is elected.

g. Nominating Committee

The nominating committee shall be comprised of the lead pastor, who shall chair its meetings, one elder selected from within the Elder Board, and two confessing members elected by the congregation at its annual meeting for a one-year term. The committee shall recommend a slate of nominees for offices, except for the office of elder, and committee members for election by the congregation at its annual meeting.

h. Audit Committee

The audit committee shall examine the congregation's prior year financial records and report its findings to the congregation's annual meeting. The committee shall be comprised of two confessing members elected by the congregation at its annual business meeting for a one-year term.

4. Officers

a. Chairman

The combined chairman of the congregation and of the Elder Board shall lead business meetings of the congregation and the Elder Board, and, in consultation with the Elder Board, prepare agendas for congregational meetings. He shall be a member of the Elder Board, elected annually by the Elder Board.

b. Vice-Chairman

The vice-chairman shall assume the role of the chairman in his absence. He shall be a member of the Elder Board, elected annually from within the Elder Board.

c. Secretary

The secretary shall keep accurate minutes of decisions made at the business meetings of the congregation, follow through with accompanying correspondence, and submit a complete report at each business meeting. The secretary shall be a confessing member of the congregation, nominated for a one-year term by the nominating committee for election at the annual meeting of the

congregation.

d. Treasurer

The treasurer shall present financial reports to the congregation at its business meetings, act as a signatory on church accounts and contribution statements, and lead the annual audit process. The treasurer shall be a confessing member of the congregation and shall be nominated by the nominating committee for election at the annual meeting of the congregation for a one-year term.

**ARTICLE II
GOVERNANCE OF FACILITIES, AND PASTORS AND STAFF**

This congregation shall not allow or sanction any service, function, celebration, or any other activity to take place on the property owned or under the control of the Congregation which conflicts with or is expressly contrary to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren Statement of Faith, Position Papers, Ministerial Acts, or the Church of the Lutheran Brethren view of and exegesis of Scripture, which in the view of the Congregation, would bring disrepute to the name of Christ.

Any Pastor or Staff employed by the Congregation is prohibited from performing any service, function, celebration or ceremony which conflicts with or is expressly contrary to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren view of and exegesis of Scripture, which in the view of the Congregation would bring disrepute to the name of Christ.

**ARTICLE III
MEETINGS AND RELATED MATTERS**

1. Meetings of the congregation:

- a. Worship Services are held on a weekly basis.
- b. An Annual Meeting of the congregation shall be held in the month of January at which time annual elections are held, the annual budget is considered, and for such other business that may appropriately come before the meeting. Notice of the Annual Meeting shall be given at each of the two preceding Sunday morning worship services.
- c. In addition to the Annual Meeting, not less than three additional

congregational business meetings shall be held during each calendar year.

- d. Special purpose business meetings may be called by the Elder Board, or by written petition signed by not less than ten confessing members, the request submitted to the Chairman of the Elder Board not less than forty-five days prior to the date desired for such meeting.
- e. All business meetings of the congregation shall be conducted in conformity with Roberts Rules of Order.

2. Fiscal Year:

The congregation's fiscal year shall extend from January 1 through December 31.

3. Quorum:

Not less than 75 voting members shall be present in order to transact business at the annual meeting of the congregation, and 25 members at other business meetings of the congregation. In either case, for purposes of calling or dismissing a pastor, or to act on the sale or purchase of property, an affirmative vote of not less than two-thirds majority of those present at the meeting.

4. Vacancies:

Ministry team, committee and officer vacancies shall be filled by Elder Board appointment. The appointee shall serve the balance of the term of the person vacating the office.

5. Document Acknowledgements:

The Director of Operations shall be authorized to sign documents regarding normal business operations. The chairman, secretary, and treasurer of the congregation shall sign contracts which obligate the congregation beyond normal business operations, such action having first been authorized by resolution approved at a duly constituted meeting of the congregation.

**ARTICLE IV
LIMITS TO EXPENDITURES**

The operations budget approved by the congregation authorizes the expenditure of those funds to accomplish the ministry plan, and limits the total expenditures to the total operations budget amount which is approved. Capital expenditures greater than 1.5% (one point five percent) of the total approved operations budget amount require direct authorization from the congregation.

**ARTICLE V
AMENDMENTS TO THE BYLAWS**

The bylaws of this constitution may be amended at a duly called annual or quarterly congregational business meeting. Such amendments must have been read at the previous congregational business meeting, having been submitted by the Elder Board or by the petition of no less than ten confessing members at that meeting. Adoption of amendments to the bylaws requires a minimum two-thirds approval by the voting membership present at the meeting. Amendments to the bylaws shall not conflict with ARTICLE II - CONFESSION OF FAITH, ARTICLE IV - MISSION STATEMENT or ARTICLE VI – PROPERTY AND DISSOLUTION.

