

## Constitution and Bylaw Guidelines for LCC Congregations

Congregations of Lutheran Church-Canada become members of the synod “only after a district convention or a Convention has convinced itself that the constitution of the congregation, which must be submitted for examination, contains nothing contrary to the Scriptures or the Confessions” (*Synodical Constitution, Article V, Membership*). Any additional amendments must also be approved **before** going into effect. While it is impossible to fashion one constitution and bylaws to fit every congregation, the following are guidelines to assist congregations drawing up their constitutions. It is recommended that the constitution and bylaws of a congregation be brief, allowing the congregation to move forward in its mission without having to make constant, time-consuming amendments.

The synodical bylaws outline the procedure a congregation needs to take in order to become a member of synod:

- a. A congregation which applies for membership in Lutheran Church-Canada shall, two months prior to the district convention or the Convention, send its constitution to the district president, who shall refer it to a standing committee of the district. This committee shall examine the constitution to ascertain whether its provisions are in harmony with Scripture, the confessional position of the Synod, and the Constitution and these Synodical Bylaws in order that any necessary changes may be made by the congregation before the district convention or the Convention convenes. A congregation shall not hold membership until it has made such changes as the board of directors of the district may have deemed necessary and has so notified the district president.
- b. A member congregation which translates, revises or amends its constitution or adopts a new constitution shall submit such translation, revision, amendment, or new constitution to the district president, who shall direct it through existing channels for review. Upon favourable action by the board of directors of the district, the congregation shall be notified that the changes are valid and approved and that the congregation is empowered to function under the new or changed constitution. Such actions shall be submitted to the next convention of the district for ratification.
- c. It shall be the policy of Lutheran Church-Canada:
  1. to decline membership to congregations whose constitutions deny membership or other congregational privileges to any Christian because of race or ethnic origin;
  2. to encourage such applying congregations to bring their constitution and practices into harmony with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions, so that their applications might receive favourable action. (*Synodical Bylaws, 1.15 Constitutions of Congregations*)

**1. Name**

Congregations should consult legal counsel as well as laws governing each province regarding Articles of Incorporation. Some provinces make this a requirement, while others do not. The name “Lutheran” shall appear in the name of the congregation.

**2. Mission**

A brief paragraph to state the mission or purpose of the congregation can be included. It can contain, although not be restricted to, the Mission Statement of the congregation, if such a statement has been written.

**3. Confessional Standard**

To become a member of Lutheran Church-Canada, congregations confess and accept the confessional basis of synod’s constitution, Article II. It is necessary to adopt something very similar in the congregation’s constitution

**4. Membership**

Membership in the congregation consists of three categories: *Baptized* members are all who have been baptized in the name of the Triune God and who are under the spiritual care of the pastor, including the children who have not yet confirmed their baptismal vows; *Communicant* members are those who have been baptized in the name of the Triune God, have been confirmed in the Lutheran faith, commune regularly, are familiar with the contents of *Luther’s Small Catechism*, accept the Confessional Standard of their constitution, and are not members of organizations whose principles and conduct conflict with the Word of God; *Voting* members are communicant members who have reached the age of 18 years, have been received by the Voters’ Assembly, and have signed the constitution of the congregation.

An “Associate Membership” category could be established and would refer to a communicant member of the synod in good standing with his “home” congregation but who lives in another community and either occasionally or on a seasonal basis attends worship in another congregation. It is recommended that those seeking “Associate Membership” not be eligible for “Voting Membership” until such time as they have been received as communicant members of the congregation.

Many congregations restrict voting membership to those who have reached the legal age of majority. This is especially important when a voting member holds an office in the congregation dealing with legal matters or contracts. Care should be taken to prohibit membership in organizations whose principles and conduct conflict with the Word of God, eg. The Lodge.

**5. Called Church Workers**

The congregation, as a member of synod, calls only pastors and deacons who are members of the synod. (*Synodical Constitution, Article VI, Conditions of Membership, 5; Synodical Bylaws, 5.01, 5.11*) Pastors and deacons are called by the

entire voters' assembly and not by any group of members in the congregation. Congregations can consult the district president regarding calling procedures.

**6. Authority of the Congregation**

All officers, boards and committees are to be accountable to the voters' assembly and not to an individual or small group within the congregation. Auxiliaries and other organizations operating in the congregation are encouraged to make regular reports to the congregation through the voters' assembly.

**7. Officers and Boards**

Congregations are free to use any governance model that assists the congregation in their mission and does not conflict with the doctrinal stance of the congregation's constitution.

The congregation, in its initial stages, will benefit by having only those officers and boards that are required for them to carry out the mission of the congregation. Additional officers, boards, and committees can be added as circumstances demand. Job descriptions can be set out and described in the bylaws of the congregation. Instead of the term "Church Council," or parish planning council, congregations may opt for "Board of Directors." Offices in the congregation relating to the pastoral office are to be held only by males. (cf. CTCR document) The practice of changing the name of the offices in which women may not serve (eg. "directors" instead of "elders") is discouraged since their duties may still involve specific functions of the pastoral office (eg. distribution of communion). Examples of boards: eg. Missions, evangelism, stewardship, youth, etc.

**8. Division**

When conflict in the congregation cannot be resolved through reconciliation, and the result is a parting of the ways as the congregation divides, then the property of the congregation and all benefits shall remain with those voting members who continue to adhere in confession and practice to Article III of the constitution. In the event the congregation should disband, the property and all rights shall be transferred to the district in which the congregation held membership at the time of dissolution.

**9. Synodical Membership**

A congregation shall hold membership with Lutheran Church-Canada as long as the confessions and constitution of the Synod are in agreement with Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the congregation's constitution as described in its "Confession" article. A change in affiliation shall require a three-quarters majority ballot vote at a properly called voters' meeting, and take place only after a thorough consultation with the district.

**10. Amendments**

Every constitution should provide a method for its own amendment. Legally there are no unalterable articles. Normally, articles that are not changed, maintain our confessional heritage. All amendments need to be submitted for approval through the district president (*Synodical Bylaws, 1.15*). Amendments to the constitution may be adopted by a two-thirds majority ballot vote at a properly called voters' meeting. From a congregation's perspective the following articles may be defined as unalterable: "Confession," "Called Workers," "Division."

**11. Nominations and Elections**

Congregations may choose to elect only the officers of the congregation, and have the Church Council appoint the various boards and committees of the congregation. Or the Church Council may appoint the chairmen and direct them to appoint their own boards and committees, subject to the approval of the voters' assembly.

Staggered terms of office ensure continuity in the congregation's work. Limitations of terms of office may be adopted in order to train and mentor new workers in the congregation. To ensure continuity in the congregation's work, the treasurer and financial secretary may serve as many years as they are re-elected.

**12. Resources**

Canadian Council of Christian Charities, [www.cccc.org](http://www.cccc.org)  
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, [www.lcms.org/ccm](http://www.lcms.org/ccm)