

PILGRIM LUTHERAN BRETHREN CHURCH



9514 Johnnycake Ridge Road
Mentor, Ohio 44060
(440) 255-9403
(440) 255-2748

Email - pilgrimlbc@gmail.com
Website - www.pilgrim-lutheran-brethren.com

CONSTITUTION

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ARTICLE I

NAME:

The name of this congregation is: **Pilgrim Lutheran Brethren Church
Mentor, Ohio**

ARTICLE II

1. **The Bible:**

We believe and confess that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. We believe the Bible, including both the Old and the New Testament as originally given, is verbally and plenary inspired and free from error in the whole and in the part, and is therefore the final and authoritative guide for faith, doctrine and conduct.

2. **Creeds:**

We accept the Apostolic, Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds.

3. **Confessional Writings:**

We accept the following confessional writings of the *Lutheran Church: The Augsburg Confession* and *Luther's Small Catechism*. We believe these are good and do accept them so far as they are in conformity with the Word of God.

4. **The Trinity:**

There is one God eternally existent in three distinct persons in one divine essence; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father has revealed Himself to us as the Creator of the world and its Preserver to whom the entire creation and all creatures are subject.

5. **The Deity of Jesus Christ:**

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, is the image of the invisible God. To accomplish our redemption, He took upon Himself the form of man, being conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. By His perfect obedience and substitutionary death on the cross, He 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. Finally, He will judge the living and the dead and make an eternal separation between believers and unbelievers.

6. **The Holy Spirit:**

The Holy Spirit is a divine person eternally one with the Father and with the Son. His ministry is to call, to regenerate repentant sinners, to sanctify believers and to preserve them in the one true faith. He guides and comforts the children of God, directs and empowers the Church in fulfillment of the great commission, and "Convicts the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment."

7. **Man and Original Sin:**

Man was originally created in the image and after the likeness of God to live in his fellowship. He fell into sin through the temptation of Satan and thereby lost fellowship with God, became totally depraved and is under the wrath of God. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." **Romans 5:12**

8. **Salvation and Regeneration:**

The knowledge and benefit of Christ's redemption from sin is brought to man through the means of grace, namely, the Word of God and the Sacraments. The Word of God through the law clearly reveals, exposes and convicts the sinner of his sin, while through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His grace is bestowed unto forgiveness of sin to anyone who repents and personally accepts by faith the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. We believe that salvation is a "gift of God" offered us in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Eternal Son, and that man must personally accept Jesus Christ as Savior from sin by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit if he is to be saved. **John 1: 12; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9.**

In the Sacrament of Baptism, God offers the benefits of Christ's redemption to all men and graciously bestows the washing of regeneration and newness of life to every believer. Because of the total depravity of the human nature, and because the promise of God also includes little children, infants are to be baptized. When the baptized child reaches the age of spiritual understanding, he must personally see his need of experiencing Christ's saving grace and decide to follow Him, if he is to be a Christian. **Matthew 18:3; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 10:13-16; Acts 2:38-39; 16:15; 18:8; I Corinthians 1:16; Galatians 3:27.**

In the Sacrament of Holy Communion (Lord's Supper), Christ gives to the Communicant His body and blood, and on the basis of the believer's acknowledgment and faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, he receives assurance that his sins are forgiven and his faith is strengthened. The Scripture clearly warns against partaking "unworthily" which has reference to the unregenerate. It shall then be administered only to those who are true believers and who are living in open fellowship with Christ and the brethren. **I Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-32.**

9. **The Church:**

The Church universal consists of all those who truly believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The local congregation is the communion of Saints or true believers "In which the gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." Therefore, it follows that the local congregation shall comprise only those who by life and testimony show that they are living in fellowship with Jesus Christ. **Acts 2:41, 44, 47; Romans 1:8; 10:9-10; I Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 1:2-4.**

10. This Article is unalterable as stated in Article VIII on Amendments.

ARTICLE III

AIM

Our aim, in obedience to the Lord's command, is, by the preaching of the Word, personal witnessing, and the exercise of the gifts of grace, to win souls for Christ and to strengthen the believers and join with other congregations of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in the ventures of faith that God gives us in missions and in Christian education.

ARTICLE IV

DEFINITION AND CHURCH FORMATION

A Lutheran Brethren Congregation is an assembly of believing regenerated Christians in a certain locality, whose life and testimony witness that they are living in communion with Christ, and among whom the Word of God is being preached in harmony with the fundamental doctrines of the Lutheran Faith, and Sacraments administered in accordance with the Lord's institution. According to the Scriptures, only regenerated persons, such as make up the body of Christ, can constitute the Church. It follows that the local congregation has no Biblical authority to have other members than those whose life and testimony witness that they, through regeneration (a new birth) and a living faith, have communion with Christ, the Head of the Church. It cannot, however, be avoided that hypocrites might be found in the congregation, that is, such whose pretense and wickedness are not manifest or provable to men. **Deuteronomy 29:29.** Since it also is the Will of God, according to Scriptures, that the Church of Christ shall appear in the world as an externally visible organism, it becomes necessary for the individual believers in every locality to unite themselves into assemblies or congregations, in order, thereby, most effectually to discharge their duties, to wit; inwardly by its chastening, guiding and sanctifying power to effect its own preservation and growth, and outwardly by its quickening and disseminating activity in its position as the light and the salt of the world.

ARTICLE V

MEMBERSHIP

I. The membership of this congregation shall be classified as: **Confessing Members and Baptized Children of the Church.**

- (a) **Confessing Members:** As Confessing Members of this congregation, only those are received who confess and believe in Jesus Christ as personal Savior, that is, through regeneration (a new birth), accept the teaching of the Lutheran Small Catechism; have received baptism; whose lives and testimonies witness that he or she are living in fellowship with Jesus Christ; and agree with and accept this Constitution. **Acts 2:46-47.** Only Confessing Members of this church who have attained the age of 18 years are eligible to vote.

Any person who is a member of the Masonic Lodge or any other secret society cannot be a member of this congregation.

- (b) **Baptized Children of the Church:** Baptized Children of the Church are the baptized children of parents who belong to the church. This congregation shall endeavor diligently to instruct the children in the Word of God. It shall arrange for religious instructions such as: Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, Bible classes and catechism instruction. At the age of 12 or 13 years, all Baptized Children of the Church shall begin a period of two years catechism instruction. Upon completion of the two-year catechism instruction, a public catechism takes place. (Confirmation exercises.) If, at the time of public catechization, it becomes evident that any of these young people do not live in conscious fellowship with Jesus Christ, they will remain as Baptized Children of the Church. However, the congregation shall, through Christian intercourse, endeavor to show them both love and interest and shall arrange for such definite work among them as will be in accordance with the Word of God and this Constitution, and will seek to win them for Jesus Christ and the church. Baptized Children of the Church shall have the privilege of being served by the pastor in his ministerial capacity in the instances of weddings, baptisms, Christian instruction, and funerals in accordance with the directions given in our Constitution.

Those young people who at the time of public catechization (Confirmation) show clear evidences of having faith in Jesus Christ and their life and testimony prove it, may become Confessing members by meeting the conditions of Article V, I, (a), and Article V, Point 2, (a).

2. **Procedure for Receiving Confessing Members into the Church:**

- (a) Anyone desiring membership in this congregation must, through consultation with pastor and elders, be examined as to their faith in Jesus Christ; their life and testimony before God and man, and their willingness to accept this Constitution. At a congregational business meeting, the Board of Elders recommends the prospective members, after which the congregation will officially consider them for confessing membership of this church. A two-thirds majority of those present is necessary for acceptance. It is desirable that such a meeting be held in connection with the Communion Service. At this service, they may give public testimony of their faith in Christ.

- (b) In cases of transfers from other churches, the same procedure is followed as stated above, upon presentation of letter of transfer. In the event one should request a transfer from this congregation to another, he shall ask the pastor for a letter of recommendation, which shall be approved by the Board of Elders.

3. **Responsibilities of the Members:**

Each member should recognize his or her responsibility to pray for the church, as far as possible be present and take active part in the meetings and functions of the church, as well as to contribute to the support of the church as God has prospered them.

4. **Church Discipline:**

The church, through the pastor and Board of Elders, takes heed to exercise careful watch over the faith and conduct of its members. If it is discovered that a member is not true to the faith set forth in Article II, or that their conduct brings disgrace to the Christian church, or causes dissension, or that they are apparently staying away from the church without good reason, a special effort, constrained by love, shall be made to help the erring one into repentance and restoration through the means of exhortation from the Word of God and brotherly intercession.

In the event that there is no response, discipline will be exercised according to **Matthew 18:15-18; II Corinthians 2:5-11 and/or I Timothy 5:19-20.**

ARTICLE VI

CHURCH MANAGEMENT

Christ is the Head of the Church. Through His Spirit He guides the church by His Word, and according to this Word, He bestows upon the church the gifts of grace for the effectual performance of its various ministrations.

Among these ministrations, we especially emphasize the office of the Shepherd of Souls, teaching and governing elders, evangelists, teachers and trustees. **Acts 14:23, 20:17-28; Titus 1:5, I Peter 5:1-4; I Thess. 5:12; Ephesians 4:11; II Timothy 4:1-5; Acts 6:2-6; Philippians 1:1.** All positions of church management shall be filled by Confessing Members of the Church in good standing, except for the Pastor who shall be called as directed in Article VI, Point 2, (a).

1. **The Church Council:**

The Church Council shall consist of the Pastor, the elected Board of Elders, the Board of Trustees, and the Chairman of the Congregation. To this body the congregation commits its spiritual and financial direction. The Church Council is next to the congregation in authority to make decisions, however, any program initiated by either of the two boards is subject to the approval of the congregation. The Council shall call congregational meetings as often as the congregation demands them or the Council finds them necessary.

2. **The Board of Elders:**

(a) **The Pastor:**

For the office of pastor, the congregation shall call a man who is recognized as a true Christian, who accepts this Constitution, and who otherwise has the necessary qualifications. He is to be recognized as the shepherd of the flock and shall particularly attend to the preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. He shall also perform such other services within the church as are required of him by the Word of God. His call, as well as his dismissal, takes place at a lawful meeting of the congregation, by three-fourths simple majority. The Pastor remains in office as long as both parties find it desirable. His resignation becomes effective after three months reciprocal notice.

(b) **The Elders:**

The congregation shall elect as many elders who have the necessary gifts and qualifications as it finds advisable. The duties of the elders are to assist the pastor of the congregation, watch over the spiritual condition of the church and to exercise such supervision that all its activities are in accordance with the Word of God. In the absence of the pastor, one of the elders shall lead the devotional meeting. The pastor and elders make up that body which counsels and recommends applicants for membership, while the actual admittance or reception is passed upon the congregation. The elders are elected to serve for a term of three years in office. They shall be ordained by the laying on of hands and special prayer offered on their behalf to perform the duties of this office. Ordination, unless revoked, shall be for life, while practice shall be determined by congregational vote. The pastor and elders shall nominate men for new elders and shall recommend the size of the Elder Board.

3. **Board of Trustees:**

The church elects three or more men to serve as trustees. Their duties are to care for all financial matters pertaining to the congregation and to submit a report of the same once a year, and to supervise all property belonging to the congregation. They have no authority to buy, sell, mortgage, rent or transfer any real property belonging to the church

except by decision of the congregation. They are to be elected for a term of three years on a rotating basis. Church Council shall recommend the size of the Trustee Board.

4. **Chairman:**

Each year the church shall elect a man as Chairman. The Chairman's duties are to preside over and lead all Congregational and Council meetings of the church. The Church Council shall elect from its membership a man as Vice-Chairman of the Congregation who, in the absence of the Chairman, leads the meetings.

5. **Secretary:**

Each year the church shall elect a Secretary. The Secretary's duties are to keep accurate minutes of the transactions and decisions made at business meetings of the Congregation, care for its correspondence and submit a complete record at each business meeting. The Secretary shall also record and keep records of Council meetings and of special events of the church.

6. **Treasurer & Financial Secretary:**

Each year the church shall elect a Treasurer. The Treasurer's duties are to keep accurate accounts of funds belonging to the Congregation and report the financial status of the church whenever required. The Treasurer shall pay all obligations of the church as approved by the Congregation in the yearly budget.

Each year the church shall elect a financial secretary. The duties of the financial secretary are to receive and deposit funds belonging to the congregation, keep accurate accounts of same and report the financial status of these funds whenever required.

7. **Auditors:**

Two or more auditors are to be elected annually by the congregation at the annual meeting. The auditors shall examine the financial records of all treasuries of the church and submit a report at the following annual meeting. Auditors shall not audit records which they have maintained in other positions in the church. Church council shall recommend the number of auditors.

8. **Board of Parish Education:**

The Board of Parish Education shall consist of the pastor, two elders (to be selected by the Elder Board), the Sunday School superintendent, the assistant Sunday School superintendent, and at least three members-at-large who shall be elected annually. Church Council shall recommend the number of members-at-large. The duties of this board are to provide, promote, maintain, and direct the educational program of the congregation, such as the Sunday School, week-day school, daily Vacation Bible School, and the selection of materials and teachers to conduct these activities.

9. **Sunday School Superintendent, Assistant, Secretary and Treasurer:**

The Sunday School superintendent is elected to have charge of the Sunday School. Its leadership must always be exercised in complete harmony with the Board of Parish Education and with the principles of the church. The assistant superintendent, the secretary, and the treasurer shall also be elected at the annual meeting.

10. **Nominating Committee**

The congregation shall annually elect a nominating committee. This committee shall be responsible for making nominations for all regularly elected positions of church management, other than for the elders, prior to the next annual meeting. The Nominating Committee shall consist of one elder, to be selected by the Elder Board, and six active and regularly attending confessing members. A senior (experienced) member of the committee shall be its chairperson, chosen by the committee. Members of this committee shall serve staggered two-year terms, with three members of the committee being elected by the congregation for a two-year term at the Annual Meeting one year, and the remaining three being elected for a two-year term the following year. The pastor shall not be a member of this committee.

ARTICLE VII

CHURCH PROPERTY

If a division should ever occur in this congregation (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 the minority. In the event that this congregation is dissolved, the property shall be deeded over to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America. This paragraph is unalterable.

ARTICLE VIII

AMENDMENTS TO THIS CONSTITUTION

This Constitution can be amended (with the exception of Article II and Article VII) by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present at the annual meeting of the congregation providing motion for amendment has been presented or read at the previous annual meeting.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I

MEETINGS

1. **Devotional Meetings:**

The devotional services of this congregation shall consist of : Sunday School for All Ages, Morning Worship Services, Evening Gospel Fellowship Services, and a Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer Service. Holy Communion Services will be held as often as the pastor and elders find it desirable. Special evangelistic meetings to be held at least once a year shall be arranged by the Board of Elders.

- (a) Baptism and Holy Communion shall be administered according to the ritual of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America.
- (b) At marriages, funerals, catechization, as well as installation of pastors, elders and trustees, together with all other ministerial acts, the ritual of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America is followed.
- (c) New members are welcomed into the fellowship of the church in connection with the Holy Communion Service. Members who are reinstated are welcomed with the reading of the following passages of Scripture: **I Corinthians 2:6-11; James 5:16; Psalm 32:5; John 20:23.** Prayer is offered and opportunity is given for confession.

2. **Business Meetings:**

There shall be two kinds of general business meetings, namely, the annual meeting and special meetings. The annual meeting shall be held on a Saturday between January 15th and February 15th, at which time all general business such as presentation and hearing reports from heads of organizations, and other officers such as pastor, secretary, treasurer, auditors, etc., shall be transacted. Election of officers, committees, adopting a tentative budget, adopting plans and recommendations regarding spiritual and material developments in our congregation, shall take place at the annual meeting. Notice of the annual meeting shall be made by December 15th of the previous year.

Special business meetings of the congregation shall be held as often as the church council deems it necessary.

A quorum of fifty percent of the resident members is required at every business meeting of the church in order to transact business, except meetings where the sole function is to accept new members. At a meeting whose sole function is to accept new members, a minimum of 50 members must be present.

ARTICLE II

AMENDMENTS TO THE BY-LAWS

By-laws may be amended when motion is made at regular meeting; adoption requires two-thirds majority at the annual meeting.

ARTICLE III

POSITION STATEMENT

This congregation shall not join the World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches or any organization that compromises our position as stated in Article II of this Constitution.

ARTICLE IV

MISSION STATEMENT

Our heart's desire and prayer for this church (Pilgrim Lutheran Brethren Church) is that it shall continue to be a spiritual witness to the glory of God, to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, to teach the Bible in truth and purity, and to bring lost souls to Christ, and that all the members shall always be faithful to the Articles of this Constitution.