

CONSTITUTION
of the
SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
(Revised May 7, 2011)

(Parenthetical numbers are source references to the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.)

PREAMBLE

This Association adopts and affirms as its own, as part of and in relation to this Constitution, the following provisions of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ:

The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and Savior. It acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God. In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among Evangelical Christians, it recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. (2)

INTERPRETATIONS

- A. A local church is composed of persons who, believing in God and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are organized for Christian worship, for the furtherance of Christian fellowship, and for ongoing work of Christian witness.
- B. The local churches of the United Church of Christ have, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for that Church, its labors and its extension, even as the United Church of Christ has, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for the well-being and needs and aspirations of its local churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, the one and the many share in common Christian experience and responsibility. (14)
- C. The autonomy of the local church is inherent and modifiable only by its own action. Nothing in this Constitution shall destroy or limit the right of each local church to continue to operate in the way customary to it; nor shall be construed as giving to the Conference or the Association, now or at any future time, the power to abridge or impair the autonomy of any local church in the management of its own affairs, which affairs include, but are not limited to, the right to retain or adopt its own methods of organization, worship, and education; to retain or secure its own charter and name; to adopt its own constitution and by-laws; to formulate its own covenants and confessions of faith; to admit members in its own way and to provide for their discipline or dismissal; to call or dismiss its pastor or pastors by such procedure as it shall determine; to acquire, own, manage and dispose of property and funds; to control its own benevolences; and to withdraw by its own decision from the United Church of Christ at any time without forfeiture of ownership or control of any real or personal property owned by it. (15)

- D. Actions by, or decisions or advice emanating from the General Synod, Conference or Associations, should be held in the highest regard by every local church, such actions, decisions or advice being advisory, not mandatory. (16)

ARTICLE I – NAME

The name of the Association shall be the Southwest Wisconsin Association of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ.

ARTICLE II – PURPOSE

- A. This association shall seek to promote Christian fellowship among the local churches and ministers that comprise it, and to contribute to their efficiency at their common tasks.
1. It is concerned with the welfare of all its local churches and ministers. (145)
 2. An Association seeks ways and means to assist local churches when they are undergoing unusual difficulties requiring help beyond their own resources.
 3. At the request of a local church in difficulty, the Association may, through an appropriate committee, selected by the Executive Committee, receive and consider the concern, and offer advice and counsel regarding the concern stated in the request.
 4. The offices and services of the Association are open to overtures from members of local churches who have reasonable concerns; and when requested by such members, the Executive Committee may receive and refer such concerns as stated in writing to an appropriate committee for review and whatever advice and counsel it may have to offer.
- B. Because this Association is affiliated with the General Synod of the United Church of Christ through the Wisconsin Conference, (5)
1. It seeks with Divine guidance to develop among local churches and ministers an understanding of and commitment to the total program of the United Church of Christ at home and abroad, through Our Church's Wider Mission.
 2. It receives and acts on business referred to it by its member churches and ministers, by the Wisconsin Conference, by the General Synod, and by ecumenical bodies. (151)
- C. This Association determines qualifications for, confers, and certifies to, and terminates ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ. (29,149, 150)
1. It receives under its care students for the ministry, extending them fellowship, counsel and assistance during their academic preparation. (25, 104-5, 149)
 2. It confers the status of Commissioned Minister and Authorized Lay Pastor. (31,32,135f, 140f)
 3. It grants licensure. (26, 105-8, 150)
 4. It ordains candidates. (27, 109-112, 150)

5. It installs or recognizes ordained ministers. (150)
- D. This Association determines qualifications for, confers, certifies to, and terminates the standing of local churches of the United Church of Christ within its area. (31)
 1. It offers encouragement, guidance, and assistance in the organization of new churches. (147)
 2. When local churches are qualified, this Association receives them into the United Church of Christ. (148)

ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP

A. Ministers in Full Standing

1. All ordained ministers registered with the United Church of Christ through this Association have full standing as members of this Association.
 - a. When ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ are engaged in a church vocation other than the parish ministry, they may hold standing in this Association only when they reside within its area. (114)
 - b. When ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ are engaged in a ministry requiring prolonged absence from the United States or one that does not permit a fixed residence, they may hold standing in this Association. (115)
 - c. When ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ who are under sixty-five years of age withdraw from fulltime service in the ministry, they may apply to this Association for a leave of absence for one year. Except in special cases such leaves of absence shall not be granted for more than five years in succession. (116)
 - d. When ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ retire from active service by reason of age or disability, they may retain standing in this Association.
2. When the standing of ordained ministers in this Association is in dispute, the Division on Church and Ministry shall make inquiry. If the matter is not satisfactorily settled, the Division shall submit the concern to the entire Association.
3. The transfer of ministerial standing from this Association to another into which the minister has moved, shall not require undue formality or delay, so that in normal instances it will be a routine procedure. (113)
4. Ministerial standing shall be terminated by action of this Association at a minister's own request. Ministerial standing may also be terminated by action of this Association, upon the recommendation of the Division on Church and Ministry:
 - a. After the minister has moved beyond the bounds of this Association for three or more years, without having good reason for continuing in full standing or requesting transfer to another Association;
 - b. After entrance into the service of another denomination before retirement by reason of age or disability;
 - c. As the result of disciplinary action. (120)

B. Ministers with Limited Standing

1. Ordained ministers of other denominations who wish to retain their present denominational standing while serving as pastor of a local church of the United Church of Christ, or a yoked church or a federated church, one part of which is affiliated with the United Church of Christ, within the area of this Association, may be enrolled as a ministerial member with limited standing, for the duration of that pastorate.
 - a. During that period they shall have the privileges of full membership except that they shall have no vote on matters affecting the standing of ministers or local churches;
 - b. Neither shall they be elected as officers of the Association nor be delegates to the General Synod. (134)

C. Other Types of Standing

1. Licensure: On recommendation of the Division on Church and Ministry, the Association may grant to a member in discernment license to preach, teach, and conduct the pastoral and administrative functions of a church, including administration of the Sacraments and rites of the church, for a period of one year, subject to annual renewal.
 - a. A Licentiate is listed separately on the rolls of this Association, and is not considered to be a ministerial member. (108)
2. Commissioned Ministers: On recommendation of the Division on Church and Ministry, the Association may grant the status of Commissioned Ministers to unordained persons for a specific church-related service. (31,136)
 - a. A certificate designating them as Commissioned Ministers is issued, bearing the signature of the Officers of this Association and the President of the United Church of Christ. (137)
 - b. Commissioned Ministers are listed separately on the rolls of this Association and are not considered ministerial members. (138)
 - c. Commissioned Ministers who take up some other full-time employment resign their commission or apply to this Association for a leave of absence. Such leave of absence is granted for one year at a time, but not for more than three consecutive years. (139)
3. Authorized Lay Pastors: On recommendation of the Division on Church and Ministry, this Association may grant the status of Authorized Lay Pastor to unordained persons, authorizing them to preach and conduct services of worship within this Association and under its guidance. (32)
 - a. Authorized Lay Pastors are listed separately on the rolls of this Association and are not considered ministerial members. (142)

D. Churches in Full Standing

1. All local churches registered with the United Church of Christ through this Association are members of this Association in full standing.
2. When the standing of a local church of this Association is in dispute, the Division on Church and Ministry shall make inquiry. If the matter is not satisfactorily settled, the Division shall submit the concern to the entire Association.

3. The standing of a local church of this Association shall be terminated by action of this Association at the request of that local church, after consultation with the Division on Church and Ministry; and may be terminated by action of this Association, upon recommendation by the Division on Church and Ministry, when that local church gives evidence that it is no longer in sympathy with the purposes and programs of the United Church of Christ.

E. Churches with Limited Standing

1. The name of any church within the area of this Association that has held full standing in a Congregational Association and then has not joined the United Church of Christ, shall be entered in a separate Registry of Congregational Churches, so that it may continue unbroken its historic fellowship with the churches and ministers of this Association.
 - a. The statistics of such a church shall be kept separately; its members shall not be counted in determining the number of delegates that the Wisconsin Conference is entitled to send to the General Synod. (11)
 - b. No member of such a church, except a minister holding full standing in this Association, shall be a delegate to the General Synod or hold elective office in that body, or be an officer of this Association, or have vote on matters affecting the standing of ministers or local churches. (11)
 - c. No direct or indirect participation by any such local church in, or in support of, the work of the United Church of Christ, or of the Wisconsin Conference, or of this Association, shall be construed as making it a church of the United Church of Christ. (11)
2. At the request of any church holding standing in this Association's Registry of Congregational Churches, the Association shall immediately transfer that standing to the United Church of Christ. (11)

F. Voting Members of this Association shall consist of:

1. Ordained ministers holding full standing.
2. Ordained ministers holding limited standing, subject to the exceptions note in III-B-2-a.
3. Two lay delegates from each local church in full standing and one for each 500 members or fraction thereof beyond the first 500 members.
4. Two lay delegates from each church holding limited standing, one for each 500 members or fraction thereof beyond the first 500 members.
5. Commissioned Ministers
6. Authorized Lay Pastors

ARTICLE IV - MEETINGS

- A. There shall be an annual meeting of the Association, with special meetings at such other times as may be necessary for the discharge of its responsibilities.
- B. Special meetings may be called by the Executive Committee of this Association, or at the request of five churches or five ministers of this Association, for consideration of the items specified in the call.
- C. The place of all meetings shall be determined by the Executive Committee.
- D. With the exception of an overture addressed to the General Synod which requires a two-thirds affirmative vote of those present and voting, all motions, resolutions, petitions and overtures shall be adopted by a majority affirmative vote of those present and voting. (152)
- E. The Association shall adhere to Robert's Rules of Order.
- F. A Quorum for an Association meeting shall be one-third of the ministerial members, and one-third of the constituent churches as represented by lay delegates, who in either case have standing to vote on the business under consideration. When meeting as an Ecclesiastical Council a quorum shall consist of ministers and delegates responding to an official call.

ARTICLE V – ORGANIZATION

A. Officers

- 1. The officers of this Association shall be:
 - a. A Moderator, who shall be elected for a term of two years, expiring in even numbered years. The office of the Moderator shall alternate between minister and lay member.
 - b. A Vice-Moderator, who shall be elected for a term of two years, expiring in even numbered years. The office of Vice-Moderator shall alternate between lay member and minister, opposite to the office of Moderator.
 - c. A Secretary, who shall be elected for a term of two years, expiring in odd numbered years.
 - d. A Treasurer, who shall be elected for a term of two years, expiring in odd numbered years.
- 2. The duties of these officers are as follows:
 - a. The Moderator shall preside at the meetings of the Association and shall be chairperson of the Executive Committee.
 - b. The Vice-Moderator shall assist the Moderator in administration, and when requested by the Moderator, shall represent the Moderator. Should a vacancy occur in the office of Moderator, the Vice-Moderator shall assume all rights and duties of the Moderator until the next regular meeting of the Association, when the Association shall elect a Moderator to fill the unexpired term.
 - c. The Secretary shall keep accurate and permanent record of the Minutes of this Association, and shall have other such duties as assigned by the Executive Committee.
 - d. The Treasurer shall oversee the receipt and disbursement of Association funds in coordination with the Conference financial staff and the management of financial assets. The Treasurer (with an alternate designated by the Executive Committee shall authorize any disbursement of Association funds as approved in the adopted budget or directed by the Executive Committee. The Treasurer shall provide annual reports to the Association and monthly updates to the Executive Committee on the Association's financial status.

B. Committees

1. Nominating Committee

- a. It shall consist of five members – the immediate past moderator, the current moderator and the incoming moderator as well as two others chosen at large by the Executive Committee. The nominees shall represent the Association geographically.
- b. In case of a vacancy occurring on the Nominating Committee, the Executive Committee shall make an appointment to fill the unexpired term.
- c. It shall nominate at least one person as candidate for each office and division or committee position to be filled.
- d. It shall nominate persons as delegates and alternates to the General Synod as provided in accordance with the constitution of the Wisconsin Conference. No person is to be a delegate to more than three successive General Synods.
- e. Additional nominations to the committee's slate may be made from the floor of the Association.

2. Executive Committee

- a. It shall meet regularly to coordinate the present work of the divisions, engage in long-term planning for the total work of the Association, and to make recommendations thereon to the Association.
- b. It shall consist of the officers of this Association, one representative of each of the Divisions of this Association, the four representatives on the Conference Board of Directors, and four members-at-large elected for a two-year term so arranged that the term of office for two of these members-at-large expire each year. The members-at-large may not serve more than three consecutive terms. The Moderator shall act as chairperson of the Executive Committee.
- c. It represents the Association when the Association is not in session.
- d. It fills vacancies occurring in offices, divisions and committees between meetings of the Association. Any such appointee shall serve only until the next meeting of the Association, unless at this meeting he/she is duly elected to the office to which he/she was appointed.
- e. It shall be subject to call by the Moderator.
- f. It shall be responsible for preparing the annual budget for presentation to the Association.
- g. Whenever the Conference shall have any entity to which this Association shall be entitled to elect or appoint members, the Executive Committee may appoint those members when no other mechanism is in place.

C. Divisions of the Association

The program of the Association is in large measure entrusted to the Divisions. Each Division shall make an annual report of its work to the Association

THE DIVISION ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY

The Division on Church and Ministry shall be concerned with ministerial standing, pastoral relations, professional standards, specialized ministries, education for church-related vocations, aid for Members in Discernment of the Association, in-service training and the general relation of ministers and churches of the Association. Upon request, this Division may give counsel to local churches.

THE DIVISION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Division on Christian Education shall be a support system for congregations to strengthen Christian education and faith development in its multiple forms.

THE DIVISION ON LAY LEADERSHIP

The Division on Lay Leadership shall work with the elected leaders of congregations to help them better understand and fulfill the duties of their office. It shall also help connect members of the Association with Conference opportunities for lay leadership training.

THE DIVISION ON PARTNERSHIPS

The Division of Partnerships shall work with groups within the Association that have established partnerships with mission programs both at home and abroad, looking for ways to sustain and grow those partnerships and to initiate new ones.

THE DIVISION ON SOCIAL CONCERNS

The Division on Social Concerns shall work with congregations and individuals in supporting the social concerns efforts of congregations in ways that reach beyond the capacity of any one congregation and to identify regional areas of social concern for our congregations to consider.

ARTICLE VI

All of the operating details to carry out the provisions of this Constitution shall be contained in by-laws adopted by the Executive Committee and amended as needed by the Executive Committee.

ARTICLE VII – AMENDMENTS

- A. The Constitution of this Association may be amended at a duly called meeting by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting, provided that such amendment shall have been:
1. Presented to the Association at the last previous regularly called meeting of the Association, signed by not less than five of the local churches composing the Association; or
 2. Recommended to the Association by the Executive Committee, and a copy thereof mailed to each local church and minister of this Association not less than thirty days prior to the meeting at which action on the proposed amendment is to be taken.