

# CONSTITUTION

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Cedar Falls, Iowa

1962

*Revised 1971, 1974, 1977, 1983, 1998, 1999, 2020*

## PREAMBLE

WHEREAS, according to God's Word (I Corinthians 14:40 and Colossians 2:5) all things should be done decently and in order in a Christian congregation; and,

WHEREAS, in obedience to this Biblical exhortation our forefathers have set an example in the drafting of Christian church constitutions;

NOW, THEREFORE, we, a number of Lutherans living in and near Cedar Falls, Iowa, by our signatures designate this present document as the order under which we are united as a congregation, and according to which all internal and external affairs of the congregation are determined and settled.

## ARTICLE I—NAME

The name of this congregation shall be Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, located in Cedar Falls, Black Hawk County, Iowa.

## ARTICLE II—PURPOSE AND POWERS

The purpose of this congregation shall be to serve our Lord and Master Jesus Christ as His disciples. It is His will that we preach His Gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8); join in worshiping Him as He commanded (Hebrews 10:24-25); practice fellowship with one another (Acts 2:41-42); serve the needs of all people in Christian love (Ephesians 4:7-16; Mark 10:42-44; John 13:35; Galatians 6:10); administer the Office of the Keys as His church (John 20:21-23); and maintain decency and order in the church (I Corinthians 14:40).

## ARTICLE III—CONFESSIONAL BASIS

This congregation accepts and acknowledges all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 as a true and sound presentation of the Christian Doctrine taken from and in full agreement with the Holy Scriptures; and in this congregation no Doctrine shall be taught or tolerated which is at variance with these Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, that is: (1) Athanasian Creed; (2) Apostles' Creed; (3) Nicene Creed; (4) The Unaltered Augsburg Confession; (5) The Apology of the same; (6) The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope; (7) The Smalcald Articles; (8) Luther's Small Catechism; (9) Luther's Large Catechism; and (10) The Formula of Concord.

## ARTICLE IV—MEMBERSHIP

### A. Categories of Membership

This congregation distinguishes between three types of congregational membership, as listed hereunder.

1. Baptized members are all members baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who are under the spiritual care of the pastor(s) of this congregation.
2. Communicant members are those who:
  - a. are Baptized members;
  - b. have received formal instruction in the fundamental doctrines of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as summarized and confessed in the Small Catechism of Martin Luther; and
  - c. have publicly declared their agreement with and acceptance of the Doctrinal Standard contained in Article III of this Constitution.
3. Voting members are all communicant members who have reached the age of eighteen (18) years.

### B. Admission into Membership

1. Baptized members are received:
  - a. through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism; or
  - b. in the case of children who have been baptized in the care of another Christian congregation, through the consent of at least one parent/guardian who is a communicant member.
2. Communicant members are received:
  - a. through the rite of confirmation and, when appropriate, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism; or
  - b. by transfer as a communicant member from a congregation in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with this congregation; or
  - c. through the profession of faith.

### C. Responsibilities of Membership

Members of this congregation shall conform their entire lives to the authority of God's Word to enable them to continually grow "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18). To this end, they shall:

1. attend Divine Service regularly, as God enables them;
2. diligently make use of the means of grace, which includes studying the Word of God, receiving the Lord's Supper, and Holy Absolution;
3. regularly bring their child(ren) to Divine Service, Sunday School, and catechetical instruction;
4. devote their talents and gifts as God has blessed them toward the building of His Kingdom in the congregation and throughout the world;
5. be willing to impart and accept fraternal admonition; and
6. abstain from membership or participation in any organization whose objectives, ceremonies, or practices are contrary to the Word of God and the faith and life of the Christian church.

### D. Termination of Membership

Membership shall be terminated as follows:

1. Transfer to Congregations in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship—Communicant members desiring to join a congregation in fellowship with this congregation shall present a written request for transfer of membership to the pastor(s), who are authorized to issue a letter of transfer. Proper notification shall be forwarded to those removed by this process and the transfer of membership shall be reported by the pastor(s) to the Board of Elders and subsequently to the Church Council and voters' assembly.

2. **Joining Other Churches Not in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship**—Communicant members who have joined, or who express a desire to join, a congregation not in altar and pulpit fellowship with this congregation voluntarily terminate their membership by such action and shall be granted a release. Proper notification shall be forwarded to those removed by this process and the pastor(s) shall report such action to the Board of Elders and subsequently to the Church Council and voters' assembly.
3. **Members Moving Away**—Members moving away from this community without obtaining a transfer of membership to another congregation in fellowship with this congregation shall be encouraged to make such transfer. If no transfer of membership is requested, after a period of one year, such a member may be removed from the membership roster of this congregation by the recommendation of the pastor(s) and a unanimous vote of the Board of Elders. Proper notification shall be forwarded to those removed by this process and reported subsequently to the Church Council and voters' assembly.
4. **Whereabouts Unknown**—Members whose whereabouts are unknown may be removed from the membership roster of this congregation by the recommendation of the pastor(s) and a unanimous vote of the Board of Elders. The action shall be reported subsequently to the Church Council and voters' assembly.
5. **Excommunication and Self-Exclusion**—Members who persistently and without repentance conduct themselves in word or action contrary to the public doctrine and practice of this congregation, as defined in Article III, shall be called to repentance in Christian love and charity. In accordance with the Word of God (e.g., Matthew 18:15-20, I Corinthians 5:1-13, II Corinthians 13:1-3, Galatians 6:1-2), efforts toward repentance and reconciliation shall include, but are not limited to, the following steps:
  - a. An in-person discussion with the member, by one who has witnessed the sinful word or action, seeking the member's repentance (Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1-2). If repentance is not achieved,
  - b. A subsequent in-person discussion, accompanied by at least two witnesses, seeking the member's repentance, shall be undertaken (Matthew 18:16, II Corinthians 13:1). Witnesses must be communicant members of the congregation and may include one or more of the pastors and/or members of the Board of Elders. If repentance is not achieved,
  - c. The matter shall be brought in-person before the Board of Elders and pastor(s) by those who have participated in the steps above. The Board of Elders shall record a detailed account of the steps taken to seek the repentance of, and reconciliation with, the member. Further efforts toward reconciliation shall be undertaken by the Board of Elders and/or pastor(s). If repentance is not achieved,
  - d. In accordance with Galatians 6:1 and with the unanimous support of the Board of Elders, the pastor(s) shall publicly enlist the entire congregation in seeking the repentance of and reconciliation with the erring member. If repentance and forgiveness are not achieved,
  - e. A unanimous vote of the Board of Elders and pastor(s) shall be required to effect excommunication. Proper notification shall be forwarded to those removed by excommunication.
  - f. The excommunication shall be announced to the congregation (I Corinthians 5:5) by the pastor(s) using the order prescribed in the Agenda. All members shall be urged to continue to work toward and pray for the repentance and restoration of the individual who has been excommunicated and will rejoice should our Lord grant restoration.
  - g. Members unwilling to submit to the fraternal steps described above shall be considered to have had their membership terminated by self-exclusion from the Christian Church. A termination by self-exclusion shall require a unanimous vote by the Board of Elders. Proper notification shall be forwarded to those removed by this process and the action shall subsequently be reported to the Church Council and voters' assembly.

Any person whose membership in this congregation has been terminated forfeits all rights of members and all claims upon the property of this congregation. Those grieved by the decision of the pastor(s) and Board of Elders may seek assistance and resolution using the Synodical Dispute Resolution Process.

E. Reinstatement of Membership:

Any person whose membership has been terminated may be reinstated as follows:

1. A former member who has transferred from this congregation to another congregation in altar and pulpit fellowship may rejoin by transferring as a new member;
2. A former member who has voluntarily withdrawn may be reinstated pursuant to the request of the former member, the recommendation of the pastor(s), and approval by the Board of Elders;
3. A former member who has departed without requesting a letter of transfer may be reinstated pursuant to the request of the former member, the recommendation of the pastor(s), and approval by the Board of Elders;
4. A former member who has been excommunicated may be reinstated pursuant to the request of the former member if the former member acknowledges his/her sinful ways, repents, and promises, with God's help, henceforth to lead a Godly life. Upon the recommendation of the pastor(s) and approval by the Board of Elders, the former member shall be reinstated and announced to the congregation by the pastor(s) according to the order prescribed in the Agenda.

ARTICLE V—OFFICES OF PASTOR AND OTHER COMMISSIONED CHURCH WORKERS

- A. The Office of the Holy Ministry in this congregation shall be conferred only upon such men who are ordained ministers, or candidates for ordination, who publicly profess, by an unconditional subscription, their acceptance of, and adherence to, the doctrinal standard set forth in Article III of this Constitution, and they must be well qualified for their work according to the standards established by God in the Pastoral Epistles (I Timothy 3:1-6, II Timothy 2:15, Titus 1:7-9). Furthermore, they must be rostered members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, candidates for the pastoral ministry who have satisfied the qualifications and requirements for assignment of first calls by Synod, or ordained ministers who are members in good standing of church bodies that have been formally recognized to be in Altar and Pulpit fellowship with the Synod when agreements for such calls are in place.
- B. Only those commissioned church workers shall receive a call who publicly profess, by unconditional subscription, their acceptance of and adherence to the doctrinal standard set forth in Article III of this Constitution, and who are qualified for the work to which they are called. Furthermore, they must be rostered members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, candidates of LCMS colleges and universities who have satisfied the qualifications and requirements for assignment of first calls, or commissioned church workers in good standing from church bodies that are in altar and pulpit fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

ARTICLE VI—POWERS OF THE CONGREGATION

- A. General—The congregation as a body, through the voting members, shall have supreme power to administer and manage all its external and internal affairs. The establishment and conduct of all organizations and societies within the congregation or related directly to the congregation shall be subject to the overall authority and general oversight of the voters' assembly. The voters' assembly shall not be empowered to act contrary to the Word of God and the doctrinal standard of the congregation as set forth in Article III; any such action shall be null and void.
- B. The Right of Choosing, Calling, and Dismissing Pastors and Other Commissioned Church Workers:
  1. The right of choosing, calling, and dismissing pastors and other commissioned church workers shall be the exclusive right of the voters' assembly of this congregation and shall never be delegated to a smaller body or individual.

2. Called, ordained, or commissioned church workers may be removed from office in Christian and lawful order by a two-thirds majority ballot vote of the voters' assembly for one of the following reasons:
    - a. persistent adherence to false doctrine,
    - b. scandalous life,
    - c. willful neglect of the duties of office, or
    - d. the inability to perform those duties.Any action toward the removal from office of either an ordained or commissioned church worker shall first be brought before the Board of Elders for consideration of just cause.
  3. When a vacancy occurs in an office of an ordained or commissioned church worker, the congregation shall notify the District President to receive assistance in temporarily filling the vacancy and to receive his counsel in calling a new pastor or other church worker.
- C. Decisions—Matters of doctrine and conscience shall be decided only on the basis of the Word of God. All other matters before the voters' assembly shall be decided by a majority vote unless otherwise specified in the Constitution and Bylaws.
- D. Power of Officers, Committees, Boards, and Church Council—Congregational officers, committees, boards, and Church Council shall have no authority beyond that which has been conferred upon them by the voters' assembly in the Constitution, Bylaws, or specific act. Whatever power may have been devolved from the voters' assembly may at any time be altered or revoked by the voters' assembly.

#### ARTICLE VII—MEETINGS

Meetings of the voters' assembly of this congregation shall be held as determined in the Bylaws.

#### ARTICLE VIII—OFFICERS, BOARDS, AND COMMITTEES

The responsibilities of the officers, boards, and committees of this congregation are contained in the Bylaws and Officers Manual of this congregation.

#### ARTICLE IX—SEPARATION/DISSOLUTION

- A. In the event that a separation should take place in this congregation for any cause, the property of this congregation and all the benefits connected with it shall remain with and belong to those members who shall faithfully adhere to Articles III, IV, and V of this Constitution.
- B. In the event that the congregation dissolves, all property shall be disposed of by or before the final voters' assembly for the payment of debts, all just claims against the congregation, and the funding of any ongoing mission or ministry that is in accord with the doctrinal standard set forth in Article III of this Constitution. Any and all surplus, and all rights connected therewith, shall be conveyed to and become the property of the Iowa East District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

#### ARTICLE X—ALTERATION OR REPEAL

- A. Proposed amendments to the provisions of this Constitution, with the exception of Articles III, V, and IX, shall be submitted in writing at a meeting of the voters' assembly and announced to the congregation by public posting and/or mail to all voting members prior to the meeting at which the proposed amendment will be acted upon. A two-thirds affirmative vote of the voters present at two consecutive meetings of the voters' assembly shall be required for adoption.

- B. Proposed amendments to Articles III, V, and IX shall not destroy their essential meaning. Amendments shall be submitted in writing at a meeting of the voters' assembly and made public to the congregation by public posting and/or by mail to all voting members. Notice of the discussion of such amendments shall be given prior to two regular meetings of the voters' assembly when the proposed action will be discussed. Notice that action will be taken on proposed amendments shall be provided to all voting members prior to the meeting when a vote will be taken. A two-thirds affirmative vote of the voters present at two consecutive regular meetings of the voters' assembly shall be required for adoption. The date of approval shall be referenced in any amendment adopted.
- C. The revised Constitution shall, as a condition of continued membership in good standing in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, be submitted to the president of the District for review by the District's constitution committee and favorable action by the District's board of directors before being adopted by the congregation.

#### ARTICLE XI—IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSTITUTION

Procedures for implementing this Constitution are contained in the Bylaws.