

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Constitution and ByLaws

Revised November 4, 2018

CONSTITUTION and BY-LAWS
of
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
of the
UNALTERED AUGSBURG CONFESSION
of
Decatur, Alabama

PREAMBLE
IN JESUS' NAME

According to the admonition of St. Paul, I Corinthians 14:40, it is certain that in a Christian congregation all things respecting the administration both of its internal and external affairs should be done decently and in order. To this end, that we may possess a definite form and order in this our congregation, we have united in the adoption of the following constitution and by-laws.

ARTICLE I
NAME

The name of this congregation shall be "St. Paul's Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of Decatur, Alabama."

ARTICLE II
CONFESSION OF FAITH

The congregation accepts and confesses all the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures to be the revealed Word of God, which is alone the supreme norm and rule of faith and life. Since, however, the only true interpretation and explanation of the same is contained in the confession of our dear Lutheran Church, we also accept these as our confessions. These, as contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580, are:

1. The Three Ecumenical Creeds;
2. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession;
3. The Apology of the same;
4. The Smalcald Articles;
5. The Small and Large Catechisms of Luther;
6. The Formula of Concord.

In our congregation all doctrines shall not only ever be taught and tried according to these confessions, but all doctrinal controversies which may arise shall be judged and decided by them.

ARTICLE III
MEMBERSHIP

SECTION 1: REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

The following are the conditions under which a person may become and remain a member of this congregation: Such person must (a) be baptized, (b) accept the confessions of the congregation, (c) lead a blameless Christian life, or evidence penitence for former open sins, (Galatians 5:19-21), (d) and publicly agree to abide by the provisions of this constitution as adopted and such resolutions as may yet be adopted by common action, in so far as such action is not contrary to the Word of God.

SECTION 2: MODE OF ADMISSION

All applications for membership must be made to the pastor, who, if necessary, imparts appropriate instructions to the applicant. Members of churches in fellowship with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod are received by letter of transfer from their respective congregations. The names of all applicants for membership shall be presented to the congregation for action. In case of voting membership, the applicant should be present at the meeting when received.

SECTION 3: PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP

Every member is entitled to all the privileges of the church within the limit of the constitution. The right of suffrage is confined to such members as have reached the age of twenty-one (21), signed this constitution, who are not under public discipline, and roll call of at least one of the last two scheduled regular business meetings showed presence unless excused.

SECTION 4: DUTIES OF MEMBERSHIP

It is the duty of every member according to ability and in Christian order (a) to care and aid that the Lutheran confession, both in respect to doctrine and life, be upheld within the congregation in all simplicity and purity, (b) to evidence his appreciation of the divine means of grace by faithful and diligent attendance upon their ministrations, (c) to regularly attend, if possible, the meetings of the congregation, (d) to provide for the Christian instruction and training of all children entrusted to his care, (e) to adorn the Gospel of Christ with a godly life, carefully avoiding all offense to the weak, (f) to contribute according to ability toward all expenditures and treasuries of the congregation, (g) to submit himself to fraternal admonition and correction with all meekness and simplicity whenever in error or at fault.

SECTION 5: FORFEITURE OF MEMBERSHIP

A willful and malicious refusal to meet these requirements and perform these duties involves forfeiture of membership.

ARTICLE IV POWERS OF THE CONGREGATION

The congregation as a body possesses supreme power in the external and internal administration and management of its own ecclesiastical and congregational affairs. No enactment or decision whether proceeding from individuals or a minor body within the congregation has validity for the congregation or any member of the same if such enactment or decision has not been made by direction or by virtue of a general or special authority delegated by the congregation. Whatever may be ordered and decided in accordance with powers delegated by the congregation by individuals or smaller bodies may at all times be brought before the congregation as the highest tribunal for decisions. The right to call, elect, and accept pastors, parish school teachers and other officials, as well as the right of administering public ecclesiastical discipline, shall be a right of which the congregation may never divest itself but which must ever remain with the congregation in its entirety and shall never be delegated to an individual nor a minor body within the congregation. The congregation has no right and power to order, enact, or decide any matter contrary to the Word of God and the confessions of the Lutheran Church. Should it attempt to do this, all such orders, enactments, and decisions are null and void.

ARTICLE V THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE

The office of the holy ministry in this congregation may be administered only by such pastors as, without reservation and qualification, confesses acceptance of and adherence to all the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures and God's revealed Word and to all the Symbolical books of the Lutheran Church therefrom derived, whose orthodoxy and aptitude to teach has been tried and attested by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, who is a member of a Lutheran Church holding altar and pulpit fellowship with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, who is of good repute and who is not temporarily hired but regularly called and ordained with exaction of a pledge upon the above named Symbols.

**ARTICLE VI
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

The congregation shall make all possible provisions for the Christian education and training of its children. Both day schools and Sunday school are under its immediate supervision and direction exercised through the pastor with assistance of the Vestry. Its parish school teachers shall not be temporarily hired but regularly called and pledged upon the Symbols of the Church. The Chairman of the Board of Parish Education shall be elected by the congregation at the same time and in the same manner as the officers of the church. His term of office shall be one year.

**ARTICLE VII
THE CHURCH VESTRY**

The Vestry consisting of the Pastor, the President (who shall be its chairman), the Chairman of the Board of Elders, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the Recording Secretary, the Treasurer, the Chairman of the Board of Parish Education, the Chairman of the Board of Parish Outreach and a Financial Secretary, duly elected by the congregation, shall have no power and authority beyond that conferred upon it by the congregation. Any authority and power thus delegated may at any time be revoked and rescinded by the congregation. All candidates for these offices must be chosen from the voting membership of the congregation and have held membership in the congregation for at least one year previous to election.

**ARTICLE VIII
ELECTIONS**

The election of officers of the congregation shall be held at the fall scheduled regular business meeting. The following officers shall be elected: President, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Trustee, Elder, and Chairman of the Board of Parish Education and Chairman of the Board of Parish Outreach, and shall take office on January the first following the elections and shall be installed by the pastor. Election must always be by ballot. The office of President and Elder shall be filled by a male member. In the event of a vacancy in any elected position, the chairman of the congregation shall appoint a replacement from those eligible to serve, as stipulated in Article VII. The congregation shall ratify the appointment by majority vote at the next regularly scheduled Voters Assembly.

**ARTICLE IX
THE TRUSTEES**

The trustees are the custodians and administrators of all personal and real property of the congregation, which it now possesses or may hereafter possess; yet in such a manner that this property of the congregation shall by them be held as a trust for the congregation. The congregation is and remains mistress of the same, reserving to itself full and unqualified right of ownership and possession. The duties of the trustees are:

1. To confer with the pastor on the affairs of the church in regular vestry meetings.
2. To look after the property of the congregation and make necessary repairs and improvements as directed by it.
3. To sign, through their officers, in the name of the congregation all documents and contracts of the congregation, which come within the scope of their office, if necessary appear in court and perform similar acts, carry out all resolutions coming within the scope of their office, which the congregation as property owner would itself have to do.

However, the trustees may not according to their own will and judgment take action respecting the possessions of the congregation but aforesaid actions must be taken only after valid resolutions and directions of the congregation. If the trustees without resolutions of the congregation arbitrarily act respecting the possession of the congregation, they will be held personally and individually responsible. On the other hand, if the trustees act by the resolution and direction of the congregation, the congregation with its possessions must assume full responsibility and secure the trustees against any and all loss.

**ARTICLE X
REMOVAL FROM OFFICE**

The congregation may in Christian order remove all officers of the congregation from their office. Sufficient cause for removal from office of a pastor or teacher are: 1. Persistent adherence to false doctrines, 2. Scandalous life, and 3. Willful unfaithfulness in the performances of official duties.

**ARTICLE XI
QUORUM**

A regular or called meeting announced one week prior in a previous public service by the pastor or when notification has been sent to all voting members through the secretary of the congregation shall be capable of passing valid resolutions. All voting members present at a validly called meeting shall constitute a quorum to transact business. In matters of doctrine and discipline, unanimous consent shall be necessary to adopt valid resolutions. In all other matters except changes in constitution and bylaws which require a two-thirds vote, a majority of the members present and voting in favor of a resolution shall secure its adoption.

**ARTICLE XII
PUBLIC WORSHIP, RITES, AND CEREMONIES**

Public services shall be conducted according to the "Book of Forms" (Liturgy and Agenda) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Hymnals and forms used in connection therewith must conform to the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church. Only purely Lutheran textbooks shall be used for religious instructions imparted by the congregation.

**ARTICLE XIII
CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

The ecclesiastical discipline required by the Word of God and observed by the Lutheran Church is exercised with careful observance of the several grades of admonition as laid down in Matthew 18:15-17 against such members as live in open sin. Manifest and impenitent sinners who have been excluded from the congregation are by such exclusion, as long as they do not repent, deprived of the privileges of absolution, of the sacrament and of acting as sponsor. Any excommunicated member has no claim whatsoever upon any property of the congregation. This also applies to such members who voluntarily sever their connections with the congregation or effect their withdrawal by removal and annulment of their relations with the congregation.

**ARTICLE XIV
ADJUSTMENT OF CONTROVERSIES**

If at any time a separation should take place in the congregation on account of doctrine, the property of the congregation and all the benefits therewith connected shall remain with those members who shall continue to adhere to Article II of this constitution.

**ARTICLE XV
AMENDMENTS**

This constitution may be amended and expanded as need may require; in such manner, however, that any changes do not contradict articles 1,2,3,4,5,6,10,13 and 14 which are unalterable. This present paragraph (15) is also unalterable. A change or addition of other alterable articles shall be made only by a two-thirds vote.

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION
AMENDMENT #1 ON MEMBERSHIP**

No one can be or remain a member of this congregation who is a member of a unionistic organization or any other society holding anti-Christian principles.

(Adopted October 17, 1927)

**BY-LAWS
ARTICLE I
MEETINGS**

Regular Business meetings of the congregation shall be held QUARTERLY with one meeting namely January, April, July, and October. The Vestry will decide the date and time of the meetings providing at least two weeks' notice to the congregation. Special meetings of the congregation shall be called by the pastor, or in case the congregation is without a pastor, by the president or the vestry. Four (4) members have at any time the right to call a special meeting through the president. The meetings shall be opened and led by the pastor, or in his absence, by the president. The president shall preside at such meetings. If the president is absent at the meeting, the Recording Secretary shall call the meeting to order, and a temporary chairman shall be selected. A member wishing to speak in a congregational meeting must arise and ask the chairman for the floor. It shall be his duty to see to it that the proceedings are conducted in good order and routine, as well as in peace and charity; especially shall he see to it that no uncivil words are used, and that none rudely interrupt the speech of another, that private and personal discussions be avoided, etc. Within the bounds of these meetings only matters pertaining to the congregation are to be discussed. In matters of doctrine and discipline, decisions must be made according to God's Word and the confessional books; in adiaphora by a majority vote, yet herein caution must be exercised lest there be sin against charity.

**ARTICLE II
MODE OF ELECTION**

Nomination for all offices shall be made by a nomination committee of three and shall be presented to the Voters Assembly at least one week prior to the regular meeting. Additional nominations may be made from the floor. The candidates having majority of the votes cast shall be declared elected.

**ARTICLE III
DUTIES OF OFFICERS**

THE PRESIDENT of the congregation shall perform all duties usually pertaining to that office, viz., preside at the meetings, appoint all committees, etc. He shall (ex-officio) be a member of all committees, and shall be authorized to sign checks for the regular business of the congregation in the absence, illness, or death of the treasurer. He shall serve as Chairman of the Church Vestry.

THE SECRETARY will keep an accurate and permanent record of all voters meetings. He will maintain an accurate list of all voting members and the membership of all official committees and boards. The secretary will conduct such correspondence as is necessary and/or requested. At the termination of his office he shall deliver all books, records, files and documents of the congregation to his successor in office. He shall serve as a member of the Church Vestry.

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY of the congregation shall receive all monies of the congregation and keep an accurate account of the same, regularly and promptly depositing these monies in a bank designated by the congregation. He shall keep an accurate list of all contributions and send each contributor a receipt and statement at least once each year. He shall make a report to the congregation at every regular voters assembly meeting. At the termination of his office he shall deliver all books, accounts, records, files, documents and monies of the congregation to his successor in office. He shall serve as a member of the Church Vestry.

THE TREASURER of the congregation shall make all disbursement and payments for the congregation by check as directed and authorized by it, keeping accurate accounts of all receipts and disbursements. He shall make a report to the congregation at every regular voters assembly meeting. At the termination of his office he shall deliver his books, accounts, records, files, documents, and monies of the congregation to his successor in office. He shall serve as a member of the Church Vestry.

THE BOARD OF ELDERS shall assist the pastors in assuring the general spiritual welfare of the congregation and shall assist the pastors in difficult problems of the ministry and see to it that congregational discipline is carried out according to the dictates of Scripture in St. Matthew 18:15-20. The Board shall meet at least once each quarter. They will by constant word and encouragement seek to stimulate a high level of spirituality in the congregation, including a regular program of calling to encourage the members of the congregation. They will assist the pastors in cultivating a constant spirit of harmony among the members, and will by word and action encourage the pastors in their work. They will be alert in encouraging the other boards and committees to widen and deepen their spheres of activity. They will endeavor constantly to improve the services of worship so that they are as meaningful and helpful as possible. The appointment and duties of the ushers shall be the responsibility of the Board of Elders. The Chairman of the Board of Elders shall be elected by the Board of Elders in January of each year, and he shall be a member of the Church Vestry. The term of office of elder shall be for two years, with one half of the elders elected each year.

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, in addition to the duties listed in Article IX of the Constitution of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, have been assigned these additional duties and responsibilities. The chairman of the Board of Trustees shall be elected by the Board of Trustees in January of each year, and shall be a member of the Church Vestry. The term of office of Trustee shall be for two years, with one half of the trustees elected each year. They will meet at least once each quarter and will see the church buildings and properties are kept in excellent functional order. They will receive and make suggestions for improvements of the properties and facilities and see to it that they are effected as soon as possible. They are responsible for the entire plant and property, including the grounds. They will purchase necessary equipment for efficient maintenance. They will watch to absorb growth and make provisions for that growth in physical equipment. The appointment and duties of the custodians shall be the responsibility of the Board of Trustees.

THE BOARD OF PARISH EDUCATION's primary objectives are to plan, administer and maintain a total educational program for the children, youth and adults of the congregation. This program is to provide for the nurturing of Christian faith and shall extend an active expression of Christian love and concern for the spiritual, intellectual and physical well-being to the congregation and community, which it serves. To assure that the objectives of the Board are carried out and to seek continuous improvement in all of the congregation's educational programs, the Board, either corporately or through specifically designated individuals, shall be responsible for:

- a. establishing and publishing objectives and policies for each of the educational agencies of the congregation (i.e. Sunday School, Weekday Bible Groups, Vacation Bible School, Early Childhood Programs, etc.).
- b. supervising the personnel administering each of the educational agencies of the congregation.
- c. maintaining student records for each of the agencies.
- d. approving curriculums and analyzing the performance of each of the agencies.
- e. studying and encouraging participation in programs provided by the educational departments of Synod, District and Circuit.
- f. establishing educational agencies to meet the educational need of various developmental groups (children, youth, singles, retired, etc.).
- g. providing special classes, seminars and conferences to meet the changing needs of the congregation.
- h. promoting active participation in the education program by all members of the congregation.
- i. maintaining lists of candidates to fill vacancies in the teaching staff.
- j. regularly evaluating existing agencies and recommending any revisions or additions necessary to meet the congregation's education objectives.
- k. providing opportunities for the training and growth of lay teachers and educational staff.

The Chairman of the Board of Parish Education shall be elected by the congregation at the same time and in the same manner as the officers of the church for a one year term of office. The Chairman of the Board shall be a member of the church vestry and shall regularly present a report at the congregational voters assembly meetings. At least four additional members shall be appointed to this board annually by the Chairman of the Congregation in consultation with the pastors and the Chairman of the Board of Parish Education. The term of office for these board members is one year.

THE BOARD OF PARISH OUTREACH shall be responsible for:

- a. providing a systematic and continuous program of visitation of potential members to win them for Christ and for active membership in the congregation.
- b. a program, which shall include the regular training of callers as well as making members aware of outreach opportunities.
- c. sponsoring and maintaining a systematic program of child evangelism designed to win the unchurched children of the area for Christ.
- d. the assimilation of members so that they become active in the life of the congregation.
- e. developing and maintaining Christian fellowship opportunities for all members of the congregation.
- f. raising the congregation's awareness of local and foreign mission efforts by developing positive community relationships.
- g. developing positive community relationships.
- h. identifying physical needs of those in society and providing opportunities for members and groups of the congregation to meet those needs.

The Chairman of the Board shall be a member of the Church Vestry and shall regularly present a report at the congregational voters assembly meetings. At least four additional members shall be appointed to this board annually by the Chairman of the Congregation in consultation with the pastors and the Chairman of the Board of Parish Outreach. The term of office for these board members is one year.

ARTICLE IV FINANCIAL REVIEW OF ACCOUNTS

The books and accounts of the financial secretary and the treasurer may be reviewed at any time upon resolution of the congregation. They shall be reviewed annually by a committee of not less than two members of the congregation appointed by the president. The committee shall report in writing at the regular business meeting held in the spring the financial condition of the church and recommendations for the improvement of the congregation's financial system.

ARTICLE V SOCIETIES

In order that its Christian and Lutheran character may be safeguarded, the congregation entrusts to its pastor and church vestry the supervision of all societies within the congregation. The pastor shall attend their meetings whenever possible, and shall by virtue of his office have voice and vote both in them and in their committees. No society without permission of the Church Vestry shall arrange any public entertainment or festivity.

ARTICLE VI ORDER OF BUSINESS

Devotional or prayer
Roll Call
Reading of minutes
Report of financial secretary and treasurer
Admission of new members
Reports of standing committees, special committees
Unfinished business
New Business: a. Report and recommendations of church vestry
 b. Other new business
Adjournment with prayer

ARTICLE VII CHANGES OF BY-LAWS

These by-laws can be changed only by a two-thirds majority of all members present in two consecutive constitutional meetings of the congregation. However, all changes pertaining to this constitution and its by-laws must be presented to the voters assembly at least two (2) weeks prior to a constitution meeting.

(revised Nov 2018)