



Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

Basic Organizational and Constitutional Documents

Contents

- I. Introduction to the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches
- II. Organizational Principles of the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches
- III. Mission Statement of the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches
- IV. Constitution of the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

I. Introduction to the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

Designed for Mission

The Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (FELC) was created solely for the purpose of Christian mission. Mission happens where member churches engage the world with the Word of God. FELC views its chief mission as proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in word, sacrament, and action. FELC is thus designed for doing church rather than just staging church (view the FELC Mission Statement).

Built on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions

FELC stands solidly upon God's Word as recorded in Holy Scripture (Bible) and as accurately interpreted through the Lutheran statements of faith (called Confessions or confessional writings). From this foundation, FELC seeks to teach and preach a pure understanding of the gospel for a living faith in Jesus Christ as the salvation of the world (view the FELC founding principles).

Reformation Approach to Church Oversight (*episkopé*)

The 16th century Lutheran Reformers valued effective oversight (*episkopé*) of parish ministries. In fact, they considered such oversight to be not only useful but necessary. The need for parish oversight did not, however, equate to the need for bishops. In fact, when the papal bishops refused parish oversight, the Lutheran Reformers assumed this responsibility by setting up teams of church experts charged with parish visitation. FELC has adopted and adapted this Reformation practice through the creation of democratically elected Councils of Visitors. FELC Councils of Visitors serve and support parishes in their mission to the world (view the FELC constitutional arrangements for ecclesial oversight).

Prudent with Declarations and Statements

FELC maintains that Scripture and the Lutheran confessions are sufficient for addressing almost all matters of the Christian faith and life. Areas of human existence not addressed by Scripture are not essential to Christian mission. Supplemental church declarations and position statements often sound promising. By their nature, however, they frequently signal a loss of faith in Scripture's sufficiency. For this reason, FELC exercises prudence in issuing declarations and statements.

Member Church Equality and Mutual Accountability

FELC is a fellowship of member churches. Each congregation is the church where church happens when the gospel is rightly proclaimed in word and sacrament. FELC member

churches have equal voice in all matters of the fellowship. FELC member churches also have the final say in the adoption of any national church legislation. Equality, accountability, and effective democracy supported by a strong system of checks and balances characterize FELC's common constitutional life (view the FELC constitution).

II. Organizational Principles of the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

Under the cross of Christ and by these principles, we form this fellowship (*koinonia*) of Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches:

1. Without reservation we accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the confessional documents of Lutheranism as the sole foundation of this fellowship.
2. Within the depths of our sin as unbelief, we trust God's Word alone for the renewal of faith and life.
3. We hold our common ministry to be that of proclaiming - in word, sacrament, and deed - the forgiving, healing, and reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ for the invocation of justifying faith as the essence of salvation for all people.
4. We are confident that in God's Word all believers are called and represented to share in the unity, life, ministry, and mission of Christ as the Word of God definitively revealed to us.
5. We are thus ready to accept into our fellowship without exception all who profess faith in Triune God, who confess faith in the saving Lordship of Jesus Christ, and who express this faith according to the Lutheran Confessions.
6. We acknowledge not only the equality of all people in sin under the accusing Law of God, but also the equality of status before God of all who believe in Jesus Christ through the Gospel. This fellowship includes people of all races, of either sex, of any age, and of all social strata.
7. We will treat differences between people as true gifts of God whose diversity compliments the tasks which God has called us to do. We will utilize such differences to enrich the priesthood of all believers for the common ministry we have under our Lord, Jesus Christ.
8. We recognize that the Holy Spirit is active through Word and Sacrament among Christians in other denominations. We rejoice in our baptismal unity with all Christians. We will celebrate the gift of unity in both work and worship with any fellow Christians, so long as this does not involve compromise or denial of the confession of either party.
9. We know through the nature of God's Word as Law and Gospel that we are to resist the encroachment of human traditions in realms belonging only to that Word. We therefore reject any human authorities or documents as binding upon us without our prior consent.
10. We pledge to act toward all within and without our fellowship in openness, honesty, trust, fairness, and above all in Christian charity.

III. The Mission Statement of the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

The Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches witnesses to the good news that sinners are justified by God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and supports its member churches in their striving to proclaim this good news. May God help us to the glory of his holy name.

To this end, the member churches of the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches pledge:

- to witness to the love, power, and justice of God's Word in law and gospel as revealed and personified in Jesus Christ,
- to reject corruption of this Word by human tradition and devices,
- to network for mission those churches whose confession accords with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions,
- to preserve the Lutheran confessional heritage as a means to advance theological clarity and integrity in the whole of Christianity on earth.

IV. The Constitution of the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

Preamble

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

As members of the priesthood of all believers, called by God through the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit to faith alone in Jesus Christ, we form this fellowship of Lutheran churches in the United States of America in order to proclaim the gospel and to make disciples of all nations.

Article 1 - Name and Incorporation

1.01. The name of this ecclesial body will be the Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. The official abbreviation will be FELC. Henceforth, this constitution will refer to this ecclesial fellowship as FELC.

1.02. FELC is incorporated and its Articles of Incorporation were filed under the laws of the State of _____ on _____ .

Article 2 - Statement of Faith

2.01. We believe, teach, and confess the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2.02. We believe, teach, and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and the gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe in him.

a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God has vanquished powers of sin, death, and the devil.

b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both law and gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgement and mercy in the person and work of Jesus Christ through whom God was pleased to reconcile the world and all things to himself.

c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they proclaim the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They are the sole authoritative source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

2.03. We accept the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the scriptural faith we believe, teach, and confess.

2.04. We believe, teach, and confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Word of God, as normative for our teaching and practice.

2.05. We believe, teach, and confess the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, that is, Epitome and Solid Declaration with condemnations, as further dependable expositions of the Holy Scriptures.

2.06. We believe, teach, and confess the gospel, proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create, sustain, and nurture justifying faith for God's mission in the world.

Article 3 - Ministry

3.01. FELC affirms the priesthood of all believers. All baptized believers are called by God as priests who minister to others in their daily lives. Some are called by God's people to the public duties of Word and Sacrament in a church to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

3.02. Pastors within FELC, ordained as public confirmation of a church's call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, will subscribe to the confession of faith and statement of purpose of FELC and will otherwise comply with the standards as established by FELC.

3.03. Chaplains, missionaries, and pastors employed in specialized ministries will be commissioned by a member church.

Article 4 – Oversight of Ministry

4.01. Standards and mechanisms for the oversight (*episkope*) of public ministry through visitations will be established by FELC, and may be altered or amended in accordance with the bylaws of FELC.

4.02. Churches in an FELC jurisdiction will elect from their collective membership by a means determined by the collective membership an oversight council of five (5) or seven (7) executive members. For constitutional purposes, the oversight council will be called the jurisdictional council of visitors. The chair of the council will rotate annually with each executive member serving as chair during his or her last year on the council. At no time shall the council of visitors have more than one member from any given parish/pastorate consisting of one or more FELC member churches.

4.02.01. A jurisdictional council of visitors may also appoint non-executive, non-voting members to assist in its tasks.

4.02.02. The council of visitors will oversee but not administer or manage the personnel and administrative operations of an FELC jurisdiction. The council will engage an administrator and/or a personnel officer to handle the jurisdiction's administrative affairs, to help parishes match their needs for mission with appropriate pastoral leadership and resources, and to report regularly to the council on a jurisdiction's business.

4.02.03. The council of visitors' chief duties, in addition to overseeing the paid personnel and administrative staff, will be the oversight of ministry in the churches within its jurisdiction through visitations. That is, in a collegial way the council will support pastors, parish workers, and churches to be equipped, educated, and energized for effective mission in their locality.

4.02.04. The council of visitors will seek to support and develop a parish site with the theological and pastoral tools necessary to enhance a parish's ability to witness to the gospel. This will include addressing conflicts and assisting churches in transition from one stage of history and ministry to the next.

4.03. A jurisdictional council of visitors may pool resources and share administrative and personnel staff with another jurisdictional council of visitors, or with several council's, but in so doing it may not omit or transfer any of its responsibility for oversight of churches within its jurisdiction to another council of visitors.

4.04. The number of member churches per oversight jurisdiction will be established and regulated through the bylaws of FELC.

Article 5 - Membership

5.01. FELC is a fellowship of Lutheran churches. Each church that subscribes in writing to this constitution in a manner determined by the fellowship and carried out by the Board of Trustees will be a member of this fellowship.

5.02. Individuals not able to belong to an FELC member church may become associate members of FELC. Such individuals will be subject to the same standards as regular members, having voice but not vote at conventions of the FELC. A list of such associate members at large will be maintained by FELC and reviewed annually.

5.03. FELC, by action taken by the board of trustees, may suspend the membership of a church for cause by three-quarters vote of a quorum of the board of trustees of FELC. The board of trustees will give at least sixty (60) days written notice of intent to seek suspension of membership in the fellowship. The board will adopt rules and regulations, approved by the national convention, governing the suspension of membership in FELC

and will report all such membership suspensions to all member churches of FELC within 30 days. The suspension will remain in force until the next regular or special meeting of the fellowship at which time a decision regarding the lifting of the suspension or the termination of the membership of a member church be made by a two-thirds majority vote.

Article 6 - Fellowship Governance

6.01. This fellowship will be organized through member churches, the national convention of FELC, and a board of trustees elected at the national convention of FELC.

6.02. Member churches will form or become part of a jurisdiction organized for the purposes of relating easily to one another and to a jurisdictional council of visitors.

6.03. Member churches may additionally form or become part of alliances or associations to suit their particular needs in service of the gospel. Such affiliations will not include in their constituting or governing documents any positions, declarations, statements, or confessions of faith that conflict with, contradict, or supplement the Statement of Faith of FELC in Article 2 above. Such alliances or associations will not accept or assume the responsibilities of the member churches' jurisdictional council of visitors.

6.04. FELC affirms the distinction between statements of faith for the sake of membership and principles of governance for the sake of order. Statements of faith circumscribe the nature of membership and service in FELC. Principles of governance assist in organizing FELC in service of gospel of Jesus Christ, but such principles will not be accorded any sanctity appropriate only to statements of faith. The FELC statement of faith supersedes all matters considered by this fellowship and may not in any way be abridged or changed in meaning or in content as being determinative for membership and thus service in FELC.

6.05. The national convention of FELC will meet annually as convened by the board of trustees or as otherwise provided in the bylaws of this fellowship. The national convention will have only such authority as is specifically granted by this constitution, the bylaws of this fellowship or otherwise granted by the members of the fellowship.

6.06. Each member church will be entitled to two delegates at all conventions where FELC business is conducted. Delegates will be selected pursuant to procedures and rules adopted by church councils of member churches or pursuant to such other internal procedures as member churches may, from time to time, adopt. The manner in which delegates vote on behalf of their respective member churches at conventions will be determined by the member church on whose behalf the delegates are acting.

6.07. Subject to the limitations imposed by this constitution, the bylaws of this fellowship and such other restrictions as may be imposed by the national convention of FELC, the business and affairs of FELC will be managed by a board of trustees.

6.08. FELC does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, national origin, age, gender, or physical impairment.

6.09. Other matters of fellowship governance, organization, and order will be addressed in the bylaws of this fellowship.

Article 7 - Member Church Governance

7.01. FELC will recognize, receive, and maintain a list of those churches which otherwise comply with the discipline of FELC and subscribe to the fellowship's statement of purpose and confession of faith.

7.02. Unless otherwise agreed by the member church and the board of trustees, each member church will own its own assets and property. FELC makes no claim to the assets and property of any church that chooses to become a member of FELC.

7.03. Each member church will govern itself in order to involve its members in fulfilling the definition, purpose, and functions of the church. FELC does not direct, control, or supervise the affairs of individual churches except as specifically provided in this constitution.

7.04. Other matters of member church governance, organization, and order will be addressed in the bylaws of this fellowship.

Article 8 - Amendment of Constitution and Bylaws

8.01. Following adoption of this constitution by the first FELC convention this constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegates present at a succeeding convention. Thereafter this constitution may be amended only through the procedures set forth in the following sections.

8.02. Amendment may be proposed in writing by ten percent (10%) of the member churches. At least four months prior to the next national convention, the proposed amendment will be referred to the board of trustees for review, comment and recommendation, and will thereafter be submitted in writing to the delegates to the national convention. Regardless of the position taken by the board of trustees on the proposed amendment, such proposed amendment will be presented to the delegates to the national convention as required by this constitution. The adoption of such amendment will require a two-thirds majority vote of the delegates present and voting at

the next annual convention, provided that such amendment will not become effective unless it is ratified in accordance with the following sections.

8.03. The board of trustees may propose an amendment six months prior to the next regularly scheduled national convention. The adoption of such an amendment will require a two-thirds majority vote of the delegates present and voting at such national convention provided that such amendment will not become effective unless ratified as described in the following sections.

8.04. Any constitutional amendment, regardless of origin, must be affirmatively ratified by seventy-five percent (75%) of the member churches acting in and through properly called member church meetings, with each member church entitled to one vote. Any proposed amendment not ratified within two years of the date of approval by the national convention will be deemed rejected. The board of trustees is authorized to adopt rules and regulations governing the ratification process provided, however, that such rules and regulations are not inconsistent with this constitution. For the purposes of ratifying constitutional amendments, each church will have one vote. Voting procedures will be defined in the bylaws of FELC.

8.05. Bylaws and Standard Operating Procedures not in conflict with this constitution may be adopted or amended at any regular meeting of the national convention when presented in writing by the board of trustees or by at least ten percent (10%) of the member churches. A two-thirds majority vote of the members present and voting at the national convention and a further two-thirds majority of the member churches of this fellowship will be necessary for ratification of the adopted or amended bylaw.

