

# Church of the United Brethren in Christ

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# **Discipline**

2011-2013

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## Introduction

The *Discipline* is the main organizational document for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA. It contains our rules of doctrine, our Constitution, our moral and social standards, and the by-laws which govern how we operate. The *Discipline* is published every two years after meetings of the United States National Conference.

The information falls into three categories.

### 1. Confession of Faith

The Confession of Faith—a concise, seven-point statement on major doctrines—was adopted in 1815 and has never been changed. Altering the Confession of Faith would first require changing the Constitution, which forbids changing the Confession of Faith.

### 2. Constitution

The Constitution was adopted in 1841 and cannot be amended without a referendum by the US members. A majority vote by the membership gives the US National Conference delegates permission to make the change, though it requires a two-thirds vote of the delegates to make it official.

### 3. By-laws

Everything from chapters 4-25 falls into this broad category. It includes our stands on moral and social issues, operational procedures for all church levels, boundaries, ministerial requirements, and much more. The information in these chapters can be changed by majority vote of the US National Conference.

### Supplemental Materials

In the past, the complete *Discipline* was published in a book along with other information—an opening section on our origin and history, an Appendix of materials which changed from edition to edition, and

the governing documents of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International. The US National Conference decided against publishing a commercially-printed edition of the *Discipline*, partly because the National Conference changed the frequency of its meetings from every four years to every two years, which cut in half the *Discipline*'s "shelf life." Instead, they instructed that the *Discipline* be made available online in PDF (Adobe Acrobat) format. This document, in an effort to keep the PDF download shorter, includes only the three sections cited above—Confession of Faith, Constitution, and By-Laws.

An important additional document is the Pastoral Ministry Handbook, which contains most of the chapters previously contained in the Ministry section—chapters on the various levels of ministerial licensing, on assignment procedures, and on doctrinal statements we have done in the past. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team is authorized to revise that Handbook as it sees fit. It is available on the United Brethren website at: [UB.org/discipline](http://UB.org/discipline)

### International Documents

You can also download the governing documents of the International United Brethren church. It includes four parts: Confession of Faith, Core Values, Constitution, and By-Laws.

Nine "national conferences" make up the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International. The United States churches comprise one of those conferences. All nine must agree to follow the standards and requirements contained in the international documents. Only the international General Conference, which meets every four years, can change those documents.

The international Confession of Faith is identical to the Confession of Faith contained in the US National Conference *Discipline*. In fact, this is the primary document which binds together United Brethren people around the world.

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# Part I: Basic Documents

## CHAPTER 1

# Confession of Faith

### 1 The Triune God

In the name of God, we declare and confess before men that we believe in the only true God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that these three are one—the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Ghost equal in essence or being with both; that this triune God created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, visible as well as invisible, and furthermore sustains, governs, protects, and supports the same.

### 2 Jesus Christ, the Son

We believe in Jesus Christ; that He is very God and man; that He became incarnate by the power of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary and was born of her; that He is the Savior and Mediator of the whole human race, if they with full faith in Him accept the grace proffered in Jesus; that this Jesus suffered and died on the cross for us, was buried, arose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God to intercede for us; and that He shall come again at the last day to judge the quick and the dead.

### 3 The Holy Spirit, Comforter and Guide

We believe in the Holy Ghost; that He is equal in being with the Father and the Son, and that He comforts the faithful, and guides them into all truth.

### 4 The Church

We believe in a holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

### 5 The Holy Bible and Salvation

We believe that the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God; that it contains the only true way to our salvation; that every true Christian is bound to acknowledge and receive it with the influence of the Spirit of God as the only rule and guide; and that without faith in Jesus Christ, true repentance, forgiveness of sins, and following after Christ, no one can be a true Christian.

### 6 The Salvation Message

We also believe that what is contained in the Holy Scriptures, to wit: the fall in Adam and redemption through Jesus Christ, shall be preached throughout

the world.

### 7 The Christian Ordinances

We believe that the ordinances, viz. baptism and the remembrance of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, are to be in use and practiced by all Christian societies; and that it is incumbent on all the children of God particularly to practice them; but the manner in which ought always to be left to the judgment and understanding of every individual. Also, the example of washing feet is left to the judgment of every one to practice or not; but it is not becoming of any of our preachers or members to traduce any of their brethren whose judgment and understanding in these respects is different from their own, either in public or in private. Whosoever shall make himself guilty in this respect shall be considered a traducer of his brethren, and shall be answerable for the same.

## CHAPTER 2

# Constitution

We, the members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, United States of America, in the name of God do, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, as well as to produce and secure a uniform mode of action in faith and practice, ordain the following articles of Constitution:

### 11 Article I Personnel

1. All ecclesiastical power herein granted to make or repeal any rule of discipline is vested in a national conference, which shall consist of:

- a. Licensed ministers in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, who meet the criteria set forth in the Discipline.
- b. Laypersons chosen by the congregations in which they are members, according to a formula provided in the Discipline.

2. The national conference is to be held every two years. All officials elected by the national conference shall be members ex officio of the national conference, the bishops to be considered presiding officers.

### 12 Article II Duties

1. The national conference shall elect one or more bishops from among the elders throughout the church who have stood six years in that capacity.
2. The national conference has authority to participate in an international United Brethren church structure, and to edit Constitutional language to reflect the same.
3. No rule or ordinance shall at any time be passed

to change or do away with the Confession of Faith as it now stands.

4. There shall no rule be adopted that will infringe upon the rights of any as it relates to the mode of baptism, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or the washing of feet.

5. There shall be no connection with secret combinations, nor shall involuntary servitude be tolerated in any way.

6. The right of appeal shall be inviolate.

### **13 Article III Property**

#### **1. Local Church Property**

The right, title, interest, and claim of any property, whether consisting in lots of ground, buildings and other improvements, legacies, bequests, or donations of any kind, obtained by purchase or otherwise, by any person or persons, for the use and benefit of the local Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, is hereby fully recognized and held to be the property of the local church.

#### **2. US National Conference Property**

The right, title, interest, and claim of any US National Conference property, including legacies, bequests, or donations of any kind, obtained by purchase or otherwise, by any person or persons, for the use and benefit of the US National Conference of the United Brethren in Christ, is hereby fully recognized and held to be the property of the US National Conference, Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

### **14 Article IV Amendments**

1. A referendum stating the proposed change will be placed before all members of US National Conference churches. If a majority of the members voting approve the referendum, it will be passed along for consideration by the next meeting of the US National Conference.

2. A two-thirds vote of the US National Conference is required to make the amendment official.

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## **Part II: Standards of the Church**

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### CHAPTER 3

## **Defining Standards**

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, recognizes the validity of a collective Christian con-

science. Throughout its history, the church has chosen to make specific statements as interpretations of our collective convictions on matters of membership, family, and social issues. These statements are found in chapters 5-7.

We believe the statements in those chapters are consistent with the Word of God and, thus, are to be observed by all members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA. Local churches shall seek to instruct, reconcile, and reform members whose lifestyles consistently conflict with these standards. When reasonable attempts at restoration fail, such members shall be removed from the membership roll.

In areas not defined in chapters 5-7, the following statements will serve as a guideline for developing appropriate biblical convictions.

### **101 Corporate Convictions**

The United Brethren church recognizes its responsibility to help members apply biblical commands and principles to contemporary issues.

The Bible gives clear instruction on many issues, but on other issues, it leaves room for Christians of equal spiritual commitment and insight to disagree. The church's historic position has been to stand firm on biblical absolutes, allow freedom where the Bible allows freedom, and maintain unity when disagreements arise.

### **102 Personal Convictions**

The Bible is the primary source of correct guidance and the final authority by which Christians should determine proper conduct regarding moral issues. The Bible's specific prohibitions must always be obeyed. In areas where Scripture does not give explicit directions or absolutes, the following guidelines will assist members in making wise lifestyle decisions based on biblical principles.

- a. Pray for guidance (James 1:5).
- b. Study all biblical passages related to the issue.
- c. Review the laws of the land regarding the issue (Romans 13:1-7). The Bible instructs believers to obey the laws of the land in which they live, but not to use those laws to justify disobeying biblical principles (Hebrews 13:17).
- d. Seek the counsel of mature Christians (Proverbs 15:22, 27:17).
- e. Carefully weigh and consider current scientific and medical evidence regarding the issue (Proverbs 18:15).
- f. Consider any harmful effect your action may have on others.
- g. Consider any harmful effect on your testimony (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 10:32-33).
- h. If in doubt, act according to your conscience and continue developing your convictions (Romans 14:23).

## CHAPTER 4

# Membership Standards

## 111 Christian Disciplines

Every member shall attend to the ordinances of the church—namely, baptism (Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38) and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29); shall be diligent in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and the study of God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15). Further, it is the responsibility of all members of the church to serve with time and talent, and to contribute to the financial interests of the church in proportion to their ability, as God has prospered them.

## 112 Love to Others

All persons should walk as in the presence of God and accustom themselves to a close communion with God in all of their employments (Colossians 2:6; Psalm 1:1,2; Romans 8:1-6). They should never speak evil of their fellow beings (Ephesians 4:25, 29, 31; Titus 3:2; James 3:5-10), but practice love toward others (Mark 12:31), rendering service to others (Luke 10:28-37, Galatians 5:13), and endeavoring to be a follower of Christ in deed (Colossians 3:17, 23), in order that a spirit of unity may exist (Ephesians 4:3).

## 113 Lord's Day Observance

Following the example of the early disciples and New Testament church, everyone should make provision for exercises of devotion on Sunday, the Lord's Day, and inasmuch as possible shall attend all services for hearing read the Word of God, singing spiritual songs and hymns, Christian fellowship, and giving of tithes and offerings (John 20:19, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Hebrews 10:25). Members are admonished to neither buy nor sell needlessly on the Lord's Day.

## 114 An Effective Witness

Since every Christian is called to be a witness to Christ (Acts 8:26-39) in the midst of ungodly people and circumstances (Acts 1:8), and since it is largely through the testimony of believers that others are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, we urge every member of the church to assume the obligation of seeking the lost and winning them to Christ.

In order that they may be prepared to witness for Christ by life as well as by word, we admonish our members of all ages to maintain a position of nonconformity to the world (Romans 12:2) and to lay aside the evil things of this life (James 1:21); and further, to guard carefully their Christian testimony—

1. By engaging only in such business and social activity which is consistent with the Christian life (Colossians 3:17, 23).

2. By observing modesty in dress, in speech, and in all other personal conduct as becomes a child of God (1 John 2:15-17; 1 Peter 3:3-4).

3. By renouncing the world and all ungodliness, seeking to lead a life of holiness and devotion to God and his cause (2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Timothy 2:19, 21).

## 115 Necessity of Union

Let us be deeply sensible, from what we have known, of the evil of a division in principle, spirit or practice, and of the dreadful consequences to ourselves and others. If we are united, what can stand before us? If we are divided, we shall injure ourselves, the work of God, and the souls of our people. To secure a closer union among ourselves, let us:

1. Be deeply convinced of the absolute necessity of union (Ephesians 4:3).

2. Pray earnestly for and speak truly and freely to each other (James 5:16).

3. When we meet, never part without prayer, if prayer is at all practicable.

4. Take care not to despise each other's gifts (Romans 12:3-8).

5. Never speak lightly of each other (James 4:11).

6. Defend each other's character in everything, so far as is consistent with truth (Ephesians 4:31).

7. Labor in honor, each preferring another before himself (Philippians 2:3).

8. Seriously examine the cause, evils, and cures of heart and church divisions (Galatians 5:26).

9. Observe and follow the principles for reconciliation or excommunication laid down by Jesus in Matthew 5:21-26 and 18:15-17 whenever an offense exists between members of the congregation.

## 116 Obedience to Government

It is the duty of every member to lead a quiet, peaceable, and godly life among mankind, as it becomes a Christian to live in peace and to be subject to the higher or ruling powers, as the Word of God requires. (*Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17*)

## 117 Legal Testimony

We believe that the mode of testifying to the truth, when required to do so in a legal form, by way of affirmation is on us solemnly, conscientiously and fully binding before God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (Matthew 5:33-37).

## 118 Going to Law

Any member refusing, in case of debt or dispute, to refer the matter to arbitration, or who shall enter into a lawsuit with another member before these measures are taken, may be expelled, except in

criminal and other cases which require and justify a process at law. (*1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Proverbs 25:8-10; Matthew 5:25-26*)

### **119 Lodges and Other Heretical Groups**

The Bible teaches that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, and that Christians are neither to participate in things done in secret (Eph. 5:10-15) nor to show favoritism (James 2:1). Therefore, United Brethren members must not be members of any other church, group, or organization which teaches a way of salvation incompatible with the United Brethren Confession of Faith, such as a Masonic lodge or the Order of Oddfellows. Members who do, and who refuse to sever the relationship after having been confronted by the pastor and at least one other board member, shall be regarded as having withdrawn their membership from the church. (*John 14:6, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15*)

## CHAPTER 5

# Family Standards

### **121 Family: Definition**

We recognize that a family can take four forms:

1. A married couple (male husband and female wife) who may or may not have children.
2. A single parent household, in which a male or female parent is charged with the responsibility of raising and nurturing his/her natural or adopted children.
3. A widow or widower who is left without children at home.
4. A single person who has chosen to live on his/her own as a separate household.

### **122 Marriage**

Marriage was instituted by God and is regulated by him. For this reason, the Church must resist all attempts to alter marriage from what the Bible has revealed about it. The purpose of marriage is companionship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:18) in a permanent relationship which can end only when one of the partners dies.

A Christian should marry only another Christian (*1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14*). Their relationship is to express God's original intention for marriage: the wife's role alongside her husband as an equal.

### **123 Family Life**

Married couples (husband and wife) should cultivate a relationship of mutual love and respect (Ephesians 5:21, 22, 25, 33). They should remember their unique oneness (Mark 10:6-9), their equality

(Genesis 1:27, Galatians 3:28), the complementary nature of their union (Genesis 2:18), and their responsibility to help bring each other to full Christian maturity in all areas of life (Ephesians 5:22-28).

A husband should follow the Bible's admonition to love his wife in the way Jesus loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25). Such Christian love, as described by the Apostle Paul (*1 Corinthians 13:4-7*), demands that the husband respond openly and cooperatively with his wife (Ephesians 5:21, 28-31).

As the head of the Christian home (*1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:25*), the husband and father should exercise his delegated authority without being authoritarian, and should fulfill his responsibility under Christ by providing for the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of each family member (*1 Timothy 5:8*). In the case of a single parent, he/she will be considered the "head of the house" along with the responsibilities that accompany this position.

The wife should follow the Bible's admonition to be submissive, though not subservient, to the headship of her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24) by cooperating with his efforts to provide the home with authority and stability under Christ.

Together, the husband and wife should exercise proper discipline tempered with love (Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews 12:5-11, Colossians 3:21). They should also create and maintain a Christian atmosphere within the home (Ephesians 6:4, *2 Timothy 3:14-15*). Such an atmosphere should consist of the following:

1. Communication with the heavenly Father through spontaneous prayer (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*), especially at mealtimes, whether in seeking his aid or giving thanks.
2. Daily, directed worship as a way for the family to express love and trust in God, and to sense his presence in the home (*Matthew 18:20*).
3. Spontaneous and directed teaching of Bible truths at every opportunity (*Deuteronomy 6:20-21a*).
4. Christian symbols and works of art in the home (*Deuteronomy 6:6, 9*).
5. A consistent example in Christian living (*1 Corinthians 11:1*).

Christian parents are encouraged to present their children to the Lord before the church body for the blessing (or dedication) of children and the affirmation of Christian parenting.

Children and young people should obey their parents in all things in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20). This was the example of Jesus (*Luke 2:51*).

### **124 Abuse**

We believe that abuse in any form, either inside or outside of the family, destroys the dignity and value God has placed in people.

### **125 Illicit Sexual Relations**

The biblical view of sex firmly establishes it within the framework of marriage and family life. Therefore, the church cannot condone premarital sex, adultery, or any form of homosexual behavior (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). All are clearly contrary to the expressed will of God concerning the union of man and woman together in this most sacred and binding of human relationships (Romans 1:20-32; Deuteronomy 22:23-27).

### **126 Divorce**

Divorce was never in God's original plan, and is really one of the consequences of the fall of man. According to Jesus in Mark 10:5, the Mosaic directive concerning divorce came only as a concession to man's hardheartedness.

In the New Testament, Jesus indicated that divorce may be granted on the basis of fornication (Matthew 5:32, 19:9). Fornication includes all forms of sexual sin, such as adultery, prostitution, sodomy, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism. Continual and deliberate sexual sin by a marriage partner is a justifiable cause for divorce.

The Apostle Paul cites another exception which applies to the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). If an unbelieving partner chooses to dissolve the marriage, the believing partner may yield to the divorce. This same exception also applies when a believer renounces faith in Christ or assumes the position of an unbeliever and chooses to dissolve the marriage. Such persons are considered unbelievers because they place themselves outside the divine directive.

Even though the Bible admonishes Christian spouses not to divorce each other (1 Corinthians 7:10-11b), there may be situations in which a spouse decides a divorce is essential, e.g., when the spouse or children suffer severe physical or emotional abuse. The Bible seems to suggest that the spouse may make the decision to divorce, but must then remain unmarried or be reconciled to the former partner (1 Corinthians 7:11). God does not advocate divorce in such situations, but when it does occur, He regulates it. The principle remains—no divorce—but the Bible recognizes that the ideal is not always observed because of hardheartedness.

In all cases, however, every effort should be made to bring about repentance, restoration, and reconciliation. Bringing about reconciliation which leads to harmony and compatibility is always preferable to divorce.

### **127 Remarriage**

We believe the Christian has biblical grounds for remarriage in the following situations:

1. When the spouse dies. In this case, the partner

may remarry a believer (1 Corinthians 7:39).

2. When the marriage and divorce occurred prior to salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:1-7).

3. When the spouse is guilty of marital unfaithfulness and will not repent and live faithfully with the partner, and the offended partner is innocent of such conduct. Marital unfaithfulness includes adultery, prostitution, sodomy, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism.

4. When an unbelieving partner has willfully deserted a believing partner (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).

5. When the spouse has assumed the position of an unbeliever by choosing to divorce the believing partner. In this case, the believing partner may remarry another believer (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).

### **128 Family Planning**

In the Christian view as based in the biblical revelation, it is only within the marriage relationship that children should be conceived, brought into the world as a precious gift in trust from God, and nurtured to full personhood.

As responsible Christians and parents, some couples may for valid reasons determine not to have children, or others may need to determine the number and spacing of children. The church admonishes its members to weigh carefully and prayerfully the responsibilities of family planning and to use those methods which are medically and psychologically suited to their needs. They shall not use methods which conflict with the church's stand on abortion, as stated in ¶129.

For those couples who for physical reasons cannot bear children, the church advises them to consider the adoption of children. Such couples should seek the assistance of reliable placement agencies to avoid possible unfortunate circumstances and to avail themselves of competent counsel.

### **129 Abortion**

Abortion is a major moral problem in our society. We believe that human life is sacred from the moment of conception, and that abortion must not occur anytime after conception. Consequently, abortion cannot be recognized morally and Scripturally as a means of birth control, as a solution to a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest, or as a way to prevent or eliminate congenital or hereditary defects.

The church recognizes the possibility of therapeutic abortion. However, it can be performed in Christian conscience only when the mother's life is in imminent danger, as determined by two competent physicians, one of whom has been or would be attending her pregnancy.

### **130 Genetic Engineering**

Genetic engineering, the ability to manipulate the

genetic formation of the living cell, is part of our scientific culture. However, the church does not condone sex selection or genetic screening as reasons for abortion, through information obtained by amniocentesis.

The church does not approve of artificial inovation (the process by which a fertilized ovum is placed in the fallopian tube or the uterus), except in the case of a married couple whose own sperm and ovum are used. The church also rejects the process of cloning in the human reproductive system. Neither does the church condone experiments to develop artificial uteruses and placentas with the ultimate goal of developing a full-term fetus without the mother's presence.

Genetic engineering raises legal, medical, ethical, and religious issues. The church is concerned that scientific knowledge, without a moral system, will lead to devastating results.

### **131 Euthanasia**

Because of the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder" (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17), the church cannot condone the taking of life for the purposes of escaping the suffering and difficulties caused by sickness, disease, injury, old age, infirmity, or for any other such reasons.

Because of the dignity of human life and the Christian's privilege of dying and going to be with Christ, the Christian or the Christian's family members, in the event that the person lacks the capacity to do so, should have the privilege of rejecting artificial means for the sustaining of life when the maintenance of life is dependent upon these artificial means.

## CHAPTER 6

# Social Standards

Christians are to be good citizens within their community, culture, nation, and world. They should be on guard against all destructive actions and vices surrounding them, and raise a proper protest in the most appropriate forum.

### **141 Human Relations**

The church respects human personality which is inherent in every race, nation and creed. We believe in the Bible's instruction that there is no basis whatsoever for a belief in the superiority or inferiority of any people. Therefore, the church protests against any action or practice that produces discrimination based upon racial, national, creedal or social differences, since God "made from one, every nation of men to live on the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

The church admonishes all members to commit their attitudes, actions and influences in faithful witness to this truth and to oppose every influence, whether it be economic, social, moral or religious which would debase, impair, or bring into bondage those whom God has created in his own likeness.

The church believes that there must be equal rights and justice for all. All members should register their concern and opposition to any form of prejudice that would prevent any individual or ethnic group from free and full participation in the privileges and benefits of our society. We advocate through due process of law and within the framework of the democratic system the elimination of poverty; the abolishment of unemployment; a fair wage in every vocation; fair practices between employer and employees; adequate provisions for the aged and for those who are unemployable; the opportunity for decent housing for all; and a proper concern for total human need in our contemporary world.

The church acknowledges that mankind's basic need is for the saving grace of Jesus Christ and is therefore committed to the telling of the Good News of the gospel to all persons. But the church also recognizes the commandment to love all men in the name of Christ. Therefore, the church admonishes all members to strive for a society characterized by unselfish compassion and service to all. (*Philippians 2:3; Matthew 25:31-41; Luke 6:31; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 Peter 3:8-12*)

### **142 Peace/Bearing Arms in War**

We positively record our disapproval of engaging in voluntary, national, aggressive warfare; yet we recognize the rightful authority of the civil government and hold it responsible for the preservation and defense of our national compact against treason or invasion by any belligerent force.

We affirm the right of our members to serve and bear arms in the national armed forces. We also support the right of the honest conscientious objector to refuse to bear arms in military service, and to instead choose humanitarian service to his/her nation.

We wish to go on record as a church as being much in favor of national and international peace; and we urge our leaders to always pursue peace.

### **143 Drug Abuse**

Christians are directed in the Bible to be temperate in all things. This implies discipline in all emotions, passions, and appetites. It means the proper use of wholesome food and drink. (*Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 5:22; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 5:11, 6:10, 6:19; and 1 Thessalonians 5:22*)

#### **1. Alcoholic Beverages**

The use of alcoholic beverages is often person-

ally injurious to their users and is often at the core of significant family and social problems. The use of alcoholic beverages is often found to be contrary to the best interest of personal and social morality, economy, and welfare. Holy Scripture teaches us to exercise good stewardship of our bodies. Scripture also admonishes us to avoid abusive indulgence of alcoholic beverages (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35).

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ believes, and experience demonstrates, that the abuse of alcoholic beverages is harmful to our physical bodies and is a detriment to the best stewardship and witness of our lives. Therefore, we urge all of our members to avoid using alcoholic beverages. We also urge our leaders to teach as well as counsel about the hazards of abusing alcoholic beverages and that deliverance is possible through the ministry of the Spirit.

## 2. Tobacco

The Bible reveals that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and instructs believers to live pure lives. The church believes and experience demonstrates that the use of tobacco is injurious to the physical body and is a detriment to the best stewardship and witness of our lives. Therefore, all members are urged to abstain from its use in any form.

We urge our leaders to teach about the hazards of tobacco use and that deliverance is available through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

## 3. Narcotic, Hallucinogenic, Mind-Altering, and Mood-Altering Drugs

The scientific, medical, law enforcement, and welfare segments of our society have given witness to the corrupting and devastating results of narcotic, hallucinogenic, mind-altering, and mood-altering drugs. Members of the church are to exercise abstinence from using these drugs in any form or for any purpose, except under the most strict prescription and observation of skilled members of the medical profession.

## 144 Gambling

The Bible teaches that the love of money is destructive and that productive work fits into God's plan for life. Gambling, on the other hand, stimulates the desire to get something for nothing and it seeks material gain by a fatalistic faith in chance. The church has observed that organized and commercial gambling is a threat to business, breeds crime and poverty, and is destructive to the best interests of good government.

Because gambling is a menace to personal character, social morality, and biblical stewardship, we therefore urge all members to abstain from participating in gambling in any form, including lotteries, and to raise a proper protest against the spread of illegal and legalized gambling. (*Proverbs 28:19-20; I*

*Timothy 6:7-11; Luke 16:10-13; I Corinthians 4:2)*

## 145 Pornography

The distribution of pornographic material in various media is one of the causes of the moral decline of our nation. We encourage our local churches to take an active part in any local movement to eliminate the distribution of pornographic material in their respective communities. In case there is no such movement in their communities, we encourage our local churches to take the initiative in carefully and prayerfully organizing such a movement.

## 146 Occult

The Holy Scriptures teach us to seek supernatural guidance from God only. Therefore, all members are to abstain from any participation in the occult. This includes all types of fortune-telling, astrology, communication with spirits and witchcraft. (*Deuteronomy 18:9-22; Galatians 5:19-21; Acts 19:13-20)*

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# Part III: The Ministry

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## CHAPTER 7

# Ministers

## 201 Introduction

In its broadest sense, the term "minister" can be applied to all Christians who use the gifts God has given them. Within that understanding, all United Brethren members should be "ministers," actively developing and using the gifts they have received.

In its more restrictive use, "minister" refers to individuals who have been recognized by the church as having received a more specific call from God. This call has been confirmed through a process of study and examination which has also equipped them to perform specific tasks within the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

The United Brethren church does not discriminate in granting ministerial credentials on the basis of gender or race.

## 202 Classifications

Ministers in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, can be classified as follows: local church ministers, national conference ministers, ordained elders, lay ministers, and specialized ministers. Specific descriptions for each of these classifications are described in the *Pastoral Ministry Handbook* maintained and revised by the Pastoral

Ministry Leadership Team.

The first three classifications—local church minister, national conference minister, and ordained elder—are parts of a three-step process which culminates in ordination. Local church and national conference ministers are expected to pursue ordination. Any of these classifications that are actively stationed or hired by a local church, and that meet current Internal Revenue Service requirements for exemption, are considered by the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, as eligible for such exemption.

### **203 General Qualifications**

No person shall be approved or retained as a licensed minister in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, whose life is not in harmony with the established moral and social standards of the church as defined in the Discipline. In addition, ministers are not permitted to use tobacco, beverage alcohol, and illicit drugs, or to engage in any immoral conduct, and their marriage relationships must be in harmony with the teachings of Scripture as defined in the Discipline.

All ministers are required to maintain membership in a local United Brethren church. Failure to do so will render the ministerial license null and void.

### **204 Expectations**

#### **1. General Statement**

All ministers are expected to model a Christ-centered lifestyle. In so doing, they will confirm the message of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ which they are to proclaim. They are to evangelize the lost, assimilate them into the church, and train those in their churches to be effective disciples of Jesus Christ as they nurture them in the faith.

#### **2. Spiritual Development and Lifestyle**

All ministers should give priority time to their own spiritual development through the disciplines of prayer, meditation on the Word of God, and fasting. They should be wise managers of their time and careful stewards of their relationships with all people, especially with regard to the opposite sex. They should use their speech judiciously, speaking evil of no one, and should take the initiative in restoring broken relationships.

#### **3. Pastoral Transitions**

When ministers transition from ministerial positions, the friendships and bonds of affection they have established with their parishioners continue; however, the pastoral relationship does not. Since the primary goal at the time of transition is the development of the new pastoral relationship, ministers are to operate in light of the following expectations. Violation of these provisions shall be con-

sidered trespassing, and ministers so accused shall be answerable to the Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team.

a. Ministers shall not communicate with members of a previous congregation in such a way that it disrupts the work of the successor.

b. Ministers shall not perform funerals, baptisms or weddings, nor participate in any other pastoral function at their former churches or for members of their former churches, unless specifically invited to do so by the current pastor or the cluster coach of the current pastor.

c. Ministers shall not arbitrarily form a new congregation (regardless of denominational affiliation) without the approval of the Church Multiplication Leadership Team.

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## **Part IV: Geographic Organization**

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### CHAPTER 8

## **Division of the Territory**

### **301 Purpose**

It is essential within the church as an institution to do all things “decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). It is also imperative to structure the organization so as to preserve the freedom of the church to respond to the mandate of Jesus Christ and the need and opportunity for ministry without unnecessary hindrance.

Therefore, the following organizational structure is established on the basic premise of assigning appropriate responsibility for policy and decision making, for review and control. Further, the structure assumes that appropriate and responsible boards will establish the procedure for analysis, planning, determining ministries, and writing personnel policies pertaining to persons under their appointment.

### **302 Administrative Divisions**

The church shall consist of the following administrative entities:

#### **1. Appointment**

A preaching point organized or not organized into a local church.

#### **2. Local Church**

A duly organized group consisting of adult mem-

bers from ten or more resident families. A resident family must include at least one person who is a member of the church. The family must also meet at least one of these requirements: live within ten miles of the church, regularly contribute financially, or regularly attend services.

### 3. Mission District

One or more appointments or local churches outside of the United States which are administered by the Global Ministries Leadership Team.

### 4. Cluster

A group of 5-10 churches (ideally not more than seven churches).

### 5. Region

A geographic designation used primarily for representation purposes. The churches of the US National Conference are grouped into these regions:

- a. *West Region.* All churches in Indiana and in all states west of Indiana, except for any states specified as part of a different region.
- b. *Central Region.* All churches in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the part of Pennsylvania north of Pittsburgh and west of Oil City.
- c. *North Region.* All churches in Michigan.
- d. *East Region.* All churches in Pennsylvania not part of the Central region, and in these states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, and the northeastern United States.

### 6. Church of the United Brethren in Christ, United States of America

All United Brethren churches in the United States comprise the national conference known as the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

### 7. Church of the United Brethren in Christ International

All United Brethren national conferences are part of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.

### 303 Right to Books and Records

Any person who has been elected to an office is entitled to immediate possession of all papers, documents, books, records, and minutes pertaining to the past acts and proceedings of said office; and the predecessor shall turn over all such documents and records in his/her possession.

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## Part V: The Local Church

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### CHAPTER 9

## Organizing New Churches

### 401 Congregations Arising from Church Plants

A congregation may officially organize as a United Brethren church by following these steps:

1. The congregation must average 50 people in weekly worship for 12 months.
2. The congregation must include adults from ten or more resident families.
3. The congregation is willing to carry out the expectations of other full-member churches in the national conference.
4. The congregation shows evidence of financial self-sufficiency and an ability and willingness to pay assessments.
5. The congregation notifies the Executive Leadership Team, in writing, of its desire to organize as a church.
6. The Executive Leadership Team votes to receive the congregation into full membership.

### 402 Adopting Non-United Brethren Congregations

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, invites existing congregations to be adopted into our fellowship. These steps should be followed when an existing congregation which is not affiliated with the United Brethren church wants to be adopted by the national conference as a United Brethren congregation.

1. The congregation will notify the Executive Leadership Team, in writing, of its desire to affiliate with the national conference.
2. The US bishop or his appointee will meet with leaders from the church to investigate such areas as:
  - a. The doctrinal teachings of the church.
  - b. The church's willingness to abide by the Confession of Faith, Core Values, and Discipline of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.
  - c. The church's willingness to meet the expectations of all other full-member churches in the national conference.
  - d. The willingness of the church's members or constituents to individually become members of the United Brethren church, according to the procedures specified in the Discipline.
  - e. Evidence of financial self-sufficiency and an ability and willingness to pay the partnership fee.
3. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team will meet with the senior pastor to review issues of min-

isterial credentialing.

4. The US bishop or his appointee shall facilitate any other meetings designed to facilitate mutual understanding and familiarization.

5. A majority of the church's constituents or members must vote in favor of being adopted as a United Brethren congregation.

6. The Executive Leadership Team will designate the church as a preaching point or a church plant. The church must hold this status for at least twelve months.

7. The Executive Leadership Team will recommend that the national conference designate the church as a full-member congregation.

8. After the twelve-month waiting period has passed, the Executive Leadership Team may designate the congregation as a full-member church, providing that these conditions have been met:

a. At least ten resident member families have been received individually as members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, according to the procedures and requirements specified in the Discipline.

b. The Executive Leadership Team has determined that the congregation meets the basic criteria for a full-member church as stated in Chapter 13, "Local Church Organization."

## CHAPTER 10

# Joining the Church

### **411 Definition of Membership**

Membership is a process that best marks and maintains a believer's commitment to life transformation, while working to insure the integrity, unity, and building up of the church. Thus, membership is more like discipleship than enlistment. It is more than simply being saved, but less than what a believer becomes in a lifetime of spiritual growth. Membership is not about an organization, but about the living organism of Christ's Body. It is not about privilege, but about becoming more like Christ in the context of a local and worldwide community. "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6-7).

### **412 Historical Underpinnings of United Brethren Membership**

1. A United Brethren church member must have a professed personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

2. Membership includes a believer's voluntary submission to a prescribed set of standards. In choosing to become a member, a Christian chooses

to follow those expectations.

3. Doctrinal commitment is important to the unity and stability of church membership.

4. Mutual accountability is essential to the maturity of the church member. Believers who choose membership in a United Brethren church voluntarily accept being held accountable for their Christian faith and practice. The church's expectations for its members are clearly stated and printed.

5. Church discipline is essential in preserving the unity of the church membership. Discipline of members should be corporately understood and accepted as it protects the integrity and unity of the church.

6. The goal of membership is not accumulation of numbers, but the spiritual development of the Christian constituency.

### **413 Adult Membership**

#### **1. Age**

Persons 16 years of age and older may become adult members.

#### **2. Qualifications**

The following must be determined to be true before persons can be accepted into membership:

a. They acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word, and that it alone reveals how to receive eternal life.

b. They have experienced the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

c. They are determined to grow in Christ and live in obedience to Christ.

d. They have been baptized, or are willing to be baptized as soon as is convenient.

e. They are willing to be governed by the church Discipline.

f. They are willing to give of their time, abilities, and resources to support the various church interests, according to their ability.

#### **3. Voting Rights**

Adult members are eligible to vote in all local elections, on referendum proposals, and in elections of delegates to the US National Conference.

### **414 Student Membership**

#### **1. Age**

Persons age 9 through 15 may join as student members.

#### **2. Qualifications**

The following must be determined to be true before persons can be accepted into membership:

a. They acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word, and that it alone reveals how to receive eternal life.

b. They have experienced the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

c. They are determined to grow as a Christian and live in obedience to Christ.

d. They have been baptized, or are willing to be baptized as soon as is convenient.

### 3. Voting Rights

Student members are not eligible to vote in church elections.

## 415 Watch-care Membership

### 1. Age

Children under the age of nine may be nurtured in the church in its watch-care membership, with the goal of leading them toward a commitment to Christ.

### 2. Qualifications

Before children are accepted into watch-care membership, the following must be determined to be true:

a. They acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word, and that it alone reveals how a person can receive eternal life.

b. They are willing to learn what the Bible says about being a Christian.

c. They will try to meet the requirements for church membership.

### 3. Parental Consent

Children shall not be admitted as watch-care members unless consent has been given by the parents or guardians.

### 4. Reporting

Because watch-care membership does not require a profession of faith, such members shall not be reported as members in full standing. Instead, they will be reported as members in watch-care.

### 5. Voting Rights

Watch-care members are not eligible to vote in church elections.

## 416 Receiving Members

Each church may determine the procedure for accepting qualified persons into membership.

It is important that new members and the congregation bond. Thus, the church should find a satisfactory way to communicate to its entire body the favorable answers to the following questions.

### 1. Receiving Adult Members

As a church, we believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, the regeneration of the soul, a wholly surrendered and Spirit-filled life, and growth in grace and knowledge of the truth. We believe that there must be perseverance in Christian living and faithfulness in Christian witness to promote harmony in our relationship with the Savior.

Our beliefs are further indicated by the questions which follow:

(The minister shall then ask the prospective member the following questions:)

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

If so, answer, "I do."

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that he accepts you as his child?

If so, answer, "I so believe."

c. Are you determined by the grace of God to follow Christ, renouncing the world and all ungodliness, seeking to live a life of holiness and devotion to God and his cause?

If so, answer, "I am."

d. Are you willing to be governed by our church Discipline, and are you willing to be placed under the authority of the local church?

If so, answer, "I am."

e. Are you willing to give of your time, talent, and means to the support of the various interests of this church according to your ability?

If so, answer, "I am."

f. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized at your earliest convenience?

### 2. Receiving Student Members

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

If so, answer, "I do."

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that he accepts you as his child?

If so, answer, "I so believe."

c. Do you promise to attend the services of the church and to read the Bible and pray, so that you may become more and more like Jesus?

If so, answer, "I promise."

d. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized?

### 3. Receiving Watch-care Members

a. Do you believe the Bible to be God's Book through which he speaks to us, and that in the Bible is shown the only way we can be saved from sin?

If so, answer, "I do."

b. Are you willing to be taught the Bible and what it means to be a Christian, and will you faithfully try to meet the requirements for membership in this church?

If so, answer, "I will."

## 417 Transfer of Members

The local board may approve a letter of transfer to another United Brethren church. Upon completion of the transfer, the person's name shall be removed from the roll.

#### **418 Withdrawal of Members**

When members desire to withdraw from the church, they may be given a letter of withdrawal by the local board. When appropriate, this letter may be accompanied by a statement of recommendation to a specific church, regardless of denomination.

#### **419 Revising the Roll**

1. To insure an active and accurate membership, each local church is encouraged to periodically revise its membership roll. It is recommended that every church revise its membership role in the year prior to the US National Conference.

2. The local board may remove members from the roll with a two-thirds vote in the following situations:

a. The local board has not known the person's location for the past one year, and the local board determines that sufficient attempts have been made to locate the person.

b. A member's lifestyle, conduct, or doctrine violate the commitment agreed to in becoming a member. This action can be taken only if attempts to restore, correct, or reconcile the person do not succeed.

3. *Students.* Upon reaching age 16, youth may be received into adult membership by meeting the qualifications for adult membership. No youth shall remain on the student roll after age 15. The student roll should be corrected annually.

4. *Watch-care.* After the age of nine, children who have made a commitment to Christ and show a continued interest in the church may become student members by complying with the requirements for student church membership. Watch-care members who persistently refuse to seek Christ or to receive religious instruction may be dropped from the roll.

#### **420 Dual Membership**

Applicants to Global Ministries must be current members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. In the case of married couples applying for endorsed status, at least one must be a current member. All are expected to maintain their membership. However, dual membership is permitted should missionaries find church membership in their place of ministry to be either necessary or advantageous.

## CHAPTER 11

# Local Church Organization

#### **421 Organization**

##### **1. Size**

A group of adults may organize as a local church when they achieve the following:

- a. Adult members from 10 or more resident families.

- b. An average worship attendance of 50 or more over the preceding twelve consecutive months.

- c. Have signed and returned the National Conference Covenant.

##### **2. Structure**

Each local church is free to establish the structure that will best suit the needs and ministries of the congregation and community, with the exception of the following requirements with regard to 422, "Local Board of Administration," and 423, "Lay Delegates," and 424, "Personnel Relations Commission."

#### **422 Local Board of Administration**

##### **1. Purpose**

The local board of administration (or its equivalent) oversees all affairs pertaining to the local church. All commissions, committees, and other groups within the church are subject to the board of administration.

##### **2. Personnel**

- a. The constituency of the board depends on the structure which the local church chooses to adopt. The senior pastor shall be a member of the board.

- b. The board will elect these officers from its own number: a chairperson and assistant chairperson.

- c. The board will appoint a person to serve as secretary.

- d. All lay board members must be members of the local church.

##### **3. Duties**

- a. The board shall establish the structure that will best suit the needs and ministries of the congregation and community.

- b. The board shall keep its rulings and policies in harmony with the policies and proceedings of the US National Conference.

- c. The board shall provide for the selection of church leaders and lay delegates.

- d. The board shall provide for the responsible handling and accounting of the church's finances.

#### **423 Lay Delegates**

##### **1. Responsibilities**

Lay delegates represent the local church to the national conference, and also serve as voting delegates at the US National Conference.

##### **2. Qualifications**

All lay delegates must be adult members of the local church they represent. The church shall not select anyone who holds a National Conference license or is being recommended to the National Conference for license.

##### **3. Selection**

Each local church may determine the method for

selecting lay delegates.

#### 4. Notification

The local board shall inform the US bishop of the delegates and alternates chosen, according to the timeline specified by the bishop

#### 424 Personnel Relations Commission

Each church shall have a Personnel Relations Committee. Its responsibilities include:

1. Serve as a conferring and counseling committee to the pastor and other employed personnel.
2. Be sensitive to the relationship between the pastor and congregation.
3. Make recommendations concerning the pastor's salary and benefits.
4. Make recommendations to the local board concerning such things as vacation, pulpit supply, and attendance at conventions and seminars.
5. Cooperate with the stationing committee in securing a pastor when the need arises.
6. Make recommendations to the local board concerning job descriptions of other employed personnel.

## CHAPTER 12

# Local Conference

#### 431 Purpose

The local conference shall be the highest authority in the local church that it represents and shall consider those items of business or concerns which should be cared for under the direction of the bishop or cluster coach.

#### 432 Personnel

The bishop, the cluster leaders, persons holding a local church minister's license and who are members of the local church or national conference minister's license, and all members of the local board of administration shall be members of the local conference.

#### 433 Meetings

The local conference shall meet at the request of the bishop, the cluster coach, the pastor, or upon the written requests of three members of the local board of administration. Such members as are present at any regularly called meeting shall constitute a quorum.

The local board of administration, or its equivalent, shall make an announcement to the congregation about the date and purpose of the meeting. Any member or attendee of the church may attend a meeting of the local conference. Only members of the local conference, as spelled out in ¶432, shall have a vote or the privilege to speak at local conference meetings.

#### 1. Chairperson

The cluster coach shall be the chairperson of the local conference (except in the case of a special session called by the bishop). A cluster coach who calls a session but is not able to be present may appoint an elder of the national conference, in consultation with the bishop, to preside.

#### 2. Secretary

The secretary of the local board of administration shall act as secretary and shall keep a correct record of the proceedings of the local conference in a book provided for that purpose.

#### 435 Duties

1. *To Grant and Renew Licenses.* The local conference shall grant and renew local church ministers' licenses and shall recommend to the bishop those ministers who are qualified for national conference license to preach. The local conference shall be empowered to take all actions necessary to the licensing of lay ministers. The local conference shall have power to remove either local church ministers or lay ministers from office according to the further provisions of Discipline.

2. *To Hear Reports and Review the Activities of All Agencies of the Local Church.*

3. *To Try Appeals.* The local conference shall receive and try all appeals, references, and complaints that may come regularly before it. No members of the local church shall be denied the right to a trial according to Discipline.

4. *Receiving the Pastor.* All local churches shall receive the pastor appointed by the stationing committee (Colossians 4:10; Philippians 2:29; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

5. *To Enforce Discipline.* The local conference shall enforce Discipline in the local church under its charge.

6. *To Disband a Local Church.* The local conference shall have the power to disband a local church when in its judgment it is found impracticable to provide the necessary organization and support. It is recommended that money from the sale of closed churches be given to the US National Conference to start new churches.

## CHAPTER 13

# Pastors in Charge

#### 441 Duties of Pastors

##### 1. To be holy in lifestyle.

- a. By leading a life of prayer.
- b. By spending time devotionally in God's Word.
- c. By setting an example of the Christian life with-

in the church and community.

**2. To preach and teach the Word of God.**

- a. By giving priority to study and preparation.
- b. By having a preaching/teaching plan to present the whole Word of God.

**3. To provide for the regular observance of the ordinances and ceremonies of the church.**

- a. By celebrating the Lord's Supper.
- b. By providing opportunities for Christian baptism.
- c. By performing weddings and funerals.

**4. To equip the believers for works of service.**

- a. By helping them find their spiritual gifts.
- b. By training them to become proficient in the use of God's Word.
- c. By training them in the various aspects of ministry.
- d. By allowing them to be involved in personal ministry within the local church.

**5. To do and teach the work of an evangelist.**

- a. By doing consistent personal evangelism in the local church and the community.
- b. By providing for training the believers in personal evangelism in both classroom and real life settings.

**6. To be responsible for local church administration.**

- a. By overseeing the worship services.
- b. By giving direction for the ministry of the local church.
- c. By doing specific planning and goal-setting.
- d. By making monthly reports to the board of administration and annual reports to the national conference.
- e. By keeping accurate membership records.
- f. By preparing and keeping an updated passbook.
- g. By presenting the church Discipline.
- h. By notifying the US bishop in writing at least 30 days before the effective date of resignation.

**7. To provide pastoral care.**

**8. To promote national conference activities.**

- a. By attending national conference activities that are provided for pastors.
- b. By promoting other national conference interests including seminars, camps, athletic events, etc.

**9. To promote national church interests.**

- a. By promoting the emphases and ministries of the national church.
- b. By overseeing national church elections.
- c. By presenting the referenda.
- d. By promoting church periodicals and publications.

CHAPTER 14

## Churches in Crisis

### 451 Crisis Intervention

#### 1. Conditions

Any existing full-member congregation shall require national conference intervention whenever it becomes unhealthy or shows consistent decline, as evidenced by any combination of the following:

- a. An average morning worship attendance of fewer than 50 for two consecutive years or more.
- b. Fewer than ten resident member families.
- c. Lack of financial stability and/or self-reliance.
- d. Lack of clear and common purpose.
- e. Severe and unresolved internal conflict which damages the church's reputation in the community and hurts the cause of Christ.

#### 2. Intervention Strategies

Such congregations may initiate their own plans subject to national conference approval and supervision, or an appropriate national conference entity may intervene to explore possible renewal and revitalization strategies. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. *Renewal Plan.* A renewal plan would help the existing congregation revitalize its ministry. Components might include an objective assessment of its spiritual health, the development of a renewed purpose, an addressing of any internal problems or obstacles, etc.
- b. *Restart Plan.* A restart plan would close the existing congregation and use its resources to start a new church in the same community with a new ministry focus, a new location, a new name, and/or a new pastor.
- c. *Maintenance Plan.* A maintenance plan would allow the congregation to decide to continue its present course, but without any further outside intervention and/or assistance. The church would lose its voice in the national conference after five years of no progress toward an agreed plan.
- d. *Closure Plan.* A closure plan would close the church in accordance with the procedures below.

### 452 Closing a Church

#### 1. Initiating a Closure

The process for closing a church can be initiated by:

- a. *The local board of administration.* The board will notify the US bishop of its desire, and the local board and cluster leader begin discussing the idea.
- b. *Executive Leadership Team.* The Executive Leadership Team may direct the cluster leader to meet with a local board about the possibility of closing that church.
- c. *Cluster leader.* The cluster leader may call a local

conference to discuss the possibility of closing the church.

## 2. Reasons for Closing

Reasons for closing a church can be based on such factors as:

- a. The church is weak in such areas as membership, attendance, finances, and purpose.
- b. There is a desire to merge with another congregation.
- c. The congregation is unable to carry out a meaningful ministry.
- d. The congregation consists of less than ten resident families.

## 3. Closing the Church

The final decision will be made by the local conference. When that decision is made, the following actions will occur:

- a. The local church will determine the 501.c(3) organization that will receive the property.
- b. A letter will be sent to each member, outlining possible options regarding church attendance and membership in nearby churches, information on what will happen to the church property, and any other relevant information.
- c. Members shall transfer their membership to the local church of their choice. If that is not done within six months, the US bishop may close the roll by removing the names from United Brethren membership.

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# Part VI: The National Church

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## CHAPTER 15

# US National Conference

### 501 Purpose

The United States National Conference shall oversee all affairs pertaining to its various ministries. The US National Conference shall establish policies pertaining to the ministry of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, United States of America.

### 502 National Conference Covenant

The National Conference Covenant is the church's opportunity to reaffirm its relationship with sister congregations and the US National Conference. Through this covenant, a local church expresses its desire to strengthen and support the ministries of the United Brethren Church in its effort to fulfill the Great Commission.

### 1. Responsibilities of Individual Congregations

Every congregation shall do the following:

- a. They shall reaffirm their support of and membership in the US National Conference by signing a covenant which includes affirmation of these points:
  - (1) They are committed to the Confession of Faith.
  - (2) They agree with the core values of the United Brethren in Christ, International.
  - (3) They agree to abide by the Constitution and Discipline of the US National Conference.
  - (4) They are passionate about fulfilling the Great Commission through their local church.
  - (5) They support the ministry and mission of the United Brethren Church, USA, through the annual partnership fee.
  - (6) They will participate in a cluster.
- b. They shall renew the covenant every two years prior to the National Conference session.
- c. The covenant shall be approved by vote of the highest governing body within the local church.
- d. The covenant shall be signed and dated by the chairman of that governing body and by the senior pastor (or a leading layperson, should the senior pastor be chairman of that body).
- e. The covenant shall be submitted to the national office 90 days prior to the National Conference session.

### 2. Responsibilities of the US National Conference

- a. If a church does not sign and submit the covenant to the national office 90 days prior to the National Conference session, the bishop shall establish a procedure for determining whether or not the church desires to remain part of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.
- b. The bishop shall give churches opportunity to comply with the covenant. If they fail to comply, the bishop may call a special local conference to determine if they desire to sign and continue in a covenant relationship with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, or to withdraw from said relationship. If a majority of the church's members at a duly called meeting determine not to sign the covenant, then the church shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.
- c. Having followed the above procedure, churches that hold title to their property and do not sign the covenant shall be considered to have withdrawn from the denomination.
- d. If a church does not keep its commitment to the standards of the national conference covenant, and has been advised by the Bishop, the ELT may, with a majority vote, revoke the covenant.
- e. The ELT shall handle any situations which may arise concerning the status of churches, but which are not already covered in the Discipline.

**503 Delegates to the National Conference**

The voting members of the United States National Conference are the US bishop, national directors, the ministerial delegate(s) from each congregation, and the lay delegates chosen by each congregation according to ¶11 of the Constitution.

**1. Clergy Representation**

Ministers are eligible to serve as voting members if they meet both of these conditions:

- a. They hold a specialized Ministry license, a national conference license, or are ordained elders in the United Brethren church.
- b. At the time of the National Conference, they meet one of these criteria:
  - (1) Are employed by a United Brethren church in the US National Conference.
  - (2) Serve the national conference in an appointed or elected position.
  - (3) Hold a leadership position in a non-United Brethren ministry recognized by the Executive Leadership Team. Persons desiring this recognition must send a letter to the bishop requesting such recognition.

**2. Lay Representation**

The following formula will be used to determine the number of lay delegates from each congregation.

| <b>Ave Attendance</b> | <b>Lay Delegates</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1-150                 | 1                    |
| 151-250               | 2                    |
| 251-350               | 3                    |
| 351-450               | 4                    |
| 451-550               | 5                    |
| etc.                  | etc.                 |

**3. Expenses**

The local church shall pay the expenses of its delegates.

**504 Officers**

**1. The Bishop**

The US bishop shall be chairperson of the US National Conference.

**2. The Secretary**

The Executive Leadership Team shall appoint a secretary to record the proceedings of the US National Conference.

**505 Responsibilities of the National Conference**

1. The US National Conference shall determine the mission and ministry of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, and provide appropriate plans and policies for its administration.

2. The US National Conference shall review the work of its elected officers, appointed leadership teams, committees, and other personnel.

3. The US National Conference shall consider the revision of the Discipline.

4. The US National Conference shall establish financial policies for developing the annual budget for the US national church. The Executive Leadership Team will adopt the budget the years that the US National Conference does not meet.

5. The US National Conference shall oversee its relationship with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.

6. The US National Conference shall guard the church's historic position of firmly upholding biblical absolutes, allowing freedom in areas not clearly mandated by Scripture, and encouraging tolerance and unity when differences arise.

7. When practices, teachings, or decisions within a local church or by US National Conference officials and institutions challenge the doctrinal integrity (as defined by the Confession of Faith), cooperative relationship, and/or ministry of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, the US National Conference shall have the authority to apply whatever disciplinary action it considers appropriate.

CHAPTER 16

**Election of Delegates**

**511 Election of Lay Delegates**

1. The bishop shall, as early as possible, announce the number of lay delegates to which each local church is entitled. The number will be based on the official statistics at the end of the first year of the biennium.

2. Each local church shall determine the method it uses for selecting lay delegates, and shall notify the bishop of the lay delegates selected by March 1 prior to the meeting of the US National Conference.

**512 Referenda**

1. The Executive Leadership Team shall approve the wording of any constitutional referenda to be placed before the membership.

2. The bishop shall, during the month of January prior to the meeting of the US National Conference, provide to each church a copy of any referenda, along with instructions regarding the voting process.

3. Each local church shall vote on referenda items throughout the month of February prior to the meeting of the US National Conference.

4. All adult members of the local church may vote.

5. Members must use a referenda ballot provided by the church in which they hold membership.

## CHAPTER 17

**The US Bishop**

The US National Conference shall elect an ordained minister to serve as US bishop for a four-year term. This person must have served as a United Brethren elder for at least six years. The bishop shall reside in the area of Huntington, Indiana.

**521 Election of the US Bishop****1. Nominating Committee**

The Executive Leadership Team shall appoint a nominating committee and approve the ballot for submission to the US National Conference.

**2. Duties of the Nominating Committee**

a. The nominating committee shall consider all elders eligible for election to the office of bishop. (See 12.2.)

b. The nominating committee shall confer with persons they desire to nominate to determine if there are circumstances which would prevent them from serving, if elected.

c. The nominating committee shall, when possible, notify the membership of the US National Conference of its nominations at least 30 days prior to the US National Conference.

**3. Amendments to the Report**

The nominating committee report may be amended by addition from the floor of the US National Conference. However, before the report can be adopted, those nominated by amendment must be interviewed by the nominating committee to determine if there are circumstances which would prevent them from serving, if elected.

**4. Election**

The election shall be conducted immediately after the report is adopted. Persons elected must receive a majority of the votes cast by ballot.

**522 Duties of the Bishop**

1. Develop and communicate the vision of the church in cooperation with the Executive Leadership Team.

2. Preside at meetings of the US National Conference and the Executive Leadership Team. The bishop shall be responsible for the general administration of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA. The bishop will oversee the work of the directors, the staff, and the national leadership teams.

3. Conduct ordination services or assign this responsibility to another ordained minister.

4. Ensure that accountability procedures are established for all directors, leadership teams, cluster coaches, and staff of the US national church.

5. Interpret Discipline. The bishop shall interpret the Discipline, and this ruling shall stand until the next meeting of the US National Conference or the ELT.

6. Appoint Cluster Leaders. The bishop shall be responsible to appoint cluster coaches. Local churches that do not voluntarily join a cluster will be assigned a cluster relationship by the bishop.

7. Comply with International Agreements. The bishop shall ensure that US National Conference entities comply with any joint ministry agreements with any other United Brethren national conferences.

8. Represent the US National Conference. The bishop shall, at his discretion, participate in or designate someone to represent the US National Conference to parachurch and inter-denominational ministries, and to other evangelical denominations.

9. Develop and implement a strategy for recruiting future pastors and churches.

10. Station pastors in conjunction with others assigned to that task.

11. Promote and communicate the Core Values of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International, and the Standards of the Church as stated in Part 2 of the Discipline.

12. Encourage and promote continuing relationship with the international conferences.

13. The bishop is an ex-officio ministerial member to the General Conference.

14. Create any leadership teams, beyond those specified in the Discipline, needed to better serve the churches and ministries of the US National Conference.

15. Maintain a manual stating job descriptions and operating procedures of the national office, staff, and leadership teams.

16. Fill vacancies on leadership teams.

17. Appoint the appropriate number of delegates to represent the US National Conference to the General Conference.

**523 Accountability**

1. The bishop shall be accountable to the Executive Leadership Team for ministry performance and moral and personal conduct. An annual evaluation will be conducted according to provisions established by the Executive Leadership Team.

2. If the bishop becomes involved in immoral or imprudent conduct or otherwise proves to be incompetent in that office, the Executive Leadership Team will request the bishop's resignation or may remove the bishop from office by a two-thirds vote.

**524 Succession**

If a vacancy occurs in the office of bishop due to death, disability, resignation, or removal, the Executive Leadership Team shall appoint an elder to serve as acting bishop until the next meeting of the US National Conference.

## CHAPTER 18

**Connections****531 Introduction**

a. All National Conference ministers and senior pastors of United Brethren congregations are required to participate in a cluster of their choice for the purpose of maintaining and developing pastoral and congregational health through mutual friendships, coaching, and accountability.

b. Clusters are the entities to which all local congregations, preaching points, and ministers are primarily accountable.

c. The cluster to which the local church is accountable shall be the cluster in which the senior pastor is a member.

**532 Clusters****1. Purpose**

All National Conference ministers, non-licensed senior pastors, and United Brethren congregations are required to participate in a cluster of their choice for the purpose of maintaining and developing pastoral and congregational health through mutual friendships, coaching, and accountability. Clusters are the entities to which all local congregations, preaching points, and ministers are primarily accountable.

**2. Formation of Clusters**

a. A cluster typically consists of five to ten (ideally not more than seven) United Brethren ministers and their congregations.

b. Groups wishing to form a cluster will present a formal request, including admissions standards, to the Bishop, who possesses the authority to approve, disapprove, or request modifications.

c. Non-United Brethren participants may be included in approved clusters.

**3. Responsibilities and privileges of approved clusters.**

Approved clusters are responsible for the following:

**a. Responsibilities.**

(1) *Assumptions.* United Brethren participants in approved clusters shall maintain the core values, Confession of Faith, Constitution, and the Discipline of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, and follow all applicable laws, ethical guidelines, fiscal requirements, and sound business practices, so as not to bring disrepute on the cause of Christ.

(2) *Accountability.* United Brethren participants in approved clusters shall remain accountable collectively to the United Brethren Church and follow reporting processes to inform the US Bishop and the Executive Leadership Team of its activities and processes. The

cluster shall also establish standards and methods whereby its participants can hold each other mutually accountable to maintain the United Brethren commitment to moral character, doctrinal soundness, administrative integrity, and ministry competence.

**b. Privileges.** Approved clusters....

(1) May adopt group admission standards, setting forth qualifications and assumptions for participation, so long as they do not conflict with the Confession of Faith, the Core Values, the Constitution, and the Discipline.

(2) May admit additional ministers and congregations beyond those that sought original approval, provided such members meet the approved admissions standards of the cluster.

(3) May release ministers and congregations that desire to join another cluster or that do not maintain the standards, policies, or procedures of the cluster. Released parties are expected to seek membership in another cluster or be assigned to a cluster by the bishop.

**4. Cluster Leader**

The cluster leader will be appointed and accountable to the US bishop and/or his appointee. The responsibilities of the cluster coach will include the following:

a. The cluster leader will facilitate the cluster meetings.

b. The cluster leader will support and resource the pastors and churches involved.

c. The cluster leader will assist in nurturing local church licensees.

d. The cluster leader will act as a liaison between the US Bishop and the pastors and churches involved in the cluster.

e. The cluster leader or his designate will serve on the stationing committee for United Brethren churches in the cluster.

**533 Associations**

All local congregations, preaching points, and ministers may also freely form or join with any association(s) of churches or ministries to pursue goals and projects of common interest (such as church planting projects, local initiatives, joint evangelistic activities, camping ministries, etc.).

## CHAPTER 19

**Property****541 Introduction**

According to the UB Constitution, all church property titled by the local church is considered as belonging to the local church. All real property owned by the

national conference is considered to be held in trust for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

### **542 Property Reverting to the US National Conference**

When property reverts to the US National Conference, the US National Conference may do any of the following:

1. Donate or sell it back to the congregation, if still in existence, according to a mutual agreement of understanding.
2. Restart the congregation or start a new congregation in the same community.
3. Sell the property to an outside interest and use the funds for ministries within the US National Conference.
4. If the property is owned by the US National Conference, the US National Conference can transfer the property to the local church and request a lien representing the funds the US National Conference has invested in the property.

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## **Part VII: Leadership Teams**

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### CHAPTER 20

## **Executive Leadership Team**

### **601 Purpose**

The Executive Leadership Team shall conduct business between sessions of the US National Conference in accordance with the plans and policies of the US National Conference.

### **602 Personnel**

The Executive Leadership Team shall consist of the bishop, plus four laypersons and four clergy elected by the US National Conference. One clergy and one lay person will be elected from each of the four regions of the US National Conference. The Executive Leadership Team will appoint two clergy and two laypersons, one person from each of the four regions, to serve with them as members of the ELT.

### **603 Officers**

The bishop shall serve as the chairperson. The Executive Leadership Team shall select an assistant chairperson and a secretary from its membership.

### **604 Duties**

1. The Executive Leadership Team shall carry out the plans and policies established by the US National

Conference. When issues arise that are not covered by the policies established by the US National Conference, the Executive Leadership Team shall determine the policy which will be followed until the US National Conference meets and deals with the issue.

2. The Executive Leadership Team shall decide questions of interpretation in the Constitution and the US Discipline. Between sessions, the US bishop's interpretation will stand until the next meeting of either the National Conference or the Executive Leadership Team.

3. The Executive Leadership Team shall fill vacancies involving the US bishop.

4. The Executive Leadership Team will receive reports from the bishop, and from other persons as directed by the bishop, including information about finances, churches, ministries, and strategic direction.

5. The ELT shall develop and approve evaluation procedures for the US bishop, and shall approve job descriptions and evaluation procedures for the directors and staff.

6. Approve new appointments to the Higher Education Leadership Team.

7. Approve job descriptions and operating procedures of leadership for inclusion in the manual of operations.

### **605 Meetings**

The Executive Leadership Team will meet at least annually. Special meetings may be called by the chairperson. A majority of the members present shall constitute a quorum.

### CHAPTER 21

## **Higher Education Leadership Team**

### **611 The Director of Higher Education**

The President of Huntington University shall be the Director of Higher Education.

### **612 Duties of the Director of Higher Education**

The Director of Higher Education creates and promotes interest in Christian higher education throughout the US National Conference

### **613 Personnel**

#### **1. Members**

The Higher Education Leadership Team shall consist of the following:

- a. The US bishop.
- b. Seven members nominated by the bishop and

appointed by the Executive Leadership Team.

c. The Director of Higher Education and any associate staff shall be advisory members.

## 2. Terms

Team members shall serve terms of four years, and shall be eligible to serve no more than three consecutive terms without one year off the team. However, the US National Conference may elect a team member to serve additional terms without regard to the three consecutive term limit. Such exceptions would be considered:

- a. To allow a commission member to serve as chair or vice chair of the board of Huntington University.
- b. To fill a need for specific expertise or unique perspective on the team.

## 3. Lay/Clergy Ration

The voting members of the Higher Education Leadership Team shall include at least 40% laypersons and 40% clergy.

## 614 Team Officers

The Higher Education Leadership Team shall elect a chairperson, assistant chairperson, and recording secretary at its first meeting following its appointment. These officers shall hold office until their successors are elected. All officers shall be United Brethren members.

## 615 Meetings

The Higher Education Leadership Team shall meet at least annually. Special meetings shall be called by the chairperson. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

## 616 Executive Committee

The executive committee shall consist of the officers and the US bishop. This committee shall meet at the call of the chairperson or upon the request of two of its members. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

## 617 Duties and Powers

1. The Higher Education Leadership Team is responsible for policies which effect the work of higher education in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.
2. The Higher Education Leadership Team shall report to the meetings of the US National Conference and the Executive Leadership Team.
3. The Higher Education Leadership Team is responsible for the oversight of Huntington University in Huntington, Indiana.
4. The Higher Education Leadership Team is responsible for ministerial education for the US National Conference.

5. The Higher Education Leadership Team is responsible for the oversight of the United Brethren Historical Society.

## 618 Vacancies

The Executive Leadership Team will fill vacancies on the Higher Education Leadership Team. The Higher Education Leadership Team may suggest persons to be considered for appointment.

## CHAPTER 22

# Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team

## 621 Purpose

The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team oversees the licensing and ordination process for the US National Conference and gives leadership to the professional development of its ministers.

## 622 Personnel

1. *Members.* The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall consist of the following:
  - a. Chairperson of the Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team.
  - b. US bishop.
  - c. Director of the Pastoral Ministries track at the Huntington University Graduate School.
  - d. Up to seven additional members appointed by the Executive Leadership Team.
2. *Qualifications.* The chairperson and appointed members must be ordained elders in the United Brethren Church

## 623 Meetings

The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall meet at least semi-annually. Special meetings may be called by the chairperson. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

## 624 Duties and Powers

1. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall report to the US National Conference and Executive Leadership Team.
2. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall develop in conjunction with the bishop a strategy to recruit new pastors.
3. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team will be responsible for promoting professional development and continuing education for pastors.
4. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall set all guidelines pertaining to licensing and ordination.
5. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall ap-

point and oversee regional Ministerial Licensing and Ordination teams.

6. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team will have the final authority to grant licenses and approve ordinations.

7. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall establish procedures for the discipline and restoration of ministers.

8. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall encourage healthy clergy lifestyles and provide support for ministers experiencing burnout.

9. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall set guidelines and procedures for pastoral assignments.

10. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team shall maintain and revise the *Pastoral Ministry Handbook*, stating information about the description, qualifications, licensing, expectations, and accountability of the various categories of ministers.

### **625 Vacancies**

The Executive Leadership Team will fill vacancies on the Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team. The PMLT may suggest persons to be considered for appointment by the Executive Leadership Team.

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## **Part VIII: Church Conflict and Resolution**

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### CHAPTER 23

## **Local Church Conflict Resolution**

The following guidelines and procedures are designed to help congregations, pastors, and conference leaders deal with local church conflict. The goal is to resolve the conflict and restore any damaged relationships. This process requires that the parties involved be willing to work through their differences in a spirit of Christian unity, and that they understand the principles of biblical conflict resolution taught in Matthew 18:15-17.

### **701 Negotiation Phase**

Individuals in conflict should first attempt to resolve their differences privately, without congregational or national conference intervention. If this fails to bring a satisfactory resolution—either the accused party denies any wrongdoing, or they are unable to settle matters between themselves—one or two witnesses may be asked to assist.

### **702 Mediation Phase**

Conflicts that cannot be settled privately should be resolved within the congregation. Local church boards and commissions may be asked to deal with the conflict.

### **703 Arbitration Phase**

A local church is responsible for resolving conflict involving its own members. However, conflicts not resolved within the congregation may be referred to national conference leadership. If efforts at the negotiation and mediation phases fail, the local church may deem it necessary to refer the conflict to the national conference. As a general rule, this should occur only at the invitation of the board of administration or Personnel Relations Commission.

The US bishop and cluster coach will determine the appropriate arbiter(s) to deal with the conflict. These arbiters will make a final report with appropriate recommendations. Their decisions will be considered final.

### **704 Termination Phase**

Any party refusing to adhere to the church's ruling may be removed from church membership and from all ministry and leadership positions. The Executive Leadership Team has the authority to remove guilty parties from church membership and leadership positions.

### CHAPTER 24

## **Discipline of Church Members**

### **711 Introduction**

All United Brethren members are expected to conduct their lives according to the standards set forth in Scripture. Their conduct should demonstrate moral purity, personal honesty, faithfulness to the Bible, and unity in the body of Christ. The church is commanded to discipline its members when they continue in open and habitual sin.

Every Christian is ultimately accountable to God. But Christians who agree to become members of the United Brethren church also voluntarily submit themselves to the authority of its governing authorities. Likewise, church leaders have an obligation to discipline its members when necessary.

### **712 Offenses Requiring Church Discipline**

Any member or minister of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, may be subject to church discipline for any of the following offenses:

1. Teaching doctrines contrary to the doctrines of

the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

2. Disobeying the provisions of the *Discipline*, or tolerating such disobedience.

3. Insubordination or willful refusal to recognize church authority, whether at the local or national church level.

4. Conduct unbecoming a member of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

5. Serious or persistent neglect of duty.

### **713 Purposes of Church Discipline**

Church discipline has several purposes:

1. Encourage the sinning member to repent.

2. Restore the sinning member to fellowship with Christ and the church.

3. Warn other members against such sin.

4. Uphold and maintain the integrity, purity, and testimony of the church.

### **714 Process of Church Discipline**

Every situation requiring church discipline is different. Therefore, church leaders need flexibility in how they handle such situations. Any or all of the following actions might be appropriate:

1. Private rebuke of the sinning member.

2. Rebuke before two or three witnesses.

3. Public rebuke before the church.

4. Removal from leadership positions and other forms of involvement in the local church.

5. Removal of ministerial credentials.

6. Termination of membership by the local board.

7. Disassociation and severance of fellowship by the local congregation.

Regardless of the process used, leaders shall carry out the discipline in a spirit of Christian love, care, and sensitivity.

## CHAPTER 25

# **Discipline of Church Bodies**

### **721 Introduction**

All organizational entities of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, are expected to follow and uphold the standards set forth in the *Discipline*. When individuals and organizational entities disagree with those standards, the proper recourse is to submit proposals for change to the US National Conference. Non-compliance with the standards agreed upon by the broader church is not a valid option.

### **722 Offenses Requiring Church Discipline**

Any local church or other body or agency of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, may be subject to church discipline for any of these offenses:

1. Disseminating or tolerating the teaching of doctrines contrary to the doctrines of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, as stated in the *Discipline*.

2. Disobeying the provisions of the *Discipline*, or tolerating such disobedience.

3. Infringing on the rights of United Brethren members, as stated in the *Discipline*.

4. Insubordination or willful refusal to recognize church authority, whether at the local or national church level.

### **723 Jurisdiction**

The US National Conference is responsible for discipline involving the actions or decisions of:

a. Local churches in the national conference.

b. Pastors and licensed ministers in the US National Conference.

c. The Executive Leadership Team.

### **724 Process of Discipline**

1. Situations of a corporate nature which require discipline must be handled on an individual basis. The principles of conflict resolution outlined in chapter 44 should be followed as much as applicable. The persons involved in dealing with the situations will vary, depending on the level—local or national—and the specific bodies or persons involved. Therefore, it is impractical to outline specific procedures intended to address all possible situations. Rather, the relevant governing body shall have discretion in how it proceeds.

2. Depending on the situation, such actions as the following might be appropriate:

a. Private rebuke of the group in question, or its leader(s), by a national leader.

b. Rebuke of the group in question, or its leader(s), before two or three witnesses.

c. Rebuke before the appropriate governing body.

d. Removal of group members from their positions.

e. Disbanding of the group.



Church of the United  
Brethren in Christ  
INTERNATIONAL

# By-laws

2005-2009

**Revised June 24, 2005**

Revised and Published by Authority  
of the 2005 General Conference

## PART 1

## Confession of Faith

### 1 The Triune God

In the name of God, we declare and confess before men that we believe in the only true God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that these three are one--the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Ghost equal in essence or being with both; that this triune God created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, visible as well as invisible, and furthermore sustains, governs, protects, and supports the same.

### 2 Jesus Christ, the Son

We believe in Jesus Christ; that He is very God and man; that He became incarnate by the power of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary and was born of her; that He is the Savior and Mediator of the whole human race, if they with full faith in Him accept the grace proffered in Jesus; that this Jesus suffered and died on the cross for us, was buried, arose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God to intercede for us; and that He shall come again at the last day to judge the quick and the dead.

### 3 The Holy Spirit, Comforter and Guide

We believe in the Holy Ghost; that He is equal in being with the Father and the Son, and that He comforts the faithful, and guides them into all truth.

### 4 The Church

We believe in a holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

### 5 The Holy Bible and Salvation

We believe that the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God; that it contains the only true way to our salvation; that every true Christian is bound to acknowledge and receive it with the influence of the Spirit of God as the only rule and guide; and that without faith in Jesus Christ, true repentance, forgiveness of sins, and following after Christ, no one can be a true Christian.

### 6 The Salvation Message

We also believe that what is contained in the Holy Scriptures, to wit: the fall in Adam and redemption through Jesus Christ, shall be preached throughout the world.

### 7 The Christian Ordinances

We believe that the ordinances, viz. baptism and the remembrance of the sufferings and death of our

Lord Jesus Christ, are to be in use and practiced by all Christian societies; and that it is incumbent on all the children of God particularly to practice them; but the manner in which ought always to be left to the judgment and understanding of every individual. Also, the example of washing feet is left to the judgment of every one to practice or not; but it is not becoming of any of our preachers or members to traduce any of their brethren whose judgment and understanding in these respects is different from their own, either in public or in private. Whosoever shall make himself guilty in this respect shall be considered a traducer of his brethren, and shall be answerable for the same.

## PART 2

## Core Values

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International, is characterized by these core values:

### 11 We Adhere to the Confession of Faith

The United Brethren Confession of Faith, adopted in 1815, states the core doctrinal beliefs to which all United Brethren conferences, churches, and members must adhere. On many theological and social issues, people of equal Christian commitment and insight may interpret the Bible differently, and we allow room for that. But when it comes to the simple statements contained in the Confession of Faith--on God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Bible, salvation, and the ordinances--we do not allow diversity. As such, it is our denomination's key unifying document, our line in the sand which must not be crossed.

### 12 We Respect Unity Amidst Diversity

The United Brethren church began with two very different men, Martin Boehm and William Otterbein, who realized that on the essentials of the faith, they were alike--that they were brothers in Christ. They differed in church background, in temperament, in stature, and in the finer points of theology. But when it came to the core of what it meant to be a Christian, they found unity.

This spirit has characterized the United Brethren church over the years. We prefer to allow diversity when it comes to worship style, Bible versions, military service, social and political action, church programs, method of baptism, end times scenarios, and other issues, as long as the positions taken do not clearly conflict with God's Word or our Confession of Faith.

In the same way, we let churches and national conferences organize in the way they think will best

fit their vision, needs, and culture. We don't want our mission to be hindered by man-made structures. We also realize that a persecuted, underground United Brethren church will look much different from a United Brethren church in a free society, and that various cultural issues will cause further diversity. Our mission must take precedence over methods.

Yet amidst this diversity, we expect unity. We stand firm on biblical absolutes, allow freedom where the Bible allows freedom, and seek to maintain unity when disagreements arise.

### **13 We Seek the Lost**

The United Brethren church began as a movement of people with a passion to reach lost people. They were willing to do whatever would bring people to Christ. As people accept Christ as Savior, we then lead them further down the road of discipleship, which includes baptism, training in righteousness, the use of spiritual gifts, and holy living.

We believe in a radical conversion which results in a transformed life. This goes beyond head knowledge, beyond church attendance, beyond practicing the sacraments. Christ's presence in a Christian's life is demonstrated by a lifestyle of faithfulness and obedience to God.

### **14 We Demonstrate Social Concern**

We must not only seek the salvation of our fellow human beings, but show genuine concern for their total well-being. We recognize our responsibility to victims of poverty, prejudice, injustice, and other forms of human suffering.

The poor will always be among us, and we cannot ignore their plight; the Bible clearly states our obligation to those living in poverty. But there are many others, whether they are poor or not, whose situation requires our aid. They include persons in prison, immigrants, widows, orphans, the unborn, the handicapped, the homeless, the elderly, and victims of abuse. We also respond corporately to large-scale tragedies, giving sacrificially to help victims of natural disasters or social strife.

Demonstrating social concern also involves raising our voice against injustice and prejudice. We stand against discrimination, slavery, and injustice, insisting that equal rights be granted to everyone. We advocate fairness in the workplace, in the courts, and in all other settings, and seek the end of any discrimination based upon racial, national, economic, or social differences.

### **15 We Preserve Our Christian Witness**

We believe that our lifestyles need to reflect God to other people. For that reason, we will make choices, sometimes stated through national conference moral and social standards, to behave in certain

ways which identify us as Christians and protect the integrity of Christ's church. These choices will vary from culture to culture, and may involve participating or not participating in certain activities. While we resist legalistic rules, we value a lifestyle which clearly honors Christ in the eyes of others, both Christians and nonChristians.

### **16 We Protect the Family**

God instituted the family as our main social unit, and it is within the family that children are to be created, nurtured, and trained. Families come in many forms, but all need to be regulated by God's Word. A husband and wife must remain faithful and loving to each other, and faithful and loving to the children God has entrusted to them. We realize we must constantly resist the forces attempting to undermine the strength and integrity of marriages and families, and the design outlined for them in God's Word: a married husband and wife, and any children they might have.

### **17 We Esteem Each Other**

We are a connectional church. As United Brethren people across the world, we recognize that what happens in any of our churches matters to each of us. We are concerned about the welfare of sister churches not only in the next town, but in other countries. From Central America to West Africa to the Far East to North America, we are part of each other. We help each other, we learn from each other, we esteem each other, and we cooperate with each other to accomplish more for the Kingdom than we could by ourselves.

In the same vein, we value "the counsel of the brethren," meaning the collective wisdom and advice of our fellow believers. While individuals may not agree with the decision of a committee, commission or conference, or with a stand taken by the conference or denomination, unity demands that we respect that corporate view as the counsel of the brethren and follow it. We believe in holding each other accountable to the standards set corporately.

### **18 We Link with the Larger Church**

We value connections with Christians outside of the United Brethren family. We are not separatist in mentality or practice. Rather, we intentionally develop connections with other Christian denominations and groups which are similar in purpose and spirit, so that we can more broadly advance the work of the Great Commission and impact our world.

## PART 3

# Constitution

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ International consists of national conferences and missions outreaches around the world. We are part of each other, and cooperate to more effectively carry out the Great Commission. The following Constitution is intended to ensure doctrinal unity, encourage cooperation among the national conferences, and extend the worldwide ministry of United Brethren churches.

## 21 Name

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.

## 22 General Conference

### 1. Meetings

The General Conference meets every four years to oversee and coordinate United Brethren ministry worldwide.

### 2. Personnel

- a. The General Conference consists of ordained ministers and laypersons from each national conference.
- b. Each national conference shall determine the method for selecting its own delegates.
- c. All officials elected by the international General Conference are members ex officio of that Conference.
- d. All delegates have full and equal rights of participation.

### 3. Duties

- a. The General Conference guards the church's historic position of firmly upholding biblical absolutes, allowing freedom in areas not clearly mandated by Scripture, and encouraging tolerance and unity when differences arise.
- b. When practices, teachings, or decisions within a national conference challenge the doctrinal integrity, cooperative relationship, and/or international ministry of United Brethren churches, the General Conference has the authority to apply disciplinary action. National conferences can appeal such actions.
- c. The General Conference accepts national conferences into the membership of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.
- d. The General Conference considers amendments to the international Constitution, Core Values, and Bylaws.
- e. The General Conference determines the way in which any international ministries it establishes and the expenses it incurs are to be funded.

f. General Conference must not pass any rule which changes or eliminates the Confession of Faith.

## 23 Amendments

This Constitution and the Core Values can be amended by a two-thirds vote of the General Conference, followed by ratification by at least one-half of the national conferences. The national conferences shall act on the proposed amendment during their first meeting following General Conference. If and when one-half of the national conferences ratify the amendment, the amendment shall be declared to be in effect, according to the procedure established by the General Conference.

## PART 4

# By-Laws

## 31 Introduction

These By-laws provide further guidance for governing the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International. The Bylaws can be changed by a majority vote of the General Conference.

## 32 Membership

Local churches in a country may become a national conference in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

### 1. Qualifications

A national conference must meet and maintain the following:

- a. It consists of at least five churches within that country.
- b. It is a legally recognized entity within that country.
- c. No other United Brethren national conference exists in that country.
- d. It is organized with a constitution and other governing documents.
- e. Its governing documents, teachings, and practices do not conflict with the Confession of Faith, Core Values, Constitution, and Bylaws of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

### 2. Procedure

The following procedure will be used for bringing new national conferences into membership.

- a. The national conference votes to seek membership in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.
- b. The national conference sends a letter to the Executive Committee which includes:
  - (1) Its willingness to be bound by the Confession

of Faith, Constitution, and Core Values of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

(2) An official request to be considered for membership.

c. The governing documents (constitution, by-laws, etc.) of the national conference are submitted to the Executive Committee.

d. The Executive Committee appoints a membership committee to examine whether that national conference meets the requirements for membership, and to consider any other relevant information and criteria.

e. The membership committee makes a report to the Executive Committee or General Conference concerning the request for membership.

f. The General Conference approves, by a two-thirds vote, the request for membership.

### **3. Rights of Membership**

National conference membership shall carry the following rights and duties:

a. Upon approval of the General Conference, a national conference will have full privileges of participation at General Conference.

b. National conferences shall be notified of all meetings of the General Conference and Executive Committee, and shall receive minutes of those meetings.

c. National conferences may withdraw from membership in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International. When this happens, churches within that national conference may maintain their identify as United Brethren churches if they do the following:

(1) Sever their relationship with the departing national conference.

(2) Ask the Executive Committee to determine their status within the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

### **4. Discipline and Termination of Membership**

a. The Executive Committee may investigate allegations that a national conference is not complying with the membership qualifications of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

b. If the Executive Committee determines that the allegations are true, it may place the national conference under discipline and establish a course of action which:

(1) Protects the integrity of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

(2) Details the conditions needed to bring the national conference back into fellowship.

c. The national conference has the right to send representatives to appear before the Executive Committee prior to any disciplinary action being imposed. The national conference must be notified of any po-

tential disciplinary action at least 60 days before the Executive Committee meets.

d. If the Executive Committee decides to terminate the national conference's membership in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International, the membership shall end only after a two-thirds vote of the next General Conference.

## **33 General Conference**

1. The chairperson of the International Executive Committee shall be the chairperson of the General Conference.

2. General Conference is responsible for establishing a formula to determine the number of delegates each national conference may send to the next General Conference. Although national conferences must choose their own representatives, the preference is that half of the delegates be ministers and half be laypersons.

3. The formula is based on average attendance at the main worship service during the most recent year possible preceding General Conference.

a. National conferences with an average attendance of 250-5000 are entitled to two delegates.

b. National conferences with an average attendance of 5001-10,000 are entitled to four delegates.

c. For each additional 5000 in average attendance, a national conference is entitled to two additional delegates.

4. National conferences shall be responsible for the expenses of their own General Conference delegates. This is not to preclude expenses being raised by one national conference and offered for the expenses of those representatives from another national conference.

5. National conferences shall be responsible for the expenses of their own General Conference delegates. This is not to preclude expenses being raised by one national conference and offered for the expenses of those representatives from another national conference.

## **34 Executive Committee**

### **1. Membership**

a. The members of the Executive Committee are the bishop or equivalent of each national conference.

b. If a member is unable to attend, an alternate from that country may attend as a full voting member.

c. The US Director of Global Ministries will be an advisory member of the Executive Committee. Additional advisory members may be appointed at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

### **2. Meetings**

a. The Executive Committee will meet annually,

except during the year of General Conference. The meeting may occur by remote technology.

b. Each national conference shall be responsible for the expense of its own representatives on the Executive Committee. This is not to preclude expenses being raised by one national conference and offered for the expenses of those representatives from another national conference.

### 3. Duties

a. Oversee the ministry of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International, during the period between meetings of the General Conference.

b. Provide for the bookkeeping and other finance-related needs of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

c. Elect from its membership a chairperson and secretary.

d. Investigate and approve requests for national conference membership.

e. Determine the date and location for the next General Conference, and notify national conferences at least a year in advance.

f. Be responsible for the program and other organizational aspects of General Conference.

g. Promote and facilitate relationships and ministry partnerships among the various national conferences.

h. Monitor changes in national conference governing documents, considering how they conform to the governing documents of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

### 35 Finances

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International, is not responsible for the financial operations or liabilities of any national conference.

### 36 Guiding Principles

1. All groups created as part of the international structure will be truly international in scope and membership.

2. National conferences are strongly encouraged to develop partnerships to advance the Great Commission, promote interaction between national conferences, and link resources to pursue common goals. Any ministry partnerships between national conferences need to be worked out between those national conferences.

3. National sovereignty shall be respected. No national conference has the authority to tell another national conference what to do. At the same time, a national conference may decide to discontinue its involvement in a cooperative venture.

4. National conferences should have an international vision, and should consider ways in which they can serve the international church.

5. Representation at the international level shall

focus on people, not on monetary resources.

6. Vision needs to be set at the national conference level.

7. We value the connections between United Brethren national conferences, and want to ensure that communication, resource-sharing, and mutual ministry occurs among them.

### 37 Decision-Making Foundations

Historically, the United Brethren church has not avoided taking stands on important moral and social issues, whether relating to personal holiness or society as a whole. The United Brethren church recognizes its responsibility to help members apply biblical commands and principles to contemporary issues. The national conferences may wish to address issues specific to their culture, issues which may or may not have relevance in other United Brethren conferences.

The Bible is the primary source of correct guidance and the final authority by which Christians should determine proper conduct regarding social and moral issues. The Bible's specific prohibitions must always be obeyed. In areas where Scripture does not give explicit directions or absolutes, the following guidelines will help national conferences be thoughtful and use biblical principles in taking stands within their culture.

1. Pray for guidance (James 1:5).
2. Study all biblical passages related to the issue.
3. Review the laws of the land regarding the issue (Romans 13:1-7). The Bible instructs believers to obey the laws of the land in which they live, but not to use those laws to justify disobeying biblical principles (Hebrews 13:17).
4. Seek the counsel of mature Christians (Proverbs 15:22, 27:17). This might include seeking advice from other national conferences which have already dealt with the issue.
5. If relevant, carefully weigh and consider current scientific and medical evidence regarding the issue (Proverbs 18:15).
6. Consider any harmful effect on others.
7. Consider any harmful effect on the testimony of the members and churches of the national conference (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 10:32-33).
8. Consider the ways in which other national conferences may have dealt with this issue or with a similar issue.
9. Consider how to deal with the issue while remaining consistent with the denominational Core Values.
10. Give weight to the historical position of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ on this issue or on issues which have parallels.