

Church of the United
Brethren in Christ
INTERNATIONAL

By-laws

2013-2016

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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 confer-

ence 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 three 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: Bylaws

¶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 identity 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 potential 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.

¶133 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. Each national conference is entitled to two delegates—the bishop or equivalent and his or her designee. Observers and advisors may attend General Conference at their own expense or the expense of their national conference.

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.

¶134 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.