

**Defining Church White Paper
For the Church of the United Brethren in Christ
2025 National Conference**

Defining Church Task Force

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Introduction

The Defining Church Task Force was created by Bishop Todd Fetters to review the United Brethren understanding of a church. The scope of the task force was to evaluate Part V of the *Discipline* (Chapters 9-14), The Local Church, and consider the subject matter they covered, and propose revisions to the *Discipline* regarding that subject matter. The question that was proposed to us was, “How should we define ‘church’?” We knew we needed to remain consistent with the Confession of Faith, but we were asked to look at how we would describe and define “church” in such a way that would bring clarity and inspiration to our current and future constituency in the United Brethren Church. For years in our discipline, church has been defined by metrics. We sought to look at this important subject through different lens.

Several factors have prodded such examination in this generation:

- The emergence of new forms of church that have not typically been part of the UB experience, and that therefore do not fit our current definitions and policies well.
- Our emphasis on planting churches, in whatever form, and the challenges they face—both legally and denominationally—in being recognized as legitimate entities.
- A growing awareness that while our policy definition of church is rooted in metrics, our theological understanding of church is and has been more defined by mission. Perhaps there is a way to align our polity more closely with our theology.

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The task force agenda included the following aspects:

- An *historical review* of the United Brethren movement, with an emphasis on what “church” has looked like in the various eras of our story, with a view toward how some earlier models might be renewed or recovered.
- A *biblical review* of the major metaphors used for “church” in Scripture (e.g. ecclesia/ assembly, body, fellowship, temple, etc.) and what each offers us in discovering or recovering a more robust understanding of church.
- A *missiological review* that studied how churches have often defined their mission, sometimes to their own detriment, and a missiological model that helps us rediscover and retain the original purpose of church, including the original intent of the United Brethren founders.
- A *policy review* of the core United Brethren documents of the US National Conference, with an eye toward how they might best be revised in order to reflect an emerging consensus about church.

Words fall short when trying to capture the full meaning of the Church—its identity, mission, and essence. Like all things related to God and His Kingdom, the Church is not merely something to be defined but something to be experienced and lived into. It is not just a doctrine to affirm, but a divine reality to participate in. The Church is a living community—a people shaped by God, belonging to one another, and sent into the world with purpose. We are a people formed, called, and equipped to join God's redemptive work.

This document is offered with both humility and hope. It is our attempt to articulate a biblically grounded and compelling vision of the Church—one that is rich in theology, rooted in Scripture, and able to be applied across a wide variety of contexts. Our prayer is that it stirs imagination, deepens love for the Church, and points toward the fullness of God’s purpose for His people. We divide our white paper into four main sections, as follows:

Section 1: A new definition of church for the United Brethren movement.

Section 2: Biblical and theological support for this understanding of church.

Section 3: How various expressions of church can faithfully live out God’s intention.

Section 4: The policy ramifications of this definition for the United Brethren *Discipline*.

Section 1 – A New Definition of Church

Definition

A church is a gathered expression of people of the global community that embodies the life of Christ in the world.

A Church is...

a. ***Spiritually Alive:*** They are people formed in the image and likeness of God, re-formed by their union with Christ, and being transformed by the indwelling Spirit in order to be conformed to the passionate love of our relational God for the world.

From the beginning, humanity was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27)—to reflect his glory, represent his character, and participate in his reign on earth (Psalm 8:3–6). Yet sin fractured that image. Humanity fell short of its calling and could no longer fully reflect or represent the Creator (Romans 3:23). In love, God initiated a covenant with Israel, calling them a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:4–6). They were to embody renewed partnership with God, but their story—like all of humanity’s—was marked by rebellion and exile.

Then, Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), being fully God and fully human, was able to embody the nature and character of God. Jesus is the perfect image bearer (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). He shows us what humanity is meant to be. Through his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, he restores what was lost. By his grace, we are born again, made new, and invited to become what we were always intended to be: faithful image bearers, conformed to the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

To be the Church is to live this Kingdom of God life—transformed from the inside out, bearing witness to the reality that God is making all things new, starting with us.

b. ***Relationally Connected:*** They are people created by God for community and unity, invited by Christ into deep, enduring bonds with each other, and choosing to share life in the Holy Spirit together as a reflection of God’s triune love.

Because God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Spirit—a perfect communion of love—human beings, made in his image, are designed to reflect that relationship. “*It is not good for man to be alone*” (Genesis 2:18) was not just about marriage; it was a declaration of our deep need for one another. From the beginning, God has been forming a people, not just saving individuals. He called Israel to be his covenant family, and in Jesus, that calling is fulfilled and expanded. Jesus came not only to restore individual image bearers, but to reconcile and restore a family of image

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bearers (Mark 3:33–35; Galatians 3:26–28). In Christ, we become part of a global Church—a community drawn from every nation, tribe, and tongue (Revelation 7:9) in every time and place.

This unity is not uniformity, but a Spirit-given bond rooted in love. We, as the Church, are to be known by our unity and our love. Jesus prayed for this unity in his final hours: “that they may be one..., Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22–23). Our love and unity for one another is meant to be a sign of God's love and unity (John 13:34–35). We are formed into the likeness of Christ in the context of community. The Spirit gives each believer gifts—not for personal gain, but to build up the Body (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:4–8; Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Peter 4:10–11). Together, we reflect the communal character of God, becoming a kingdom of priests who embody grace, truth, and unity.

To be the Church is to share life deeply, love sacrificially, and walk together as a Spirit-filled family, witnessing to the world the relational beauty of our God.

c. ***Missionally Engaged:*** They are people who join God where he is already at work, living as everyday missionaries, and offering the good news of the redemption and restoration of Christ to their neighbors, locally and globally, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

From the very beginning, God's intent was that his glory would fill the earth (Habakkuk 2:14). Humanity was blessed in creation to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the world with image bearers who would reflect God's character and reign (Genesis 1:28). Though sin fractured that mission, God never abandoned it. In Jesus, the mission of God finds its fulfillment and continuation (Ephesians 2:14–16). From the beginning, God has been at work to reconcile all things to himself, and through Christ, that work now takes shape in a new humanity—the Church. Jesus calls us to live the great commandment to love God and neighbor (Mark 12:29–31) and commissions his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20). This is not a departure from God's original intent, but the faithful continuation of his purposes in and through a redeemed people.

This mission is accomplished, not on our own strength, but through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out so that the people of God would be witnesses starting in Jerusalem then expanding to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4). That same Spirit continues to work through the Church today—calling, sending, and sustaining us in God's redemptive mission. To bear faithful witness to Jesus is not only a matter of proclamation—it is a commitment to seek the common good of others in our communities. The "common good" refers to the social conditions that allow all people—not just the Church—to experience the resources, relationships, and opportunities necessary for human flourishing. The Church, therefore, is not called to be an isolated enclave, but a generous presence for the sake of the whole community.

From the beginning, God's people were blessed to be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:2–3). The Law of Moses reflects this outward-facing ethic: six of the Ten Commandments focus on how we relate to others (Exodus 20:12–17), and laws about gleaning ensured that the poor and foreigners could eat from the edges of the harvest (Leviticus 23:22). Jesus embodied this same concern for the good of others—he healed the sick, fed the hungry, cast out demons, and lifted up the marginalized. His life and ministry created space for others to flourish, and he confronted the systems and powers that prevented it.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus formed a vision of a kingdom people whose love, justice, and mercy reflect God's heart for the world. Likewise, Paul calls the Church to a radical, self-giving love that extends both to fellow believers and to those outside the faith (Romans 12:9–21). The mission of the Church includes faithful worship and bold witness, but also active participation in cultivating communities where all people can experience dignity, wholeness, and hope. To follow Jesus is to seek the flourishing of others—in our neighborhoods, cities, and beyond.

The mission of the Church is headed somewhere. The story of Scripture doesn't end with escape from the world, but with the renewal of it. God's goal is not simply to take people to heaven but to bring heaven to earth—a new creation where God dwells with His people (Revelation 21:1–4). The garden becomes a city, the curse is broken, and the tree of life reappears, flourishing and healing the nations (Revelation 22:1–5). In that restored world, the people of God reign with him, participating in his Kingdom forever.

To be the Church is to live toward that future now—bringing a foretaste of the coming Kingdom into the present, as a people sent into the world by the King himself.

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Section 2. Biblical and Theological Support

Biblical Metaphors for the Church

The Church is too rich and dynamic to be reduced to a single image. Scripture offers us a wide variety of metaphors to help us grasp the mystery, beauty, and mission of the people of God. These metaphors don't compete—they complement each other, revealing different angles of the Church's identity and purpose:

- Body of Christ – Each member is vital, uniquely gifted, and interdependent (1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Colossians 1:18).
- Bride of Christ – Loved, pursued, and made holy by Jesus (Ephesians 5:25–32; Revelation 19:7–9).
- Family/Household of God – United by adoption into God's household (Ephesians 2:19; Galatians 6:10).
- Temple/Building – A dwelling place for God's Spirit, built together in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; Ephesians 2:20–22).
- Kingdom of Priests – A royal people who serve and mediate God's presence to the world (1 Peter 2:9–10; Revelation 1:6).
- Flock – Cared for by the Good Shepherd and led into abundant life (John 10:11–16; 1 Peter 5:2–4).
- Salt and Light – A countercultural presence that preserves, illuminates, and reveals the Kingdom (Matthew 5:13–16).
- Citizens of Heaven – Residents of earth with allegiance to the reign of Christ (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:19).
- God's Masterpiece (Poima) – Created in Christ for good works as a display of grace (Ephesians 2:10).
- Army – Equipped with spiritual armor to stand firm against darkness (Ephesians 6:10–18).
- Bridge – Reconciled people who build peace and tear down dividing walls (Ephesians 2:14–19).
- Revelation – A people through whom God makes known his manifold wisdom (Ephesians 3:10).

Each metaphor is like a lens—when we look through them together, we begin to see the fullness of who the Church is and what the Church is for. These images shape our identity, our calling, and our hope for the future.

And yet Church has not always been understood like this, or practiced as if this were understood, even in our United Brethren story. The challenge of defining church is not merely one of

ontology (that is, what Church is) but also one of missiology (that is, mission). To paraphrase Forrest Gump, Church is as Church does. If we define it solely in terms of what it is, we will inevitably veer toward institutional parameters, such as metrics of attendance, membership, giving, etc. To be sure, these may be helpful indicators of certain aspects of health in a particular congregation; on the other hand, they can easily be misinterpreted, or, worse, become an end in themselves rather than a merely diagnostic tool. And when we do that, we risk losing the reality of the Church as a movement of the Spirit, a living thing, with its own heartbeat, instincts, reproductive capacity, and, most importantly, life... derived from the one who made it. A church without a mission is merely a historical marker on the side of a road.

Missiological Perspectives

One way to help us see this mission is to use the language of “set theory,” as some missiologists have done over the past generation, to distinguish between different understandings of the mission of the Church, as follows.

Boundaried Set Church

Church has been largely defined by its boundaries—that is, who is in and who is not—for the past couple of hundred years. A local congregation might be understood, through this lens, as consisting of all of its members. Or all the people who attend its worship services. Or, historically, it might have included all of the people who lived within the boundaries of its parish. The boundaries may be defined in different ways, but it becomes obvious that they are the chief way we distinguish between being one part of one congregation or another, or being part of a church or not part of a church. Churches have solved this difficulty often by using doctrinal propositions. Those who believe in the same things, defined as a confession of faith or creed, and/ or practice the same things, defined in moral or policy statements, are the ones who are to be counted in a boundary set. It is easy to see who is in and who is not. This is “church with walls.”

Centered Set Church

In a centered set approach to church, Christ (hopefully) serves as the center. Christ draws people to himself, and as people are drawn they encounter others headed in the same direction, perhaps in the same geographical locale or expressing that discipleship journey in the same way. These people choose to make that journey together, in a committed, covenantal kind of relationship. They, then, constitute a congregation... a local expression of Church. There are boundaries, but they are fuzzy; it's harder to ascertain who is moving in, toward the center, and who is hanging around the edges. The benefit of this understanding of Church is that it honors that movement of the Spirit within the lives of individuals and a congregation. The challenge with this centered set model, however, is that it can inadvertently become consumeristic, on the part of its leaders or its members.

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Directed Set Church

Rather than being forced to choose between boundaried and centered set approaches for living out the Church's mission, we can also explore a third option, which we might call a directed set approach. This understanding still has Christ as the center, and still trusts that people are being drawn to Christ for their own deepening formation into his character and for deepening relationships with others. Yet they are also simultaneously being drawn *outward*, not away from Christ, but in participation with the outward movement of the Spirit, toward and beyond the fuzzy boundaries of the Church, or a church. To be a Christian is to be at mission in the world, not to gather as isolated communities of faith.

This third understanding fits us, historically and missionally. The United Brethren preference has always been to direct energies outward, to not merely build and preserve an institution, but to serve the world in the name of Christ. Our historical involvement in mission, in social reform movement, in collaborative partnerships with other denominations, in service opportunities within our local communities are all expressions of a directed set mentality.

Church is as church does. The definition of church (or, more specifically, of a congregation of God's people) offered in this white paper, does acknowledge boundaries. Not everyone is participating in the Kingdom of God, nor in our own unique movement. This is the "United Brethren" part of our name: a group of brethren (and sisters!) who are united by things that matter. It also insists on a center, and that the center always be Christ. This is the "in Christ" part of our name, which is essential for our self-understanding as those who are one with Christ. Yet it also recognizes that we have a mission that is larger than our own self-preservation, or any consumerist desire to be comfortable. We are here to testify to the life-changing power of the Gospel in a world in desperate need of such good news, spoken with conviction and lived out with authenticity.

And so, with a directional (missional) approach to Church, we can live up to and integrate both parts of our name. We can truly be what we call ourselves: United Brethren in Christ.

Section 3 - Expressions of Church Rooted in Our Three-Pillar Foundation

In an era of rapid cultural change and spiritual hunger, the Church must remain anchored in the unchanging truth of Christ while being adaptable in its form. As noted above, the United Brethren understand the Church not as a building or institution, but as a movement of people deeply rooted in three foundational pillars: being spiritually alive in Christ, being relationally connected to one another, and being missionally engaged with the world.

These three pillars provide a holistic vision for what it means to be the Church in any context. Rather than prescribing one model, we affirm a diversity of expressions that embody these foundations. In this section we outline how various models of Church—traditional and emerging—can faithfully live out this calling. Each of the following church models (and likely others) present an opportunity to express the three pillars in contextualized ways.

Traditional Church

Spiritually Alive: Sunday worship services, sacraments, and teaching rooted in Scripture.

Relationally Connected: Sunday School, small groups, pastoral care.

Missionally Engaged: Local outreach, global missions, community service programs.

House Church

Spiritually Alive: Shared teaching, prayer, and mutual encouragement.

Relationally Connected: Family-like community through weekly meals and conversations.

Missionally Engaged: Proximity-based outreach and hospitality-driven mission.

Microchurch

Spiritually Alive: Contextualized worship and discipleship within specific mission fields.

Relationally Connected: Small team structures that prioritize unity and care. Missionally

Missionally Engaged: Embedded in specific people groups or neighborhoods.

Missional Community

Spiritually Alive: Rhythms of worship and formation within a shared life.

Relationally Connected: Larger than house churches, yet intimate enough for deep fellowship.

Missionally Engaged: Collective mission focus (e.g., neighborhood, demographic).

Fresh Expressions

Spiritually Alive: Spirit-led gatherings in post-Christian spaces.

Relationally Connected: Built around shared interests and consistent community. *Missionally*

Engaged: Designed specifically to engage the unchurched and de-churched.

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Simple Church

Spiritually Alive: Accessible discipleship tools and Spirit-filled leadership. *Relationally*
Relationally Connected: Peer-to-peer gatherings that are reproducible and relational. *Missionally*
Engaged: Easily multiplied in diverse communities.

Online Church

Spiritually Alive: Global worship access and online teaching.
Relationally Connected: Virtual groups, prayer rooms, and chat-based pastoral care. *Missionally*
Engaged: Reaching digital natives and the physically isolated.

Brave Cities Model

Spiritually Alive: Emphasis on spiritual formation amidst urban brokenness. *Relationally*
Relationally Connected: Holistic community rooted in place-based relationship.
Missionally Engaged: Focused on justice, renewal, and creative presence in cities.

As a result, we can see that our definition of church need rest neither upon historical model nor contemporary metric, but solely on the three biblical pillars that flesh out what a healthy, flourishing church can and should be.

Section 4 – Policy Ramifications for Our Proposal

Proposed Discipline Revisions

As we worked through redefining Church, this led the task force to propose revised language for Part V of the Discipline of the US National Conference that would be both consistent with scripture and would align with our definition. We also sought to update some language. Some of these proposals include the following:

1. We begin with Proposal 1, *Definition of a Local Congregation*. We have moved away from using metrics to a biblical description of God’s intention for the local church in its existence and function. The desire of the task force is to provide clear verbiage in our denominational understanding of the local church. It is our hope that this will not only stir conversation in local church leadership meetings but will also assist denominational leaders when they are having conversations with local church leaders, no matter the size of the congregation. We recognize size does not necessarily equate with health.
2. Redefining church, and moving away from metrics, was particularly significant for revising language in Proposal 3, Proposal 7, Proposal 10, and Proposal 11.
3. Proposal 2 recommends a distinction between the words “congregation” and “church”.
4. In Proposal 9, the task force recommends the current Chapter 12 (*Duties of Senior Pastors*) be replaced with a synthesized version called *Commitments of Senior Pastors* and insert it at the end of Chapter 7, “*Ministers*”, as a new Paragraph 205.

Conclusion: A Vision for the Church's Future

As we look toward the future, the Church is called to embody the full range of its biblical identity—God's family, his body, his bride, his Kingdom, and his light in the world. We are not simply a group of individuals bound by doctrine, but a living, breathing community drawn together by the Spirit to reflect the beauty, unity, and mission of our Triune God. Our future is not shaped by the shifting tides of culture or the pressures of this world; it is shaped by the eternal purposes of God, which have always been to bring glory to himself through his people.

We are called to be a faithful, missional people, proclaiming the gospel and living out the Kingdom life in every context, from our neighborhoods to the nations. The Church is God's instrument in the world, his hands and feet, the place where his love, mercy, and justice are made visible. As we move forward in faith, we do so with the hope of seeing the renewal of all things, when Christ returns to establish his Kingdom in its fullness—a new heaven and a new earth where we will reign with him forever. The Church, as the people of God, is not just part of this story; it is the living witness to the story of redemption and restoration, a people who are being transformed now for that future glory.

Let us be a Church that lives in the light of this grand vision—a Church that is both faithful to the past and hopeful for the future, committed to the mission of God until the day Christ returns. As his Church, we are called to reflect the beauty of his Kingdom in this world and to invite all people to be a part of this story, where all things will be made new.

DISCIPLINE REVISION 35-1

Discipline Revision Proposals from the Defining Church Task Force

Changes in the proposals are indicated with **bold** or ~~striketrough~~ type.

CHAPTER 11

Proposal 1. Definition of a Local Congregation

Chapter 11, “Local Church Organization”

New ¶421

Add the following as a new ¶401:

¶421 Definition of a Local Congregation

1. A congregation is a gathered expression of people (Acts 2:42-44, Rom. 16:5) of the global community (Matt. 28:19, Rev. 7:9) that embodies the life of Christ (Eph. 1:22–23, 1 Cor. 12:27) in the world (John 20:21, 2 Cor. 5:20).
2. United Brethren churches, regardless of size, have the opportunity and freedom to pursue the expression of ministry and worship that will enable them to fulfill God’s call upon them.
3. A United Brethren congregation is expected to be:
 - a. *Spiritually Alive*. They are people formed in the image and likeness of God, re-formed by their union with Christ, and being transformed by the indwelling Spirit in order to be conformed to the passionate love of our relational God for the world (Gen. 1:26-27, Rom. 6:5, Eph. 2:4-5, 2 Cor. 3:18)
 - b. *Relationally Connected*. They are people created by God for community and unity, invited by Christ into deep, enduring bonds with each other, and choosing to share life in the Holy Spirit together as a reflection of God’s triune love (Gen. 2:18, John 17:20-23, John 13:34–35, Philippians 2:1-2).
 - c. *Missionally Engaged*. They are people who join God where he is already at work, living as everyday missionaries, and offering the good news of the redemption and restoration of Christ to their neighbors, locally and globally, by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 5:17, Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 12:29-31, Acts 1:8, Eph. 2:10, 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Proposal 2. Congregations and Churches

Chapter 11, “Local Church Organization”

New ¶422

Insert the following as a new ¶422.

¶422 Congregation vs. Church

The terms "church" and "congregation" are sometimes used interchangeably. However, in certain contexts, nuances make one term or the other more appropriate.

1. *Congregation*. "Congregation" is best suited for contexts which involve the gathering of believers—the constituents, the body, the community.
2. *Church*. "Church" best fits references to the body of believers as a duly organized ecumenical entity for such purposes as official recognition from the denomination, national conference representation, assignment of senior pastors, annual reports, property ownership, closing, and IRS recognition.

Proposal 3. Organization of a Local Church

Chapter 11, “Local Church Organization”

¶421, “Organization”

Current wording of ¶421:

¶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,” ¶423, “Lay Delegates,” and ¶424, “Personnel Relations Team.”

Replace with the following and renumber as ¶423:

¶423 Organization

1. A congregation consists of any group of adults who have organized as a local church and have signed and returned the National Conference Covenant.

2. Each local congregation 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,” ¶423, “Lay Delegates,” and ¶424, “Personnel Relations Team.”

Proposal 4. Local Board

Chapter 11, “Local Church Organization”

¶422, “Local Board”

Current wording (parts to be changed in bold):

¶422 Local Board

1. Name

The local board is the local church’s highest governing body. Churches are free to use other terminology as they see appropriate (board of administration, governing board, church council, elder board, etc.). Throughout the Discipline, “local board” or “board” are used in a generic sense to refer to the church’s highest governing group.

2. Purpose

The local board oversees all affairs pertaining to the local church.

3. Personnel

- a. The local board will consist of at least three members of the church.
- b. The senior pastor shall be a member of the board.
- c. Other members of the board will depend on the structure which the local church chooses to adopt.
- d. All lay board members must be members of the local church.

4. 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.
- e. The local board has authority in all matters pertaining to persons holding the lay ministers license.
- f. ~~The local board shall recommend to the bishop those ministers who are qualified for a national conference license.~~
- g. **The local board shall have the power to disband** a local church, subject to the provisions in ¶452.

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h. **The local board shall have power to withdraw from the denomination**, subject to the provisions in Chapter 14, “Churches that Withdraw.”

5. Special Meetings

Situations may arise which call for the involvement of the bishop.

- a. A special meeting of the local board may be **requested** by the bishop, the cluster leader, the senior pastor, **or upon a written request from** the local board.
- b. The bishop will determine whether or not to actually call a special meeting.
- c. The bishop or his designee shall chair special meetings of the local board.

Replace with the following and renumber as ¶424:

¶424 Local Board

1. Name

The local board is the local church’s highest governing body. Churches are free to use other terminology as they see appropriate (board of administration, governing board, church council, elder board, etc.). Throughout the Discipline, “local board” or “board” are used in a generic sense to refer to the church’s highest governing group.

2. Purpose

The local board **is responsible for the continuing mission** of the local church.

3. Personnel

The local board will consist of at least three members of the church.

- a. The senior pastor shall be a member of the board.
- b. Other members of the board will depend on the structure which the local church chooses to adopt.
- c. All lay board members must be members of the local church.

4. Responsibilities

The local board:

- a. Shall establish the structure that will best suit the needs and ministries of the congregation and **context**.
- b. Shall keep its rulings and policies in harmony with the policies and proceedings of the US National Conference.
- c. Shall provide for the selection of church leaders and lay delegates.
- d. Shall provide for the responsible handling and accounting of the church’s finances, **and all legal matters**.
- e. Has authority in all matters pertaining to persons holding the lay minister’s license.
- f. **Can initiate the process of disbanding** a local church, subject to the provisions in **Chapter 14**.

g. **Can initiate the process of withdrawing** the congregation from the denomination, subject to the provisions in Chapter 14.

Special Meetings

Situations may arise which call for the involvement of the bishop.

- a. A special meeting of the local board may be **called** by the bishop, or **requested** by the cluster leader, the senior pastor, or the local board.
- b. The bishop will determine whether or not to call a special meeting.
- c. The bishop or his designee shall chair special meetings of the local board.

Proposal 5. Lay Delegates

Chapter 11, “Local Church Organization”

¶423, “*Lay Delegates*”

Current wording (parts to be changed in bold):

¶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.

Revise as follows (changes in bold)

¶425 Lay Delegates

1. Responsibilities

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

2. Qualifications

All lay delegates must be adult members of the local church they represent. The **congregation** shall not select **any of the following as lay delegates**:

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- a. Persons who hold a license from the Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team.
- b. Persons being recommended for a license from the Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team.
- c. Members of the church's pastoral staff.

3. Selection

Each local **congregation** may determine the method for selecting lay delegates.

Proposal 6. Personnel Relations Team

Chapter 11, "Local Church Organization"

¶424, "Personnel Relations Team"

Current wording:

¶424 Personnel Relations Team

1. Each **church** shall have a Personnel Relations Team. Its primary responsibility is to cooperate with the stationing committee in securing a new senior pastor when the need arises. The local board will determine the constituency of the Personnel Relations Team.
2. Depending on its structure, a **church** may give the Personnel Relations Team responsibilities in related areas, such as **the work and support of the senior pastor**.

Revise as follows (changes in bold):

¶426 Personnel Relations Team

1. Each **congregation** may form a Personnel Relations Team **or its equivalent, as helpful to its mission**. Its primary responsibility is to cooperate with the stationing committee in securing a new senior pastor when the need arises. The local board will determine the constituency of the Personnel Relations Team.
2. Depending on its structure, a **congregation** may give the Personnel Relations Team responsibilities in related areas, such as **support of the ongoing work of the pastor(s)**.

CHAPTER 9

Proposal 7. Congregations Arising from Church Plants

Chapter 9, “Organizing New Churches”

¶401, “*Congregations Arising from Church Plants*”

Current wording of ¶401 (deletions indicated):

¶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 churches in the national conference.
4. The congregation shows evidence of financial self-sufficiency and an ability and willingness to pay the partnership fee.
5. The congregation notifies the Executive Leadership Team, in writing, of its desire to organize as a church.
6. The church submits to the bishop a copy of the National Conference Covenant signed and dated by the chairperson of the local board ~~and by the senior pastor (or a leading layperson, should the senior pastor be chairperson of the local board).~~
7. The Executive Leadership Team votes to receive the congregation into full membership.

Replace with the following (addition in bold):

¶401 Churches Arising from Church Plants

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

1. The congregation is willing to carry out the same expectations as those of other churches in the national conference (i.e. signing a national covenant, pay the partnership fee, and ministerial credentialing with the denomination).
2. The congregation shows evidence of **sustainability and responsible financial stewardship** (including an ability and willingness to pay the partnership fee).
3. The congregation notifies the Executive Leadership Team, in writing, of its desire to organize as a church.
4. The congregation submits to the bishop a copy of the National Conference Covenant signed and dated by the chairperson of the local board.

5. The Executive Leadership Team votes to receive the congregation into full membership.

Proposal 8. Adopting Non-United Brethren Congregations

Chapter 9, “Organizing New Churches”

¶402, “Adopting Non-United Brethren Congregations

Current wording of ¶402 (words to be changed in bold):

¶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 Discipline of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, and the Confession of Faith and Core Values of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.
 - c. The church’s willingness to meet the expectations of all other congregations 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 ministerial 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. 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.

7. The church submits to the bishop a copy of the National Conference Covenant signed and dated by the chairperson of the local board and by the ~~senior~~ pastor (or a leading layperson, should the ~~senior~~ pastor be chairperson of the local board).

8. The Executive Leadership Team determines that the congregation meets the basic criteria for a church as stated in Chapter 13, “Local Church Organization.”

The Executive Leadership Team designates the church as a congregation of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

Replace with the following (changes in bold):

¶403 Partnering with Non-United Brethren Congregations

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, invites existing congregations to **partner with** our fellowship. These steps should be followed when an existing congregation which is not affiliated with the United Brethren Church wants **to partner with** 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 **congregation’s** willingness to abide by the Discipline of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, and the Confession of Faith and Core Values of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.
 - c. The **congregation’s** willingness to meet the same expectations as those of all other congregations in the national conference (**i.e. signing a national covenant, pay the partnership fee, and ministerial credentialing with the denomination**).
 - d. The willingness of the **congregation’s** members or constituents to individually become members of the United Brethren Church, according to the procedures specified in the Discipline.
 - e. Evidence of **sustainability and responsible financial stewardship** (including an ability and willingness to pay the partnership fee).
3. The Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team will meet with the **pastor(s)** to review issues of ministerial credentialing.
4. The US bishop or his appointee shall facilitate any other meetings designed to facilitate mutual understanding and familiarization.

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5. A majority of the **congregation's** constituents or members must vote in favor of **partnering** as a United Brethren congregation.
6. The **congregation** submits to the bishop a copy of the National Conference Covenant signed and dated by the chairperson of the local board.
7. The Executive Leadership Team determines that the congregation meets the basic criteria for a church as stated in **Paragraph 401, "Definition of a Local Congregation."**
8. The Executive Leadership Team designates the church as a congregation of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.

Chapter 12

Proposal 9. Senior Pastors

Chapter 12, "Duties of Senior Pastors"

¶431-437

Current wording:

¶431 To be holy in lifestyle.

1. By leading a life of prayer.
2. By spending time devotionally in God's Word.
3. By setting an example of the Christian life within the church and community.

¶432 To preach and teach the Word of God.

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

¶433 To provide for the regular observance of the ordinances and ceremonies of the church.

1. By celebrating the Lord's Supper.
2. By providing opportunities for Christian baptism.
3. By performing weddings and funerals.

¶434 To equip the believers for works of service.

1. By helping them find their spiritual gifts.
2. By training them to become proficient in the use of God's Word.
3. By training them in the various aspects of ministry.

4. By allowing them to be involved in personal ministry within the local church.

¶435 To do and teach the work of an evangelist.

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

¶436 To be responsible for local church administration.

1. By overseeing the worship services.
2. By giving direction for the ministry of the local church.
3. By doing specific planning and goal-setting.
4. By reporting to the local board and submitting annual reports to the bishop.
5. By keeping accurate membership records.
6. By presenting the church Discipline.
7. By notifying the US bishop in writing at least 30 days before the effective date of resignation.

¶437 To provide pastoral care.

¶438 To promote national conference interests.

1. By regularly attending cluster meetings and national conference activities.
2. By promoting the ministries and partnership fee of the national church.
3. By presenting referenda items and overseeing referenda voting.
4. By promoting communications from the national office.

Replace the current Chapter 12 with the following, and insert it at the end of Chapter 7, “Ministers,” as a new ¶205.

¶205 Commitments of Senior Pastors

Senior pastors of United Brethren congregations shall:

1. Devote themselves to their own ongoing spiritual formation.
2. Provide for the proclamation and teaching of the Word of God in one’s congregation.
3. Provide for the regular observance of the ordinances and ceremonies of the church.
4. Do the work of evangelism and equip others in this work.
5. Make and equip reproducing disciples.
6. Provide for the equipping of believers for works of service.
7. Provide for ethical, effective local church administration.
8. Provide for the ongoing care and spiritual growth of members of the congregation.
9. Promote and enhance the relationship between the congregation and other United Brethren ministries.
10. Represent the work of this ministry to the larger community/context in which it is rooted.

Proposal 10. Churches in Crisis

Chapter 13, “Churches in Crisis”

¶441, Crisis Intervention

Current wording:

¶441 Crisis Intervention

1. Conditions

Any existing 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.

- d. *Closure Plan.* A closure plan would close the church in accordance with the procedures below.

Revise as follows, including changing the chapter title to “Congregations in Crisis.”

¶441 Crisis Intervention

1. Conditions

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

- a. **Participation by too few people to fulfill the unique mission of the congregation.**
- b. Lack of financial stability and/or self-reliance.
- c. Lack of clear and common purpose.

d. 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 congregation in the same community. **Components might include a new ministry focus, a new location, a new name, 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 intervention and/or assistance **from the US National Conference.**
- d. *Closure Plan.* A closure plan would close the church in accordance with the procedures below.

Chapter 13

Proposal 11. Closing a Church

Chapter 13, "Churches in Crisis"

¶442, "Closing a Church"

Current wording:

¶442 Closing a Church

1. Initiating a Closure

The process for closing a church can be initiated by:

- a. The Local Board. The local board will notify the US bishop of its desire, and the local board and cluster leader will begin discussing the idea.
- b. The Bishop. The bishop may direct the cluster leader or another person to meet with a local board about the possibility of closing that church.
- c. Cluster Leader. The cluster leader or designee may direct the local board to call a meeting consisting of all members of the local church 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.

35-14

- 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 board. When that decision is made, the following actions will occur:

- a. The local church will determine the disposition of the property. Any proceeds from selling the property will be transferred to a 501(c)(3) organization chosen by the local board.
- 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.
- d. It is recommended that assets from the sale of closed churches be given to the US National Conference to start new churches.

Revise as follows (changes in bold):

¶442 Closing a Church

1. Initiating a Closure

The process for closing a congregation can be initiated by:

- a. *The Local Board*. The local board will notify the US bishop of its desire, and the local board and cluster leader will begin discussing the idea.
- b. *The Bishop*. The bishop may direct the cluster leader or another person to meet with a local board about the possibility of closing that congregation.
- c. *Cluster Leader*. The cluster leader or designee may direct the local board to call a meeting consisting of all members of the local church to discuss the possibility of closing the church.

2. Reasons for Closing

A decision to close a church may be based on such factors as:

- a. The **congregation** 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. Participation by too few people to fulfill the unique mission of the congregation.**

3. Closing the Church

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

a. The local **congregation** will determine the disposition of the property. Any proceeds from selling the property will be transferred to a 501(c)(3) organization chosen by the local board.

b. **Communications with each member will outline** 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 **congregation** 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.

d. It is recommended that assets from the sale of closed churches be given to the US National Conference to start new congregations.

Chapter 14

Proposal 12. Ramifications for Withdrawing

Chapter 14, “Churches that Withdraw”

¶452-454, “*Withdrawing: Ramifications for Churches*”

Current Wording of ¶452-454:

¶452 Withdrawing: Ramifications for Tax Exempt Status

1. A church that withdraws will no longer be included under the denomination’s federal 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt status. This status, depending on local and state laws, may be required for:

a. Exemption from tax payments to state and federal authorities. Any contributions made to the church, such as tithes and offerings, cannot be claimed as charitable deductions.

~~b. The filing of certain tax forms.~~

~~c. Real estate tax exemption.~~

~~d. U. S. Postal Service bulk mailing permits.~~

e. The receipt of many forms of grants and bequests.

f. Granting housing allowance to ministers.

2. These advantages will be gone until the church attaches itself to another non-profit group or establishes its own 501(c)(3) status.

~~3. Legal and other services will be needed to secure new 501(c)(3) status.~~

¶453 Withdrawing: Ramifications for Ministers

1. Ministerial licenses and ordinations will no longer be valid as of the withdrawal date.

35-16

2. Any members of the church who are licensed United Brethren ministers must surrender their credentials or transfer their membership to another United Brethren church.
3. Ministers may be unable to perform certain duties, such as weddings, depending on local or state laws.
4. Ministers will not qualify for housing allowance unless they are under the umbrella of a group with a federal 501(c)(3) status.
5. All participants in the denomination's retirement program will be terminated from that program according to its requirements. Some current retirement benefits could be lost or affected.

~~¶454 Withdrawing: Ramifications for Churches~~

- ~~1. The church will be on its own when it comes to securing a new senior pastor.~~
- ~~2. Members who are attending Huntington University will lose grants that go to UB members and UB churches.~~
- ~~3. A congregation which ceases to be a United Brethren church will need to revise its corporate status. This may require filing new articles of incorporation and bylaws.~~
- ~~4. The United Brethren name is to be removed from all signs and documents following the withdrawal, reflecting the lack of association with the denomination.~~

Remove ¶454, and condense ¶452-453 as follows:

¶452 Ramifications for Withdrawing

1. *Tax exempt status.* A church that withdraws will no longer be included under the denomination's federal 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt status. The following may be affected until the church attaches itself to another non-profit group or establishes its own 501(c)(3) status.
 - a. Exemption from tax payments to **local**, state and federal authorities. Any contributions made to the church, such as tithes and offerings, cannot be claimed as charitable deductions.
 - b. The receipt of many forms of grants and bequests.
 - c. Granting housing allowance to ministers.
2. *Ministers*
 - a. Ministerial licenses and ordinations will no longer be valid as of the withdrawal date.
 - b. Ministers may be unable to perform certain duties, such as weddings, depending on local or state laws.

c. Ministers will not qualify for housing allowance unless they are under the umbrella of a group with a federal 501(c)(3) status.

d. All participants in the denomination's retirement program will be terminated from that program according to its requirements. Some current retirement benefits could be lost or affected.

Part V: The Local Church

Proposal 13. Chapter Order in Part V.

Current order:

- 9. Organizing New Churches
- 10. Joining the Church
- 11. Local Church Organization
- ~~12. Duties of Senior Pastors~~
- 13. Churches in Crisis
- 14. Churches that Withdraw

Change the order to the following (per proposal 9. the content of chapter 12 was moved to chapter 7), and revise all numbering as necessary:

- 9. Local Church Organization
- 10. Organizing New Churches
- 11. Joining the Church
- 13. Churches in Crisis
- 14. Churches that Withdraw

Chapter 8

Proposal 14. Administrative Divisions

Current ¶302:

¶302 Administrative Entities

The church shall consist of the following administrative entities:

~~1. Preaching Point~~

35-18

~~A preaching point is a group of people holding services in a place outside the bounds of an existing United Brethren church, with the goal of eventually becoming a full member congregation.~~

~~2. Appointment~~

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

3. Local Church

A duly organized group consisting of adult members 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.

Remove ¶302.1 and ¶302.2, and revise ¶302.3 as follows:

¶302.1 Local Church

A group of adult members duly organized according to ¶422.

(This paragraph continues with definitions of Mission District, Cluster, Region, Church of the United Brethren in Christ USA, and Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.)