

Constitution of The Covenant Church of Thomaston Thomaston, Connecticut

ARTICLE I. Name

The name of this church shall be The Covenant Church of Thomaston, Connecticut.

ARTICLE II. Affiliation

This church is affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church and its East Coast Conference, and purposes to support the program, policies, and institutions inherent in the fellowship.

ARTICLE III. Confession

This church believes in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for Christian faith, doctrine and conduct; and accepts the Apostolic confession of faith.

ARTICLE IV. Purpose

The purpose of this church is to unite believers in fellowship for spiritual edification, for the winning of persons to Jesus Christ, and for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ through missions home and abroad.

ARTICLE V. Membership

Membership in this church is granted to anyone who through faith in God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been born again to a living hope, and who has been baptized in the name of the Triune God and desires to live a Christian life, who promises to support the ministry and fellowship of this church and to share its obligations.

ARTICLE VI. Government

The government of this church is vested in its members, who exercise the right of control in all its affairs through regular or special business meetings.

ARTICLE VII. Church Board

Members of the church board shall be any pastors officially licensed by the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination and who are approved by the congregation to be pastors of this congregation, the chair of the church, vice-chair of the church, secretary, financial secretary, treasurer, the chair of the board of trustees, the chair, vice-chair, and secretary of the diaconate, the chair of the board of missions and evangelism, the chair and secretary of the board of Christian education, the Sunday School superintendent, and the president of Women Ministries. All members of the church board shall be members of the church.

ARTICLE VIII. Worship Services

Public services of worship, preaching, prayer and song shall be held for the edification and inspiration of the members, the church and the community. Such services will be held on the Lord's Day and on other needful and convenient occasions. The Lord's Supper shall be observed regularly according to plans adopted by the church, and is for members and Christian non-members alike.

ARTICLE IX. Property

In case of dissension, the title to all church property, real and personal, shall remain with the group abiding by this constitution, and, upon dissolution, the property and all assets of the church shall become and be the property of The East Coast Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

ARTICLE X. Amendments

Amendments to this constitution can be adopted only by a two-thirds vote of those members present and voting at an annual meeting of the church. Proposed amendments must be presented in written form at the preceding annual meeting.

ARTICLE XI. By-laws

By-laws not in conflict with this constitution may be adopted at any regular business meeting by a two-thirds vote of those members present and voting. Proposed by-laws or amendments must be presented in written form at the preceding regular business meeting.

By-Laws of The Covenant Church of Thomaston

ARTICLE I. Membership

Section 1. Admission of Members.

- a) Application for membership.
Persons desiring membership in this church shall apply to the pastor or a member of the diaconate. The applicant shall complete a course in membership instruction. The applicant shall appear before the diaconate to give his profession of Christian faith. When the diaconate finds the applicant eligible for membership it shall recommend him to the next business meeting of the church. A candidate shall not be present when his membership is being considered.
- b) Transfer of membership.
Applicants from other Christian churches shall submit letters of transfer, when available, to the pastor and the diaconate, who shall act upon each application according to the requirements of paragraph a) of this section.
- c) Reception of new members.
Applicants who are voted into membership of the church shall be welcomed at the next service of Holy Communion and make public confession of their Christian faith.

Section 2. Responsibility of Members.

Every member shall accept the responsibilities and obligations placed upon him by the Word of God and the church. He shall seek to be Christlike in all his relationships and shall give financial support to his church and denomination as God enables him.

Section 3. Discipline.

- a) Negligent members.
A member who willfully neglects his duties or fails to attend services of the church regularly or to contribute to its support according to his means shall be admonished by the diaconate. If this admonition is not heeded, he shall be dealt with as an erring member.
- b) Erring members.
A member known to err in doctrine or conduct shall be counseled according to the procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-18¹ and Galatians 6:1². A fellow member having knowledge of such error shall in the Spirit of Christian love seek to restore him. If he does not heed the counsel, the matter shall be brought to the attention

¹ "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

² "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

of the diaconate, which shall in meekness and gentleness seek to restore him. If he fails to heed the counsel of the diaconate, his error shall be brought before a business meeting of the church. Discipline shall then be administered in the spirit of Christ with due regard for the welfare of the individual as well as the church.

c) Dismissal of members.

Dismissal of a member under paragraphs a and b of this section must be voted on by the church, which alone has the authority. A two-thirds vote of those present and voting at a congregational business meeting is necessary for such action.

Section 4. Transfer of Members.

Members moving to another community should identify themselves as soon as possible with a local Christian church and make request for a letter of transfer from the pastor of this church. Withdrawal of membership shall be reported to the next business meeting where it shall be made a matter of record.

Section 5. Withdrawal from Membership.

Request for withdrawal from membership in the church shall be made in writing to the pastor or the diaconate. After careful consideration the diaconate may present a recommendation for withdrawal to a business meeting of the church.

ARTICLE II. Officers

Section 1. Chair

The chair shall preside at all business meetings of the church and of the board. The chair shall be responsible for leadership of the church services in the absence of the pastor. In the event the church is temporarily without a pastor, he/she shall, together with the board, make interim arrangements. The chair shall be an *ex-officio* member of all the church boards. The chair is also a member of the pastoral relations committee and of the investment committee.

Section 2. Vice-Chair

The vice-chair shall assume the duties of the chair in his/her absence, and assist in the chair's duties.

Section 3. Secretary

The secretary shall keep and preserve the minutes of all business meetings of the church and of the church board, and shall conduct and preserve all official correspondence as delegated. The secretary shall be responsible for the official seal and documents of the church.

Section 4. Vice-Secretary

The vice-secretary shall assume the office of secretary during the secretary's absence and shall assist the secretary as needed.

Section 5. Financial Secretary

The financial secretary shall receive, record and transmit to the church treasurer all

funds contributed to the church. The financial secretary is also a member of the budget committee. The office of Financial Secretary shall be shared by two or more persons consisting of a Financial Secretary and an Assistant. This Assistant may assist the Financial Secretary and assume the responsibilities of the Financial Secretary in his or her absence (vacation, sickness, family situations, etc.).

Section 6. Treasurer

The treasurer shall be responsible for all funds committed to him/her and shall make disbursements as authorized by the church. The treasurer shall also present a written report of the receipts and expenditures to each quarterly business meeting and for the year to the annual business meeting of the church. The treasurer is also a member of the budget committee and of the investment committee. The office of Treasurer shall be shared by two or more persons consisting of a Treasurer and an Assistant. This Assistant may assist the Treasurer and assume the responsibilities of the Treasurer in his or her absence.

ARTICLE III. Boards

Section I. Church Board

The board in its administrative responsibility shall function within the limitations set by the congregation and in general shall have the following responsibilities:

- a) Study the needs of the church and make recommendations for the progress and welfare of the church.
- b) Appoint and oversee office administrative staff, as needed.
- c) Oversee all officers, boards, and committees of the church.
- d) Receive monthly reports from the church treasurer; the trustees, the diaconate, the board of Christian education, and the board of missions and evangelism.
- e) Coordinate and control the church calendar.
- f) Grant the use of the church facilities for appropriate events. Requests for one-time uses by church members or by previously approved users may be approved, after consulting availability on the church calendar, by the action of two church board members. Long-term usage by any group requires approval by the full board.
- g) Consider requests for absence by salaried personnel and make suitable arrangements.

All decisions and recommendations shall be recorded by the secretary and reported to the next business meeting of the church.

Section 2. Board of Trustees

The board of trustees shall consist of up to six members. They shall exercise proper supervision over church properties, arrange for adequate insurance coverage for all church properties and for possible liabilities and appoint sextons or other staff as needed. The trustees shall have the authority to expend up to \$1,000.00 for maintenance and repair of the church. They are not authorized to dispose of or purchase property for the church except as directed by a duly called church business meeting. The trustees immediately after the annual election shall elect from their own number a chair, and report the name of the officer to the annual business meeting of the

church. At the annual business meeting the chair for the previous year shall present a written report. The chair of the trustees is also a member of the pastoral relations committee.

Section 3. Diaconate

The diaconate shall consist of up to twelve members. Whenever possible there shall be an equal number of deacons and deaconesses. The diaconate, with the pastor, shall supervise the spiritual work of the church and its benevolences. They shall prepare the communion table and assist the pastor in administering the communion service or arrange for appropriate assistance. They shall also visit the sick and the aged and assist the needy. The diaconate will arrange for a flower coordinator to oversee Sanctuary flowers and decorating for special occasions. Their character shall be in harmony with the requirements stated in Acts 6:3³, Romans 16:1-2⁴, and 1 Timothy 3:8-13⁵. The diaconate immediately after the annual election shall organize itself by selecting a chair, a vice-chair., a secretary, and a treasurer, and report the names of such officers to the annual business meeting of the church. At the annual business meeting the chair for the previous year shall present a written report. The chair of the diaconate is also a member of the pastoral relations committee.

Section 4. Board of Christian Education

The board of Christian education shall consist of up to eight members. They shall be responsible for the educational program of the church, its curriculum, teachers, counselors and leaders and shall appoint staff for youth and children's groups. The board of Christian education immediately after the annual election shall elect from its own number a chair, a secretary, and a superintendent of the Sunday School, and report the names of such officers to the annual business meeting of the church. At the annual business meeting the chair and Sunday School superintendent for the previous year shall present written reports. The board of Christian education shall appoint-a treasurer for the Sunday School from whom a written report shall be required for the annual business meeting. The chair of the board of Christian education is also a member of the pastoral relations committee.

Section 5. Board of Missions and Evangelism

The board of missions and evangelism shall consist of up to eight members. They shall be responsible for promoting evangelism and outreach efforts and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. The board of missions and evangelism, immediately after the

³ "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility [daily distribution of food] over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁴ "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me."

⁵ "Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus."

annual election, shall organize itself by selecting a chair, and a treasurer, and report the names of such officers to the annual business meeting of the church. At the annual business meeting, the chair for the previous year shall present a written report. The chair of the board of missions and evangelism is also a member of the pastoral relations committee.

Section 6. Vacancies

When a vacancy of an essential member occurs in any of the boards of the church, the church shall elect a member to fill the unexpired term.

ARTICLE IV. Committees

Section 1. General Provisions

Unless otherwise provided, the following committees shall be elected by the church at its annual election to hold office for one year. Following the election, members of each committee shall meet and elect a chair from among their number and report the name of such chair to the annual business meeting of the church. Committees shall present written report to the annual business meeting when significant issues have been addressed during the year. Any committee or group which maintains a fund must present the fund's records for annual audit and must provide a report of the fund's activities to the annual meeting. The number of members to be elected to committees, unless otherwise specified, is not fixed, but shall be determined by the church. Vacancies occurring on committees may be filled by the church board.

Section 2. Pastoral Relations Committee

The pastoral relations committee shall consist of the chair of the church, the chair of the trustees, the chair of the diaconate, the chair of Christian education, the chair of the missions and evangelism board and two other members of the church elected annually at the December quarterly business meeting. It shall be the responsibility of this committee to maintain good relations between the pastor and the church. The committee shall meet with the pastor(s) at least quarterly. Such meetings shall be announced at a Sunday morning worship service not less than one week prior to the meeting and shall include the date, time, and place of meeting.

Section 3. Music Committee

The music committee shall be responsible for the music program of the church. They shall purchase supplies for the choirs and shall arrange for maintenance of the church's pianos and organ. The music committee shall also appoint an accompanist, and a choir director, and shall arrange for any other needed staff. All members of the music committee shall be members of the church.

Section 4. Budget Committee

It shall be the duty of the budget committee to prepare a workable annual budget for presentation to the annual church business meeting. The Treasurer and Financial Secretary of the church are permanent members of the committee. All members of the budget committee shall be members of the church.

Section 5. Nominating Committee

- a) The nominating committee shall consist of one representative each from the board of trustees, the diaconate, the board of Christian education, the board of missions and evangelism and four members at large from the church elected at the December quarterly business meeting. Their terms shall commence January 1.
- b) The nominating committee, after being convened by the church chair, shall elect from among its number a chair and a secretary. The responsibilities of the committee shall include the following:
 - (1) Prepare a ballot for the annual election listing at least one qualified candidate for each office to be filled, if possible. If it cannot find qualified candidates to fill each office available, then it shall submit a ballot with as many qualified people as it has found. If an officer position cannot be filled by the efforts of the Nominating Committee, then the Nominating Committee has the option of requesting the incumbent to continue to serve for one more year for a combined total of four consecutive years.
 - (2) Confirm the willingness of each candidate to serve before listing the person's name on the ballot.
 - (3) Gather on a regular basis to pray for God's guidance in preparing the upcoming ballot as well as to pray for those already in office.
 - (4) Give each candidate for office an updated job description of tasks and responsibilities required for each job.
 - (5) Present a complete ballot to the meeting of the annual election. This shall constitute completion of the committee assignment, unless specific responsibilities are given at said meeting.

Section 6. Auditors

It shall be the duty of the auditors to audit all financial records of the church and its organizations annually or at such other times determined by the church. Auditors may serve three successive terms only. All auditors shall be members of the church.

Section 7. Social Committee

The social committee shall have supervision of refreshments for socials and picnics at the request of the church board. They shall be in charge of the kitchen and kitchen equipment.

Section 8. Ushers

The ushers shall manage in a hospitable way the seating of the congregation at all public services as well as keep a watchful eye for all necessities of such occasions. The chair of the ushers shall prepare a schedule of ushers for all services and provide ushers with an outline of their duties.

Section 9. Memorial Committee

The memorial committee shall record and acknowledge and maintain a permanent inventory of memorial gifts to the church. When gifts are offered for a specific purpose the committee shall refer the request to the church board for action. All members of the memorial committee shall be members of the church.

Section 10. Investment Committee

The investment committee shall consist of the chair of the church, the treasurer of the church, and three other members of the church elected annually by the church. The committee shall oversee and manage the church's financial investments and shall report the status of the investments to the church at each congregational business meeting. All actions of the committee regarding the investments shall be by the affirmative vote of not less than four members of the committee. The committee shall annually designate one of its members as authorized to execute all documents to carry out the decisions of the committee.

Section 11. Technology Committee

The Technology Committee shall consist of the Office Manager and up to three other members of the church elected annually by the church. The committee shall oversee the use of technology within the church.

Section 12. Nursery Committee

The Nursery Committee shall be responsible for arranging care for young children during the Sunday morning worship services. It shall be in charge of the nursery facility by keeping the play things and equipment clean and in safe working order. It is to alert the Trustees of any repair issues. The committee shall establish an appropriate age of participating children and coordinate volunteers. The Nursery Committee reports to the Christian Education Board and all members and adult volunteers shall be members of the church.

Section 13. Other Committees

Other committees shall be elected or appointed as needed and shall be disbanded when they are no longer needed.

ARTICLE V. Pastor

Section 1. Qualifications

The pastor of the church shall meet the New Testament requirements of his office (I Timothy 3:2-7⁶) and shall be a member in good standing in the Covenant Ministerium. He shall by virtue of his call be a member of the church and a member of the church board, and *ex-officio* on all boards and committees within the church.

⁶ "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

Section 2. Duties

The pastor shall devote himself to the service of the church, preaching and teaching the Word of God, administering the sacraments, and faithfully giving himself to pastoral work. He shall watch over himself and his flock, visiting, as far as time permits, all members of his church, especially the sick and the needy. He shall instruct the youth of his parish in the Holy Scriptures. He shall provide the church with an accurate record of his pastoral acts and present a written report to the church annual business meeting. He shall practice good administrative procedures and cooperate with the church board. Any bi-vocational lay pastor officially licensed by the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination and approved by the congregation to be a pastor of this church may be a member of any church board, but may not be approved by that board as its chair.

Section 3. Cooperation

The pastor shall, both in word and precept, work in harmony with the Covenant, the regional conference, and his fellow ministers.

Section 4. Call

The pastor shall be called at a regular or special church business meeting, the purpose of which shall be announced in advance. The pastor shall be chosen by paper ballot with a two-thirds favorable vote of those present and voting required for a call. A unanimous vote, however, would be preferred. The call shall be for an indefinite period, with a minimum of six weeks' notice by the church or the pastor for termination of the pastor's employment. If termination is by the pastor, the pastor shall give notice to the church board or the church chair. If termination is by the church, the church shall convene a special meeting for the specific purpose of discerning the church's decision. At that meeting a majority vote by paper ballot of those present and voting will indicate whether the pastor's employment is to be terminated. Ten members may, at any time, present a written request to both the chair and the pastoral relations committee for a congregational meeting for a "vote of confidence/no confidence." Notwithstanding the above, the pastor can be released from employment immediately for just cause by the congregation's majority vote.

Section 5. Charges against the Pastor

Charges against the pastor shall be submitted in writing to the Pastoral Relations Committee and shall not be considered unless supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he should be found to err in doctrine or conduct, the Pastoral Relations Committee shall admonish him. If this does not have the desired result, the matter shall be referred to the committee on ministerial standing and discipline of the regional conference prior to further action by the church. If the pastor is found unworthy of the gospel calling by the committee on ministerial standing and discipline of the regional conference and also by the church he may be dismissed by the Church without notice.

ARTICLE VI. Meetings

Section I. Business Meetings

- a) Time of meetings and commencement of terms.
The annual business meeting of the church shall be held during the month of January, the exact time to be determined by the church board. Additional regular business meetings shall be held during the months of March, June, and September. The annual election of officers, board members and committee members shall be held in January at the annual meeting. Their terms shall commence February 1st. Special business meetings may be called at any time by the chair of the church or a majority of the church board.
- b) Notice.
Notice of all church business meetings shall be given at a Sunday morning worship service not less than one week prior to the meeting and shall include the date and time of meeting.

Section 2. Board Meetings

The church board, the trustees, the diaconate, the board of Christian education, and the board of missions and evangelism shall meet at regularly stated times as each board shall decide.

Article VII General Provisions

Section I. Quorum

- a) Church business meetings.
Fifteen members of the church, including two officers shall constitute a quorum at a church business meeting.
- b) Board and committee meetings.
The quorum for all board and committee meeting shall be a majority of its membership. *Ex-officio* members shall not be considered "members" in determining the quorum.

Section 2. Tenure

The chair, the vice-chair, the secretary, the vice-secretary, the treasurer, and the financial secretary shall be elected annually for a term of one year and shall not succeed themselves more than twice in the same office. Members of the board of trustees, the diaconate, the mission and evangelism board, and the board of Christian education shall be elected for terms of three years each in such an order that approximately one-third of the terms expire each year. They may not succeed themselves more than once on the same board.

Section 3. Rules of Order

All business meetings of the church and of the boards, committees and organizations of the church shall be conducted according to *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised*.

Section 4. Gender References

All references to one gender in these by-laws shall be deemed to refer to both male and female persons.

ARTICLE VIII. Church Property

Disposition or purchase of real estate and/or conveyance of real estate to secure mortgage loans shall be authorized by the church at a business meeting called for that purpose, subject to the following conditions:

- a) A notice shall be read at a Sunday morning worship service on the two Sundays immediately preceding the business meeting, said notice briefly describing the proposition to be considered.
- b) A two-thirds majority vote of all members present and voting by secret ballot at a business meeting so called shall constitute authority.

ARTICLE IX. Amendments

Amendments to these by-laws not in conflict with the constitution may be adopted at any regular business meeting or at a special business meeting called for that purpose by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting, providing that such amendments have been presented in writing to the church board and at a preceding regular business meeting.