

- Clarification of routes to ordained ministry (Bylaws 3.10.2.3–5) and creation of a Pastoral Formation Committee to ensure consistency in training of pastors (3.10.4–3.10.4.7)
- Regarding the Synod's nominations and elections: a consistent test for region membership, namely, residence (Bylaw 3.12.1 [b]); elimination of the requirement that a congregation's voters in the presidential election have attended the most recent district convention, along with a new procedure for compiling the list of voters (3.12.2.3); and use of the Committee on Convention Nominations for nomination of regional Board of Directors and mission board positions (3.12.2.8)
- Regarding the districts: allowance for a district board of directors to finish a revision of bylaws amended by its convention (Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3 [b]); allowance of electronic convention materials (4.2.1 [g]); and a simplified procedure for convention delegate accreditation (4.2.2)

The convention did not complete revisions to Bylaw Sections 2.14–2.17, necessitated by opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters having to do with who has the authority to suspend a member. Instead, by Res. 12-14, it directed the Secretary to consult with the Council of Presidents and develop new bylaws consonant with the Constitution on this point (see CCM Op. 16-2791, 16-2794). That process concluded with adoption of the requisite amendments by the Board of Directors (BOD) on May 19, 2017. With these revisions complete, print publication of the 2016 *Handbook* could finally proceed. Together with the Commissions on Constitutional Matters and Handbook, whose diligent work is reflected in these pages (adding to that of overture writers, task forces, delegates, floor committees, and others), I hope this edition will serve well throughout the triennium, and that its delayed appearance did not unduly inconvenience the Synod.

Finally, I call attention to two new features of this edition of the *Handbook*. The first, incorporated in its final pages, is a completely revised and expanded index. Development of this often-requested feature was begun by my predecessor in office, Dr. Raymond Hartwig, whose diligent labors over the past six triennia are reflected on virtually every one of this book's pages, and to whom both I and the Synod are greatly indebted for far more than that. I have attempted to round out his work on the index, thinking of how various users might approach the book, and envisioning what parts of their responsibilities might lie outside those sections of the bylaws obviously pertaining to them. Commentary and suggestions on the new index are welcome, and to be directed to my office at lcmssecretary@lcms.org.

The second feature, separately available from the Commission on Handbook (COH) website (<http://www.lcms.org/handbook/>), is a red-lined comparison edition of the Handbook, indicating each change relative to the 2013 text and the source of each change (convention resolution, COH action, or BOD action under Res. 12-14). This edition is offered in the hope that it will help all those whose policies and duties depend on the *Handbook* to review what revisions will now be required.

The Commission on Handbook, having consulted with the Commission on Constitutional Matters as to its content, now presents this electronic revision of the 2016 *Handbook* to the Synod with the prayer that this body of laws may truly serve the Gospel among us, as “upon this Rock” we repent, confess, and rejoice as one.

John W. Sias, *Secretary*

CONSTITUTION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Preamble

Reason for the Forming of a Synodical Union

1. The example of the apostolic church. Acts 15:1–31.
2. Our Lord's will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit. 1 Cor. 12:4–31.

Article I Name

The name of the synod organized under this constitution shall be: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Article II Confession

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.

Article III Objectives

The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall—

1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;
2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world;
3. Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth;
4. Provide opportunities through which its members may express their Christian concern, love, and compassion in meeting human needs;
5. Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries;

6. Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith;
7. Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith;
8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;
9. Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights;
10. Aid in providing for the welfare of pastors, teachers, and other church workers, and their families in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special need, or death.

Article IV Powers

The Synod in convention is empowered to and has formed corporate entities which shall have legal powers:

1. To purchase, hold, administer, and sell property of every description in the interest of the Synod;
2. To accept, hold, administer, and, if deemed advisable, dispose of legacies, donations, commercial papers, and legal documents of every description in the interest of its work.

Article V Membership

Membership in the Synod is held and may be acquired by congregations, ministers of religion—ordained and ministers of religion—commissioned, such as teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of family life ministry, directors of parish music, deaconesses, parish assistants, and certified lay ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who confess and accept the confessional basis of Article II.

A. Voting Members

All organized congregations that have joined the Synod hold voting membership. At the meetings of the districts of the Synod every congregation or parish is entitled to two votes, one of which is to be cast by the pastor and the other by the lay delegate. At the meetings of the Synod a number of congregations shall form a group which shall be represented by two voting delegates, one a pastor and one a lay delegate.

B. Advisory Members

Advisory members only are the following:

1. Pastors whose congregations do not hold membership in the Synod
2. Ministers not in charge of congregations
3. Professors at the Synod's educational institutions
4. Teachers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church
5. Directors of Christian education
6. Directors of Christian outreach

7. Directors of family life ministry
8. Directors of parish music
9. Deaconesses
10. Parish assistants
11. Certified lay ministers
12. Candidates for the office of the ministry, for that of a teacher of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, for director of Christian education, for director of Christian outreach, for director of family life ministry, for director of parish music, for deaconess, for certified lay minister, or for parish assistant

Article VI Conditions of Membership

Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are the following:

1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II.
2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:
 - a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;
 - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession;
 - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.
3. Regular call of pastors, teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of family life ministry, directors of parish music, deaconesses, certified lay ministers, and parish assistants and regular election of lay delegates by the congregations, as also the blamelessness of the life of such.
4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school.
5. A congregation shall be received into membership only after the Synod has convinced itself that the constitution of the congregation, which must be submitted for examination, contains nothing contrary to the Scriptures or the Confessions.
6. Pastors, teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of family life ministry, directors of parish music, deaconesses, certified lay ministers, or candidates for these offices not coming from recognized orthodox church bodies must submit to a colloquium before being received.
7. Congregations and individuals shall be received into membership at such time and manner, and according to such procedures, as shall be set forth in the bylaws to this Constitution.

Article VII Relation of the Synod to Its Members

1. In its relation to its members the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is but an advisory body. Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with

the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned.

2. Membership of a congregation in the Synod gives the Synod no equity in the property of the congregation.

Article VIII Synodical Meetings

A. Time and Legality of Meetings

1. The Synod convenes every three years for its regular meeting.
2. For a legal convention a constitutional convocation of the meeting and the presence of at least one-fourth of the constitutionally elected voting representatives are necessary.

B. Special Sessions of the Synod

1. The Synod may under circumstances call a special session if two-thirds of the voting representatives present so decide.
2. In cases of urgent necessity a special session may be called by the President with the consent of two-thirds of the district presidents or by three-fourths of the district presidents without the consent of the President; however, all congregations and other members of the Synod must be notified 30 days in advance and told for what purpose this extra meeting is being convened.

C. Resolutions at Synodical Meetings

All matters of doctrine and of conscience shall be decided only by the Word of God. All other matters shall be decided by a majority vote. In case of a tie vote the President may cast the deciding vote.

Article IX Representation

The synodical meetings are composed of regularly elected and delegated representatives and of certain individual persons, as specified in the Bylaws, to wit:

1. Representatives of congregations, entitled to vote
2. Advisory representatives of the advisory members of the Synod
3. Advisory representatives of boards, commissions, and educational institutions and such as by virtue of their office are required to attend the Synod

Article X Officers

—A—

The officers of the Synod are:

1. A President
2. Vice-presidents, in line of succession, as prescribed by the Bylaws
3. A Secretary
4. A Board of Directors
5. Other officers, as specified in the Bylaws

—B—

1. The President, the vice-presidents, and the Secretary must be ministers of religion—ordained of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and, like other officers and the members of the Board of Directors, members of voting congregations.
2. The time of service of all officers, boards, and commissions shall be fixed by the Bylaws of the Constitution of the Synod.
3. Any officer or any member of any board or commission ceases to be an officer of the Synod or a member of any board or commission as soon as he ceases to be a member of a congregation affiliated with the Synod.

Article XI Rights and Duties of Officers

A. In General

1. The officers of the Synod must assume only such rights as have been expressly conferred upon them by the Synod, and in everything pertaining to their rights and the performance of their duties they are responsible to the Synod.
2. The Synod at all times has the right to call its officers to account and, if circumstances require it, to remove them from office in accordance with Christian procedure.
3. The Synod reserves the right to abolish any office it has established.
4. Conventions of the Synod and of the districts have the right, in extraordinary cases, to elect a chairman other than the regular presiding officer.

B. Duties of the President

1. The President has the supervision regarding the doctrine and the administration of
 - a. All officers of the Synod;
 - b. All such as are employed by the Synod;
 - c. The individual districts of the Synod;
 - d. All district presidents.
2. It is the President's duty to see to it that all the aforementioned act in accordance with the Synod's Constitution, to admonish all who in any way depart from it, and, if such admonition is not heeded, to report such cases to the Synod.
3. The President has and always shall have the power to advise, admonish, and reprove. He shall conscientiously use all means at his command to promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod.
4. The President shall see to it that the resolutions of the Synod are carried out.
5. When the Synod meets in convention the President shall give a report of his administration. He shall conduct the sessions of the convention so that all things are done in a Christian manner and in accord with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod.

6. It is the duty of the President, or an officer of the Synod appointed by the President, to be present at the meetings of the districts, to advise them, and to report at the next session of the Synod.
7. The President shall perform all additional duties assigned to him by the Bylaws or by special resolution of the Synod in convention.
8. When matters arise between meetings of the Synod in convention which are of such a nature that action thereon cannot be delayed until the next convention, the President is authorized to submit them to a written vote of the member congregations of the Synod only after full and complete information regarding the matter has been sent to member congregations by presidential letter and has been published in an official periodical of the Synod. If such matters are related to the business affairs of the Synod, such a vote shall be conducted only after the President has consulted with the synodical Board of Directors. In all cases at least one-fourth of the member congregations must register their vote.

C. Duties of the Vice-Presidents

1. The vice-presidents shall upon request of the President represent him in all his functions.
2. In case of the disability, the deposition from office, or the death of the President, the vice-presidents, in the order of their rank of office, advance to the President's place, with full power, until the expiration of his term of office.

D. Duties of the Secretary

The Secretary shall

1. Record the proceedings when the Synod meets in convention;
2. Perform such other work as the Synod may assign to him through the Bylaws or special resolutions of the Synod.

E. Composition and Duties of the Board of Directors

1. The Board of Directors shall consist of not fewer than seven voting members, to wit: the President, the Secretary, one pastor, and four laymen. The First Vice-President shall be a nonvoting member.
2. The Board of Directors is the legal representative and custodian of all the property of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, directly or by its delegation of such authority to an agency of the Synod. It shall exercise supervision over all property and business affairs of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod except in those areas where it has delegated such authority to an agency of the Synod or where the voting members of the Synod through the adoption of bylaws or by other convention action have assigned specific areas of responsibility to separate corporate or trust entities, and as to those the Board of Directors shall have general oversight responsibility as set forth in the Bylaws. For the purposes of this article, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod includes both the Synod formed by this Constitution and the Missouri corporation formed by the Synod.

Article XII Districts of the Synod and Their Regulation

1. The Synod is divided into districts, the geographical boundaries of which are determined by the Synod and are altered by it according to circumstances.
2. This Constitution is also the constitution of each district of the Synod; however, each district is at liberty to adopt such bylaws and pass such resolutions as it deems expedient for its conditions, provided that such bylaws and resolutions do not conflict with the Constitution and the Bylaws of the Synod.
3. The officers of the districts are:
 - a. A district president
 - b. District vice-presidents as the Bylaws prescribe
 - c. As many circuit visitors as each district may determine upon
 - d. A district secretary
 - e. A district treasurer, who may be elected by the district convention or appointed in such manner as the district may prescribe
4. Additional officers, boards, and commissions are elected by the districts as they are required for the execution of the business of the districts.
5. The election and time of service of the district officers shall be determined by the Bylaws of the Constitution of the Synod.
6. All officers of the districts have the same rights and duties as those outlined in this Constitution for the officers of the Synod but only insofar as these apply to the district and only within the boundaries of their districts.
7. The district presidents shall, moreover, especially exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned ministers of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the congregations of their district. To this end they shall visit and, according as they deem it necessary, hold investigations in the congregations. Their assistants in this work are the circuit visitors, who therefore shall regularly make their reports to the district president.
8. District presidents are empowered to suspend from membership ordained and commissioned ministers for persistently adhering to false doctrine or for having given offense by an ungodly life, in accordance with such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod.
9. Furthermore, the district presidents shall
 - a. See to it that all resolutions of the Synod which concern the districts are made known to the districts and are carried out by them;
 - b. Submit an annual report of their administration to the President of the Synod and, in general, permit him to obtain all necessary insight into their official activities as district presidents;
 - c. Perform, either in person or by proxy, the ecclesiastical ordination of the candidates for the ministry assigned to their districts and the installation of such, as well as the installation of the candidates for the office of schoolteacher and of all ministers and teachers called by the congregations in their districts;
 - d. Sign all examination papers and certificates of ordination and, in general, all official papers and documents of their district.
10. The meetings of the districts of the Synod are composed of the following:

A. Voting Representatives

The pastors of such congregations as hold voting membership in the Synod and the lay delegates elected and deputed by these congregations shall be voting representatives.

B. Advisory Members

Advisory members are:

- a. Pastors whose congregations do not hold membership in the Synod
 - b. Ministers not in charge of congregations
 - c. Professors at the Synod's educational institutions
 - d. Teachers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church
 - e. Directors of Christian education
 - f. Directors of Christian outreach
 - g. Directors of family life ministry
 - h. Directors of parish music
 - i. Deaconesses
 - j. Parish assistants
 - k. Certified lay ministers
 - l. Candidates for the office of the ministry, for that of a teacher of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, for director of Christian education, for director of Christian outreach, for director of family life ministry, for director of parish music, for deaconess, for certified lay minister, or for parish assistant.
11. The districts, when legally incorporated, are represented before the State by a board of directors composed of the president, the secretary, and the treasurer of the district, which board, however, may be constituted otherwise.
 12. The districts are independent in the administration of affairs which concern their district only, it being understood, however, that such administration shall always serve the interests of the Synod.
 13. The regular sessions of the districts are held in the year immediately preceding the general convention of the Synod. Only the Synod has the right to make an exception to this rule.
 14. For the legal holding of the sessions of the districts a constitutional convocation of such sessions and the presence of at least one-third of the voting members represented by at least one of their respective representatives (pastor or lay delegate) are required.
 15. In cases of urgent necessity the district president is empowered to convene special sessions of his district; he must, however, previously have obtained consent of at least a majority of the voting members of the district after having informed them and the President of the Synod of the purpose of the intended special session.

Article XIII Expulsion from the Synod

1. Members who act contrary to the confession laid down in Article II and to the conditions of membership laid down in Article VI or persist in an offensive conduct, shall, after previous futile admonition, be expelled from the Synod.

2. Expulsion shall be executed only after following such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod.
3. If the member expelled is a pastor or teacher in a congregation of the Synod, such congregation, unless it has already done so, is held to depose him from office and to deal with him in accordance with the Word of God, notwithstanding an appeal. If it persistently refuses to do so, the respective district is to deal with it. If all negotiations and admonitions fail of their purpose, such congregation forfeits its membership in the Synod.
4. Because of their expulsion those so expelled forfeit their membership and all share in the property of the Synod. The latter holds good also with respect to those who for any reason themselves sever their connection with the Synod.

Article XIV Bylaws

The Synod in convention may adopt bylaws that are consistent with and do not contradict the Constitution of the Synod, which controls and supersedes such bylaws and all other rules and regulations of the Synod. Bylaws, which may be adopted, revised, or eliminated by a simple majority vote of a national convention, are binding regulations for the Synod and its conduct and governance.

Article XV Changes in, and Amendments to, the Constitution

1. Changes in the Constitution and amendments thereto may be made provided they do not conflict with the provisions laid down in Article II and in Article VI.
2. All proposed changes and amendments must be submitted in writing to the Synod assembled in convention, and each proposed change shall be voted on separately. A two-thirds majority of all votes cast shall be necessary for adoption.
3. After adoption by the convention such amendments shall be submitted to the congregations of the Synod by means of three announcements in the official periodical within three months after the close of the convention.
4. Amendments to the Constitution of the Synod shall be submitted directly to each voting congregation of the Synod on an official ballot, and the congregations shall by official action express their affirmative or negative vote and indicate the same to the Secretary of the Synod on this official ballot. The proposed amendment shall become effective at the expiration of six months from the date on which the amendment is submitted for vote, provided a two-thirds majority of the votes cast within that period shall have favored the amendment. At the end of the six-month period the Secretary of the Synod shall announce the outcome of the voting by districts in the official periodical of the Synod.