

The
Bergthaler Mennonite Church
of Altona

Constitution

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CONSTITUTION of the BERGTHALER MENNONITE CHURCH OF ALTONA

As accepted at a membership meeting on February 4th, 2000.
Amendments accepted on February 5th, 2000.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Lord admonished the believers and the Church to let all things be done decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:40) and since it is necessary that every organized corporate body have certain rules and regulations according to which its affairs are regulated and administered, this Church has adopted the following constitution. The constitution shall aid the church in its work and shall in no way assume undue prominence, nor in any way minimize the importance of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

1. NAME

The name of this congregation shall be:

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Altona

2. AFFILIATION

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Altona is:

2.01 - A member of Mennonite Church Manitoba;

2.02 - A member of Mennonite Church Canada;

2.03 - A member of Mennonite Collegiate Institute Society
and Ebenezer Home for the Aged Society.

3. PURPOSE

The purpose of the church is to build the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ by nurturing the believers through worship, instruction, fellowship and service, and to bring the unsaved to the knowledge of Christ and into the broader fellowship of the church, both in our immediate community and, in a broader sense, through our mission effort.

4. AUTHORITY

All authority in spiritual and administrative matters is rooted in the Word of God and vested in the membership; the membership is guided by the ministerial body and the Church Council. The membership, ministerial body and Church Council are to be directed by the Holy Spirit.

5. CONFESSION OF FAITH

5.01 - We believe that the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God, divinely inspired and infallible, and the only trustworthy guide in faith and life.
(2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13)

5.02 - We believe in the only, living and true God, Creator, Sustainer and Ruler perfect, holy and eternal, existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19; John 1:30; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 1:1-5)

5.03 - We believe that Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God, the eternal begotten Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit born of the virgin Mary, that He lived in perfect holiness, suffered and died, arose and ascended to Heaven to reconcile man with God, that He ever lives to intercede for His children, and that He will come again according to His purpose. (Matthew 16:16; Luke 1:31-33)

5.04 - We believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, one with the Father and the Son, that He convicts and regenerates man, and sanctifies, instructs and guides the believers.
(John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14)

5.05 - We believe in a visible Church, the Body of Christ, made up of those who through repentance and regeneration have come to the faith, have received the Holy Spirit, and have become members of the fellowship here on earth, of which Jesus Christ is the head and foundation, it is responsible to preach the Gospel to all people, according to the command of Christ. (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 1:18; Acts 20:21; 17:30; Galatians 3:26)

5.06 - We believe in the following Biblical ordinances:

5.061 - Baptism

We believe that all who through repentance and faith in Christ have been regenerated and have become children of God should upon confession of faith submit to water baptism according to Christ's command.
(Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27)

5.062 - Lord's Supper

We believe in the observance of the Lord's Supper as a constant responsibility of the believers in remembrance of the suffering and death of our Savior Jesus Christ, and for fellowship with God and with one another.

(Matthew 26:26-29; I Corinthians 11:23-25)

We practice open communion, by which we mean that an invitation is extended to all believers who confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and are at peace with God and others who wish to express their faith in this manner.

5.07 - We believe in the institution of marriage of one man and one woman; according to the Lord's will that this be unto death. (Matthew 19:1-9; I Corinthians 7)

5.08 - In addition to the foregoing articles of faith, we believe in the following Scriptural teachings:

5.081 - The Biblical teaching of peace, love and non-resistance as Christ himself practiced this in His life, and as we learn it from the teachings of Christ and the apostles. (Matthew 5:38-48; 26:47-56; Luke 6:27-38; John 18:33-37; Romans 12:17; I Corinthians 13; I Peter 3:9)

5.082 - Avoidance of the oath. (Matthew 5:33-37)

5.083 - The practice of church discipline according to New Testament teaching. (Matthew 18:15-18; I Corinthians 5:5; II Corinthians 6:1-7; Titus 3:10; Galatians 6:1)

5.09 - We believe that we have been called with a holy calling to live a life of separation from sin and the world. (Ephesians 1:4; I Peter 1:15; Colossians 1:22)

6. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

6.01 - Qualification - membership in this church is open to any mature person who:

6.011 - professes Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, has been baptized upon that confession, is striving for a consistent Christian life, and is committed to building the Kingdom of God in fellowship with other believers in this church.

6.012 - is in essential agreement with this constitution.

6.02 - Admission

6.021 - Persons may become members in this congregation through one of the following:

6.0211 - Baptism - persons seeking membership by baptism will be expected to receive doctrinal instruction, and will be expected to give a spoken confession of faith before the church membership, or to submit a written confession of

faith for reading before the church membership. Each baptismal candidate, in consultation with a pastor, will be asked to choose a sponsor(s) who is a member of our church.

6.0212 - Transfer

6.02121 - Persons who have been baptized on confession of faith may be received into the church after they provide, wherever possible, a written transfer from their former church showing standing in good faith and give a spoken confession of faith before the church membership or submit a written confession of faith for reading before the church membership.

6.02122 - An applicant who is a former member of this or another congregation whose membership has been terminated for any reason whatsoever shall satisfy the congregation of true repentance and/or reconciliation before being accepted as a member.

6.022 - The following procedure shall normally apply:

6.0221 - A prospective member shall complete a membership application.

6.0222 - A pastor shall interview and counsel the applicant; then review the application with ministerial. The ministerial shall then present the applicant and a recommendation for membership at a regular Sunday morning worship service, not less than two (2) weeks before the proposed admission to membership.

6.0223 - Unless objections have been raised by members in the congregation, the applicant is received into the church through the hand of fellowship from the pastor (or his designate) and the chairperson of church council.

6.03 - Termination of Membership

6.031 - Members may terminate their membership voluntarily through one of the following ways:

6.0311 - Transfer to another church: members who make a written request for transfer to another church shall, upon recommendation to Church Council by the pastor and/or ministerial, be granted a letter of transfer.

Where a member informs the church that they

have transferred to another church the Pastor shall bring such information to Church Council at which time a formal release shall be issued.

6.0312 - Withdrawal: members may request to withdraw their membership. Such requests shall be honored after counsel has been given.

6.032 – The church has the right to release members as per article 6.08 and 6.09.

6.04 Legal Rights of Members: Any member withdrawing from, or in any other way losing membership in the congregation, thereby forfeits all rights and privileges to any and all properties of the congregation. All properties of the church shall be held in common by all members and shall not be divided.

6.05 Privileges of Members: All members of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Altona are entitled to:

6.051 – participate in the activities of the church;

6.052 – hold any office to which they are appointed or elected;

6.053 – vote at membership meetings.

6.06 Duties of Members: Membership in the church of Jesus Christ involves certain obligations. These are fully expounded in Holy Scriptures and summarized in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The obligations contained in this sub-section are listed for clarity only and are therefore not to be taken as an exclusive listing.

The Christian life comes to fruition both within the believing fellowship and in the world in which it is set. It manifests itself in:

6.061 – the desire to search the Scriptures and live by its precepts;

6.062 – an emphasis on the Scriptural teaching of peace, love and non-resistance, as taught by our Lord and exemplified in His life. (Matthew 5:9, 43-48)

6.063 – abstaining from taking of oaths. (Matt. 5:33-37)

6.064 – the demonstration of the reality of forgiveness. (Matthew 18:21,22)

6.065 – abstaining from any act which would harm the brother, or compromise Christian loyalty and witness. (Romans 14:1-23)

6.066 – practicing Scriptural discipline. (Matt. 18:15-20)

6.067 – recognizing God's claim on everything that He has entrusted to us: time, abilities, possession. (I Corinthians 6:19,20)

6.068 – regular attendance at church services and at the Lord's Supper.

6.069 – abstaining from membership in secret societies. (Matthew 5:33-37; Colossians 1:18; 3:17; II Corinthians 6:14)

6.07 Dual Membership: Upon recommendation of the ministerial and church council to membership, dual membership may be permitted in special cases.

6.08 Inactive Members

6.081 - Members moving to another community and not worshipping with us on a regular basis are considered inactive members. They are to be counselled to join a like-minded church in the area of their residence. If they consistently fail to respond to counselling, they may be released from the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Altona by a membership vote. Such a release may be made after such a member has a new place of residence for three years or more. Allowance shall be made in special cases like that of students or those away on service.

6.082 - Members living in the area of the church yet failing to participate in the life of the church become inactive members. Inactive members are to be befriended, counselled, encouraged and exhorted as in Matthew 18:16ff to become active. If they consistently fail to respond they may be released from membership by a membership vote.

6.09 - Church Discipline: Should a member fall into sin or drift away through neglect of devotion and interest, such a person shall be prayerfully counselled with love and understanding by members or leaders of the church. If full fellowship is not restored, the church shall unitedly seek with love for a solution. Only after all other redemptive efforts seem to have failed shall excommunication of a member be considered and redemptively acted upon. (Matthew 18:15-35; I Corinthians 5:9-13; I Thessalonians 5:11,14; Acts 20:28,31; II Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Romans 16:7; II Corinthians 6:15; Philemon 4:5; II Corinthians 2:2-11).

Even though that member's relations with the congregation are severed, the relationship of the congregation to that person shall continue to be one of redemptive love. Only after genuine penitence and a renewed agreement to the membership commitment has been made can such a former member be readmitted by a membership vote.

7. ORGANIZATION

7.01 - Congregational Meetings

7.011 - Authority: Policy matters and all other important matters concerning the functioning of the church are to be decided by membership meetings. An annual meeting shall receive reports of the past year, make plans and adopt a budget for the future, and hold elections for the various church positions.

Membership meetings also call ministers and a leading minister.

7.012 - Calling of Meetings

7.0121 - An annual meeting shall take place before the 15th of February of each year. Reports shall be printed and circulated at least a week before the meeting. The church year shall be the calendar year.

7.0122 - Special meetings may be called by the church council, by resolution at a membership meeting, or by written request to the church council from 25 members.

7.0123 - All membership meetings for the conduct of business shall be announced at least two (2) worship services prior to the meeting.

7.0124 - Agendas for all meetings shall normally be available at least one (1) week before the meeting.

7.013 – Chairing Membership Meetings: Membership meetings shall be chaired by the chairperson of church council. The vice-chairperson of the council shall serve as chairperson in the absence or incapacity of the chairperson.

7.014 - Voting: Voting shall be done by voice vote or show of hands unless ballot votes are called for. Matters are to be decided by not less than a majority vote, but meetings can set a higher requirement. However, any clause in the constitution that specifies a certain percentage can only be changed by a constitutional amendment.

7.015 - Nomination and Election: The Nominations Committee shall attempt to present more nominees than are to be elected to each office. Additional nominations may be made by those present at the meeting.

7.016 - Quorum: The quorum for all congregational meetings for the conduct of business shall be 10% of the resident membership.

7.017 - Office: The terms of all officers shall end at a February annual meeting.

7.02 - Leadership

Leadership is vested in the church council and in the ministerial. While the two bodies work together as co-leaders, it is considered that the spiritual leadership rests with the ministerial and the administrative leadership with the council, and the council chairperson as the signatory for the church for legal purposes.

7.03 - Ministerial

7.031 - The church may have in its ministerial any or all of the following from time to time:

- Pastor(s)
- Assistant to the Pastor
- Youth Pastor
- Lay Ministers
- Deacons

Members of the ministerial shall strive to exemplify qualifications as listed in Scriptural passages such as Acts 6:3 and I Timothy 3:1-13.

7.032 - The ministerial oversees the spiritual life of the membership. Responsibilities of the ministerial shall be as listed in the Church Policy Manual.

7.0321 – In the event that there is no active ministerial group a Spiritual Advisory Committee shall deal with spiritual matters of the Church. This committee shall be: Lead Pastor; one member of C.A.T. (Caregiver Accommodation Team) as selected by their members; the Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson of Church Council as selected by Church Council; and the two (2) Church Council members-at-large elected by the membership at the annual meeting. The three (3) members from Church Council shall serve on this committee according to their terms on Church Council.

7.033 - Pastor - Duties and responsibilities of the Lead Pastor shall be according to the Job description developed by Personnel Commission and the Lead Pastor.

The Pastor is an Ex-officio member of any church commission or committee.

Duties and responsibilities of other Pastors within the church (Assistant Pastor, Youth Pastor, etc.), shall be according to Job descriptions developed by Personnel Commission and each respective pastor in consultation with the Lead Pastor.

7.0331 - Call and Ordination: When the church decides to call a pastor(s), the Search Committee shall search for

suitable candidates. These shall be recommended to the church council and through it to the membership.

A recommendation to call a pastor(s) shall receive the support of 75% of all votes cast at a membership meeting called for the purpose of deciding on the recommendation from church council. If the recommendation is accepted, a formal call will be extended to the candidate(s).

The Lead Pastor shall be ordained as a minister, according to the Mennonite Church Canada ordinal guidelines.

The Assistant Pastor(s) and/or Youth Pastor shall be licensed/commissioned and in consultation with the Lead Pastor, Personnel Commission and the Conference Minister shall begin dialogue and consider ordination towards the end of their first term and/or the commencement of their second term.

7.0332 - Term of Office: Pastors are called for a three (3) year term. This term may be extended for a further three (3) year term by the support of 75% of all votes cast at a membership meeting.

Notice of termination shall be given by either the church or the pastor(s) in writing at least three (3) months prior to the end of the term.

Further extension of term(s), evaluation and/or termination shall be dealt with as per the Recall of Pastors Policy.

7.034 - Lay Ministers

7.0341 - Believing in the priesthood of all believers and the value of lay and multiple ministry, the congregation may elect or call lay ministers. Elections shall take place in manners decided by the membership and calls shall be made upon recommendation from church

council and shall receive the support of 75% of all votes cast at a membership meeting.

7.0342 - Lay Ministers may be elected or called for specific duties or for more general contributions. Generally, the lay ministers work with the pastor and assist in preaching, visitation, counselling and giving advice and support in all areas of church endeavor.

7.0343 - Lay Ministers shall be installed for a three (3) year term. Terms may be renewed. Lay Ministers who have been installed may be ordained later.

7.0344 - If ordained lay ministers join the congregation as members, they may be called to the lay ministry in this congregation through a recommendation from the church council which shall receive the support of 75% of all votes cast at a membership meeting.

7.035 - Deacons

7.0351 - Deacons shall be elected or called according to procedure agreed upon by the membership.

7.0352 - Deacons shall be installed for a three (3) year term by the support of 75% of all votes cast at a membership meeting. Terms may be renewed for a further three (3) years by the support of 75% of all votes cast at a membership meeting.

7.0353 - Deacons shall serve according to their gifts in some or all of the following areas: aid in performing the ordinances, visiting, admonishing the indifferent and inactive, teaching, preaching and counselling.

7.04 - Secretary - The secretary employed by the church shall keep a written record of all business meetings of the congregation and church council. Duties and responsibilities of the Secretary shall be according to the Job description developed by Personnel Commission and the Secretary in consultation with the Pastor.

7.05 - Treasurer - The treasurer shall be appointed annually by church Council as recommended by Finance and Trusteeship Commission.

The treasurer shall serve on the Finance & Trusteeship Commission as an ex-officio member. When the treasurer is absent, the chairperson of the commission on Finance & Trusteeship shall act as the treasurer.

Certified Public Accountants shall be appointed as auditors, by the membership, at the annual membership meeting.

7.06 – Children’s Ministry Coordinator – this position is dealt with under Church Policy.

7.07 - Church Council

7.071 - Organization: The church council shall consist of:

7.0711 - the pastor;

7.0712 - one (1) assistant pastor - chosen by ministerial;

7.0713 - one (1) representative from the deacons - chosen by the deacons;

7.0714 - the elected chairperson from each commission;

7.0715 - the congregational chairperson - elected by the membership; two (2) year terms and may serve three (3) consecutive terms;

7.0716 - vice-chairperson - elected by the membership; two (2) year terms and may serve three (3) consecutive terms;

7.0717 - two (2) members-at-large - elected by the membership; two (2) year terms and may serve three (3) consecutive terms.

7.072 - The council is the executive body of the church and the governing body of the church when the membership is not in session.

Responsibilities of Church Council shall be as listed in the Church Policy Manual.

7.08 - Nominations Committee: The nominations Committee consisting of three (3) members shall be chaired by the vice-chairperson of church council with two (2) members to be appointed by council annually; immediately following the annual membership meeting as referenced in 7.0121.

Responsibilities of the Nominations Committee shall be as listed in the Church Policy Manual.

7.09 - Commissions

7.091 - The church shall have the following six (6) commissions:

~ Commission on Home Ministries

~ Commission on World Ministries

~ Commission on Education

~ Commission on Finance and Trusteeship

~ Commission on Personnel

~ Commission on Worship and Music

7.092 - Organization

7.0921 - Each of the commissions shall consist of not fewer than five (5) lay members elected at the annual business meeting for a period of three (3) years.

7.0922 - A member may hold two (2) full terms plus a partial term in fulfillment of a vacancy. A commission member having served six (6) or more consecutive years on one commission may be elected into another commission only after at least one (1) year out of office, and may be elected into his/her original commission only after three (3) years out of it;

7.0923 - Each commission organizes itself and conducts its own regular meetings for the purpose of planning its area of work;

7.0924 - Any commission member absent for three consecutive commission meetings without good cause shall be considered inactive, thus vacating the position;

7.0925 - The appointment of special representatives of committees, or the organization of auxiliaries shall be made whenever desirable and necessary to involve more members in the interests of the total church work;

7.0926 - All major decisions of any commission, committee, or auxiliary, including the appointment of special committees and presentations of recommendations to membership must be cleared by church council;

7.0927 - No member may serve in more than one of the commissions at one time.

7.093 - Duties

7.0931 - The commissions shall be considered to be arms of the church and they shall be directly responsible to it. Their functions will be those of their parallel boards and committees in

the Manitoba and Canadian Conferences, as these functions and duties apply to the work of the local congregation.

Responsibilities of all Commissions and their respective chairpersons shall be as listed in the Church Policy Manual.

7.0932 - Commission on Home Ministries: shall be responsible for service and ministry (other than education) in the local church and the Altona community.

7.0933 - Commission on World Ministries: shall be responsible for service and ministry outside our community. This may involve working with other churches.

7.0934 - Commission on Education

7.09341 - In addition to the elected members the commission shall consist of:

- ~ Children's Ministry Coordinator
- ~ Youth Pastor

7.09342 - The commission represents educational interests of the congregation, the community and the broader Mennonite Church.

7.0935 - Commission on Finance and Trusteeship: The commission shall:

7.09351 - be responsible for the business administration of the congregation, its properties and its investments. Custodians are to report to the Finance Commission.

7.0936 - Commission on Personnel: the duties shall be to supervise the work of the Pastoral Staff and the Secretary(s).

7.0937 - Commission on Worship and Music: the duties shall be to work with the pastoral team in giving leadership to the ministry of worship and music at the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Altona.

7.10 Auxiliary Organizations: serve a vital function in the work of the church. These organizations may serve jointly with any of the commissions as a particular project may require. In any special problem they may make direct representation to the church council.

8. AMENDMENTS

This constitution is to be considered a servant and not a master in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ through the church. Therefore, this constitution and its by-laws may be altered, amended or repealed by the members at any regular or special congregational meeting by the support of 75% of all votes cast at a membership meeting, provided the announcement of such a proposed change is given in writing at least two (2) consecutive Sundays immediately preceding the date of the meeting.