

Summary of Major Changes Proposed to the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva

Introduction

The process for revising our Church Constitution was initiated by the Church Council on 26 March 2015. The Church Council minutes note:

- The German-Speaking Congregation Council has proposed that the ELCG Constitution be updated and amended. The current constitution dates in the main from 1980, with a brief amendment in 2011, with the main change relating to the management of assets if the church was to be resolved. Among the issues to be addressed would be:
 - Provisions regarding the rights and obligations of congregations, and for receiving new congregations, as well as clarifying responsibilities of existing congregation.
 - The responsibilities of congregations for building expenses, and the distinction between congregations that use the church building and those that do not.
 - The French-language name of the church.
 - Not all Church Council members need be currently members of their Congregation Council.

At its meeting on 29 May 2018, the Constitution Drafting Group finalized text for presentation to the ELCG Church Council. This group was comprised of members from both our congregations (Friederike Aebischer, Heinz Buschbeck, Ralston Deffenbaugh, Friedrich Lohmann (Church Council Chairperson), Martin Magold, Jackson Sempele, and Maarten Wilbers).

Major Changes Proposed to the Constitution

1. Addition of a Preamble to clearly state why we adopt a Constitution for this Church.
2. Clarify that “The Church shall be comprised of the members of one or more congregations” (Article I(1)). This makes sure there is consistency with current Article II(1): “The membership of the Church shall consist exclusively of baptized persons who wish to share in the traditions, teaching and life of one of the Congregations.”
3. Amend the statement of faith (Article I(3)) so as to track the wording from the Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation.
4. State that the Church is part of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein (BELK), the Lutheran World Federation, and the Leuenberg Agreement. (Article I(4))

5. Provide a way for other congregations to become an Associate Congregation of the ELCG, without becoming a full member congregation. (Article III(5))
6. Clarify the voting majorities required in the General Assembly—either two-thirds or three-quarters, depending on the decision to be taken. (Articles IV(4 & 6))
7. Provide that at least half (currently it is all) of the Church Council members from each Congregation shall be members of that Congregation's Council. Define a two-year term for Church Council members, with the possibility of being re-elected for a total of no more than three terms. (Article IV(7))
8. Define the membership of the Executive Committee of the Church Council to be its officers: chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. (Articles IV (9 & 11))
9. Reinforce the commitment of the Congregations so that they “contribute to the expenses of the Church and shall make every effort to meet their commitment to the sustainable stewardship of the Church.” (Article V(3))
10. Strengthen the provisions of the Constitution relating to the Church's property, providing a commitment to the “sustainable management and preservation of the church building.” (Article VII)
11. Provide that the Church may adopt Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions. These may be adopted and amended either by the General Assembly or by decision of the Church Council. They are ways in which the Church can adopt and preserve decisions of a governance or longer-term nature that are consistent with the Constitution, without having to amend the Constitution. (Article IX)

Bylaws

The major provisions of the Bylaws include:

1. The name of the Church in French. (B1.01)
2. The list of Congregations of the Church. (B3.01)
3. The size of the Church Council, and how many members come from each Congregation. (B4.07)
4. The duties of the Officers. (B4.09)
5. Principles regarding the financial resources of the Church. (B5.01 & B5.02)

Continuing Resolutions

This is the document where the Church remembers major decisions of the Church Council that are longer-term in nature. Examples include:

- Which organizations the Church has joined (other than BELK, which is in the Constitution).
- Child Protection Policy.
- Church Council organization, meetings, and schedules of what gets decided when.
- Financial contributions from the Congregations and Associate Congregations.
- Who can use the building, and at what cost.
- Building management, insurance, maintenance, and utility costs.