

CONSTITUTION

of the

HILLSIDE

LUTHERAN

BRETHREN

CHURCH

First Revision 1/25/89  
Second Revision 1/23/92  
Third Revision 4/25/96  
Fourth Revision 1/21/99  
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## **ARTICLE I**

### **NAME**

The name of this congregation is Hillside Lutheran Brethren Church of Succasunna, New Jersey, USA.

## **ARTICLE II**

### **DOCTRINAL STATEMENT OF FAITH**

1. The Bible, including both Old and New Testaments as originally given, is the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God and is free from error in the whole and in the part, and is therefore the final authoritative guide for faith and conduct.
2. There is one God eternally existent in three distinct persons in one divine essence, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. God the Father has revealed Himself as the Creator and preserver of the universe, to Whom the entire creation and all creatures are subject.
4. God created Adam and Eve in His image to live in fellowship with Him. They fell into sin through the temptation of Satan and thereby lost fellowship with God. Through their disobedience the entire human race became totally depraved, that is, self-centered sinners who oppose God, and who by nature are unable to trust, fear or love Him. They are subject to the devil, and are condemned to death under the eternal wrath of God.
5. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, is the image of the invisible God. To accomplish our redemption, He became fully human, being conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man, by His perfect obedience and substitutionary death on the cross, has purchased our redemption. He arose from the dead for our justification in the body in which He was crucified. He ascended into heaven, where He is now seated at the right hand of God, the Father, as our interceding High Priest. He will come a second time personally, bodily, and visibly to gather the believers unto Himself and to establish His millennial kingdom. He will judge the living and the dead and make an eternal separation between believers and unbelievers. His kingdom shall have no end.
6. The Holy Spirit is a divine person eternally one with the Father and with the Son. Through the Word of God He convicts people of sin, persuades them to confess their sinfulness to God and calls them to faith through the Gospel. He regenerates, sanctifies, and preserves believers in the one true faith. He comforts, guides, equips, directs, and empowers the church to fulfill the great commission.
7. The knowledge and benefit of Christ's redemption from sin is brought to the human race through the means of grace, namely the Word and the sacraments.
  - a. Through the Word of the Law God brings sinners to know their lost condition and to repent. Through the Word of the Gospel He brings sinners to believe in Jesus Christ, to be justified, to enter the process of sanctification, and to have eternal life. This occurs as the Holy Spirit awakens them to see their sin, convicts them of their guilt of sin, and calls them to repent and believe, inviting and enabling them to accept God's grace in Christ. Each one who thus believes is instantly forgiven and credited with Christ's righteousness. The Word then

teaches and guides the believer to lead a godly life.

- b. In the Sacrament of Baptism, God offers the benefits of Christ's redemption to all people and graciously bestows the washing of regeneration and newness of life to all who believe. God calls the baptized person to live in daily repentance, that is, in sorrow for sin, in turning from sin, and in personal faith in the forgiveness of sin obtained by Christ. By grace we are daily given the power to overcome sinful desires and live a new life in Christ. Those who do not continue to live in God's grace need to be brought again to repentance and faith through the Law and Gospel. Because the sinfulness of human nature passes on from generation to generation and the promise of God's grace includes little children, we baptize infants, who become members of Christ's believing church through baptism. These children need to come to know that they are sinners with a sinful nature that opposes God. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, they need to confess their sinfulness and yield to God; and possess for themselves forgiveness of their sin through Jesus Christ, as they are led from the faith received in infant baptism into a clear conscious personal faith in Christ as their Lord and Savior and being assured of salvation, rely solely on the finished work of Christ, and the power of the Gospel to live as children of God.
  - c. In the Sacrament of Holy Communion, Christ gives to the communicants His body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. He declares the forgiveness of sin to all believers, and strengthens their faith.
8. Eternal salvation is available to every living human being on earth by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This salvation consists of an instantaneous aspect and an ongoing, continual aspect.
- a. Justification is God's gracious act by which He, for Christ's sake, instantaneously acquits repentant and believing sinners and credits them with Christ's righteousness. At that moment, God gives each one who believes a new and godly nature and the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctification. There is no place for human effort in justification.
  - b. Sanctification is God's gracious, continual work of spiritual renewal and growth in the life of every justified person. Through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit works to reproduce the character of Christ within the lives of all believers, instructing and urging them to live out their new nature. The Holy Spirit enables believers more and more to resist the devil, to overcome the world, and to count themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in and bestows spiritual gifts upon all believers. He calls, empowers and equips them to serve God in the home, in the community, and as part of the Church Universal. The process of sanctification will be complete only when the believer reaches glory.
9. The Church Universal consists of all those who truly believe on Jesus Christ as Savior. The local congregation is an assembly of believers in a certain locality among whom the Gospel is purely taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. The confessing membership of the local congregation shall include only those who have been baptized into "the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," confess personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, maintain a good reputation in the community and accept the constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. It cannot, however, be avoided that hypocrites might be mixed in the congregation; that is, those whose unbelief is not evident to the congregation.
10. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren practices the congregational form of church government and the autonomy of the local congregations. The office of pastor and elder is to

be filled by men only. The synodical administration has an advisory function as it relates to the congregation, and an administrative function as it relates to the cooperative efforts of the congregations.

11. The Lutheran confessions are a summary of Bible doctrines. We adhere to the following confessional writings: The Apostles' Creed, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism.

### **ARTICLE III SYNODICAL MEMBERSHIP**

This congregation is a member of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and operates in harmony with the Constitution and By-Laws of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Relationship of the Local Congregation to the Synod:

In our relationship to the synod, we practice the congregational form of church government and the autonomy of the local congregation. Toward the congregation, the synod has an advisory function rather than a ruling function. Its power to rule extends to the cooperative efforts of the congregations of the synod (such as Lutheran Brethren World Missions, Lutheran Brethren Seminary etc.). In the case of discipline problems within the local congregation, the Synodical Council has whatever authority is delegated to it by the local congregation. It may, upon recommendation from the district in which the congregation is located, expel a local congregation from membership in the synod if the congregation no longer reflects the position of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. It may also revoke the ordination of a pastor for doctrinal, moral, or other sufficient reasons.

### **ARTICLE IV MISSION STATEMENT**

Because of who God is and what he has accomplished for us in Christ: we listen to his words, we speak those life-giving words; and we live those words by actively serving one another in Christian love and sacrificially bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people we meet.

### **ARTICLE V CHURCH MANAGEMENT**

1. Christ is the Head of the Church

Christ is the Head of the Church. Through His Spirit He guides the Church by His Word. According to His Word, He bestows upon the Church gifts of grace necessary for the effectual performance of its various ministrations. Among these ministrations we especially emphasize the office of the pastor and elders. (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5; Acts 6:2-6; Philippians 1:1)

2. Membership

The voting membership is made up of confessing members who are eighteen years of age or older.

Business decisions take place at the congregational annual meeting and other duly called

meetings of the congregation.

### 3. Church Council

At the congregational level, we follow the New Testament model of choosing elders in organizing the leadership team. The pastor/s and elders constitute the Church Council, and to this body the congregation as a whole commits its direction.

The Church Council acts for the church in all matters pertaining to the spiritual and temporal affairs of the congregation. It may delegate, as appropriate, business or ministry functions to the Finance and Property Committee (Trustees) and other ministry committees established by the congregation.

No organization under the jurisdiction of the congregation shall organize or disband without the approval of the Church Council.

The Church Council is to watch over and pray for the spiritual well being of the congregation and to exercise such supervision that all the involvements and activities of the congregation are in accordance with the Word of God and consistent with a clear Christian witness to the world. The Church Council should provide spiritual leadership that will develop a sense of unity, purpose, direction, mission, and growth among the congregation.

The Church Council recommends applicants for membership to the congregation for their vote at duly called congregational business meetings. The Church Council is also charged with the responsibility of exercising suitable means of church discipline in accordance with God's Word, however, revocation of membership remains the sole right of the congregation, exercisable by a simple majority vote on a secret ballot, at a duly called congregational business meeting.

The Church Council shall also fulfill all other responsibilities as prescribed in the By-Laws of this Constitution.

Elections and other matters of primary importance shall be considered by the Church Council before being brought to the business meeting of the congregation for discussion and final decision.

#### a. Pastor/s

For the office of pastor, the congregation shall call a man who is a true Christian, who accepts the Constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, who otherwise has the necessary qualifications and is listed on the Church of the Lutheran Brethren Clergy roster or has been approved by the Synodical Council, pending formal listing on the Clergy roster.

The pastor's primary calling, according to Ephesians 4:12-13, is "to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." He is to give particular attention to the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments.

A pastor is to fulfill his call in accordance with the Word of God, his letter of call, his ordination vows, and the policies of the Ministers of the Gospel Handbook.

All ordained pastors become members of the church, members of the Board of Elders and non-elected voting members of any or all other boards and standing committees of the congregation for which they have ministerial responsibility. All non-ordained pastors become members of the church, and can attend Board of Elders meetings, without voting privileges. The pastor/s of the congregation shall be approved for call by the process described in the by-laws.

b. Elders

The office of elder shall be filled by men who have the spiritual qualifications and abilities as designated in the Scriptures (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-3) and are confessing members of the congregation, recognized as men of faith, integrity and maturity. Elders are called by the Church Council and affirmed by the congregation at its annual meeting for three-year rotating terms by a minimum two-thirds of the voting membership at the annual meeting. Elders are ordained or installed into office by the congregation: ordained if they are new to the office, installed if they have been previously ordained. If practical, after serving two three-year terms the elder will be given a one-year leave before returning to active service upon affirmation by the congregation.

4. Officers

a. Chairman

The chairman of the congregation leads the business meetings of the congregation and chairs the Church Council. He shall, in consultation with the Church Council, set the agendas for the meetings. Candidates for the position shall be members of the Church Council. The congregation at its annual meeting elects the chairman for a one-year term.

b. Vice-Chairman

The vice-chairman, in the absence of the chairman, leads the business meetings of the congregation and chairs the Church Council. Candidates for the position shall be members of the Church Council. The Church Council selects from its membership a vice-chairman for a one-year term.

c. Secretary

The secretary records and maintains the minutes and correspondence of the congregational business meetings. The secretary shall be a confessing member of the congregation. The congregation at its annual meeting elects the secretary for a one-year term.

d. Treasurer

The treasurer, in conjunction with the Finance and Property Committee, maintains the financial records of the congregation. He/ she deposits funds, keeps accurate accounts of deposits, pays or supervises payment of all authorized expenses, issues receipts to donors and provides monthly financial reports to the Church Council, the Finance and Property Committee, and to the congregational business meetings. Members of the Finance and Property Committee other than the treasurer shall receive and deposit funds belonging to the Congregation. The treasurer shall be a confessing member of the congregation and a voting member of the Finance and Property Committee (Trustees). The congregation at its annual meeting elects the treasurer for a one-year term.

5. Ministry Committees

a. Finance and Property Committee (Trustees)

The finance and property committee serves under the general supervision of the Church Council with the responsibility of accounting for the finances and caring for the assets of the congregation. In addition to the treasurer and mission treasurer, the congregation elects as many members to the finance and property committee as it finds advisable; the committee shall have a minimum of three members. Candidates for the office of deacon are nominated by the Nominating Committee and elected by a simple majority vote. The members of the committee shall be confessing members of the congregation. They are elected by the

congregation at its annual meeting for three-year rotating terms.

b. Deacons/ Deaconess Committee

For the office of deacon, the congregation shall elect a man who by his life and testimony, is a living Christian and an active, confessing member of the congregation.

The congregation elects as many deacons as it finds advisable. Candidates for the office of deacon are nominated by the Nominating Committee and elected by a simple majority vote. A deacon is elected to a term of three (3) years.

The responsibilities of the Deacons are to minister to the welfare of the poor, sick, and needy, and serve at the regular services of the congregation according to the manner prescribed in the By-Laws of this Constitution.

For the office of a deaconess, the congregation shall elect a woman, who by her life and testimony, is a living Christian and an active, confessing member of the congregation.

The congregation elects as many deaconesses as it finds advisable. Candidates for the office of deaconess are nominated by the Nominating Committee and elected by a simple majority vote. A deaconess is elected to a three (3) year term. The responsibility of the Deaconesses is to assist the elders and deacons in ministering to the needs of the aged and sick according to the manner prescribed in the By-Laws of this Constitution.

All duly elected deacons and deaconesses comprise the Deacon/ Deaconess committee, which elects its own chairperson at its first scheduled meeting of each year.

c. Nominating Committee

The nominating committee presents a slate of candidates for each elected office at the congregation's annual meeting with the exception of the office of elder. The nominating committee shall be composed of one elder selected by the Church Council and two confessing members elected by the congregation at its annual meeting for a one-year term.

d. Auditing Committee

The auditing committee verifies and reports on the accuracy of the congregation's financial records to the congregational annual meeting. The committee shall be composed of two confessing members, elected by the congregation at its annual business meeting for a two-year term, ending in alternate years. An auditor shall not be elected to consecutive terms of office.

e. Other Committees

The congregation shall establish additional ministry committees as needed to carry out the mission of the congregation and fill these committees by election or appointment. These committees shall operate under the general supervision of the Church Council. They will submit annual ministry plans, budget proposals and annual reports to the Church Council. All committees which elect or appoint their own chairperson shall elect or appoint an active, confessing member of the congregation to such a position.

## **ARTICLE VI PROPERTY**

All property of the congregation shall be deeded to the congregation itself and held in its corporate name. No property of the congregation shall be sold, leased, mortgaged or otherwise disposed of without the same having first been approved by a 2/3 vote of the membership in attendance at a business meeting duly called for the specific consideration of the proposal. The

secretary of the congregation and the chairman of the congregation shall certify in such conveyance, lease, or mortgage, that the same has been duly authorized and approved by the congregation.

## **ARTICLE VII DISSOLUTION**

Upon dissolution of the congregational corporation or the winding down of its affairs, the assets of the corporation shall be distributed exclusively to an organization(s) which qualifies under the provisions of Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and its regulations as they now exist or as they may hereafter be amended, and in accordance with the following provision:

If a division should ever occur in this congregation, its properties and assets shall belong to that part of the congregation which abides by this constitution and votes to retain its membership in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America, whether that part be in the majority or minority. In the event that this congregation is dissolved, the property shall be deeded over to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America. This paragraph is unalterable.

## **ARTICLE VIII AMENDMENTS**

This constitution may be amended only at the congregational annual meeting. Such amendments must be read at a previous congregational annual meeting, having been submitted by the Church Council or by the petition of no less than ten confessing members at the previous congregational annual meeting. Adoption of

amendments to the constitution requires a minimum two-thirds approval by the voting membership present at the congregational annual meeting. Amendments to the Constitution shall not conflict with ARTICLE II - CONFSSION OF FAITH, ARTICLE IV - MISSION STATEMENT OR ARTICLE VII- DISSOLUTION.

## **BYLAWS TO THE CONSTITUTION ARTICLE I CHURCH MANAGEMENT**

### **1. Members and Parishioners**

a. Members of the congregation shall be classified as follows:

- 1) Confessing members
- 2) Baptized children of the congregation

**Confessing members.** Confessing members shall have been baptized into “the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,” confess personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, maintain a good reputation in the community and accept this constitution. All requests for confessing membership are made to the Church Council which recommends candidates to the congregation.

Baptized children of the congregation who have become confessing Christians may request confessing membership when they reach confirmation age. Only confessing members of the congregation who have reached the age of eighteen may vote at congregational business meetings. They shall not have membership in any secret society or other organization that, in its official statements or rites, asserts that individuals are reconciled to God outside of Jesus Christ and His atonement.

**Baptized children of the congregation.** Children baptized in the congregation and all baptized children of confessing members shall be designated baptized children of the congregation. This status continues until they reach the age of eighteen, or are accepted as confessing members of the congregation, whichever occurs first. Those not requesting adult membership shall become parishioners.

The congregation shall diligently guide these children and youth by teaching the Word of God and modeling godly attitudes and behavior. Every congregation shall arrange for Sunday schools, Bible schools, youth ministries, pastoral instruction, confirmation and other Christian training programs. These young people shall be made the objects of prayer as the congregation seeks to guide them to conscious faith, spiritual growth and confessing membership in the church.

b. Parishioners

Baptized children of the congregation become parishioners if they have not been received as confessing members. In addition, the Church Council may include as parishioners those who wish to call this their church home. The Church Council may remove the names of parishioners when they deem it necessary or advisable.

2. Church Council

The Church Council shall additionally:

- a) Determine dates and times for the business meetings of the congregation.
- b) Maintain and annually review the membership roster of the congregation. Any member who, in the judgment of the Church Council has not been actively participating in the work of the local congregation for a period in excess of one (1) year, may be placed on inactive status by the Church Council. Inactive members shall not have voting rights. If an inactive member does not apply to the Church Council for reactivation of his membership within two (2) years of being placed on inactive status, the Church Council may, at its discretion, recommend that the congregation, by a simple majority vote, remove such inactive member/s from the membership roll of the congregation.
- c) Handle all cases of church discipline as set forth in Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 1 Timothy 5:19.
- d) Strengthen the mission of the church through planning meetings, prayer and evangelism workshops, and by encouraging congregational participation in district meetings, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren annual convention, Bible camps and other opportunities for fellowship and spiritual growth.
- e) Develop the congregational ministry plan and budget for presentation and approval at the congregational annual business meeting.

a. Pastor

- 1) Call Process: The voting membership is responsible for calling the pastor/s of the congregation. A call committee shall be appointed by the Board of Elders. The call

committee shall be made up of five to seven people, reflecting a balance of elders and other representatives of the congregation. The call committee shall interview possible candidates and prepare a recommendation for the congregation. The call process shall be conducted in harmony with the CLB documents entitled The Pastoral Calling Process and The Pastoral Office Policies of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. The letter of call shall be approved by a minimum of two-thirds of the voting membership at a duly called congregational business meeting.

- 2) Pastoral Work: The pastor shall conduct himself and his ministry according to the guidelines set forth in the synodical policy statement entitled, The Pastoral Office Policies of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. He shall follow the Ministerial Acts of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in leading the services of the church, and conduct regular membership classes.
- 3) Dismissal: The dismissal of a pastor shall take place upon the recommendation of the Church Council at a duly called business meeting of the congregation. The dismissal requires approval by a minimum of two thirds of the voting membership present at the meeting. If dismissed, the pastor shall be provided his current compensation package, prorated for one month per year of former service within the congregation, for a maximum of three months, or until he is placed in another call or other employment, which ever occurs first. If he is living in a parsonage he is entitled to remain in the parsonage for up to three months.
- 4) Resignation: The resignation of a pastor shall be read at a duly called congregational business meeting. The pastor's departure from the congregation shall take place within a negotiated period of one to three months.

b. Elders

- 1) The Church Council shall provide one year of training for prospective elders prior to calling them to the Office of Elder.
- 2) The pastor/s and elders of the church shall seek to strengthen their skills through regular participation in training events, studies, seminars and classes.
- 3) An elder who violates the responsibilities of his office may be removed from office by applying the following procedures based on Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5:19: An elder or other member of the congregation must bring the charge before the Church Council, which will review its validity. The elder in question shall have opportunity to answer the charge before the council. If by a majority vote, the council concurs with the charge, the elder shall forfeit his position and duties, or be allowed to resign gracefully. If the elder feels he has been unfairly treated, he may request that the matter be referred to a duly called congregational business meeting for a vote. His removal from office by the congregation requires approval by a minimum of two-thirds of the voting membership present at the meeting.

3. Finance and Property Committee (Trustees)

This committee shall:

- a. Keep accounts of the financial affairs of the congregation and the day to day business of all real and personal properties belonging to the congregation on behalf of the Church Council, and submit financial reports, minutes from its business meetings and proposals to the Church Council.

- b. Transact all other business of the congregation assigned to it by the congregational meeting or by the Church Council.
  - c. Maintain the congregational property and buildings.
  - d. Submit to the Church Council, three weeks prior to the congregational annual meeting, an annual ministry plan and budget.
4. Deacon/ Deaconess Committee

This committee shall:

- Assist the pastors and elders serving at Holy Communion and Baptisms.
- Assist the pastors and elders in visiting and overseeing the visitation of the sick, infirm, and aged of the congregation.
- Receive and administer funds for the “Deacon Fund” of the congregation.
- Serve as ushers at the regular services of the congregation.
- Oversee the hospitality and maintenance of the facilities before, during, and after regular services of the congregation.
- Oversee the provision of meals for those who may need temporary assistance as in the cases of serious illness, death in the family, and the like.
- Serve at funeral services at the church.

## **ARTICLE II MEETINGS**

- 1. Worship Services are held on a weekly basis.
- 2. Baptism and Holy Communion is administered according to the ritual of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America.
- 3. At marriages, funerals, confirmations, as well as installations of the Pastors, Elders, and Deacons, together with all other Ministerial Acts, the Lutheran Brethren Ritual shall be followed.
- 4. Annual Congregational Meeting
  - a. The congregation’s fiscal year extends from January 1 through December 31.
  - b. An annual business meeting of the congregation shall be held during the month of January. The annual meeting shall be announced at the worship service on two Sundays prior to the date of the meeting.
  - c. The voting membership of the congregation is made up of confessing members who are at least eighteen years of age.
  - d. At the annual meeting, reports from the congregational secretary and treasurer, pastor/s, Church Council, and committees are received; the congregational vision statement, ministry plan and budget are adopted; business is conducted and Church Council members, officers and committee members are elected.
  - e. *Roberts Rules of Order* shall be the basis for parliamentary procedure in all deliberations of the business meetings of the congregation.
- 5. Other Business Meetings

Business meetings, other than the annual meeting, shall be held quarterly or as deemed necessary by the Church Council. Business meetings shall be announced at the worship service one Sunday prior to the meeting.

#### 6. Quorum

To transact legal business at the annual meeting, call or dismiss a pastor, or act on the sale or purchase of property, a quorum of fifty percent of the resident members is required. All other business meetings of the church require a quorum of twenty-five percent of the resident members to transact legal business.

### **ARTICLE III LIMITS TO EXPENDITURES**

Non-budgeted expenditures, such as unforeseen repairs or replacements, or special opportunities, shall be approved by the Church Council. Non-budgeted expenditures exceeding *one percent of the annual budget* must be approved by the congregation.

### **ARTICLE IV AMENDMENTS TO THE BYLAWS**

The Bylaws of this constitution may be amended at a duly called annual or quarterly congregational business meeting. Such amendments must have been read at the previous congregational annual or quarterly business meeting, having been submitted by the Church Council or by the petition of no less than ten confessing members at that previous annual or quarterly business meeting. Adoption of amendments to the by-laws requires a minimum two-thirds approval by the voting membership present at the meeting. Amendments to the Bylaws shall not conflict with ARTICLE II - CONFSSION OF FAITH, ARTICLE IV - MISSION STATEMENT or ARTICLE VII- DISSOLUTION.