

CONSTITUTION  
OF  
St. John's First Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Bridgeton, NJ

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.  
Amen.

ARTICLE 1. Name of the Congregation - Its Purpose.

We, the members of the Christian Church at Bridgeton, New Jersey, hereby unite to form a congregation to be known as Saint John's First Evangelical Lutheran Church, and adopt the following Constitution for the purpose that by the labors and sacrifices of love we may retain among ourselves the pure Word and the Holy Sacraments of God as the only means ordained by Him for the salvation of the Lost and for the up-building of His people, and that we may maintain the necessary Church discipline for the preservation of pure teaching and furtherance of Godly life, peace and well-being of the Church.

ARTICLE 2. Of the Confessional Writings and Synodical Affiliation.

2.1 This congregation subscribes to the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments as the Inspired Word of God, the only norm of doctrine and life, as well as to the Confessional Writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, specifically, those of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Luther as the true and faithful exposition of God's Word. All teaching in church, school and home shall be in accordance with, and all questions of doctrine shall be settled according to this our Confession. All books used by the congregation in worship or instruction shall be in harmony with this Confession.

2.2 This congregation shall be affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod so long as its teachings agree with Article 2.1 of this Constitution.

ARTICLE 3. Of All the Members, and Their Duties and Privileges.

3.1 This congregation shall consist of the Pastor, or Pastors, and other believers in Christ who have been

baptized, confirmed and united in one Communion under this Constitution and who have pledged themselves to abide by its statutes. The congregation also includes all baptized members who have not yet attained the age of individual responsibility and are still, by God's ordinance, under the control of parents or guardians.

- 3.2 In so far as age and spiritual fitness allow, the congregation is entitled to the Means of Grace as administered in this congregation and to all benefits which arise from faithful observance of their duties.
- 3.3 It is the duty of all members to remain faithful to their Baptismal Covenant, and if they be parents or guardians, to present their children early for Holy Baptism, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and conscientiously urge them to attend instruction for Confirmation and preparation for Holy Communion. They should increase, with the years, in the knowledge and grace of God. They should diligently read the Scriptures as well as devout books in accord with them; should pray sincerely for the guidance and aid of the Holy Spirit. They are to make prior announcement of their intention to partake of the Lord's Supper, and are to examine themselves so that they may partake worthily of the Sacrament of the Altar whenever it is celebrated, and are by no means to neglect the public services or the private devotions at home. They shall be temperate in all things; they shall avoid all associations with any unbelieving or ambiguous organization arrogating unto itself those things which God has entrusted only to His Church; they should love and assist each other, especially considering the needy under all conditions; in keeping with God's ordinance, they should contribute toward the maintenance of this congregation and the payment of its debts. They are not only to remember their brethren in the faith, but are also to make the spiritual welfare of mankind a matter of personal concern. They are to avoid all false teachers, but are to love, support and pray for faithful Pastors. In general, they are to strive to conform more and more to the example of our blessed Lord and Savior.
- 3.4 Communicant members who join congregations outside of our fellowship thereby terminate their membership. Their names shall be removed from the membership list by resolution of the Voter's Assembly.

ARTICLE 4. The Right of Suffrage and Conditions of Voting Membership.

4.1 All confirmed men and women members, shall have the right of Suffrage and shall be encouraged to exercise the privilege of active participation in all congregational meetings, business affairs and elections, with the condition that they not be under church discipline; that they regularly and conscientiously, as God grants them ability, contributes to the support of the congregation and it's benevolence.

4.1.1. Women may serve as officers and as members of all boards and committees of this congregation that do not call upon them to carry out the specific functions of the pastoral office (preaching in or serving as the leader of public worship service, the public administration of the sacraments, and the public exercise of church discipline,) Accordingly, a woman shall not serve as pastor of this Congregation or as a member of the Board of Deacons.

\*a. The age given at least the required age established by the State of New Jersey for Non-profit Organizations.

b. Here shall be listed those positions or offices which call for their holders to carry out the specific functions of the pastoral office as listed in the sample paragraph.

c. That lay assistance in the distribution of the elements in the celebration of Holy Communion, in order "to avoid confusion regarding the office of the public ministry and to avoid giving offence to the church", to be listed as Laymen.

\*The state of New Jersey establishes that any minor may be listed as of service to a non-profit organization, but as per St. John's constitution and by-laws, that privilege is only extended to confirmed members.

4.1.1.1 This action does not release men from their God-given responsibility of service and that we urge all men to be faithful servants of their Lord Jesus Christ and of this congregation.

4.1.2 All confirmed members, 18 years of age and older, shall be declared eligible to serve on Committees, Boards, and hold elected offices except as restricted by Article 4.1. and 4.2 of the Congregational Constitution.

*Resolution 4.1 and 4.1.1. Adopted 04/2006 Voters Assembly Meeting  
Resolution 4.1.2 and 4.2 Adopted 11/12/95 Voters Assembly meeting*

4.2 The Voters of the congregation, inasmuch as they act as the representatives of common rights, should duly weigh the wishes, wants and convictions of all the members.

4.3 Membership in the voting body shall be classified as explained in the By-Laws.

#### ARTICLE 5. Meetings of the Congregation

5.1 The Congregation's Meetings shall be held regularly in accordance with the By-Laws.

#### ARTICLE 6. Powers of the Congregation.

6.1 Supreme authority in all legislative matters of the congregation, both internal and external, shall be vested in the voting members.

6.2 The congregation has no right to make any regulations or to render any decisions contrary to the Word of God and the Symbols of the Church, as stated in Article 2. Should it commit such acts, they are null and void.

6.3 The congregation, through its Voters, shall have the right to appoint committees with specific and general instructions; to approve of the organization of suitable societies within itself, but subject to the congregation's control; to elect delegates to Synod or Conference, and to transact all business for which it has not made provision in its Constitution.

ARTICLE 7. Of the Pastor.

7.1 The Pastoral Office of the congregation shall be conferred only upon ministers and candidates who unreservedly subscribe to the Confession of Faith as stated in Article 2 (which therefore is to be made binding on him in his Vocation); whose orthodoxy and ability to serve in a pastoral capacity has been examined and approved by the Synod of which our Church is a member; and who has been regularly called and installed (not hired).

7.2 It shall be the duty of the Pastor, as the teacher and spiritual guide of the congregation, to study diligently, to teach and retain the pure truth of God's Word, both in public and private life to set an example of unfeigned holiness and Christian propriety. He shall conduct divine services. He shall permit no one to occupy his pulpit of whose soundness of faith, as confessed by the Lutheran Church, there may be any doubt. He shall diligently instruct the young, and all others needing it, in the basic teachings of the Christian Church; he shall exercise supervision over the Sunday School and other schools of the Church and shall confirm those, who after suitable instruction, prove their earnest desire to be faithful followers of Christ. He shall administer the Sacraments according to the teachings and practices of the Missouri Synod. He shall be diligent in the care of souls, especially among the sick, the poor, the sorrowing, and those whose spiritual condition demands his particular attention. He shall bless the marriage bond in obedience of God's Word and in conformity with the civil laws. He shall bury those who died as members of the church according to its practices. He shall, in case of burying any one not a member of the congregation, grant or refuse such request. He shall earnestly carry out the provisions of church discipline according to Article 10; he shall promote all sound undertakings of Christian benevolence and shall labor to prevent all indifference as well as fanaticism, schism, heresy, separation or alienation.

7.3 When public announcements of excommunication or restoration are made, they shall be made by the Pastor. No excommunication or restoration shall take place which he conscientiously recognizes as being at variance with the Word of God and the discipline of

this congregation. No official action of the Council or Voting Body shall take effect without his knowledge and his being granted an opportunity to be heard.

7.4 Charges against the Pastor, which render him unfit for his office, shall not be accepted unless attested by at least two competent witnesses. Any member having charges against a Pastor must first proceed according to Matthew 18:15-16. If the matter cannot thus be disposed of, it shall be presented to the Council in writing. If the Council considers the charge, or charges, of sufficient importance, it shall elect a suitable member from its own number to preside and proceed to hold an investigation; however, it is to furnish the accused Pastor with a copy of the charges and grant him an opportunity to be heard in his own defense, at which time the witnesses both for and against him shall be heard. In case the charges prove to be well founded, the Council shall report the case to the congregation to be disposed of in accordance with Matthew 18:15-16 and the Synodical Constitution. Sufficient causes for the removal of the Pastor are: persistent adherence to false doctrine, ungodly life, and the willful neglect of official duties. An appeal from the action of the congregation may be taken to the District Conference or to the Synod.

7.5 The Pastor is to maintain a record book and/or books, in which all his official acts shall be entered. Such books shall be provided by the congregation and remain its property.

7.6 In case of a vacancy, the congregation is to inform the Circuit Counselor and the President of the District, meanwhile making provision that the congregation be served with Word and Sacrament, and after prayerful consideration shall nominate a candidate, who, according to Article 2, is eligible and possesses the requisite physical and mental endowments, purity of Christian character, sound judgement, and a willingness to work. Only one candidate shall be nominated at one time and he shall be elected by the voting members specified in Article 4. Voting shall be by ballot and the election and its returns shall be under the supervision of the tellers. If a Pastor is elected by a majority of the Voters, a written Call shall be extended to him by the Officers of the Congregation.

The support guaranteed shall be specified in the Call.

ARTICLE 8. Stewards of the Congregation.\*

8.1 The Congregational officers shall consist of six or more deacons, three or more trustees, a president, a vice-president; a recording secretary, a financial secretary, a treasurer, two or more tellers, members of the Board of Education, head usher, members of the Board of Finance, Sunday School superintendent.

8.2 The Council Officers shall consist of the Pastor or Pastors, the head deacon, the head trustee, the president, the vice-president, the recording secretary, the financial secretary, the treasurer, the Chairman of the Board of Education and the Chairman of the Board of Finance and (3) Three members "At Large". (See also By-Laws, Article 3.)

8.3 Appointed and voluntary stewards shall function on various committees and in various groups as permanently or temporarily established by either the Church Council or Voter's Assembly.

\*Congregational Officers: applies to all elected stewards

Council Officers: applies specifically to the members of the Church Council

Committeemen: All appointed stewards to committees or boards

Stewards: All who serve the church

ARTICLE 9. Of Christian Education.

9.1 The Church recognizes that the care and religious instruction of the young so that they may grow in their knowledge and nurture of the true Christian faith is of great importance; therefore,

9.1.1 All members are enjoined to have their children baptized at the earliest possible time.

9.1.2 All members are urged to conduct regular family devotions, particularly utilizing a format that encourages active participation by the

children.

9.1.3 All members are instructed to see that their children are in regular attendance at Sunday School and also should attend Bible Classes themselves to not only set a good example, but because they are still "children of God" and in need of spiritual growth.

9.1.4 All members should regularly bring their children to church so that all may mutually benefit from the Saving Grace of God.

9.1.5 Since all parents are parents until death, the commitment to children does not end at confirmation or at legal age and all necessary efforts should be expanded to keep the offspring in contact with God.

9.2 Formal religious instruction shall be provided in such schools as the congregation may maintain and control.

9.3 Called teachers in our Church Schools shall subscribe to the Confession of Faith as defined in Article 2 of this Constitution. In case of a vacancy the congregation shall proceed according to the provisions of Article 7.6 of this Constitution.

9.4 Charges against teachers which render them unfit for office shall follow the procedure stated in Article 7.4 of this Constitution.

#### ARTICLE 10. Of Church Discipline.

10.1 In accordance with I Corinthians 5:13, our congregation recognizes its responsibilities to exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from its midst. Therefore by using the Christ-instituted power of the Office of the Keys and the loving stages of admonition as set forth in Matthew 18:15ff., the congregation will excommunicate such impenitent individuals and will exclude them from the rights and privileges of a Christian. This action is taken in love for the individual, to show him the magnitude of his sin, to lead him to repent, and most important to help him find forgiveness. Any charges against an individual must be presented to him in writing. He has the privilege of

attending the entire investigation and providing for his own defense. Excommunication must be the unanimous decision of all other voters present.

10.2 When God through the Holy Spirit awakens the individual under discipline to repent of his sin and seek absolution, he shall be received as a forgiven brother and receive full rights and privileges of church membership. Announcement of such restitution shall be made at a meeting of the Voters' Assembly.

ARTICLE 11. Right of Property in Case of Separation.

11.1 If at any time a separation should take place in this congregation on account of doctrine (which the Lord may mercifully prevent), the property of the congregation and all the benefits therewith connected shall remain with those members who shall continue to adhere to Article 2 of this Constitution.

ARTICLE 12. Alterations and Amendments of the Constitution.

Amendments to this Constitution may be proposed by:

12.1 Three legal voters or the Constitutional Bylaws Review Committee.

12.2. All proposed additions, deletions or changes must be submitted in writing showing the existing article and section along with the proposed change(s).

12.3 All additions, deletions or changes shall be submitted to the Constitution/Bylaws Committee for review and recommendation(s).

12.4 Proposed changes to the constitution shall be read to the congregation prior to the Voters' Assembly Meeting.

12.5 Copies of the proposed changes are to be available by the church newsletter and to all those attending the Voters' Meeting.

12.6 Constitutional amendments are to be read, discussed, then tabled until the next Voters'

Assembly Meeting at which time action will be taken.

- 12.7 Adoption of Constitution amendment(s) requires a two-thirds vote by the legal voters present.

Amended September 1993      Recopied 08/14/98  
Amended April 2006          Recopied 4/17/09