

First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio
Constitution and Bylaws
As revised June 28, 2020 and effective January 2021
Additional revision to Bylaws October 21, 2021

INTRODUCTION

This constitution, adopted by the congregation in 2020, seeks to provide an orderly way for our church to conduct ministries and make decisions, while supporting the evolving arrangements by which we empower our members to follow Jesus Christ in service to one another, to our neighbors, and to the world. The model of governance represented here leans away from a permission granting structure and toward a resource investing culture. This means that we want to help each other to share the gifts we have been given by God.

The vision for life together represented here is one of collaboration and flexibility. The three ministry circles overlap with one another and the ministry leaders share a persistent conversation that engages with the spiritual discernment of the deacons and the pastors in the leadership circle. The church in this vision is a network of vitally integrated practices of discipleship that adapt freely to the challenges and opportunities of our context. The constitution adopted by FMC then should be seen less as an order for keeping things secure and more as a process for making things new. It is that spirit of renewal and transformation—the Holy Spirit—that will bring this constitution to life in the members of this beloved body.

PREAMBLE

First Mennonite Church originated in the Swiss Mennonite Congregation which was formed in 1837 in Allen and Putnam counties. On April 1, 1918, the First Mennonite Church became a separate congregation. It was incorporated on October 15, 1993. The following is a revision of the constitution adopted on June 28, 2020.

ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this congregation is the First Mennonite Church of Bluffton, Ohio.

ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

The purpose of this congregation is to be a gathering of believers in Christ who share the Anabaptist vision and are committed to following Jesus Christ in discipleship. To accomplish this purpose, First Mennonite Church seeks to provide for worship, spiritual nurture, and teaching in matters of the Christian faith; to minister to people in times of spiritual, emotional, physical or financial need; to celebrate together in times of rejoicing and support each other in times of sorrow;

and to engage with like-minded congregations in witness and service in the wider world.

ARTICLE III: MEMBERSHIP

Membership in First Mennonite Church is voluntary, and open to all who, having affirmed their faith in God and having affirmed their intention to live as faithful disciples of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, pledge themselves to support Mennonite principles (see Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective) and to share actively in the life and work of this congregation.

ARTICLE IV: AFFILIATION

The congregation is a member of Mennonite Church USA and the Central District Conference or their successors.

ARTICLE V: GOVERNANCE

- A. Congregational autonomy.** In keeping with Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions of congregational autonomy and responsibility, members of this congregation make all decisions in matters of local concern. The members of the congregation control its property and programs by decision-making of the whole, by delegation of authority to elected members, and by authorization of hired church staff. The congregation looks to the conferences in which it holds membership in matters such as licensing ministers, cooperating in mission work, service projects, seminary education, camping, and similar endeavors.
- B. Business meetings.** The annual business meetings of the congregation will be held each year in the month of November. Other meetings of the congregation may be called by the Leadership Circle as needed. A special meeting of the congregation may be requested by a written petition signed by 20 members of the congregation. The Leadership Circle must schedule such a meeting.
- C. Officers.** Leadership Circle will consist of no fewer than 10 members, including the moderator, moderator-elect, treasurer, recorder of minutes, three (or more) deacons, and three (or more) ministry leaders.
- D. Pastoral Leadership.** The pastoral leadership shall provide spiritual guidance for the congregation. The lead pastor shall be the administrative head and direct the activities of the church staff.
- E. Nominations.** A Gift Discovery Committee will nominate persons for each elected position, as well as nominate persons to positions on boards of other organizations to which the congregation sends representatives, such as Et Cetera Shop and Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio.
- F. By-laws.** The congregation will establish and maintain a set of by-laws to clarify and discharge the mandates of this constitution.

ARTICLE VI: AMENDING PROCEDURES

Amendments to this constitution can be made by a two-thirds majority of eligible votes cast. The text of the proposed amendments and the time of voting must be publicized for at least 30 days prior to the vote.

BYLAWS

BYLAW I: MEMBERSHIP

A. Categories of Membership

1. Members participate in the life of the congregation, support the congregation as financially able, vote on matters being brought before the congregation for decision, and are eligible to hold office, both elected and appointed. Membership is open to all who meet the qualifications set forth in the constitution. Persons who are absent due to infirmity or are on assignment with a church agency will continue to be counted as members participating in the life of the congregation. Members who move but wish to retain a connection to the congregation may request Associate Member status.
2. Associate Members participate in the life of the congregation but choose to maintain membership in another congregation. They have the same standing and responsibility as Members, except they may not become members of Leadership Circle nor represent the church as delegates to Central District Conference or Mennonite Church USA.
3. Members in Absentia are no longer participating in the life of the congregation and do not vote. The deacons are responsible for designating who are Members in Absentia. This designation is not applied to young adults or those pursuing higher education. Upon recommendation of the Deacons and after due attempts of contact, Members in Absentia who fail to maintain contact may be dropped from membership rolls by action of Leadership Circle.

B. Admission to Membership

1. Persons who declare their intent to become participating members of the congregation and are recommended by the pastor and the deacons and affirmed by the congregation as a whole may become members or associate members upon:
 - a. confession of faith and baptism; or
 - b. letter of transfer from another congregation; or
 - c. confession of faith acceptable to the deacons and the pastor.

C. Termination and Restoration of Membership

1. A member may request a letter of transfer to another congregation. Membership in First Mennonite Church ceases on the day such a letter is issued.
2. If a member requests release from membership, this release will be granted. The release is to be made known to the congregation.

3. Upon recommendation of the deacons and vote of the Leadership Circle, an individual's membership may be terminated. When appropriate, such action will normally take place after attempts have been made to solve any differences according to Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 13.
4. Persons whose membership has been terminated may have it restored upon recommendation of the deacons and vote of the Leadership Circle.

BYLAW II: CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

- A. Annual meetings.** A November Business Meeting of the congregation is to be called by the Leadership Circle to:
 1. adopt the budget for the coming year; and
 2. transact other business proposed by Leadership Circle, such as elections for church offices.
- B. Special meetings.** Meetings at other times of the year may be called by Leadership Circle or by written request signed by at least 20 members. The purpose of such a meeting must be stated in writing.
- C. Procedures.** When a church business meeting is called, date, time, place and purpose are to be announced at least two Sundays prior to the time of meeting. Business conducted at special meetings is to be restricted to the announced agenda. Conduct of all church meetings is to be according to Robert's Rules of Order, unless otherwise specified in a by-law. The chairperson of all meetings is to be the moderator or the moderator-elect. If neither is available, then the Recorder may preside over the meeting. Voting is by show of hands, unless a ballot is called for. In weighty matters such as calling or releasing a pastor from contract, purchasing or selling real property, or embarking on a major building program, a ballot vote is to be used.
- D. Absentee Voting.** Members and Associate Members of First Mennonite Church may request an on-going or one-time absentee ballot for one of the following reasons:
 1. physical/health disabilities that make it impossible for the member to be present at the church to vote; or
 2. a work-related commitment that makes it impossible for the member to attend church to vote.Leadership Circle approves all absentee ballots.
- E. Quorum.** A minimum of 50 Members and Associate Members present shall constitute a quorum.

BYLAW III: LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

- A. Composition.** Leadership Circle is the body of members with planning and policy oversight. It is made up of at least 10 members or associate members. The congregation elects the following Leadership Circle members:
 1. Moderator; presides at congregational and Leadership Circle meetings
 2. Moderator-elect; advises and succeeds moderator for two-year term

3. Treasurer; keeps an accurate record of congregation's finances, issues checks in payment of legitimate expenses of the congregation, presents regular financial statement to Leadership Circle and a financial report at least annually to the congregation.
4. Recorder; keeps an accurate and complete record of Leadership Circle and congregational meetings.
5. Deacons—3 (see bylaw IV.)
6. Stewardship ministry leader (see bylaw V.)
7. Christian formation ministry leader (see bylaw V.)
8. Connection ministry leader (see bylaw V.)

B. Terms of office. The moderator-elect serves in this capacity for a two-year term, and then succeeds to the office of moderator for a two-year term. Ministry leaders are elected for two-year terms and may be reelected twice before a break in service. Deacons are elected for three-year terms and may be reelected twice before a break in service. Ministry Leaders and Deacons filling an unexpired term are eligible for two full terms if elected.

C. Pastoral staff. Pastoral staff are ex-officio, but non-voting, members of Leadership Circle.

D. Duties of Leadership Circle.

1. Articulate congregational vision.
2. Develop strategic planning.
3. Make congregational policy and staffing decisions.
4. Review and update specific job descriptions for governance functions.
5. Exercise the legal and financial authority of the congregation.
6. Call regular and special meetings of the congregation.
7. Recommend the spending plan to the annual business meeting.

E. Meetings. Leadership Circle will meet as needed and at least quarterly during the year.

F. Quorum. A majority of Leadership Circle members is a quorum.

G. Executive committee. The moderator, moderator-elect, treasurer, and recorder may act as an executive committee of the Leadership Circle in those cases where a response to a situation demands action between meetings of Leadership Circle. Such actions are to be reviewed by the Leadership Circle when it next meets.

H. Treasurer: The treasurer is supported and advised by a treasurer-elect and past-treasurer. The treasurer is a member of the Leadership Circle and serves two years. The treasurer-elect assists the treasurer and serves two years before becoming treasurer. The past-treasurer assists the treasurer for a two-year term following service as treasurer. The treasurer-elect is elected by the congregation

with the understanding that they will serve for at least six years: two years as treasurer-elect, two years as treasurer, and two years as past treasurer.

BYLAW IV: DEACONS

- A. Deacons are a spiritual council of reference for the congregation.
- B. Deacons are elected for three-year terms with each term starting on a different year.
- C. Pastoral staff attend meetings of the Deacons ex-officio.
- D. Responsibilities of the Deacons include:
 - 1. supporting the pastors in ministries of shepherding and pastoral care.
 - 2. assuring and assisting in leading the regular observance of the Lord's Supper.
 - 3. attending to the spiritual and personal discernment needs of members (i.e. through Discovery teams)
 - 4. organizing the practice of mutual aid, including distribution of money from the Mutual Aid Fund.
 - 5. offering the community prayer during Sunday worship as needed.
 - 6. serving with the Leadership Circle in carrying out its duties.

BYLAW V: MINISTRY CIRCLES

A. Ministry Circles are networks of ministries, groups, and roles represented by a ministry leader and meeting together as needed throughout the year. Ministry Circle leaders regularly update the list of groups and roles that support the ministries associated with a circle. The three ministry circles include the following:

- 1. **Stewardship Ministry Circle.** The Stewardship Ministry Circle is responsible for resourcing the congregation with gifts discovery, financial oversight, facility management, and staff relations.
- 2. **Connection Ministry Circle.** The Connection Ministry Circle is responsible for mission work, peacemaking, service activity, Christian fellowship and hospitality, community learning and engagement, conference and denominational participation, and ecumenical partnerships.
- 3. **Christian Formation Circle.** The Christian Formation Circle is responsible for worship planning and leading, congregational singing and music, choir programs, Christian education for all ages, youth ministry, mentoring, catechism, and the library.

B. Ministry Leaders

- 1. Support and resource ministries.
- 2. Articulate relationships among different ministries.

3. Provide encouragement to members involved in ministry.
4. Assist with discernment.
5. Actively identify and develop gifts of ministry in the congregation.
6. Maintain an updated list of ministries, groups, and roles for their ministry circle.
7. Represent their Ministry Circle in the Leadership Circle
8. Lead through mentoring, modeling, and organizing.

Proposed New By-Laws to Amend the First Mennonite Church Constitution
Approved by Leadership Circle, October 21, 2021

BYLAW VI: GIFTS DISCOVERY AND MINISTRY PARTICIPATION TEAM

A. The purpose of the gifts discovery and ministry participation team is to strengthen the ministries of the church by expanding the ministry involvement of the church's members and participants.

B. The gifts discovery and ministry participation team consists of the leader, leader-elect, and past leader, along with additional volunteers recruited by the team. The stewardship circle ministry leader and one of the pastors are ex-officio members of the team. The gifts discovery and ministry participation team leader-elect is elected by the congregation with the understanding that they will serve for two years as leader-elect, two years as the leader, and two years as the past leader.

C. The responsibilities of the gifts discovery and ministry participation team include the following:

1. increase awareness of ministry needs and roles;
2. create contexts for the healthy exploration of ministry involvement;
3. support the creation of new ministries;
4. provide opportunities to discover, develop, and contribute ministry gifts;
5. encourage mutual affirmation of each other's gifts in the congregation.
6. develop the annual slate of elected leaders.

BYLAW VII: STAFF RELATIONS COMMITTEE

A. The purpose of the staff relations committee is to promote a healthy and sustainable relationship between the staff and the congregation.

B. The Leadership Circle appoints three members of the congregation to serve for three years with one being appointed each year.

C. The responsibilities of the staff relations committee include the following:

1. formulate and negotiate a financial benefits package for pastoral staff using Mennonite Church USA (or its successor) guidelines where applicable;
2. recommend proposals for staff salaries and benefits to the Leadership Circle, in consultation with the treasurer;
3. establish the process and ensure the completion of annual staff evaluations, including the selection of persons to carry out the evaluations;
4. oversee the periodic evaluation of pastoral staff by the congregation;
5. assure that staff job descriptions reflect current job expectations;
6. serve as a liaison among the congregation, the pastoral leadership, and other staff, in matters of concern or conflict;
7. provide support during transitions of staff personnel;
8. work with Leadership Circle to support staff during challenging personal and congregational circumstances.

BYLAW VIII: AMENDMENTS

These by-laws may be amended by a simple majority of the members present at a regular or special meeting of the congregation, provided that the proposed amendment has been published twice, the first time being at least 14 days prior to the meeting.