

Constitution



Revised 2014

First Mennonite Church
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Table of Contents

I. Name and Address	2
II. Confession of Faith.....	2
III. Mission (1997).....	2
IV. The Congregation.....	4
Section 1. The Congregation	4
Section 2. The Congregational Meeting	4
V. Membership.....	5
Section 1. Admission	5
Section 2. Classification	6
Section 3. Termination.....	7
Section 4. Membership Covenant with Christ and the Church	7
VI. The Staff.....	8
Section 1. Pastoral Staff	8
Section 2. Other Staff.....	8
VII. Organization	8
Section 1. The Congregation	8
Section 2. The Church Board.....	9
Section 3. Officers	10
Section 4. Ministry Commissions	10
Section 5. Resourcing Committees	11
Church and Staff Relations Committee.	11
Financial Stewardship Committee	12
Gifts Discernment Committee.	12
Property Committee	12
Historical Committee	12
Section 6. Task Forces or Special Committees.....	12
VIII. Auxiliary Organizations	13
IX. Congregational Procedures	13
X. Amendments.....	16

CONSTITUTION

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH Newton, Kansas

PREFACE

We, the members of First Mennonite Church, are a congregation united by our faith in God, redeemed by God's grace through the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. We come together for the nurture and enrichment of our lives and to carry out God's mission. Therefore, heeding the Biblical admonition that "all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40), we covenant to abide by this constitution as the organizational structure and guide for the congregation.

I. Name and Address

The name of the congregation is First Mennonite Church of Newton, and is located at 429 East First Street, Newton, Kansas.

II. Confession of Faith

We affirm *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 1995, found at www.mennoniteusa.org.

III. Mission (1997)

As a body of believers in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, our mission is to glorify God, which is fulfilled through the following:

A. Expressing our love to God in worship.

1. Joyfully, creatively honoring the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from the heart.
2. Joining together in celebrative events that recall God's blessing and call us to new spiritual commitments.
3. Using a tapestry of musical and dramatic forms that span the richness of our Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage and newer expressions of Spirit-inspired artistry.

B. Experiencing love in Christian community.

1. Encouraging one another to grow toward Christlikeness through spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, celebrating the Lord's Supper, and listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance.
2. Discovering God's call to ministry and using God's gifts for ministry, individually and corporately, in a supportive fellowship.
3. Participating in smaller groups that offer mutual support and accountability as we seek to live as followers of Jesus.

C. Extending God's love to the world.

1. Sharing our witness of God's saving action and inviting persons to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
2. Pursuing peace, seeking justice, and bringing the enriching influence of faith in God to our community and the world.
3. Sending and supporting workers in cross-cultural ministries that seek to meet people's spiritual and physical needs.

IV. The Congregation

Section 1. The Congregation

The congregation is governed by its members meeting together with leadership and discernment provided by the Church Board.

The congregation is a member of the Western District Conference and Mennonite Church USA. It subscribes to the common beliefs of the Anabaptist/Mennonite theological perspective and heritage. It supports the common endeavors of missions, church planting, relief and service ministries, stewardship, and education of the wider Mennonite church.

The congregation holds itself accountable to Mennonite Church USA and Western District Conference, and it accepts and expects support, guidance, and services from both of these bodies, including provision of resources for nurture and worship activities, credentialing and setting standards of professional ethics for pastors, and the publication of Anabaptist/Mennonite materials.

The congregation supports Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite colleges and seminaries and participates in the ministry and education programs of Mennonite Church USA.

Section 2. The Congregational Meeting

Congregational meetings are composed of the members and participants in business sessions.

- A. Meetings are held to make decisions, receive reports, and evaluate the life and ministry of the congregation. Meetings will include planning, sharing viewpoints, conducting elections, adopting budgets, deciding policy and organizational matters, amending the constitution, and taking action on any other issues that require the counsel and decision of the congregation.

- B. Meetings are called by the Moderator. Agendas for meetings are established by the Moderator in consultation with and by approval of the Church Board. A call to meet will be issued to the congregation no less than two Sundays prior to the meetings. A meeting may be held on the second of the two Sundays that the call is issued.
- C. Fall congregational meetings of the congregation will be held no later than November 14. Spring congregational meetings of the congregation will be held as soon as feasible after March 31.
- D. Special meetings will be held when deemed necessary by the Moderator or as requested by the Church Board or when requested in writing by at least 5 percent of the membership (active) of the congregation. In the event of such a request, the Moderator will call the meeting. The agenda for a special meeting will be announced in the call for the meeting.
- E. All members, including associate members, are eligible to attend, participate in discussion, and vote in meetings. Participants (non-member) may attend meetings, may make presentations and participate in discussion, but are not eligible to vote. No member may vote in absentia.

V. Membership

Membership in the congregation is open to any person who confesses Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, is committed to living a Christian life, embraces the congregation's mission and confession of faith, and wishes to join in the life and ministry of the congregation by supporting it with time, talent, and finances.

Section 1. Admission

A person may become a member of the congregation by baptism upon profession of faith, by letter of transfer and recommendation from another congregation, or by giving an affirmation of faith when a letter of transfer is not available. Admission to membership will take place in a public meeting

of the congregation if possible. Persons will be admitted as members after approval by the Caregiving and Membership Commission, who will commend them to the congregation.

Section 2. Classification

Membership designations are as follows:

- A. **Members/Active**—Persons for whom the congregation is the primary group in their Christian commitment and fellowship, their community of worship, and who have been admitted as members of the congregation. Members will have the privilege of attending congregational meetings and of voting. They will be eligible for election as officers, members of the Church Board and commissions, and appointment to serve on resourcing and special committees or task forces.
- B. **Members/Inactive**—Persons who hold official membership in the congregation but choose not to participate. They will be defined as persons who have neither attended (although able) nor financially supported the church for at least one year. They are not counted in denominational statistics as members.
- C. **Associate Members**—Persons who participate in the life and ministry of the congregation but choose to continue their membership in another congregation or persons who participate in other congregations but who request a continuing relationship with this congregation and are commended by the Caregiving and Membership Commission as associate members. Associate members will be eligible to serve on the Property Committee and the ministry commissions, with the exception of the Caregiving and Membership Commission. They may engage in congregational meetings, discussion, and voting.
- D. **Participants (Non-Members)** – Persons who participate in the life and ministry of the congregation but choose not to become a member. Participants will be eligible to serve on the Property Committee and the ministry commissions, with the exception of the Caregiving and

Membership Commission. They may engage in congregational meetings and discussion but are not eligible to vote.

Section 3. Termination

- A. Transfer—Letters of transfer and recommendation will be issued by the Caregiving and Membership Commission upon receiving requests from members who wish to become members of other churches. Members who become members of other churches without requesting letters of transfer or submitting resignations will thereby terminate their memberships in this congregation.
- B. Resignation—Members who want to terminate their memberships may submit resignations, which will be referred to the Caregiving and Membership Commission.
- C. Inactive—The Caregiving and Membership Commission will be responsible for contacts and relationships with inactive members. The Commission will have authority to move persons to inactive membership, communicating this action to both the Church Board (by report) and the congregation (by the yearbook).

All membership terminations will be reported to the congregation.

Section 4. Membership Covenant with Christ and the Church

Members of First Mennonite Church make commitments to Christ and the church as follows:

- A. They confess their faith in Jesus Christ to cleanse them of all sin and release them from the power of evil.
- B. They covenant with God to walk in the way of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- C. They accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life.
- D. They join themselves with the congregation, which is part of the new community of disciples who gather to worship, to fellowship, to learn, and to be sent into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to share the hope of Christ.
- E. They develop individual and corporate practices that sustain their faith and their discipleship, including the stewardship of time, talent, and finances.

VI. The Staff

Section 1. Pastoral Staff

The pastoral staff, whose particular ministries and responsibilities are designated by their position descriptions, will work with the board, commissions, committees, and members in order to enhance the spiritual wellbeing of the congregation and its members. They will conduct worship services, including funerals and marriages; administer the ordinances of the church, including baptism, communion, and anointing; and offer pastoral care to those who are in need. They will provide spiritual leadership and administrative coordination.

Section 2. Other Staff

Administrative, clerical, bookkeeping, custodial, and other staff will be employed at the discretion of the Church Board. Such other staff will be administratively supervised as provided in the Policy Manual.

VII. Organization

Section 1. The Congregation

The congregation in business session will consider and make decisions on major matters, including but not limited to physical facilities, program, policies, leadership, calling pastors, and adopting annual budgets. Carrying out decisions will be assigned and delegated to the officers, the Church Board, the commissions, the committees, and the staff.

Section 2. The Church Board

The purpose of the Church Board is to lead the congregation in formulating, interpreting and implementing its mission and vision.

A. The Church Board will carry out its purpose by:

1. Serving as the congregation's leadership, governing, and coordinating body.
2. Making decisions on matters concerning the congregation as a whole, rather than on those that are the responsibility of a particular commission or committee.
3. Making administrative and operating decisions concerning the congregation's life and ministry, subject to the congregation's authority, direction and mission.
4. Carrying out decisions of the congregation.
5. Ensuring accountability with and coordination among commissions and committees.
6. Regularly reporting its activities to the congregation.
7. Referring amendments to the constitution, Church Board policy, and officers' responsibilities to the congregation for direction and decision.

B. Specific duties of the Church Board include:

1. Calling, appointing, and employing staff, and terminating the call, appointment, or employment of staff.
2. Establishing and administering personnel policies.
3. Managing and overseeing the congregation's business affairs and property.

4. Appointing delegates to the Western District Conference and Mennonite Church USA meetings and representatives of the congregation to other organizations as required by the wider Mennonite body.

(Refer to the Policy Manual for further detail.)

The Church Board will consist of the officers of the congregation, including: the Moderator, ex officio, without vote; the Church Board Chair; the Secretary; and the Treasurer. In addition, the board will include one representative from each of the ministry commissions and resourcing committees. Representatives will serve for one-year terms but may serve consecutive terms as determined by their commission or committee. Those who serve on the Church Board must be members of the congregation.

Church Board policy may be changed only by action of the congregation.

Section 3. Officers

The officers of the congregation will be the Moderator, the Church Board Chair, the Secretary, and the Treasurer. Officers will have two-year terms renewable up to six years. The treasurer's term may be extended beyond the six-year maximum at the discretion of the Church Board following regular performance reviews.

Duties of the officers as described in the Policy Manual may be changed only by action of the congregation.

Section 4. Ministry Commissions

Ministry commissions established by the congregation will plan, give leadership to, and carry out the mission of the congregation according to the provisions of this constitution and the policies of the Church Board and the congregation. Each commission will submit their budget requests to the Financial Stewardship Committee to be used in the development of the annual budget for the congregation to be approved by the Church Board for recommendation to the congregation.

- A. **The Caregiving and Membership Commission**, as it tends to the well-being and integrity of the congregation through its ministries, helps us experience love in Christian community.
- B. **The Fellowship Commission**, through its ministries of hospitality, helps us to experience love in Christian community.
- C. **The Nurture Commission**, through programs of Christian formation for people of all ages, leads us to express our love to God in worship, experience love in Christian community, and extend God's love to the world.
- D. **The Outreach, Missions, and Peace Commission** gives leadership to our efforts to extend God's love to the world through ministries of mission, outreach, peacemaking, and social justice.
- E. **The Worship Commission** gives oversight to activities that help us express our love to God in worship.

Members of the ministry commissions will be elected at Fall congregational meetings. Ministry commissions will be composed of a majority of congregational members, with the exception of the Caregiving and Membership Commission, which will be composed entirely of members/active.

Section 5. Resourcing Committees

Resourcing committees, established by the congregation, will plan and give leadership to the internal functioning and structure of the congregation, according to its mission, in the following areas: staffing and personnel; financial stewardship; gifts discernment; property; and historical record-keeping and interpretation.

- A. **The Church and Staff Relations Committee** will assist the Church Board in carrying out its duties in personnel administration and staff

relationships. The committee is composed of the Church Board chair and three members elected by the congregation.

- B. **The Financial Stewardship Committee** will assist the Church Board in carrying out its duties of planning and administering the financial stewardship program of the congregation. The committee is composed of the Treasurer and four members elected by the congregation.
- C. **The Gifts Discernment Committee** will lead the congregation in a process of discerning spiritual gifts, abilities, and talents, in order to call the people to use their gifts in congregational and community ministry. The committee will present nominations for the election of members to positions in the congregation. The committee is composed of six members elected by the congregation.
- D. **The Property Committee** will care for the congregation's physical plant and helps to provide a hospitable environment for congregation and community. The committee is composed of five persons elected by the congregation.
- E. **The Historical Committee** will oversee the archiving of church records and promote awareness and appreciation of church history and the Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage. The committee is composed of three members elected by the congregation.

Members of the resourcing committees will be elected at annual congregational meetings. Resourcing committees will be composed entirely of members/active of the congregation, with the exception of the Property Committee, which must have a majority of members/active.

Section 6. Task Forces or Special Committees

Task forces or special committees may be appointed by the Church Board or elected by the congregation to carry out special assignments. The resolution creating a task force or special committee will include a written statement of their assignment and composition and to whom the committee is responsible.

Section 7. Duplicate Service

Congregants may hold only one elected position in order to avoid conflicts of interest. They may serve on special committees or task forces while holding other office.

VIII. Auxiliary Organizations

Service, social, and auxiliary organizations and groups exist to fulfill the mission of the congregation. Each organization will submit a report to the Church Board and the congregation at the time of the annual congregational meeting. The funds of the auxiliary organizations will be available for auditing on an annual basis.

IX. Congregational Procedures

A. **Nominations** presented by the Gifts Discernment Committee for election at congregational meetings will be announced to the congregation at least one Sunday prior to meetings. Members will have the privilege of making nominations from the floor of congregational meetings. Nominees will have agreed to serve, if elected. Members of the pastoral staff will not be eligible for election as officers or as members of the board, ministry commissions, or resourcing committees.

B. Voting

1. Election of officers and board and commission/committee members may be by ballot or acclamation. Voting concerning the calling or the requested resignation of members of the pastoral staff will be by written ballot. Other voting may be by ballot or other indication.
2. To be elected as an officer or board or commission/committee member, the nominee must receive a majority of votes cast. In other matters brought before a congregational meeting, a majority of votes cast will constitute a deciding vote. To call a member of the pastoral staff, a three-fourths affirmative vote will be required. To request the

resignation of a pastor or to amend the constitution, a two-thirds affirmative vote will be required.

- C. **The fiscal year** of the congregation will be January 1 through December 31. The annual local mission budget will be adopted at the fall congregational meeting. Year-end written fiscal reports for the prior year will be provided to the congregation by January 31, and a full oral report made at the spring congregational meeting.

- D. **Congregational meetings:** The fall congregational meeting of the congregation will be held no later than November 14. The Spring congregational meeting of the congregation will be held as soon as feasible after March 31.
 - 1. At the Fall meeting, the budget will be adopted, election of commission/committee members will take place, and the annual reports of commissions and committees received. Plans for the next fiscal year may also be included. Any other business deemed necessary for implementing the mission of the congregation may be presented.
 - 2. At the spring meeting, the final fiscal audit from the prior year will be presented. Any other business deemed necessary for implementing the mission of the congregation may be presented.

- E. **A quorum** for congregational meetings will be 10 percent of the members/active of the congregation. The presence of a majority of the members of the board, commissions, or committees will constitute a quorum for the meetings of these groups.

- F. **Terms** of officers, members of the Church Board, ministry commissions, and resourcing committees will begin January 1 following the fall congregational meeting at which they are elected. The beginning of terms of members of special committees and task forces and duration of their terms will be set when they are appointed.

G. Vacancies

1. Vacancies in unexpired terms of officers as the result of resignations or for any other reason will be filled by appointments made by the remaining members of the Church Board.
 2. Vacancies in unexpired terms of members of ministry commissions and resourcing committees will be filled by appointments made by the Church Board. In the event that the congregation, at the Fall congregational meeting, fails to elect commission or committee members to fill vacant positions, vacancies will be filled by appointments made by the Church Board.
 3. Vacancies on special committees and task forces will be filled by appointments made by the Church Board or by the group that initially established the special committee or task force.
 4. An appointment to fill a vacancy in an unexpired term will be for the remainder of the unexpired term. Serving one year or more of an unexpired term will be considered as a full term in determining eligibility for re-election or re-appointment.
 5. The counsel and assistance of the Gifts Discernment Committee will be sought and considered when making appointments to fill vacancies.
- H. **The first commission/committee meeting** of the year will be an orientation to the mission of the congregation, the work of the committee/commission, and the committee/commission's goals for the year. The commission/committee will meet once per quarter minimally.
- I. **An ex officio member** of the board, a commission, or a committee will have all the rights, privileges, and duties as other members of the board, commission, or committee, except as otherwise stated.
- J. **Roberts Rules of Order, Revised**, may be used for the proceedings and conduct of business at meetings of the congregation, the board,

commissions, and committees, as they may apply and to the extent that they are consistent with this constitution and rules adopted by the congregation. The Church Board is encouraged to develop and use ways of facilitating healthy decision-making and discernment procedures appropriate to the agenda at hand.

X. Amendments

This constitution can be amended at a meeting of the congregation, provided that a notice of the meeting is announced to the congregation at least two Sundays prior to the meeting and that the proposed amendment is published in writing at the time the first notice of the meeting is given. For an amendment to be adopted, two-thirds of the votes cast must be in favor of adopting the proposed amendment.