

**CONSTITUTION OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH OF BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON**

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

(est. 1903)



2401 Cornwall Avenue
Bellingham, Washington 98225
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The name of the church shall be "First Congregational Church of Bellingham, Washington." The church is an affiliate of the United Church of Christ.

ARTICLE I: Faith

The following statement of faith is not a test for membership, but an expression of the spirit in which the national denomination of the United Church of Christ interprets the life of a Christian. Members have the right to their individual interpretation of the principles of the Christian faith, and the church respects each person's honest convictions. As a UCC church we affirm "No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome in this church."

STATEMENT OF FAITH OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*In the form of a doxology
We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God,
and to your deeds we testify:
You call the worlds into being
and create persons in your own image,
and set before each one the ways of life and death.
You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.*

*You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared
through prophets and apostles.
In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior,
you have come to us
and shared our common lot,
conquering sin and death
and reconciling the world to yourself.*

*You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues and races.
You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.*

*You promise to all who trust you
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.
Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.*

ARTICLE II: Covenant & Mission

COVENANT

We promise to worship God, preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, celebrate the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and encourage the realization of God's will in the lives of people from birth to death, individually and collectively, as seen in the life, teaching, death and living presence of Jesus Christ. In keeping with Christ's teaching, we are...

“Welcoming all,
Growing in Faith,
Living God's Love, Justice, Compassion...”

MISSION

We are a congregation
Composed of many
Made up of one and one and one.

Together, in all we do, we aim to hold
God at our center as we
Seek in our diversity a common vision.

Together, God at our center in all we do, we seek to
Experience God's love
Celebrate God's gifts
Listen
Practice Christ's teachings
Take care of each other
Bring love and justice to our community

Welcome and include all people in the life and work of the church
One by one by one
God at our center.

In the spirit of the mission and covenant, the congregation may speak through the process of resolutions to elaborate upon ways to promote justice and peace. The resolutions adopted by First Congregational Church of Bellingham may be found in the Appendix of this constitution.

ARTICLE III: Ministry Areas

Sec. 1: Ministry Area Organization.

The ministry areas of Worship, Community, Spiritual Growth, Social Justice and Operations are core values in the common life of faith and healthy functioning of the church. The ministry areas represent an organizational framework that can help focus and facilitate the work of the church. They are not governing bodies. See Bylaws for the organizational framework.

Sec. 2: Ministry Area Purpose.

The purpose of the ministry areas is to ensure that every established and/or emerging group in the church has a "home" that connects to the overall structure. The individual areas reflect how various activities support the vision and values of the church. They promote easy communication, interaction, exchange of ideas and shared resources among groups with a similar focus. Ministry areas enable everyone, newcomers and long-time members alike, to easily identify where and how to get involved and participate more fully in the life of the church.

Sec. 3: Ministry Area Coordinators.

The ministry area coordinators, their duties, their method of election and their terms of office shall be as specified in the Bylaws.

ARTICLE IV: Membership

Sec. 1: Uniting With the Congregation.

Membership shall be open to any person who affirms the covenant of the congregation.

Sec. 2: Membership Responsibilities.

Active members shall covenant to attend church services regularly, to give systematically for its support and benevolences, to participate in the life and work of the church and to walk together supporting all travelers on their faith journey.

Because members choose to be in community with one another, members shall strive to treat one another with respect and care for one another with love, foster an atmosphere of open communication and mutual trust and risk change so that lives are transformed.

Sec. 3: Membership Privileges.

Only active members shall have a vote in the government of the congregation and shall be eligible to hold and perform the duties of office in this congregation and in the larger United Church of Christ.

Sec. 4: Membership Status.

Membership status shall be changed by leaving the church, by a transfer to another congregation or by becoming inactive as specified in the Bylaws.

ARTICLE V: Government

Sec. 1: Governance.

The governance of the church, a Washington non-profit corporation, is vested in its members who, in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution and its Bylaws, shall exercise the right of control in all its affairs subject to conformity with Washington State laws.

Sec. 2: Affiliation.

As an affiliate of the United Church of Christ, the church shall sustain that relationship described in those portions of the Constitution and Bylaws of the national United Church of Christ relating to local churches. The church shall maintain standing in the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ. The responsibilities of affiliation with the United Church of Christ shall be as specified in the Bylaws of First Congregational Church of Bellingham.

ARTICLE VI: Meetings

As a congregational church (UCC), authority is vested in its gathered members.

Members shall conduct business at two regularly called meetings of the congregation. In addition, any member of the congregation may attend meetings of the Church Council, boards or committees except for meetings of Personnel Committee, Pastoral Relations Committee and Search and Call Committee. Meetings of the Church Council and aforementioned committees may be closed for executive sessions for sensitive matters.

A quorum of ten percent of the membership shall be required to transact business at any called congregational meeting. Members must be present in order to vote. Proxy votes are not allowed. A constitutional amendment must be presented at one regularly called meeting and voted on at the next regularly or specially called meeting.

Sec. 1: Regular Meetings.

Regular meetings of the church are for the transactions of church business. Notice shall be given in the church bulletin, electronically, and announced during worship at least two Sundays before each meeting. The latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* shall be the guide for the conduct of the meetings. *Robert's Rules of Order* may be suspended upon majority vote of the participants.

a. January Agenda

1. Approve Church Ministry Funding Plan
2. Present annual reports
3. Elect church officers
4. Elect delegates to the Pacific Northwest Conference of the UCC.

b. June Agenda

1. Review the state of the church at mid-year
2. Elect board members

Sec. 2: Special Meetings.

Special meetings may be called by the clerk at the direction of the moderator of the church or upon written request of not fewer than ten members. Notice of additional congregational meetings shall be announced in the church bulletin, electronically, and during worship at least two weeks before the date of such meetings.

ARTICLE VII: Church Organization

Sec. 1: Church Council.

The Church Council is the governing body responsible for carrying out the direction of the membership when not gathered in a congregational meeting. The Church Council is composed of a representative from each board, ministry area coordinators who represent the congregation at large, and church officers. Called pastoral staff may serve ex-officio on the Church Council. Only church members shall be eligible to serve on Church Council. The moderator shall act as chair of the Church Council and the clerk shall be the secretary. Frequency of meetings and responsibilities shall be as specified in the Bylaws.

Sec. 2: Church Boards.

Boards act on behalf of the whole congregation as a catalyst for its collective ministry. They are charged with imagining, planning and overseeing activities that help the congregation live into their vision and values as a faith community. Boards represent the ministry areas of the church that include Worship, Community, Social Justice, Spirituality and Operations. Church Council shall determine the number of boards and their job descriptions as specified in the Bylaws. Board members are elected by a vote of the congregation during the June meeting. Nonmembers can serve on boards without voting privileges.

Sec. 3: Church Committees.

The size of the committee and appropriate tenure shall be left to the discretion of the governing body unless specified in the Bylaws. The recommended tenure on standing committees is three years. A member may serve two consecutive terms and then must take a year off before becoming eligible to serve again. It should be noted that the desirability of experience and expertise must be balanced against the need for fresh ideas and energy. Members of Church Council committees may attend Church Council without voting privileges. Nonmembers may serve on committees without voting privileges.

Sec. 4: Officers.

The elected officers of the church shall be the moderator, vice-moderator, past moderator, clerk, treasurer and historian. Persons holding these positions must be church members. The duties of these officers, their method of election and their terms of office shall be as specified in the Bylaws.

The moderator, past moderator, vice-moderator, clerk, treasurer, a representative from ministry area coordinators and called pastor(s) shall meet as a Leadership Team.

Sec. 5: Church Staff and Employees.

Church employees include called ordained clergy, contracted clergy, full and part time program facilitators, office staff and custodial persons. The terms and conditions of their employment are provided in their Letters of Agreement, Letters of Call and/or Employee Policy Handbook that can be found in the church office. Called pastor(s) may serve as an ex officio member of the Church Council and all boards and committees. For further details see Bylaws.

ARTICLE VIII: Church Property

Sec. 1: Management.

In accordance with the Church Articles of Incorporation filed with the State of Washington and authorized by a congregational vote, the Church Council may instruct the Board of Trustees to hold, buy, transfer and manage real and personal property.

Sec. 2: Dissolution.

In accordance with the laws of the State of Washington and the Internal Revenue Tax Code, upon dissolution of the church, its assets and all property and interest in its possession, including any devise, bequest, gift or grant contained in any will or other instrument, in trust or otherwise, shall be transferred to the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ to be used as they deem fit.

ARTICLE IX: Amending the Constitution & Bylaws

Sec. 1: Notices of the Meetings.

Notices of the meetings and the text of proposed amendments to the Constitution or the Bylaws shall be sent to all members, posted in the narthex and announced during worship each of two Sundays prior to a meeting.

Sec. 2: Constitutional Amendments.

The Constitution shall be amended with a two-thirds super majority vote by a quorum of church members. The changes shall be read at one regular called meeting and voted on at the next regular called meeting of the congregation.

Sec. 3: Bylaw Amendments.

The Bylaws shall be amended by a simple majority vote of the quorum of church members at a regular or specially called meeting of the congregation. The Church Council may make changes in the Bylaws and live into them until the next regular called congregational meeting when they must be voted on. The Church Council shall provide for a review of the Bylaws to take place every three years.

APPENDIX I: Resolutions

RESOLUTIONS OF THE CONGREGATION

Open and Affirming.

“We, the members of the First Congregational Church of Bellingham, United Church of Christ, publicly resolve:

We believe in a loving God, who embraces the dignity, worth, and sacredness of every person. We believe God loves all persons without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, economic or social status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. We believe we are created in God’s image and are called upon to accept and understand our humanity and diversity as gifts from God. We recognize that the institutional church has often judged persons based upon their sexual orientation and has excluded these persons from the community of faith.

The church has often been silent concerning societal injustice. Therefore, we covenant to welcome and affirm every person, without regard to sexual orientation, into the full life, rites, and ministry of our church. We commit ourselves to act for justice and inclusiveness.

Together, God at our center, we covenant to be an Open and Affirming church community. We pray, as those who follow Christ, for the capacity to envision life as it could be and, with the help of God, to unite ourselves across our differences and to treat all with respect, dignity, love, compassion and justice.”

This statement was approved by congregational vote on March 14, 1999. A January 13, 2008 congregational vote approved the present language with the understanding that “rites” include marriage rites.

Just Peace.

Jesus taught and lived a new reality he referred to as the 'Kingdom of God.' God's reign was already present in our world if we just shifted our perception, recognized it, and lived in God's domain now. Jesus invited his disciples then, and invites us today, to a life of Peace and Justice; a 'Just Peace' rooted in the Hebrew word 'Shalom' – a sense of wholeness for each person and for our planet.

Jesus invites us to a life of...

- Service to our Neighbor
- Radical Hospitality
- Peace Making
- Restorative and Economic Justice
- Stewardship of our Planet
- Building Community for the Journey

Our chosen methods are the practices of...

- Hope
- Unconditional Love
- Forgiveness
- Non-Violence
- Reconciliation

In living out Shalom as a Just Peace church, we covenant as a bold faith community to reflect Jesus' radical love as an Open and Affirming church. No matter where you are on life's journey personally, a Just Peace church declaration encourages us as individuals and as a faith community to educate, grow, empower and spiritually renew ourselves for peace making, doing justice and practicing sustainability in our families, community and world. Where there is justice, there is peace.

- We are called as a Just Peace church to...
- Stand with, and advocate for, all who experience injustice and violence: the hungry, sick, poor, elderly, homeless, neglected, exploited, marginalized, and discouraged.
- Partner with religious and community groups who advocate for justice and peace.
- Root out the causes of injustice and violence within the social structures of our society to bring about systemic change and healing.
- Create a spiritual home of renewal and nurture for all those who do peace and social justice work in the world, at their jobs or as volunteers, sharing each other's joys and burdens.

This statement was approved by a congregational vote on Sunday, January 27, 2013.