

Sojourners United Church of Christ in Charlottesville

CONSTITUTION

(Adopted on August 21, 1994; Constitution amended on September 15, 1996;
amended on November 18, 2007; Bylaws amended on June 23, 1996;
amended on September 16, 2007; amended on January 27, 2008)

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this Church shall be Sojourners United Church of Christ, located in Charlottesville, Virginia.

ARTICLE II - PURPOSE

The purpose of this Church shall be to worship God, preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and celebrate the Sacraments, and to realize Christian fellowship and unity within its congregation and the larger community. In keeping with Christ's teaching, this Church will strive to promote righteousness, justice and peace.

Mission Statement

We are a self-governing congregation of seekers guided by the Scriptures and the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ. Together we strive to understand the workings of God's spirit within us. We recognize that this understanding may be different for each individual. Yet, as many visions of God are joined together, our collective understanding can be stronger; our insight can be keener.

As witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we strive for truth, justice, and peace in our community and nation, and in the world. To carry out this mission, we seek to grow in grace through worship, education, witnessing, service and stewardship.

Historically, not all seekers have been welcomed and valued equally by the Christian community. We embrace those who have already been welcomed into the Christian church. We also reach out to those who are not involved in a Christian community. We welcome and affirm those who have been wounded or accepted only conditionally in the past because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or their physical, mental, spiritual or economic conditions.

We work together to move beyond mere tolerance to a celebration of our diversity. We see this as an opportunity for better understanding God's unlimited love and following the example of Jesus Christ. To list human differences is to risk excluding someone. ALL ARE WELCOME. All are encouraged to participate in the full fellowship of the church. With God's help, we will create a church family that affirms the priesthood of all believers, and in which all members use their gifts to minister to others.

ARTICLE III - GOVERNANCE

1. This Church shall be a part of the United Church of Christ, and it shall sustain that relationship as described in those portions of the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ relating to local churches. This Church shall hold standing in the Shenandoah Association, and shall be a member of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ and through it of any organizations to which it belongs.

2. The governance of this Church is vested in its members, hereinafter called "the congregation," who in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution and its Bylaws exercise the right of control in all its affairs. It is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body, but it accepts the obligations of mutual counsel, cooperation and fellowship with other churches of the United Church of Christ.

3. In keeping with our stated mission to reach out to those who have felt unheard and undervalued by other churches, we will strive for consensus in all our decisions, encouraging the expression of personal truth and diversity, and hearing and affirming each voice.

ARTICLE IV - FAITH AND COVENANT

This Church holds that Christian faith springs from the authority of One God manifested in the life of Jesus Christ. We celebrate two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. We grant to each member the right to her or his individual interpretation of the principles of the Christian faith, and respect each person's honest convictions. Consequently, the following Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ is set forth not as a test for membership in this Church but as a testimony of the belief generally accepted by the United Church of Christ.

United Church of Christ Statement of Faith (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 world into being,
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 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 power 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 the realm which has no end.*

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.

This Church is an association of persons united in the acceptance of a mutual covenant, which is as follows:

"We are a community of faith called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk in the way of Jesus, by embracing all persons in all walks and ways of life in our worship and celebration, nurture and growth, love and service."

We welcome all persons to participate in the life of the Church. Those persons who are not members we consider to be "Friends of the Church", as defined in the Bylaws, Section 1.b.

ARTICLE V - MEMBERSHIP

1. Joining the Church. Membership in this Church shall be open to any person who has been baptized and affirms our Covenant, or who presents a letter of transfer.
2. Membership. Membership begins when the applicant is received by the Congregation. Members shall have a voice and vote in the government of the congregation, as provided in the Bylaws, and shall be eligible to hold and perform the duties of office in this congregation and in the larger United Church of Christ.
3. Transfer. Any member may transfer to another church, as provided in the bylaws.
4. Leaving the Church. Upon a member's request, that member's name will be removed from the membership roll.

ARTICLE VI - OFFICERS

The officers of this Church shall be a Moderator/Co-Moderators, a Secretary, a Treasurer, Trustees as required by the Commonwealth of Virginia, Delegates to the Association and Conference, and such other officers as the congregation may deem necessary. The persons holding these positions must be church members. The duties of the officers, their method of election, and their terms of office shall be as specified in the bylaws.

ARTICLE VII - CHURCH ORGANIZATION

The responsibility of administering the government of this Church and carrying out its programs shall be vested in the Church Council. The Church Council shall create the following committees: Worship, Pastoral Relations, Membership and Parish Care, Christian Education, Service and Missions, Stewardship and Finance, Personnel, Property, Pastor Search Committee (when needed) and such others as may be needed from time to time.

Only church members shall be eligible for election to the Church Council. The method of their elections, terms of office, and responsibilities shall be as specified in the bylaws.

ARTICLE VIII - CHURCH PROPERTY

Acting through its Trustees, as provided in the Bylaws, and in accordance with Title 57 of the Code of Virginia, the Church may hold, buy, sell, transfer and manage real and personal property. Upon dissolution of the Church or upon its reaffiliation with a denomination other than the United Church of Christ, its assets and all real and personal property and interests of which it shall then be possessed, including any devise, bequest, gift or grant contained in any will or other instrument, in trust or otherwise, made before or after dissolution or reaffiliation, shall be transferred to the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ or its legal successor.

ARTICLE IX - MEETINGS

1. Stated Meetings. There shall be two congregational meetings each year. The Annual Meeting of the congregation shall be for the presentation of annual reports by the officers of the Church and the chairpersons of the committees, the adoption of annual budgets, the election of officers, members of the Church Council and Trustees for the ensuing year, and the transaction of such other business as may be brought before the congregation. The one additional stated meeting shall be for the purpose of information, self-assessment and fellowship.

2. Other meetings. Special meetings of the congregation shall be called in accordance with the Bylaws.

3. Quorum. A quorum of the membership, as specified in the bylaws, shall be required to transact business at regular and special meetings of the congregation.

ARTICLE X - AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended by the consensus of the members of the congregation at any stated or special meeting of the congregation, provided that the proposed amendment shall have been stated in the required notice of the meeting as provided by the Bylaws. There must be a minimum of two readings of the proposed amendment at consecutive congregational meetings to allow time for reflection on such changes. If consensus cannot be achieved within three consecutive meetings of the members of the congregation, the proposed amendment may be adopted by a two-thirds majority vote of the members at the end of the third consensus-building meeting.