

VIENNA COMMUNITY CHURCH
CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

Revision Dates: 18 February 2007, 20 October 2008
and 29 January 2012

CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

Believing it to be the will of God that the followers of Jesus Christ associate themselves in fellowship for mutual encouragement of public worship and for active Christian service, English-speaking residents representing many denominational traditions do hereby declare their common heritage and purpose by establishing a local congregation under the following articles.

ARTICLE I

NAME

This congregation shall be known as the Vienna Community Church, Vienna, Austria.

ARTICLE II

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Vienna Community Church is to be:

1. A place of worship. Worship is the core of our life together. Our worship is God centred, uplifting, joyous, inclusive, enriched with a variety of music, and relevant to all.
2. A place of community. We seek to follow Christ's teachings in the spirit of tolerance and unconditional love.
3. A place of fellowship. We support and uphold one another with mutual love and respect in our daily lives.
4. A place of prayer. We encourage mutual support through corporate and individual prayer and by special prayer requests.
5. A place of education. We provide Christian education for children and adults.
6. A place of service. We offer opportunities for serving one another within our congregation and in the world.

ARTICLE III

COVENANT

Recognizing full liberty of individual interpretation, and taking cognizance of the various statements of faith under which its members may have made their professions, the Church agrees upon the following main points as indication of the basic convictions of its membership:

We believe in God, the Heavenly Father, whose goodness is our blessing, and whose wisdom is our law.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Divine Lord and personal Saviour, whose life and death and resurrection redeem and inspire all who accept Him.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, by whom we are led in the ways of righteousness and love.

We believe in the Holy Scriptures to be the word of God which reveals to us His will and is our guide in faith and practice.

We believe in the Kingdom of God as the divine rule in human society.

We believe in the power of prayer, and in baptism and Holy Communion, as sacraments, and we believe the Church to be Christ's body of believers and in life everlasting.

Upon this foundation of our faith we covenant with one another and with God to live and labour together, as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

ARTICLE IV

MEMBERSHIP

- (1) Membership in the Vienna Community Church (VCC) is open to all Christians, whatever their denomination, provided that:
 - a) They legally reside in Vienna or the environs and intend to stay in Austria for longer than 6 months;
 - b) They are in agreement with the purpose of the VCC;
 - c) They declare their willingness to unite in this Covenant;
 - d) They declare their willingness to abide by the VCC Constitution and By-Laws; and
 - e) They undertake to promote the welfare of the VCC by attending its services, contributing towards its support, and personally participating in its activities.
- (2) Membership is based on baptism and may be acquired by one of the following:
 - a) Presentation of a letter of transfer from another Church;
 - b) Confirmation of baptismal vows;
 - c) Reaffirmation of faith in Christ; or
 - d) Profession of faith in Christ (those who have never been members of a Christian Church shall previously receive from the pastor appropriate instruction in the Christian faith and, if necessary, be baptized).
- (3) Members of the VCC may remain members of their home Church, if this is outside Austria.
- (4) If families wish to become members, each member of the family that has completed the age of 14 years shall declare his/her wish to become a member separately. Children that have completed the age of 12 years cannot be forced to become a member against their will, and children under the age of 12 years shall be given adequate information about membership.
- (5) Persons below the age of 18 years neither have the right to vote in any matters related to the VCC nor are eligible to be elected

to the VCC Board.

- (6) Membership in the context of (1) is either as a full member or as an associate member. Requests for membership should be made to the pastor and presented by the pastor to the Board for approval.
- (7) In accordance with the law and the associated regulations of the Austrian Protestant Church (A.B. und H.B.), a full member may not at the same time be a member of another Austrian congregation or religious community. Any person who is a member of another Austrian congregation or religious community shall either relinquish his/her membership in the other Austrian congregation or religious community or become an associate member.
- (8) Associate members neither have the right to vote in any matters related to the VCC nor are they eligible to be elected to the VCC Board.
- (9) Membership will automatically cease when
 - a) A member departs from Vienna or the environs in accordance with the requirements given in (1)a); or
 - b) Does not attend the VCC Sunday worship services for more than 12 consecutive months without clear reason, and does not respond to enquiries from the VCC.
- (10) Members, on request, may be granted a letter of transfer to another Church.
- (11) Notwithstanding the above provisions, a member may terminate his/her membership by writing to the moderator of the VCC Board at any time.

ARTICLE V

GOVERNMENT

The government of this Church is vested in its members who exercise the right of control in all its affairs. All members, 16 years and older, may vote at any congregational or special meeting of the Church members. In matters to be decided by vote at these meetings, such as motions put before the meeting and the election of officials, one vote is allotted to each eligible member present. In special circumstances, a proxy vote may be given by a member who cannot be present. This vote is restricted to motions and elections of officers, the motions and candidates for election having been laid before the congregation at least one week prior to the date of the meeting. If at the meeting, the motion is changed, or the candidate list for a position changes, the proxy vote shall no longer be valid. Proxy votes must be lodged with the moderator before the meeting and the number of votes declared at the beginning of the meeting.

1. CONGREGATIONAL MEETING: Two congregational meetings shall be held in a year. The autumn/fall meeting would be primarily for the presentation and adoption of the budget for the following fiscal year. The spring meeting would be for all other business to include, but not be limited to, the review of reports by the pastor, officials and all committees, and the election of members to the Church Board.

In order to hold a congregational meeting, notice shall be given to the Church members not later than two Sundays preceding the date of the meeting.

2. SPECIAL MEETING: Special meetings may be called by the pastor, the Church Board or by petition to the Church Board made by at least five members of the Church. One week's notice of these meetings shall be given and the purpose stated.

3. QUORUM: For congregational and special meetings, 25 percent of the members who are resident in Vienna at the time and eligible to vote shall constitute a quorum. If a quorum cannot be formed, the meeting shall be postponed for not more than fifteen days, the new date shall be announced at the next regular worship service and

business at such meeting shall be transacted with those members present.

4. SELECTION OF A NEW PASTOR: The recommending of a suitable candidate for the position of a new pastor is the responsibility of the PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE that shall be appointed within a reasonable time prior to the departure of the incumbent pastor¹ by the congregation at a congregational or special meeting. The Committee shall seek and recommend a suitable candidate for appointment as Pastor. Its members shall be from the church membership and reflect its diversity. To the extent possible the Committee should include at least one member who has served on a previous pastor search committee. The current pastor may serve on this Committee. The Committee should report regularly on its progress to the Church Board and, as appropriate, to the congregation. Once the committee has completed its evaluation of all candidates under consideration it shall compile a ranked short list of candidates for discussion with the Board. Once agreement is reached with the Board, the Committee shall recommend one candidate to the congregation at a special meeting for election. If that candidate is not accepted by the congregation, the Committee shall continue its search.

5. THE CHURCH BOARD: The Church Board shall study needs, determine objectives and policies, have authority over all the programmes of the Church and exercise review and control of the administrative activities of the Church, subject to the final authority of the full membership in congregational or special meetings.

The Church Board shall consist of the chairpersons of all standing committees, the elected officials, and the pastor (ex-officio). The members shall be elected annually at the spring congregational meeting and any vacancies in the membership occurring between congregational meetings shall be filled by appointment of the Church Board. Except for the treasurer, a Church Board member shall not normally serve longer than three consecutive full one year terms in any one position, but

¹ Experience has shown that 12 months prior to the departure of the incumbent pastor is required for this.

becomes eligible for re-election to that position after an interval of one year, following completion of his or her term; however this stipulation may be waived for special circumstances through specific action at a congregational or special meeting of the Church.

In accordance with the law and the associated regulations of the Austrian Protestant Church (A.B. und H.B.), at least one member, and preferably more, of the executive of the VCC Board, consisting of the moderator, the vice moderator, the treasurer and the secretary, shall be a citizen of the European Union (EU).

In matters to be decided by vote of the Church Board, one vote is allotted to each member of the Church Board. In all cases of procedure not covered by this Constitution, Robert's Rules of Order shall be the authority.

The Church Board shall establish such internal committees as it deems necessary, including but not being limited to:

- a. THE PASTOR'S COMMITTEE which shall liaise with the pastor on matters of importance to the pastor, his/her work and the congregation including contractual matters.
- b. THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE shall consist of the vice moderator as chair and not more than four other members, reflecting, as far as possible, a cross section of the congregation (nationality, denominational background, etc.). It shall nominate members it considers most able to fill vacancies on the Church Board for election by the congregation.

LIAISON WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The Church Board can appoint persons from amongst its members to liaise with other organisations including, but not limited to, the Reformierte Stadtkirche (Oberkirchenrat H.B.) and the Oberkirchenrat A.u.H.B.

ARTICLE VI

OFFICIALS

1. THE PASTOR: Whenever the word pastor appears in this document it shall be understood to mean the incumbent pastor of the Vienna Community Church. The pastor shall be a regularly ordained clergyman or clergywoman of a denomination associated with the World Council of Churches. He or she shall be elected at a congregational or special meeting by a two-thirds vote of the members present following the presentation of the report of the pastor search committee. The voting shall be by secret ballot.

The terms of his or her call shall be agreed upon between the pastor and the Church Board. The pastorate may be terminated by mutual agreement or upon three month's notice by the pastor or Church. Action by the Church in the latter case must be at a congregational or special meeting upon recommendation of the Church Board and by two-thirds vote of members present.

The pastor shall be in charge of the spiritual welfare of the congregation, including preaching of the Gospel, leading worship, selecting hymns, parish visitation, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The pastor is an ex-officio member of all committees of the congregation.

The pastor shall be installed during a special worship service by the Church Board, a member of the Consistory of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg and of the Helvetic Confessions (Oberkirchenrat A. und H.B.) and a minister of the Evangelische Kirche H.B. Vienna Inner-city (Reformierte Stadtkirche).

2. THE MODERATOR shall serve as presiding officer at meetings of the Church Board and at congregational and special meetings. He/she is the principal administrator of the church.
3. THE VICE MODERATOR shall assist the moderator and act in the role of moderator if the moderator is absent or not able to fulfil his or her duties for a period of time. The vice moderator shall serve as

chair (head) of the nominating committee with the expectation that he or she would be the next moderator.

4. CLERK: The clerk shall keep complete and permanent records of the meetings and business transacted by the Church and the Church Board. He or she shall keep a list of members, record baptisms, marriages, and funerals, and perform all duties normally associated with this office.
5. THE TREASURER: The treasurer shall receive all Church monies, keep accurate account of the finances of the Church, issue payments as authorized and render a report at each regular meeting of the Church Board and at the autumn/fall congregational meeting. He or she shall be a member ex-officio of the Board's stewardship and finance committee. The treasurer shall present to the Church Board a signed review of the Church's financial affairs made by a person other than the treasurer. This shall occur every 12 months, in the month before the autumn/fall congregational meeting.
6. OTHER OFFICIALS: If other officials are elected, their duties shall be defined and agreed at that time and recorded in the clerk's minutes.

All officials, with the exception of the pastor, shall be elected at a congregational meeting. Nominations for election to the Church Board are not restricted to one person per position and may also be made from the floor.

ARTICLE VII

AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote at any congregational or special meeting provided that notice of such a meeting and of the proposed amendments shall have been given at the morning service on the two preceding Sundays, or provided that such notice shall have been mailed to members of the Church at least ten days before the meeting.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I

STANDING COMMITTEES OF CHURCH BOARD

There shall normally be the following standing committees reporting to the Church Board:

1. Worship
2. Music
3. Fellowship
4. Benevolence
5. Membership
6. Stewardship and Finance
7. Publicity
8. Property
9. Christian Education

However, through specific action at a congregational or special meeting of the Church, a change can be made to this list as deemed necessary by the Church Board.

The membership of each committee shall be appointed by the chairperson of that committee in consultation with the pastor and the moderator, and with the approval of the Church Board.

ARTICLE II

DUTIES OF STANDING COMMITTEES

1. **WORSHIP:** This committee shall be responsible for working out a schedule and securing personnel for ushering at all services of worship.

It shall, together with the pastor, keep under review the worship services and recommend changes where necessary or desirable.

It shall keep records of attendance at worship services.

It shall make all necessary arrangements of Holy Communion.

It shall make provisions for supplying the pulpit during the pastor's absence and when the pulpit is vacant.

It shall be responsible for the printing and delivering of the service bulletin.

2. **MUSIC:** This committee, in consultation with the pastor, shall have charge of the Church's musical programme.

It shall be responsible for retaining the service of an organist.

It shall endeavour to obtain a choir director and assist him or her in organizing and maintaining a choir.

Neither the organist nor the musical director shall at the time serve as chairperson of the music committee.

3. **FELLOWSHIP:** This committee shall be responsible for the maintenance of Christian fellowship within the congregation.

It shall plan, publicize and organize regular Church social events, such as coffee hours, Church dinners, picnics, etc.

4. **BENEVOLENCE:** This committee shall study needs and opportunities for local ministries and for the support of various benevolent Christian activities.

It shall bring recommendations for disbursements of all benevolence funds to the Church Board for approval.

It shall direct Church Board approved social services undertaken on behalf of the Church.

Special appeals for benevolence need the approval of the Church Board. In urgent cases, this can be given by the Pastor, Moderator or his or her designate.

5. **MEMBERSHIP:** This committee shall be responsible for seeking out English speaking Christians and leading them into the fellowship of

the Church. It shall also be responsible for the integration of members into the life of the Church

It shall promptly communicate to the pastor and the Church Board the names of new members, and shall arrange for the publication of their names in the service bulletin or the periodic newsletter.

6. STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE: This committee shall have supervision of all financial matters of the Church, under the overall direction of the Church Board.

It shall prepare a budget for the fiscal year after consultation with appropriate officers and committees. It shall submit this budget to the Church Board for approval. The approved budget shall be presented to the congregation at the autumn/fall congregational meeting for endorsement.

It shall ensure that the Church offerings are counted and verified by two people.

It shall send out periodic statements to members of the congregation informing them of the status of their pledges and gifts.

It shall establish and oversee a fund for endowments.

It shall authorize expenditures in accordance with policies set by the Church Board.

The treasurer shall be ex-officio a member of this committee, but he or she shall not be the chairperson

7. PUBLICITY: This committee shall arrange for publicizing the services of worship and the programme of the Church.
8. PROPERTY: This committee shall be responsible for keeping accurate records of all Church property and for ensuring proper maintenance and upkeep of such property.

It shall be responsible for keeping contact with the owner of the pastor's residence, relating to the rental contract, maintenance, etc.

It shall be responsible for shipping and related arrangement for the pastor's personal belongings.

9. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: This committee shall assist the pastor in the planning and administration of activities for children, youth and adults of the Church. The committee may appoint a Church School superintendent who would be responsible for securing Church Board approval for curriculum material, recruiting teachers and organising the required facilities.

Each committee shall prepare a budget estimate for inclusion in the annual budget. Each committee shall also prepare an annual report of their activities to be presented to the congregation at the spring congregational meeting.

ARTICLE III

AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS OF THE CHURCH

The establishment of any such organizations must be approved by the Church Board and be responsible to it.

ARTICLE IV

FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year shall be from 1 January to 31 December.

ARTICLE V

The church will observe two sacraments: Communion and Baptism.

HOLY COMMUNION

All Christians shall be welcome to full participation on dates determined by the pastor in consultation with the worship committee chairperson. This sacrament shall be observed at least eight times annually.

BAPTISM

The sacrament of baptism may be administered to adults on profession of faith either by sprinkling or immersion, according to the preferences of

the person involved.

Children may be baptized or dedicated to God as desired by the parents.

ARTICLE VI

AMENDMENTS

These By-laws may be amended by two-thirds vote of the Church at any congregational or special meeting, provided one week's notice of the proposed amendment has been given.