

# CONSTITUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONGREGATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

[adopted 26 July 2006 at Corfu, Greece]

## PREAMBLE

WHEREAS, Christians calling themselves Congregational have historically and universally held that Christ's headship and presence, as warranted by His promise that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is in the midst of them, makes each separate local church independent and autonomous, complete in spiritual power and ecclesiastical authority; and,

WHEREAS, the foundation principles of autonomy and fellowship of the churches, stemming from the Lordship of Christ, proclaimed in Scripture and historically held in many nations, ought to be continued in living usage:

THEREFORE, an international body to be known as the International Congregational Fellowship, based on the historic truths and spiritual principles stated above, was formed in London, England, July 9 to 16, 1977.

THIS CONSTITUTION adopted on the 26th day of July 2005 sets forth the objects and administrative procedures of the said International Congregational Fellowship (hereinafter referred to as "The Fellowship") and takes the place of the original Constitution of 1977 as amended.

## 1. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Within this Constitution the following words shall only have the associated meaning as herein:

**Conference** – the quadrennial gathering of members of the ICF at a time and place determined and to which others not being members may also be invited.

**Congregationalism** – that form of church government that asserts the scriptural right of every separate church to maintain independence in the government and administration of its own affairs, and where ultimate authority under God is understood as being within the gathering of those who form the local congregation rather than through priests, ministers or elders, thus normally making congregational churches non-hierarchical. Each church is autonomous and independent in affairs relating to its own life, but shares an interdependent relationship with wider ecclesiastical bodies.

**Congregationalist** – a person who accepts and supports congregationalism.

**Congregational** – attributes that are derived from the principles or practice of Congregationalism.

**Church** – except where the context clearly means the Universal Church, the word church, whether the word is capitalised or not shall only be understood to mean a single and geographically local company of Christians, committed in fellowship to one another, whether by covenant or some other means, to be a local church. It shall not mean an association of

congregations subscribing to a common instrument, whether national or international, which Congregationalists would understand only as a denomination.

**Fellowship** – a voluntary association of churches and/or individuals in which the sovereignty of each is respected.

## **2. LIMITATION OF AUTHORITY**

The Fellowship warrants that in any case it shall not assume legislative authority or become a court of appeal. The Fellowship has no authority to ordain or censure a minister.

## **3. OBJECTS**

The purposes for which the Fellowship is established are:

To encourage fellowship and mutual counsel among Congregationalists worldwide;

To encourage all Congregationalists, Congregational churches, and Congregational associations, and other Congregational bodies in their work of proclaiming the Christian gospel and engaging in the works of God's mission;

To raise awareness of the distinctive values of Congregationalism throughout the wider Christian family;

To encourage the exploration of Congregationalism through training, education and experience among people of all ages;

To foster and encourage stronger relationships between existing Congregational churches, associations and other Congregational bodies, and to develop the expression of Congregationalism among emerging churches throughout the world;

To promote theological education, and research; especially where this is related to Congregational principles;

To express solidarity with all people in upholding justice, respect for human life, peace, and the integrity of creation.

## **4. MEMBERSHIP**

Any of the following may become members of the Fellowship, with equal rights providing they subscribe to the aims and objects as defined and described within this Constitution:

Associational bodies of Congregational churches;

Individual Congregational churches;

Individual Congregationalists.

Institutional bodies that are identified with Congregationalism, such as theological colleges, mission organisations, etc.

No Individual may cast more than a single vote, regardless of whether that member occupies more than one membership category.

## **5. GOVERNING BODY**

- (a) The Quadrennial Conference of the Fellowship shall be its Governing Body.
- (b) All members of the Fellowship shall be invited to each Conference. Churches, associations of churches, and other institutional bodies in membership shall be encouraged to send as many representatives as possible.
- (c) All business at the Conference should be conducted with appropriate prayerfulness and with a view to the common good. Except as provided herein all persons attending a Conference whether representing a Congregational church, Associational body, Institutional body, or as individual Congregationalists shall be entitled to vote.
- (d) In the event of any dispute over entitlement to vote, the Moderator's decision taken after consultation with the members of the International Executive Committee (hereinafter defined as "IEC") shall be final, provided this is supported by a majority of the IEC.
- (e) Voting by proxy is not allowed. Associational or Institutional members may not instruct any representative(s) as to how they are to vote. It is the duty of all who are voting to seek the mind of the Holy Spirit, free of any other constraint.
- (f) Conference should prayerfully seek a clear consensus on all resolutions. Except as may be determined within this Constitution, at least 66% of those present and voting at Conference shall be required for the passing of any resolution.
- (g) Conference may elect to conduct any voting by written or closed ballot, and may appoint who it wishes to be teller(s), such decisions being by simple majority.
- (h) Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, Conference may delegate some of its authority to an IEC.
- (i) Each successive Conference shall determine the dates and location for the following Conference ensuring that, through the IEC, notification of the dates and location shall be provided to all members in writing as soon as possible following the conclusion of the Conference. Provided such notification is given then no quorum shall be required.
- (j) Since the attendance at any Conference may not be fully representative of the total membership, and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, and only where the well-being of the Fellowship might suffer as a consequence of a lack of balanced representation, the IEC shall have power to postpone a vote at Conference and may determine instead that a postal ballot of members be conducted. In such a situation Conference must agree on the form of words to be sent out to all members. Members must be allowed 60 days from the date of posting to register their vote through the Moderator or International Secretary (whichever shall be determined), and canvassing or lobbying shall not take place.

- (k) Not less than 75% of votes received through a postal ballot shall be required to carry a resolution.

## **6. INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

- (a) Conference shall appoint persons, being Congregationalists from among the members of the Fellowship, and in good standing within their church, to serve on the International Executive Committee.
  
- (b) The following shall be members of the IEC by virtue of their office:
  - The Fellowship Moderator
  - The Moderator Elect
  - The Immediate Past Moderator
  - Regional Secretaries
  - The International Secretary
  - The International Finance Officer
  - The Communications Officer
  
- (c) In addition Conference may appoint to serve the on the IEC until its next Quadrennial Conference any Ambassadors at Large, Chairpersons of Commissions, and any other persons that represent any significant aspect of the life of the Fellowship.
  
- (d) The IEC has authority to co-opt not more than two other persons to its number where specific experience or knowledge or ability would enable the IEC to better serve the Conference.
  
- (e) It shall be the duty of the Moderator, following consultation with the International Secretary, and with other members of the IEC, where possible to determine the date and location of its meeting. The IEC shall meet at least once and not more than twice between Conferences. Otherwise all IEC business should be conducted by correspondence or through telephone or Internet communications.
  
- (f) The meetings of the IEC shall be chaired by the current Moderator. In the absence of a Moderator then the Moderator Elect shall take the Chair. In the event that neither a Moderator nor a Moderator Elect is available then the IEC shall appoint a chairperson by simple majority.
  
- (g) Decisions of the IEC shall be passed on the basis of a simple majority.

## **7. OFFICERS**

- (a) Conference shall appoint the following officers with the associated responsibilities to serve from the date of their appointment until the following Quadrennial Conference:

**Moderator** - to preside at the Plenary Sessions of a Conference and at IEC meetings, to represent the Fellowship on occasions authorised by the Conference or the IEC, and to oversee the work of other officers between meetings of the IEC.

**Moderator-Elect** - to serve as assistant to the Moderator, and in the event of the Moderator being absent to preside at the Plenary Sessions of a Conference and/or IEC meeting. If the Moderator should vacate his/her office, the Moderator-Elect shall become Moderator.

**International Financial Officer** – to administer the financial affairs of the Fellowship including the collection of funds and the payment of authorised expenses.

**International Secretary** - to keep a full and accurate account of all meetings of the Conference and IEC, and to publish summary minutes that record all resolutions passed. To work with the Moderator to ensure good communication within the Fellowship.

**Regional Secretaries** – to promote the objects of the Fellowship within their regional areas determined by Conference, and to offer encouragement, counsel and assistance to Congregational Churches and/or ministers if asked. The Regional Secretaries shall provide a report at least annually within their respective regions.

**Communications Officer** – to be responsible for ensuring a well maintained presence on the World Wide Web, and regular publications of newsletters and/or magazines as directed by Conference, and to provide advice on matters such as publicity and published information.

- (b) A Conference may determine that more than one person might hold any office jointly. In such circumstances such an appointment shall be deemed exceptional and such appointees shall bear joint and several responsibility and rights for the proper fulfilling of the office.
- (c) Nominations for all offices shall always be sought with due care and prayerfulness. Nominations must be proposed and seconded by members of the Fellowship or those officially representing institutional members. All nominees must give their permission to the nominators prior to any announcement of their name.
- (d) Nominations shall be submitted in writing to the International Secretary. The IEC will appoint three of its number to serve on a Nomination Panel, one of whom should normally be the Immediate Past Moderator who would convene the Panel; Conference will elect three other persons, making a total of six persons. Persons being nominated should not serve on the Nomination Panel. It will be the duty of the Nomination Panel to ensure that all nominations comply with this Constitution before bringing them before Conference.
- (e) Only members within Regions may nominate their respective Regional Secretary.
- (f) Nominees will be asked to withdraw from the Conference Session once their name has been put forward. Where more than one nominee is put forward for the same office then voting shall be by written closed ballot.
- (g) In the event of an office becoming vacant and where the work of the Fellowship might suffer in consequence of the vacancy, the Moderator shall ensure that the position is filled

following consultation with all members of the IEC. All such provisional appointments shall be subject to ratification at the next IEC meeting.

## **8. FINANCE**

- (a) The IEC, subject to the advice of the International Finance Officer, shall be responsible for the production of a budget detailing estimated expenditure for the Fellowship covering the period of four years following each Conference.
- (b) Conference will receive and must approve the budget in order to authorise expenditure.
- (c) The IEC will prepare an audited Revenue Account and Balance Sheet for submission to each Quadrennial Conference and covering the four year period up to and including the date two months before that commencement of the Conference. Conference is required to adopt the accounts.
- (d) The IEC may approve the setting up of Regional Accounts, which can be used within the Region for the general purposes of the ICF as defined herein. Such accounts shall remain part of the funds of ICF and the regional accounts shall also be subject to whatever auditing processes are required either by these instruments or that may be required by the appropriate regulatory body.
- (e) The IEC will make such recommendations, for approval by Conference, as they are able with regard to solicitation to members for donations or offerings or any other sources in order to meet the budget.
- (f) No fundraising shall be undertaken by any Regional Secretary or member of the ICF in the name of the Fellowship except as authorised by the International Finance Officer.

## **9. GENERAL POWERS**

- (a) Any amendments, addition and alterations to this Constitution shall require the support of not less than 75% of members present and voting at Conference.
- (b) Conference shall have authority to appoint such additional officers, whether paid or voluntary to serve the objects of the Fellowship, providing such appointments shall be for the period until the following Quadrennial Conference, and that any such appointments do not necessarily include a position on the IEC.
- (c) Conference may authorise the undertaking of such activities as are necessary or desirable to further the objects of the Fellowship, including the setting up of such Commissions as may be appropriate for fulfilling its objects.

## **10. WINDING UP**

If any property remains after the Fellowship has been wound up or dissolved and all debts and liabilities have been satisfied, it shall not be paid to or distributed among the members of the Fellowship. It shall instead be given or transferred to some other charitable institution or institutions having similar objects to those of the Fellowship and which prohibits the distribution of its or their income and property among its or their

members. The institution or institutions that are to benefit shall be chosen by members of the international executive committee at or before the time of winding-up or dissolution.