



By-laws of Hope Central Church, as amended February 2, 2013

I. Name of Church. Affiliation.

The name of this corporation shall be “Hope Central Church” and will be referred to hereafter as the “congregation.” Hope Central Church is affiliated with the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ and the Northeast Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

II. Purpose

Hope Central Church is a diverse community of hope, learning and growing together in faith, love, and joy. With God's help, we seek to struggle together for God's peace and justice, to explore practices of Christian spirituality, and to serve our neighbors in greater Boston and beyond with open minds, open hands, and open hearts.

III. Membership / Covenant Partnership

Membership in this congregation is open to all people. Members, also known as Covenant Partners, are those who unite with Hope Central Church by a public declaration of faith and commitment. Membership may be terminated in the following ways: transfer of membership, request of the covenant partner, death, or inactivity. Members to be terminated due to inactivity will be sent a written notice when possible and given an opportunity to request that their membership be preserved.

A. Meetings of Covenant Partners

- i. The congregation of Covenant Partners shall meet at least twice a year: once in an Annual Meeting to do the business of the church, another to be in retreat to dialog and discern on the goals and vision for the future of the church. Special meetings may be called by the Leadership Circle to address emergency situations or opportunities that require congregational vote, and may be called by written petition of any 10 Covenant Partners.

The Annual Meeting shall be held on a Sunday in the first quarter of the year not later than March 31, the purpose of which is to:

- a) Discuss and approve the recommended budget for the upcoming year, brought forth to the congregation by the Leadership Circle, having been drawn up for review by the Finance Committee.
- b) Vote on a slate of candidates for the three (out of nine) rotating Leadership Circle openings and any open terms. A written ballot will be provided to each attending Covenant Partner with space for write-in alternatives.

- c) Any additional business to this meeting must be brought forward to the Leadership Circle in advance and must be approved by that body by majority vote as a relevant matter of congregational discussion and/or vote, or by a petition of any 10 Covenant Partners.
- ii. Written notice of the Annual Meeting and any special business meeting will be given by email and bulletin announcements not less than 21 days in advance or more than 60 days prior to each Annual Meeting, and will specify the place, day, and hour of the meeting. In an emergency situation, the Leadership Circle may call for a special meeting on at least 10 days notice.
- iii. A quorum of 10% or 20 Covenant Partners, whichever is greater, is required to do the business of Annual Meeting and any special business meeting.
- iv. Each Covenant Partner will have one vote.
- v. Decision-making at Hope Central Church will be by consensus, where possible, otherwise a simple majority of the voting members present is required.
- vi. However, any changes to this constitution and by-laws will require a two-thirds affirmative vote. The decision to call or terminate pastoral staff will require a three-quarters affirmative vote.
- vii. The following matters must come before the entire congregation of Covenant Partners at a duly called congregational meeting:
 - a) Calling pastoral staff to serve. Pastoral staff shall mean pastors, associate pastors, or any position that requires ordination.
 - b) Terminating pastoral staff (as defined in a.) except in cases of misconduct.
 - c) The borrowing of money or capital improvements in excess of 10% of the yearly church operating budget
 - d) Any commitment to acquire, lease, or dispose of real property
 - e) Any extra budgetary program or project, excluding repair or replacement, using over \$10,000 of endowed funds or investment income
 - f) Changes to denominational affiliation(s)
 - g) Dissolution of the congregation
- viii. Minutes will be taken of every congregational meeting held, transcribed and saved in the church office.

IV. Leadership Circle

- A. The nine members of the Leadership Circle must be Covenant Partners of Hope Central Church. Hope Central Church pastoral staff serve as ex-officio, non-voting members.
- B. Members are chosen through the vote of the congregation at the Annual Meeting on a rotating basis – three members elected for staggered three-year terms, so that each year 1/3 of the Leadership Circle comes up for a vote by the congregation.
- C. Each member of the Leadership Circle serves a three-year term and can be re-elected once and, after a one year hiatus, can be elected again and re-elected once. This process may be repeated. In the

event of a vacancy on the Leadership Circle, the congregation shall elect someone to serve the balance of the term.

D. The responsibilities of the Leadership Circle are:

- i. To provide general oversight of all the activities of the church and plan for the church's future.
- ii. To provide a forum of communication among the various ministry teams, officers, pastor, and staff of the church and address differences among them.
- iii. To select and remove officers.
- iv. To manage the financial health of the church, borrow money and incur indebtedness for purposes of the church, and to execute and deliver, in the church's name, evidence of such debt.
- v. To oversee and provide direction to pastoral staff.
- vi. To design and facilitate a yearly evaluation of the pastor's and the church's ministry.
 - a) designing and facilitating a yearly evaluation of the pastor's (s') ministry
 - b) facilitating and disseminating an evaluation of the church's ministry, including the pastor(s) and ministries
 - c) presenting findings to the Pastor, PPRC, and Leadership Circle
 - d) preparing a written report on the summary findings available to all Covenant Partners
- vii. In situations involving allegations or proof of misconduct by pastoral staff, to investigate any allegations, and if appropriate, to suspend or terminate the pastor or staff member, and communicate with the congregation and the denominations as appropriate.
- viii. To hire, oversee, and provide direction to, and terminate the non-pastoral staff.
- ix. To preside over congregational meetings, accept for review petitions from the congregation, evaluate and offer recommendations regarding any changes to by-laws that may come up for congregational review.
- x. Ensure that an Annual Report on the past year is presented to the congregation at the time of the Annual Meeting.

E. Meetings of Leadership Circle:

- i. A simple majority of the total number of the Leadership Circle shall be necessary to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. Every act or decision done or made by a majority of the members present at a duly held meeting, which may be in person or teleconference, at which a quorum is present, shall be regarded as the act of the Leadership Circle, unless a greater number is required by law or by the Articles of Incorporation.
- ii. The Leadership Circle will schedule meetings to be held at least ten times per year which will be published on the church calendar.

- iii. All Leadership Circle meetings are open to members of the congregation except Executive Sessions which may be closed but which must be posted in the bulletin in advance.
- iv. Minutes will be taken at all Leadership Circle meetings and will be made available to the public within two weeks, except for minutes from Executive Sessions. Minutes from the preceding meeting will be read and approved at the beginning of a Leadership Circle meeting. A file will be kept in the church office of all Leadership Circle meeting minutes as well as minutes from all congregational meetings.

V. Officers

- A. From the members of the Leadership circle, the following roles will be filled by a Leadership Circle vote:
 - i. **Moderator:** The primary duties include coordinating and facilitating meetings of the Leadership Circle and the congregational meetings.
 - ii. **Moderator Alternate:** The primary duties include supporting the moderator and coordinating and facilitating meetings of the Leadership Circle and the congregational meetings in the moderator's absence.
 - iii. **Clerk:** Primary duties include recording or delegating the recording of minutes of all Leadership Circle meetings and congregational meetings. Also responsible for making sure minutes other than from Executive Sessions are made available to the congregation.
 - iv. **Treasurer:** Primary duties include oversight of financial procedures and collaborating with the staff and Stewardship and Finance Team in the preparation and implementation of a responsible budget. Should no one in the Leadership Circle have the skills or spiritual gifts necessary for the work of the office of treasurer, the Leadership Circle may appoint an appropriate Covenant Partner who is responsible to the Leadership Circle.
- B. Officers serve on **one-year terms** which come up for review and/or renewal yearly by the Leadership Circle.

VI. Standing Committees

- A. The following are the committees required to be active in the congregational life of Hope Central Church. These ministries shall be staffed by members with appropriate gifts and graces, chosen by either the Leadership Circle or the Congregation as specified below, in collaboration with the Pastor(s) and Nominating Committee.
 - i. **Nominating Committee:** will be comprised of five covenant partners elected yearly by the Congregation at the annual meeting, and the Leadership Circle moderator as an ex-officio, non-voting member.
 - a) The nominating committee develops job descriptions for various volunteer positions as needed, canvasses the congregation in search of volunteers to serve on standing committees and ministries, and brings forward names of Covenant Partner candidates to fill positions on the Leadership Circle, Nominating Committee, and Pastoral Search Committee preceding any elections to these bodies by the congregation.

- b) Nominating Committee members may serve for more than one year, but each year's nominations for the following year's Nominating Committee must include at least two people not currently serving on the Nominating Committee.
- ii. **Pastoral Search Committee:** Upon request of the Leadership Circle, a Search Committee of six to eight members shall be formed to screen, interview, and recommend individuals to serve as clergy for the congregation.
 - a) The Search Committee shall consist of one member each of the Leadership Circle and the Pastoral Support Committee chosen by those respective bodies, and four to six other Covenant Partners elected by the Congregation to represent the interests and goals of the congregation.
 - b) Committees searching for Associate Pastors shall seek the advice of the Senior Pastor, who shall serve as an ex officio member of the Search Committee.
 - c) The Search Committee will present one candidate to the Leadership Circle, which will then present the candidate to the congregation for approval at a congregational meeting.
- iii. **Pastor Parish Relations Committee:** will be comprised of five Covenant Partners chosen by the Nominating Committee in collaboration with Leadership Circle and the Pastor.

The Pastor Parish Relations Committee shall seek to achieve and maintain an open, effective, and trusting relationship, and two-way communications between the Pastor(s) and the congregation.

The deliberations of the PPRC are confidential and meetings are not open to others in the congregation for general participation.

- iv. **Stewardship and Finance Team:** will be comprised of six Covenant Partners chosen by the Leadership Circle. Duties include:
 - a) Determining the total anticipated revenue each fiscal year and submitting to the Leadership Circle a budget based on anticipated revenues and the priorities of the church as submitted to the Leadership Circle by the various committees, staff, and ministries.
 - b) Organizing and facilitating an annual stewardship drive.
 - c) Taking responsibility for developing sound financial policies and procedures to be used by the church.

VII. Ad-Hoc Committees: Can be created by the Leadership Circle as it deems appropriate.

VIII. Ministry Teams:

- A. Ministry Teams may be developed by the pastor, Leadership Circle, or Covenant Partners of the church.

- B. Ministry Teams will work in consultation with the Pastor(s) on ministries that further the mission and vision of Hope Central Church.
- C. Ministry Team Leader's authority and responsibility includes:
 - i. Recommending priorities and goals for programming in that ministry and for the spiritual direction of the congregation as it relates to that ministry.
 - ii. Planning, implementing, and evaluating activities and events in the life of the church related to that ministry.
- D. Most Ministry Team Leaders will serve an initial one-year term that may be extended by mutual agreement.
- E. Ministry Team Leaders will meet monthly one-on-one with the pastoral staff and at least two times a year as a group of Ministry Team Leaders.

IX. Staff:

A. Pastor:

- i. The pastor(s) will be called as spiritual leader(s) and head administrator(s) of the community, supported and empowered by the congregation to freely lead the community. Pastor(s) should maintain high moral standards, feel commitment to a growing spiritual life, be ordained, hold a Master of Divinity degree, and have sufficient training and experience for the needs of Hope Central Church.
- ii. Dismissal of Clergy. If a member of the pastoral staff loses the support or confidence of the congregation or the Leadership Circle, or if other serious problems arise that may ultimately warrant the dismissal of the pastor or a change in the call agreement, the Leadership Circle shall initiate whatever procedures it deems appropriate to solve the problem or restore support or confidence in the pastor. If such procedures are unsuccessful, the Leadership Circle shall make appropriate recommendations or seek guidance from the congregation. The Leadership Circle may, if appropriate, seek guidance or assistance from the two denominations that support them.
- iii. The pastor shall attend all Leadership Circle meetings as appropriate and shall prepare a report of his/her activities over the previous month, bring to the church news and issues relating to the wider Church, participate in discussion and planning and provide spiritual direction.
- iv. The Leadership Circle will arrive at an adequate compensation package to offer the pastor on a yearly basis that can adequately be met by the church budget.

X. Finances

- A. **Fiscal year** is the same as the calendar year – January through December.
- B. **Budget process:**

- i. The budget process starts by committees and ministries making their monetary requests for the upcoming year to the Stewardship and Finance Team.
- ii. That team then implements a Stewardship campaign, letting congregation know of the vision and requests of ministries and standing committees.
- iii. With the pledge amounts in mind, the Stewardship & Finance Team develop a workable budget and submit it to the Leadership Circle.
- iv. The Leadership Circle reviews the draft budget, makes any changes it may deem necessary and submits it to a congregational vote at the annual meeting.
- v. This then becomes the budget and any changes between line items must be approved by the Leadership Circle. Any line item change amounting to \$5,000 or more must additionally be approved by a congregational vote at a special congregational meeting.
- vi. A minimum of 10% of actual annual income will be tithed to Social Justice and Outreach ministries.

C. Audit & Financial Control:

- i. **Check signing:** At all times, there shall be at least two, but no more than four individuals, who are authorized to sign checks. Those authorized to sign checks shall be designated by the Leadership Circle. For all checks of \$2,000.00 or more, other than salary checks, the signatures of two individuals shall appear on such checks. Similarly, for all withdrawals of \$2,000.00 or more from the savings account, the signatures of two members shall be required.
- ii. **Internal Audit:** An internal audit shall be conducted annually. The audit shall consist of a review of all of the financial records of Hope Central Church. The moderator shall appoint an individual or a committee to conduct the internal audit.
- iii. **External Audit:** An external audit shall be completed every three years. The external audit shall be completed by a Certified Public Accountant or by an otherwise-qualified accountant. The Leadership Circle shall budget appropriate funds to pay for the services of an accountant to conduct the external audit.
- iv. The treasurer shall provide to the Leadership Circle current financial information for all meetings. The Leadership Circle shall provide current financial information to Covenant Partners at least monthly.

XI. Amending By-laws:

- A. By-laws may only be amended by two-thirds vote of the congregation.