

Introduction to Constitution and Church Order for Immanuel Lutheran Church, Jaffa

The present Constitution for Immanuel Church, Jaffa, has been prepared and ratified by the Advisory Council of Immanuel Church (established December 2nd, 2006) and subsequently adjusted and ratified by the present governing body of Immanuel Church, the Joint Mission to Israel. The Constitution for Immanuel Church seeks to establish a frame for a healthy development of the congregation on the basis of the stipulations here agreed upon. The goal is to empower the congregation, stimulate involvement and induce a sense of responsibility and ownership. The hope is that the congregation on this basis will be able to grow in numbers and in maturity so that it one day may be able to take over the leadership on all levels. This constitution in other words aims to outlive itself in terms of the articles pertaining to leadership and ownership, but in terms of the articles pertaining to basis and purpose it aims to guard and inspire the ministry and life of this unique church for generations to come.

Historical roots

Immanuel Church is already an established church with a long history, which has shaped the character of the present congregation and ministry. The church building was erected in 1904 in order to serve the German colony then present. Following World War II and the establishment of the state of Israel, the church building, as well as the present congregation house, was handed over to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In 1955 LWF transferred the de-facto ownership to the Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel (NCMI), who was serving a congregation of Jewish believers in the land, mostly of Romanian origin. Over time other local and international believers joined the congregation and the main language changed from Romanian and German to Hebrew and English. In 1977 the church building was renovated to accommodate and reflect the Jewish Christian nature of the congregation. The congregation grew and in the late 1980's steps were taken to indigenize the church and seek independence from the Norwegian mission. The plans failed as they instead led to a schism in 1992 and great numbers left the church. The NCMI had to take responsibility for the church again. In 1997 a new governing body was formed, as the "Joint Mission to Israel" (JMI) was established (a cooperation between NCMI, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, the Danish Israel Mission, the Swedish Israel Mission and the Faeroese Israel Mission). Since then the JMI Joint Board has been governing and supervising the ministry of Immanuel Church. No separate church constitution for Immanuel Church was formed, except for the basis outlined in the JMI agreement. With the present document a separate church constitution has been formulated, yet still within the framework of the current governing structure of the JMI.

Nature of the church

The physical appearance of the church building, with tower, apse, bells, organ etc. clearly signals "church" and this very fact to some extent defines the character of our congregation and ministry. This may be perceived as a stumbling block, as we are reaching out to the Israeli populace, but it is also what makes us visible, accessible, clearly defined and – combined with the beauty and historical background of the building – even *attractive* to the society around us. We therefore embrace the "churchy" atmosphere and try to make it an ally in our efforts to serve the kingdom of God.

IC presently has two weekly services of quite different character. The Sabbath service is a direct continuation of the Jewish Christian congregation, which was established on the premises in 1955. The main language is Hebrew. The Sunday service was established mainly as a service for the expatriate community in the greater Tel Aviv area and seeks a more international liturgy in English. These two services, however, are perceived as serving *one* congregation united in all other functions of the Church. It is, however, a general priority for the IC to move towards a clearer Hebrew language identity in all areas of congregational life, at the same time as we acknowledge our responsibility towards the international community seeking our Church.

We confirm the validity of the quest of some Jewish believers in Jesus trying to establish a distinct Messianic Jewish identity in Israel and elsewhere. We contest that such in-culturalization of the Gospel into a Jewish context necessarily has to follow either the lines of Neo-protestant forms of worship and theology or the lines of modern rabbinical forms of worship and traditions. In parts of the historical liturgy of the Church we see genuine Jewish elements and sound biblical forms of collective worship preserved. We therefore strive to preserve and further develop a living and dynamic liturgy fitting to our context in this land. At the same time we seek to incorporate elements such as songs and other available material from the Messianic Jewish body in general into the Hebrew service as well as into our congregational life in general.

Although we strive to move towards the development of a genuine Israeli congregation, we find it a matter of principle to underline the *unity* of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus (Eph. 2). Concerning the discussions on the relationship between the Jewish People and the Church we subscribe in principle to "the Willowbank Declaration" (World Evangelical Fellowship, 1989) and to "the Declaration on the Relationship between the Church and the Jewish People" (Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel, 2004).

Denominational identity

IC is, in terms of members, a cross-cultural and inter-denominational experience. In terms of confessional identity we find it appropriate, however, to express our Lutheran basis. We argue that it is an illusion to define any congregation, Messianic or not, as “non-denominational” in so far as any congregation must make practical and theological choices in order to function, which in turn inevitably places them within one such denominational framework. We therefore find it most appropriate for the sake of clarity and integrity to acknowledge our denominational flavor. At the same time it is a matter of principle to IC to offer full participation, membership and communion to Christians of any denominational background, who find themselves at home in our Church.

We acknowledge the negative connotations connected with the name “Lutheran” in our mainly Jewish context. By “Lutheran”, however, no general submission to Luther’s person or his writings is intended. “Lutheran” only indicates adherence to the theological doctrines formulated by Luther and others at the time of the reformation. In this we are concerned about being *biblical* rather than “Lutheran”. We strongly denounce some other writings of Luther like his “Against the Jews” – no matter to what extent the later Anti-Semitic use of this document was an abuse or not.

Incorporation

Immanuel Church sees itself as a part of the larger body of Christ in Israel. In light of the special character and historical background of Immanuel Church and its situation in an Israeli context – it is however necessary to define our identity and incorporation in this body with more precision in order to be able to preserve and develop our unique character and ministry in the land:

- Immanuel Church seeks to establish ties with other Lutheran churches and organizations in Israel. We are, however, not structurally submitted to any other Lutheran church or organization in Israel. The supervision of Immanuel Church lies solely in the hands of the JMI. We do not foresee any future structural incorporation into the trans-national Arab “Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land”, as we are trying to build a genuinely Israeli congregation.
- Immanuel Church seeks to be connected with other evangelical churches and organizations in the region and is through the Joint Mission partners a part of the fellowship of the United Christian Council in Israel.
- Immanuel Church seeks to be connected with the Messianic Jewish body in Israel. Although we want to maintain our rather unique identity, we see ourselves as part of the larger body of Jewish believers in Jesus in Israel. We seek to establish and further links to the Messianic body on various levels (exchange of resources, music/songs, camps, outreaches etc.).

Terminology

We acknowledge that there may be disagreements concerning the appropriate terminology connected with the body of Christ in Israel. In this document we have used “Christian” in English and “Meshichi” in Hebrew as interchangeable denoting believers in the Christ. When speaking about the Jewish believers in Jesus seeking a distinct Jewish identity, we talk about the “Messianic Jews”.

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1. Name

1.01. The name of the church shall be “Immanuel Lutheran Church” in daily use “Immanuel Church” (in this document referred to in abbreviation: IC).

2. Confessional basis

2.01. This congregation confesses the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as the one true God. It proclaims the Father as Creator and Preserver; His Son, Jesus the Messiah, as Redeemer and Lord; and the Holy Spirit as Regenerator and Sanctifier.

2.02. This congregation confesses the one true God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who has revealed himself and his message in judgment and mercy through word and deed in the history of Israel and in fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ as testified in the Tanach/the Old Testament and the New Testament respectively.

2.03. This congregation confesses that the Gospel is the revelation of God’s saving will and grace in Jesus Christ, which He imparts through Word and Sacrament. Through these means of grace the Holy Spirit creates believers and unites them with their Lord and with one another in the fellowship of the Holy Christian Church.

2.04. This congregation confesses the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God, through which God still speaks, and as the only source of the Church’s doctrine and the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the Church.

2.05. This congregation subscribes to the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran confession as true and faithful summaries of the Christian Faith as it is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures, namely:

- a. The Apostolic, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds as the chief confessions of the Christian faith.
- b. The unaltered Augsburg Confession as its basic formulation of Christian doctrine and Luther’s Small Catechism as a clear summary of Christian doctrine.

3. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of IC, as a local expression of the universal Church, is to:

3.01. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.

3.02. Nurture and educate the members of its congregation in the Word of God so as to be preserved in Christ and grow in faith, hope and love.

3.03. Carry out Christ’s great Commission by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Jews and Gentiles alike in and beyond our geographical setting.

3.04. Manifest the unity given to the body of Christ by fostering and strengthening Christian fellowship and love in and beyond our congregation.

3.05. Encourage one another to follow and serve Jesus in all areas of life – in home, society and congregation.

3.06. Serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs in our congregation as well as in the society.

3.07. Strive to build bridges between the Church and the populace of the society in which we live and work.

4. Governing structure

4.01. The Joint Mission to Israel (JMI), which was established in 1997 (Agreement on Mission Cooperation in Tel Aviv-Jaffo, March 25, 1997), holds responsibility for the ministry at IC. JMI is a joint cooperation between a number of missions involved in mission to the Jewish people, presently the Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel (NCMI), the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), the Danish Israel Mission (DIM), the Swedish Israel Mission (SIM) and the Faeroese Israel Mission, (HFI) also referred to as the JMI partners.

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4.02. The Joint Mission Joint Board (JMI-JB) is the governing and supervising body of JMI and consists of the Chief Executive Officers or designated representatives of the member organizations.

4.03. The Joint Mission Executive Committee (JMI-EC) consists of one resident representative from each of the JMI partners (if such exists) and one or two staff members from the IC appointed by the JMI-JB. The JMI-EC is responsible for the ongoing work of the JMI according to the policies laid down by JMI-JB.

4.04. The JMI is responsible for the employment of local staff (staff with Israeli citizenship). The JMI partners screen, send and finance volunteers and staff workers according to the Agreement and in cooperation with the JMI-EC. The volunteers and staff at IC are under the supervision of the pastor/head of IC.

4.05. The IC Advisory Council (AC) consists of congregation members at IC and the pastor as stipulated below (point 8). The AC holds responsibility for a number of activities relating to the congregation. The AC is subject to the JMI-JB as the governing body of IC. The AC relates to JMI through its minutes and through the pastor/head of IC. The AC prepares an annual budget for the congregation on the basis of the local income, which is presented to the JMI for approval. The AC will keep the accounts separately, but they will be integrated into the annual accounts of JMI.

4.06. The JMI-JB holds the authority to dissolve the AC and/or withdraw its budget, if it deems it necessary.

5. Property ownership

5.01. The IC property (congregation house and church building) is registered in the name of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel (NCMI) is the de facto owner of the buildings and fixtures related.

5.02. Movables at IC belong to the organization that purchased them, unless specifically donated to IC or otherwise deemed to have depreciated over time in which case they belong to the JMI. Movables purchased by JMI in principle belong to JMI, but since JMI is not a registered legal entity, they belong to NCMI from a legal point of view. Movables purchased by AC in principle belong to the IC congregation. Since the AC budget is a part of the JMI accounts, any purchase made by the AC in principle belongs to the JMI or, from a legal perspective, to the NCMI. At such time as the IC congregation becomes a registered Amutah any purchase made by the AC, shall be turned over to the ownership of this Amutah.

6. Membership

6.01. Anyone who is baptized in the name of the Triune God and who is willing to submit to the constitution of this Church shall be invited to receive membership. Although the IC is a Lutheran Church in terms of confessional basis (point 2.05), it is sufficient for members to subscribe to point 2.01-2.04.

6.02. Admission of new members:

- a. By baptism.
- b. By transfer from another congregation, in which case the candidate is asked to produce a letter of recommendation from the pastor/head of the former congregation.
- c. By simple request by the candidate, if the person in question has been baptized, but does not presently have any congregational affiliation.

6.03. A person, who is only temporarily participating in the congregational life of IC and doesn't wish to terminate the membership of his/her home congregation, may join the IC as a temporary member.

6.04. Termination of membership:

- a. By resignation.
- b. By prolonged, unexplained and unprovoked absence from the fellowship and services of the Church.
- c. By evidence that a member has received membership in another congregation.
- d. By an act of exclusion in case of open, willful and persistent disregard for fundamental Christian values and principles.

6.05. The management of admission and termination of membership at IC lies in the hand of the pastor. The pastor is required to counsel with the AC, but does not have to submit to the advice of the council. In the case of possible expulsion of a member, however, the following process applies: Prior to disciplinary action, reconciliation will be

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attempted following the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17, proceeding through these successive steps: a) private admonition by the pastor, b) admonition by the pastor in the presence of two or three witnesses, and c) citation to appear before the AC. If the case proceeds to c) the accused shall receive the charges in a written form at least 10 days before the meeting. The accused should be given a fair hearing. The AC shall then decide whether and which disciplinary action is required (suspension of membership for a defined period of time or termination of membership).

6.06. Rights and duties of members:

- a. All members above the age of 18 are eligible for election to the AC.
- b. Temporary members are eligible to join the AC.
- c. All members are encouraged to take responsibility for the development of the life in the congregation and its ministry – in terms of involvement, participation, encouragement and funding.

7. Sacraments

7.01. The sacraments, baptism and holy communion, are administered by an ordained pastor or persons, who have been authorized and appointed to this task by the JMI.

7.02. Admission to baptism:

We admit anyone to baptism, who has not previously been baptized according to the following criteria:

- a. Infants may receive baptism by request of one of its parents (or holders of custody) provided that the parent in question is a Christian (has been baptized). If the infant has another living parent (or holder of custody) baptism can only take place with the written and signed consent of this person.
- b. Children may receive baptism if they so wish provided that the request be made by one of its parents (or holder of custody). If the child has another living parent (or holder of custody) baptism can only take place with the written and signed consent of this person.
- c. Adults, above the age of 18, may receive baptism if they so wish, having received proper instruction in the Christian faith.
- d. Two witnesses or sponsors must be present at the baptism and recorded as such.

7.03. Admission to holy communion:

- a. Anyone who is baptized is admitted.
- b. Baptized children are admitted under the supervision of their parents/holder of custody.

8. Advisory Council

8.01. The Advisory Council (AC) exercises a great deal of authority in the practical and spiritual life and ministry of the IC congregation. The purpose of the council is to further congregational life and involvement in all areas stipulated above in point 3.

8.02. The AC consists of minimum 5 and maximum 7 members (or 8 as explained in 8.03c). The AC may appoint sub-committees including non-AC church members to oversee various activities in the congregation.

8.03. Admission to the AC:

- a. The AC members are elected from among the members eligible (see point 6.06) by the congregation at the Annual General Meeting (point 9). Candidates may be nominated by any member. The nomination is valid, if it has been forwarded to the chairman in written form, signed by the nominator and nominee, seven days prior to the Annual General Meeting. The full list of nominees shall be available to the congregants at all times following the announcement of the Annual General Meeting. AC members, who are already on the council, do not need to be nominated in order to run for re-election, but are placed on the list of candidates, if they wish to run. Election takes place by secret ballot.
- b. The pastor of IC is ex officio member of the AC.
- c. One representative of the JMI-staff may be appointed by the pastor as ex officio member of the AC (in which case the AC may have a maximum of 8 members).
- d. If an AC-member steps down from the AC before his period is over, AC may co-opt any eligible member in his stead until the next annual general meeting.
- e. Only one member of a family can serve on the AC at any given time.

8.04. Termination of membership of the AC:

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- a. By the resignation of the member in question.
- b. By the termination of the membership of IC of a given member (see point 6.04).
- c. By the absence from three successive AC-meetings without valid cause.
- d. By vote at an AC-meeting at the initiative of at least three AC-members on the basis of a written statement forwarded to the chairman.

8.05. The AC shall constitute itself with a chairman, a vice chairman, a treasurer and a secretary (recording minutes). The chairman sits for one year and is elected by the AC. The chairman may be re-elected.

8.06. The AC shall meet a minimum of four times a year. The chairman coordinates, prepares agenda and summons the council in cooperation with the pastor. The meetings shall be announced at least two weeks in advance at the Saturday and Sunday service. The date of the following AC meeting shall also be noted in the minutes of any given AC meeting. Church members and JMI-staff may attend the AC meetings as observers.

8.07. Decisions at the AC meetings are made on the basis of 60% majority vote. Decisions can be made when at least three members of the AC are present, of whom one is the chairman or vice chairman.

8.08. The minutes of the AC meetings shall be made available to the members of the Church for handout at the Saturday and Sunday Church service (within 10 days maximum).

9. Annual General Meeting of the Congregation

9.01. An Annual General Meeting for all adult members of the congregation shall be held once a year in order for the council to present its work, reports, accounts and budget and in order to discuss matters concerning the life of the IC congregation. At the Annual General Meeting members of AC are elected according to the rules stipulated above (point 8.03a).

9.02. The Annual General Meeting shall be announced at least two months (60 days) in advance allowing members of the church to nominate candidates for the AC and suggest items to the agenda.

9.03. The chairman of the AC coordinates and prepares the agenda in cooperation with the pastor.

9.04. Subjects and issues raised at this meeting are submitted to the AC for further discussion and action.

9.05. Suggestions for amendments to the Constitution for IC should be formally presented, considered and voted for on this meeting, according to the stipulations of article 10 below.

9.06. The presence of 15 adult members forms a quorum.

10. Amendments

10.01. Amendments to this constitution may be proposed by at least three members of the IC congregation or by the AC itself. Proposals must be filed in writing with the AC at least one month (30 days) before the Annual General Meeting (see point 9). At the Annual General Meeting the proposal is formally presented and considered. If the proposal is accepted by the Annual General Meeting by 80% (4/5) majority vote, the proposed amendment is forwarded to the JMI-JB for consideration at the first possible JMI-JB meeting. The JMI-JB can then reject or ratify the proposal.

10.02. Amendments should have the effective date included in the resolution and noted in the constitution.

10.03. Changes to article 2 (Confessional Basis) and 3 (Statement of Purpose) can only be made by unanimous vote.

10.04. Changes to the Constitution of IC that are contrary to the content of article 2 and 3 cannot be made.

Chairman of Immanuel Church, Yoel Ben David

Chairman of Joint Mission Executive Committee, Pastor Jan Mortensen

Chairman of Joint Mission Joint Board, General Secretary, Rolf Gunnar Heitmann