

Bylaws of Open Table

PREAMBLE

Seeking to follow Jesus's hopeful ways of Christian love, spiritual and social transformation, biblical hospitality, grace-filled inclusion, and joyful worship, the members and active participants of Open Table have adopted these bylaws to order our stewardship of the responsibilities of our community of faith.

I. Name

This Christian community of faith, located in Mobile, Alabama, shall be known as Open Table.

II. Covenantal Relationships

As a member of the United Church of Christ, Open Table will relate to the various expressions of the church (other local churches, Associations, Conferences and the General Synod) in a covenantal manner. Covenantal is understood to mean a free-willed commitment to be in relationship that includes rights and responsibilities. Open Table will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission, attending to its responsibilities in relation to all expressions of the church. As a member of the body of Christ, Open Table is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Open Table listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, Open Table joins the various expressions of the United Church of Christ to seek to walk together in all God's ways.

Open Table has, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for the United Church of Christ, its labors and its extension, even as the United Church of Christ has, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for the well-being and needs and aspirations of its local churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ, the head of the church, Open Table shares with the entire United Church of Christ in common Christian experience and responsibility.

Actions by, or decisions or advice emanating from, the General Synod, a Conference, or an Association, will be held in the highest regard and processed through prayerful discussion and discernment, using respectful language about areas of disagreement.

III. Mission and Purpose

Open Table is a diverse United Church of Christ congregation that strives to fulfill this mission: *to follow Jesus's hopeful way of Christian love, spiritual and social transformation, biblical hospitality, grace-filled inclusion, and joyful worship.* Journeying together on a path of faith, Open Table seeks to answer the Biblical call to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

Open Table is formed to operate as a church and exclusively for religious purposes, in such a manner that it shall qualify as an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and to have and exercise all rights and powers conferred on a non-profit corporation under the laws of Alabama.

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IV. Membership

Section 1: Definition

Members of Open Table are persons who have chosen to follow Jesus's hopeful ways, enter into a covenantal relationship with other members and active participants to pursue the mission of Open Table, and agree to contribute freely—as they are able—of their time, talent, and resources to the activities and ministries of Open Table.

Open Table is inclusive and respectful of the diverse Christian traditions in which the faith of members and active participants has developed and, therefore, does not require any member to accept any doctrinal or theological position beyond her or his declaration that she or he has chosen to follow Jesus's ways. Membership in another community of faith does not preclude a person from membership in Open Table. An active participant is defined as one who exhibits an interest in participating in the life of the church, its worship and/or ministries.

Section 2: Membership Process

Open Table welcomes into membership persons who complete the following process for becoming a member:

First, a person expresses interest in becoming a member of Open Table to the pastor or another member or an active participant.

Second, a person completes an orientation process with the pastor or the pastor's designee to learn about the mission and core values of Open Table, its on-going ministry activities, its organizational structure, and the responsibilities of its members. During the same orientation process, the prospective member will be asked to reflect on ways she or he may contribute to the life of the congregation. If the person has not previously chosen to follow Jesus's ways, the orientation process will also include an opportunity for him or her to explore God's call to embark on the Christian journey.

Third, upon completion of the orientation process, the person exploring membership may make a request to become a member and schedule a Sunday to be presented to the congregation. The pastor or a member of Open Table will present the person to the congregation as a new member. If the person is also embarking on the Christian journey, she or he will be invited to participate in Christian baptism as an outward sign of her or his response to God's call.

Section 3: Removal from Membership

A member of Open Table may be removed from membership at the member's request or upon a member's death.

Section 4: Participation in Open Table

All may participate in the community of faith that worships, meets and serves as Open Table. Council members and officers must be members of Open Table or active participants. Only members and active participants may participate in the decisions made at congregational meetings.

V. Organization and Meetings

Section 1: Governance

Governance of Open Table is vested in the body of members and active participants who comprise it. Open Table is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body, but is in covenantal relationship with all expressions of the United Church of Christ and may form relationships of mutual counsel and cooperation with other bodies and organizations whose purposes complement its own purposes.

Section 2: Officers

The officers of Open Table shall consist of the moderator, treasurer, and church clerk, who shall have the duties and responsibilities that are enumerated below. The officers shall be members or active participants of Open Table. Potential candidates will engage in a period of mutual discernment with the pastor prior to standing for election. Officers shall be elected with a majority vote by the members and active participants of Open Table at the annual meeting and shall serve for a one-year term beginning January 1. Officers may be reelected to serve additional terms.

- A. *Church Moderator*: The church moderator shall preside at the annual meeting of Open Table and at special business meetings, as called. The church moderator will also serve on the church council to coordinate council meetings and activities and assist the pastor and ministry leaders as needed. The church moderator will sign as “president” and/or “chairperson” on behalf of Open Table in official transactions with other organizations or agencies that require the signature of such an officer. The church moderator will perform other duties and responsibilities as specified in such policies for operations as Open Table may adopt from time to time.
- B. *Church Treasurer*: The church treasurer shall oversee the fiscal affairs of Open Table and shall report on the fiscal affairs of Open Table at the annual meeting, special business meetings, and to the church council, as appropriate. The church treasurer will perform other duties and responsibilities as specified in such policies for operations as Open Table may adopt from time to time.
- C. *Church Clerk*: The church clerk shall serve as the secretary of Open Table at its annual business meeting and at special business meetings, shall take and maintain accurate minutes of all business meetings of Open Table, including church council meetings, and shall be responsible for maintaining the official membership records of Open Table. The church clerk will perform other duties and responsibilities as specified in other articles of these bylaws and in such policies for operations as Open Table may adopt from time to time.
- D. *Vacancies*: In the event an officer cannot complete his or her term of service, the church council will be notified. The council may leave the post unfilled, appoint a temporary office

holder, or ask the clerk to call a special business meeting with the goal of filling the vacancy until the annual meeting.

- E. *Absences of Church Officers:* In the event that one of the church officers is unable to be present and perform his or her responsibilities at an annual meeting of Open Table or a special meeting, the other two officers will designate another person to fulfill the

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responsibilities of the absent officer. In the event that two or more of the church officers are unable to be present and perform their responsibilities at an annual meeting of Open Table or a special business meeting, they will recommend to the church council that the meeting be re-scheduled at a time when two or more of the church officers will be present and able to perform their responsibilities.

Section 3: Church Council

- A. *Duties and Responsibilities:* The church council shall be responsible for planning, leading, and coordinating the activities of Open Table that carry out the mission and ministry of this community of faith. The church council will have specific responsibility for scheduling the annual business meeting, proposing an annual budget for Open Table, and nominating officers. The church council will also perform such duties and responsibilities as specified in other articles of these bylaws and in such policies for operations as Open Table may adopt from time to time.
- B. *Composition:* The church council shall be composed of the pastor and other persons, regardless of membership in Open Table, who share the purposes of this community of faith and who commit to serve for a period of at least one year. The number of council members may vary from time to time. Normally, persons will become members of the church council following a period of mutual discernment between the individual and the pastor.
- C. *Meetings:* The church council shall establish a schedule of regular meetings and a process for calling special meetings, when needed. Meetings of the church council shall be announced, by appropriate and convenient means, to the members and active participants of Open Table and will be open to all persons who want to attend as observers.
- D. *Procedures and Records:* The church council shall establish procedures for its work that are reasonable and appropriate for its duties and responsibilities and are in keeping with such policies as Open Table shall from time to time adopt. The church council shall maintain such records of its decisions as are necessary for the successful completion of its duties and responsibilities.
- E. *Decision Making:* Consensus building through prayerful discernment will be the means by which the Church Council will reach decisions. All voices will be encouraged and respected.

Section 4: Annual Business Meeting

- A. *Time and Date:* Open Table shall hold an annual business meeting during the fourth quarter (October, November, or December) for the purpose of electing officers, adopting an annual budget, receiving reports, adopting policies, and conducting other business that may come before the members. The church clerk shall ensure that Open Table participants are notified of the date and time for the annual business meeting in writing (via the newsletter being an acceptable method) at least two weeks in advance.

- B. *Quorum*: The members and active participants present and voting will constitute a quorum.
- C. *Voting*: Except as otherwise provided in these bylaws or in the policies of Open Table, a majority vote of the members and active participants present and voting will be necessary for action. (Typically, adopting the budget, the election of officers, and approval of selected contracts require 51% to pass. The threshold for calling a pastor is three-fourths (75%) of those present and voting. Changing these bylaws requires a two-thirds vote (66%) of those present and voting.)

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- D. *Discernment Decision Making*: Except as otherwise noted in these bylaws or in the policies of Open Table, a recommendation's acceptance will be identified through a process of discernment. If consensus is not reached, the moderator may table the recommendation or send the recommendation to the church council for possible changes. If the recommendation is changed, a special business meeting will be called to consider the changed recommendation. The church council may also allow the recommendation to remain tabled.

Section 5: Special Business Meetings

- A. *Time and Date*: Open Table will meet in special business meetings to consider matters of special urgency. The church council or any group of no fewer than five members and/or active participants may call a special business meeting by presenting a request to the church clerk. The church clerk shall notify the members and active participants of the date, time, and subject of the called meeting in writing at least one week in advance.
- B. *Quorum*: The members and active participants present and voting will constitute a quorum.
- C. *Voting*: Except as otherwise provided in these bylaws or in the policies of Open Table, a majority vote of the members and active participants present and voting will be necessary for action.
- D. *Discernment Decision Making*: Except as otherwise noted in these bylaws or in the policies of Open Table, a recommendation's acceptance will be identified through a process of discernment. If consensus is not reached, the moderator may table the recommendation or send the recommendation to the church council for possible changes. If the recommendation is changed, a special business meeting will be called to consider the changed recommendation. The church council may also allow the recommendation to remain tabled.

Section 6: Church Committees

Open Table, acting in its annual business meeting or in special business meetings, may create such standing committees and ad hoc committees as it deems necessary for planning and conducting the affairs of the congregation.

The church council, acting at any time, may create such ad hoc committees as it deems desirable for fulfilling its duties and responsibilities.

VI. Church Staff

Section 1: Pastor

- A. *Duties and Responsibilities:* The pastor is responsible for leading Open Table as this community of faith seeks to follow Jesus's hopeful ways of Christian love, spiritual and social transformation, biblical hospitality, grace-filled inclusion, and joyful worship. The pastor shall lead in worship and have primary preaching responsibility. The pastor's preaching shall be both prophetic and pastoral. The pastor shall lead Open Table in ministry and serve as a member of the church council.
- B. *Process for Calling a Pastor:* A pastor shall be chosen and called by Open Table whenever a vacancy occurs. A pastor search committee nominated by the Church Council and called by the members and active participants of Open Table, in consultation with the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, shall have the responsibility to seek out and recommend a suitable pastor to the members and active participants of Open Table. The

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pastor search committee shall recommend only one person at a time for the consideration of the members and active participants in an annual or special business meeting. The affirmative votes of at least three-fourths of the members and active participants present and voting shall be necessary for Open Table to call a pastor.

- C. *Resignation:* The pastor is expected to give at least one month's notice of her or his intention to resign.
- D. *Compensation and Professional Development:* Open Table shall provide for its pastor such compensation and support for continuing professional development as is appropriate and reasonable for the pastor's duties and responsibilities. The pastor shall have the right to be involved in ministries outside of Open Table provided that such involvement does not cause a neglect of pastoral duties or conflict with the purposes of Open Table.

Section 2: Other Staff Positions

Open Table, acting in its annual business meeting or in special business meetings, may create additional ministerial staff position as are deemed to be necessary for planning and conducting the affairs of the congregation.

VII. Service

As a community of faith that strives to follow Jesus's hopeful ways of Christian love, spiritual and social transformation, biblical hospitality, grace-filled inclusion, and joyful worship, Open Table renders service to our neighbors, our immediate community, and our world. In doing so, Open Table is committed to . . .

- Seeing Christ in those whom we serve as well as to being Christ to those whom we serve. We do not seek to impose our beliefs onto others. Rather, we assume that God is already working for *shalom* in our world, and we are called to join in that ongoing work, which then opens us to ever deepening experiences of God.
- Serving others as a recursive spiritual practice that stems from and leads to theological reflection and discerning prayer.
- Partnering with those who we serve in relational, sustainable, respectful, and mutual ways.
- Challenging ourselves to be open to fresh understandings, to be in new relationships with diverse people, to listen humbly to others, to get outside our comfort zone because Jesus

ministered to those who were marginalized and because sacred transformation often happens on the “margin.”

- Maximizing our service by matching our unique gifts, experiences, and passions to the community’s needs.
- Recognizing the systemic cause of much that harms and diminishes God’s children and creation. Thus, we hope to understand root causes and respond not only with aid but also with actions for advocacy and empowerment. We wish to prioritize working for justice over providing charity.
- Cultivating and strengthening community within and without our congregation through love and service. We hope to keep the boundaries between our congregation and our community “thin”: permeable and not particularly important.

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VIII. Fiscal Responsibility

Section 1: Fiscal Year

Open Table shall define its fiscal year as the period of time beginning on January 1 and extending through the next December 31.

Section 2: Indemnification

Open Table shall indemnify and hold harmless any of its officers, leaders, and any member of its staff against expenses, liabilities, or losses that arise as a result of actions that he or she takes in his or her role as an officer or staff member of Open Table, provided that the actions are within the scope of his or her duties and responsibilities and that he or she acted in a manner that are reasonable and consistent with accepted standards of good practice.

Section 3: Insurance

Open Table shall purchase and maintain insurance, at its expense and in reasonable amounts, to protect Open Table or any individual serving as one of its officers, leaders, or staff from expenses, liabilities, or losses.

Section 4: Power to Enter Contracts

The church council will review all contracts. Those contracts needing congregation approval due to their value, length of commitment, or unusual stipulations will be presented in the annual meeting or in a special business meeting. If approved with a majority vote, the approved contract must bear the signatures of two officers of Open Table.

Section 5: Dissolution

Upon dissolution of Open Table, its assets will be distributed to the United Church of Christ and are exempt for federal income tax purposes. No member or active participant of the church shall benefit from such distribution.

IX. Amendment

The members and active participants of Open Table, acting in an annual business meeting or in a special business meeting, may amend these bylaws, provided that any proposed amendment has been presented to the members and active participants of Open Table in writing at least one month in advance and receives at least two-thirds of the affirmative votes of the members and active participants present and voting.

Revisions initiated by a policy review team (Demetrius Semien, Justin Litaker, Emilia Gonzalez, Rhoda Vanderhart) and confirmed by the council with congregational input.

Adopted at Annual Meeting, November 22, 2015

Section IV, A. of Article V, Organization and Meetings was revised and approved at the annual meeting on November 10, 2019.