

Sample Framework for Constitution and By-Laws/Operations Manual

Note: It is recommended that constitutions be as short as possible and contain the core principles of the church's legal existence and standing. While not un-changing, the constitution should be changed infrequently. Items such how leadership is elected and how frequently business meetings are held should be in the by-laws or operations manual. These should be easier to change (although should require approval of the church) to match the changing needs of a congregation. Check with your local Baptist union for any legal requirements that you may need to include. Because the IBC Office is located in Germany, we have included some items that should be reflected in constitutions for churches in Germany based on our work with the German Baptist Union (BUND).

Constitution

1. Preamble: purpose of the constitution
2. Name and location: include name and location of church and legal status
3. Relationships: for example membership in the IBC and the local Baptist union. Can include any affiliations as well.
4. Purpose
5. Statement of Faith
6. Membership
7. Organizational and Leadership Structure
8. Church (Business) Meetings
9. Finances
10. Amendments to Constitution
11. Closure
12. Date of ratification or last approval

By-Laws/Operations Manual

1. Organizational Structure: qualifications, responsibilities, selection, terms of service, termination, meetings (if necessary). This should include pastor(s), leadership, and church officers.
2. Ordinances
3. Church (Business) Meetings: how often, what types, moderator, and voting procedures.
4. Church Ministry Year
5. Quorum: how many members are needed to officially conduct business.

6. Amendments to by-laws/operations manual
7. Date of ratification or last approval

Legal Requirements for Churches in Germany

The following lists the items that are legally required to be in a church constitution:

- Name and location of the church (Article 1)
- Legal status and membership in the Bund (Article 1)
- Purpose and tasks
- Membership – how to become a member, how to terminate membership
- Decision-making bodies – who decides on membership and leadership, how decisions are made and the extent of these decisions
- Legal representatives (key leaders) and those given the power of attorney from the Bund (at least two people)
- Finances/Budget
- Closure of the church (the Bund should be involved)