

CONGREGATIONAL MINUTE:

What is a Congregational church? Since we believe in the autonomy and the freedom of the local church, no two Congregational churches are exactly the same. However, based on our beginnings and our continuing tradition, we can make a few generalizations.

A Congregational church is “a gathered church.” Congregationalists often turn to Matthew 18:20—“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Each local church is a people who have been gathered together by Jesus Himself, and the Lord Jesus alone is the Head of the church. We have no other authority over us, although we seek fellowship and advice from other churches of like faith and order.

A Congregational church is ruled by the congregation. Government of the local church is not vested in any one person—neither the pastor nor the moderator nor any other single person—but church government is the responsibility of the whole congregation, even if the people have delegated some of their authority to a moderator or to an executive council.

A Congregational church is an orthodox, Trinitarian church. While our polity is distinctive, our theology generally is similar to that of other churches in the Reformed tradition.

A Congregational church attempts to be a true church in the sense that all its members are genuine believers, insofar as that can be determined by mere human beings. Ideally, a person gives a credible testimony to being born again before becoming a church member.

A Congregational church will ordinarily have a pastor who is a Congregationalist, ideally someone who has been raised up from that local congregation. While a Congregational church is free to ordain anyone, our tradition favors pastors who are educated.

A Congregational church listens to the Holy Spirit. In its ideal form, a Congregational church meeting makes no decision until the church is unanimous, having sought the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Arthur Rouner, Jr., wrote, “Where the Spirit has led, we have been free to follow.”

A Congregational church is a covenant church. Each church creates a church covenant after much deliberation and much prayer, and members periodically affirm that covenant, which is understood to be a solemn agreement among the people, and between the people and God. As John Robinson said, “A company, consisting though of but two or three, separated from the world, and gathered into the name of Christ by a covenant, is a church, and so has the whole power of Christ.”

A Congregational church is in fellowship with all other true churches, regardless of their denominational labels. We are truly ecumenically-minded. We believe that each local church that is true to the Gospel is a complete manifestation of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

A Congregational church is focused on missions. We were involved in the very beginning of the missions movement in America, and we believe in spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

A Congregational church understands that Christians must follow Jesus’ admonition that we are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house the homeless.

A Congregational church tends not to be an overly formal church. Vestments and liturgy were abandoned by early Congregationalists. The great John Milton described “this liturgy, all over in conception lean and dry; of affections empty and unmoving; of passion, or any height whereto the soul might soar upon the wings of zeal, empty and barren.”

A Congregational church is characterized by joy and by love. We rejoice in our salvation, and we seek to spread that joy to others. We do our best to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength; and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.