

# CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERATION OF FREE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN GERMANY | KDÖR<sup>1</sup>

## PREAMBLE

1. The Federation of Free evangelical Churches (Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden) is an association of independent congregations joined together by a common spiritual and ministry focus. The binding basis for faith, teaching, and life in the local church congregation and denomination is the Bible, God's Word.
2. The congregations agree with the Apostles' Creed: *"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."*
3. The congregations align themselves in their structure and service with the characteristics of the church as they are found in the New Testament. Anyone who believes in the Triune God and confesses that Jesus Christ died for their sins, granting forgiveness, and who is willing to let Jesus be the Lord of their lifestyle can become a member. The believer then becomes part of the church, the body of Christ. According to the priesthood of all believers each member of the congregation commits to contribute with their gifts and talents to fulfill the mandate of the church. The members of the congregations care for, serve, encourage and advise each other. Concerning questions about biblical exegesis and practical issues, the church respects the conscience of each individual, guided by God's Word. At the same time the fellowship always strives for a shared faith and conviction.
4. Jesus Christ is the one who joins the congregations of the Federation into one church community. The individual member congregations maintain their individuality and diversity, yet the fellowship of life and service in the Federation is gift and commitment at the same time. Part of that is a shared channeling of spiritual, personal and economic resources. Jesus Christ sends the congregations to witness the gospel together in word and deed. The Federation is committed to promote unity in the worldwide Christian community according to the Bible – for the glory of God.

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<sup>1</sup> This constitution was adopted at the Parliament of the Freie evangelische Gemeinden on March 21, 2015 in Dietzhoelztal-Ewersbach. It was last changed on September, 25 2021.

## ARTICLE 1: NAME, FORM OF ORGANIZATION, DOMAIN, AND HEADQUARTERS

1. The Federation of Free evangelical Churches (Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden in Deutschland) – hereinafter referred to as the “Federation” – was founded in 1874 in Wuppertal (then Elberfeld and Barmen) and is a corporation under public law (Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts | KdöR)<sup>2</sup>.
2. The domain of the Federation is comprised of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland).
3. The headquarters of the Federation with its office are in Witten in the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (Land Nordrhein-Westfalen).
4. The Federation is composed of independent individual congregations, which bear the name “Freie evangelische Gemeinde + place name”. In case of deviating names, the name suffix “Freie evangelische Gemeinde” (FeG) is added. They organize themselves in accordance with the “Model Bylaws for the local congregation” passed by the Federal Parliament (Bundestag).
5. Newly founded congregations which are not yet member of the Federation may be granted the status of "congregation in formation" by the Executive Federal Leadership.
6. Congregations wishing to join the Federation may be granted the special status of an associated congregation by the Executive Federal Leadership.

## ARTICLE 2: TASKS, METHODS OF OPERATION, AND PURPOSE

1. The essential tasks of the Federation are: Cultivation of the fellowship of the congregations through conferences and congresses, assistance and counseling of the congregations, mission in Germany and abroad, founding of new congregations, diakonia and social responsibility, training and further education of pastors and other full-time employees, training of employees, publishing and public relations work, promotion of services for children, teenagers and adults, support for Free Evangelical Churches abroad, cooperation with the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC), with the Association of Protestant Free Churches (Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen | VEF), the Evangelical Alliance in Germany (Evangelische Allianz in Deutschland | EAD) and the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland | ACK), as well as the cultivation of contacts with other federations of congregations, Christian communities, churches and organizations.

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<sup>2</sup> The Federation became a Körperschaft öffentlichen Rechts by law in the State of North Rhine-Westphalia by law of May 15, 1956 (Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen of May 28, 1956, page 154), in the State of Hesse by Certificate of the Hessischen Ministeriums für Erziehung und Volksbildung of October 12, 1956 (Staats-Anzeiger für Hessen 1956, No. 44, page 1136), and in Hamburg by Ordinance of September 1, 1981 (Hamburgisches Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt of September 14, 1984).

2. The governing branches of the Federation are the Federal Parliament (Bundestag) (Art. 5) and the Federation Leadership (Bundesleitung) (Art. 7 and 8). They make their decisions in responsibility before God. Members of the bodies must be members of a congregation according to Art. 1 paragraphs 4 or 5.
3. The Federation carries out its tasks through its governing branches, through employed and voluntary staff, through work departments, working groups and working teams, as well as through the Federal Ministries (Bundeswerke).
4. The relationship between pastors in the service of the Federation, a district or a local congregation and the Federation is regulated by the "Bylaws for the Appointment and Employment of Pastors". The pastors otherwise regulate their cooperation in the Federation, the regions, and the districts independently.
5. By virtue of its legal form as a public corporation and its recognition as a religious community and the special mission associated with it, the Federation exercises sovereign activities. At the same time, its activities exclusively and directly serve ecclesiastical and charitable purposes in line with tax law in accordance with Sections 51 et seq. of the German Fiscal Code.

### ARTICLE 3: DISTRICTS

1. The congregations belong to geographically organized districts (Kreise). The essential tasks of the districts are, among others, assistance and counsel of individual congregations, implementation of common tasks, missionary activity in the district area, establishment of new congregations, training of employees, support of the Federation in its tasks, and the cultivation of the Federation community.
2. The districts organize themselves in accordance with the "Model Bylaws for the district" adopted by the Federal Parliament.
3. Each district appoints a district council for its tasks. Each congregation in the district sends delegates to the district council for four years, who are, if possible, members of the church leadership. The district council elects a district executive committee.
4. The districts can, by resolution of the Federal Parliament, set up working groups at the federal level for certain areas of responsibility, consisting of the representatives of the districts for the respective area of responsibility. These working groups have an advisory function for the Executive Federal Leadership and its working groups that are responsible for the same area of responsibility. The leader of the respective district is at the same time the leader of the working group, unless the Federal Parliament decides otherwise. The working groups shall each send one member to the Federal Parliament.

## ARTICLE 4: REGIONS

1. The districts belong to geographically divided regions (Regionen). The congregations in the regions are supervised by a Region Superintendent in matters of congregational life and when looking for a new pastor.
2. The regions follow the "Model Bylaws for the Region" adopted by the Federal Parliament when it comes to their tasks concerning the Federation.
3. The regions are involved in the preparation of election proposals of the Personnel Appointment Committee for the Region Superintendents, the members of the Extended Federal Leadership and the Economic Committee from the regions. They may also appoint candidates.

## ARTICLE 5: FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

1. As the representative assembly of all the federal congregations, the Federal Parliament (Bundestag) is the supreme federal body. It discusses issues that affect all congregations. It decides on questions of fundamental importance. It decides about the membership of congregations in the Federation as they are proposed by the Executive Federal Leadership and decides on amendments to the Constitution. The Federal Parliament receives the reports of the Executive Federal Leadership, the Extended Federal Leadership and the Economic Committee and discharges them from their respective responsibilities.
2. The Federal Parliament uses the services of a Standing Committee to administrate its responsibilities. It may, in individual cases, reassign tasks to the Standing Committee.
3. The Federal Parliament is convened by the Standing Committee as required, at least once a year. In addition, it must be convened without delay if at least ten per cent of the federal congregations so request, stating their reasons in writing.
4. The Federal Parliament is comprised of
  - a) congregational delegates who, if possible, are part of the leadership of their congregation; congregations send one delegate for every 150 members or part thereof, as a rule for a period of four years,
  - b) the members of the Extended Federal Leadership,
  - c) the members of the Economic Committee, the Committee for Pastoral Employment and the Personnel Appointment Committee,
  - d) four members of the Professors' Group of the Ewersbach Theological College,
  - e) the heads of departments of the Federation,
  - f) one delegate from each district's Executive Committee,
  - g) two pastors as representatives from each district,
  - h) one representative from each of the working groups,
  - i) two representatives of the Pension Fund, and
  - j) one representative of each of the Federal Ministries.

5. The Federal Parliament decides on the changes of districts and regions.
6. The Federal Parliament elects the President of the Federation on the proposal of the Standing Committee.
7. It elects the other members of the Executive Federal Leadership on the proposal of the Personnel Appointment Committee and appoints the principal of the Theologischen Hochschule Ewersbach in accordance with its Basic Bylaws.
8. The election periods of the President, the other members of the Executive Federal Leadership, and the Director are six years each. Re-election is possible.

## ARTICLE 6: STANDING COMMITTEE

1. The Standing Committee (Ständiger Ausschuss) consists of
  - a) the delegates from the District Executive Committees in the Federal Parliament,
  - b) an equal number of delegates pursuant to Article 5 para. 4a who are not employed by the Federation and are elected from among the members of the Federal Parliament, as a rule not more than two per Federal District. Further details are regulated by the Bylaws of Procedure of the Federal Parliament.
  - c) the representatives of the working groups,
  - d) other members appointed by the Standing Committee, whose total number shall not exceed 5 percent of the members of the Standing Committee in accordance with the intended number of members under letters a) to c).
2. The Standing Committee approves the budget and the staff appointment plan of the Federation and determines the annual financial statements. It decides, as a rule on the proposal of the Executive Federal Leadership, on the establishment, significant changes and dissolution of Federal Secretariats (Bundessekretariate) and Departments (Referate).
3. It prepares the meetings of the Federal Parliament together with the Executive Federal Leadership by means of a joint working group and reports on its work there.
4. In matters of particular urgency it decides in place of the Federal Parliament.
5. It proposes to the Federal Parliament that the Executive Federal Committee, the Extended Federal Committee, and the Economic Committee be discharged for their respective responsibilities.
6. It meets at least twice a year together with the Executive Federal Leadership and the Economic Committee.

7. Based on the proposal of the Executive Federal Leadership, it elects the heads of departments of the Federation for four years, and the professors of the Theologischen Hochschule Ewersbach for eight years in accordance with the Appointment Bylaws of the Theologischen Hochschule Ewersbach. Re-election is possible.
8. It elects the members of the Extended Federal Leadership (if they are not elected by the Federal Parliament), the voluntary members of the Economic Committee, and the Personnel Appointment Committee for four years. Re-election is possible.
9. It decides on amendments to the Model Bylaws for the congregation, district and region.
10. It decides on amendments to the Pension Fund Bylaws, approves the annual financial statements of the Pension Fund and discharges the management board of the Pension Fund.
11. It elects three members to the board of the Pension Fund on the proposal of the Economic Committee and two members on the proposal of the pastors.

## ARTICLE 7: EXECUTIVE FEDERAL LEADERSHIP

1. The Executive Federal Leadership (Geschäftsführende Bundesleitung) conducts the current business and represent the Federation externally. It is available to the congregations for spiritual and practical advice and attends to common supra-local concerns on their behalf. The Executive Federal Leadership represents the Federal Parliament and its Standing Committee between their meetings. It is accountable to the Federal Parliament
2. The Executive Federal Leadership meets as required, at least five times a year.
3. The Executive Federal Leadership includes the President, the CFO and the Region Superintendents.
4. The Executive Federal Leadership appoints the heads of departments of the Federation for four years at a time. Initial appointments require the approval of the Standing Committee.
5. The Executive Federal Leadership may appoint committees for the preparation and execution of decisions.
6. The Executive Federal Leadership appoints working groups to advise on important tasks. It delegates the CFO to the Economic Committee for the duration of their office.
7. The Committee for Pastoral Employment (Arbeitskreis Pastorenwechsel) exists for the mediation and support of pastors when they want to change to another congregation. The working group consists of the Region Superintendents who deal with pastoral issues, one pastor from each region (if possible), as well as a Federal Pastoral Guidance Counsellor (Bundesvertrauenspastor).

8. Legally binding declarations of the Federation require the signature of the President and the CFO. The Executive Federal Leadership may delegate the authority to sign to other members of the Executive Federal Leadership if they are unable to sign themselves.

## **ARTICLE 8: EXTENDED FEDERAL LEADERSHIP**

1. In addition to the members of the Executive Federal Leadership, the Extended Federal Leadership (Erweiterte Bundesleitung) includes one member from each region who is not employed by a congregation, a district or the Federation and who has no voting power in the Standing Committee. In addition, there shall be one representative from each of the Federal Ministries and one Federal Pastoral Guidance Counsellor (Bundesvertrauenespastor). The principal of Theologischen Hochschule Ewersbach shall attend the meetings as a non-voting member.
2. In the meetings of the Extended Federal Leadership, strategic topics of the Federation are discussed and jointly decided. Spiritual questions and current trends are examined and, if necessary, groundbreaking recommendations are made or initiated.

## **ARTICLE 9: PERSONNEL APPOINTMENT COMMITTEE**

1. A Personnel Appointment Committee (Personalberufungsausschuss) consisting of eight members is formed for the purpose of preparing election proposals. The President and two other members are delegated by the Executive Federal Leadership, and an additional five members are elected by the Standing Committee, in each case for a period of four years.
2. The Personnel Appointment Committee proposes the members of the Executive Federal Leadership, with the exception of the President, to the Federal Parliament for election. It proposes to the Standing Committee the members from the regions in the Extended Federal Leadership and in the Economic Committee for election. It examines the election proposals of the Federal Ministries and the pastors for the Extended Federal Leadership and proposes them to the Standing Committee for election. It also considers the nominations of the Spar- und Kreditbank (SKB) and the pastors for the Economic Committee and proposes them to the Standing Committee for election.

## **ARTICLE 10: ECONOMIC COMMITTEE**

1. In order to carry out its economic responsibilities, the Federal Parliament uses the services of an Economic Committee (Wirtschaftsausschuss). This committee includes one member from each region, the CFO, a member of the Board of Directors of the Savings and Loans Bank, and a Federal Pastoral Guidance Counsellor.

2. The Executive Federal Leadership and the Economic Committee adopt the budget and submit it to the Standing Committee of the Federal Parliament for approval. The financial year shall be the calendar year.
3. The Executive Federal Leadership and the Business Committee are jointly responsible to the Standing Committee for the accounting of the Federation. The annual financial statements are prepared by the CFO in consultation with the Economic Committee; the annual financial statements are audited by an auditor to be appointed by the Standing Committee, whose report shall be submitted to the Standing Committee.

## ARTICLE 11: ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

1. In principle, the Federation cover its expenses by regular, reasonable contributions from the local churches, by individual donations, and by earnings from our ministries. It does not levy taxes or other charges.
2. The "Gemeinwohl-Immobilien-Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung" in Witten, Germany, serves as the fiduciary administration of the real property of congregations and the facilitation of legal transactions in real property matters, unless the real property of the congregations is registered directly in the name of the Federation in the respective land register.
3. The Pension Fund (Versorgungswerk) in the Federation serves to provide for the full-time employees and pastors in the Federation. Further details are regulated by the Pension Fund Bylaws.
4. The "Spar- und Kreditbank des Bundes Freier evangelischer Gemeinden eG " in Witten is responsible for monetary transactions in the Federation and for granting loans to congregations and Federal Ministries.

## ARTICLE 12: FEDERAL MINISTRIES

1. Federal Ministries (Bundeswerke) are the legally independent institutions within the Federation which perform tasks within the meaning of Article 2 (1). They conform to the basic biblical orientation of the Federation in their statutes and actual management, in their electoral and substantive decisions, and in their mode of operation.
2. The Federal Parliament decides on the recognition or establishment of legally independent institutions as Federal Ministries.
3. At least one member of the Executive Federal Leadership or one of its delegates shall have a seat and vote in the leadership of each Federal Ministry as defined in Paragraph 1.

## ARTICLE 13: PASSING OF RESOLUTIONS

1. Resolutions are passed unanimously. If this cannot be achieved, a majority of votes must be established. If at least a two-thirds majority of valid votes cast is not obtained, a motion shall be deemed rejected. Only if an absolute majority is achieved shall the resolution be postponed until, after further thought and prayer, at least a two-thirds majority can be expected when the resolution is again adopted.
2. The vote is bound to the conscience of the individual. This also applies if someone is to vote as a representative in accordance with instructions they have received.
3. In exercising the right to vote, each person entitled to vote has only one vote; proxy voting and absentee voting is not possible; abstentions are deemed to be votes cast.
4. Resolutions, election results, and important negotiations are recorded in protocols.

## ARTICLE 14: FINAL PROVISIONS

1. As a rule, full-time employees shall not serve longer than until they reach the statutory retirement age.
2. If a member from a region for which he or she has been elected to a committee transfers his or her residence outside the previous region, membership in the committee shall continue until the end of the election period, without another member from the previous region being elected to the committee.
3. The Federal Parliament, the Standing Committee, the Executive Federal Leadership and the Extended Federal Leadership, the Economic and Personnel Appointment Committee each adopt their own Bylaws of Procedure. The Standing Committee's Bylaws of Procedure require the approval of the Federal Parliament. The Bylaws of Procedure of the Executive Federal Leadership and Extended Federal Leadership, the Economic Committee and the Personnel Appointment Committee require the approval of the Standing Committee. Amendments to the "Bylaws for the Appointment and Employment of Pastors" requires the approval of the Federal Parliament.
4. A three-fourths majority of the members present in the Federal Parliament is required to amend this Constitution.
5. The dissolution or annulment of the Federation or the cessation of its present purpose may be decided only at a meeting of the Federal Parliament expressly convened for this purpose at least three months in advance. The quorum of this Federal Parliament shall be constituted only if at least three-fifths of its members are present. If this number is not reached, a new meeting must be convened within two weeks with a minimum notice period of one month. The members then present shall in any case constitute a quorum. A resolution within the

meaning of the first sentence requires a four-fifths majority of the members present. In this case, the remaining assets of the Federation shall flow to the congregations according to their number of members, in compliance with the provisions of the law on non-profit organizations and for their religious and charitable purposes.

6. The announcements of the Federation are made in the church magazine published by the Federations Publishing Company, the SCM Bundes-Verlag.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Constitution of the Federation: <https://verfassung.feg.de>
- Homepage of the Federation of Free evangelical Churches in Germany: <https://feg.de>
- Facts about the Federation: <https://fakten.feg.de>