

# The International Church of Lucerne

## *The Scope And Purpose of This Booklet*

People often ask, "how do I become a member of the International Church of Lucerne?" It is a fair question and it needs to be answered with clarity. We used to say that they needed to attend a membership class. But scheduling becomes cumbersome and people who could not attend were left without recourse. In the spirit of eliminating as many obstacles as possible we have prepared this booklet as a more accessible answer to the question.

This format is not the place to answer every question someone may have about ICL, the Christian faith, or the Bible. We are happy to address your further questions but this booklet is very specific in answering only questions which pertain to membership in ICL.

The short answer to the question of membership comes directly from our organizational Constitution. ***"Membership is open to all who are in agreement with the purposes of this Church, who unite in its Covenant, and who undertake to promote its welfare by attending its services, by regular contribution toward its support, by personal participation in its activities, and by consistent Christian living."***

So what are the "purposes of this Church" to which one must agree? What is this "Covenant" one must "unite in"? Again, the answer could be quite succinctly stated just by quoting our Constitution. But that would likely not be entirely satisfying either for the inquirer or the congregation to which they would join.

So this document moves beyond just those basics. In the spirit of full disclosure we want you to have a more comprehensive feel for who we are, where we have come from, what we value, what we believe, what we are aiming at, and how we are organized.

We are not trying to create a high threshold of entry but we also do not want to encourage people to join something that they will never really feel a part of. That serves no one.

## MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

*Welcome to*  
**ICL**



*We are a diverse,  
Christ-centered  
community of faith,  
hope, and love.*

*The different sized and shaped boxes you see above and on our entry wall represent the diversity which is ICL. You will note that they are intentionally placed to present a cross-centered focus.*

## FROM OUR CONSTITUTION

## There Is A Story To Tell About – A Brief History of ICL

### Preamble

*Believing it to be the will of God that the followers of Jesus Christ associate themselves in fellowship for the worship of God, for mutual encouragement in Christian living and for active service, the English-speaking residents in this community, representing many different denominations and national traditions, do hereby declare their common Christian heritage and purpose by establishing a local congregation under the following articles and in accordance with the appropriate laws of Switzerland.*

### Purpose Of ICL

*The purpose of this Church shall be to encourage and foster in the lives of its members the significance of Christ's Lordship and his rule in their lives; to provide a means of witness to their loyalty to Christ; to engage its members in worship, public and private, in Christian education, and in service; to invite and encourage others to make Christian profession of their faith; and to maintain full fellowship with all other bodies of Christians, especially other church groups in this area.*

### Covenant

*Recognising full liberty of individual interpretation and taking cognizance of the various statements of faith under which its members may have made their professions, we, the members of this Church, associate ourselves with all who follow Jesus and sincerely promise to work with one another in this Church to promote its Christian calling in worship and in service supporting its efforts as best we are able. We humbly repent of all the selfishness that is in us and of the wrongs that we have done, and trusting in God's love to forgive, guide, and strengthen us, hereby propose to love Him with all our heart and mind and strength, and our neighbours as ourselves. We resolve to follow the Biblical injunction to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God; to take Jesus Christ as Master, His Spirit as our spirit, and His way of life as ours. We promise to pray, to work, and if need be, to suffer for the realisation of righteousness, freedom and unity among all people.*



As one can see on the signs and inscription at the entrance of our meeting place, we are not the first church to meet in this historic structure. The building was built over 100 years ago by the Swiss Evangelical Methodist Church. That congregation had formed in Luzern in the late 1800's as one of the very few Protestant churches in this staunchly Catholic Canton.

Through the years the Methodist Church periodically offered services for English speaking tourists visiting the city. Beginning in the early 1970's during the ministry of Herr Denkel the English Service for tourists became a regular summer offering.

In 1978 with the encouragement of Herr Denkel a group of foreign teachers at the American College of Luzern were encouraged to gather for worship in English every Sunday throughout the year. Herr Denkel arranged to have students from the Baptist Seminary near Zurich to come and preach to the group on Sundays. This was done for two years as a part of the Methodist congregation. Sometimes in those early years the worshipping congregation was as small as just one person and the visiting pastor and his wife.

In 1980 Herr Denkel encouraged the English group to incorporate as an independent English language church. As a part of a student project David Chawner led the small group, then called the International Fellowship of Luzern through the process of legally setting up a church. This included writing the Constitution and By-Laws by which we are still governed today. A rotation of about eight student pastors came until 1984.

*You can get a flavor of the formative influences of each of these Godly servants by watching their brief messages to ICL at our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in August 2010. Those messages are available at [you-](#)*

Herm Luben was ICL's first full time minister. He came from the United States and was the pastor here from 1984-1987. Herm has gone to be with the Lord but not before touching many lives here. He was followed by Eric Wright who came from the UK in 1987 and served for 6 years. During that time the name was changed to the International Church of Lucerne. Bud and Donna Palmberg from the US served from 1993-2000. They were followed by Ian and Jill Dodge from New Zealand from 2000 through 2006. Then Brian and Bonnie Post from the US served the church from 2006-2008.

In 2008 the local Swiss Methodist denomination made the decision to close their local congregation because of an aging and declining membership. After 28 years of renting the space on a regular but limited basis, ICL was invited to take over the use of the entire church facility. The rent we pay now goes into the retirement fund for the pastors of the Swiss Methodist denomination. We in turn are blessed with the full use of this well maintained, well located facility. In addition to three levels of church space we also have two apartments on the level above the balcony. One for the pastor and one for our preschool and nursery ministry.

The Palmberg's returned for 5 months of interim ministry followed by four months of interim ministry with Randy and Joyce Klassen. In July 2009 Reagon and Rachel Wilson came to Luzern after spending the previous 15 years providing pastoral care and counseling to missionary families and pastors around the world.

Today ICL is a thriving congregation of more than 100 family units. We are united by our desire to love and serve God through Jesus Christ and to worship Him in English. We come from every age group, six continents, more than thirty countries, and who knows how many denominational backgrounds. We work hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by keeping the main thing the main thing.

# FOUR DEFINING VALUES

## A Helpful Metaphor

Throughout this discussion we are going to make generous use of a rather specific word picture. In order to help you better understand the International Church of Lucerne we are going to suggest that **ICL is the Switzerland of Churches**. We think that can serve a useful metaphor in this context for expressing our unusual identity and defining values. As with all figures of speech we must not press it to the literal or we will miss the intended point. Apologies to those who think this plays fast and loose with their national identity, and to those who hold a higher view of the church than to liken it to any nation.

### Background

The face of modern Europe was shaped by a thousand years of wars. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in particular, many of those wars had as much to do with religious issues as with any other driving force. It is not a pretty story. Most would rather forget that all of that even happened.

Switzerland was by no means exempt from the religious infighting. In 1531 a major battle was fought near Zug to determine the religious affiliation of the Cantons of the Helvetic Confederacy (Switzerland). Dominantly, the cities leaned towards Protestantism while the rural areas remained loyal to the Pope. Ulrich Zwingli, the former Catholic priest turned reform pastor (regarded as the father of the Swiss Reformation) died in the battle at the head of the Protestant army of Zurich.

After the French Revolution (not very friendly towards the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestants) Napoleon Bonaparte occupied Switzerland, instituted social reforms, mandated a new constitution, provided civil administration, and created the internationally recognized neutral state which Switzerland is today. From then on *Switzerland became the international gold standard of neutrality*.

## 1. Diversity (*leading to neutrality*)

Switzerland is a diverse, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, geographically divided country which under normal circumstances would have never become a single nation. Because of its neutrality it has famously avoided involvement in the conflicts of its neighboring countries.

It is fair to say that the Swiss have their opinions. Lots of them. Likely no one is entirely pleased with everything about this fascinating little country. There are language frustrations to be sure. Regional preferences. Demographic tensions. Ideological differences. Religious concerns. Everyone could say “*things would be better if...*”

However - there are points which hold them together despite their diversity. There are values they hold in common which are stronger than their differences. **That is actually quite an accurate summation of ICL as well. Our diversity is obvious. Our unity is rare. Our neutrality is priceless.**

Let's be perfectly clear. There is no getting around the fact that we are not a Catholic Church. The Pope himself would label us as Protestant. But the state recognized Reform Church would not claim us either. They regard us as a “free church”. We do not fit into either of these dominant boxes – not because we choose to define ourselves that way. Our unwillingness to fold ourselves into the structures and priorities of our religious neighbors causes us to be labeled by default. That is just how neutrality works.

We highly value this position even if it is unusual, at times uncomfortable, or judged by others to be unacceptable. It is who we are. Like Switzerland, the reality of our diversity leads us to intentional neutrality.

## 2. Centrality (*we are intentionally Christ-centered*)

How does an intentionally neutral church maintain that posture when it comes to historically divisive doctrines, creeds, and interpretations? Do we all just agree to disagree? That is not a very stable, healthy, or helpful platform on which to stand. Instead we choose something much more reliable. **We choose to be Christ-centered.**

The Swiss flag makes a powerful statement of centrality. A bloody red background has a pure white cross squarely centered on it. We as a church are similarly centered. We are a Christ-centered church. We mean by that that we are not self-centered; institutionally-centered; doctrinally-centered; administratively-centered; issue centered; or even as some might suspect, language-centered.

We have our difference, our disputes, our difficulties. But we will not allow these to shift our focus. We are very intentionally and unapologetically Christ-centered. He is what brings us together. We will return to this in our discussion of our core beliefs.



## WHERE WE GET OUR PRIORITIES

Jesus was asked one day “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?” It was the perfect opportunity for him to challenge the question and remind people that every word from God is equally important and one should not be prioritized above another.

But that is not what Jesus did. Without hesitation he affirmed that one priority was a mountain peak which towered above the rest:

<sup>29</sup> “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:29-31

Elsewhere Jesus said: “A new command I give you; love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35

You don’t miss that prioritized emphasis in the rest of the New Testament either. For instance, Paul would write “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love.” Galatians 5:6. “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

Even in the Old Testament there are clear statements of these towering priorities.

“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

## 3. Priority (we want to keep the main thing the main thing)

Everywhere in the world Switzerland is instantly identified by its majestic Alpine mountains. Those of us who live here know that Switzerland is not just mountains. There are valleys, rivers, lakes, cities, and more. It would be unrealistic to have a nation that was only mountains.



This will stretch our metaphor a bit but stay with me for a moment. Not all scripture is created level. There are mountains and there are valleys. There are flat plains to be sure. Historically, there are exceptions but most of the battles have been fought on the flat, broad plains of the globe. That may be true when it comes to scripture battles as well.

At ICL we recognize the mountain peaks of Scripture. We choose to secure the high ground. What do we mean by that? See the box on the left.

These are the mountain peaks and we refuse to level them for the sake of Biblical uniformity. We want to be faithful in prioritizing what Jesus prioritized. One way we express that around ICL is to say that **we are committed to keeping the main thing the main thing**. Most division among believers occurs when we forget to do that.

## 4. Community (we are here for each other)

For thousands of years the Alps stood as a formidable barrier dividing Mediterranean Europe and northern Europe. Eventually the barrier proved to be passable though still very difficult. It was not advisable for these mountains to be crossed alone. In time, there were marked passes, trails, bridges, roads, and tunnels. It was highly recommended that you use a knowledgeable, experienced guide and stay together and work together as a group. Even today when people approach the Alps recreationally it is best done with a guide and a group.

Guide and group. Community. Helping each other make the journey. The truth is: life is hard. It is filled with trouble and obstacles. We are not meant to go it alone. That is why Jesus’ church exists. It is not to be an institution of power but a fellowship of travelers. Encouraging, equipping, engaging, guiding. We are all on this journey together. We are by design and intention – not a social club or a civic institution. We are a Christ-centered fellowship. We are a worshipping body of believers and Christ-followers. We are an organism, not an organization. We are a community of Christ. Prioritizing what he prioritized, following where he leads, keeping our eyes fixed on him we are becoming more and more like him every day. Our great desire is to be helpful to one another on this journey.



### SUMMING IT UP IN A SENTENCE:

*We are a diverse, Christ-centered community of faith, hope, and love.*

It was the wisdom and foresight of our founding members to keep the process of membership as uncluttered as possible. They did not hammer out a precise statement of faith which must be agreed to. Nor did they select a historic creed which must be recited and affirmed. Here is what they said:

*“Membership is open to all who are in agreement with the purposes of this Church, who unite in its Covenant, and who undertake to promote its welfare by attending its services, by regular contribution toward its support, by personal participation in its activities, and by consistent Christian living.”*

Throughout Christian history the definitive (and unfortunately divisive) creeds and doctrines of the Church did not get formulated in a vacuum. They largely arose in specific contexts and as specific reactions to something which seemed either threatening or missing at the time. Separated from that context and crystallized into recitable affirmations they can cause as much harm as they do good. For that reason we choose not to choose a historic creed of the faith which will speak for us. We are not against those creeds per se, but we cannot be defined by them. They tend to say either too much or too little.

What then do we believe? Does ICL believe anything and everything? Certainly not. Some churches have page after page of doctrinal specifics which one must confess and adhere to in order to become a member. We will not do that. We are resisting the creation of a list even here. Not because we are wanting to hide anything but because the Bible itself presents no such list. Unless perhaps it is this. Listen to what Paul told the Corinthian Church. If you do not feel comfortable with this kind of emphasis you would probably not want to become a member of ICL. These things speak to the core of our beliefs.

*<sup>1</sup>Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup>By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*<sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as **of first importance**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup>and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

*<sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether, then, it is I or they, **this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11*

It is hard to miss that Paul speaks of matters of first importance. Whatever else we believe, this is the core. In the above text he stresses three points. While this is not exhaustive, it is certainly suggestive of what we emphasize too.

### Christ is the Message

Like Paul, we believe and preach the atoning death of Jesus, the certain burial of Jesus, and the validating resurrection of Jesus. We believe that these points combine both subjective tenants of faith with objective matters of history. We believe that the death of Jesus of Nazareth was not just that of a misunderstood martyr. He died for our sins not his. Repeatedly the emphasis of the New Testament regarding his death is that he died one time, for all time, for all people. (John 1:29, 1 Peter 3:18) Accepting that forgiveness becomes the foundation of both our relationship with God, and of our capacity to forgive others, even ourselves. (Ephesians 4:32-5:2)

The emphasis on his burial, seems redundant when placed between his death and his resurrection. But it stresses the reality of Jesus humanity. He is God who took on human flesh and lived among us. (John 1:1-18) The Bible emphasizes the importance of Jesus being human not just divine. (Hebrews 2:14-18, and 4:14-16) His burial underscores the value of his life as an understanding advocate. He knows what we go through as human beings.

The central claim which Jesus' first followers made concerning him was that he rose from the dead. They did not simply say “his teachings live on” or “his influence will never die.” No, only days after their fear-filled retreat from Jesus, they stood in the power of the Holy Spirit as witnesses to boldly proclaim: This same Jesus you crucified, God has raised from the dead. (Acts 2:22-24) This continued to be their message till death. This is why they claimed that Jesus was both Lord and Savior. This is why they believed his words could be trusted and obeyed. And that this is just the beginning. They said we too will be raised in the last day if we put our trust in him. The immediate implication is that this resurrection reality begins right now as we trust in him to enable us to live in newness of life. (Romans 6)

### The Place of Scripture

It was very important to Paul to stress that these things (matters of first importance) are “**according to the Scriptures**”. We believe that the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments are completely unique among all the words ever written. Though they come to us through a very human process of recording, copying, translation, distribution, and interpretation, we believe that they are divine in their origin and fully adequate for their intended purpose. As Paul affirms: “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The Bible was not written as a text book but as a story of a holy Creator and his desire for relationship with his creation.

We will always be seeking to understand life and faith and present day issues and struggles “according to the Scriptures”. As we do so we want to make sure that we always interpret the Scriptures in the light of Jesus Christ, who is the living word of God. (John 1:1, 14) He is God's full and final revelation of himself. (John 14:9 and Hebrews 1:1-4) We do not want to handle the Scriptures in ways that cause us to miss what is most important. Note what Jesus said to those who elevated the Scriptures beyond their legitimate place. “*<sup>39</sup>You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, <sup>40</sup>yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*”(John 5:39-40)

### Grace Saturated

Paul is also keen to stress, three times in verse 10, that this is all by God's grace. Grace is a pervasive theme throughout the New Testament. When Jesus revealed the Father to us he was “*full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:14-18) Paul adds: “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” (Ephesians 2:8-10) Grace is the basis of our salvation, sustenance, and service. Peter ends his writings on this note as well: “*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” (2 Peter 3:18) And so at ICL, we will always make it our aim to “See to it that no one misses the grace of God. (Hebrews 12:15)

## MEMBERSHIP IN ICL

*Membership is open to all who are in agreement with the purposes of this Church, who unite in its Covenant, and who undertake to promote its welfare by attending its services, by regular contribution toward its support, by personal participation in its activities, and by consistent Christian living.*

Switzerland welcomes visitors. So do we. We are delighted to have a steady stream of visitors every week from literally all around the world. Some people actually visit ICL for years without becoming a member. We would really like to help people move from the non-commitment of visiting to the involvement of membership. We believe it will help both the person and the church to be more accountable for positive growth in Christ.

Switzerland welcomes citizens of other countries to live and work in Switzerland as permanent residents without taking on Swiss citizenship. We have a category quite like that as well. It is called **Affiliate Membership**. It allows someone to become a fully involved and voting member while they are here without having to give up membership in a church in their home country.

The category of **Full Membership** is something like taking on Swiss citizenship. There are both rights and responsibilities that come with this decision. It ought not be taken lightly.

We are not intent on screening and weeding out those we do not want. We look for ways to be inclusive rather than exclusive. But we are quite sure that there is no mutual value to accepting members who really don't value what we value, believe what we believe, or are not willing to commit to what we are and do.

***This is not about perfection but direction.***

If ICL sounds like the place you can grow in your faith, hope, and love - we welcome you to join with us.

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ICL MEMBERS

### VOTING AND REPRESENTING

As a church we are congregational in our governance structure. That is to say, there is no higher body than the congregation itself. The members are the church. They control the affairs of the church. There is no hierarchy.

Every active Member and Affiliate Member is eligible to vote at the Annual General Meeting and at any Special Meetings of the church. And any active Member of Affiliate member is able to nominate, second, or stand for election to the rotating Church Leadership Committee.

The Church Leadership Committee is delegated the task to manage the regular affairs of the church on behalf of the whole. It is the general administrative body which carries out the objectives and policies of the church. All of its actions are subject to the authority of the full membership of the church in both annual and special meetings.

The Church Leadership Committee is not a self-perpetuating center of control. It is a duly elected, term limited, representative group of members accountable to the whole of the membership.

### A WORD ABOUT FUNDING

Because we are a "free church" we receive no state funds and no denominational funds. Our entire operating budget comes from the generous giving of our members because they believe in the value of what we are doing. We have no assessment, send no bills, and set no expectation. We give as we are able and we desire to do it with the desire to honor the teaching of Scripture: *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* (2 Corinthians 9:7)

### BEING AND DOING

Again we point intentionally to our founding documents. When speaking of both the purpose of the church and the membership covenant they refer interchangeably to what we are to be and what we are to do. As believers in Jesus it is understood that our doing grows out of our being. As we are humbly submitted to Christ's rule in our lives we grow in our walk with him. As we grow in him, the doing comes naturally.

#### **Purpose** (from ICL Constitution)

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### USING OUR GIFTS TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER

*The paragraph above states we "sincerely promise to work with one another in this Church to promote its Christian calling in worship and in service supporting its efforts as best we are able."* What does that really mean? How do we flesh that out?

The Bible teaches that each member of the body has been given unique gifts of God's grace. These are given for the benefit of the whole. We have freely received these gifts and they are to be freely used. We do not all have the same gifts but every gift is needed in order for a local congregation to be a fully functioning, faithful representation of the life of Christ in this place and time. \*See 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4)

We take the matter of serving in the area of our giftedness seriously. This goes well beyond our willingness to share in the "chores" of the church. We want every member to have the joy of using their God-given grace gifts for the glory of God and the good of others. You may not know what your gifts are just yet but as a member of ICL we want to help you discover that and help you find ways to use them to honor God and help others.

# APPLICATION FOR ICL MEMBERSHIP

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Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Handy \_\_\_\_\_

Family Members if Applicable \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Have you made a public profession of your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Please tell us briefly about that.

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\_\_\_\_\_

Please state briefly why do you wish to become a member of ICL?

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Is there anything else you would like for us to know about you?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you are applying for Affiliated Membership please tell us the name and location of the church where you will be maintaining your membership.

\_\_\_\_\_

*In signing this application for membership you are stating that having read the contents of this booklet and you understand and are in agreement with the distinctive nature, stated purpose, and covenant of the International Church of Lucerne and that you desire to promote the welfare of this body of believers by your actions, attitudes, involvement, service, and your growing walk with Christ.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*