

CHURCH CONSTITUTION

of the

Isa-e Church Bangladesh



27 January 2011

ICB, Dhaka

Content

INTRODUCTION OF ISA-E CHURCH BANGLADESH.....	3
1. OUR FAITH	4
2. THE VOCATION OF CHURCH AND CONDREGATION.....	5
The Church.....	5 - 6
The Name.....	6
Congregations	6 - 7
The offices and the Ecclesial assemblies	7 - 9
3. THE LIFE OF CONGREGATION AND CHURCH.....	9
Worship services.....	9
Holy Baptism	9 - 10
Holy Communion.....	10
Missionary, diaconal and pastoral work	10
Spiritual education	11
Supervision	11 - 12
Care of financial affairs.....	12
Complaints and disputes	12
The education and training of ministers.....	12
The life and work of the church in an ecumenical perspective.....	13
4. THE ORDER OF THE CHURCH.....	13
The ordinances	13
Change in the church order	13 - 14
The order of the church in times of emergency	14

INTRODUCTION OF ISA-E CHURCH BANGLADESH

For the preservation and security of the principles of our faith and the all things be done “decently and in order” and “with love”, consistent with the teachings of the Holy Bible and the accepted beliefs of the Isa-e Churches Bangladesh, and for the purpose of safeguarding the inherent liberties of each individual member of this church and also the freedom of action of this body in relation to Christ and to other bodies of like faith, we do adopt and establish this constitution.

The purpose of this church shall be to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus, God the Father through obedience to the Word of God and the worship of the triune Godhead. To that end the church will execute the Great Commission in the preaching of the gospel for the purpose of making disciples, baptizing the same in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things the Lord has commanded by proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

The Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of ICB reflect both the underlying theology of this church as well as its organizational principles and governance structures. They are both ecclesial and legal documents. Thus, they commit this church in each of its expressions – congregations, synods, and the church wide organization – to the centrality of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, carrying out Christ’s Great Commission, serving the neighbor in response to God’s love, worshipping God, nurturing members in the Word of God, and manifesting the unity given to God’s people in living together in Christ. At the same time, these governing documents also provide necessary organizational principles, structures and policies for good order and to meet legal requirements. Taken together, these governing documents reflect the organic whole of this church in its interdependent relationships and as part of the one holy universal Church.

Although the Isa-e Church Bangladesh (former Isa-e Jamat Bangladesh mission) began operation in 2nd September, 1999 with like minded Muslim Background believers and working and living especially among the Majority Community, its governing documents are rooted in Scripture.

We, as members of this church, find ourselves consulting these documents frequently to guide, direct, and assist us in mission and ministry together. They remind us again and again that this is not our church, but God’s church. As God’s people in the ICB we are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world. We are doing God’s work.

Rev. Abdul Mabud Chowdhury
Moderator
Isa-e Church Bangladesh

1. OUR FAITH

Article I

We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!

Isa Mashih (Jesus Christ), the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.

The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Isa and to apply the saving work of Isa to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior, indwelling our hearts. He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.

Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Isa alone for their salvation, and thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Isa Mashih become children of God and heirs of eternal life.

The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Isa and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Isa. The Church finds her visible yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity, where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting she awaits the return of her Lord. We as believers are from Muslim backgrounds and our religious devotion is according to the contextualized Bengali Islamic way.

Isa Mashih will come again to the earth personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20)

Isa Mashih commands all believers to proclaim the gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. We use to break down the cultural barrier between the traditional Hindu orientated churches and the Bangladeshi Islamic culture. So we proclaim the Gospel in cultural acceptable Bangladeshi way. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to “Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.” He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. “For we are His workmanship, created in Isa for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10)

2. THE VOCATION OF CHURCH AND CONGREGATION

The Church

Article II

In accordance with its confession Isa-e Church Bangladesh is manifestation of the one holy apostolic and universal Christian Church, which sharing in the expectation granted to Israel, looks forward to the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

Living by God's grace in Isa Mashi, the church carries out the mandate of its Lord to hear and to proclaim the Word. ICB use to break down the cultural barrier between the traditional Hindu orientated churches and the Islamic culture in Bangladesh.

In order to bring the Gospel to the majority people, we speak their Islamic Bengali language. And we follow the Islamic religious cultural regulations. In our worship style, food regulations, cloths, and other cultural forms and codes, we follow the Bengali Islamic cultural concepts.

Involved in God's turning towards the world, the church, in obedience to Holy Scripture as the one source and norm of the church's proclamation and ministry, confesses the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The confession of the church takes place in communion and tradition with the confession of our ancestors as formulated in *Apostolicum*, the *Nicene Creed* and the *Athanasian Creed* by which the church is joined to the universal Christian church.

We stay in communion with the Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition believes the 5 sola's:

- Sola Scriptura: The Scripture Alone is the Standard
- Soli Deo Gloria: For the Glory of God Alone
- Solo Christo: By Christ's Work Alone are We Saved
- Sola Gratia: Salvation by Grace Alone
- Sola Fide: Justification by Faith Alone

In its celebrations, words and actions the church continually confesses Isa Mashi as the Lord and Savior of the world and thus calls for renewal of life in culture, society and state. The church bears witness before people, powers, and governments to God's promises and commandments and in doing so seeks a dialogue with other churches.

Sent into the world and called to administer reconciliation, the church bears witness to the salvation in Isa Mashi in proclamation and service to all people and to all nations. Especially ICB evangelize and plant churches among the Majority people of Bangladesh as Jesus called all believers to do in Matt 28:18-20.

Isa-e believers' lives scattered over the country, without pastoral care or Christian fellowship. Church planting is one of the priorities of ICB. We inspire them to come together and form a congregation to worship and praise our Lord and Savior. (Hebrew 10:25)

In it's witnessing in word and deed the church is obliged to act in accordance with its confession.

The church and all its members are called to test the confession in the light of Holy Scripture.

The church shuns that which contradicts its confession.

All properties of the local Isa-e church belong to the denomination Isa-e church Bangladesh.

The name

Article III

Isa-e Jamat Bangladesh (IJB) started as a platform of Muslim background believers. Many scattered believers form all over the country were not organized in a congregation. So IJB started Church planting work among the Muslim majority community in a contextualized Bengali Islamic way.

We used the word "Jamat" to mean the local congregation. But this name is mostly used by Islamic groups, so to avoid the confusion we changed the congregational name in Isa-e Church Bangladesh. (ICB).

So, as member of the universal Church, we are Isa-e Church Bangladesh (ICB). The continuing church denomination of the platform of Isa-e Jamat Bangladesh (IJB).

Congregations

Article IV

By the grace of God and in virtue of His covenant Congregations are assembled around Word and Sacraments.

To a congregation belong those whose incorporation in the fellowship of the Church has been confirmed by holy baptism.

Those who receive baptism are called to public profession of Isa Mashi and to responsibility in the congregation.

Mindful of the faithfulness of the God of the covenant a congregation includes in its community the non-baptized children of congregation members as well as those who show solidarity with the congregation.

The church has baptized members and confessing members. Baptized members, confessing members, guest members, the non-baptized children of congregation members and those who show solidarity with the congregation are entered as such in the register of the congregation.

The congregation, blessed for this purpose by the Spirit, is called to ministry of the Word of God in the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper

1. in public worship
2. in the ministry of prayers
3. in missionary work

4. in diaconal work
 5. in pastoral care
 6. in spiritual education
- and also in all other work that serves to build up the body of Isa.

All members of the congregation are called and authorized to use their gifts to fulfill the mandate which Isa gives to the congregation.

Under the supervision of the church council the congregation obeys its call by promoting the coherence in its life and work and by devoting itself entirely to praising the Name of the Lord and serving the world.

The offices and the ecclesial assemblies

Article V

To focus the congregation on salvation and to keep it to its call in the world the public office of Word and Sacrament was given on the part of Isa. With a view to this ministry the church distinguishes

- the office of minister,
 - the office of elder,
 - the office of deacon
- as well as other ministries in church and congregation.

The office-bearers are jointly responsible for building up the life of the congregation in the world by providing for

- the ministry of Word and sacraments,
 - missionary, diaconal and pastoral work,
 - spiritual education,
 - supervision,
 - stewardship over financial affairs
- and other work serving to build up the life of the congregation.

The ministers as servants of the Word are especially called to the administration of Word and sacraments, the proclamation of the Word in the world, pastoral care and supervision and instruction and lay training.

The elders are especially called to care for the congregation as a community, bear co-responsibility for the administration of Word and sacraments, provide pastoral care and supervision and train the congregation to fulfill its pastoral and missionary vocation and those who are designated for this purpose to the administration of financial affairs. The House Church (cell group) leaders are elders with a special vocation for their own Church (cell group).

The deacons are especially called to the ministry at the Table of the Lord and to collect and distribute the gifts of charity, the ministry of compassion and justice in the congregation and the world the training of the congregation to fulfill its diaconal vocation and the administration of diaconal financial affairs.

The call to office takes place on the part of Isa, locally by the congregation, and otherwise by the church through the authorized assemblies.

An office in the church can only be held by those who have been called there to according to the order of the church, who have made profession of faith and have been confirmed in office with supplication for the presence of the Spirit.

Confirmation in office takes place in the midst of the congregation, using a form from the church's book of worship.

The other ministries consist of administrations and functions to be indicated as such in the order of the churches which are carried out in collaboration with the office-bearers in order to fulfill the vocation of church and congregation.

So that one office shall not lord it over another, one office-bearer over another, or one congregation over another, but so that all things shall be aimed at obedience to Isa the Head of the Church, the leadership in the church is entrusted to ecclesial assemblies.

These assemblies are

- for the local congregation the church council;
- for the congregations belonging to a classis the classical assembly;
- for all congregations together and hence for the entire church the general synod.

The church council is formed by ministers, elders and deacons serving in the congregation. The classical assembly is formed by the delegated office-bearers of the church councils of the congregations belonging to the classis.

The general synod is formed by the office-bearers delegated by the classical.

The church council directs the life and work of the congregation. The classical assembly directs the life and work of the classis and in doing so expresses the responsibility of the congregations for each other and for the entire church, as well as the responsibility of the church for the congregations.

The general synod directs the life and work of the church as a whole.

The church council shall not take decisions in affairs which are of essential importance for the life of the congregation without consulting the members of the congregation on these affairs.

Without losing its final responsibility, the church council can share its care for building up the life of the congregation with working groups to be instituted by the council.

For work that is to be carried out jointly for the congregations the classical assemblies will work together in general classical assemblies according to rules laid down by ordinance. A general classical assembly is formed by members of the classical assemblies working together in it.

In order to fulfill the vocation of the church and the congregations the classical assemblies will be assisted by auxiliary bodies. An auxiliary body is instituted by an ecclesial assembly and is charged, under the responsibility of that assembly, with the task assigned to this body in its field of work.

An ecclesial assembly can designate a number of its members who together form a broad board to which the assembly can delegate the exercise of certain powers, according to rules laid down by ordinance.

For carrying out work that is of general importance to a classis or to the church as a whole, the ecclesial assemblies concerned can call ministers in general service of the church or appoint functionaries who are attached to the

classis. Region-coordinators, field coordinator, program-managers, are examples of ministers in general services.

The major assemblies will deal only with those matters which according to the order of the church belong to the work of the major assemblies, or with those which cannot be concluded in the minor assemblies.

3. THE LIFE OF CONGREGATION AND CHURCH

Worship services

Article VI

Called by its Lord the congregation assembles for

- the reading of Holy Scripture and the public preaching of the Gospel,
- the administration and the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper,
- the ministry of praise and prayer
- the ministry of compassion and justice.

The congregation assembles for repentance, thanksgiving and prayer services, doctrinal services, marriage services and services of mourning and commemoration.

Furthermore, the church has daily prayer services with thanksgiving and prayers.

Worship services are lead by those designated in the order of the church. The order of worship services is determined by the church council taking into account the special responsibility of the ministers and those taking care of church Choir. For use in worship services the general synod, according to rules given by ordinance, designates, offers, or determines

- the Bible translation,
- the psalm-book and hymn-book
- and the worship book with liturgical forms.

The church celebrates on the Islamic day of rest, Friday-morning or evening. The church celebrates and commemorates on special days the coming, the birth, and the appearance of Isa, His suffering, death and resurrection, His ascension, Fasting, Ash Wednesday and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The church has the possibility to arrange prayer and thanksgiving worship services.

Holy Baptism

Article VII

Holy baptism signifies and seals God's covenant of grace with us and our children demonstrating that we are saved for eternity through His love.

In baptism God promises by grace alone: to forgive our sins; to adopt us into the Body of Isa, the church; to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us; and to resurrect us to eternal life.

Through baptism Isa Mashi calls us to new obedience: to love and trust God completely; to forsake the evil of the world; and to live a new and holy life.

Water is the visible symbol that God has cleansed us of our sins through Isa' blood. Sometimes water is sprinkled or poured on to the person being baptized; at other times, the person is immersed in water.

Holy baptism is administered in the midst of the congregation by Imam (Minister) with the use of one of the forms from the ICB worship book.

Baptism is administered to those for whom or by whom baptism is desired after profession of faith has been made by and with the congregation.

Baptism is administered under the responsibility of the church council, with due respect for the guidelines laid down by the church.

Baptism is the physical sign that God adopts us into his family. It signifies entrance both into the wider church and into the community of a particular congregation.

Holy Communion (The Lord's Supper)

Article VIII

The Lord's Supper is celebrated by the congregation and administered by a minister with the use of one of the forms from the church's worship book.

To the Lord's Supper are invited those who confess Isa Mashi and assent to His praise and who have been introduced into this mystery by instruction in faith.

The church council determines after consultation in the congregation in what way the members are prepared for participation in the Lord's Supper and also whether the members can participate in the Lord's Supper only after public profession of faith.

The Lord's Supper is celebrated under the responsibility of the church council, with due respect for the guidelines laid down by the church.

Missionary, diaconal and pastoral work

Article IX

On account of its missionary task, the congregation is devoted in its entire existence to witnessing and ministry to those who do not know the Gospel, specially the Majority people of Bangladesh, so that they too may share in the salvation in Isa Mashi.

The congregation fulfils its diaconal vocation in the church and in the world by sharing, in the ministry of compassion and justice, the gifts bestowed on it, helping where there is no helper and bearing witness to the justice of God where injustice occurs.

The congregation performs its pastoral task in pastoral care to members and others who need this care, so that they may edify one another in faith, hope and love.

As to the fulfillment of its missionary, diaconal, and pastoral vocation, the congregation seeks to cooperate with other local or national church communities and NGO's.

Spiritual education

Article X

The congregation is called to be and remain a learning community.

The education and training of its members takes shape in instruction and reflection, in meditation and prayer, in consultation and active exertion.

The spiritual education of young congregation members takes place in religious instruction at home and in the congregation.

Isa-e Training Institute (ITI) training is a part of training in the congregation. ITI training gives local Ministers (Imams) the opportunity to train and develop the believers.

The congregation seeks opportunities for the expression of faith in the social and cultural contexts in which young people orient themselves.

By means of catechetical teaching ecclesiastical instruction is given to the young members of the congregation and to all those who desire this instruction.

The aims of catechetical instruction are learning to live by God's promises and according to His commandments, training for Christian witnessing in the world, discovering and learning to use the gifts for building up the congregation of Isa Mashi, introduction into the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper and preparation for public profession of faith.

Catechetical instruction concerns reading and understanding Holy Scripture; the worship service, hymns and prayers; the confession and the history of the church; life as a Christian in the world.

Public profession of faith is made to receive or confirm baptism, as a token of willingness to bear witness to the Lord, to bear co-responsibility in the congregation of Isa Mashi and to stay within the communion of Word and sacraments. Public profession of faith takes place in the midst of the congregation with the use of a form from the church's worship book. The church council talks with those who intend to make profession of faith about their motivation and about the content of their faith.

Care of catechetical instruction rests with the local church council.

Supervision

Article XI

The congregation is called to stay on the path of the confession of the church. Supervision, grounded in the compassion of Isa Mashi, takes place to the glory of God, to preserve the congregation and to save those who err.

In the congregation the members are called to look after each other pastorally and lovingly and to edify each other in faith, hope and love.

The supervision that is exercised by or by order of the ecclesial assemblies concerns the spiritual life of the congregations, obedience to their vocation, and the execution of offices and other services; the confession and conduct of members and of office-bearers and of those who perform other services; and

the proclamation, catechetical instruction, and the education and training of ministers.

Supervision of the congregations takes place by means of visitation and concerns their spiritual life, obedience to their vocation, and the execution of offices and other services, its purpose being to build up the life of the congregation.

Supervision of the confession and conduct of members and office-bearers and of those who perform other services is exercised by pastoral dialogue and admonition.

With a view to the right administration of Word and sacraments, the church exercises supervision of proclamation and catechetical instruction, as well as the education and training of ministers.

If necessary, the church shall proceed to apply the means entailed in ecclesiastical discipline, according to the rules laid down by ordinance.

Care of financial affairs

Article XII

The care of the financial affairs of the congregation rests with the church council.

The care of the financial affairs of the classis rests with the classical assembly.

The care of the general finances of the church rests with the general synod.

The care of financial affairs is supervised by the designated bodies of the church. Classis and general synod creates financial supervising bodies.

Complaints and disputes

Article XIII

Complaints and disputes for the consideration of which no separate body or particular manner of consideration is indicated in the order of the church are presented to the boards designated for this purpose.

Without prejudice to the provisions in paragraph 1 a request may be made to an ecclesiastical body to reconsider a decision taken by this body.

The education and training of ministers

Article XIV

The care of the education and training of Ministers (Imams) rests with the general synod.

The education and training of ministers takes place at ITI training founded by ICB.

Those who desire admission to the office of minister shall cooperate in the investigation into suitability, competence and vocation for the office.

If there are no objections, they are granted the right to be a candidate for the office of minister after taking the appropriate oath.

The life and work of the church in an ecumenical perspective

Article XV

As manifestation of the one holy apostolic and universal church, the church is called to seek and promote unity, fellowship and cooperation with other churches of Isa Mashi (Jesus Christ). The church takes part in and stimulates ecumenical work in Bangladesh and in the world.

It seeks and maintains closer relations with churches to which it is joined by special confessional or historical bonds. It seeks union with the churches with which there is unity or kinship in faith and church order.

In missionary work, in the Bangladesh and in the world, the church fulfils its missionary vocation, together with local churches and congregations, in support of each other.

In diaconal work, in the Bangladesh and in the world, the church carries out its mandate to labor for those who suffer and to help them in their search for comfort and justice, in cooperation with local churches and congregations and with kindred institutions.

The church conducts its work of witness and service in respectful intercourse with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. This intercourse is respectful, but not conflicting with our confession of faith in Isa Mashi, the Only Way to Life.

4. THE ORDER OF THE CHURCH

The ordinances

Article XVI

ICB will make ordinances how to organize the Church.

The order of the church is more specifically determined by ordinance.

An ordinance is laid down or changed by the general synod.

A proposal to lay-down or change an ordinance can be submitted either by a classical assembly, by an auxiliary body of the general synod or in the general synod itself. However, the aforementioned assemblies cannot make a final decision to submit such a proposal in the same assembly as that in which the proposal was made.

After the general synod has laid down an ordinance or a change in an ordinance in first reading, it is submitted to the church councils for consideration by the classical assemblies.

After this the general synod can lay down the relevant ordinance or change in an ordinance.

Change in the church order

Article XVII

Changes in the church order are introduced by the general synod.

A proposal to introduce a change in the church order can be submitted either by a classical assembly the general synod itself.

However, the aforementioned assemblies cannot make a final decision to submit such a proposal in the same assembly as that in which the proposal was made.

After the general synod has laid down a change in the church order in first reading, it is submitted to the church councils for consideration by the classical assemblies.

After this the general synod can lay down the change in the church order, for which a majority of two thirds of the valid votes is required.

The order of the church in times of emergency

Article XVIII

If and in so far as extraordinary circumstances of country and nation make it impossible for the life of the church to function normally, the appropriate bodies of the church or their members shall take temporary measures, deviating from the order of the church as the circumstances make necessary.

This constitution was passed by the ICB Annual General Meeting held on 26-27th January 2011 at BSFB Hall Room, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh, with ICB Church representatives.