

MALAWI ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

LOCAL CHURCH CONSTITUTION

In accordance with the constitution and By- Laws of Malawi Assemblies of God, all local assemblies under Malawi Assemblies of God shall operate under the provisions of this local church constitution, in order to enhance harmony of purpose, conduct, and mode of operation among all local assemblies. By virtue of being Pentecostal in nature, every local assembly shall exist to carry out the responsibility of spreading the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to develop the indigenous church, abiding by all policies of Malawi Assemblies of God.

ARTICLE 1 NAME

Each local assembly may, with the express written approval of the National Executive Committee use any name agreed upon by the said church under the main name of the Malawi Assemblies of God (Article 1 Section 3 of MAG constitution)

ARTICLE 2 DEFINITIONS (ARTICLE 2 OF MAOG's CONSTITUTION)

- i. The **General Assembly**, whose composition is stipulated in Article 9 section 2 of the Malawi Assemblies of God constitution, shall mean a body of selected and invited delegates, which constitutes the supreme national authority of Malawi Assemblies of God.
- ii. The **National Church** is a term used synonymously with the term Malawi Assemblies of God.
- iii. **National Officers** shall mean the members of the National Board of Administration (NBA)
- iv. The **National Board of Administration** is the body of seven national officers that ran the affairs of the General Assembly (GA), General Presbytery (GP), and the National Executive Committee (NEC) when not in session.
- v. The **National Executive Committee** (NEC) is the body that oversees all activities and programs of the National church.
- vi. The **General Presbytery** (GP) is the second supreme body in authority of Malawi Assemblies of God. It is comprised of members of the National Board of Administration, Division Board of Administration, District Superintendents, National ministry directors, and a Missionary partners' representative.
- vii. The **Division** is an administrative area of the National church. It is made up of several districts and headed by a Division Director.
- viii. The **District** is an administrative area of the National Church and follows the same geographical boundaries of the administrative districts of the nation of Malawi, unless otherwise declared by the General Presbytery. The District Superintendent governs it.
- ix. The **District Assembly** is a supreme governing body for the district.
- x. The **District Superintendent** is the chairperson and leader of the district.
- xi. The **Section** is an administrative area of the National church within a district. It coordinates and oversees the activities of the local assemblies within a selected geographical area.
- xii. The **Presbyter** is the chairperson and leader of the section.
- xiii. The **Local Assembly** is a local body of believers who frequently and regularly gather to fulfill the purposes of Malawi Assemblies of God.

- xiv. The **Indigenous Missionary Churches** are local assemblies that have a pre-set pattern of being self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating and self-theologizing. They also have as their mandate to plant and produce other local assemblies of the same pattern.
- xv. **Church Departments** are organizations that carry out other auxiliary functions of the National church such as provision of health, education, relief, and development.
- xvi. **Church Ministries** are the organizations through which the core functions and purposes of Malawi Assemblies of God are carried through.
- xvii. **Advisory Services** are services rendered by retired ministers, senior ministers, and other professionals, to serving ministers.
- xviii. The **General Presbytery Disciplinary Committee** is the second highest appellate tribunal of Malawi Assemblies of God.
- xix. The **National Disciplinary Council** is the supreme and final appellate tribunal of Malawi Assemblies of God.
- xx. **National Directors of Ministries** are persons given responsibilities to lead and oversee the activities and programs of specific church ministries.
- xxi. The **Pentecostal Church** is a term used to define a National Church or local assembly whose characteristics follow the beliefs and practices of the New Testament church. They believe in the baptism, infilling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit for ministry in this day and age. They also believe that the initial physical evidence of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is speaking in other tongues as the spirit gives utterance.

ARTICLE 3 LOCAL ASSEMBLY (ARTICLE 9 OF MAOG BY-LAWS)

Section 1: Nature

A group of Christians which meets regularly for worship, and is part of a section, and follows the doctrine and policies of Malawi Assemblies of God, shall be recognized as a “local assembly,” and shall fulfill the following requirements: (Article 9 Section 2-MAG constitution)

- I. The local assembly shall have membership list of all those that have attended church regularly for at least six months.
- II. Shall have a pastor supported from the tithes and offerings of the Christians of the local assembly, and from other sources of income of the Local Assembly.
- III. Shall have a board of elders whose lives meet the requirements of the local assembly constitution and the MAG constitution and its by-laws.
- IV. Shall have the following ministries and departments functioning within the local assembly.
 - a. Sunday School
 - b. Women’s Ministries
 - c. Youth ministries
 - d. Men’s ministries
 - e. Children’s ministries
 - f. Missions and evangelism
 - g. Relief, education, and development whenever applicable.
 - h. HIV/AIDS and health
 - i. CHI-ALPHA college ministry whenever applicable.
 - j. Homecells
 - k. Royal Rangers, and other ministries that may be deemed necessary by the assembly.

- V. A local assembly shall support its students attending theological training at an Assemblies of God approved theological institution, by paying their school fees either fully or partially depending on the financial situation and circumstances at the assembly, and by providing any other necessary support.
- VI. Shall have a pastor's house preferably away from the church premises, or shall rent a good house for the pastor, and an approved assembly building, which are kept in a good state of repair.
- VII. Shall be expected to continually grow spiritually, numerically, and financially.

Section 2: Composition

The local assembly shall be composed of

- (i) Credentialed ministers
- (ii) Elders
- (iii) Deacons
- (iv) Registered members

Section 3: Functions

The local assembly exists to carry out the objectives of Malawi Assemblies of God as stated below:

- (i) To encourage and promote the evangelization of the world;
- (ii) To encourage and promote the worship of God the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in truth and in spirit.
- (iii) To encourage and promote the edification of believers;
- (iv) To provide a basis of fellowship among Christians of like precious faith;
- (v) To establish and maintain such departments, institutions and ministries as may be necessary for the propagation of the gospel and the work of Malawi Assemblies of God.
- (v) To promote humanitarian services to the needy.

Section 4 Special Events at the Local Assembly

The local assembly shall participate in all events that are published on the MAG calendar of events every year as follows:

- (i) **Pastors' Appreciation Day** – This is the day when the pastor(s) of the local assembly will be appreciated in a special way for the good work they are doing for the Lord at the assembly. The assembly board shall organize special gifts for the pastor(s) and hand them to him/them at the end of that Sunday's sermon. Ministries and members will also be given an opportunity to present individual gifts to him/them if they so desire. This day does not replace the usual days the church sets aside to present gifts to the pastor's family.
- (ii) **Other special events** – There shall be National Children's Day, AGREDS Day, OMC Day, CHI-ALPHA Day, Evangelism Day, Men's Day, Youth Day, AGARP Day, National Pentecost day, and other national days that may be declared from time to time by the National Executive Committee of Malawi Assemblies of God.

On these special events days, a special offering, in addition to the normal offerings that remain at the church, shall be collected and sent to the national ministry concerned and shall be used for the promotion of that ministry.

Section 5: Standards for Church Membership

Each local assembly shall set a day for receiving new members. All believers, following water baptism, shall serve a period of probation before their reception to full membership, so as to prove their faithfulness to the assembly, and to receive teaching on the fundamental doctrines of Malawi Assemblies of God and other teachings relative to Christian conduct and responsibility of local assembly members.

Requirements for membership are:

- (i) Experience of the new birth.
- (ii) Baptized in water.
- (iii) Holiness of conduct
- (iv) Faithfulness in attendance at all services.
- (v) Faithfulness in paying tithes of their gross income to the local assembly.
- (vi) Faithfulness to the doctrine and policies of Malawi Assemblies of God.
- (vii) Completion of the church membership study.

Section 6: Qualifications for Appointment as Elders/Deacons

- i. Must be born again
- ii. Must be baptized in water
- iii. Must be filled with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.
- iv. Must be faithful in paying all tithes, offerings, and other financial obligations of the local assembly.
- v. Must be faithful in attending all church services and meetings.
- vi. Must adhere to the teachings and doctrines of Malawi Assemblies of God.
- vii. Must live an exemplary and holy life that is above reproach.
- viii. Must be recognized members of the local assembly.
- ix. Must be willing to submit to the authority of the Senior Pastor/other pastors of the assembly.

Section 7: Board of Elders

There shall be a board of elders comprising:

- i. The Senior Pastor
- ii. Associate pastor and/or other pastors appointed by the senior Pastor when he needs them.
- iii. Secretary, treasurer, and heads of ministries/departments.

Section 8: Appointment of Elders/Deacons

- (i) The Elders/deacons, if used interchangeably, shall be appointed by the Senior Pastor every two years. An elder or deacon may be re-appointed by the Senior Pastor depending on his/her performance.
- (ii) However, a church elder/deacon may be removed from the board at any time if he is underperforming or failing to support the vision of the Senior Pastor.

Section 9: Functions of the Board of Elders

The board shall exist to:

- i. Support, promote and multiply the vision of the Senior Pastor.

- ii. Promote the welfare of the pastor in terms of adequate financial support, good accommodation, and any other things related to his well-being including Ministers benefit Fund.
- iii. Ensure that the assembly building and its premises are in good-looking condition.
- iv. Ensure the protection of the pastor and the assembly.
- v. Ensure that all departments are functioning in accordance with the vision of the assembly.
- vi. Receive reports from all departments.
- vii. Review and recommend assembly membership.

Section 10: Board of Administration

There shall be a Board of Administration comprising the following:

- i. Senior Pastor
- ii. Associate/ Assistant Pastors when necessary.
- iii. Secretary
- iv. Treasurer
- v. Any other elder who may be appointed by the Senior Pastor when necessary

Section 11: Duties of the board of Administration

The Board of Administration shall:

- i. Ensure the day-to-day functions of the church.
- ii. Shall come up with proposals on strategic management and budgetary plans to the church board.
- iii. Be responsible for the recruitment and termination of services of support staff.
- iv. Determine and review allowances, salaries and other benefits of the pastors and of the support staff and report the same to the church board.
- v. Facilitate the development of policies of the church e.g. on operations, finances, human resources etc.
- viii. Hear and make decisions relating to discipline.
- ix. Implement strategic management plans and policies.
- x. Act as the secretariat of the church board.
- xi. In the event that the pastor of the church dies, the board of Administration shall ensure that:
 - All funeral arrangements are made in consultation with relevant authorities.
 - The pastor's family remains in the church's house for a period of at least three months, getting the full allowance of the late husband.
 - All logistical arrangements for the family's place of stay and terminal benefits are made.

Section 12: Duties of Officers

(i) The Senior Pastor

The mandate of assigning a Senior Pastor to a local assembly shall be in the hands of the Section, District, Division, or the National Executive Committee. The same committees shall have the prerogative to move a Senior Pastor to another church. The Senior Pastor shall be required to be present at the local assembly at least three Sundays a month unless other circumstances demand his prolonged absence, and shall perform the following duties:

- a. Shall be responsible for the appointment of the board of elders.
- b. Shall be responsible for all spiritual matters of the church.
- c. Shall emphasize and implement the mission of the church.
- d. Shall be the overall in charge of all the work of the church.
- e. Shall provide the vision and be responsible for the setting of a strategic direction of the church.
- f. Shall be the chairman of the board meetings of the church.
- g. Shall be an ex-officio member of all boards and committees of the church.
- h. Shall be responsible for the signing of all official and legal documents unless he delegates when necessary.

(ii) The Associate Pastor

The mandate of inviting and/or removing an associate pastor to a local assembly shall be in the hands of the senior pastor of the local assembly. The senior pastor shall treat the associate pastor as a fellow minister who needs to be respected. Should the services of the associate pastor be genuinely no longer required at the local assembly, the assembly shall ensure that he/she is supported until he/she is assigned to another assembly. The associate pastor(s):

- (a) Shall deputize the Senior Pastor.
- (b) Shall carry out any other duties assigned to him by the Senior Pastor and/or the local assembly from time to time.

(iii) Secretary/Administrative Officer

- a. Shall keep a true record and minutes of all proceedings of church meetings and shall publish the same within 30 days after the meeting.
- b. Shall keep a record of the membership of the church.
- c. Shall distribute information to all members as directed by the Senior Pastor
- d. Shall perform any other duties as directed by the Senior Pastor.
- e. Shall be required to prepare and present reports to the church board.

(iv) Treasurer and/or Business Administrator or Accounts Clerk

- a. Shall be the custodian of all funds and the disbursement of the same under the direction of the Senior Pastor.
- b. Shall ensure that accurate and audited records of all financial transactions of the church are rightly kept.
- c. Shall be responsible for preparing and presenting financial reports to the church board.
- d. Shall ensure that accepted accounting systems are used in keeping accurate financial records.
- e. Shall be responsible for the preparation of the annual budget of the church and submit it to the church board.
- f. Shall be the chairperson of the finance committee.
- g. Shall perform any other duties as may be directed by the Senior Pastor.

Section 13: Meetings

(i) The Church Board:

The church board shall meet at least once every three months

(ii) The Board of Administration

The Board of Administration shall meet at least once every month. Under no circumstances shall any board meet without the presence or sanction of the senior pastor as that will not be deemed to have been done with good intentions.

Section 14: Finances

(i) Opening accounts

Every local assembly is encouraged to open an account with the bank of their choice and the pastor shall be the main signatory. Keeping church funds in a member's or pastor's house is discouraged.

(ii) General Fund

Every local church shall send one tenth of the church's monthly income to the division office. Any local church that fails to pay its church tithe for three months in a year shall result in its board of Administration being put on discipline by relevant authorities.

(iii) Missions

Malawi Assemblies of God is a Missions church. Therefore every local assembly shall send adequate monthly financial support to the National Missions Fund through the division.

(iv) Every first Sunday of the month shall be a missions Sunday and a missions offering shall be taken.

(iv) Education/Training

The educational/training institution is a very important institution of Malawi Assemblies of God. Its operations are supposed to be supported by MAG local assemblies. Therefore, every local assembly shall send financial support to the education/training department every month through the division.

(v) Ministers' benefit fund

This fund is meant to take care of the minister's financial needs after retiring from active ministry. Therefore, each local assembly shall send its pastors' monthly contribution towards the fund in line with Article 8 Section 3 of the By Laws of MAG.

(vi) National Properties Council

The National Properties Council is responsible for raising funds for assisting in roofing church buildings of churches that fail to do it on their own especially rural churches. Each local assembly shall therefore contribute 1% of its total monthly income to the division in accordance with the MAG Constitution and By Laws.

ARTICLE 4 PASTORS' WIVES

Wives of pastors shall support the ministry of their husbands. They shall also act as advisors to the local church's OMC ministry. Members of the local church shall treat the pastors' wives with the same respect they give to the pastors. However, the wives will behave in a respectable manner at all times and under no circumstances shall they treat the local church members with contempt.

Pastors' wives will endeavor to attend at least one year's training at a recognized MAG training institution or extension school.

If a senior pastor's wife is also a recognized minister with ministry credentials, she shall be free to be appointed as an assistant pastor but not associate pastor, provided that she will cease to serve as an assistant pastor of the local assembly when the husband is on discipline, or has been transferred to another assembly. However, when the husband, who is the senior pastor, dies, she will continue to be an assistant pastor at the local assembly.

ARTICLE 5 CODE OF CONDUCT

Section 1 This article should be read together with the provisions spelt out in Articles 16 and 17 of MAG By-Laws. It should also be regarded as a clarification on issues that are not clearly spelt out therein.

Section 2 The Local church code of conduct is a set of guidelines and standards that have to do with the general behavior of members of Malawi Assemblies of God. Whereas Malawian cultures differ from one area to another, Christian conduct is primarily a reflection of Christ like character. It demonstrates our loyalty to God despite our existing diversity of cultures.

Therefore, deliberate breach of this code of conduct will be reasonable cause for disciplinary action. The local assembly board of administration shall be responsible to determine when an action constitutes a ground for discipline.

Among such causes for disciplinary action shall be:

Section 3 Unbecoming Behavior or Moral Indiscretion.

The Following Are Examples:

- (i) Spouse battery (beating)
- (ii) Habit of running into debts or getting involved in usury.
- (iii) Failure to honor debts
- (iv) Habit of begging
- (v) Proposing for extra-marital affairs
- (vi) Lack of confidentiality
- (vii) Lack of sound judgment on moral issues
- (viii) Backbiting and false accusations
- (ix) When found guilty of sexual misconduct including appearance of evil such as: being found at awkward places and at awkward hours that would be considered highly suspicious with a member of the opposite sex (1 Thessalonians 5:22); doing acts that would be considered indecent on a member of the opposite sex such as touching him/ her on sensitive body parts such as buttocks, breasts, thighs, private parts etc; enticing a member of the opposite sex for indecent acts.
- (x) When found guilty of a crime by a court of law.
- (xi) Membership into secret societies or sects.
- (xii) Financial misconduct whether in or outside the church
- (xiii) Failing to tithe for three or more months in a year.

Section 4 Insubordination to Church Authorities by Local Assembly Pastors

The pastors of a local assembly may be disciplined by the section, district, or division for constant refusal to be transferred when there is a just cause such as: Collapse of relationships between the pastor(s) and the congregation; lack of growth of the church after several years of ministry (five years and above).

Section 5 Insubordination to Church Authority by Local Assembly Members

Local assembly members may be put on discipline for any of the following:

- (i) Rebellion against church leadership
- (ii) Lack of loyalty/inciting disloyalty among church members
- (iii) Unconstructive criticism of church authorities
- (iv) Arbitrary rejection of counsel from authorities
- (v) Trying to unconstitutionally evict a pastor from the local assembly
- (vi) Being disrespectful to authorities either by word or demeanor.
- (vii) Creating factions in the church
- (viii) Indulging in acts of violence either in the church or outside of it.
- (ix) Fighting against the fundamental beliefs of MAG

Section 6 Abuse of Church Sanctuary

- (i) Using the sanctuary for business or activities that bring disrespect to the name of the Lord.
- (ii) Perpetual neglect of proper upkeep of the sanctuary.

Section 7 Violation of Christian Courtesy

- (i) A member should be kind to an incoming pastor after a former one has been transferred to another church
- (ii) A member should never despise a new pastor or his work in comparison with one that got transferred to another church.
- (iii) A member should never campaign for a pastor to come to the pastorate.
- (iv) A member should not undermine the loyalty of the congregation to the pastor.
- (v) A member should not form factions in the church.
- (vi) A member should not disrespect a fellow member without just cause.

ARTICLE 6

DISCIPLINE (IN LINE WITH ARTICLE 17 OF MAOG BY-LAWS)

Section 1 Nature and Purposes of Discipline

Discipline is an exercise of scriptural authority for which the church is responsible. The aims of discipline are that God may be honored, that the purity and wellbeing of the church may be maintained, and that those under discipline may be brought to repentance and restoration.

Discipline is to be administered for the restoration of the member while fully providing for the protection of the spiritual wellbeing of the local assembly. It is to be redemptive as well as corrective in nature and must be exercised under a dispensation of mercy.

Section 2 Disciplinary Procedures for Local Assembly Members

- (i) The Local Assembly Board of Administration shall hear disciplinary cases and administer discipline of local assembly members as laid down in the local assembly constitution, and the constitution of MAG and its By-Laws.
- (ii) If unsatisfied with the ruling of a Local Assembly court, either the complainant or the defendant has a right of appeal to the section. That such appeal cases shall be handled by separate committees appointed specifically for this purpose. These committees shall be functional at both the section and district levels.

Procedure for the Appointment of Appeal Committees.

- (a) The Section/District Board of Administration shall appoint two experienced pastors and two spiritually mature members from within their areas of jurisdiction to handle such appeal cases.
- (b) The appeal committees shall begin to hear the appeal cases within 30 days of receiving the same.
- (c) An appeal committee shall be appointed to serve a term of four years and will serve concurrently with the current section/district board of administration.

Divisional leaders may intervene in section and district cases that prove to be too difficult for them to handle, provided that such intervention shall be done in consultation with leaders of those offices.

- (iii) A case shall be heard within thirty days after being received at any of the levels. If it is not heard within the thirty days, the appellant has the right of appeal to a higher court.
- (iv) Any member found to be beyond corrective discipline shall be excommunicated from the fellowship of Malawi Assemblies of God. Once excommunicated, such a member will under no circumstances be accepted as a member in another Assemblies of God church.

Procedure for the Re-admission of Excommunicated Members.

If an excommunicated member decides to re-join Malawi Assemblies of God, the decision to accept him/her back into the fellowship will depend on how genuinely repentant he/she is. The procedure for re-admission will be as follows:

- (a) He/she shall write an application for re-admission
- (b) The application shall be addressed to the body that excommunicated him/her
- (c) Upon receipt of the application, the concerned body shall require the applicant to appear before it for an interview.
- (d) If convinced that genuine repentance and submission have taken place, the concerned body shall require the applicant to be under observation at his/her church of choice, and the pastor of that church will provide necessary information for re-admission or rejection of the same. The period of observation shall be at least six months but not more than one year.

Section 3 Duration and Requirements of Discipline for Local Assembly Members

- (i) The period of restoration shall not be more than six months except when the violation involves sexual misconduct such as: adultery, fornication, homosexuality, child abuse, incest, bestiality, or etc, in which case it shall be for at least 6 months but not exceeding 12 months.
- (ii) A member on discipline shall be required to attend all local assembly programs and activities but shall not be permitted to take any leading role.
- (iii) During the period of discipline, a member shall be permitted to participate in partaking the Holy Communion because he/she is still a born again and needs to fellowship with the body of believers in this regard provided that he/she has been exhibiting a repentant spirit.
- (iv) Every member on discipline shall pay his/her tithes to the local assembly faithfully.
- (v) In the event that a member dies while on discipline, he/she shall be accorded all rites of a Christian burial (singing hymns, preaching, burial ceremony etc.) provided a public statement shall be made concerning the situation.
- (vi) Restoration of a member on discipline shall depend on his/her demonstration of true repentance, and active participation in all church programs in line with (ii) and (iv) above.
- (vii) **Burial of Prospective Members**
In the event that a local assembly MAG pastor is invited to preach at a prospective member's funeral, the occasion shall be treated as an opportunity to evangelize the lost. However, members of the assembly shall not be obliged to take a leading role as they do for a member of their assembly. A statement will also have to be made that the church is doing that for the sake of preaching to the living souls present at the funeral. Hymns may either be sung and the usual pronouncements from the pastor's handbook be made or not during the burial ceremony depending on the pastor's and church board's prayerful decision as they treat each individual case as it occurs.

ARTICLE 7

AMENDMENTS (ARTICLE 30 OF MAOG CONSTITUTION)

Amendments to the constitution may be made at any duly constituted General Assembly meeting of Malawi Assemblies of God, provided the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing by the Secretary General to District Assemblies through the divisions at least three months before the said meeting. To be adopted, amendments shall require a two-thirds vote of the members present.