The *Saeima*1 has adopted and

the President has proclaimed the following law:

**Law on the United Methodist Church of Latvia**

**Section 1. Terms Used in the Law**

(1) The terms used in the Law correspond to the terms used in the Law on Religious Organisations unless it has been laid down otherwise in this Law.

(2) The following terms are used in the Law:

1) **Church**– the United Methodist Church of Latvia with all its congregations;

2) **Bishop of the Church**– the superintendent who has assumed the office and leads the Church in accordance with the procedures laid down in the articles of association;

3) **clergy of the Church**– the ecclesiastics included in the list of clergy of the Church;

4) **house of worship**– a building which has been built or adapted for holding services;

5) **pastoral conversation**– a conversation between a clergy and layperson on initiative of a layperson in the premises of worship or in another place where the regular care of a clergy of the Church is not available;

6) **articles of association**– the articles of association of the Church which, in accordance with the procedures laid down in the law, have been registered with the Register of Religious Organisations and the Institutions Thereof.

**Section 2. Purpose and Task of the Law**

(1) The purpose of the Law is to promote the development of an open, judicial, and harmonious society, and also that of cultural environment.

(2) According to the constitutional traditions and the provision of Article 99 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, taking into account the continuous existence and spread in the territory of Latvia of the Church as a religious organisation that is traditional in Latvia, and also recognising its contribution to and rich experience in the fields of the physical and mental health of the society, education, culture, social assistance, and other fields, the task of the Law is to govern legal relationship between the State and the Church and to determine the joint tasks of the State and the Church in social, legal, educational, and cultural field.

**Section 3. Status of the Church**

(1) The Church holds the status of a legal entity and the rights arising from it in accordance with the laws and regulations.

(2) The Church shall conform in its activity to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, this Law, the Law on Religious Organisations, and other laws and regulations governing the activity of religious organisations, and also the articles of association of the Church.

(3) The State shall recognise the right of the Church to interpret the Holy Scripture of the Bible, to formulate its dogma (doctrine) and to preach it, to shape its internal life, including its organisational structure and mission.

(4) The decisions of the Church on canonical issues shall not be subject to appeal in State institutions.

(5) The full name of the Church is the United Methodist Church of Latvia. The name of the Church may only be used by the Church and the congregations in its composition and the institutions and bodies founded by the Church. The names of other religious organisations, associations, foundations, and legal subjects shall be unequivocally different from the name of the Church.

(6) The Church may request that unlawful use of its name is terminated, and also the losses caused to the Church are reimbursed.

**Section 4. Bishop of the Church**

(1) The Bishop of the Church shall represent the Church in relationship with the State.

(2) The Bishop of the Church may, in the cases and in accordance with the procedures laid down in the articles of the association of the Church, authorise in writing other persons for operation in relationship with the State on behalf of the Church.

**Section 5. Property of the Church**

(1) The Church may have movable and immovable property in the ownership.

(2) The acquisition, alienation, pledging and other encumbering of immovable properties of the Church with property rights shall be possible only with a written consent of the Bishop of the Church. It shall not be necessary if the immovable property is alienated in accordance with the law On Expropriation of Immovable Property for State or Public Needs. The houses of worship and cemeteries in the ownership of the Church shall not be subject to expropriation. If a congregation of the Church has decided to acquire in ownership, alienate, pledge, or otherwise encumber immovable property with the property rights, it shall inform the Bishop of the Church thereof in writing in advance.

(3) It is prohibited to pledge houses of worship and ceremonial objects, and recovery upon request of creditors may not be directed against them.

(4) If any of the congregations within the composition of the Church is being liquidated, its property shall be transferred into the ownership of the Church in accordance with the procedures laid down in the articles of association of the congregation. The property of the liquidated institutions of the Church shall transfer into the ownership or possession of the Church in accordance with the procedures laid down in the articles of association of the Church.

**Section 6. Right of Clergy of the Church to Perform a Marriage Ceremony**

Such clergy of the Church to whom the Church has granted an authorisation and who have been entered in the list of clergy with the right to perform a marriage ceremony submitted to the Ministry of Justice are entitled to perform a marriage ceremony in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Civil Law and other laws and regulations.

**Section 7. Religious Burial Ceremonies**

The Church may perform religious burial ceremonies also in the cemeteries arranged by local governments and in crematoria in accordance with the procedures stipulated by local governments.

**Section 8. Protection of a Pastoral Conversation**

(1) A clergy of the Church may not be interrogated and it may not be demanded that he or she discloses the information established during a pastoral conversation even if such clergy is a witness or a participant to the proceedings in a court.

(2) It is prohibited to obtain information during pastoral conversations by using operational activities measures.

(3) None of the authorities or officials shall be allowed to recruit a clergy of the Church.

**Section 9. Church and Military Service**

Persons in the National Armed Forces have the right to receive spiritual care by a clergy of the Church and to participate in the Church services unless it hinders the fulfilment of the duties of military service.

**Section 10. Spiritual Activity of Chaplains of the Church**

(1) Chaplains of the Church shall operate in the National Armed Forces, airports, ports, land transport stations, medical treatment institutions, medical care institutions and social care institutions, prisons, and in other places where the regular care of a clergy of the Church is not available in accordance with the Law on Religious Organisations.

(2) The spiritual activity of chaplains of the Church shall be supervised by the Church.

**Section 11. Relationship of the Church with Employees**

In establishing, existence, amending, and termination of employment relationship with employees, the Church is entitled to be based on religious affiliation, readiness, and ability of a person to operate in good faith and loyalty in relation to the Church dogma (doctrine), and also on the aggregate of moral, behavioural norms, principles, and ideals which form the basis of the Methodist religious conviction.

**Section 12. Church and Education**

The Church has the right to teach the Christian religious instruction in State and local government educational institutions in accordance with the procedures laid down in laws and regulations.

**Section 13. List of the Clergy of the Church**

(1) The Church shall submit a list of such persons to the Ministry of Justice in writing who conform to the status of clergy of the Church referred to in Section 1, Clause 3 of this Law and who are entitled to perform the activities referred to in Sections 6 and 10 of this Law, and also information on such persons. The amount of information to be submitted to the Ministry of Justice, the procedures and time periods for the submission and updating thereof shall be determined by the Cabinet.

(2) The Church shall, within two weeks, notify the Ministry of Justice of changes in the information provided for in Paragraph one of this Section in writing.

(3) The information submitted to the Ministry of Justice shall be accessible to the public.

**Transitional Provisions**

1. The Church shall, by 1 May 2008, harmonise the articles of association with this Law by making the relevant amendments to the articles of association, approving them in a new wording, and submitting them to the Ministry of Justice for registration in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Law on Religious Organisations.

2. The Church shall, by 1 June 2008, notify the data referred to in Section 13, Paragraph one of this Law to the Ministry of Justice.

The Law shall come into force on 1 May 2008.

The Law has been adopted by the *Saeima* on 17 May 2007.

President V. Vīķe-Freiberga

Rīga, 7 June 2007