

Constitution and Bylaws

Grace Covenant Church of Weatherford Est. 2015

CONSTITUTION

Article I. Name

The name of this church shall be Grace Covenant Church of Weatherford.

Article II. Foundation, Object and Priorities of Ministry

- (1) The foundation of this church is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11), and its code of guidance in all its affairs, the Word of God, and this church does here affirm its faith that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of Almighty God (Mark 13:31).
- (2) The object of this church shall be to worship God according to the teaching of His Word, to practice the precepts and examples of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in the New Testament, to sustain its ordinances and doctrines and to preach and propagate among all peoples the gospel of salvation that is by personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
- (3) The priorities of ministry of this church flow from the vision of God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ. We exist to savor this vision in worship (John 4:23), strengthen the vision in nurture and education (1 Corinthians 14:26; 2 Peter 3:18), and spread the vision in evangelism, missions, and loving deeds (1 Peter 2:9, 3:15; Matthew 28:18-20, 5:16). The purpose of Grace Covenant Church is to equip God's people to delight in His glory and declare that glory to the nations.

Doctrinal Statement

I. The Word of God

We believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to humanity, and thus the sixty-six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God. *Jeremiah 23:28-29; 1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21*

We believe the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. *2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Mark 13:31; John 8:31-32; John 20:31; Acts 20:32*

II. The Trinity

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that these are equal in every divine perfection and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence and redemption. *Genesis 1:1, 26; John 1:1, 3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:5-6*

III. God the Father

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. We believe that He orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace. *Luke 10:21-22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16, 6:27; Romans 1:7; 1 Timothy 1:1-2, 2:5-6; 1 Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6; Isaiah 46:9-10*

As the only absolute and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence and redemption. In His sovereignty, He is neither author nor approver of sin nor does He waive the accountability of His creatures. He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own, not based on anything we have done but according to His own good pleasure. *Genesis 1:1-31; Revelation 4:11; Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36; 1 Timothy 6:13-16; Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47; 1 Peter 1:17; James 1:13; Ephesians 1:4-6, 2:8-9*

IV. Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary, propitiatory (satisfaction of His Father's holiness, thereby averting His wrath) death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people and personal, visible return to earth. We believe Jesus Christ is coequal, consubstantial (i.e., having the same substance, nature or essence), and coeternal with the Father. *Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1, 14, 10:30, 14:9, 20:28; Romans 8:46, 9:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30-31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8, 6:9-10; Hebrews 1:8, 7:25, 9:28; 1 Timothy 3:16; Isaiah 9:6-7; 2 Peter 1:1*

We believe that in the Incarnation (God becoming man), Christ surrendered only the prerogatives of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind. *Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9*

We believe that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness. *Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9-10; Colossians 2:9*

We believe that on the basis of the efficacy (effectiveness) of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, every genuine believer is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day the very presence of sin; and that he/she is declared righteous (justification), given eternal life and adopted into the family of God. *Romans 3:25, 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18*

We believe that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, God the Father displayed to His creation the deity of His Son and gave proof that He accepted the propitiatory work of Christ on the cross. *Isaiah 53:10-12*

V. The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit who came forth from the Father and the Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign agent in regeneration. It is His work to indwell, sanctify, instruct, empower for service and seal until the day of redemption all who believe on Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ and that He is an abiding helper, teacher and guide. He is a divine person, eternal, underived (having no beginning or source), possessing all the attributes of personality and deity. In all the divine attributes, He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father and the Son. *John 14:16-17, 26, 15:26-27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Acts 2:15-20; Hebrews 10:15-16; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13*

VI. Humanity

We believe that humanity was directly and immediately created by God in His own image and likeness, free from sin, with a rational nature, intelligence and volition; yet with a moral responsibility to the God who created him. *Genesis 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Genesis 2:7, 15-25; James 3:9*

We believe that God's intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God by enjoying Him forever. *Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11*

We believe that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, humanity lost its innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God and became inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. Thus, every human being is utterly depraved and, having no recuperative powers to enable him to rescue himself, is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is, therefore, wholly of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1-19; John 3:36; Romans 3:10-11, 23, 5:12, 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 John 1:8, 8-9*

We believe that because all humanity descended from Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all of humanity (Jesus Christ, having no human father, being the only exception). All of humanity is thus sinful by nature, by choice and by divine declaration, spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins, and by nature, children of God's wrath. *Psalms 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-18, 23, 5:10-12; Ephesians 2:1-3*

VII. Salvation

A. Election

We believe that election is the sole act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ all whom He graciously regenerates, saves and sanctifies. *Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2*

We believe that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of human beings to their Creator. Spiritually dead humanity, however, can never be considered righteous and none will ever understand spiritual truths, much less ever seek after God on their own accord. Therefore, God's sovereign grace includes the only means of receiving the gift of salvation. God's sovereign election always results in what God determines. Therefore, all whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith and all who come in faith the Father will receive. *Isaiah 55:6-7; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Ephesians 2:1-2; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 3:10-18; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Peter 1:1; Ephesians 2:4-5; John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:28-30, 9:11-16; Ephesians 1:4-11*

We believe when God grants grace to utterly depraved sinners, it is not related to any initiative of their own, nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely on the basis of His sovereign purpose and will. *Ephesians 1:4-8; 2 Peter 1:1; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:1-2*

B. Regeneration

We believe that man was created by God in His own image; that he sinned and thereby incurred physical, spiritual and eternal death, which is separation from God. As a consequence, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners and therefore under condemnation. We believe that those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit repent and forsake sin and trust Jesus Christ as Savior become new creatures, delivered from condemnation and recipients of eternal life. *Genesis 1:26, 5:2, 3:1-24, 2:17, 3:19; Ecclesiastes 2:11; John 3:14, 5:24, 5:30, 7:13, 8:12, 10:26; Romans 9:22; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 19:3, 20, 20:10, 14-15, 21:18; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19, 5:19; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9; John 1:13, 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1*

We believe that regeneration is manifested by fruits consistent with repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works will be the proper evidence and fruit of genuine repentance. *Matthew 7:18-21; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:10*

C. Justification

We believe that justification is the act of God by which He declares man righteous. This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. By this means, God is able to "be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (*Romans 3:26*). *Romans 8:33, 3:20, 4:6; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:26*

D. Sanctification

We believe that every genuine believer experiences justification before God. Therefore, having been justified, we believe that in the daily life of the believer he/she is being progressively conformed to the likeness of Christ. In this respect, every saved person is involved in a daily conflict – the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh (indwelling sin). Those who are genuinely saved will persevere to the end in this battle against the flesh. *John 17:17, 19; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 5:23; Matthew 24:13*

E. Perseverance of the Saints/Preservation by the Savior

We believe that all those regenerated by the Spirit of God will be likewise kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ. *John 5:24, 6:37-40, 10:27-30; Romans 5:9-10, 8:1,31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 4:30; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 7:25, 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24*

Paralleling the clear teachings concerning the security of the true believer, however, are also warnings to the professing church concerning the perseverance of those who claim the name of Christ (cf., Matthew 24:9-13; Hebrews 10:23-39; Revelation 2-3). We believe that the true children of God, chosen from the foundation of the world, *will* stand firm for Christ to the end.

We believe that references to those who do "fall away" (Matthew 24:10), whose "love will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12) are references to men and women who claim that they are in Christ but, in reality, are not. Christ taught that the kingdom of God – the genuine elect of God – will be infiltrated with tares, those who claim – and may even think – that they are in Christ but, in reality, are not (Matthew 7:21, 13:24-30, 37-42). These professors – tares – may be members of the church in general but have never been true citizens of the kingdom of God.

For these reasons, we believe that these warnings should be taken seriously by all of us who claim the name of Christ, including the leadership of Grace Covenant Church, "so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28). Only the genuine elect of God will ever experience the promise of Christ "that of all that He [the Father] has given Me [Christ] I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:39). Therefore, we teach and encourage all who claim the name of Christ to "test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5; cf., 1 Corinthians 10:12).

We believe that it is the privilege of all genuine believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, but we also teach that God's Word clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for sinful living and carnality. For that reason, we teach that "faith, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17). *Romans 6:1-2, 15-22; 13:13-14; Galatians 5:13, 25-26; Titus 2:11-14*

VIII. The Church

We believe in the universal church, a living spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all regenerated persons are members. We believe in the local church, consisting of a company of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized on a credible profession of faith and associated for worship, ministry and fellowship. We believe that the overflow of the worship of this glorious God will lead the members of the local church to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. *Ephesians 2:19-22; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:19-21; Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:23-25*

We believe that every child of God is baptized by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the bride of Christ, of which Christ is the Head. We also believe that the bride of Christ includes Old Testament saints (Isaiah 54:5-6, 62:4-5; Hosea 2:19-20). *1 Corinthians 12:12-13; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18*

We believe that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures and that the members of the one spiritual, universal body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25). *Acts 13:1-3, 14:23, 27, 20:1, 7, 28; Romans 16:1-5, 16; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1*

We believe that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors and pastor-teachers. Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11). The local congregation is to submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17). The biblically designated officers serving the assembly under the direction of the elders are deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Both elders and deacons must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
Ephesians 1:22, 5:23; Colossians 1:18

We believe that these leaders who lead or rule "well" are worthy of double honor before the church, but likewise, those who continue to sin in a manner contradictory to the biblical qualifications while holding the office and responsibility of an elder must be publicly rebuked before the congregation for the purpose of making the church fearful of sinning (1 Timothy 5:17-22).

We believe in the importance of discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2) and mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matthew 18:5-14), as well as the need for discipline of unrepentant members of the congregation in accordance with the standards of Scripture.
Matthew 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16

IX. Christian Conduct

We believe that a Christian should live for the glory of God and the wellbeing of his fellow men; that his conduct should be blameless before the world; that he should be a faithful steward of his possessions and that he should seek to realize for himself and others the full stature of maturity in Christ. *1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 12:1-3; Hebrews 12:1-2; John 14:15, 23-24; 1 John 2:3-6; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Colossians 1:9-10*

X. The Ordinances

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances to the local church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of the believer in water into the name of the triune God. We believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for commemoration of His death. We believe that these two ordinances should be observed and administered until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not believe these ordinances hold any salvific value; that is, they do not convey saving grace upon the recipient. *Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

XI. Religious Liberty

We believe that every human being is created in the image of God and is responsible to God alone in all matters of faith; that each church is independent and must be free from interference by any ecclesiastical or political authority. *1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 14:7-9, 12*

XII. The Last Things

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and in His eternal kingdom in heaven. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal felicity of the righteous and the endless suffering of the wicked. *Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Philippians 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; 2 Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:4-6, 11-15*

Our Church Covenant

- (1) Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.
- (2) We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.
- (3) We also engage to maintain family and personal devotions; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements and exemplary in our deportment, to avoid all gossip, backbiting and excessive anger; to seek God's help in abstaining from all drugs, food, drink, and practices that bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.
- (4) We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always be ready for reconciliation and mindful of the guidelines of our Savior to secure it without delay.
- (5) We moreover engage that when we move from this place, we will, if possible, unite with a church where we can carry out the articles of this confession and the spirit of this covenant.

Article III. Membership

The membership of this church shall consist of persons who confess faith on the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior; who give evidence of regeneration by living consistently with their profession and with the views of faith, doctrine and practice of this church; who have been baptized by immersion and who have been received into its membership according to the Bylaws of this church. It will be required that each person who desires membership in Grace Covenant Church will go through the eight-week *Foundations of Church Membership* course. Furthermore, they will be required to submit a membership profile in which they understand and agree to abide by and be held accountable for the church's beliefs, positions and policies as outlined in these Constitution and Bylaws. Should disagreement in any of these areas ever occur, members will hold Grace Covenant Church and its leadership "harmless;" there will be no appeal to any court. Membership in Grace Covenant Church will not vest in any member any proprietary rights in the church but shall only entitle the member to vote on those matters submitted to the church membership by the Council of Elders.

Article IV. Leadership and Organization

- (1) The officers of the church shall be elders and deacons. The purpose of the elders of the church is to lovingly govern, care for and equip the membership to do the work of the ministry. The purpose of the deacons is to lovingly serve the needs of the membership.
- (2) The leadership of the church shall be vested in the Council of Elders who are responsible for governing the church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this church. The elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. Under the authority of Jesus Christ and the Word of God, this plurality of elders is the final authority within this local church. The Council of Elders shall have authority in the following areas:
 - a) Accept members into the church, give letters of transfer or recommendation to members or drop members from the church roll
 - b) Appoint officers of the church
 - c) Discipline members by dismissing them and discipline officers by removing them from office
 - d) Approve annual budgets of the church, authorize any expenditure of the funds of the church when such expenditure is not covered by an approved budget and approve any transactions regarding real property
 - e) Adopt, amend or repeal the Constitution or Bylaws of this church. The membership will be notified of any such adoptions, amendments or repeals
 - f) Approve the call, job description and initial salary of Vocational Pastors and Ministers
- (3) Deacons shall assist the Council of Elders by performing services of advice, administration and implementation of ministry.

Article V. Church Property

- (1) In the event of a division of this church, from which may God in His mercy save us, the property of this church shall belong to that group of such division as represents the largest portion of the church membership, provided such group is loyal to this Constitution; otherwise it shall belong to the group remaining loyal to this Constitution though it may not be the largest group in such division.
- (2) Should a condition arise at any time in the future when for any reason, the church work cannot continue, the church property shall be sold to retire any debt and the remaining proceeds shall be donated to Grace Community Church of Glen Rose, Texas.
- (3) Should conditions arise where a consolidation with another church of the same beliefs be advisable, the Council of Elders shall be authorized by the church to negotiate the terms of such consolidation in so far as the property of this church is concerned.

Article VI. Revisions, Additions and Amendments

Revisions, additions or amendments of this constitution may be made only in the following manner:

- a. Any proposed revision, addition or amendment must be submitted in writing to the Council of Elders.

- b. There must be a subsequent meeting in order to allow for adequate discussion of the matter(s). If such a meeting allows for ample discussion and reflection on the matter, then a decision may be made.
- c. If necessary, an optional third meeting may be convened for a decision to be reached on the matter under consideration.

BYLAWS

ARTICLE I. Membership

Section 1. GENERAL PROCEDURE. All actions regarding membership, either of admission or dismissal, shall be made by the Council of Elders and presented to the church body.

Section 2. ADMISSION BY BAPTISM. Any person professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, giving evidence of change of heart, and having accepted the faith, aims and ideals of this church as expressed in the Doctrinal Statement and Church Covenant, may be received into membership by baptism, upon the decision of the Council of Elders. Valid New Testament baptism is that which is received after one's commitment to Christ. The church holds that baptism is not necessary for salvation, but rather is an important step of obedience in every believer's life and walk with Christ. For this reason, it is a requirement for church membership at Grace Covenant Church.

Section 3. ADMISSION BY EXPERIENCE OR RESTORATION. All applicants for membership other than by baptism – that is, by Christian experience if previously baptized or by restoration – shall be received into the church in the same way as those by baptism, except the ordinance shall not be administered.

Section 4. INSTRUCTION TO NEW MEMBERS. All persons uniting with this church in any of the ways set forth in Sections 1 through 3 above shall previously have completed the eight-week *Foundations of Church Membership* course. New members shall pledge themselves to fulfill their stewardship obligations as to worship, service and giving when they make public profession of faith and join the church. If the individual has not yet submitted to believer's baptism, they shall agree to do so, as well as testifying publicly with the other membership candidates of their faith in Christ and their support of the church.

Section 5. DISMISSAL OF MEMBERS ON GROUNDS OTHER THAN CHURCH DISCIPLINE. Members in good standing who have fulfilled their obligations to the church or satisfactorily arranged the same with the elders, shall upon request be granted a letter of character to unite with such a church as they may designate. Such letter of character shall be sent to the Pastor or the Clerk of the church the member intends to join. Members who shall unite with another church without such letter shall be dropped from the church roll.

ARTICLE II. Church Government

Section 1. GENERAL STATEMENT

- (a) **Officers.** The Officers of the Church shall be a Council of Elders and the Deacons. Officers shall be called to office by affirmation of the membership of the church. All officers of the church shall be members of the church in good and regular standing.

- (b) Committees and Appointees. The Council of Elders has the authority to create committees and positions to which it may delegate any specified aspect of its responsibility. The Council of Elders has the authority to dissolve any committee or position that it created. The Council of Elders also has the authority to appoint elders, deacons or other members of the church to serve as members of such committees and to act as its agents in such positions. Every committee shall have a chairperson, responsible for the overall operation of the committee, whom the Council of Elders shall appoint. The Council of Elders may delegate the responsibility for selecting the chairperson to the committee. These committees shall exist for the specific time period so directed by the Council of Elders. These committees shall perform tasks solely in accordance with the duties and with powers specifically delegated by the Council. The general functions of the committees will be:

- (1) To bring considered recommendations to the Council concerning ministries
- (2) To provide a wider base of counsel to the elders in their general oversight of specific ministries

Section 2. VOCATIONAL PASTORS AND MINISTERS

- (a) Definition. Vocational Pastors are the ordained elders of the church, who in response to God's call, have devoted their vocational lives to the ministry of the Word and prayer in the service of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Vocational Ministers are the non-ordained ministers of the church who, in response to God's call, serve the church as their primary vocation. Both Vocational Pastors and Vocational Ministers are supported financially by the church in return for their vocational labors.
- (b) Duties. In addition to the duties of their office as described in Sections 4 and 5 below, Vocational Pastors and Ministers shall perform the duties determined by the Council of Elders. The duties shall be in writing at the time of the call to service and substantial changes shall be approved by the Council of Elders.

The church's call of a Vocational Pastor is a call to the eldership of the church. Therefore, Vocational Pastors shall be members of the Council of Elders and have all the Biblical qualifications of an Elder.

Vocational Ministers are not necessarily called to the eldership, but are assisting partners in the ministry. Therefore, Vocational Ministers shall be deacons. Vocational Ministers may, when appropriate, be added to the Council of Elders from the deacons.

- (c) Calling of Vocational Pastors and Ministers. The Council of Elders shall have the responsibility of all hiring and terminating of Vocational Pastors and Ministers.
- (d) Termination of Vocational Call.
- (1) By resignation. The question of terminating the vocational call of a Vocational Pastor or Minister shall be considered at any time by the Council of Elders upon the presentation of the Pastor's or Minister's resignation.
 - (2) Grievance. Where a grievance exists against a Pastor or Minister, either due to his preaching or teaching contrary to the beliefs of the church as set forth in Article II ("Doctrinal Statement") of this Constitution or to alleged conduct on his part unfitting an elder or deacon, such grievance may be brought before the Council of Elders by

any two members in good standing, following the procedure prescribed in Article VII (Discipline) of this Constitution. If the Council, after thorough investigation and consideration, believes the grievance to be true and substantial, then the vocational call of the Pastor or Minister may be terminated upon the decision of the Council of Elders.

Section 3. LAY OFFICERS

- (a) Definition. Lay officers are the non-vocational elders and deacons of the church.
- (b) Duties. The duties of lay elders and deacons are described in Sections 4 and 5 below.
- (c) Calling. The Council of Elders shall recognize, interview and investigate candidates for lay elder and deacon. The Council shall provide for individual members of the church either to nominate candidates or to present themselves to the Council as candidates for office and for the Council's further investigation. In no instance shall any individual be considered a nominee for the office without the nominee's consent. In those cases where the Council of Elders concludes that a nominee is not qualified for office, they shall so inform the nominee stating the reasons for this conclusion.
- (d) Removal.
 - (1) Resignation. An officer may resign his office at any time if he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of the office.
 - (2) Grievance. Where a grievance exists against an officer of the church either due to the adherence to and propagation of beliefs contrary to the beliefs of the church as set forth in Article II ("Doctrinal Statement") of this Constitution or to alleged conduct on his part unfitting an elder or deacon, such grievance may be brought before the Council of Elders by any two members in good standing, following the procedures prescribed in Article VII ("Discipline") in this Constitution. If the Council, after thorough investigation and consideration, believes the grievance to be true and substantial, then the officer may be removed from office upon the recommendation of the Council of Elders.

Section 4. COUNCIL OF ELDERS

- (a) Composition and Calling. The Council of Elders shall be composed of men, both lay elders and vocational elders. The Council of Elders shall always be a plurality (more than one), to be composed of a minimum of three members, with the number of lay elders (non-payrolled) always exceeding by at least one, the number of staff elders (those on the payroll of Grace Covenant Church). The total number of elders at any time on the Council of Elders shall be determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men in the church.

The man who holds the full-time office of pastor/teacher will also hold the office of elder.

Other candidates will be carefully examined by the Council of Elders as to their qualifications and support of both the doctrine and practice of the church.

A potential elder must have proven himself as a man of elder character and ability within the context of Grace Covenant Church for no less than a period of one year.

The following steps will be the process by which an individual will be screened and evaluated in terms of discerning God's hand upon that person's life, in qualifying him for a leadership position within Grace Covenant Church:

- (1) Initiation. The individual responds to God's working in his life by expressing a desire to serve in a leadership capacity.
 - (2) Consultation. The Council of Elders and the individual meet together to discuss the biblical qualifications for service, agreement with the doctrine and constitution of Grace Covenant Church, expectations of the ministry, and/or other areas that may be deemed pertinent and beneficial by either the elders or the individual.
 - (3) Confirmation. The Council of Elders must unanimously agree that the individual has the potential for leadership and thereby assume responsibility to work with the individual toward that end.
 - (4) Demonstration. The elders will inform the congregation that the man is under consideration for the leadership position and will assign specific responsibilities of ministry within the church for a period of three months in order for the entire body to examine the individual's spirit and effectiveness in service.
 - (5) Presentation. If the individual's life and service is deemed to be appropriate by the Council of Elders, the person will be presented to the entire church for evaluation, examination and affirmation as one whom God has qualified for leadership. The entire congregation will be given a 30-day period in which to personally express any concerns or needed input to the Council of Elders.
 - (6) Affirmation. After the Council of Elders have acted upon the input of the congregation (if necessary), and if the elders are in unanimous agreement that the individual has indeed been qualified by an act of the grace of God for leadership within the church, then the elders will affirm what God has already done in the man's life by setting him apart for the leadership position.
- (b) Qualifications. Elders and nominees for elder shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9 and 1. Peter 5:1-4.
- (c) Responsibilities. The fundamental responsibility of the elders is to devote themselves to prayer and the Word. The elders are responsible for governing the church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this church.

The responsibilities of the Elders shall include: examining prospective members and acquainting them with the Doctrinal Statement and *Foundations* material, overseeing the process of church discipline, examining prospective candidates for office, overseeing the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conducting worship services, administering the ordinances of the Gospel, equipping the membership of the church for the work of the ministry, teaching the whole counsel of God both formally and informally, correcting error, overseeing, coordinating and promoting the ministries of the church, and mobilizing the church for world mission. The Council of Elders shall possess the authority to establish policies, positions, and practices for Grace Covenant Church that are consistent with the purposes of the church.

- (d) Organization. The Council of Elders shall organize itself however it determines to be best to achieve the mission of the church. The elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. The elders must meet at least once per month. Meetings of the elders may be held at any location and may be conducted by means of electronic communication through which the elders may simultaneously hear each other. Unless the Council provides otherwise, meetings of the Council may be held immediately upon notice. A quorum for meetings of the Council of Elders is defined as at least one-half of the elders. In particular, the priorities of discussion and action at elder meetings shall comply with the following:
- (1) Prayer/Worship – the shepherding and accountability roles of the elders over the flock (cf., 1 Peter 5:2-3; Acts 20:28)
 - (2) Management of Church Affairs –: decisions regarding finances, administration and policies affecting the direction of the ministry (cf., 1 Timothy 3:5)
 - (3) Decisions and Applications of Church Discipline – church discipline is to be administered by the Council of Elders when necessary (cf., Hebrews 13:17)
 - (4) Doctrinal Decisions Regarding Church Policy and Ministry Methodology – periodic discussions regarding the ministry and how to be biblical and effective in the task God has called elders to do.
- (e) Decision-Making. Decisions shall be reached by the Council of Elders after prayerful consideration only by the unanimous or majority vote of the Council, as differentiated below, in a spirit of humility, each elder thereby regarding others before himself. Therefore, in essence, whether the decision is one that necessitates a unanimous vote or a majority vote, the net result after all discussions are terminated and binding decisions have been made, the Council must have a spirit of unanimity as to the direction the church should take. Any violation of this spirit of unanimity must be considered a serious breach of elder qualifications. If it should occur more than once without genuine repentance, this elder must seek the re-approval of the Council of Elders to continue in the office of elder (Titus 3:10).
- (1) Unanimity of All Elders Required. Matters requiring a vote include calling a member of the pastoral staff; approving an elder, deacon or missionary (to be supported by the Missions Budget); an amendment to or modification of the Constitution, Bylaws and/or the Doctrinal Statement; approval or modification of a Policy/Position Statement; or modification to the indebtedness limitations outlined in Article IV, Section 5. A quorum for the vote shall consist of all members of the Council of Elders, whether voting in person or by telephone (and later confirmed in writing), and must be unanimous.
 - (2) Majority of All Elders Required. All other decisions (other than those listed under the preceding unanimity paragraph), will be made on the basis of simple majority of all elders. Those elders in the minority position, after opportunity to defend their minority view from Scripture, will yield to the majority position of the Council of Elders in the spirit of Philippians 2:3, thereby preserving the spirit of unanimity that the Council of Elders must maintain to the church congregation and the public in general. Therefore, the minority elders must publicly support the decision of the majority of the Council of Elders in every situation. Any violation to this spirit of unanimity will be dealt with as outlined in the opening paragraph of this section.

- (3) Voting Exclusions. Decisions by the Council of Elders that pertain directly to any of the elders themselves (such as church discipline or salary review, etc.), may be made at the discretion of the majority of the other elders without the participation of the elder in question (other than providing input required by other elders) in the discussions or the final decision of the Council.
- (4) Church Participation. The elders may seek entire church participation in decisions on some major issues as determined by the Council in the following manner:
 - (i) Decisions made by the elders will be presented to the entire church for consideration and clarification at a meeting deemed appropriate by the Council of Elders.
 - (ii) Questions of a clarification nature only will be answered by the elders at the time of presentation. Questions of an objectionable nature or other information deemed appropriate to support one's objection will be directed to one of the elders on a personal basis at some time other than the time of presentation and within one week from the time of presentation. If the elder who is presented with the information relating to the objection is not able to answer the member's concern satisfactorily, that elder must take the information to the entire Council of Elders for consideration. To assist the elders in their discussion of the issue at hand, the individual may be asked to meet with the Council of Elders to clarify the concerns or objections.
 - (iii) Before any final action may be initiated, the elders must come to a decision as outlined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this section. Should the new information presented prevent the unanimous/majority vote required of the elders, no action will be taken. The congregation will be informed of this process in a manner deemed appropriate by the elders; no action will be taken on the issue at hand until the required unanimous/majority vote is reached. After all consideration is given to the input of the congregation, if the required unanimous/majority vote is still the mind of the Council of Elders, then the decision will be implemented as originally presented.
- (f) Leadership of the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders will, by majority vote, appoint a Chairman of the Council who will provide leadership for Council meetings and will represent the Council to the congregation in public meetings. The Chairman of the Council of Elders must be reconfirmed every 12 months.

Section 5. DEACONS

- (a) Composition and Calling. The deacons shall be both vocational ministers and lay deacons. The number of deacons shall be determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of individuals in the church.
- (b) Qualifications. Deacons and nominees for deacon shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include 1 Timothy 3:8-12.
- (c) Responsibilities. The deacons shall advise and be ready to assist the elders in any service that shall support and promote the ministry of the Word, new and existing ministries of the church and the care for the members of the congregation. Their responsibilities may include:

- (1) Administering a fund to assist the poor and needy and otherwise providing aid in times of crisis or distress
 - (2) Greeting and welcoming ministries of the church
 - (3) Assisting in administering the ordinances of the Gospel
 - (4) Assisting at fellowship gatherings of the church
 - (5) Caring for and maintaining the church properties
 - (6) Administering the business affairs of the church that pertain to its material assets
- (d) Organization. The deacons shall organize themselves however they determine to be best to achieve the mission of the church. The elders or the deacons may designate any specific deacon or group of deacons to specialize in some particular diaconal function. Meetings of the deacons or subcommittees thereof shall be held at least once a month to best fulfill their responsibilities.

ARTICLE III. Church Employees

In addition to Vocational Pastors and Ministers, the church may employ additional personnel. The monies for such personnel must be approved by the Council of Elders in conjunction with the Budget and Finance Committee. The Council of Elders shall be responsible for determining the duties and hiring of such personnel.

ARTICLE IV. Church Finances

Section I. IN GENERAL

No method of raising funds shall be entertained which is in conflict with the scriptural ideals of the church. All funds donated shall pass through the financial administrator of the church in order that due record may be made. The deacons shall provide assistance for the financial administrator in accounting for funds donated.

Section 2. CONTRIBUTIONS

It is understood that membership in this church involves financial obligations to support the church and its causes with regular and proportional giving. Each member shall be encouraged in scriptural giving, with tithing as the ideal minimum.

Special offerings may be sought by the church or by any of its organizations after approval by the Council of Elders. This shall not preclude individuals from making special offerings or designated gifts at any time as the Spirit of God may move them.

Section 3. FINANCIAL PLANNING

The financial planning of the church shall be carried out through the use of annual budgets that fund the various programs of its work. Annual budgets shall be adopted by the church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders or, if authorized by the Council, the Deacons or other committees. Matters involving staff compensation shall be the responsibility of the Budget and Finance Committee in conjunction with the Council of Elders.

Section 4. ACCOUNTS

Financial receipts from all sources shall be accounted for by the financial administrator according to the purposes for which contributions are designated. The financial administrator shall disburse these funds promptly according to the financial program of the church as detailed in the budget or other authorized designations. All monies for missions shall be remitted each month in accordance with the Mission Budget of the church.

Section 5. INDEBTEDNESS

No note or contract that pledges the credit of the church that exceeds 1% of the total annual budget shall be made except by recommendation of the Council of Elders in consultation with the Budget and Finance Committee.

Section 6. AUTHORITY TO BIND THE CHURCH

Only the Council of Elders has authority to execute legal documents relating to real estate, church property and church finances, as provided in accordance with these Bylaws, the Church Constitution, and any applicable laws.

ARTICLE V. Corporate Worship

Public services shall be held on the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated on the first Sunday of each month or at such other times as the Council of Elders may determine. Other religious services may be appointed as the advancement of the work of the church may require.

ARTICLE VI. Organization of Members for Ministry

Members of this church shall have the liberty to participate in and organize themselves for ministry, provided that such participation and organization does not conflict with Article II of the Constitution. Any such organization may seek church sanction from the Council of Elders as an official ministry of Grace Covenant Church. Such sanction shall be granted provided that (1) the object, purpose, belief and conduct of the organization and its members is consistent with Article II of the Constitution, and (2) the primary officers of the organization are members of the church or other regular attenders of the church who have been approved under guidelines established by the Council of Elders. Sanction by the Council of Elders does not necessarily imply support of the organization by the church with personnel, finances or facilities. Such support may be requested as provided by the leadership of the church.

ARTICLE VII. Discipline

The discipline of members shall be a responsibility of the Council of Elders under such rules and procedures as the elders may from time to time establish on the basis of Scripture. All such proceedings shall be guided by a spirit of prayer mingled with Christian kindness, forbearance, and holy firmness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Section 1. GENERAL POLICY

All members of the Body of Christ have an individual responsibility to live righteously and to encourage righteous behavior in other believers. Interpersonal accountability is a Christian obligation that extends beyond the membership of the local church. As Galatians 6:1-5 instructs, this process begins with self-examination and a spirit of humility sensitive to one's own faults. Believers are instructed to be aware of their own sins, to be penitent and to be quick to seek reconciliation with offended individuals (Matthew 5:23-25, 7:1-5). It is recognized that Grace Covenant Church members have a special relationship one to the other. Consequently, Grace Covenant Church members have the privilege of experiencing the full expression of love and care for the local body as outlined in Scripture and as detailed below.

Church discipline is regarded as a serious and clear directive in Scripture. Church discipline is intended to restore an erring member (2 Corinthians 2:5-8), to purify the Church (1 Corinthians 5:6-8), to warn other members about the dangers of sinful behavior or teaching (Deuteronomy 19:20; Acts 5:11; 2 Corinthians 7:11) and to demonstrate the reality of righteous living to the unsaved world (Ephesians 4:22-24). Discipline is exercised with compassion for the erring member and a sincere desire to seek that person's repentance, reconciliation and, if necessary, restoration to the fellowship of the local church (Matthew 18:12-14).

Discipline does not entitle the elders to abuse their authority over the members of the church (1 Peter 5:1-3). Specific guidelines are followed that identify the grounds for church discipline and the process of such discipline.

The members of Grace Covenant Church belong to a spiritual body of local believers who identify with a common purpose and mission. There is a mutual accountability that each member has, one to the other, to encourage and provoke holy living (Hebrews 10:23-25). Church discipline begins with individual accountability that is a responsibility of every member. Members are encouraged to take this responsibility seriously.

Scripture is clear that the motives of the individual(s) or the elders dealing with the erring member must be pure before our Savior, His Church and the world.

- (a) They are to avoid vengeance and arrogant presumption (Galatians 6:1).
- (b) They are not to be motivated by hostility or anger but by a loving concern for the erring member (2 Thessalonians 3:15).
- (c) They are to approach the erring member with heartfelt sorrow and sincere concern (1 Corinthians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 2:4).
- (d) They are to be ready to grant restoration to the erring member when repentance occurs (Luke 17:1-10; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8).

Section 2. OFFENSES APPLICABLE TO CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Individual accountability is an ongoing expression of believers and is always the first step in dealing with an erring member. No member is above or immune from accountability (1 Timothy 5:19-22). Church discipline is not God's method for making the church sinless. Scripture defines certain deviations from the truth as grounds for formal disciplinary action. Sin that damages the church, weakens its testimony or promotes disunity constitutes an offense that necessitates formal disciplinary action. These sins can be understood in the following categories:

- (a) False teaching constitutes a deliberate, persistent program of teaching that intentionally rejects the foundational doctrines of Scripture (Titus 3:10; Revelation 2:14).
- (b) Apostasy constitutes a public denial of the essential truths of God's Word (i.e., a belief in the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the final authority for belief and behavior; a belief in the Trinity; a belief in the complete humanity and the complete deity of Christ; a belief in the utter sinfulness of all humanity; a belief in the virgin conception of Christ and His Incarnation as the eternal Son of God; a belief in Christ's substitutionary atonement as the only way of salvation; a belief in the bodily resurrection and return of Christ; a belief in salvation by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone; a belief in the eternal damnation of the lost and the eternal glorification of the saved). These essential truths are reflected in the Doctrinal Statement of the Church Constitution (Galatians 2: 11-14; 1 John 2: 19).
- (c) Divisiveness constitutes behavior that undermines the unity of Grace Covenant Church either between members or against God's established authority in the church (Philippians 4:2-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- (d) Immorality is constituted scripturally as behavior that is deemed immoral and brings shame on the testimony of Christ and the local church (1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-11). This category includes sexual immorality and sexual deviancy (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). While sexual behavior may or may not be known publicly, these sins internally pollute the church and disrupt its mission. Scripture denounces sexual impurity. These sins include adultery, homosexuality and every other kind of sexual deviancy or impurity that Scripture calls fornication (*porneia*). This behavior will not be tolerated among the membership of Grace Covenant Church (Romans 1:26-27).

Section 3. PROCEDURES FOR MEMBERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY

Church discipline is to be handled prayerfully, carefully and justly. Below are the steps of accountability and discipline that follow the guidelines given in Matthew 18:15-20.

- (a) First step. Arrange a private meeting with the offender. Humbly confront the person with the nature of the offense. If the person repents, the matter is closed (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3). Scripture does not specify the number of times that an offender should be confronted on an individual basis. Scripture is clear that believers should be long-suffering and have an unrelenting desire for that person's repentance (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 1 Peter 4:8). If there is no repentance and the offense is of the nature categorized above as "Offenses Applicable to Church Discipline," then there is a responsibility to move to the next step in the process.
- (b) Second step. Set up another private meeting, this time with one or two other witnesses present (Matthew 18:16). This step should never be taken in haste but only after there is prayerful conviction that step one has not availed. If repentance occurs, the offender should seek forgiveness from the circle of offense and no more.

It is important to understand who qualifies as a witness and what their function is in the disciplinary process.

Biblically, a witness is a person who bears testimony of another's wrongdoing based on firsthand knowledge. A person is not constituted a witness who bears testimony based on hearsay, gossip or second-hand knowledge (Deuteronomy 19:15-19). The Bible condemns false witnesses (Exodus 20:13). Accusations not substantiated by two or three witnesses must be left to the One who knows all things and judges righteously (Numbers 35:30; Psalm 51:3-4).

It is the function of a witness to ensure that the offense is clearly and impartially presented and that nothing is left unsaid. The witnesses also keep each others' motivations and actions accountable before God (Matthew 18:20).

If there is no repentance, the circle of knowledge must be broadened at this point to include the elders for their consideration in order that Step Three might be taken.

- (c) Third step. At this point, the matter must be brought by the elders to the members of Grace Covenant Church in a closed session (Matthew 18:17). The entire membership has a responsibility, as opportunity provides, to call the offender to repentance. An equitable period of time will be established by the Council of Elders in order to optimize the fullest effect of the witness of the entire membership, to allow for the work of the Lord and to provide more than ample time for repentance.

Should there be repentance, the entire body should be quick to respond with forgiveness, grace and love (2 Corinthians 2:5-8). While repentance and forgiveness are instantaneous, restoration to service will be monitored by the elders for the benefit and development of the person.

If there is no repentance, the elders will meet to take action on the final step.

- (d) Fourth step. As defined in Matthew 18:17, the unrepentant offender will be considered a "pagan or a tax collector."

This phrase contains two interrelated aspects. First, the offender is likened to a pagan, which signifies that the person is outside the community of God's blessing and grace. Second, the offender is likened to a tax collector, which signifies that the person is untrustworthy and potentially dangerous.

By way of application, this constitutes a removal from church membership and fellowship resulting in a recognition that the unrepentant offender is outside the realm of God's blessings (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Common ground for intimate friendship has been removed. The entire congregation has an ongoing responsibility to act in unison, calling the person to repentance with all contact, so as not to undermine the scriptural process or the severe temporal consequences of the person's obstinate behavior. It is sincerely hoped there will be repentance and reconciliation as a result of the consistent and loving application of this heart-wrenching but biblical action.

The action of the church in matters of discipline carries the highest conceivable authority and is both final and binding as clearly stated in Matthew 18:18-20. There can be no appeal to any court as a result of this action (1 Corinthians 6:1-2) and a member may not resign his/her membership in order to avoid church discipline.

Section 4. Integrity of Knowledge.

In all matters of church discipline, if and when members become aware of the offense and the disciplinary action being brought against the unrepentant member, the members are expected, without exception, to hold the knowledge with integrity, avoiding gossip and the defamation of character (Ephesians 4:31-32; James 4:11). Church disciplinary matters are internal affairs and must not be paraded before the world.

ARTICLE VIII. Amendments

Amendments to these Bylaws may be introduced in written form and submitted to the Council of Elders for approval and recommendation.