

GCC

# Book of Faith & Order

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## PREFACE

**Grace Covenant Church** was founded as a New Testament Church and as a local expression of the universal body of Christ on September 7, 1997. The founding members of this new fellowship worked prayerfully and industriously for one full year before establishing the charter statement and *The Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order*.

The original members of this assembly selected the name, *Grace Covenant Church*, because they desired to reflect two great biblical emphases. Specifically, the charter members wanted to magnify the *grace of God* that brings people into *the new covenant* with the King of kings. These people knew that, by God's grace, they were members of *Christ's New Covenant Community* and that by his grace they would continue and persevere in the faith.

Although *Grace Covenant Church* is a newly established church, it is a *historic church*, nevertheless. It is historic in its adherence to the ancient truths of the Christian faith found in the Bible. The teaching and preaching at this church proclaim the sacred message conveyed by God to the writers of Holy Scripture and displayed supremely in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven by which one is saved.

This newly established and yet historic church has attempted to state its beliefs regarding biblical doctrine and biblical church governance in *The Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order*. As the name of the document indicates, this book is divided into two sections. Section one contains *The Grace Covenant Confession of Faith*, the church's official doctrinal position. Section two contains *The Grace Covenant Constitution*, the church's official book of order.

*The Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order* is a tool that should assist the members of this church to practice doctrinal purity and orderliness. This book shall always remain subject to the teachings of the Scripture, the unchanging Word of the Living God. May God, by His Word and Spirit, effect within the members of *Grace Covenant Church*, the grace to live in joyful submission to the Lord Jesus Christ as they eagerly anticipate his second coming.

# PART ONE: CONFESSION OF FAITH

## WHY A CONFESSION OF FAITH IS NECESSARY

The practice of Christians confessing their faith corporately is an ancient one. To the present it is common to hear congregations in unison recite the *Apostles Creed* or the *Nicene Creed* in conjunction with their worship of God. The *Apostles Creed* originated as a statement of faith expressed by believers at the time of their Baptism, when a pastor would ask them a series of questions pertaining to their belief in the Trinity. The present wording of this creed cannot be traced earlier than the eighth century, but the concepts it affirms appeared in creedal form in the late second century, first in the Greek language.

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (d. 397) was the first church leader to call this the *Apostles Creed*, a summary of the Apostles' teachings. By the eighth century the present form of the creed had become the standard across Christendom, and for several hundred years Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches have adopted it and used it as a public declaration of their fundamental beliefs.

Although the ancient creeds express biblical truths in a majestic manner, there are some issues they do not address today because they were not points of controversy at the time those creeds appeared. *Sola Scriptura*, the sole and final authority of the Bible, for example, does not appear as an affirmation in these historic statements, nor do they explain the Scriptural teaching about sin and salvation in any detail. They are silent about the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they make only passing reference to the sacraments.

By the sixteenth century Christendom had become confused about many doctrines of the faith, and the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages had never taken a dogmatic stand with regard to some beliefs that the Protestant Reformers discovered in the Bible, doctrines which, for centuries, the medieval church had ignored or distorted. Protestants invoked the principle of *sola Scriptura*, and as they did so, they rejected some traditional teachings of the Catholic Church as incompatible with clear biblical revelation.

Protestants therefore found it necessary to clarify and express their understanding of Scripture in new confessions of faith. The Lutherans produced the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Reformed Churches published the Helvetic Confession (1536), the Belgic Confession (1561), and the Heidelberg Catechism (1561), while English and Scottish Presbyterians adopted the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1647-1648).

Baptists of the seventeenth century became heirs to the Protestant confessions already in use, but they found it necessary to proclaim their own statements of faith so as to clarify and express the distinctive doctrines that pertained to their own understanding of Christianity. In this way, they published the two London Confessions (1644 and 1689), which revealed their close affinity with the Presbyterians while at the same time affirming their own specifically Baptist convictions.

All the historic Christian confessions appeared in times of controversy and confusion. The Nicene Creed (325), for example, was a necessary clarification of the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ at a time when Arius of Alexandria (d. 336) was denying these dogmas and leading large numbers of professing Christians to regard Christ as the Son of God only by adoption, not by nature. Had Arianism prevailed, biblical Christianity would have disappeared, so a creedal affirmation about the controverted

questions was essential. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Protestants had to defend the scriptural teachings of salvation *sola gratia*, by grace alone, and justification *sola fide*, through faith alone, while the Roman Catholic Church rejected these principles categorically in a dogmatic statement entitled the Canons of Trent (1563).

In the centuries since the Protestant Reformation many issues about doctrine and practice have appeared, often as a consequence of influences due to deviations from biblical teaching within Protestant ranks or from pseudo-Christian cults which have revived ancient falsehoods such as the Arian view of Christ. These influences require occasional revisions and expansions of historic creeds to meet the challenges which arise from time to time. In the late twentieth century, for example, it is necessary to affirm the sole authority of Scripture in opposition to the rationalism that has infected many churches and in opposition to the charismatic groups that regard emotional experience as the keystone of true Christianity.

In order to declare its own position with regard to historic Christianity and to express its specifically Baptist beliefs, Grace Covenant Church hereby declares its allegiance to the Holy Scriptures as the supreme and final authority for faith and practice. This church seeks to be truly *Catholic*, truly *Evangelical*, and truly *Reformed*. It aspires to be truly Catholic in standing with Christians across the ages who have believed the biblical truths summarized in the *Apostles Creed* and the *Nicene Creed*. It desires to be truly Evangelical by proclaiming that the Gospel of Christ offers the only remedy for sin, and it seeks to be truly Reformed by affirming the principles of *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, rediscovered by the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century.

In order to accomplish these objectives, this church has adopted the Confession of Faith as written in part one of *The Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order*. These articles are divided into three sections for the purpose of bringing people from a basic elementary knowledge of the essentials of the Christian faith to a more mature understanding of the deep truths of biblical Christianity. Section one, *Truths That We Confess*, contains the *Apostles Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *Grace Declaration*, three statements people must align themselves with in order to become members of Grace Covenant Church. Section two, *Truths That We Treasure*, is a declaration with which members must agree in order to teach and / or lead in formal ministry capacities within this church. Section three, *Truths That We Teach*, modeled after the Westminster Confession and the second London Confession, comprises the official statement of faith for all serving as elders within this community of believers.

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## **SECTION 1: TRUTHS THAT WE CONFESS**

### **A. THE APOSTLES' CREED**

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

### **B. THE NICENE CREED**

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets; and we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### **C. THE GRACE DECLARATION**

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God, solely for his own glory, justifies sinners by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone according to the exclusive authority of the Holy Scriptures.

## **SECTION 2: TRUTHS THAT WE TREASURE**

1. We believe in the one true and living God, in three Persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who is invisible, personal, omnipresent, eternal, dependent on none, unchanging, truthful, trustworthy, almighty, sovereign, omniscient, righteous, holy, good, loving, merciful, long-suffering, and gracious.

2. We believe that Almighty God has revealed all that is necessary to life and salvation in the sixty-six books of Holy Scripture which are the Word of God. All Scripture was given by inspiration of God, is infallible and inerrant, and is the final arbiter in all disputes. Its authority is derived from its Author and not from the opinions of men.
3. We believe that God made our first father Adam perfect, holy and upright. He was appointed representative and head of the human race thereby exposing all his offspring to the effects of his obedience or disobedience to God's commands.
4. We believe that Adam fell from his original righteousness into sin and brought upon himself and all his offspring death, condemnation, and sinner-ship.
5. We believe it is utterly beyond the power of fallen man to love God, to keep His laws, to understand the Gospel, to repent of sin or to trust in Christ.
6. We believe that God, before the foundation of the world, for his own glory did elect an innumerable host of men and women to eternal life as an act of free and sovereign grace. This election was in no way dependent upon his foresight of human faith, decision, works, or merit.
7. We believe that God sent his Son into the world, conceived of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, unchangeably sinless, both God and man, born under the Law, to live a perfect life of righteousness, on behalf of his people.
8. We believe that God's Son died at Calvary to effect propitiation, reconciliation, redemption, and atonement for his people. God bore testimony to his acceptance of his Son's work by raising him from the dead.
9. We believe that God's Son ascended to the right hand of his Father and is enthroned in glory, where he intercedes on behalf of his people and rules over all things for their sake.
10. We believe that God the Son has poured out the Holy Spirit to work alongside the preached word. The Spirit of God regenerates the elect sinners and draws them irresistibly to faith in Christ the Savior.
11. We believe the elect, whom God calls to himself, are justified in the sight of God on account of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ which they receive through faith alone.
12. We believe that those people whom God regenerates, calls, and justifies shall persevere in holiness and never finally fall away.
13. We believe that baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper are gospel ordinances belonging only to regenerated believers.
14. We believe that the local church is under the authority of Christ alone. The communion of saints, however, requires recognition of and fellowship with other churches.
15. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ shall come again to raise the dead, both the righteous and the unrighteous, and that the righteous shall enjoy everlasting life and the wicked endure everlasting punishment.

## SECTION 3: TRUTHS THAT WE TEACH

### ARTICLE 1 - HOLY SCRIPTURE

1. The Holy Scripture is the all-sufficient, certain and infallible rule or standard of the knowledge, faith, and obedience that constitute salvation. Although the light of nature and God's works of providence give such a clear testimony of his wisdom, goodness, and power that people who reject them are left inexcusable, they are not sufficient to convey the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation. Because of his mercy and grace, God has, in addition to the general revelation of his creation, made himself known through special revelation which now is in writing in those sixty-six books which Christians have historically received as the Bible. *Psalm 19:1-3; Proverbs 22:19-21; Luke 16:19-31; Romans 1:18-32; 2:12-16; 15:4; II Timothy 3:12-17; Hebrews 1:1-4; II Peter 1:19-21*
2. The Holy Scripture is self-authenticating. Its authority does not depend upon the testimony of human beings or of any church, but entirely upon God, its author, who is truth itself. All people must acknowledge its authority because it is the Word of God. *I Thessalonians 2:13; I John 5:9-12*
3. The Scripture is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction, and the majesty of its style, the coherence among its parts, and the fact that it glorifies God and reveals the only way to salvation is abundant evidence that it is the very Word of God. Submission to the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture, however, requires the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, who persuades and assures believers by bearing witness by and with the Word in their minds. *John 16:12-15; I Corinthians 2:6-15; I John 2:18-27*
4. The special revelation of God appears in its entirety in the Scripture, which contains all things necessary for God's glory, the salvation of sinners, and the prescriptions for life and godliness. All such matters are either expressly declared in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time may be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or by traditions of men. *II Timothy 3:12-17; Galatians 1:6-9; I Corinthians 2:6-15; Revelation 22:18-21*
5. The infallible rule for the correct use of Scripture is Scripture itself. When there is a question about the full and true meaning of any passage, believers must determine it by comparing the portion in question with other passages that teach on the same subject more clearly. Scripture is its own best interpreter. *Acts 15:12-21; II Peter 1:19-21*

### ARTICLE 2 - GOD, THE HOLY TRINITY

1. There is but one living and true God, who is self-existent. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. All that he does is the out-working of his righteous will and therefore demonstrates his glory, as he directs all things according to his good pleasure. God is perfectly loving, gracious, merciful, and patient. He forgives iniquity and sin, and he abundantly rewards those who seek him. God is, nevertheless, just and terrible in his judgments because he hates sin, and he will not spare the guilty. *Exodus 3:13-14; 34:4-7; Deuteronomy 6:1-9; I Kings 8:27; Nehemiah 9:32-33; Psalm 5:4-8; 90:1-2; 115:1-7; Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 6:1-3; 46:9-13; Jeremiah 10:10; 23:23-24; Malachi 3:6; John 4:21-24; Romans 11:33-36; I Corinthians 8:4-6; Hebrews 11:6; Revelation 4:8*

2. God is self-sufficient and therefore does not need anything from his creatures, nor does he derive any glory from them. On the contrary, He demonstrates his glory in and by them. God is the source of all being, the origin and end of all things. He is sovereign over all his creatures, and he employs them as he pleases to accomplish his purpose. In all that he decrees and does God is perfectly righteous. Angels and humans owe him obedience as their creator, and they must worship him and perform whatever he requires from them. *Job 22:2-3; Psalm 95:1-7; 119:65-68; 145:17-20; Isaiah 40:10-31; Daniel 4:34-35; Acts 7:2-50; Romans 11:33-36; Hebrews 4:12-13; Revelation 5:11-14*
  
3. There are three persons in the Godhead-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one in essence, equal in power and glory. Each person is fully God, yet the Godhead is one and indivisible. The Father owes his being to no one. He is Father to the Son, and the sonship of the Second Person is an eternal sonship. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, yet the Third Person is an eternal Spirit. The tri-personal nature of God does not negate his unity, a unity that is above human comprehension and known only because God has revealed himself as such. The personal relations within the Godhead and the variety of works that the persons perform constitute the foundation of believers' communion with God and their confident dependence upon him. *Exodus 3:13-14; Matthew 28:16-20; John 1:1-18; 14:1-11; 15:26-27; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 8:5-6; II Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:4-7*

### **ARTICLE 3 - THE DECREES OF GOD**

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1. God freely and unalterably decreed from all eternity all that should happen, according to his own wise and holy will. This does not, however, make him the author of sin, nor does He accept responsibility jointly with humans for sin. His decrees do not violate the wills of his creatures, nor do they negate the reality of secondary causes. God is completely sovereign, and human beings are entirely responsible to believe his Word and to obey his laws. *Numbers 23:19; Isaiah 46:9-10; John 19:8-11; Acts 4:27-28; 27:1-44; Romans 9:14-29; Ephesians 1:3-14; Hebrews 6:16-17; James 1:13-15*
  
2. God's decrees are not based upon His foreknowledge that, under certain circumstances, things will occur. His decrees are independent of all such foreknowledge. *Acts 2:2-28; Romans 9:11-18*
  
3. By His decree, and for the demonstration of His glory, God has predestined chosen angels and human beings to eternal life through Jesus Christ, thereby revealing His grace. Others, whom He has left to perish in their sins, show the terrors of His justice. *Matthew 25:34; Romans 9:22-24; Ephesians 1:3-14; II Thessalonians 2:13-15; I Timothy 5:21; Jude 3-4*
  
4. Before he created the world, God chose in Christ certain people to be the recipients of his saving favor. He did so out of his mere good pleasure without regard to any merit within those he chose, and he appointed the means to accomplish his purpose in saving them. He willed that his elect should be redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ and called effectually by his Holy Spirit to embrace Christ through faith. By the work of his grace God has elected, justified, adopted, sanctified, and preserved his people for eternal life with him. The elect alone enjoy these undeserved benefits. *John 6:35-40; 10:22-30; 17:1-26; I Peter 1:1-9*
  
5. The mystery of predestination must be proclaimed with care and prudence, so that people are directed to the revealed will of God in Scripture that they may obey it. Believers become assured of their election in Christ through the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of predestination therefore leads the elect to praise God gratefully with reverence and wonder that he

has included them within the body of his chosen people. It encourages humility and diligence in the service of God, and it brings great comfort to all who sincerely believe and obey the Gospel. *Luke 10:17-20; Romans 11:1-6; 33-36; Ephesians 1:1-6; I Thessalonians 1:4-6; II Peter 1:10-11*

#### **ARTICLE 4 - CREATION**

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1. In the beginning, it pleased God to create the world and all things within it. He did so by an expression of his will, and thereby he initiated the existence of all material objects and beings. This was an ex nihilo (out of nothing) production, not an arrangement of previously existing materials. In this way, God demonstrated his omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness. *Genesis 1:1-2:2; Psalm 19:1-6; 90:1-2; Isaiah 40:25-26; John 1:1-3; Romans 1:18-20; Colossians 1:15-16; Hebrews 1:1-2*
2. God created all creatures, each in its turn, and species did not evolve from one another. Human beings came last in the order of creation, and God gave them dominion over all other earthly beings. God designed and created humans for harmonious fellowship and relationship with himself by endowing them with the “*image of God*,” that is, God-like qualities that made them distinctive and superior to all animals. As humans came fresh from the hand of their Creator they possessed true knowledge, righteousness and holiness and the divine law written in their hearts with the ability to obey it. Since God gave them the liberty of mutable wills, they had the opportunity to disobey him. *Genesis 1:26-28; 2:4-25; Romans 2:14-15*

#### **ARTICLE 5 - DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

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1. God, who in infinite wisdom and power has created all things, governs them by his supremely wise and holy providence. He fulfills his purposes for his creatures, ruling them and all their actions for his own glory and praise. *Job 38:1-40:2; Psalm 135:5-12; Isaiah 46:8-13; Matthew 10:26-31; Ephesians 1:3-14; Hebrews 1:1-3*
2. Although, in relation to God’s foreknowledge and decrees, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet by his providence, God orders them to occur in connection with genuine secondary causes, either as fixed laws or freely by human volition. God’s providence extends to his entire creation, but he exercises it in special benevolent ways on behalf of his people, to whom he has promised his fatherly goodness. *Genesis 8:20-22; Psalm 90:1-17; Proverbs 16:9,33; Isaiah 43:1-5; Amos 9:5-10; Acts 2:22-28; Romans 8:28-39*

#### **ARTICLE 6 - THE FALL OF MAN: SIN AND PUNISHMENT**

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1. Although God created humans perfect, our first parents lost their righteousness and forfeited their standing with God when they sinned against him. They violated the covenant of works that required obedience as a condition of life, and they fell from the divine favor into a condition of sin and misery and spiritual death. Since Adam and Eve represented all mankind, their sin brought the imputation of their guilt upon all of their offspring who descend from them by ordinary generation, and their descendants are, as a consequence, conceived and born in sin and corrupted in all faculties of body and soul. *Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-24; 6:5-7; Psalm 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Romans 3:9-20; 5:12-21; Titus 1:15-16*
2. Conceived in sin and subject to divine wrath, humans are servants of iniquity, who find pleasure in rebellion against God. They are therefore subject to the spiritual, physical, and eternal

consequences of sin, unless Christ, the Redeemer, sets them free. The sins that people commit are the products of their corrupt nature transmitted to them by their first parents. Because of this corruption, they are unable and unwilling to please God and can do nothing to merit his favor. *Psalm 51:1-5; Romans 5:12-21, 6:15-23; I Corinthians 15:20-49; Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:21-23; Hebrews 2:14-18*

3. Although God mercifully intervenes to save his elect from sin and spiritual death, a corrupt nature remains within them as long as they remain in this world. That corruption and all the evil thoughts and deeds that come from it are actually sinful and deserve condemnation, from which Christ has spared them by his grace. *Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:16-17; I John 1:8-10*

## **ARTICLE 7 - GOD'S COVENANT OF GRACE**

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1. God, at first, inaugurated a covenant of works with Adam and Eve in which he promised to them life upon the condition of perfect obedience. Because of their fall into sin, they came under the curse of divine law, but God was pleased to make a covenant of grace, which freely offers life and salvation to sinners because of the work of Jesus Christ. God requires that sinners place faith in Christ in order to be saved, and he promises to give his Holy Spirit to all those he has elected to eternal life, so that the Spirit may persuade and enable them to believe the Gospel and trust in Christ alone for salvation. *Genesis 3:15-17; Ezekiel 36:24-27; John 3:16-18; 6:44-46; 17:6-19; Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 3:10-14*
2. God's covenant of grace is revealed in the gospel, at first to Adam and Eve in the promise of salvation through the "offspring of the woman," and thereafter progressively until the full revelation of Christ in the New Covenant. A covenant of redemption among the members of the Godhead is the basis for the salvation of the elect, a covenant conceived in eternity and executed in time by Jesus Christ through his sacrificial death on behalf of sinners. *Genesis 3:15; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Acts 4:12; Romans 4:1-8; II Timothy 2:8-10; Titus 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3; 11:1-39; 13:20-21*

## **ARTICLE 8 - CHRIST, THE MEDIATOR**

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1. In order to enact his eternal purpose, God commissioned his unique, eternal Son, Jesus Christ, as the executor of the covenant of grace, to be the mediator between God and his people. Jesus entered history to be prophet, priest, and king, head and savior of his church, heir of all things, and judge of the world. He came to redeem those whom the Father had given him in eternity, those whom the Father decreed to call to himself, to justify, sanctify, and glorify. *Psalm 2:1-12; Isaiah 42:1-4; 52:13-53:12; Luke 1:26-33; John 17:6-12; Acts 3:22-23; 17:29-31; Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:15-23; Hebrews 1:1-4; I Peter 1:17-20*
2. The Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, is true and eternal God, the "brightness of the Father's glory", of the same essence as the Father, and equal with Him. The Son, at the appointed time, took upon Himself genuine human nature, with all of its essential characteristics and its common limitations, but without sin. Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and thereby he possesses two distinct and complete natures, divine and human. He is one Person, true God and true man, the only mediator between God and man. He is altogether pleasing to the Father, "full of grace and truth." *Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-8; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-56; John 1:1-18; Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 4:4; I Timothy 2:1-6; Hebrews 2:14-18*

3. In order to execute the work of mediator, Christ became subject to God's law and fulfilled its requirements completely. He endured the punishment due for the sins of his people and thereby suffered incomparably in body and soul, as he was "obedient unto death, even death upon a cross." After his crucifixion, Jesus rose bodily from the grave and ascended to heaven, where he sits at the Father's right hand and intercedes for his redeemed people. He will come back to earth at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. *Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 26:36-38; 27:45-46; John 10:14-18; 20:24-31; Acts 1:1-11; 10:39-43; Romans 8:31-39; I Corinthians 15:1-8; II Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 9:23-28; 10:5-10; I Peter 3:18; II Peter 3:1-18*
4. By His perfect obedience to and fulfillment of the divine law, Jesus Christ demonstrated that he was fully qualified to save sinners by his sacrifice on the cross, which satisfied all of the claims of divine justice vicariously for his people and reconciled them to God and gave them an eternal inheritance in heaven. *John 17:1-5; Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 9:11-15*
5. Christ certainly and effectually applies eternal redemption to all of those for whom he accomplished it. By his Holy Spirit he unites them with himself, persuades them to believe and obey the Word of God, and assures them of his companionship. He does all things graciously for his elect with no regard for any merit of their own. *John 3:1-15; 6:35-40; 10:14-16; 17:6-12; Romans 5:9-11; 8:9; 12-17; I Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:7-10*
6. Christ's threefold offices, prophet, priest, and king, are for the well-being of his people. They need his prophetic office to overcome their sinful ignorance, and because sin has alienated them from God, they need his priesthood to reconcile them to God and to intercede on their behalf. His kingship is necessary to rule and protect them until they enter his heavenly kingdom. *Psalms 110:1-4; Luke 1:68-75; John 1:15-18; 10:27-29; Colossians 1:21-23*

## ARTICLE 9 - THE HUMAN WILL

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1. In the natural order, God endowed humans with the liberty of will to act upon choice, so that he compels them to do neither good nor evil. In the state of innocence Adam and Eve enjoyed freedom of will and the ability to do good that was acceptable to God. By a perverse employment of that freedom they sinned and fell from God's favor and thereby lost their liberty to choose and perform anything that is truly good and acceptable to their Creator. Because of the fall, all humanity is by nature "dead in trespasses and sins," unwilling and unable to merit divine favor and cannot prepare itself to turn to God. *Genesis 3:1-7; Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Ephesians 2:1-3; James 1:13-15*
2. When the Holy Spirit regenerates sinners, he frees them from their natural bondage to evil, and by his grace alone, he persuades and enables them to choose and to perform what is truly good and pleasing to God. The effects of sin remain, however, so that believers are still not completely conformed to their Creator's will. *John 8:34-36; Romans 7:14-20; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:13-14*

## ARTICLE 10 - EFFECTUAL CALLING

1. Effectual calling is the work of God, whereby he convinces his elect of their spiritual misery and lost condition and persuades them to embrace Christ, freely offered in the Gospel. As a consequence of

this call his people begin to understand revealed truth, to seek and to perform what is actually good. The elect respond willingly to this call, for the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit makes them willing. *Ezekiel 36:26-27; Acts 26:15-18; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:15-23; 2:1-10; II Thessalonians 2:13-15; I Peter 2:9-10*

2. God's effectual call of sinners proceeds from his grace alone. Until sinners receive spiritual life, they remain dead in sin and insensitive to God's demands. In regeneration and effectual calling they are entirely passive and make no contribution to their salvation. The power that enables them to answer God's call comes completely from God himself, and the effect is comparable to a resurrection from the dead. *John 5:24-27; I Corinthians 2:10-15; Ephesians 1:18-21; 2:4-9; II Timothy 1:8-10*

## ARTICLE 11 - JUSTIFICATION

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1. Those persons whom God effectually calls he justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins and accounting and declaring them righteous. He does this for Christ's sake alone and not because of any merit of their own. The righteousness that God imputes to his elect is not the result of their faith or belief or of any other act of obedience to the Gospel they may have rendered. The righteousness of justification is based upon the obedience and merits of Christ — his active obedience in satisfying the demands of divine law flawlessly and his passive submission to the Father's will in his death upon the cross. The faith through which sinners believe the Gospel and rest upon Christ alone for salvation is a gift from God, not a faculty inherent within them. Justification through faith alone in Christ alone is indispensable to true Christianity, the article upon which the church will stand or fall. *John 1:10-13; Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-24; 4:1-8; 5:12-21; 8:28-30; I Corinthians 1:26-31; Galatians 3:6-9; Philippians 3:1-11*
2. By His obedience and death Christ paid the full debt of all of those he has justified. By the sacrifice of Himself, Jesus entirely and absolutely satisfied all the claims which God's justice had against His people. *Isaiah 53:5-6; Romans 3:25-26; 8:31-34; II Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:1-10; I Peter 1:17-19*
3. God decreed from eternity to justify his elect, and at the proper time Christ died for their sins and rose again. The chosen people are not, however, justified personally until the Holy Spirit regenerates them and calls them effectually to the Savior and thereby enables them to receive him through faith. Believers in the Old Testament were justified exactly the same way as New Testament believers. Whereas Old Testament believers were justified through faith in a promise that awaited future fulfillment, New Testament believers are justified through faith in the actual fulfillment of that promise. *Romans 4:18-25; Galatians 3:6-9; Colossians 1:21-23; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 9:11-28*

## ARTICLE 12 - ADOPTION

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For the sake of Christ, God confers the grace of adoption upon all justified persons. In this way, they are received into and enjoy all the privileges of the children of God, whom they are entitled to call "Father," and by whose grace they remain in his family forever. *Psalms 103:13; Proverbs 14:26; Isaiah 54:8-9; John 1:10-13; Romans 8:15-17; II Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 4:4-6; Ephesians 1:1-7; 4:30; Hebrews 12:4-6; Revelation 3:11-13*

## ARTICLE 13 - SANCTIFICATION

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1. Because of the Word and Spirit of God at work within them, the elect experience renewal of the image of God, and God enables them progressively to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. These blessings flow from the merits of Christ's death and resurrection. Sanctification weakens the desire to sin and increases and strengthens a desire for holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. *John 17:3-19; Acts 20:32; Romans 6:5-14; Galatians 5:22-24; Ephesians 3:14-19; Colossians 1:9-14; I Thessalonians 5:23-24; Hebrews 12:14*
2. Sanctification is a progressive growth in holiness that will not come to completion until eternity. The remnants of sinful corruption remain within believers and defile all parts of their lives. A spiritual warfare therefore occurs within them, an antagonism between the renewed image of God and the sinful nature inherited from Adam. Saints, nevertheless, grow in grace and sincerely love God's law and endeavor to obey it in all things, as they submit to Christ, their King. *Romans 7:7-25; II Corinthians 3:18; 7:1; Galatians 5:16-26; I Peter 2:11-12*

## ARTICLE 14 - SAVING FAITH

1. The Holy Spirit confers the gift of faith upon the elect and thereby enables them to believe the Gospel. The ministry of the Word of God and the sacraments nourish this faith and enable believers to strengthen their confidence in Christ and to progress toward holy living. *Acts 20:32; Romans 10:14-17; II Corinthians 4:13-15; Ephesians 2:8-10; I Peter 2:2-3*
2. Through faith Christians believe everything God has revealed in Scripture, but the principal acts of saving faith relate first of all to Christ, whom believers accept, receive, and rest upon for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, all in accord with the covenant of grace. *Psalms 19:7-9; 119:72; Isaiah 40:8; 66:1-2; John 1:10-13; Acts 15:5-11; 16:29-31; 24:10-16; Galatians 2:20-21; II Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 11:1-16*

## ARTICLE 15 - REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE AND SALVATION

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1. The repentance that leads to salvation is the product of a gospel grace by which the Holy Spirit causes people to realize the wickedness of their sins and to humble themselves through faith, which expresses itself in deep sorrow for sin, a profound hatred and grief because of sin, and a firm resolve to abandon sin and to live righteously in accord with God's moral laws. *Psalms 119:5-8; Ezekiel 26:24-32; Zechariah 12:10; Acts 11:15-18; II Corinthians 7:2-15*
2. When our Lord Jesus said, "repent", he willed that the entire life of believers be one of repentance, because Christians remain sinners with an inner corruption that inclines them toward disobedience. It is therefore their duty to repent for each particular sin and to make regular confessions of sins and frank admissions of their unworthiness to receive divine favor. *Luke 19:1-10; I Timothy 1:12-17*
3. In the covenant of grace God has made full provision to preserve believers in the state of salvation, so that there is no sin so great that it would bring them damnation. The regular preaching of repentance is necessary therefore for both believers and non-believers. *Isaiah 1:16-18; 55:6-7; Romans 6:20-23; Revelation 2:1-7*

## **ARTICLE 16 - GOOD WORKS**

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1. Only the works which God has commanded in His Word are truly good. Any other works or prescriptions that people have promoted as good are not so, because they lack the sanction of Holy Scripture. The desire and ability to do good works does not arise from human nature but from impartation of saving grace, so that good works are the fruits and evidences of genuine, living faith. By means of such works believers demonstrate their gratitude, strengthen their assurance of salvation, and improve their Christian witness. They glorify God, who has made them new creatures in Christ. *Psalm 116:12-14; Matthew 5:13-16; John 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 6:11-12; James 2:14-26*
2. Although the works of believers are never perfect, God accepts them and rewards them because they are performed in faith and express love for him. The works of unbelievers, even though they may conform to the requirements of God's law, are not acceptable to God. They do not originate in faith, nor do they express love for God. They cannot make the doers worthy of divine favor, but to neglect such works is even more sinful and displeasing to the Lord than is the performance of them. *Matthew 25:14-30; 25:31-46; I Corinthians 13:1-13; Titus 3:3-8; Hebrews 11:4-6*

## **ARTICLE 17 - PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS**

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1. Real believers in Christ endure in the faith throughout their lives, and their persevering attachment to Christ is the chief mark that distinguishes them from superficial professors. Divine providence watches over their welfare and the power of God keeps them through faith unto salvation. *Psalm 37:23-29; John 8:31-32; 10:25-30; Hebrews 3:14; I John 2:18-19*
2. The perseverance of the saints depends upon the immutable decree of God in election, which, in turn, depends upon the free, unchangeable love of God the Father, the redeeming merits of God the Son, the Son's present intercession, and the believers' union with him. The Holy Spirit indwells the saints and never departs from them. The terms of the covenant of grace are immutable. *Jeremiah 32:36-41; John 14:13-21; Romans 5:9-11; 8:28-30; 9:10-16; Hebrews 6:13-20; I John 3:9-10*
3. When Christians fall into sin, they incur God's displeasure, grieve his Holy Spirit, diminish their comforts, experience accusations of conscience, impair their witness, and bring divine chastisements upon themselves. Yet, because they are saints, they will renew their repentance and through faith persevere in Christ to the end of their lives. *Psalm 32:1-5; 51:1-10; Isaiah 64:1-9; Matthew 26:69-75; Ephesians 4:29-32; I John 1:5-10*

## **ARTICLE 18 - THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION**

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1. The certainty of salvation is not mere probability but an infallible assurance of faith grounded in the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the Gospel. The Holy Spirit bears witness with believers' spirits that they are children of God. *Romans 8:15-17; Hebrews 6:11-20; II Peter 1:3-11; I John 3:1-3*
2. The infallible assurance of salvation is not an essential part of salvation, for true believers may struggle long before attaining to it. It does not come by extra-biblical revelation but by means of grace, as the Holy Spirit enables believers to know the reality of God's eternal love as guaranteed to the elect in Scripture. It is the duty of all who claim saving faith to be diligent in making their calling

and election sure by attending to the means of grace (observance of the Lord's Day, private reading and public proclamation of the Scriptures, participation in the sacraments, and prayer) and by regular self-examination in light of God's demands for holiness of life. This healthful spiritual exercise will lead the elect to an increase of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit and to deeper love and gratitude for his mercy. *Psalm 77:1-12; 119:33-40; Isaiah 50:8-10; Romans 5:1-5; 6:1-2; 14:16-18; Titus 2:11-14; I John 4:13-16*

## ARTICLE 19 - THE LAW OF GOD

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1. God gave to Adam and Eve a law written in their hearts, and he promulgated one specific commandment, that they refrain from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam, Eve, and their posterity were thereby bound to obey God completely and perpetually, and God threatened them with death if they violated his law. He endowed them with ability to keep his law. *Genesis 2:15-17; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10-12*
2. After the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, God continued to require obedience to the law he had written in their hearts, and in the time of Moses he inscribed it upon tablets of stone in the form of the Ten Commandments. This summary of the moral law now constitutes the whole duty of humanity toward God and mankind. *Exodus 20:1-18; Deuteronomy 5:6-21; 10:1-5; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Romans 2:12-16*
3. In addition to the moral law, God gave the people of Israel ceremonial laws as types of things to come. Among these regulations were rites relating to worship that prefigured Christ, his actions, sufferings, and blessings he procured for his people. The ceremonial laws remained in effect only until Christ came as the Messiah, and since the inauguration of the New Covenant, those laws are no longer binding upon believers. *I Corinthians 5:1-8; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-19; Hebrews 10:1-14*
4. Obedience to the moral law of God is a perpetual obligation for all human beings, including those justified through faith in Christ. Those who love God love his law also and seek to meditate upon it and to enact its requirements joyously. *Psalm 1:1-2; Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31; 13:8-10; James 2:8-13*
5. Although the law as a covenant of works has no application to believers, in other ways it is a great benefit to them. As a rule of life it informs them of God's will and instructs them of their duties. It exposes the sinful character of their natures, indicts them for sin, and calls them to a humble and honest admission of their need for Christ, who alone kept the law with no infractions. Because the law condemns sin, it encourages regenerate people to resist temptation and to suppress their evil tendencies. The warnings of the law remind believers of what punishments their sins deserve, and the promises attached to the law show God's approval of obedience and set forth the blessings that come as saints conform to the law's requirements. Freedom from condemnation and penalty of the law does not entail license to disregard God's moral precepts. *Romans 3:19-20; 6:11-14; 7:7; 8:1-5; Galatians 2:16; I Peter 3:8-12*
6. The uses of the law which expose sin and pronounce death upon offenders, and the didactic role of the law in instructing believers in the ways of righteousness, do not contradict the Gospel of grace, for the Holy Spirit subdues rebellious sinners and persuades and enables them to obey the law cheerfully. The opposite of law is not grace but lawlessness. *Ezekiel 36:24-32; Galatians 3:21-25; James 2:8-13*

## ARTICLE 20 - THE GOSPEL AND ITS GRACIOUS EXTENT

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1. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the law has continued as an indictment of human sin, but it cannot confer forgiveness and eternal life. God, therefore, in his mercy, promised a redeemer, who would be born of a woman, and by his grace, he promised to call his elect unto himself and to grant them faith and repentance to embrace Christ, the redeemer. This is the word of the Gospel; the means God employs for the conversion of lost sinners. *Genesis 3:14-15; Galatians 2:16; 3:10; 4:4*
2. The Gospel alone proclaims the true way of life. Its message does not appear in general revelation but in Scripture alone. This is the only external means of making the grace of Christ known to humanity, but an internal work of the Holy Spirit is necessary before sinners can and will believe the Gospel. The regeneration of dead sinners is indispensable before genuine conversion to Christ can occur. *Matthew 28:18-20; John 6:44; I Corinthians 2:10-15; II Corinthians 4:1-6*

## ARTICLE 21 - CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

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1. Christ has purchased a liberty for believer that include freedom from the guilt of sin and the penalty that guilt entails, freedom from the curse of God's law, and deliverance from bondage to sin and Satan and the fear of death and damnation. This freedom includes access to God and the liberty to obey him joyously, not as a slave serves his master, but with childlike love and eagerness. Although Old Covenant believers enjoyed these benefits, New Covenant saints participate in them more extensively, because they include freedom from ceremonial laws to which the Hebrews were subject but which Christ has fulfilled. *Luke 1:67-75; John 7:37-39; Romans 8:1-4; 12:17; I Corinthians 15:50-57; Galatians 1:3-4; 3:10-14; Hebrews 10:19-24; I John 4:18*
2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and he has set it free from any obligation to accept or obey doctrines or demands that in any way oppose his Word or which his Word does not contain. To accept such doctrines or demands is to betray liberty of conscience. *Matthew 15:1-9; Acts 4:13-20; Romans 14:1-12; I Corinthians 7:17-24; Galatians 5:1; Colossians 2:20-23; James 4:12*
3. To practice sin or to harbor evil desires on the pretense that Christian liberty allows it perverts the purpose of grace and endangers those guilty of such offenses, for the purpose of Christian liberty is to enable believers to serve God "without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all their days." *Luke 1:74, 75; Romans 6:1,2; Galatians 5:13; II Peter 2:18,21*

## ARTICLE 22 - WORSHIP AND THE LORD'S DAY

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1. Worship is due to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and to God alone, and, because of the fall, humans cannot worship him without a mediator. The sole acceptable mediator is Jesus Christ, and God requires that all people approach him in Jesus' name. All worship must be "in spirit and in truth." That is, it must proceed from sincere love for God, and it must be rendered in accord with God's Word. Nothing false may occur in acts of worship, whether it be untrue doctrine, improper prayer, or non-scriptural music. *Exodus 20:1-6; Deuteronomy 2:29-32; Psalm 95:1-7; Jeremiah 10:6-7; Matthew 4:1-11; John 4:19-24; 14:5-7; Romans 8:22-27; I Timothy 2:1-8; I John 5:13-15; Revelation 19:9-10*

2. Reading the Scriptures, preaching and hearing God’s Word, and instructing and admonishing one another by “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” are essential features of worship, along with the reverent observance of the sacraments. On special occasions fasting, solemn humiliation, and thanksgiving are appropriate as well. *Exodus 15:1-19; Psalm 107; Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 5:19; I Timothy 4:13; II Timothy 4:1-2*
3. Humans are responsible to worship God everywhere according to the requirements of his Word. This should occur on an individual basis, in families, and in religious assemblies. To neglect or to forsake such worship is sin. God has determined that one day in each seven be a special time allocated for worship, a holy Sabbath unto himself. The observance of the Sabbath, a creation ordinance, now called “The Lord’s Day,” is a positive, moral, and perpetual obligation continuing until the end of time. *Exodus 20:8; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2; I Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 10:23-25; Revelation 1:9-11*
4. People keep the Lord’s Day holy when they lay aside mundane activities and give themselves to the private and public worship of God and to the performance of works of mercy and necessity. *Nehemiah 13:15-22; Isaiah 58:13-14; Matthew 12:1-13*

#### **ARTICLE 23 - CIVIL GOVERNMENT**

1. As King of the universe, God has instituted civil government and has established authorities, subject to him, to rule communities for his glory and for the public good. To these authorities he has the given power of life and death for the safety and encouragement of those who do good and for the restraint and punishment of those who do evil. Christians may accept the duties of public office as a means to maintain justice and peace. Civil government may wage war when justice and necessity require it. *II Samuel 23:1-4; Psalm 82:1-4; Luke 7:1-10; Romans 13:1-7*
2. All people are obliged to obey the civil rulers in all matters that concur with God’s laws. They must submit to all lawful authorities, pray for them, and pay taxes due them. They may disobey such rulers only in cases where such obedience would conflict with their duty to obey God. In such incidents rightful disobedience must be passive, not violent, in character. *Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 4:1-22; Romans 13:1-7; I Timothy 2:1-2; I Peter 2:13-17*

#### **ARTICLE 24 - MARRIAGE**

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1. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. A man may not have more than one wife nor a woman more than one husband at the same time. God instituted marriage for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the procreation of the human race, and for the prevention of immorality. *Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18, 20-34; Malachi 2:15; Matthew 19:3-6; I Corinthians 7:1-9*
2. All kinds of people may marry, provided they are able to give rational consent. It is the duty of Christians, however, to marry only “in the Lord”. Those who profess Christ may not enter the marital covenant with those who are unbelievers. It is unfitting for godly people to marry persons who lead wicked lives or who maintain heretical beliefs. *Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Nehemiah 13:23-27; II Corinthians 6:14-18; I Timothy 4:1-5; Hebrews 13:4*
3. Marriage must not be contracted within the degrees of blood relationship or kinship forbidden in God’s Word. Such incestuous relationships can never be made lawful, whether by civil government

or by consent of the parties involved. Marriage is a life-long binding contract. *Genesis 2:21-24; Leviticus 18; Matthew 19:1-6; Mark 6:18; I Corinthians 5:1*

4. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to obtain a divorce if the guilty party is impenitent. In such cases, after the divorce, the innocent party is also free to marry another. Nothing but adultery or willful desertion, which neither church nor civil officials can remedy, is sufficient reason to dissolve a marriage. *Matthew 19:8-9; I Corinthians 7:12-15*

## ARTICLE 25 - THE CHURCH

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1. The catholic or universal church consists of all of God's chosen people on earth and in heaven. Its precise membership God alone knows, so it is invisible with respect to the Holy Spirit. It is the "body of Christ," who is sovereign head of the church. *Ephesians 1:1-23; 5:22-32; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 12:22-24*
2. Even the purest congregations of believers are liable to be troubled by error and evil behavior of their members, and some congregations have degenerated to the point that they are no longer churches but "synagogues of Satan." Christ, nevertheless, maintains his body in this world and protects it so that even the "gates of Hades will not overcome it." Christ supremely governs and defends his church and will do so until the end of time. *Matthew 16:13-30; 28:18-20; I Corinthians 5; II Thessalonians 2:1-12; Revelation 2:1-3:21*
3. The members of the true church are those saints whom God has called effectually to salvation, and those people then profess Christ openly and conform their lives to his laws. A local church, organized according to the will of Christ, is composed of believers and under the authority of duly chosen elders, otherwise known as pastors. The congregation must select its pastors and publicly install them through prayer and the laying on of hands. In a similar way, the church must select deacons to assist the elders in ways the elders and congregation may direct. The choice of deacons too must be accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands. *Acts 2:38-41; 5:12-14; 6:1-7; 14:21-25; 20:13-38; Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:1-3; II Corinthians 9:12-15; Philippians 1:1-3; I Timothy 4:11-14*
4. Elders must give faithful attention to the service of God through the care of his people in the church. This means that elders will give priority to prayer and the ministry of God's Word, and grateful congregations must honor and support their elders spiritually and materially and allow them time to pursue the priorities of their calling without undue distractions. *Acts 6:3-4; I Corinthians 9:1-14; Galatians 6:6-7; I Timothy 5:17-20; Hebrews 13:7*
5. Although elders have the duty to preach and teach God's Word, this responsibility need not be exclusively theirs. If the Holy Spirit has conferred the requisite gifts upon others in the congregation, it is fitting that they too exercise them for the benefit of the body. In this case the elders should recognize such gifts and allow those who possess them to share in the ministry under the supervision of the elders. *Acts 11:19-21; I Peter 4:10-11*
6. All believers in Christ have a solemn obligation to join a local church that proclaims biblical Christianity and to support its ministry and submit to its authority. They are duty-bound to pray for the prosperity of the ministry of that and of all faithful churches and to assist other believers by the exercise of their spiritual gifts, whatever those gifts may be. Local congregations which share a

common doctrinal basis should fellowship and cooperate with one another as a testimony to their unity in faith and mission. *John 17:6-25; Romans 16:1-2; Ephesians 6:18; I Thessalonians 5:12-14; II Thessalonians 3:6-15; III John 5-10*

7. When difficulties or differences arise with regard to doctrine or church government, and the peace and unity of the church are at risk, the matter may involve only one congregation, or it may concern the entire fellowship of churches in communion with one another. If a member or members of a congregation be injured by unjust discipline, or if a dispute about doctrine threatens the allegiance of a congregation to God's truth, it is appropriate for churches of the same character to confer together to advise one another and to recommend a proper course of action for the church or churches affected. Although such a conference of churches has no authority over the internal affairs of any one congregation, it may, when necessity arises, sever fellowship with a congregation that remains adherent to false teachings or which maintains unjust discipline of one or more of its members. *Acts 15:1-35; II Corinthians 1:23-34; I John 4:1-3; II John 7-11*

## **ARTICLE 26 - THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH**

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The term sacrament identifies something set apart for sacred use, a sign or seal of God's oath or pledge to forgive sins because of Christ's sacrifice. Sacraments are outward, visible signs of an inner, spiritual grace, visible enactments of the Word proclaimed audibly through preaching. The Word and the sacraments are inseparable, for there could be no sacraments without the Word. The Word and sacraments are the ordinary means by which God communicates his grace to his people. They proclaim God's actions within the covenant of grace by pointing people to Christ, and the Holy Spirit applies grace to those who believe. The sacraments are channels which Christ has instituted in the church, as he has pledged himself to his people to be their Savior. The Word of God proclaims that truth to the ears; the sacraments proclaim it to the eyes. In the proper observance of the sacraments, the Word of God becomes visible, for there is a visible portrayal of the truth of redemption through Christ's work. The Word of God precedes the sacraments and gives them their significance. The Word exists apart from the sacraments, but the sacraments cannot exist apart from the Word. *Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:1-4; I Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:26*

## **ARTICLE 27 - BAPTISM**

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1. The sacrament of Baptism is a sign to believers that God has accepted them for Christ's sake. It signifies believers' fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection and their being engrafted into Christ; it portrays to them the remission of their sins because of Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. It indicates that baptized people have received Christ as Savior and Lord and have accepted the obligation to live in a manner pleasing to him. *Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:1-4; I Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:26*
2. Faith in Jesus Christ and repentance for sin are prerequisites for Baptism, and water is the outward sign to be applied in the administration of the sacrament. Believers are to be immersed in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19-20; John 3:22-23; Acts 2:14-41; 8:12-40; 16:25-40; 18:7-8*

## ARTICLE 28 - THE LORD'S SUPPER

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1. Christ instituted the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, on the night when he was betrayed as a perpetual remembrance of his sacrifice of himself. It is a sign to believers that the benefits of the Lord's death apply to them, and receiving it promotes their spiritual nourishment and growth in sanctifying grace. The communal reception of this sacrament binds Christians together in a communion of saints, as they pledge themselves to Christ and to one another. *I Corinthians 10:14-21; 11:17-34*
2. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament but not a sacrifice. It does not supplement the sacrifice of Christ on the cross but is a memorial of that sacrifice, a spiritual offering of praise to God for the atoning death of Christ, which is forever sufficient for sin and therefore needs no repetition or supplement. *Matthew 26:17-30; I Corinthians 11:17-34; Hebrews 9:11-28*
3. In this sacrament Christ directed his ministers to pray, and to set apart the elements of bread and wine for holy use. Those who administer the Eucharist should break the bread and present the cup and give both to the recipients, while the ministers themselves participate at the same time. The outward signs of bread and wine do not become the body and blood of Christ, but they bear such a close relationship to the crucified Lord that they are sometimes called by the names of the things they signify, the body and blood of Christ. *Matthew 26:17-30; I Corinthians 11:17-34*
4. Those who, with sincere faith and contrite hearts, receive the emblems of Christ's body and blood, at the same time feed upon Christ crucified and receive all the benefits accruing from his death. Inwardly and by faith they feed upon Christ, whose body and blood are spiritually but not physically present to those who commune believingly. *I Corinthians 10:14-21; 11:17-34*
5. All who desire to receive the Lord's Supper must examine themselves, so that they express proper reverence for the Lord and his sacrament, lest they sin against his body and blood and bring judgment upon themselves. The Supper is the gift of Christ for his own people, so unbelievers, and Christians who live with the knowledge of unconfessed sin must refrain from participating. *I Corinthians 11:27-32; II Corinthians 6:14-18*

## ARTICLE 29 - THE STATE OF MAN AFTER DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

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1. After physical death human bodies return to dust, but souls return to God who gave them. The souls of the redeemed are perfected in holiness and received into paradise, where they dwell with Christ and await the resurrection of their bodies. The souls of lost sinners are confined to hell, where they endure just punishment while they await final judgment at the return of Christ to earth. Heaven and hell are the only places of residence for departed souls, for Scripture speaks of no other abode. *Genesis 3:17-19; Ecclesiastes 12:1-8; Luke 16:19-31; 23:32-43; II Corinthians 5:1-8; Philippians 1:21-26; Hebrews 12:22-24; Jude 3-7*
2. At the return of Christ, Christians then on earth will not die but will be changed into the likeness of their Savior. The dead in Christ will arise bodily from their graves to receive a blessed immortality, as their souls reunite with their bodies to enjoy full salvation with Christ for eternity. *Job 19:25-27; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:1-4; I Corinthians 15:35-56; I Thessalonians 4:13-18*

3. When Christ returns, he will raise the bodies of lost sinners as well as those of his redeemed children. The lost will then, as whole beings, body and soul, go to judgment to receive the penalties their sins deserve. *Daniel 12:1-4; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:14-16*

## **ARTICLE 30 - THE LAST JUDGMENT**

1. God has appointed a day in which he will judge humanity in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has given all authority to judge. At that time, apostate angels and all human beings who have lived upon the earth will appear before the Lord to account for their thoughts, words, and deeds, there to receive his awards in accordance with what they have done while on earth, whether good or evil. *Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 12:36-37; 25:31-46; John 5:19-30; Acts 17:29-31; Romans 14:9-12; II Corinthians 5:6-10; Jude 3-7*
2. God's purpose in judgment is to display the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of his elect, and to show the glory of his justice in the damnation of the lost. In that day, the saved, justified through faith alone in Christ alone, will inherit everlasting life and blessed immortality to enjoy in the presence of their Lord. Those who do not know God and have not obeyed the gospel of Christ will suffer exclusion from the divine presence forever and will receive the punishment due to their sins. *Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 9:19-26; II Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 22:12-21*
3. The certainty of divine judgment to come is to deter sinners and to encourage saints to realize that full redemption approaches ever nearer. God has kept the time of Christ's return secret, and his Word forbids speculation about it. Believers are to watch and ever be prepared to meet their returning Savior, no matter how soon or how distant his advent will be. Their prayer must be, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen." *Mark 13:32-37; Luke 12:35-40; II Timothy 4:1-8; Revelation 22:12-21*

## **PART TWO: CONSTITUTION**

### **PREAMBLE**

The members of Grace Covenant Church constitute, establish, and joyfully submit themselves to the following articles. This Ohio nonprofit religious corporation has its office in Beavercreek, Ohio.

### **ARTICLE 1 - STATEMENT OF MISSION**

#### **SECTION 1 - PURPOSE**

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The purpose of Grace Covenant Church is to glorify and enjoy God by fulfilling the purposes of His Kingdom through loving obedience to the Great Commission as given by its Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Therefore, this community, gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit, applies itself to making disciples of Christ by proclaiming the gospel to non-believers, by persuading them to place their faith in him, and by producing mature saints who joyfully submit themselves to the King's rule. The work will culminate when Christ returns and all people bow before him, confessing his absolute reign over the entire created realm *Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; 1 Peter 2:9; Mark 10:42-45; Matthew 22:34-40; Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 8:18-27*

#### **SECTION 2 - SPIRITUAL COMMITMENT**

The spiritual commitment that magnifies the mission of Grace Covenant Church to enact authentic Christian ministry is its growing passion for God and increasing compassion for others.

#### **SECTION 3 - VALUES**

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Grace Covenant Church sets forth its basic values and understanding of its essential mission. These values, distinguishing this local church from many others, create the necessary context required to promote effective decision making. Thus, whenever this fellowship constructs long range goals, short term objectives, and implementation strategies, it must do so in a manner consistent with these values. The values impelling this community to fulfill its mission are listed as below.

##### **A. Biblical Authority**

Grace Covenant Church commits itself to conforming to the full authority of the Scriptures which alone are sufficient for life and godliness. It seeks to submit itself to the proclamation of the whole counsel of God, to the regular exposition of biblical passages, and to the truths it proclaims.

##### **B. Genuine Worship**

Grace Covenant Church commits itself to exalting the matchless reputation of God through worship that is in accordance with biblical teaching. The essential elements of this worship are the reading of Scripture, preaching and teaching the Bible, reverent observance of the sacraments, participation in common prayer, and singing to God's glory.

##### **C. Ethical Integrity**

Grace Covenant Church commits itself to developing a ministry characterized by ethical integrity as evidenced through honest communication, mutual accountability, and responsible stewardship. Its

membership desires genuine relationships that characterize all of its life.

#### **D. Evangelistic Fervor**

Grace Covenant Church commits itself to fulfilling the “Great Commission” by equipping its members for personal evangelism, supporting and praying for missions at home and abroad, and praying for spiritual awakening.

#### **E. Ministry Training**

Grace Covenant Church commits itself to equipping its members through education in the Scriptures. This training is intended to enable members to serve and edify fellow believers through the employment of their spiritual gifts.

#### **F. Community Atmosphere**

Grace Covenant Church commits itself to develop a community atmosphere characterized by mutual love and prayer for one another. The members encourage one another to bear each other’s burdens, to serve and strengthen individuals and family units by demonstrating Christ’s love through hospitality to all.

### **SECTION 4 - VISION**

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Grace Covenant Church strives to become a body of faithful believers adoring God as he has revealed himself through inerrant Scripture, demonstrating a commitment to the centrality of God in worship and ministry, providing systematic instruction in God’s Word through preaching and teaching, and honoring God through employment of its treasure, time, talents, and all of the resources God has provided.

Grace Covenant Church seeks to fulfill the “Great Commission” (*Matthew 28:19-20*) by proclaiming the gospel and living by its truths, baptizing believers, and making disciples of Christ in its neighborhood and throughout the world until the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **ARTICLE 2 - GOVERNMENT**

#### **SECTION 1 - CHRIST AS HEAD OF THE CHURCH**

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Grace Covenant Church gratefully acknowledges Christ alone as the Head of his body, the church. The Community recognizes the Holy Scriptures alone as the inerrant and sufficient guide in all matters of faith, church order, and discipline. This local assembly, acting with wisdom and prudence, may seek the assistance and counsel of other churches when special concerns arise; however, it is neither accountable to nor under the jurisdiction nor direct supervision of, any other ecclesiastical body. Thus, the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this community. This congregation may never cooperate with any group that permits the presence of apostasy or that denies fundamental tenets of the Gospel. *Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; II Timothy 3:12-17; II Peter 1:19-21; Acts 15:1-35*

#### **SECTION 2 - ELDERS AS SERVANT-LEADERS OF THE CHURCH**

A plurality of elders shall lead this local church as defined in Article VI. These men shall at all times and in all activities stand under the authority of Christ and His Word. They shall exercise authoritative and decisive leadership, but they must do so as servant-leaders and faithful stewards of the community, not as lords and dictators. *I Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 20:24-28*

## ARTICLE 3 - ARTICLES OF FAITH

### SECTION 1 - SCRIPTURE ALONE AS THE FINAL AUTHORITY

The Scripture alone is the final and ultimate authority in all matters related to the Christian life. Since God's Word remains the final authority for this community, the creeds, declarations, and confessions contained within *Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order* do not bind this congregation in a strict and absolute sense. This assembly's confession of faith assists its leaders and members in the event that controversy should arise.

### SECTION 2 - TRUTHS CONFESSED BY THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

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Grace Covenant Church requires that all members agree with the central truths of biblical Christianity as summarized in "*The Truths That We Confess*" as they appear in *The Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order* (Part One: "Confession of Faith", Section 1). In addition, all members shall demonstrate both a willingness to abide by this constitution and a sincere desire to grow in their understanding of the '**Truths That We Treasure**' and the '**Truths That We Teach**' (Part One: Confession of Faith, Sections 2-3).

### SECTION 3 - TRUTHS TREASURED BY MINISTRY LEADERS

Grace Covenant Church requires all members of its diaconate, all teachers, and all missionaries to agree with and teach in a manner demonstrating full harmony with the "**Truths That We Treasure**", a concise summary statement of the "**Truths That We Teach**" (Confession of Faith, Section 2).

### SECTION 4 - TRUTHS TAUGHT BY ELDERS

Grace Covenant Church requires all of its elders to enthusiastically agree with the "**Truths That We Teach**". This statement, based upon the *Westminster Confession* and the *Second London Confession* as its models, provides the elders of this fellowship with a brief systematic theology (Confession of Faith, Section 3). As such, it assists them by helping them develop and communicate a distinctive Christian world and life view. This tool thoroughly grounds the members of the fellowship so they become better equipped for kingdom living. *1 Peter 3:15*

## ARTICLE 4 - CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

### SECTION 1 - DEFINITION AND FUNCTION

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All those having placed their faith in Jesus Christ immediately secure the baptism of the Holy Spirit and join the universal church, the body of Christ, of which He is the head (*1 Corinthians 12:12-20; Ephesians 1:22*). All believers in Christ must join with a local church thus becoming members of a clearly defined local community of believers (*Acts 2:41-47; 14:21-23; 20:28; Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13*). Church membership requires every church member to fulfill numerous responsibilities beyond that of placing their names upon a formal role.

## SECTION 2 - RESPONSIBILITIES

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### **A. Commitment to the Means of Grace**

This local fellowship requires its members to commit themselves to the consistent exercise of the various means of sanctifying grace made available by God to them. These means of grace include the following:

**1. Proclamation and Application of God's Word**

Each member must listen faithfully to the public instruction of the Word of God with a desire to apply the Scriptures to daily life. This duty requires the complete participation of each member at the regularly scheduled activities, especially on the Lord's Day. *Acts 2:42; II Timothy 3:16-4:4; Ephesians 4:11-14*

**2. Fellowship of Believers**

Each member must minister sincerely to the welfare of the rest of this local assembly on a regular, continuous basis. Faithful attendance at the stated services of the church, unless providentially hindered, is an obligation, not an option, for all church members. No members shall habitually divide their time and interests between other local assemblies and this one without the consent of the elders. *Acts 2:42, 47; I Corinthians 12:13; Hebrews 10:24, 25*

**3. Communion of the Saints**

Each member must participate consistently in the Lord's Table in the congregational setting as scheduled by the elders. *Acts 2:42; I Peter 2:5,9; I John 2:19*

**4. Exercise of Prayer**

Each member must regularly exercise prayer on behalf of others. This duty carries with it the responsibility of continuously interceding for the on-going ministry of the local church. *Acts 2:42; Philippians 1:3-6; Colossians 4:2-4; James 5:13-14*

All those, then, who would count themselves members of this local community of believers, must fulfill the functions of membership as defined by the Scriptures.

### **B. Commitment to Biblical Governance within the Home**

This fellowship expects its members to follow the Scriptures in governance of their homes. The home holds a central attention in God's Word and is the object of frequent exhortations in the New Testament, as appearing below:

1. Men must lovingly and firmly lead their families. *Ephesians 5:23-24; I Peter 3:7*
2. Women must show respect for and joyfully submit themselves to their husbands. *Ephesians 5:22*
3. Parents must train and instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, by righteous example, and by firm discipline. *Proverbs 13:24; 23:13; 29:15; Ephesians 6:4*
4. Children must reverently obey their parents. *Ephesians 6:1-2*

*These primary responsibilities, prayerfully executed, honor the name of Christ in the community and strengthen the cause of Christ in generations to come.*

### **C. Commitment to Kingdom Work**

All members of this church have the privilege and duty to exercise their spiritual gifts for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Thus, all members must recognize and seize every opportunity to redeem the time, to bear witness to their faith in Christ, and to give sacrificially of themselves to the good of the body. *I Corinthians 15; II Corinthians 5:11-21*

### **D. Commitment to Sacrificial Financial Giving**

Every member has the responsibility of generously and faithfully supporting this local church by giving

financial offerings to it. Scripture asserts proportionate and sacrificial giving as a distinctive and positive privilege. For this reason, the members of this congregation pledge their support by making systematic contributions on a regular basis. *Malachi 3:8-11; I Corinthians 16:2*

#### **E. Commitment to Obedience and Christian Liberty**

All members of this assembly must render in their daily lives joyful, spontaneous, and loyal obedience to all the moral precepts established in the Word of God (*Romans 8:3-4; James 2:12*). If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in his Word, Christians are at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to live in the fear of God and to glorify Him in all things (*I Peter 1:17; I Cor. 10:31*). Those practicing Christian liberty must demonstrate a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brothers (*I Corinthians 8:9; Romans 15:1-3*), a compassion for the lost (*I Corinthians 9:19-22*), and a zealous regard for the health of their own lives (*Romans 13:14; I Peter 2:16*).

#### **F. Commitment to the Authority and Oversight of the Church**

All who choose membership within this church accept the obligation to recognize and submit themselves to the authority of the elders of the church in matters clearly expressed in Scripture. *I Corinthians 16:15-16; I Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17*

### **SECTION 3 - REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. Profession of Faith in Christ**

All persons professing repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, having been baptized following their profession of faith, expressing a willingness to follow the beliefs and practices of this fellowship, and evidencing a willingness to submit to its governing authorities shall be eligible for church membership.

Admission to membership does not require one's *mastery* of the entire *Grace Covenant Confession of Faith* that appears in the first part of this constitution. Such a requirement violates the order of Matthew 28:19-20 which instructs the church to baptize and then to teach baptized disciples to observe all of Christ's commands. *It is necessary, however, that any believers applying for membership demonstrate a willingness to abide by the constitution and a sincere desire to grow in their understanding of the confession of faith of the church.*

#### **B. Those in Basic Disagreement**

Anyone in basic disagreement with the constitution, purpose, and confession of faith of this assembly could not be consistently submissive to the teaching ministry of the fellowship. The church shall not admit such a person to membership because this would be unwise and without scriptural support.

### **SECTION 4 - ADMISSION**

#### **A. Application Procedure**

Any persons desiring membership in this congregation may request interviews with the elders. Upon receiving such requests, the elders shall distribute applications for membership as well as copies of The Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order to the potential members. These elders shall then meet with the applicants so they may hear the candidates' testimonies and determine whether they fulfill the basic requirements for membership.

#### **B. Correspondence with Other Local Churches**

If applicants are or have been members of other local congregations, the elders will attempt to determine

their standing in those assemblies and the reasons for their departure. Before the elders accept them into membership, they may send a letter of inquiry concerning the candidates' standing in their former congregations.

### **C. Procedure of Final Acceptance**

Upon reception of the written applications, the elders will schedule meetings with the applicants. If either the applicants or the elders have any problems or reservations at this point in the process, they shall seek to achieve a private resolution of the matter. The elders may postpone the reception of applicants into membership until they are able properly to investigate the matter and answer any objections which, in their judgment, are sufficiently serious. Once the elders have determined the applicants' eligibility as members, they shall extend the right hand of fellowship to these people at a stated meeting of the congregation.

## **SECTION 5 - CATEGORIES**

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### **A. Resident Membership**

Resident membership is for those active, participating members who comprise the majority of the congregation.

### **B. Non-resident Membership**

Non-resident membership is for those serving on mission fields, attending school outside the area for extended periods, or people whose circumstances, at the discretion of the elders, seem to fit this category. Those desiring non-resident memberships must apply for it in writing to the elders and must maintain communication with the church and support it upon returning home. Such members will not participate in affirmations until they return to the church, meet with the elders, and make request for resident membership.

### **C. Associate Membership**

Those desiring memberships during short term relocation may apply for associate membership. In such cases, associate members may keep their membership active in their official home churches. These associate members may not participate in affirmation in family meetings but may exercise all other duties and privileges of membership.

## **SECTION 6 - WITHDRAWAL AND EXCLUSION**

### **A. By Physical Death**

When members of the fellowship are removed from the visible church by death, the elders must remove their names from the membership roll.

### **B. By Transfer**

When members seek transference to another assembly they must make request for the elders to remove their names from the membership roll of this body. Members may request a letter of recommendation from the elders to their new assembly. As long as members are in good standing with this fellowship, are not in the process of church discipline, and the church where they are attending is in basic agreement with the central truths of the faith, the elders may grant their approval of the transfer. If, however, members are currently subject to church discipline or they request transference to a church not adhering to the central truths of the faith, the elders must not give consent for the transfer. In such cases, these members will receive admonitions and warnings concerning their spiritual state. *1 John 2:19; Matthew 7:21-23*

### **C. By Exclusion**

#### **1. Willful Absence**

Members who for a period of three to six months habitually and willingly absent themselves from the regular meetings of the church, or do not fulfill the functions of membership, or who show no interest in the church, shall be admonished and warned by the elders of the serious spiritual state such actions manifest (*1 John 2:19; Matthew 7:21-23*). If there is no response the elders shall enlist the congregation to contact these members (*Galatians 6:1-2; John 13:34-35*). If they fail to respond to the congregation, the elders shall exclude them from the membership records. Those removed from membership shall be so advised by letter from the elders. If an excluded member applies again for membership, the procedures set forth in Section 3 of this article would again apply.

#### **2. Relocation**

Members who relocate and who make no effort either to maintain a vital contact with this church or to transfer their membership will receive admonition and possible exclusion from the membership by action of the elders. In such instances, the elders shall announce to the congregation that such persons have been dismissed from this membership.

### **D. By Excommunication**

According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, this congregation must cut off from its fellowship and membership any persons who teach or insist upon holding to false and heretical doctrine. This assembly must break its fellowship with any persons who blatantly and persistently conduct themselves in a manner inconsistent with their Christian profession or who disturb the unity or peace of the church. ***This procedure is explained in Article V of this constitution.***

## **SECTION 7- AFFIRMATION PRIVILEGES FOR RESIDENT MEMBERS**

Resident membership in this church shall entitle members to participate at family meetings. Only resident members whose names stand on the resident membership record the day of any family meeting are eligible to participate. These resident members must be at least eighteen (18) years of age. Members must exercise their privilege to affirm in person by attendance at the meeting. This church does not permit absentee ballots.

## **SECTION 8 - FAMILY MEETINGS**

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### **A. The Annual Family Meeting**

The annual family meeting shall be held each year sometime in June. At this meeting, the membership shall receive ministry reports for the preceding church year, affirm a balanced budget, and conduct other matters as deemed necessary. Copies of the proposed budget and public notice of this meeting must be given at the regular services on two preceding Sundays.

### **B. Other Family Meetings**

The congregation shall, in addition to the annual family meeting, conduct quarterly family meetings as deemed necessary by the elders. In addition, any member of this congregation may request a special family meeting by stating his or her reasons in writing to the elders, who may then schedule such meetings at any time. The elders shall, however, give prior notice of the meeting, stating its time and purpose for two consecutive Sundays during the services of the church. In the event of an immediate crisis or a rare

need requiring immediate action, no such advance notice is necessary. Such urgent matters, including the need for immediate church discipline or other serious action, require only twenty-four hours' notice. The elders alone shall determine when a crisis demands such action. The only matters that may be conducted at a special family meeting is that which the elders announce as the reason for the meeting.

### **C. Moderator**

The chairman of the elders shall moderate the family meetings. In the event that the moderator is absent, the elders shall appoint another elder to serve as the vice-moderator.

### **D. Quorum**

The quorum necessary for the transaction of a family business meeting is 25% of the resident members eligible to participate. Among the members present, not fewer than two elders shall be in attendance.

### **E. Affirmation of Matters**

A simple majority of those who are present and participating is necessary for affirming any matter unless otherwise stated in this constitution. In the event that any item shall come to the congregation that does not fall under a category appearing in this constitution, the elders shall determine the percentage of participation needed to affirm the matter.

## **ARTICLE 5 - DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS**

### **STEP 1 - FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE**

Formative discipline functions positively to promote and maintain the conditions of learning necessary for making obedient disciples in the body of Christ. Formative discipline involves teaching truth in such a way that it stimulates progressive righteousness in the lives of God's people. This is the formal responsibility of the church's leadership (*Ephesians 4:11-12*) and the informal responsibility of all members. All must exercise their spiritual gifts, encourage, admonish, teach and serve the other members of the community. *I Corinthians 12:12-27; Hebrews 10:24-25; Colossians 3:16; Galatians 5:13-14*

### **STEP 2 - CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE**

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Corrective discipline is necessary because of conduct or doctrine contrary to biblical requirements. Corrective discipline must occur when members refuse to settle differences biblically (*Matthew 18:15-35*), when public and scandalous sins occur (*I Corinthians 5:1-13*), and / or heretical beliefs appear in the congregation (*I Timothy 1:18-20*), and / or divisive actions persist among members (*Titus 3:9-11*). Corrective discipline always aims for the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the congregation, and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offenders.

### **STEP 3 - STEPS OF CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE**

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#### **A. One to One Attempt to Restore**

Any member of this church, having *factual knowledge* of an erring member's heresy, misconduct, or refusal to be reconciled must correct such a person in private and seek his or her restoration (*Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1-2*). However, members must not become *busy bodies* seeking such confrontations.

## **B. One or Two Witnesses Attempt to Restore**

If, after repeated attempts, the erring member refuses to heed such warnings, then the warning member shall return, privately, with one or two witnesses. These witnesses, after self-examination and prayer, shall adjudicate the matter and seek to reconcile the parties and / or to restore the erring member (*Matthew 18:16, 19-20*).

## **C. Members Attempt to Restore**

### **Stage 1 - Report to the Elders**

If the witnesses determine that the erring member refuses to heed such warnings, they shall report the matter to the Elders. This report is necessary if the church is to conduct its ministry in a decent and organized manner during the process. God has called the elders, not the general membership, to keep watch over the flock. These men will give an account to God for their stewardship of the church (*Hebrews 13:17*). For this reason, their involvement at this point in the process is absolutely necessary. At this stage, the witnesses along with the elders, after self-examination and prayer, shall adjudicate the matter and seek to reconcile the parties and / or to restore the erring member (*Matthew 18:16, 19-20*).

### **Stage 2 - Report to the Membership**

If the witnesses and the elders determine that the erring member refuses to heed such warnings, they shall report the matter (only the necessary information) to the entire fellowship. At this stage, the witnesses along with the elders and the entire congregation, after self-examination and prayer, shall adjudicate the matter and seek to reconcile the parties and / or to restore the erring believer (*Matthew 18:16, 19-20; Galatians 6:1-5*). At this point in the process, the members of the congregation may associate with the erring brother or sister only to warn him or her of his or her error. During this sobering time, the fellowship must exclude the erring one from participation in the Lord's table and the privileges of membership, according to the guidelines of Scripture. *Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:9-11; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15*

A member may, at times due to the public and scandalous nature of his or her sin, be reported by the elders to the congregation, at this level of discipline without pursuing the informal and private steps (*I Corinthians 5:1-13*). *This will occur only if the elders have found it impossible to implement the informal and private procedure first. Only the elders are authorized to make such a report.*

## **D. Excommunication**

### **1. Failure to Heed Warnings**

If, after members of the congregation have attempted to retain the erring member, he or she still refuses to repent, he or she shall be put out of the church, "turned over to Satan", and treated as an unbeliever, being publicly dismissed from the church. *Matthew 18:17-18; I Corinthians 5:4-5, 13; I Timothy 1:18-20*

### **2. Acceptance of Resignation and Report to the Membership**

If, during any of the steps of corrective discipline, the erring member seeks to resign from the membership of the church, the church shall accept the resignation. The elders shall in such instances report the reasons for the resignation to the congregation. At this time the elders shall publicly disclose any unresolved issues to all members. Then, the elders shall instruct the congregation to treat the resigning member according to the commands in *Matthew 18:17* and *I Corinthians 5:9-11*.

## **E. Restoration of the Erring member**

### **1. Informal and Private Level of Discipline**

If the erring member repents at the informal and private level of discipline (e.g., one-to-one and witness stage), then repentance, confession and restoration shall be private. *Matthew 18:15-16; Luke 17:3-4; Ephesians 4: 32; Colossians 3:13*

## **2. Formal and Public Level of Discipline**

If the discipline proceeds to the formal level of public disclosure before the congregation, then, the repentance, confession, and restoration must also be formal and before the congregation. *II Corinthians 2:5-11*

## **3. Responsibility of Membership**

At whatever level restoration occurs, members must forgive the offender upon his or her confession and repentance. *Luke 17:3-4; Ephesians 4:32; II Corinthians 2:5-11*

# **ARTICLE 6 - THE ELDERS**

## **SECTION 1 - THE NECESSARY GIFT**

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Jesus Christ alone is head of his body, the church (*Colossians 1:18*), and he governs it by **servant-leaders** endowed by His Spirit with the necessary gifts and graces needed faithfully to accomplish their work. Therefore, it is the duty of the whole church to seek continually to discover those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for leading God's People. Christ has ordained that local churches be governed by such men called elders. *Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4*

## **SECTION 2 - THE BASIC FUNCTION**

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God has called men known as *elders, pastors, and overseers* to function as those who govern and teach the congregation. These three interchangeable names designate one and the same ministry in a New Testament church. *Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-4; I Timothy 3:1; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:7*

## **SECTION 3 - SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES**

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### **A. Shepherding**

Since God commands elders to shepherd his flock (*Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-4*), elders must:

1. Preach and teach the Word of God. *Colossians 1:28; I Timothy 5:17; II Timothy 4:1*
2. Establish the theological and doctrinal purity of the church and guard the flock of God against error and heresy. *Acts 20:28-31*
3. Counsel and admonish believers, confront sin, and teach individuals and families as men who will give an account to God. *Acts 20:20; I Thessalonians 5:12; Colossians 1:28; Ezekiel 34; Hebrews 13:17*
4. Pray for the congregation and the work of God. *Acts 6:3-4*
5. Equip the membership for ministry. *Ephesians 4:11-16; II Timothy 2:2*
6. Organize the official pulpit committee and submit to the membership the name of a suitable candidate for the ministry of Pastor if the need arises.

### **B. Oversight**

Since God commands elders to oversee his flock (*Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3:1*) they must manage it as a father would his family (*I Timothy 3:4-5; 5:17; I Thessalonians 5:12-13*). Elders must:

1. Supply the pulpit in the absence of those elders with primary pulpit responsibilities.
2. Lead in the discipline and reconciliation of erring members.
3. Operate as ex-officio members of all church councils, committees, and groups.
4. Appoint and oversee the work with the diaconate as together they establish and implement the policies, procedures, ministry descriptions, and practices of the church.

5. Designate all ministry leaders and ministry teams for the orderly functioning of the church.
6. Listen to the members of the church, remembering that elders are not lords but leaders and that the church is composed of gifted members. To that end, the elders must actively seek the advice of the congregation when making decisions or setting policy. They shall receive, consider, and dispose of any grievance, suggestion, or recommendation from any member or organization of the church.
7. Correct any members or non-members at times when these create dissension that impairs the unity or the doctrinal integrity of the church. At such times, it shall be the duty of the elders to rebuke them and to warn the congregation about the dissension and to seek to correct those responsible for it.
8. Review and approve missionaries that the congregation shall support. The elders shall also provide for ministry involvement of the congregation through regular communication, consistent prayer, and a significant, sure level of financial support.
9. Ensure that the financial offerings of the congregation are used effectively, efficiently, and with accountability as characterized by good stewardship of the resources provided by the Lord.

#### **SECTION 4 - THE MANDATED QUALIFICATIONS**

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God has set forth the qualifications necessary for men chosen to function as elders (*1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-4*). These God-given character traits must be evident prior to the appointment of any given elder.

- A. Any man nominated as an elder must state, in writing, his adherence to *Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order*.
- B. The church prohibits women from functioning as elders, since God's Word makes no such allowance.

#### **SECTION 5 - THE TYPICAL PLURALITY**

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In new or small congregations, only one man may have the personal qualifications and gifts necessary to be an "elder"; however, the evidence of the New Testament points to a typical plurality of elders in a given local church (*Acts 20:17; Philippians 1:1*). These same men are called "bishops", meaning "overseers", because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly. These men, called the 'pastors' and 'teachers,' are the Holy Spirit's gifts to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." (*Ephesians 4:11-12*). Scripture prescribes the pattern of pastoral responsibilities and authority as being distributed among the Elders.

#### **SECTION 6 - THE ESSENTIAL EQUALITY**

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Every elder has equal governing authority in the church, though gifts possessed and functions performed may vary from elder to elder.

#### **SECTION 7 - THE SINGULAR DIFFERENCE**

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While there is no New Testament distinction between "vocational pastors" and "bi-vocational elders", this church recognizes that the Spirit of God does grant differing measures of the gifts and time necessary for leading and feeding the flock. The eldership must recognize these requisite gifts and the constraints of time and organize itself in the most efficient manner to enact its shepherding ministry to the glory of God and for the good of the flock.

The responsibilities of this office are numerous and demanding; therefore, this church desires at least one of its elders to devote his full time to the vocation of the pastoral ministry and the oversight of the church. Such men should be thoroughly educated, skilled in public preaching and private exhortation, and carefully prepared to labor in the Word and in teaching as a livelihood (*I Timothy 5:17*). This fellowship desires to train and equip gifted men who support themselves through other employment to provide ministry as elders in a bi-vocational manner.

## **SECTION 8 - FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

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The church is responsible to give generous financial support to men devoting all or large portions of their time and energy to their work as vocational pastors (*I Timothy 5:17-18; I Corinthians 9:9-11*). The church is free to invite men from outside the local congregation to come into its midst and serve in this capacity. Any man thus called to this servant-leader function must be able conscientiously to affirm his extensive agreement with the constitution, including both the confession of faith and the constitution. Should he at any time move from this position, he is under obligation to make this fact known to the church.

## **SECTION 9 - IDENTIFICATION**

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### **A. Responsibilities of the Congregation**

The congregation, in understanding the vital importance of identifying its elders, must apply itself to prayer, an honest examination of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those it would consider in the appointment process. The congregation must seek continually to discover those whom the Spirit of God is preparing for the work of elder.

### **B. Responsibilities of the Elders**

The Elders must carefully consider the needs of the church and seek to add only biblically qualified men to the church's leadership. The elders are responsible to establish the exact procedures needed to install candidates properly as well as to train and examine them. In addition, the elders must solicit the help of the congregation in evaluating candidates and then lead the congregation; as together, they ordain these men into eldership.

### **C. Responsibilities of the Candidates**

Men considering the ministry of elder are responsible to develop the character, gifts, and skills necessary for effective service. As they progress in their own maturity they must seek to lead the church based on an inward conviction and a sincere desire rather than through external motivation (*I Peter 5:1-4*).

## **SECTION 10 - LENGTH OF MINISTRY**

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Elders shall be ordained to their ministry for life, unless they fall into heresy or some other sin by which they are no longer able to meet the qualifications of *I Timothy 3*, *Titus 1*, and *I Peter 5*. In such case an elder may be subject to reevaluation either by a request from other elders or upon the written petition of two or three members of the congregation (*See Article VII, Section 12, Letter B*).

## **SECTION 11 - THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

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Any action taken by the elders must be in keeping with the New Testament spirit of unanimity and unity (*Romans 15:6; Philippians 1:27; 2:2; I Corinthians 1:10*). Therefore, decisions made and actions taken by the

elders must reflect the complete unity that glorifies the Lord of the Church. Even a single dissenting judgment is cause for further prayer and consideration of the issue, until a likeness of mind is achieved among those serving as elders.

## **SECTION 12 - REMOVAL**

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### **A. Mutual Accountability before God**

While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder as an individual is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church. This makes the process of maintaining one's ministry function as an elder a matter of continual re-evaluation by the eldership.

### **B. Disqualification: Factually Proven by Two or Three Witnesses**

If two or three witnesses have factual knowledge (not merely hearsay) regarding an elder's scandalous sin and / or false teaching, they must bring the matter to the eldership. After the elders have thoroughly investigated the matter and have verified the accusation, they shall disclose these facts publicly and rebuke the erring elder before the entire congregation. At such a sobering time, the man must be dismissed from the eldership and the church must attempt to reconcile the man to Christ and the congregation. *1 Timothy 5:19; 1 Peter 5*

### **C. Personal Choice**

An elder may desire to resign from the eldership for a temporary period due to reasons other than those that would disqualify him. These reasons may include needed rest from oversight responsibilities, a time to reevaluate his personal life, a family illness, etc. The process of reinstatement at a later time will be determined by the elders in relation to the circumstances and his qualification and desire to serve again.

## **SECTION 13 - NUMBER**

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The church should endeavor to discover and then formally recognize all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite qualifications, gifts, and graces and has set over the church. It is evident, therefore, that the church cannot fix the number of elders.

## **SECTION 14 - MEETINGS**

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The elders shall determine its regular meeting dates at its first meeting of the year. At this meeting, the elders shall appoint those whom The Spirit of God has graciously gifted in specific areas for the orderly *shepherding and oversight* of the church.

## **ARTICLE 7 - THE DEACONS**

### **SECTION 1 - THE PRACTICAL FUNCTION**

God has called the deacons to a ministry of assisting or helping the elders and the congregation. The deacons assist the eldership by assuming responsibility for those tasks assigned it by the elders so that such work will not interfere with the elder's ministry of the Word and prayer. Deacons serve the congregation by overseeing the physical needs of the church and the ministries of mercy and benevolence.

This in no way replaces the need and biblical mandate to love and serve one another. The Deacons should strive to encourage and equip the body to serve itself. The members of the church bear the responsibility of seeking and discovering from among its members those to whom the Spirit of God has imparted the necessary qualifications and gifts required for this ministry.

## **SECTION 2 - THE MANDATED QUALIFICATIONS**

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The qualifications for a man chosen to function as a deacon are set forth in Scripture particularly in I Timothy 3:8-13. Any man nominated for this ministry must state, in writing, his adherence to “**The Truths That We Treasure**” as stated in the confession of faith. Each nominee must adhere to the constitution of this church also.

## **SECTION 3 - THE NECESSARY ORGANIZATION**

It is clear the Scriptures leave room for a variety of organizational models with respect to the Deacons. The Grace Covenant Church Deacons shall be organized according to the gifts of the Spirit and for the welfare of the church and its outreach ministry. Instead of a central Deacon board, the diaconate will be made up of teams, each team led by a Deacon and responsible to fulfill their area of service, whatever that may be, i.e., finance, facilities, benevolence, etc. They may select on an ongoing basis from the general membership, men and women to assist them and serve in the various capacities as needed to meet the physical/spiritual needs of both the membership and community. The elders shall appoint one qualified Deacon to serve as Head Deacon for the oversight of the diaconate teams and representing the diaconate to the elders.

## **SECTION 4 - THE ESTABLISHED ACCOUNTABILITY**

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All deacons must fulfill their duties in cooperation with one another and in full subjection to the elders.

## **SECTION 5 - IDENTIFICATION**

### ***A. Responsibilities of the Congregation***

The members of the congregation, in recognizing the vital importance of the selection of their deacons, must apply themselves to fervent prayer, an honest examination of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those they would consider in the appointment process. They do this in order to discover those whom the Spirit of God is preparing for the work of deacon.

### ***B. Responsibilities of the Elders***

The Elders must carefully consider the needs of the church and seek to add qualified men to the church's Diaconate. The elders are responsible to establish the exact procedures needed to install candidates properly as well as to train and examine them. In addition, the elders must solicit the help of the congregation in evaluating candidates and then lead the congregation, as together, they install these men into the Diaconate.

### ***C. Responsibilities of the Candidates***

Corresponding to the congregation's discovery and the approval of the elders, there must be the development of an inward desire on the part of those who would serve the church as deacons.

## **SECTION 6 - THE LENGTH OF MINISTRY**

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Deacons shall be installed for life, but they may be removed from their ministry if they fall into heresy or some other sin by which they no longer meet the qualifications of I Timothy 3. In such case a member of the diaconate may be subject to reevaluation either by one of the elders of the church or upon the written petition of two or three members of the church. In these instances, the elders may remove them from their ministries. Deacons may for some other reason request removal from an active role in their ministry.

## **SECTION 7 - NUMBER OF DEACONS**

The church should endeavor to discover and then formally to recognize all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite qualifications, gifts, and graces. It is evident, therefore, that the church cannot fix the number of deacons.

## **SECTION 8 – MEETINGS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

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All the Deacons will meet quarterly for prayer, planning, and reporting the activities of the Diaconate teams. The Deacons and their teams shall determine their regular team meetings (may include non-deacon members) for the purpose of carrying out their designated ministries. Each team will provide an annual written report to the elders. The Head Deacon will organize and preside over these meetings and at the first meeting see that a Deacon is selected to keep a record of these meetings. This person will then forward this record to the Administrative elder after each meeting.

## **ARTICLE 8 - MEMBER-MINISTERS**

### **SECTION 1 - GENERAL STATEMENT**

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The elders and deacons have the liberty to appoint other member-ministers to develop a variety of ministries aligned with the church's purpose. All members have the distinct privilege of exercising their spiritual gifts for service to the church and to the world.

### **SECTION 2 - FLEXIBLE APPROACH**

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While the church may practice only that which is consistent with Scripture, it shall not limit its ministry by rigidly imposing the regulative principle that restricts members to minister in only the exact prescribed forms found in the Scriptures. Instead, the church shall seek to organize itself in the flexible manner encouraged by the New Testament so as to effectively minister in today's culture. Thus, the elders and deacons will appoint members to various ministries on an ongoing basis.

### **SECTION 3 - GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS**

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Any male or female appointed to an official ministry *leadership* position must meet the requirements listed below. He or she must be:

1. In good standing as an official member of this local fellowship.
2. In adherence to this constitution and in agreement with "**Truths That We Treasure**" as stated in the

confession of faith.

3. Willing to serve God and his people.
4. Growing in personal righteousness.
5. Loyal and accountable to the governing body of this church.
6. In regular attendance at the stated services of this church.

#### **SECTION 4 - OTHER COMMITTEES AND MINISTRIES**

The elders and diaconate, to promote the effective ministry and work of Grace Covenant Church, may appoint various task forces, committees, and other groups from within its membership and the church at large. These groups shall perform work in accordance with the duties and with the privileges specifically delegated by the elders. All other organizations within or identified with this church, such as Bible studies, fellowship groups, sports activities, or any other such organizations and ministries, are subject to this constitution and to the oversight of the elders.

### **ARTICLE 9 - LEGAL TRUSTEES**

#### **SECTION 1 – BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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In order to meet legal requirements, Grace Covenant Church shall have an official Board of Trustees for conducting corporate business. This board shall consist of all serving elders and the Head Deacon. They will meet each year to review and approve the church budget and submit it to the congregation for its annual meeting. In addition, they shall conduct any other corporate business that may be required. The chairman of the legal trustees may call any special meeting as he deems necessary for corporate business purposes.

#### **SECTION 2 - THE AUTHORIZED LIMITATION**

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The legal trustees shall not encumber, transfer, sell, or purchase any real estate for the church except by the affirmation of the majority of the membership. No obligation shall be incurred to spend more than 2% of the annual church budget total on one item without the affirmation of the congregation, unless that item already appears in the adopted budget.

### **ARTICLE 10 - AMENDMENTS**

The congregation may amend the confession of faith and constitution contained in The Grace Covenant Book of Faith and Order by a three-fourths (3/4) majority affirmation of the members present at a family meeting. The elders will post the amendments in written form at least two Sundays prior to the family meeting. The elders, however, have direct oversight of all policies, procedures, and ministry descriptions contained in The Grace Covenant Ministry Handbook (*See Article VI, Section 3*) located in the church office. The elders shall communicate and distribute any newly established or revised policies and procedures to the congregation at any duly called business meeting. All members are responsible to read these updated policies and procedures and to act in accordance with them.

## **ARTICLE 11 - DISSOLUTION**

### **SECTION 1 - THE PROCESS**

Only the legal trustees, acting within the spirit of unanimity, may recommend the dissolution of this corporation to the congregation. No less than a three-fourths (3/4) majority affirmation of the members present and voting shall be required in order to dissolve this corporation.

### **SECTION 2 - THE RESPONSIBILITIES**

In the event of the dissolution of this corporation, the official trustees shall ensure that all debts are satisfied, that there is no division of assets, and that all assets herein be distributed to another corporation or corporations with purposes similar to those identified in Article I of The Grace Covenant Constitution. No less than a three-fourths (3/4) majority affirmation of the members present shall be required in order to decide upon this distribution of assets.