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CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

We, the members of The Grace Community Church at Bigelow, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

ARTICLE I

NAME

The name of this church shall be The Grace Community Church at Bigelow.

ARTICLE II

PURPOSE

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints. To this end we are committed to proclaiming God's perfect law and His glorious Gospel of Grace in Jesus Christ throughout the world, and to defending the "faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

ARTICLE III

ARTICLES OF FAITH

We hereby adopt this doctrinal statement of faith as a sufficient expression of our faith. We also believe many of the church's historic confessions of faith that may attest to the historic Christian faith so long as they accurately follow the Scriptures. According to our faith and practice, we also acknowledge that we operate as a Baptist ministry.

The Grace Community Church at Bigelow

The Benefits and Limitations of a Statement of Faith

Although the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and practice, a statement of faith can serve as an excellent summary of what we believe the Bible teaches. Many people claim to believe the Bible, yet disagree on vital issues. A statement of faith provides necessary definitions. It also serves as a helpful teaching tool by providing a concise summary of biblical truth. We recognize that any statement of faith is a fallible, human attempt to summarize the riches of God's revelation and should therefore be open to further revision in the light of Holy Scripture.

Our statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our faith. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. Therefore, in accordance with the Scripture's authority, our Board of Elders will bear the responsibility of interpreting and applying God's Word for the purposes of church doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline. The following is a summary of what is taught as Biblical truth at The Grace Community Church at Bigelow:

What We Teach

I. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach that the Bible is God's complete written revelation, and the sixty-six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit, constitute the plenary (inspired in all parts) word of God and cannot be added to or subtracted from (1Co. 2:7-14; 2Pe. 1:20-21; Rev. 22:19; Prov. 30:6).

We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1Co. 2:13; 1 Th. 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2Ti. 3:16), infallible, and absolutely inerrant in the original manuscripts. We also hold to a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Gen. 1:31; Ex. 31:17).

We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice, being fully sufficient for every human need and all that pertains to life and godliness. (Mat. 5:18; 24:35; Jn. 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1Co. 2:13; 2Ti. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12; 2Pe. 1:3, 20-21). We teach that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2Pet. 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Mat. 5:18; 2Ti. 3:16).

We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true contextual and/or prophetic interpretation. The precise meaning is to be found as one diligently applies the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation under the leading of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1Co. 2:7-15; 1Jo. 2:20). It is the responsibility of all believers to give themselves to the diligent study of the word of God in order to be able to ascertain the true intent and meaning of the Scripture, recognizing that proper, accurate application is binding on all generations. Yet, the truth of Scripture always stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

II. GOD

We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5-7; 1Co. 8:4), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes and substance, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mat. 28:19; 2Co. 13:14; Isa. 48:12-16), each equally deserving worship and obedience.

A. God the Father

We believe that God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Ps. 145:8, 9; 1 Cor. 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1–31; Eph. 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Ps. 103:19; Rom. 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator, He is Father to all men (Eph. 4:6), but He is Spiritual Father only to believers (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Eph. 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chr. 29:11). In His sovereignty, He is neither author nor approver of sin (Hab. 1:13), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Pet. 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Eph. 1:4–6); He saves from sin all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Heb. 12:5–9).

B. God the Son

We teach that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, being co-equal, consubstantial, and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 10:30; 14:9).

We teach that God the Father created all things according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom, and for whom, all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Cor. 8:6).

We teach that in the incarnation (God becoming man) Christ surrendered only the status and privileges of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind. In His incarnation, the eternally existing second person of the Trinity accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God-man (Phil. 2:5–8; Col. 2:9).

We teach that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Mic. 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9, 10; Col. 2:9).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26–35); that He was God incarnate (John 1:1,14); and that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (Ps. 2:7–9; Is. 9:6; John 1:29; Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 7:25,26; 1 Pet. 1:18,19).

We teach that, in the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity laid aside His right to the full prerogatives and privileges of coexistence with God. The eternal Son of God took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Phil. 2:5–8).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross and that His death was voluntary, a payment for the penalty of sin, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24).

We teach that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is efficacious. That is, Christ's death accomplished its intended purpose which is freedom from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day, the very presence of sin; and that the believer, at the point of saving faith, is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Rom. 3:25; 5:8,9; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

We teach that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now intercedes as our Advocate and High-Priest (Matt. 28:6; Luke 24:38,39; Acts 2:30,31; Rom. 4:25; 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

We teach that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the

atonement work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection life for all believers (John 5:26-29; 14:19; Rom. 1:4; 4:25; 6:5-10; 1Co. 15:20, 23).

We teach that Christ will return in His own way and His own time to establish His kingdom (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20).

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind, both the saved and unsaved in every generation, at the Great White Throne Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; John. 5:22-23; Rev. 20:11-15).

As the mediator between God and man (1Ti. 2:5), the head of His body, the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18), and the coming universal King who will reign on the throne of David (Isa. 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who are not trusting in Him as Lord and Savior (Matt. 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31, Rom. 1:19-20; 2:12-13).

C. God the Holy Spirit

We teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, eternal, not created, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity including intellect (1Co. 2:10-13), emotions (Eph. 4:30), will (1Co. 12:11), eternity (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Psa. 139:7-10), omniscience (Isa. 40:13-31), omnipotence (Rom. 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13).

In all the divine attributes, He is co-equal and having the same substance with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1Co. 12:4-6; 2Co. 13:14; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:15-17).

We teach that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to His elect. We also recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Gen. 1:2), the incarnation (Matt. 1:18), the written revelation (2Pe. 1:20-21, John 14:25-26), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7; 6:63).

We teach that the Holy Spirit was given by the Father as promised by Christ

(John 14:16-17; 15:26) to complete the building of the body of Christ, which is His Church (1Co. 12:13; Eph. 2:21-22). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, issuing the call of God in the hearts of men, effecting the regeneration and conversion of the elect, and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Rom. 8:29; 2Co. 3:18; Eph. 2:22).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the body of Christ at the moment of conversion (1Co. 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers for service, and seals the saints of God unto the day of redemption (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13; 1Pe. 1:3-5).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the divine teacher who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they were moved to write God's revelation, the Bible. Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (John 16:13; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18; 2Pe. 1:19-21; 1Jo. 2:20, 27).

We teach that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts but glorifies Christ by revealing Him to His people, implementing His work of redeeming the lost, and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 15:26; 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1Co. 12:4-11; 14; 2Co. 3:18).

III. MAN

We teach that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created in all spiritual, moral, and physical perfection, with a rational nature, intelligence, emotion, will, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Gen. 2:7, 15-25; Jam. 3:9).

We teach that God's intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God, enjoy God's fellowship, live his life in the will of God, and by this, accomplish God's purpose for man in the world (Isa. 43:7; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11).

We teach that in Adam's disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, which is sin, man lost his innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God, and became inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God, apart from divine grace. Man has no recuperative powers that enable him to recover himself, and thus he is hopelessly lost. Man will never seek after God on his own (Rom. 3:10-11), he is a slave to sin (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:17), spiritual things are complete foolishness to him (1Co. 1:18; 2:14), his heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9) and will only do evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Therefore, man's salvation is nothing of himself, but wholly by the sovereign act of God through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:13; 6:44-45; Eph. 2:1-9; 2Pe. 1:1; 2Ti. 1:8-9; 2:25; Acts 13:48; 1 Jn. 1:8).

We teach that because all men were in Adam, his guilt was justly imputed to every man, and a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception (Rom. 5:18-19). All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

IV. SALVATION

We teach that salvation is wholly of God, by grace, on the basis of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, in the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (Jn. 1:12-13; Eph. 1:7; 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5; 1Pe. 1:18-19).

A. Election

We believe that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Rom. 8:28–30; Eph. 1:4–11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1,2).

We teach that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18,19,36; 5:40; 2 Thess. 2:10–12; Rev. 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37–40,44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

We believe that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not in any way dependent on any initiative of their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Eph. 1:4–7; Titus 3:4–7; 1 Pet. 1:2).

We teach that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign, but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Rom. 9:11–16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God in a manner totally consistent with His character, as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:25–28; 2 Tim. 1:9).

We teach that the Christian does not know who God has elected to salvation, therefore it is the responsibility of every Christian to evangelize or share the gospel with as many people as he has opportunity to share with. God has established the Christian's duty and privilege to evangelize because He has elected some to salvation, and He has determined to save sinners through the preaching of the gospel. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:13-17; 1Co. 1:18-21, 1 Thess. 2:13-14). The gospel therefore should be offered to all people indiscriminately (Matt. 28: 19-20).

B. Atonement

God's good pleasure to save sinners by a substitutionary atonement was founded in the love and justice of God. It was the justice of God that required the demands of the law to be met and His love that provided a way of escape for lost sinners. The atonement is the only means for the salvation of sinful man (Luke 24:26; Gal. 3:21-24; Heb. 2:10; 9:11-14; 10:1-14). If there were any other way to satisfy the justice of God, it would have been rendered (Acts 4:12; John 8:23-24; 14:6).

The atonement made propitiation to God, reconciling God to chosen sinners by the removal of the wrath of God through the substitutionary work of Christ. The Scripture sets forth the atoning work of Christ as a propitiation (Rom. 3:21-26), a canceling of the penalty of sin (Heb. 7:26-27; 9:6-15), reconciliation (Rom. 5:10; 2Co. 5:18-19), and redemption (Matt 20:28; Rom. 3:24; 1Co. 1:30; Eph. 1:7), thereby fully accomplishing its intended purpose.

C. Regeneration

We teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the soul is quickened and divine life is imparted (John 3:3-7; Tit. 3:5). It is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the power of the Word of God (John 5:24; Rom. 10:13-17, 1 Peter 1:23). Having been regenerated, the sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, is brought to repentance and responds in faith to the gospel. (1Jn. 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29).

Genuine regeneration will manifest itself in fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct (1Co. 6:18-20; Gal. 5:17-25; Eph. 2:10) as the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit, in all areas of life, through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Eph. 5:17-21; Phil. 2:12b; Col. 3:16; 2Pe. 1:4-11).

This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (2Co. 3:18). Such conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Rom. 8:17; Col. 3:4; 1Pe. 1:3-5; 1Jo. 3:2-3). It is impossible for man to achieve sinless perfection in this life, but holiness will be the primary direction of his life and is a basis of his assurance (Heb. 6:11-12; 1 Jo. 1:8).

D. Justification

We teach that the justification of sinners is an instantaneous act of God (Rom. 3:21-26; 8:33) by which He legally declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Isa. 55:6-7; Luke. 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom. 2:4; 5:1; 2Co. 7:10) and confess Him as Sovereign Lord (Rom. 10:9-10; 1Co. 12:3; 2Co. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Rom. 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Col. 2:14; 1Pe. 2:24), the forgiveness of our sins, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1Co. 1:30; 2Co. 5:21). By this means, God is enabled to be "just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

E. Sanctification

We teach that there are two distinct aspects of sanctification, the first one being positional and the second one being progressive. We teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous, having to do with the believer's standing, not his present walk or condition, and should not be confused with progressive sanctification (Acts 20:32; 1Co. 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2Th. 2:13; Heb. 2:11; 10:10; 13:12; 1Pe. 1:2).

We teach also a progressive sanctification, beginning at the point of conversion, by which the practice of the believer is continually brought closer to the position he enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the empowering of the Spirit, the believer is both enabled and compelled to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Rom. 6:1-22; 8:29; 12:2; 2Co. 3:18; 1Th. 4:3-5; 5:23).

In this respect, we teach that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict (the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh). Yet, adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. The total eradication of sin in this life is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:20-24; Phil. 3:12; Col. 3:9-10; 1Pe. 1:14-16; 1 Jo 3:5-9). Hence, we do not teach sinless perfection, but we do teach that the believer's life will necessarily be characterized by the pursuit of holiness (1Co. 5:9-13; Tit. 1:16; 1Jo. 2:3-6; 3:9-10).

F. Security

We believe that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom. 5:9,10; 8:1,31-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:4,5; Jude 24).

- 1. Preservation** - We teach that all who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and, thus, are preserved to the end. Therefore, salvation is wholly dependent upon God who has willed to save those whom He gave to His dear Son. Their salvation can never be lost, because the elect are kept by God's power, through faith, and nothing can separate them from His love.
- 2. Perseverance of the Saints** - We teach that they, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, will neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved.

3. Christian Liberty -We believe that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, which, however, clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an excuse for sinful living and carnality (Rom. 6:15–22; 13:13, 14; Gal. 5:13,16,17,25,26; Titus 2:11–14).

We teach that the following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

- a. Fear of God- As servants of Christ, all actions should be motivated by love for God, and all objects are to be used for His glory. The term "liberty" is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which Scripture clearly forbids (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:15- 16).
- b. Love for the Brethren- Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow saints must always deeply affect the believer's decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent their stumbling (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 14:21-23).
- c. Compassion for the Unconverted- Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and the behavior chosen should always be that which is likely to win some (1 Cor. 9:19-22).
- d. Watchfulness over the Soul- Though free in conscience to use all of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded because of remaining lusts. Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain in order to Scripturally persevere (1 Cor. 9:23-27).

G. Separation

We believe that separation from sin is clearly called for throughout the Old and New Testaments, and that the Scriptures clearly indicate that in the last

days apostasy and worldliness shall increase (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1; 2 Tim. 3:1–5).

We believe that out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us, and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should live in such a manner as to demonstrate our adoring love to God and so as not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. We also teach that separation from any association with religious apostasy, and worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 5:9–13; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1; 1 John 2:15–17; 2 John 9–11).

We teach that believers should be separated unto the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:17-24; Heb. 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness demonstrated by a continual pursuit of holiness (Matt. 5:2-12; Rom. 12:1-2; 2Co. 7:1; Heb. 12:14; Tit. 2:11-14; 1Jo. 3:1-10). However, we also teach that a believer is not to withdraw in isolation from the world, because the world is his God-ordained place of ministry (Matt. 5:13-16, John 17:15; 1Co. 5:9-10). Therefore, he is to expose the deeds of darkness as one who is in the world but not of the world (Eph. 5:1-17).

V. THE CHURCH

A. The Makeup of the Church

We teach that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the Church (1Co. 12:12-13), which is the Bride of Christ (2Co. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7-8), and of which Christ is the head. We teach that the church is a unique spiritual body designed and built by Christ, made up of men and women in every age who have been saved by grace through faith (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; Col. 1:18).

We teach that the establishment, autonomy, and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Gal. 1:2; Phil. 1:1; 1Th. 1:1; 2Th. 1:1) and that the members of the Church Universal are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies for edification, worship, prayer, and the ministry of the Word (1Co. 11:18-20; Heb. 10:25).

We teach the obedient submission of believers to the leaders God has appointed over them (Heb. 13:7, 17), the necessity of discipleship (Matt. 28:19-20; 2Ti. 2:2), the mutual accountability of all believers to one another (Matt. 18:5-14), and the practice of church discipline in accordance with the standards of Scripture (Matt. 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1Co. 5:1-13; 2Th. 3:6-15).

We teach the autonomy of the local church with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any external hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Tit. 1:5). Churches are to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the one true faith. However, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, each local church should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1Co. 5:4-7, 12-13; 1Pe. 5:1-4).

We teach that God uses the church as His primary instrument to accomplish His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. First, He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:7-12). He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5-8; 1Co.

12:4-31; 1Pe. 4:10-11).

B. The Leaders of the Church

We teach that the one, supreme authority for the church is Christ (1Co. 11:3; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders or bishops, men called to the primary responsibilities of prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-4). The role of pastor/teacher is a specific function within the office of an elder (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11). Additionally, God has also appointed deacons to the operational and administrative leadership responsibilities of the body. Men functioning in these offices must meet the spiritual qualifications set forth in the Scriptures (1Ti. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1Pe. 5:1-5).

We also believe that because of the clear teaching of Scripture regarding the qualifications of an elder and deacon, these offices are restricted to men only. This does not mean that any man can be an elder simply because of his gender, but that he must also meet the rest of the qualifications as provided in Scripture (1 Tim. 3.1-13; Tit.1.5-9). Women are not restricted from all teaching but are restricted from both offices of the church where no clear example is given in Scripture of a woman functioning in those offices. Subsequently, women are to engage in other meaningful ministries e.g. preaching the gospel to non-believers, which would include missionary work and is the call of all believers at varying degrees (Mt. 28.19; Act. 1.8; 18.24-26); assisting the leaders of the church (Rom. 16.1); mercy ministries (Jam. 1.27); teaching the younger women (Tit.2.3); engaging in teaching one another in the common body life of the church wherein there is no necessary exertion of authority (Eph. 4.25; Col. 3.16; Heb. 3.13); teaching children, especially in the context but not limited to one's own home, (2 Tim. 1.5; Eph. 6.4); exercising spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 11.5; Joel 2.28; Acts 21.9); engage in corporate prayers as well as assisting (but not leading) in congregational worship (1 Cor. 11.5; Acts 2.42; 4.27; 12.12). The list above is by no means an exhaustive list on the sphere of women's ministry. We believe that women who follow the pattern of Scripture will find an abundance of opportunity to serve and impact the world for the kingdom of God.

C. Spiritual Gifts

We believe that God has given the church many spiritual gifts for the edification of the body (Rom. 12.3-8; 1 Cor. 12.1-11; Eph. 4. 11- 12). We believe that believers are given a great diversity of gifts, making the body of Christ consist of believers with diverse talents, callings, and gifts (Rom.12). We believe that every member of the body of Christ is called to use his or her gift(s) according to each individual gifting, calling, and faith for the mutual edification of the saints (Rom. 1.11-12; 12.3-8). We believe in the Sovereignty of the Spirit over all things pertaining to the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12.11).

We do not believe that the spiritual gifts should be a point of division or the test for Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 13.1-2; 14. 40).

D. Ordinances

We teach that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:36-42).

1. Believer's Baptism

Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the visible demonstration of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to new life (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:11-12). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42), and is a pledge in the presence of God and His saints, to live a life of good conscience before Him (1Pe. 3:21).

Baptism has absolutely no saving merit or regenerative power; salvation is entirely the work of Almighty God in accordance with the eternal decree of the Father (Eph. 1:3-6), as accomplished on the cross by the Son (Rom. 5:9-10), and applied by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5).

2. The Lord's Supper

We teach that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of

Christ's death until He comes. The Lord's Supper is reserved for those who have been born of the Spirit of God and must always be preceded by sober self-examination (1Co. 11:28-32). The Lord's Supper is an actual communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way in fellowship with His people (1Co. 10:16). However, the elements of communion are nothing more than a representation of the flesh and blood of Christ.

E. The Mission of the Church

1. Exalting the Lord

We teach that it is the primary mission of the church to bring glory to God. Therefore, the corporate meeting of the church is for the exaltation of God in worship: expressed in prayer, music, and the reading and preaching of God's word (Rom. 11:36; 1Co. 14:23-25; Eph. 3:21, Psalm 150, Col. 3:16).

2. Edifying the Saints

We teach that the saints are edified through the means of grace; by the instruction of the Word (Eph. 4:13-16; 2Ti. 2:2, 15; 3:16-17; 4:1-2), by biblical fellowship (Acts 2:46-47; Heb. 10:25; 1Jo. 1:3), and by the corporate observance of the ordinances (Lk. 22:19-20; Acts 2:38-42).

3. Evangelizing the Lost

We teach that Jesus Christ has given the church an enduring commission to evangelize the lost, with this responsibility extending to every believer. Biblical evangelism must involve both the spoken word and the unspoken testimony of a life transformed by the grace of God in Christ (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8; 1 Th. 1:2-10; Tit. 3:1-8; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-4, 15). We believe that the work of evangelism should not just be local but that we should endeavor to obey the great commission, which extends the purpose of the church regarding evangelism to the whole world (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8).

VI. ANGELS

A. Holy Angels

We believe that angels are created beings and are therefore not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God and to worship Him (Luke 2:9–14; Heb. 1:6,7,14; 2:6,7; Rev. 5:11–14).

A. Fallen Angels

We believe that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator (Is. 14:12–17; Ezek. 28:11–19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:1–14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1–15). We believe that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Is. 14:13, 14; Matt. 4:1–11; Rev. 12:9, 10), the prince of this world who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, (Rom. 16:20) and that he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Is. 14:12–17; Ezek. 28:11–19; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

VII. LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY)

Since no one knows the day or hour of the Lord's return, not even Christ Himself in His humanity (Matt. 25:13; Mark 13:32), the timing of the return of Christ, (1Th. 4:15-17) and the millennial debate between the various positions among premillennialists and non-premillennialists, should not be made a test of Christian fellowship in and of themselves. While the Lord's return is undeniable, the conviction regarding its timing together with the millennial issue is subject to one's presuppositions and the particular interpretive principles applied to unfulfilled Bible prophecy. As such, Peter's instruction and admonition sets forth an important principle for the saints. When serious consideration is given to the return of Christ and the cataclysmic destruction that will characterize the impending Day of the Lord, the exhortation to Christians is sobering:

“Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the

coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!” (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

A. Death

We teach the historical orthodox Baptist view of death, which is physical death involving a separation of soul and body with no loss of immaterial consciousness. The souls of the redeemed are made perfect in holiness (Heb. 12:23) and pass immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23; 2Co. 5:8), while the souls of the unsaved are held in torment awaiting final judgment (Luke 16:19-26).

We teach the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Rom. 8:10-11, 19-23; 2Co. 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Rev. 20:11-15). Believers shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the Day of Judgment (Matt. 10:32) and made perfectly blessed in both body and soul unto the full, eternal enjoyment of God. The unsaved shall be condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) and cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41-46), where they will be cut off from the life of God, abiding under his undiminished wrath forever (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:41-46; 2Th. 1:6-9).

B. The Day of the Lord

We teach that God will pour out the full fury of His wrath upon an unbelieving world (1 Thess. 4:15- 5:1-10; Jer. 30:7; Dan.12:1; Zep. 1:7-18; Rev. 14:13-16:21), and these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory with His saints and His holy angels to judge all those living upon the earth (Matt. 24:27-31; 2Th. 2:7-12; Rev. 19:11-21).

C. The Kingdom

We teach that the Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come

and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age (Gen. 1:1; Is. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; Matt. 3:2; 4:8-10, 23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Rom. 5:17; 8:19; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Col. 1:13; Heb. 11:10,16; 12:28; 1 Pet. 2:4-10; 4:13; Rev. 1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 21-22)

D. Last Things

We teach that God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness.

The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord (Is. 2:4; 11:9; Matt. 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 36, 44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40, 48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:24-28, 35-58; 2 Cor. 5:10; Philip. 3:20-21; Col. 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thess. 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:27-28; Jam. 5:8; 2 Pet. 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 1:18; 3:11; 20:1-22:13.).

ARTICLE IV
MEMBERSHIP

Section 1- Requirements for Membership

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized as a believer, and who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines, aims, and government of this church, shall be eligible for membership. It is understood that each individual will have studied the doctrinal statement of faith and Constitution expressed in the by-laws of this church for mutual agreement and conscientious commitment. All members will be encouraged to attend any congregational meetings summoned by The Grace Community Church at Bigelow.

Section 2 - Forms of Membership

- A. **Regular-** All who are received into the membership of the church on the above-mentioned conditions shall be considered members in good standing until such status is changed by one of the conditions set forth in Article IV, Section 4. Any change in the status of membership shall be determined by a unanimous vote of the eldership.

- B. **Other-** The membership status of invalids, Christian workers, and others, whose relationship to the church involves special consideration and circumstances, shall be determined in each case by a unanimous vote of the eldership.

Section 3- Procedure for Receiving New Members

Before any person will be officially considered for church membership at The Grace Community Church at Bigelow, one of the following must first take place:

- A. **New Believer:** A person has expressed faith in Jesus Christ and has publically identified with the Body through believers' baptism under the Pastoral care of the Grace Community Church at Bigelow.

- B. **Regular Attender:** A person has been consistently attending the majority of congregational meetings of The Grace Community Church at Bigelow for an "observation" period of approximately 6 months and has expressed to the Elders that he/she desires to be considered for membership. (Article IV: Section 1: A)

- C. **Letter of Transfer:** A letter of recommendation from another Biblical church shall be submitted to the Elders on behalf of any person desiring to unite with The Grace Community Church at Bigelow as a member. (Article IV: Section 1: B)

Upon meeting one of the above criteria for consideration, the Elders shall then fix a time and place for meeting with the applicant, who shall attend and be questioned as to his or her basic Christian experience (i.e. testimony of conversion and baptism), doctrinal beliefs, and seriousness of intention to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of The Grace Community Church at Bigelow. (Article IV: Section 1: A, B)

After meeting with the applicant, the Elders shall then privately discuss the matter. If the Board of Elders is satisfied that an applicant gives credible profession of faith and meets the requirements for membership, they may accept that person as a potential member by a unanimous vote.

Once the Elders have successfully determined an applicant to be a potential member, a membership class will be conducted and will require the attendance of the applicant. The following five questions will be the focus:

1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope apart from His sovereign mercy?

2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and trust Him alone for

salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support this church in its worship and work to the best of your God-given ability?

The GCC@B Membership Covenant reads as follows:

“The Fellowship of the Spirit”

“The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints. To this end, we are committed to proclaiming God's perfect law and His glorious Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ throughout the world, and to defending the faith once delivered unto the saints.”

As a follower of Jesus Christ, I joyfully and thoughtfully enter into a bond of mutual edification, fellowship, and accountability with the other members of this body. I have repented of my sin, trusted in Christ as my Savior and Lord, and been baptized as a true believer.

I will faithfully participate with this church in worship, prayer, study, fellowship, and the ordinances of baptism and communion. I will use my spiritual gifts for the common good. Through my involvement, and even sacrifice, I will seek to illustrate to my family and a watching world the immense significance of life in the body of Christ.

In addition to the regular meetings of the church and in the spirit of a true disciple of Christ, I will diligently train myself and my family in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, seeking to develop Christian character, knowledge, and skills.

I will work toward doctrinal unity with a humble and teachable spirit. For this reason, I am willing to be taught according to the statement of faith which this church believes to be an accurate summary of biblical truth. Where there is disagreement or a lack of understanding regarding doctrinal convictions, I assume the liberty to ask questions and engage in edifying discussion, yet I

will not seek to undermine the stated teaching of the Church. I will reject all heretical beliefs and practices, using Scripture as the final authority.

I will accept and fellowship with all members, regardless of ethnicity, gender, background, social status, or level of education, since all are of equal value in Christ.

I will pursue peace with all people, especially with other believers, always being slow to take offense and eager to reconcile. I will shun gossip and divisive words, knowing that they are destructive to Christian fellowship.

I will seek to live a life that is above reproach. I will be just and honest in my dealings and faithful in my responsibilities and commitments. I will abide by the standards of sexual purity and ethical integrity as taught in the Bible. I will affirm the biblical prohibitions of homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and other sinful sexual behaviors, and I understand that the teaching and counsel of the church will be in accordance with these prohibitions.

I will affirm that God made mankind in his image as male and female, that a person's gender corresponds to his or her biological sex, and that it cannot be selected by the person or altered by any means.

I will affirm that marriage is the union of one man and one woman and that God hates divorce. To that end, I will seek to uphold this God-ordained institution in both my doctrine and practice.

I will watch over the other members in love as they watch over me. I will remember them in prayer, help them in sickness and distress, promote their spiritual growth, restrain them from sin, and stir them up to love and good deeds.

I will submit to the church's discipline upon myself and lovingly assume my responsibility to participate in the discipline of other members [for the purpose of restoring an errant brother or sister], as taught in Scripture. If I am offended in connection with a disciplinary matter, I will seek resolution within the church.

I will contribute cheerfully and regularly to this church for its general ministry and expenses, the relief of the poor, the cause of reformation and revival, and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. I will dedicate myself, my money, and my possessions to the cause of Christ as a faithful steward,

avoiding all forms of greed.

I will seek to do my part to remain actively connected to the life and vision of this fellowship. I will regularly attend services, church functions, participate in discipleship opportunities, and church meetings. In addition, I will continually seek out ways to serve my church family in the most tangible of ways.

I will seek the salvation of my family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, and people of all nations.

I promise to remain faithful to this church in membership. I will consult with the elders in advance if I sense that God is directing me elsewhere. If I must leave, I will unite with another true church.

In summary, I will love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and I will love others as Christ loves me.

I will not allow my weaknesses and failures to deter me from my intention to abide by these Christian standards. I will pursue holiness through genuine repentance and persevering faith in the One to whom I owe all obedience for time and eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Section 4- Termination of Membership

A. By Transfer- Letters of recommendation shall be granted by the eldership to churches which request them, provided the member in question is in good standing and not subject to or under discipline at the time of the application. When such letters have been granted, the relationship to this church shall be considered terminated. Letters of dismissal shall be forwarded and given only to other evangelical churches. If the person in question is in the process of, subject to, or under church discipline and visits or requests membership in another church, the eldership will inform the other church of the person's status and the specific sins involved. (Philemon 2; 1Cor. 5).

B. By discipline- It is right and in harmony with the Scriptures for the congregation, upon recommendation of the eldership, to exclude from this fellowship any person who persists in holding false or heretical doctrine; or who obviously and persistently lives a life inconsistent with his Christian profession; or who lives in violation of the law of the land (so long as those laws are not inconsistent with the

Scriptures) or public morals; or who walks disorderly; or any person who persists in disturbing the unity and peace of this church; or who habitually absents himself from the stated meetings of this church without just cause (Matt. 18.15ff; 1 Cor. 5.1ff; 2Thess. 3.6,11, 15; Rom. 16.17; Heb. 10.23-25).

ARTICLE V

CONDUCT

Section 1- Means of Grace

All public and private means of grace, such as regular attendance at the services of the church (Heb. 10.25), daily systematic reading of the Bible, and private and family prayers shall be urged and encouraged upon our members for the edification of the body and the individual.

Section 2- Government of the Home

The church expects its members to follow the Scriptures in home government. God requires that godliness in the home have a high priority in every life. The home holds a central attention in God's law and is the object of frequent exhortation in the New Testament. Men are expected to rule their homes with gentleness but firmness loving their wives and children as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5). Women must be subject to the husbands in everything as unto the Lord (Eph. 5). Parents should train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6.4) by holy example, catechizing, consistent education, and firm discipline. Children must reverently obey their parents (Eph. 6.1). These primary responsibilities, prayerfully executed, will honor the name of Christ in the community and strengthen the cause of Christ in generations to come.

Section 3- Marriage and Sexuality

We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning, and that is marriage sanctioned by God which joins one biological man and one biological woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture.

Given the aforementioned definition of marriage, and that we view the marriage ceremony itself as a worship service (not merely a legal rite), we do not believe that same-sex unions fall within the parameters of a marriage sanctioned by God and is therefore excluded as a legitimate marital union in our faith and practice.

We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to only occur between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate, sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography, or any attempt to change one's gender or disagreement with one's biological gender, is sinful and offensive to God.

We believe that the Bible teaches those entering into marriage should be of like faith. For this reason, we do not believe a Christian should knowingly enter into a marital union with a non-believer.

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of the church, as the local body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the church members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by the church, in any capacity, who serve as volunteers, or who desire to utilize our facilities for weddings or other requested purposes, should abide by and agree to this statement on marriage and sexuality and conduct themselves accordingly.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of the church.

Section 4- Missions and Witnessing

It is the duty of every Christian and of every church of Christ to seek to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Missionary efforts are the

natural consequences of regeneration (Ps. 51. 10-14; Acts 1.6-8). It is the duty of every child of God to witness by life and word. Personal efforts at witnessing for Christ are expected of every member. Beyond this, we are committed to common efforts for sending the gospel to the ends of the earth

Section 5- Principles of Giving

We also assert our conviction that Christians are to support the work of the Lord by offerings made to the local church. Proportionate giving is a distinct and positive command in Scripture (Mal. 3. 8-11, Matt. 23.23); hence, we pledge ourselves to systematic contribution of the support of this church with a proportion of our income according to the principle in 1 Cor. 16:2.

Section 6- Christian Liberty

We shall require of each other in our daily walk and conversation, loyal obedience to all those moral precepts established in the Word of God (Heb. 10.24-25); however, where God has not prohibited certain practices in His Word, the Christian has liberty to participate in them. The following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

- A. **Fear of God-** As the servant of Christ, all action must be motivated by love to God, and all objects must be used for His glory. The term "liberty" is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which is sin (1 Cor.10.31; 1 Tim. 4.4; 1 Pet. 2.15-16).
- B. **Love for the Brethren-** Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow saints must always deeply affect his decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent their stumbling (Gal. 5.13; 1 Cor. 10. 23; 1 Cor. 8.9; Rom. 14.21-23).
- C. **Compassion for the Unconverted-** Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and behavior chosen which is likely to win some (1 Cor. 9.19-22).
- D. **Watchfulness over the Soul-** Though free in conscience to use all

of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded because of remaining lusts. Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain in order to Scripturally persevere (1 Cor. 9.23-27).

Section 7- Support of the Church Leaders

It is the duty of every member to respect the God-appointed officers of the church. The duties of church members toward their elders, deacons, teachers, ministers, and pastors are as follows:

- A. To pray for them, that God would open a door of utterance unto them, to unfold the mysteries of the Gospel (Eph. 6.18-20).
- B. To obey the Elders in the Lord, in whatsoever they admonish them, according to the Word of God (Heb. 13.17-22; 3 John 3,4).
- C. To follow their example and footsteps, as far as warranted by the Word (1 Cor. 4.16, 11.1; Phil. 3.17; Heb. 13.7).
- D. To stand by them, in all their trials and afflictions, and to defend them in all good causes, as far as each member is able. In 2 Tim. 1.5 those of Asia are blamed for turning away or not standing by the Apostles.
- E. In the event of the necessity of exposing the transgressions of the officers, let it be done according to the principles of Matt. 18. 15-21 and 1 Tim.5.19-20, with soberness and charity for the sake of the Gospel.
- F. To support the Elders financially within the guidelines of 1 Tim. 5.17 (see Article VII, Section 2D)

ARTICLE VI

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Section 1- Formative Discipleship

Formative discipleship is primarily positive through the teaching of God's Word, the example of Christian living, and the mutual ministry of the members of the body of Christ. It has as its objective the instruction of disciples, the transformation of their lives, and their edification in love (Eph. 4.11-13; Rom. 12.1-16; 1 Cor. 12.4-27). Formative discipleship has a sanctifying influence. All members should be satisfied with their God-given ministry, and thus we shall all grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 4.7-12).

Formative discipleship utilizes the gifts of each church member, whether old or young, for the edification of all. All who have been redeemed by Christ should live for Him and His church and not for themselves (2 Cor. 5.15). As members of this church, we recognize our obligation to honor, serve, worship, praise, and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ in all that we say and do (1 Cor. 10.31). Jesus Christ is the head of the church and, therefore, its endeavor is to keep His commandments (John 14.15). In His Holy Word our Lord has entreated believers to perform certain duties one toward another. Some of these duties are:

- A. To love one another without offense or hypocrisy (John 13.34 35; Rom.12.9-10; 13.8-10).
- B. To labor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3).
- C. To endeavor for the edification and spiritual benefit of the whole body, that they all may grow up to be a holy temple in and for the Lord (1 Cor. 14.12, 26; Eph.4.12, 29; 2.21-22).
- D. To look out for the best interests of others (Phil. 2.3,4).
- E. To pray with and confess our sins to one another (James 5.16).

F. Not to neglect the assembling of themselves together, for the celebrating of divine worship, and so promote one another's spiritual benefit (Heb. 10.25; Acts 2.42).

G. To unanimously contend for the faith and truth once for all delivered to the saints, in the purity thereof, according to the Holy Scripture (Ps. 93.5; Zech. 14.2; 1 Cor. 14.33-40; 11.2; Jude 3). The above duties, when faithfully performed by all, will have a positive, formative effect upon the whole assembly; and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we will all be enabled to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Section 2 – Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline results from disorderly conduct or heretical doctrine which is contrary to the church's standard of life and doctrine. Reasonable efforts shall be made to resolve difficulties and remove offenses before any action is taken. No offenses shall be brought before the church until the instructions of Scripture have first been followed (Matt. 5. 23-24; 18.15; Gal. 6.1-2). Corrective discipline always has for its aims the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church, and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender.

A. **Exclusion-** If a member is habitually absent from the fellowship of this church without just cause or requests severance of membership, he or she may be excluded from the membership.

B. **Expulsion under Church Discipline-** We recognize termination of church membership as a disciplinary measure to be a most serious action; however, in order that the purity of the church may be maintained, any member guilty of a serious offense (see Constitution Article IV, Section 4. B) and remaining unrepentant despite repeated admonitions must be removed from the membership of the church. Yet, our zeal for the glory of God must ever be tempered by a loving and prayerful concern for the full restoration of the offender (Gal. 6.1).

The procedure to be followed depends upon the nature of the offense; however, the following procedure shall be followed in most cases; the

suspected person shall first be interviewed as directed in Matthew 18. 15-18. If this does not lead to restoration of fellowship, charges shall be filed with the eldership. After a fair and impartial hearing of all the witnesses accessible and all the facts ascertainable, if the eldership unanimously believes the accused to be guilty, the eldership shall make an appropriate recommendation to the congregation for their action at a regular worship service. This recommendation will include a detailed explanation of the offense, including the pertinent sinful actions committed by the offender. The congregation shall have the right to excommunicate the offender based upon the judgment of the elders. The aim of exceptional discipline is the glory of God, the purity, unity, influence, and witness of the church, and the good of the one disciplined.

A. Restoration to Church Membership- The right to exclude or excommunicate persons or the withdrawal of fellowship (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3.6) is in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament (Matt. 18. 16-17). The Apostolic church also had a right to restore those persons who gave satisfactory evidence of repentance (2 Cor. 2. 6-8). The object of the discipline having been accomplished, the congregation shall have the right to restore the repentant member to full membership, under the recommendation of the eldership.

ARTICLE VII

CHURCH OFFICERS

Section 1- General Statement

Jesus Christ alone is Head of the Church (Col. 1.18). He governs His church through office-bearers whom He appoints and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Office-bearers in the church are of two kinds: Elders (also called Overseers and Pastors) and Deacons (Phil. 1.1; 1 Tim. 3.1-13). It is the duty of the church to seek and discover among its male members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for office-bearing. It is ultimately the duty of the eldership to recognize those who qualify for the offices of the church (Tit. 1.5; Acts 14.23). The decision of the eldership is ultimately subject to and determined by the qualifications found in Scripture (1Tim. 3; Tit. 1). Any members of the church who are privy to disqualifying factors pertaining to the potential candidate under consideration should bring the

matter before the eldership for thorough investigation. Scriptural complaints must be the basis for disqualification (1Tim. 3.1-7, 8-13; Tit. 1.5-9).

In the case that the church no longer has qualified officers, the membership may invite another like-minded congregation to oversee the church until such time that qualified officers are raised up. If the church cannot agree as to the decision to invite outside ministries to govern this church, dissolution may be considered. (see By-Laws Article VI).

Section 2 – Elders

- A. Plurality and Parity** – The scriptures indicate that normally there should be a plurality of Elders in the local church (Acts 20:17; Phil 1:1). These men are called “Bishops” (meaning overseer) because they have oversight of the assembly (Accts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; Heb 13:17). They are called the “Pastor-teachers” given to the church “for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering unto the building up on the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12; Acts 20:28). There is parity (equality) among the Elders, each bearing authority in the deliberations and decisions of the Board of Elders. Thus the plurality and parity of the Elders guard the flock from the weakness of rule by one man and use the collective wisdom of several godly men to rule the flock of God as one Board.
- B. Qualifications-** The qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of Elder are clearly set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The recognition of these qualifications by the congregation will help prevent the infiltration of hirelings who forsake the flock and wolves that enter in and destroy the flock (John 1:12-13; Acts 20:28-30). Any man called to the Eldership must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with and support of the Doctrinal Statement, Constitution and By-Laws of the church. Should he at any time move from his agreement, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this fact known to the Elders for further consultation. In the event of irreconcilable differences after consultation, this fact must be made known to the church for further disposition.
- C. Responsibilities-** All Elders are pastors of the flock (Acts 20:28). They are responsible for the spiritual ministrations of the church, the implementation of discipline, the oversight of the souls of the

members, and the oversight of all ministries and functions of the church. They shall give account to God for all things in the church (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). While every Elder should be “apt to teach”, some will be more engaged in formal and public teaching while others will be more engaged in pastoring (that is, private teaching and admonishing) and governing (1 Tim. 5:17a). The gifts of each man will be considered by the Board of Elders in assigning responsibilities.

It shall be the duty of the Elders to be diligent and faithful in attendance at the Board of Elders meetings and the regular services of the church. They shall make suggestions regarding the pulpit ministry and encourage the one preaching in the work of the Lord. Elders may call upon one or more of the Deacons to assist them in the fulfillment of their responsibilities.

- A. **Support-** In view of the fact that the responsibilities of the eldership are numerous and great, Scripture makes provision for the financial support of Elders (1 Tim. 5:17) and encourages the support of “elders who rule well” (oversight) but “especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” Thus, a congregation may support more than one Elder in the various duties of that office but should place priority on the teaching function.
- B. **Election-** The normal procedure in the New Testament for the election of Elders is the process of recognition (1 Tim. 3:1-13). For this reason, the congregation normally will look first among its members for officers (See By-Laws, Article III). However, in the event that none of the Elders possess sufficient proficiency to be financially supported to as to “labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17b), the Elders may look outside the congregation for such a man. In such a case, the Elders and the congregation should exercise extreme caution to avoid introducing a hireling or wolf into the flock (John 10:12-13; Acts 30:28-30). The procedure for the election of Elders is outlined in By-Laws Article III, Section 2.
- C. **Length of Service-** The Holy Spirit equips and places Elders in the church (Acts 20:28). Therefore, the church cannot arbitrarily fix either the number of Elders or their term of service. Therefore, the term of service for Elders is indefinite except for certain cases discussed in By-Laws Article III, Section 2.

ARTICLE VIII

BOARD OF ELDERS

The Board of Elders shall consist of all the duly elected Elders. There is parity (equality) among the Elders, each bearing equal authority in the deliberations of the Board of Elders.

Section 1- Responsibility of the Board of Elders

The Board shall have the general oversight of all this church's affairs. The conduct of all church business and the work of all church organizations shall be subject to its supervision and government.

Section 2- Membership and Discipline

The Board shall accept applicants for church membership, and apply discipline to offending members in accordance with Article VI. The Elders shall watch over the souls of the flock as "they that must give account" (Heb. 13:17). They must be persistent in prayer for, visitation of, and instruction of the membership and its families.

Section 3- Church Officers and Teachers

The Elders shall appoint the Superintendent of the Sunday School and the directors of all church groups from its own membership. These, in turn, upon request, shall be responsible to present to the Elders, for its approval, all proposed teachers and leaders.

Section 4- Pulpit Supply

The Elders have complete responsibility for the teaching ministry of the church. It shall be the duty of the Board of Elders to supply the pulpit with men whose ministry in our church shall be consistent with the Doctrinal Statement of this church.

Section 5- Administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The Elders shall examine and approve candidates for professor's baptism and church membership.

The Elders shall have complete oversight over the administration of the Lord's Supper. Christian liberty in the matters of food and drink has application to the relationship between believers at all times and places (Rom. 14:20-21; 1 Cor. 10:31-32). This is especially true at the Lord's Supper, the supreme symbol of Christian unity (1Cor. 10:14- 17, 23-24, 31-33). While recognizing, with the 1689 London Confession, that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with the elements of the Passover (unleavened bread and mixed wine), it must also be noted that the New Testament seems to allow some degree of liberty in the choice of the elements. Jesus used the generic term "fruit of the vine" instead of the specific term "wine," (Matt. 26:29; Num. 6:3-5) providing biblical harmony with Paul's instructions on Christian liberty (Rom. 14:20-21; 1 Cor. 10:14-17, 31-33). Also, the broken bread of the Lord's Supper on the day of Pentecost was most likely the leavened bread of that feast (Lev. 23:16-17; Acts 2:42). Therefore, the Elders of this church shall exercise wisdom and liberty in accordance with the above principles in the selection and administration of the elements of the Lord's Supper for our worship.

Section 6- Grievances and Suggestions

The Board shall receive, consider, and dispose of any grievance, suggestion, or recommendation by any member or organization of this church.

Section 7- Miscellaneous Duties

The Board of Elders shall exercise oversight over all other powers and duties which properly belong to a local church, congregation and corporation.

ARTICLE IX

BOARD OF DEACONS

Section 1- Ministry of Mercy

The ministry of mercy in our church and community is a special responsibility of the Diaconate. The Board of Deacons shall see that the sick, the sorrowing, the aged, and the feeble-minded receive spiritual and physical comfort. They shall minister in accordance with the Word of God,

administer this church's benevolence funds, and render counsel to those in need of comfort. They shall be vigilant for opportunities to show goodness, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal. 6.10)

Section 2- Business Affairs

The Board of Deacons shall have general executive powers to administer the business affairs of this church. It shall be the Deacons' and Elders' joint responsibility to prepare the church budget and submit it to a joint session of the Board of Elders and the Board of Deacons each year. The final church budget will be approved both by the Eldership and the Deacons collectively. Furthermore, the duty of caring for and maintaining the church's properties shall belong to the Deacons.

Section 3- Duties of the Church Treasurer

The Church Treasurer shall be appointed by the Board of Elders from the Diaconate. The Treasurer shall be responsible for the deposit of all church funds in a bank account or accounts, as instructed by the Board of Deacons, which account shall be opened and maintained in the name of the church. He shall make monthly reports to the Board of Deacons and Elders, and an annual report to the congregation at the annual meeting. He shall submit his books for an annual audit prior to the annual meeting, and at such other times as he may be directed by the Board of Elders and Deacons. The Treasurer shall be primarily responsible for all offerings received by the church, therefore, immediately following any service, at least two Deacons shall count and keep a record of all offerings, and that amount shall be reported to the Church Treasurer.

- A. **Duties of the Financial Secretary-** The Financial Secretary will be appointed to assist the Church Treasurer in matters of church finance. The Secretary shall help to maintain an accurate record of all offerings received. The Financial Secretary shall also keep an accurate record of individual contributions and present to each contributor an annual report of gifts received.

Section 3- Limitations of Powers

The Board of Deacons shall not encumber, transfer, sell, or purchase any real estate for the church except by the express authorization conveyed by

the Eldership. Any financial responsibilities delegated to the deacons must be approved by the Board of Deacons and elders.

Section 4- Representation at Meetings

The Board of Deacons shall inform the Board of Elders of all of their meetings so that a representative may be present. Likewise, the Board of Deacons may be asked to present regular reports of its business to the Board of Elders.

ARTICLE X

ORDINATIONS

Section 1 - Recognition for Specific Ministries

It is our hope that spirit-filled men will be called out from among us to proclaim the Gospel of the Grace of God. The elders may oversee such men for preaching, missions, planting churches, foreign missions, the military chaplaincy, etc. When there is a prospective candidate for such ministries, the Board of elders shall guide that person in his studies and preparation. It shall then call the elders and the congregation to examine the qualifications of the candidate. It shall look into the soundness of his conversion, the godliness of his walk, the soundness of his doctrine, the degree of his gifts, the extent of his training, and the blessing of God upon his labor for Christ. The Elders shall insure that the examination will conform to the requirement of the specific ministry.

The eldership will take preliminary measures for ordination. These preliminary measures will include the input of all church members to examine, pray, consider, as well as voice any grievances concerning the candidates under consideration for ordination. If the Board of Elders considers a man proven, he will be presented to the congregation for the office that he is qualified for. At this time the congregation will have two weeks to bring forth any issue that might disqualify the man for the office. If nothing is determined to be disqualifying by the Board of Elders the man will be appointed to the office.

Section 2- Biblical Qualifications (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1)

ARTICLE XI

FINANCES

The work of this church is financially dependent upon the voluntary gifts of God's people. Before the annual congregational meeting, the Board of Elders shall obtain from the Board of Deacons an estimate of the needs of the several divisions of the work, and a prepared budget, detailing the proposed expenditures for the coming year. When this budget is subscribed to, it shall be considered the basis for the current liabilities. No committee or board is authorized to make changes in its provisions or to make unauthorized disbursements without the consent of the elders (Article IX, Section 3).

ARTICLE XII

AMENDMENTS

Amendments of the Constitution or Doctrinal Statement of this church are subject to the needs of the church and are subject to the unanimous vote of the elders.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I

CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

Section 1- Notice of Meetings

Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at regular worship services on the two successive Sundays immediately prior to the meeting. In an emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each local member by mail of the time, place, and purpose of the congregational meeting.

Section 2- Method of calling Meetings

It shall be the right and responsibility of the board of elders to call all congregational meetings. A written request to call a congregational meeting, stating clearly its purpose, signed by fifteen residents, voting members of the church in good and regular standing and presented to the clerk, shall require the board of elders to call such a meeting. When special congregational meetings are called, notice must be given to the congregation as to the purpose.

Section 3- Monthly Meetings

Monthly members' meetings shall be held for the purpose of monitoring the status and progress of the various ministries, financial reporting, and acting upon normal matters of business.

Section 4- Annual Meetings

An Annual Business Meeting will be held the first Wednesday of each December for the presentation of the annual budget and the transaction of other necessary business.

Section 5- Responsibility for Meetings

The board of elders shall arrange the details of all congregational meetings

and see that all possible preparation for their successful conduct is made, including the appointment of the Clerk to record the meeting minutes.

ARTICLE II

MEMBERSHIP

In order to keep an accurate membership roll, there shall be an annual review of the membership roll by the elders one month prior to the Annual Meeting.

ARTICLE III

CHURCH OFFICERS

Section 1- Method and Requirements for Election of Elders and Deacons

- A. All nominees shall have been a member of the church for a reasonable period of time before being placed in consideration for church offices by the eldership. No candidate who has been a member of the congregation for less than a year will be considered for any office without the consent of the elders.
- B. Consent must be secured from the candidates before their names are placed before the congregation for an examination period of two weeks as stated in the constitution (ARTICLE X section I).

Section 2- Election of church officers

Elders will be examined on their understanding of the Scriptures and their Doctrinal Statement of Faith. They must be apt to teach. Deacons will be examined on these things in a more general way as “holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1; Acts 6.). If the Board of Elders considers a man proven, he will be presented to the congregation for the office that he is qualified for. At this time the congregation will have two weeks to bring forth any issue that might disqualify the man for the office. If nothing is determined to be disqualifying by the Board of Elders the man will be appointed to the office.

Section 3- Termination of Service

The term of services for elders and deacons is permanent in nature. Therefore, church officers are not elected for a specific period of time. However, there must be allowances for the termination of service under certain circumstances.

- A. **Leave of Absence-** After consultation with the elders, an officer may request a leave of absence from the responsibilities of office for a certain period of time. If the elders grant the request, this action should be reported to the congregation with an explanation. Extended leaves of absence beyond six months are at the discretion of the elders and may require final resignation from office.

- B. **Resignation-** Upon request of resignation the elder resigning will be questioned as to his reasons for the resignation. The eldership will be responsible for determining the validity of the resignation and the manner and timing of the resignation.

- C. **Termination-** If the relations between an officer and the congregation become detrimental to the welfare of the church, and the officer has not submitted to the exhortations of the board of elders (1 Tim. 5.19-20), the board of elders shall have authority to consider this matter. Any Elder may be removed from office if he becomes physically incapacitated, spiritually unqualified, or his inability to serve is established in the minds of the remainder of the Board of Elders. If the elder who has been removed has previously been financially supported by the church, the elder under termination will continue to receive support from the church for a period not to exceed ninety days or until other means of employment are gained.

- D. **Departure-** If an officer moves away from the community and can attend this church no longer, his service will be terminated after six months.

Section 4- Interim Support for a Prospective Elder

The normal process for the election of elders is to look first in the congregation. But in the event that none of the present elders possess sufficient proficiency to be financially supported to “labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5.17), the elders may look outside the congregation for

such a man. Extreme caution is urged in such a case to avoid hirelings and wolves entering the flock. After receiving nominations from the church, and after employing the Nominating committee for advice, the elders may invite a prospective elder to visit the church for an interview, preaching, officer's meetings and congregational examination. It is preferred that the elders work with only one candidate at a time. If the elders and the nominating committee are satisfied with the prospective elder's qualifications, and if they propose the candidate to the church and receive the required twenty five percent nomination from the resident voting members, they may propose that the congregation extend a call to the candidate for pastoral office. A seventy-five percent majority vote will be required for congregational approval. The above procedure will constitute the normal process of congregational nomination and recognition required of other church officers. At the discretion of the elders and with the prior agreement of the prospective candidate, a confirmation vote may be required in some circumstances after a period of one year's service. This procedure is designed to protect the flock in certain cases. This may be required of candidates who are largely unknown to the church beforehand, or who are presently without pastoral charge, or who have limited pastoral experience. In the event that the required seventy-five percent majority is not attained in the confirmation vote, the church will provide ninety days severance support to assist the candidate in his life plans, or less if mutually agreed upon.

ARTICLE IV

CHURCH BOARDS

Section 1- Monthly Meetings

The Board of Elders and the Board of Deacons shall hold regular monthly meetings.

Section 2- Quorum and Call for Meetings

The quorum of the Board of Elders or of the Board of Deacons shall be two-thirds of the total number of the board. They shall meet at the request of any three members of the Board.

ARTICLE V

AMENDMENTS

Amendments to the By-Laws of this church are subject to the needs of the church, and are subject to the unanimous vote of the elders.

ARTICLE VI

DISSOLUTION

This church shall be considered dissolved when its membership concludes that it can no longer fulfill its hereto stated purpose of existence. In the event of dissolution, no donor, member, officer of the church, or private individual shall be entitled to share in the distribution of any assets of this church. Any assets of the church upon dissolution shall be used to pay any outstanding debts. Any remaining assets shall be equally divided among the missionaries supported by the church at the time of dissolution or the assets shall be given to another church of like faith and practice, holding to theology which accords with and is within the sphere of the church's doctrinal statement of faith, or other similar religious organization that is qualified as a charitable organization under section 501(c) (3), Internal Revenue Code of 1954, as amended.

*Revised and adopted by The Grace Community Church at Bigelow Elders on
April 13, 2022.*