

## THE STATEMENT OF FAITH AND PRACTICES OF GRACE CHURCH

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## History of the Document

Written: Summer 1984.

Approved by the Elders: September 15, 1984 Elders' Meeting.

Accepted as the 'Church Constitution' for establishment of a Domestic Non-profit Corporation in the State of Michigan: September 24, 1984.

Accepted by the congregation: November 10, 1984 (membership formed).

Accepted by the Internal Revenue Service as the 'Church Constitution' for 501(c)(3) status: March 18, 1985.

Addition: *Procedure for Hiring Full-Time Ministry Staff*, December 2, 1989 Elders' Meeting.

Minor corrections of spelling and punctuation: Summer 1990.

Amendment: Revision of *Practical Applications: II. The Recognition and Review of Deacons*, November 5, 1990 Elders' Meeting.

Addition: *Practical Applications: IV. Meetings of the Congregation*, May 7, 1994 Elders' Meeting.

Addition: *Practical Applications, V. Amendment of the Statement of Faith and Practices*, May 7, 1994 Elders' Meeting.

Reformatting: Fall 2003.

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Amendment: Removal of *Practical Applications: II. The Recognition and Review of Deacons*; Replacement with *Practical Applications: II. The Role of Deacons in the Church*, May 3, 2008 Elders' Meeting.

Addition: *Practical Applications: II. The Role of Deacons in the Church, A. Trustees*, December 6, 2008 Elders' Meeting.

**v. Amendment of the Statement of Faith and Practices**

- A. This document, entitled The Statement of Faith and Practices of Grace Church, functions as the constitution and by-laws of the church.*
- B. This document may be emended at any time by majority vote of the elders at any regularly scheduled Elders' Meeting in which revision of the document is listed on the agenda for that meeting and the proceedings are included in the minutes of the meeting.*
- C. All amendments, revisions, and alterations must be communicated in writing to all the members of the church within sixty days of their ratification by the board.*

#### IV. Meetings of the Congregation

- A. *Calling a meeting: The congregation shall meet once per year for the annual congregational business meeting to elect trustees, review the budget, and handle business which the trustees shall bring to congregational attention. The elders of the church may call for additional meetings to deal with congregational concerns as they deem necessary.*
- B. *Notice of a meeting: The annual business meeting, and any other congregational meeting called by the elders, shall be given at least one week's notice, either in writing or by spoken announcement.*
- C. *Moderator of the meeting: Ordinarily, the Senior Pastor will be the Moderator of the meeting unless it is deemed not possible, practical or wise by the team of Elders. In that event, the Elders shall appoint one of its members to call the meeting to order and to preside. The Moderator shall appoint a person to take the minutes of the meeting.*
- D. *Quorum: The quorum which shall be required for the congregation to act shall consist of twenty percent of the active members of the church.*
- E. *Eligibility to vote: Those who are eligible to vote consist of those persons who are active members of the congregation as of the date of the meeting, as determined by the board of Elders, and who are present at the meeting.*

### III. Procedure for Hiring Full-Time Ministry Staff

- A. *The Senior Pastor will gather the resumes of potential candidates and do a preliminary interview either in person or by phone.*
- B. *From the preliminary interviews, the elders will choose the candidates they wish to interview in depth, and will bring them to the church for a weekend to meet with the elders and the staff team.*
- C. *When the Elders have decided on a person to nominate for the position, the individual and his wife will be brought to the church to formally candidate.*
  - 1. They will meet with the congregation for a time of questions and answers in an informal setting.
  - 2. The candidate will speak in some capacity at a Sunday morning service. This may include preaching at the morning service if the candidate under consideration will be expected to preach as a part of his job-description.
- D. *As in the procedure for recognizing elders and deacons, private congregational response will be sought by the Elders before the final decision is made.*
- E. *With the congregational input in mind, the Elders will make the final decision and make conclusive plans for hiring, salary, moving, etc.*
- F. *The Senior Pastor will then contact all of the original candidates for the position to inform them that the position has been filled.*

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government, the Elders serve as the God-appointed office-bearers who are to lead the church under the Lordship of Christ, we recognize them as having the authority to appoint the Trustees.

Every year, the Elder Team shall appoint four Trustees to serve as President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary of the corporation. These Trustees may be appointed from among the Elders, the Administrative Team, the Pastoral Staff, the Administrative Staff, or other key leaders of the church. The only restriction is that the Board of Trustees must include at least one Ruling Elder who will serve as President.

The Elders shall inform the members at the Annual Meeting of the names of those who will be serving as Trustees of the church for the following calendar year.

## II. The Role of Deacons in the Church

Deacons are referred to in only two passages in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3.8–13; Philippians 1.1), and it is only in the church of Philippi that the apostle Paul addresses their deacons. The fact that the New Testament contains such slight information about deacons explains why there have been such divergent practices regarding them in the history of the Christian church.

It appears that deacons, as ‘servants’ (the meaning of the word) of the church, were needed only when a local church became large enough that the elders could no longer devote themselves ‘to prayer and the ministry of the word’ without significant interruption and difficulty. When that became the case, the elders would appoint others to assist in matters of finance, care of the poor, and other physical needs.

At Grace Church, we believe that all of those who are appointed by the elders to carry out official tasks that are recognized and valued by the congregation (either in paid or non-paid positions) in order to relieve the elders of some of the clerical, administrative, financial, legal, and management duties of their responsibilities are functioning in a deacon role. This is true in a significant way of the administrative support staff and of those non-elders who serve on the Administrative Team.

One practical application of this approach is that we practice care in seeking to place people in such positions of service who meet the biblical qualifications of deacons.

The fact that we do not usually use the title ‘Deacon’ in our church life does not indicate a lack of value placed on those who serve the church in this way.

### *A. Trustees*

As noted above, scripture calls those church leaders who serve under the oversight of the Elders in specific areas of ministry in order to allow the Elders to focus on the shepherding-care of the congregation by the title, ‘deacons.’ One of those areas of ministry is the Trustees.

The State of Michigan requires that a Michigan Domestic Non-Profit Corporation has a board of at least four Trustees who act as the officers authorized to transact the official business of the church (e.g., buying and selling property, entering contracts and leases, etc.). Since in our understanding of New Testament church

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6. The entire process may take two to three months. In the event of a special need, the Elders may refer to previous nominees to make a selection, or may re-initiate the whole selection process, as they deem necessary.

### *B. The Review of Elders*

1. Since Scripture indicates no fixed term for Elders, no specific fixed term of office is recommended. Instead, each Elder, upon appointment, shall be asked for a one year commitment, subject to review and re-commitment each subsequent year.
2. During the period of annual review, both the individual and the other Elders shall evaluate his continued service as an Elder, again considering the biblical qualifications as well as any other personal factors that may affect his service. An individual's service as an Elder may be discontinued by his own decision, or by the unanimous decision of the other Elders.
3. Those Elders renewing their commitment would again be presented to the members of the congregation for affirmation and dedication.
4. A person's leaving the board of Elders would not preclude his service as a future Elder, subject to the regular selection process.

## Practical Applications

### I. The Recognition and Review of Elders

Scripture gives evidence of the first Elders being appointed by the founders of the church. By this example it is implied that the existing spiritual leadership of the church (the Elders) should be intimately involved in the process of selecting other Elders, to insure selection based on spiritual rather than superficial qualifications. Beyond this, there are no specific guidelines given in Scripture regarding the selection process. It would therefore appear that freedom is given to the individual congregation to develop a process that will best serve its own special needs and situations. (*Acts 14.23; Titus 1.5*)

#### A. *The Recognition of Elders*

1. When the need arises for added leadership, the congregation will be provided with information and teaching regarding the biblical qualifications of Elders and their Scriptural role.
2. With the biblical qualifications in mind, members of the congregation will be asked to submit prayerfully and confidentially the names of those men they feel are qualified to serve as Elders.
3. The existing Elders will then review the names of those who have been nominated and remove the names of any that are not felt to meet the qualifications. Persons who are under consideration will be interviewed and urged to engage in self-appraisal and personal evaluation in light of the Scriptural qualifications. Any person may withdraw his name at that point if he does not aspire to the position of Elder (*1 Timothy 3.1*) or he does not feel that he adequately meets the qualifications.
4. The names of the prospective Elders will then be brought before the congregation, who will be given 30 days to indicate why any one of the prospective Elders would not be qualified to serve. This information must be given privately and in person to one of the existing Elders.
5. At the end of 30 days, the selected Elders will be presented to the members in a public meeting in a service of recognition and dedication.

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- c. If there is still no evidence of genuine repentance after confrontation by a group, the elders should bring the matter before the entire congregation who will then appeal to the person to forsake their sin and follow the Lord. (*Matthew 18.17*)
- d. If there is still no evidence of repentance, the Scripture teaches that the person should be removed from the church body and believers should break fellowship with him until such time as there is genuine repentance. (*Matthew 18.17; 1 Thessalonians 3.14; 1 Corinthians 5.11; Titus 3.10-11*)

In addition to the above procedure, Scripture teaches that such correction should be approached and carried out with an attitude of love, concern, and humility, and should be motivated by the sincere desire to see repentance and restoration to fellowship. Reflecting Christ's grace and forgiveness, Christians are taught to be quick to forgive when there is evidence of genuine repentance on the part of a fellow believer.

**Note:** The same biblical principles of accountability and restoration apply in attempting to resolve relational conflicts between believers. In such cases the Bible indicates that it is the responsibility of the believer to go promptly to his or her brother or sister when he has been offended, or when he has reason to believe that he may have done the offending. Such actions greatly enhance the relationships of the body and protect the unity of the church.

to confront brothers and sisters according to biblical principles when there is evidence of sin. This is necessary both to preserve the purity of the church and to maintain a spirit of peace and unity. (*Philippians 2.1-4; 1 Corinthians 1.9; Psalm 133; Galatians 6.2; 1 Peter 3.8-9; Matthew 18.15ff; James 5.6*)

**Note:** The above Scriptural principles of commitment and accountability to the Lord and his people do not represent a “pathway to salvation.” Salvation is wholly the result of God’s free grace, not the result, in whole or in part, of any human works or goodness.

### *E. Principles of accountability and restoration.*

Becoming a member of a fellowship of Christians is like becoming a member of a family. The Bible teaches that we have certain family responsibilities as Christian brothers and sisters in the church.

#### 1. The need for accountability.

As members of a church family, we are to be concerned for each other’s spiritual growth and welfare. Ongoing sin in the life of a believer obstructs his walk with the Lord, threatens the unity and fellowship of the body, and weakens the witness of the church in the community. Therefore, the Bible encourages us to be concerned for each other’s spiritual well-being and to lovingly confront when there is evidence of sin. This principle of accountability and restoration in the body of Christ helps us to correct problems that may arise in the church fellowship.

#### 2. The procedure for accountability and restoration.

In Matthew 18.15-17, the Lord Jesus gave instruction on the means by which accountability and restoration might be lovingly and carefully maintained in the local church. When there is knowledge of ongoing sin in the life of a fellow believer, Grace Church acknowledges the following biblical principles:

- a. Go promptly and confront the individual in private.  
(*Matthew 18.15*)
- b. If there is not expression of repentance, reprove the individual in the presence of two or three witnesses.  
(Note: In Grace Church structure, the best witnesses would be the elders as representatives of the body.) (*Matthew 18.16*)

### *D. Responsibilities of membership.*

In the New Testament, the highest privilege of a believer was to be a part of a local expression of the body of Christ. In the church, the believer shared in the common life in Christ, had the fellowship and encouragement of other believers, and helped in the spread of the gospel, both in his or her city and in the world. Along with these privileges, believers became responsible to the Scriptural principles of commitment and accountability to the body of Christ as summarized below.

#### 1. Gifts and Abilities

The body of Christ is composed of many interdependent members, each uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body. Therefore, each believer must seek to identify, develop, and utilize his or her spiritual gifts and natural abilities for the growth and strengthening of the church and with the support and affirmation of the church. (*Romans 12.4-6; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4.11-16; 1 Peter 4.10*)

#### 2. Time

Regular fellowship and worship with other believers is absolutely essential to Christian growth. Therefore, believers must be willing to adjust their schedules to give priority to meeting with the church when it corporately assembles. Further, because Christ give himself on our behalf, we must be willing to give our time to help his cause in the world and pursue those things of eternal significance. (*Hebrews 10.24-25; Matthew 6.33; Philippians 2.5-7; 2 Corinthians 5.15; Romans 14.7-8*)

#### 3. Treasures

Since we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ, everything we are and have belongs to him. In response to Christ's abundant giving, we should increasingly seek to submit our personal resources to his Lordship, with a spirit of liberality and cheerfulness. (*Matthew 6.19-21; 1 Peter 1.17-19; Luke 5.38, 21.1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9*)

#### 4. Fellowship

As members of a local expression of Christ's body, we should seek to develop a spirit of mutual love, concern, and encouragement. Our desire is to be for the spiritual growth and well being of our fellow believers. Because sin impedes one's walk with the Lord and hinders fellowship, we are commanded

### III. MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

#### A. *The purpose of membership.*

The New Testament presents a picture of definable groups of people who, once committed to the Lord, identified themselves with and committed themselves to a specific local body of Christians. In order to implement the principles of accountability and commitment to the local body of Christ, as defined in the New Testament and practiced in the early Christian churches, Grace Church recognizes the need for formal membership. (*Acts 2.41-42; Acts 11.26; Romans 16.1; 1 Corinthians 1.2; Philippians 1.1*)

#### B. *Criteria of membership.*

Any person who wishes to become a member of this local church and accept with God's help the privileges and responsibilities that go with this membership will joyfully and publicly be received after: 1) Attending a class about the purpose, strategy, and structure of the church; 2) Requesting membership in the church in writing; 3) Giving testimony to the Elders of his or her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire to live a consistent Christian life, and 4) accepting the doctrinal statement of this church.

#### C. *Termination of Membership*

1. Membership in the church may be voluntarily withdrawn in writing at any time. Members in good standing who request a letter of dismissal and recommendation to another Christian fellowship may request this from the elder board.
2. Membership in the church, including all of the privileges and responsibilities that belong to it, may be terminated by the majority vote of the members in a stated meeting in keeping with the procedure outlined in § III, E, 2 of the Grace Church *Statement of Faith and Practices*.
3. The withdrawal or termination of membership by a person who is under disciplinary proceedings of the church (as outlined in § III, E, 2 of the Grace Church *Statement of Faith and Practices*), does not preclude the continuance of those proceedings by the church.

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*J. What is to be the response of the congregation to their leaders?*

In response to the biblical pattern of leadership, members of the body are taught in Scripture to lovingly support their leaders and to submit to their authority in the leadership of the church and in the pastoral care of the congregation. (*1 Thessalonians 5.12-13; Hebrews 13.17; 1 Corinthians 16.16*)

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### **Personal Character**

<i>Reverent</i>	Deacons must be mature, of sound mind and character, yielded to the Holy Spirit.
<i>Not double-tongued</i>	Deacons must demonstrate verbal consistency. They must not be prone to saying one thing to one person and something else to another.
<i>Not addicted to much wine</i>	Deacons must be free from addictions, and willing to limit their liberty for the sake of others.
<i>Not greedy for dishonest gain</i>	Deacons must not be stingy, greedy or out for dishonest gain.

### **Vocational Qualifications**

<i>Holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience</i>	Deacons must have a sound knowledge of Christian truths and a lifestyle in accord with them. They must not be easily swayed from the truth.
<i>First tested</i>	Deacons must have proven over time that they are faithful and that their walk is credible.

### **Family Life**

<i>Husband of one wife</i>	Deacons must be devoted husbands. They must be characterized by faithfulness to their one and only marriage partner.
<i>Managing their children and their own households well</i>	Deacons must have well-ordered households, a healthy family life, and well-behaved children.

### **Qualifications for Female Deacons**

<i>Dignified</i>	Female Deacons must be mature, of sound mind and character, yielded to the Holy Spirit.
<i>Not slanderers</i>	Female Deacons must not be given to spreading information about other people to those who do not need to know.
<i>Sober-minded</i>	Female Deacons must be self-controlled, free from excesses, enslaved to nothing.
<i>Faithful in all things</i>	Female Deacons must have demonstrated over time that they are reliable in performance of their tasks.

### *H. What are the biblical responsibilities of Deacons?*

#### **Acts 6:2-3**

*<sup>2</sup>And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.*

Deacons are to serve under the authority of the Elders, undertaking those areas of service necessary for the church's functioning that would otherwise prohibit the Elders from performing their biblical responsibilities. No specific on-going roles are mentioned in Scripture, probably because service needs change, and so the role of the Deacons should be flexible. This is most likely why qualifications for Deacons are stressed more than specific tasks. In contrast, the function of the Elders is more stabilized, because spiritual needs are relatively constant.

While there is actual equality between Elders, Deacons, and in fact, all members of the body, for the purpose of order, Scripture indicates that the Elders, as overseers, are entrusted with the final authority within the local church.

### *I. What are the biblical qualifications of Deacons?*

#### **1 Timothy 3:8-13**

*<sup>8</sup>Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup>They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup>Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup>Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup>For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

#### **General Qualifications**

*Blameless*

Deacons must be above reproach in every area of life, presenting no patterns of Scriptural disobedience or grounds for accusation.

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<i>Not a recent convert</i>	Elders must not be new believers. They must be Christians long enough to demonstrate a consistent Christian testimony.
<i>He must hold firm to the trustworthy word</i>	Elders must be stable in the faith, knowledgeable of the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, and obedient to the Word of God.
<i>Able to teach</i>	Elders must be able to communicate the truth of God and exhort sound doctrine in a non-argumentative way.

### *E. How long do Elders serve?*

The Bible indicates no fixed term for Elders. Since they are to serve based on qualifications to lead the body and the willingness to give themselves to the work, there is no fixed term of service. Their service to the body in ministry of oversight may be discontinued by their own personal decision or by the unanimous decision of the other Elders.

### *F. What is the function of full-time Christian workers?*

God has uniquely gifted certain members of the body of Christ for the task of “equipping the saints for works of service” (*Ephesians 4.11*). The most visible of these gifts are those of the Evangelist and the Pastor-Teacher. Such “ministers” may be asked by the Elders to serve under their authority, performing their area of ministry in the church in order to best equip the believers to minister for Jesus Christ. The equipping ministry of the church may be organized by the Elders in whatever way will best meet the needs of the body. (*Ephesians 4.11-16*)

### *G. Are there any other leaders in the local church?*

The New Testament church also had a group of individuals called “Deacons.” These men and women served under the authority of the Elders, undertaking those areas of service necessary for the church’s functioning that would prohibit the Elders from performing their biblical responsibilities. They were most likely publicly recognized in the same way as Elders. (*Philippians 1.1; 1 Timothy 3.8-12*)

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<i>Not a lover of money</i>	Elders must not be greedy, stingy, or out for dishonest gain.
<i>Not covetous</i>	They should not be preoccupied with amassing material things, but rather should be a model of giving.
<i>Loves what is good</i>	Elders must desire the will of God in every decision.
<i>Holy</i>	Elders must be reverent, continually desiring to be separated from sin. They must be devoted to prayer, the study of Scripture, and the guarding of their own spiritual walk.

### **Personal Relationships**

<i>Respectable</i>	Elders must demonstrate a well-ordered life and good behavior.
<i>Hospitable</i>	Elders must be unselfish with their personal resources. They must be willing to share blessings with others both inside and outside the church.
<i>Not violent but gentle</i> <i>Not quarrelsome</i> <i>Not quick-tempered</i>	Elders must be gentle and characterized by forbearance and tenderness. They are not to be given to selfish argumentation, but be able to exercise self control and patience in difficult circumstances.
<i>Well thought of by outsiders</i>	Elders must be respected by believers and must be free from hypocrisy.
<i>Just</i>	Elders must be fair and impartial. Their judgments must be based on scriptural principles.

### **Family Life**

<i>Husband of one wife</i>	Elders must be devoted husbands. They must be characterized by faithfulness to their one and only marriage partner.
<i>He must manage his own household, with all dignity keeping his children submissive.</i>	Elders must have a well-ordered household, a healthy family life, and well behaved children.
<i>Having faithful children not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination</i>	

### **Vocational Qualifications**

*D. What are the biblical qualifications of Elders?*

**1 Timothy 3.1–7**

*<sup>1</sup>The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup>for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup>Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

**Titus 1.5–9**

*<sup>5</sup>This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you —<sup>6</sup>if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup>For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup>He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

**General Qualifications**

*Above reproach*

Elders must be above reproach in every area of life, presenting no patterns of Scriptural disobedience or grounds for accusation.

**Personal Character**

*Self-controlled*

Elders must be self-controlled, enslaved to nothing, free from excesses.

*Sober-minded*

Elders must be sober, sensible, wise, balanced in judgment, not given to quick superficial decisions based on immature thinking.

*Not a drunkard*

Elders must be free from addictions, and must be willing to limit their liberty for the sake of others.

### *B. What are the biblical responsibilities of Elders?*

#### 1. Shepherd the Flock

Serving in all humility, Elders are to guide, direct, guard, and protect members of the congregation. They are to pray for the spiritual and physical well-being of the believers, seeking to meet their needs and assist in any way possible, and warning them against harmful influences and the dangers of false teachers. (*Acts 20.28ff; James 5.14; 1 Peter 5.1-3*)

#### 2. Instruct the Flock

By example. The Elders are to provide a Scriptural role model and are to set a pattern before the flock of a rightly ordered life — with a single purpose, to glorify God. (*1 Peter 5.3*)

By teaching and exhorting. Elders are to see that the flock is fed through insightful and accurate biblical instruction and admonition. (*1 Timothy 3.2; Titus 1.9*)

By refuting those who contradict the truth. Elders are to confront those who are teaching what they should not teach or who are continuing in a pattern of behavior contrary to biblical truth. Thus, Elders are to keep closing potential entrances for Satan, so that the truth of Christ will remain credible both to the congregation and the community. (*Acts 20.29-31; Titus 1.9*)

#### 3. Manage the Church

Elders are to oversee the proper functioning of the church and supervise the financial affairs, with the assistance of Deacons and other godly leaders. (*Acts 11.29-30; 1 Timothy 3.5; 5.17*)

### *C. How are Elders recognized?*

In the New Testament period, Elders of local churches were appointed by the Apostles or their representatives. The Apostle Paul left us with a list of qualifications so that the congregation could recognize those whom the Holy Spirit was raising up to perform the ministry of oversight. The example of the early church implies that the existing spiritual leadership (the Elders) should be intimately involved in, and ultimately responsible for, the selection of Elders to insure selection based on spiritual rather than superficial qualifications. (*Acts 14.23; Titus 1.5; 1 Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9; Acts 20.28*)

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

### I. The Guidance of the Church

#### A. *Who is the Head of the church?*

Christ alone is Head of the church. By his power, he is the true source of all the church is and does. His glory is to be the objective of every motive, function and act of the body, both individually and corporately. (*Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.18, Colossians 2.19*)

#### B. *Where does the church receive its guidance and authority?*

The Bible alone is the fully authoritative guide for the church. Through it, God has revealed his counsel, commands, directions, and purpose for the church and for every believer. (*2 Timothy 3.16-17, Isaiah 40.8, Psalm 119*)

#### C. *What is the source of the church's power?*

The Holy Spirit is the source of the church's power. He guides, instructs, empowers, and gives gifts to believers for godly living and service in the body of Christ. (*1 Corinthians 2.1-4, 1 Corinthians 2.11-16, 1 Corinthians 12*)

### II. Leadership in the Church

#### A. *Who leads the church?*

The church is to be governed by a group of men called "Elders" (at times the Scriptures call these men "Bishops"). There should always be more than one and among them there is absolute equality. Elders may be called upon to give themselves more fully to the ministry and be financially supported by the church. (*1 Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9; Acts 20.17,28; 1 Peter 5.1; 1 Timothy 5.17*)

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## **THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH**

The Church exists to glorify and honor God by introducing people to a vital, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and by helping them to develop into mature representatives of Christ in society. This purpose may be summed up in the three-fold function of exaltation, edification, and evangelism.

### **EXALTATION** — *The Church Existing for Christ*

Worship is the sincere response of adoration, fear, and obedience that believers give to God for what he has done. The purpose of the church begins with the recognition that we do not belong to ourselves but to the Lord who purchased us with his own blood. Thus, worship is to be the lifestyle of each individual Christian and the focus of the corporate gatherings of the church. Since the Lord is enthroned with majesty and endowed with all authority, we should seek in all things to serve him with our time, treasures, and talents, to follow his will revealed in the Bible, and to honor his name. (*John 4.23-24; 1 Peter 1.18-19; Philippians 2.8-10; 1 Corinthians 6.19; Psalm 99.5-9; Isaiah 57.15*)

### **EDIFICATION** — *The Church Existing for Itself*

The result of the gospel and a central purpose for the church's existence is the life-transformation of each of its members. To this end, God calls believers into mutually accountable relationships in which they can encourage one another to live holy lives and to serve the Lord. This requires the responsibility of the leadership to provide practical Bible teaching and training in discipleship and personal evangelism. It also requires the responsibility of each uniquely gifted member of the body to exercise his or her spiritual gifts and natural abilities for the building up of the body and the bearing of one another's burdens. (*Ephesians 4.11-13; Hebrews 10.24-25; 2 Timothy 4.2-4; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Galatians 6.1-2*)

### **EVANGELISM** — *The Church Existing for the World*

We accept the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ as a priority of the church collectively and of each believer individually. It is our desire to share as widely and effectively as possible the good news of God's love and forgiveness in Christ. Every believer is unique in his or her personality, abilities, and vocation, and within that context they are to be witnesses by word and deed to the Lord Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the gospel should be motivated by genuine concern and love for all and for the whole person. (*Matthew 28.18-20; Acts 1.8; Colossians 4.3-6; Matthew 5.13-16*)

## THE STATEMENT OF FAITH AND PRACTICES OF GRACE CHURCH

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unbelievers to continue their own rejection of God in eternal punishment, and,

2. The judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ, revealing the quantity and quality of works done in the body, not with reference to salvation, but for the purpose of bestowing rewards in his Kingdom.

*(John 5.28-29; Luke 16.19-31; 2 Corinthians 5.8; 1 Thessalonians 1.6-10; Revelation 20.11-15; 1 Corinthians 3.11-15; 2 Corinthians 5.10)*

- \* We believe that this Statement of Faith represents an adequate and accurate summary of what Scripture teaches on these matters. All members shall refrain from advocating doctrines that are not included in the Statement of Faith in such a way as to cause divisions.

The Bible references listed here are to illustrate biblical themes. They are not intended to be used as isolated proof-texts, nor are they the only passages which deal with these subjects.

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We believe that it is the obligation of every Christian to grow in spiritual maturity and holiness through obedience to the Word of God by the power of the indwelling Spirit. Due to the power of remaining sin in the believer, progress to maturity is not automatic. A Christian can, through sin, lose his fellowship, joy, power, testimony and reward, and incur the Father's discipline. The relationship of the believer with the Lord is eternal, being established by the new birth; fellowship, however, is dependent upon obedience to the Word of God. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the available source of power, comfort, and teaching for all believers. His power and control are appropriated by faith, making it possible for the believer to live a life of Christlike character and to bear fruit to the glory of the Father. (*1 Thessalonians 4.3; 1 Corinthians 2.10-16; Galatians 5.15-26; Ephesians 5.18; Colossians 3.16; John 15.8; 1 John 1.5-2.2*)

### **THE CHURCH**

We believe that there is one true and universal church, made up of all those who in every place acknowledge Jesus Christ as their only Savior. The Word of God commands believers to gather together in local, autonomous congregations to devote themselves to worship, prayer, the teaching of the Bible, the maintenance of holy lives, the observation of the ordinances of water baptism and Communion, the edification of the body through the development and use of gifts and talents, and an active ministry to an unsaved world. A local expression of the church is found wherever Christians meet regularly in obedience to these commands. Under the spiritual oversight of Elders and the supportive leadership of Deacons, members of the body of Christ are to work together in love, maintaining unity of spirit and intent on one purpose—to glorify Christ. (*1 Corinthians 1.2; 12.12-14; Ephesians 1.22-23; Acts 2.42-47; 1 Timothy 3.1-13; Ephesians 4.11-16*)

### **HUMAN DESTINY**

We believe that for all humankind there is a life to come, a resurrection of the body, and a future judgment. At physical death, the believer enters immediately into eternal, conscious fellowship with the Lord, and the unbeliever into eternal, conscious separation from the Lord. The bodies of all the dead shall be raised; some to a resurrection of glory, some to a resurrection of condemnation. There are two aspects of the righteous judgment of God:

1. The final judgment of all humankind at the Great White throne of God, revealing the depth of sin and the fairness of divine justice in consigning

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### God the Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the eternal third Person of the Trinity. He was sent by the Father and the Son into the world to apply to humanity the saving work of Christ. He enlightens the mind of sinners, and convicts them of their need for a Savior. He regenerates them and at the point of salvation permanently indwells every believer whom he also seals for the day of redemption. He guides, instructs empowers and gives gifts to believers for godly living and service in the body of Christ. (*Matthew 28.19-20; John 14.16-26; John 16.7-15; John 3.5-8; Romans 8.9; 1 Corinthians 12.11; Galatians 5.22-23*)

### HUMANITY

We believe that the first humans, Adam and Eve, were originally created in the image of God, holy and upright for the purpose of glorifying and enjoying God in unbroken fellowship. However, at the beginning of human history, Adam defied God by breaking the express command given to him in the Garden of Eden. By this transgression, both Adam and Eve were alienated from God, lost all spiritual life, and suffered the corruption of their nature, rendering them unable to please God and liable to eternal punishment. The sin of the first human, since he is the representative head of the whole race, is imputed to all his descendants. As a result all individuals born since suffer these same consequences, are fallen, sinful, and lost, and are thus in need of the saving grace of God. (*Genesis 3.1-9; Romans 3.10-20,23; 5.12-21; Ephesians 2.1-3*)

### SALVATION

We believe that God, out of love for the human race, sent Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners. Salvation is wholly a work of God's free grace. It is not the result of any human works, ordinances, or church membership, and is personally received through faith and in the finished work of Christ. Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in Jesus Christ alone and in what he accomplished on the cross, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life, which, once granted, can never be lost. The assurance of eternal salvation rests solely on the promise God makes in his word that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ alone possesses eternal life. (*1 Timothy 1.15; Romans 3.21-25; 1 Corinthians 1.18; Romans 13.11; Ephesians 2.1-10; Titus 3.3-7; John 5.24; John 10.27-30; Romans 8.38-39; John 3.16*)

### SANCTIFICATION

## Statement of Faith\*

### THE BIBLE

The sole basis of our belief is the Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments. We believe that the Bible in its entirety originated with God and that it was given through the instrumentality of chosen men. We hold the Scriptures to be infallible and inerrant in the original manuscripts. They are the unique, full and final authority on all matters on which they bear, and there are no other writings similarly inspired by God. (*Psalm 119.89; Isaiah 40.8; Matthew 5.18; 2 Timothy 3.16-17; 2 Peter 1.20-21*)

### GOD

We believe in one true God, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of whom possesses equally all the attributes of deity and elements of personality. (*Deuteronomy 6.4; Matthew 28.18-20; 2 Corinthians 13.14*)

#### God the Father

We believe that in the beginning God the Father created out of nothing the universe and all it contains, thus manifesting the glory of his power, wisdom, and goodness. By his sovereign power he continues to sustain his creation. By his providence he is both active in the daily life of every Christian and he is operating throughout history to fulfill his redemptive purposes. (*Genesis 1.1; Isaiah 46.10; Ephesians 1.11-19; Hebrews 1.1-4*)

#### God the Son

We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal second Person of the Trinity, Who was united forever with a true human nature by a miraculous conception and virgin birth. He lived a sinless life, performed signs and miracles, and died on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for human sin. By his death as a substitute for sinners, he infinitely satisfied divine justice and accomplished salvation for all who trust in him alone. He was raised from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which he lived and died. He ascended to the Father's right hand where he is Head of the church and intercedes for believers. He shall return again to earth, personally, visibly, and bodily, to receive his Kingdom and to consummate the eternal plan of God. (*Matthew 3.17; John 1.1,14; Luke 1.30-35; Romans 3.24-25; 2 Corinthians 5.21; 1 Corinthians 15.1-4; Romans 8.34; Acts 1.10-11; Hebrews 9.23-28*)

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**THE STATEMENT OF  
FAITH AND  
PRACTICES  
OF GRACE CHURCH**

**Adopted November 10, 1984**

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