

CONSTITUTION
OF
GRACE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
OF
KINGSPORT, TENNESSEE

Adopted as per the merger of
Grace Covenant Church
And
Oakwood Forest Christian Church

Founded by the congregational votes of
both churches on October 27, 2019

Founded by the commencement of
corporate worship on November 24, 2019

Founded by the celebration of a
“Merger Dedication Service” on February 16, 2020

PREAMBLE

In his 1809 Declaration and Address Thomas Campbell wrote, “The church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to Him in all things according to the Scriptures.” The “oneness” spoken of by Campbell is an echo of the words of Jesus in ‘The High Priestly Prayer’ of John 17: “(Father I pray) that they may be one” (John 17:11, 21, 22).

It is in the spirit of oneness and unity that on October 27, 2019, GRACE COVENANT CHURCH [founded July 30, 2006] located at 2001 American Way in Kingsport, Tennessee, and OAKWOOD FOREST CHRISTIAN CHURCH [founded April 6, 1958] at 1713 East Sevier Avenue in Kingsport, Tennessee, did each declare by congregational vote their desire and intent to merge into one congregation of the Lord’s one church and to do so under the name GRACE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. The first official gathering of Grace Christian Church was for worship on Sunday, November 24, 2019, at the facility located at 1713 East Sevier Avenue, Kingsport, Tennessee. A ‘Merger Dedication Service’ was held on Sunday, February 16, 2020.

Until “the Blessed Hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13), may this constitution and said church be a testimony that, as Jesus said, “The gates of Hell will not prevail against My Church” (Mt. 16:18). Moreover, may the members of Grace Christian Church be individually and congregationally faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ in loving Him more than life, unto death, and through eternity. For God the Father, in God the Son, and through God the Spirit the members of Grace Christian Church do, therefore, and for posterity sake, declare the founding of GRACE CHRISTIAN CHURCH and do humbly and prayerfully proceed, begging for God’s grace and mercy to the end that His will is served and honored to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

PREFACE

It is the goal of Grace Christian Church to be ‘in communion’ with the church of the Ages in being a sign, symbol, foretaste and harbinger of the perfect reign and rule of God vested in Jesus Christ. The necessity for demonstrating ‘Kingdom-life’ by the church comes into view as a result of the pleading disciples’ petition, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk. 11:1). When Jesus responded, “Pray in this way.....Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” (Mt. 6:10), the disciples were taught not only prayer, but ‘praxis’ – that is, informed, purposeful, and value-driven practice. As embodied by the church, it is properly called “orthopraxis.”

Orthopraxis, or ‘right practice’ flows out of orthodoxy, or ‘right belief.’ In the community of faith – ie., the Church – this is expressed as the Heavenly reign and rule of God faithfully lived out in the church on earth. It is God’s will being put into practice in the earthly realm of God’s people. To that end, Grace Christian Church is committed to being Biblically-faithful.

Grace Christian Church believes a path to Biblical faithfulness is well served by specific alignment with the ‘Stone-Campbell Tradition’ [Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ] of the ‘Restoration Movement’. In addition, we are informed by the 16th century Protestant Reformation nurtured by a 500+ year heritage of faith credited with rediscovering and reviving the Biblical truths of “Christ alone, Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone, and God’s glory alone.” It is our strong conviction that those truths converge in God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and risen from the dead. We believe this redemptive work is the content of the eternal message of the Gospel of Salvation and is perfectly canonized in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, that together constitute the divinely inspired Word of God. We believe the Bible is inerrant, infallible, and unchanging and, therefore, authoritative for Christian faith and practice.

For doctrine, Grace Christian Church appeals to the enduring adage – “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things love.” In addition, we hold to Thomas Campbell’s 1809 admonition, “Where Scripture speaks, we speak; Where Scripture is silent, we are silent.” It is our conviction that Scripture speaks clearly that the following represent some of the essential tenets of Biblical faith:

{We believe in.....}

1. God’s absolute sovereignty (Ps. 93:1/ Ps. 115:3/ Ps. 135:6/ Is. 46:10/ Dan. 4:35/ II Chr. 20:6/ Is. 43:3/ Eph. 1:11/ I Tim. 1:17/ I Tim. 6:15/ Rev. 15:3/ Rev. 19:6);
2. The full Deity of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19/ Col. 2:9);
3. The Miraculous Conception and Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:18/ Lk. 1:26-38);
4. The singular Lordship/Saviorhood of Jesus Christ (John 14:6/ Acts 4:12);
5. The necessity and sufficiency of Christ’s blood atonement at Calvary for the remission of sin (Eph. 1:20/ Heb. 9:11-22);
6. The Bodily Resurrection, Ascension, and 2nd Coming of Jesus (Lk. 24:36-40/ I Cor. 15:20/ Acts 1:9/ Lk. 24:50-51/ I Peter 1:3/ John 14:3/ Titus 2:11-13/ I Peter 1:13);
7. The total depravity of man (Eph. 2:3/ Rom. 7:9/ Rom. 11:32/ Gal. 3:22);
8. The enabling and sustaining grace of God (Eph. 2:8/ II Cor. 12:9/ John 6:39/ John 6:44, 65/ Rom. 9:16);
9. The regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3/ Rom. 6:22/ II Thes. 2:13);
10. The Triune nature of God – that is, One God whose Being consists of God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:18-19/ Mt. 3:16-17/ I Peter 1:2);
11. Bodily resurrection for ‘elect believers’ unto salvation and for ‘reprobate unbelievers’ unto damnation (Rev. 20:4-6/ 11-15/ Rom. 9:14-24/ Rom. 8:28-34);

12. The necessity for faith and repentance (Mk. 1:15/ Heb. 11:6/ Acts 2:38/ Acts 3:19/ John 3:36/ John 5:24/ Acts 16:30-31) and for them to be understood as gifts from God (Acts 5:31/ Acts 11:18/ John 6:28-29/ II Tim. 2:24-25/ II Peter 1:1-2) and to be evidenced by a faithful and fruitful Christian life (Gal. 5:22-23/ James 1:22-25/ James 2:18-24/ Eph. 2:10);
13. Baptism understood as the ‘sacrament (ordinance) of initiation’ (Acts 2:38/ Rom. 6:3-4/ I Cor. 12:13/ Gal. 3:27/ Eph. 4:4-6/ Rom. 4:9-12/ Acts 2:41/ Mt. 28:19/ Mk. 16:16);
14. Communion understood as the ‘sacrament (ordinance) of continuation’ (Mt. 26:26-29/ Mk. 14:22-25/ Lk. 22:14-20/ I Cor. 11:23-34/ Acts 2:42/ Acts 20:7);
15. The purpose of the Church on earth understood as God-glorifying worship, the edification of believers, and the redemption of God’s people (Eph. 4:11-16/ I Peter 2:4-9);
16. Human obedience to God (including belief, repentance, confession, baptism, and service) is a faithful response to His saving grace (John 6:44, 65/ John 1:12-13/ I Cor. 12:3/ Mt. 16:13-17/ Heb. 12:2/ Eph. 2:4-9);
17. Good works are never a ‘means’ of salvation, but always the ‘fruit’ of salvation (Eph. 2:10/ John 15:5);
18. A life that conforms to the image of Christ as revealed in Scripture (Gal. 3:27/ Gal. 2:20/ Col. 3:1-4/ Rom. 8:29/ II Cor. 5:17);
19. God’s earthly discipline (sometimes through the Church) as a sign of His love (Heb. 12:5-11/ II Cor. 1:9/ Gal. 6:1/ Mt. 18:15-18);
20. An eternal Heaven and Hell – Heaven as a grace-gift for the saved and Hell as the just recompense for the unsaved (Rev. 20:1-6, 11-15);

As these tenets are lived out by the members of Grace Christian Church, we are committed to being a local community of faith where spiritual life can be nurtured and shared under the whole counsel of God's Word. To that end we adopt a polity of independence and a practice that is evangelical.

Our polity of INDEPENDENCE functions as an ecclesiastical government of congregational autonomy. Such autonomy in no way replaces or circumvents the Biblical mandate for Christ's Headship (Col. 1:18/ Eph. 1:22/ Eph. 4:15), Elder leadership (I Peter 5:2), and member participation via "the priesthood of all believers" (I Peter 2:5,9). Congregational autonomy simply means that we are non-denominational in character. All governing authority is vested in the local congregation.

In addition, a polity of INDEPENDENCE does not in any way deny, inhibit, abandon, or forego the ecclesiastical connectionalism that is so important for the Church and its mission throughout the world. It does, in fact, strengthen the same. Connectionalism pursued and experienced through appropriate inter-congregational and inter-denominational outreach and cooperation is at its best when a polity of independence is in force. Then and only then is it free from institutional, bureaucratic, and political constraints, and open to a spirit of voluntary cooperation and goodwill.

Finally, our practice of EVANGELISM is one of witness and outreach. It is a function of Jesus' 'Great Commission' to "make disciples" (Mt. 28:18-20/ Mk. 16:15-16) as well as "to love and serve our fellow man" (John 13:13-15, 34-35/ James 2:15-16/ I John 3:16-17/ Mt. 25:31-46). To accomplish the same, we beg for the Divine favor of being included as a handmaiden of the Holy Spirit through whom God works according to His eternal counsels in "calling" His elect to saving faith (Rom. 8:29/ II Thes. 2:13-14/ Eph. 1:3-12). We believe that 'ecclesiology' [Doctrine of the Church] is a function of 'pneumatology' [Doctrine of the Holy Spirit]. That is to say, the Holy Spirit is prior to the Church. Hence, the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, regeneration, and sanctification is graciously extended through the Church.

Primary in the Holy Spirit's work through the Church is the ministry of the Word of God for regeneration, enlightenment, edification, exhortation, conviction, correction, consolation, admonition, aspiration, inspiration, reproof, revival, and vision. We believe these results constitute the "manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4:10) for "calling His elect and conforming them to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29-30).

ARTICLES

I. RE: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Godly prudence, wisdom, and love demand that Christian decision-making, discourse, debate, and polity always apply the 'Spirit of the Law' to the 'Letter of the Law.' In so doing, when the constitutional Letter of the Law requires amendment, it should remain faithful to the Spirit to which it is beholding. Henceforth, the 'letter' of this constitution must necessarily point beyond itself to the greater 'Spirit' for which it exists and by which it is fulfilled.

It is the strong conviction of Grace Christian Church that a healthy household of faith should expect its membership to be pervaded by such a spirit of goodwill that the need for policy-making is minimized. That does not, however, mean that policies are undervalued or that policy-making is a last resort. It merely indicates a belief that behind excessive policy-making are often trust issues that probably belie some spiritual problem that needs to be addressed. Prudent policy-making is a wisdom proposition that discerns the appropriate times to be proactive and the proper occasions to be reactive. Whether proactive or reactive, new policies will inevitably need to be made and old policies revised or updated. This constitution, therefore, may be amended via the following procedure:

- 1) Elder recommendation to the Board of Deacons and Elders;
- 2) Board of Deacons and Elder recommendation to congregation;
- 3) Called congregational meeting with a minimum two-week notice; and
- 4) Required congregational quorum vote of two-thirds to pass. [NOTE: A quorum is those members present and voting.]

II. RE: SACRAMENTAL (or ORDINANCE) THEOLOGY

Grace Christian Church believes the New Testament reveals that two sacraments (or ordinances) have been instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry- that is, 'Baptism' and 'Communion ['Lord's Supper'] - and that they are intended to be practiced in the church until our Lord's Second Coming. We believe that both sacraments (or ordinances) were anticipated and foreshadowed in the Old Testament - Baptism via Circumcision and Communion/ Lord's Supper via Passover. Baptism, practiced as the Sacrament (or Ordinance) of Initiation, is an outward symbol of and response of obedience to the inward grace of rebirth/regeneration. Communion ['Lord's Supper'], practiced as the Sacrament (or Ordinance) of Continuation, is an outward symbol of and response of obedience to the inward grace of nurture/sanctification.

It is expected for membership in Grace Christian Church (and the Church universal) that all Christians should be baptized. The candidate for baptism should confess belief in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior and the mode of baptism should be immersion. It is intended that all baptized Christians are invited by the Lord to participate in the Sacrament (or Ordinance) of Communion. Neither denominational, nor congregational, affiliation should be a hindrance to participation.

Communion may be offered as often as every Lord's Day and other relevant occasions related to the seasonal *I* holiday calendar or to other church activities and services where fellowship is emphasized. Communion may be delivered to the sick or shut-in and may be included in Christian weddings. Whenever and wherever Communion is practiced, it should always include the emblems of bread and wine (i.e., grape juice) and should always be understood in the context of a 'memorial-theology' (ref. - Luke 22:19 / I Corinthians 11:24-25) - the efficacy of which does not include the doctrines of 'transubstantiation' or 'consubstantiation.'

Baptism should ordinarily be administered, or presided over, by a duly ordained minister. Such administration, however, is not absolute, wherein it is entirely appropriate that elders, deacons, or other non-ordained Christian believers could be in a position that includes their administration or presidency. Our understanding of the 'priesthood of all believers' (ref. - I Peter 2:9 / Rev. I:6) allows for such.

Communion should ordinarily be administered, or presided over, by duly ordained officers of the Church—that is, ministers, elders, or deacons. Such administration, however, is not absolute wherein it is entirely appropriate that other non-ordained Christian believers could be in a position that includes their administration or presidency. Our understanding of the 'priesthood of all believers' (ref. - I Peter 2:9 / Rev. 1:6) allows for such.

We recognize and accept baptisms received in other Christian traditions provided that such were administered in conformity to the Biblical Trinitarian formula: "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19). It is expected that ordinarily baptism be administered, but once in the life of a Christian believer (Eph. 4:4-6); moreover, we believe there is only one efficacious baptism – that is, into the life of Jesus. However, we would not be so legalistic so as to forbid or prevent a 're-baptism' in extraordinary cases - that is, wherein failure to do so would become an obstacle or stumbling block to the spiritual formation or faith development of the believer.

We do not believe the Sacraments (or Ordinances) of Baptism or Communion are inherently efficacious, or a means of grace unto themselves. We believe both sacraments (or ordinances) are efficacious and grace-conveying only insofar as they are understood and practiced in the community of faith in ways that are consistent with Biblical orthodoxy. In other words, we believe that 'water regeneration' theology in baptism and 'transubstantiation/ consubstantiation' theology in communion are prodigal theologies. For baptism, Biblical orthodoxy means that the

believer is baptized for the remission of sin and in identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. For communion, Biblical orthodoxy means that believers commune with Christ and other Christians as a sign of fellowship and identification with them in the realities of the Christian life, including all of the disciplines, sacrifices, and glories revealed in Scripture (ref. - Rom 8:16-17 / Phil. 3:10).

The Sacraments (or Ordinances) of Baptism and Communion understood, administered, and practiced according to the aforementioned may be a means of sanctifying grace. How such is appropriated or experienced is not vested in the water of baptism, nor in the emblems of communion, but in the faith of the believers regarding the sanctifying work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. In the final analysis, the test of such efficacious appropriation or experience is its conformity to the dictates of Scripture. In all cases, such efficacy should include the significance of Baptism and Communion for their demonstrative confessional role as outward faith expressions of the inward grace of regeneration and nurture. The confessional roles bear witness of faith in Christ within the Church and to the world.

III. RE: ORDINATION OF MINISTERS

As the law allows, Grace Christian Church, as an autonomous independent congregation, claims the legal right of ordaining Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Qualification(s) for ordination will be determined and evaluated under the prayerful guidance of the Holy Spirit and will take into account Biblical orthodoxy, spiritual maturity, education, moral character, vision, leadership qualities, life experience, calling to ministry, etc. Candidates for ordination will be examined by the elders, recommended to the Board of Deacons and Elders, and commended to the congregation (and the universal church-at-large). The candidate will then be set apart in a formal service of ordination. The ordained candidate will be properly credentialed by the Church.

IV. RE: HIRING OF MINISTERS

As an autonomous independent congregation, Grace Christian Church will seek, examine, call, hire, and, if necessary, dismiss its own minister(s). Candidates for hiring will be sought, examined, called, and hired according to the following procedure:

1. The elders will determine the terms of call, including pay package, vacation, job description, etc. and will recommend the same to the Board of Elders and Deacons for approval.
2. The Board of Elders and Deacons will appoint a Ministerial Search Committee consisting of at least one-third, but no more than one-half elders.
3. The Search committee will seek and examine candidates with respect to their preparedness and suitability for ministry, their conformity to the dictates of Scripture (i.e., the Bible), and their compatibility for service at Grace Christian Church.
4. A single selected candidate (i.e., one candidate at a time) will be recommended to the congregation.
5. The candidate will preach at a Sunday A.M. service (and, if the elders deem necessary and appropriate, be available for questions and answers).
6. The congregation will vote on the same Sunday as the candidate preaches (and answers questions). [NOTE: A call may be extended to the candidate by a two-thirds quorum vote. A quorum is those members present and voting.]

Hired ministers should have their ordinations reviewed, validated, and received by the elders and, then, recorded in the minutes of the Board of Elders and Deacons.

V. RE: ELECTION AND ORDINATION OF ELDERS/DEACONS

The elders of Grace Christian Church will determine if the church should be served by a unicameral (i.e., elders only) or a bicameral (i.e., elders and deacons) governing structure. This determination may be changed according to the needs of the church, but it is assumed that ordinarily the structure will be bicameral. The Elders should ensure that eldership and deaconship candidates conform to the dictates of scripture, especially as revealed in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. [Note: If a unicameral governing structure is deemed necessary, Article VI would need to be amended according to Article I].

The elders will determine the number of elders / deacons needed to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the Church. There should, however, never be fewer than five elders and there should, if possible, be an odd number. Of the number of elders (and deacons) approximately one-half will be elected each year. Thus, terms of service are for two years and should coincide with the calendar year. There are no term limits, so elders and deacons may succeed themselves indefinitely.

In the event of midterm / midyear vacancies, the elders are at liberty to fill or not fill the vacancies according to the needs of the church. If vacancies are filled, the elders should proceed according to an appropriate protocol of appointment.

The following procedure shall be followed for the election and ordination/ installation of elders and deacons:

- 1) The elders will meet the first week of October each year to determine which elder/deacon positions are being vacated by term completion. At the same meeting, a slate of Biblically-qualified nominees from the 'active' membership roll of the church will be approved. [NOTE: Nominees will include Biblically-qualified men.]

- 2) The approved slate of nominees (along with a ballot) will be hand-distributed to all members of the congregation on the third Sunday of October. Slates / ballots not distributed will be mailed on the third Monday of October;
- 3) Completed ballots should be returned to the ballot box by the first Sunday of November;
- 4) The elders will meet as soon as feasible after the first Sunday of November to count the ballots. Nominees will be contacted to confirm their willingness to serve;
- 5) A Congregational Meeting will be held on the second Sunday of November to elect elders and deacons from a prepared election ballot. [NOTE: Provision will be made on the ballot for the entire slate of nominees to be elected or for the election option of voting on an individual basis.] After the election, the elders will count the votes. The entire slate, or the individuals therein included, must be elected by a 51% quorum. [NOTE: A quorum is those members present and voting]; and
- 6) An Elder / Deacon Installation and/or Ordination Service will be held on the second Sunday of January. [NOTE: Elders and Deacons need be ordained but once. Thereafter, they should be installed for each term of active service. Ordination from other Christian denominations may be accepted.]

The above procedure may be temporarily suspended if the number of qualified and willing candidates for Elder and/or Deacon is equal to, nearly equal to, or lower than the number of vacancies being filled. In such event, the Elders may choose to discontinue the nomination/election process until the number of qualified and willing candidates for Elders and/or Deacons is

sufficiently greater than the number of vacancies being filled. When this option is exercised, sitting Elders and Deacons will remain in office until a return to the 'normal' nomination/election procedure.

The Board of Elders and Deacons is charged with appointing a sufficient number of Trustees who are willing and able to supply business, legal, and or transactional representation of the church, especially for signatory needs. The Board will determine the terms and duration of Trustee service.

VI. RE: MEETINGS

All 'called meetings' of the congregation should provide a minimum of two weeks notice. One 'regular business meeting' of the congregation will be held in January of each year. At that time, the congregation will receive appropriate reports as the elders deem necessary. In addition, an annual budget prepared by the Board of Elders and Deacons will be presented and voted on by the congregation. The budget must be approved by a two-thirds quorum vote. [NOTE: A quorum is those members present and voting.]

Elders will meet as the shepherding body of the Church. Elders and Deacons will meet together as a Board of Elders and Deacons to address other governing, administrative, facility, financial, or programming needs. As a check and balance for governing purposes, Elders meetings and Board of Elders and Deacons meetings are separate. As a check and balance for budgeting purposes, the yearly budget presented to the congregation should be recommended by the full Board of Elders and Deacons. Large unbudgeted property (real or personalty) transactions (purchasing or selling) should be addressed by the Board of Elders and Deacons on a case by case basis. It is assumed that such transactions would ordinarily require the congregational input of 'common consent' or voting (voice or ballot).

The Elders and the Board of Elders and Deacons will ordinarily meet no less than once a quarter. Most likely, monthly meetings will be necessary for the effective and efficient shepherding of the church. Nevertheless, extraordinary circumstances may dictate meeting less than once a quarter. The Elders will decide on a meeting quorum at

the beginning of each year. The Board of Elders and Deacons will also decide on a meeting quorum at the beginning of each year. A quorum should never be less than 51% of the elders or 51% of the joint board. All Elders' meetings are 'closed' except by invitation or permission.

The Elders, with the advise and consent of the joint-board, create all temporary or standing committees of the church and may alter them based on the changing needs of the church. All such committees should, if possible, include at least one elder. Other auxiliaries of the church - e.g., women's groups, service groups, Bible studies, fellowship groups - must be approved by the Elders. Such groups have no governing authority and need not include Elders.

All regular and called meetings of the congregation and church officers (i.e., Elders and Deacons) will be moderated by the installed minister, an associate, an Elder, or an Elder-appointed representative, such as a Deacon. The moderator of such meetings shall have 'voice, but no vote.' For leadership purposes, the Elders should nominate a 'Chairman of the Elders' and the Board of Elders and Deacons should nominate a 'Chairman of the Board of Elders and Deacons'.

VII. RE: MEMBERSHIP

In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church as revealed in Scripture, membership in the Church of Jesus Christ should be declared via the Sacrament (or Ordinance) of Baptism and public confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Grace Christian Church acknowledges itself as a 'particular church' (or congregation) of the Lord's one true 'universal church.' All Christians, regardless of denomination, are recognized by Grace Christian Church as members of the one universal church.

Grace Christian Church designates the following statuses to describe relationship/ membership in the church:

1. Unbaptized candidates who desire to join the church should declare their faith via public confession of Christ as Lord and Savior followed by baptism. At such time, they will be counted as 'voting members' of the church.
2. Those who have been baptized in other churches may 'transfer' their membership to Grace Christian Church. Such transfer may be accomplished via 'letter,' or, if a letter is unattainable/unavailable/unnecessary, such transfer may be received on the 'good faith promise' of prior Christian baptism. In either case, transfer should, if possible, be accompanied by a 'public stand,' understood as the simple gesture of walking forward at a church service during the time of commitment / invitation. In cases of 'shut-in' sickness, convalescence, or handicap, transfers of baptized Christians may be received 'in absentia.' All such received members are 'voting members' of the church (if and when able to attend for inclusion in the quorum mandate of "those present and voting").
3. Removal from the church roll can be done via member request or notice of transfer to another church. The Elders may withhold voting privileges of 'on-roll members' due to their protracted periods of voluntary, or unaccounted for, absence, or on moral grounds.

VIII. RE: MINISTRY, MISSION, DISCIPLESHIP, AND EDUCATION

The programming of ministry, mission, discipleship, and education at Grace Covenant Church will be a 'form follows function' proposition. This is because the 'function follows form' configuration can, in time, lead to irrelevance or the idolatry of tradition - i.e., 'traditionalism.' To be sure, tradition is an invaluable, often sacred, heirloom; but if traditional means, modes, models, and methods fail to engage individuals and culture at the point of 'need,' then the form should be altered, adjusted, or changed - hence, 'form follows function.' The form, however, must not be altered if doing so fails to conform to the dictates of Scripture.

The eternal Gospel message of "Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and risen from the dead" will never change. It is timeless as the necessary and sufficient remedy for the human condition - both temporary and eternal; physical and spiritual. The message must, however, be communicated in order to meet life with relevance and power. Scripture does not straight-jacket the church methodologically, but allows for considerable creative license with respect to ministry for cultural relevance [ref. -Acts 17:16-23].

It is, therefore, the necessary responsibility and burden of the minister(s), staff, officers (Elders and Deacons), and church members to proactively and reactively plan, organize, design, implement, and evaluate programs of worship, ministry, mission, discipleship, and education that serve the ends of 'Kingdom-building.' Kingdom-building includes those activities of worship, evangelism, discipleship, and service that exhort, equip, edify, encourage, educate, and enlighten both members and non-members toward the growth and maturity of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

While various programs of the church may explore, even experiment, with various creative means, modes, models and methods, there should always be a motivational flow from and objectival flow back to the dictates and mandates of Scripture. It is, therefore, imperative that the worship program of the church be praise-based, the ministry program of the church be service-based, the mission program of the church be salvation-based, the discipleship program of the church be nurture-based, and the education program of the church be enlightenment-based (with the Bible as the primary curriculum and reflected as primary in adopted secondary or supporting curricula.)

The minister of the church will have the primary role of program planning and will proceed with the consult, advice, input, and assistance of the ministry staff, Elders, Board of Elders and Deacons, and relevant standing or temporary committees. This co-laboring relationship will be shaped by the 'servant-leadership model' demonstrated through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Grace Christian Church leaders should always be regarded as leading via 'following out front' - i.e., the leaders of the church should be found as 'faithful shepherds' because they themselves are following the "Chief Shepherd" (I Peter 5:4).

In shepherding the church, the Elders will determine staffing and personnel needs (ministry, administrative, clerical, etc.), along with associated job descriptions. Such determinations will be recommended to the Board of Elders and Deacons. The Board will proceed in hiring for positions to meet those needs.

IX. RE: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Discipline in the church can be a very difficult, even daunting, task. It is expected that most ecclesiastical discipline proceed from the ministry of the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture with convicting appeal in the lives of individual believers, inviting and compelling them toward repentance. It must be recognized, however, that in a community of faith there are instances, times, and seasons when loving and redemptive mutual accountability demands intervention.

It is the policy of Grace Covenant Church that any necessary discipline should adhere to the following five rules:

1. Discipline must locate its basis, means, and ends in Scripture (ref. Mt. 18:15-17/ I Cor. 6:1-7/ Gal. 6:1/ I Peter 4:8);
2. Discipline must be applied on a case-by-case basis;
3. Discipline must be redemptive and restorative in nature;
4. Discipline must convey the specific expectation that members of Grace Christian Church have the responsibility to conform their lives to the dictates of Scripture; and
5. The Elders will initiate, moderate, and conclude all formal cases of discipline.

X. RE: MORAL IMPERATIVES

Grace Christian Church believes the Bible provides the Christian with a rule of faith and practice, and that such faith and practice is nurtured and sustained by the convicting, enlightening, and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. We believe a life that obediently conforms to the dictates of Scripture is not a means of salvation, but the fruit of salvation.

However, because modern and postmodern culture, with their emphasis on relativism, pragmatism, and amoralism, have so frequently corrupted the moral order and ethical fabric of society; and because heresies of unorthodox doctrines, theologies, and beliefs emanate from the same, and sometimes threaten the church from within, it behooves us to issue the following Biblically-based moral imperatives:

1. We believe HOMOSEXUALITY is a sin (ref. -Lev. 18:22 / Lev.20:13 / Rom. I:18-32 / I Cor. 6:9 / I Tim. I:8-11). God's plan for family life includes one man and one woman united in covenant before God and the State within the holy bonds of matrimony. All ministers, elders, deacons, church staff, or other leaders at Grace Covenant Church must either be married in a heterosexual relationship, or single and chaste. Despite the legalization of 'gay marriage' by the U.S. Supreme Court case, "Obergefell vs. Hodges" on June 26, 2015, Grace Christian Church does not permit the solemnization of gay marriage by its staff or on its premises.
2. We believe that ABORTION is a sin. Scripture is clear that humans are known/conceived in the mind of God even before physical conception (ref. - Jer. I:5 / Ps. 139:13-16 / Is. 49: I). Abortion is, therefore, murder and violates the sixth commandment (ref. - Ex. 20:13).
3. We believe that HUMAN SEXUALITY is a gift from God with the sacramental-like quality of pointing beyond itself to the relationship between Christ, The Bridegroom and the Church,

The Bride (ref. -Rev. 19:7-9 / Mt. 22:1ff / Mt. 25:1ff). Human sexuality is, therefore, intended to be confined to the relationship of marriage. Outside of that relationship it is counted as fornication, or adultery, which is sin.

4. We believe the ENVIRONMENT is a gift from God in which 'common grace' flows forth to common humanity. It is, therefore, necessary for us to be good and faithful stewards of creation, honoring the Biblical mandate for 'human dominion' (ref. - Gen. 1:28-30) as a 'use without abuse' proposition. As Christians we are 'pro-environment,' but we are not proponents of an 'environmentalism' that includes ideologies that devalue or demoralize humans, demonize human dominion, or deify nature toward the heresy of pantheism.
5. We believe the policy of 'SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE' enshrined by our forebears is wise and prudent. We do not, however, believe that such policy equates to the SEPARATION OF GOD AND GOVERNMENT. It is, then, our prayerful intention to be a conscience of community, culture, and society, as well as, their concomitant institutions, including family, government, education, military, etc. Such conscience we pledge to exert and uphold for the promotion and preservation of Judeo-Christian values.
6. We believe that Christianity's treatment of ISRAEL is a moral issue. It begins as a theological issue in that Scripture identifies the Jewish people as a "chosen nation" (ref. - Is. 41:8 / Is. 45:4). To be sure, such 'chosenness' extends abundantly beyond Israel to a 'Gentile multitude' (ref. - Is. 56:8 / John 10:16 / I Peter 2:9-10 / Rev. 7:9

gathered as the New Testament Church during "the time of Israel's blindness / hardening" (ref. - Rom. 11:25)- i.e., "the last days" [The Church Age] (Acts 2:14-17). With the Scriptural understanding that God has not abandoned Israel (ref. - I Sam. 12:22/ Ps. 94:14/Rom 11:1-2/Rev. 7:4-8/Rev. 14:1), we condemn 'Replacement Theology' and, therefore, declare that it is a moral imperative that Christians treat Israel with respect and Jews as the object of a most affectionate evangelistic outreach. This position, in no way, infers a departure from the 'Singular Lordship/ Saviorhood' of Jesus as the 'only way of salvation' for Jews and Gentiles alike (ref. -John 14:6).

- 7) We believe that TRANSGENDERISM is incompatible with God's plan for humanity. We believe that each soul is so personally and individually conceived and endowed by God that 'transgenderism' is an affront to His precise pre-determination of gender as being either 'male,' or 'female.' We do not believe that gender is 'fluid,' but 'fixed' by God.