

Constitution
Grace Fellowship Church
Gulfport, MS
(Rev. 2018)

PREAMBLE (Statement of Purpose)

The members of Grace Fellowship Church, in submission to our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy scriptures, hereby adopt this Constitution as a practical guide to the orderly governance of our church to the glory of the triune God.

ARTICLE I: MEMBERS AND ELECTORS

Section 1: Qualifications

- A. The membership of this Church shall consist of persons who:
 - a. Profess repentance toward God and confess faith on the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,
 - b. Have been baptized as a believer by immersion,
 - c. Give evidence of regeneration by living a life consistent with their profession and with the views of faith, core doctrine and practice of this Church,
 - d. Agree to submit to the teaching of God's Word as expressed in the Second London Baptist Confession, and
 - e. Have been received into its membership according to the Constitution of Grace Fellowship Church.

- B. Membership begins when the church membership application has been agreed upon and signed. The elders oversee a membership list, which must include names, baptisms, and communicant status.

- C. In special cases, individuals may come under our pastoral care without coming into full Membership.

- D. There are three primary ways a person can become a member of Grace Fellowship Church. A person can be presented by baptism, by statement, or by reconciliation.

Section 2: Prospective Members

- A. The ordinary process of church membership begins by approaching one of the elders requesting an application for church membership. Once the application is completed a time will be scheduled where the candidate is interviewed by the elder(s). After said interview the person will be presented at the following elders' meeting for consideration. The elders will then decide whether or not to receive a person into membership by unanimous consent based upon the interview process, discussion, and prayer. The elders are not under any obligation to make a positive or negative decision at that meeting but

can extend the discussion to the next meeting and may call for another interview for clarification of any issues that could arise. All prospective members will also be required to attend a church membership class, taught by one or more of the elders.

- B. Once the elders have agreed by unanimous consent that a person or persons can be added to the membership of the church, the church membership class has been attended, and the Grace Fellowship Church Membership Application has been signed then the prospective member(s) will be asked in front of the congregation the following questions:
- a. "Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in need of salvation by Christ, and do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving and resting upon Him alone as He is offered in the gospel?"
 - b. "Have you been baptized in accordance with His Word?"
 - c. "Do you covenant, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to live in a way that becomes followers of Christ?"
 - d. "Do you covenant to support the ministry of this church in its worship and work, submitting to its instruction, government and discipline, while pursuing its purity and peace?"
- C. When these vows are taken, the congregation will respond with "Amen" when they are asked: "As a congregation of Christ, do you receive [this Christian/ these Christians] into the covenant fellowship of this local church together with you, renewing your membership covenant as you do so?"

Section 3: Duties and Privileges of Membership

- A. Each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, consistent with God's leading and with the gifts, time, and material resources each has received from God.
- B. Only members of this congregation shall be entitled to serve in the ministries of the church.
- C. Non-members may serve on an ad-hoc basis, including, but not limited to, purposes of professional consultation, administration, or such purposes as defined by the elders, and only by the approval of the elders.

Section 4: Release or Transfer of Membership

- A. If any member requests to be released to the care of another Christian church, the elders will normally release him with a blessing.
- B. If any member requests to be released because of disciplinary proceedings against him or someone in his household, the elders will delay acting on the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved.

- C. If members move from our geographical area, they are charged to find a new church home within six months. This time may be extended at the elders' discretion. After this time is expired, they are released from membership.

Section 5: Heads of Household

- A. Heads of Household are the (born) male heads of member households. In accordance with Scripture (1 Co. 11:3 Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18), we believe each husband and father represents the spiritual authority for each household. Therefore, the Heads of each household represent the body of the church as a whole.
- B. Independent, unmarried (born) male members are considered as a household for purposes of voting.
- C. Households spiritually headed by a woman will fall under the authority of one of the elders.
- D. All Heads of Household not under official church discipline may participate in decision-making regarding church matters that are subject to decision by Heads of Household as provided herein, including voting on decisions requiring a vote as provided herein.

Section 6: Head of Household Meetings

- A. The congregation will hold a meeting of heads of member households at least quarterly, during which church business shall be conducted. Meetings will be scheduled by the elders, and members will be notified at least two Sunday services prior to the scheduled meeting. Written minutes will be taken at each meeting and such minutes shall be the property of the church. Each meeting shall, at a minimum, cover the following:
 - a. Review old business from minutes of the previous meeting.
 - b. Circulate a list of the current members of the church for Head of Household review.
 - c. Review church finances for the previous quarter.
 - d. Discuss and make decisions regarding any matter required herein to be decided by heads of household.
- B. The matters listed below shall be decided by the church, as represented by its Heads of Household, and shall not be decided by elders, deacons, pastors, or any members apart from the Heads of Household acting as a body:
 - a. One-time financial expenditures in excess of \$500.00 or recurring expenditures in excess of \$1200.00 per year.
 - b. The Church's annual budget. The budget will be presented by the elders at the last quarters Head of Household meeting, and will be approved by the Heads of Household no later than the following quarters meeting.
 - c. Any revisions to official church documents (constitution, statement of faith, confession, etc.)
 - d. The purchase or sale of any real property or vehicles.

- e. Setting or revising financial policies of the church, including authorizing check-signing authority for any particular member.
 - f. The election of Elders, Deacons, and Pastors.
- C. Decisions regarding the matters enumerated above shall be made as follows:
- a. A quorum shall be present at the meeting during which a decision is made. A quorum shall be at least 75% of the Heads of Household (excluding any who are under official church discipline).
 - b. First, the Heads of Household shall seek to reach a consensus in which all present Heads of Household agree unanimously.
 - c. If the matter cannot be decided unanimously but is a time sensitive emergency situation (for example, a decision required in response to litigation), then the decision shall be made by 80% majority of the Heads of Household present at the meeting.
 - d. If not of a time-sensitive emergency nature, the decision shall be tabled until the next meeting in order to allow further time for discussion and prayer regarding the matter.
 - e. If the Heads of Household are not able to reach unanimous consensus at the following meeting then the matter shall be made by 80% majority of the Heads of Household present at the meeting.

ARTICLE II: ELECTION OF PASTORS, ELDERS, AND DEACONS

Section 1: Principles

The process for church elections shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following Principles:

- A. Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, should be an integral part of the election process
- B. Nominations should proceed with the support of the elders.
- C. All candidates for church office should be treated with the grace, kindness, and, honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members.
- D. The election process shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration that is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Section 2: Selection of Elders, Deacons

- A. The election of officers shall be held at a Head of Household meeting of the church. Names of (born male) nominees to serve as elders or deacons, shall be presented by the elders at least two Sunday services prior to the meeting at which the election is to be held. The elders should seek recommendations and involvement from the general membership in the nomination process. Any member with reason to believe that a nominated candidate is unqualified (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9) for an office should express such concern to the elders. Members intending to speak in opposition to a candidate should express their objection to the elders as far in advance as possible before the relevant Head of Household meeting.

- B. The elders shall declare elected all men receiving a 75% majority of all HOH votes cast for the office of elder. For all other offices, the elders shall declare elected all persons receiving a simple majority of all HOH votes cast; abstentions will not be considered as votes cast. If not yet ordained, the current elder(s) must ordain the elected men before they may assume their respective offices (LBCF 26.9; 1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 6:3, 5, 6). The persons elected and ordained shall assume their respective offices upon election and/or ordination, unless another date has been specifically designated.

Section 3: Calling of the Senior Pastor

- A. In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed.
- B. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential senior pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Confession of Faith and Church Covenant.
- C. Notice of the nomination of a man to be elected to membership and called as senior pastor (which shall include, if necessary, election to membership of his wife if he is married) must be given at two Sunday morning services following the nomination, prior to the vote at a Heads of House meeting.

ARTICLE III: DUTIES OF CHURCH OFFICERS

Section 1: Summary

The Biblical offices in the church are elders and deacons. In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions under this constitution of clerk and treasurer. All officers must be members of this church prior to assuming their responsibilities.

Section 2: Duties of Elders

- A. Under Christ and in submission to the Scripture, and subject to the will of the congregation, the responsibility of oversight of ministry and the resources of the church falls on the board of elders. The ministry of the elders shall include ruling/ shepherding (1 Pet. 5:1-2); equipping (Eph. 4:11-12); prayer/fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3); teaching/preaching (1 Tim. 5:17); administering baptism and the Lord's Table (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26) and visiting the sick (Jas. 5:14-15).
- B. The elders are responsible to delegate responsibilities to the deacons, hire and fire church support staff, define responsibilities for church staff, and create the annual budget for membership Approval.

- C. Elder business will be conducted no less than once a month at their elder meeting or at special meetings called for the purpose. The elders will rotate the responsibility of chairing meetings, and will appoint a secretary to record minutes as the elders deem appropriate for official church business. Individual elders are responsible for those duties delegated to them by the elders in session, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts, abilities, and desires. In all meetings of the session of elders, each elder has one vote.
- D. Elders whose assigned duties preclude them from providing for their families in the ordinary way will be compensated by the church (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Elders shall serve a term of three years, then be reelected to another 3-year term, or they have the option of stepping down if they so choose. Pastors are exempt from this limitation on continuous service. An elder's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal.

Section 3: Duties of Deacons

- A. Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons are ministers of mercy (Acts 6:2-4). As such they administer the practical care and servant ministries of the church. Additionally, they may perform acts of service in the maintenance of church facilities.
- B. The business of the deacons will be conducted at their regular deacon meeting, or at special deacon meetings called for that purpose. The deacons will give a general report of their work at each heads of household meeting.
- C. Individual deacons are responsible for those duties assigned to them by the elders, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts and desires.

Section 4: Resignation of Elders or Deacons

If an elder or deacon desires to resign or take a leave of absence, he will present a letter to the Church. If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal irregularity, the resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate biblical discipline.

ARTICLE IV: REMOVAL OF PASTORS, ELDERS, AND DEACONS

- A. An elder's, pastor's, or deacon's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal.
- B. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder, pastor, or deacon should be dismissed should express such concern to the elders and if need be, to the congregation.
- C. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5: 17-21.
- D. Any of the elders, pastors, or deacons may be dismissed by a 75% vote of the Heads of House at any Head of House meeting, as long as this meeting was announced at least 2 Sunday services prior to the meeting at which the vote is taken.

ARTICLE V: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Section 1: Informal

The ordinary course of discipline is informal. Members are encouraged to self discipline, overlooking the failings of others in love (1 Pet. 4:8), and encouraging other members to covenant faithfulness (Matt. 18:15).

Section 2: Formal

Formal church discipline can include admonition by the elders or the congregation, suspension from communion for a definite period of time by the elders (Elders), removal from non-ordained office by the elders (Elders), and excommunication by the congregation (Congregation). (see Matthew 18:15-17, Thessalonians 3:14-15, 1 Timothy 5:19-20, 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, LBCF 30.8).

Section 3: Order of Discipline

The normal order of church discipline should follow these steps, for all members, both laypeople and church officers alike:

- A. 1st step of discipline – one on one: The offended member should go and discuss the issue with the one who has offended them. The offended member “should not disrupt any church action or absent themselves from the assemblies of the church or administration of any ordinances because of the offense at any of their fellow members.” (LBCF 26.13)
- B. 2nd step of discipline – 2 or more witnesses: If the offending member does not listen and the matter is not resolved, the offended member should then bring along one or more members who witnessed the event, “that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses”. If multiple parties are involved, then the issue must be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. (It is important that the matter should not be communicated to other members of the church for possible resolution to avoid sowing seeds of discord or scandal among the church body. Matters of church discipline should be handled in as discreet a manner as possible so as to respect the privacy and dignity of all parties involved.)
- C. 3rd step of discipline – The matter is taken to the church: If the issue cannot be resolved by the first two steps of church discipline, and it involves egregious sin (e.g. Titus 3:10, 1 Cor 5:11) then the matter must be taken before the Heads of Household to vote at the next Head of House meeting to determine if excommunication action should be taken. Any formal church excommunication action taken upon a member must be voted on and passed by at least 75% of the Heads of House at the meeting. (Discipline by the elders short of excommunication does not have to be necessarily brought before the Heads of House.)

Section 4: Counsel of the Elders

- A. The elders being spiritual overseers/rulers of the church (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17), managers and caretakers of the church (1 Tim. 3:5), shepherds of the flock (1 Pt. 5:1-3), and those

to whom Christ refers when He commanded his church to “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Heb. 13:7), the parties involved in the disciplinary process should seek the counsel of the elders at some point in the process listed above before it is taken to the Heads of Household for a vote on excommunication.

- B. This does not mean that the elders may in any way prohibit, or hinder, the disciplinary process from reaching the heads of household, as it is the church gathered who has ultimately been given the authority from Christ to excommunicate (Mt. 18). This is only in the hopes that through counsel, the issue may be resolved without further conflict. Yet if the parties involved feel that the issue has not been resolved, as stated previously, the elders may in no way hinder or prevent the matter from going to the heads of household.
- C. However, if the member who is in sin refuses to listen to the advice and counsel of the elders to repent of their offense, and continues in unrepentant sin, then the elders, by unanimous decision, may suspend the offending member from the Lord’s Table until the offending member is penitent.

Section 5: Restoration

The goal and intent of excommunication being salvation and restoration, the congregation may upon satisfactory evidence of being penitent, restore the penitent individual to full membership by a 75% vote of the Heads of Household (1 Co. 5:5; 2 Co. 2:6-8).

ARTICLE VI: AMENDMENTS

The Grace Fellowship Church Confession of Faith and Constitution may be amended through a 80% vote of the Heads of House when there is first a presentation of the proposed change at the heads of households meeting, then a written copy of the proposed change is made available to the congregation at church, and finally the elders seek due consultation with the heads of households of the church at a subsequent quarterly heads of households meeting.