

Constitution
Grace Covenant Church
Litchfield, New Hampshire USA

Article 1. Name

By unanimous decision on August 25, 2016, the Session voted to name the church Grace Covenant Church.

Article II. Declaration of Charitable Status

The church is registered with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501c3 corporation with tax ID# 02-0418154. It is also incorporated in the State of New Hampshire.

Article III Purpose Statement

The following purpose statement was approved by the Session on October 11, 2016:

A body of Christ followers, seeking to glorify and enjoy God by reaching upward in grateful worship, inward to build up believers in the faith, and outward to our community with the life transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Article IV. Standards of Faith and Practice

The standards of faith and practice of Grace Covenant Church are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments exclusively. As a statement of what we believe the Scriptures teach concerning faith and practice, we retain the Westminster Standards (The 1788 American Revision), comprised of the Westminster Confession, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as our subordinate standard. As a truly subordinate standard it has no power to bind the conscience of any man and its authority lies only in its expression of true Scripture teaching*.

*Grace Covenant Church makes the following additional statements relative to the standards: The church will maintain an open policy on baptism in regard to subjects and mode, allowing believers to practice infant and/or believers baptism according to their own conviction and allowing them to choose the mode of baptism which they deem right (WCF 28:3, 4). However, this position does require church members to be gracious and exercise true charity toward other members whose position differs from their own. As Grace Covenant Church is presently operating as an independent congregation, bodies known as synods and councils above session level are not applicable to our current status (WCF 31).

Article V Membership

1. Believers may be accepted for membership upon a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord given to the elders of the church. Applicants will be asked to narrate to the elders the circumstances of their conversion to Christ and, in broad terms, of their walk in Christ since conversion.
2. Ordinarily those applying for membership should be in regular attendance at the services of the church for six months before an application is considered. No one under the age of 18 years shall be admitted into church membership. Children of members who are under the age of 18 are considered to be members of the church and part of the covenant community under their parents, but do not have access to the rights and privileges of full membership.
3. Elders will enquire of any applicant whether they are currently under the discipline of any other church or if there are any outstanding issues with another church which need to be resolved. Elders reserve the right to contact an applicant's previous church and will inform the applicant if they intend to do so.
4. The elders will take pains to emphasize both the rights and the responsibilities of members and will give applicants sufficient opportunity to ask any questions about the vision, doctrine and ministry of the church. If desired, the elders will provide a copy of the Westminster Standards, to which the elders subscribe, to enable applicants to obtain a thorough understanding of the doctrinal foundation of the church.
5. An applicant may be refused membership if the elders have sufficient evidence to prove that he/she is acting contrary to the spirit of the gospel e.g. by gossiping, divisiveness etc. In such case the elders will seek, in a spirit of love for the individual, to point out the problem and in meekness to restore the individual to fellowship with the Lord and His people.
6. If approved for membership the applicant will be received into full membership at the communion following the elders' decision.
7. A member in good standing is entitled to fully participate in the ministry of the church, and, in the case of qualified men, is eligible to be a candidate for the offices of elder or deacon.
8. A member under church discipline may have the rights of membership suspended. Such discipline may involve (a) deposition from office, (b) suspension from public ministry and the Lord's table or (c) excommunication from the church. No person under the aforementioned forms of discipline can be a candidate for office or vote at congregational meetings until the discipline is lifted.
9. Members whose change of residence makes it impossible for them to be in attendance at the church services will be encouraged to seek fellowship in another evangelical church. To facilitate this the elders will provide a letter of transfer. However, the elders may decline to provide such a letter, if, in their opinion, the church with which the member seeks to affiliate, is seriously unsound in doctrine and practice. In the event that the member cannot find a church which he in good conscience may join, he can be a non-resident member provided he reports to the church at least once a year either by letter or

in person. In this case, if the period of physical absence exceeds six months, the voting rights and eligibility for office of the member will be temporarily suspended.

10. Members absenting themselves from the church for a period of six months without sufficient cause, as determined by the elders, may be dismissed from membership.

Article VI Government and Operational Structure

1. Principles.

A. Jesus Christ is the sole head of His church (Eph. 1:22, 4:15, Col. 1:18). All Authority has been given unto Him by the Father to govern His church by His Word and Spirit (Mt. 28:18, Eph. 1:20-23, Heb. 1.1-3, Jn. 14:26).

B. Christ has called and gifted men unto whom He has given spiritual and ministerial authority in the church (Ephesians 4:7-16, Mt. 16:19, 18:18, I Cor. 5:12-13, I Cor. 12:28). He has established two permanent offices in the church, which are the offices of elder (both teaching and ruling elders) and deacon (Phil. 1:1, I Tim. 3:1-13, 5:17). Thus the elders shall form the church *session*, and the elders and deacons combined shall form the church *board*.

C. I Timothy 5:17 makes the distinction between teaching and ruling elders. Historically, teaching elders have held pastoral positions in the church. While all elders are to be able to teach (I Tim. 3:2), the position of pastor presupposes a level of giftedness and training for laboring in the word and doctrine.

D. In view of the headship of Christ, the desire to be led of the Spirit in every decision, and the fallibility of even the best men (Jam. 3:2, Acts 15:37-40), we shall seek unanimity if at all possible in every decision of both session and board. Where unanimity does not at first exist, the normal practice will be to delay decision on the matter at hand in an effort to obtain unanimity by seeking the Lord and the Scriptures for greater light and by further prayerful discussion of the issue. The Advisory Board (see Article IX) may also be consulted for their wisdom. However, recognizing that unanimity may not always be possible on all matters, and that certain matters require a decision of some kind, the Session or Board may move forward with a majority decision.

E. The session or board may delegate specific duties and actions to members of the congregation in good standing as individuals or in groups. However, the church session shall maintain oversight of all activities and all committees and organizations.

F. All matters revealed by members to the session or individual elders will be held in strict confidence unless they involve matters of doctrine or practice requiring, according to Scripture, church discipline or requiring, by law, the involvement of civil authorities.

2. Offices

A. Elders: Elders are not to be "lords over God's heritage" (I Peter 5:3), but servant-leaders (Mt. 20:25-28) and under-shepherds serving the Lord by attending to the welfare of His flock (Heb. 13:7, 17).

1. Their duties include:

- a. Spiritual oversight
- b. Teaching (both public and private)
- c. Administration of the ordinances
- d. Reception and Discipline of Members
- e. Pulpit supply in the absence of the pastor
- f. Counseling and ministries of comfort, encouragement, and admonition to families and individuals

2. Qualifications to be elected to this office are:

- a. A candidate for the office of elder must fulfill the qualifications given in I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
- b. A candidate for the office of elder must be a male member in good standing who has been in membership for at least one year.
- c. A candidate for the office of elder must be prepared to subscribe to the Westminster Standards as a confession of his own faith.

3. Pastors and Associate Pastors (if needed) may be proposed to the congregation by the session if they meet the qualifications of I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 and give evidence of biblical understanding, godliness, and aptitude for spiritual ministry and leadership.

4. The session is to seek to maintain sufficient elders to minister to the spiritual needs of the entire congregation. When the session recognizes a need for additional elders, they may organize and announce a process of nomination and election to obtain the additional elders necessary. All elders serve in perpetuity.

5. In pursuing the spiritual oversight of the congregation and the ministry of the Gospel, the session will meet at least monthly. It will engage in regular review of all ministries of the church to ensure that each element of the church purpose statement is being fulfilled. It will also regularly and prayerfully consider every family and individual in the church to seek to encourage spiritual health and growth in all.

6. The session shall elect from its number a clerk to keep accurate record of all session business. The

term of the clerk shall end whenever there is a change in the membership of the session, at which time any session member, including the previous clerk, may be nominated and elected to the office.

7. Meetings of the session will be chaired by the senior pastor. In the event of the inability of the pastor to attend, the elders may elect a moderator *pro tempore* to chair the meeting. This may be another elder or associate pastor.

B. Deacons: The office of deacon is established in Scripture in Acts 6:1-7, Phil 1:1, and I Tim. 3:8-13.

1. Their duties include:

- a. Advice and assistance to the elders in caring for the congregation and carrying out the existing ministries of the church
- b. Care of church property.
- c. Administering the financial and business affairs of the church
- d. Ministering to the health and temporal needs of the congregation

2. Qualifications to be elected to this office are:

- a. A candidate for the office of deacon must fulfill the qualifications given in I Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3.
- b. A candidate for the office of deacon must be a male member in good standing who has been in membership for at least one year.
- c. Since the Westminster Standards form the doctrinal foundation of the church, and since deacons are instrumental in carrying out the various ministries of the church, a candidate for the office of deacon will be required to demonstrate a working knowledge of the Standards. Any questions or concerns related to those Standards should be addressed to the session prior to agreeing to be a candidate for the office.

3. The session is to seek to maintain a sufficient number of deacons to carry out their duties. When the session recognizes a need for additional deacons, they may organize and announce a process of nomination and election to obtain the additional deacons necessary. Those already serving as deacons will not need to be reelected. However, they will be able, if they wish, to resign at that point or take a leave of absence for a period of their choosing, after consultation with the session.

4. In pursuing their duties, the board will meet at least every other month. It will engage in regular

review of all areas of responsibility. Deacons will be on constant watch for new needs that arise among the congregation and in any area of their responsibility.

5. The board shall elect from the current deacons a secretary to keep accurate record of all board business. The term of the secretary shall end whenever there is a change in the membership of the board, at which time any board member, including the previous secretary, may be nominated and elected to the office. If circumstances make it necessary, the position of secretary may be filled by an elder.

6. The board shall elect or designate a Treasurer to be responsible for the management of the church's finances, keeping accurate records of donations and disbursements, and providing any necessary financial records or statements. Due to the necessity of specific financial aptitude it shall not be required that the Treasurer also be an elected officer. However, that person will be required to be in membership.

7. Meetings of the board will be chaired by the pastor. In the event of the inability of the pastor to attend, the board may elect a moderator *pro tempore* to chair the meeting. This may be a deacon, elder, or associate pastor.

Article VII Congregational Meetings

1. Congregational meetings are required for the following matters of business:

a. The election of elders and/or deacons

b. The calling of a pastor or associate pastor

c. The dismissal of a pastor or associate pastor

d. Amending the constitution.

e. Discussing and/or voting on matters brought to its attention by the elders

f. Informing the congregation about matters of church discipline. In this regard discretion must be allowed to the session with regard to the amount and nature of the information disclosed publicly.

g. Discussing and/or voting on affiliation with a denomination or fellowship of churches, or to sever such affiliation

h. Discussing and/or voting on a motion to discontinue the church's ministry and transfer its assets (Article X)

i. In addition, the elders will seek to keep the congregation informed as far as possible on issues

affecting the congregation as a whole, and may consult them on any matter they deem appropriate.

2. All congregational meetings shall be announced at all Sunday services at least two Sundays prior to the date of the meeting and published in the church bulletin for the same two weeks. The announcement must include the purpose of the meeting.

3. An attendance of fifty per cent (50%) of members in good standing is required to constitute a quorum at any congregational meeting.

4. The following majorities of the membership are required to approve the specific actions identified:

a. Amending the Constitution – 2/3 majority

b. Calling or dismissal of pastor/associate pastor – 2/3 majority

c. Electing an elder - 2/3 majority

d. Affiliating or severing affiliation with denomination or fellowship of churches- 2/3 majority

e. Discontinuing the church's ministry and transferring its assets – 2/3 majority

f. All other votes - simple majority

Article VIII Amendments to Constitution

When they deem necessary, the session will propose amendments to the Constitution to the congregation. In addition, any member in good standing may propose an amendment for session approval. Amendments shall be voted on at a congregational meeting called for the purpose. The text of the amendment must be made available to the congregation at least two Sundays prior to the date of the meeting.

Article IX Affiliation

The church may decide to affiliate with a denomination or association of churches who hold to a similar vision and doctrinal position as Grace Covenant Church for the purposes of fellowship and cooperation in the work of Christ. Such affiliation will be voluntary and may be terminated by the congregation at any time for any reason it deems sufficient. Any decision to affiliate, or to sever such affiliation, will be made at a congregational meeting called for the purpose. However, it is also required that an informational meeting be held with the congregation at least one month prior to the date of the vote to give the congregation opportunity to receive all relevant information and to ask any question concerning the proposed affiliation or severance. As long as the church is not affiliated, the

session will maintain an Advisory Board of no fewer than 3 experienced ministers or elders to be consulted for important situations in which the session agrees to seek their input.

Article X Dissolution of the Church

In the event that, at any time in the future for any reason, the Church work cannot continue, the church property and assets will, upon a 2/3 majority vote of the congregation, be transferred to another church or mission work committed to the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, such assets and property shall be transferred only after the satisfaction of any indebtedness by the church.