

Constitution
Grace Covenant Church
Litchfield, New Hampshire USA

Article 1. Name

By unanimous decision on August 25, 2016, the **Elders** 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 **Elders** 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 **London Baptist Confession (1689)**, 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 Scriptural teaching.

Article V Membership

1. We use the Word “member” in the following ways.

A. To describe a believer united in heart to Christ and his people. He/she is so united by being a member of His spiritual body, and as an expression of this, he/she is a member of a local body of believers, which is a physical representation of the spiritual body (1 Cor. 12; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 John 3:14-16; Ephesians 4:12-16).

B. We use the term “member” to indicate the soul over which the elders are placed by Christ and for whom the elders will give an account in the day of judgment (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17).

C. We also use the term “members” to indicate those who have entered into a relationship of mutual covenant accountability with each other including those who are the elders (Mal 3:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 5:4-13; Heb. 10:12-14; 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-5)

2. 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. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the individual seeking membership to have been baptized after a profession of his or her faith in believer’s baptism. If the individual seeking membership has not been baptized by immersion, the individual must be willing to be baptized by immersion during the membership process.

3. Those applying for membership will ordinarily be required to attend the Church for at least 4 months, be willing to attend a New Member’s class, and willing to participate in the pre-membership interview with the elders. The 4-month attendance may be adjusted depending on the circumstances.

4. 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.

5. 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. The elders will provide a copy of the **London Baptist Confession (1689)**, to which the elders subscribe, to enable applicants to obtain a thorough understanding of the doctrinal foundation of the church.

6. 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.

7. Upon posting or announcement of new applicants for membership, time will be allowed (at least two weeks) for objections or questions to be raised with the elders or the applicant by any member of the church regarding the applicant’s doctrine or practice. If approved for membership the applicant will be received into membership within a reasonable amount of time following the elders’ decision.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. Members absenting themselves from the church for a period of six months without sufficient cause, as determined by the elders, may be considered by the elders to have resigned their membership.

12. Termination of membership:

A. By transfer - The elders may grant a letter of transfer for a member in good standing. (Acts 18:27). No letter will be given to a member under corrective church discipline. The elders also may refuse to issue a letter of transfer to any church that teaches doctrine contrary to biblical doctrine or to a church that does not exercise godly care over its members.

B. By resignation - A member may resign from membership with stated reasons in a peaceable manner. A resignation offered by a person that is guilty of sin, calling for corrective discipline, may be denied resignation and the church may proceed in corrective church discipline including excommunication if warranted. If a member ceases to attend the church without showing just cause, or relocates and ceases communication with the church, the elders will do due diligence to investigate the situation and will bring a recommendation to the congregation.

C. By excommunication - Any member who teaches or holds to false and/or heretical doctrine, who habitually and blatantly conducts himself or herself in a manner inconsistent with his or her profession of faith, or who persists in causing division, disunity, or hinders the purity of the church must be cut off from the fellowship and membership of the local church as defined in the Word of God (Matt. 18:15, Rom. 16:7-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure for excommunication to be followed is explained in the “Article VI Church Discipline.”

D. By physical death – When a member passes on by physical death, the member’s name will be removed automatically from the membership roll (Heb. 12:23)

Article VI. Church Discipline

1. Formative Discipline - Every disciple (learner and follower) of Jesus Christ must be under the discipline (His instruction and correction) of the Lord, which is administered to each individual, personally (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30-32; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 2:22-23) and through the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:11-16; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 3:12-14; 12:15). The mutual

submission of one another and to the overseers whom the Lord has set over His church (Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5) will result in sanctification of the individual member and the corporate body by the grace of God. There are occasions when formative discipline alone is insufficient and therefore, corrective discipline may become necessary.

2. Corrective Discipline - Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine appears among members of the church. Corrective discipline also becomes necessary when ungodly conduct such as disorderly behavior, immorality, and/or scandalous conduct appears in a member of the church. As a general rule and whenever feasible, an effort must be made to resolve conflict and correct error through counsel and admonition before stronger steps are warranted (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). The biblical principles given in Matt. 18:15-16; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20, and Titus 3:10 must be diligently and carefully followed and appropriately applied to each case of corrective discipline. In some cases, public admonition may be justified (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20). In other cases, some of the privileges of membership may need to be suspended and appropriate parameters imposed (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). In the most extreme cases, excommunication from the church may become necessary (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Tim. 1:20; Titus 3:10). The church is a spiritual and religious institution and corrective discipline (2 Cor. 2:6-7) exacted by the church has spiritual consequences. This may include public, verbal reproof, (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20) social avoidance (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6,14), and withdrawal of Christian fellowship (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13; 2 John 10) with the intention of stimulating one's repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame (2 Cor. 2:8-9; 2 Thess. 3:14). A member accused of criminal actions may be delivered to the civil authorities (1 Pet. 4:15). The goals of corrective discipline are always for the restoration of the offender (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 1:20), for the welfare and purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6), and for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 4:15).

A. Public Reproof/Censure - Public reproof consists of the elders, before the gathered church, call an un-repentant church member or members to repentance for sin(s) too serious to be covered with love (Prov. 27:5). The elders may administer public censure whenever, according to their judgment, public misconduct (Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Tim 5:20), patterns of habitual sin (Titus 1:12-13), or serious doctrinal error (Titus 1:10-13) pose a significant threat to the purity, testimony, and unity of the congregation. Those who receive the public reproof humbly and affirmatively, owning their sin, and manifest biblical change (Prov. 28:13) will afterward be publicly commended for their repentance (2 Cor. 7:7-11). If the public reproof is not heeded, further disciplinary actions may be imposed.

B. Suspension of Privileges - When a member's misconduct is detrimental to the purity, unity, and testimony of the church requiring public reproof, it may be accompanied by the suspension of some of the privileges of membership appropriate to the nature and gravity of the offense (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). In cases of suspension of privileges, the member is still regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church and not as one cut off from Christian fellowship (Matt. 18:17-18; 2 Thess. 3:15). The general grounds and generic categories that may warrant suspension are as follows:

1. Habitual, unrepentant private offender (Matt. 18:15-17) - When a private offense continues to be unresolved even after the process prescribed by the Lord in Matt. 18:15-17 has been diligently, prayerfully, and graciously followed, it may be considered an aggravated offense. The matter may be brought to the elders from those involved, and if

the elders judge that the matter is severe and the offender is unrepentant, the elders may then bring the matter to the church for a recommendation of suspension (Matt. 18:17). If the person continues to be unrepentant and remains in sin, excommunication may be enacted.

2. Divisive teaching (Rom. 16:17-20; Titus 3:10-11) - When a member of the church deliberately continues in the propagation of doctrinal error that is contrary to Scripture or the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith and attempts to sow discord among members of the church, the member may be suspended. It is also the responsibility of all members to disclose to the elders any known divisiveness (Deut. 13:6; 1 Cor. 1:10-11). The elders are to confront doctrinal error and divisiveness swiftly yet patiently and with meekness (1 Cor. 4:10-21; Titus 3:10). If the member persists in doctrinal error and/or divisiveness, the elders will report the issue to the church and recommend suspension or excommunication.

3. Disorderly Behavior/Scandal (2 Thess. 3:6-15) - If a member is behaving disorderly or is involved in an unrepentant scandalous sin, the elders are to confront it directly with patience and meekness (2 Thess. 3:10-12). If the member continues, in this behavior, the elders shall report the issue to the church and recommend suspension. If the disorderly behavior or scandalous sin continues the elders will recommend excommunication to avoid reproach being brought on the name of Christ (2 Sam. 12:14; Rom. 2:2-16; 1 Tim. 5:20; Heb. 3:12-14).

C. Excommunication

1. Some conduct is described as “immoral” (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 6:9-10). A member who is blatantly and unrepentantly guilty of such conduct must be cut off from the fellowship of the church (1 Cor. 5:3-5, 13; Matt. 18:17). In such a case, the elders will make diligent efforts to bring the member to true repentance. If these efforts fail, they will report to the congregation at a meeting of the church and recommend that the member be excommunicated according to Scripture by action of the entire church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5). An act of excommunication must have the approval of at least 2/3 of the members present and voting.

2. Some wrong beliefs regarding the doctrines of Scriptures are so severe and serious that they must be categorized as heretical (Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 4:1). A member who persists in propagating or holding to such beliefs, in spite of diligent admonition by the elders, will be excommunicated in the same process as the immoral person (1 Cor. 5:5).

Article VII 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 (Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:20-23, Heb. 1:1-3, John 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, Matt. 16:19, 18:18, 1 Cor. 5:12-13, 1 Cor. 12:28). He has established two permanent offices in the church, which are the offices of elder and deacon (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:1-13, 5:17). Thus, 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 elders 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. However, recognizing that unanimity may not always be possible on all matters, and that certain matters require a decision of some kind, the elders or Board may move forward with a majority decision.

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

F. All matters revealed by members to the elders or individual elder 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 **London Baptist Confession (1689)** as a confession of his own faith.

3. Pastors and Associate Pastors (if needed) may be proposed to the congregation by the elders 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 elders are to seek to maintain sufficient elders to minister to the spiritual needs of the entire congregation. When the elders recognize 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 elders 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. Meetings of the elders 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

e. Deacons will serve a 3-year term and may be re-elected after qualifying again through the election process.

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 **London Baptist Confession (1689)** forms 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 confession. Any questions or concerns related to the confession should be addressed to the elders prior to agreeing to be a candidate for the office.

3. The elders are to seek to maintain a sufficient number of deacons to carry out their duties. When the elders recognize 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 continue to serve out their term. 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 elders.

4. In pursuing their duties, the board will meet at least quarterly. 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 one of the elders. The board may elect a moderator *pro tempore* to chair the meeting. This may be a deacon, elder, or associate pastor.

Article VIII 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 and for voting about matters of church discipline. In this matter, discretion must be allowed to the elders 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 XI)
 - 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 percent (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. Electing a deacon - 2/3 majority
 - E. Affiliating or severing affiliation with denomination or fellowship of churches- 2/3 majority
 - F. Discontinuing the church's ministry and transferring its assets – 2/3 majority

G. All other votes - simple majority

H. Where suspension or excommunication is recommended by the elders a 2/3 majority shall be required to ratify the recommendation.

Article IX Amendments to Constitution

When they deem necessary, the elders will propose amendments to the Constitution to the congregation. In addition, any member in good standing may propose an amendment for elder 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 X 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.

Article XI 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.

Amendments changed and voted on with a 7/8 majority on September 08, 2019:

1. Article I
2. Article III
3. Article IV, paragraph 1
4. Article IV, paragraph 2 will be deleted
5. Article V 2
6. Article V 4
7. Article VI, 1D, 1E
8. Article VI, 1F

9. Article VI, 2A 2c
10. Article VI 3, 4
11. Article VI, 2A 5, 6, 7
12. Article VI, 2B, 2c
13. Article VI, 3
14. Article VII, 1f
15. Article VIII
16. Article IX

Amendments ratified by unanimous decision on October 09, 2022:

1. Article V, 1 added, 1-10 renumbered to 2-11, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12 added
2. Article VI added changing the numbering of Articles VI-X to VII- XI
3. Article VII, 1B, 1D, 1E, 2A6 deleted, 2B1e added, 2B3, 2B4, 2B7
4. Article VIII, 1F, 1H, 4D added, 4H added
5. Article X, delete the last sentence