

# ***Constitution of Grace Covenant Church Of Fox Valley***

## **Preamble**

Since it has pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call certain of His servants to unite here in 2010 for regular corporate worship on the Lord's Day; and since we, the charter members of Grace Covenant Church of Fox Valley, have seen by God's providence the need for a new, Gospel Centered, Christ-exalting ministry in this place; we do hereby organize ourselves in accordance with the state laws of Illinois by adopting this Constitution as our articles of governance, to be interpreted at all times to reflect the character of Jesus Christ and bring glory to Him as revealed in the Holy Bible; and by adopting the standards set forth in the Statement of Faith and Membership Covenant of this church.

## **Article 1 – Name**

The name of this church will be Grace Covenant Church of Fox Valley.

## **Article 2 – Purpose**

This church, as all other true churches, is built as a temple for God's dwelling, on the cornerstone of His Son Jesus Christ, for God's triune glory, which shall be the ultimate purpose of all our activities. This church glorifies God by loving Him and obeying His commands, which entails:

- a) Worshipping Him together on the Lord's Day through public proclamation and the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper
- b) Equipping the saints through Bible instruction, study, and personal discipleship
- c) Personal evangelism
- d) Encouraging, supporting, and participating in missions work, local, domestic, and international
- e) Encouraging biblical fellowship among believers
- f) Serving other individuals, families, and churches by providing for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, in the name of Jesus Christ
- g) Setting an example for fellow churches in biblical faithfulness and purity through modeling the nature and purpose of the local church.
- h) Carrying out the commitments that we have made to one another in our Church Covenant.

## **Article 3 – Vision**

Our vision is to be a display of God's glory through our love for Jesus Christ, our proclamation of His word, and our love for one another (Eph 3:10; Dt 6:4-5; 2Tim 4:2; John 13:34-45). To that end, we embrace the following core values:

- a) The primacy of expositional preaching
- b) The fruitfulness of reformed doctrine
- c) The functional centrality of the gospel
- d) The responsibility of personal evangelism
- e) The mandate for both domestic and international missions
- f) The meaningfulness of church membership
- g) The pursuit of spiritual growth and equipping
- h) The value of biblical church discipline
- i) The exercise of biblical church leadership

## **Article 4 – Membership**

### **Section 1 – Requirements**

To be affirmed for membership in this church, a person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who gives evidence of regeneration, who has been baptized, in obedience to Christ, following his or her regeneration, and who wholeheartedly believes in the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible. Each member must agree to submit to the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Statement of Faith and must promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant. The elders shall be responsible for determining each person's qualifications for membership. In making this determination, they may rely on a person's profession of faith, or such other evidence, as the elders deem appropriate.

### **Section 2 – Admission of Members**

To be admitted into church membership, applicants shall be recommended by the elders for admission and accepted by affirmation of the members at any regular or special meeting of the members, and shall at that point relinquish their membership in other churches.

### **Section 3 – Duties and Privileges of Membership**

In accord with the duties enumerated in the Church Covenant, 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. Only those shall be entitled to serve in the ministries of the church who are members of this congregation; non-members may serve on an ad-hoc basis with the approval of the elders. Notwithstanding, non-members may serve the church for purposes of administration and professional consultation.

Under Christ, this congregation is governed by its members, as guided by the leadership of the elders. Therefore, it is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all members' meetings and vote on the following items:

- a) Election, re-affirmation and dismissal of officers (see Article 7 on elections)
- b) Approval of a new senior or associate pastor (see Article 7 on elections)
- c) Decisions regarding public church discipline (see Article 4, Section 5 on church discipline)
- d) Approval of annual budgets
- e) Amendment of the Constitution (see Article 11 on amendments)
- f) Amendment of the statement of faith or church covenant (see Article 11 on amendments)
- g) Any other matter that the congregation and elders may agree to submit to a congregational vote.

### **Section 4 – Church Discipline**

Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the church, shall be subject to the admonition of the elders and the discipline of the church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15–17 and the example of scripture. Church discipline, then, should ordinarily be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed, and ordinarily following the leadership and discernment of the elders.

Church discipline can include admonition by the elders or congregation, suspension from communion for a definite period, deposition from office, and excommunication (see Matthew 18:15–17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15; 1 Timothy 5:19–20; 1 Corinthians 5:4–5).

The purpose of such discipline should be...

- a) for the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined (see Proverbs 15:5; 29:15; I Corinthians 4:14; Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 3:4–5; Hebrews 12:1–11; Psalm 119:115; 141:5; Proverbs 17:10; 25:12; 27:5; Ecclesiastes 7:5; Matthew 7:26–27; 18:15–17; Luke 17:3; Acts 2:40; I Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 6:1–5; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15; I Timothy 1:20; Titus 1:13–14; James 1:22);

- b) For the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to them (see Proverbs 13:20; Romans 15:14; I Corinthians 5:11; 15:33; Colossians 3:16; I Thessalonians 5:14 [note this is written to the whole church, not just to leaders]; I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:11; Hebrews 10:24–31);
- c) For the purity of the church as a whole (see I Corinthians 5:6–7; II Corinthians 13:10; Ephesians 5:27; II John 10; Jude 24; Revelation 21:2);
- d) For the good of our corporate witness to non-Christians (see Proverbs 28:7; Matthew 5:13–16; John 13:35; Acts 5:1–14; Ephesians 5:11; I Timothy 3:7; II Peter 2:2; I John 3:10); and
- e) Supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy character (see Deuteronomy 5:11; I Kings 11:2; II Chronicles 19:2; Ezra 6:21; Nehemiah 9:2; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 36:20; Matthew 5:16; John 15:8; 18:17, 25; Romans 2:24; 15:5–6; II Corinthians 6:14–7:1; Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; I Peter 2:12).

### **Section 5 – Termination of Membership**

The church will normally recognize the termination of a person’s membership after he or she has voluntarily resigned or joined with another church, or following his or her death. Membership may also be terminated as an act of church discipline (ordinarily, but not necessarily, at the recommendation of the elders) upon the vote of at least two-thirds of the members present at any regular or special meeting of the members.

The church shall have authority to refuse a member’s voluntary resignation of membership, either for the purpose of proceeding with a process of church discipline, or for any other biblical reason.

### **Section 6 – Associate Membership**

Students and others temporarily residing in the Chicagoland area who are members of an evangelical church may apply for associate membership. Qualifications are identical to those for full membership as set out above, except that home church membership must be retained. A letter of commendation will be sought from the applicant’s home church.

Duties and privileges of associate members are the same as for other members except that

- Regular attendance at our services is an obligation only during those periods of temporary residence in which the associate member is actually living in the Chicagoland area.
- While they will be encouraged to participate in members’ meetings they will not be eligible to stand for any office or to vote.

Termination of associate membership as a disciplinary measure will be as it is for other members, except that the elders shall notify the pastor or elders of the home church of that termination. Associate membership will normally terminate immediately upon the ending of the period of intermittent residence in the Chicagoland area. An associate member may petition to become a full member of GCC upon moving to the Chicagoland area permanently.

## **Article 5 – Meetings**

### **Section 1 – Worship Meetings**

Worship services shall be held each Lord’s Day, and may be held throughout the week as the church determines.

### **Section 2 – Members’ Meetings**

In every meeting together, members shall act in that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

An elder designated by the elders shall preside as moderator at all members’ meetings of the church. The elders shall see that the stated meetings of the church are regularly held and that required reports are submitted to the church by the responsible members.

Regular Members’ Meetings – There shall be a regular members’ meeting at least quarterly, at some time apart from a public worship service agreed upon by the membership. All regular members’ meetings must be

announced from the pulpit on the two Sundays prior to the scheduled vote. Any congregational vote to take place at a members' meeting must also be announced in writing at least two weeks prior to the vote.

Special Members' Meetings – Special members' meetings may be called as required by the elders, or at the written request, submitted to the elders, of twenty percent of the membership. The date, time, and purpose of any special meeting shall be announced at all public services of the church within two weeks preceding the meeting. In the event of a written request from the members, the elders shall call a special meeting to be held within one month of their receipt of the request.

Provided all constitutional provisions for notification have been met, a quorum necessary to hold any members' meeting shall be understood to be met by 60% of the total membership of the church either in person or by absentee ballot.

- For all congregational votes pertaining to items a-e in Article 4, Section 3, 2/3 of the members voting, whether in person or by absentee ballot, must affirm the motion on the ballot.
- For category f, in Article 4, Section 3, 75% of the total membership of the church must affirm the motion.
- For items that fall into category g in Article 4, Section 3, a simple majority of the members voting will pass the motion.

At any regular or special members' meeting, officers may be elected and positions filled as needed, so long as all relevant constitutional requirements have been met.

A budget shall be approved by the membership at a members' meeting not more than 30 days after the start of the fiscal year. Prior to this approval and subject to the elders' discretion, expenditures may continue at the prior year's level.

## **Article 6 – 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 – Elders**

Composition – The elders shall be comprised of not fewer than three men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-4. A majority of the active eldership shall be composed of church members not in the regular pay of the church, and no elder shall hold the office of deacon or treasurer during his tenure. If at any time the Lord's providence reduces us to just two elders, composed of one staff elder and one non-staff elder, then the elders shall choose, at their discretion, another male member of the congregation to help them in making decisions on behalf of the church, until such time as another elder can be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation. The elders shall annually elect a moderator of the elders' meetings and shall also elect one of their number to serve as moderator of members' meetings. For purposes of compliance with the nonprofit corporation laws of the State of Illinois, the senior pastor shall serve as the president of the corporation.

Recognition – The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as elders. This recognition shall be reaffirmed triennially. After an elder, other than the senior or associate pastor, has served two consecutive three-year terms, he may only be elected to the office of elder after at least one intermittent year.

Responsibilities – Subject to the will of the congregation, the elders shall oversee the ministry and resources of the church. In keeping with the principles set forth in Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Peter 5:1-4, the elders shall devote their

time to prayer, the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and shepherding God's flock.

The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions. The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

The elders may establish ministry positions or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The elders may also propose funding for new paid staff positions. The membership shall approve all candidates to fill the positions of senior and associate pastor. The scope and approval of job descriptions for any staff position shall reside in the hands of the senior pastor, in consultation with the elders.

The elders shall have primary responsibility for employment, as well as supervision and regular evaluation of the ministries of the church.

Each year the elders, after consultation with the deacons and the membership, shall present to the church an itemized budget. This budget shall be presented for discussion at a specially-called budget meeting and called up for a vote at the following members' meeting. No money shall be solicited by or on behalf of the church or any of its ministries without the approval of the elders.

Accountability – The elders shall disclose to the congregation any issue in the life of a current or potential elder that may be widely perceived as inconsistent with the qualifications for eldership listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:3-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Termination – An elder's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder should be dismissed should first express such concern to that particular elder, then, if need be, to the congregation, in consultation with the elders. 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. Any of the elders may be dismissed by a congregational vote of the members.

### **Section 3 – The Senior Pastor**

The senior pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2 above, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. His call shall not be subject to the triennial reaffirmation or to the term limitation set out in Article 6 Section 2 for elders. His call shall be defined per Article 7, Section 3.

He shall preach on the Lord's Day, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, and perform such other duties as normally pertain to that office, or as set forth in the constitution. In the absence or incapacity of the senior pastor the elders shall assume responsibility for his duties, any of which can be delegated.

The senior pastor shall also be the primary elder responsible for the development of new elders, the encouragement of ministry skills in current elders, and the theological development of the elder team.

### **Section 4 – Associate Pastors**

The church may call additional pastors whose relationship to the senior pastor is that of associate. An associate pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2 above, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. His call shall not be subject to the triennial reaffirmation or to the term limitation set out in Article 6, Section 2, for elders. His call shall be defined as per Article 7, Section 4.

He shall assist the senior pastor in the performance of his regular duties and shall perform any other duties as normally pertain to the office of pastor, or as set forth in the constitution, or which may be specifically assigned to

him by the congregation. He shall report directly to the senior pastor and will be subject to an annual review by the senior pastor in consultation with another elder.

In the absence or incapacity of the senior pastor for defined periods of time (such as sabbatical or illness), the associate pastor shall assume the responsibility for his duties under the oversight of the elders.

### **Section 5 – Pastoral Assistants**

The senior pastor may, in consultation with the elders, hire additional staff to assist with pastoral ministry, designated as pastoral assistants. These shall not be pastors, though they may be recognized as elders should they be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation, in accordance with Article 6, Section 2.

The senior pastor shall assign the responsibilities of the pastoral assistant(s). They shall serve at the will of the pastor for a term of one year, though that term may be extended with the approval of the elders.

### **Section 6 – Deacons**

The office of deacon is described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-7. The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, men who are giving of themselves in service to the church, and who possess particular gifts of service. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons and deaconesses. They shall be elected to one term lasting for a maximum of three years and may only be elected to another term after one year.

Deacons shall care for the temporal needs of members, attend to the accommodations for public worship, and encourage and support those able to help others and those with gifts of administration.

The deacons, with the agreement of the elders, may establish unpaid administrative positions or teams of members to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities in the church.

### **Section 7 – Clerk**

It shall be the duty of the clerk to record the minutes of all regular and special members' meetings of the church, to preserve an accurate roll of the membership, and to render reports as requested by the pastor, the elders, the deacons, or the church. The clerk shall be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation to serve a term of one year. In the absence or incapacity of the clerk the elders shall appoint a member to perform the duties of the church clerk. The church clerk shall ensure that dated copies of the most recent revision of this constitution shall be available for all church members.

### **Section 8 - Treasurer**

The treasurer, who shall not be an active elder, deacon, or paid church staff member, shall ensure that all funds and securities of the church are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories as appropriate. The treasurer shall also be responsible for presenting regular reports of the account balances, revenues and expenses of the church at each members meeting. The responsibility may be delegated with the approval of the elders. The treasurer shall also ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept in books belonging to the church, and that adequate controls are implemented to guarantee that all funds belonging to the church are appropriately handled by any officer, employee, or agent of the church. The treasurer shall render to the elders annually, or whenever they may require it, an account of all transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the church.

The treasurer shall be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation to serve a term of one year.

## **Article 7 – Elections**

### **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, shall 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 Officers**

The election of officers shall be held at a members' meeting of the church. Names of nominees to serve as elders, deacons, clerk, or treasurer shall be presented by the elders at the previous members' meeting (providing that previous meeting occurred at least eight weeks prior), and the election shall proceed as directed by the moderator. 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 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 church members' meeting.

The moderator shall declare elected any nominee for office according to the percentages stipulated in Article 5 Section 2. Abstentions will not be considered as votes cast. The persons elected shall assume their respective offices upon election, unless another date has been specifically designated.

## **Section 3 – Calling of the Senior Pastor**

In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. 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 Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. 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 members' meeting.

## **Section 4 – Calling of Associate Pastor**

In the calling of any man to the position of associate pastor, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential associate 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 Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. Notice of the nomination of a man to be called as associate pastor (which shall include, if necessary, election to membership of him and his wife if he is married) must be given at two Sunday morning services following the nomination, prior to the vote at a members' meeting.

# **Article 8 – Stewardship**

## **Section 1 – Contributions**

Membership in this church entails the financial privilege and obligation to support the church and its ministries with regular, proportionate, and sacrificial giving (2Cor 8:1-15; 9:6-15).

## **Section 2 – Financial Planning**

The financial planning of the church shall be carried out through the medium of annual budgets, which shall be adopted by the church upon recommendation of the elders. Matters involving staff compensation shall be the responsibility of the non-staff elders.

## **Section 3 – Indebtedness**

No note or contract exceeding 1% of the total annual budget whereby the credit of the church is pledged shall be made except by recommendation of the elders and approval of the congregation.

## **Article 9 – Indemnification**

### **Section 1 – Mandatory Indemnification**

If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the elders determine that the person acted (a) in good faith, (b) with the care an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, (d) having no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful, and (3) in accordance with biblical revelation.

## **Article 10 – Dispute Resolution**

Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian Church (see, e.g., Matthew 18: 15–20, I Corinthians 6: 1–8), the church shall require its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without reliance on the secular courts. Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles to resolve disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or pagan and whether individuals or corporate entities.

## **Article 11 – Amendments**

The Statement of Faith and Church Covenant may be amended by a 75% affirmation of the total membership of the church, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.

This constitution may be amended by a 2/3 affirmation of the members voting at the meeting, whether in person or by absentee ballot, provided that a quorum exists and the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.

The revised version of this constitution shall be made available to all church members by the church clerk.