

# ***GRACE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH CONSTITUTION***

## **Preamble:**

We, the members of the Grace Evangelical Free Church, in order to carry out more effectively the commission given by Jesus Christ to His Church, do ordain and establish the following constitution to which we voluntarily submit ourselves:

## **ARTICLE I: NAME**

1.100 The name of this organization shall be "**Grace Evangelical Free Church.**"

## **ARTICLE II: AFFILIATION & AUTHORITY**

2.100 AFFILIATION: This church shall be affiliated with the Evangelical Free Church of America and its North Central District Conference and shall send delegates to their conferences, support their missions and unite in mutual efforts for the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the measure that the church itself may officially decide.

2.200 AUTHORITY: The Membership has authority under the headship of Jesus Christ and at its annual, quarterly and special business meetings as the legislative body of this organization in the following areas:

- 2.201           A. The selection, affirmation, and dismissal of Elders as otherwise provided in this document.
- 2.202           B. The approval of the annual church budget and any amendments to and/or changes of said budget.
- 2.203           C. The approval of the reception of all new members and the dismissal of current members for disciplinary reasons.
- 2.204           D. The approval of the purchase or sale of all real property.
- 2.205           E. The approval of all amendments to this constitution.
- 2.206           F. The affirmation of all delegates and alternates to Evangelical Free Church district and/or national conferences.

2.300 The Elders of the church, in the physical absence of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall strive as undershepherds to equip the congregation to properly minister, so that the church may be built up in Christ-likeness and unity (Eph. 4:11-16). The Elders shall be entrusted with the responsibility (according to 1 Tim. 5:17) of superintending all areas of congregational life not specifically reserved to the

membership in this Article. The Elders shall be empowered to delegate tasks and oversight of various areas of the church to committees and/or individuals as they see fit without forfeiting final authority over these areas. The Elders shall also be trustees of the church for purposes of Minnesota law.

2.301 All boards, committees, etc. in the church shall be under the authority of the Elders.

2.400 Functions and priorities of Elders:

2.401 A. To keep right with God (Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2).

2.402 B. To feed and protect the flock under their care (Acts 20:28 and John 21:15-17).

2.403 C. To pray and study the Scriptures (Acts 6:4).

2.404 D. To be free from self-interest (Acts 20:33 and 1 Peter 5:2).

2.405 E. To direct the affairs of the church well (1 Timothy 5:17).

2.500 Qualifications of Elders:

2.501 A. An elder shall be an active member of the church in good standing.

2.502 B. An elder shall meet the Biblical qualifications for Eldership as described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

2.503 C. Given the instruction in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and the fact that a primary role of elders is to teach the Scriptures, the Eldership shall be reserved for men.

2.600 Procedure for Elder Affirmation:

2.601 A. The membership shall be notified that there are openings on the Elder Board and asked to nominate men whom they feel are suited for this position. Such notification should take place at an official membership meeting; written nominations for elder will then be taken at the next membership meeting. Only written nominations will be accepted.

2.602 B. All nominees will then be contacted by the existing Elder Board. They will be informed of the responsibilities and rewards of the position and asked if they would like to continue in the selection

process. The Elders will take special care at this stage to insure that the nominees agree with the doctrinal position of the church and are prepared to defend that position; further, that the nominee demonstrates ability to lead and guide the flock. Nominees will also be asked to read the church's constitution and agree to uphold it.

- 2.603 C. Nominees, if there are no unresolved objections, shall be affirmed as Elders if they receive a 75% positive vote from the membership at the first membership meeting following completion of the process described in section 2.602.
- 2.604 D. There will be a corporate recognition of an approved nominee emphasizing his role as a servant leader and the membership's responsibility to submit to the Elder's prescribed authority.
- 2.605 E. The only exception shall be for the initial Elder Board. The initial Elder Board will consist of men approved by the Steering Committee in advance of the first membership meeting and approved by a 75% vote of members present at the first membership meeting.
- 2.700 Elders shall serve for three year terms. There shall be no maximum on the number of terms an Elder can serve, but there shall be a maximum of two consecutive terms served at any time, to be followed by a minimum of one year off the Elder Board before serving another term.
- 2.701 It is hoped that the Elder board will consist of a minimum of three Elders, plus any and all pastors. However, the church shall be free to have less than three Elders at a given time if there are not available three men who are both qualified and willing to serve.
- 2.800 Dismissal of Elders -- Elders may be removed from office by:
  - 2.801 A. Withdrawal from membership.
  - 2.802 B. Voluntary written resignation.
  - 2.803 C. Failure to receive a 75% reaffirmation for a second term.
  - 2.804 D. In the unlikely event that an Elder be deemed derelict in his conduct and/or responsibilities, 20% of the membership, but not less than five members, can petition the Elder Board for an early reconsideration of that Elder. Failure to receive a 75% reaffirmation by vote of the membership will result in the removal of the Elder from his position.
- 2.900 All pastors shall be considered Elders and shall be expected to meet the

qualifications specified in Section 2.5. However, the pastor(s) shall not be subject to the guidelines of sections 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8. Instead:

- 2.901 A. Selection of salaried pastor(s) shall begin with a diligent search by the existing Elder Board, informed by input from the membership and from the larger congregation. Once a candidate has been selected, he will be presented to the membership at a membership meeting and will require a 75% positive vote for approval.
- 2.902 B. Any and all Pastors shall be reviewed annually by the rest of the Elder Board. The Board shall notify the church in advance of beginning this process in order to inform members of the opportunity to approach the Elder Board to give input.
- 2.903 C. A pastor may be relieved of his pastoral responsibilities immediately on grounds of immoral conduct or heresy by decision of the Elder Board. Such action shall be presented to the congregation in a timely manner. The pastor will be retained and his responsibilities restored by a ballot vote of affirmation of 75% of the membership present. Failure to attain said percentage shall result in the pastor's dismissal. Any other questions regarding the removal of the pastor must be presented to the Elder Board for consideration. If deemed necessary by the Elders, the matter will be brought to the membership as described above.

### **ARTICLE III: MISSION**

- 3.100 At Grace Evangelical Free Church *we are becoming a people who treasure Christ and the building of His Kingdom.*

### **ARTICLE IV: STATEMENT OF FAITH**

- 4.100 The Statement of Faith of this organization shall be the same as the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America, which reads as follows:
- 4.101 God - We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.
- 4.102 The Bible - We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and

endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

- 4.103 The Human Condition - We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.
- 4.104 Jesus Christ - We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus-Israel's promised Messiah-was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.
- 4.105 The Work of Christ - We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.
- 4.106 The Holy Spirit - We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.
- 4.107 The Church - We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.
- 4.108 Christian Living - We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.
- 4.109 Christ's Return - We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

- 4.110 Response and Eternal Destiny - We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.

**ARTICLE V: MEMBERSHIP**

- 5.100 Membership of this church shall be composed of those individuals who, through saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have been born again, who manifest the fruit of a true Christian life, who support the aforementioned Doctrinal Statement, who affirm the church covenant, who are willing to support the church by their prayers, contributions, and attendance.
- 5.300 Method of admission to membership for all subsequent members:
- 5.301           A. Candidate shall notify the Elders of his/her interest in membership.
- 5.302           B. Candidate shall attend a membership class which, at a minimum, will include discussion of the following: the church's doctrine, vision, philosophy of ministry, ministry opportunities in the church, and Christian conduct.
- 5.303           C. Following the membership class, the candidate shall meet with the elders to affirm their faith in Christ and desire to join in the ministry of the church.
- 5.304           D. Only those candidates demonstrating a genuine saving faith in Christ by both word and deed will be considered for membership; failure to give such demonstration will result in termination of the application for membership without a vote by the existing members.
- 5.305           E. All candidates who have met the foregoing requirements shall be presented to the membership for approval at a duly called membership meeting. A positive vote of 75% of the members present shall be necessary to induct the candidate into official membership.
- 5.306           F. In order to become a member all candidates must formally renounce any membership in another church. Exception to this rule may be granted by the Elders (for example in a case where a missionary needs to retain membership at multiple churches in order to receive financial support from said churches).
- 5.307           G. No minimum age for membership shall be specified, but only those eighteen years old and older shall be eligible to vote.

- 5.400 Termination of membership shall take place:
- 5.401 A. Upon the death of the individual member.
  - 5.402 B. At the written request of the individual member.
  - 5.403 C. Upon the individual's geographic relocation to an area far enough away so as to make active participation in membership impossible.
  - 5.404 D. If the individual has been absent from the church for twelve months or has otherwise ceased to function as an active member, except in cases of special arrangements made with the Elders (e.g. arrangements made for someone serving on a one or two year missions project).
  - 5.405 E. By the decision of the membership according to the steps described in section 5.5.
- 5.500 Procedure for church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-20:
- 5.501 A. Discipline may be initiated by any member due to a Biblical grievance and should be conducted in a private manner in accordance with Matthew 18:15-20 and involving other individuals only in accordance with the guidelines set forth in Matthew 18:15-20.
  - 5.502 B. If the person under question does not see the matter as one in which discipline is required or is unrepentant, the Elders shall interview and counsel the individual.
  - 5.503 C. If the Elders affirm that the offense warrants discipline and the person remains unrepentant, then the matter shall be brought before the church.
  - 5.504 D. The church may revoke the membership of the individual by a 75% vote.
  - 5.505 E. As the goal of discipline is repentance and restoration, the individual may be restored to membership upon giving evidence of genuine repentance and upon the approval of the membership.

#### **ARTICLE VI: PROPERTY**

- 6.100 This church shall have the power to receive, either by gift or purchase, and to hold such real, personal, or mixed property as is authorized by the laws of the state of Minnesota and as is deemed necessary for the business of the church,

and shall have the power to dispose of such property by mortgage, deed or otherwise.

- 6.200 In case of a division of the church (from which we pray God by His mercy shall preserve us), the property of the church shall belong to those who abide by its Constitution.
- 6.300 In case of the dissolution of the church organization, the property shall be assigned to the North Central District Conference of the Evangelical Free Church of America, to enable said Conference to renew the work or use the values thereof for further Gospel enterprises. The church shall be considered dissolved if so decided by the organization, or when the church has not held an annual meeting for three years, or when less than six members remain.

#### **ARTICLE VII: AMENDMENTS**

- 7.100 Proposed amendments to this constitution must be submitted to the Elder Board for consideration. If deemed appropriate by the Elder Board, the proposed amendment(s) must be presented at a regular business meeting at least three months prior to the next annual meeting. If adopted at the aforementioned business meeting, they must be acted upon as previously adopted without further amendment at the annual meeting and furthermore must receive an affirmative vote by 75% of the membership present and voting.
- 7.101 Article IV can only be amended by a 100% positive vote of the membership present at the appropriate business meeting.

#### **ARTICLE VIII: MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

- 8.100 The annual membership meeting shall be held during the month of October with the fiscal year ending on December 31 of each year.
- 8.200 The Elder Board in cooperation with other ministry groups, committees, etc. in the church will prepare an annual report for presentation at the above meeting.
- 8.300 Special meetings may be called by the Elders in order to deal with any matters of urgency or to seek the participation of the membership in establishing the direction of the church.
- 8.400 The dates, times, and locations of all membership meetings must be publicized at the main gathering of the church for at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

8.500 Quorum at any membership meeting shall be 20% of the membership.

8.600 A 75% positive vote of the assembled members shall be required when acting on items specified in sections 2.201, 2.202, 2.203, 2.204, 2.205, and 2.206.

**ARTICLE IX: ADDITIONAL CHURCH OFFICERS**

9.200 Treasurer

The Treasurer shall be appointed annually by the elder board with confirmation by the membership at the last quarterly business meeting of the fiscal year. The term of office shall be one fiscal year.

The Treasurer shall, in cooperation with the Financial Secretary, receive all contributions. The Treasurer shall be responsible for disbursing all funds to all authenticated bills and shall sign all checks along with the elder designated to administrate church financial matters. The Treasurer shall provide a monthly expenditure report to the elder board and an annual report to the membership.

9.300 Financial Secretary

The Financial Secretary shall be appointed annually by the elder board with confirmation by the membership at the last quarterly business meeting of the fiscal year. The Financial Secretary cannot be the same person as the Treasurer. The term of office shall be one fiscal year.

The Financial Secretary shall receive all monies contributed for all causes of the Church, shall keep accurate accounts of individual contributions, record all offerings and other contributions, and deposit these monies in the designated bank within one business day. The Financial Secretary shall provide a deposit report to the Treasurer as well as provide a monthly report to the elder board and an annual report to the membership.

9.400 Clerk

The Clerk shall be appointed annually by the elder board with confirmation by the membership at the last quarterly business meeting of the fiscal year. The term of office shall be one fiscal year.

It shall be the duty of the Clerk to keep a correct record of all regular and special business meetings of the church, to keep an accurate register of all members, to issue and attest all letters of recommendation, transfer, or dismissal as authorized by the elder board, and to make any such reports as might be requested by the elder board.

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This constitution was officially adopted by the congregation of the Grace Evangelical Free Church (then Wyoming Community Church) of Wyoming, Minnesota in 1996.