

Constitution & Bylaws
For
Grace Community Church Of Central Maine

Submitted and Ratified
April 30th In The Year of Our Lord
2008

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**ARTICLE I:
DEFINITION AND PURPOSE
OF THIS CONSTITUTION**

This written document is a declaration of our beliefs and understanding of the Holy Scripture, as to our doctrinal beliefs, form of church government, organizational structure, and purposes as a body. It is vitally important for a church, if it is to glorify God and accomplish His purposes, that its people be in agreement with regard to doctrine, organizational structure and goals (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3, 13).

This is thus designed to be a statement of these things that it might promote a oneness of mind within our own ranks, and that those interested in becoming a part of this ministry might have a clear concept of our beliefs and objectives.

This document is not a higher authority than the Word of God. It must be remembered that the local church itself is a living, growing, and flexible body subject ultimately to the authority of Jesus Christ alone as it is declared in the Word of God (Eph. 1:22; 4:12-16). As we grow in the Word, this document is therefore subject to amendment according to the provisions of Article XVI. This document is, however, to be followed in all its parts as a protection to all until part of all is amended according to its provisions.

ARTICLE II: NAME

The name of this local church shall be Grace Community Church of Central Maine, a corporation under the laws of the state of Maine and a 501 (C) 3 non-taxable religious organization under the laws of the United States of America.

ARTICLE III: MISSION, GOALS

AND OBJECTIVES

A. Our Mission

The supreme mission of the church, and so also of every individual believer, is to glorify God and to serve Him forever (Eph. 3:21; Rom. 11:36; I Pet. 4:11).

Therefore, if what we do as a church, or as individuals, cannot serve the glory of God, it should not be done.

B. Our Goals

Our goals are to serve God and bring glory to Him. Certain God-ordained goals are established in Scripture for the local church. These are basically set forth in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) as outlined below.

1. Equipping Believers

Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry in all its aspects along with their spiritual maturity in the Lord (Eph. 4:12-16; Col. 1:28-29).

2. Evangelization of the Lost

Reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ, both at home and abroad (Rom. 1:14-16; I Thes. 1:8; Acts 1:8).

C. Our Objectives

1. Internal Objectives and Functions

a. Instruction in the Word of God—Teaching: To stand for the historic, fundamental truths of Scripture, and through Scripture, to equip the saints for service, and for the building up of the body of Christ for unity, knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity, measured by the stature of the fullness of Christ, and for protection against the deceitful scheming of Satan (Eph. 4:12-16).

b. Fellowship: To encourage and provide for means of developing meaningful relationships among believers (expressions of sharing and caring for, and loving one another, warning, stimulating, and encouraging one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24-25; 13:1-2; Acts 2:42-47).

c. Worship: To provide the means for developing and expressing meaningful worship in prayer, songs of praise, adoration, admonishment, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper (Heb. 13:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:23-34; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:42).

d. Ministry: To provide the means for developing and exercising spiritual gifts for the edification of the body and the evangelization of the lost (Rom. 12:3-8; I Pet. 4:10-11).

2. External Objectives and Functions

a. Outreach: To present the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never trusted in Him as their Savior, and to encourage them to trust in Him (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; I Thes. 1:2-10).

b. Holy Behavior: To live holy lives in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation acting as salt and as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15; Matt. 5:13-14; I Pet. 2:11-15; Col. 4:5).

c. Showing Mercy: To do good to all men whenever there is the opportunity and the means to do so within biblical principles and precepts (Gal. 6:10; Luke 10:29-37).

Our **mission, goals** and **objectives** set forth our philosophy of the local church and its ministry. This, in turn, must form the foundation for our thinking and activities as a body of people. It directs us in what we ought to be doing. Anything

which does not contribute to this philosophy of our mission, goals, and objectives should then be either corrected, rejected or alleviated from the activities of the church.

ARTICLE IV: DOCTRINE

Since the Word of God is foundational and absolutely essential to true spiritual-ity, fellowship, spiritual sustenance, effectiveness in service and ministry, faith and doctrinal accuracy, we believe that the most important function of this local church, and its central thrust, is consistent teaching and study of the Word of God (1 Tim. 4:6-7; II Tim. 2:15).

The study of the Word of God is not **an end in itself**, but it is a high priority and a necessary channel for fellowship with God and thereby also of effective ministry to one another and to the world. It will not therefore, be bypassed or made secondary in the interest of social concerns, actions, or activities, but must be so promoted that the Word, and the teaching of the Word, become the pulse and heartbeat behind all church and non-church related activities or concerns (Psa. 119:1ff; 138:2; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; I Thess. 2:13; I Tim. 1:5; 4:1-16; II Tim. 3:15-17; 4:1-3).

This local church shall thus function as an independent, evangelical Bible church, committed to the fundamental, historic truths recorded in God's inerrant revelation—the Holy Scriptures. To hold positions within Grace Community Church of Central Maine, all elders, ministerial staff, deacons/deaconesses, and teachers must wholeheartedly agree with the Doctrinal Statement, Article V, of this church.

ARTICLE V: DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

A. The Scriptures

We believe that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," by which we understand the whole Bible is inspired in the sense that holy men of God "were moved by the Holy Spirit" to write the very words of Scripture. We believe that while there was progress in revelation from God, this divine inspiration extends equally and fully to all parts of the writings (historical, poetical, doctrinal, prophetic) and to the smallest word and inflection of a word as appeared in the original manuscripts. We believe that the whole Bible as originally given is therefore without error.

We believe that all Scriptures center about the Lord Jesus Christ in His person and work in His first and second coming, and hence that no portion, even of the Old Testament, is properly read or understood until it leads to Him. We also believe that all the Scriptures were designed for our practical instruction (Matt.

5:18; Mark 12:26, 36; 13:11; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Acts 1:16; 17:2-3; 18:28; 26:22-23; 28:23; Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 2:13; 10:11; II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:20-21).

B. The Godhead

We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence and obedience (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 12:29; John 1:14; Acts 5:3-4; I Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:4-6).

C. Angels, Fallen and Unfallen

We believe that God created an innumerable company of sinless, spiritual beings known as angels; that one, "Lucifer, son of the morning," the highest in rank, sinned through pride thereby becoming Satan; that a great company of the angels followed him in his moral fall, some of whom became demons and are active as his agents and associates in the prosecution of his unholy purposes, while others who fell are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19; I Tim. 3:6; II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:3-4).

We believe that Satan is the originator of sin, and that under the permission of God and as the adversary of God and His character, through subtlety he led our first parents into transgression, thereby accomplishing their moral fall and subjecting them and their posterity to his own power; that he is the enemy of God and the people of God opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; and that he who in the beginning said, "I will be like the most High," in his warfare appears as an angel of light even counterfeiting the works of God by fostering political and religious movements and systems of doctrine, which systems are characterized by such as the denial of God, the person and work of Christ as the God-man substitute or salvation by grace alone (Gen. 3:1-19; Rom. 5:12-14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 11:3-4, 13-15; Eph. 6:10-12; II Thess. 2:4; II Tim. 4:1-3; I John 4:1-3).

We believe that Satan was judged at the cross, though not then executed, and that he, a usurper, now rules as the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4); that at the second coming of Christ, Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years and after the thousand years he will be loosed for a little season and then "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone" where he "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Col. 2:15; Rev. 20:1-3, 10).

We believe that a great company of angels kept their holy estate and are before the throne of God from whence they are sent forth as ministering spirits to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation (Luke 15:10; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 7:11-12).

We believe that man was made lower than the angels and, that in His incarnation, Christ took for a little time this lower place that He might lift the believer to His own sphere above the angels (Heb. 2:6-10).

D. Man Created and Fallen

We believe that man was created by God as a human being, and did not evolve from a lower order of life. We believe that man was originally created in the image and after the likeness of God, and that he fell through sin and, as a consequence of his sin, lost his spiritual life becoming dead in trespasses and sins, and that he became subject to the power of the devil. We also believe that his spiritual death, or totally depraved human nature, has been transmitted to the entire human race of man, the Man Christ Jesus alone being excepted; and hence that every child of Adam is born into the world with a nature which not only possesses no spark of divine life, but is essentially and unchangeable bad apart from divine grace (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 6:5; Psalm 14:1-3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 3:6; 5:40; 6:53; Rom. 3:10-19; 8:6-7; Eph. 2:1-3; I Tim. 5:6; I John 3:8).

E. The First Advent

We believe that, as provided and purposed by God and as pre-announced in the prophecies of the Scriptures, the eternal Son of God came into this world that He might manifest God to men, fulfill prophecy and become the Redeemer of a lost world. To this end He was born of the virgin and received a human body and a sinless human nature (Luke 1:30-35; John 1:18; 3:16; Heb. 4:15).

We believe that on the human side, He became and remained a perfect man but sinless throughout his life; yet He retained His absolute deity being at the same time very God and very man (Luke 2:40; John 1:1-2; Phil. 2:5-8), and that His earth-life sometimes functioned within the sphere of that which was human and sometimes within the sphere of that which was divine.

We believe that in fulfillment of prophecy, He came first to Israel as her Messiah-King, and that being rejected of that nation, He according to the eternal counsels of God, gave His life as a ransom for all (John 1:11; Acts 2:22-24; I Tim. 2:6).

We believe that in infinite love for the lost, He voluntarily accepted His Father's will and became the divinely provided sacrificial Lamb and took away the sin of the world (John 1:29), bearing the holy judgments against sin which the right-eousness of God must impose. His death was therefore substitutionary in the most absolute sense—the just for the unjust—and by His death, He became the Savior of the lost (Luke 2:11; Rom. 3:25-26; II Cor. 5:14; Heb. 10:5-14; II Pet. 3:18).

We believe that according to the Scriptures, He arose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He had lived and died, and was seen among witnesses (I Cor. 15:1-8), and that His resurrection body is the pattern of that

body which ultimately will be given to all believers (John 20:20; Phil. 3:20-21).

We believe that on departing from the earth, He was accepted of His Father and that His acceptance is a final assurance to us that His redeeming work was perfectly accomplished (Heb. 1:3).

We believe that He became Head over all things to the church which is His body, and in this ministry He ceases not to intercede and advocate for the saved (Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

F. Salvation Only Through Christ

We believe that, owing to universal death through sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born again; and that no degree of reformation, however great, no attainments in morality, however high, no culture, however attractive, no baptism or other ordinance, however administered, can help the sinner to take even one step toward heaven; but a new nature imparted from above, a new life implanted by the Holy Spirit through the Word, is absolutely essential to salvation and only those thus saved are sons of God. We believe also that our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made to be sin and was made a curse for us, dying in our stead; and that no repentance, no feeling, no faith, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts, no submission to the rules and regulations of any church, nor all the churches that have existed since the days of the apostles, can add in the very least degree to the finished work wrought for us by Him who united in His person true and proper deity and perfect and sinless humanity (Lev. 17:11; Is. 64:6; Matt. 26:28; John 2:7-18; Rom. 5:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 6:15; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 3:4-9; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; I Pet. 1:18-19, 23).

We believe that the new birth of the believer comes only through faith in Christ and that repentance is a vital part of believing, and is in no way in itself a separate and independent condition of salvation; nor are any other acts, such as confession, baptism, prayer, or faithful service to be added to believing as a condition of salvation (John 1:12; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 13:39; 16:31; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:22, 26; 4:5; 10:4; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 2:8-9).

G. The Extent of Salvation

We believe that when an unregenerate person exercises that faith in Christ which is illustrated and described as such in the New Testament, he passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life and from the old creation into the new; being justified from all things, accepted before the Father according as Christ His Son is accepted, loved as Christ is loved, having his place and portion linked to Him and one with Him forever. Though the saved one may have occasion to grow in the realization of his blessings and to know a fuller measure of divine power through the yielding of his life more fully to God, he is, as soon as he is saved, in possession of every spiritual blessing and absolutely

complete in Christ, and is therefore in no way required by God to seek a so-called "second blessing" or a "second work of grace" (John 5:24; 17:23; Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1; I Cor. 3:21-23; II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10; 1 John 4:17; 5:11-12).

H. Sanctification

We believe that sanctification, which is a setting apart unto God, is three-fold: It is already complete for every person because his position toward God is the same as Christ's position. Since the believer is in Christ, he is set apart unto God in the measure in which Christ is set apart unto God. We believe, however, that he retains his sin nature, which cannot be eradicated in this life. Therefore, while the standing of the Christian in Christ is perfect, his present state is no more perfect than his experience in daily life. There is therefore a progressive sanctification wherein the Christian is to "grow in grace" and to "be changed" by the unhindered power of the Spirit. We believe also that the child of God will yet be fully sanctified in his state as he is now sanctified in his standing in Christ when he shall see his Lord and shall be like Him (John 17:17; II Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Eph. 4:24; 5:25-27; I Thes. 5:23; Heb. 10:10, 14; 12:10).

I. Eternal Security

We believe that, because of the eternal purpose of God toward the objects of His love, because of His freedom to exercise grace toward the meritless on the ground of the propitiatory blood of Christ, because of the very nature of the divine gift of eternal life, because of the present and unending intercession and advocacy of Christ in heaven, because of the immutability of the unchangeable covenants of God, because of the regenerating, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all who are saved, we and all true believers everywhere, once saved shall be kept saved forever. We believe, however, that God is a holy and righteous Father and that since He cannot overlook the sins of His children, He will, when they persistently sin, chasten them and correct them in infinite love; but having undertaken to save them and keep them forever, apart from all human merit, He who cannot fail will in the end present every one of them faultless before the presence of His glory and conformed to the image of His Son (John 5:24; 10:28; 13:1; 14:16-17; 17:11; Rom. 8:29, 32-39; I Cor. 6:19; Heb. 7:25; I John 2:1-2; 5:13; Jude 24).

J. Assurance

We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior; and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude and obedience (Luke 10:20; 22:32; Rom. 8:15-16; II Cor. 5:1, 6-8; II Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:22; I John 5:13).

K. The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, though omnipresent from all eternity, took up His abode in the world in a special sense on the day of Pentecost according to the divine promise, dwells in every believer and, by His baptism, unites all to Christ in one body and that He, as the indwelling One, is the source of all power and all acceptable worship and service. We believe that He never takes His departure from the church, nor from the feeblest of the saints, but is ever present to testify of Christ; seeking to occupy believers with Him and not with themselves nor with their experiences. We believe that His abode in the world in this special sense will cease when Christ comes to receive His own at the completion of the church (John 14:16-17; 18:7-15; I Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:22; II Thes. 2:7).

We believe that in this age, based on that which the Holy Spirit is to the believer, the Holy Spirit has certain well defined ministries, and that it is the duty of every Christian to understand what the Holy Spirit is to him, and does to him, and to be rightly adjusted to the Holy Spirit in his own life and experience. We believe that the Holy Spirit, as a special provision of God, is an **anointing** (II Cor. 1:21; I John 2:20-27), a **seal** (II Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), and an **earnest, or downpayment** (II Cor. 1:11; Eph. 1:14). His ministries to the Christian are the restraining of evil in the world to the measure of the divine will; the convicting of the world respecting sin, righteousness and judgment; the regenerating of all believers; the indwelling of all who are saved whereby they are sealed unto the day of redemption and anointed of God for service; the baptizing into the one body of Christ of all who are saved; and the continued filling for power, witnessing, teaching, leading, and service of those among the saved who are yielded to Him and who are subject to His will (John 3:6; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:3-14; I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:30; 5:18; II Thes. 2:7; I John 2:20-27).

We believe that some gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and miraculous healings were given to be used as signs to authenticate the message of the first century church. We believe that speaking in tongues was never the common or necessary sign of the baptism nor of the filling of the Spirit, and that the complete deliverance of the body from sickness or death awaits the consummation of our salvation in the resurrection (Acts 4:8, 31; Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 13:8; II Cor. 12:12). We believe that in accordance with the sovereign will of God, healing is available through the prayer of believers (James 5:14). We believe that other non-sign gifts were given to the church and that through the exercise of these gifts in the church, believers who learn and apply the truth of Scripture to their lives will mature spiritually. We further believe that ecstatic experiences, though they may be valid manifestations of the grace of God, do not appreciably contribute to one's spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:11-16; I Pet. 2:2).

L. The Church, A Unity of Believers

1. The Universal Church

We believe that the church is composed of all who are united by the Holy Spirit to the risen and ascended Son of God, that by the same Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, and thus being members one of another, we are responsible to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, rising above all sectarian prejudices and denominational bigotry, and loving one another with a pure heart fervently (Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 2:42-27; Rom. 12:5; I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:20-24; 4:3-10; Col. 3:14-15).

2. The Local Church

We believe that God's primary (intended) organization of believers, after the family unit, in the present age is local assemblies of believers, committed to the Lord and to each other for the purpose of carrying out the universal church's visible activities; that is, the communication of God's truth to the people of God, the worship of and prayer to God by God's people, the loving care of God's people for one another, and the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth; that these assemblies (or churches), though they should endeavor to cooperate with other Christian assemblies, are to function under the lordship of Christ, free from external controls of any religious organizations beyond the early oversight by the church founders and the influence of its own mature leaders; and that it is God's intention that all believers publicly identify with a visible, local assembly (Acts 2:41-47; 4:19; 5:29; I Cor. 1:1-2; I Thes. 1:1; Heb. 10:24-25).

M. The Ordinances of the Church

We believe that Christ, the head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22), has commanded us to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19); and to partake at His table. When He had given thanks, he broke the bread and said, "this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "this cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (I Cor. 11:23-26).

N. The Christian's Walk

We believe that we are called with a holy calling to walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit, and so to live in the power of the indwelling Spirit that we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. But the flesh with its fallen, Adamic nature, which in this life is never eradicated, being with us to the end of our earthly pilgrimage, needs to be kept by the Spirit constantly in subjection to Christ, or it will surely manifest its presence in our lives to the dishonor of our Lord (Rom. 6:11-13; 8:2, 4, 12-13; Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:1-10; I Pet. 1:14-16; I John 1:4-7; 3:5-9).

O. The Christian's Service

We believe that divine, enabling gifts for service are bestowed by the Spirit upon all who are saved. While there is a diversity of gifts, each believer is energized by the same Spirit and each is called to his own divinely appointed service as the Spirit may will. In the apostolic church, there were certain gifted men, i.e., apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers who were appointed by God for the perfecting of the saints unto their work of the ministry. We believe also that today some men are especially gifted of God to be evangelists and pastor-teachers, and that it is to the fulfilling of His will and to His eternal glory that these men shall be sustained and encouraged in their service for God (Rom. 12:6; I Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11; I Pet. 4:10-11).

We believe that, wholly apart from salvation benefits which are bestowed equally upon all who believe, rewards are promised according to the faithfulness of each believer in his service for his Lord, and that these rewards will be bestowed at the judgment seat of Christ after He comes to receive His own to Himself (I Cor. 3:9-15; 9:18-27; II Cor. 5:10).

P. The Great Commission

We believe that it is the explicit message of our Lord Jesus Christ to those whom He has saved that they are sent forth by Him into the world even as He was sent forth of His Father into the world. We believe that after they are saved they are divinely reckoned to be related to this world as strangers and pilgrims, ambassadors and witnesses, and that their primary purpose in life should be to make Christ known to the world (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15; John 17:18; Acts 1:8; II Cor. 5:18-20; I Pet. 1:17; 2:11).

Q. The Blessed Hope

We believe that according to the Word of God the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord in the air to receive to Himself into heaven both His own who are alive and remain unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in scripture, and for this we should be constantly looking (John 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; I Thes. 4:13-18; Tit. 2:11-14).

S. The Second Coming of Christ

The Lord Jesus will physically return to earth to establish His millennial kingdom. It is not possible to know the date of His coming; nevertheless, every Christian should live in earnest expectation of His coming at any time. When He comes in the air, both dead and living believers will be caught up to meet Him (I Thes. 4:13-5:4, I Cor. 15:51-53). At this time these believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, to be judged, not for sins, but for rewards. Following this event there will be a time of judgment on the earth, in which the wrath of God will be poured out on unsaved men because of their rejection of God and His

Son. God's wrath will not affect believers as the church is exempt from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9, I Thes. 1:10, 5:9). After these events, Christ will come to earth in power and glory to reign for a thousand years.

T. The Eternal State

We believe that at death the spirits and souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for His own, whereupon soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory; but the spirits and souls of the unbelieving remain after death conscious of condemnation and in misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (Luke 16:19-26; 23:42; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; II Thes. 1:7-9; Jude 6-7; Rev. 20:11-15).

ARTICLE VI: GENERAL

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The local church body is composed of one body with many members all of whom are in vital relationship with Jesus Christ, but the body also has "joints of supply," units of control, and unity, i.e., church leaders (Eph. 4:16). This together suggests body participation under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ with leadership direction, submission and authority in a two-directional manner.

First, the local government is invested in the body of believers who compose the local body under the headship of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 18:20; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 5:21; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

Second, executive authority or leadership, however, is invested by the congregation, as authorized by Scripture, in a Board of Elders who lead the church and to whom the congregation is to submit under the headship of Christ. These men have the authority and responsibility to delegate to individuals, committees, or other boards (as a board of deacons and deaconesses) authority and responsibility to carry out the business or ministry of the church in spiritual and physical (material) matters (Acts 20:28; 15:6; Eph. 4:11-12; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17).

In using its delegated authority, and in making its decisions, the Board of Elders must seek to be guided by the Scripture, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and by input from the congregation (Acts 20:32; 6:2-5a; 11:22; 15:22; II Cor. 8:19).

ARTICLE VII: ELDERS

A. Qualifications

Elders shall be men whose lives are characterized by the qualities set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. These qualities can be categorized as:

- (1) They must **desire** the office of elder and demonstrate spiritual leadership abilities among the flock.
- (2) They must be **able to teach** and use the Word of God with wisdom and patience.
- (3) They must be **lovers of God** and men who take God and His Word seriously.
- (4) They must be **able to manage their household** in a biblical manner.
- (5) They must be able to spiritually **manage their interpersonal relationships**.
- (6) They must be men who are seeking to be controlled by Christ and His Word rather than by worldly and fleshly desires.
- (7) These men shall hold to the doctrinal statement of this Constitution in accord with the statements of Article V, and be supportive of the entire Constitution.
- (8) The Board of Elders shall be the Trustees of the Church.

B. Authority

The ministry of Grace Community Church of Central Maine shall be under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ working in and through the Board of Elders and the congregation of believers. The elders will be the primary decision-making body within the church. However, it is critical that the elders make decisions based on carefully assembled facts, scriptural insight, the individual, corporate leading by the Holy Spirit, and input from the body (Acts 6:5; 15:6, 22; Heb. 13:17; 1 Thes. 5:12-13). Such input includes recommendations from committees organized to address specific church ministries (see article X). The Board of Elders, as the recognized church ruling authority, is not required to enact such recommendations, nor require a church vote on said recommendations. This veto authority rests with the pastor-teacher or the majority of the Board of Elders. This veto may be overturned by a 2/3's vote of the congregation at the next quarterly business meeting at the behest of the pastor-teacher, simple majority of elders, or any member having gathered a collection of 35% of member signatures. In the event that there is no board of elders, the pastor-teacher will govern in cooperation with the congregation, relying heavily on input from the steering committee.

The church is not a democracy or a government where the majority rules. Jesus Christ Himself is the Head and Ruler of the church. However, as seen in Article VI, the Lord Jesus leads and directs through both the body and the elders. Since the Lord Jesus dwells in each member of the body of Christ, as so leads and directs through the body as to needs, desires, and responsibilities for each local body, it is important and necessary for the elders to seek input, information and

guidance from the body, especially on practical matters of church life. As a result of these biblical facts, in major decisions of church life, the congregation will vote to show a unified movement toward the direction in question and to show a sense of God's leading. The elders will not move forward with a decision until, or unless, the majority of the body is unified on the matter. Unless otherwise indicated, all church business will pass with a simple majority vote. The following illustrates areas where a two-thirds majority vote is required:

- (1) Making major financial decisions (i.e., annual budgets, staff salaries, purchases exceeding \$1000 beyond budgeted expenditures).
- (2) Adding or removing paid staff members, or changes in salary of staff persons (Article VIII).
- (3) Adding to or removing elders from the Board of Elders (Article VII).
- (4) Carrying out church discipline (Article XII).

NOTE: When a vote is taken, the procedure outlined in Article XI, Section F shall be followed.

C. Duties

Because of external and internal Christian testimony to be promoted with the local body, the elders must first and foremost exercise a personal spiritual walk which promotes self examination, maintain a servant-like quality in life, and serve with gentleness and humility in all that he does. Out of his biblical perspective, the elder is to joyfully undertake the following duties:

- (1) Give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- (2) Guard and protect the flock.
- (3) Cooperate with the pastor-teacher, providing him counsel and assisting with the oversight and spiritual direction of the church.
- (4) Aid in finding and developing gifted teachers of the Word (II Tim. 2:2).
- (5) Warn and discipline as outlined in Article XII.
- (6) Support, encourage, counsel and lead in humility.
- (7) See to the appointment of deacons/deaconesses as needed per Article IX.
- (8) Provide guidance to the deacons/deaconesses as needed.
- (9) See to the oversight of the finances of the flock per Article XIII.
- (10) Pray for and encourage the sick.
- (11) Seek the Lord's will to interpret the Articles and provisions of this Constitution in the light of Scripture.
- (12) Make decisions and perform any other duties as situations within the church dictate, either directly or through proper and orderly delegation of committees or persons as necessary.

The elders shall strive to maintain open communication with the flock, both to discern needs, concerns and viewpoints, and to communicate information and decisions. This may be done through the Sunday bulletin, pulpit announcements, group or congregational meetings and discussions (at least one such meeting held annually), votes, and one-on-one personal contact (Acts 6:1-5;

11:22; 15:1, 6, 22; 16:2).

D. Appointment (General Principles)

The Scriptures emphasize that elders in the church are not appointed by men, but by God, and confirmed by the congregation (Acts 1:26; 6:5; 20:28). The task of the people in the church then should be to seek and discover God's direction and leading within the church body in the appointment and confirmation of elders.

Nominations for the position of elder shall come from the Board of Elders or the congregation eight weeks prior to any vote on their appointment. All elders shall have served a minimum of one year in the office of deacon. Someone who has not shown himself to be a faithful servant is not fit for the office of elder (Matt. 20:26). To confirm an elder appointment, a two-thirds vote of the congregation is required.

The elders, in consultation with or in response to the request of body members, shall seek to discern the nature of the need and to follow God's leading in deciding if the need justifies the appointment of an elder. Upon a decision by the Board of Elders that a need does exist, the church will prayerfully and carefully seek God's direction in choosing the right man or men.

It is the purpose of Grace Community Church of Central Maine to base the selection process upon an orderly, proper sequence of events which will most easily facilitate the recognition of God's appointment of men to this ministry. The whole flock should be on the alert for men whose lives characterize the qualifications laid out in Scripture. Only qualified men will be appointed. If no qualified men are available, or if men are unwilling to serve, who would otherwise be qualified, no appointment will be made. The church should wait on the Lord either to remove the need or to provide qualified men.

The Scriptures speak of two categories of elders within a church body: presiding elder, otherwise known as the pastor-teacher who labors in Word and doctrine (Eph 4:11-16), and ruling elders (I Tim. 5:17-18). The following procedures outline the steps necessary to appoint elders:

E. Tenure

The term of the elder appointment, excluding the pastor-teacher, shall be for three years. The term may be renewed only with the support of the pastor-teacher with a two-thirds vote of the congregation.

Elders are appointed to a term of three years consistent with their desire and ability to serve in this capacity. Involuntary removal of elders from office shall be effected by personal resignation or by disciplinary actions in accordance with the following sections:

F. Voluntary Resignation

An elder may step down at any time he so chooses. The Elder should prayer-fully reflect on his decision and seek counsel from the Board before making a final decision.

G. Involuntary Dismissal

Involuntary dismissal of any elder, paid or non-paid, will be a disciplinary action of the church body in accordance with the instruction of I Timothy 5:19-20; Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-18. The specific procedures for this are spelling out in Article XI with the following differences:

(1) If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, or believes he has been unfairly treated, then it is to be brought before the congregation to hear the issues and to allow the person concerned to present his case. It will then be decided by a two thirds majority vote of the body at a congregational meeting. The body must be informed of such meeting at least two weeks prior to the time of the meeting.

(2) If members of the body believe they are not being properly and biblically represented by the Board or any member of the Board, they are to follow the procedures of Matthew 18:15-16 and first discuss the issues with the Board of Elders. If, after following the above procedures, the issue is not resolved, then they have the right and may call for a congregational meeting (Matt. 18:17) where the issues may be presented and ruled on by two-thirds majority vote of the congregation, pursuant to Article XI, paragraph F. Again, a two-week announcement period will be necessary before the meeting can be held. The congregation, at such time, may remove any or all members of the Board of Elders.

ARTICLE VIII: PASTOR-TEACHER

AND STAFF

A. Pastor-Teacher

The pastor-teacher plays a critical role in the growth, maturity, spirituality and effectiveness of the church. He is responsible for the quality and content of the teaching and counseling within the flock (Eph. 4:11-16; I Tim. 4:6-16). Grace Community Church of Central Maine recognizes that the Lord has given spiritual gifts to all believers and there-fore does not expect the pastor-teacher to provide all the teaching, evangelism and counseling, etc., within the body (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-12; I Cor. 12:4-11; I Pet. 4:10-11). Rather he is to equip the saints "for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12).

1. The appointment of the pastor-teacher will be according to the following guidelines:

a. The elders shall form a pulpit committee for the express purpose of calling a man, meeting the qualifications outlined in I Timothy 3:1-7, to fulfill the office of the pastor-teacher. After prayerful consideration of candidates, the committee shall make recommendations to the board of elders, who will then prayerfully consider those recommendations. Final candidates will be brought before the congregation for a vote. The appointment of the pastor-teacher shall be confirmed by a two-thirds vote of the congregation. In the event that a two-thirds majority cannot be achieved, the committee shall resume its search until a candidate is found. Pulpit committee members will be appointed at the discretion of the elders but should include at least two elders and two deacons/deaconesses.

b. In the absence of a pastor-teacher, the Board of Elders will govern the church with the cooperation of the congregation.

The pastor-teacher, for the purpose church government, shall be the Chief Executive Officer of the Church, Chairman of the Elder Board, and Presiding Elder.

B. Associate Pastoral Staff

The need for paid associate pastoral staff to assist in meeting the needs of the flock may be recognized by any member of the church body or leadership. Such need must be agreed to by the pastor-teacher (in consultation with the Board of Elders) before action is taken. The need for this expenditure should be discussed with the flock.

The procedure for hiring associate pastoral staff members shall be the same as for the pastor-teacher. The pastor-teacher will automatically head the selection committee for any associate pastoral staff (Article VII, paragraph D).

All paid pastoral staff will look to the pastor-teacher and board of elders for supervision of their duties and for periodic reviews of their performance. A written job description will be prepared for all staff members. This description will be prepared by the pastor-teacher in consultation with the Board of Elders.

After appropriate consultation with the church leadership, a recommendation by the pastor-teacher will be sufficient for modifying the duties or redirecting the efforts of any paid staff member. Removal of any associate pastoral staff member shall follow the same guidelines as outlined in Article VII.

F. Non-Pastoral Staff

The hiring of baby sitters, janitorial services, secretary, etc., will be planned for and directed by the Board of Elders.

Since the secretary will be working primarily for the pastor-teacher, he will make the final decision, in consultation with the Board of Elders, on who will fill that position.

ARTICLE IX: DEACONS/DEACONESSES

A. Qualifications

Deacons/deaconesses shall be persons who desire to be servants of the local church body, who are able to serve, who meet all the qualifications of Scripture set forth in Acts 6:3 and I Timothy 3:8-12, and who are conscientiously and wholeheartedly in agreement with the Constitution of this church.

B. Duties

In Acts 6:1-4, certain persons were appointed to minister to the physical needs of the flock, to relieve the elders so they would have more time to concentrate on prayer and ministry of the Word. These were undoubtedly the first deacons and functioned as helpers to the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

Adhering to this example, and the example set forth in Romans 16:1-2, deacons/deaconesses will be appointed to assist the elders in ministering to the needs of the body, especially the physical needs (such as caring for the building and property), though they may serve in other capacities as their gifts and training allow.

Their specific duties will be designated by the elders according to the need of the church and a deacon/deaconess' particular gifts, capacities and talents.

C. Appointment

Deacons/deaconesses shall be appointed to serve as long as they are qualified and willing to serve and as long as a need for their ministry exists.

I Timothy 3:10 teaches that potential deacons/deaconesses are to be tested. The primary means of testing is time; time for the flock to evaluate a person's commitment to the Lord and their qualifications according to I Timothy 3:8-12, their doctrinal understanding, and their willingness to serve the local body. The flock and the Board of Elders should be on the alert for those persons who demonstrate the qualifications of a deacon/deaconess.

In the New Testament church, both the church leaders and the flock played an important role in choosing deacon/deaconesses (Acts 6:1-6).

Deacons/deaconesses will be appointed as the need arises. However, only qualified and willing men and women will be appointed. If no qualified individuals are available, or if those qualified are unable or unwilling to serve, no appointment will be made. The church shall wait on the Lord to provide a qualified person to meet the need.

The following outlines the procedure Grace Community Church of Central Maine will follow in selecting deacons/deaconesses:

- (1) The Board of Elders shall decide if the need for a deacon or a deaconess exists.
- (2) When there is a need, then the Board shall notify the congregation of the need and ask them to recommend to the Board those individuals whom they believe meet the qualifications.
- (3) The Board of Elders will review the names submitted to them along with any additional names of those persons believed to be qualified.
- (4) Each name submitted will be carefully and prayerfully considered and reviewed according to their qualifications, gifts, the need, and the individual's willingness to serve.
- (5) The elders will then appoint that person or persons whom they believe to be the most qualified to serve according to the specific needs and the qualifications.

D. Removal of Deacons

1. Voluntary

A deacon/deaconess may voluntarily step down from his position at any time he so chooses. The deacon should prayerfully reflect on his decision and seek counsel from the Board of Elders before making a final decision.

2. Involuntary Dismissal

Involuntary dismissal of a deacon shall be in accord with the procedures for church discipline outlined in Article XII. If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, the Board may remove him from office, but only after the principles for church discipline have been prayerfully considered and followed (Matt. 18:15-18).

Article X: CHURCH COMMITTEES

The church will form committees to assist in the planning and direction of the church in the fulfillment of its responsibilities given in the Great Commission. The committees will be, but not limited to, finance, worship, children, nursery, hospitality, adult education, technology, marketing, membership, shut-in, outreach, home fellowship, and missions. Each committee will elect a chairman and conduct its business under the supervision of the Board of Elders. Each committee will be responsible to meet at least once per quarter and have reports of activities prepared for each quarterly business meeting. Recommendations from each committee, after a majority vote of committee members, will be presented to the Board of Elders for consideration, subject to Article VII, paragraph B.

Each committee chairman will constitute the steering committee, which is

instituted and designed for the purpose of communication, recommendations, and direction to aid the elders.

ARTICLE XI: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A. General

Voting members of this church shall have professed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, be at least 18 years of age, shall have been baptized in accordance with their desire by immersion as a symbol of inward regeneration, agree substantially with the church constitution, and have completed the Grace Community Church of Central Maine membership class.

B. Admission

Believing that the Lord adds believers to a church to serve Him through that local assembly, (I Cor. 12:14-31; Eph. 4:11-12); we present the following for those who are led of the Lord to join this church:

- (1). If, after reading the church Constitution, one finds himself/herself in substantial agreement with the Doctrinal Statement, Articles of Faith, and Church Government, then the applicant must complete the application for church membership attached to this constitution and give it to the Elders.
- (2) Meet with an Elder(s) personally at a time convenient to all for any discussion that may be helpful.
- (3) After giving the congregation two weeks notice of your stated intention to be united with the fellowship of Grace Community Church of Central Maine, your name and the names of other current applicants will be brought forth at the next church business meeting and voted upon.
- (4) As the congregation carries your request for membership, you will be received into the fellowship the Sunday following the business meeting.
- (5) Miscellaneous- A husband and wife may join the church with their believing children (under age 18) as a family. Any child 18 years of age or older, should join individually.

C. Termination of Membership

- (1) Discipline (for Restoration) - Believing that the purity of the local assembly is of great importance in Scripture, (I Cor. 5; Acts 5:1-11) it is necessary to establish a Scriptural disciplinary procedure.
 - a. Personal, loving, private rebuke (Matt. 18:15). If a person is living in sin as a bad testimony, or has offended you, go to that person and ask him/her to repent, or make right the offense.
 - b. The rebuke of two or three witnesses of which one should be an Elder or Deacon (Matt.18:16). These witnesses go with you to ask him/her to repent or make right the wrong.
 - c. The church rebukes him/her (Matt. 18:17). The church is asked to approach the wrongdoer for reconciliation.

d. If he/she still does not repent, withdraw him from the fellowship and continue to pray that the Lord will change him (Matt. 18:17b, I Cor. 5:7-13). 5. To be reinstated, the repentant believer would need to present themselves to the Board of Elders to seek reinstatement, and then follow the steps of any new member

(2) Absence

a. Any member who is continually absent from church services for 3 consecutive months will automatically be moved to inactive, non-voting status subject to evaluation by the Board of Elders pursuant to Article XI, paragraph E unless that absence is involuntary (illness, etc).

b. Reinstatement to active status is pursuant to Article XI, paragraph E.

(3) Request -

a. Any member requesting that his membership be dropped because of moving, etc. need to give his/her request in writing to the Elder(s) and his name will be dropped.

b. To be reinstated, a person would simply need to apply as a new member.

(4) Death

a. If a member of the church passes on to Glory, they will of course, cease to be a member of the church.

E. Membership Roll

(1) The elders will review the membership roll annually. Members may be removed from the roll by the member's choice, by church discipline (Article XI), or by

noninvolvement with the body. If an individual appears to no longer be involved with the church, an elder(s) will attempt to meet with the person to verify

their membership status. No individual will be removed from the roll without an earnest attempt at contact made by an elder(s).

(2) Three-month absence from the fellowship will constitute "non-involvement" and will automatically place a member on inactive, non-voting status. This disqualifies them from voting at business meetings, special or scheduled, until voting privileges are reinstated by the Board of Elders, but they are retained as a member of the church until the reason for the non-involvement is determined. To re-activate voting privileges, inactive members must submit a request via

the Board of Elders. No member will be placed on inactive status without first being contacted by an elder.

F. Voting and Congregational Meetings

The purpose of voting is not to simply obtain a "majority-rules" consensus. Rather, all voting in this church is designed to show God's leading within the flock on an issue. Unless specifically indicated differently within the Constitution, a simple majority vote in favor of an issue shall signify to the church leadership

that the flock agrees that God is leading favorably in the decision being voted on.

Any member of the church on active status may vote. The person may vote in person or they may vote absentee. An absentee vote is valid if the person writes down on any piece of paper the issue being voted on, their vote, and their signature. Absentee votes must be turned in to an elder no later than the date of the meeting.

The means of voting will normally be by written ballot. This may vary, however, if the leadership announces the form of voting to be used when the meeting of the vote is announced. The flock will be advised of the date and time of a meeting for a vote at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

At least 50 percent of the church membership must vote to make the results of the vote binding.

ARTICLE XII: CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We believe in the responsibility and necessity of church discipline as clearly outlined in Scripture. It is a very difficult area and hard to practice. Nevertheless, church discipline has the divine authority of Scripture and is vital to the purity of the church. In church discipline, the following matters must be carefully understood and applied.

A. The Pattern and Basis for Discipline

The discipline of the church is first patterned after the fact that the Lord Himself disciplines His children (Heb. 12:6) and, as a father delegates part of the discipline of the children to the wife, so the Lord has delegated the discipline of the church family to the church itself.

Discipline is further based on the holy character of God (I Pet. 1:16; Heb. 12:11). The pattern of God's holiness, his desire for the church to be holy, set apart unto Him, is an important reason for the necessity of church discipline. The church is therefore to clean out the leaven of malice and wickedness from its ranks (I Cor. 5:6-8). A failure to discipline in a church today evidences a lack of awareness of the holiness of God.

Church discipline must be patterned after and based on the divine commands of Scripture. We have numerous passages which both command and give us biblical directives on the how, when and where of church discipline. Again, a failure to exercise this responsibility demonstrates a lack of obedience and belief in the authority of the Bible (I Cor. 5:1-13; Matt. 18:17-18; Titus 3:10; II Thes. 3:6-15; I Tim. 5:20; Gal. 6:1).

A final basis for the necessity of church discipline is the testimony of the church

in the world. The world observes the behavior and life of the church. When the church acts no differently than the world it loses its credibility and authenticity (I Pet. 2:11-18; 3:8-16; 4:1-4).

B. The Purposes of Church Discipline

- (1) Concern for the glory of God and the testimony of the flock.
- (2) The restoration and building up of the sinning believer.
- (3) The winning of a soul to Christ (if only a professing Christian).
- (4) The purity of the local body and its protection from moral and doctrinally impure influences, knowing a little leaven can leaven the entire lump (I Cor. 5:6-7).

Such goals automatically govern the spirit in which all disciplinary action is to be given. Thus:

- (1) It must be done in the spirit of humility, gentleness and patience, looking to yourself lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1-2; II Tim. 2:24-25).
- (2) Those who walk disorderly are to be admonished, warned, and appealed to in love (I Thes 5:14-15; I Tim. 5:1-2; Eph. 4:15; II Tim. 4:2). This admonishing, etc., is not restricted to the leaders but may be done by any member (I Thes. 5:14).
- (3) If there is no response in repentance and obedience, then members are to withhold intimate fellowship until there is obedience (II Thes. 3:6, 14). This is to indicate to the offender that his action has caused a rupture in the harmony of the body. Its goal is restoration and the person is still to be counted as a brother (II Thess. 3:14-15).
- (4) If the person persists after admonition and withdrawal of intimate fellowship, the final step is separation from the fellowship (Titus 3:10; Matt. 18:17b), accompanied by public rebuke before all (I Tim. 5:20). Examples of church discipline are found in Scripture. The Corinthian believers were to be "gathered together" in order to take action against the offending brother (I Cor. 2:6). We also find that it was the whole church in Rome and in Thessalonica who were to take action with regard to the unruly and schismatic and not just a few (II Thess. 3:6-15; Rom. 16:17).
- (5) Finally, discipline in the name of our Lord always includes a readiness to forgive. The many, or majority who discipline, must also be ready and eager to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love to the sinning person (II Cor. 2:6-8).

C. The Practice of Church Discipline

1. When it is to be Practiced

Great care must be exercised here. Scripture does not warrant the exercise of

church discipline for an individual or a church's pet taboos or peeves. According to Scripture, there are five categories which warrant church discipline. These are:

- a. Difficulties between members (Matt. 18:15-17).
- b. Divisiveness: People causing divisions in the church (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11).
- c. Disorderly conduct: Conduct clearly out of line with the prescribed commands of Scripture (II Thes. 3:6-15).
- d. Sins of the type mentioned in I Corinthians 5: incest, immorality, covetousness, idolatry, abusive speech, drunkenness, and swindling (I Cor. 5:1, 11).
- e. False teaching: Erroneous teaching and views which concern the fundamentals of the faith, not lesser differences of interpretation (I Tim. 1:20; II Tim. 2:17-18; also implied in Rev. 2:14-16; Phil. 3:2-3, 15-19; Rom. 16:17-18).

The key concerns here are: (a) the holy character of God, (b) the testimony of the flock, (c) the effect upon the unity and purity of the flock, and (d) the edification and restoration of the individual.

2. How it is to be Practiced

Scriptural procedure here is clear and specific steps are prescribed. They are as follows:

- a. Recognize the offense. Caution—one must be sure it is an offense which calls for discipline. Again, the Word is our criterion.
- b. Seek private correction and/or reconciliation with the offender (Matt. 18:15). This is when the problem involves two believers. The one offended or the one who recognizes the offense is to go private-ly and try to rectify the problem. If this fails, he is to take witnesses, preferably spiritual leaders, so that if it has to be brought before the whole church it can be firmly proven or es-tablished (Matt. 18:16-17).
- c. Seek reconciliation through the spiritual leadership if the problem involves an offense that is against the whole body, or is a threat to its unity. Initiatory action following the concept of Galatians 6:1 should be taken by the mature spiritual leaders of the church rather than by just one person. "You who are spiritual" in Galatians 6:1 is plural meaning literally, "you, the spiritual ones" These initial contacts provide opportunity for loving admonition, correction and forgiveness.
On the other hand, if these first steps are not heeded, it constitutes a warning that further action will be taken and gives occasion for serious rebuke (II Tim. 4:2; I Thes. 5:12-14; Titus 2:15; 3:10).
- d. Seek reconciliation through the whole body. If further action is necessary, it is to be taken before the whole church (Matt. 18:17). This action would consist of a minimum of loss of voting privileges, but may result in more severe action. Any action taken must be approved by a congregational vote as outlined in Article XI, Section F.

In essence then, this is the action of the Lord carrying out discipline through the action of the whole body through the leadership of the elders or the spiritually mature (I Cor. 5:4 "in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled...with the power of our Lord Jesus ..."). Similar heavenly authority is seen in the ratification of this disciplinary action as spelled out in Matthew 18:18-19).

ARTICLE XIII: FINANCES

Believers are to give financially from an attitude of commitment to the Lord (II Cor. 8:1-6). It is the policy of Grace Community Church of Central Maine to keep the congregation informed of financial needs by means of the weekly bulletin, announcements from the pulpit, or other means as necessary. This will not include individual solicitation of members to taking of financial pledges. The purpose of this information is not to coerce or pressure anyone into giving, but rather to provide avenues for giving as the Lord provides. Each believer is to give according to their ability with a cheerful heart (II Cor. 9:7).

This body does not believe that the New Testament believer is required to tithe as was the Old Testament Jew. The tithe, which the Old Testament Law commanded, required that each Jew give a certain percentage of his income to the Lord. However, the Jews could give gifts above and beyond their tithe. The required tithe served more as a "tax" than a gift. Scripture records no such required tithe for believers in the church age. Each believer is to give as God provides from an attitude of cheerfulness and commitment to the Lord (II Cor. 8:12-15; 9:7), recognizing that we are only stewards of what God already owns.

Because giving is done unto the Lord, it is critical that the local church handle the finances given with care and wisdom both for the glory of the Lord and for the testimony of the church (II Cor. 8:20-21). With this view in mind, the following outlines the policies of handling financial decisions:

(1) All paid staff shall be paid a salary commensurate to their duties and abilities (I Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6-7; I Cor. 9:6-11).

(2) All gifts given as a designated gift will be used as designated so long as those designations are in accord with biblical principles. If any special gifts are given with the directions to use it in whatever area has the greatest need, the board of Elders will decide how that gift will be used. All other gifts will go into the general fund.

(3) The local church has the privilege and responsibility to provide financial support for those in service for the Lord (missionaries, seminary students, etc. [Phil.

4:14-17; II Cor. 8:1-5]). Grace Community Church of Central Maine will support certain of those in service as the Lord leads and provides. All of these supported must hold a doctrinal view in agreement with the doctrinal statement presented in this Constitution. The Board of Elders will recommend to

the

congregation which people and ministries Grace Community Church of Central Maine will support.

(4) Depending on the amount of money involved, the senior paid elder may make a financial decision by himself, or the Board of Elders may make the decision, or the congregation must make the decision.

(5) On an annual basis, during the first quarter of the year, a special finance committee will be appointed to examine the salaries of all paid salary members, the

amount of support given to the persons and ministries supported in number 3 above, and the expenditure limits for the paid elder(s) and Board of Elders. This committee shall consist of at least two elders and the church treasurer. All recommendations concerning changes in these areas will first be presented to the Board of Elders. The elders will present the recommendations to the congregation for approval by a vote as outlined in Article XI, Section F. The final decisions

made per this procedure will be recorded in the written minutes of the next elders' meeting following the meeting with the congregation.

(6) In order to keep orderly records, a treasurer shall be appointed by the Board of Elders. The treasurer shall keep all necessary books, write necessary checks to pay bills, prepare monthly financial statements and any other duties as prescribed by the Board of Elders.

ARTICLE XIV: GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Suggestions and proposals from the flock can be a vital and healthy avenue by which the leadership may minister to the rest of the flock. When handled scripturally, this type of communication edifies the body, ministers to the needs of the flock, helps preserve and promote unity within the church and brings glory to God.

Following the principles outlined above, any member of the flock who harbors a disagreement about any policy or procedure promoted by the church or its leadership, should as a first step, prayerfully and privately approach the leadership. This may be done through informal consultation with an elder, by means of a signed letter to the Board, or meeting with the Board at the church member's request. It is recognized that these steps should be taken prior to public discussion of any issue so as to help the leadership minister to the body more effectively and to help avoid discord and disunity within the flock (Prov. 13:3; 16:27-28; 17:4).

The church leadership should seek to prayerfully accept and address any complaint thus presented and seek to resolve all problems in a manner which best promotes those benefits mentioned above (Prov. 16:21-24).

When these policies are not followed, causing factions and strife, it will be

necessary to exercises church discipline to deal with the offending member as per Article XII (Titus 2:10-11).

ARTICLE XV: AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended or replaced when the need for change is recognized by the elders and the members of the church body. At the time such need is believed to be present, the elders, after consultation with the body, shall make provisional modification in light of Scripture and all essential information on this matter shall be communicated to the congregation in written form, providing adequate time for study and response. A date will be proposed for acceptance of the revisions at a congregational meeting. The congregation will then vote to see if there is a unity of acceptance and understanding of the amendments according to Article XI, Section F. If so, the amendments to the Constitution will become effective.

ARTICLE XVI: DISSOLUTION OF PROPERTY

In the event of dissolution, all of the remaining assets and property of the organization shall, after payment of all necessary expenses thereof, be distributed to organizations that qualify under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, or corresponding provisions of any subsequent Federal tax laws, or to the Federal government or State or local governments for a public purpose, subject to the Federal government or State or local governments for a public purpose, subject to the approval of a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Maine.

The decision to dissolve or disband must be approved by two-thirds of the membership of the congregation by means of the procedure outlined in Article XI, Section F.