

# Grace Covenant Church

## Constitution

### ARTICLE I - NAME

The official name of the Church shall be Grace Covenant Church of Virginia Beach, Virginia, hereafter in this document, for sake of brevity, called Grace Covenant Church.

### ARTICLE II - AFFILIATION

We are an autonomous Church, associated with the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America (ARBCA).

### ARTICLE III - DOCTRINE

We adhere to historic Reformed Baptist beliefs, as expressed in the London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) and, in concise language, in the Abstract of Principles.

### ARTICLE IV - SACRAMENTS

A sacrament is a formal religious act that is sacred, being a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality. We recognize only those two sacraments instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ: (1) Baptism, and (2) The Lord's Supper (see Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:34-39; Romans 6:3-4; Matthew 26:26-29; and 1 Corinthians 11:20-34)

1. Baptism - As an outward sign that he or she has been regenerated, every believer should be baptized in water. Baptism does not save us, but is an expression of an inner salvation already experienced. Because paedobaptism (infant) baptism is nowhere taught in Holy Scripture, we will not baptize infants or children too young to comprehend what is being signified. We do, however, encourage parents to dedicate their children to God, and vow to conscientiously fulfil their God-given role. Our mode of baptism shall be immersion, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. The Lord's Supper - As instituted by Christ himself on the night He was betrayed, and amplified by the Apostle Paul, we will partake of the Lord's Supper on a regular basis. Our partaking points to the death of Christ and symbolizes our reception of his perfect life and atoning sacrifice. It also points to our being made members of his body, the Church, and of our spiritual unity therein. All believers present when the elements of the Lord's Supper are distributed may partake, whether or not they are voting members of Grace Covenant Church. They must take heed, however, to the warning found in 1

Corinthians 11:27-32, lest any partake in a careless manner and bring chastening upon themselves. Children may also partake with us (at the discretion of their parents) if they have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ from the heart, confessed him with their mouth, and been baptized in water, according to his command.

## ARTICLE V-GOVERNMENT

General Statement. – The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, He has ordained that each local church exercise the responsibility of recognizing those whom He is appointing to be elders and deacons in that particular church. Men are to be recognized as elders and deacons by the laying on of hands by the eldership (1 Timothy 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (1 Timothy 5:2). Therefore, each elder and deacon must have the approval of the church as a whole and of the eldership in particular.

Plurality of Elders – By definition, the elder structure of government is a collective form of leadership in which each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office. (Biblical Eldership, Strauch: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1995, page 39, Second Edition) Some elders give more time to the spiritual leadership than others and are called to fulfill more demanding responsibilities. They are worthy of "double honor" (monetary compensation - 1 Timothy 5:17). All elders will hold to the Reformed Faith, as well as the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith.

Elder-Congregation Relationships – Elders have the ultimate responsibility for the spiritual oversight of this church and the shepherding of the congregation (1 Peter 5:1-3). They plan and execute the spiritual affairs, oversee the work of the deacons, and provide leadership in the work of the ministry, with particular emphasis on their primary duties of prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).

Congregational Responsibilities to the Elders - The authority of the elders is very real authority. God's people are, therefore, required to submit when it is biblically exercised (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5). "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves." - 1 Thessalonians 5:12 & 13, NKJV. The church will have at least one business meeting a year.

## ARTICLE VI - MEMBERSHIP

Persons who join Reformed Baptist Church are expected to take their vows seriously. This should manifest itself in their regular attendance, their tithes and offerings; their

voluntary service; their submission; and their spiritual unity. The requirements for membership are:

1. Interview - People should not become members of the visible Church who are not regenerate members of the Christ's (universal) Church, which is visible only to Him. They should be able, therefore, by personal testimony, to confess the Lord Jesus Christ and their union with Him. Candidates for membership shall first be interviewed, either by the Elder(s) of the Church or by persons appointed by them for such service, and recommended to the Deacons, before being received into membership. They must also have been baptized, as believers, or be willing to be baptized in joining.

2. Age - The children of members under the age of eighteen are automatically members by virtue of their parent or guardian's membership, albeit theirs is a non-voting and non-office-holding status. When they reach the age of eighteen, however, they no longer enjoy that special status but are expected, when they are converted, to apply for membership. Believing children of unbelieving (or non attending) parents may also be recognized and gladly received into our local Church family, but they will remain in the same non-voting, non office holding status as their peers until they reach the age of eighteen.

3. Membership Covenant (to be signed before joining)

Having been led by the grace of God through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit to repent of my sin and in faith turn to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and having given public testimony of this faith through baptism, I now joyfully and solemnly enter into this covenant with the members of Grace Covenant Church:

We commit, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in love, to remember one another in prayer, to help one another in times of need, to exercise gentleness and humility in our dealings with one another as we speak the truth in love, to be faithful in our responsibilities and commitments, to be just and honest in our dealings, and to honor ourselves and others for Christ's sake through sexual purity, personal integrity, and abstaining from things or practices which bring harm to our faith or the faith of another.

We commit to faithful participation in times of worship, prayer, study, and fellowship with other believers, to the building up of the church by using our spiritual gifts in ministry, to contributing cheerfully and regularly for the ministry and expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel to the world.

We commit to practice personal and family worship, to train our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and to seek the salvation of our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, and all peoples of the world.

We commit to submit to the teaching and leadership of the Elders inasmuch as it accords in good conscience with the truth of scripture, to the governing of the church according to its Constitution and Bylaws, to the settlement of disputes by and/or among the members of the church without appeal to any outside civil court, according to Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, to the Word of God as our final authority, to the church's discipline upon ourselves and lovingly assume our responsibility to participate in the discipline of other members, as taught in scripture.

We have read the Constitution, Bylaws and Policies of the church, including the dealing with church discipline, conflict resolution and members' rights and responsibilities and membership covenant and agree to be bound by the Policies and Procedures set forth in them.

We will, when we move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

(A brief personal testimony is appropriate in a public worship service, but not mandatory.)

4. Letters - Those coming to us with letters of recommendation from other churches will be received in the same manner as those without them. Persons bringing letters from ARBCA sister churches, however, will always be given special consideration.

5. Inactive Members - Brothers or sisters who leave our area are encouraged to band together with like-minded believers in their new locations, preferably with other Reformed Baptist churches. They may, however, experience short-term absences and wish to remain on our membership roll, albeit in an inactive status. When so, they must furnish written statements to the Deacons to that effect. While away they will not be expected to attend public meetings nor counted for quorum purposes at business meetings. When they return they will be reinstated to active status, provided there has been no significant change in their beliefs or lives.

6. Membership Roll - The membership roll of Reformed Baptist Church, which is maintained by the Deacons, is the list of all members, active and inactive.

7. Discipline and Termination of Membership - If for some reason a member desires to have his name removed from the membership roll, he may do so by furnishing a written statement to that effect to the Deacons. The Bible teaches that we are our brother's keeper. We need daily to exhort one another lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. @A brother or sister who practices sin not only endangers himself, but also the spirit and witness of the whole Church. Anyone who continues to practice sin, whether member, legal trustee, deacon, or elder ... should be approached by the first member who is made aware of it and, in the spirit of meekness and love, restored to fellowship with Christ. If the errant member cannot be corrected by that effort, the

concerned member should follow the guidelines found in Scripture (Matthew 18:15-17; James 5:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; and 2 Corinthians 2:5-11), always moving from the simple to the complex, always involving as few persons as possible, and always with a view toward restoring his brother or sister. Any member who continues in violation of God's holiness and/or his membership vows (after reasonable attempts have been made to restore him) shall have his membership terminated. Likewise, a member who misses four consecutive Lord's Day meetings without good reason and prior notification shall be notified that his or her name will be removed from the membership roll within two weeks unless acceptable justification is provided. Then he or she may reapply for membership at any time

## ARTICLE VII - MEETINGS

Meetings of the membership fall into two categories: (A) non-business meetings (usually social in nature) where non-members may be included and no voting is done; and (B) business meetings, wherein important decisions are made. There shall be at least one such business meeting per year, for the purposes of relaying information; electing new officers; approving budgets; and making major decisions, ie., hiring; building; or excommunicating. Business meetings may be called by the Elder(s), by a majority of Deacons, or by a petition signed by at least twenty percent (20%) of the active membership of the Church, and stating the purpose for the meeting (such a petition must be presented to the Deacons beforehand, who must send written notices in accordance with item 1). For a business meeting to be conducted, the following four elements must be included:

1. Written notice - Notices must be mailed to every voting member at least two weeks in advance, stating the date, time, place, and purpose for the meeting.
2. The Presence of a Quorum - A quorum consists of two-thirds of the active membership of the Church. No voting can take place without such a quorum. Accordingly, the Recording Secretary shall count the number of members present to determine whether or not there is a quorum (see Article IX, item 2-b) and record the same in the minutes.
3. Rules - Among spiritually-minded brethren, rules made by men are rarely needed. As churches grow larger, however, or are overtaken by carnality, maintaining order at business meetings can become difficult. Should either occur at Reformed Baptist Church, Robert's Rules of Order, shall be invoked and followed. The Moderator of the meeting, normally an Elder, may act as Parliamentarian, or he may appoint another member to so serve.
4. Voting - Issues shall be normally decided by simple majority vote of those who are present. If a greater majority is deemed wiser, for certain weighty considerations, any

member may make the motion, in advance of the casting of the vote, to do so. If seconded and approved by the membership, that becomes the rule for that decision. The votes shall be counted by at least two active members (one must be a deacon) and recorded in the official minutes of the Church. Votes resulting in a tie shall be taken a second time, after a season of prayer. If the voting remains tied, the issue may be taken up at a future business meeting.

## Article VIII-Office of Elder

Selection of Elders – Will be based on: Desire, Qualification, and Examination.

**Desire.** The initial step toward becoming an elder is the expressed desire to do so, as seen in 1 Timothy 3:1. Such a person should approach an elder or the elder board expressing his desires.

**Qualification and Examination.** Upon being made aware of the desire, the elder board will provide the potential candidate with a written application. Once the written application is accepted by the elder board, he will become a candidate. The elder board will begin comparing the candidate's life to the qualifications outlined in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1-7). If, in the opinion of the existing elder board, he appears qualified, his name will be presented to the congregation for further examination. This will be accomplished both by the announcement of his candidacy during regularly scheduled worship services on the Lord's Day and by letter from the elder board to each member of Grace Covenant Church. If not, the elder board will explain to the candidate which qualification or qualifications were found lacking and provide recommendations for personal and/or spiritual development, which could be a basis for reconsideration.

**Relationships Among the Elders.**

**Elder Responsibilities to Fellow Elders -** The authority of every elder is the same. Thus, every elder has equal rule in the church. Though gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from elder to elder, this diversity must not undermine real parity among the elders. Each elder has the responsibility to hold each other accountable and lift each other up in prayer (Proverbs 27:17).

**Decision-Making Process.** Unanimity in all major decisions, doctrinal or otherwise. In lesser matters, it should be possible for individuals to allow their preferences to be overridden by the majority without feeling that some great personal or theological cause has been sacrificed. (A Noble Task, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1987, pages 83, 84 - Strauch - pages 126, 127, Second Edition)

**Single Elder Contingency.** As we believe it to be the God-ordained standard, maintaining a Plurality of Elders is the desire of the Elder Board of Grace Covenant

Church. If, however, the situation arises where only one qualified, recognized elder is serving locally at Grace Covenant Church, the following guidelines will be observed.

That elder will meet regularly with the Deacon Board to promote fellowship, accountability, and encouragement.

That elder will keep the Deacon Board informed of the status of the ministry regarding routine operations.

That elder will meet regularly with the Deacon Board to discuss the State of the Flock. That elder and the members of the Deacon Board must be particularly devoted to prayer regarding the raising up of additional qualified men to aid in the shepherding of this local assembly.

Duties - As with literal shepherds, the duties of elders consist of feeding the flock, leading the flock, and protecting the flock. Accordingly, the flock is fed the whole counsel of God as it is found in Holy Scripture, led by personal example and exhortation, and protected from unsound doctrine and/or practice by those who must prayerfully watch for your souls. In keeping with these duties, the Elder(s) may call business and other meetings of the membership at their discretion; serve as members ex-officio of the diaconate; preside at business meetings (unless the purpose of the meeting is to consider their removal); and select guest speakers, when appropriate, to enhance and balance their own ministry.

Removal of an Elder.

Any elder may be removed involuntarily from office by a 60% no-confidence vote by secret ballot of all Regular and Associate Members at a meeting called for that purpose. Such a meeting must be called at least thirty days in advance. These are solemn proceedings that must be initiated and conducted only with much care, prayer, and wisdom from the Lord.

Removal will be effective immediately following the vote. In the case of a paid elder, a minimum thirty-day compensation package will be provided.

Resignation of an Elder - Should an Elder choose to resign his office, or leave the Church altogether, he shall give at least sixty days written notice of his intention, hopefully explaining his reasons for so doing. In certain circumstances this requirement may be waived by the majority vote of the remaining Elder(s) and Deacons.

Article IX-Office of Deacon.

Definition. Deacons are to serve under the direction of the elders, undertaking those areas of service necessary for the church's functioning that would otherwise prohibit the elders from performing their biblical responsibilities. All deacons are subject to the church's disciplinary procedures.

Appointment and Qualifications. Deacons shall be appointed from the men of this church, and shall meet the spiritual qualifications set forth in the Word of God (1 Timothy 3:8-13). All deacons will hold to the Reformed Faith, as well as the Abstract of Principles.

Evaluation and Approval. Deacon candidates will be evaluated and approved by the elder session(1 Timothy 3:8-13). They will then be presented to congregation for approval.

Duties - The specific duties of deacons will vary, according to the number of elder(s) serving, the willingness of members to labor, and the size and ministries of the Church. Treasurer, for example, responsible for receiving and recording contributions to the Church, and Recording Secretary, responsible for keeping the official minutes of the Church, are deacon roles. Other duties include. The Deacons shall each be engaged in ministry to Church members, especially the fatherless and widows.

Auditing - Whether internal or external, the Deacons shall arrange for an annual audit of every Church account. This audit must be conducted by someone who was not managing a Church account during the year being audited.

Maintenance - The Deacons shall insure that all church building(s), grounds, properties, and equipment are properly warranted, cleaned, repaired, and readied for public meetings. After buying new items; disposing of; or replacing worn items, the Deacons shall periodically furnish that updated information to the Legal Trustees, who are charged with the responsibility of maintaining an inventory and insuring it against theft, vandalism, or natural disaster.

Diaconal Structure - After their election it falls to the Elder(s) to appoint the Deacons to their various roles (Acts 6:3). This will normally be done in consultation with the deacons themselves, and will be based upon their gifts, experiences, and various life circumstances. Also, depending upon the gifts and needs of the Elder(s) and the character and maturity of the Deacons, the Elder(s) may appoint one of them to act as Chairman of the diaconate (body of deacons). Every elder is automatically a member ex-officio of the diaconate, however, and may or may not attend their meetings. When an elder does attend such a meeting, and wishes to do so, he shall be permitted to speak and given first place on their agenda. Should the Church find itself without an Elder, the Deacons shall assume the responsibilities of the same, to the best of their ability, until an Elder can be found and properly ordained. During such times they shall also select one of their number to act as their Chairman and the Moderator at Church business meetings.

## ARTICLE X - LEGAL TRUSTEES

Legal Trustees, referred to hereafter as Trustees for brevity's sake, are necessary to satisfy the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. To comply and use this requirement and serve the interests of our Church, we require that there be three, elected by the majority vote of the membership at a duly called business meeting wherein a quorum is present (see Article VII). The Trustee receiving the greatest number of votes automatically becomes Chairman of The Trustees, and will act as Liaison to the Elder(s) and Deacons. In the event of a tie vote, the newly elected Trustees shall meet and decide among themselves who will be their Chairman. They shall then notify the Elder(s) and Deacons of their decision. If unable to reach a consensus as to the Chairmanship within one month, they shall communicate that inability to the Deacons, who will appoint their Chairman.

Due to the legalities, costs, and inconvenience of registering their names in Court, the Trustees shall be elected for terms of five years. Trustees may, however, be re-elected to successive terms. Trustees must be stable members, men of great integrity, who are likely to remain at the Church long enough to fulfil their terms. As with all other Church offices, however, a Trustee can resign or be removed from office in mid-term for scandalous behavior or incompetence. Upon the death, resignation, or removal of a Trustee, a business meeting shall be called (in accordance with Article VII) to elect a replacement. The new Trustee shall be elected for the duration of the departed Trustee=s term. The specific duties of the Trustees include:

1. Signing and Maintaining Important Church Documents - The Trustees legally own the Church's assets for the Congregation. Their signatures are required on certain legal documents pertaining to buying, owning, and selling real estate, and securing mortgages and loans. Trustees act only as directed by the voting membership. They have no personal liability, so long as they are lawfully executing their office as Trustees. The Trustees shall designate one of their number to keep the files of important Church documents. These include Court documents pertaining to their appointment, deeds, property appraisals, insurance policies, letters to and from attorneys at law, and letters to and from state, federal, and local governments.

2. Maintaining the Archives - The Trustees are responsible for maintaining the archives (permanent records) of the Church. After the close of a year, when the Deacons have completed their work; conducted their annual audit; corrected the minutes (proceedings) of all business and deacons meetings recorded and signed by the Recording Secretary; sent annual reports to the membership, and the Treasurer has sent statements of annual contributions to every known contributor, they shall put everything pertaining to that year in final form and turn it over to the Chairman of the Trustees. This then becomes part of the permanent archives of the Church. If this is not done by the end of May, the Trustees shall petition the Deacons for said records. If the records are not in their possession by June 30th the Trustees shall call a meeting of the Membership (in accordance with Article VII) to determine the cause thereof.

3. Releasing Information - From time to time, the Trustees may be called upon by the Membership, Elder(s), or Deacons, to search the archives for needed historical information. With a reasonable amount of time given them to comply, the Trustees shall produce that information. However, the Trustees must never hand over the originals of such records without being present with them. The permanent archives of the Church are important and irreplaceable. The originals must never be handled carelessly, passed from person to person, separated, altered, or lost. Should information ever be required by the Internal Revenue Service concerning a person's declared financial contributions, it is normally provided by the outgoing Treasurer. Once archived, however, the Trustees must provide that information.

4. Maintaining Inventory and Insurance Information - The Trustees, during the year following their election, shall take an existing insurance coverage and make sure that the insurance company is periodically updated concerning the assets owned by the Church. The Trustees shall also, at least once during their term, compare insurance companies and costs, recommending changes, if needed, to the Deacons. This is a matter of good stewardship and an important role, especially after a fire, theft, or other painful providence. careful inventory of every significant item owned by the Church, estimating dates of purchase and replacement costs, and recording model and serial numbers when needed. The Trustees themselves shall determine what is to be considered significant and therefore subject to being listed and/or insured. This will probably include electronic equipment, sound room equipment, kitchen equipment, audio-visual equipment, furniture, hymn books, office and cleaning equipment, lawn care equipment, choir robes, and any vehicle owned by the Church. The Trustees shall also review the Church

5. Other Duties - At the pleasure of the Membership, expressed by majority vote at any duly called business meeting (see Article VII), the Trustees may also be tasked with other assignments.

#### ARTICLE XI - PROPERTY

The building and grounds of Reformed Baptist Church are dedicated to the cause of God and truth. Any outside group desiring to use our facilities must have the prior approval of the Elder(s) and Deacons.

#### ARTICLE XII - DISPOSAL OF ASSETS

At least three business meetings are required to disband Reformed Baptist Church(may God deliver us). Should a majority of members vote to disband the Church (at a business meeting called for that purpose; see Article VII), they shall at that time elect a special disbanding committee to recommend how best to dispose of tangible remaining

assets (they shall elect their own chairman). In so doing, the committee shall seek the furtherance of Christ's cause upon earth, that is, the building of His beloved Church. Special consideration should be given to those associations, churches, and/or missionaries that share our Reformed Baptist doctrinal views. Also, at that time, a second meeting shall be scheduled to enable the disbanding committee to present its recommendations to the membership.

At that second meeting, if the recommendations of the disbanding committee are adopted (see Article VII), a procedure and time line shall be established for the execution of same, and a third business meeting scheduled, to enable the disbanding committee to report the distributions they have made to the membership, and provide the necessary documentation. Also, at that second meeting, a volunteer shall be elected to store several boxes of Church records for not less than seven years. This is to protect past and present members from audits by the Internal Revenue Service and/or possible satanically-inspired, after-the fact, hard-to-defend, accusations of wrong doing. If the person elected does not have space available for such storage, and space must be rented, the cost of same shall be paid in advance from remaining Church assets. A reasonable amount should also be included to anticipate the possibility of this elected archivist having to dig out, produce, and re-store such records, perhaps even appearing at a legal proceeding. All Church records may be destroyed seven years after the Church has been disbanded.

At that third (and hopefully, final) business meeting, each remaining member shall be furnished with an itemized statement, showing the exact disposition of every item and dollar, signed by every member of the disbanding committee. Nothing is to be excluded. Should differences of opinion grow into a dispute, a knowledgeable Virginia attorney shall be consulted and remunerated from Church assets. Should that occur, yet another meeting shall be scheduled. Under no circumstances is The Congregation of The Reformed Baptist Church of Virginia Beach, Virginia, to be considered disbanded while tangible assets remain.

#### ARTICLE XIII - AMENDMENT

These Articles of Association may be amended, in whole or in part, by a majority vote of the active membership at a duly called business meeting (see Article VII, item 1).

<sup>1</sup>Before voting to excommunicate a member, he (or she) must have first been afforded an opportunity to defend his innocence. He will also be invited to attend the meeting at which his excommunication is be considered but he cannot vote.

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