



**Grace Church of Lakeland
BYLAWS 2017**

**ARTICLE 1
NAME AND PURPOSE**

SECTION 1.01—NAME

This congregation of believers shall be known as Grace Church of Lakeland. It is incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the laws of the state of Florida.

SECTION 1.02—PURPOSE

This congregation is organized as a church exclusively for charitable, religious, and educational purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Revenue Law), for such purposes including, but not limited to, proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; establishing and maintaining religious worship; educating believers in a manner consistent with the requirements of Holy Scripture; and maintaining missionary activities in the United States and any foreign country.

**ARTICLE 2
STATEMENT OF FAITH**

SECTION 2.01—AUTHORITY OF STATEMENT OF FAITH

- A. The Statement of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our faith. The Bible itself is the sole and final source of all that we believe. We do believe, however, that the Statement of Faith accurately represents the teachings of the Bible and, therefore, is binding upon all members.
- B. All literature, whether print or electronic, used in the church shall be in complete agreement with the Statement of Faith. In all conflicts regarding interpretation of the Statement of Faith, the Council of Elders, on behalf of the church, have the final authority.

SECTION 2.02—STATEMENT OF FAITH

A. Beliefs on Doctrine

1. The Word of God

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

2. The Trinity

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, that these are equal in every divine perfection, and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence and redemption.

3. God the Father

We believe in God, the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of all people, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ.

4. Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, and ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth.

5. The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ, and that He is an abiding helper, teacher and guide.

6. Regeneration

We believe that all people are sinners by nature and by choice and are, therefore, under condemnation. We believe that those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

7. The Church

We believe in the universal church, a living spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all regenerated persons are members. We believe in the local church, consisting of a company of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized on a credible profession of faith, and associated for worship, work and fellowship. We believe that God has laid upon the members of the local church the primary task of giving the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

8. Christian Conduct

We believe that Christians should live for the glory of God and the well-being of others; that their conduct should be blameless before the world; that they should be faithful stewards of their possessions; and that they should seek to realize for themselves and others the full stature of maturity in Christ.

9. The Ordinances

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water into the name of the triune God. We believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for commemoration of His death. We believe that these two ordinances should be observed and administered until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

10. Religious Liberty

We believe that every human being has direct relations with God, and is responsible to God alone in all matters of faith; that each church is independent and must be free from interference by any ecclesiastical or political authority; that therefore Church and State must be kept separate as having different functions, each fulfilling its duties free from dictation or patronage of the other.

11. Church Cooperation

We believe that local churches can best promote the cause of Jesus Christ by cooperating with one another in a denominational organization. Such an organization, whether it is the Conference or a district conference, exists and functions by the will of the churches. Cooperation in a conference is voluntary and may be terminated at any time. Churches may likewise cooperate with interdenominational fellowships on a voluntary independent basis.

12. The Last Things

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal felicity of the righteous, and the endless suffering of the wicked.

The Statement of Faith was adopted by the Converge Worldwide (Baptist General Conference) in 1951, reaffirmed in 1990 and amended in 1997. Grace Church of Lakeland is an affiliated partner of Converge Southeast (www.converge.org).

B. Beliefs on Cultural Issues

(1) Marriage and Sexuality.

- a. We believe that the term “marriage” has only one, legitimate meaning, and that is marriage sanctioned by God, which joins one man and one woman in a single, covenantal union, as delineated by Scripture. (Matt. 19:4-6)

- b. Whenever there is a conflict between the church's position and any new legal standard for marriage, the church's statement of faith, doctrines and biblical positions will govern. (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:22-23; Mark 10:6-9; I Cor. 7:1-9).
- c. Marriage ceremonies performed in any facility owned, leased or rented by Grace Church of Lakeland will be only those ceremonies sanctioned by God, joining one man with one woman as their gender was determined at birth.
- d. We oppose efforts to alter one's bodily identity (e.g., cross-sex hormone therapy, gender reassignment surgery) to refashion it to conform to one's perceived gender identity.
- e. We continue to oppose steadfastly all efforts by any governing official or body to validate transgender identity as morally praiseworthy (Isaiah 5:20); and be it further that we oppose all cultural efforts to validate claims to transgender identity. (Ps 139:13-16)
- f. Our love for the Gospel and urgency for the Great Commission must include declaring the whole counsel of God, proclaiming what Scripture teaches about God's design for us as male and female persons created in His image and for His glory (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 20:27; Romans 11:33-36).
- g. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of marriage as defined above. We believe that any other type of sexual activity, identity or expression that lies outside of this definition of marriage, including those that are becoming more accepted in the culture and the courts, are sinful expressions of and contradictory to God's original design and purpose for human sexual activity. (Gen. 2:24; Lev. 18:1-30; Rom. 1: 26-29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9-10; 1 Thess. 4:1-8)

(2) Family Relationships.

- a. We believe that men and women are spiritually equal in position before God but that God has ordained distinct and separate spiritual functions for men and women in the home and the church. The husband is to be the leader of the home, and men are to be leaders in the church. (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:4-5, 12)
- b. We believe that God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church. The wife is to submit herself to the Scriptural leadership of her husband as the church submits to the headship of Christ. Children are a wonderful gift and heritage from the Lord. Parents are responsible for teaching their children spiritual and moral values through consistent lifestyle example and appropriate training and discipline. (Gen. 1:26-28; Ex. 20:12; Deut. 6:4-9; Ps. 127:3-5; Prov. 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; Mk. 10:6-12; 1 Cor. 7:1-16; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Pet. 3:1-7)

(3) Divorce and Remarriage.

- a. We believe that divorce was never intended to be part of God's design and is always costly to the divorcing parties, connected children and society (Mal. 2:14-16; Matt. 19:3-12)

- b. Divorce is not an unforgivable sin, but it is a result of sin and hardness of heart by one or both parties. Anyone who loves God and knows of His goodness would never consider divorce without broad input from community and spiritual counsel.
- c. Divorced, remarried persons or divorced single persons are not prevented from holding positions of service and/or leadership in the church (Mark 10:11-12; Rom. 7:1-3; I Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6; I Cor. 7:10-16).

(4) Abortion.

- a. We believe that human life begins at conception and that the unborn child is a living human being. Abortion is murder and constitutes the unjustified, unexcused taking of unborn human life. (Job 3:16; Ps. 51:5; 139:13-16; Isa. 44:24; 49:1, 5; Jer. 1:5; 20:15-18; Luke 1:36, 44)
- b. In addition, there is forgiveness for mothers who have had an abortion. The Gospel affirms that they can be washed of its guilt and spared it's just punishment through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. In His mercy, God is willing to forgive anyone who has participated, in any manner, of facilitating or performing an abortion. The Bible declares that God's grace is far greater than our sin. (Isa. 1:18; Mark 3:28b; Rom. 4:7 and 8?)

(5) Euthanasia.

- a. We believe that an act or omission, which, of itself or by intention, facilitates premature death, is assuming a decision that is to be reserved for God.
- b. We do not believe that discontinuing medical procedures that are extraordinary or disproportionate to the expected outcome is euthanasia. (Ex. 20:13; 23:7; Job 14:5; Ps 139:16; Matt. 5:21; Acts 17:28)

(6) Love.

- a. We believe that we should demonstrate love for others, not only toward fellow believers, but also toward those who are not believers, those who oppose us, and those who engage in sinful actions.
- b. We are to deal with those who oppose us graciously, gently, patiently, and humbly. God forbids the stirring up of strife, the taking of revenge, or the threat or use of violence as a means of resolving personal conflict or obtaining personal justice.
- c. Although God commands us to abhor sinful actions, we are to love and pray for any person who engages in such actions. (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 5:44-48; Luke 6:31; John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:9-10; 17-21; 13:8-10; Phil. 2:2-4; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Titus 3:2; I Peter 3:8-9).

(7) Racism

- a. The Bible, our infallible guide in all matters of human relationships, speaks clearly and explicitly against racism, prejudice, and discrimination.
- b. We consider racism, prejudice, and discrimination to be sins against our fellowman, and therefore sins against God, who has created all humankind in His image.

- c. Grace Church calls to repentance any and all that have sinned against God by participating in racism through personal thought or action, through religious and social structures, or through failure to address the evils of racism. (Acts 10:34-35; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; James 2:9; 1 John 2:11; Rev. 7:9)

(8) Lawsuits Within the Church.

- a. We believe that Christians are prohibited from bringing civil lawsuits within the Church.
- b. We do believe, however, that a Christian may seek compensation for injuries from another Christian's insurance company as long as the claim is pursued without malice or slander. (1 Cor. 6:1-8; Eph. 4:31-32).

(9) Protection of Children.

- a. We believe that children are a heritage from the Lord and must be absolutely protected within the church from any form of abuse or molestation.
- b. The church has zero tolerance for any person, whether a pastor, elder, deacon, paid staff, church ministry leader, volunteer, member, or visitor, who abuses or molests a child. (Ps. 127:3-5; Matt. 18:6; Matt. 19:14; Mark 10:14).
- c. By Florida law (Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes), anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is being physically abused, sexually abused, neglected or is dependent is required to report this information.
- d. If abuse is suspected, they should immediately call the Florida Abuse Hot Line at (800) 962-2873.
- e. The Lead Pastor and/or Elder should be informed immediately of any suspected child abuse.

**ARTICLE 3
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

SECTION 3.01—QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

- A. Those seeking membership, who are 18 years of age or older, must, through their actions, words, lifestyle, and affiliations, evidence a genuine experience of regeneration through faith in and personal acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Regardless of age, water baptism alone is not a basis for membership at Grace Church.
- B. A child, growing up at Grace Church, upon turning 18 years of age, will then be eligible to follow the membership process in order to become a member of Grace Church.
- C. Candidates for membership will be required to attend pre-membership classes led by the Lead Pastor and/or Elder, in which they will review the Statement of Faith, the bylaws of Grace Church, general church practices and policies, and expectations and opportunities of members.

- D. At the conclusion of the pre-membership classes, candidates will meet personally with the Lead Pastor and another Elder.
- E. Prior to being recommended for formal membership, the Lead Pastor and/or Council of Elders will affirm that the candidate fully subscribes to the Grace Church Statement of Faith by submitting a signed Grace Church Membership Covenant.
- F. Following the above process, church membership will be granted upon the recommendation of the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders, and upon compliance with any one of the following conditions:
 - (1) By Believer's Baptism defined as water baptism by immersion, at this local church following a profession of faith as a believer in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord a;
 - (2) By Letter of Transfer from another local church of like faith and practice, or other written statement of good standing from the prior church if the applicant has been previously water baptized by immersion subsequent to a profession of faith; or
 - (3) By Testimony of Faith, having previously been water baptized by immersion in another local church of like faith and practice.

SECTION 3.02—PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP

- A. Only members of at least eighteen years of age who are physically present at a duly called business meeting of the church shall be entitled to vote. There shall be no proxy or absentee voting.
- B. The eligible membership of the church may only exercise voting privileges in those areas that are defined and limited by these bylaws. Members may not vote to initiate any church action; rather the vote of a member is to confirm and ratify the direction of the church as determined by the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders.
- C. Determinations of the internal affairs of this church are ecclesiastical matters and shall be determined exclusively by the church's own rules and procedures. The Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders shall oversee and/or conduct all aspects of this church.
- D. Membership in this church does not afford the members with any property, contractual, or civil rights based on principles of democratic government.

- E. Although the general public is invited to all of the church's worship services, the church property remains private property.
- F. The Lead Pastor (or in his absence, an individual designated by the Council of Elders) has the authority to suspend or revoke the right of any person, including a member, to enter or remain on church property. If after being notified of such a suspension or revocation, the person enters or remains on church property, the person may, at the discretion of the Lead Pastor, (or in his absence, an individual designated by the Council of Elders), be treated as a trespasser.
- G. A member may inspect or copy the prepared financial statements of the church and the minutes of the proceedings of church and committee meetings, provided they shall have made a written request upon the church and the church has received the written request at least five business days before the requested inspection date.
- H. Board meeting minutes and discipline committee meetings, as well as other information involving privacy interests, such as, but not limited to donor records, lists of names and addresses of church members, individual benevolence, individual salaries, health information, background checks, the accounting books and financial records of the church, and social security numbers, are exempt from this provision and are not subject to inspection or copy without the expressed permission of the member whose privacy interests are involved.
- I. The church may impose a reasonable charge, covering the costs of labor and materials, for copies of any documents provided to the member before releasing the copies to the member.

SECTION 3.03—AUTOMATIC TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

- A. The membership of any individual member shall automatically terminate without notice if the member in question has not attended a regular worship service of the church in the preceding six months. This provision may be waived at the discretion of the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders upon the showing of good cause.
- B. The membership of any individual shall automatically terminate without notice if the member adopts opinions—verbally, in print, via social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), or in any other manner or medium—that are in direct contravention to the Grace Church's Statement of Faith.
- C. Since agreement with the church's Statement of Faith is a requirement for membership in this church, the member's non-conforming statements will be treated as the member's resignation by the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders.

- D. The membership of any individual member shall automatically terminate without notice if the member unites in membership with another local church.
- E. The membership of any individual member shall automatically terminate without notice if a member files a lawsuit in violation of Section 2.02 (B) (8).
- F. The membership of an individual will automatically terminate upon his or her death.
- G. For any memberships terminated in accordance with the above provisions, with the exception of memberships terminated under (E) above, the church may send a letter informing the prior member of the termination, but this is not required.

SECTION 3.04—TRANSFER OR RESIGNATION OF MEMBERSHIP

- A. Members not under the disciplinary process of Section 3.05 may request that letters of transfer be sent to another church.
- B. A member may resign at any time, but no letter of transfer or written statement of good standing will be issued upon such resignation, except at the discretion of the Lead Pastor.

SECTION 3.05—SPIRITUAL RESTORATION OF A MEMBER

- A. When a member becomes aware of an offense, of such magnitude that it hinders the spiritual growth and testimony of an individual in the local church or the body as a whole, they are to go alone to the offending party and seek to restore their brother/sister.
- B. It is important, before they proceed to restore their brother/sister, they should first examine themselves and seek out the brother/sister with a spirit of humility and have the goal of restoration. (Gal. 6:1-2)
- C. If reconciliation is not reached, a second member is to accompany the one seeking to resolve the matter. This second step should also be preceded by self-examination and exercised in a spirit of humility with the goal of restoration.
- D. If the matter is still unresolved, after the steps outlined in subsections (A) and (B) have been taken, the two members who are aware of the offense, shall bring the issue before the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders. They function as representatives of the church body in keeping with Matthew 18.

- E. The purpose is always to seek full spiritual healing and restoration with the individual. The Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders shall attempt to meet with the offending brother/sister as soon as possible. If reconciliation is not reached, the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders, as representatives of the church body, may terminate the individual's membership without further notice to the individual(s).
- F. Unless the matter involves an issue of safety or security to the members of the church at large, the specifics of the matter shall not be addressed in a public forum or with the general church membership.
- G. The Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders shall be entitled to the same steps as other church members and be subject to the same restoration process. If the Lead Pastor, an Elder, or a Deacon, is the subject of a disciplinary matter, he/she shall not be permitted to vote on his own membership termination.
- H. For any memberships terminated in accordance with this provision, the Lead Pastor may cause a letter to be written informing the prior member of the termination, although the Lead Pastor is not required to do so.
- I. The procedures provided in this section are scripturally based on Matt. 18:15-20; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:1-11; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6, 10-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20; and Titus 3:10-11.

ARTICLE 4 CHURCH OFFICERS

SECTION 4.01—SUMMARY

The “church officers” are designated as the Lead Pastor, members of the Council of Elders, and members of the Council of Deacons. This may also include a Council Secretary, Church Treasurer, and any other officers the church officers deem necessary.

SECTION 4.02—DESIGNATION OF CORPORATE OFFICERS

As an accommodation to the legal relationships outside the church, the Lead Pastor shall serve as president of the corporation; the chairman of the Council of Elders shall serve as vice president of the corporation; the church council secretary shall serve as secretary of the corporation; and the church treasurer shall serve as treasurer of the corporation.

SECTION 4.03—ELIGIBILITY FOR OFFICE

- A. The church shall not install or retain an officer who fails to adhere to or expresses disagreement with the Statement of Faith set forth in Article 2. All church officers, upon request of the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders, shall affirm their agreement with the Statement of Faith.
- B. All church officers must be approved initially and thereafter annually by the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders in order for them to commence or continue in their offices.
- C. Only church members are eligible for election or appointment to any church office or position.

SECTION 4.04—COUNCIL OF ELDERS

1. BIBLICAL OFFICE OF ELDER

- A. The Council of Elders shall consist of members selected by the Pastor and current Elders based on spiritual gifts of leadership, administration and wisdom and maturity.
- B. The church at its annual business meeting or special called business meeting must approve an Elder by a 75% majority vote of those members present.
- C. Since the office of an Elder is a biblical one, certain qualifications of spiritual maturity must be met (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- D. The Bible indicates that men are to only hold this “ruling” office and that the church is to set them apart for this ministry in a special act of laying on of hands. These men will lead the church and be its primary shepherds and teachers.
- E. The Elder is a *Christian* first. It is critical for both the church and its Elders that leadership is seen in a proper light. Pastors and churches suffer when pastors are seen in an inflated manner or as some “professional” class of Christians far removed from “the rest of us.”
- F. There are several Biblical principles that inform how an Elder should view of himself.
 - (1) Elders are men under authority before they are men entrusted with authority (1 Cor. 11:3, Rom. 1:1).

- (2) Elders are “brothers in Christ” with all those in their church before they are “fathers in the faith” to anyone (Romans 12:10, John 1:12).
- (3) Pastors are also sheep before they are shepherds (John 10:1-15; 1 Pet. 5:4).
- (4) Overseers are servants before they are “leaders” (Mark 10:42-45; 1 Tim. 3:4-5).
- (5) Elders must see themselves as only one part of the body of Christ with Christ alone as the head (Eph. 1:23; 4:15-16; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

2. PROCESS OF SELECTION:

- A. The congregation will be informed of the need of additional Elders and given at least two weeks advance notice in order to prayerfully consider names of the man/men recommended by the Council of Elders.
- B. These candidates will be interviewed by both the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders. If the candidate(s) show both willingness and spiritual fitness for the office, their names will be brought to the congregation for final confirmation by the membership of Grace Church.
- C. The candidate must be affirmed as an elder by a 75% majority vote of members present and qualified to vote. This vote shall be taken by written-secret ballot.
- D. Upon the recommendation of the Council of Elders and the vote of the church, a Special Business Meeting can be called to dismiss an Elder at any time.
- E. A former Lead and/or Senior Pastor of Grace Church will not be considered nor allowed to serve on the Council of Elders.

3. PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES:

The responsibilities of the Council of Elders will include, but not be limited to:

- A. To lead in planning of the future direction and goals of the church, to set ministry direction and the structures of ministry and in communicating these decisions to the church body.
- B. To oversee the planning of the budget, including annual reviews of staff salaries and benefits to be presented at the Annual Business Meeting. They are responsible for the work of the Financial Officer and/or Treasurer, keeping track of the income and expenditures.
- C. The establishment, hiring, replacement and dismissal of any and all staff positions, providing the total budgeted salaries are not exceeded.

- D. To appoint people to fill vacancies on ministry teams and other positions due to illness, dismissal or resignation.
- E. To promote and teach sound doctrine.
- F. To oversee the legal affairs of the church, including the management of the church properties, enter legal arrangements, and sign legal papers necessary for “corporation” of Grace Church.
- G. To hire, recommend or appoint from among the church membership, leaders, which include:
 - (1) To appoint a Business Meeting Moderator: They will set the agenda and preside at all the meetings of the congregation. If possible, he/she should represent Grace Church at the Converge Southeast annual meeting.
 - (2) To appoint a Recording Secretary: The recording secretary will keep the minutes of all the meetings of the church and elders and take care of the correspondence in the name of the church as assigned. It is the responsibility of the recording secretary to maintain an accurate record of all the members of the church, plus any other historical records of Grace Church.
 - (3) To appoint a Financial Officer: The Financial Officer (F.O.) is the principal steward of financial policies and procedures. The F.O. will oversee the following functions:
 - i. Manage the church's relationship with government taxing authorities, i.e. submit tax funds, reports;
 - ii. Submit policy and procedure recommendations to the Elders;
 - iii. Submit reports required by the Elders;
 - iv. Deposit of all funds in a timely fashion;
 - v. Keep confidential records of all contributors;
 - vi. Oversee the payment of expenses as authorized by the budget or congregation with checks which are required to have two signatures.
 - vii. The Financial Officer will be responsible to the Elders and will work with a Financial Team appointed to help with Grace's financial policies.
- H. To appoint an Elder of Benevolence Ministries: The Council of Elders shall disburse the benevolence fund in cooperation with the Lead Pastor, and shall assist him in all other outreach efforts of the church.

- I. To oversee the needs of the church in the absence of the Lead Pastor: They shall provide the pulpit supply and choose a moderator for church meetings if the Lead Pastor is unavailable or the office of Lead Pastor is vacant. Upon the death, resignation, or dismissal of the Lead Pastor, the Council of Elders will appoint a pulpit committee.
- J. To provide oversight of the church properties: All appointments for public worship, Bible studies and the arrangements thereof, including time, place and the use of all properties belonging to the church, for any other purposes, shall be under the direction of the Lead Pastor, who, with the advice of the Council of Elders, will determine the appropriateness of all property use, as well as persons permitted to the use the church property.
- K. To function as the Board of Directors of Grace Church: The Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders shall constitute the Grace Church “Board of Directors” of the corporation.
- L. In addition to the various powers specifically granted the Elders under these bylaws, the Council of Elders have authority to exercise the following powers, upon authorization by a 75% majority vote of the eligible members at a duly-called business meeting:
 - (1) To purchase, lease, or otherwise acquire real and personal property on behalf of the church, and to take real and personal property by will, gift, or bequest on behalf of the church.
 - (2) To sell, convey, alienate, transfer, lease, assign, exchange, or otherwise dispose of, and to mortgage, pledge, or otherwise encumber the real and personal property of the church, to borrow money and incur indebtedness for the purpose and use of the church; to cause to be executed, issued, and delivered for the indebtedness, in the name of the church, promissory notes, bonds, debentures, or other evidence of indebtedness; and to secure repayment by deeds of trust, mortgages, or pledges.
 - (3) To exercise all powers necessary for the dissolution of the church corporation.
 - (4) All responsibilities shall be compatible with the laws of the State of Florida.
- M. The Council of Elders shall review the church bylaws annually, and shall bring suggested changes to a meeting of the Council of Elders of which has been previously designated for the purpose of reviewing the bylaws

N. Provide oversight to the safety and security of Grace Church members and attenders: The Elders shall, in conjunction with the Lead Pastor, conduct a regular ministry liability and safety review of the following policies and/or topics:

- (1) Child protection, including but not limited to worker screening procedures, child abuse reporting procedures, and worker training on child abuse prevention;
- (2) Building safety and security measures;
- (3) Insurance and liability coverage;
- (4) Financial accountability;
- (5) Transportation; and
- (6) Sexual harassment.

SECTION 4.05—LEAD PASTOR/ELDER

- A. The role of Lead Pastor-Elder is supportable by biblical precedent and practical wisdom. It is not a biblical office per se and therefore not absolutely required in this polity. Nonetheless, the Bible presents numerous examples of groups in the Bible where a man is or becomes the leader, or at least the spokesman.
- B. Whether it is Moses over Israel, heads of tribes and clans in Israel, judges and kings over Israel, Peter over the Twelve apostles, or James in the Jerusalem church, it seems that biblically there is typically a man identified as the leader or spokesman (e.g., Acts 1:15; 15:13ff.).
- C. Further, practical wisdom tells us that a group is served when one individual is identified as the primary leader or spokesman, even if he is technically a “first among equals.”
- D. He is an equal among his fellow elders in the exercise of authority, not another class of elder, but his role is distinct in that he serves as a leader of his fellow elders.
- E. The Lead Pastor/Elder is part of a plurality of elders, and his character and gifting are not necessarily uniformly greater than that of the other men. He shall perform the duties of an elder as described in Section 4.04, above, but shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.
- F. The Lead Pastor shall be responsible to fill the pulpit for each regularly scheduled church service as well as any special services.

- G. In the event of his absence, he (or an Elder in the case of a vacancy of a Lead Pastor or where the Lead Pastor is temporarily unable to perform his duties) shall be responsible to invite speakers from within the membership or outside the church to preach in a manner consistent with the beliefs articulated in the Statement of Faith.
- H. The Lead Pastor with the Council of Elders shall be responsible to establish mandatory safety and security procedures for all ministries and programs. There will be a zero-tolerance policy with regard to abuse of minors; and any reasonable suspicions of child abuse alleged to be perpetrated by staff, volunteers, members or non-members will be reported to the appropriate law enforcement or child abuse prevention authorities.
- I. The pastor or his designee will be responsible to provide yearly child abuse prevention training for all staff and volunteers.

SECTION 4.06—CALLING OF A LEAD PASTOR/ELDER

- A. Upon the resignation, death or dismissal of the pastor, the church shall seek a male candidate who subscribes to the Statement of Faith and bylaw provisions of the church, and whose life aligns with the qualifications of a Lead Pastor/Elder as described in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.
- B. The church shall abide by the following guidelines for calling a pastor:
 - (1) The Council of Elders shall select a pastoral selection team. The pastoral selection team shall be composed of 5 or 7 people, be members in good standing if Grace Church, and have both male and female members.
 - (2) The pulpit committee shall interview potential candidates and will only consider men who completely subscribe to the Statement of Faith and who have read these bylaws.
 - (3) The interview process for selecting a pastoral candidate shall include, at a minimum, the following: a criminal background check, a credit check, a multi-reference check, and the completion of a detailed application that explains the potential candidate's philosophy of ministry as well as his positions on issues of doctrinal significance.
 - (4) After a majority vote of the pastoral selection team, they will formally announce the proposed candidate to the church on a regular Sunday morning worship service. This announcement must be given on two consecutive Sundays prior to the candidate's arrival.

- (5) The proposed pastoral candidate must preach at least on one regularly Sunday morning service and must be available for a church-wide question/answer time prior to being voted upon by the church membership.
- (6) Once this process has been completed, official notice will be given on two consecutive Sundays prior to the church membership official vote of the pastoral candidate.
- (7) The candidate must be elected as pastor by a 75% majority vote of members present and qualified to vote. This vote shall be taken by written-secret ballot.
- (8) The pulpit committee will only present for consideration to the membership one candidate at a time, and an up-or-down vote must be cast prior to consideration of other potential candidates.

SECTION 4.07— COUNCIL OF DEACONS

1. BIBLICAL OFFICE OF DEACON

- A. Deacons (Gk. *diakonos*) are servants and leaders of ministries who support the work of the church and the Elders (Acts 6:1–6; 1 Timothy 3:8–13). Although deacons’ primary function is not teaching, they are no less spiritually qualified, honored, or respected.
- B. It is essential to recognize that deacons are equally qualified with elders in terms of character and spiritual life. The one difference between their qualifications is the elder’s ability to teach. Their contribution to the ministry and their spiritual character are the same.
- C. The only quality not repeated for both elders and deacons is the aptitude to teach with skill. That is not required of deacons. Elders should be given the priority responsibility of teaching the Word, and that can be accomplished as Deacons share the work of the ministry with them.
- D. The deacon’s task sums up the essence of spiritual greatness. Our Lord said, *“Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve”* (Matthew 20:26–28).
- E. The Lord Jesus Himself, then, is the model for those who would step into the deacon’s role. It is a role of service, of sacrifice, and of commitment to others’ needs.

2. BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS

- A. In the local church deacons are chosen members of spiritual commitment, exemplary life, compassionate spirit, and sound judgment.
- B. This sets a high standard for the deacon's character as defined by 1 Timothy 3, Romans 12 and Philippians 2.
- C. Based on this a deacon must be:
 - (1) Worthy of Respect
 - (2) Sincere and Honest
 - (3) Not a Drunkard
 - (4) Not Greedy
 - (5) Not a Gossip
 - (6) Temperate & Self-Controlled
 - (7) Trustworthy
 - (8) Dedicated to their spouse
 - (9) Able to manage family well
 - (10) A Humble Servant
 - (11) Confident of Gifts

3. PROCESS OF SELECTION:

- A. The congregation will be informed of the need of additional Deacons and given at least two weeks advance notice in order to prayerfully consider names of the man/men/woman/women recommended by the Council of Elders and the Council of Deacons.
- B. These candidates will be interviewed by the Lead Pastor, the Council of Elders, and the Council of Deacons. If the candidate(s) show both willingness and spiritual fitness for the office, their names will be brought to the congregation for final confirmation by the membership of Grace Church.
- C. The candidate must be affirmed as a deacon/deaconess by a 75% majority vote of members present and qualified to vote. This vote shall be taken by written-secret ballot.
- D. Upon the recommendation of the Council of Elders and the vote of the church, a Special Business Meeting can be called to dismiss a Deacon at any time.

4. PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

A. General Responsibilities:

- (1) Assist in the services of worship with ushering, greeting, communion preparation, and in the safety/security needs of the church.

- (2) To provide administrative and ministry support as needed to the Lead Pastor, pastoral team, and church staff. This may include in the care, visitation and spiritual nurture of the church membership.
- (3) Be actively involved in the weekly attendance of the Sunday morning worship services, Mid-Week service and/or classes, and other aspects of church life and schedule.

B. Oversight of the Church Property & Building Maintenance

- (1) Maintain, repair and expand the building and grounds of the church as needed.
- (2) Oversight of the church van and/or vehicle maintenance, scheduling, scheduled use.
- (3) Planning so that physical church facilities meet the needs and mission of the congregation.
- (4) Meeting timely deadlines for accomplishing assigned repair and/or building projects.

5. RECOGNITION OF DEACONESSES

- A. First Timothy 3:11 begins, “Women must likewise be dignified.” Again, the word likewise relates these women to an office of the church. It refers back to verse 1, and indicates that Paul was talking about the category of an office.
- B. In Romans 16:1, we read, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant *diakonos* of the church which is at Cenchrea.” The church recognized Phoebe *for her service*. It’s possible she served in an official capacity as a deaconess at the church in Cenchrea.
- C. The Greek word for “women” in 1 Timothy 3:11 is *gunaikas*. That refers, most likely, to women who are in the *office of deaconess*. The only way Paul could refer to women in verse 11 would be to use the Greek word *gunaikas*, because there is no feminine form in the Greek of *diakonos*.
- D. The same form of the word *diakonos* is both masculine and feminine; it would have been unclear for Paul to use just the term *diakonos* if he wanted to refer to women servers. He had to identify them as women.
- E. There are three distinct offices advocated in 1 Timothy 3 -- Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses. This is what Paul had to say about deaconesses: They must be “dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things” (v. 11).¹

¹ The section on “deaconesses” was adapted from the book *Deacons* by Dr. John F. MacArthur

ARTICLE 5
CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

SECTION 5.01—ANNUAL CHURCH BUSINESS MEETING

- A. The annual church business meeting, for the selection of Elders and/or Deacons, and/or the transaction of other church business, shall be held on last Sunday of January.
- B. A quorum shall consist of the eligible members' present. Public notice of the meeting shall be given from the "pulpit" for two successive Sundays immediately preceding the meeting.
- C. A quorum shall consist of 30% of the active members of Grace Church and shall be authorized to act in any ministry and business necessary according to the provision of this Covenant unless acting on the calling of pastoral staff, budget or building projects, which will require the 40% of the active members to form a quorum.
- D. The Lead Pastor or his designee shall serve as moderator of church business meetings.
- E. In the temporary absence of the pastor, or if the office of pastor is vacant, the Elder chairman or his designee shall serve as moderator. In the event of a conflict of interest, the Elders may substitute a moderator.
- F. The moderator shall determine the rules of procedure according to his sense of fairness and common sense, giving all members a reasonable opportunity to be heard on a matter. The moderator is the final authority on questions of procedure, and his decision is final and controlling.
- G. For any meeting under this article, the moderator, in his sole discretion, shall have full and unilateral authority to require nonmembers (or children, if circumstances so warrant) to leave the meeting room and to order the immediate removal of any member or other person present who is deemed by the moderator to be disruptive to the proceedings by act or presence.
- H. If the moderator determines that compliance with his order of removal is unsatisfactory, he may, in his sole discretion, revoke the disruptive person's right to remain on the premises and treat the person as a trespasser.

SECTION 5.02—SPECIAL MEETINGS

- A. The Lead Pastor (or the Council of Elders if the office of Lead Pastor is vacant or if the Lead Pastor is the subject of possible disciplinary action) may call a special church business meeting by giving notice of such a meeting and the purpose for which it is called to the church from the pulpit at least one Sunday and not less than one week prior to said meeting.
- B. A meeting for the calling of a Lead Pastor or for the discipline and/or removal of the Lead Pastor, shall be called in accordance with the provision of Sections 4.05 and 4.06.

SECTION 5.03—VOTING AT MEETINGS

- A. Voting at any church business meeting is limited to eligible members in good standing with the church who are physically present at the meeting.
- B. Absentee voting is not permitted, and any member who is undergoing church discipline at the time of a vote is not permitted to vote.
- C. A 75% majority vote will constitute the requisite number of votes for passage of amendments and motions, whether by the Council of Elders voting at an Elder's meeting or by the members voting in a church business meeting.

SECTION 5.04—MOTIONS

- A. Church members, who desire that a certain motion and/or subject to be discussed during an annual, regular, or special business meeting must file a written recommendation with the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders. This request must be submitted two weeks prior to the set meeting.
- B. The Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders will then consider the proposal and proceed according to their conscience and what they understand to be in the best interests of the church.
- C. All other motions will be presented by the Lead Pastor and/or chairman of the Elders (or other moderator if the office of Lead Pastor is vacant) unless the pastor and/or the Elders have delegated authority to another member and/or officer to raise certain motions. No motions will be made from the floor.

SECTION 5.05—FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year of the church shall begin January 1 and end December 31.

ARTICLE 6 EDUCATIONAL MINISTRIES

SECTION 6.01—PURPOSE

- A. The church believes that the home and church are responsible before God for providing a Christian education.
- B. To help fulfill this responsibility of imparting biblical truth and furthering the Great Commission, this church shall establish and maintain an educational program (either a Sunday School and/or a weekday educational program) for the purposes of winning souls to Christ and teaching Bible doctrine, Godly worship, and Biblical Christian living. To this end, the church shall engage in educational ministries.

SECTION 6.02—CHURCH PARTICIPATION

- A. All educational programs or courses of instruction formulated and offered by the church shall be primarily for the benefit of the members of the church;
- B. The Lead Pastor and/or the Council of Elders, on behalf of the church, may permit non-church members to participate in church educational programs or courses of instruction if they deem it in the best interest of the church.

SECTION 6.03—AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT OF FAITH

- A. All educational programs or courses of instruction shall be conducted as an integral and inseparable ministry of the church and shall be taught and presented in full agreement with the Statement of Faith of the church and the inerrant Word of God.
- B. The church shall not hire, appoint, or retain any employee or volunteer for its educational programs who fails to adhere to or who expresses disagreement with the Statement of Faith or who adopts or lives a lifestyle inconsistent with the beliefs and practices of the Statement of the Faith or this church, whether in or out of the classroom.

ARTICLE 7 COMMITTEES

SECTION 7.01—COMMITTEES

The Lead Pastor, the Council of Elders, and/or the Council of Deacons, on behalf of the church, may designate or form any committees and may appoint members and/or chairpersons of said committees as considered by the pastor and Board to be in the best interests of the church. These committees may be standing or temporary (special) committees.

SECTION 7.02—ACTIONS OF COMMITTEES

- A. Committees, whether standing or special, have no authority to act on behalf of the corporation. Their primary function is to research and recommend.
- B. Committees shall make available upon request all records and materials to the pastor and Board, who shall have the right to overrule any plans or decisions made by the committee.
- C. Each committee shall have a secretary that keeps minutes of each meeting and shall timely submit the minutes to the pastor and church secretary to be filed with church records.
- D. If deemed appropriate by the pastor and Board, the committee secretary, in conjunction with the chairman, shall submit an annual report to the church of the decisions and plans of the committee.

ARTICLE 8 DESIGNATED CONTRIBUTIONS

From time to time the church, in the exercise of its religious, educational, and charitable purposes, may establish various funds to accomplish specific goals. If the church receives a designated contribution for these funds or for any other designated purpose, the church will attempt to honor the designation; however, all designated contributions shall not be legally mandatory in nature.

Contributions are subject to the discretion of the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders. If a contribution needs to be re-designated, then the contributor would be notified. No fiduciary obligation shall be created by any designated contribution made to the church other than to use the contribution for the general furtherance of any of the purposes stated in Section 1.02.

**ARTICLE 9
BINDING ARBITRATION**

SECTION 9.01—SUBMISSION TO ARBITRATION

Members of this church agree to submit to binding arbitration any legal matters within the church, which cannot otherwise be resolved, and expressly waive any and all rights in law and equity to bring any civil disagreement before a court of law, except that judgment upon the award rendered by the arbitrator may be entered in any court having jurisdiction thereof.

SECTION 9.02—ARBITRATION PROCEDURES

The procedures for arbitration shall be as adopted by the Council of Elders. If the Elders have not adopted procedures, the church will use arbitration procedures provided by the National Center for Life and Liberty.

**ARTICLE 10
TAX-EXEMPT PROVISIONS**

SECTION 10.01—PRIVATE INUREMENT

No part of the net earnings of the church shall inure to the benefit of or be distributable to its members, trustees, officers, or other private persons, except that the church shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for the services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Section 1.02 hereof.

SECTION 10.02—POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

No substantial part of the activities of the church shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. The church shall not participate (including the publishing or distribution of statements) in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

We affirm the priority of prayer for our nation and those who hold political office, irrespective of political party, as stated in 1 Timothy 2:1–2, *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”*

SECTION 10.03—DISSOLUTION

Upon the dissolution of the church, the Elders shall, after paying or making provision for payment of all the liabilities of the church, dispose of all assets of the church to Converge Southeast as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law), as the Elders shall determine. Assets may be distributed only to tax-exempt organizations that agree with the church's Statement of Faith.

SECTION 10.04—RACIAL NONDISCRIMINATION

The church shall have a racially nondiscriminatory policy and, therefore, shall not discriminate against members, applicants, students, and others on the basis of race, color, or national or ethnic origin.

SECTION 10.05—LIMITATION OF ACTIVITIES

Notwithstanding any other provision of these bylaws, the church shall not, except to an insubstantial degree, engage in any activities or exercise any powers that are not in furtherance of the purposes stated in Section 1.02.

**ARTICLE 11
AMENDMENTS**

These bylaws may be revised or amended by a majority vote of the eligible members present and voting at any regular church business meeting, provided that said revision or amendment has been announced at a regularly scheduled Sunday morning worship service on at least two consecutive Sundays, and at least fourteen (14) days before the vote is taken.

- A. Proposed amendments or changes must be made available to voting members for review at least two weeks prior to the meeting at which the vote to amend the bylaws will be taken.
- B. Amendments become effective immediately upon adoption.
- C. These bylaws were adopted by a 75% majority vote of the members present and voting at a duly called meeting of the church in which a quorum was present.
- D. These bylaws supersede any other bylaws of Grace Church of Lakeland, Florida.

Date

Grace Church Recording Secretary/Officer



Ephesians 3:21 (ESV)

To him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.