

**Constitution and By-Laws for
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church**
Originally Adopted June 1998
Revised April 2002
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ARTICLE I. Name and Purpose

This body of the Church of Jesus Christ shall be known as Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church (GCPC), located in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Our chief purpose is to worship and glorify the Triune God by proclaiming and obeying His Word as found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and by observing the sacraments.

ARTICLE II. Aims, Standards and Objectives

- A. The general objectives of GCPC are: to make disciples of all nations; promote submission to God's Word in all areas of faith and practice; nurture and educate believers and their households; administer the sacraments and moral discipline within the church; and lead the congregation in worship, fellowship and charitable service. We welcome opportunities to labor with other Christian churches and groups in our community and throughout the world.
- B. GCPC, standing within the tradition of the churches of the Protestant Reformation, recognizes the following ecumenical creeds and confessions: *the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, Definition of Chalcedon, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (originally adopted in Scotland in 1647 and 1648 respectively), the Three Forms of Unity (*the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism*). These documents (with exceptions noted) are found in Appendix A and comprise our secondary doctrinal standards.
- C. GCPC is a member of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC), the constitution of which is part of the GCPC constitution (see CREC Constitution, Appendix B).
- D. Should any conflict arise between this constitution and by-laws and any of the above standards (or between the above standards themselves), the controlling authority for resolution of the conflict shall follow this order:
 - 1) Scripture
 - 2) The above named creeds, confessions, and catechisms
 - 3) The constitution and by-laws

- E. The first court of adjudication to resolve alleged conflicts between these standards shall be the Session of Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church (Session) followed by the Presbytery and Counsel of the CREC.

ARTICLE III. Determination of Members

- A. Those desiring membership in GCPC shall be evaluated and approved by the Session based upon their baptism, profession of faith and/or transfer of membership from a Christian church.
- B. Upon approval, membership vows shall be administered at the time of formal reception of members (see Membership Vows, Appendix C).
- C. Procedure for receiving new members:
 - 1) New converts to the Christian faith shall be evaluated by the Session and, upon their baptism and taking membership vows, shall be received into the membership of GCPC.
 - 2) Members of other Christian churches may transfer their membership provided they are leaving their former church in good standing (i.e., not under church discipline). The Session of GCPC may make inquiry, request a letter from the transferring church or notify the transferring church that the person has moved their membership.
 - 3) Once membership is established, a person shall remain a member under the oversight of the Session unless removed by order of the Session on the basis of death, discipline or proper transfer of membership to another Christian church.
- D. Procedure for transferring membership to another Christian church:
 - 1) If any member in good standing requests to be released to the care of another Christian church, the Session will normally release that member with a blessing.
 - 2) Regardless of the reason for desiring to transfer membership, the member must notify the Session of his or her intention and be willing to meet with the Session to discuss the matter.
 - 3) Members must continue to honor their membership obligations until the formal transfer of their membership to another Christian church has been completed.
 - 4) The Session reserves the right to withhold the transfer of membership in the event of unresolved conflict and/or disciplinary matters.
 - 5) Members requesting a transfer are expected to find a new church home within six months. This time may be extended at the Session's discretion. During this transition time, members must communicate regularly with the Session. If the member does not communicate or does not find a new church home within this six-month period, the member may be removed from the membership roll under censure.

ARTICLE IV. Expectations of Members

- A. Members shall regularly attend all appointed church services.
- B. Members shall devote themselves to regular private and family devotions with Bible reading and prayer and the extension of hospitality to the saints.
- C. Members shall serve fellow Christians by sharing both physical and spiritual blessings with one another.
- D. Members shall, in obedience to the Word of God and as a token of gratitude for God's gifts, cheerfully give a tithe (10%) of their increase to GCPC.
- E. Members shall pursue holiness in their attitude, speech and conduct toward all men, especially those of the household of faith, and shall be slow to take offense and ready to resolve conflicts according to the instruction of Scripture.
- F. Members shall recognize, respect and submit to the oversight of the Session in obedience to Hebrews 13:17.

ARTICLE V. The Calling and Conduct of Congregational Meetings

- A. Scheduling and Notice of Meetings
 - 1) Congregational meetings shall be at the call of the Session.
 - 2) All meetings shall be conducted in general accordance with Robert's Rules of Order.
 - 3) Notice of any congregational meeting shall be given at least seven days in advance of the meeting by public announcement, circular letter or email.
 - 4) Any member of the church is welcomed to attend congregational meetings unless otherwise specified by the Session.
- B. Annual and Special Meetings
 - 1) An annual business meeting shall be held at least once every calendar year on a date set by the Session.
 - 2) The Session shall call special meetings at its discretion or upon written request by one-third of the voting heads of households. At special meetings, no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice of the meeting.
- C. Quorum and Voting in Meetings
 - 1) Only heads of households (male or female) who have been members for at least six months and are not under disciplinary proceedings shall be entitled to vote.
 - 2) The quorum for transacting business at a duly-called meeting shall be the voting members in attendance.
 - 3) Eligible voters who are present but abstain from voting shall not be counted for the purposes of determining voting percentages.

- 4) The election of elders and deacons shall always be by a legibly printed or signed ballot.
- 5) Voting by proxy in the election of church officers shall be permitted only by special approval of the Session.

D. Presiding Officer and Secretary

- 1) One of the church officers (elder or deacon) shall preside in meetings.
- 2) The presiding officer of a meeting may vote.
- 3) The presiding officer shall appoint a secretary for the meeting.
- 4) The secretary shall keep an accurate record of all business transacted. The minutes of the meeting shall be approved at the beginning of the next regular business meeting. The secretary shall provide a final copy of the minutes to the Session, which shall maintain a copy for the church records.

E. Prerogatives of the Members

- 1) The following items of business may be transacted by the voting heads of households at duly called meetings:
 - a. Voting on non-budgeted expenditures over \$10,000, and the acquisition or disposition of any real property;
 - b. Recommending to the session men to serve as elders, pastors, missionaries or deacons for the congregation.
 - c. Voting on any candidates who may be presented to the church by the Session as qualified for the office of minister, ruling elder, missionary or deacon;
 - d. Voting on the removal of a church officer at a duly-called business meeting by a three-fourths majority vote;
 - e. Voting to approve the minutes of a previous meeting;
 - f. Voting to amend the constitution and by-laws;
 - g. Voting on membership in any formal affiliations, which shall require the approval of the Session and a two-thirds majority vote of the heads of households.
- 2) Members shall have the right to review the church's annual financial reports and offer counsel to the Consistory regarding the annual budget.

ARTICLE VI. Church Officers

- A. The officers of the congregation in their capacity as functioning church ministers are the congregation's duly elected, ordained, and installed elders and deacons. The congregation shall always (so far as it is possible) provide for itself a minimum of two elders, thus constituting a "session of elders."
- B. The officers of the church are the duly elected, ordained and installed teaching elders (pastors), ruling elders, deacons and missionaries/evangelists (see Ordination Vows, Appendix D).

- C. The elders of the church, whether teaching or ruling, shall constitute the Session and also shall serve as the Directors of the Corporation for the purposes of transacting business. The Consistory shall be comprised of the Session and the deacons.
- D. Upon election, ordination and installation, the officers of the church shall hold office for life, unless one of the following conditions arise:
 - 1) Resignation with the approval of the Session,
 - 2) Removal from office at the request of the Session and upon the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the heads of households at a duly-called meeting,
 - 3) Transfer of membership, or
 - 4) Excommunication from the church.
- E. Only male heads of households shall be considered for and ordained to a church office.
- F. When the Session determines there is a need for additional elders or deacons, it shall solicit recommendations from the congregation. The Session shall then consider the qualifications and readiness of those recommended.
- G. The Session may examine a candidate for office or appoint a board of examination.
- H. Office of Elder
 - 1) The congregation shall be served by a minimum of two teaching and/or ruling elders.
 - 2) If the church finds herself with only one teaching elder (pastor) and/or ruling elder, she shall seek the oversight of one or more teaching and/or ruling elders pro-tempore from another CREC congregation.
 - 3) Teaching Elder (Pastor)
 - a. Candidates for the office of teaching elder shall be examined by the Session and/or a congregational board of examination and also shall receive the recommendation of an examination committee of the Presbytery.
 - b. Candidates for the office of teaching elder who have been previously ordained by other congregations must have their credentials approved by the Presbytery.
 - c. Approved candidates for office shall be presented by the Session and must be elected to office by the affirmative two-thirds vote of the heads of households.
 - d. GCPC shall hold all ordination credentials.
 - 4) Powers of the Session:
 - a. Maintaining the government of the congregation
 - b. Adding and removing members from the rolls of the church
 - c. Overseeing all matters concerning the conduct of public worship and the administration of the sacraments
 - d. Promoting the spiritual growth of church members

- e. Resolving questions of doctrine and discipline
 - f. Adding and amending appendices to the constitution and by-laws (in which case, the congregation shall be notified)
 - g. Exercising moral discipline over members
 - h. Arranging and supervising the evangelistic and educational projects of the church
 - i. Overseeing the work of the deacons and all organizations within the church
 - j. Hire and fire Church staff, define responsibilities for Church staff, and delegate responsibilities to the staff
 - k. Providing for the execution and delivery of contracts for and in the name of the congregation
 - l. Approving an annual budget and overseeing church finances including non-budgeted expenditures up to 10,000 dollars
- I. Office of Deacon
- 1) The responsibilities of the deacons shall be those duties delegated by the Session.
 - 2) Diaconal responsibilities include ministries of mercy and stewardship of church property.

ARTICLE VII. The Sacraments

- A. Baptism: Baptisms performed at GCPC shall be by sprinkling or pouring of water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (see Baptismal Vows, Appendix E).
- B. The Lord's Supper: All baptized persons in good standing in a Christian church are welcomed to commune at the Lord's Table.

ARTICLE VIII. Procedure for Amending the Constitution and By-laws

- A. Proposed amendments to the constitution must be submitted to the Session for its approval, or amendments may be proposed by the Session.
- B. Proposed amendments shall be distributed to the church membership for review and comment for a period not less than 10 days.
- C. Approval of amendments shall require a two-thirds affirmative vote of the heads of households.