
CONSTITUTION OF THE GRACE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH OF EAST TORONTO

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Grace Fellowship Church, do ordain and establish the following Articles, to which we voluntarily and solemnly submit ourselves. We also humbly thank our sister church, Grace Fellowship Church of West Toronto, for their help and assistance in the production of this document.

ARTICLE 1: NAME

The name of this church shall be the Grace Fellowship Church of East Toronto (herein referred to as “Grace Fellowship”, “the church”, or “this church”).

ARTICLE 2: PURPOSE

The purpose of this church is to glorify and delight in the God of the Bible by maintaining and promoting His worship, by evangelizing sinners, and by edifying His saints. Therefore, we are committed to:

- The proclamation of God’s perfect Word and His glorious gospel of grace through all the world
- The defence of that “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3)
- The pure and faithful celebration of the ordinances of the New Covenant

ARTICLE 3: STATEMENT OF FAITH

The church accepts the Holy Scriptures as the only supreme and complete authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. However, we also recognize that we stand as one small part in an historic movement known as the universal Church, which has, at times, written out succinct summaries of what we believe the Bible teaches. Such Confessions of Faith can be helpful in expressing those things we believe and also in uniting us together with our brothers and sisters through the ages.

We gladly stand in the line of the Ancient Church (the Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed), the Reformers (the Westminster Confession), and the early English Baptists (The First and Second London Baptist Confessions of 1644 and 1689). In our own time, we are thankful for the group known as The Gospel Coalition and take much of our Statement of Faith from them.

3.1. The Tri-une God

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

3.2. Revelation

God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

3.3. Creation of Humanity

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

3.4. The Fall

We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan's temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God's own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

3.5. The Plan of God

We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

3.6. The Gospel

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is “Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised”). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

3.7. The Redemption of Christ

We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he cancelled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

3.8. The Justification of Sinners

We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God’s justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ

was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

3.9. The Power of the Holy Spirit

We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the “other” Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, baptizing them into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit’s agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God’s family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

3.10. The Kingdom of God

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honour of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God’s kingdom, we are to love our neighbours as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God’s sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan’s dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

3.11. God’s New People

We believe that God’s new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each “local church” is, in fact, the church,

the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbours, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

3.12. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. Baptism is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the Lord's Supper with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

3.13. The Restoration of All Things

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

ARTICLE 4: MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the church of Jesus Christ is based on salvation.

4.1. Basic Requirements to be a Member

Any person shall be eligible for membership who:

- Professes allegiance to and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ
- Has been baptized in water upon profession of his or her faith¹
- Is not under the biblically warranted corrective discipline of a genuine church²
- Expresses substantial agreement with the teachings, aims and organization of this church³

4.2. Method of Becoming a Member

- (i) First, notice is given to an elder by the individual that they would like to become a member of Grace Fellowship in one of two ways:
 - a. By verbal request. Any person who meets the above mentioned requirements may make their desire for membership known to one of the elders.
 - b. By letter of transfer. Any person who meets the above mentioned requirements, and is coming from another evangelical church desiring to unite with this church may present a letter of recommendation from the other church to the elders.
- (ii) Second, the applicant is interviewed by the elders and congregation.
 - a. An elder (or elders) will meet with the applicant, who will be questioned as to his or her basic Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and seriousness of intention to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this church. At this meeting, the elders will invite the applicant to provide a written testimony for distribution to the members explaining his/her understanding and experience of the Gospel of Christ. This written testimony is intended to promote a proper evaluation of the potential member and to encourage knowledgeable fellowship with him/her. The elders may request further clarification and/or expansion of this written testimony before proceeding with the application process. The purpose of this process will be to deter-

¹ The only form of baptism that we practice is baptism by immersion in water for we believe that this most accurately reflects the Biblical data and imagery. We are willing to consider for membership, however, those that have been baptized by other means (such as pouring, sprinkling) after (or, "at") their profession of faith in Jesus. Our conscience does not permit us, however, to accept into membership any who were baptized as an infant (or in any other way unknowingly) as we believe the Bible teaches this ordinance must always follow faith in Christ.

² Matt. 18:17,18; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6,14,15; 3 John 9,10; 2 Cor. 2:6-8.

³ Mastery of church confessions is not required of any new disciple before he is admitted to church membership. Such a requirement would violate the order of Matt. 28:19,20, which instructs us to disciple, to baptize, and then to teach the baptized disciple to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. It is necessary, however, that any disciple applying for membership manifest a willingness to be taught and possess substantial agreement with what he already knows concerning the church's doctrine and government.

mine whether or not the applicant meets the qualifications as stated in Section 4.1 of this Constitution.

- b. If the applicant has been a member of another church, the elders will investigate his/her standing in that church before he/she is accepted as a member in this church. Where it is possible and appropriate, a letter of transfer will be requested. Reception by transfer does not negate any of the requirements for becoming a member in this assembly.
- c. Upon the reception of an acceptable written testimony, the elders may, at their discretion, ask for another meeting with the applicant. Otherwise, the written testimony will be distributed to all members at least two weeks (14 days) prior to the membership vote. This time period is for the purpose of enabling the members to read the testimony and to raise any questions or objections concerning the applicant's qualifications. Existing members are expected to consider this a personal duty of the most serious nature. They are expected to voice privately to the elders all questions or objections that have not yet been resolved, after personal contact has been made with the applicant (Matt. 18:15ff; Lev. 19:16, 17).

- (iii) Finally, the applicant is publicly received into the church membership.

If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the qualifications for membership, and any objections raised by the membership are effectually resolved, the person will be voted on by members in a members-only meeting, and then subsequently received at a stated meeting of the church (Matt. 3:6-12; Acts 9:26, 27; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2).

4.3. Reaffirmation of Membership

It will be the custom of this church that all members present will renew their membership promise at the induction of any new members, using this time to evaluate how well they have lived out their commitment and to thoughtfully consider how to fulfill their promise even more.

4.4. Termination of Membership

- (i) By transfer. Upon recommendation by the elders, letters of transfer will be granted by the church to members who apply for them, providing they are in good standing at the time of the application. Letters of transfer shall only be given to other evangelical churches.
- (ii) By request. A member may request to remove his or her membership from the church. This may be done at any time, provided the member is not currently

under discipline as described below. All those who so remove their memberships must go through the original application process if they want to rejoin the church again.

- (iii) By exclusion. Any member who is habitually absent from the stated meetings of the church for a period of six months or more, or is unwilling to settle matters of private offence with others in a biblical manner, or requests severance of membership may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the elders, subject to the approval of the members.
- (iv) By excommunication. It is right and in harmony with the Scriptures for the elders, upon approval of the congregation, to exclude from this fellowship any person who persists in holding false doctrine or who obviously and persistently lives inconsistently with his or her Christian profession or who persists in disturbing the peace and unity of the Church (see Matthew 18:15ff; 1 Corinthians 5:1ff; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; Romans 16:17).

4.5. Blessings of Membership

Membership in this church includes the following privileges:

- (i) Participation in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42; 1 Cor. 11:18-26, 33).
- (ii) Attendance at, appropriate participation in, and voting during church business meetings (Acts 6:1-6 [cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:13-14]; 1 Cor. 5:4-7; 13 [cf. 1 Cor. 1:2]).
- (iii) Labouring to extend God's Kingdom in ministries of the church (as one's gifts, graces and calling make appropriate) (1 Cor. 12:4-27 [cf. 1 Cor. 1:2]; Eph. 4:7; 11-12; 16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).
- (iv) Reception of the committed oversight and care of the pastors of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3).
- (v) Reception of the committed care and discipline (as needed) of the membership of the church (Acts 6:1-2 [cf. Acts 2:41; 5:13-14; 9:26]; 1 Cor. 5:4-5 [cf. 1 Cor. 1:2]; Gal. 6:10).

4.6. Expectations of Members

There are also biblical expectations upon every member:

- (i) All members are expected and encouraged to attend the corporate meetings of the church whenever possible.⁴

⁴ The term "corporate meetings" refers to: (1) All services on the Lord's Day (morning and evening worship, the Lord's Supper, and baptisms); (2) Mid-week prayer service; (3) Church business meetings; and, (4) Any special

- (ii) Each member is expected to regularly read the Bible and pray, and to tell others what God has done for them in Jesus Christ.
- (iii) All members are expected to support the church financially by systematically giving a generous proportion of their income as the Lord directs them according to the principle laid down in 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8, 9. The tithe (ten percent of one's gross personal income) is not imposed on the people of God as a tax but is strongly urged as an excellent starting place in our worship through basic giving. Added to this should be gifts and offerings according to one's ability and the willingness of his heart (2 Cor. 8:1-5; Exod. 36:2-7).
- (iv) All the members of this church are required to obey the teachings of Scripture in respect to the life and government of the family. The husband is the God-appointed head of the family and must rule his household with gentleness, love, wisdom, and firmness (Eph. 5:25ff; 1 Tim. 3:4, 5; 1 Pet. 3:7). The wife must be in Scriptural subjection to her husband in all things (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:1-6). The husband and wife must bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, being careful to not provoke them to anger (Eph. 6:1-4). This includes setting a godly example before them, consistently instructing them from the Scriptures (Deut. 6:4-9), and administering corporal chastening to them when needed (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 29:15; Heb. 12:7).
- (v) It is the duty of every Christian, as an individual and as a member of a local church, to labour by prayer, word, and deed for the extension of the kingdom of God in ever widening circles, beginning at home and stretching forth to the ends of the earth (Isa. 54:1-3; Acts 1:8). Therefore, every member of this church is expected prayerfully to recognize and to seize every opportunity to bear witness to his faith in Christ, both by consistent Christian conduct and by the testimony of his lips.
- (vi) Each member of the church is required to render loyal obedience to all the moral precepts of God's Word in his daily life (Rom. 8:3, 4; 1 Cor. 9:20, 21; James 2:12). If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in His Word, a Christian is at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God and to glorify Him in all things (1 Pet. 1:17; 1 Cor. 10:31), a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brothers and sisters (1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 15:1-3), a compassion for the lost (1 Cor. 9:19-22), and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul (Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 9:24-27; Gal. 5:22, 23; 1 Pet. 2:16).

meetings that the elders shall occasionally deem necessary. When any member is absent from the above stated meetings for any extended period of time, he or she should inform an elder directly or indirectly of the reason.

- (vii) All who come into the membership of this church are expected to recognize and to submit to the authority of the overseers of the church (1 Cor. 16:15,16; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:17). This responsibility will include willingly scheduling an oversight meeting with (an) elder(s) when requested.
- (viii) We who have been joined to Christ by faith and are members of this church are also members one of another (Rom. 12:5). With this privileged relationship come particular responsibilities. We must maintain mutual transparency and honesty (Eph. 4:25). We must rejoice in each other's honour and bear one another's sorrows (1 Cor. 12:26). We must discreetly confess our faults one to another (James 5:16). We must mutually oversee each other, faithfully admonish and encourage one another, avoid all backbiting and gossip, and keep in strict confidence all matters which the elders determine are of private concern to the church (Prov. 11:13; Matt. 18:15ff; 1 Thess. 5:14, 15; Heb. 3:12, 13; 10:24, 25). Also, we must, when necessary, help meet the material needs of our brethren (Gal. 6:10; James 2:14-16; 1 John 3:16-18).

4.7. Records of Membership

The elders shall keep a file of all past and present members.

ARTICLE 5: THE ORDINANCES

5.1. Introduction

We believe that there are two ordinances that Jesus Christ has commanded us to observe, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a public testimony in which the believer identifies himself or herself with the Saviour, who died, was buried and rose again. The Lord's Supper is a visible, symbolic reminder that Jesus Christ gave His body and shed His blood on Calvary for our redemption.

5.2. The Lord's Supper (Communion)

All who profess faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour are welcome to join this church in taking of the Lord's Supper. However, known unbelievers or children without proper understanding must not partake otherwise they eat and drink judgement upon themselves.

5.3. Believer's Baptism

Following the direction of the Scriptures we practice baptism of believers by immersion and only admit into membership those who have testified to their faith in the waters of baptism. Any person who professes allegiance to and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and whose life gives tangible evidence that this is the case may make known their desire to be baptized to one of the elders. A representative of the elders will then meet with the applicant who will be examined concerning his or her Christian experience, and understanding of the meaning of baptism.

ARTICLE 6: OFFICERS

6.1. General Statement

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Col.1:18). He has ordained that individual churches should be governed by Himself through officers whom He appoints, who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Christ has ordained that local churches are to be administered by elders and deacons. Beside these two offices the Scriptures acknowledge no office which continues in the church today (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

6.2. General Prerequisites

- (i) All officers of this church must be members of it except as provided in section 6.7.
- (ii) Any individual set apart to one of these offices must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's Statement of Faith and Constitution. If he should at any time move from this position, he would be under spiritual and moral obligation to immediately make that fact known to the elders in an orderly manner.
- (iii) While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given women and the valuable assistance they may render to the officers of the church (Rom. 16:1-6; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11), the Bible prohibits women from holding the office of elder in the church (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7). Also, since it is a violation of the Scriptures for a woman to exercise authority over a man in spiritual things, no woman shall be appointed to a teaching or authoritative function in a ministry of the church where adult men would be regularly under her ministry.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge and encourage the valuable gifts and assistance of women in the formal instruction of children and other women (Titus 2:3-5), in the informal instruction even of men (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 18:26), and especially the benevolent ministries of the church (1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9, 10).

6.3. Elders

- (i) Those who have been called of God to rule and teach in the church are called elders, pastors, or bishops. These are three interchangeable names designating one and the same office in a New Testament church (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11, 12; Titus 1:5, 7).
- (ii) Anyone desiring the office of an elder must evidence to God's people the personal, domestic, and ministerial qualifications that are set forth in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
- (iii) Because the authority of the elders of the church is human authority exercised in the house of God, it has both high prerogatives and important limitations.
- (iv) One crucial aspect of the elders' duties is personally overseeing the flock of God. Fulfillment of this duty shall include regularly and systematically meeting with each member of the church on at least an annual basis, except when physically impossible due to distance.
- (v) Elders will be maintained in material necessities and disentangled from the cares of another vocation according to their gifts, the needs and capability of the church, and the direction of Christ her Head (1 Tim. 5:17ff).
- (vi) Though a plurality of elders is the New Testament norm for every church, the New Testament does not specify the number of elders each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an elder's term of office. One truly called to this office is usually called to it for life. He is a gift of Christ to the church. Only when an elder fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from being an elder.

6.4. Deacons

- (i) Deacons are responsible primarily to administer the benevolent concerns of the church as well as its business affairs. Deacons are called upon to carry out the ministries which tend to distract the elders from their God-given calling to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. Deacons must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders.

- (ii) The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall set apart according to its need those who evidence the scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

6.5. Appointment of Officers

6.5.1. 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. Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (1 Tim. 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (1 Tim. 5:22). Therefore, each officer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership in particular. The Lord's appointment of an individual to either of these offices is recognized by means of that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for the particular office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never be dealt with without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered. Each member of the church has a spiritual responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

6.5.2. Procedure of Appointment

The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church is executed in three steps: nomination, election, and ordination.

- (i) Nomination. Nominations to either office are made by the eldership once they have identified a candidate whom they feel to be qualified. The elders are always receptive to hearing from members who have identified potential candidates for office in the church, although the elders alone reserve the right to put forward an official nomination.
- (ii) Election. Any church meeting for the election of officers shall be announced at least two weeks (14 days) prior to its being held. The names of all nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. During the discussion the nominee under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the church until the written ballot is taken. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and ex-

pounded, and the nominee's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the nominee. The church should seek unity of mind concerning each nominee, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election. This vote shall take place by written ballot subsequent to a full and free discussion oriented to the relevant scriptural passages. The vote shall stand as it is first given in the written ballot.

- (iii) Ordination. Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer shall be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the eldership. This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the whole church (Acts 13:1-3). The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer-elect. Should the elders be unable to conscientiously ordain an officer-elect (1 Tim. 5:22), they shall inform each member of their reasons in an appropriate manner.

6.6. Review of Officers

- (i) Officers shall hold office only as long as they meet the biblical qualifications for their office in the esteem of the church. The church, therefore, shall reconfirm or withdraw its confidence in the biblical qualifications of each officer four years after his ordination and every fourth year thereafter.
- (ii) There may arise reasons that would require an officer to be reviewed before the regularly scheduled time. Such a review meeting may be called by a majority of the elders (or a majority of the other elders in the case of an elder). The members may also request such a meeting. This request must be set forth in writing with the signatures of one-fourth of the total membership of the church. It must be presented to the elders, who shall in a timely and constitutional way (see item [iii] below) call such a meeting.
- (iii) Any meeting for the review of an officer shall be announced at least two weeks (14 days) prior to its being held. During the discussion, the officer under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the church until the written ballot is taken. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the officer's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the officer. Any member who publicly suggests in such a meeting that the officer being reviewed is unqualified for his office must have previously spoken with the officer himself and informed

the elders of the church of his concerns (1 Tim. 5:19). He must also present biblical and factual warrant for his concerns at the review meeting, with supporting evidence from at least one or two other witnesses. Just as it is wrong for a church to retain an officer who is not biblically qualified, so also it is rebellion against the head of the church to reject an officer for any but biblical grounds. Additionally, any officer about whom such concerns are raised must be permitted, if he wishes, to return to the meeting and defend himself. The church should seek unity of mind concerning the matter, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for the confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing to attain confirmation no longer holds office in the church. This vote shall take place by written ballot; and the vote shall stand as it is first given in the written ballot.

- (iv) An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion and for good and valid reasons. This resignation together with its reasons and the date upon which he wishes his resignation to be effective shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the Church.

6.7. Loss of a Plurality of Elders

- (i) This Constitution assumes, and the norms of biblical church order require, that a plurality of elders oversee this local church. Therefore, if at any period in the life of the church there no longer exists a plurality of elders in office and this lack cannot in a timely way be supplied, the remaining elder (or the church, if there are no elders) shall seek the temporary oversight of the pastors of Grace Fellowship Church of West Toronto. Failing the availability or willingness of elders from Grace Fellowship Church of West Toronto to function in this capacity, the elders of another Calvinistic Baptist church, whose Statement of Faith is not incongruous to that of this church shall be asked to give temporary oversight. The purposes of such an arrangement are to provide pastoral care and leadership in the absence of a plurality of elders.
- (ii) When an eldership meeting this requirement and willing to undertake these responsibilities is located, the church shall within a reasonable period of time officially place itself under this eldership. If the church has a remaining elder, this eldership shall function as his fellow elders. This action shall be taken by a written ballot at a properly called meeting of the church. A three-fourths majority of those present and voting is necessary for such an action. The recognition of the oversight of such an eldership shall be confirmed (or failing a three-fourths majority withdrawn) in the same way at the annual meeting of the church in succeeding years. When a plurality of resident elders is raised up, the oversight arrangement here described shall immediately cease, by written request from the eldership of this church.

ARTICLE 7: FINANCES

The organization of this church shall be carried on without purpose of financial gain for its members. Any profits or other financial gains to this church shall be used in promoting its objectives as outlined above.

This church depends entirely on the prayers, personal services, and gifts of God's people. Before the annual business meeting the elders will prepare a detailed budget of the proposed expenditures for the coming year. Once the budget is approved by a majority vote of the congregation it will be the basis for the utilization of church funds.

ARTICLE 8: AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended, modified, or rescinded by a three-fourths majority of church members voting at any regular or special meetings for business. Such amendments must be submitted to the church membership two weeks (14 days) prior to the meeting by a written announcement. Any considerations for by-laws will follow the same procedure.

ARTICLE 9: CHURCH MEETINGS

9.1. The Annual Business Meeting

An annual business meeting of the church shall be held in June each year. At this annual meeting a report shall be given by the elders which shall contain an account of the membership of the church. The status of those whose membership involves unusual circumstances will be reviewed. A financial report for the previous year and the proposed budget for the coming year shall also be presented. These reports including the proposed budget shall be approved by a vote of the church.

9.2. The Occasional Members Meetings

Church meetings may be called by the elders or when one-fourth of the voting members make a written request for such a meeting. This request must state the reason for the meeting, be signed by one-fourth of the members in good standing, and must be presented to the elders, who shall in turn make the proper announcement of the meeting. Every meeting at which business is to be

transacted shall be announced at least two weeks (14 days) prior to the meeting. Other business meetings at which there is no business transacted by vote may be called at the discretion of the elders without previous notice.

9.3. Voting

All members except those suspended by a vote of the church shall constitute the voting membership of the church (see sections 4.1–4.3). All voting members should regard their presence at a duly called church meeting with the same seriousness with which they would regard their attendance at a stated service of worship. It shall be our goal to prayerfully discern the mind of God so that in all matters of church business it may be said of us, as it was said of that church business meeting recorded in Acts 6, that this thing “pleased the whole multitude.” However, in situations in which this unanimity is not realized, no less than a two-thirds majority of those voting will make a resolution valid. In other matters wherein the Constitution requires a different proportionate vote, this two-thirds figure will be overridden by the express statements of the Constitution regarding those categories of business. The voting members present at any properly convened meeting of the church shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The elders may cancel any previously announced business meeting of the church if through an act of God (such as inclement weather) an unusually large proportion of the members of the church cannot be present.

ARTICLE 10: TRUSTEES

In order to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” this church shall have an official Board of Trustees. The official board shall consist of the resident pastors (elders) as voting members and deacons as non-voting members. In the absence of a resident plurality of elders, both the eldership and the deaconate must approve any decision relevant to the Board of Trustees. The voting members of this board shall serve as the legal representatives of the church.