

# **CONSTITUTION**

**FREE GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH**

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### ***PREAMBLE***

We, the members of Free Grace Baptist Church do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

### **ARTICLE 1**

#### ***NAME***

The name of this church will be Free Grace Baptist Church.

### **ARTICLE 2**

#### ***PURPOSE***

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, edifying saints, and evangelizing sinners. To this end we are committed to proclaiming God's perfect Law and His glorious Gospel of Grace in Jesus Christ throughout the world, and to defending the "faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

### **ARTICLE 3**

#### ***ARTICLES OF FAITH***

The Holy Bible is the final and only authority in all matters of faith and practice. We adopt the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (hereinafter referred to as the London Confession) as the fullest and most accurate expression of the Christian faith as it is taught in God's Holy Word. "This document is a most excellent epitome of things most surely believed among us. We accept the same not as an authoritative

rule or code of faith, whereby we are to be fettered, but as an assistance to us in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. Here the members of our church will have a body of Divinity in small compass and by means of Scriptural proofs will be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us.” (1 Peter 3:15; quote from Charles Haddon Spurgeon)

## **ARTICLE 4** ***MEMBERSHIP***

### **A. ELIGIBILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP**

Any person will be eligible for membership who professes repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized upon profession of his<sup>1</sup> faith, whose life and doctrine do not deny his profession and who expresses a willingness to assume the responsibilities of members set forth in Section B of this Article.

### **B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS**

1. Every member agrees to give unreserved subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ in every area of his life. This subjection is lived out through willing obedience to the Word of God, which expresses the mind of Christ our Lord (Matt 28:20; Rom 14:8-9).
2. Every member agrees to give willing submission to Christ’s appointed overseers in the church whose duty is to shepherd the church according to the will of God as contained in the Scriptures (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17).
3. Every member is urged to be faithful in attendance at all the stated meetings of the church (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25).

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<sup>1</sup>“He” and “his” are being used throughout this constitution in the generic sense without gender distinction (anyone in the class of mankind be they male or female) unless referring to office bearers. Then they mean the male gender only.

The stated meetings are all the services on the Lord's Day, the Lord's Supper, the midweek service, the business meetings of the membership and any special meetings which the elders may occasionally call.

4. Every member agrees to be willing to serve the local body of Christ according to his natural talents, spiritual gifts and God-given responsibilities.

The members must actively seek to cultivate acquaintance with one another so that they may be better able to pray for one another; love, comfort, and encourage one another; and help one another materially as necessity may require (I Cor 12:12-31; Eph 4:11-16).

They must refrain from speaking ill of one another. Their differences and offenses with each other must be handled in the manner taught in Scripture (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15-16; Col 3:12-15; I Pet 4:8). This applies as well to their relationship with the office bearers of the church.

5. Every member agrees to submit to the corrective discipline of the church (Matt 18:15-17; Heb 3:12-13).

Such discipline is mandated in the Scriptures for the threefold purpose of:

- upholding the honor of Christ's name in the earth
- maintaining the purity of the church
- recovering the straying and fallen member.

6. Every member agrees to give wholehearted cooperation in the outreach of the church, seeking to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:18-20) through the means of:

- ***Bearing witness*** to Christ through deed and word (Matt 5:14-16; Col 4:5-6; I Pet 2:12; 3:15).

- **Praying.** This is one way we enter into the labors of others (II Cor 1:11; Col 4:2-4; II Thes 3:1-2).
- **Giving.** Members are responsible to maintain the ongoing life and ministry of the church by their regular financial gifts (I Cor 9:13-14; 16:2; II Cor 8-9).

7. Every member must be in substantial agreement with the doctrine of the church as stated in the 1689 Confession.

Disagreements with the confession should be brought to the attention of the eldership while the applicant is seeking church membership or if there is a situation where the member has a change of mind concerning a particular aspect of the Confession.

There may be varying levels of understanding and conviction, yet he must promise not to spread doctrine contrary to the Confession and must be willing to hear preaching that may be contrary to his beliefs.

### **C. ADMISSION TO MEMBERSHIP**

Each person desiring membership in the church must meet with the elders who will examine him as to his eligibility prescribed in Section A and his responsibilities in Section B.

If the applicant is or has been a member of another church, his standing in that church and his reasons for leaving will be discussed. At the discretion of the elders, the former church may be contacted concerning these matters.

Upon satisfactory examination of the person, the elders will announce the same to the congregation at a stated meeting of the church. Time will be allowed for members to talk with the applicant and, if necessary, to raise questions with the elders concerning the applicant's manner of life or doctrine.

If no objection is raised of such a serious nature as to unfit the candidate for membership, or upon satisfactory

resolution of the problem, the applicant shall be received into the fellowship of the church by a majority vote of the members present and voting in any congregational meeting upon the recommendation of the elders.

#### **D. SPECIAL CASES OF MEMBERSHIP**

The membership status of any whose relationship to the church involves abnormal circumstances preventing them from fulfilling membership responsibilities will be considered and determined as each case arises (invalids, missionaries, students, members in transit, etc.).

#### **E. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP**

1. **TRANSFER** - Upon approval of the membership, letters of transfer will be granted by the elders to requesting members, recommending them, provided they are in good standing, not subject to or under discipline at the time of their request. Such letters will be given only to other evangelical churches.
2. **RESIGNATION** - If a member wants to resign his membership, he should exercise his Christian responsibility by requesting a meeting with the elders to discuss his actual reasons for desiring to leave. If he is not subject to or under discipline, then upon the recommendation of the elders and the approval of the membership his request will be granted.
3. **EXCLUSION** - (See Article 5, Section B, Paragraph 3)
4. **EXCOMMUNICATION** - (See Article 5, Section B, Paragraph 4)

All decisions regarding termination of membership must have the approval of two-thirds of the members present and voting at a properly called business meeting. (See Article 7)

## **ARTICLE 5**

### ***CHURCH DISCIPLINE***

#### **A. FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE**

God has ordained that the members of the church have a mutually sanctifying effect on one another. Each are called to participate in the full-orbed life of the church in order that the body may build itself up in love. There is to be mutual edification as each member exercises his gifts and graces, and seeks to promote the holiness of the rest (Heb 3:12-13; 10:24).

This mutual concern for one another's sanctification will aid us in being kept from sin, in recovering from sin, and in growing in likeness to Jesus Christ. The lack of this formative discipline or the spurning of it makes the application of a more formal corporate discipline necessary.

#### **B. CORPORATE DISCIPLINE**

##### **1. GENERAL STATEMENT**

Corporate discipline becomes necessary when disorderly conduct or heretical doctrine appears which is contrary to the church's standard of life and doctrine. All reasonable efforts will be made to resolve difficulties, remove offenses and correct errors through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Gal 6:1; Jas 5:19-20). No offenses will be brought before the church until the instructions of Christ have first been followed or at least attempted (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15-16).

Corporate discipline always aims:

- to uphold the honor of Christ's name in the earth,
- to maintain the purity of the church,
- to recover the straying and fallen.

##### **2. SUSPENSION**

- a. Any conduct on the part of a member which disturbs the peace of the church or damages its testimony

may require that the offending member be suspended from certain rights and privileges of membership.

Although such a person is considered to be walking disorderly, and is therefore under this discipline, he must still be regarded as a member and not as one cut off from the church (II Thes 3:15).

- b. If a member has publicly sinned, but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the admonitions of the elders, severe discipline (such as excommunication) would be improper.

Nevertheless, serious offenses will not be overlooked altogether, lest God's enemies be given opportunity to blaspheme, lest other saints be encouraged to sin and lest the offender be harmed by a failure to test his own soul and realize the seriousness of his offense.

Therefore, at the discretion of the elders, lesser terms of discipline may be imposed upon a member such as public rebuke or suspension of certain rights and privileges of membership. An attitude of acceptance and compassion should especially be communicated by the membership in its discipline of one showing hopeful signs of repentance.

- c. In the case where a member is accused or suspected of gross sin and absents himself from the congregation, refusing to meet with the elders that the matter may be investigated, he may be suspended from certain rights and privileges of membership.

All suspensions will be reported to the church by the elders and will remain in force until the suspended member gives evidence of true repentance and change of conduct. The lifting of the suspension will be done at the discretion of the elders and reported to the church.

### **3. EXCLUSION**

If a member in good standing relocates to another church without resigning his membership, the elders will call for his exclusion.

Not all unsettled problems involving varying degrees of sin are deserving of the most severe discipline of excommunication. Exclusion is a lesser discipline that removes one from membership but does not consider him as an unbeliever. If a person requests to be released from membership who is not in completely good standing due to some problem or unsettled difference, he may be excluded from the membership (II Thes 3:6-15).

This will be done with due admonition and reproof and only applies to infractions that are not deemed to be deserving of excommunication (i.e., offenses that do not deny or negate their Christian profession).

All exclusions from membership must have the approval of two-thirds of the members present and voting at a properly called business meeting.

#### **4. EXCOMMUNICATION**

- a. Some types of conduct are inconsistent with profession of faith in Christ (Matt 18:15-17; Rom 16:17; I Cor 5:11; 6:9-10). A member who persists in such conduct must be cut off from the membership of the church and treated as an unbeliever (Matt 18:17; I Cor 5:3-5,13).

Before such action is taken, earnest efforts must be made to bring the offender to repentance (Matt 18:15-17; Tit 3:10-11).

If these efforts fail, and the elders believe the accused is guilty and deserving of severe discipline, then at a properly called meeting of the membership, they will state the charges against the offender and recommend that he be excommunicated.

An act of excommunication must have the approval of two-thirds of the members present and voting at a properly called business meeting.

- b. In the same way, some wrong opinions regarding the doctrines of Scripture are so serious that they must be regarded as “heretical” and inconsistent with Christian profession (Rom 16:17-18; Gal 1:6-9; I Tim 1:19-20; 4:1-3; Rev 2:2,14-16,20).

A member who persists in propagating or holding any such opinion, in spite of earnest and patient admonition by the elders, will be excommunicated in the same manner as the person in “a” above.

- c. It is the duty of the church to forgive and restore to membership those who give satisfactory evidence of repentance (Luke 3:8; II Cor 2:6-8).

Upon recommendation of the elders, the members will have the right to restore an excommunicated person by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at a properly called business meeting.

## **ARTICLE 6**

### ***CHURCH OFFICERS***

#### **A. GENERAL STATEMENT**

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Col 1:18). He rules his individual churches through officers whom He appoints and equips by His Spirit with the abilities and godliness needed to accomplish their work. In the New Testament church there remains only two offices: elders and deacons (Phil 1:1; I Tim 3:1-13). These offices will be held by men only.

#### **B. ELDERS**

1. Those who have been called of God to lead and oversee the church are called “elders”, “pastors”, or “bishops” (overseers).

These are interchangeable names designating one and the same office (Acts 20:17,28; Eph 4:11,12; Tit 1:5,7; I Pet 5:1-3).

2. The elders are responsible for the general oversight of all the church's affairs, the spiritual nurture, the implementation of discipline, and the keeping watch over the souls of the church's members "as men who must give an account" to God (Acts 20:28; I Tim 5:17; Tit 1:9; Heb 13:17; I Pet 5:2-3). These "pastors" are given to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:11-12). The elders will seek to maintain the peace and purity of the congregation in doctrine and life.
3. While every elder must be "able to teach", some may be more engaged in the formal and public teaching of the congregation, while others give themselves more to private teaching and governing. Gifted and godly men who are not recognized as elders may also engage in such public preaching and teaching under the supervision of the elders (Eph 4:11; I Tim 3:2; II Tim 2:2).
4. In view of the fact that the responsibilities of this office are many and of supreme importance, it is highly desirable that at least one elder should devote his full time to the work of the ministry. These elders should be given adequate financial support to free them from the cares of another vocation. Though every elder has equal authority in the church this does not mean that all should therefore receive full financial support. Such a decision should take into consideration the needs and ministerial responsibilities of the man as well as the needs and capability of the church (I Tim 5:17-18).
5. Any man being considered for the office of elder must demonstrate to God's people the personal, domestic, and ministerial qualifications that are set forth in the Scriptures (I Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9). He must be able to

conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's Confession of Faith and his willingness to uphold this constitution. If he should at any time move from this position, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to immediately make this known to the church in an orderly manner.

6. The church may call a qualified man from outside the local congregation for this office. The procedure for doing so is found in Article 6, Section D, Paragraph 4.
7. While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the other members of the church.
8. The number of elders will be determined in accordance with the needs of the church and the leading of the Holy Spirit. 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 as 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.

### **C. DEACONS**

1. Deacons are responsible for the physical needs of the church:
  - its ministry to those with material needs,
  - its business and financial affairs,
  - the maintenance of its building and grounds.

Their diligent service should enable the elders to devote themselves without distraction to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-4).

2. Though a deacon may be given a specific area of responsibility, he is to work in conjunction with the other deacons in carrying out the overall deaconal ministries.
3. Though deacons attend to material needs, their work is to be done with spiritual grace and in cooperation with and subjection to the elders.
4. Each man chosen to fulfill the office of deacon must evidence the qualifications set forth in Acts 6:3 and I Tim 3:8-13. He must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's Confession of Faith and his willingness to uphold this Constitution.
5. The number of deacons will not be fixed. The church may choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having the Scriptural qualifications for that office.
6. Their term of office will be indefinite, terminating only upon resignation of a deacon or by disqualifying himself.

#### **D. APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS**

##### **General Statement:**

It is Christ, the Head of the church, who equips and calls those He wants to serve as officers in His church. The Lord's appointment is recognized both by the conviction of the individual that he is called, and by the conviction of the church that Christ has indeed given him the necessary godliness and ability for office bearing. So the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and according to the principle of need, should be endeavoring to discover and formally recognize all the men whom Christ by the Holy Spirit is setting over it (Acts 20:28).

##### **Procedure:**

1. **Nomination** - Any member may make recommendations of a nomination to office to the elders

at any time for their consideration, but it is the existing elders who must approve their recommendations and bring them to the membership for a vote. Officers will be nominated for their office by the existing elders. In no case may a man be nominated by the elders without his knowledge and prior consent.

2. **Election** - Each nominee must be voted on individually. This will take place only after sufficient time has been given to evaluate the man's fitness for office in light of the individual abilities and godliness required by Scripture. This evaluation is the responsibility of each member of the church and should be performed in a serious and prayerful manner (Acts 6:3-6). A nominee will be elected by a three-fourths vote of the members present and voting at a properly called business meeting.
3. **Installation** - The newly selected office bearer will be formally set apart for his responsibilities at a regular worship service by prayer and the laying on of hands by the existing elders (Acts 6:6; I Tim 4:14; 5:22).
4. **Calling a pastor from outside the local church** - When a pastor is sought from outside of Free Grace Baptist Church, the members will select a pulpit search committee of no less than 3 men and no more than 7. Any existing elders will be a part of this committee and will be charged with its leadership. The role of this committee will be to search for a man who fits the qualifications set forth in this constitution. The committee will nominate to the membership such a man who must then be approved by a three-fourths vote of the members present and voting at a properly called business meeting.

## **E. OFFICIAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," this church will be incorporated under the laws of the State of Washington and therefore will designate an official Board of Directors. This board of no less than three, shall

consist of the current elders and deacons of the church. If, at any time there are not three elders and deacons, the remainder of the Board of Directors shall be elected for three year terms from among the male voting members of the church.

The Directors will perform such legal and business transactions as are designated to them by the laws of the State of Washington and as are agreeable with our Confession of Faith and Constitution.

## **ARTICLE 7**

### ***CONGREGATIONAL BUSINESS MEETINGS***

#### **A. CALLING OF MEETINGS**

There shall be three quarterly business meetings and an annual business meeting of the membership for the hearing of reports and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the meeting. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

#### **B. NOTICE OF MEETINGS**

Notice of all membership meetings shall be given at regular worship services on two successive Lord's Days immediately prior to the meetings.

However, in the case of an emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying local members of the time, place and purpose of the meeting. A member unable to attend an emergency meeting because of previous commitments may cast a written absentee vote with an elder prior to the meeting.

Other meetings may be called on shorter notice when no vote is to be taken or business transacted.

### **C. QUORUM**

A quorum at any meeting where business is to be transacted shall consist of fifty percent of the local voting members in good standing. Members are asked to notify the elders if they are unable to attend.

### **D. VOTING**

Any member present at a business meeting who is in good standing and is eighteen years of age or over may vote on any matter brought before the members.

Because the church is one body in Christ, unanimity of heart and mind shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realized, at least a two-thirds majority of members present and voting shall be required to make a resolution valid. In other matters wherein the Constitution requires a different proportion of the vote, this two-thirds figure will be overridden by the express statements of the Constitution regarding those categories of business.

### **E. ORDER**

Roberts Rules of Order, or similar rules, shall be the authorized procedure for all church Congregational Meetings in matters not covered by this Constitution.

## **ARTICLE 8** ***ASSOCIATIONS***

When it is thought desirable to have fellowship, consultation and cooperation with local churches of like faith and order, this church may join itself to associations of churches.

Upon recommendation of the elders, such affiliations may be entered by a two-thirds vote of the membership. Withdrawal from associations may be affected by a majority vote of the membership.

Although we may seek the assistance and counsel of other churches in matters of special concern to us, the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church.

**ARTICLE 9**  
***FINANCES***

The work of this church is financially dependent upon the voluntary gifts of God’s people. Before the annual congregational meeting, the elders shall obtain from the deacons a prepared budget detailing the proposed expenditures for the coming year.

When this budget is approved by a vote of the membership, no one is authorized to overspend the budget without membership approval except that the elders and deacons may make necessary individual expenditures up to 2% of the total budgeted expenses.

The fiscal year of the church shall begin October 1 and end September 30.

**ARTICLE 10**  
***DISSOLUTION***

In the event of the dissolution of Free Grace Baptist Church as a non-profit corporation, the assets of the corporation shall be given and paid over to a non-profit corporation(s) of like faith and practice as determined by the Board of Directors (such as the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in America).

**ARTICLE 11**  
***AMENDMENTS***

This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting at a properly called meeting of the membership, provided that the amendment was

distributed to the membership in written form at least two weeks prior to such a meeting.

## **ARTICLE 12**

### ***CHURCH COVENANT***

Having, as we trust, been brought by divine grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to give up ourselves to him, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith, in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we do now, relying on His gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian Church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.

We will endeavor to bring up such as may at any time be under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.

We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.

We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

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

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

## **BY-LAWS**

### **ARTICLE 1** ***CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS***

The following shall be regular Congregational Meetings:

1. Sunday services, morning and in the evening, which may be a prayer meeting.
2. A mid-week Bible study.
3. Baptismal services in conjunction with Sunday services when deemed necessary.
4. The Lord's Supper shall be observed regularly.

Other meetings for business, fellowship and worship shall be called by the Pastor or by the elders as deemed necessary.

### **ARTICLE 2** ***CHURCH CLERK***

The Church Clerk, a member to be elected by the congregation at the Annual Congregational Meeting, shall keep a record of all business transacted at the Congregational Meetings, keep an accurate record of the membership, and carry on all necessary correspondence for the congregation. His term shall be for one year.

### **ARTICLE 3** ***CHURCH TREASURER***

The Treasurer, a member to be elected by the congregation at the Annual Congregational Meeting, shall deposit all church funds in a bank account or accounts, as instructed by the deacons, which accounts shall be opened and

maintained in the name of the church. He shall disburse the same at the direction of the deacons. He shall make monthly reports to the deacons and an annual report to the congregation at the Annual Congregational Meeting. He shall submit his books for an annual audit prior to the Annual Congregational Meeting, and at such other times as directed by the deacons. He may be required to furnish a bond, the amount of which shall be determined by the deacons, and the cost of which shall be paid by the church. His term shall be for one year.