

MEMBERSHIP AT GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

THE CHURCH APPENDIX ONE

Article Four of the Bylaws of Grace Bible Church defines membership in our church. This appendix contains that entire article in this typeface. Brief explanatory commentary on this article is included in this appendix in this typeface. Please read this article, not only to gain understanding about membership at Grace Bible Church, but about church membership in general.

SECTION 1: Church Membership: The Nature and Purpose

- A. All Christians automatically become members of the Universal Church at the time of conversion. (Acts 2:41, 46-47) Membership in a local church, as taught in the Bible, is voluntary, but not trivial. Local church membership is a commitment to serve and to mutual accountability as prescribed in scripture.

All Christians are members of the Universal Church, but relationship with and ministry in the Universal Church is difficult if not impossible. Local churches are the tangible expressions of the Universal Church. Individual believers can participate and serve Christ in them in more concrete ways.

While there is no verse in the Bible that calls on believers to become *members* of a local church, we see the importance of commitment to the life and ministry of local churches. Membership is a way of formally expressing this commitment. Those who oppose formalizing this commitment to a local church may be likened to those who live with a lover without the benefit and commitment of marriage.

- B. The procedures of membership outlined below are designed solely for the purpose of maintaining scriptural and accountable local church government (Hebrews 13:17), such that our affairs are conducted in decency and order. (1 Corinthians 14:40) In no way is our understanding and practice of membership to be construed in such a way as to disrupt our Christian unity and fellowship with true saints who attend church elsewhere. (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

Membership in our church does not separate us from being members of the universal church, nor from enjoying fellowship with Christians who are members of other churches.

- C. There is a difference between being a *regular attender* of Grace Bible Church and being a *member* of Grace Bible Church. While all are invited to attend, members make a formal commitment to the church. That commitment includes:

1. Attending Sunday worship regularly, at least 75% of the time. Exceptions would include illness, necessary work, or being out of town. (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25)

Members attend and participate. In the New Testament, the church met each week on the Lord's Day. Attending 75% of the time is a minimal level of participation expected by members. If a person attended only 75% of the time, it would be the equivalent of missing three months out of the year. Illness, being out of town, or necessary work are among the few legitimate reasons to not attend

church. If a member's attendance drops below 75% for long enough to indicate that there is a problem, it is the responsibility of the Elders to follow-up to see if there is a problem. Those whose membership continues below the 75% level will be challenged regarding their status as members. We require that those who apply for membership attend Grace faithfully for at least three months prior to being received into membership.

2. Participating in the ministry by serving. (Romans 12:4-6; 1 Peter 4:10-11)

We recognize that all believers have varying gifts and time. It is not important how much a person serves. What is important is that members are serving the body in some way, rather than merely being attendees. Members are expected to serve in the local church in some way. Service may be in the children's ministry, building maintenance, ushering, or any other of the service ministries that keep a church going. As it is with attendance, the leaders of the church have an obligation to follow-up on any members who stop serving. We require that those who apply for membership serve in some capacity prior to being received into membership.

3. Participating in the ministry through biblical financial contribution. Biblical giving is to be regular, proportional, and offered in faith (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). A tithe (10% of one's income) is considered a biblical baseline.

Members are expected to tithe, or give 10% or more of their income to the ministry of the church. The church does not monitor anyone's financial giving. This is an issue between the individual and the Lord. Those applying for membership, may not be giving 10% since for some who are new to the faith, giving 10% may be something they need to grow into. In such cases, we ask that those who are not tithing be able to agree with the concept and be committed to working in that direction. Again, we do not monitor anyone's giving. We merely ask members if they understand the concept of being a financial participant in the church, that a tithe (10%) is a biblical baseline, and that they are participating financially in the ministry of our church. Members must be able to say yes.

4. Receiving the Lord's Supper regularly and frequently as administered by the church. (Luke 22:19-20)

Regular and frequent are relative terms. We do not monitor this, but members should seek to receive the Lord's Supper at least monthly. We normally celebrate the Lord's Supper at Grace twice each month.

5. Concurring with the Grace Bible Church Statement of Faith (including the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689), vision statement, and distinctives. (Amos 3:3, Philippians 2:1-2)

The church's statement of faith explains what we teach. It is important that members are able to affirm what their church teaches—including the London Baptist Statement of faith. Every local church has its own distinctives. It is important that members understand, and are in support of, those distinctives. Key distinctives of Grace Bible Church are described in the booklet entitled, "How We Do Ministry At Grace Bible Church."

6. Willingly submitting to the spiritual leadership of the Elders of the church as they submit to God and the scriptures. (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5) Desiring to be held accountable by the church, including church discipline if necessary. (Proverbs 18:1; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; James 5:16-20)

The leaders of the church are charged by God to lead the congregation, and will give an account to God for how they lead. Members must be willing to submit to the leaders as they submit to the Lord.

If the leadership of the church, out of concern for a member, approaches a member about an issue in his life, the member needs to be reminded that this caring action was invited by applying for membership. The person should also realize that the Elders do not take such action lightly, and have spent much time in prayer before hand. Church discipline is described in fuller detail in Section 7.

7. Pursuing peace in all relationships within the church, including speaking positively about the church, the leaders and other congregants. This also includes dealing biblically with persons with whom any problems may arise according to Matthew 18:15-17.

Peaceful loving unity among believers is commanded by Christ and is the truest mark that we belong to Christ (John 13:34-35). This mandates forgiving one another and seeking to resolve issues that might arise between us.

8. Promising to seek the counsel of the Elders regarding withdrawing membership and/or changing churches before a decision is made.

Problems that might prompt one to leave the church are often misunderstandings, or about matters that can be resolved. Members give the elders a chance to try to help resolve problems without a separation of the body.

9. Understanding that membership at Grace Bible Church will be renewed annually from the date when received into membership after speaking with one of the officers of the church. (2 Corinthians 13:5) (See Article IV, Sec. 4.)

Members should welcome this annual visit. The purpose for the annual renewal is two-fold. First, this helps the leaders shepherd the people by seeing that every member family is visited at least once each year to discuss the spiritual state of that family. Second, this will help insure that members do not fade out of fellowship while remaining members. The hope will be that every member is functioning as a member and will continue to do so. Those who are drifting will hopefully respond to the pastoral counsel during the annual review and renew their commitment as well.

SECTION 2: Church Membership: Requirements and Procedures

- A. Before being accepted as members of Grace Bible Church, applicants must:

1. Be baptized believers in Jesus Christ.

The church must, to the best of our ability to discern, have a regenerated membership. While baptism does not save a person nor make him a member of the church, this basic commandment from our Lord is required of those who desire membership.

2. Live a life-style that does not contradict their profession of faith.

Members are not expected to be sinless. If however a person is living in a life style of sin, that life style must be addressed before being received into membership. An example of this would be if a person was living with a boyfriend or girlfriend without the benefit of marriage.

3. Demonstrate a commitment to the ministry of Grace Bible Church for a minimum of three months:

This is to see that people have been here long enough to get a feel for the church rather than joining without full knowledge of what our church is about.

- a) By attending Sunday Worship Services 75% or more of the time, unless hindered by illness or some other necessary reason. (Hebrews 10:25)

See Section 1, C., 1.

- b) By serving in some form of ministry of the church. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

See Section 1, C., 2.

- c) By contributing financially to the church. Biblical giving is to be regular, proportional, and offered in faith. A tithe (10% of one's income) is considered a biblical baseline. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

See Section 1, C., 3.

4. Be 18 years of age (for the purpose of voting).

Official membership is limited to those who are of legal age since in issues that might call for a congregational vote, a measure of maturity is needed. Please see Section 6.

5. Be willing to submit to the government of this church.

The members of the church are to submit to the God-ordained leadership of the church *regarding issues of the church, as the leaders submit to the Lord*. The church leaders have no desire or right to dictate personal issues not expressly addressed in scripture. Their responsibility is to point people to the Lord and to His Word. See Section 1, C., 6.

6. Apply for membership by:

- a) Reading and concurring with the material on membership at Grace Bible Church provided by the Elders, including Article IV of the church's bylaws.

It is important for prospective members to know as much about the church as possible before joining. For this purpose we have assembled a packet of pertinent information regarding the church. Those seeking membership must read this packet and concur with its contents.

- b) Interviewing with two of the Elders of the church.

This interview gives prospective members a chance to meet at least two of the elders and to ask questions about what was in the membership information packet, or anything else. This is also an opportunity for the elders to get to know the prospective member. This may be done in a personal interview or if there are more multiple applicants it may be done in a "Membership Class" setting. After the interview or class, interested parties will be given application forms to fill out.

- c) Completing an application for membership.

The application provides a formal record of the prospective member's intentions to join the church. Applications may be returned to the church office or directly to any of the elders

- B. Once accepted as members, applicants will sign the church roll sheet and will be acknowledged as members in an appropriate manner.

A formal roll sheet is kept by the church as a record that the member has committed to the terms of membership in the church. Generally, members are officially welcomed into membership by placing an announcement in the church bulletin welcoming new members into the fellowship.

SECTION 3: Church Membership: Membership Rolls

A list of members who are actively participating in church activities shall be maintained.

SECTION 4: Church Membership: Accountability

The Elders of the church will hold members accountable to maintain their commitment to the Lord and to His Church. Annually, each member shall reconsider each of the commitments required of new members.

People's level of involvement sometimes diminishes over time. For this reason, each year around the anniversary date of having been received into membership, the elders will meet with each member or member family to evaluate the present level of commitment. Attendance, serving, and giving will be discussed. This annual review will also provide members a chance to ask questions, express concerns, and seek counsel of the elders. Please see Section 1., D.

- A. If a member is continuing steadfastly in his commitments and wishes to renew his membership, he will be invited to do so. The renewal will be so noted in the membership roll book.
- B. If a member has become lax in any of the commitments required for new members and wishes to renew his membership, he will be given three months to demonstrate a renewed commitment to his membership. After three months, if the areas of concern have been rectified,

the member will be invited to renew his membership, and the renewal shall be so noted in the membership roll book. If after three months the member has not satisfactorily rectified the areas of concern, the membership will be terminated. The member may reapply for membership whenever he is again ready to make and keep the necessary commitment.

The goal of this is always to help members be restored to full participation in membership, never is the desire to terminate membership. The elders will work with people in a gracious manner, but they cannot shepherd the people if they are not given the opportunity to do so.

SECTION 5: Church Membership: Termination

Membership shall be terminated in the following ways:

- A. Membership may be terminated by request by member to terminate membership. There may be instances in which a person will choose to withdraw his or her membership. As entering into membership should not be taken lightly, neither should withdrawal be taken lightly.

Membership is voluntary. Although we do not want to see members terminate their membership, we respect their right to do so.

1. Conscientious members should seek counsel from the Eldership if they are contemplating the termination of their membership before such a decision has been determined.
2. Members have an obligation to discuss their withdrawal from membership before simply leaving the church.

The reason for these terms of membership is that the elders cannot help a person with a problem if they do not know about it until the person has already determined to leave the church.

- B. Membership may be terminated at the time of the annual renewal if the member is no longer demonstrating the level of commitment required of members. (See Article IV, Sec. 4, B.)
- C. Membership may be terminated for non-participation after appropriate efforts to restore fellowship and participation have failed. The length of time of non-participation that warrants termination shall be determined at the discretion and good judgment of the Elders.

The elders will do everything they can to find out what is happening with a member who is not attending or responding to inquiry. This step is not taken quickly.

- D. The Elders may terminate a person's membership as an act of discipline. (See Article IV, Sec. 7.)
- E. Church membership shall be terminated upon the event of a member's death.

When a member dies, their membership is understood to have been transferred to heaven.

SECTION 6: Church Membership: Voting Membership

Each member shall be entitled to one vote in matters that call for a decision of the membership. (See Article V, Sec. 3., D. & F.)

There are only two items about which the members of the church vote. They are, terminating the ministry of the current pastor and calling a new pastor. These are the only items the members vote on, and only members may vote.

SECTION 7: Church Membership: Discipline

A. The Nature of Discipline

Discipline is a censure or correction that is required of the church by scripture. The goal of church discipline is not punitive, but corrective, desiring always to see Christians repent of sin and be restored into full fellowship with the Body of Christ.

Christ has set forth standards to which His church is to be held. Failure to recognize these standards invites spiritual ill-health into the body. Standards with no consequences are not standards at all. The willingness of a church to exercise discipline, including excommunication if necessary, will in most cases mean that the church will not need to do so very often, if at all.

B. The Motivation for Discipline

1. The spiritual welfare of the Church. The church must purge out those elements that will bring reproach on Christ and His Church. (1 Corinthians 5)

Christ is committed to individual Christians but He is no less committed to His Church. When serious sin is allowed to remain in the church unchecked, the whole body suffers. The account of Achan in Joshua 7 is a sober reminder of this fact.

2. The spiritual welfare of individuals who are called to hold others accountable. We bring judgment on ourselves if we do not discipline those who should be disciplined. (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

Those who are charged to lead God's people place themselves in line for judgment if they fail to discharge this duty when necessary.

3. The spiritual welfare of individuals who are in sin. Though difficult and painful, biblical discipline is one of God's appointed means of delivering a person from sin. (1 Corinthians 5:4-5, Hebrews 12:5-6, Proverbs 13:24)

The church is only as healthy as its members. Church discipline has the spiritual health of its individual members in mind.

C. The Process of Church Discipline

The Elders of the church will, through teaching and example, encourage the members of the church to discipline themselves and one another in the following ways:

1. Exercising self-discipline; e.g. applying self-correction. (1 Corinthians 11:31)

Those who discipline themselves need not be disciplined, but those who will not discipline themselves invite discipline from others.

2. Overlooking, in love, the failings of one another. (1 Peter 4:8)

We seek always to be charitable and understanding of one another, remembering that none of us is without sin. Love covers a multitude of sins.

3. Admonishing a brother or sister when necessary. (Matthew 18:15)

Christ calls on us to deal with issues on a personal and confidential level first, avoiding "official actions" that may involve more people than necessary.

4. Taking one or two others as witnesses if the personal admonition is rejected. (Matthew 18:16)

In cases of scandalous sin that may bring reproach on Christ and His Church, there is no requirement to attempt private resolution of the matter and it should be brought to the Elders without delay.

5. Bringing the issue to the Elders of the church who act as representatives of the church if the previous admonition is rejected. (Matthew 18:17)

Only after personal attempts at resolving a problem have failed is there to be any "official action" taken. When the elders of the church are brought into an issue, they too seek to rectify the problem in a confidential manner without taking the issue to the next and most serious level.

6. Excommunicating the person under discipline, communicating the same to the congregation if the admonition of the Elders has been rejected. (Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 11-13)

There are several issues regarding this most serious step that must be understood. (1) The action is biblical. (2) Excommunication is *not* condemnation or a pronouncement by the church concerning the person's salvation. The church has no such authority. (3) Excommunication is an exclusion from fellowship, with the goal in view that the person being excommunicated will repent and be restored to fellowship. (4) The body must be involved so the congregation will know how to relate to the person being disciplined so that his restoration may be hastened. This is a serious action and is taken only as a last resort.

7. Restoring the person under discipline when, in the opinion of the Elders, that person has been restored through repentance and rededication or conversion. The Elders shall announce the end of the disciplinary action to the church. (2 Corinthians 2:5-8)

In the same way that the body must know in order to participate in the necessary act of discipline, the body must

know when the person under discipline has repented and been restored to fellowship so that the body may rejoice in that restoration.

D. The Subjects of Discipline

1. Non-member attenders. The authority and responsibility of the church to discipline those who have not made a commitment to membership in the church is less than it is regarding members or leaders in the church. Excommunication of non-member attenders may or may not be communicated to the Congregation (C., 6.), depending on the nature of the issue and the person's influence in the church.

If a person must be excluded from the fellowship of the church, the exclusion will only be as widely publicized as is necessary to protect the body from spiritual harm.

2. Members. The authority and responsibility of the church to discipline its members is invited by its members by applying for and being received into membership of the church. If a member who is subject to church discipline opts to terminate membership as a means of avoiding discipline, the rest of the church members will be informed of the circumstances of the discipline and termination of membership.
3. Leaders. Elders and Deacons have greater responsibility and receive greater honor than other members of the church. (1 Timothy 5:17) Therefore they are judged by a higher standard than other members of the church. (James 3:1) Because their ministries are public and because their sin can bring greater reproach to Christ and His Church, based on the judgment of the Elders of the church, if an Elder is living in sin and will not repent, he is subject to public rebuke. If an Elder is repentant, but his sin is of a nature that requires him to step down from his position as an Elder, he will not be rebuked, but the membership of the church will be notified regarding the reason for the man's removal as an Elder. (1 Timothy 5:19-20)
4. Children of members. The Elders will exercise disciplinary authority, with children in the congregation, if necessary, in the following ways:
 - a) If a child in the congregation has professed faith in the Lord and subsequently demonstrates a rebellious spirit, or repudiates his earlier profession of faith, the Elders will offer pastoral help to the head of the household as appropriate. If the child persists in a state of rebellion, the Elders may initiate the process of church discipline and the child may be excommunicated.

The elders have no intention of intruding into family unnecessarily. This point is a proactive act of love, extending a hand to parents in the congregation. The excommunication of a child or young person would only be considered if that child or young person poses a threat to the spiritual health of the church.

- b) If the rebellion of a child is of a scandalous nature, and the member parents refuse to cooperate with the church discipline, the Elders may initiate the process of church discipline with the member parents.

If a child or young person must be excluded from the fellowship of the church, and if the parents of that child or young person will not cooperate with the leadership of the church, those parents may need to be excluded if their refusal to cooperate poses a threat to the spiritual health of the church.

- E. Grace Bible Church of Moorpark will honor acts of church discipline carried out biblically in other Christian churches.

The local church is but an expression of the Universal Church of Christ. As members of the Universal Church, the local church must honor the acts of church discipline that are carried out in a biblical manner in other local churches. When a person comes to Grace Bible Church from another church in the area, it is our practice to contact the leadership of the person's former church to be sure there is no unfinished business that needs attention.