GRACE POINTE CHURCH

Highlights of our Constitution…

Elder-led with congregational accountability: This means the congregation will have final say in matters related to the selection of a Senior Pastor, cases of church discipline, and selection/reaffirmation of all elders, while the elders will be responsible for general oversight of the church—especially the ministry of the word and prayer.

Partnership: We have chosen to use the word "partner" to describe those who join the church instead of the traditional "member." This highlights our understanding of a shared responsibility in mission as opposed to simply being part of a club.

Relational commitments: As part of our partnership commitment, we will agree to the relational commitments recommended by Peacemakers. These commitments will describe how church partners and leaders are to relate to one another within the church, provide a clear track to follow if ever conflict should threaten to divide us, and demonstrate the steps that will be taken to move quickly toward reconciliation. They will also establish guidelines on counseling others, guarding confidential information, and protecting children from abuse.

Affiliation and strategic alliances: One of the lessons learned in our history as a church is the great advantage of being formally associated with other like-minded churches. These groups can be of particular benefit whenever there are irresolvable disputes within a congregation. We are affiliated with a group of churches known as Converge Worldwide. It is our intention to multiply ourselves through planting other churches. We will always remain an autonomous congregation.

Baptism and partnership: At Grace Pointe, we will only practice believer's baptism by immersion. However, recognizing different positions among biblical/evangelical Christians regarding the timing and mode of baptism, partners may disagree on these secondary matters provided they hold their views based upon biblical convictions.

44 Life: Four Realities and Four Pursuits

Four Realities

The Four Realities represent one way of summarizing the storyline of the Bible. They are called "realities" because each of them is true whether we believe them or not. The fact that they are true shapes our understanding of life, sin, Christ, the future, and ourselves.

(1) Creation. We are someone else's idea, placed in a wondrous world swirling through a vast cosmos that someone else designed and spoke into existence out of nothing. He was very pleased with what He had made.

All of this is the result of God's handiwork and we are the crown of His creative expression. He fashioned us in His very own image and gives each of us the gift of life that we enjoy. He knit us together. He decided when and where we would be born. Every day of our lives is lived under His providential care; from the air we breathe and the food we eat to the relationships we enjoy.

This has profound implications for our lives. It means, among other things, that we belong to the One who created us. Life involves stewarding someone else's property and giving an account of ourselves to Him. It means that I am here for a reason. I have purpose. I am not an accident or the product of random chance. God wants me here. I am fearfully and wonderfully made, designed by Him for His cause. My identity is tied to my Maker and His purposes in the world He created.

Because I was made by and for God, I will never find lasting satisfaction and personal peace until I experience a relationship with Him. Anything less leaves me hollow at the core.

(2) Fall. Even as we celebrate all the wonders of our world, we are aware that something is seriously wrong. Things are not as they should be. From injustice and oppression, interpersonal conflict and terrorism, despite being capable of extraordinary feats of kindness and heroism, human beings display a persistent and horrific evil.

The Bible traces the source of our problems back to the initial act of rebellion by the very first man and woman. Instead of trusting the Creator's goodness enough to follow His instructions, they chose to act according to their own limited and self-serving reason. Their disobedience introduced sin into paradise. Like dark ink dumped into clear water, the contamination spread until all of creation was infected.

The consequences for the man and woman included corruption of their own hearts. Not only were they besieged with feelings of guilt and shame for the first time, but sin had now twisted their desires. Their natural inclination became resistance to God rather than glad surrender to His authority.

Although I was made for God and the crown of His creative expression, as part of the

human race, sin has corrupted my heart, too. I am discovering, often through relational pain and self-generated difficulty, that I am incapable of living up to even my own standards of what is right. I know that I am made for so much more than this, but also increasingly aware that I cannot get there on my own.

My problem, then, is at least two-fold: I am guilty before a holy and just God…and I am powerless to live as I know I should. Hopeless and helpless. This is reality, but need not be the final reality.

(3) Gospel. God, our Creator, has become God, our Savior!

The Good News is that God is not only holy and just, but He is also merciful and loving. His love impelled Him to act on our behalf. Through Jesus Christ, God upheld His holiness and justice while at the same time opened the way for His mercy and love to reach us. When Jesus died on the cross, our sins were punished through His sacrifice (justice), thus bringing about the way for us to be acceptable to a holy God (mercy).

Jesus lived a perfect life. He died on the cross for my sins as my substitute. He was buried in a grave. Three days later, He was raised to life again demonstrating that God had accepted His sacrifice. He then ascended to heaven and has assumed the position of all authority over all creation. One day soon, He will return to fully establish His Kingdom forever.

Those who believe this message admit their sin and turn from it. They trust Jesus Christ to save them from the condemnation they deserve. Jesus rescues them and now leads them. While this gift of forgiveness and acceptance cost Jesus His life, it is offered for free to anyone who will rely upon Him by faith. Whoever cries out to Jesus gets saved.

(4) Restoration. One day everything will be made right under the reign of Jesus Christ as King. Those who are trusting Jesus live with an assurance that justice is coming in the form of a Kingdom. It will break into history unexpectedly and cataclysmically when Jesus returns.

When this happens, the prayer Jesus taught His followers to pray will be fully and finally realized: “May your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This age to come will truly be heaven on earth: No more tears or pain or sin or death. Nothing will ever again disturb God’s family.

He will be their God. They will be His people forever.

Because Jesus is alive, this hope is alive in all who follow Him. It is based upon the events of the Gospel and its arrival is only delayed so that others may trust Jesus before it is too late. This adds an urgency to the Gospel message but a deeply sustaining peace as we wait for Jesus to return.

Four Pursuits

The Four Pursuits represent key disciplines in Christ-centered living. They give definition to our faith, the action and the direction of believing Jesus.

(1) Word of God. God reveals His will to us through His Word. It is the highest authority for what we believe and practice. Our faith is clarified and nourished by meditating on Scripture. It is not just true but truth itself.

(2) Spirit of God. In studying the Bible, however, we are after more than mere intellectual understanding. We seek to welcome all that the Bible teaches and so we read with our hearts open to the Holy Spirit. He is our ultimate Teacher, Counselor, and Guide. We continually pursue complete surrender to Him, longing to be so filled by Him that our lives reflect that fruit produced by Him.

(3) People of God. We were not designed to live the Christian life alone. We need other believers. We are only one part of the Body of Christ. All the "one another" commands of Scripture become the regular practice of our lives. We confess our sins to each other, bear each other's burdens, pray for one another, encourage one another, etc.

(4) Mission of God. Jesus Christ has chosen to continue His mission of advancing His Kingdom through us. We are the means He uses to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, and preach the Good News. Every follower of Jesus has been gifted to serve the mission. God's mission becomes our mission.

Statement of Faith:

1. The Word of God - The Bible is God's Word to us. It tells us of God's initiative to rescue us from sin and its consequences through His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the key to the interpretation of the whole Bible. The Holy Spirit of God directed human authors to write down just what He wanted. When the Bible was originally written, it was without error. The Bible is true and trustworthy, telling us everything we need to know to please God and find meaning and fulfillment. It is the highest authority for everything we believe and do. (Mk 13:31; Jn 8:31-32; Acts 20:32; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21)

2. The Trinity - There is only one true God, and God simultaneously exists in three persons. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are equally deserving of worship and honor. The three persons of the Trinity have distinct, but complementary roles in the fulfillment of God's perfect plan. (Gen 1:1,26; Deut. 6:4; Matt 28:19; Jn 1:1,3; 4:24; Rom 1:19-20; Eph 4:5-6)

3. The Father - The Father is the first person of the Trinity. He is infinite (having no beginning or end) and knows all things (past, present, and future), yet He wants to interact with you on a personal level. The Father is perfect in every quality and virtue. He has the power and integrity to keep all of His promises. (Mt 23:9; Lk 10:21-22; Jn 3:16; 6:27; Rom 1:7; 1 Tim 1:1-2; 2:5-6; 1 Pet 1:3; Rev 1:6)

4. The Son, Jesus Christ - Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. He is the unique Son of God who always existed with the Father. Jesus entered human history: God became man, was born to Mary while she was still a virgin, and had no original sin. He then lived his entire life free from any sin. He performed miracles and taught with authority, giving evidence of His position in the Trinity. Jesus was murdered by being nailed to a cross. He died willingly and His blood provides the perfect and only sacrifice for sin. Jesus was buried in a tomb. On the third day after His death He was raised to life again, demonstrating that His sacrifice for sin on our behalf was accepted by the Father. Jesus returned to heaven and is our advocate in the presence of the Father. (Mt 1:18-25; 20:28; Lk 1:26-38; Jn 1:1; 20:28,30-31; Acts 1:11; Rom 5:6-8; 6:9-10; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 1:4-5; 1 Pet 2:21-24; Heb 7:25; 9:28)

5. The Holy Spirit - The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is the One who shows people how they violate God's standard of perfection. He shows them what is good and right and lets them know there will some day be a judgment. He gives God's people spiritual life and special abilities for service. The Holy Spirit lives in every person who has their sins forgiven by Jesus Christ. He is consistent in His help, teaching and causing people to change from the inside out until they are just like Jesus. (Jn 3:6-8; 14:14-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-14; Rom 8:8, 13-14, 26-29; 12:4-8; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:11,19; 12:1-31; 2 Cor 3:16-18; Gal 4:29; 5:18; Eph 3:16; 4:1-13; 2 Th 2:13; 2 Tim 1:7; Tit 3:5; Rom 15:16)

6. Spiritual Birth - Every person has broken God's standard of perfection. Every person has sinned. We have chosen to do things that are wrong and we have inherited an inner nature from our forefathers that has been in rebellion against God since the first person, Adam. Sin requires death which is why Jesus died on the cross. Jesus gave His own blood to provide the only way of forgiveness. When the Holy Spirit convinces a

person that they are guilty and that the blood of Jesus Christ is the only satisfactory payment for sin, He also gives the power to turn from sin and trust Jesus Christ for new life, bringing that person into God's family forever. We believe those who have turned from their sin and trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord have new and eternal life. (Gen 1:26; 2:17; 3:19; 5:2; Psa 51:7; Prov 28:13; Ecc 2:11; Jer 17:9; Jn 1:12-13; 3:14; 5:24,30; 8:12; 10:26-28; 16:8; Rom 3:19-20; 5:19; 8:1-17; 9:14-24; 2 Cor 5:17; 2 Th 1:9; 2:13; Tit 3:5-7; 1 Jn 1:9; Jam 1:14; Rev 21:1-8)

7. The Church - The Church is people and includes everyone who has experienced this spiritual birth. Followers of Jesus Christ also come together to form local churches that worship, serve and grow together. We grow in relationship to God through the study and application of His Word, which also leads us to love one another. Jesus is Head of the Church. The Church is to do the things Jesus gave us to do and help others learn about the Good News of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ. (Acts 1:8; 2:41-42; Eph 2:19-22; 5:19-21; Col 1:18; Heb 10:23-25)

8. How Christians should live - Christians have the privilege of living free of the control of sin that had us trapped before the Holy Spirit gave us new life. We can now make progress in living in a way that pleases God, maintains our freedom and lets others know God does change lives! It is for our best that we learn to live what the Bible teaches. As we grow we will see God changing our character to be more like the character of Jesus. People around us will see that God is real and that He is good. (Jn 14:15, 23-24; Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 9:6-13; Eph 4:13; Col 1:9-10, 28; Heb 12:1-2; 1 Jn 2:3-6; 4:7-12; 1 Th 4:1)

9. Two practices Jesus gave the church - Jesus gave the church two practices that remind us and show others what God has done for His people in the Gospel: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Though practicing them does not make you more acceptable to God, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, they confirm and nourish the believer. We know that Christians disagree on when and how people should be baptized, but our practice will be to baptize by immersion those who profess personal faith in Jesus Christ. (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 2:38-42; 8:36-39; Rom 6:1-11; Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:17-20; 1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:23-26; 1 Pet 3:21)

10. We have been given freedom and responsibility - When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in that person and will teach him/her according to the Bible. Each person can speak and relate directly to God and is accountable to God. The local church also has freedom and accountability before God and is to be controlled solely by the authority of Jesus Christ (not denominational or political authorities). (Acts 5:29; 20:28-32; Rom 14:7-9; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19-20; Eph 2:20-22; 2 Cor 3:7-18; Col 1:18; 1 Tim 2:5)

11. The end of time - Some day Jesus Christ will make a visible return to the earth to set up His kingdom. Every person who has ever lived will be brought before God for a final judgment. Those who have not come to faith in Jesus Christ will spend eternity in Hell, separated from God's loving favor where there is nothing but evil and endless suffering. Those who have experienced spiritual birth (see #6) will live in the joyous presence of God forever. (Mt 16:27; Mk 14:62; Jn 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor 4:5; 15:20-24,35-58; Phil 3:20; 1 Th 4:14-18; 2 Th 1:6-10; 2 Tim 4:1; Tit 2:13; Rev 20:4-15)

Church Covenant:

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, we do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We pledge, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and faith; to promote its well-being and spiritual maturity; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, in the measure that God prospers each of us, to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel throughout all nations.

We also pledge to maintain family and private devotions; to teach our children the Christian truths; to seek the salvation of our family and friends; to walk with discernment in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, a godly example in our behavior, and zealous in our efforts to advance the Kingdom of our Savior.

We further pledge to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to seek God's help in avoiding anything that might harm our own or another's faith; to be slow to take offense but always ready for reconciliation and to seek it without delay.

We moreover pledge as individuals that when we move from this community, we will seek out some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

Constitution and Bylaws:

Article 1 - The Name
The name of this church shall be Grace Pointe Church Saint Cloud, Inc. (GPC) located in Saint Cloud, Florida.

Article 2 - The Purpose

GPC exists to make more and better disciples of Jesus Christ together.

Article 3 - The Criteria for Partnership
Partnership shall be open to anyone who is personally trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, has been baptized, and who is in agreement with our statement of faith, church covenant, relational commitments, and constitution.

Article 4 - Procedure for Admission to Partnership
Those meeting the above criteria for partnership, may become partners of GPC through the following procedure:

A. Demonstration of regular worship attendance and consistent participation in the life and ministry of GPC.

B. Personal Interviews. Individuals desiring to become partners shall meet with an elder or appointed leader to verbalize their personal testimony, to determine the integrity of their faith, and commitment to and alignment with GPC as a local body of believers. Upon verification of these matters, the elders shall recommend the candidate(s) to the congregation for acceptance into partnership.

C. Signed Statement of Commitment. A signed Statement of Commitment shall confirm an individual's desire for partnership and serve as a formal record of partnership.

D. The candidate's partnership shall become effective upon a simple majority vote by the current partners.

E. In the event that a partner no longer participates in the life and ministry of GPC for a period of at least twelve months, their partnership status shall be considered inactive and their partnership privileges revoked. Reinstatement may be granted to full partnership status upon reengagement in the life and ministry of GPC and action of the elders.

Article 5 – Annual Meeting and Fiscal Year
An annual meeting of the GPC partners shall be held in the first quarter of each year for the purpose of informing the congregation of ministry concerns and priorities for the coming year. The fiscal year of the church shall be January 1 – December 31 inclusive.

Article 6 – Discipline of Partners
A. Personal Grievances. Whenever partners have a grievance, the persons involved

shall follow the rules set forth in Matthew 18. If this procedure does not lead to reconciliation, the issue(s) shall be submitted in writing to the Board of Elders and persons directly involved for consideration. Counsel will be given and appropriate church action, if necessary. (see Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 6:8)

B. Unchristian Behavior and Other Discipline Cases. Each partner will be encouraged to maintain his/her Christian obligations as stated in the church covenant. When the actions of a partner in any of these areas are determined to be detrimental to the church or any other partner, the matter shall be considered by the Board of Elders or person(s) appointed by the elders. Such consideration shall include confidential inquiry, counsel to the partner(s) and recommendation to the church for appropriate action, if necessary. The spirit of this inquiry and counsel is to be supportive and expressive of the acceptance, help, and forgiveness of the church. If the partner responds favorably to the inquiry, demonstrating acceptance of forgiveness through repentance (change of life), no report to the church shall be necessary and the matter shall be considered closed, except that counsel may continue to be given as needed. Should the partner fail to respond to the inquiry or fail to demonstrate the acceptance of forgiveness through repentance, the Board of Elders shall recommend to the church that his/her name be removed from partnership. If possible the partner must be notified of the meeting and given the privilege of speaking on his/her own behalf. Upon evidence of restoration to the faith and/or the church, a dismissed partner may be reinstated through the regular procedure for admission.

Article 7 - Selection of Elders

While sharing equally in the blessings of salvation, men and women are given distinctive, complementary roles by God as part of the created order. The primary teaching ministry and governing authority of the local church is to be entrusted to men who meet the standards of godliness and maturity described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. This designation is not a matter of giftedness or ability but the sovereign design of God (1 Tim 2:12-13). The following steps shall be followed in the selection of elders:

A. The name of any potential elder candidate who is a partner in good standing, senses God's call, and meets the standards of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, may be placed before the Elder Board by any partner of the congregation.

B. At least two representatives of the elders will interview the candidate to provide an initial determination of whether his desire, qualifications, calling, gift mix, and personality will strengthen and complement the Elder Board.

C. If the candidate is approved for consideration, his name will be submitted to the entire Elder Board. Upon the unanimous agreement of the Elder Board, the candidate will be announced to the congregation as an elder apprentice and will begin an apprenticeship of not less than 6 months or more than one year. The apprentice will be assigned to serve alongside one of the elders who will coach, guide, evaluate, and encourage him.

D. At the beginning of the apprenticeship, the name will be presented to the

congregation at any regular worship service. The congregation should observe, encourage, and evaluate the apprentice's suitability to serve in the office of elder throughout the apprenticeship.

E. If after the apprenticeship the apprentice still believes God is calling him to serve as an elder and upon a unanimous confirmation of the Elder Board, the apprentice's name will be announced to the congregation as a nominee to the office of elder. Any partner of the congregation may present concerns of the nominee's suitability to the elders for a period of thirty days following nomination.

F. If concerns are raised, issues will be evaluated by the elders in light of 1 Tim. 3:2-7 and Tit. 1:6-9.

G. Following the thirty-day nomination period, with all concerns resolved, the name of the nominee will be considered by the Elder Board.

H. Upon unanimous confirmation of the Elder Board, the nominee shall be presented to the partners of the congregation for approval. The nominee must receive at least three-fourths majority vote for approval.

I. This process may be discontinued at any point by the candidate, or by unanimous agreement of the Elder Board.

Article 8 - Terms of Elders

Since the Bible indicates no fixed term for elders, no specific fixed term of office is recommended. Instead, each elder, upon appointment, will be subject to review, recommitment, and re-affirmation by the congregation each year at the annual meeting. Those elders who renew their annual commitment and receive at least a three-fourths majority vote of affirmation from eligible partners present at the annual meeting are approved for another year of service.

An individual's service as an elder may be discontinued by his own decision or a unanimous vote of all remaining elders. The decision of an elder to leave the Elder Board would not preclude his service as a future elder, subject to the regular elder selection process (except for apprenticeship requirements).

If, at any time, it is confirmed by two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19-20) that an elder is involved in sin that would disqualify him from office according to 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1, he will be publicly rebuked and removed from office as soon as the Elder Board becomes satisfied the charges are true. It is the intention of the church that a sinning brother be restored in his relationship to the Lord and the church family. Any elder who is removed from office due to sin cannot be a candidate for elder for a period of at least five years. It is most critical that a meaningful relationship with the Lord, a godly lifestyle, and the confidence of the church family be restored.

Article 9 - Role of Elders

Elders are charged with the biblical responsibility of the oversight of the church. All policy, staff, budgeting and ministry plans are ultimately the responsibility of the Elder

Board. The Elder Board may appoint individuals or special teams for limited periods of service to complete assigned tasks when the board determines delegation to be the most appropriate method.

The Elders shall determine and approve the annual financial budgets of the church or any changes in or additions to such budgets; authorize any expenditure of the funds by the church Treasurer for any purpose when such an expenditure is not covered by an accepted budget. The Elders shall encourage input from the congregation regarding budgetary needs while keeping them informed of budgetary priorities and financial needs. At least once a year, the Elders shall have a review of the church financial records conducted by someone from outside the congregation.

Article 10 - Role of Deacon/Deaconess

The Deacon/Deaconess may serve within the Deaconate through a wide variety of practical tasks within the church family as directed by the Elder Board. Both men and women may serve within the Deaconate (understanding the Greek γυναῖκας in 1 Timothy 3:11 to allow for the interpretation of "women" rather than "wives" as well as Paul's commendation of Phoebe as a deacon, διάκονος, in Romans 16:1). When the Elders identify a circumstance indicating the need for a new Deacon, they will request nominations from the partners of Grace Pointe Church. Deacons and Deaconesses may be nominated by any partner in good standing and will then be chosen by the Elder Board. Nominees must have attended Grace Pointe Church for at least 12 months (unless otherwise approved by the Elders) and must be a present partner in good standing. Both a husband and wife may serve within the Deaconate simultaneously with the approval of the Elders and agreement from the couple.

Since the Bible indicates no fixed term for Deacons and Deaconesses, no specific fixed term of office is recommended. Instead, each Deacon/Deaconess, upon appointment, will be subject to review, recommitment, and re-affirmation by the Elder Board each year at the annual meeting. Deacons or Deaconesses may be removed from the Deaconate at any time by a three-fourths vote of the Elder Board. The prototype of the deacon ministry is found in Acts 6:1-7. Biblical qualifications for Deacons/Deaconesses are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

Article 11 - Ministry Staff

The elders shall be responsible for the oversight of ministry staff, including staff selection and dismissal, when necessary. Each ministry staff member will be accountable to one supervisor. The roles and job descriptions for staff members require approval of their immediate supervisor and the elders. Staff salaries shall be determined annually by the Elder Board.

Article 12 - The Role of the Lead Pastor

Consistent with the New Testament teaching regarding spiritual gifts, it is evident that the Lead Pastor, like any partner of the body, is uniquely gifted and should seek to serve within his gift area. (Eph. 4:11ff; 1 Cor. 12)

In addition to his shepherding role as an elder, the Lead Pastor is primarily to be a teacher of the Word of God, the Bible. He is to teach and exhort with words and by example. His goal is to help bring people to maturity of faith through insightful and

accurate presentation and proclamation of the Bible, equipping them to be the true ministers of the body. As a teacher he must stress both the understanding and the application of God's Word.

The Lead Pastor should not be responsible to serve in areas unrelated to his primary function as a teaching elder and should maintain a proper balance of prayer, teaching, shepherding and leadership.

As shepherds of the church, it is one of the roles of the elders to appoint other leaders with complementary gifts to undertake areas and aspects of the ministry that cannot and/or should not be filled by the Lead Pastor.

In the case of irresolvable differences between the Lead Pastor and/or Elders, the District Executive Minister of Converge Southeast shall be invited to help facilitate resolution of the disagreement.

Article 13 - Selection of the Lead Pastor
In the event of vacancy in the office of Lead Pastor, the elders shall be responsible to conduct a search for candidates to fill the position.

Once the elders have selected a candidate, evaluated and approved him according to the elder qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he will be presented to the congregation as a nominee for the office of Lead Pastor. No candidate may be presented to the congregation who has not first been closely evaluated and approved by the Elder Board.

A suitable process of exposure and evaluation by the congregation will be developed by the Elder Board. At the conclusion of the congregational evaluation, a three-fourths majority vote of the partnership in attendance at a meeting called for that purpose will be required for approval and appointment.

Notice will be given to all partners at least two weeks prior to a meeting to be held for the purpose of voting on a Lead Pastor. It should be understood that a congregational vote does not constitute a call from God but gives indication of a desire and willingness to follow the leadership of this man and affirms his role as an elder.

Article 14 – Dismissal of the Lead Pastor
A call for dismissal of the Lead Pastor must be recommended by at least three-fourths of the Elders and shall require the affirmative vote of at least three-fourths of the church partners present and voting at a regular or special meeting called for that purpose. Notice of the time, place, and purpose of such meeting shall be given by letter from the Elders to all church partners at least two weeks prior to the meeting date. Upon termination, the Lead Pastor may receive appropriate severance pay as determined by the Elders.

Article 15 – Indemnification Statement
GPC will indemnify any and all persons who may serve or who have served at any time as a Pastor, Associate Pastor, or in another executive level staff position in the church, as a church officer or partner of a church board or committee, as a youth leader for a church youth organization, or as a teacher or counselor of the church elected or

appointed by the church of any board or committee of the church, against any and all expenses, including amounts paid upon judgments, counsel fees, and amounts paid in settlement (before or after suit is commenced) actually and necessarily incurred by such persons in connection with the defense or settlement of any claim, action, suit, or proceeding in which they, or any of them, are made parties, or a party, or which may be asserted against any such person be adjudged in any action, suit, or proceeding to be liable for duties. Such indemnification will be in addition to any other rights to which those indemnified may be entitled under any law, bylaw, agreement, or otherwise.

Article 16 - Property Acquisition and Disposition
The Elder Board is responsible to guide the process of property acquisition and disposition. Prior to making any legal agreement to purchase or sell real property, the elders are required to present the proposal to the partners. A majority vote of the partners present will be required for approval of acquisition or disposition. In the event God should lead GPC to disband, the Elder Board will present the recommendation to the partners with a proposal to use any remaining assets to further the purpose of GPC in church planting.

Article 17 - Procedure for Amendment
This document was drafted by faithful but fallible people. Should the Spirit of God point out the need to revise this document in any way, the Elder Board will present suggested revisions to the partnership of this body for ratification by majority vote of the partners present at a meeting called for that purpose. Notice of the meeting will be given to all partners at least two weeks in advance.

Minor revisions not effecting change in the theology, ministry philosophy or overall structure and government shall be made at the discretion of the elders (i.e. grammar, clarification of ideas considered confusing, added Scriptural support, etc.).

Article 18 - Statement of Cooperation and Partnerships
In order to further accomplish what Jesus has given us to do, we network with other churches of similar doctrine and objectives through an association of churches. Our local church is voluntarily a part of Converge Worldwide and Converge Southeast. If it ever becomes necessary GPC may withdraw from the conference at the discretion of the Elder Board. This association exists and functions to help local churches make more and better followers of Jesus Christ. We also join with independent churches and churches of other denominations when we believe this relationship will help us do what God wants us to do. (Acts 15:36,41; 16:5; 1 Cor 16:1; Gal 1:1-3; Rev 1:4,10-11)

Article 19 - Dissolution
Should it become apparent that Grace Pointe Church should dissolve, the elders of Grace Pointe Church may call for a vote of the current partners to approve such a decision by a three-fourths majority vote. Only the current partners may make the decision to dissolve Grace Pointe Church. The elders may only call for such a vote if a three-fourths majority of current elders approve such a vote to occur.

Should Grace Pointe Church ever dissolve, the elders will decide (by vote requiring three-fourths majority approval from among the current elders) the organization(s) to whom the church's remaining assets should be donated. All assets must be donated to a

tax-exempt organization within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose.

Relational Commitments:

INTRODUCTION

The following Commitments are designed to help the people who attend our church relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic relationships. These Commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, protecting children from abuse, counseling, confidentiality, and mutual accountability.

These Commitments are intended to help us build a strong community of faith. By *community*, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to encourage and support one another as we worship God, grow in our understanding of his love for us, and seek to tell others about the salvation and peace they, too, can find through faith in Jesus Christ.

We know that true community isn't easy to achieve. Each of us brings our own expectations and agendas into the church. This diversity usually leads to rich discussions and creative ministries; but sometimes it can lead to conflict. As James 4:1-2 warns, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it."

That certainly describes us! At times, no matter how hard we try to build a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. That's where these Commitments come in. They pull together key principles from God's Word and serve as our relational guidelines. These Commitments accomplish several important purposes:

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ.
- They help to prevent surprises, disappointed expectations, confusion and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide a clear track for us to run on when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guidelines for how our leaders will counsel others, guard confidential information, and protect our children from abuse.
- They define and limit the spiritual authority of church leaders and thereby insure that all members are treated fairly. [1]
- Finally, they reduce our church's exposure to legal liability by clearly establishing our relational practices and by affirming our mutual commitment to resolve conflict biblically.[2]

---

[1] When we use the term "leader" in these Commitments, we are referring to the pastors and elders of our church.

[2] See www.PeacemakerChurch.net for information on how these Commitments can help to prevent conflict and reduce exposure to legal liability in our church.

As you read our Relational Commitments, we encourage you to study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. We want you to be confident that these Commitments are based solidly on the Word of God. If your study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach our leaders, who will be happy to talk with you about these principles.

We encourage you to expressly embrace these Commitments and formally join our church by going through our partnership process, acknowledging your faith in Christ, and signing our Church Covenant provided at the end of this document. (See pages 6 and 29 for more information about church partnership.)

If you are not yet ready to become a partner, you and your family are certainly welcome to attend our worship services, find fellowship in a Life Group, and seek assistance from our leaders. Please realize that if you continue relating to us in any of these ways, we will assume that you have consented to these Commitments, even if you have not yet formally joined the church. (See the story on the next page to learn why these Commitments apply to both partners and attenders.)

As followers of Christ, we will do all we can to encourage you to grow in faith and godliness and to live a disciplined life that honors our Lord Jesus Christ and enhances the witness of His church.

The Elders of Grace Pointe Church

These Relational Commitments are adapted from *The Peacemaker Church*.
Used by permission of Peacemaker® Ministries.
Edition 1.1 www.PeacemakerChurch.net

A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

Two boys, John and Luke, lost their mother at a young age. When they were in their teens, their father was reported to have died when his plane crashed into the ocean. The boys had no other relatives, so two neighboring families took them in.

The Friendly family did all they could to make John feel welcome in their home. They gave him his own bedroom, provided his meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. Not wanting him to feel any pressure, they did not explain to him any of the family rules. Instead they hoped that he would notice how their other children behaved and decide on his own to act the same way.

Not knowing exactly what was expected of him, John frequently disappointed the family by violating unspoken rules. Feeling judged and unconnected to the family, he became increasingly independent. He came and went at any hour, played loud music, and spent long hours in his room with a variety of girls. When Mr. Friendly finally tried to talk with him about his behavior, John said, "I'm not your son, so you have no right to tell me how to live my life. I like having a bedroom and meals whenever I decide to be here, but I'll still do whatever seems right to me."

Tensions continued to build, and finally Mr. Friendly asked John to leave. Fortunately for John, there was another Friendly family in town, and they were happy to take him in. But there the cycle started all over again.

John's brother had an entirely different experience. Luke was taken in by the Loving family. They wanted him to feel welcome, so they gave him a room, provided meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. But they also wanted to avoid misunderstandings and conflict. So shortly after Luke arrived, Mr. Loving explained the family rules to Luke, so he would know how to get along with the rest of the family. He said, "Even though you are not my son, I will be glad to look out for you the best I can. But as long as you are in my home, I also will expect you to behave as my other children do."

Like any normal teenager, Luke sometimes broke the rules. When he did, Mr. Loving sat down with him, pointed out what he'd done wrong, and held him accountable to the same standards he had established for his other children. Luke sometimes resented this discipline, but he eventually realized it was always done in love, and it kept him out of a lot of trouble.

After a few months, Mr. Loving approached Luke and said, "Since you are living here like part of the family, we would like to make it official. If you feel this is where you'd like to stay, we'd like to adopt you and make you our son."

Luke gladly accepted and formally committed himself to the family. In doing so, he changed from being an orphan who merely resided in the home to being a son who willingly accepted and enjoyed all of the same responsibilities and privileges of his new brothers and sisters.

Suppose that John and Luke's father is rescued from an island two years later. When he is reunited with his sons and hears what has happened to them, which family will he thank the most? The Friendly family, who were kind enough to give John a place to hang out, but could not bring themselves to give him any boundaries? Or the Loving family, who welcomed Luke in, held him accountable to the same rules as the rest of the family, and invited him to be a son?

The answer is obvious. And there is a real Father who one day will evaluate the way we care for the people who come into our church family. Therefore, we are glad to welcome people and give them a place to worship, grow and serve. But being "friendly" is not good enough. We want to be loving, as God defines loving (Heb. 12:5-6; 10:24). Therefore, we will encourage and expect everyone who attends our church to live out the biblical principles that are summarized in these Relational Commitments.

And when people have lived like part of our family for a while, we will encourage them to "make it official." Living like an orphan, with its illusion of independence and self-determination, may seem appealing to some. But it cannot compare to the security, privileges, and sense of belonging that come from joining a biblical church and living as truly committed brothers and sisters in the family of God.

COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9).

Our church is committed to building a "culture of peace" that reflects God's peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness and broken relationships are not appropriate for the people whom God has reconciled to himself through the sacrifice of his only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14).

Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us his wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to live out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

Personal Peacemaking

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the "logs" out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29). If we have a problem with others, we will talk *to* them, not *about* them.
- We will make "charitable judgments" toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as he has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).
- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others' interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Assisted Peacemaking

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.
- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other

party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.

- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our *Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline*.
- If we have a legal dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration, in accordance with the *Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation* of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker Ministries (www.Peacemaker.net).

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and lead others to know his infinite love and peace.[3]

[3] Adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict,* by Ken Sande (Baker Books, 3rd Ed. 2004).

COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES

So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate (Matt. 19:6).

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with his bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, he established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since experienced the repentance and forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus. We want all of you to know that you are welcome in our church.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a significant portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide thorough premarital counseling to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are well prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in weekly fellowship groups in which people can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to providing counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness and ongoing discipleship.

We recognize, however, that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. We believe divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matt. 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

Even though divorce is *permissible* in these situations, it is not *required*. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7). When divorce becomes an option, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the

church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it ends. Therefore, when someone is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our leaders and cooperate with them as they determine whether grounds exist, promote repentance and reconciliation, and exhaust redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who have filed for divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court issues a divorce decree. Thus they should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is biblically valid and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God graciously extends this same love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.

COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The prudent see danger and take refuge (Prov. 27:12a).

Children are a blessing from God, and he calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a safe and blessed place for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.
Since sin affects every person and organization in the world, however, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen within our fellowship, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children from foreseeable harm. This commitment includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- We do not allow anyone to work regularly with our youth (children or teenagers), unless he or she has regularly attended our church for at least six months and is a formal member.
- We require all of our youth workers to complete a detailed application and screening process.
- We require that, whenever practicable, youth workers serve in teams of two or more and be visible to other workers.

If a child is harmed in our church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold offending youth workers fully responsible for their actions. We will also evaluate our practices and procedures, considering changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.*

* Grace Pointe Church has a separate and more extensive safety policy concerning our children and youth. It governs policies and procedures as well as requirements for volunteer workers. To obtain a copy, please contact the GPC office at 407-494-4644.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships. Whenever believers are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through personal efforts, God calls them to seek assistance from other believers, and when needed from church leaders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its people to seek counsel from and confess sins to each other and to our leaders.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Unless they specifically state otherwise, none of those who counsel in this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.

God calls our leaders to set an example for us "in speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity"(1 Tim. 4:12). Therefore, we expect them to treat counselees with every respect and courtesy, and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity during counseling (Eph. 5:3). We also expect counselees to promptly report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.

To prevent our leaders from being placed in situations that might compromise their pastoral commitments, we, the members and attenders of this church, agree that we will not try to compel them to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge any confidential information they receive through pastoral counseling or ministry (Prov. 11:13, 25:9).

There are occasions when our leaders do not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counseling. At such times we expect our leaders to give first priority to people who have formally joined the church (Gal. 6:10), and to serve those who only attend the church by referring them to another source of godly counsel.

COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY

A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy man keeps a secret (Prov. 11:13).

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all members and attenders are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our leaders will carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when our leaders believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

- when a leader is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other leaders in our church or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Prov. 11:14);

- when the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);

- when a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20); or,

- when leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).

Like all of our Relational Commitments, the principles and practices described below apply to all the people who attend our church (both partners and attenders).

A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect his character, wisdom and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph. 3:10-11). He loves his church so much that he sent his Son to die for her (Eph. 5:25). His ultimate purpose for his church is to present her as a gift to his Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the "bride" of Christ (Rev. 19:7). For this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Phil. 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb. 10:24-25).

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic or harsh, as modern society does. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (Ps. 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

> *If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?*

And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matt. 18:12-13).

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Pet. 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so they can play a piece properly. And we applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble, so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in his Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

The leaders of our church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in our church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks him in prayer, and draws on his grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a Life Group leader, other ministry leader or church leader. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If an individual persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our leaders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our leaders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including but not limited to private and public admonition, withholding of the Lord's Supper, removal from office, withdrawal of normal fellowship, and, as a last resort, removal from partnership (Matt. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:17).

If the straying individual does not repent in response to private appeals from our leaders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person's behavior.[4] This step may include close friends, a Life Group, another ministry group, or the entire congregation if our leaders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20).[5]

If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then our leaders may formally remove him or her from partnership and normal fellowship. They

---

[4] For example, it is not uncommon for a person to attend a church, develop relationships of trust, persuade people to give him money to invest, and then fail to return the money as promised. Senior citizens are particularly vulnerable to these schemes, and many people have lost much of what they had saved for retirement. When such sinful men are discovered, they usually leave a church, but continue to prey on members who have not heard about their schemes. If our leaders found such a man in our church, they would call him to repent and confess his wrongs. If he refused, they would bring him under formal discipline, and also warn the congregation not to trust him with their money.

[5] If our leaders inform our entire congregation about a disciplinary situation, they have discretion whether to divulge the individual's name. This decision usually will depend on a variety of factors, such as: how widely known the situation already is; whether there might be people in the congregation who could persuade the individual to repent; or whether the congregation needs to be on guard against potential harm he might cause (see previous footnote). Even if our leaders decide it is not necessary to identify an individual specifically, they may still inform the congregation of the general situation and the disciplinary steps they have followed. This general information can help to enlist wide prayer support, let the congregation know that our leaders are obeying the Lord's command to seek after those who stray, and warn people who may be flirting with secret sin that they, too, may face discipline if they do not turn back to God.

also may inform the church body of their decision and instruct the congregation to treat the individual as an unbeliever. This means that we will no longer treat him as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him, remind him of God's holiness and mercy, and call him to repent and put his faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability if discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be given effect until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If an individual leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our leaders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from his sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members[6] (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, and our leaders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

People who have been excluded from another church will not be allowed to partake of the sacraments in our church, to become partners, or to participate in the regular fellowship of our church until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our leaders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10-11).

---

[6] For example, if we confronted a man in our church for seducing young women, or for acting inappropriately around little children, or for sowing gossip and division, and he left and started attending another church, we would consider it our duty to urge the leaders of that church to counsel with him and to protect their people from his harmful behavior.

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A PARTNER OF OUR CHURCH

We believe that God wants every Christian to become a partner of a local church. To learn why, we encourage you to read the third chapter of Donald Whitney's book, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ*. Becoming a partner of a church can be a life-changing decision. The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use your gifts, and mutual accountability that you experience in a church can dramatically change your relationship with the Lord and with the people he places in your life. Therefore, we want you to take time to get to know our church, learn how we are fulfilling God's command to build his kingdom, and see how we love and relate to one another in daily life.

If you like what you see in our church, we would love to visit with you more about our beliefs and vision for ministry and what it means to become a formal partner. Visit with any of our pastors, elders, or staff members for more information.

If you are convinced that joining our church will help you to grow in your ability to love and serve God, we would be delighted to have you become a partner of our body. By joining our church, you will demonstrate in a concrete way your desire to unite with us to advance Christ's kingdom.

If you would like to learn more about the importance of church partnership, please read the books mentioned above. You also may meet with our leaders, who would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about partnership.