

# **CONSTITUTION OF GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MOUNT LAUREL, NEW JERSEY**

## **ARTICLE I – The Name**

The name of this church shall be: “Grace Presbyterian Church of Mt. Laurel.”

## **ARTICLE II– The Constitution Defined**

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Book of Church Order (BCO), comprising the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline and the Directory for Worship; all as adopted by the Church. The following articles are in addition to our above stated constitution and where there are allowable additions or differences, the articles herein are to be followed.

## **ARTICLE III – Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of Grace Presbyterian Church of Mt. Laurel is to carry out the Great Commission as given by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19, 20). That Commission is to:

1. Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations,
2. Baptize those disciples in the Name of the Trinity,
3. Teach all nations the commands of Jesus,
4. Edify Christians through the teaching of God’s Word.

To that end we labor together to evangelize the lost by proclaiming God’s saving grace through the shed blood and finished work of Jesus on Calvary, we gather for the promotion of godly worship and Bible-based teaching, we send out missionaries into other places, we cooperate with those of like purpose, and - being a Reformed Church of the Presbyterian Church in America – we stand for the defense of the faith as expressed in the Westminster Standards as adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

## **ARTICLE IV – Doctrine**

The doctrine of this church shall be that system commonly called “The Reformed Faith,” as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as held by the Presbyterian Church in America); an abbreviation of which, called “The Doctrinal Statement of the Church,” is as follows:

1. We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as inspired of God, and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are of supreme and final authority in faith and life.

2. We believe in one God, existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, coequal and eternal.
3. We believe that man was created in the image of God and that he sinned and thereby incurred not only physical death, but also that spiritual death which is alienation from God; and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature, and become sinners in thought, word, and deed.
4. We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and is true God and true Man.
5. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice, and that all who believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood.
6. We believe in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord, in His ascension in the heavens, and in His present life there for us as High Priest and Advocate.
7. We believe in that blessed hope, the personal and visible return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
8. We believe that all who receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ have been born again of the Holy Spirit, and thereby become children of God.
9. We believe in the eternal salvation and everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the eternal, conscious punishment of the lost.
10. We believe that Christ instituted the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to be observed until He comes.
11. We believe that marriage is the union of only one man and one woman in covenant with God (Gen. 2:24). Further, because we do believe that marriage is the union of only one man and one woman in covenant with God, marriage in this church will only be performed if both parties are believers in Christ and children of God as defined in item 8 above, and are in agreement with the doctrinal statements as outlined in this article (Article IV).

## **ARTICLE V – Membership**

Section 1 – Any person who has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and has given assurance of his/her desire to fulfill the five membership vows of the PCA (BCO 57-5) shall be eligible for membership.

Section 2 – Persons who are to be received into membership of this church with or without a letter of transfer from another church shall give testimony of faith in Jesus Christ before the Session of the church, and be received as a member of this church upon the motion to that effect being passed by the Session. Those persons approved by the Session shall normally be publicly welcomed by the congregation at a mutually agreed upon time.

Section 3 – Members are expected to strive conscientiously to live according to the teaching of God's Word, and to support wholeheartedly the services and activities of the church.

Section 4 – It shall be within the province of the Session to drop from the roll any member or members who for one year show themselves to be indifferent or opposed to the life and work of the church (according to BCO 38-3,4). The name of any person dropped from the roll of the church for any reason, after having been notified, shall be reported at a regularly convened congregational meeting.

Section 5 – Members may be removed from membership at their own request by informing the Session of their intention to withdraw and the reasons why they are unable to fulfill their membership vows. If a member requests to withdraw because of specific problems or disappointments with the church, the Session shall attempt to resolve those matters so that the member may remain in the church and enjoy greater fruitfulness and personal spiritual growth. If the Session is unable to resolve those matters, it shall offer to assist the member in locating a church of like faith and practice that can respond more effectively to the member's gifts and needs. If it appears to the Session that a member has requested removal merely to avoid church discipline, that request shall not be given effect until the disciplinary process has been properly concluded.

Section 6 – All members are expected to contribute to the support of the church. This church shall be supported by the free will offerings and tithes of its members and friends and not by any commercial enterprises.

Section 7 – We, as Christians, live in a non-Christian society. As the people of God, who are called to be holy, we find that the standards for Christian behavior are at odds with the standards of the world. For this reason, our church subscribes to the principle of personal and ecclesiastical holiness.

A. Personal Holiness

The church leadership has the duty to speak on practices that, according to the Bible, are sinful and to direct its membership not to participate in them. Of those commonly held practices and beliefs in our society that the Bible calls sin, we would mention the following: abortion and any participation in the abortion industry, any sexual behavior that is not between one man and one woman in marriage, pornography, belief that God did not create the universe (as in Evolutionary Theory), and the opinion that individuals can attain salvation by holding to religions that do not have Jesus Christ as the only Savior of mankind.

The church leadership also has the duty to warn about those practices that, though they may not in themselves be listed as a sin in the Bible, are wise and expedient for the Christian to avoid. They are the practices that are often common in our society, but were not common in the society of biblical times. Because we believe the conscience is to be free from the commandments of men, we do not require obedience in those areas the Bible does not explicitly address. The leadership still has the duty, however, to teach pastorally that these are areas that Christians should avoid because they are temptation to sin.

## B. Ecclesiastical Faithfulness

We warn against participating with other religious groups that deny the Gospel. In addition, we warn against those churches that claim to be Christian, yet deny the Word of God as the only authoritative rule for what we are to believe and how we are to act. These churches believe doctrines and conduct themselves in ways that are contrary to the teaching of Scriptures. We find cooperation with them as unacceptable for Bible-centered Christians and for our church programs.

## **ARTICLE VI – Government**

Section 1 – The government of this local church is clearly defined in our Book of Church Order, Form of Government (chapters 1-26) and ought to be strictly adhered to in all ecclesiastical matters. Furthermore, the Session ought to encourage the congregation to read and be familiar with the form of government, reviewing it as needed, but especially during any New Members' class.

Section 2 – The pastor shall be called upon a three-quarters (75%) majority vote of the members present and eligible to vote at a duly called congregational meeting, after recommendation by the Session, or by a committee appointed by the Session. Pastors have their standing in the church courts by membership in or appointment of their presbyteries, not as delegates or representatives of their particular churches. Pastors of particular churches are installed or removed by authority of the presbytery and not by the congregation; yet, the presbytery may not install a pastor in any particular church without the approval of the congregation expressed by orderly ballot, nor may the presbytery refuse to remove a pastor if a majority of the congregation requests his removal according to the provisions of the BCO (23-1). If a pastor resigns, he shall give a minimum of thirty days' notice before termination of his services. In the event that the congregation votes to terminate the pastor's services abruptly, the salary shall continue for ninety days, unless his termination is due to the abuse of his office.

Section 3 – The Session shall have general oversight of the spiritual life, regular services, the administration of the sacraments of the church, and the ordination and installation of elders and deacons. The Pastor shall be an ex-officio member of the committees connected with the church and any of its organizations, act as moderator in the meetings of the Session and congregation, and shall conscientiously perform such duties as may be arranged between the Session and himself. If at any time his personal belief, preaching, teaching, or living be not in full accord with the doctrinal statement and standard of this church, and with the "Statement on Personal Holiness and Ecclesiastical Faithfulness" previously referred to, his services as pastor shall be terminated as soon as possible in accordance with the provisions of the BCO (23-1).

Section 4 – Although the chief responsibility for the spiritual affairs of the church rests with the Session and not with the congregation; and although their authority is from Christ as His will is expressed in the Bible and not from the congregation; and although the ruling elders

represent the communicant members of the congregation in the courts of the church; yet, the congregation has the right to choose its ruling elders by a three-quarters (75%) majority vote of members eligible to vote at the Annual Congregational meeting in January called for the election of ruling elders.

Section 5 – All organizations of this church shall come under the jurisdiction of the Session. The Session shall handle and consider suggestions, recommendations, and grievances upon the part of any member or organization affiliated with the church.

Section 6 – The Session shall appoint the elders who will represent the church in each Presbytery and General Assembly meeting.

Section 7 – The Session shall elect as its clerk an elder who is competent in the keeping of records. The Session shall keep an accurate and clear record of its members, including the names of communicant members, the names and ages of their baptized children, and the names of former communicant members transferred to other churches or suspended or otherwise removed from the rolls. The Session records and rolls shall be open to the Presbytery or its duly appointed agents at all times, and shall be submitted to the Presbytery for review at a stated meeting at least once each year.

Section 8-- The Session shall have the full responsibility for all uses of the church property. If uses are to be made of the church property other than those already approved, the privilege of such use must be obtained from the Session.

Section 9 – The Session is responsible for the government and the discipline of the church. Therefore, to keep this responsibility a living, active one, the elders shall assist the pastor in household visitation of the sick and delinquent, inquiring into the spiritual knowledge and conduct of the people, and encouraging them in Christian living.

Section 10 – The Session shall hold a regular monthly meeting unless providentially hindered.

Section 11 - Ordination Vows for Elders and Deacons: the following vows shall be taken by all those ordained to the sacred office of Ruling Elder or Deacon, as contained in the Book of Church Order (BCO) 24-6.

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?

3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of Ruling Elder (or Deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity, and edification of the Church?

## **ARTICLE VII – The Deacons**

Section 1 – The Deacons shall be elected by a three-quarters (75%) majority vote of members eligible to vote and present at the Annual Congregational meeting in January called for the election of deacons. The Deacons of this church shall be organized as a board, of which the pastor shall be an advisory member. The board shall elect a Chairman, Secretary and a Treasurer from their number. Three Deacons (including the Chairman) shall constitute a quorum for any meeting. In the absence of the Chairman, the Pastor can serve as Chairman.

Section 2 – The Board of Deacons shall be responsible for assistance to the poor of the congregation, visitation of the sick, oversight of the presentation of the table for Communion, direction of the physical needs concurrent with the worship services, and any other administrative and charitable duties as may be encouraged by the Session and the congregation. They shall endeavor by God’s grace to live and serve in full conformity with the standards set forth in this Constitution for their particular office and especially as found in the Word of God, I Timothy 3:8-13.

Section 3 – The Board of Deacons shall be responsible to the Session and thus shall make a report of their activities, transactions, receipts, and disbursements to the Session on a regular basis.

Section 4 – The Deacons shall meet separately at least quarterly unless providentially hindered. In addition, the Deacons will meet at the request of the Session.

Section 5 – The Deacons shall elect two from their number to serve on the Board of Trustees annually at the February meeting of the board.

Section 6 – The decisions of the Deacons shall not be ratified until the Minutes of their meeting have been reviewed and approved by the Session. This is so the Book of Church Order will not be violated by allowing the Board of Deacons to usurp authority from the Session, which is the ruling body of the Church (BCO 9-2).

Section 7 – The Deacons shall have the responsibility to arrange for the receiving, counting, and recording in proper form, in books provided for this purpose, all offerings and monies received by the church. It shall be required that a minimum of two unrelated people be

present for the counting and recording of the offering. There are to be two records of the collection, one kept by the Deacons and the second shall be put in a sealed envelope that is given to the church Treasurer. Both records shall contain the initials of the people counting.

## **ARTICLE VIII – The Trustees**

Section 1 – The Board of Trustees shall have entrusted to them the material and financial concerns of the church property. The officers of the Board of Trustees shall be corporate officers of this nonprofit Corporation which is registered in the State of New Jersey. They shall not transfer, sell, purchase, or encumber with loan any real estate for the church, nor spend \$5,000.00 on any item except by express authorization conveyed through a majority vote of the membership present at a meeting of the corporation held in accordance with the laws of the State of New Jersey. When the Trustees feel a special meeting of the Corporation is needed, they shall send the request to the Session, along with the business to be conducted.

Section 2 – The Trustees shall be made up of two members of the Session, two members from the Board of Deacons, and a minimum of four communicant members at large from the congregation who are not Elders or Deacons. The members from the congregation are those elected by the congregation each year at the January meeting of the congregation. They shall be elected by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the members eligible and present at the meeting. The Deacons shall elect from their number two members to serve as Trustees on a yearly basis. The Session will send two members to serve as Trustees every year.

Section 3 – The Trustees shall elect from out of their number every year a President and a Vice-President from the ordained officers, and a Secretary. They shall also elect a Treasurer and a Vice-Treasurer, either from their number or from the congregation at large.

Section 4 – The Board of Trustees shall meet as a distinct body on a monthly basis unless providentially hindered. Special meetings of the Board may be called by the President or, in his absence, the Vice-President, or by direction of the Session. When such special meetings are called, for which no previous notice has been given, prudence should be exercised to conduct only such business as demands immediate attention. If the business is of substantial import, effort should be made to poll absent members by telephone. At least three Trustees, one of whom must be a member elected from the congregation, and the President or Vice-President of the Board, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at any meeting.

Section 5 – The President of the Board of Trustees or the Vice-President, in his absence, shall moderate the meetings and act as the general business manager of its business affairs, as authorized by the Board of Trustees. He shall perform all other duties as may be required of him under the laws of the State of New Jersey, the constitution of this church, and the resolutions of the Board of Trustees. He shall sign all documents, deeds, contracts, and obligations of the corporation. In addition to the President's signature shall be that of the Secretary and one other Trustee. In the absence of the President or in the case of his inability

or refusal to act, the Vice-President shall perform all the duties and possess all the powers of the President.

Section 6 – The Secretary of the Board of Trustees shall keep an accurate record book of all the actions of the Board.

Section 7 – The Treasurer of the church shall draw checks against the church funds as directed by the Board of Trustees or the Session. There shall be kept under his direction a ledger showing the cash amount of all funds and a balance taken at the close of each month. There shall also be prepared monthly in approved form, under his direction, a financial statement; he shall also prepare an annual statement showing the true status of all funds for the fiscal year, for presentation at the stated meeting of Corporation called by the Session. He shall also have custody of the legal papers pertaining to the property and finances of the church; such deeds, abstracts, insurance policies, bonds, notes, etc., which shall be kept in a depository designated by the Board of Trustees; and any access he may have to this depository shall be made under the direction of the Board of Trustees or the Session. His books shall at any time be available to the Board of Trustees and or the Session, and must be submitted to audit at least once a year, as directed by the Board of Trustees. In the event the Treasurer is unable to perform his duties, or there is a vacancy in this office, the duties of the Treasurer shall devolve upon the Assistant Treasurer until action is taken by the Board in supplying another Treasurer.

Section 8 – The decisions of the Trustees shall not be ratified until the minutes of their meeting have been reviewed and approved by the Session. This is so the Book of Church Order will not be violated by allowing the Board of Trustees to usurp authority from the Session, which is the ruling body of the church.

## **ARTICLE IX – Meetings**

Section 1 – There shall be one annual meeting of the congregation each year in January as called by the Session. The Session may receive nominations for the offices of Elder, Deacon, and representatives from the congregation to serve on the Board of Trustees at this meeting and hold elections for men previously nominated and approved by the Session. Only men who have been members for at least one year can be nominated. The course of study for men nominated to the offices of Elder or Deacon will include at least six classes of instruction in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Christian Living. Only those who successfully complete this course of study and sustain the examination before the Session and are recommended by the Session will be permitted to stand for election. It shall be required that every candidate placed in nomination shall state his agreement with the ordination vows as stated in Article 6, Section 11. Trustees, unlike the ordained offices of Elder and Deacon, shall simply be interviewed by the Session regarding the testimony of their conversion and Christian living before being able to stand for election at a called meeting of the congregation.

Section 2 – In the conduct of business meetings any parliamentary questions not covered by this Constitution shall be decided by the latest edition of “Robert’s Rules of Order.”

## **ARTICLE X – Amendments**

This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members present and eligible to vote at any regular or special meeting, said vote to be expressed by written ballot, provided the proposed amendment has been read to the congregation, or presented in such form that each member may read it, at each regular church service for two Sundays preceding said meeting, and provided an exact copy of the proposed amendment has been conspicuously posted in the church, on the four Sundays immediately preceding said meeting. All proposed amendments to the constitution must be presented to the Session for approval before being presented to the congregation.

## **ARTICLE XI – Dissolution**

Section 1 – Dissolution must first be approved by two-thirds vote of the Session of Grace Presbyterian Church of Mt. Laurel at the special meeting called for that purpose with the appropriate notice given in writing stating the purpose of the meeting. Upon such approval by the Session, the membership of Grace Presbyterian Church of Mt. Laurel must then approve such dissolution by a majority vote at a specially called meeting pursuant to proper notice. The Board of Trustees shall cease corporate activities and dissolve and liquidate the corporation only after the required approval by the Session and the membership of Grace Presbyterian Church of Mt. Laurel.

Section 2 – Upon dissolution of the corporation, the Board of Trustees shall pay or make provision for the payment of all of the liabilities of the corporation, and shall thereafter dispose of all of the assets of the corporation exclusively for the purposes stated in Article III of the Constitution of Grace Presbyterian Church of Mt. Laurel thereby in such manner, or to such organization or organizations which are organized and operated exclusively for charitable, educational, or religious purposes as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or the corresponding provision of any future United States internal revenue laws), as the Board of Trustees shall determine.

Section 3 – If any such assets are not so disposed of, the appropriate court of the county in which the principal New Jersey office of the corporation is then located shall dispose of such assets exclusively to the Mission to North America. If the Mission to North America is not in existence at that time, the appropriate court shall dispose of such assets exclusively for the purposes stated in Article III of the Constitution of Grace Presbyterian Church of Mt. Laurel therein, and exclusively to such organization or organizations which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes and at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under Section 501 (c) (3), as such court shall determine.

## **ARTICLE XII – FISCAL YEAR**

The fiscal year of this church shall be from the first day of January to the thirty-first day of December.

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Revised 4/28/99

Revised 9/26/01

Revised 4/27/11

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Revised 9/29/13

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