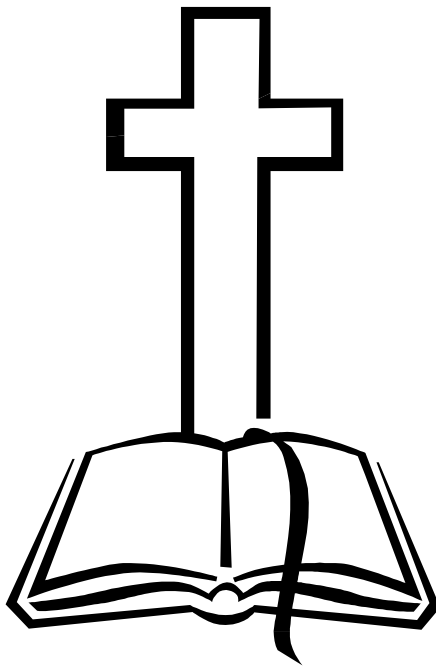


**THE
CONSTITUTION**



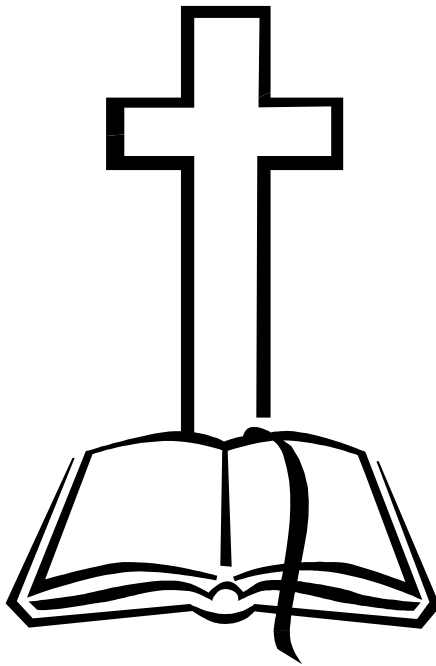
**GRACE CHURCH
of Roanoke, Virginia**

2731 Edgewood St., S.W.

Roanoke, VA



**THE
CONSTITUTION**



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of Roanoke, Virginia**

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Roanoke, VA

Amended: December 5, 1982, December 8, 1991 (see endnotes)

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Name

Grace Church of Roanoke, Virginia, (hereafter called Grace Church), is a congregation of Bible-believing Christians, autonomous in the government of its own affairs, not affiliated with any denomination or ecclesiastical system (I Cor. 1:11-13), and exercising sole and complete control of all property held in its name by trustees duly appointed by the court under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. It was organized in June 1951 and was first called Grace Presbyterian Church, Independent. In February 1953, the congregation voted to drop the word "Presbyterian" and to change the name to Grace Church Independent. In April 1966, the congregation voted to drop the word "Independent" and to change the name to GRACE CHURCH. The significance of this name is as follows:

"GRACE" indicates our grateful acknowledgment that all we are and have is by the grace of God (I Cor. 15:10), and that He, having justified us freely by His grace (Rom. 3:24), has commissioned us to make known to all men the gospel of His grace (Acts 20:24).

"CHURCH" signifies that we are a fellowship of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:2), members of the True Church (Eph. 1:22, 23) of which Christ alone is the Head (Col. 1:18), which He alone is building (Matt. 16:18), and to which He alone adds those who are saved (Acts 2:47). We are subject unto Christ (Eph. 5:24), dependent on the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2,4), and at the same time in loving fellowship with all true members of the Body of Christ everywhere (Eph. 4:3-6).

B. The Object

The object of this church is the edification of Christians through the teaching of God's Word and fellowship, the salvation of souls, the world-wide proclamation of God's saving grace expressed in the shed blood and finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary, the promotion of godly living and worship, and the defense of the faith, until He comes.

II. THE SHORTER DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

1. We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, verbally inspired by God the Holy Spirit (II Sam. 23:2; II Pet. 1:21), inerrant in the original writings (Matt. 5:18; Luke 24:44), the supreme and final authority in faith and practice (II Tim. 3:16; John 12:48).

2. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, coequal in power and glory, having the same attributes and perfections (II Cor. 13:14; John 10:30; Gal. 4:6).

3. We believe that all men are sinners (Rom. 3:12, 23), and that apart from Christ they are presently and eternally dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1), separated from God (Eph. 2:12), and under His condemnation (John 3:18, 36).

4. We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35), was born of the Virgin Mary (Isa. 7:14; Luke 2:7), lived entirely without sin (Heb. 4:15; 7:26), died as the sinner's substitute, making perfect atonement for the sins of the world (II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 3:18; Heb. 10:10-14; I John 2:2), was raised bodily from the dead (Luke 24:6, 39; I Cor. 15:1-4), ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven (Acts 1:9; 7:55,56), where He is the believer's High Priest and advocate (Heb. 9:24; 7:25; I John 2:1).

5. We believe that all who receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour are justified on the ground of His shed blood (Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:9), are born again by the Holy Spirit through the Word (John 3:3-7; I Pet. 1:23), thereby becoming children of God (John 1:12,13; Gal. 3:26), and are indwelt and sealed by the Spirit until the day of redemption (Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13, 14). Believers are thus eternally united to Christ by the Spirit (I Cor. 12:12, 13), and together form the True Church, the Body and Bride of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7-9).

6. We believe in the personal, visible, premillennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:11; I John 3:2; Rev. 20:1-6), first to receive His own (John 14:1-3), and then to judge the world (Matt. 24:29, 30; 25:31-46), the bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust (John 5:28, 29), and the everlasting punishment of the lost (Luke 16:23-26; Rev. 20:11-15).

III. THE CHURCH COVENANT

1. We purpose, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

2. We purpose, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to let no corrupt speech proceed out of our mouths, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers and thus not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption; to let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from us with all malice; and to be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us (Eph. 4:29-32).

3. We purpose, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to maintain family and private devotions and to educate our children in the Word of His grace (Deut. 6:6, 7; Matt. 6:6; Eph. 6:4).

4. We purpose, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to attend faithfully the services of the church, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25).

5. We purpose, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to honor the Lord with the firstfruits of all our increase, to lay by as the Lord has prospered us, and to give, every man according as he purposeth in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver (Prov. 3:9; I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:7).

6. We purpose, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to encourage and uphold prayerfully the officers of the church, knowing that they watch for our souls as they that must give account (Heb. 13:17).

IV. THE LONGER DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Essential agreement to the Longer Doctrinal Statement is required for Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Missionaries, Sunday School teachers, Grace Academy teachers, administrators and School Board members, Chairmen of the Missions Committee, Christian Education Committee, and all other individuals exercising a ministry of instruction or leadership under the auspices of Grace Church.

By the term "essential agreement", it is meant that a person must give fundamental and substantial agreement to the Longer Doctrinal Statement and if there is any disagreement, this must be brought to the attention of the Session which will then decide whether the deviation is serious enough to keep the person from holding office.

1. **Bible.** We believe that the Bible, in all of its parts, is the Word of God, verbally inspired by God the Holy Spirit (II Sam. 23:2; II Pet. 1:21), inerrant and infallible in the original writings (Matt. 5:18; Luke 24:44), the supreme and final authority in faith and practice (II Tim. 3:16; John 12:48), and is also authoritative on all subjects to which it speaks.

2. **God.** We believe in one living, sovereign, and true God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, coequal in power and glory, having the same attributes and perfections (II Cor. 13:14; John 10:30; Gal. 4:6).

3. **God's Purpose.** We believe that the eternal purpose of God includes all events (Eph. 1:11; Dan. 4:35; Psa. 115:3; Acts 15:18; Prov. 16:4; II Tim. 1:9); therefore, a Christian should look at all of life from God's perspective, and not treat part of his life as sacred and part as secular. The eternal purpose of God is also holy and wise and does not deprive man of freedom (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23;

4:27, 28; John 1:12, 13; Phil. 2:12, 13) nor make God the author of sin (Jas. 1:13). Yet, before the world began, God the Father chose in Christ a great multitude of individual sinners, whom He gave to His Son, to be holy and without blame before Him. This choice was made according to the good pleasure of God's will, and was in no way based on or influenced by the foreseen goodness, actions, or responses of the individuals chosen. This saving purpose of God for those chosen will certainly be accomplished (Eph. 1:4, 5; II Thess. 2:13; John 6:37, 17:2; Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:29; Phil. 2:13).

4. **Sin.** We believe that all men are sinners (Rom. 3:12, 23), because Adam and Eve, their first parents, were tempted by Satan, disobeyed God's command, and by their own choice fell from their original state of innocence and fellowship with God, and came under the power and penalty of sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:6-8). Therefore, all men fell in Adam, being sinners by imputation, nature and choice (Rom. 5:12-19; Psa. 51:3; Rom. 3:23) and are presently and eternally dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1), separated from God (Eph. 2:12), and under His condemnation (John 3:18, 36), and apart from God's grace cannot come into a personal relationship with Christ (John 6:44).

5. **Christ.** We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35), was born of the Virgin Mary (Isa. 7:14; Luke 2:7), lived entirely without sin (Heb. 4:15; 7:26), died as the sinner's substitute, satisfying divine justice (I John 2:2), purchasing (Eph. 1:7) and reconciling (Rom. 5:10) a people to God, making perfect atonement for sin (I Cor. 15:3), was raised bodily from the dead (Luke 24:6, 39; I Cor. 15:1-4), ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven (Acts 1:9; 7:55,56), where He is the believer's High Priest and Advocate (Heb. 9:24; 7:25; I John 2:1).

6. **Holy Spirit.** We believe the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is active in the application of the redemption purchased by Christ. He convicts of sin (John 16:8-11), regenerates (John 3:5, 6), enables men to obey with repentance the call of the gospel (I Thess. 1:5, 9), and as the One who continually indwells every believer, is the author of holiness, power, comfort, and all Christian experience (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19,20; Eph.5:18).

7. **Salvation.** We believe that all who are born again by the Holy Spirit through the Word (John 3:3-7; I Pet. 1:23), receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, are justified on the ground of His shed blood (Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:9) and righteousness (II Cor. 5:21), thereby becoming children of God (John 1:12, 13; Gal. 3:26), and are indwelt and sealed by the Spirit until the day of redemption (Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13, 14). Believers are thus eternally united to Christ by the Spirit (I Cor. 12:12, 13), and are eternally secure in Christ (John 10:27-29), and together form the True Church, the Body and Bride of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7-9). Anyone who has trusted Christ as personal Lord and Savior will produce spiritual fruit as described by the Word of God (Gal. 5:22; Matt. 6:13-23; Rom. 7:4; Eph. 2:10).

8. **Church.** We believe in the one universal church of which Christ is the Head (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). The universal church consists of all true believers in Christ. The local church is composed of professing Christians who have gathered together in a local assembly to do the will and the work of Christ. It is the duty of all believers to profess their faith openly by uniting with a biblical local church. The primary mission of the church is spiritual, and its work is twofold: to establish within the church members a firm foundation of biblical doctrine and knowledge; and to witness to the truth of God to the ends of the earth, preaching the gospel to all men (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48).

9. **Return of Christ and Judgment.** We believe in the personal, bodily, visible, and premillennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:11; I John 3:2) to judge the world (Matt. 24:29, 30; 25:31-46), the bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust (John 5:28, 29), the everlasting punishment of the lost in hell (Luke 16:23-26; Rev. 20:11-15), and the everlasting bliss of the saints in heaven (Matt. 25:46; I Thess. 4:16, 17). The historic position of Grace Church is a belief in the premillennial return of Christ, but we do acknowledge the other traditional eschatological views (amillennialism, postmillennialism) of the Christian Church as viable possibilities. All positions agree on the basic issues of Christ's bodily and visible return. The areas of difference are of secondary importance and are not necessary to salvation or fellowship.

V. MEMBERSHIP

A. Requirements Of Membership

1. Any person who has accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, has been baptized, and who gives assurance of his desire to live a consistent Christian life may make application for membership. Church membership is not limited to persons of a particular race, color, or culture, but is limited to those who make a credible profession of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. The validity of the applicant's baptism (whether infant or believers') will be determined on a case by case basis by the Elders of Grace Church.

2. Those who have indicated a desire to unite with Grace Church shall be personally interviewed by the Pastor or an Elder, shall attend membership classes, and shall appear before the Session for an interview at a conveniently appointed time. Each person shall be required to give a statement of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of his baptism, and of his essential agreement with the Shorter Doctrinal Statement (Article II), the Church Covenant (Article III), the Form of Government (Article VII) and Church Discipline (Article VI). During this interview, the Session shall seek to determine whether the candidate has a credible profession of faith, an acceptable baptism, is in essential agreement with the doctrines (see Article II above) and practice of the church, intends to give

wholehearted support to the church and submission to its government and discipline. The unanimous vote of the Session shall be requisite for approval.

3. New members shall be publicly welcomed at a regular service on the Lord's Day, at which time the Pastor shall read the Church Covenant and the congregation shall give them the right hand of fellowship.

B. Rights and Privileges of Membership

Membership is about serving, not being served (Mark 9:35). Nevertheless, there are certain rights and privileges that members of Grace Church have that non-members do not. Those rights and privileges include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Voting

Membership in this church shall not vest in any member any proprietary rights in the Corporation, but shall only entitle the member to vote at congregational meetings as defined in section VII.D.2 below. In such cases, voting privileges are restricted to members who are in good standing, who are not under any disciplinary action, and who have passed their eighteenth (18) birthday. Membership shall not be assignable inter vivos (that is, from one living person to another) by any member nor shall membership vest to any personal representative, heir, or devisee.

2. Pastoral and Diaconal Care

While the Elders and Deacons of Grace Church seek to serve and minister the Gospel to all without exception insofar as God allows, the membership of Grace Church must be given the priority in terms of time, energy and financial care (I Pet. 5:1-4).

3. Ministry Positions

While every Christian has a responsibility to exercise his gifts for the edification of the body (I Cor. 12:7), the privilege of serving in official capacities in Grace Church (Elder, Deacon, Sunday School teacher, Committee Chairmanship, and other positions as determined by the Session) is limited to church members for the sake of accountability and mutual support. Exceptions may only be made by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of the Session.

C. Types of Membership

Each member of the church is acknowledged to form a vital part of the body and to have a peculiar function in the life of that body (I Cor. 12:14-27). Practical considerations, however, require that certain distinctions be recognized in the membership of this church. Any non-Regular Member (i.e. Temporary,

Associate, or Youth) may convert his status to Regular Membership at such time as his circumstances are in line with the requirements. To do so, he must appear before the Session to reaffirm his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and essential agreement with the Shorter Doctrinal Statement (Article II), the Church Covenant (Article III), the Form of Government (Article VII) and Church Discipline (Article VI).

1. Regular Members

All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedures set forth in section V.A above, and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church, shall be considered regular members in good standing and entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church.

2. Temporary Members

Persons who come to live in our area for a limited period of time (e.g., college students, military personnel, persons on special work assignments) may be received into the membership of the church on the same basis and in the same manner as persons who have permanent residence in our geographical area. If such a person is already a member of a church in his place of permanent residence, he need not be released from the membership of his "home church" but will be regarded as a temporary member while in our midst, enjoying all the rights and privileges of regular membership, except for the right to vote. When such a person terminates his period of temporary residence and leaves our area, he will automatically be released to the fellowship of his "home church" and no longer be regarded as a member of this church.

3. Associate Members

Regular members who permanently move away from our area and who cannot find another local church with which they can conscientiously unite will, at their request and Session approval, be retained as associate members of this church. Such persons must maintain regular communication with the church in order to maintain their associate membership in it. Nevertheless, they are urged to seek diligently a church with which they can unite elsewhere. An associate member shall not be allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church. At the discretion of the Session, associate membership may also be granted to invalids, Christian workers, college students away at school, and others whose relation to the church involves unusual circumstances.

4. Youth Members

Those under the age of eighteen may be accepted into membership of this church through the same procedure as Regular Members (see section V.A above). Youth members are not allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church.

D. Termination of Membership

1. *By Physical Death*

When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall automatically be removed from the membership roll.

2. *By Transfer*

When it is so requested, the Elders may grant to a departing member in good standing a letter of dismissal to the fellowship of another church. No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church. The Elders may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any "church" which is in their judgment disloyal to "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) or which does not exercise godly care over its members.

3. *By Exclusion*

If a member habitually absents himself from the stated meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if due to relocation he ceases to maintain a vital contact with the church, he may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the Elders. Also, any member who personally so requests may, after due admonition, be excluded from the membership. If an excluded member applies again for membership, the procedures set forth in section V.A above will again be followed.

4. *By Excommunication*

According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding false and heretical doctrine, who blatantly and persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church (Matt. 18:15ff; I Cor. 5:1ff, Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Article VI below.

VI. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A. Purpose

The threefold purpose of church discipline is to glorify God by maintaining purity in the local church (I Cor. 5:6), to edify believers by deterring sin (I Tim. 5:20), and to promote the spiritual welfare of the offending believer by calling him or her to return to a biblical standard of doctrine and conduct (Gal. 6:1).

B. Cause and Procedure

Members of this church and all other professing Christians who regularly attend or fellowship with this church who err in doctrine, or who engage in conduct that violates Scripture as determined by the Board of Elders, shall be subject to church discipline, including excommunication, if necessary, according to Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; Titus 3:10-11, and other pertinent Scriptures.

1. In the Case of Private Sins

In the case of private sins,

(1) it shall be the duty of any member of this church who has knowledge of the erring individual's misconduct to warn and correct such erring individual in private, seeking his or her repentance and restoration. If the erring individual does not heed this warning, then

(2) the warning member shall again go to the erring individual, seeking his or her repentance, but accompanied by one or two individuals who shall confirm that the sin has occurred or is continuing to occur, and/or that the erring individual has been appropriately confronted and has refused to repent. The first and second warnings may occur with no specified time interval. If the erring individual still refuses to heed this warning, then

(3) it shall be brought to the attention of the Session. If the Session determines – after thorough investigation (including attempted contact with the erring individual) in accord with the procedures prescribed by pertinent Scripture, including Matthew 18:15-18 and I Timothy 5:19 – that there is corroborating evidence that the erring individual has sinned or is continuing to sin, that he or she has been appropriately confronted, and that he or she has refused to repent, then the Elders shall inform the church and the congregation thereof at a regularly scheduled worship service in order that the church may call the erring individual to repentance. If the erring individual demonstrates repentance, then notice to that effect may be given at a regularly scheduled worship service. If, however, the erring individual does not repent in response to the church in its collective call to repentance, then

(4) he or she shall be publicly dismissed from the fellowship and/or membership of the church and the congregation thereof at a regularly scheduled worship service. If the erring individual, after such dismissal, heeds the warning, demonstrates repentance, and requests reinstatement before the Session, then he or she shall be publicly restored to all the rights, duties, privileges, and responsibilities of fellowship and/or membership.

2. In the Case of Public Sins

The Session, in the exercise of their discretion, may proceed directly to public rebuke or immediate excommunication when one or more of the following have occurred:

(1) Where the transgression and the refusal to repent have been public, i.e. openly and to the offense of the whole Church (I Cor. 5:1-5);

(2) Where the disciplined party has taught or otherwise disseminated doctrine deemed false or erroneous by the Elders, then chosen to disregard the direction and reproof of the Elders (Rom. 16:17); or

(3) Where the disciplined party has been warned twice to cease from factious and divisive conduct and has chosen to disregard that warning (Titus 3:10-11).

C. Civil Appeals and Church Resignation

The members of this church, and all other professing Christians who regularly attend or fellowship with this church, agree that there shall be no appeal to any civil court because of the dismissal or because of public statements to the congregation at the third or fourth stages of church discipline. Members who are under discipline by the church, as defined in the previous paragraphs, forfeit and waive the right to resign from this church. Resignations from membership are possible only by members who are not under any disciplinary action. Discipline will be carried to its appropriate completion even if the party being disciplined withdraws from the fellowship of the church before the process is finished.

D. Required Absence from Church Premises

Separate and apart from the process of church discipline, but subject to the discretion and approval of the Session, a member, non-member regular attender, or other individual may be notified that he or she is not to be present upon church premises for such a period of time as is deemed necessary for the safety and well-being of others on church premises. Such required absence may, but need not, be concurrent with church discipline of that person.

E. Council of Appeals

Any matter involving controversy within this church, within the Elders, or between the congregation and the Elders, if it threatens to cause dissension and injury to the welfare of this church must be called to the attention of the Elders. If the Elders fail to resolve the difficulty so as to allay dissension, any such matter may be taken to a Council of Appeals.

1. Formation

A Council of Appeals shall be formed at the request of the Elders, or by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members present and voting at a duly called congregational meeting (see section VII.D.2.b below). The Council shall consist of the Elders and an equal number of non-Elder Regular Members in good standing to be chosen by the congregation (not to include either Elders or non-Elders directly involved in the controversy). The congregation shall also appoint a Chairman from those on the Council to preside at its meetings. Council members (other than Elders) and Chairman are to be nominated, and elected in

order of nomination, by majority vote of members present and voting, until all positions are filled. Questions of proper protocol not specified herein are to be decided according to Robert's Rules of Order.

2. Quorum

A quorum for a Council of Appeals shall be the sum of the Elders less no more than one, the sum of the laymen less no more than one, and the Chairman. If a member of the Council is unable to attend a meeting after the judicial process has begun, he may thereafter sit and hear the case, but will be disqualified to vote on the final issue of the case.

3. Decision

The resolution of any matter shall require a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Council of Appeals. When a final decision of the Council of Appeals is announced to the congregation, that decision is final and the case is ended.

4. Intent

This Council of Appeals procedure is not to be considered a normal act in the life of the church lest it violate the Constitutional and doctrinal intent of Article VII with regard to church government. It is rather to be considered as providing adequate procedural relief under the principle of Matthew 18:17 in extreme circumstances of governmental failure.

VII. THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. He is the true source of all the church is and does, and His glory is to be the objective of every act, function and motive of the Body, both individually and corporately (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22,23). It is our belief, that just as believers individually should seek to govern their lives by guidelines given in the Scripture, church bodies should follow scriptural instructions and precedents in governing themselves. The New Testament pattern of leadership in the church is the mediation of the authority of the Lord through a plurality of godly men called Elders. The Elder form of government, as set forth in the New Testament, is, we believe, the form of government which most closely follows the Scriptural pattern (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17-32; Phil. 1:1). Elders are committed to the Scriptures (Acts 20:32), are called and equipped by Christ (Acts 20:28), and recognized by the vote of the congregation. The Elders as a Session shall be rulers in (I Thess. 5:12) and servants of (I Pet. 5:1-4) the congregation in the handling of the affairs of the church, performing those duties as defined by this Constitution, and shall be subject to the majority vote of the congregation as defined by this Constitution. Elders are themselves members of the congregation and individually subject to the watch-care, rule and discipline that Christ has established in the Church.

The Elders are to be assisted by a special office of servants who are called Deacons.

A. Special Offices of the Church

Grace Church shall have two special offices: the Session and the Diaconate. The Session and the Diaconate shall meet frequently in joint session to confer on matters of common interest, seeking ever to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1. The Session

a. Definition of the Session

The Session consists of the Pastor(s) and other Elders. We understand that the terms elder, overseer, and pastor are used in the New Testament to describe the same individuals who occupy the teaching and primary office of authority in the local Church. The term "elder" refers to the spiritual maturity of the individuals whereas the term "overseer" is descriptive of their work of overseeing the affairs of the local Church. The term "pastor" refers to the Elders' task of feeding the flock of God with His divinely revealed truth and protecting them from the infusion of error into their life's view or lifestyle (Acts 20:28-31; I Pet. 5:1-3). While all Elders are responsible for pastoring Christ's flock, we use the term "Pastor" to refer to the Teaching-Elder(s) who makes his/their living from the ministry (Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 5:17-18).

b. Constituency of the Session

The Session will consist of a plurality of godly men who have been raised up by the Holy Spirit and recognized by the church as possessing those qualifications as stated in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The Session shall elect one of its members as Moderator. The Clerk of the Session, who shall also be Clerk of the Congregation and shall keep the official minutes and records of the Session and the church, shall be elected annually by the Session from its membership. Meetings shall be regularly held according to a schedule agreed upon by the Session and at the call of the Moderator. A quorum consists of more than one-half (1/2) of the Regular membership. All meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer.

c. Duties of the Session

The Session shall be responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church, with the following specific duties:

- (1) Praying together as a body of Elders.

(2) Oversight of the spiritual welfare of Grace Church, exercising government and discipline. Elders shall watch diligently over the flock committed to their charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enters therein.

(3) Responsibility for the church's worship, including all regular and special services, the music, supervision of the ordinances, and the approval of all visiting speakers.

(4) Supervision of the Sunday School and all other teaching within the church.

(5) Appointment of committees within the sphere of Sessional authority.

(6) Calling of congregational meetings.

(7) Direction of the Missions Program of the church.

(8) Supervision of all church finances, including those of the Sunday School.

(9) Appointment of the Church Treasurer and Assistant Church Treasurer. The Treasurer, with the help of the Deacons, shall arrange for receiving, counting, and crediting in their proper form all offerings received by the church and Sunday School and shall be responsible for the banking of such funds each week to the account of the church in a bank designated by the Session. He shall draw checks against these funds as directed by the Session, and shall keep a ledger showing the cash account of all funds and a balance taken at the close of each month. He shall also prepare a financial statement showing the true status of the various funds in this account, to be approved by the Session. He shall also have the custody of all legal papers pertaining to the property and finances of the church, which shall be kept in a depository designated by the Session, and any access he may have to this depository shall be made at the direction of the Session. His books shall be available at any time to the Session and must be submitted to audit at least once a year as directed by the Session. In the event that the Treasurer is unable to perform his duties, these tasks shall be undertaken by the Assistant Treasurer, whose regular responsibility is to assist the Treasurer. The Church Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer shall furnish bond, the cost of same to be paid by the church.

(10) Informing the congregation of the financial status of the church.

- (11) Supervision of any and all ministries of Grace Church.
- (12) Visitation of the sick, poor, aged, neglected and troubled.

d. Regarding the Pastor(s)

(1) Qualifications

The man who fills this office shall be sound in the faith, apt to teach, blameless in life, and possessing a competency of human learning. He shall exhibit a sobriety and holiness of life becoming the gospel. He shall rule his own home well and have a good report of them that are without. He shall be in essential agreement with the Longer Doctrinal Statement of the church.

(2) Duties

It shall belong to the office of the Pastor to feed the flock, by reading, expounding, and preaching the Word; to administer the ordinances with the other Elders; to instruct the children and youth in the Word in preparation for church membership; to give guidance to the educational program of the church; to make official visits to the people when necessary, devoting special attention to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, the aged, and the dying; to pray for and with the flock; to administrate the total church program; and to oversee the church staff and secretarial staff.

(3) Eldership

The Pastor, as a Teaching-Elder, will serve on the Session without voting privileges. The Pastor shall be in submission to the final decisions of the Session.

(4) Call

The Pastor shall be recommended to the church by a three-fourths (3/4) or more vote of the total active Session and called in a regularly convened congregational meeting. A two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting shall be required to call a Pastor. The Pastor shall be voted on by secret ballot. Upon accepting the call, the Pastor shall become a member of Grace Church.

(5) Termination and Resignation

The Pastor may be removed from office at any regular or special meeting of the Session if he is found to be physically or mentally incapacitated or spiritually unqualified (according to pertinent Scripture, including I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9), after thorough investigation by the Elders, in accord with the procedures prescribed by pertinent Scripture, including Matthew 18:15-18 and I Timothy 5:19. When the Pastor is removed because of sin that is deemed sufficient to disqualify him from shepherding, and if he refuses to repent from that sin, the removal shall be accompanied by a public rebuke, and notice shall be

made before the church at a regularly scheduled worship service as prescribed in I Timothy 5:20. Under these conditions, removal from office shall not be subject to a congregational vote.

The termination of the Pastor's service for reasons other than incapacitation or moral disqualification may be effected at any time by the same order of procedure as prescribed for his call (see section VII.A.1.d(4) above). If said termination is due to some deficiency in pastoral skills or duties, reasonable attempts at remediation are to be made prior to termination proceedings.

If the Pastor shall desire to terminate the Pastoral relationship by resignation, then sixty days notice shall be given by the Pastor to the Session and the congregation.

In the event of termination, the time of termination is to be determined by the Session with the provision, if deemed appropriate, that the Pastor shall receive at least two months salary after such Session action.

(6) Evaluation

The Session shall appraise the Pastor at least once a year. This appraisal shall be for the three-fold purpose of: (a) reviewing with the Pastor the spiritual condition of the church as seen by the Session; (b) Sessional expression of his performance in fulfilling the duties outlined in section VII.A.1.d(2) above; and (c) Sessional recommended corrective action where considered necessary.

e. Regarding the Elders

(1) Qualifications

The Elders shall be men sound in faith, able to teach with wisdom and discretion, blameless in life, and by the holiness of their walk, examples to the flock. They shall endeavor by God's grace to serve in full conformity to the standards set forth in this Constitution for their particular office, and especially as found in the Word of God (I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). They shall be in essential agreement with the Longer Doctrinal Statement of the church.

(2) Duties

The Elders, acting as a Session, shall perform those duties as directed in section VII.A.1.c above. The Elders shall have oversight of the flock and shall assist in administering the ordinances, and shall visit the congregation, seeking to encourage the members of the church to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord.

(3) Election

The office of Elder shall be for a three (3) year term. The Elder may be re-elected at the end of his three year term and serve consecutive terms without a mandatory sabbatical. However, an Elder may take a temporary sabbatical (up to one year) if he so desires or if it is

recommended by the Session. If the sabbatical is longer than one year, the Elder's status as Elder will be automatically ended and re-election will be necessary in order to serve again as an Elder. Candidates for the office of Elder shall be recommended to the church by a three-fourths (3/4) vote of the total active Session and elected in a regularly convened congregational meeting, by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting. Each Elder candidate shall be voted on by the congregation, as an individual, by secret ballot. An Elder may also be nominated and elected to serve as a Deacon. If elected as a Deacon, this would terminate his service as an Elder.

(4) Termination and Resignation

Any Elder may be removed from office at any regular or special meeting of the Session if he is found to be physically or mentally incapacitated or spiritually unqualified (according to pertinent Scripture, including I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9), after thorough investigation by the Elders, in accord with the procedures prescribed by pertinent Scripture, including Matthew 18:15-18 and I Timothy 5:19. When an Elder is removed because of sin that is deemed sufficient to disqualify him from shepherding, and if he refuses to repent from that sin, the removal shall be accompanied by a public rebuke, and notice shall be made before the church and the congregation thereof at a regularly scheduled worship service as prescribed in I Timothy 5:20. Under these conditions, removal from office shall not be subject to a congregational vote.

The termination of an Elder's service for reasons other than incapacitation or moral disqualification may be effected at any time by the same order of procedure as prescribed for his election (see section VII.A.1.e(3) above). If said termination is due to some deficiency in shepherding skills or duties, reasonable attempts at remediation are to be made prior to termination proceedings.

An Elder may resign his office at any time without prejudice if for good and valid reasons he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of it. He may do so by giving written notice to the Session. Any such resignation shall take effect at the date of the receipt of such notice or at any later time specified therein.

Regardless of the reason(s) for the termination/resignation of an Elder's service, the congregation will be notified at a regularly scheduled worship service that said Elder is no longer serving in that capacity.

(5) Training

All potential Elder candidates shall be required to take a training course on the office and duties of an Elder before they will be placed in nomination for office.

2. *The Diaconate*

a. Constituency

The Diaconate will consist of a plurality of godly men who have been raised up by the Holy Spirit and recognized by the church as possessing those qualifications as stated in I Timothy 3:8-13. The Diaconate shall annually elect the following officers from its membership: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Clerk. The Chairman shall preside at all meetings, but when he is unable to attend, the Vice-Chairman shall preside. The Clerk shall keep an accurate record of all proceedings. Meetings shall be regularly held according to a schedule agreed upon by the Diaconate and at the call of the Chairman. A quorum consists of more than one-half (1/2) of the membership. All meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer.

b. Duties

The Diaconate shall operate under the general supervision of the Session. The Diaconate shall have the responsibility for the following specific duties:

- (1) Ministering to the sick, poor, aged, neglected and troubled.
- (2) By word and walk seek to develop the grace of liberality and service among the members of the church.
- (3) Care of all church property.
- (4) Ushering at regular and special services of the church.
- (5) Appointment of committees within the sphere of Diaconate authority.
- (6) Use of funds allocated by the Session.
- (7) Other duties as directed by the Session in order to insure that the Session can effectively devote its attention to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).

c. Qualifications

The Deacons shall be men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment. They shall endeavor by God's grace to live and serve in full conformity to the standards set forth in this Constitution for their particular office, and especially as found in the Word of God (I Tim. 3:8-13). They shall be in essential agreement with the Longer Doctrinal Statement of the church.

d. Election

The office of Deacon shall be for a three (3) year term. The Deacon may be re-elected at the end of his three year term and serve consecutive terms without a mandatory sabbatical. However, a Deacon may take a temporary sabbatical (up to one year) if he so desires or if it is recommended by the Session. If the sabbatical is longer than one year, the Deacon's status as Deacon will be automatically ended and re-election will be necessary in order to serve again as a Deacon. Candidates for the office of Deacon shall be recommended to the church by a three-fourths (3/4) vote of the total active Session, and elected in a regularly convened congregational meeting by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting. Each Deacon candidate shall be voted on by the congregation, as an individual, by secret ballot. A Deacon may also be nominated and elected to serve as an Elder. If elected as an Elder, this would terminate his service as a Deacon.

e. Termination and Resignation

Any Deacon may be removed from office at any regular or special meeting of the Session if he is found to be physically or mentally incapacitated or spiritually unqualified (according to pertinent Scripture, including I Timothy 3:8-13), after thorough investigation by the Elders, in accord with the procedures prescribed by pertinent Scripture, including Matthew 18:15-18. Under these conditions, removal from office shall not be subject to a congregational vote.

The termination of a Deacon's service for reasons other than incapacitation or moral disqualification may be effected at any time by the same order of procedure as prescribed for his election (see section VII.A.2.d above). If said termination is due to some deficiency in ministry skills or duties, reasonable attempts at remediation are to be made prior to termination proceedings.

A Deacon may resign his office at any time without prejudice if for good and valid reasons he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of it. He may do so by giving written notice to the Session. Any such resignation shall take effect at the date of the receipt of such notice or at any later time specified therein.

Regardless of the reason(s) for the termination of a Deacon's service, the congregation will be notified at a regularly scheduled worship service that said Deacon is no longer serving in that capacity.

f. Training

All potential Deacon candidates shall be required to take a training course on the office and duties of a Deacon before they will be placed in nomination for the office.

B. Staff

1. Description

The staff of Grace Church will consist of all full-time and part-time paid church workers who are called by the congregation. The Pastor is not considered a member of the staff. Paid employees not called by the congregation (such as secretaries, book-keeper, janitor, etc.) are hired by, and work under the direction of, the Pastor in accordance with Session approval and within the constraints of the approved budget.

2. Qualifications

The persons who fill these positions shall be sound in the faith, blameless in life, and possess a competency of human learning in their respective fields. They shall exhibit a sobriety and holiness of life becoming the gospel. They shall rule their own homes well and have a good report of them that are without. They shall be in essential agreement with the Longer Doctrinal Statement of the church.

3. Duties

Each staff member shall be carefully selected by the Session as to spiritual gifts for his respective ministry. Each staff member will be part of a team ministry with the freedom to develop his own program within the bounds and philosophy of the ministry of Grace Church as prescribed by the Session. All staff members will work under the direction of the Pastor and are ultimately responsible to the Session of Grace Church. Any qualified member of the staff may serve as an Elder. No more than one-fourth (1/4) of the members of the active Session may be staff at one time. No member of the staff may vote on Pastor or staff salaries or the removal of Pastor or staff.

4. Call

A staff member shall be recommended to the church by a three-fourths (3/4) or more vote of the Session and called in a regularly convened congregational meeting. A two-thirds (2/3) majority of those present and voting shall be required to call a staff member. Each staff member shall be voted on by secret ballot.

5. Termination

The termination of a staff member's services may be effected at any time by the same order of procedure as prescribed for his election.

If a staff member desires to terminate his relationship with the church by resignation, he must give thirty days notice, which shall be given by the staff member to the Session with the provision that the staff member shall receive at least two months salary if the Session deems it appropriate.

6. Evaluation

The Session shall formally appraise a staff member at least once a year. This appraisal shall be for the purpose of: (a) reviewing with the staff member his compatibility with the Pastor, Session, other staff members and the congregation; (b) Sessional expression of his performance in fulfilling his duties as outlined by the Session, and (c) Sessional recommended corrective action where it is considered necessary.

C. Trustees

Trustees shall be elected to serve as legal holders of all property of Grace Church. These men shall have the same qualifications as the Deacons and shall be elected in the manner prescribed for Elders and Deacons. The number of Trustees and their term of office shall be determined by the congregation.

In the event of a dissolution of Grace Church, the Trustees shall distribute the assets of Grace Church for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provisions of any future United States Internal Revenue Law).¹

D. Elections

1. Nominating Committee

The Session shall act as the Nominating Committee for Elders, Deacons and Trustees and shall prepare a slate of candidates to fill the expiring or vacant offices. Recommendations may be made by letter to the Session by any member of the church up to 28 days before the annual meeting. The slate of candidates for each board shall be posted by the Session at least 14 days prior to the annual meeting.

2. Congregational Meetings

a. Annual Meeting

The annual congregational meeting shall be for the purpose of electing officers and approving the proposed yearly budget. This meeting shall be normally held on the third Sunday in November, and if postponement is necessary due to extraordinary circumstances, it is not to be held any later than the second Sunday in December.

The slate of candidates for regular elections shall be announced and posted by the Session two (2) weeks prior to the meeting. Those elected must receive a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting. More than one-half (1/2) of the eligible voters shall constitute a quorum. The method of voting shall be by secret ballot and confined to eligible members present at the meeting.

The General Fund Budget for the following year will be voted on by the congregation by secret ballot, and a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting is necessary to pass the proposed General Fund Budget. (No major indebtedness shall be incurred nor any major financial transaction made without approval of two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting at a duly called congregational meeting).

b. Other Meetings

Congregational meetings shall be called by the Session either as part of their regular duties or upon petition of at least forty percent (40%) of the eligible voters in the membership. Those eligible to vote are Regular Members eighteen (18) years of age or older. Where deemed advisable by the Session, they may determine, and post two (2) weeks in advance, a list of those members who are considered eligible members in accordance with Article V of this Constitution. More than one-half (1/2) of the eligible voters shall constitute a quorum. The Moderator of the Session, or in his absence, the Clerk of the Session, shall preside at all congregational meetings. The method of voting shall be confined to eligible members present at the meeting.

All business to be brought before the congregation at any congregational meeting must be presented to the Elders and posted two (2) weeks before the slated meeting.

VIII. ORDINANCES

The church shall observe those two ordinances given by the Lord Jesus Christ to His Church (Matt. 28:19; Luke 22:19).

A. Baptism

Those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior shall be encouraged to obey the Lord in the public expression of their faith and oneness in Him by being baptized in water. The mode of baptism is left to the conscience of each believer.

B. The Lord's Table

This remembrance of our Savior's death shall be held at frequent and regular intervals, as prescribed by the Session.

IX. CHURCH MINISTRIES

Reflecting the stated Object of Grace Church (Section I.B above), the ministries of Grace Church fall under two general categories.

The first is Education, which includes the teaching of God's Word, fellowship, the promotion of godly living and worship, and the defense of the faith.

The second general category is Evangelism, which is the world-wide proclamation of God's saving grace expressed in the shed blood and finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary, with an ultimate view toward fulfilling the Great Commission.²

A. Sunday School

In order that the members of the church and their children may grow in grace and in knowledge of the Lord, classes of instruction in the Word of God shall be provided each Sunday morning.

Those appointed as regular Sunday School teachers shall be men and women who have publicly confessed Christ as personal Savior, are in essential agreement with the Longer Doctrinal Statement of the church, are living consistent Christian lives, and holding membership in Grace Church. Exceptions to the membership requirement may only be made by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of the Session.

B. Grace Academy

In order to provide the children of Grace Church and the children of other interested parents a God-centered education, Grace Church provides Grace Academy, a Christian day school, as one of its ministries. The school's purpose is to provide an academically excellent program which gives to students a biblical world-life view.

Grace Academy shall be under the jurisdiction of the Session with powers being delegated through a School Board to a Headmaster. The School Board and Headmaster shall be chosen by the Session and they shall be in essential agreement with the Longer Doctrinal Statement. The Pastor may make suggestions to the Headmaster but will not have authority over him in school-related matters. The School Board and the Headmaster of the Academy will be directly responsible to the Session.

The School Board shall be comprised of not less than six members of Grace Church with a Chairman elected by the members of the Board. The Headmaster of Grace Academy shall moderate the Board meetings. At least one member of the School Board must be from the Session.

The Headmaster of Grace Academy shall be a man of spiritual character and exemplary life, with the proper credentials for his position. The Headmaster shall have authority over and responsibility for all general administrative management of the school, including admitting and dismissing of students, overseeing all school finances, and carrying out the overall school program as determined by the School Board.

Those appointed as teachers shall be Christians of high caliber, living consistent godly lives, having the necessary abilities and credentials to teach in Grace Academy, and shall be in essential agreement with the Longer Doctrinal

Statement and the philosophy of the school. The teaching staff shall be directly responsible to the Headmaster and ultimately to the School Board.

Grace Academy admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the Academy. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in its administration or its educational policies, scholarships and loan programs, and athletic or other school administered programs.

The foregoing paragraph shall be published at least once each year prior to the beginning of the school session.³

C. Missions

Missions, from the divine perspective, is the work of Jesus Christ, through which, after His completed redemptive work as mediator, He draws some of all people to His salvation and makes them to partake of the gifts which He has obtained for them. Missions, from the human perspective, is that activity of the universal Church of Christ, through the preaching of the gospel of Christ, whereby the peoples of the earth are called to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Therefore, the task of the local church is the world-wide proclamation of God's saving grace in Christ. This proclamation may be accomplished by personally going to the peoples of the world with the gospel, by praying consistently for world evangelism, and by giving liberally of finances to the cause of world missions.

A Missions Committee, made up of members of Grace Church who have a deep concern and burden for missions, shall have the responsibility of keeping missions before the entire church.

The Missions Committee shall be led by the Chairman, and at least one of the members of the committee must be a Session member. The committee members will elect a Chairman and Treasurer each year. All election of officers and all actions and policies set forth by the committee must be approved by the Session.

The Missions Committee shall review and recommend to the Session new missionary candidates for prayer and financial support. The committee shall keep the congregation informed of praise and prayer requests of the missionaries, give encouragement and guidance to those of Grace Church who believe God is leading them into missionary work, and shall organize special missionary conferences.

Grants to missions and to other individuals or organizations not qualified as Section 501(c)(3) organizations under the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 shall be made only for charitable purposes.

No grant may be made to any individual or non-section 501(c)(3) organization except upon receipt of an application from such proposed grantee. The Missions committee shall make a good faith determination that the grant is made for religious or otherwise charitable purpose.⁴

X. AMENDMENTS AND REVISIONS

As the church must always be reforming in order to be more perfectly conformed to the Holy Scriptures, it is sometimes necessary or desirable to make changes to the Constitution. For our purposes, an “amendment” is defined as an addition to the Constitution without substantial changes to the text already in force. A “revision” is defined as a substantial change to the text already in force and may also include additions. A “substantial” change is a change to the actual content. It does not include inconsequential alterations such as spelling, grammar, or formatting corrections, or alterations in wording for a clearer reading. Amendment and Revision dates should be clearly identified in the Constitution.

This Constitution may be amended or revised by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting at a duly called meeting, provided that the proposed amendment or revision has been made available to the membership and posted conspicuously for two (2) weeks prior to said meeting.

Articles II and III of this Constitution shall not be amended or revised.

XI. OPERATIONAL LIMITATIONS

Notwithstanding any other provisions of these Articles, Grace Church, or any part thereof, shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by an organization exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law) or (b) by an organization, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(b)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provisions of any future United States Internal Revenue Law).⁵

¹ Paragraph added by Dec. 5, 1982 Amendment.

² These introductory paragraphs under “VIII Church Ministries” added by Dec. 8, 1991 Amendment.

³ This and the foregoing “non-discrimination” paragraph added by Dec. 5, 1982 Amendment.

⁴ This and the foregoing “grants” paragraph added by Dec. 5, 1982 Amendment.

⁵ This “Operational Limitations” paragraph added by Dec. 5, 1982 Amendment.