



Church Membership at Grace Community Baptist Church

At Grace Community Baptist Church, church membership is important! Nearly every New Testament epistle was written to a specific city that contained at least one local church, which clearly had some way to identify those who made up the church and those who did not. After all, the church is not a place; it's a people!

Nowadays, most cities contain multiple local churches, so it becomes even more important to know if a particular believer is committed to a particular church, especially regarding governance, finances, and supporting each other. Over the years, we have adopted a formal church membership practice to maintain a registry of active members.

It is certainly true that the formal method of joining a church is not specified in scripture. Still, we believe that the process outlined by Grace Community is for the edification and the building up of the body of Christ as we seek to follow the patterns we find in the Bible.

Acts 2:37-47 reveals that there is a numerical record of those who have professed Christ and been filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 41) and an acknowledgment that the church was tracking the growth (v. 47). In Acts 6:1-6, we see elections take place to address a specific problem and accusation. In Romans 16:1-16, there is an awareness of who is a church member. The principle is that the church had a minimum standard of understanding of who was involved enough to be considered a part of the local church.

In the scriptures, this sense of community and relationship is used to govern, share resources, and discern direction for ministry. Outside influences could have derailed the church in each of these instances. Paul especially warns of wolves in sheep's clothing (Acts 20:28-30). These people would come into the church body without being committed to its doctrine, teaching, ministry, and leadership. They were interested in their own ideas and personal elevation. The only way to see who these wolves were was to listen to them, discerning what and how they said it. The church knew who it was and what it was about. Anything else was kept out and viewed as a threat. The church was not all-inclusive; it was selective and carefully considered who it accepted as "members" to protect itself.

In 1 Timothy 5:3-16, there is a clear teaching on how to handle the needs of widows in the local church. It is clear who would or would not qualify for Ephesus's widow care program. The local church in Ephesus was organized, had a clear idea of who they were, and was working out a plan to care for each other.

In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, not only are church members connected to each other, but the connection runs deeper than mere association. Church members are connected as if parts of a body are connected. How can the church exercise the commands of scripture and have this connection without a sense of clear belonging? Otherwise, the church would not be a body of Christ in unity; it would be individual body parts of Christ piled up and non-functioning.

It is clear in the scriptures that God's plan for his church is that those who come will grow into a local covenant community of faith. This is for the church's protection, growth and for the good of others. The issue of membership is not about preference. It is about committing relationally to the church. An area where this becomes most apparent is the area of discipline and growth.

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.

Hebrews 12:11

When confronted with a tough issue, people are more likely to leave their church than stay. However, when there is commitment, and the church is unified in its love for each other, discipline and growth are more likely to occur. The church has the power to confront sin, help people grow, and be transformed by the power of God within them.

Church membership is not a club. It is not an association. It is a choice that one makes to be obedient to the pattern set before them in the scriptures. It is a bond that is not easily entered into or broken. That is why it is called a covenant relationship.

Becoming a Member of Grace Community Baptist Church

Becoming a church member begins with understanding God's word regarding membership and prayer. If you decide to move forward with membership, we ask that you fill out the membership application. This demonstrates your intent to join the church membership and informs the Elders of your story.

They will follow up with an informal get-together to provide ample opportunity to answer questions, pray together, and encourage you. After that, the Elders will decide on your desire to enter into the covenant relationship of church membership. Then, during a worship service, a presentation to the church will be made, and you will be prayed over by the church elders. The process usually takes about a month.

Preamble to the Church Bylaws

We, the members of Grace Community Baptist Church of Astoria, Oregon, purpose to be organized as closely as possible to the New Testament pattern of church life. As such, we recognize the Bible as our authority, guide, and true constitution. This constitution and bylaws, as written here, are not intended in any way to replace or add to the Word of God (Rev. 22:18,19). It is conceived for the following purposes:

- To state those fundamental and essential doctrines of the Christian faith that we believe ought never to be compromised;
- To define the nature of the church as a covenant community;
- To state our purpose and vision, mission and values as a church;
- To state the qualifications, privileges, and responsibilities of membership and leadership in this body;
- To facilitate orderliness, understanding, communication, and unity in the exercise of church ministries.

For these reasons, this constitution and bylaws are intended to be an implementation of scripturally based principles, embracing the whole counsel of God's Word.

The Covenant of the Members of Grace Community Baptist Church

Grace Community Baptist Church, as a part of the body of Christ, acknowledges our God-ordained covenantal relationships as a local fellowship of believers. Holding in common our doctrine, polity, and philosophy of ministry, we agree to a covenant relationship expressed in dependence upon, responsibility for, and accountability to our Area Association and throughout the Northwest. Therefore, we commit ourselves to one another:

- In *dependency*, acknowledging that through this body and its members, the Lord will meet our needs as we walk by faith, and He will provide opportunities for service and worship;
- In *responsibility*, devoting our gifts and abilities to the building up of His body and its members as He will nurture it and cause it to grow;
- In *accountability*, we submit ourselves to this body and its members to the authority;
 - Of Christ as the head of this church,
 - Of the Scriptures as our sole guide for faith and practice,
 - Of the elders of this body, and
 - Of this congregation as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

In acknowledgment of this covenant, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, we agree to this church's Doctrinal Statement and submit ourselves to this church's standard for character and conduct.

Grace Community Baptist Church Statement of Faith

The Word of God

We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original writings, complete as the revelation of God's will for salvation and the supreme and final authority in all matters to which they speak.

The Trinity

We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of all things, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that these are equal in every divine perfection and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence, and redemption.

God the Father

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal Spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, and love. We believe He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is God's eternal Son, and has precisely the same nature, attributes and perfections as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. We believe further that He is not only true God, but true man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. We also believe in His sinless life, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, His priestly intercession on behalf of His people, and His personal, imminent return from heaven.

Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, His personality, and His work in regeneration, sanctification, and preservation. His ministry is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and implement Christ's work of redeeming the lost and empowering the believer for godly living and service.

Man

We believe God created man, male and female, in the image of God and free from sin. We further believe man is a sinner by nature and choice and is therefore spiritually dead. We also believe that those who repent of sin and trust Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Salvation

We believe in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We further believe that this salvation is based upon the sovereign grace of God, and was purchased by Christ on

the cross, and is received by man through faith, apart from any human merit, works, or rituals. We further believe salvation results in righteous living, good works, and proper social concern.

The Church

We believe that the church is the spiritual body of which Christ is the head. We believe that the true church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We believe that this body expresses itself in local assemblies whose members have been baptized upon credible confession of faith and have associated themselves for worship, for instruction, for evangelism and for service. We believe the ordinances of the local church are believer's baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper. We also believe in the interdependence of local churches and the mutual submission of believers to each other in love.

Separation of Church and State

We believe that each local church is self-governing in function, and must be free from interference by any ecclesiastical or political authority. We further believe that every human being is directly responsible to God in matters of faith and life, and that each should be free to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience.

Christian Conduct

We believe that the supreme task of every believer is to glorify God in his life; that his conduct should be blameless before the world; that he should be a faithful steward of his possessions; and that he should seek to realize for himself the full stature of maturity in Christ.

We believe God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God. (Gen. 1:26-27.) Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

We believe that the term, "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in scripture. (Gen. 2:18-25.) We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2-5; Heb. 13:4.) We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God. (Matt 15:18-20; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.)

Last Things

We believe in the bodily resurrection of the saved and lost, the eternal existence of all men either in heaven or hell, in divine judgments, rewards, and punishments.

Conclusion:

This statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our faith. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God, speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. For purposes of church doctrine, practice, polity, and discipline, the Elders of Grace Community Baptist Church are the final interpretative authority on the Bible's meaning and application.

(For a complete explanation of our doctrine, please see Appendix A)

Application for Church Membership

Please fill out this form for membership and return it to the church office. You may write or type your responses. Additional pages may be attached as necessary.

Date _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

1. Briefly describe your conversion/salvation experience.

2. Have you been baptized? Yes No

3. By what mode? Immersion Other _____

Briefly describe your baptism experience.

We believe that each person who trusts in Jesus for their salvation has received a spiritual gift for edifying and building up the body of Christ, the church. In what ways do you feel you are gifted?

What area(s) of church ministry are you passionate about serving in?

4. Are you in agreement with the attached doctrinal statement Yes No

If not, in which area(s)? (Disagreement does not necessarily disqualify from membership, but needs to be discussed to determine if it will create difficulties later)

5. Do you agree with the membership philosophy as stated in the introduction and agree to uphold it so long as you are a Grace Community Baptist Church member? Yes No

6. Do you agree to support our body as stated in our covenant? Yes No

7. If you are presently a member of another church, list the name and address?

Name of church _____

Address: _____

What else would you like to tell us about yourself or your spiritual journey?

For our church records, please submit the following information also.

Single Married, If married, name of your spouse

Your Birthday _____ Spouse's Birthday _____ Wedding Anniversary _____

Names, ages, and birthdays of your children (if still living in the home)