

# GRACE CHURCH BYLAWS

*Created on Oct. 14, 2018  
Amended on Jan. 31, 2021*

## **I. Legal Name**

Grace Church

## **II. Mission**

The mission of Grace Church is to live and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ in our home, workplace, school, and other communities; and to make disciples of all nations in the neighborhoods of Queens and in our respective mission fields.

## **III. Denomination**

Grace Church is affiliated with ECO (A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) and is a member of the Northeast coast Presbytery.

As a member of ECO, we agree to the standards, requirements, and the constitution of ECO. Thus, if our church's bylaws conflicts with ECO constitution, the constitution of ECO will supersede our bylaws.

## **IV. Membership**

Grace Church membership is open to everyone who is 18 or older and has made a profession of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior and has subscribed to and signed the Grace Church Membership Covenant. For those not previously baptized, the sacrament of baptism or confirmation is to be provided for these new members and offered to children under their care. Session shall determine the criteria and curriculum to perform baptisms and confirmations.

### **A. Active Member**

An active member is a member who fulfills the above requirements and attends worship services regularly.

### **B. Inactive Member**

An inactive member is a member who has not attended worship services for more than 6 months without properly notifying members of the session or other appropriate church leaders. The reinstatement of such person's membership will be determined by the session.

## **V. Congregational Meetings**

### **A. Calling Congregational Meetings**

These meetings may be called by the session or by the session when requested by over ¼ of active members. Announcements to the church regarding congregational meetings shall precede in advance (including the location, time, and purpose) at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting.

### **B. Agenda Items**

Congregational meetings are required for the following discussions but are not limited to:

- 1) Financial reporting (e.g. annual financial report, budget approval);
- 2) Election of the electoral committee, elders and deacons;
- 3) Approval and amendment of the church's bylaws;
- 4) Purchase or sale of church real property.

### **C. Eligibility for Attendance and Participation**

Only active members shall attend and participate in the voting process at congregational meetings.

### **D. Moderator**

The lead pastor shall moderate all congregational meetings. If it is impractical for the pastor to preside, the pastor can delegate such role to another pastor or elder with the session's approval.

### **E. Secretary and Records**

The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all congregational meetings. In the absence of the clerk of session, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting.

### **F. Virtual Meetings**

Virtual congregational meetings shall be allowed only under emergency situations declared by the session. These electronic meetings shall be subject to all rules adopted by the congregation.

## **VI. The Session**

### **A. Purpose and Composition**

Grace Church congregation is governed by the session. The session consists of the elders duly elected by the members of Grace Church, along with the congregation's lead pastor. The minimum number shall be 3 active elders plus the lead pastor who serves as a moderator.

### **B. Meetings of the Session**

The session shall hold meetings at least quarterly with the lead pastor moderating all meetings. Full minutes of the meetings shall be maintained and made available to any member of the congregation or at the request of the presbytery.

C. Responsibility and Authority

The session has responsibility and authority for governing the congregation and guiding its mission for Christ in the world. In the Reformed tradition, the marks of the church are the proclamation of the Word, the Sacraments rightly celebrated, and the exercise of discipline. Therefore, the session shall:

- 1) Provide for the worship and educational life of the congregation;
- 2) Provide a place where the congregation may regularly worship;
- 3) Provide for the regular preaching of the Word by persons properly approved;
- 4) Oversee the planning and the ordering of the worship services of the congregation;
- 5) Lead the congregation in ministries of evangelism, compassion, and justice;
- 6) Develop and nurture relations with other congregations;
- 7) Authorize and provide for the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper;
- 8) Authorize the administration of baptisms and confirmations;
- 9) Exercise due care and provide sufficient education to the congregation and to new believers that the sacraments may be rightly received as means of grace.
- 10) Plan for and provide an effective disciple-making, ministry-discernment process for the congregation and new believers, equipping them to be missional Christians and being faithful to nurture them into spiritual maturity and significant ministry.
- 11) Provide for and nurture the common life of the congregation;
- 12) Receive and dismiss members;
- 13) Exercise oversight of all programs and finances of the congregation;
- 14) Train, examine, ordain and install those men and women chosen to serve as elders and deacons;
- 15) Lead and teach the congregation in matters of stewardship and Christian living;
- 16) Direct the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all other organizations of the congregation;
- 17) Bear witness against error in doctrine and practice; and
- 18) Serve in judicial matters pertaining to the congregation as necessary.

**VII. Elders and Deacons**

A. Elder Defined

Ruling Elders should be persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. They are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling Elders together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationship.

B. Deacon Defined

The ministry of deacons as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

C. Qualifications

Members who are qualified to become elders and deacons must have been an active member for 2 consecutive years before the service of ordination and installation, and live in accordance with 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The minimum age requirement to be elected as elders and deacons are 28 and 26, respectively.

D. Nomination and Election

Elders and deacons are nominated by the electoral committee. The electoral committee shall be presented by the session, and a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote of all the active members present shall be required to elect. Absentee and proxy voting are not permitted. The electoral committee shall express the rich diversity of the congregation's membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness. The committee shall consist of at least 3 active members and include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the session. The lead pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote.

When a person is nominated by the electoral committee, the session shall then examine the nominees as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrines, government, and disciplines contained in the bylaws of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall confer with the nominees their willingness to undertake the ministry as described in the Constitution. If the examination is approved, the session shall set forth the date and manner by which the election will take place. A  $\frac{1}{2}$  majority vote of the active members present at the meeting is required to elect. Absentee and proxy voting are not permitted.

When a person is elected to the ministry of elder or deacon, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation. The service of ordination and installation shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion. The moderator of session or person authorized to preside shall state briefly the nature of the ministry of ruling elder and deacon. The act of ordination and installation takes place in the context of worship.

E. Term of Service

Elders and deacons shall be elected to serve for 3 years on the session or board of deacons, and may be eligible for reelection. However, no ruling elder or deacon shall be eligible to serve more than 6 consecutive years and a ruling elder or deacon who has served 6 consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year.

## **VIII. Disciplinary Process**

Any matters of discipline within Grace Church shall be handled in accordance and consistent with the ECO Constitution, which include the ECO Rules of Discipline and the ECO Essential Tenets. Grace Church believes that following our bylaws and The Essential Tenets is essential to spiritual growth and maturity within the church community and hopes that all members will abide by them.

## **IX. Amendment**

These bylaws may be revised by obtaining a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote of members at a congregational meeting after an amendment proposal is submitted to the session. Absentee and proxy voting are not permitted.