



Membership Statement

“How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” proclaimed King David in the psalms (Psalm 133:1).

It is a divine blessing to share spiritual fellowship and to commit to working together for the kingdom of God as part of the Body of Christ. That’s what our membership statement seeks to encourage. It outlines our shared understanding of what we commit to doing together as a fellowship for God’s glory and according to his will.

Grace Communion International is an evangelical Christian church uniting people in more than 100 nations around the world. Our fellowship’s history is a wonderful testimony to the grace of God in action. We focus on Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and on the message of salvation by grace through faith. We submit ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, in accord with the Christian Scriptures, the Holy Bible.

Mission and Vision

Our church is committed to living and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our church is built up and grows as it equips Christian men and women for this work.

Part of the body of Christ

The Christian church is described in Scripture as “the body of Christ”. Grace Communion International is one part of that body. Each member of the church is thus, first and foremost, a part of the body of Christ, placed in it according to God’s will and purpose.

One of the great blessings of the new life we are given in Christ is that God generously gifts each of us for the purpose of doing his work in the world. Everyone has a ministry! Everyone is given to the church as a gift! Everyone is given the opportunity to serve in doing God’s work!

Transformed by God's grace ...

The ongoing renewal of our church has focused more emphasis on the potential of each member and each congregation of members to participate directly in the work of ministry. We are all called to be “light” and “salt” (Matthew 5:13-16) in our world by living and sharing the gospel as we build relationships in the communities in which we live, work, play, and worship. In this way, the kingdom of God grows and expands in our world. Each of us are citizens of that kingdom and have accepted the calling to take up the cross of Christ, deny ourselves, and become “living sacrifices” to God.

... for the work of the gospel

As a worldwide denomination, our church strives to support, equip and promote the work of each member and each congregation.

- The regional office provides training, ecclesiastical supervision, governance, financial, legal, and media services.
- Local councils, pastoral teams and ministries are equipped and resourced to do the work of the gospel in their communities.
- The role of the pastor is supported in line with the New Testament model of “shepherd”, “servant”, “leader”, “pastor-teacher”, and “equipper of the saints”.
- Elders, deacons, deaconesses, and commissioned lay ministry leaders provide specific support, service and leadership in each congregation.
- All members are recognised as being called to ministry for the work of the gospel according to the gifts God has given them.

Membership

The church acknowledges that being a member of a particular congregation and denomination is just one part of being a Christian, a member of the body of Christ. Yet, to work together effectively and productively for our Lord and Master we need a shared vision, compatible expectations, and a supportive framework upon which we agree.

Therefore, this document establishes the fundamental standards and expectations of membership in Grace Communion International. Any person accepting a leadership role in the church (council or pastoral team member, commissioned or ordained ministry

role) will be asked to publicly affirm this statement prior to their appointment. Those currently holding such offices will also be asked to do so.

Such times of public affirmation are times of celebration and a rehearsal of the standards and values we hold in common as members of Grace Communion International. They are times of thanksgiving for those who are willing to serve the church and commit to leadership in the church.

Structure

Organisationally, Grace Communion International functions according to a modified episcopal hierarchy. Officers and elders are not voted into or out of office. Appointments to office and eldership are made by authorised appointment. This appointment process includes actively seeking the advice and input of informed, spiritually mature and gifted members. Appointments are not considered to be lifetime positions of tenure or status, but are related to functions of service and needs in given locations at particular times.

As part of its continuing renewal, the church is seeking to establish a functional structure that recognises the endorsement of the body in appointing people to leadership positions. This approach is already being implemented at the congregational level in our region. The church's President and international Advisory Council of Elders, as well as the regional administrations of the church, have all endorsed and begun working on formalising such an approach into a functional governing structure.

Our church is structured internationally and regionally as follows:

- ☐ The President of the church serves as the senior administrative and ecclesiastical officer of the church.
- ☐ This office is supported by an Advisory Council of Elders, appointed by the President.
- The church's international headquarters in the United States of America provides doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and administrative supervision to all the denomination's national churches around the world.

- ☐ mission developers and national directors are authorised by the international headquarters to oversee the activities of the church in their regions and or nations.
- ☐ Each region or nation has its own administrative structure to coordinate, support, direct, and supervise ecclesiastical and administrative activities.
- ☐ Pastors and pastoral teams are authorised by regional and national offices to minister to, lead, equip, and coordinate the activities of congregations.
- ☐ Gifted and spiritually mature members, endorsed by the congregation, are commissioned to carry out the ministries and activities of the congregation.

A worldwide fellowship

As a worldwide fellowship, the Grace Communion International serves as a spiritual home both to those who have committed their lives to God through Jesus Christ and those who, while attracted to the truth of the gospel, have not yet been baptised.

Further, the church is home to people in a variety of situations:

- ☐ Those who participate regularly in the life of a Grace Communion International congregation;
- ☐ Those who are physically distanced from congregations but who consider their church membership to be with the Grace Communion International;
- ☐ Those who cannot participate regularly in congregational life due to health or other personal reasons but who consider their membership to be with the Grace Communion International;
- ☐ Those who do not have a church home and who do not attend church regularly but who look to Grace Communion International as their church;
- ☐ Those who attend regularly or irregularly but who do not consider themselves to be members;
- ☐ Those who belong to local congregations that have chosen to affiliate with Grace Communion International.

Because of the clear biblical precedent and example of gathering together in fellowship, the church naturally encourages and considers important to membership the personal commitment of members to regular fellowship and corporate worship wherever possible.

Why understanding and affirming membership is important

Understanding and affirming our membership status in the church is important because:

- ☐ It is a commitment to work in and in harmony with a specific part of the body of Christ;
- ☐ It is a means of sharing a common understanding of our fellowship together;
- ☐ It establishes clear and reasonable expectations between members;
- ☐ It establishes the rights and responsibilities of participation in the church.

While all Christians are baptised into the spiritual body of Christ, we participate in the life of the body in specific denominations and congregations. It is important that within those denominations and congregations we share a common focus and understanding of our life together so that we can walk in unity of purpose to achieve all we can for the kingdom of God.

Scriptural guidance

While the Scriptures do not focus on the structure of the church, they do give some clear guidelines and principles for us to consider and respond to:

The church is the temple of God

1 Corinthians 3:16 *“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred and you are that temple.”*

Gifted for ministry to build up the church

Ephesians 2:10 *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Ephesians 4:11-16 *“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body,*

joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Romans 12:1,3-8 *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship ... For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”*

Leadership and pastoral care

Acts 6:2-6 *“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group ... They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.”*

Acts 20:28-29 *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 *“Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.”*

Hebrews 13:17 *“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*

Fellowship and love

Romans 14:1,13 *“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters ... Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”*

Ephesians 4:1-7 *“As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”*

Ephesians 4:29-5:21 *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen ... Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you ... But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving ... Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil ... Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

Hebrews 10:24-25 *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Hebrews 13:16 *“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

Church life

1 Thessalonians 1:3 *“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Definition

Membership in Grace Communion International refers to an individual’s voluntary commitment to participate in the life of the Church. The term “membership” is used in this context and not in the legal context of “members” of church councils, boards, or other such legally constituted bodies.

Members of Grace Communion International:

- Have personally accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and have expressed their commitment to God through baptism;
- Are committed to a life consistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ;
- Personally hold to the church’s Doctrinal Summary;
- While understanding that the church’s Statement of Beliefs is not a closed creed, do accept the doctrinal positions it presents, or, where they cannot, undertake not to teach or promote contrary positions;
- Have been accepted into fellowship by the congregational pastor(s) or pastoral team, or by a national, regional or international office of the church;
- Do not hold conflicting membership in any other fellowship (this does not preclude participation in the life of any other church or Christian organisation whose teachings and activities are in harmony with GCI membership);
- Accept the leadership and authority of duly appointed ecclesiastical officers;
- Contribute to the life of the church (as able) through regular attendance and fellowship, involvement in a ministry, prayer and financial support, and care for other members.

The church may, with just cause as determined through its authorised offices, at any time revoke, suspend, or reject the membership of any person.

Baptism

Baptism is a condition of membership, but it is not the same as membership. We are each baptised “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, not into an organisation or denomination.

Membership in a particular church does not come between or take priority over a person’s relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But membership does invite a person who, through baptism, has publicly accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour to voluntarily participate in the life of a church as part of their new life in him.

Special note is made here of those who accept all aspects of membership, but who are not yet baptised. The term “member” shall here generally extend to such individuals according to the determination of properly authorised congregational offices. This shall extend to their appointment to non-ordained, non-commissioned roles of leadership in the congregation or denomination.

Rights

Members of Grace Communion International may:

- Nominate others for congregational offices (e.g., advisory councils, pastoral teams) in the congregation of which they are a member;
- Be appointed, commissioned and ordained to offices, functions and roles within the congregation of which they are a member by and through the church’s authorised offices (conditional upon public affirmation of this membership statement);
- Be nominated and appointed to national councils by and through the church’s authorised offices (conditional upon public affirmation of this membership statement);

- Be appointed to offices of national administration by and through the church's authorised offices (conditional upon public affirmation of this membership statement, see addendum);
- Be appointed to serve in ordained ministry positions of the church by and through the church's authorised offices (conditional upon public affirmation of this membership statement, see addendum).

Discipline

Continuing membership in Grace Communion International is contingent upon upholding the expectations, standards and responsibilities outlined in this document and any future such published documents or statements. Those in positions of leadership in the church are charged with a biblical responsibility to protect the church and its members from being deceived by conduct, attitudes and behaviours that are in conflict with Christian teaching, and to uphold unity within the body of Christ.

Those in properly constituted positions of leadership within the church—congregational, national, regional, or international—may exercise appropriate discipline where an individual within their area of responsibility does not reasonably conform to the definition of expectations for members outlined in this or any future such documents.

Disciplinary action may involve:

- Private counsel
- Recommendation for further counsel
- Formal discipline or correction
- Suspension or revoking of responsibilities or offices
- Suspension or revoking of membership.

Such actions may be administered by duly appointed and denominationally recognised elders, pastors, pastoral teams, councils, ecclesiastical or administrative officers of the church. And all such actions will be surrounded with prayer for reconciliation, understanding, forgiveness, and love.

Grievance process

Because misunderstandings and misconduct occur within any organisation from time to time, the church offers a formal grievance process to deal with situations where members believe they have been unfairly treated or where they believe a breach of the code of ethics for elders has occurred. The matter should be handled according to the church's established grievance procedure. The grievance process does not exist to address grievances by those who are not members of the church.

Working together for the kingdom of God

It is a privilege and a blessing to be part of the body of Christ. To be gifted by God for his divine purposes and work is just one more expression of his grace. Christians do not simply work together to sustain the life of the church, but to reach out with the gospel of Jesus Christ to advance the kingdom of God.

Together, let us do the Lord's work until he comes ...

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 *"We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Thank you for your desire to commit to the work of the kingdom in Grace Communion International! May God richly bless you as you walk with him and serve him with your brothers and sisters in Christ.