

CONSTITUTION
GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, INC.
ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

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PREAMBLE

God requires that a Christian congregation shall conform to His divine Word in doctrine and practice (Ps. 119:105; Matt. 28:18-20; Gal. 1:6-8; 2 Tim. 4:1-5) and that all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). Therefore we, the members of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Inc., located at St. Petersburg, Florida, accept and subscribe to the following Constitution and By-Laws, in accordance with which all spiritual and material affairs of our congregation shall be governed.

Psalm 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*

Matthew 28:18-20 *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Galatians 1:6-8 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*

2 Timothy 4:1-5 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

ARTICLE I - NAME and LOCATION

The name of this congregation shall be Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Inc. When used in this Constitution and By-Laws, "Grace" refers to and includes our church and school. Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Inc. is located at St. Petersburg, Florida.

ARTICLE II – PURPOSE (Unalterable)

The purpose of this congregation shall be: to seek the honor and glory of God; to carry out His will; to manifest the unity of our faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior; to spread the kingdom of God; and to foster Christian fellowship and love; by the preaching of the Word of God; by the administration of the Sacraments; and by the religious instruction of its members, according to the confessional standard of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ARTICLE III).

For the carrying out of this purpose the congregation may receive, acquire, hold, manage, control, and sell real and personal property of whatever description and such other property as may hereafter be acquired.

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ARTICLE III – DOCTRINAL STANDARD (Unalterable)

- A. This congregation acknowledges and accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testament as the revealed and inerrant Word of God, verbally inspired, and submits to them as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.

- B. This congregation acknowledges and accepts all the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580 as true and genuine expositions of the doctrines of the Bible. These confessional writings are the Ecumenical Creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, Luther's Large and Small Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord.

ARTICLE IV - SYNODICAL MEMBERSHIP

This congregation shall hold membership in The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) as long as this Synod remains true to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions.

ARTICLE V - MEMBERSHIP

A. Definitions

1. Baptized Membership

Baptized Members are all who have been baptized in the name of the Triune God and who are under the spiritual care of the pastor(s) of this congregation.

2. Communicant Membership

Communicant Members are those Baptized Members who have been instructed in the Lutheran faith, accept the doctrinal standard of Article III of this constitution, and meet the Conditions of Membership in Article V, Section B.

3. Associate Membership

Associate Members in this congregation, shall be persons who establish a semi-permanent residence in this area, and who wish to maintain their primary membership in another Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod congregation, but who also desire to take an active part in the life and ministry of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church. They shall meet all the requirements for Communicant Membership in this congregation. Associate Members are not eligible to hold an office or be a member of any board or committee.

4. Voting Membership

Voting membership shall be held by all Communicant Members and Associate Members who have attained the age of 18; who have been received by the Voters Assembly; and who have signed the Voters Register, which is maintained by the Secretary of the congregation. The group thus constituted shall be known as the Voters Assembly.

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Associate Members shall have all the privileges of voting membership except the right to vote in:

- a. the selection of the Call Committee or of the issuing of any Call for a pastor or other profession Church Worker;
- b. matters dealing directly with the budget;
- c. matters affecting membership in the Synod;
- d. the purchase, sale, or improvement of or to real property owned by the congregation;
- e. matters of church discipline or the acceptance of members into the Voting Membership of the congregation; or
- f. modifying the Constitution or By-Laws of this congregation.

B. Conditions of Membership

Membership in this congregation is offered and granted only to those who:

1. are baptized in the name of the Triune God;
2. have been instructed in and are familiar with Luther's Small Catechism and declare their acceptance of it;
3. publicly declare their acceptance of the Doctrinal Standard of this congregation as defined in Article III of this Constitution;
4. lead a Christian life in accordance with the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-25 *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."*);
5. are not members, affiliates or supporters of any organization whose principles and practices conflict with the Word of God in doctrine or way of life (2 Corinthians 6: 14-18 *"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*)

C. Reception into Membership

1. Applicants for Communicant Membership shall submit a written application and letter of transfer from a congregation in church fellowship with LCMS. They may be received into Communicant Membership – as long as they meet the conditions of Article V, Section B of this Constitution. Their application shall be reviewed by the Board of Elders and their reception shall be reported at the next Voters Assembly.
2. Applicants for Communicant Membership, who previously were affiliated with a Lutheran congregation not in fellowship with LCMS, shall give satisfactory evidence of their qualification for membership in an interview with the pastor. They may be received into Communicant Membership – as long as they meet the conditions of Article V, Section B of this Constitution. Their reception shall be reported to the Board of Elders and at the next Voters' Assembly.

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3. Other applicants, prior to reception into membership, shall receive an adequate course of instruction in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion. They may be received into Communicant Membership – as long as they meet the conditions of Article V, Section B of this Constitution. Their reception shall be reported to the Board of Elders and at the next Voters Assembly.
4. Applicants for Associate Membership shall submit a written application detailing their current church membership status. They shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges of Communicant Membership. They may be received into Communicant Membership as defined in Article V, Section B of this Constitution. They are encouraged to use their talents within the congregation. Their application shall be reviewed by the Board of Elders and their reception shall be reported at the next Voters Assembly.
5. The rite of receiving Communicant and Associate Members shall be publicly celebrated at a worship service and announced to the membership in a timely manner.

D. Duties of Membership

It shall be the duty of every Communicant Member to:

1. attend divine services diligently and to partake in the Lord's Supper frequently;
2. share faithfully in time, talent and treasure according to the ability God has given, toward the edification of the Body of Christ in the congregation and throughout the world;
3. provide for the Christian education of any children under their parental care through the various agencies of Christian education provided by the congregation.

E. Voting Membership

1. Voting Membership shall be held by all Communicant Members and Associate Members who have:
 - a. attained the age of 18;
 - b. requested in person at a regularly scheduled Voters Assembly to become a Voting Member;
 - c. been approved at a Voters Assembly; and
 - d. signed the Voters Register and the Constitution.
2. Newly approved Voting Members may not vote at the same Voters Assembly in which they have been accepted.
3. The group thus constituted shall be known as the Voters Assembly. Associate Members shall be limited in their voting privileges as stated in Article V, Section A.4.
4. Voting Members, in addition to the duties of Communicant Members, are to:
 - a. conscientiously and prayerfully advance the work of Jesus Christ in our midst and through our District and Synod;
 - b. faithfully attend meetings of the Voters Assembly; and
 - c. encourage eligible Communicant Members to become Voting Members.
5. Voting Members may be removed from the voting rolls if:
 - a. their membership has been terminated as stated in Article V, Section F; or
 - b. they have become mentally incompetent;
 - c. they have not attended three consecutive regularly scheduled Voters Assemblies.

F. Termination of Membership

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1. By transfer, Communicant Members who desire to join a congregation in church fellowship with LCMS shall present their request for a letter of transfer to the pastor. Such transfer of membership shall be approved by the pastor. Their transfer shall be reported to the Board of Elders and to the next Voters Assembly.
2. By release, Communicant Members who desire to be released shall submit their request to the pastor. Their release shall be reported to the Board of Elders and to the next Voters Assembly.
3. By relocation, Communicant Members who have moved and who have not requested transfer to another congregation within one year shall be notified in writing to their last known address that they may be removed from membership. Upon review by the pastor and Board of Elders, they may be released from membership. Any release shall be reported to the next Voters Assembly.
4. By self-exclusion, Communicant Members who have not attended worship services and communed for over one year shall have their membership status reviewed by the pastor and Board of Elders. Upon review, they may be released from membership. Any release shall be reported to the next Voters Assembly.
5. By excommunication, any member who conducts himself/herself in an unchristian manner shall be admonished in accordance with the various grades prescribed in Matthew 18, 15-18

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Members who are unwilling to submit to this divine rule shall be considered manifest and impenitent sinners.

- a. Manifest and impenitent sinners shall, after fruitless admonition, be excommunicated by recommendation of the pastor and the Board of Elders and action by the Voters Assembly. The vote to excommunicate a member must be a unanimous vote of all Voting Members in attendance at a properly called Voters Assembly. The vote shall be by written ballot. The individual whose case is being heard shall not be allowed to vote on the matter.
- b. Members who have been excommunicated forfeit all rights and privileges of membership in the holy Christian Church and of this congregation.
- c. Members who have been excommunicated shall be so notified in writing by certified mail, with return receipt requested.
- d. Members who have been excommunicated and who seek to be restored into membership with the holy Christian Church shall go through the rite of Individual Confession and Absolution with the pastor. They shall be received back into Communicant Membership of the congregation by the public rite of Restoration to The Holy Christian Church. Their restoration of membership shall be reported to the Board of Elders and the next Voters Assembly.

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ARTICLE VI - THE OFFICES OF PASTOR AND TEACHER (Unalterable)

The pastoral office of this congregation, as well as the office of a called teacher in the parochial school, shall be conferred only on such ministers, teachers, and candidates who profess and adhere to the confessional standard set forth in Article III of this Constitution and who are qualified for their work. Pastors and teachers shall be pledged to this confessional standard.

ARTICLE VII - AUTHORITY OF THE CONGREGATION

A. GENERAL

The Voters Assembly shall be the governing body of this congregation and shall be empowered to administer and manage all its affairs. The establishment and conduct of all organizations and societies within the congregation shall be subject to the approval and supervision of the Voters Assembly. The Voters Assembly shall establish a Church Council to act in its behalf between Voters Assembly meetings. The Church Council may be abolished by the Voters Assembly by ballot with a two-thirds majority vote of a quorum.

B. RIGHT OF CALLING

The right of calling pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers shall be vested in the Voters Assembly and shall never be delegated to another group or to an individual. Called Workers must be rostered members in good standing of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

In the event of a pastoral vacancy, the Voters Assembly has the authority to secure a Vacancy or Interim Pastor. An Interim or Vacancy Pastor must be a rostered member in good standing of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

C. DECISIONS

All matters of doctrine and of conscience shall be decided only by the Word of God. All other matters shall be decided by a simple majority vote of the Voters Assembly, unless otherwise specified by this Constitution or By-Laws.

D. REMOVAL FROM OFFICE – CALLED WORKER

1. Any Called Worker may be removed from office by the Voters Assembly by a two-thirds majority, written ballot vote of a quorum, in Christian and lawful order, for one of the following reasons: persistent adherence to false doctrine; scandalous life; or willful neglect of duties.
2. Any Called Worker may be requested or required to resign from his position in the congregation by the Voters Assembly by a two-thirds majority, written ballot vote of a quorum, in Christian and lawful order in the case of prolonged incapacity, inability to perform assigned duties, or reduction in staff.
3. The District President shall be consulted prior to removal of a Called Worker by the congregation from his office or position.

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E. REMOVAL FROM CONGREGATIONAL OFFICE

Any congregational officer, board member, and/or committee member may be removed from office by the Voters Assembly by a two-thirds majority, written ballot vote of a quorum, in Christian and lawful order, for one of the following reasons: persistent adherence to false doctrine; scandalous life; willful neglect of or inability to perform duties; or prolonged incapacity.

F. REMOVAL FROM MEMBERSHIP

The Voters Assembly shall have the authority to excommunicate any communicant member in accordance with Matthew 18:15-18 as described in Article V, F, 5.

ARTICLE VIII - OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

- A. The officers of this congregation, by whom the legal affairs of this corporation are to be managed, shall be such officers as the By-Laws and this Constitution may prescribe.
- B. Congregational officers, boards, or committees, whether elected or appointed, shall have no authority beyond that which has been conferred on them, and whatever authority may have been delegated to them may at any time be altered or revoked by the electing or appointing authority.
- C. Women who have reached the age of 18 and are Voting Members in the congregation may serve as officers and as members of the boards and committees as long as these positions are not directly involved in the specific functions or oversight of the pastoral office (preaching, the public administration of the sacraments, church discipline). They shall not serve as pastor, as a member of the Board of Elders or as President or Vice-President of the congregation.

ARTICLE IX - DIVISION (SCHISM)

If at any time a division should take place on account of doctrine, the property of the congregation and all benefits connected therewith shall remain with those Communicant Members who continue to adhere in the confession and practice of Article III of this Constitution. If division takes place for any other reason, the property shall remain with the majority of the Communicant Members.

In the event the congregation shall totally disband and dissolve, the property and all rights connected therewith shall be transferred to that District of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod of which the congregation has been a member at the time of disbanding and dissolving.

ARTICLE X - DOCTRINAL CONFORMITY (Unalterable)

Only such hymns, prayers, and liturgies shall be used in the public services of the congregation and in all ministerial acts as conform to the confessional standard of Article III.

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ARTICLE XI - CHANGING OF CONSTITUTION

A. UNALTERABLE ARTICLES

Articles II, III, VI and X of this Constitution shall not be subject to change or repeal.

B. AMENDMENTS

Amendments to this Constitution may be adopted at a regular Voters Assembly, including a properly called adjourned meeting, provided:

1. They do not conflict with the provisions laid down in Article III, or with any other that pertains to a Scriptural doctrine and practice;
2. The proposed amendment has been submitted in writing at a previous meeting of the Voters Assembly and published prior to the meeting at which the proposed amendment will be acted upon; and
3. An affirmative vote of two-thirds majority of a quorum, as specified in Article I, Section E of the By-Laws, is secured at the Voters Assembly.

Voters Assembly Approval Date: