

CHURCH CONSTITUTION

Sovereign Grace Church
of Aberdeen, SD
2012

Constitution and By-Laws

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this church shall be Sovereign Grace Church. This church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of denominational control. Recognizing, however, the universal communion of followers of Christ and the benefit of a wider association, this church will be affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention in its national, state, and local expressions.

Article II - BELIEFS

The doctrinal outlook of the corporation is reflected in the following statements:

I. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20,21; Mark 13:31; John 8:31,32; John 20:31; Acts 20:32

II. THE TRINITY

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons; that these are equal in every divine perfection, and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence and redemption.

Genesis 1:1,26; John 1:1,3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19,20; Ephesians 4:5,6

III. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He infallibly foreknows all that shall come to pass, that 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.

Luke 10:21,22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1,2; 2:5,6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6

IV. JESUS CHRIST

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His eternal existence, virgin birth (incarnation), sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth.

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 8:46; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30, 31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9,10; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:28; I Timothy 3:16

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower all who believe in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ, and that He is an abiding helper, teacher and guide.

John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26

VI. REGENERATION

We believe that man was created by God in His own image; that he sinned and thereby incurred physical, spiritual and eternal death, which is separation from God; that as a consequence, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners by choice and therefore under condemnation. We believe that those who repent and forsake sin and trust Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and become new creatures, delivered from condemnation and receive eternal life.

Genesis. 1:26; 5:2; Genesis 3; Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Eccl. 2:11; John 3:14; 5:24; John 5:30; 7:13; 8:12; 10:26; Romans 9:22; II Thessalonians 1:9; Rev. 19:3,20; 20:10,14,15; 21:18; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19; 5:19; Proverbs 28:13; I John 1:9; John 3:16; John 1:13; II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1

VII. THE CHURCH

We believe in the universal church, a living spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all regenerated persons are members. We believe in the local church, consisting of a company of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized on a credible profession of faith, and associated for worship, work, and fellowship. We believe that God has laid upon the members of the local church the primary task of giving the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

Ephesians 2:19-22; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:19-21; Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:23-25

VIII. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

We believe that a Christian should live for the glory of God and the well-being of his fellow men; 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 and others the full stature of maturity in Christ.

I Corinthians 10:31; Romans 12:1-3; Hebrews 12:1-2; John 14:15,23-24; I John 2:3-6; II Corinthians 9:6-9; I Corinthians 4:2; Col. 1:9-10

IX. THE ORDINANCES

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances to the local church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of the believer in water into the name of the triune God. We believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for commemoration of His death. We believe that these two ordinances should be observed and administered until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:3-5; I Corinthians 11:23-26

X. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

We believe that every human being has direct relations with God, and is responsible to God alone in all matters of faith; that each church is independent and must be free from interference by any ecclesiastical or political authority.

I Timothy 2:5; Romans 14:7-9,12

XI. CHURCH COOPERATION

We believe that local churches can best promote the cause of Jesus Christ by cooperating with one another in a denominational organization. Such an organization, whether a regional or district conference, exists and functions by the will of the churches. Cooperation in a conference is voluntary and may be terminated at any time.

Acts 15:36,41; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelations 1:4,10,11

XII. THE LAST THINGS

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal felicity of the righteous and the endless suffering of the wicked.

Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:4-6,11-15

Article III - ELDERS

The senior leadership of Sovereign Grace Church shall be vested in a governing board of male elders/pastors, hereinafter referred to as the elders, which is composed of both vocational and non-vocational elders/pastors who follow the leading of Jesus who is the Senior Pastor of Sovereign Grace (1 Peter 5:1-4).

A. Qualifications

To be considered as an elder, a man must have been called by God into leadership at Sovereign Grace (Acts 20:28) and be a man of the highest Christian character according to the qualifications of Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

1. Relation to God

- a. A man - masculine leader
- b. Above reproach - above criticism/free of accusation (of the qualifications that follow)
- c. Able to teach - gifted in communicating the truths of Scripture
- d. Not a recent convert - mature Christian

2. Relation to Family

- a. Husband of one wife - one-woman man, sexually pure
- b. Pastors and shepherds his children
- c. Manages family well - provides for, leads, organizes, loves

3. Relation to Self

- a. Sober-minded - mentally and emotionally stable
- b. Self-controlled - disciplined life of sound decision-making, not impulsive
- c. Not given to drunkenness - without addictions
- d. Not a lover of money - financially content and upright

4. Relation to Others

- a. Respectable - worth following and imitating
- b. Hospitable - welcomes strangers, especially non-Christians, shows the love of Christ
- c. Not violent - even tempered
- d. Gentle - kind, gracious, loving
- e. Not quarrelsome - peaceable, not contentious/divisive
- f. Well thought of by outsiders - respected by non-Christians

Additionally, he must competently and consistently accomplish the biblical duties of an elder/pastor which include:

1. Prayer and Scripture study (Acts 6:4)
2. Ruling/leading the church (1 Timothy 5:17)
3. Managing the church (1 Timothy 3:4-5)
4. Caring for people in the church (1 Peter 5:2-5)

5. Keeping watch over the souls of the church, as one who will give an account to God (Hebrews 13:17)
6. Living an exemplary life (Hebrews 13:7)
7. Rightly using the authority God has given him (Acts 20:28)
8. Preaching (1 Timothy 5:17)
9. Praying for the sick (James 5:13-15)
10. Teaching sound doctrine and refuting false teachers (Titus 1:9)
11. Working hard (1 Thessalonians 5:12)
12. Rightly using money and power (1 Peter 5:1-3)
13. Protecting the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17-31)

All elders must hold to the beliefs articulated in the elder affirmation of faith.

Article IV - ELDER SELECTION

The process of becoming an elder/pastor involves at least the following steps:

1. He must be a member in good standing at Sovereign Grace who has demonstrated the calling, character, and competency of an elder.
2. He must make his desire to become an elder known to one of the elders and be interviewed for approval.
3. His nomination must be approved without objection from any elder.
4. If accepted as an elder nominee, the man will then undergo a period of training and testing, which will include whatever is deemed necessary to enhance the nominee's understanding of an elder's responsibilities as outlined in Scripture.
5. Upon completing his training and testing process, the man must be approved by the elders without objection to be introduced to the church members as an official elder candidate.
6. If approved as an elder candidate, members of Sovereign Grace will be notified that he has met the criteria of an elder. Anyone, in or out of the church, having a concern regarding the man's qualifications to lead as an elder will have at least four weeks to notify the elders, who can investigate the matter to determine if there is any reason to disqualify the man.
7. Affirmation from the congregation, indicated by a 75% majority vote, is required prior to the installation of an elder. Notably, disapproval ought to be voiced during step #6, as opposed to voicing disapproval during step #7.
8. An official final vote of the elders shall be taken and if there are no objections to his installation from any elder, the man will be installed by the laying on of hands.
9. When a man is hired as a pastor from outside the church body, the process of his affirmation and season of investigation may take a slightly different form, but a 75% majority vote is still needed from the congregation as well as unanimous approval of the elders. Once the man is hired, he is immediately installed as an elder.

Article V - ELDER SERVICE

- A. Once a man becomes an elder at Sovereign Grace, it is expected that he will continue as an elder indefinitely.
- B. If the elders determine that an elder needs an extended Sabbath for a season because of a legitimate need (e.g., illness, tragedy), then that elder can transition to an inactive and non-voting elder for a set period of time determined by the elders.
- C. To resign from the Council of elders, an elder must notify the Council of his decision in the form of a letter of resignation.
- D. An elder who senses God's call to leave Sovereign Grace to help plant a Sovereign Grace-sponsored church plant should make his desire known to the Council of elders. If the elders confirm his calling, the elder will be sent out with blessing to help lead another church.
- E. Any credible charge of moral impropriety, doctrinal error, or anything else that could displease the Lord or harm Sovereign Grace shall be handled in accordance with the church discipline process outline in Article X. The elder in question shall be placed on temporary leave while any necessary investigation takes place. If found guilty of sin, and unrepentant, the elder shall be rebuked in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear according to 1 Timothy 5:19-21. If found guilty, but repentant, the elder's leadership status shall be determined by the governing Council of elders.

Article VI - GOVERNANCE

The elders may structure and organize however they deem necessary for the sake of simplicity, clarity of communication, and efficiency of organization, according to the needs of the church and the size of the Council of elders, so long as it preserves the plurality of elders and the doctrinal and character requirements for elders articulated in Scripture and reflected in this document.

To promote efficient handling of the Council of elders matters, the elders may appoint various committees from within its membership, the staff, and from the church at large. These committees shall perform tasks solely in accordance with the duties and with powers specifically delegated by the elders. The general functions of councils and committees are:

- a. To bring considered recommendations to the elders concerning ministries.
- b. To provide a wider base of wisdom to the elders and have oversight of specific ministries.

All councils and committees shall exist for a period of time specified by the elders.

The elders have the authority to hire and fire assistants or office staff without seeking congregational approval as long as the staffing costs are reflected in the annual budget.

Article VII - DEACONS

A. DESCRIPTION: A deacon is a lead servant in the ministry of the local church. He/She works with his/her fellow deacons in extending the overseeing ministry of the elders into the physical needs of the people and property of the church and responsibilities of the body. He/She is to care for and maintain the orderly administration of our fellowship in which God has placed him/her as a deacon. Deacons are not in a position of authority in areas of teaching, correction, or rebuke. They may serve as long as they remain qualified and are willing to serve.

B. QUALIFICATIONS:

1. In accordance with the biblical requirements found in 1 Timothy 3, deacons at Sovereign Grace must be respectable, sincere, temperate and trustworthy. They must not be greedy, drunkards, or slanderers. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience, and manage their families well. Deacons will be tested to ensure that their lives qualify them for the task of service.
2. The first deacons in Acts 6:1-7 were “full of the Spirit and wisdom;” Deacons of Sovereign Grace must also demonstrate fullness of the Spirit and wisdom.

C. SELECTION:

1. Church members should bring recommendations to the elders.
2. The elders will determine whether deacon qualifications are met.
3. Deacons will be instated/appointed by the elders (Acts 6:1-7).

D. TERMINATION:

1. Resignation.
2. Continued behavior which violates the Biblical qualifications for the office (requires 3/4 vote of the elders).
3. Continued agreement with doctrine which violates the doctrinal outlook of Sovereign Grace Church (requires 3/4 vote of the elders).

Article VIII - MEETINGS OF THE COMMUNITY

ANNUAL MEETING: At the annual meeting of the community, the elders shall submit a budget to the members of the congregation for approval. The elders may call other meetings of the congregation, as deemed necessary.

Article IX - MEMBERSHIP IN THE CONGREGATION

A. Membership shall be based upon (all of the below):

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1. A confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, and the testimony of believer's baptism.
2. Completed membership classes and required interviews as determined by the elders.
3. An expressed desire to accept the responsibility of living a holy life, to participate actively in ministry, to give generously to Sovereign Grace Church, and to live an evangelistic lifestyle. As such, membership candidates will solemnly commit to covenant with the Sovereign Grace community, to uphold its fundamental doctrines, and to pray for, serve, and fellowship with the believers in the church.
4. A sympathy with and willingness to submit to the doctrinal outlook of the church.
5. An agreement with (by signature) the membership covenant.
6. Final approval by the elders and a vote of affirmation by the congregation.

B. Voting Privileges: Members at Sovereign Grace are entitled to vote at a meeting of the members on those matters specifically set forth in these by-laws or that the Council of elders chooses to submit to the church membership for affirmation and approval. In such cases, voting privileges are restricted to members who are:

1. In good standing.
2. At least 16 years of age.
3. Not under any disciplinary action.

C. Dual Membership: Any person who is currently a member of another church, yet through a temporary relocation has routinely been in attendance at Sovereign Grace Church, and meets the membership requirements, shall be encouraged to have dual membership status. This status shall facilitate proper watchcare and oversight while the person is under the care of Sovereign Grace Church.

D. Termination of Membership: Members shall be removed from the roll for the following reasons:

1. Death.
2. Transfer of membership to another church. A letter is needed from the church to which one has transferred in order to properly remove the member from the membership rolls.
3. Withdrawal of Membership. In order to properly withdraw from membership, a written letter of intent is required with explanation of reasons submitted to the Council of elders.
4. Dismissal by Church Discipline as outline below in Article X.

Article X - CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Through God's grace, the fourfold purpose of church discipline is the means (1) to help conform us individually and corporately to Christ, in terms of the purity and unity of his church, for the glory of God (Col 1:28; Eph. 4:1-6; 1 Cor. 10:31), (2) to help bring a wandering soul back to Christ (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:5; Gal. 6:1-5), (3) to help deter others from sin (1 Tim. 5:20), and (4) to help protect the church from false teachers, wolves, and division (Acts 20:25-31; Titus 1:10-11).

Application of church discipline shall be consistent with the biblical approach outlined in Matthew 18:15-20. As such, it is to be exercised against offenders who are members of Sovereign Grace. The elders oversee the final two steps of the disciplinary process.

A. Offenses Addressed - General categories of offenses in Scripture that may result in church discipline may include:

1. Divisiveness (Titus 3:9-11, Romans 16:17-18, Hebrews 13:17)
2. Scandalous immorality (1 Corinthians 5:9-11, 6:9-10, Exodus 20:12-17)
3. Rejecting doctrines of the Christian faith, specifically doctrines articulated in the congregational statement of faith as interpreted by the elders (1 Timothy 1:19-20, 6:3-5, 2 John 9-11)

B. Method Used - Matthew 18:15-20 outlines the approach to bring about reconciliation between individuals when offenses occur. Each of the four following steps represents a separate phase of church discipline; the time required for each depends upon the particular circumstances. Each step in the process below will be documented in writing and will include all pertinent information (e.g. history, proven offenses, expectations, actions taken). The elders will not entertain anonymous accusations. The person accused of sin has the right to face and answer his or her accusers. Any charges against an elder must be supported by two or more witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19) as well as provided in writing.

The Church Discipline Process

All church discipline should maximize redemptive and protective efforts for all involved in accordance with the Scriptures. For the sake of context, the passage on church discipline is embedded within other relevant passages: (Matt. 18:7-11) - the seriousness of causing others to stumble; (Matt. 18:12-14) - the importance of pursuing the one lost sheep; (Matt. 18:21-35) - the parable of the unmerciful servant.

The process for church discipline outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 involves four progressive steps:

(Step 1) Privately seek reconciliation (Matt. 18:15).

(Step 2) If the person refuses to listen in the private confrontation, involve select others (Matt. 18:16).

Transitioning from Steps 1-2 to Steps 3-4

If disciplinary steps 1 and 2 are unsuccessful, then those who sought the offender's repentance may come to the church, through the elders. The elders, in turn, are to follow the general procedures below to ensure order throughout the final phases of church discipline.

(Step 3) If the person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the elders so that they can inform the church (Matt. 18:17a). The elders are to conduct an investigation to determine if the accused is guilty of the charges. If the charges are proven false, then appropriate exhortation will be given to the parties so that reconciliation can occur. If the charges are proven (whether by confession or by witnesses), the elders will inform the church, so that the church can also call the person to repentance.

(Step 4) If the person refuses to listen even to the church, treat the unrepentant person as an unbeliever (Matt. 18:17b).

A. Removal from Membership: If admonition and redemptive efforts fail to result in repentance, removal from membership will occur. The elders will lead the congregation through this process. The person removed from membership is to be treated as an unbeliever and is excluded from the privileges of membership. He or she is thus excluded from communion. He or she is also excluded from social meals, gatherings, and recreational activities with other church members (1 Cor. 5:11). If a member withdraws from membership while the subject of a pending disciplinary action according to Matthew 18:15-20 and begins attending another church, the elders are obligated to inform the new church of a pending disciplinary action according to Matthew 18:15-20. Such withdrawal shall not cancel the congregation's responsibility to complete the appropriate disciplinary action.

B. Restoration: If and when the person removed from membership repents, restoration begins. Restoration is a process that restores an offender to the full privileges that were withdrawn during excommunication. Restoration to membership will be contingent on successful fulfillment of the requirements of membership articulated in Article IX.

Other Important Details

1. Separate and apart from the process of church discipline, but subject to the discretion and approval of the elders (or a duly appointed committee thereof), a member, a regular attendee, or other individual may be notified that he or she is not to be present upon church premises or at church functions 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.

2. Separate and apart from the process of church discipline, but subject to the discretion and approval of the elders, the names of any members who have not attended a worship service or other meeting at or under the leadership of Sovereign Grace church for a consecutive period of six months or longer may be removed from the membership rolls.

By joining Sovereign Grace Church, all members agree that these church discipline methods shall provide the sole remedy for any dispute arising against the church and its agents, and they waive their right to file any legal action against the church in a civil court or agency (1 Cor. 6:1-11).

Article XI - BIBLICAL COUNSELING

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships (Romans 3:23, 7:7-25). Whenever a Christian is unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through private efforts, God desires that he or she seek assistance from other members, and especially from the elders who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (Romans 15:14, Galatians 6:1-2, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 3:16-5:2, Hebrews 10:24-25, 13:17, James 5:16). Therefore, this

church encourages and enjoins its members to make confession to and seek counsel from each other and especially from pastoral counselors.

A. Principles of Counseling:

Counseling at Sovereign Grace Church is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. The counselors of this church are not trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists. The counselors of Sovereign Grace Church seek to apply biblical principles to all aspects of life. If a member or regular attendee of Sovereign Grace Church seeks help in legal, financial, medical, or other technical questions, the counselor will apply scripture to the matter to the best of his ability. The counselor will seek to cooperate with professional advisors and help members or regular attendees consider their advice in the light of relevant scriptural principles.

B. Confidentiality in Counseling:

Confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible; however, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when the elders of this church believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people. Typical circumstances include:

1. When an elder is uncertain about how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other elders (Proverbs 11:14, 13:10, 15:22, 19:20, 20:18, Matthew 18:15-17).
2. When the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Proverbs 24:11-12) where required by scripture or law.
3. When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to institute disciplinary proceedings (Matthew 18:15-20 and Constitution Article X) or seek the assistance of individuals or agencies outside this church (see Romans 3:1-5).
4. When required by law to report suspected child abuse or other illegal activity.

Article XII - FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year of the corporation shall be January 1 - December 31.

Article XIII - BUDGET

Any expansion of the budget which exceeds 5% of the annual budget must be approved by the elders and affirmed by the congregation. Any expansion of the budget of 5% or less of the annual budget can be approved by the elders.

Article XIV - VOTING

Even though Scripture clearly teaches that elders are to oversee the affairs of the church and shepherd the flock (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9), we believe that it is most helpful to seek congregational affirmation in certain circumstances because we understand that the Holy Spirit dwells within every believer and can inform the leaders of the leading of the Spirit in the congregation.

Congregational voting shall occur in the following instances:

- A. Affirmation of the annual budget and significant changes in the budget exceeding 5% of the annual budget.
- B. Affirmation of elder candidates from within Sovereign Grace for installation (75%).
- C. Purchases of land and real estate.
- D. Amendments to the constitution and by-laws (75%).
- E. Affirmation of new candidates for membership.

A quorum of 40% of the membership shall be necessary when voting on a budget, elder, purchase of land or real estate, and amendments to the constitution or by-laws. A quorum is not necessary when voting on any other issues brought to the congregation by the elders.

Article XV - EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

The corporation will not discriminate in employment policies for reasons of race, religion, or sex, except in those situations that are in clear disagreement with Scripture.

Article XVI - AMENDMENTS

The elders may later amend the constitution and by-laws with a 75% affirmation of the members of the congregation, provided that notice of the proposed amendment is given at least two weeks preceding the meeting.