

We covenant with our Lord, and with one another; and we do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all His ways, according as He is pleased to reveal Himself to us in His blessed Word of Truth; and do explicitly, in the name and fear of God, profess and solemnly vow to walk as follows, through the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We affirm the Lord to be our God, and ourselves to be His people, in the truth and simplicity of our spirits. We give ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Word of His grace for the teaching, ruling and sanctifying of us in matters of worship and behavior, resolving to cleave to Him alone for life and glory, and to reject all contrary ways, canons, and constitutions of men in His worship.

Promising also to our best ability to teach our children the knowledge of God, and of His will, so that they may serve Him also; and all this not by any strength of our own, but by the Lord Jesus Christ: whose blood we desire may sprinkle this Covenant made in His name.

The Constitution, By-laws, and Statement of Faith of Abounding Grace Church of Visalia

Preamble

We, the members of Abounding Grace Church, Inc. of Visalia, California, do ordain and establish the following articles and we voluntarily submit ourselves to them as reflecting an orderly congregational life according to the Scriptures. *1Corinthians 14:33,40.*

Article I: Name

We are, by the Grace of God, a congregation of God's people, yet for the purpose of identification to the state and to mankind, the name of this church shall be: *Abounding Grace Church, Inc. of Visalia, California*

Article II: Purpose

The Purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Bible in promoting His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints, spreading and strengthening the church, and showing benevolence to the needy. To this end we are committed to proclaiming God's perfect Law and glorious Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ our Lord throughout the world, and to defending the "faith once delivered unto the saints." *Ephesians 3:21; 1Peter 2:5; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 11:29-30; Galatians 6:10; Jude 3*

Article III: Statement of Faith

1. Authority of the Bible

The Holy Scriptures are accepted as the only final authority and statement of absolute truth. The Bible is the ultimate authority in all matters of faith, order, and morals. *2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-2*

2. Confession of Faith

We declare ourselves to be in substantial agreement with many of the ancient confessions of faith, but we specifically embrace and adopt, as the fullest expression of what the Bible teaches, the *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* as slightly revised by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. This document is maintained separately from this Constitution.

3. The Bible - The Word of God

We believe the Bible, consisting of 66 books (Genesis through Malachi and Matthew through Revelation), was written by holy men of God who were controlled by the Holy Spirit so that the result of this cooperative work is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is without error in the original manuscripts. The Bible perfectly reveals the will of God, and therefore is the basis for Christian unity and the standard by which all conduct, creeds and opinions should be judged. *2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Psalm 19:7-14*

4. God, The Holy Trinity

We believe that there is one and only one living and true God, an infinite, personal, holy, and good Spirit, the Creator, Sustainer, Governor, Judge, and Redeemer. He is inexpressibly glorious in all His perfections and worthy of all honor, confidence, and love. In the unity of the one God are three Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each of these three Persons executes a distinct but harmonious office in the work of redemption. *1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Romans 11:36; John 10:30; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; 4:10; Ephesians 1 :3-14; Matthew 28:19*

5. The Creation and Fall of Man

We believe that God created mankind, male and female, in His own image and in righteousness and holiness, though capable of sinning. By voluntary disobedience man fell from that happy and holy state. As a result, all mankind are now sinners by nature. From birth all are utterly void of the righteousness required by God and are positively inclined only to evil. Therefore all are under God's righteous condemnation to eternal ruin, and without any excuse or hope apart from the love and grace of God. *Genesis 1-3; Romans 3:9-19; Romans 5:12-19; Ephesians 2:1-10*

6. God's Gracious Purpose

We believe that God freely, sovereignly, and graciously chose specific sinners from eternity to share in His salvation in Jesus Christ. God graciously regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and preserves his chosen ones in time through the Gospel. God's choice is not based on foreseen faith, yet is consistent with the free agency of man; it comprehends all the means in connection with the end. God's choice of sinners is a glorious display of His sovereign love, and is infinitely gracious, wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes all boasting, and promotes love, humility, worship, prayer, and trust in God; it encourages the sinner to seek God. God's choice may be seen by its effects in all who believe the Gospel, and it is the foundation of Christian assurance. To make certain that we are God's chosen requires the utmost diligence. *2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; Colossians 3:12-17; Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:28,29; 2 Timothy 2:10; 2 Peter 1:10-11; Matthew 28:18-20 with John 17:2*

7. The Way of Salvation

We believe that the salvation of sinners is entirely of grace, through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He is the mediator between God and man. In obedience to the Father, He freely took upon Himself our human nature (yet without sin). He honored God's Law by His personal and complete obedience. By His death He atoned for the sins of His people. Having risen from the dead, He is now at the Father's right hand where He intercedes for us. As both God and man, He is in every way qualified to be an all sufficient Savior. *Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 4:25; 5:19; 8:3; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 2:9-18*

8. Regeneration

We believe that in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again. Regeneration consists in the impartation of Divine life to the soul, whereby the mind and heart are inclined toward God. It is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with the Word of the Gospel, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the Gospel. The evidence of regeneration consists in the holy fruit of repentance and faith leading to holiness and newness of life manifested in obedience to God's commandments. *John 1:12,13; 3:1,13; James 1:18; Acts 2:37-47; Titus 3:4-6; 1 Peter 1:22-25; 1 John 2:3-6; Ephesians 4:17-24*

9. Repentance and Faith

We believe that repentance and faith are sacred duties and inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God. In repentance and faith we turn to God with sincere contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy, being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, and of the way of salvation through Christ. At the same time, we heartily receive the Lord Jesus Christ in His mediatorial offices as our Prophet, Priest, and King and rely on Him alone as the only and all-sufficient Savior. *1 John 3:23; Acts 2:37,38; Ephesians 2:8; Acts 11:18; Acts 17:30; Romans 10:9-13*

10. Justification By Grace Through Faith Alone

We believe that the great Gospel blessing which Christ secures to believers is justification. Justification includes the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life on the basis of God's righteousness in Christ. It is bestowed, not in consideration of any works of merit which we have done, but solely through faith alone and on the basis of Christ's obedience and death. By virtue of Christ's obedience and death, His perfect righteousness is imputed to us by God. Justification brings us into a state of blessed peace and acceptance with God, establishes the basis for God's treatment of us as sons, and secures every other blessing needed for time and eternity. *Romans 3:21-5:21; 8:14-17; 8:31-39; 2 Corinthians 5:21*

11. The Free Offer of the Gospel

We believe that the blessings of salvation are offered freely to all without distinction by the Gospel. It is the immediate duty of all to accept these blessings by a cordial, penitent and obedient faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing prevents the salvation of any sinner but his own inherent depravity and willful rejection of the Gospel. Such rejection aggravates the

condemnation of the sinner. *Isaiah 55:1,2; Matthew 11 :20-24; 28-30;23:37-39; Revelation 22:17; Acts 17:30; Hebrews 2:1 -4; Mark 16:15,16; Romans 1:16-17*

12. Sanctification

We believe that sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of His holiness. Sanctification is a definitive work begun at regeneration with a radical change of one's affections towards sin, and a setting apart of the believer to God. We are sanctified by virtue of our union with Christ. We continue to be sanctified in the progressive work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, in an on-going separation from sin and a dedication to God through the regular use of the appointed means - especially the study of the Word of

God, self-examination, self denial, prayer, watchfulness, and Christian fellowship. *2 Peter 1 : 4-11; Matthew 6:9-13; 26:41; Acts 20:36; Romans 6; 7:5,6; Ephesians 4:1-16; 4:17-6:20; Lamentations 3:40*

13. The Perseverance of the Saints

We believe that all those whom the Father chose unto life, and redeemed in His Son, and sanctified by His Spirit shall surely persevere unto the end and be saved. Their love for Christ and perseverance in holiness are the grand marks which distinguish them from false professors of the faith. A special providence watches over the welfare of believers, and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto final salvation and glory. *John 6:39-44; 66-71;10:26-29; Matthew 10:24-33; 13:1-23; 25:1-13; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 2:1-12; Romans 8:28-39*

14. The Church of Christ

We believe that the Church of Jesus Christ in the most inclusive sense consists of all the elect of God who have or shall come to faith in His Word concerning Jesus Christ. This is the one Body of Christ. Visible love and unity ought to prevail among all true believers in our common Lord and we gladly pronounce a benediction upon all who love Him in sincerity. We believe that the primary emphasis given to the doctrine of the Church in the New Testament is to local churches in various geographical locations, each having its own ordinances, order, and leadership. These churches are congregations of baptized believers, associated in the fellowship of the Gospel for worship, ministry, evangelism, instruction, and observance of the ordinances, according to the Word of God. Abounding Grace Church leadership consists of Elders and Deacons and its only Head is Christ. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, each church is separate from the state, free from human ecclesiastical authorities, and Divinely authorized to decide all its internal and external affairs and associations. *Hebrews 10:23-25; 12:22-24; Philippians 1:1; John 13:34,35; Romans 12:4,5; Acts 2:37-47; 14:23; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 12:13; Revelation 2 and 3; John 17; Ephesians 2:11-3:21; 4:1-11; 6:24; Matthew 16:18; Acts 18:1-11; Galatians 1:2; 1 Timothy 3:1-15*

15. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

These are two ordinances of special significance which our Lord has commanded us to observe. We believe that neither of them has saving merit nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of baptism or the bread and cup of the supper. Christian baptism is the

immersion in water of a believer, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Baptism shows our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and symbolizes *our* death to sin and resurrection to a new life. We believe that Baptism should coincide with the privileges of membership in the local church and that as soon as possible the member should be baptized. We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sacred commemorative meal in which believers, by partaking of bread and wine, remember and proclaim the dying love of the Lord Jesus Christ, until He returns. Participation in the Lord's Supper should always be preceded by solemn self-examination. *Acts 2:27-41; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Matthew 26:26-29; 28:18-20; Luke 22:17-20; Romans 6:3-6*

16. The State

Authority: We acknowledge no authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church. We embrace the Holy Scriptures as our only final and binding authority given to us by Christ in and for every area of life, faith and practice. The authority of Christ is binding upon every member of this church. *Ephesians 5:23; John 8:31; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:1-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Colossians 2:6-10.*

Government: We believe that Christ, through the Holy Scriptures, directs the affairs of the church through elders and deacons chosen, ordained, and submitted to by the approval of the membership according to the precepts of Scripture. The elders and deacons themselves at all times and in all of their activities are subject to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. *Acts 14:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:24; 4:1-2; Ephesians 4:8-16; 2 Corinthians 1:24; 2:17; 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 5:19-21*

We believe that Civil Government is ordained by God for the interests and good order of human society. We are to pray for civil leaders, honor them, submit to them, except in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. *Romans 13:1-10; Peter 2:13-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Acts 5:25-29*

17. The Last Things

We believe that at the Last Day the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven and will be visibly manifested as Lord to the whole world. All who have died will be bodily raised. The Lord Jesus will judge and condemn all who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel, but He will bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. The wicked will be condemned to everlasting torment in Hell. The Lord Jesus will glorify His elect and receive them into the everlasting joy of His presence. At His coming the Lord Jesus Christ will establish His Kingdom. We confess our hope and confidence in these things with the prayer, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!" *Acts 1:11; John 6:37, 39, 44; 2 Peter 3:10-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 20:11-15; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 21 and 22; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11*

Article IV: Membership

Definition: A "member" is a believer who is united in heart to Christ and His people. That believer is a member of Christ's mystical body, and as an expression of this the believer is to be a member of a local body of believers. We use the term "member" to designate those whom the Elders of Abounding Grace Church are placed over by Christ and for whom the Elders must give

an account in the day of judgment. Any individual "member" is accountable to all other "members" of the church as well as the leadership.

Section 1. Reception of Members

Any person desiring to unite with this church shall make application through the Elders. The Elders shall meet with the applicant, who shall be examined as to their conversion, Christian experience, views of Biblical doctrine, and willingness to submit to the Confession of Faith and Constitution and Bylaws of this church. We believe that Baptism by immersion should coincide with the privileges of membership in the local church, and that as soon as possible the member should be baptized. If the applicant has been a member of another evangelical church of like faith and practice, holding to the reformed faith, a letter of inquiry or request for membership transfer shall generally be sent by the elders before the applicant's acceptance is final. Three fourths vote by the Elders is required for approval of membership. Upon approval of the applicant by the Elders, the prospective member shall be presented to the church body.

Section 2. Termination of Membership

(1) Letters of Commendation

A letter of commendation will be granted according to the discretion of the Elders, for members who request that they be mailed to a different church body. To receive such a commendation the member must be in good standing and not under discipline at the time of request. Such letters will be granted only to other evangelical churches of like faith and practice.

(2) Exclusion

If a member is absent (this is generally understood to mean inactive in the regular services for 3-6 months) from the fellowship of the church or requests severance of membership for reasons unrelated to matters of church discipline, they may be excluded from the membership of the church by three fourths vote of the Elders. The removal of membership must be brought before the church at a time left to the discretion of the elders, but not later than the next church business meeting.

(3) Discipline

See Article VI for disciplinary action

Section 3. Categories of Membership

(1) A Regular Member

is one who attends services when available unless providentially hindered. They are active in the affairs of the church, should make known to the elders their opinions on the affairs of the church, assembling together for the building up of themselves and others. *Hebrews 10:25; 13:8*

(2) Non-Resident Member

A non-resident, membership category shall be maintained for the purpose of a home church for members who move away-such as missionaries, college students, etc. Such members are expected to maintain communication with the church and support it as the Lord leads. When

such a member returns to the area, they may request to be returned to the regular membership roll.

(3) Inactive Resident Member

An inactive membership category shall be maintained for the purpose of allowing those who are in the process of seeking another church family, or are physically unable to attend, to be members in good standing. The Elders are responsible for keeping an account of which category each member of Abounding Grace Church belongs to and shall make this membership list available. Any change of category shall only be done with the proper notification of the person involved. The death of a member shall be cause to remove the name from the membership role.

Article V: Conduct

Section 1. Standard of Conduct

The standard of conduct for the members of this church is the Holy Word of God as progressively revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We are committed to the Law of God expounded by the prophets of the Old Testament and by our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles in the New Testament. We are further committed to walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, who alone enables the people of God to fulfill the Law by His work of progressive sanctification in the believer. *John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Romans 8:4-5; 13:8-10; Matthew 5:17-48*

Section 2. Means of Grace

Unless they are providentially hindered from doing so, it is expected that all members will observe all private and public means of sanctifying grace, such as observing the Lord's Day, regularly attending the services of the church, regularly engaging in the systematic reading of Scripture, and regularly engaging in private, family, and corporate prayer.

Section 3. Government of the Home

The church, in keeping with the Scriptures, expects its members to be subject to God's Word in the government of the home. Men are expected to rule their homes with loving firmness. Husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church and wives must submit to their husbands as unto the Lord in everything not contrary to the Word of God. Parents are to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by holy example, consistent education, and firm discipline (including corporal punishment). Children must reverently obey their parents. These responsibilities, prayerfully executed, will bring glory to God in the community and strengthen the cause of Christ in the generations to come. *Ephesians 5:21-6:4*

Section 4. Missions and Evangelism

It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and every local church of Christ to seek to extend the pure Gospel to the ends of the earth. Therefore, personal efforts in witnessing to Christ by conduct and conversation are expected of every member. We also, as a church, are committed to collective efforts for sending the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Section 5. Principles of Giving

Christians are to support the work of the Lord by offerings made to the local church. Therefore, we pledge ourselves to systematic contribution for the support of this church and her ministries, with a proportion of our incomes according to the principle laid down in *1 Corinthians 16:2*.

Section 6. Christian Liberty

We shall require of each other in our daily walk and conversation loyal obedience to the moral precepts established in the Word of God. Where God in His Word has not prohibited certain practices, the Christian is free to participate in them; however, the term "liberty" is often used as a cloak for malicious self-indulgence, which is sin (*1 Peter 2:15-16*). Therefore, the following Biblical principles are always to guide the believer's exercise of liberty:

(1) The Fear of God

As one who lives, moves, and has his being in God, Christians must act solely from a motive of love to God and must use all objects for His glory. Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Timothy 4:4-5

(2) The Lordship of Christ

Because all of life is under the Lordship of Christ, the servant of Christ is responsible to soberly and deliberately direct every area of his life toward the establishment of Christ's kingdom. *2 Corinthians 5:9-10; 1 Peter 1:13-15; Romans 11 :1 -2; 1 Corinthians 10:23,31; Ephesians 5:8,15-17*

(3) Love of the Brethren

Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of his fellow saints must always deeply affect his actions. In a spirit of loving service to his Christian brothers and sisters, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent them from sinning. *Galatians 5:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9; 10:23*

(4) Compassion for Lost Sinners

Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and by that behavior chosen which is most likely to win them to Christ. *1 Corinthians 9:19-22*

(5) Watchfulness over the Soul

Though the believer is free in conscience to use all of God's creation, he must exercise carefulness in practice. Where the believer judges himself weak because of indwelling sin, he must abstain in order to assure his perseverance. *1 Corinthians 9:23-27*

Section 7. Soul Liberty

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has not bound it to the teachings and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not explicitly revealed in it. To believe such teachings or to obey such commandments for sake of conscience betrays the freedom God has given. Requiring an implicit faith or blind obedience destroys reason and liberty of conscience.

Section 8. The Church and Contemporary Concerns

We believe that the Gospel requires the Church in every period of human history to testify against the forms of ungodliness and unrighteousness peculiar to that time. *See Romans 1:18-32 and Ephesians 5:11-13*. Of the many forms of disobedience to God's Word practiced in our day, we would single out the following as requiring special attention:

A. *Abortion and Euthanasia.* Because we regard life from its inception in the womb to its termination at death to be the special gift of God (and, therefore, sacred and protected by His Law), we reject the current worldly attitude toward the unborn and the aging and/or dying manifested in the promotion and practice of abortion and euthanasia (so-called 'mercy-killing') as being violations of God's Law and the ultimate violation of human beings.

B. *Alcohol and Drug Abuse.* We regard the use of mind altering drugs and the abuse of alcohol to be contrary to the sobriety and soundness of mind to which we are called by the Gospel. Furthermore, we testify against the sinful abuse of these things which has led to the violence, domestic disruption, and death so current in our society.

C. *Materialism.* We regard wealth and the power to achieve it to be gifts of God and a power for good in our society. However, we testify against the predominant, blatant lust for wealth as being idolatrous and destructive. We assert that Christians are to live without covetousness in simplicity, contentment, and generosity in this present evil age.

D. *Sexual Debasement.* We affirm the Divine intention for the expression of man's sexuality to be within the covenant bond of marriage between one man and one woman. We testify, therefore, against the debasement of human sexuality inherent in our current society, demonstrated in sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, pornography, and unlawful divorce as being violations of human beings and of God's Law.

Article VI: Church Discipline

Section 1. Formative Discipline

God has ordained that through the comprehensive and faithful preaching of His Word that members of local churches be taught to walk so as to please Him. The ministry of the church is to "preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 *Timothy* 4:2). In addition to this, the church must build up its members by the use of the spiritual gifts of both young and old. If mutually sanctifying influences of the whole body, as taught in *1 Corinthians* 12:12-27, be well understood, and every member be satisfied with his God appointed place, we shall all "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 *Peter* 3:18). We acknowledge that one's failure to respond properly to formative discipline leads to the necessity of implementing subsequent sections of this article.

Section 2. Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline is necessary because of conduct or doctrine contrary to Biblical standards. No offenses shall be brought before the church until the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ have been followed as outlined in *Matthew* 5:23-24 and 18:15-16. Corrective discipline always aims for the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the local church, and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender.

(1) *Suspension*

There are occasions when a member's carelessness in the performance of duty, disorderliness, and departure from the instructions of the Word of God requires church discipline-but of a less severe nature than excommunication (see 2 *Thessalonians* 3:6, 11, 14-15). Nevertheless, serious offenses may not be overlooked altogether, lest God's enemies multiply their blasphemies, other

saints be emboldened to sin, and the offender be harmed by a failure to test his own soul and appreciate the gravity of his offense. Therefore, if a member's disorderliness requires discipline, the church may suspend the offender from church membership and publicly rebuke him through the Elders at a duly called congregational meeting. The Elders have the right and responsibility to suspend such a one by three-fourths vote. This discipline consists of temporary suspension of rights to attend the Lord's Table, and to serve publicly in the church. The offender is not to be treated as an enemy, but admonished as a brother.

(2) Excommunication

It is right and in harmony with the Scriptures for the congregation to exclude from the fellowship any member who persistently holds to false and heretical doctrine, or is unwilling to settle differences in a Scriptural manner, or openly and persistently lives inconsistently with the Christian profession, lives in violation of the law or public morals, or persistently disturbs the peace and unity of this church. This discipline may occur when suspension fails to secure the offender's repentance, or may be enacted without prior corrective steps if the offense is of a sufficiently serious nature. The steps to be followed are: (1) Matthew 18 must have been followed and the Elders may then decide to bring a potential discipline matter before the entire church body. (2) If the Elders decide to excommunicate the member in question, then a period of time will follow that meeting and another meeting will be set in which the Elder vote itself will be taken. At this interval, the member under discipline is to be sent a formal letter informing him or her of the pending excommunication if steps to repentance are not taken. Likewise, church members are to be informed of the pending decision of the elders at a public gathering, that they too may pray and exhort the person under discipline to repent. This is intended to give the member time to repent before the final action is taken. All the details of the sin concerning the member in question need not be shared with the entire church body due to the nature of some sins and the repercussions of sharing them in public. If the member in question is excommunicated by a three fourths vote of the elders, a formal letter shall be sent to the excluded member by the Elders. The church is required to deal subsequently with excommunicated individuals according to *Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13*. The only exception to the above procedure shall be when an elder is the member in question and the other elders decide to adopt a different procedure for presenting the matter formally. If a member ceases to attend church meetings for an extended period of time without showing just cause, then they may be excluded from membership With a three fourths **vote** of the elders.

(3) Restoration

The church must restore to fellowship in full forgiveness those persons who show satisfactory evidence of repentance (*2 Corinthians 2:6-8*). The time of this restoration and factors surrounding it will be left to the discretion of the Elders, coupled with a three-fourths vote of the Elders. Persons shall then be restored at a duly called congregational meeting upon the decision of the Elders.

Article VII: Church Officers and Staff

Section 1. Church Leadership

The leadership of Abounding Grace Church shall consist of Elders) (Pastors, Overseers) and Deacons. Except for the Elder who is designated as "first among many." (who is an Elder), all in

leadership positions shall have been members of this church for at least one year before being nominated. Prior to the annual or semi-annual business meeting the membership may recommend for nomination any man whom they believe is qualified to be an Elder or Deacon. All recommendations must be brought to one of the elders at least four months prior to the next business meeting. If the recommendation is submitted after the four months, then it shall be considered for the subsequent business meeting. The outcome of those persons recommended by any member shall be left to the discretion of the elders. Nevertheless, if a member makes a recommendation to one elder, that elder must inform the other elders of that recommendation. (The Elders may also formally nominate any other qualified members who may not have been recommended by the congregation). At least three months prior to the following business meeting, the Elders shall submit all nominations for leadership to the congregation after careful consideration and deliberation. During the three months prior to possible inauguration into office, each member is expected to make known his or her opinion to the elders regarding the person under consideration. Likewise, the Elders should listen to the congregation so that they do not place someone over the people to whom the people may have trouble respecting or submitting. All candidates for consideration shall be voted upon by written ballot. The terms of service for Elder or Deacon shall begin upon the election of the candidate by a three-fourths majority of the Elders. The one Elder designated as "first among many" and all other Elders and Deacons are expected to serve permanently until they seek release from office or are removed by the Elders. If a leader's life or teaching violates the standards of the church, the Elders may make recommendation concerning him at a duly called Elders' meeting. The services of the leader in question may be terminated immediately following a three-fourths vote of the Elders. The congregation may also make such recommendations to remove an Elder or Deacon if the scripturally appointed teaching of *Matthew 18:15-20* and *1 Timothy 5:19* has been followed and the individual is unresponsive to the concern of the membership in this matter. An Elders' meeting may be duly called for this purpose. The leader in question in such a called meeting may not moderate the meeting but may be present to speak on their own behalf. Likewise, those of the membership who have made this recommendation may also be present to press their case. The services of the person in question may be terminated immediately following a three-fourths vote of the Elders.

Section 2. Elders

Men meeting scriptural qualifications set down in *1 Timothy 3:1-7* and *Titus 1:5-9* may be chosen by the church body to serve as Elders. Elders shall be men in full communion with the church, of mature judgment, of unquestioned Christian character, loyal to the Word of God, able to teach sound doctrine and devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ and the scriptural welfare of the church. Only those who will conscientiously uphold the Confession of Faith and the Constitution shall be chosen. The evidence of the N.T. points to a plurality of Elders in a given local church. But this plurality is neither necessary for a local church to be a church nor does it mean that all Elders are equal in their work or position in the church (*1 Timothy 5:17*). It does, however, establish a basis for avoiding the conception of a single ruler and leads to a distribution of authority and responsibility among the body of Elders that more nearly corresponds to the Jewish community from which the office of Elder was adopted in the apostolic church age.

It is the duty of the Elders to oversee the general spiritual welfare of the church through faithful preaching and teaching of the Word and through personal attendance to the members of the church. They shall oversee the administration of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They shall lead the church in matters of church discipline. They shall oversee the work of the Deacons and may, if necessary, call upon the Deacons to assist them in appropriate ministries.

(1) First Among Many. [hereafter designated as Pastor]

Because the responsibilities of the Eldership are both numerous and grave) it is highly desirable that at least one Elder should be chosen to devote himself to the work of the ministry and the oversight of the church. This man should be adequately trained, skilled in public preaching, and thoroughly prepared to engage in this work of ministry as a livelihood (*1 Timothy 4:15; 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:4*). This Elder shall function as the appointed Pastor, who, with all other Elders, leads the church through the careful application of the Word of God in all matters. Foremost among his duties shall be the public and private preaching of the Word of God in order that the saints might be completely equipped and fully mature (*Acts 20:20; 1 Timothy 5:17; Ephesians 4:11,12*). This man, though not superior to the other Elders in authority, is recognized as the leader of the Eldership by virtue of the heavier burden that he bears in proportion to 'his teaching and preaching ministry. He should give evidence of a divine call to the Gospel ministry and the preaching of God's Word. The preaching and teaching ministry of the church is the concern of all Elders, but principally it is the responsibility of the Pastor. The church is responsible to give adequate financial support to such a man. *1 Corinthians 9:9-11; 1 Timothy 5:17,18*. In the event of a vacancy in the office of Pastor, the church is free to invite men from outside the local congregation to come into its midst and serve in this capacity, The Elders are to over see both the temporary pulpit supply and the search for a new Pastor. If they so choose, they may appoint a group of members ("Search Committee"), or simply utilize individuals to help them search for a Pastor. The appointing of the Pastor must follow the guidelines of the appointing of an Elder in Article VII) Section I, if possible. However, if a man is brought from outside the church to be considered, then he must preach a minimum of two sermons before the congregation, and so whatever else the Elders think appropriate. The membership must be responsible to voice its opinion to the Elders of the man under consideration. The Elders must take into account the desire of the people, so that they do not place a Pastor over the people to whom the people would not submit. Finally, the Elders may hire the Pastor with a three-fourths vote of the Elders.

The Pastor may seek release from his office according to the general Biblical principles of faithfulness to God's call upon his life. Action to terminate the service of the Pastor may be initiated by the Elders or the congregation according to the guidelines found in Article VII, Section 1. Any arrangements concerning salary should be fair and equitable.

(2) Miscellaneous Duties of Elders

The Elders shall also be responsible for the following:

(a) Relationship of Elders to Deacons

The Elders are responsible to oversee the other church leaders, therefore, the Deacons are directly responsible and accountable to these men. They are to care for God's church and direct its affairs as those who manage a family. *1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17*

(b) The Relationship of Elders and Teachers

The Elders may recognize all members who have a mature Christian experience, possess gifts to instruct and edify, and may permit them to teach the church. The teachers must submit to the authority of the elders, and they must be in full accord with our Confession of Faith and Constitution.

(c) Pulpit Supply

It shall be the duty of the Elders of the church to supply the pulpit with men whose ministry in the church is consistent with the Confession of Faith and apt to edify the saints.

(d) Grievances and Suggestions

The Elders of the church shall receive, consider, and dispose of any grievance, suggestion, or recommendation from any member or organization of the church.

Section 3. Deacons

Any male member meeting the scriptural qualifications set down in *1 Timothy 3:8-13* may be chosen by the church body to serve as a Deacon. Deacons shall be members in full communion with the church, sober in life) of good reputation, and able to comfort and assist those in need. It is the duty of the Deacons to lead in the financial affairs of the church. They shall wisely and prayerfully serve in meeting spiritual and material needs of the needy in the congregation. They shall also carry out the responsibility for scriptural social action outside of the fellowship. As a church we believe that we are responsible, as our resources allow, to aid the poor, oppressed, down-trodden and degraded as well as the victims of catastrophe, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Deacons and Elders shall work together in the preparation and presentation of a yearly budget. The maintenance of the church's properties is the responsibility of the Deacons.

Section 4. Paid Ministry

The church may elect to call other gifted individuals to serve as financially supported laborers who will work in association with and under the oversight of the Pastor and the Elders. These individuals may be called to serve this church in "fulltime" ministries. Depending on the nature of their ministry, these individuals may or may not be chosen as either Elders or Deacons. It is to be hoped that such individuals may be raised up from within the members of this church body should God make them available and they become adequately trained and equipped to serve in such a capacity.

Article VIII: Finances

The work of this church is financially dependent upon the faithful offerings of God's people. Before the annual congregational meeting the Elders and Deacons shall estimate the needs of the church and prepare a budget with itemized expenditures for the coming year. This proposed

budget shall be submitted to the elders prior to the Annual Meeting. If approved by three fourths vote of the elders, it shall be the basis for financial action during the new church year. Nevertheless, it is to be brought before the congregation at the Annual Meeting. If the congregation insists upon changes or additions to the budget, the Elders are advised to consider changes or additions to the annual budget. If the Elders choose to change the budget immediately, during or after the congregational meeting, they may do so with three-fourths consent. On account of any changes to the budget due to the annual meeting with the congregation, the Elders must bring the changes to the annual budget before the congregation soon. (If consent of the Elders for change occurs during the Annual Meeting, then the Elders do not need to resubmit the changes). No committee or organization within the church is authorized to make changes in its provisions, or to make unauthorized disbursements without the consent of the Elders. No single expenditure shall exceed \$1000 without congregation notification and without adequate time given for congregational response, unless previously provided for by the adopted Annual Budget (Emergency situations may void the time factor for response, but the congregation must be notified as soon as possible.) The Elders and Deacons of the church shall have authority to make expenditures for matters relating to the general maintenance of the church. Furthermore, the Elders and Deacons of the church shall have authority, without consulting the gathered church, to minister financial assistance to needy members of the community in amounts not exceeding \$500 per person or per family. The fiscal year of the church shall begin January 1 and end December 31.

Article IX: Associations of Churches and Missions

Section 1. Affiliations and Fellowship

Abounding Grace Church may cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern and we may seek assistance and counsel in matters of special concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church. When it is thought desirable to have fellowship, consultation, and cooperation with other churches of like faith and order, this church may join itself to associations of churches. If the Elders begin seriously to consider associating with other churches, they must inform the congregation and give appropriate time for member response. After this brief period, such affiliations may be entered into by a three-fourths vote of the elders. Withdrawals from such associations may be effected by the same procedures. Messengers to such affiliations, or associations shall be one or more of the Elders or Deacons with final approval of a three-fourths vote of the Elders.

Section 2. Missions and Programs

This church will support only those ministries which are evangelical, reformed, and in basic agreement with our missional purpose. All missionaries or ministries supported must be approved by the Elders and then presented to the congregation. With the consent of the congregation and a three-fourths vote of the Elders, the church may begin the support of ministries or missionaries outside of this church. The same vote is necessary to terminate such support. This does not preclude the receiving of special offerings.

Article X: Ordinations, Licensures, and Installation of Church Officers**Section 1. Ministers of the Gospel**

It is our hope that Spirit-filled men will be called out from among us to proclaim the Gospel of the grace of God. The church will commission such men by approving those whose ministries will be limited in scope and time, and ordaining others to the full-time ministry of the Word of God. The Elders shall guide, in preparation and studies, the prospective candidate for ordination to the ministry. The Elders shall then examine the qualifications of the candidate: the soundness of his conversion, the godliness of his walk, the soundness of his doctrine, the degree of his gifts, the extent of his training, and the blessing of God upon his labors for Christ. If the Elders believe that the candidate be ordained, they must inform the church and give the church adequate time to evaluate and make its opinion known to the Elders. (The time recommended for congregational evaluation and prayer is 3 to 6 months. Nevertheless, given the circumstance of a calling from another church or otherwise, this time period may be adjusted or omitted to suit the best interests of the kingdom of God). The Elders may grant the commission by a three-fourths vote of the Elders. The church, under the principles set forth in Article VI, shall have the power to discipline, even to the revocation of the church's ordination or approval of other ministries.

Section 2. Installation of Elders

In a regular service of worship the Pastor shall question the newly elected Elder as follows:

- (1) Do you believe the Scriptures as written in the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and do you accept them as the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- (2) Have you personally adopted and will you cheerfully submit and defend the Confession of Faith and Constitution of this church?
- (3) Do you accept the office of Elder readily, and do you promise to perform its duties of caring for the flock of God in the fear of His name? Then the Elders shall place their hands upon the head of the new Elder and prayer shall be offered for him. Following this, the people shall be exhorted to esteem and obey those whom God has placed over them.

Section 3. Installation of Deacons

In a regular worship service of the church) the Pastor shall question the newly elected Deacon as follows:

- (1) Do you believe the Scriptures as written in the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and do you accept them as the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- (2) Have you personally adopted and will you cheerfully submit to and defend the Confession of Faith, Constitution and By-laws of this church?
- (3) Do you accept the office of Deacon and do you promise to care for the poor and needy of both this church and the world (as providence allows) and to manage the business affairs of this church in the fear of God?

Then the Elders shall place their hands upon the head of the new Deacon and prayer shall be offered for him.

Article XI: Amendments

Amendments to this Constitution may be adopted by a three-fourths vote of the Elders at a duly called Elders meeting, along with a two-thirds *vote of acceptance* by the Congregation. Prior to the vote of acceptance, the Elders must submit to the Church in writing all changes or additions to the Constitution. (The written changes may include a duly called Congregational meeting to discuss them with the Church). After these two months (or longer if the Elders deem appropriate) the Congregation must vote a two-thirds majority vote to accept the amendments to the Constitution. Those who participate in the *vote of acceptance* by the Congregation must be Members 18 years and older who are in good standing within the church. If the Church affirms the Elder's leadership to Amend the Constitution, then these changes and/or additions are effective immediately following the Congregation's acceptance

By-laws

Article I: Congregational Meetings

Section 1. Notice of Meetings

Elders must give notice of all congregational meetings at the regular worship services of the Lord's Day at least one week prior to the meeting. With the approval of the Elders an emergency meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each local voting member of the time, place, and general purpose of the meeting.

Section 2. Number of Meetings

Congregational meetings shall be held semi-annually for the reception of reports from the Elders and the discussion of business, including a financial update. The Annual Congregational Meeting shall be held in *January* for the presentation of the Annual Budget. Any other necessary business shall be considered as well.

Section 3. Responsibility for Meetings

The Elders and Deacons of the church shall see to it that all possible preparations are made for the successful conduct of each congregational meeting.

Section 4. Quorum for Meetings

The quorum for any congregational meeting in which business is discussed is two-thirds of the membership.

Section 5. Moderator of Church Meetings

An Elder or Deacon chosen by the body of Elders shall moderate the congregational meetings.

Section 6. Rule of Order

Because our God is not a God of disorder, but of peace, Robert's Rule of order shall be a general guide in order to aid in the decorum and direction of business procedure.

Article II: The Church Clerk and the Church Treasurer

Section 1. Election of the Church Clerk and the Church Treasurer

The Deacons are to choose amongst themselves with a two-thirds majority vote (at the consent of the one chosen) who they believe should function as the Treasurer and Clerk. (A Clerk mayor may not be utilized, but that is left to the discretion of the Elders). Whom they choose between themselves, & how they share responsibilities is for them to decide with the consent of the Elders.

Section 2. Duties of the Church Clerk

The clerk shall keep a record of all business discussed at the congregational meetings, keep a record of membership, and, on behalf of the Elders, may carry on all necessary correspondence relating to church membership. (If the Elders do not utilize a church clerk, then the Elders must make arrangement for some record to be kept.)

Section 3. Duties of the Church Treasurer

The treasurer shall deposit all the church funds in a bank account or accounts, under the guidance of the Elders and Deacons, to be opened and maintained in the name of the church. He shall disburse these funds at the discretion of the Elders and Deacons. He shall make a monthly report of income and expenditures, and a comprehensive semi-annual report to the church body in July and an annual report in January. He shall be required to submit the account books at any time upon request of the leaders or the congregation. The treasurer shall be primarily responsible for all offerings received by the church and following any service he shall count and keep a record of all offerings. He shall keep and supply yearly records for any desiring them for income tax purposes. An assistant treasurer may be appointed by the Elders and Deacons to assist in these duties.

Article III: Committees

Section 1. Formation of Committees

The need may arise for the formation of committees for the purpose of expediting the ministries of the church. A committee may be formed by recommendation of the Elders and by approval of the congregation.

Section 2. Committee Membership

Any member of the church who is a member in good standing may serve on any committee which is formed. All nominations to any committee must be approved by the Elders.

Article IV: Legal Trustees of the Church

In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" the Elders of the church may designate willing members of the church to serve on a Board of Trustees for legal purposes only. The treasurer may also serve as a legal trustee of the church. In the event that the church is dissolved, the Trustees shall release all assets to another church which holds to substantially the same Reformed theology and doctrinal standards as those presented in this Constitution.

Article V: Amendments

Amendments of the By-laws may be accepted from the Elders by a two thirds majority vote of the members present and voting at a duly called congregational meeting provided that amendments have been distributed by the Church Elders in written form at least two months prior to the congregational meeting.