

SOVEREIGN GRACE

CHURCH

MEMBER HANDBOOK

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Sovereign Grace Church Member Handbook
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE - CHURCH LIFE

1	Why a Member Handbook?	9
2	The Vision of Sovereign Grace Church	10
3	Joining and Resigning Membership	12
4	<i>The Statement of Faith of Sovereign Grace Churches</i>	18
5	The Corporate Worship of the Church	23
6	Elders at Sovereign Grace Church	26
7	Deacons at Sovereign Grace Church	31
8	Pastoral Confidentiality	34
9	Our Practice of Church Discipline	35
10	A Charge Against an Elder	48

PART TWO - OUR DENOMINATION

11	Sovereign Grace Churches (Our Denomination)	51
12	<i>The Book of Church Order of Sovereign Grace Churches</i>	52
13	<i>Partnership Agreement of Sovereign Grace Churches</i>	54

PART THREE - OFFICIAL CHURCH DOCUMENTS

14	Sovereign Grace Church Bylaws	61
15	Sovereign Grace Church Articles of Incorporation	89
16	Children's Ministry Policy	91

PART ONE

CHURCH LIFE

1

Why a Member Handbook?

When Christians get together to form a church there are a lot of *practical* matters to think through. None of these rival the most important ones of all—core doctrines like the Triune God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, or central commandments to love God, love one another, and love our neighbor. Yet, they are important nonetheless. Some of these issues include questions like, *what does it mean to join a church, or how do we join this particular church? What does church discipline look like? Does our church have bylaws and articles of incorporation? What are elders and deacons at this church? What does it mean that this church is connected to Sovereign Grace Churches?* This Member Handbook is meant to supply answers to many of these questions—not all, but many.

We should say at the outset that the matters contained in the Member Handbook are ones that don't quite fit into other existing documents like *Exploring Membership* (given in our new members class), our Statement of Faith (though we include a copy of this below), certain policy documents (like our Child Protection Policy), the Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches, and our books on Deacons and Baptism.¹ We refer to these titles in the Member Handbook, but you can look elsewhere to get the full documents.

*The elders of Sovereign Grace Church
September 4, 2015*

¹ *Deacons: Serving God and Serving God's People; Believe and Be Baptized*. Both are available in our bookstore and at Amazon.com.

2

The Vision of Sovereign Grace Church

THE OVER-ARCHING PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The over-arching purpose of our church is to glorify God. All that we do is to be done for that grand purpose. The church is to display the wisdom and glory of God to the visible and invisible universe (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rom. 11:36), and the church's good works are to result in God being glorified (Matt. 5:16). The church is even called the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20-22; cf. Rev. 21:3).

THE VISION OF SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCH

Within this over-arching purpose are three core activities that represent the broad biblical responsibilities of the church: We love God through our worship and growth as disciples, love one another through our mutual service, edification, and concern, and we love our neighbors through our evangelism to the lost and our service to the needy.

Our first obligation is to love God through our worship and growth as disciples. To "worship God" (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17; Heb. 12:28-29; 1 Peter 4:10-11) means to proclaim his all-surpassing glory in all that we do individually and corporately as a church. While all of life is to be worship (Rom. 12:1), the high point of our worship is the corporate gathering we experience on Sunday mornings (1 Cor. 11:23-32; 14:26ff.). To "grow as disciples" means that we are growing in character ("fruit of the Spirit," Gal. 5:22-23) and in our respective ministries (Eph. 4:12). This means first that we are committed to our own ongoing spiritual growth. We are pursuing God through Bible-reading and prayer, and we are putting sin to death (Rom. 6:1-5). This is a recognition that we belong to Christ and not ourselves (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Further, All Christians are endowed by God with specific gifts so that we might benefit others and serve others, and believers should be willing to be used in this way (1 Peter 4:9-10; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Cor. 12:3-7; Rom. 12:3-8), first to those inside the church and then to those outside: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). The Bible makes it clear that because of the gifts we have received and the service we are to render, we are in fact involved in "the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12). The church is not be filled with ministers and non-ministers, because *all are ministers*. Instead, a church is made up of pastors and members who are all ministers in various ways. In fact, part of the essential role of elders is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (ibid.). In this way we hope to build an "every-member ministry" at Sovereign Grace Church—a place where every member is fulfilling their God-given ministry.

Our second obligation is to "love another" through our mutual service, edification, and concern. Christians in the church are also to "love one another," which means to live together in a vibrant local fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ. Love is central to all that we do as Christians,

and thus it is a critical part of our life together (1 Cor. 13:1-7; 1 John 4:7-12; etc.). We are not simply collaborators in a common cause or members of the same organization, but we are brothers and sisters adopted into the same family (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; etc.). We are thus living a life marked by affection for one another (1 Peter 4:8), sacrifice for one another, sharing life's trials and triumphs together, and living out the "one another's" of the New Testament together. This fellowship also means that we build others up through our speech and actions as we have opportunity (Eph. 4:29; 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:23; 14:4; 1 Thess. 5:11; etc.). This is to be a goal for each of us as we live life together.

Our third obligation is to "love our neighbors." Jesus taught us that loving our neighbors involves serving those in need around us (Luke 10:36-37). This is part of our calling to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19), because the greatest love we can express to our neighbors is to share the gospel with those who are not yet converted. This starts them on the journey of discipleship. Such disciple-making engages the whole local church since we are each gifted in different aspects of the task. Some of us are more gifted to love the lost in practical ways, others of us are more able to share our faith well. The key is that we are personally committed to this effort, whatever our part in the process might be.

Further, loving our neighbor as Jesus taught involves serving those in need. Our Christian life is to extend beyond the walls of the church itself and is also to be marked by good works toward the needy (Luke 10:25-37; Matt. 5:16; James 1:26-27; etc.). Most of these good works will be done in private and individual ways by Christians, but at times the church will facilitate larger efforts to provide for those who are needy in various ways.

3

Joining and Resigning Membership

REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

To join Sovereign Grace Church a person must be:

- (1) A believer;
- (2) Baptized in water as a believer;
- (3) An adult;
- (4) In general agreement with our Statement of Faith; and
- (5) Willing to support the values, mission, and policies of the church.

Here is a brief look at each of these five requirements:

(1) Membership is for Believers: Because God's church consists of those who are born-again, it is appropriate for a local church to be limited to those who are born-again. We can see a clear picture of this in places like 1 Corinthians 1:2 where Paul greets the Corinthian church: "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). While we cannot guarantee who is and who is not born-again, we can ask that all those who join Sovereign Grace Church be able to give a sincere profession of faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

(2) Membership is for those baptized in water as believers: In the New Testament, one of the key markers for a believer is that they are baptized in water by immersion. This does not *make* someone a believer, it only marks them as such. Jesus said to baptize "disciples" (Matt. 28:19), the clear pattern of Acts is to baptize those who make a profession of faith (8:12; 29-39), and elsewhere the meaning of baptism shows that this is appropriate only for believers (Rom. 6:1-5; 1 Peter 3:21). We make an exception for someone who has been sprinkled *as a believer*, but we would exhort even this person to consider whether he ought to be baptized by immersion.

This is because immersion best fulfills the meaning of the word in the Greek (which means to "dip into"), mirrors the pattern first shown by Jesus and then by all the apostles and ministers of the gospel in the New Testament, and captures the symbolism of places like Romans 6:1-4 (it has to do with death, burial and resurrection, not simply cleansing from sin). Requiring members to be baptized is really a truth related to number one, that a member must be a Christian.

(3) Adult Membership: Membership at Sovereign Grace Church is for adults only. While we certainly believe that children can be converted and vital participants in the church (almost half of our church is under the age of 18), the responsibilities and service expected of members imply

that it is something best reserved for adulthood. As one example, a member is at times required to participate in the church discipline of another member. The wisdom and responsibility this entails mean that it is best if adults are the ones who perform such an action. Further, a child is still under the authority of their parents, and at times the interaction between the authority of the church and parental authority makes it challenging to treat a child as a typical member. For this reason, we regard the children of members as being members through the membership of their parents, but not as having their own independent membership. Once they graduate from high school and are at least seventeen years old, they are eligible for church membership.

(4) General Agreement with our Statement of Faith: To join Sovereign Grace Church a person must also generally affirm our Statement of Faith. Complete agreement in all details of our doctrine isn't practical or necessary, but to be a unified church there must be a basic commonality of doctrine. Otherwise, we will have a hard time working together and growing together as disciples. This "unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13f.) will be in flux until we all have perfect knowledge, but we expect at least a basic unity.

There are core doctrines where there must be unity. These include essential issues like the Trinity, the Bible as the Word of God, or the necessity of salvation. On these issues, if there is disagreement then we can have no confidence the person is even a Christian. However, we can allow for differences of opinion on issues such as election, spiritual gifts, or church officers (elders and deacons). This is what we mean by a *general agreement* with our Statement of Faith.

(5) Willingness to support the values, mission, and policies of Sovereign Grace Church: A person who joins our church must also be willing to support the direction of the church as it is reflected in our values, mission, and policies. Our values are common to all the Sovereign Grace churches and include (1) Reformed soteriology, (2) gospel-centered expository preaching, (3) Continuationist pneumatology, (4) complementarian leadership in the home and church, (5) elder-governed and elder-led churches, (6) national and international outreach and church planting, and (7) interdependent churches united in fellowship, mission, and governance. You can find out more about these seven shared values in *The Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order* and on the Sovereign Grace blog (<http://sovereigngrace.com/sovereign-grace-blog>).

Our mission is to *love God, love one another, and love our neighbor*. This captures the broad categories of our life together. To *love God* includes both our worship and our personal growth as disciples of Christ. To *love one another* includes our fellowship, mutual love, care, and service to our brothers and sisters in this church. To *love our neighbor* involves our service, mercy ministry, and evangelism to those outside the church.

Our church policies include those detailed in *The Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order* as well as our church bylaws, our policy regarding the protection of children, our process of church discipline, and our understanding of pastoral confidentiality. We cover church discipline and confidentiality in chapter seven of our new members book (at least in part), and our child protection policies are located on our website.

EXPECTATIONS FOR MEMBERS

There are also expectations we have for members. The reason we list out these expectations is that we want you to see what a typical member does in our church. If any of them jumps out as offensive or strange, please talk to us. They might simply be new to you, and we would love to talk with you more about them. There are times when a difference of opinion on these issues becomes an important tipoff that our church isn't for you. Likewise, if you can see the biblical basis for these and are excited to be part of such a church, then maybe this is a sign we are indeed a church you should consider. Finally, one thing you'll notice about these expectations is that they are applications of what God commands.

There are five basic expectations for church members:

- (1) Regularly attend Sunday morning worship;
- (2) Actively participate in our home group ministry;
- (3) Serve on a ministry team;
- (4) Support the church financially; and
- (5) Submit to the leadership of the elders

(1) Regularly attend Sunday morning worship: The most important meeting of our church takes place as we gather corporately on Sunday mornings. We understand missing because of things like vacations, sickness, work conflicts, etc., but we expect that schedule- and situation-permitting, members will attend on Sundays. Hebrews 10:25 says not to neglect "to meet together," and the most important meeting we have is the Sunday service.

(2) Actively participate in our home group ministry: We also expect members to regularly attend *home group meetings*, again schedule- and situation-permitting. Once a church hits a couple hundred people it becomes impossible to know, love, and serve *everyone*. So if we are going to live out the "one another" commands we mentioned, then we are going to need another context in which to do this. For us this is the goal of our home groups. These bi-weekly meetings take place in someone's home and are a key place for building relationships and living life together as the body of Christ.

(3) Serve on a ministry team: Members are also expected to serve on a *ministry team*, which are teams throughout the church dedicated to a particular area of ministry. Some are more visible like serving on the worship team, and some are less visible like those who serve as part of our Financial Advisory Board (deacons who help the elders with the financial management of the church). Yet, all of these are ways that we can take the gifts that God has given us and invest them into the growth of others.

(4) Support the church financially: We give our money as an act of worship, an expression of gratitude to God, to support church ministers, for the sake of the poor, and to support other churches nationally and internationally (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:25-32; Malachi 3:10; Acts 2:45; 4:34-35; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:10-19; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; etc.). When we give our money we are giving ourselves, and when we invest our finances in the church we are

investing our very heart in God's church (Matt. 6:21). We recommend that you prayerfully consider giving a tithe (a tenth) to the church as a starting point for your giving. Offerings can be given beyond this amount as God so leads you.

(5) *Submit to the leadership of the elders:* Another expectation is that church members submit to the elders. The New Testament says to "obey your leaders and submit to them" (Heb. 13:17). This is not a categorical submission like a child to a parent (so long as the parent is not asking the child to sin). This is a specific submission to the specific leadership of the elders. An elder's authority concerns a person's life in the church, not his life as a family member, citizen, worker, or in other contexts in which he might have other authorities. The teaching of the church might impact how we live in those contexts, but the elder's authority does not extend that far. There is a practical side to this as well like in matters of the church schedule, basic ministry structures, and the Sunday liturgy. In these practical areas of our church life we expect a basic responsiveness to the leadership of the elders. Further, there should be a basic receptivity to their teaching and input. The elders of a church are the God-given officers to teach and govern and protect the church (Acts 20:28f; 1 Tim. 5:17f.), so it is right to recognize their place in your life if you decide to join this church.

This submission to the elders is reflected in the commitments the congregation voices when an elder is ordained:

- Do you, the people of Sovereign Grace Church, receive _____ as your pastor?
We do.
- Do you promise to receive the word of truth from him with meekness and love and to submit to him in the due biblical exercise of his leadership? *We do.*
- Do you promise to supply him with whatever material support he may need to fulfill his ministry among you? *We do.*
- Do you promise to encourage him in his labors and to assist his ministry and leadership for your spiritual edification, the evangelization of the lost, and the promotion of God's glory? *We do.*

When someone does not fulfill one or more of these expectations, this can be a place for appeals by other members or the elders. Most of the time someone's inability to meet these expectations is because of a season-of-life change or a new schedule or some other practical consideration. We understand that we can't all hit these marks 100% of the time. Yet, there are occasions when someone's failure in these areas is a sign of a greater problem in their lives, and thus it can become necessary for others to get involved in a more serious manner.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO BECOME A MEMBER

The first step to become a member at Sovereign Grace Church is to take our new members class. The point of this class is to give you a clear sense of what we believe and do as a church. It is a significant decision to join a church, and we want you to make an informed choice.

After the class, if you feel ready to take the next step, go ahead and fill out the Membership Questionnaire, which will help the pastor who does your interview know how best to use that time.

Once the class concludes, please set up a time for your pastoral interview. Contact one of our secretaries to do that. The point of this interview is for you to ask questions you didn't think about during the class, or which are personal and specific to you. This is also a chance to go over any material you missed or did not understand. The basic point of this interview is to help clarify if our church is the one God is calling you to join.

If you need to be baptized before you join the church, tell us, and we will choose a Sunday on which to do that.

In most instances, *a person is a member upon completion of their pastoral interview*. When baptism is required or other circumstances require, sometimes membership is delayed. At such times our desire is to serve the church and to serve you as you engage in this process.

The final step of membership is New Member Sunday, where you are introduced to the church along with the other new members. This weekend we also typically have a dinner so the new members can get to know the pastors and their wives in a less formal environment. We appreciate these events because it gives us a chance to express our gratitude for partnering with us in the cause of Christ, and it allows us to get to know you more.

RESIGNING YOUR MEMBERSHIP

To resign your membership from Sovereign Grace Church you simply need to provide written notice to the elders that you would like to do so (along with the date that this becomes effective).

If you are willing, we would also appreciate that you meet with one of the pastors so that we can hear you out more personally. Sometimes people leave for reasons that are entirely practical (going to college, a job transfer, becoming part of a church plant, etc.), but sometimes their reasons have to do with ways we could grow in serving our people, and these interviews help us to strengthen our weaknesses and grow as a church.

An exit interview with one of the pastors can take the place of the written notice mentioned above.

Within 30 days after the effective date of your membership resignation we'll remove you from our church directory.

Also, though we trust this will never be relevant in your situation, resigning membership does not necessarily stop the church discipline process. Sometimes a person leaving still needs to be held to account for his actions after he has left our church.

RESIGNATION BY NON-PARTICIPATION

When someone persistently fails to meet the five expectations of members listed above and it is not for some practical limitation like work schedule or health or other temporary hindrance, then the elders may regard this as a "resignation by non-participation." This means that though the person has not walked out the steps to formally resign their membership, he has resigned through his actions. Church membership is an active and ongoing partnership and a commitment to the "one another's" of the Bible—love one another, serve one another, bear one another's burdens (e.g., Rom. 12:9ff.)—so it doesn't make sense to call someone a church member who is not active in that membership. In these cases the elders will not take this step quickly, but will likely make a series of appeals to establish the nature of the non-participation.

4

The Statement of Faith of Sovereign Grace Churches

We are connected to Sovereign Grace Churches, Inc., and so our *Statement of Faith* is the same as theirs.²

THE SCRIPTURES

We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God. The Bible is the only essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Being given by God, the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation, or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture.

GOD IS TRIUNE

There is one God: infinite, eternal, almighty, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. In the unity of the godhead there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, co-existent, co-equal, co-eternal. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, yet each is truly Deity. One God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the foundation of Christian faith and life.

GOD THE FATHER

God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By his Word and for his glory, he freely and supernaturally created the world from nothing. Through the same Word he daily sustains all his creatures. He rules over all and is the only Sovereign. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is faithful to every promise, works all things together for good to those who love him, and in his unfathomable grace gave his Son, Jesus Christ, for mankind's redemption. He made man for fellowship with himself, and intended that all creation should live to the praise of his glory.

² This Statement of Faith was obtained from <http://sovereigngrace.com/statement-of-faith> on September 18, 2014.

JESUS CHRIST³

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was the eternal Word made flesh, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He was perfect in nature, teaching, and obedience. He is fully God and fully man. He was always with God and is God. Through him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in him all things hold together by the word of his power. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, and in him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily. He is the only Savior for the sins of the world, having shed his blood and died a vicarious death on Calvary's cross. By his death in our place, he revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness, and for a period of 40 days appeared to more than 500 witnesses, performing many convincing proofs of his resurrection. He ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, he intercedes for his people and rules as Lord over all. He is the Head of his body, the Church, and should be adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel he persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit a person is led to trust in divine mercy. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, brings about the new birth, and dwells within the regenerate. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son, who in turn came to glorify the Father. He will lead the Church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored, and worshiped as God the Third Person of the Trinity.

MAN

God made man—male and female—in his own image, as the crown of creation, that man might have fellowship with him. Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God. Being estranged from his Maker, yet responsible to him, he became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God. This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives under the dominion of sin and Satan. He is at enmity with God, hostile toward God, and hateful of God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ.

THE GOSPEL

Jesus Christ is the gospel. The good news is revealed in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion is the heart of the gospel, his resurrection is the power of the

³ There are several oddities in this paragraph that are currently undergoing review by Sovereign Grace Churches. One is the use of the past tense in places like, "was the eternal Word made flesh." This is confusing and should read, "is the eternal Word." Also, to say that he is "perfect in nature" gives the impression that Jesus had only one nature, not two. We affirm what the historic creeds of the church have affirmed, which is that Jesus Christ is one person in two natures, one human and one divine. The intention of the "Jesus Christ" paragraph above is not to be in any way unorthodox or to conflict with this footnote. It's just that the language chosen is unusual and confusing.

gospel, and his ascension is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death is a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases his holy wrath. It also demonstrates his mysterious love and reveals his amazing grace. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have of glorifying God because of what he has accomplished. Therefore, we want all that takes place in our hearts, churches, and ministries to proceed from and be related to the cross.

MAN'S RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

Man's response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for his own pleasure and glory. It is also true that the message of the gospel is only effectual to those who genuinely repent of their sins and, by God's grace, put saving faith in Christ. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations. Biblical repentance is characterized by a changed life, and saving faith is evidenced by kingdom service or works. While neither repentance nor works save, unless a person is willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, he cannot become his disciple.

MAN'S INHERITANCE THROUGH THE GOSPEL

Salvation, the free gift of God, is provided by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone turning from sin in repentance and looking to Christ and his substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life and is declared righteous by God as a free gift. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. He is justified and fully accepted by God. Through Christ's atonement for sin an individual is reconciled to God as Father and becomes his child. The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin and, via the miracle of regeneration, liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit.

SANCTIFICATION

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification and seeks to produce his fruit in us as our minds are renewed and we are conformed to the image of Christ. Though indwelling sin remains a reality, as we are led by the Spirit we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavoring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word, and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve his people until the end, which is most certain.

EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well. Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the

Spirit are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.

THE CHURCH

God by his Word and Spirit creates the Church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's Body. By the same Word and Spirit, he guides and preserves that new redeemed humanity. The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve him by faithfully doing his will in the earth. This involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in all the world for a testimony. The ultimate mission of the Church is the making of disciples through the preaching of the gospel. When God transforms human nature, this then becomes the chief means of society's transformation. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church, in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer.

All members of the Church universal are to be a vital and committed part of a local church. In this context they are called to walk out the New Covenant as the people of God, and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God. The ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the church (including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) for the equipping of Christ's body that it might mature and grow. Through the gift ministries, all members of the Church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of ministry. Women play a vital role in the life of the church, but in keeping with God's created design they are not permitted "to teach or to exercise authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:12 ESV). Leadership in the church is male. In the context of the local church, God's people receive pastoral care and leadership and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in his service in relation to one another and to the world.

SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Water baptism is intended only for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become his disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself, and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of his death and resurrection. It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death, and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin.

As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of his blood on our behalf, and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the

death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

THE CONSUMMATION

The Consummation of all things includes the visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. In the Consummation, Satan with his hosts and all those outside Christ are finally separated from the benevolent presence of God, enduring eternal punishment, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with him forever. Married to Christ as his Bride, the Church will be in the presence of God forever, serving him and giving him unending praise and glory. Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

5

The Corporate Worship of the Church

THE PRIORITY OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

We believe that the New Testament establishes the priority of corporate worship in the local church. We are not to neglect "to meet together, as is the habit of some," but we are to be "encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:25). Further, throughout the New Testament we see by example (Acts 2:41ff.) and commandment (Heb. 10:25) that we are to meet together regularly as a local church. As Christians have practiced since the first-century, we meet weekly on "the first day of the week" (1 Cor. 16:2), also called "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10).

THE GOALS OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

During this time of "coming together" (1 Cor. 11:17; 14:26; etc.) we are primarily about the business of glorifying God (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Yet, this goal includes within it the goal of "building up" our brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, Paul says to "let all things [in the corporate meeting] be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26).

We also see the evangelization of the lost as one of the goals of our Sunday meeting (Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 2:22ff.). As the word is preached, praises are sung, and Christians demonstrate their faith, the gospel is being presented to the lost in our midst. We desire to see God's Spirit bless this gospel proclamation with conversions.

THE ELEMENTS OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

The corporate worship of the local church contains many elements that are to be regularly a part of our services. These cannot be included in every service, but they are to be included on a regular basis.

The list of the elements of our corporate worship includes the following:

Reading, preaching, teaching, and hearing the Bible (Deut. 31:10-12; Neh. 8; 1 Tim. 4:11, 13; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; James 1:22-25). Because this is a primary activity throughout all eras of the people of God in the Bible, it must always remain a priority for Sovereign Grace Church and its leaders.

Corporate and individual prayer (Neh. 9; Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:1-2, 8). Corporate and individual prayer is a hallmark of the corporate gatherings of the people of God throughout the Bible and should be a regular component of our gatherings as well. This includes formal liturgical prayers,

pastoral prayers, corporate intercession, thanksgiving, and prayers of all kinds that occur in our meetings.

Singing, musical accompaniment, and physical expressions of worship (1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:16; Psalms 47:1; 149:3; 150; etc.). God's people have always sung of his attributes and redemption (cf. Ex. 15; Rev. 5:9-10), and we desire for this to mark our weekly meeting with very few exceptions. Further, the Bible commands us to use instruments and includes a variety of physical expressions like clapping, dancing, raising our hands, and more to be a part of the praise of our great God.

Prophecy, tongues, and spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:26-30). The expectation of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is that our corporate gatherings would be times where the Holy Spirit manifests himself through various spiritual gifts. He also commands us to "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:1), and he creates the expectation that when we gather many would have contributions to make in the corporate meeting (1 Cor. 14:26). Elsewhere he says not to "quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). So, even as we pursue an appropriate order and spiritual discernment in our meetings (1 Cor. 14:26ff.; 1 Thess. 5:21-22), we want our meetings to be marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Collecting tithes and offerings for the ministry of the church, the poor, churches in need, and various aspects of our local and extra-local mission (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:25-32; Malachi 3:10; Acts 2:45; 4:34-35; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:10-19; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; Matt. 28:18-20). We worship God by giving our financial resources for his purposes. The work of ministry is to be funded by members giving sacrificially. The poor in our community and the needy in our church are to be ministered to by our giving. Gospel outreach is to be funded by local churches providing for ministers of the gospel to give themselves full-time to making disciples of all nations.

The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-30; Matt. 26:17ff.; Mark 14:12ff. Luke 22:7ff.). Few corporate worship elements are highlighted in the New Testament, so the ones that are demand special recognition. The Lord's Supper is one of these. We celebrate the Lord's Supper with an open table (open to all believers) on a regular basis. We do this to remember the sacrifice of our Lord (Luke 22:19), to recognize our unity in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:29), to proclaim Christ's redemptive sacrifice and his return (1 Cor. 11:26), to participate in his death (1 Cor. 10:16-21), and to reflect on his presence among us and our inclusion in him (John 6:51; Romans 6:1-5).

Individual and corporate confessions of faith (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 Tim. 3:16). In the context of baptisms we often hear public professions of faith. As part of our corporate worship we occasionally read historic creeds or other confessions of faith.

Baptism of believers (Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 16:29-33; Rom. 6:1-7). While it is not required that baptisms be practiced in the corporate meeting, we see it as edifying to do so. These are often events that involve someone in our families or network of relationships that has come to faith, so it is a church event in that sense. For this reason we include these on Sunday mornings when we can.

Ordinations of elders and deacons (Acts 6:1-7; 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). The ordination of various officers into their respective ministries at Sovereign Grace Church happens in the Sunday meeting. Deacons are ordained annually in September and elders are ordained as they are needed in the life of the church.

Expressions of fellowship such as personal greetings and the informal care that happens as we meet (Rom. 16:16; James 2:1-4; 1 Peter 5:14). Sunday meetings are not just a collection of activities that we perform, but it is the coming together of brothers and sisters in Christ that God has joined in the household of God. Therefore we see these gatherings as times to express affection toward one another, to greet others, and to minister to various needs as we are able to in the context of the weekly meeting.

How these activities are practiced will largely reflect Christian prudence and practical wisdom, but the goal is to see these clear, biblical practices represented in our meetings. Some of these are practiced virtually every week (preaching God's word, singing God's praises, prayer, giving financially). Others are practiced regularly (Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts). Others occur less often and typically as needed (baptisms, ordinations, confessions of faith).

6

Elders at Sovereign Grace Church

INTRODUCTION

Because of the variety of approaches to the office of elder, it is important for us to clarify a few things about this role at Sovereign Grace Church. In some churches the pastor is a virtual monarch, while in others he is little more than a spokesperson for a deacon board. Some churches place final authority in the hands of a regional bishop, but others see the congregation as having final authority for decisions and judgments. So what about Sovereign Grace Church? How is our church governed? That's what we want to look at here.

WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY?

One important question when it comes to governing the church is, *who has the authority?* That is, in the final analysis, who really has the final say in a given decision? Historically, the church has given four answers to this question.

Some church traditions feel final authority rests with the *bishop*, a person in a given denomination who has authority over a number of other churches. This is called an *episcopal* form of government and is perhaps the oldest form. The Episcopal, Anglican, and Roman Catholic Church all adopt this church government. Local pastors have authority, but the bishop has a greater authority.

Other churches feel final authority is in the hands of the *congregation* itself, and historically they are called *congregational* churches. This authority is typically exercised through all-member votes. In these churches there are differences about which matters are voting matters and which ones are worked out through other means, but they all affirm that the congregation is the highest level of authority in the church. Baptist and Anabaptist churches of various kinds adopt this understanding.

A smaller segment of the church has said authority rests in the hands of *apostles*. This is actually the history of the Sovereign Grace churches until 2013, at least officially. Apostles in this government are not at all equated with the original Twelve or Paul, but would be similar to men like Timothy, Titus, and Silas in the Bible. There is some similarity with an episcopal government, but it is only a superficial likeness. The role of bishop and that of an apostle in this type of government are quite different. Some Charismatic and Pentecostal denominations adopt the office of apostle in this qualified sense.

The fourth type of government, and the one we adopted in April of 2013, sees the *elder* as having the primary place of authority within the church. Such churches are called *presbyterian* after the Greek word *presbuteros* for "elder" (cf. Acts 15:6).

This doesn't mean we are identical with traditional Presbyterian denominations. Those churches are generally cessationist, affirm the complete Westminster Confession of Faith, practice paedobaptism (baptizing infants instead of exclusively believers), and have a strong division between teaching and ruling elders. We are charismatic, affirm only parts (though large parts) of the Westminster Confession of Faith, practice credobaptism (the baptism of believers), and see all elders as having an equivalent office.

Our common ground with Presbyterians is our belief in a church government built around the office of elder. Because of its importance in our church and denomination we need to explain what we mean by "elder."

THE OFFICE OF ELDER

There are three terms the New Testament uses to describe the role of "elder." Sometimes people divide these into at least two different positions in the church, but they are really three ways of describing the same office.

An elder is most often called by that name, "elder" (Grk. *presbuteros*). Titus was told to "appoint elders in every town" (1:5) and is then given specific prerequisites for those elders (vv. 6-9). Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders...in every church" in their first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). The title "elder" speaks to the wisdom and character of the leader of God's church. It refers more to the caliber of the man than his precise age, though age can *sometimes* be a factor in whether to choose a man or not. The role was a critical one in the Old Testament, though it was never fully defined (Ex. 3:16; Jer. 26:17; 29:1; etc.).

Elders are also called by the name of "overseer" (Grk., *episkopos*). In fact, in Titus 1:5-9 where Titus is told to "appoint elders," Paul then says "an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach" (v. 7). Similarly in 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul uses the title "overseer" instead of "elder." This title speaks to the way an elder is to lead Christ's church. In fact, the Bible says they are to "rule well" (1 Tim. 5:17), and the church is to "submit to them" (Heb. 13:17).

Another title of great importance for the elder is that of "pastor" (Grk., *poimēn*). The word really means a "shepherd," something captured in the ESV in Ephesians 4:11: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers." A shepherd cares for, protects, feeds, knows, and provides for his sheep, and this accurately captures the kind of concerned leadership an elder is to provide in his church. Thus, the elders are commanded to "shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (NASB, Acts 20:28). We know these three titles and roles are synonymous from passages like Acts 20. In verse 17 Luke tells us that Paul "called the elders of the church to come to him, and then in verse 28 he exhorts them, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [shepherd] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." These elders are overseers who shepherd their flock. Thus, a pastor is an elder is an overseer.

Elders in the New Testament are given four basic responsibilities in the church. They are to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17), lead or rule (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4), protect (Acts 20:28-31), and love (1 Peter 5:1-4) the church. As Paul makes very clear, the church does

not belong to the elders, though they exercise leadership in the church. The church belongs to God himself: "Care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). One point of confusion is to think that since elders are the official leaders in the church, they do most or even all of the ministry in the church. This is simply not true! In fact, God says a healthy church is filled with ministers. Notice in this passage how God gives gifted men for certain roles, but the point of these men is to equip others to do the ministry:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

This vision of a healthy church body has captured our imagination and our ministry philosophy. It means that while elders are vital to a healthy church, they are by no means the primary workers in the ministry of that church. All are required if the body is to grow up to full maturity. Now what kind of person is to be an elder? Can anyone sign up for this role? Not exactly. We learn from the New Testament an elder is to be a man of character, gifting, and leadership. That he is to be a man is affirmed in places like 1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-7; and Titus 1:5-9. The need for gifting and leadership flows out of what he does—teach, lead, protect, and love the church. The need for character we learn from two clear passages, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable,³ able to teach,³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Tim. 3:1-7)

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you--⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:5-9)

This is a sobering picture because it creates a number of ways a man will either not qualify for the office or can be removed from the office. Yet, here as in all things, we dare not be smarter than God. He has told us clearly what we are to look for in our elders, and we need to rest in his revelation.

ORDAINING ELDERS AT SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCH

The ordination of elders at Sovereign Grace Church happens according to the process detailed in "The Ordination of Elders" in our *Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches* (BCO-9). The process is designed to help a local church identify, evaluate, and train a man to serve as an elder. It involves the leadership of the local elders, the input of the congregation, and the evaluation and approval of the Regional Assembly of Elders. Once a man is identified as an "elder candidate" he will begin a training regimen that is detailed in the current ordination standards of Sovereign Grace. His character and gifting are examined primarily by the local elders. It is in the area of sound doctrine where the Regional Assembly offers specific examinations, and they must also affirm that the man is not engaged in any scandalous sin. The congregation offers general and informal input about the elder candidate, and at a certain point in the process the elders will allow for more formal input. The congregation does not have the final voice of approval, but it is wise and helpful to get their perspective on a leader that will have such a significant role in their lives in the church. Once the candidate has completed the training program, passed his ordination exams, the congregation has given their input, and the Regional Assembly has approved the candidate, then the man can be ordained on a Sunday morning at Sovereign Grace Church.

In fact, we can learn about the role of elder at Sovereign Grace Church by reading the commitments that elders make when they are ordained (the answer to each question being, "I do"):

- *Do you promise to shepherd the flock of God not under compulsion but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge but being an example to the flock? (1 Pet. 5:1-4)*
- *Do you promise to faithfully guard the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer, and do you promise to protect that flock from false teaching, division, and dissension? (Acts 20:28-31)*
- *Do you promise to care for the flock of God, not as a hireling, but as an under shepherd of the Great Shepherd, caring for his sheep as the precious ones for whom he died? (Ezek. 34)*
- *Do you, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and this congregation, promise to preach the Word in season and out of season, and do you promise to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience, enduring suffering, while remaining sober-minded in all of your preaching and teaching, and will you do the work of an evangelist among those whom God has given you charge? (2 Tim. 4:1-5)*
- *Do you declare sincerely before God that you believe all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith fully agree with the Scriptures? Do you own that Statement as the statement and confession of your faith? And do you promise to teach and defend these doctrines in public and private?*
- *Do you promise further that if in the future you come to have reservations about any of these doctrines, you will share these reservations with your eldership and the Regional Assembly of Elders?*

- *Do you promise to keep a close watch on yourself and to walk humbly before others, to be self-suspicious of your own motives, to invite criticism from others, and to make yourself accountable to those whom God has put in your life?*
- *Do you submit without exception to the explicitly mandated practices of the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order, affirming that that form of government is a wise and suitable application of Scriptural principles?*
- *Do you promise to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel and to show yourself in all respects, in action and in speech, to be a model of good works, integrity, and dignity so that neither the church, nor our Savior Jesus Christ, nor the gospel may be brought into reproach? (Titus 2:7-8)*
- *Do you promise to continually seek the gifts of the Spirit that you might serve God's people, not in the energy of the flesh, but in the power of the Holy Spirit and to carry out your ministry without fear of man?*

7

Deacons at Sovereign Grace Church⁴

THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON DEACONS

The New Testament establishes the office of "deacon" by example (Acts 6:1-6) and implicit command (1 Tim. 3:8-13; Phil. 1:1). A deacon, as the name suggests, is a "servant" of the church, for the Greek *diakonos* means "one who is busy with something in a manner that is of assistance to someone."⁵ It can mean a somewhat official capacity, as when Paul refers to governing officials as "ministers" (Rom. 13:4), or it can be our general calling as servants of others (Matt. 20:26). If there is a question of whether the term is a demeaning one, this evaporates when we consider that Jesus himself is called a "deacon" in his redemptive work for Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 15:8-9).

Acts 6:1-6 records the appointing of the first deacons. These men were chosen to meet a specific need in the church, in this case feeding the Hellenist widows. The need in this case was circumstantial or occasional, and deacons in all churches need not be bound by this single ministry of care for the poor. The apostles made clear that they themselves were to be devoted to "prayer and to the ministry of the word" (6:2, 4). As the church becomes more developed it is not the apostles in the local church who are devoted to this ministry but the elders. Deacons thus come alongside the elders to enable this same devotion.

Deacons were to be men of exemplary character: "men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (6:3). These men were appointed to this ministry and apparently functioned with significant independence (v. 4). Last, it is important that the apostles defined the role for the deacons, though the deacons could apparently fulfill that role as they saw fit.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 fills out the character requirements of the deacon (and the deacon's wife) even further:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but

⁴ See the church's publication, *Deacons: Serving God, Serving God's People* (available at Amazon.com) for more on this office. Our theology and practice of deacons is consistent with the Sovereign Grace *Book of Church Order*, but since there is allowable latitude on this issue in our churches it is also necessary to define more specifically how we approach this New Testament office.

⁵ Bauer, Walter, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, eds. Danker, Arndt, Gingrich (3rd edition, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), *diakonos*. Hereafter called BDAG.

*sober-minded, faithful in all things.*¹² *Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.*¹³ *For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3:8-13).*

Deacons are to be spiritual men, not simply chosen for their ability to manage practical details. They "hold the mystery of the church with a clear conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9), and they are "full of the Spirit" (Acts 6:3). This also implies that they can teach certain things in the life of the church, perhaps seminars and the informal teaching that happens as men lead discussions in small-group meetings. While this is a primary responsibility of the office of elder, it is a possible aspect of the diaconate.

The mention of "managing their children and their own households well" (1 Tim. 3:12) seems to imply that part of their service will be "managing" some aspect of church life. While elders "manage" the entire church (1 Tim. 3:5), deacons manage a portion of it, as the deacons in Acts 6 managed the specific aspect of feeding the Hellenist widows.

From these texts we conclude that deacons are (1) men of exemplary character, (2) who provide leadership in a part of the service of the church (in ways greater than the service all Christians are to provide in their local church), (3) exercise relative independence in fulfilling that role, and (4) serve under the leadership of the elders of a local church.

DIACONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AT SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCH

Deacons at Sovereign Grace Church fulfill the character requirements of 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-6, and provide leadership in an area of service in the church.

The home group leader is a diaconal role at Sovereign Grace Church, and they lead their respective home groups in carrying out the "one another" passages of the New Testament, those summarized at loving one another, serving one another, and building one another up (Rom. 12:9-21; 1 Cor. 12-14; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Peter 4:9-10). They are to facilitate this "one another" life of church members at Sovereign Grace Church and incorporate unbelievers into this life as they are able.

Other diaconal roles at Sovereign Grace Church vary according to the needs of the church, but they can include administrators in various ministry teams, assisting with managing the church finances (especially through the work of the Financial Advisory Board or FAB), or in carrying out certain mercy and outreach endeavors. The church administrator at Sovereign Grace Church is also a diaconal position.

ORDAINING DEACONS AT SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCH

Deacons at Sovereign Grace Church are typically ordained in September for a period of one-year.

The church will be notified about a month prior to this with the names of the deacons for the coming year. Church members can respond in writing about the deacons being considered, and

are encouraged to do so, especially when they question whether the deacon fulfills the requirements for character or gifting in Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

It is expected that deacons will continue in their service past the initial one-year of service, but for practical reasons we will renew their office annually.

Here are the commitments that these deacons make when they are commissioned:

Gentlemen, at the end of the description of the commitments, you will answer, "I do."

A deacon must be a man of character. 1 Timothy 3:8-9 says that "deacons...must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." 1 Timothy 3:12 says that a deacon must live a life of marital fidelity and manage his household well. Acts 6:3 says that a deacon must be both "full of the Spirit" and "full of wisdom."

Further, a deacon must fulfill his role with faithfulness. In Acts 6:1-7 the deacons were entrusted with the responsibility to serve the Hellenist widows in the distribution of food. It was a task they were to own responsibly. It was delegated to them, and they had responsibility to see it accomplished according to their own judgment and leadership.

Additionally, a deacon is called to serve the church for the glory of God. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says that we serve others with grace given to us so that "God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" and that "glory and dominion" are due to him "forever and ever."

Therefore, in light of the kind of man a deacon is to be and the dedication to his ministry that he is to model, do you now commit yourself to fulfill this task with faithfulness, integrity, diligence, and a reliance on God's grace and the Holy Spirit?

"I DO."

8

Pastoral Confidentiality

The pastors of Sovereign Grace Church are committed to confidentiality in all matters where it is helpful to you and to us. In most counseling there is no need to share anything with others, but sometimes for your benefit we share selectively. A pastor might share with another pastor or his wife in order to get additional wisdom. At times we also share with the other pastors if there is a need for extra accountability in the counseling relationship (i.e., the pastors need to be accountable to the other pastors). The motivation for all of this is love expressed in a desire to serve you and the church as well as possible (Matt. 7:9; 22:39). See Section 9.7 in our Bylaws for more on this issue.

Related to this, certain situations require that a pastor report information to the authorities. North Carolina law states that if a person has "cause to suspect" that a child is the victim of abuse or neglect by an adult, or that they are a "dependent" (child without adequate adult supervision in the home), that person must report the situation to the county's department of social services.⁶ The law is less explicit about reporting a crime against a child that is not abuse by an adult (e.g., a child-on-child situation).

It is not possible to write a policy that captures every contingency, but our desire is to involve the authorities as much and as quickly as seems warranted in a situation. The safety and welfare of our children is a concern that overrides a person's privacy and our desire to preserve confidentiality. We recognize that our civil authorities are not perfect, but as obedient Christians we submit to their authority when it does not conflict with our obligation to God (Rom. 13:1-7; Acts 3:19; 5:29). We also recognize that we are often trying to balance the fact that our knowledge and wisdom are imperfect with the need to act as quickly as possible. These exceptions notwithstanding, our desire is to value the confidentiality that should exist between a pastor and a member of his church.

A final area where a pastor might share information is when it seems likely that the person will harm himself or someone else. This could include a person expressing that he has considered suicide. These areas are often grey with respect to the law, but our moral obligation binds us to act for the safety and well being of the person and others involved. At such times we see calling 9-1-1 (or another appropriate person or authority) as a way to serve and love people in need.

As we said above, the motivation to act in these cases is Christian love. Though protecting privacy is often the path of love, there are times when seeking counsel or alerting the authorities is the more appropriate way to express a love for our neighbor.

⁶ See the North Carolina General Statutes 7B-101 and 7B-301 to read the relevant sections of the state laws. Available at http://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_7B/GS_7B-301.html and http://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_7B/GS_7B-101.html on November 8, 2013.

9

Our Practice of Church Discipline ⁷

INTRODUCTION

The word "discipline" has a variety of meanings in the text of the Bible. We are to "discipline" our children (Eph. 6:4). Paul says to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7, NASB). God himself "disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:6; Prov. 3:11-12). In these passages the authors mean that some kind of negative pressure or consequence should be applied to someone so that he or she might become more holy. In fact, the goal of all discipline is holiness.

Thus, discipline refers to the correction brought when a person sins. This can be personal and direct as in the case of a parent and child. A parent will introduce discipline for a specific sin expressed by the child. But discipline can also be indirect and broad, something that theologians at times speak of as "formative discipline." This happens through the teaching or discipleship ministry of the church. As an example, a person might hear a Sunday sermon that becomes a tool of God's correction for him.⁸ Along these lines we even use the term "spiritual disciplines" to refer to personal Bible reading, prayer, fasting, and various other practices because these all have a kind of corrective or training effect in our life. They help us battle sin and train us in godliness—even as they serve in the very positive way of building our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Further, there are numerous ways that Christians are to appeal to other Christians in a corrective fashion with the result that we grow in holiness. The author of Hebrews warns us, "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:12). This is a ministry that we exercise to "one another" and we do it "every day." It isn't a formal process, just the healthy give-and-take that is to occur in a church committed to holiness.

⁷ For more information on the discipline of both elders and members, please refer to the "Rules of Discipline" in the Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches. These sections describe various elements of charges against elders and how appeals by church members can be made. Helpful resources: Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986); Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 145-156; "Guidelines for Formal Discipline" (obtained on March 4, 2014 at <http://www.peacemaker.net/site/c.aqKFLTOBIpH/b.5474599/>); Jonathan Leeman, "A Church Discipline Primer," obtained at <http://www.9marks.org/journal/church-discipline-primer#print-preview> on September 5, 2012 and *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); "Steps in the Institution of Judicial Process" (Book of Discipline, chap. III), *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (2000); Mark Dever, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), pp. 167ff.; Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd., 2012).

⁸ Leeman, 27.

Sometimes this brotherly ministry of appeal (and correction) even happens according to the general shape of Matthew 18:15-17, a passage that guides the process of formal church discipline detailed below. As we will see shortly, this passage begins by a personal appeal from one Christian to another. Then we take "one or two others" along to increase the pressure of that appeal. Finally we involve "the church," which in this more common way means involving the elders of the church. Each time we only increase the pressure if there is a lack of response (no discernible repentance). And each time the goal is the same, the holiness of the offender.

Some authors call this "informal discipline" to distinguish it from an official process that can ultimately lead to excommunication.⁹ Most sins that Christians commit will be treated in this manner. They are serious and hurtful to us, but they aren't serious enough to have us removed from the church and its fellowship.

All the above can loosely be called "church discipline," because it is corrective in nature and occurs within the church. Yet, the phrase also refers to the *formal process* of appeal and rebuke that can ultimately result in excommunication. This formal process has historically been called "church discipline" and is likely what most people envision when they hear the phrase. The rest of this chapter will develop this aspect of church discipline and explain how it is to occur at Sovereign Grace Church.

THE GOALS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We need to start with a clear statement about the goals of church discipline lest we mistakenly assume that the intent is to shame or simply punish someone. In fact, the goal is not punishment at all. The goals of church discipline are fourfold.

(1) The first goal of church discipline is to bring a sinner to repentance. In the words of Matthew 18, the goal is to "gain your brother" (v. 15). Thus, the desire of the church in this process is the spiritual health of the offender and his true fullness of life in Christ. It is a rescue mission attempting to save the sinner from the clutches of his sin: "My brother, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

(2) The second goal is to protect the health, spiritual purity, relational harmony, and biblical faithfulness of Sovereign Grace Church. Sin left unchecked can do great harm to a church. This is why the apostle Paul said, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). Further, we desire to be a people who are marked by the same holiness that we see in God himself: "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). Rightly responding to sin is also a powerful encouragement for other believers in our church: people see the seriousness of sin and that we as a church take sin seriously, and both can be significant deterrents from sin that will protect and purify the other members of the church.

(3) The third goal of church discipline is to protect our witness to the world. Jesus told the apostles that "by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one

⁹ E.g., Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 46ff.

another” (John 13:35). Our lifestyle (love in this case) demonstrates our discipleship. The way that we live communicates the God we serve. And what is true in how we love each other is true in our holiness as well. We reflect God to the lost world around us, and we want that reflection to be as close as possible to the real thing (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6-8).

(4) The fourth goal of church discipline is to glorify God. When we pursue biblical obedience, personal holiness, and corporate purity, we are not after creating a name for ourselves. We are desiring the glory of God: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).¹⁰

As you can see from the above, punishing a sinner is not at all the goal with church discipline.

SINS WORTHY OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

One question to consider with church discipline is whether all sins are grounds for it. It is our conviction that not all sins are worthy of removing someone from the local church. We all commit sins routinely (1 John 1:8-10), and some of these we will likely never stop doing. But most or all of these are not worthy of church discipline. We will all be proud, self-righteous, and angry at times, but this does not mean that church discipline is necessarily required.

In 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 we are given a list of sins that can lead to excommunication if someone persists in them:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler-- not even to eat with such a one.¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Paul says we are "not to associate" with someone who calls himself a Christian and yet continues these practices. This gives us guidance about what constitutes a sin that would get us removed from a local church if we never repented: "sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler" (v. 11). These sins destroy the person and those around them, as well as their Christian testimony, and therefore necessitate church discipline if they continue without change or repentance.

Further, in Titus 3:10 another sin is identified that can rise to this level of offense: "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him" (Titus 3:10). Paul does not duplicate the steps of Matthew 18:15-17, but the progression of "once and then twice," followed by "have nothing more to do with him" seems to imply at least some progression. Perhaps the shortened process has to do with the serious harm a truly divisive person can do to a church. The critical point here is what is meant by "stirs up

¹⁰ These points were influenced by Mark Dever, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*, 15.

division." Disagreement, even passionate disagreement, cannot be what is meant. Rather, it seems to picture some disagreement within the church that carries with it a rallying of others to support it as a faction. It is establishing a rival party to those in authority in the church. The reason for the strong response here is that such discord can profoundly damage a church. Throughout the New Testament this kind of divisiveness is condemned (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 11:18; Titus 1:10-16).

In other words, *sins that threaten the holiness or unity of the church in a significant way are places where (formal) church discipline can be appropriate.*¹¹

THE PROCESS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

As in all areas of church discipline, the Bible and biblical wisdom inform the process. A central passage here is Matthew 18:15-17:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

This process begins with a personal appeal and then progresses to excommunication if the offender does not repent of their sin. It is essential to see this as a *process* that unfolds over time and with patience and wisdom and justice preserved along the way. This process begins with a "one-on-one" appeal, progresses to include "one or two others," and finally involves "the church." Jesus does not detail a procedure in these few sentences, but he does establish a clear picture of a gradual and progressive intensity that only goes further if there is no repentance on the part of the sinner. In other words, true repentance stops the process, and a persistent unrepentance requires that the process continue.

We should say at the outset that some sins require immediate action on the part of the elders.¹² For instance, we would not expect a case of alleged adultery to pass gradually from personal appeal to "one or two others," etc. Rather, the elders would be involved immediately. Paul envisions this kind of action in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 where private appeals are bypassed and the church is to immediately "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (v. 5):

¹¹ Jonathan Leeman offers a helpful summary of when church discipline becomes appropriate: "Somewhere there is a line in between sins that you expect of Christians, and sins which make you think that someone may not be a Christian. Informal and private discipline occurs on both sides of the line, to be sure. But formal church discipline or excommunication is warranted, broadly speaking, when an individual crosses from the first domain to the second, from sins we expect to sins we don't" (*Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 49).

¹² Cf. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 67.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus,⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

In other words, he is to be removed from the fellowship ("Let him who has done this be removed from among you," v. 2). In this case it has to do with the public and clearly sinful behavior of the man (cf. v. 1).

Titus 3:10-11 also envisions an abbreviated process as well, likely because there is a clear threat to the unity of the church:

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

It would seem that these warnings—"once and then twice"—are coming from the church's leadership, because Titus is written to a church leader himself, not the church-at-large. This also protects the process from becoming some version of vigilante justice. The reason for such swift and decisive action is the damage and destruction that disunity can bring to a church.

Even though the New Testament envisions times when immediate and strong action is required elders are still obligated to withhold judgment until the facts are known. Everyone is to be given due process before serious actions are taken. We must always allow that there can be mitigating factors that make the apparent sin less evil than we expect. This does not mean the elders should be timid or unnecessarily slow in their response, but only that as they enter into the situation they need to prioritize getting a clear picture of the details.

If church discipline is to occur in the normal manner and not an abbreviated one, then it is to proceed as follows:

STEP ONE: ONE-ON-ONE

The first step of church discipline actually occurs in an informal manner. Jesus simply says, "if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). At this point we are still basically in the realm of the brotherly give-and-take we spoke about earlier. For that reason, to call it a "step" of church discipline is a little misleading. Yet, we place it here to make sure that this has happened before there is any further action. It would not be right for the elders or the "one or two others" to get involved before this private encounter has occurred.

The point of this meeting is for the one offended to clearly communicate what they believe the offender to have done. How exactly did "your brother sin against you"? That is the basic content of what is communicated. The offender should be given a chance to respond in case it is all a misunderstanding. The hope is that "he listens to you," in which case the matter is dropped (Matt. 18:15). This means that the offender agrees with the appeal and repents (or that the offended party realizes his error and withdraws the accusation).

We should add here that the person offended in the situation may not necessarily deliver the private rebuke. There are a number of reasons why an advocate on behalf of the offended party might deliver the rebuke. If the sin is against a child or in some situations involving a man and a woman or there is something in the relationship that puts the two parties on unequal standing,¹³ then it might be prudent to have someone go along with the offended party to make sure that they are fairly heard.

Further, some matters have an additional civil dimension to them. If the alleged sin is actually a crime (domestic violence, child abuse, vandalism, stealing, etc.), then local authorities might be involved in addition to church members or the elders. It would be impossible to detail all procedures for all possibilities. For the sake of this document, we want simply to acknowledge this aspect of discipline cases. Most discipline will be a matter of church members only.

Getting back to our process, Jesus said, "if he listens to you, you have gained your brother." If this happens the matter is dropped. Yet, "if he does not listen," the process escalates to the next step (Matt. 18:16).

STEP TWO: ONE OR TWO OTHERS

If the offender does not respond appropriately, the process goes to step two. Matthew 18:16 says that if our brother does not respond to the private rebuke we are to "take one or two others along with you." These should be men or women who are respected by both parties and the church as well (they may be called upon to give testimony to the elders). Jesus does not specify whether this person is a church officer (deacon or elder) or not, so we are free to involve whomever we think will be a wise, discerning, humble, and biblical support.

There are four basic roles these "one or two others" can fulfill:

First, they can be eyewitnesses who may have personally witnessed the sin committed. In this case they are not only appealing on behalf of the offended party, but they are appealing as brothers or sisters in Christ who desire to see a fellow Christian rescued from his sin.

Second, they may not have observed the sin but are convinced it did occur and is serious. Here they bring added godly pressure to bring the sinner to repentance. As in the case above, they are appealing as brothers and sisters in Christ, only this time they are not appealing as eyewitnesses.

¹³ As an example, if someone believes his much older pastor has sinned against him there might be a sense of intimidation in going to him to "tell him his fault" (Matt. 18:15). Perhaps there shouldn't be, but in the event that there is, it would be wise for the offended party to ask an appropriate person for help (their home group leader, parent, older man in the church, etc.).

Third, they may play an investigative role. They may be coming to determine if the charge is indeed credible and what kind of response is thus demanded. This reminds us that in this step there should be opportunity for the offender to state clearly their side of the story and for the accuser to do the same. In the process of the conversation it is assumed that there will be sufficient clarity that the "one or two others" can make a decision about whether to rebuke the offender or to encourage the accuser to drop the matter and be reconciled with the other party.

Fourth, the "one or two others" help protect the integrity of the process. Their presence will add another set of eyes and ears to all that is happening, and this will help ensure that all follows a course that is both godly and consistent with this policy.

If it is clear that the offender has sinned against the accuser, then the goal is for the offender to repent of their sin and walk in the light. If there is not an appropriate response the process escalates again.

STEP THREE: TELL IT TO THE CHURCH ELDERS

After an offender has "refused to listen to" the "one or two others," the next step is to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17). This step has a fair amount of complexity to it because Jesus does not distinguish between the elders and the entire church. The obvious reason for this is that the church as an institution did not exist at this time. As an *ekklesia* (congregation of "called out ones") it certainly did, but not as an organization overseen by elders. Thus, we need to approach this step with a certain amount of care and wisdom.

We are seeing in this "tell it to the church" step actually three separate actions, which are captured in STEPS 3-5: (1) STEP 3: The elders become directly and formally involved; (2) STEP 4: A hearing is held so that a formal judgment can be made; and (3) STEP 5: The congregation is informed and solicited to join in the increasing appeals to the offender.

Thinking of "tell it to the church" in this way helps (1) protect the dignity of the offender, for it allows for some investigation and appeal to happen without the entire church knowing the details; and it (2) captures the progressive nature of the discipline described in Matthew 18:15-20. Since one of the goals of church discipline is the repentance of the offender, this helps to create an environment that can facilitate that. Justice that is too swift can make it virtually impossible for the offender to have opportunity to repent. Of course, we are aware of the tension here, for justice that is too slow is often injustice and a failure to act appropriately in the face of clear sin.

Here we are concerned with the first of these actions, the formal involvement of the elders. Their role at this time is to make appeals to the offender and add to the pressure already being exerted by the offended party and the "one or two others" that have been added. If the sinner repents, then the process stops here. But if, as before, these appeals are not heard and the offender remains unrepentant, then the process must further escalate to a formal hearing (see below).

STEP FOUR: THE HEARING

The point of a hearing is to establish the sin(s) committed, to let the offender defend himself, and to make another more formal appeal to the offender. All hearings of this kind must proceed according to the *Rules of Procedure for Adjudications for the Sovereign Grace Churches*. All parties in adjudications will be given the accompanying *Rules for Parties in Adjudications* that provides the critical information from the *Rules of Procedure* that applies to them.¹⁴

A general description of the trial is that three elders (likely from Sovereign Grace Church but perhaps from the Mid-South Regional Assembly of Elders) will serve as the Panel to hear the case. The trial will proceed according to typical trial formats with an opening by the Moderator of the Panel, a clear statement of the issues to be decided, opening statements by the plaintiff and defendant, the presentation of evidence (documents and personal testimony), and closing statements by the Moderator, plaintiff, and defendant.

Plaintiffs and defendants may have advisors to help them with the trial (as stipulated in the *Rules of Procedure*), and there are clear guidelines for how evidence is to be presented and how communication is to occur throughout the trial.

Within ten days the Panel shall render their judgment in the trial (also according to the *Rules of Procedure*). This judgment may have certain consequences attached to it, and this judgment may be appealed to the Regional Assembly of Elders (through the Regional Judicial Committee). The elders of Sovereign Grace Church can provide contact and process information for such appeals.¹⁵

If the result of the hearing is that (1) the sins were in fact committed, (2) that they are in fact worthy of excommunication, and (3) that the offender remains unrepentant, then the process escalates to step five.

STEP FIVE: TELL IT TO THE CHURCH CONGREGATION

With this step we more literally "tell it to the church," meaning the congregation. This could mean the entire congregation or it could be only a part. Wisdom will dictate which is the more appropriate in a given situation, but we expect that most situations will involve the entire congregation. The church may be told in a letter or a family meeting or through some other means. Enough information will be revealed so that the church members can make a meaningful appeal to the offender. This is the farthest thing from gossip where the goal is either entertainment at someone else's expense or simply to hurt the reputation of another. Rather, the goal of informing the church about the offender and his sin is to rescue the sinner from the self-destructiveness of his sin and the damage it is causing to others (as well as the other goals mentioned above).

If the sinner refuses to respond to the appeals of the congregation and remains unrepentant, then the process escalates to the final step: excommunication.

¹⁴ Both documents are available at <http://sovereigngrace.com/polity> and can be ordered at www.amazon.com.

¹⁵ Interested parties can refer to the aforementioned *Book of Church Order* and *Rules of Procedure* for information on appeals.

STEP SIX: EXCOMMUNICATION

To excommunicate someone from the church is to treat them "as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:17). Here is another place where we need extra space to develop what we mean and do not mean. Here are seven key points about excommunication:

First, with excommunication the church and the elders here are not making a definitive statement that the offender is absolutely *not* a Christian. Rather, we are only saying that the behavior of the person is so contrary to that of a Christian that it is inappropriate to treat them as one. In this sense, it is more of a statement about their behavior than their salvation. Jesus said to treat them *as if* (Greek *hōsper*, "just as") they were "a Gentile and a tax collector," not to treat them this way *because they are* "a Gentile and a tax collector." That difference is important.

Second, to treat a person "as a Gentile and a tax collector" means withholding the privileges of Sovereign Grace Church that are reserved for Christians and/or members:

- They will be forbidden from taking the Lord's Supper (an action reserved for believers).
- They will be removed from membership.
- They will be unable to serve on a ministry team.
- We will also attempt to evangelize this person in a loving and faithful manner. Their behavior so calls into question their faith in Christ that we assume they do not believe in Jesus. Therefore we will appeal to them to repent and turn to Christ. This might feel illogical or even unloving, but that has more to do with our sentimentality than biblical Christianity. Christian love "rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6), even if it offends those we formerly called our brother or sister in Christ.

Third, to treat a person "as a Gentile and a tax collector" goes even further. It also means forbidding this person from attending all Sovereign Grace Church events and meetings—Sunday services, home group meetings, and even hospitality with members of the church. Paul commanded the Corinthians not even "to associate¹⁶ with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty" in the ways described in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. This is a more than a statement of withholding *membership* privileges to such a one. It is a statement of forbidding any kind of Christian fellowship. We see this same idea in places like 1 Timothy 1:20, "Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." Also, 2 John 1:7-10 and Romans 16:

¹⁶ From the Greek *sunanoamignumi*, "to associate with one another, normally involving spatial proximity and/or joint activity, and usually implying some kind of reciprocal relation or involvement" (Louw-Nida). C.K. Barrett seems to argue that the term means physical and complete removal: "be separated from the church body" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1968, 131-132). Thiselton defines the verb "do not associate with" as "do not mix indiscriminately with," but over the course of his argument he seems to envision disassociating with the offender in all religious and social settings, though basic politeness that we extend to all on the streets and in the marketplaces, etc., we would still extend to this person. The point is not treating them as we would a fellow-believer *in any setting* (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC, 2000, 408-418). Gordon Fee writes that the man is to be "excluded from the *community* as it gathers for worship and instruction," but he is unsure about whether this extends to individual social settings (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 1987, 226). John Calvin says on 1 Cor. 5:11 that "what Paul means is, that, in so far as it is in our power, we are to shun the society of those whom the Church has cut off from her communion" (*Commentary on 1 Corinthians*).

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.⁸ Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.⁹ Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, (2 John 1:7-10)

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. (Rom. 16:17-18)

Fourth, this means that for the Christian, there are three categories of people, not two. First there are believers that we regard as brothers and sisters in Christ even if they are not members of our church. Second there are unbelievers that we evangelize as much as we are able. But third there are *so-called Christians* living in violation of serious and clear commandments in the Bible. In order to protect the church and the name of Christ, we must not extend to them our Christian fellowship and allow them to participate in the life of our church. We might relate to them publicly, but it is always with the intent of evangelizing them and urging them to repent of their sin.

Fifth, it must be clear that we are talking about serious and clear violations of the word of God. We are not looking at the idols of a person's heart or the motivations of a person's heart or tendencies toward pride that we all possess. We are looking at behaviors that are *serious breaches of biblical living and clearly observable to others.*¹⁷

¹⁷ Here are five approaches to church discipline from different sources:

(1) Note the following statement from the Presbyterian Church of America *Book of Church Order* (obtained March 4, 2014 at <http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013-BCO-Reprint-ALL-with-links-for-Web-site-12-20-2013-asn.pdf>):

Excommunication is to be administered according to one or other of the two modes laid down for indefinite suspension, or to be inflicted in public as the court may decide. In administering this censure the moderator of the Session shall make a statement of the several steps which have been taken with respect to the offending brother, and of the decision to cut him off from the communion of the church. He shall then show from Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 the authority of the church to cast out unworthy members, and shall explain the nature, use and consequences of this censure. He shall then administer the censure in the words following:

Whereas, _____, a member of this church has been by sufficient proof convicted of the sin of _____, and after much admonition and prayer, obstinately refuses to hear the Church, and has manifested no evidence of repentance: Therefore, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, we, the Session of _____ church do pronounce him to be excluded from the Sacraments, and cut off from the fellowship of the Church.

Prayer shall then be made that by God's blessing this solemn action of the court may issue in the repentance and restoration of the offender, and in the establishment of all true believers (36-6, emphasis mine).

The PCA statement seems to imply that a member who is excommunicated will not participate in the life of the church in any formal or informal way.

Sixth, if a member is to be excommunicated, then the church will be informed either by written communication or at a members meeting. The communication will give enough detail to enable the church to properly call the offender to repentance. The communication will also make clear the restrictions placed upon the offender. That is, the elders will communicate what privileges and meetings will be forbidden to the offender. Last, the communication will convey the love we have for the offender and our desire to see him fully restored as a member of Sovereign Grace Church (or at least a Christian in good standing).

Seventh, excommunication exists as long as the person remains unrepentant, but as soon as the person repents appropriately that excommunication can be lifted (see below). Such restoration is always the goal with church discipline, because the point of discipline is not to punish but to redeem.

THE NON-PARTICIPATION OF THE OFFENDER

If a church member stops participating in the church discipline process or attempts to resign their membership during the process, the elders reserve the right to continue the discipline process in their absence. The demand for integrity, justice, and the protection of God's name and God's church require that we continue this process even if the offender fails to participate. At such

(2) 9 Marks argues that excommunication means to treat someone like an unbeliever, but does not go so far as to exclude them from the fellowship of the church as 1 Corinthians 5 seems to argue (<http://www.9marks.org/journal/church-discipline-primer#print-preview>). Jonathan Leeman of 9 Marks says, "The general tenor of one's relationships with the discipline individual should markedly change. Interactions should not be characterized by casualness but by deliberate conversations about repentance. Certainly family members should continue to fulfill family obligations (see Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:1-2)" (*Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 76).

(3) Acts 29, or at least Mars Hill Church, seems to adopt the position of Mark Driscoll that excommunication means to disassociate from someone, not merely to refuse the Lord's Supper or some other membership privilege (<http://marshill.com/2012/01/27/church-discipline-in-the-bible>, which cites his book, *Vintage Church* and the chapter entitled, "What is Church Discipline?").

(4) Jay Adams (*Handbook of Church Discipline*, 1986, 82-86) has an odd section in his book where he states that we are to remove the privileges of membership from the excommunicated member, but we are not forbidding them from attending worship services. Yet, in his reasoning he connects Paul's statement, "Purge the evil person from among you" (1 Cor. 5:13) to the places of Deuteronomy where an Israelite was to be removed from the community and stoned to death (Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 21:21; 22:21-24). In other words, the Old Testament reference would seem to point toward a physical removal from the community of faith, not merely removing the privileges of membership. Adams has no more argumentation in this section.

(5) Robert Cheong wrote *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Christian Focus, 2012) for Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, KY. He defends the position that excommunication means removing a person from the community and mutual care of the church (cf. 139-155). This means that someone "removed from covenant community will no longer enjoy: (1) The relational support and accountability of friends from within the church; (2) The mutual benefit of serving others in the church; (3) The sense of community and identity associated with a group united in membership and purpose; (4) The mutually beneficial interactions in various contexts such as neighborhood functions, sporting events, workplace, and social gatherings; (5) The business arrangements that emerge from within the church circles. Members of the body of Christ will need to address such business-related agreements on a case-by-case basis and evaluate them using their Spirit-led consciences as a guide" (145). Even more explicitly he states that once someone is excluded "from community" they are also excluded "from church gatherings" (230).

times the elders will communicate with the church and with the offender as necessary, wise, and just.

THE RESTORATION OF THE OFFENDER

If the offender repents after the above process has occurred and expresses a desire to be restored to full church membership, he is to inform the elders of his desire. Restoration of the offender will involve his complete repentance and a verbal acknowledgment (in appropriate detail) of his sinfulness. It will also involve a statement of his forgiveness of sins¹⁸ by all appropriate parties and the elders themselves.¹⁹ If there are practical steps of restitution that need to take place (alienated spouses moving back in together, financial damages to be paid, etc.), these should, if at all possible, occur before restoration can be completed.

Of course, there are times when it is not possible for restitution to be made or for reconciliation to take place or for forgiveness to be granted by the offended party. At such times the elders will apply biblical wisdom to decide if sufficient repentance has taken place by the offender.

If the elders feel the offender is sincere and his repentance is credible, they will hold another hearing to formally restore him. The hearing will include the offender, the offended (as much as they are willing and able and it is seen as appropriate to the situation), and the elders of Sovereign Grace Church. The elders will begin the meeting with a statement of the purpose for the meeting and a prayer for God's grace to be upon it. Then they will hear from the offender as he details his repentance. The offended will be in attendance to verify that the repentance has occurred (if appropriate). One to two others can be present with the offended and with the offender as they desire. These others are not to participate in the formal proceedings. They are present to provide counsel and support. They also serve as witnesses to the proceedings.

If the elders feel that the repentance is genuine, they can decide immediately to restore the person to full membership. If they feel it necessary, they may also postpone that decision for a period of time. During this time (no more than 90 days), they can give a set of reasonable assignments for the offender to demonstrate true repentance. The elders may also decide that the repentance is not genuine and reject it. The person will continue in their current state of excommunication if this is so.

If an offender is restored, the church and all relevant parties will be notified in the same manner as they were notified of the person's excommunication. If they were told at a members meeting, then another members meeting will be held to inform them of his restoration. If it was through a mailed letter, they will be informed by letter of his restoration. During this meeting or in the letter, the elders will describe the offender's repentance, their steps in restitution, the expression

¹⁸ Jay Adams, "Forgiveness is a promise in which one person goes on record as declaring he will never again bring up another's offense and hold it against him. The past as a debt is discharged; he is no longer held liable. His offense may be remembered only to help him to learn to act differently in the future. The offense will not be mentioned to him, or to others, and will not be the subject of brooding on the part of those who granted forgiveness" (*Handbook of Church Discipline*, 92-93).

¹⁹ The elders in this case are not saying the offender is forgiven for his sin against the elders, but that he is forgiven by Christ for the sins he committed against the offended party.

of forgiveness by those sinned against and the elders, and any practical guidance to the church in how to relate to the restored offender.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS REQUIRING AN ABBREVIATED PROCESS

As we said above, there are times when a process does not involve all six of the steps of Matthew 18:15-20. Sometimes we will shorten this process along the lines of 1 Corinthians 5 and Titus 3:10-11. This can occur if the sin of the individual is so obvious, hurtful, and divisive that the protection of the welfare of the church or certain individuals requires it. This does not mean that due process has been abandoned, only that it has been significantly shortened because the evidence is clear and the actions of the defendant risk causing significant harm to the church or individuals. In all such matters, we are balancing the rights of the individual and the justice that is due to them with the obligation to protect the name of God and to defend his church.

APPEALING THE DECISION OF THE ELDERS

Decisions in matters of church discipline can be appealed to the Regional Judicial Review Committee, as described in the *Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches* (Section 23).²⁰ The elders will assist the individual in getting this information if they are unable.

ALL DISCIPLINE HAS A REDEMPTIVE GOAL

As we contemplate the process above and especially as we envision the possible excommunication of a member of the church, it is important to remember that all discipline has a redemptive goal. The desire throughout such a process—even one that ends in excommunication—is that the person will wake up to the seriousness of their sin, turn to the forgiveness offered them at the cross of Christ, and commit to walking out repentance as it relates to this sin. The intent is never to punish, never to alienate, never to seek revenge. The goal is the restoration of the offender, whether it happens sooner or later. Excommunication is not an act of alienation, but it is an act meant to communicate the seriousness of the sin in question and the critical need of the offender to repent.

²⁰ The *Book of Church Order* can be obtained at <http://sovereigngrace.com/polity> as of September 4, 2015.

10

A Charge Against an Elder

One of the key texts with regard to bringing a charge against an elder is 1 Timothy 5:19-21:

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

This passage both provides a way to bring a charge against an elder and so protects congregations against the sins of elders, and it protects elders against frivolous and sinfully motivated charges. When an elder is guilty of certain sins, it brings great harm on the church and the name of God. Therefore, in order to walk in integrity before God we must provide a clear way whereby church members can bring an accusation against an elder.

Section 24 in the Sovereign Grace *Book of Church Order*²¹ details the principles and practices for bringing charges against elders. The first step at Sovereign Grace Church would be to bring it to the elder himself (if appropriate). Another approach is to bring it to one of the other elders since we have a plurality. If the charge has enough weight and seriousness to it, a trial will likely occur and the details for such a trial are contained in the BCO and in the *Rules of Procedure* (see the fn. for the link).

Please know that our desire is to take seriously all legitimate charges against elders. There is great pressure on elders to be entreatable, humble, godly, just, and righteous in all such matters. If you ever feel that the elders of Sovereign Grace Church are failing to act in this way, you can take it up with the Regional Assembly of Elders, which includes elders from our sister churches in the Mid-South area (contact Eric Holter at Redeeming Grace Church of Durham, NC, or Mickey Connolly of Crossway Community Church in Charlotte, NC). These men will direct you in how best to direct your issue.

²¹ Obtained at <http://sovereigngrace.com/polity> as of September 4, 2015, where you can also find the *Rules of Procedure* mentioned on this page.

PART TWO

OUR DENOMINATION

Sovereign Grace Churches (Our Denomination)

What exactly is *Sovereign Grace Churches*? There are a lot of ways to answer this question, but our *Book of Church Order* (see chapter twelve) says the following:

The Sovereign Grace churches comprise an ecclesiastical body, significantly bound together in a common confession of faith, pursuing a common mission, guarding the corporate holiness of all the members, and governed by the assembly of the elders. (1.10)

This means that though we are many churches (right now just under a hundred), we are actually one "body" that is united on the basis of our doctrine and mission. It is a way to give true expression to the fact that all true churches are part of the one and only "body of Christ" with Christ as our head (Eph. 1:22-23).

Sovereign Grace can also be called a "family of churches," a phrase we use to capture our relational and organic connection. We are not a mere organization or association which is contractually united together.

A more common term for our union is simply a *denomination*. Though we are much smaller than denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention or the Presbyterian Church of America, we are a denomination because we are a distinctive group of churches that are united around certain key identifiers. Some of these are our seven shared values: 1) Reformed soteriology; (2) Gospel-centered expository preaching; (3) Continuationist pneumatology; (4) Complementarian leadership in the home and church; (5) Elder-governed and -led churches; (6) National and international outreach and church planting; (7) Interdependent churches united in fellowship, mission, and governance.

It is through our partnership with other Sovereign Grace churches that we are working to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Further, we see this connection as a critical way that we will protect sound doctrine for future generations and see truly qualified men rise up as elders in our churches. It is a great privilege and joy to be a part of Sovereign Grace.

The Book of Church Order **of Sovereign Grace Churches²²**

In April, 2013, the churches of Sovereign Grace voted to adopt a *Book of Church Order* (1st edition) which reorganized our family of churches into a modified-presbyterian model of church government. It also articulated our view of elders, deacons, congregations, and church discipline. The churches established national and regional committees that would protect our doctrine, expand our mission, and increase our ability to care for one another as churches. The document is over one hundred pages in length, but here we want to give you some of the highlights of it.

Part One, *General Principles of the Sovereign Grace Churches*, explains some of the foundational theology that went into the BCO. It explains that Jesus Christ remains the head of the church and that all believers are part of his church. Individual churches are both to be autonomous in certain ways and interdependent in other ways. Further, Sovereign Grace is an ecclesiastical body and not a loose association of churches. The seven values of Sovereign Grace are also articulated here: (1) Reformed soteriology; (2) Gospel-centered expository preaching; (3) Continuationist pneumatology; (4) Complementarian leadership in the home and church; (5) Elder-governed and –led churches; (6) National and international outreach and church planting; (7) Interdependent churches united in fellowship, mission, and governance.

Part Two, *Local Church Polity*, defines the offices of elder and deacon in our churches, though it is the elder that gets the most thorough treatment. In these sections we look at the elder and issues related to his job description, qualifications, plurality, bi-vocational elders, ordination, and relationship with the congregation. Deacons are looked at as well—especially the areas on deacons where we must agree and where there is latitude.

Part Three, *Extra-Local Polity*, is the most distinct to Sovereign Grace. Our family of churches are connected in two critical ways. First there is a Council of Elders, much like the US Senate, made up of one elder from each church (two in churches with more than 500 adults). The Council of Elders is the highest authority in Sovereign Grace and votes on a variety of matters. A second critical connection for us is the Regional Assembly of Elders, which is all the elders within a given region (basically defined in geographical ways). It is at the regional level where much of the life of Sovereign Grace happens, for they handle judicial, church planting, and ordination matters. There are various committees at both the regional and national level that are explained in the BCO.

²² For the latest edition of *The Book of Church Order*, go to <http://sovereigngrace.com/polity>.

Part Four, *Rules of Discipline*, articulates our theology and practice of church discipline in the local church, accusations against elders, and appeals to the regional and national appellate courts. Someone who has grave concerns about an elder and is considering making a charge against him would look here for guidance in how to do that.

As has been said on many occasions and in many ways, a *Book of Church Order* is no guarantee that we and our children will love God, sacrifice for the gospel, and preserve sound doctrine. Yet, it does provide a powerful means of grace in doing that. We are encouraged by the document and especially by the massive effort by dozens of people to produce it (not the least of whom was our senior pastor, Phil Sasser, who gave many months to shepherd it to completion).

Partnership Agreement of Sovereign Grace Churches²³

19 Partnership Agreement – United States Churches²⁴

19.1 Preamble

The Sovereign Grace churches together voluntarily form a unified ecclesiastical body (Sovereign Grace Churches) to glorify God as an expression of the bride of Christ. The churches share spiritual and material resources for the furtherance of our common mission, under a common government, which guards our fidelity to our common Statement of Faith and standards of corporate holiness. A local church (Church Partner) joins itself to the Sovereign Grace Churches when its elders, representing the Church Partner, enter into this Partnership Agreement with Sovereign Grace Churches, represented by its Executive Director, and its Regional Assembly of Elders, represented by the Regional Leader.

19.2 The Partnership Commitments

19.2.1 The Commitments of the Regional Assembly of Elders

The Regional Assembly of Elders recognizes that the terms and conditions of this Partnership Agreement are an integral part of The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches (BCO), and promises to uphold its commitments in the BCO among which are 1) to responsibly steward its role in the examination and approval of elder candidates for ordination in the Church Partner, 2) to pursue justice, righteousness, and holiness as it adjudicates conflicts involving the Church Partner, 3) to coordinate and support church planting and outreach within the Region, and 4) to care for the Church Partner and her elders in time of need.

²³ This section is duplicated from The Partnership Agreement as included in *The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches (4th edition)*, section 19. We have kept the numbering scheme the same as in the BCO to avoid potential confusion.

²⁴ *From the editors of the SG BCO*: The reason the current agreement is called *Partnership Agreement - United States Churches* is because the commitments speak most directly to churches in that setting. Our global churches outside of the United States will adapt this Partnership Agreement as best fits their abilities in their context. They will do this in cooperation with a Regional Leader and the Leadership Team.

19.2.2 The Commitments of Sovereign Grace Churches

Sovereign Grace Churches, on behalf of the Sovereign Grace Churches Council of Elders (Council of Elders) recognizes that the terms and conditions of this Partnership Agreement are an integral part of the BCO and promises to uphold its commitments in the BCO among which are 1) to steward the Statement of Faith by pursuing sound, biblical doctrine that includes Reformed Soteriology and Continuationist Pneumatology, 2) to maintain the BCO and to ensure its consistent implementation throughout all Regions, 3) to provide theological education via the Pastors College and training opportunities to the elders of every Church Partner, 4) to coordinate all Regions in the planting of churches globally as God would grant the resources to do so, and 5) to vigorously maintain and promote all of the unique values of Sovereign Grace Churches including elder governed/led polity, complementarian roles in the home and church, and gospel-centered doctrine and preaching.

19.2.3 The Commitments of the Church Partner

The Church Partner recognizes that the terms and conditions of this Partnership Agreement are an integral part of the BCO, and promises to uphold its commitments contained in the BCO among which are 1) to subscribe to the Statement of Faith (as articulated in Sections 9 and 13), 2) to submit to the BCO as articulated in Sections 9 and 13, 3) to actively participate in the Regional Assembly of Elders and Council of Elders, and 4) to actively support the mission and values of Sovereign Grace Churches in spirit, through participation, and by giving financially.

19.3 Terms and Conditions of Partnership

19.3.1 Declarations of Intentions

19.3.1.1 This Agreement does not constitute a formation of a corporation (whether for profit or not-for-profit), a limited liability company, a legal partnership, a joint venture, or any other type of legal entity, an employment-employee relationship, or an independent contractor/consultant relationship.

19.3.1.2 Each Party's execution of this Agreement does not confer to any other party hereto the legal right to or any interest in such executing party's real property, personal property, intellectual property, employees, or responsibility or liability for such party's debts, claims, or liabilities.

19.3.1.3 Entering into this Agreement is entirely voluntary, which means that nothing herein is intended to prevent any Church Partner from leaving, as described in the BCO.

19.3.1.4 Notwithstanding this Agreement, the Church Partner shall continue to be solely responsible to fulfill its corporate purposes, as currently described by its governing documents, and to operate in a manner consistent with its status as a tax-exempt nonprofit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

19.3.1.5 This Agreement recognizes the independence of the Church of Jesus Christ from the control of the government as provided in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States because it reflects the Church Partner's sincerely-held beliefs and practices contained in the Bible and in the BCO with respect to a regional collaboration with other local churches united in the mission of Sovereign Grace.

19.3.1.6 For Church Partners outside the United States who, for legal and/or cultural reasons, are not able to sign this partnership agreement, the Leadership Team will propose a modified partnership agreement to be included in Section 19 of the BCO in accordance with Section 15.3.3 (approval of changes to the BCO).

19.3.2 Partnership Giving Plan

19.3.2.1 To fund this partnership in church planting, church development, and global mission efforts, each Church Partner commits to a goal of giving 10% of their annual general (non-designated) fund giving. Unless or until the Council of Elders modifies these distribution percentages, the annual giving will be allocated as follows: the first 5% will support our central functions, and the second 5% will support the region of the member church.

19.3.2.2 The Church Partner agrees to share fairly and proportionally in the expenses of any Regional Assembly of Elders events and activities in which its elders participate, or to make other arrangements in collaboration with, and with the consent of, the other Church Partners.

19.3.3 Intellectual Property

19.3.3.1 The Church Partner agrees to respect copyright ownership of all materials owned and/or licensed by Sovereign Grace Churches and to abide by its policies and procedures for using such materials.

19.3.3.2 The Church Partner acknowledges that the **Sovereign Grace**[®] name and logo are trademarks owned by Sovereign Grace

Churches. Sovereign Grace Churches grants to each Church Partner a nonexclusive license to use the **Sovereign Grace**[®] name and logo to identify its affiliation with Sovereign Grace Churches.

19.3.4 Indemnification

19.3.4.1 Each Church Partner will be responsible for determining its own risk management strategy, including maintaining appropriate levels of insurance coverage, implementing a safe and prudent child protection policy, and other measures.

19.3.4.2 As independent and autonomously governed entities, each Church Partner acknowledges and understands it is solely responsible for all respective claims, loss, damage, liability, or expenses occasioned or claimed by reason of acts or neglects of its own employees, independent contractors, invitees, or guests.

19.4 Signature Document

19.4.1 The Executive Director, on behalf of Sovereign Grace Churches
I, the undersigned Executive Director of Sovereign Grace Churches, having prayerfully and soberly considered this Partnership Agreement, with God as witness, representing the Council of Elders, enter into it assuming all of the responsibilities and privileges described therein.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____, *Executive Director, Sovereign Grace Churches*

Date: _____

19.4.2 The Regional Leader, on behalf of the Regional Assembly of Elders
I, the undersigned Regional Leader, having prayerfully and soberly considered this Partnership Agreement, with God as witness, representing all the elders in the Region enter into it assuming all of the responsibilities and privileges described herein.

Sovereign Grace Region: _____

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____, *Regional Leader*

Date: _____

19.4.3 The Local Elders, on behalf of the Church Partner

We, the current undersigned elders, having prayerfully and soberly considered this Partnership Agreement, with God as witness, enter into it, on behalf of the Church Partner, assuming all of the responsibilities and privileges described herein.

Church Name: _____

City/State: _____

Elders:

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

PART THREE

OFFICIAL CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Sovereign Grace Church Bylaws²⁵

Adopted September 17, 2015

1. GENERAL

1.1. Incorporation of Local Church

Sovereign Grace Church, Incorporated, (the “Church”) is an ecclesiastical body established by Jesus Christ in Apex, North Carolina, to preach the gospel, disciple the nations, and establish a community of Christian believers and disciples of Jesus Christ. The Church is incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in North Carolina (the “Corporation”) to conduct its business affairs by, among other things, leasing and/or owning and maintaining place(s) of worship; receiving, holding, and disbursing gifts, bequests and funds; ordaining and licensing ministers of the gospel for civil purposes, and otherwise organizing and operating itself exclusively for the nonprofit, religious, educational, and charitable purposes stated in the Articles of Incorporation.

1.2. Autonomy of Local Church and Collaboration with Other Churches

The Church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs and own its own property and other assets. Recognizing, however, the benefits of collaboration with other churches, the Church participates in an association of churches called Sovereign Grace Churches, a Maryland nonstock corporation whose primary place of business is in Louisville, Kentucky, in accordance with *The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches* (hereafter called *The Book of Church Order*)²⁶ and its *Partnership Agreement*. As stipulated in said agreement, this association involves no legal transfer to, or sharing of properties with Sovereign Grace Churches, but is a collaboration that advances a shared mission and facilitates interdependent church fellowship.

²⁵ The current bylaws state in article 9 that, "These bylaws may be altered, amended, or repealed and new bylaws may be adopted at any regular or special meetings of the board." Also, NC Guide for Nonprofits simply states the following vis-à-vis bylaws: "In both membership and non-member corporations, a set of rules known as the bylaws governs the internal administration and regulation of the affairs of the corporation. The bylaws may contain any provisions not inconsistent with the law or the Articles of Incorporation. The initial bylaws must be adopted by the incorporators or board of directors. A complete set of the bylaws, however, will not be filed with the N.C. Department of the Secretary of State. (N.C. Gen. Stat. §55A-2-06)" (See p. 15 of the document obtained at <http://www.secretary.state.nc.us/corporations/pdf/NonprofitCorporation.pdf>).

²⁶ Documents such as *The Book of Church Order*, the *Partnership Agreement*, and related resources are available at <http://sovereigngrace.com/polity>. Churches can choose to include *The Book of Church Order* and other documents as appendices if they so desire.

1.2.1. Voluntary Partnership

The Church voluntarily partners with other local churches that are represented by the same Regional Assembly of Elders (the “Regional Assembly”), as further described in the *Partnership Agreement*. These Bylaws are subject to the authority and precedent of *The Book of Church Order*; and they shall consist of the standards of doctrine, governance, discipline, and worship employed by this and other partnering churches in the Regional Assembly. All references to *The Book of Church Order* herein shall be deemed to include any subsequent current amendments or restatements. The Church's participation in the Regional Assembly of Elders as defined by *The Book of Church Order* (including its Regional Judicial Committee) and the Sovereign Grace Court of Appeal is strictly voluntary and does not confer or transfer any of the Corporation’s legal rights, privileges, assets, and liabilities to any of these distinct ecclesiastical bodies or any of their related or affiliated entities.

1.2.2. Responsibilities of Partnership

Responsibilities of and to Sovereign Grace Churches shall be such as are summarized in the *Partnership Agreement* signed by all Sovereign Grace churches as found in the Sovereign Grace Church *Member Handbook* and *The Book of Church Order*.

1.2.3. Withdrawal From Partnership

Should the Board of Elders determine that for reasons of conscience the Church must withdraw from the Sovereign Grace Churches association, it shall do so in full compliance with guidelines stipulated in *The Book of Church Order*, as agreed upon by the Church’s Board in submission to the *Partnership Agreement*.

2. STATEMENT OF FAITH

2.1. Statements of Faith, Biblical Morality, and Godly Conduct

2.1.1. Statement of Faith

The Statement of Faith affirms the Church’s commitment to sound biblical doctrine and to the core beliefs to which it is committed. Christianity involves essential truths which are taught in Sacred Scripture, and are meant to embody our faith and guide our practice. These truths—which reveal the nature, character, work and promises of God in the gospel—form the foundation of our faith and the center of our fellowship.

The *Statement of Faith* of this Corporation is as follows:

2.1.1.1. The Scriptures

We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God. The Bible is the only essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Being given by God, the scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired

by God. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power.

All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation, or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology, must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture.²⁷

2.1.1.2. **God is Triune**

There is one God: infinite, eternal, almighty, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. In the unity of the godhead there are three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; co-existent, co-equal, co-eternal. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, yet each is truly Deity. One God and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the foundation of Christian faith and life.²⁸

2.1.1.3. **God the Father**

God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By his word and for his glory, he freely and supernaturally created the world out of nothing. Through the same Word he daily sustains all his creatures. He rules over all and is the only Sovereign. His plans and purposes cannot thwarted.

He is faithful to every promise, works all things together for good to those who love him, and in his unfathomable grace he gave His Son Jesus Christ for mankind's redemption. He made man for fellowship with himself, and intended that all creation should live to the praise of his glory.²⁹

2.1.1.4. **Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was³⁰ the eternal Word made flesh, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He was perfect

²⁷ 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Matt. 5:17, 18; John 10:34, 35; 1 Cor. 14:37; Ps. 1:2; 19:7-11; Acts 17:11; James 1:18-25; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Peter 3:14-17; Gal. 1:8, 9. Appropriate scripture references have been added as footnotes to the end of each section to provide scriptural reference support for the statement above.

²⁸ Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15, 16; Daniel 4:34, 35; Isa. 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; John 1:1, 14; Acts 5:3, 4; Titus 1:13; Heb. 1:8-12

²⁹ Gen. 1:1-31; Ps. 104:1-35; Heb. 11:3; Isa. 40:26; Daniel 4:34, 35; Ps. 115:3; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 4:20, 21; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:17, 18; 10:23; 2 Cor. 1:20-22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rom. 8:28; James 1:17; Gen. 2:8; 1 John 1:2, 3; John 17:3; Rev. 4:10, 11; Isa. 43:7

³⁰ The Sovereign Grace Theology committee is currently looking to make changes to this section of the statement of faith. They are considering replacing the word "was" with the word "is" in the SGC statement of faith.

in nature³¹, teaching, and obedience. He is fully God and fully man. He was always with God and is God. Through him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in him all things hold together by the power of his word. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, and in him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily. He is the only Savior for the sins of the world, having shed his blood and died a vicarious death on Calvary's cross.

By his death in our place, he revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness, and for a period of forty days appeared to over five hundred witnesses, performing many convincing proofs of his resurrection. He ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, he intercedes for His people and rules as Lord over all. He is the Head of His body, the Church, and should be adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all.³²

2.1.1.5. **The Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel, he persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit a person is led to trust in divine mercy. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, brings about the new birth, and dwells within the regenerate.

The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son who in turn came to glorify the Father. He will lead the Church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored, and worshiped as God the third person of the Trinity.³³

2.1.1.6. **Man**

God made man—male and female—in his own image, as the crown of creation, that man might have fellowship with him. Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God. Being estranged from his Maker, yet responsible to him, he became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God.

This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will and affections. Unregenerate man lives under the dominion of sin and Satan. He is at enmity with

³¹ While the wording here is ambiguous, the theology of Sovereign Grace Church and Sovereign Grace Churches is that Christ was perfect in both his human and his divine natures, in all that he taught, and in his active and passive obedience (i.e., his obedience to the commands and will of God even unto death).

³² John 1:1, 2, 14-18; Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:34, 35; Heb. 1:2, 3, 8-12; 4:15; 7:26; Col. 1:15-19; 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14; John 3:16; Isa. 53:3-6; Matt. 20:28; 1 Peter 4:18; Rom. 3:23-26; Heb. 7:26, 27; 10:5-12; Matt. 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-29; Acts 1:3, 8-11; 2 Tim. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Heb. 2:14, 15; Rev. 1:17, 18; Rom. 5:6-11; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:23-25; Eph. 1:19-23; Col. 1:15-20; Rev. 5:1-14; 1 Cor. 1:22; John 14:21, 23, 24.

³³ Gen. 1:2; Rom. 1:3; 8:2, 6; John 16:7-11; 1 Cor. 2:8-13; 12:3; Eph. 3:16-19; John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:2; John 16:13-15; 14:17, 25, 26; Acts 5:3, 4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Matt. 28:19; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 1:13, 14.

God, hostile toward God, and hateful of God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ.³⁴

2.1.1.7. **The Gospel**

Jesus Christ is the Gospel. The Good News is revealed in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion is the heart of the Gospel; his resurrection is the power of the Gospel; and his ascension is the glory of the Gospel. Christ's death is a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases His holy wrath. It also demonstrates his mysterious love and reveals His amazing grace.

Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have of glorifying God because of what he has accomplished.³⁵

2.1.1.8. **Man's Response to the Gospel**

Man's response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for his own pleasure and glory. It is also true that the message of the gospel is only effectual to those who genuinely repent of their sins, and by God's grace, put saving faith in Christ. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations.

Biblical repentance is characterized by a changed life, and saving faith is evidenced by kingdom service or works. While neither repentance nor works save, unless a person is willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, he cannot become his disciple.³⁶

2.1.1.9. **Man's Inheritance through the Gospel**

Salvation, the free gift of God, is provided by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone turning from sin in repentance and looking to Christ and his substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life and is declared righteous by God as a free gift. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him.

³⁴ Gen. 1:26, 27; 9:6; James 3:9; Ps. 8:3-8; Gen. 2:8; 3:1-13; Rom. 5:12-14; Gen. 3:23, 24; Rom. 5:6-14; 1 Cor. 15:22; Gen. 6:5; Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Isa. 53:6; John 3:3, 19, 20; 8:34; 2 Peter 2:12, 18, 19; 1 Cor. 2:14; Phil. 3:18, 19; Rom. 3:9-18; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3, 12; 4:17-19; Isa. 64:6.

³⁵ Luke 2:10, 11; 2 Cor. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:1-4; Acts 8:32-35; John 20:30 cf. 17:2, 3; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:16; Luke 24:45-47; Rom. 1:1-4; 3:21-26; 5:15-21; 6:1-4; Acts 1:6-11; 1 John 2:2; 3:9, 10; Phil. 2:5-11; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6, 10; Eph. 1:3-14.

³⁶ Eph. 1:3-6; Rom. 8:28-30; 9:10-24; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; 1 Cor. 1:26-29; Luke 24:46, 47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 16:31; 20:20, 21; 26:17, 18; Rom. 3:26-28; 4:4-8; 5:1; Eph. 2:8-10; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:6; James 2:14-26; Luke 9:23-29.

He is justified and fully accepted by God. Through Christ's atonement for sin an individual is reconciled to God as Father and becomes his child. The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin and, via the miracle of regeneration, liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit.³⁷

2.1.1.10. **Sanctification**

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification and seeks to produce his fruit in us as our minds are renewed and we are conformed to the image of Christ. Though indwelling sin remains a reality, as we are led by the Spirit, we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavoring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve his people until the end which is most certain.³⁸

2.1.1.11. **Empowered by the Holy Spirit**

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well. Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and believers should seek this filling as a regular and recognizable blessing for the Christian life.

The Holy Spirit also imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.³⁹

³⁷ Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 3:27, 28; Titus 3:4, 5; Gal. 3:10-14; John 3:13-18; Rom. 4:4; 5:10, 11, 18-21; 6:23; 8:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:20, 21; Phil. 3:8, 9; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:5-7; Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:1-8, 14-17; 1 John 1:9; Heb.9:14; 10:12-18; Col. 2:13, 14; John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5.

³⁸ Rom. 6:1-14; 8:1-16; Gal. 5:16-25; 1 Peter 1:2; Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 4:20-24; Col. 3:1, 2; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 5:1, 2, 18; 2 Peter 1:3-11; 3:18; 1 John 5:3; Phil. 2:14, 15; Matt. 5:16; 1 Peter 2:11, 12; Titus 2:1-14; Matt. 24:13; Heb.2:1; 4:11; Rom. 5:3; James 1:12; 5:10, 11; Luke 8:15; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:10-15; Phil. 3:12-16; Matt. 12:33-37; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb.4:12, 13; Acts 17:11; Ps. 1; 19; Col. 3:16; Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thess. 5:17; Eph. 6:18; Matt. 6:9-13; Acts 2:46, 47; Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16, 17; James 5:15, 16; Jude 1:1, 20-24; John 10:27-29; Jer. 32:38-41; 1 Peter 5:10, 11; Heb.13:20, 21; Phil. 2:12, 13; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24.

³⁹ Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:1-14, 38, 39; 4:8, 29-31; 6:3; 9:17; 13:9; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; Eph. 5:18-20; 1 Thess. 5:19-21; Gal. 3:4; Eph. 4:3-13; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

2.1.1.12. **The Church**

God by his Word and Spirit creates the Church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's Body. By the same Word and Spirit, he guides and preserves that new, redeemed humanity. The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve him by faithfully doing his will in the earth. This involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in all the world for a testimony. The ultimate mission of the Church is the making of disciples through the preaching of the gospel. When God transforms human nature, this then becomes the chief means of society's transformation. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, and the Lord's Supper and prayer.

All members of the Church universal are to be a vital and committed part of a local church. In this context they are called to walk out the New Covenant as the people of God and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God. The ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the church (including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) for the equipping of Christ's body that it might mature and grow. Through the gift ministries, all members of the Church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of ministry. Women play a vital role in the life of the church but in keeping with God's created design, they are not permitted "to teach or to have authority over a man" (1 Tim. 2:11). Leadership in the church is male. In the context of the local church, God's people receive pastoral care and leadership and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in his service in relation to one another and to the world.⁴⁰

2.1.1.13. **Water Baptism**

Water baptism is only intended for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become his disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Water baptism is a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of his death and resurrection. It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Matt. 16:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:40-47; 13:1-3; 14:27; 15:41; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:8-13; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:5; Heb. 3:12, 13; 10:23-25; 1 Cor. 14:31-35; 1 Tim. 2:8; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Thess. 5:12-14; 1 Peter 4:10, 11; Rom. 12:3-13.

⁴¹ Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:35-38; 9:16-18; 10:44-48; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-4.

2.1.1.14. **The Lord's Supper**

As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of his blood on our behalf, and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death.

As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.⁴²

2.1.1.15. **The Consummation**

The consummation of all things includes the visible, personal, and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. In the Consummation, Satan with his hosts and all those outside Christ are finally separated from the presence of God, enduring eternal punishment, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with Him forever.

Married to Christ as his Bride, the Church will be in the presence of God forever, serving him and giving him unending praise and glory. Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.⁴³

2.1.2. **Statement of Biblical Morality**

The *Statement of Biblical Morality* expresses this Church's response to the changing legal and moral context in which it exists. It is a conscious application of the divine imperative that the Church "*not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind*" (Romans 12:1, 2). In an age in which specific biblical practices are being increasingly threatened by a rapidly deteriorating moral climate and assailed by an aggressively secular agenda, it is essential that the Church respond with clear conviction and steady voice. The Bible stands as our guide for faith and practice, not the changing values of the culture. To that end we affirm the following:

2.1.2.1. **Church Discipline**

The Scriptures call every Christian to a life of holiness, forbidding believers from habitual conformity to the sinful desires of the flesh or the ungodly patterns and

⁴² Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:17-34.

⁴³ Matt. 24:29-31; John 5:28, 29; 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; Rom. 8:18-25; 13:11, 12; 1 Cor. 15:20-58; 2 Cor. 4:16-5:10; Phil. 3:20, 21; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess. 1:5-12; 5:23; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:3-9; 2 Peter 3:8-13; 1 John 3:2, 3; Jude 1:24, 25; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 1:7; 5:9, 10; 20-22.

behaviors of the world. Since sin clings so easily to the believer, Jesus, as Lord of the Church, has established means of accountability (commonly known as *church discipline*) within the local church, to guard the Christian from impenitent habitual sins. Such church discipline, which ranges from private admonition to public rebuke and/or removal from membership in the Church, is to be motivated by a shared desire for holy lives, a loving desire to lead others to repentance and restoration, and a zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord.⁴⁴ The Church practices church discipline according to the principles and practices outlined in the *Member Handbook*.

2.1.2.2. **Sexuality and Gender Identity**

We must ground our view of manhood and womanhood in the Sacred Scriptures. We affirm that God's creation of humankind included the creation of two distinct sexes—male and female—and that Adam and Eve demonstrate for us that gender has to do with biological differences given to individuals at conception. "Male and female" (Gen. 1:27) is thus not a feeling or preference or a decision that we make as people. However, because of sin and human brokenness, our subjective perception of our sex and gender is not always that which God the Creator originally designed. We believe this is within the Lord's power to heal and correct, and yet until such restoration we trust in his grace to help us remain sexually pure in our desires and actions. Further, we look to him to progressively sanctify us through his Spirit and Word until our glorification.

In light of the above, the Church and its elders may not support or affirm a gender identity different from one's birth sex, or support attempts to change one's given biological birth sex through medical procedures. Further, the elders of Sovereign Grace Church may not officiate same-sex marriages or unions, regardless of what the civil government allows or prescribes.⁴⁵

2.1.2.3. **Marriage and Gender Roles**

A Biblical view of manhood and womanhood also includes a joyful commitment to marriage and family as taught in the Sacred Scriptures. The holy institution of marriage is to be the union of one man and one woman for life as established by God in Eden and is to point us to the relationship between Christ and his Church.

While men and women are equal before God as sharers of his image in creation and partakers of his grace in Christ, we believe that specific gender roles in marriage are God's normative law for the family. We believe in the servant-leadership role of men in both home and church and in the complementary role of women in supporting and submitting to that leadership. Therefore, it is sinful for a man to be domineering toward his wife, including verbal or physical abuse. It is also sinful for him to be

⁴⁴ 1 Peter 2:11, 12; 4:1-3; Rom. 12:1, 2; Heb. 12:1; Matt. 18:15-19; Rom. 16:17, 18; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 12:20-13:10; 2 Thess. 3:6-12; 1 Tim. 5:19-22; Titus 3:10, 11; James 5:19, 20; 2 John 1:8-11; Rev. 2:20.

⁴⁵ Some of the above comes from the *Employee Handbook of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Inc.* (50-51).

passive or negligent with regard to his leadership. Likewise, the woman must not disrespect her husband, reject his authority, or be passive in her role as a wife.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the Bible commands sexual chastity before marriage and lifelong fidelity in marriage. This is to be the abiding divine law for every Christian and represents the teaching of this church. Sexual chastity includes abstinence from pre-marital sex, pornography, adultery, and homosexuality—i.e., any sexual activity outside of a one-man-one-woman covenant marriage.

While sexual sin is particularly serious before God, no sexual sin is beyond God's power to redeem and restore. We affirm the love of God for all who are guilty of sexual sin in any of its forms, and we offer the gospel and grace of God to all who will repent of such sins and turn in faith to Christ for their forgiveness and deliverance.⁴⁷

2.1.2.4. **Divorce**

It is God's intention that the covenant of marriage be a joyful union that endures for life. Those whom God has joined together must cleave as one flesh in faithful love and are not to be torn apart. Divorce is prohibited by God except when sexual infidelity and/or abandonment occur. When these occur, the offended spouse is free to divorce.

In cases of physical and/or severe mental abuse all reasonable steps should be taken to protect spouses. These steps might include separation, which is different from divorce. There can be times when *separation* is allowable and even recommended but where *divorce* is not a biblical option.⁴⁸

2.1.2.5. **The Sanctity of Life**

The Scriptures teach that human life begins at conception, and that people are made uniquely in the image of God. This infuses sanctity into all human life from conception to death. This sacredness must afford to the unborn and to the infirmed of any age all the rights and protections granted to all other human beings. It is the duty of every Christian to speak for and defend such rights in every way he or she is able.

As a means of protecting the sanctity of innocent human life, Scripture allows for capital punishment (1) administered by the civil magistrate (2) through a just process under strict guidelines (3) for those found guilty of capital crimes. Consistent with the

⁴⁶ The position of this church is consistent with that articulated in *The Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, by The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, www.cbmw.org

⁴⁷ Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-25; 1 Cor. 11:2, 3; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18, 19; 1 Peter 3:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:9-15; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:1-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-16; 14:34, 35; Mal. 2:14-16; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-20; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 5:1-13.

⁴⁸ Gen. 2:18-25; Prov. 5:15-20; Mal. 2:14-16; Matt. 5:27-32; 19:1-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-16; Eph. 5:22-33.

value of human life which is made in God's image, all people should be treated with dignity.⁴⁹

2.1.2.6. **Parental Discipline of Children**

Children are a gift from God to be cherished and enjoyed with all affection and love. It is every parent's duty to delight in his or her children and to create a home of tender affection and love. The Holy Scriptures further mandate that parents train up their children to become responsible, mature, and Christian men and women. To this end the Bible commands parents to love, nourish, teach, train, and discipline their children.

While the Scriptures teach the corporal discipline of children, such discipline must be applied with great caution and tender care. Remembering that every child is made in the image of God, he or she must always be treated with respect and dignity. This precludes every form of wrathful, harmful, or injurious physical discipline, and requires that parents be loving, humble, cautious, and measured in the exercise of any corporal training.

The Church deplors child abuse in any and all of its forms and shall make every reasonable effort to ensure that parents understand and practice parental discipline with all due regard for the safety, well-being, and joy of every child. To do harm to a child is to incur the special displeasure of God.⁵⁰

2.2. **Religious Practices of Corporation**

To be consistent with the Church's religious mission, the Corporation shall not:

2.2.1. Establish any public or private policies or positions that conflict with the Statement of Faith;

2.2.2. Elect or appoint or retain any Board member who has not subscribed to and maintained agreement with the Statement of Faith. Any elder who drifts from agreement with the statement of faith is bound to alert the board to his disagreement;

2.2.3. Hire or retain any employee whom the Board has determined is not a member of the Church in good standing.

3. **OFFICES**

3.1. **Registered Office and Agent.** The Corporation shall continuously maintain a registered office and registered agent within the state of North Carolina.

⁴⁹ Ps. 139:13-16; 51:5; Luke 1:41-44; Gen. 1:27; 9:6; Prov. 24:11, 12; 31:8, 9; Ps. 72:1-4; James 1:27; Gen. 9:6, Deut. 17:6, 7; 19:15-20; Leviticus 19:15, Rom. 13:1-4; Gen. 1:27.

⁵⁰ Ps. 127:3-5; 1 Thess. 2:7, 8; Matt. 19:13, 14; Eph. 6:1-4; Deut. 6:4-9; Ps. 78:2-10; Prov. 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15; Heb.12:11; Matt. 18:2-5.

3.2. **Principal Office.** The principal office of the Corporation shall be located at 401 Upchurch St., Apex, NC, 27511, or such place as shall be determined by the Elder Board.

3.3. **Additional Offices.** The Corporation may also have offices at such other places as the Elder Board may from time to time determine and the business of the Corporation may require.

4. ELDER BOARD

4.1. Elders As Directors

All authority in the Church is derived from Jesus Christ and is exercised on His behalf. The primary governance structure in this local church is its eldership. The elders serve as the Corporation's Board of Directors, which shall exercise all such powers of the Corporation and do all such lawful acts and things that are not prohibited by statute, the Articles of Incorporation, or by these Bylaws. While ordination to eldership and appointment to the board are two separate appointments, all elders of a particular local church are to be appointed to the board and therefore the terms elder and board member are interchangeable. *The Book of Church Order* addresses the number, term, qualifications, selection process, responsibilities, voting rights, removal, and resignation of elders, and is incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth in this Section 4 of these Bylaws. The Church shall be responsible for the ordination of its elders in accordance with the standards maintained by its Regional Assembly and subject to the accountability generally described in Section 7 of these Bylaws, and more specifically described in *The Book of Church Order*.

4.2. Number

The Elder Board shall consist of not less than three (3) persons, as may be determined from time to time by resolution of the Elder Board. If the Church has only one elder, the Corporation shall appoint as directors at least two other elders from one or more local churches represented in the same Regional Assembly in which the Church is a Partner. If the Church has only two elders, the Corporation shall appoint as director at least one other elder from a local church represented in the same Regional Assembly in which the Church is a Partner. Directors shall be appointed by the Elder Board for terms as determined by the Board or until their successors are appointed and qualify in their stead.

4.3. Appointment

The initial Elder Board shall be as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation. Subsequent appointments of directors of the Corporation may be made by a three-fourths majority vote of those directors present at any regular meeting of the Elder Board, or at a special meeting convened for that purpose.

4.4. Vacancy

If the office of any director becomes vacant, the remaining directors, though less than a quorum, shall be authorized to select a successor who shall be appointed by the Elder Board of the Corporation to serve the unexpired term of the vacated directorship.

4.5. Powers

The government of the Church is vested in its elders, who shall provide oversight in the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Church. The Elder Board shall exercise all such powers of the Corporation and do all such lawful acts and things that are not prohibited by statute, the Articles of Incorporation, or by these Bylaws.

4.6. Committees⁵¹

Committees of the Board may be appointed by resolution passed by a majority of the whole Board, or by delegation of the Lead Pastor when he is authorized by the Board so to do. Committees shall be composed of two or more members of the Board and shall have such powers of the Board as may be expressly delegated to it by resolution of the Board of Elders, except with respect to:

- 4.6.1. The creation or filling of vacancies in the Board of Elders.
- 4.6.2. The adoption, amendment or repeal of the Bylaws.
- 4.6.3. The amendment or repeal of any resolution of the Board that by its terms is amendable or repealable only by the Board.
- 4.6.4. Action on matters committed by the Bylaws or a resolution of the Board of Elders exclusively to another committee of the Board.
- 4.6.5. The Board may designate one or more elder(s) as alternate members of any committee, who may replace any absent or disqualified member at any meeting of the committee. In the absence or disqualification of a member of a committee, the member or members thereof present at any meeting and not disqualified from voting, whether or not he or they constitute a quorum, may unanimously appoint another elder to act at the meeting in the place of any absent or disqualified member.
- 4.6.6. Each committee of the Board shall serve at the pleasure of the Board. The delegation of authority to any committee shall not operate to relieve the Board of Elders or any member of the Board from any responsibility imposed by law or Scripture. Rules governing procedures for meetings of any committee of the Board shall be established by the Board of Elders, or in the absence thereof, by the committee itself. All actions by any Board Committee shall be reported to the Board of Elders at the meeting next succeeding such action. The general functions of councils and committees are:
 - 4.6.6.1. To bring considered recommendations to the Board concerning ministries.
 - 4.6.6.2. To provide a wider base of counsel to the Elders having the oversight of specific ministries.

⁵¹ This section is especially relevant when the number of elders in a church gets to such a size that much of the business of the elders (i.e., board) is done by various committees and not all the elders together.

4.6.6.3. To complete such duties and exercise such powers as are delegated to them by the Board.

4.6.6.4. All councils and committees shall exist for the period specified by the Board

4.7. Removal and Resignation

Any director who resigns or is removed as an elder in the Church (or another local church, if the Church has only one or two elders) shall automatically be removed as a director of the Corporation.

Any director may be removed from the Board with or without cause when, in the sole judgment and discretion of the Elder Board, it is determined by at least a two-thirds majority of the Board at a meeting duly called for that purpose and at which a quorum is present that such director should no longer serve on the Board; provided, however, that a notice, including the names of the director(s) proposed to be removed, and the date, time and place of any meeting called to consider such removal shall be given in writing to each of the directors at least seven (7) days prior to the date of such meeting.

4.7.1. Any elder may be removed from the board/eldership at any regular or special meeting of the Board if he is found to be physically or mentally incapacitated, or in the case of being found spiritually unqualified according to the procedural steps outlined in *The Book of Church Order* and the relevant policies of this Church (according to the Scriptures, including 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 as well as other texts describing mature Christian character; e.g. Galatians 5:18-24; 1 Corinthians 13), after thorough corroborating investigation by the Elders (or a duly appointed Committee of the Board, per Article VII, Section 18 of these Bylaws, at the sole discretion of the Board).

4.7.2. Should an elder confess to serious sin, and agree to resign from his position, the regional Judicial Review Committee should be contacted to appoint a moderator of just cause to review the resignation agreement to confirm a trial is not necessary. Should the moderator determine the process and agreement are fair and freely agreed upon, the eldership will follow the same guidelines as outlined in 24.8.4 of *The Book of Church Order* for removal from office.

4.7.3. Removal of an elder from the board may also occur for non-disciplinary reasons. Evaluation regarding the performance of a man in his office or the elimination of a role at the discretion of the Board may necessitate removal as well. In such instances great care should be exercised to decide such matters:

4.7.3.1. Only upon careful review and discussion.

4.7.3.2. By a super-majority of the Board.

4.7.3.3. With due consideration of the man's needs, family, and calling, as well as the church's needs. Pastoral care should be given to clarify to the congregation the

reasons for the decision, so as to avoid any appearance of discipline that might reflect negatively upon the man or his reputation.

4.7.3.4. Removal of a man for non-disciplinary reasons does not revoke his ordination.

4.7.4. Whenever a man is removed from office for any reason, such actions should be taken with all care and gentleness, giving due regard to family, financial, and other considerations. In such cases the man removed shall be informed of the possibilities of future restoration; and if such restoration is deemed possible, the process involved.

4.7.5. A director/elder may resign by delivering a written notice of intent to resign to the Board chair, which shall be effective upon its acceptance by the Board. Acceptance requires a majority vote by the Board at an official meeting (one where each director has had at least 7 days notice of the meeting and its agenda).

4.7.6. The elders reserve the right to dismiss the Lead Pastor in accordance with *The Book of Church Order*. The Lead Pastor must give thirty (30) days' notice if he intends to resign.

4.8. Accusations against an Elder

Full adjudication of the matter shall be completed in accord with procedures more fully outlined in Scripture, the Church's *Member Handbook*, and in *The Book of Church Order*.

4.9. Transactions with Interested Parties

A contract or other transaction between the Corporation and one or more of its directors, officers, or family members thereof (hereinafter "Interested Party"), or between the Corporation and any other entity of which entity one or more directors, officers, or elders are also Interested Parties, or in which entity an Interested Party has a material financial interest, shall be voidable at the sole election of the Corporation unless all of the following provisions are satisfied:

4.9.1. The transaction was fair and reasonable as to the Corporation, or was reasonably determined to be in furtherance of its exempt purposes at the time the Corporation entered into the transaction.

4.9.2. Prior to consummating the transaction, or any part, the Elder Board authorized or approved the transaction, in good faith, by a vote of a majority of the directors then in office, without counting the vote of the interested director or directors, and with full knowledge of the material facts concerning the transaction and the Interested Parties' interest in the transaction, even though the disinterested directors are less than a quorum.

4.9.3. The Corporation entered into the transaction to advance its corporate purposes and not primarily for the personal benefit of any other party or other entity.

4.9.4. Prior to authorizing or approving the transaction, the disinterested members of the Elder Board, in good faith and with ordinary care, determined, after reasonable investigation and consideration, that either the Corporation could not have obtained a more advantageous arrangement, with reasonable effort under the circumstances, or the transaction was in furtherance of the Corporation's tax-exempt purposes.

Common or interested directors may be counted in determining the presence of a quorum at a meeting of the Elder Board (or a committee thereof) that authorizes, approves, or ratifies such contract or transaction.

Notwithstanding the above, no loan shall be made by the Corporation to any of its directors or officers, as provided further in Section 10.6 of these Bylaws.

4.10. **Conflicts of Interest Policy**

It is the policy of the Corporation to avoid conflicts of interest and to provide for full disclosure of any and all material conflicting interests by Board members, officers, senior management, and employees. The Board should be equipped to gather all relevant facts and circumstances to determine in accordance with the guidelines of Section 4.9 above, whether or not any disclosed potential conflict is benign and not in any way jeopardizing the religious mission, exempt function, or reputation of Christ's church, so that the contemplated transaction may be authorized as just, fair, and reasonable to the Corporation. This policy will be implemented by appropriate practices and / or written procedures adopted by the Elder Board.

4.11. **Fees and Compensation**

Elders are not required to be paid for their services as elders, but the Elder Board may choose for them to be paid for their labors. Fixed salaries may be determined through:

4.11.1. The extent and nature of the elder's work;

4.11.2. Any salary recommendations of our Sovereign Grace Churches family of churches;

4.11.3. The recommendations of the Financial Advisory Board (a group of no less than 3 deacons appointed by the elders to provide counsel and expertise on financial matters within Sovereign Grace Church).

4.12. **Royalties and Honoraria**

Refer to the church's employee policies for any relevant information about royalties and honoraria.

4.13. **Resignation, Termination, and Severance**

Should an elder desire to leave the employment of Sovereign Grace Church, a four (4) week resignation notice is required. Those elders who choose to leave the employment of the church

will be paid for earned, unused vacation days provided they give the required four (4) week notice. They will not be paid for unused sick days.

Standard severance pay for those who have been terminated by the church will be one week of pay for each full year of service with a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of twenty-five (25) weeks. In addition, the church will also normally pay for earned, unused vacation days. It should be stated that the Church does not participate in the unemployment insurance program with the state of North Carolina and that unemployment income based on employment with Sovereign Grace Churches will not be received.

In considering the amount of severance for termination, allowance may also be made for the facts and circumstances of each case as follows: length of service, age of the individual, the individual's position, the length of advance notice, circumstances of termination, condition of the local economy. The church is not required to consider these factors but may do so at its option.

In the case of resignation the matter of severance shall be determined by the Board of Elders. In consideration of this the Elders are not obligated to, but may choose to consider the factors cited in Article VII, Section 21, Paragraph 3. In addition they may consider (1) precedent in similar cases, (2) the precise reason for and circumstances surrounding the resignation, (3) the present financial state of the congregation, (4) whatever other factors are deemed applicable to the situation at the discretion of the Board of Elders.

5. MEETINGS OF THE ELDER BOARD

5.1. Notice

Regular, annual, and special meetings of the Elder Board may be held within or outside of North Carolina without formal notice at such time and place as shall from time to time be determined by the Board, except for meetings at which the Board shall consider the removal of a director, as noted in Section 4.7.

5.2. Waiver of Notice

Whenever any notice is required to be given by statute, the Articles of Incorporation, or these Bylaws, a waiver thereof in writing signed by the person or persons entitled to the notice, whether before or after the time stated therein, shall be deemed equivalent thereto. Attendance at a meeting by a person entitled to notice shall constitute a waiver of proper notice of such meeting, except where attendance is for the express purpose of objecting to the transaction of business because the meeting is not lawfully called or convened.

5.3. Quorum

A majority of the directors shall be necessary and sufficient to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, and the act of a majority of the Board at a meeting duly called for that purpose and at which a quorum is present shall be the act of the Elder Board, except as may be otherwise specifically provided by statute, the Articles of Incorporation, or these Bylaws.

5.4. Action Without a Meeting

Any action required or permitted to be taken at a meeting of the Elder Board or by a committee thereof may be taken without a meeting, by written action authorized by all the Directors. However, a written consent setting forth the action so taken and authorized and dated by all the members of the Board or of a committee, as the case may be, must be filed with the minutes of proceedings of the Board or the committee. The written action is effective when authorized and dated by the required number of Directors, unless a different effective time is provided in the written action. When written action is permitted to be taken by less than all Directors, all Directors must be notified promptly of its text and effective date. Failure to provide the notice does not invalidate the written action, but a Director who does not sign and date the written action is not liable for the action.

5.5. Participation by Alternate Means

Members of the Elder Board or of any committee designated thereby may participate in a meeting of such Board or committee by means of communications equipment by which all persons participating in the meeting can effectively interact with one another, if each individual entitled to participate in the meeting consents to the meeting being held by means of that system. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at such meeting. When such a meeting is conducted by means of a conference telephone or other means of remote communications, the minutes recording any action taken at such meeting shall also note who participated in person and who participated by alternative communications.

6. OFFICERS⁵²

6.1. Number and Positions

The officers of the Corporation shall be elected by the Elder Board. Except as otherwise provided, the officers may, but need not be elders of the Church. However, all officers must be members in good standing of the Church. The Board may appoint such other officers and agents as it shall deem necessary, who shall hold their offices for such terms and shall exercise such powers and perform such duties as shall be determined from time to time by the

⁵² For the sake of this discussion, (1) directors (collectively as the Board of Directors) provide governance oversight, direction, stewardship of the vision and values, transactional authorization, and over all ensure adherence to the corporate purposes. Directors are typically volunteers who are not compensated for the service to the corporation; (2) The officers of the Board, like the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer serve the housekeeping functions of the Board, and also typically are volunteers (i.e., they are not paid specifically for their service on the Board); (3) The officers of the corporation, on the other hand, such as the president (in this case the Senior Pastor), the chief financial officer, or executive pastor, or business manager, etc., provide day-to-day management, implement the plans and actions of the Board, report to the Board of Directors, and typically are full-time or part-time employed by the corporation. Often the president (or in this case the Senior Pastor) may actually wear all three hats. In some corporations, the chairman and/or vice-chairman of the Board may be considered “officers.” To avoid confusion, a corporation may wish to distinguish between officers of the Board (e.g., chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, secretary, etc.) and officers of the Corporation (e.g., president, vice-president, chief financial officer, chief operating officer, etc.). As will be evident in sections to follow, Sovereign Grace Churches maintains these basic distinctions, but these bylaws should be consulted for a specific understanding of each of these roles and their responsibilities in Sovereign Grace Church.

Board. In the event that the President is incapacitated, another regional elder could be appointed to serve in the transition.

6.2. **Term of Office**

The Elder Board shall elect officers of the Corporation, who shall serve at the pleasure of the Board. Any officer elected or appointed by the Elder Board may be removed at any time by the affirmative vote of a two-thirds majority of the Board at a meeting duly called for that purpose and at which a quorum is present, whenever, in their judgment, the best interests of the Corporation will be served thereby. If the office of any officer becomes vacant for any reason, the vacancy shall be filled by a majority vote of the Elder Board. In case of the absence or disability of an officer of the Corporation, or in any other case that the Elder Board may deem sufficient reason therefore, a majority of the Board at a meeting duly called for that purpose and at which a quorum is present, may delegate for the time being any or all of the powers or duties of any officer to any other officer, elder, or any other person.

6.3. **President**

The President of the Board will typically be the "Lead" or "Senior" Pastor, but the Elders may decide to appoint a different pastor to this position. To be appointed as President, and to maintain that position, an individual must satisfy the criteria established for pastors, as set forth in Section 7.

6.3.1. **Corporate service** - He shall serve as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation, and he shall have stewardship responsibility for advancing the vision and mission of the Corporation and managing or overseeing the business of the Corporation consistent with the authority delegated and the resolutions promulgated by the Board.

6.3.1.1. He shall see that orders and resolutions of the Board are carried into effect, sign and deliver in the name of the Corporation deeds, mortgages, bonds, contracts, or other instruments pertaining to the business of the Corporation, except in cases in which the authority to sign and deliver is required by law to be exercised by another person or is expressly delegated by the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws or by the Board to another officer or agent of the Corporation.

6.3.1.2. He shall make reports to the Elder Board, and shall have such other rights, duties, and powers as are authorized by the Elder Board from time to time.

6.3.1.3. This corporate role of the Lead Pastor shall always be secondary and subservient to his primary role as the spiritual leader of the local church to establish the Church's vision, mission, and priorities in accordance with the Bible, to lead the local church to be a gospel-centered reflection of Christ's body, to extend the glory and kingdom of God in and through this local church.

6.3.2. Selection of the Lead (or Senior) Pastor

It is the responsibility of the Eldership of the Church to identify and commission each of its members to fulfill tasks and responsibilities as they see fit, including the Lead Pastor. However, because of the visibility that a Lead Pastor has, and because of the unique and important role in which he serves with respect to the congregation, choosing him should be done carefully.

6.3.3. Role of the Lead (or Senior) Pastor

The role of the Lead Pastor is outlined in *The Book of Church Order*, section 6. The precise nature of the role of the Lead Pastor in the Church may vary depending on the maturity of an eldership, the range of gifts on the team, the level of specialization on the team, and various other factors. The eldership will adjust the role of the Lead Pastor to match his job description as needed. Generally, the Lead Pastor at the Church shall be expected to:

- Provide doctrinal leadership through a prominent teaching role
- Develop the eldership into a cohesive leadership team
- Provide pastoral care for the eldership
- Facilitate decision-making by serving as Chairman of the Board of local elders, or by ensuring that another elder is so tasked
- Identify and deploy spiritual gifts among the elders in consultation with the other elders
- Encourage efficiency on the Eldership
- Coordinate elder training
- Act as the normal spokesman for the elders

6.3.4. Accusation and Dismissal

Charges made against the Lead Pastor (and all pastors) shall be adjudicated in compliance with guidelines established by *The Book of Church Order*.

6.3.5. Duration of the Lead Pastor's Role

The Lead Pastor shall continue in his role until such a time either that he resigns or he is disqualified from the role or is better suited for another role, or that another man is more strategically gifted for the role according to the careful and deliberate decision of the eldership. Periodic review of the Lead Pastor's role, gifting, labors, and character shall be made in accord with the standard review policies of the church.

6.4. Vice President

A Vice President is not required, but he should be an elder if one is appointed.

6.5. The Secretary

6.5.1. The Secretary or an assistant Secretary shall attend all meetings of the Board and record all votes and the minutes of all proceedings in a book to be kept for that purpose.

6.5.2. He shall bear responsibility for maintaining records of and, when necessary, certifying proceedings of the Board.

6.5.3. He shall perform like duties for the standing committees when required.

6.5.4. The Secretary shall give, or cause to be given, such notice as is required of all meetings of the Elder Board.

6.5.5. He shall have such other rights, duties, and powers as are authorized by the Elder Board from time to time.

6.5.6. The Secretary shall keep in safe custody the seal of the Corporation and, when authorized by the Board, affix the same to any instrument requiring it, and when so affixed it shall be attested by the signature of the Secretary, or by the signature of the Treasurer or an assistant Secretary.

6.6. Assistant Secretaries

The assistant Secretaries in the order of their seniority shall, in the absence or disability of the Secretary, perform the duties and exercise the powers of the Secretary, and shall have such other rights, duties, and powers as are authorized by the Elder Board from time to time.

6.7. The Treasurer

6.7.1. The functions below are typically fulfilled by the Treasurer but may be delegated to others within the Elder Board or Church:

6.7.2. Deliver all funds and securities of the Corporation which may come into his hands to such bank or trust company as the directors shall designate as a depository, and shall keep full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements in books belonging to the Corporation;

6.7.3. Disburse the funds of the Corporation as may be ordered by the Board, taking proper vouchers for such disbursements;

6.7.4. Render to the Lead Pastor and the Elder Board, at the regular meetings of the Board or whenever they may require it, an account of all his transactions as Treasurer and of the financial condition of the Corporation;

6.7.5. Deposit money, drafts, and checks in the name of and to the credit of the Corporation in the banks and depositories designated by the Board;

6.7.6. Endorse for deposit notes, checks, and drafts received by the Corporation as ordered by the Board, making proper vouchers for the deposit.

6.7.7. Upon request, provide the Lead Pastor and the Board an account of the financial condition of the Corporation;

6.7.8. If required by the Elder Board, give the Corporation a bond in such sum and with such surety or sureties as shall be satisfactory to the Board for the faithful performance of the duties of his office, and for the restoration to the Corporation, in case of death, resignation, retirement or removal from office, of all books, papers, vouchers, money, and other property of whatever kind in possession or under the control of the Treasurer, belonging to the Corporation;

6.7.9. Shall also have such other rights, duties, and powers as are authorized by the Elder Board from time to time;

6.7.10. May delegate his responsibilities to other qualified members but retains overall responsibility for the discharge of the duties of his office.

6.8. Assistant Treasurers

The assistant Treasurers in the order of their seniority shall, in the absence or disability of the Treasurer, perform the duties and exercise the powers of the Treasurer, and shall have such other rights, duties, and powers as are authorized by the Elder Board from time to time.

7. ORDINATION, LICENSING, COMMISSIONING

7.1. Ordination

Ordination refers to the recognition by the Board of Elders of a man's call to the ministry, preparation as a shepherd, and qualification to serve. Such ordination shall be conferred in accordance with procedures delineated in Article VI, Section 3 of these *Bylaws* (see especially 6.3.2.1), in compliance with *The Book of Church Order* (and the ordination standards of Sovereign Grace Churches, Inc.), and any relevant policies of Sovereign Grace Church. Ordination within Sovereign Grace Churches shall be conferred for life, and is transferable within his region, as stated in *The Book of Church Order*, so long as the man continues to manifest the qualifications of the office.

7.2. Licensing

A license may be issued by the Board of Elders and may be given in recognition of a man's service in a ministry. Its aim is to allow a man to perform the ecclesiastical duties and functions of the church at the discretion of the elders.⁵³ Licenses will be evaluated—and

⁵³ The United States Internal Revenue Service defines *ministers* as follows, "Ministers are individuals who are duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed by a religious body constituting a church or church denomination. Ministers have the authority to conduct religious worship, perform sacerdotal functions, and administer ordinances or sacraments according to the prescribed tenets and practices of that church or denomination. If a church or denomination ordains some ministers and licenses or commissions others, anyone licensed or commissioned must be

issued or renewed—periodically at the discretion of the Elders. Licenses are issued only to members of Sovereign Grace Church.

7.3. Commissioning

When local-church certification is required for ministry where ordination would be unnecessary or inappropriate, a person may be commissioned by the Board of Elders to minister. This authorization continues as long as the opportunity to minister remains in effect and as long as the person maintains the qualifications for ministry.⁵⁴

7.4. Appeals of Decisions

As noted in *The Book of Church Order*, the Church's decisions on the disqualification or discipline of elders and Church members may be appealed to the Regional Judicial Committee, and decisions of the Regional Judicial Committee may be appealed to the Court of Appeals. The Corporation shall accept and/or recognize the decisions of the Regional Judicial Committee and the Court of Appeals according to the stipulations and qualifications of *The Book of Church Order* and the *Partnership Agreement*, to the extent that they may affect matters of corporate governance (e.g., the fitness of an individual to serve as a director based on his qualification or disqualification as an elder).

8. ADVISORY GROUPS

8.1. The Elder Board may create one or more advisory groups, for such terms as deemed fit by the Elder Board. Such advisory groups shall have no vote or governance role, but shall serve the Elder Board in the specified advisory capacity. The members of such advisory groups must be active Church members.

9. CHURCH MEMBERS

9.1. Membership Universal and Local

As a concept distinct from corporate membership, which refers to the Elder Board, the Church follows the New Testament concept of church membership: that each person regenerated by the Holy Spirit and responding in repentance and faith toward Jesus Christ is a unique and indispensable part of the organism which is Christ's body and all such persons are members of the universal body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:2). Membership in this Body of Christ is the grounds for fellowship between Christians. However, the Bible identifies local churches as those Christians in a locality who by the leadership of God and common agreement join together under recognized local leadership and governance for the purpose of worship, instruction, mission, and fellowship. Christians are added as members of the Church according to the requirements and process outlined in the *Member Handbook*.

able to perform substantially all the religious functions of an ordained minister to be treated as a minister for social security purposes" (IRS Pub. 517).

⁵⁴ For example, prison chaplains normally require a commissioning by a local church in support of their role.

9.2. Church Polity Regarding Members

The Book of Church Order addresses the qualifications, responsibilities, discipline process, and disqualification of members. The sections of *The Book of Church Order* applicable to Church members are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth in Section 9 of the Bylaws.

9.3. Participation in Church Decisions

To the extent deemed appropriate by the Board, Church members may participate in key Church decisions, including a formal and public affirmation of elders and deacons, approving the annual budget, providing comments on proposed changes in the Bylaws, implementing major changes in the Church's ministries, and receiving new Church members; provided, however, that such participation is not binding, does not nullify the authority of the elders and/or directors to govern the Church or Corporation, and does not contradict *The Book of Church Order*.

9.4. Church Discipline

For the Church to remain under God's blessing and fulfill God's intentions, at times it may become necessary, formally and corporately, to confront sin or false doctrine in a Church member, including one who is serving as a Church elder.⁵⁵ The Corporation shall follow the rules prescribed in the *Member Handbook* and in *The Book of Church Order* for the adjudication of matters giving rise to possible church discipline and the administration of church discipline involving Church members, and the adjudication of charges against and the possible discipline of Church elders. The Corporation shall submit to the decisions of each ecclesiastical body that *The Book of Church Order* prescribes as having jurisdiction over the disciplinary matter at each stage of its adjudication. Unless the Board determines that it otherwise serves the best interest of the Corporation, any individual serving as a Director and/or officer of the Corporation who is the subject of any church disciplinary proceeding shall be required to take a leave of absence from active service. After the disciplinary process has concluded, the Board shall exercise discretion over whether it is appropriate for the individual to return to active service, to continue his leave of absence for a prescribed period of time, or to resign or be removed from his position.

9.5. Resignation of Membership

A Church member may resign from his Church membership by submitting a written communication to one or more of the elders at any time, which shall be effective upon formal acceptance by the Board (a personal meeting with a pastor may substitute for this written communication). However, if such resignation is an attempt to avoid the process of Church discipline, the Board will not accept the resignation until that process is completed to the

⁵⁵ Scriptural instruction and precedent for this practice appear in Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1-2; Acts 20:28ff; Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Tim. 5:20; Titus 3:10-11; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 2:5-11.

satisfaction of the Board. Though generally such resignations by Church members not under discipline shall not be formally announced or published, such information is treated as public and available to any Church member or inquiring elder from another local church. See the *Member Handbook* for more on this issue.

9.6. Removal from Roll

When a Church member resigns his Church membership or he is removed from Church membership due to unrepentant sin or doctrinal error, their name will be removed from the Church membership roll.

9.7. Confidentiality

Though every reasonable effort shall be made to protect confidential communications, especially those received in a pastoral counseling context, there will be times when to properly fulfill their spiritual and leadership responsibilities, the Church's elders may, as they deem necessary or appropriate, share confidential information with one another, Church members, civil authorities, or others they deem may be part of the solution or problem.⁵⁶ They may do this for the purpose of counsel or the purpose of protecting others from the effects of a Church member's sin, or to assist one another in providing spiritual care to the people of the Church. See the *Member Handbook* for more on this issue.

9.8. Settlement of Disputes

In any dispute arising between church members and pastors or staff pertaining to any matter of spiritual teaching or practices, church finances, or title to property purchased with church contributions, the dispute *may be* resolved by the Board of Elders (or a duly appointed Committee of the Board). In such cases, decisions shall be reached after prayerful consideration, in a spirit of humility, with each non-conflicted/non-accused elder regarding one another before himself and striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3). Any elder(s) accused shall recuse himself/themselves from the final decision made.

9.8.1. Disputes between members of the church which cannot be resolved privately may be adjudicated by due process under the oversight of the Board of Elders in obedience to biblical principles of conflict mediation, arbitration and reconciliation, and in compliance with procedures delineated in *The Book of Church Order*.

9.8.2. In such cases every attempt shall be made to resolve conflicts via these means, except in such matters as involve criminal implications. In such cases legal due process may be mandated by civil law and shall be deemed permissible by the Elders, if not required. If no legal process is mandated, church members will be expected (unless, at the discretion of the Board, other recourse is judged permissible) to ask the church for mediation in all personal disputes including such matters as alleged breaches of contracts,

⁵⁶ Please note that this will likely erode the attorney-client privilege.

sale of real or personal property, and/or loss of employment or employment discrimination.

10. SEAL

10.1. The Corporation may have a seal in the form determined by the Elder Board. Said seal may be used by causing it or a facsimile thereof to be impressed or affixed or otherwise reproduced, or by writing the word "SEAL" beside the signature of an authorized officer of the Corporation.

11. FISCAL MATTERS

11.1. Deposits

The Elder Board shall select banks, trust companies, or other depositories in which all funds of the Corporation not otherwise employed shall, from time to time, be deposited to the credit of the Corporation.

11.2. Checks

All checks or demands for money and notes of the Corporation shall be signed by such officer or officers or such other persons as the Elder Board may from time to time designate.

11.3. Fiscal Year

The Elder Board shall have the power to fix, and from time to time to change, the fiscal year of the Corporation. Unless otherwise fixed by the Board, the fiscal year shall commence on September 1st and shall terminate on August 31st.

11.4. Designated Contributions

The Corporation may accept any designated contribution, grant, bequest or devise provided it is consistent with the Corporation's (1) mission and spiritual priorities as determined from time to time by the Board, (2) budget process and fiscal restrictions, (3) full ownership and control of the funds or assets, and (4) tax-exempt purposes, as set forth in the Articles and these Bylaws. As so limited, donor-designated contributions will be accepted for special funds, purposes or uses, and such designations generally will be honored. The Corporation shall reserve all right, title and interest in and to, and control of such contributions, as well as full discretion as to the ultimate expenditure or distribution thereof in connection with any special fund, purpose or use.

11.5. Books and Records

The Corporation shall keep at its office correct and complete books and records of account, the complete copies of its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, the activities and transactions of the Corporation, minutes of the proceedings of the Elder Board and any committee of the Board, and a current list of the directors and officers of the Corporation and their residence

addresses. Any of the books, minutes, and records of the Corporation may be in written form or in any other form capable of conversion into written form within a reasonable time.

11.6. **Loans to Directors and Officers Prohibited**⁵⁷

No loans shall be made by the Corporation to its directors or officers. Any director or officer who assents to or participates in the making of any such loan shall be liable to the Corporation for the amount of such loan until it is repaid. Nothing in this section shall bar any director or officer from receiving approved compensation in their employee capacities, or approved payments from the Corporation's benevolence fund in accordance with the policy and procedures governing such a fund, provided they do not participate in the decision to grant such benevolence.

11.7. **Benevolence Fund**

Consistent with biblical teaching to share with those in need (e.g., Eph. 4:28; 1 John 3:17), the Corporation may establish a benevolence fund to meet material and financial needs of Church members and others. This fund shall be administered under a policy that sets forth the fund's purpose, procedures for administration, and objective criteria for selection of recipients for financial assistance.

11.8. **Accounting and Fiduciary Guidelines**

The directors and officers of the Corporation shall conduct their affairs with integrity in the sight of God and men, and shall to that end maintain prudent and responsible control and accountability over all funds they receive and ensure that all funds are dedicated to the Corporation's tax-exempt purposes. Toward that end, the directors and officers shall implement practices, procedures, and / or policies that position the Corporation to be a model of faithful stewardship and quality internal accounting controls and procedures. In the case where elders from the regional assembly serve as directors of the corporation, they may appoint a financial audit and budget review committee of non-ordained individuals to serve locally.

12. **INDEMNIFICATION**⁵⁸

12.1. Any person made or threatened to be made a party to any action or proceeding, whether civil or criminal, by reason of the fact that he, his testator or intestate, is or was a

⁵⁷ This is considered a "best practice" for nonprofit tax-exempt organizations, and may be required under the laws of the particular jurisdiction in which the Church is located. However, if this practice is not prohibited by law, a church may decide not to prohibit such a practice if it is necessary to serve the best interests of its mission; for example, if it is located in a geographic region where the cost of living is particularly high, it may consider a loan in order to facilitate the transition of a new pastor. If a church is interested in reserving such an option, it should consult with legal counsel to determine or confirm whether it is permitted by law and consider any tax and other legal consequences.

⁵⁸ Indemnification means "to protect (someone) by promising to pay for the cost of possible future damage, loss, or injury; to give (someone) money or another kind of payment for some damage, loss, or injury" (*Merriam-Webster*).

director, officer, employee, or agent of the Corporation, may be indemnified by the Corporation, and the Corporation may advance his related expenses, to the fullest extent permitted by law.⁵⁹ The Corporation may purchase and maintain insurance to indemnify:

12.1.1. Itself for any obligation which it incurs as a result of the indemnification specified above; and

12.1.2. Its directors, officers, employees, and agents.

13. AMENDMENTS

13.1. These Bylaws may be amended, altered, or repealed by a majority of the Elder Board in attendance at any regular meeting of the Board, or at any special meeting of the Board if notice of the proposed alteration or repeal is contained in the notice of such meeting or notice is properly waived as outlined in Section 5.2 of these Bylaws.

⁵⁹ Although this provision provides for permissive indemnification, some states require indemnification in specific circumstances. Depending on the requirements of state law, a corporation may also establish a more precise standard for indemnification, such as permitting indemnification if the director, officer, employee, or agent has acted in good faith and in a manner reasonably believed to be in the best interests of the Corporation, and with respect to any criminal action or proceeding, in a manner in which he had reasonable cause to believe was lawful.

Sovereign Grace Church Articles of Incorporation

State of North Carolina
Department of the Secretary of State
ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
NONPROFIT CORPORATION
Filed May 26, 1992 (Amended 2007)

We, the undersigned natural persons of the age of eighteen years or more, acting as incorporators for the purpose of creating a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of North Carolina contained in Chapter 55A of the General Statutes of North Carolina, entitled "Nonprofit Corporation Act," and the several amendments thereto, do hereby set forth:

Article I

The name of the corporation is Sovereign Grace Church, Incorporated.

Article II

The period of duration of the corporation shall be perpetual.

Article III

The purpose for which the corporation is organized is: To engage in any lawful act or activity for which non-profit corporations may be organized under the General Statutes of North Carolina.

Article IV

The Corporation shall have no members and the board of directors shall be elected or appointed as provided by the bylaws.

Article V

The street address and county of the registered office of the corporation is 401 Upchurch St., Apex, NC, 27511.

Article VI

The registered agent of the corporation is G. Philip Sasser.

Article VII

The board of directors shall be a minimum of 3, and the names and addresses of the persons who serve as directors are:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| G. Philip Sasser | 1207 Kingston Ridge Rd., Cary, NC, 27511 |
| Daniel Baker | 1332 Falkirk Ct., Cary, NC, 27511 |
| Jim Martin | 704 Cameron Glen Dr., Apex, NC, 27502 |

Mike Noel
Walt Briley

8701 Marigold St., Raleigh, NC, 27603
5916 Rounder Lane, Holly Springs, NC, 27540

Children's Ministry Policy (December, 2013)

• Ministry Mission Statement
• Guest Check-In
• Security Procedures
• Worker Qualifications / Screening Requirements
• Supervision, Restroom Procedures, Work Restrictions and Discipline
• Substitutions
• Illnesses / Injuries
• Class Assignments and Promotions Schedule
• Incident Reporting
• Internal Investigations
• Violation of Policies / Procedures
• Emergency Medical Response
• Fire Safety and Other Safety Precautions
• Reporting Abuse
• Interaction with Law Enforcement and Media
• Revisions of Policies / Procedures
• Acceptance of Policies/Procedures

Ministry Mission Statement

Children are a gift from the Lord. The following goals guide our service:

1. To provide a safe environment where newborns through 6th graders are entrusted to carefully screened and qualified volunteers committed to serving families in the church.
2. To demonstrate and declare the gospel of Jesus Christ through structured, age-appropriate teaching, activities, and games that make learning and application memorable.
3. To help parents fulfill their responsibility to teach and train children in the ways of the Lord (Deut. 6:6-7).
4. To glorify God in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31)

Our *vision and beliefs* for children, their parents, and our service are as follows:

- **We teach a curriculum that is God-centered.**
Our lessons are designed to exalt God – showing Him as great and Almighty. We study Scripture with the question, “*What does this say about God?*” We emphasize man’s sinfulness, his need for a Savior, and Christ’s redeeming work upon the cross.
- **We uphold the authority and supremacy of God’s Word.**
We teach solid Biblical truths that provide a firm foundation for life. We direct children to the Bible as the authoritative, infallible, and all-sufficient Word of God. We teach in an in-depth, yet child-friendly and interesting way.
- **We believe children learn most effectively when taught systematically.**
We teach Biblical truth on a simple level in the preschool years, reinforcing and expanding it at the primary levels. Truths are reintroduced as children grow, each time digging deeper and widening the scope of their understanding. We use materials designed to build sequentially, allowing children to learn in a systematic way.
- **We maintain that our ministry works to assist and support parents.**
We provide relevant biblical worship and instruction for children as a *support to*, rather than a *substitute for* parental involvement. We pray parents find our service an encouragement for their role of raising their children in the fear and the admonition of the Lord (Eph. 4:11-12).
- **We welcome all who can to serve in Children’s Ministry.**
God has provided the members of the church with many gifts as a way of building up the church body. We invite all eligible and qualified individuals to consider serving in Children’s Ministry as an opportunity to put their gifts to work in ways that yield eternal fruit in the lives of young people they serve.

Guest Check-In

Objective: Our goal is to provide a process where first time guests to Children’s Ministry are welcomed and received in a positive, loving, and efficient manner. We want to use this opportunity to answer questions, provide necessary information, care for families, and help children and their parent(s) feel welcome.

The steps of the process are as follows:

Before entering the classroom, guest families should visit the Children’s Ministry Guest Check-In Station located in the main lobby. Registration should take only a few minutes and will include collecting all the information necessary to enroll a student into class, as well as provide an opportunity to answer the family’s questions. The registration process will conclude with providing the student with a guest nametag and the parent with a matching family identification card, which is required for picking up the child from class. The guest check-in station will open 30 minutes prior to the start of the Sunday morning worship service.

Please Note: New guest registration is the best opportunity to gather important information relative to a child’s allergies, dietary restrictions, special requests from parents, etc. This information should be carefully documented and conveyed to the classroom workers as soon as possible.

Upon entering the classroom, guest families will be greeted by a classroom teacher or helper who will add the child to the class roster from the information provided on his/her guest nametag. Guests who did not register at the check-in station should be graciously instructed to do so before the child can be received into the class.

Depending upon age, some children may require a parent’s assistance in helping them get comfortable in their new environment. Parents may remain in the class as long as necessary to serve the child and/or observe the class. When a parent leaves, the teacher/helper should remind him/her of the details for the pick up procedure at the end of the service.

If a child has been visiting a new class **for more than two weeks**, parents should be graciously encouraged to sit in the lobby with children who are still struggling to adjust to their new class. This should be handled with the utmost care. Parents need to know they are welcome in the classroom, but that allowing them to stay indefinitely would violate church security policy. It may be helpful to involve a team leader when these types of situations come up. (All who serve in children’s ministry must be members and must have a church approved background check.)

Guest families who return for future meetings will continue to use the guest family ID and children’s security nametags that were issued during their first visit. Children’s security nametags should remain in the classroom and guest family ID cards should be returned to the registration table.

Security Procedures

Objective: Our goal is to provide a secure environment in which parents can confidently entrust their children to our care. This will be accomplished through the following procedures.

- For identification purposes, all workers will wear nametags on the upper portion of their shirt/blouse. Workers in classrooms with children 3 years and younger will wear CM aprons.
- Parents are issued a family identification card with a family ID number. A single card is used for all children in the family. Each child is issued a nametag containing the family ID number.
- Children wear their nametags at all times while in Children’s Ministry. Parents keep their family ID card.
- When a parent is needed to assist a child, the teacher/helper notifies a hallway monitor to have the family number posted on the overhead screen in the main auditorium. The parent should return to the classroom as soon as possible to assist the child.

- Attendance records are maintained in each class. New rosters will be provided to the class on a monthly basis, on which new participants are added and inactive ones removed.
- Check-In Procedure. A child's parent or guardian (or designated sibling) should escort a child to the classroom. Teachers and helpers will greet the parent and child, mark the child present on the roster, and supply the nametag.

FIRST-TIME GUESTS: Visiting families must register at the Guest Check-In Station in the main lobby. They should arrive at the classroom with their guest nametags. Guests arriving without a nametag should be returned to the registration table to be properly checked in before the student is received into the classroom.

- Check-Out Procedure. *ALL* children within the ministry are to be picked-up by a parent, guardian, or family member 13 years of age or older. Parents should make every effort to pick up children within 15 minutes of the conclusion of the service. Teachers and at least one helper should remain until all children in the class have been picked up. *Do not bring children to their parents, but wait for the parent to arrive.*

Check-out takes place in the classroom. When a child is removed from the class, the teacher/helper must match the security nametag to the family ID card. In the interest of safety, no child can be released without matching tags. In the event of a misplaced tag, please send the parent to the registration table for a temporary replacement. Student nametags are collected and stored in the classroom for the next meeting.

Worker Qualifications / Screening Requirements

Objective: Our goal is (1) to deploy qualified volunteers who make the best use of God-given gifts to serve; and (2) to ensure our ministry is a safe environment where parents can entrust their children to us. We maintain the following qualifications and screening requirements for every volunteer who serves in our ministry.

Adult Volunteers (ages 18 and up):

- Church membership is **REQUIRED** for adult members. *(Includes successful completion of SGC's foundations series, having officially been received into membership, and not currently under any formal steps of church discipline.)*
- Completion of a Sovereign Grace Church Children/Youth Work Application.
- Completion of a criminal background check. These background checks are repeated periodically so that they remain current.
- ***Pastoral approval of the candidate for service.***

Minor-Age Volunteers (ages under 18):

- A child of parent(s) who are members in good standing. (Pastoral discretion is exercised for the occasions where this is not possible)
- Demonstrated growth in loving and serving the Lord as attested to by parents, home group leaders, church leaders, peers, etc...
- Completion of a Sovereign Grace Church Children/Youth Work Application.
- Completion of a criminal background check *(for applicants 16 years of age and older)*.
- ***Pastoral approval of the candidate for service.***

Gifted and need will determine the placement of approved candidates. Classroom leaders, administrators, and pastors will each provide input into placement decision. It should be commonplace to allow candidates to start in roles of lesser responsibility, broadening them over time as opportunity, gifting, and experience allow.

Evidence indicating a candidate (or current worker) poses a potential threat to others or has any prior history of physical or sexual abuse will result in the immediate removal of the individual from consideration. This will be a pastoral decision and is intended to care for everyone involved. Additional questions should be directed to a pastor.

Supervision, Restroom Procedures, Work Restrictions and Discipline

Objective: Our goal is to provide specific guidance to workers in the sensitive areas of supervising children, restroom procedures, necessary work restrictions, and administering discipline to children. We acknowledge the presence of indwelling sin in the heart of every person and desire to take every necessary precaution to protect worker and child alike. Our desire is to care for children in such a way as to eliminate the appearance of evil or impropriety.

Supervision:

- At least two workers must be present at any function and in each classroom, vehicle, or any other enclosed area where children, youth, or disabled individuals are present.
- Workers assigned to supervise children should arrive at least 20 minutes (or more if necessary) before a scheduled activity. Volunteers will serve until all children entrusted to their care have been picked up by a parent, guardian, or responsible individual designated by the parent.
- Under no circumstances will a child be sent out to find his/her parents or to await pick-up or transportation away from a worker's care and direct supervision.

Restroom Procedures:

- Restroom facilities - Children in the 2 year-old class benefit from availability of restroom facilities located in the classroom. All other classes will use the building's main and/or auxiliary restroom facilities. When possible, children in 2nd grade and below will use the smaller auxiliary facilities located within the children's area. Children in 3rd-6th grade will use the main restrooms located off the main lobby.
- No child may leave a classroom to use the restroom without an escort.
- Female workers must escort children through the 2nd grade to the restroom (boys or girls).
- Escorts do not enter the restroom (except in the cases of the youngest children who require assistance). Doors to the auxiliary restrooms should be left ajar while an adult assists a child. Under no circumstances can an adult (other than the child's parent) be in a restroom alone with a child behind closed doors.
- Escorts must serve in pairs, preventing the case where a child and adult are left alone. The hallway monitor can serve as the second adult.

Worker Restrictions:

- For nursery-age children, unless the parent indicates otherwise, changing diapers is allowable and expected. However, the parent(s) of a persistently fussy child should be notified and will be expected to provide the care necessary for their child.

- Under no circumstances should a volunteer touch a child's private areas with the exception of changing diapers when there are two workers present. (e.g. the nursery)
- Workers must avoid the appearance of impropriety, such as sitting older children on their lap, kissing or embracing others, etc...
- Workers must NEVER take children outside on Sunday morning during class. (e.g. You are not permitted to take children to the playground.)
- Workers must release a child into the care of his/her parent, guardian, or person specifically authorized to pick up the child.

Discipline:

- Workers may never spank, hit, grab, or otherwise physically discipline children in their care.
- A child who persistently lacks self-control and/or refuses to respond to a teacher/helper's corrective instructions may need his/her parent's assistance. The parent may be requested to return to the classroom to address the child.
- Disciplinary problems should always be reported to the parent and the classroom team leader.

Substitutions

Objective: Our preference is for workers to serve when scheduled. However, schedule conflicts, illnesses, and other events make substitutions necessary. If you find that you are unable to routinely serve on your scheduled dates, please work with your classroom leader to address the situation. The procedure/requirements for substitutions are as follows:

- *It is the worker's primary responsibility* to secure an acceptable replacement whenever he/she is unable to serve on a scheduled date. You will need to coordinate your plans with your classroom leader, but please ensure you take full responsibility for any required substitution.
- Where possible, please plan substitutions in advance. A few weeks notice is helpful to everyone involved. This includes securing your replacement, as well as informing the classroom leader and any other individuals scheduled to serve with you.
- In the event you are ill, you are required to make every reasonable effort to secure a replacement. Please refer to the illness/injury policy for greater clarification on what symptoms disqualify you from being able to serve.
- The best candidates to consider for substitutions are other teachers/helpers who serve the same class. Please exhaust this list of candidates before considering anyone else. If you are unable to secure a substitute from this list, it is possible to recruit a teacher/helper from another class. However, the classroom leader must approve this before your plans are finalized.
- Replacement candidates must meet all Children's Ministry worker qualifications and screening requirements. Please consult the relevant policy on qualifications and requirements for specific details. *Under no circumstances may a substitute work without meeting these requirements.*
- You should be willing to trade service dates with your replacement.

- If you are unable to secure a replacement, you must inform your classroom leader as soon as possible. Please do everything within your power to avoid these situations. Failure to show up and/or notify a team leader of an absence is unacceptable.

Illnesses/Injuries

Objective: Our goal is to provide clear guidance to address situations of illness for children and workers. Please serve us by maintaining the following standards.

- Any person who has exhibited symptoms of cough, fever, or runny nose (not due to allergies) within the previous 24 hour period of time must not be allowed to participate in Children Ministry activities.
- In the case of illness for a teacher/helper, an acceptable substitute must be secured to fill their vacancy. Please see the Substitutions policy for more information.
- In the case of a sick child, parents should be aware of and willing to adhere to this policy. Our Sick policy will be prominently posted throughout the children’s area of the church. The signs posted will read as follows:

Sick Policy:

Parents, please note that in order to best serve all our families, children who have been sick *within the past 24 hours*, showing symptoms of *cough, fever, nausea, or runny nose* (not due to allergies) will not be permitted to participate in Children’s Ministry today. Your child is welcome to remain with you in the main meeting. Thank you for your cooperation.

- Workers who observe a child with symptoms should graciously notify the parent immediately, asking them to please remove the child from Children’s Ministry for that Sunday. Children exhibiting symptoms are welcome to remain with their parents in the main meeting or in the lobby.
- If a child becomes ill during class, the teacher/helper should seek immediate assistance from the nearest Hall Monitor. The Hall Monitor will contact the parent(s) who can assist the child and remove him/her from Children’s Ministry.
- In the event a child is injured during class, our first priority is to provide necessary care to the child. Regardless of the extent of the injury, teachers/helpers should seek immediate assistance from the nearest Hall Monitor. Hall Monitor’s act as the CM “first responders.” They will work with the teachers/helpers to evaluate a child’s injury and will lead in taking the necessary actions to care for the child. Hall Monitors will act in accordance with the Emergency Medical Response procedures that are posted in each classroom. They will work with teachers/helpers to determine if the child needs a parent, a physician in the church, or emergency medical assistance. If emergency medical assistance is required, the Hall Monitor will direct someone to call 911 or press 911 on the security panel. [Security panels are located near the entrance to the church office and near the main entrance of the church.]

Important Exception: If it is obvious that a child has a life-threatening emergency, someone should call 911 immediately. In this case, the hall monitor can be notified after the call has been made to 911. (For a more detailed explanation see the section below titled Emergency Medical Response - “Life Threatening Emergencies.” (p. 8)

- In order to identify and fix potential hazards, an incident report is required when a child is injured. Even if an incident report is not required, it is wise to communicate the details of an injury to parents when they pick up their children. Please consult the incident reporting policy for more information.

Class Assignments and Promotions Schedule

Infants through two year olds are assigned to a class based on age and are promoted on their birthday. Our three, four, and five year old children are assigned to class based on their age. They are promoted to their next class the first Sunday of each September. Children older than five years old are assigned based upon their school grade level (grades 1-6). These students also advance at the start of the school year each September.

We recognize that grade level determination for home school children presents unique challenges. Our goal is to graciously allow families flexibility to place the child in the right class, while maintaining consistency of age across grade school classes wherever possible.

Provided a child can successfully meet the minimum academic and maturity standards of the class, he/she should be placed into the grade level consistent with the age standards established by the Wake county school system. Exceptions are possible, but should be avoided where unnecessary.

Incident Reporting

Objective: We will document all situations where injury takes place or there is suspicion of an abuse or molestation connected with any ministry activity. The results of the incident report will be used as a part of any necessary follow-up investigation. Please adhere to the following guidelines requiring the reporting of a particular incident.

- The first priority for a worker who becomes aware of an injury or suspects the possibility of an act of abuse is to ensure the safety of the child affected, as well as any other children and workers present. This includes removing present hazards and assessing the extent of an injury to determine the most appropriate medical response. Please consult the Emergency Medical Response procedures posted in the classroom for more information.
- Once the children's safety is secured, as soon as is feasible, a worker should inform a Children's Ministry Administrator and the Classroom Team Leader of the incident.
- The Children's Ministry Administrator will work with the teacher/helper who observed the incident to complete a "Children's Ministry Incident Report". The incident report will be used as a part of any necessary follow-up investigation or to take steps necessary to eliminate any future incidents.
- The teacher/helper will submit completed copies of the incident report to the pastor who oversees the ministry, as well as the child's parent(s).
- If the incident in question involves the suspicion of child abuse, neglect, and/or molestation, other conditions apply. Please consult the Child Protection Policy for more information.

Internal Investigations

Objective: Our goal is to have a fair, expeditious, and clear process by which we are able to conduct an internal investigation in the unlikely event of a case of suspected child abuse, neglect, or molestation that takes place within Children's Ministry (or any other church-administrated event).

- Any allegations of abuse, neglect, or molestation will be investigated by ministry leaders and a pastor.
- All internal investigations will be handled with pastoral discretion and in a confidential manner. Only those immediately involved in the incident and any individuals whose observations and/or expertise will assist in a fair and thorough investigation will be asked to participate. The main objective is to identify and evaluate necessary evidence while maintaining the dignity and privacy of all involved.
- Any ministry team member who is the subject of an investigation will be temporarily suspended from their position, pending the completion of the investigation.
- Upon the completion of an investigation, if sufficient evidence exists to support a charge of abuse, neglect, or molestation, the pastor will initiate contact with appropriate authorities, including local police, legal counsel, and any other parties necessary. The subject under investigation will then be permanently removed from his/her role within Children's Ministry and will be subject to the necessary legal process.
- If the investigation concludes with finding the subject in question is without guilt, his/her suspension from serving in Children's Ministry will be lifted and he/she will return to regular service.
- Regardless of the outcome of an internal investigation, the results of the investigation will be made known in written form to the pastoral staff, the subject under investigation, and the parent(s) of the child involved in the incident. Others will be informed on a need-to-know basis, depending upon the outcome and its impact outside those immediately involved.
- The local police *may be* notified at a certain point in the investigation. This is not the same as reporting an incident of child abuse (which is required by law and happens as soon as possible), but at times their wisdom and expertise is helpful in order to establish whether abuse has occurred and the proper response we should take.

Violation of Policies / Procedures

- Workers are required to review and understand the policies and procedures that govern their role in Children's Ministry, knowing they exist for the safety and success of everyone involved in the ministry.
- Workers should assist one another in helping to maintain accountability among themselves to the policies that guide the ministry.
- Workers must promptly notify their classroom leader and/or immediate supervisor of any activities taken by themselves or others that violate policy.
- Any supervisor of volunteers within Children's Ministry who becomes aware of a violation will take the necessary steps to ensure future compliance with the policies and procedures by all workers.

- An administrator within the ministry has the ability to remove a worker in the unlikely event of a serious violation that threatens the well-being of others and/or a pattern of routine violations where the worker refuses to comply with repeated appeals to change. An administrator(s) and a pastor can assist in making these determinations.
- An administrator should help to remind workers of a policy and its purpose, should unintentional violations occur. In cases where policies and procedures are unclear, inconsistent, or non-existent, workers can serve the leaders by making these facts known so that they can be corrected.

Emergency Medical Response

Life threatening Emergency – *Always call 911*. The following are considered life or death emergencies: a loss of consciousness, a loss of breathing, or excessive or uncontrollable bleeding. NEVER move an injured person. Have one worker remain with the injured person until help arrives. Telephones are located in the office area and emergency “panic” buttons for fire, police, and ambulance are located on the security panel keypads in the office and main doorway of the lobby. *After calling 911, notify the Hall Monitor.*

Non-Life threatening Emergencies – take the following steps to care for an injured child:

- Send helper to seek immediate assistance from the nearest Hall Monitor.
- Secure the child’s safety to guard against further injury.
- Pray with the child as you assess the extent of his/her injury.
- The hallway monitor will notify the child’s parent(s) for injuries requiring first aid treatment.
- For minor cuts and scrapes, first aid kits are located in each of the classrooms. Please wear gloves when dealing with any type of blood. Gloves are located in the nurseries.
- Never under any circumstances administer medicine or pills in any form.
- Once care is provided, the teacher or team leader should thoroughly document the incident, taking care to remove hazards that contributed to the injury. Documentation should be submitted to the pastor overseeing the ministry.

Fire Safety and Other Safety Procedures

Fire – The children’s area of the facility is equipped with fire detection monitors, alarm pull stations, and fire extinguishers throughout. Each classroom is configured to provide at least two points of exit in the event of a fire.

If a fire alarm sounds, you should take the following steps:

- Do not panic. Calmly and quickly gather your class. Quickly take roll from the roster located in the classroom safety manual (take the safety manual with you). Direct students to follow your instructions and stay with you. Infants should be carried and/or placed into cribs with evacuation casters.

- When you step into the hallway a Hall Monitor will direct you to exit the nearest exterior door. Once outside assemble your class at the rear of the building in the grassy area next to the parking lot. Close any open doors.
- Take roll again to make sure everyone is present.
- Keep the class together and calm. Listen for further instructions.

If you observe a fire, please take the necessary precautions to remove children from harm and extinguish and/or sound the necessary alarms.

Power Outage – Gather your students, take roll, and remain calm. Stay in your class unless other instruction is provided. The facility is equipped with emergency lighting throughout.

Building maps are located throughout the facility to assist in locating the nearest exterior exits.

Reporting Abuse

- North Carolina Law speaks extensively to the issue of child abuse and what we are obligated to report. This applies not just to pastors and churches, but anyone who has "cause to suspect" that abuse has occurred. ***We are to report any situation in which we have cause to suspect that a child is the victim of abuse, neglect, or is a dependent (child without sufficient supervision).*** Sometimes we are not sure and must do some kind of investigation to determine if we have "cause to suspect" abuse. The credibility of a witness and the strength of any hearsay we receive and any corroborating signs of abuse all become relevant at this point. But the law is clear that once we have cause to suspect, we must report it to the Wake County authorities (or relevant jurisdiction). North Carolina statutes 7B-101 and 7B-301 are the source of the information below. They can be found on the North Carolina government website.
- "Abuse" is against a juvenile by an adult who is a parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker. The "parent" in this case can also include someone acting *in loco parentis*, which means "on behalf of the parent" (babysitter, etc.). Abuse includes anything that causes serious physical injury or creates a substantial risk of such injury, any cruel or grossly inappropriate method to modify behavior, any sexual act against a child, anything that causes "serious emotional damage" with evident symptoms, or anything that involves "moral turpitude" (deviancy). North Carolina statute 7B-101 speaks to this and the following definitions.
- "Neglect" is any inaction or disregard for a child that "constitutes an unequivocal danger to the juvenile's health, welfare, or safety, but does not constitute abuse."
- "Dependent": We must also report any child who does not have someone to care for them, or has someone present but who is unable to care for them, or someone who is present but voluntarily chooses not to care for them.
- Note on criminal behavior and reporting: The law is explicit when it comes to reporting abuse, but it is more ambiguous with respect to reporting other criminal activity. In the area of children this is relevant because there are some sexual crimes that are not considered "abuse" in the above categories (e.g., certain child-on-child sexual activity). The law does not mandate that we report all crimes, but it is our sense that reporting such activity is in the best interest of the church and our children. It is not possible to write an exact policy that covers any and all situations, but our disposition is to bring to the proper authorities any situation we feel to be criminal as defined by the law and hurtful to a child. At times an internal investigation will be held to determine whether we have just cause to suspect that

a crime has been committed.

- **HOW TO REPORT:** North Carolina Statute 7B-301 says that reports of abuse, neglect, or dependency are to be made to the relevant county's department of social services, which for us is Wake County.⁶⁰ Wake County says that reports can be made:

(1) By Phone: Call the CPS Report line (919-212-7990 for English, 919-212-7963 for Spanish)

(2) In Person: During normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., you can make a report on the fourth floor of the Human Services Building at 220 Swinburne St., Raleigh, NC.

(3) After hours and on weekends and holidays: Call 911 and say you wish to make a CPS report. The 911 operator will contact an after-hours social worker who will return your call.

- North Carolina statute 7B-301 says the following about the actual report:

"The report shall include information as is known to the person making it including the name and address of the juvenile; the name and address of the juvenile's parent, guardian, or caretaker; the age of the juvenile; the names and ages of other juveniles in the home; the present whereabouts of the juvenile if not at the home address; the nature and extent of any injury or condition resulting from abuse, neglect, or dependency; and any other information which the person making the report believes might be helpful in establishing the need for protective services or court intervention."

Interaction with Law Enforcement and Media

Objective: Our goal is to provide workers and leaders with helpful information in the event they are asked to interact with representatives from law enforcement agencies and/or the media. The purpose is to ensure accurate information is conveyed and to protect the privacy of individuals.

- All ministry leaders, employees, and volunteers will cooperate fully with any law enforcement or governmental agency that may be investigating allegations of injury, abuse, neglect, or molestation in connection with church-related activities.
- Legal counsel may be contacted for advice and guidance as soon as possible after the church receives notification of possible abuse, neglect, or molestation. Decisions concerning the church's response to the allegations will be made in accordance with such advice.
- A single church spokesperson will be designated to speak on the church's behalf regarding the event/allegation in question. All requests for information from the church, its members, and attendees should be directed back to the church's spokesperson.
- Only information necessary and relevant to the situation will be conveyed by the spokesperson.

Revision of Policies / Procedures

The policies and procedures that govern Children's Ministry will be regularly reviewed and amended as needed. Changes will result as the ministry grows, allowing us to better respond to its changing needs.

⁶⁰ <http://www.wakegov.com/humanservices/children/safety/Pages/cpsintake.aspx>

Changes may also result from advice from legal counsel and/or input from pastors, parents, workers, leaders, etc.

Any modifications will be promptly conveyed to ministry workers as soon as is reasonably possible.

Acceptance of Policies / Procedures

All who serve in Children's Ministry are required to read and agree to this policy before they will be permitted to serve. They will also be required to review the policy annually and sign signifying that they have read and understand the policy as written.

