

## **Constitution**

**Adopted by the membership on October 29, 2000**

**Revised by the membership on November 20, 2022**

### **Preamble**

Since it pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call certain of His servants to unite under the name Three Rivers Grace Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for the worship of God and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and

Whereas we, the members of Three Rivers Grace Church, having searched the Scriptures under the guidance of His Spirit, have recognized the need to constitute ourselves to closely conform to His will for the Church in this age and prepare ourselves for great efforts in His name;

Now therefore we, the members of Three Rivers Grace Church, do hereby adopt this Constitution as our articles of governance, to be interpreted at all times to reflect the character of and bring glory to Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Bible and articulated in the Statement of Faith (2000) and Church Covenant (2000) of this church. This church shall be affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

### **Article 1 - Name**

The name of this church is Three Rivers Grace Church.

### **Article 2 - Purpose**

This church exists by the grace of God, for the glory of God, which shall be the ultimate purpose in all its activities.

This church glorifies God by loving Him and obeying His commands through:

Worshipping Him;

Equipping the saints through Bible instruction and study;

Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching and personal evangelism, and any other means consistent with the teachings of Holy Scripture;

Encouraging, supporting, and participating in missions work, local, domestic, and international;

Administering the ordinances of believers' baptism and communion;

Encouraging Biblical fellowship among believers; and

Serving other individuals, families, and churches by providing for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, in the name of Jesus Christ.

### **Article 3 - Governance**

Governance of Three Rivers Grace Church is elder-led, deacon-served, and congregational (as defined in section 3 of this article). This article details key elements of organizational and decision-making processes governing our pursuit of God's mission for us.

#### **Section 1 - Elder-led**

The elders lead the congregation spiritually, shepherding the flock with the Word and prayer. The elders' duties include praying, preaching, teaching, casting vision for ministry, providing personal counsel to church members, overseeing members' meetings, and leading the church in matters of discipline.

Ministry decisions will be made by the elders, consulting the deacons and / or other ministry leaders.

The elders will set the agenda for members' meetings and will moderate the meetings to occur in an orderly manner. Only the elders will bring proposals to be voted upon by the membership, provided appropriate time for consideration, questions and discussion have occurred.

#### **Section 2 – Deacon-served**

The deacons serve the congregation practically, managing financial, facility, and benevolence matters. Each deacon will oversee a specific area of ministry (such as finances, facility, benevolence, etc.) and will have the responsibility to make decisions pertaining to that area of ministry, in consultation with the elders, and with other deacons, as appropriate.

#### **Section 3 – Congregational**

The congregation is involved in the work of ministry and included in major decisions of the church. All members are expected to attend worship services and other gatherings of the church, give, serve, attend members' meetings, pray for the leaders, respect, support and follow the elders' leadership and assist the deacons as needed according to each member's abilities.

Decisions made by the membership as a whole via voting at a members' gathering (worship service or members' meeting): affirming new members, affirming new elders and deacons, matters of church discipline, affirming an annual budget, and other large financial decisions presented by the elders.

Members' meetings are for current active members, meaning those who are regularly attending and regularly giving to the church. Members are encouraged to contact elders or deacons to make suggestions regarding ministry ideas, building projects, missions giving, benevolence, etc. Opportunities for questions, comments, and suggestions will be made in advance of members' meetings; however, proposals for voting will be presented only by the elders.

## **Article 4 - Membership**

### **Section 1 - Qualifications**

To qualify for membership in this church, a person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who gives evidence of regeneration, who has been baptized, in obedience to Christ, following his or her regeneration, and who wholeheartedly believes in the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible. Each member must agree to submit to the teaching of scripture as expressed in the Statement of Faith and must sign the Church Covenant and promise to keep the commitments expressed therein. The elders shall be responsible for determining each person's qualification for membership. In making this determination, they may rely on a person's profession of faith, a letter or communication with an elder from the person's previous church, completion of the new members' class, or such other evidence as the elders deem appropriate.

### **Section 2 - Admission of Members**

To be admitted into church membership, applicants shall be recommended by the elders for admission and accepted by the majority of members present when brought forth to the congregation, and shall at that point relinquish their membership in other churches.

### **Section 3 - Duties and Privileges of Membership**

In accord with the duties enumerated in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, consistent with God's leading and with the gifts, time, and material resources each has received from God. Only those shall be entitled to serve in the ministries of the church who are members of this congregation; non-members may serve on an ad-hoc basis with the approval of the elders. Notwithstanding, non-members may serve the church for purposes of administration and professional consultation.

It is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all members' meetings and participate in the selection of officers, and decisions regarding membership status and any other such matters as may be submitted for consideration.

Contributing to the ministry of the church (gifts, time, resources) and regular attendance are prerequisites for participation in members' meetings.

### **Section 4 - Associate Membership**

Students and others temporarily residing in the Pittsburgh area who are members of an evangelical church may apply for associate membership. Qualifications are identical to those for full membership as set out above, except that home church membership must be retained. A letter of commendation will be sought from the applicant's home church.

Duties and privileges of associate members are the same as for other members except that:

- a. when absent from the Pittsburgh area for extended periods of time they are released from the responsibility to attend our church services;
- b. while they will be encouraged to attend members' meetings, they will not be eligible to stand for any office or to participate in congregational decisions.

Termination of associate membership as a disciplinary measure will be as it is for other members, except that the elders shall notify the pastor or elders of the home church of that termination. Associate membership will normally terminate immediately upon the ending of the period of temporary residence in the Pittsburgh area.

## Section 5 - On Church Discipline

Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the church, shall be subject to the admonition of the elders and the discipline of the church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and the example of scripture. Church discipline, then, should only be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed.

The purpose of such discipline should be for the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined (see Proverbs 15:5; 29:15; I Corinthians 4:14; Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 3:4-5; Hebrews 12:1-11; Psalm 119:115; 141:5; Proverbs 17:10; 25:12; 27:5; Ecclesiastes 7:5; Matthew 7:26-27; 18:15-17; Luke 17:3; Acts 2:40; I Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 6:1-5; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; I Timothy 1:20; Titus 1:13-14; James 1:22);

For the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to them (see Proverbs 13:20; Romans 15:14; I Corinthians 5:11; 15:33; Colossians 3:16; I Thessalonians 5:14 [note this is written to the whole church, not just to leaders]; I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:11; Hebrews 10:24-25);

For the purity of the church as a whole (see I Corinthians 5:6-7; II Corinthians 13:10; Ephesians 5:27; II John 1:10; Jude 24; Revelation 21:2);

For the good of our corporate witness to non-Christians (see Proverbs 28:7; Matthew 5:13-16; John 13:35; Acts 5:10-14; Ephesians 5:11; I Timothy 3:7; II Peter 2:2; I John 3:10); and

Supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy character (see Deuteronomy 5:11; I Kings 11:2; II Chronicles 19:2; Ezra 6:21; Nehemiah 9:2; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 36:20; Matthew 5:16; John 15:8; 18:17, 25; Romans 2:24; 15:5-6; II Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; I Peter 2:12).

## Section 6 - Membership List

The elders will work diligently to maintain an up-to-date list of active members. An individual will be removed from the membership list following his or her death, or upon voluntary resignation of membership, or when he or she has joined another church. If a member stops attending for six months or longer, with no indication of returning, the elders will make this known at a members' meeting. If attempts to reach out to the individual continue to fail, the elders will then remove the person from the membership list. Membership may also be terminated as an act of church discipline at the recommendation of the elders and with the agreement of a majority of the members present at any regular or special meeting of the members.

## **Article 5 - Meetings**

### Section 1 - Worship Meetings

Worship services shall be held each Lord's Day, and may be held throughout the week as the elders determine.

### Section 2 - Members' Meetings

In every meeting together, members shall act in that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Members are encouraged to ask questions and provide input at appropriate times in the meetings, conducting themselves with respect and love toward one another and toward the leaders, and are asked to be concise in their comments during meetings.

There shall be a regular members' meeting at least every six months.

An elder shall preside as moderator at all members' meetings of the church. The elders shall see that the stated meetings of the church are regularly held and that required reports are submitted to the church by the responsible members.

Provided all constitutional provisions for notification have been met, a quorum shall be understood to be met by those members present.

There shall be an annual members' meeting, at which a budget shall be approved by a majority of the members present prior to the start of the fiscal year.

Special members' meetings may be called by the elders. The date, time, and purpose of any special meeting shall be announced at all public services of the church within two weeks preceding the meeting.

## **Article 6 - Officers**

### Section 1 - Summary

The Biblical offices in the church are elders and deacons. In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions under this constitution of clerk and treasurer. All officers must be members of this church prior to assuming their responsibilities.

### Section 2 - Elders

The elders shall be men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. To maintain a plurality of elders, there should always be at least two qualified men actively serving in this office. At least half of the elders shall be nonvocational. No elder shall hold the office of deacon during his elder tenure.

The elders shall oversee the ministry and resources of the church. In keeping with the principles set forth in Acts 6:1-6 and I Peter 5:1-4, the elders shall devote their time to prayer, the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine in keeping with the Statement of Faith), and shepherding God's flock.

The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on selection of officers. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as elders.

An elder's tenure in office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder should be dismissed should express such concern to the elders and, if need be, to the congregation. Such an accusation against an elder will be considered if it is determined to be based on credible evidence that the elder has disqualified himself by falling into sin or false teaching. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and I Timothy 5:17-21. Any elder may be dismissed by the unanimous agreement of the other elders at any time, and any elder or group of elders may be dismissed by a three-fourths vote of the members (excluding elders) at any members' meeting of the church. Such a vote would only follow a formal, written letter containing the testimony of at least two witnesses submitted to the other elders and / or deacons, an investigation into the accusation (by the other elders and / or deacons) is concluded, written conclusions of the investigation are communicated to the congregation, and an opportunity for the accused elder or group of elders to respond is concluded.

The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the

membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice in keeping with the Statement of Faith and the Church Covenant, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions. An elder shall preach each Lord's Day (allowing for guest speakers as appropriate). The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

The elders may establish ministry positions or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The elders may also propose paid staff positions, and elders shall present a job description for each position to the membership for approval. The membership may approve all candidates to fill such positions or may delegate this responsibility, on a position-by-position basis, to the elders, deacons, or other staff member.

The elders shall have primary responsibility for the hiring, supervision, and evaluation or removal of compensated staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to the deacons or other staff member.

### Section 3 – The Lead Pastor

The Lead Pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2, above, but shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. He shall serve alongside the other elders as coequals with them in complete parity, while additionally being tasked with providing initiative, vision-casting, leadership, and guidance for the elder team. The Lead Pastor will also be the supervisor for other compensated staff members and have the option to delegate supervision to other elders.

### Section 4 - Deacons

The office of deacon is described in I Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-7. The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on selection of officers, men who are giving of themselves in service to the church, who possess gifts of leadership, and who are called to further service. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons.

A deacon's tenure in office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. An accusation against a deacon will only be considered if it is determined to be based on credible evidence that the deacon has disqualified himself by falling into sin. Any deacon may be dismissed by the unanimous agreement of the elders at any time, and any deacon or group of deacons may be dismissed by a three-fourths vote of the members (excluding deacons) at any members' meeting of the church. Such a vote would only follow a formal, written letter containing the testimony of at least two witnesses submitted to the elders, an investigation into the accusation (by the elders and / or other deacons) is concluded, written conclusions of the investigation are communicated to the congregation, and an opportunity for the accused deacon to respond is concluded.

Deacons shall care for the temporal needs of members, attend to the accommodations for public worship, oversee the financial activities and properties of the church, and encourage and support those able to help others and those with gifts of administration.

The deacons shall receive, hold, and disburse a fund for benevolence, reporting on its use to the elders at their request, and reporting to the church its total receipts and total disbursements only.

The deacons, with the agreement of the elders, may establish unpaid administrative positions or committees of members to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities in the church.

## Section 5 - Clerk

It shall be the duty of the clerk to record and distribute the minutes of all regular and special members' meetings of the church, to preserve an accurate roll of the membership, and to render reports as requested by the pastor, the elders, the deacons, or the church.

In the absence or incapacity of the clerk, the elders shall appoint a member to perform the duties of the church clerk, e.g., an administrative assistant.

The church clerk shall ensure that dated copies of the most recent revision of this constitution shall be available for all church members.

## Section 6 - Treasurer

The treasurer, who shall not be a paid church staff member, shall ensure that all funds and securities of the church are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories, as the deacons shall designate. The treasurer shall also ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept in books belonging to the church, and that adequate controls are implemented to guarantee that all funds belonging to the church are appropriately handled by any officer, employee, or agent of the church. The treasurer shall render to the elders annually, or whenever they may require it, an account of all transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the church.

Each year the treasurer, elders and deacons will create an itemized budget proposal for the next fiscal year. This itemized budget will be presented to the church at a members' meeting at least four weeks prior to the annual members' meeting. This budget shall be presented for discussion at that time and called up for approval at the annual members' meeting. Spending in any major budget category may not exceed the budgeted amount by more than five percent without explicit approval from the members in a members' meeting. No money shall be solicited by or on behalf of the church or any of its ministries without the approval of the elders and deacons.

A finance committee shall include no less than two members, including the treasurer, a deacon, and additional church member(s). The committee will assist the treasurer in keeping the financial records and maintaining adequate fiscal controls of church funds.

## **Article 7 - Selection of Officers**

### **Section 1 - Principles**

The process for selection of officers shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following principles:

Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, should be an integral part of the selection process;

Nominations should proceed with the support of the elders;

All nominees for church office should be treated with the grace, kindness, and honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members;

The selection process shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Section 2 - Procedure**

The elders should seek recommendations and involvement from the general membership in the nomination process. Any member with reason to believe that a nominee is unqualified for an office should express such concern in writing to the elders. Members intending to speak in opposition to a nominee should express their objection in writing to the elders at least one week before the relevant church members' meeting.

The moderating elder shall declare appointed all persons receiving the affirmation of two-thirds of the members present.

The persons selected shall assume their respective offices upon congregational approval, or at a later date agreed upon by the elders and the incoming officer. Any vacancies that may occur during the course of the year may be filled at any members' meeting, upon recommendation of the elders.

### **Section 3 - Calling of the Lead Pastor**

In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential Lead Pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. Notice of the nomination of a man to be elected to membership

and called as Lead Pastor must be given at two Sunday morning services following the nomination, prior to presentation for approval at a members' meeting.

## **Article 8 - Indemnification**

### **Section 1 - Mandatory Indemnification**

If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the elders determine that the person acted (a) in good faith, (b) with the care an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, and (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, and the person had no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful.

### **Section 2 - Permissive Indemnification**

At the discretion of the elders, the church also may indemnify any person who acted in good faith and reasonably believed that his or her conduct was in the church's best interest and not unlawful.

### **Section 3 - Procedure**

If a quorum of the elders is not available for an indemnification determination because of the number of elders seeking indemnification, the requisite determination may be made by the membership or by special legal counsel appointed by the membership.

## **Article 9 - Dispute Resolution**

Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian Church (see, e.g., Matthew 18:15-20, I Corinthians 6:1-8), the church shall require its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without reliance on the secular courts. Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles and the avoidance of suits of law to resolve disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or pagan and whether individuals or corporate entities. The elders shall adopt policies and procedures to effect these requirements and aspirations. If there are unresolved conflicts among the elders, the elders agree to meet with a mediator or mediators (e.g., a trusted local pastor, or a representative of the denomination) until the conflict is resolved in a manner consistent with aforementioned principles.

## **Article 10 - Amendments**

Amendments to the Statement of Faith, Church Covenant, and this constitution may be made by the recommendation of the elders and affirmation of two-thirds of the members present at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at a previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to the meeting for approval.

The original and revised version of any amended document shall be made available to all church members by the church clerk.