

**The Constitution and By-Laws of Sovereign Grace  
Fellowship**

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## **Preamble**

We, the members of the Sovereign Grace Fellowship of Orangeville, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

### **Article I: The Name**

The name of this church is *Sovereign Grace Fellowship of Orangeville, Pennsylvania*.

### **Article II: The Purpose**

The purpose of this church, in all its activities, is to glorify the God of the Scriptures. We seek to glorify God by promoting and maintaining His worship both individually and corporately, by edifying and equipping His saints, by evangelizing the nations and by practicing benevolence to the poor and needy. We are committed to the proclamation of the whole counsel of God in the Scriptures, declaring His glorious gospel of grace in all the world, and defending the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

### **Article III: Articles of Faith**

We accept *The London Baptist Confession of 1689* as the fullest expression of our faith. We find it to be a good, albeit imperfect, summary of the teachings of Scriptures as well as an assistance in controversy, a confirmation of faith, a means for edification and a basis for church unity. However, as is affirmed in the first chapter of this historic document, the Bible alone is the ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice.

### **Article IV: Covenant**

#### Section 1: Introductory Statement

God has graciously entered into a New Covenant with His people through the work of Jesus Christ, whose obedience and blood infallibly secure all of its benefits for them. By making us members of the one body of Christ, the New Covenant lays upon us responsibilities, not only to God, but also to each other. In this covenant God writes His law upon our hearts and causes us to walk in His ways. Thus, both our desire and ability to obey spring from the work of Jesus Christ. Christ purchased for us the Holy Spirit, by whose gift of faith we obey, not to establish our own righteousness before God but to express our gratitude for grace. What follows is a summary of that which we consider to be our new covenant obligations toward God and one another. (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Matt. 26:26-28; Rom. 12:4-5; 1Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:25; Heb. 8:6-13; 10:16-17; 13:20-21)

#### Section 2: Our Covenant Commitments

Having been led by the grace of God to repent of our sins and to believe on Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and having confessed our faith through baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we now, by the grace of God, do joyfully and solemnly enter into holy covenant with one another as members of Sovereign Grace Fellowship.

- a) We pledge to worship only the one, true and living God, who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We will proclaim His glory in the world and have no other gods before Him. We pledge to worship God in the way that He prescribes, only through the mediation of His Son, Jesus Christ, excluding from our worship whatever He has not prescribed and faithfully practicing the ordinances of the new covenant.

- b) We pledge, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge and holiness and encouragement, to promote its prosperity and spirituality and to sustain its worship, ordinances, disciplines and doctrines as set forth in the 1689 London Baptist Confession. We pledge to give it a sacred pre-eminence over all institutions of human origin, including civic groups, clubs and lodges and to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor and the spread of the gospel through all nations.
- c) We pledge to submit ourselves to the spiritual oversight and biblical authority of the elders of this church. We further pledge to support the officers and leadership of this church with our prayers and with our cooperation as they seek to lead and administer the ministries of the church. We further pledge to submit ourselves to the biblical discipline of this church and to participate in the discipline of other members, as necessary for their benefit and the testimony of Christ's church.
- d) We resolve to practice personal and family worship, to bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and to seek the salvation of our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances. We resolve, furthermore, to order our homes by biblical principles, as wives, willingly submitting to husbands and, as husbands, tenderly loving our wives as Christ loved the church.
- e) We resolve to pursue holiness in our personal lives, earnestly seeking, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to avoid all uncleanness in thought, act and speech and to order our conduct according to the Word of God. We pledge to avoid all drunkenness and the use of illegal drugs. We furthermore resolve to walk circumspectly in the world, to be just and faithful in our dealings and to maintain a consistent Christian witness in the world. We will seek to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, avoiding backbiting, tattling and excessive anger.
- f) We pledge to cease from our own works on the Lord's Day, except for works of compassion and/or necessity. We will sanctify the day by careful attendance of public worship, fellowship with one another, acts of mercy and by engaging in personal devotion and domestic religion.
- g) We pledge to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress, to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech, to be slow to take offence but always ready for reconciliation and, mindful of the rules of our Savior, to secure it without delay.
- h) We pledge, moreover, that if we remove from this place, we will, as soon as possible, endeavor to unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of our doctrinal statement as found in God's Word.

## **Article V: Membership**

### Section 1: Requirements for Membership

To be eligible for membership in this church a person must:

- a) demonstrate repentance toward God and the fruits thereof, as well as that faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ that works through love. The demonstration of these realities naturally requires observation over a period of time. The duration of this time shall be determined by the elders on a case by case basis. (Luke 3:7-9; Acts 20:21; 26:20; Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:18-22)
- b) have been baptized as a believer. Normally, this will be baptism by immersion, but the elders may make exceptions for extraordinary circumstances as they deem advisable. (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:41)

- c) have completed a new members class.
- d) affirm substantial agreement with the church's doctrine, as summarized in the 1689 London Baptist Confession, as well as with the church's covenant, constitution and government. Substantial agreement with the confession will be a level of like-mindedness that, in the judgment of the elders, will allow for the preservation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. A candidate for membership is not required to master the confession, as this would violate the spirit of Matt. 28:19-20, where we are instructed to make disciples, baptize them, *then* teach them. However, he/she must be willing to be instructed in accordance with the doctrines found in the confession.
- e) not deservedly be under the corrective discipline of another church. (Matt. 18:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 3John 9-10; 2 Cor. 2:6-8)
- f) If, at any time, a member becomes convinced that he/she either never met or no longer meets the requirements for membership, he/she is obligated to inform the elders of that fact.

## Section 2: Types of Membership

- a) Regular membership: All those received into membership through the procedures set forth in section 3 of this article, not under corrective church discipline, not having been terminated (according to Section 4 of this article) and not falling under the stipulations of any of the other types of membership here enumerated will be considered regular members in good standing.
- b) Associate membership: The standing of "Associate Member" may be granted to persons in certain circumstances. Associate members will be treated as regular members but may be restricted from holding office or teaching roles in the church.
  - 1) Members who temporarily leave the area for various reasons (temporary work assignment, college, etc.), who wish to maintain their membership in this church will be granted associate membership. Such individuals should, at the same time, seek out a church in their area of temporary residence for fellowship, worship and accountability even while maintaining associate members status in this church. When such individuals return to the area, their membership will be resumed as regular membership, in the absence of any other circumstances that would affect their good standing as regular members.
  - 2) Members who leave the area and are subsequently unable to find a church with which they can conscientiously unite as members may hold associate member status. To maintain associate membership, such individuals must communicate regularly with the church. Such individuals will be encouraged to continue to seek out a church with which they can unite in membership as soon as the Lord directs.

- 3) We recognize that many individuals who hold to the overall system of reformed theology as expressed in the reformed confessions (such as the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Canons of Dort and the 2<sup>nd</sup> London Baptist Confession) nevertheless differ with us in regard to the mode and objects of baptism, holding that baptism is a sign and seal to be applied to believers and their children. While we firmly disagree with such brethren over the issue of baptism, we rejoice in our like-mindedness in many other areas. Moreover, such brethren may, at any given time, find difficulty in locating a like-minded, reformed church in the immediate area with which they might conscientiously unite in membership. Such individuals, furthermore, may find such a degree of oneness among us that they wish to be joined to our fellowship. Such individuals may, at the discretion of the elders, be granted associate membership in this church. They will not, however, be eligible to hold office or to function in any regular teaching capacity in the church.

### Section 3: Reception of New Members

The following procedures will be followed for those desiring membership in Sovereign Grace Fellowship:

- a) The person desiring membership will complete a membership application.
- b) The applicant will be required to complete a new members class. This class will provide an overview of the doctrines and practices of this church and the privileges and responsibilities of membership in the church. The specific content and length of the class will be determined by the elders.
- c) Following completion of the new members class, the applicant will be interviewed by the elders. The purpose of this interview will be to determine if the person fulfills the requirements for membership, is committed the responsibilities of membership and can cheerfully submit to the church's leadership and practices.
- d) If the applicant has been a member in another church, inquiry will be made as to the applicant's standing in that church and reasons for leaving. If the other church raises concerns or objections which the elders consider valid, the applicant may be denied membership.
- e) Following the above procedures, if the elders are satisfied that an applicant is qualified for membership, the applicant's name will be announced to the congregation in the morning worship service for 2 consecutive Lord's Days. This time period is to allow members the opportunity to raise any concerns or objections concerning the applicant's qualifications for membership. Members are encouraged to first attempt to resolve any concerns by private contact with the applicant. Concerns that are not resolved such contact should be shared, privately, with the elders. The elders will carefully investigate and seek to resolve any such objections or concerns and will postpone reception of the applicant into membership until such issues are resolved to their satisfaction.
- f) If there are no objections from the membership or if all objections have been resolved to the satisfaction of the elders, the applicant will be received into membership during a stated meeting of the church.

### Section 4: Termination of Membership

Membership in Sovereign Grace Fellowship may be terminated in three ways: by death, by transfer to another church and by exclusion.

- a) Death: When a member is removed from our midst by physical death, the elders will remove that person's name from the membership roll.
- b) Transfer: When a member relocates, he should give the utmost diligence to find a church in his new location where the Word of God is faithfully taught and practiced, to which he may be joined in membership. A member in good standing who wishes to transfer his membership to another church should make request to the elders, who may submit a letter of commendation to the church to which the member wishes to transfer his membership. No such letter will be granted to any member currently under church discipline. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of commendation to any church which, in their judgment, is disloyal to "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) or which does not exercise godly care over its members.
- c) Exclusion: Membership is initiated jointly by the voluntary commitment of the applicant and acceptance by the church. Accordingly, it follows that members may not terminate their membership unilaterally. If a member wishes to terminate his membership and does not seek transfer to another local church, he must be excluded from the membership of the church. In some cases a member's conduct may require that he be excluded from the church even though he expresses no wish to be excluded. Exclusion from the church may take two different forms: exclusion not under discipline and exclusion by excommunication.
  - 1) Exclusion not under discipline: In certain circumstances, a member may need to be excluded from membership under circumstances that, in the view of the elders, do not warrant corrective discipline. This would include the resignation of a member who concludes that he is not a Christian or who, for reasons that do not impugn his Christian profession, is no longer able or willing to fulfill the expectations of membership in Sovereign Grace Fellowship. Also included in this category are individuals who relocate without requesting a transfer to another church and who, subsequently, fail to maintain contact with the church. In all such cases, the elders will make efforts to resolve the situation in a way that does not require exclusion. After these efforts have been exhausted, the elders will recommend to the church, at a stated meeting, that the individual be excluded from membership.
  - 2) Excommunication: According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false and heretical doctrine, or who blatantly or persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church. The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Article VI, Section 2.c, of this Constitution. (Matt. 18:15 ff; 1 Cor. 5:1 ff; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10-11)

#### Section 5: Expectations of Membership

Membership in the local church is a covenant commitment to the body of Christ. Such commitment involves obligations as well as privileges. Each member is expected to live in accordance with the covenant he has made before the Lord and this congregation. The following list is a summary of the major expectations of the members of Sovereign Grace Fellowship.

- a) Members are expected to faithfully attend and participate in the church's stated meetings for public worship. (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1Cor. 11:18; Heb. 10:24-25)

- b) Members are expected to support and honor the overseers of the church, who have responsibility for teaching and watch-care over their souls. This support includes, but is not limited to, making regular prayers on their behalf, giving heed to their instruction and admonition, following their godly example, seeking to make acquaintance with them, being ready to assist them as needed and showing a willingness to cheerfully abide by their decisions regarding the corporate life of the church even when differing with their judgment. (Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:19; 1Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17)
- c) Members are expected to regularly contribute of their finances to the work of the Lord through the local church, as the Lord provides, and in proportion to their income. The Old Testament tithe (one-tenth of one's income), while not a "law" in the New Testament, should be seen as a biblical norm for basic giving. Gifts and offerings are amounts that are added in addition to this according to one's ability and willingness. (Mal. 3:8-10; Acts 11:28-30; 1Cor. 16:2; 2Cor. 8-9)
- d) As members of a local church, we are united together in one body, yet having many individual members. It is expected that each member will strive for the good and edification of the body and to maintain the spirit of unity in the bond of peace. Members are expected to cultivate acquaintance with one another and to maintain transparency and honesty so as to better pray for one another. They are expected to love, admonish and encourage one another; to meet material needs in the body as necessity requires; and to refrain from all backbiting and gossip. (Lev. 19:16; Psa. 15:2-3; Rom. 12:5; 1Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:1-16; Col. 2:1-3; 1Thess. 4:18; 5:11-14; Heb. 10:24-25; James 5:16; 1John 3:16-18)
- e) Members are expected to apply the teachings and principles of Scripture to family life and government. The husband is the God-appointed head of the family and must rule his household with gentleness, love, wisdom, and firmness. He is responsible, with the help of his wife, to bring up their children in the instruction and discipline of the Lord. This includes setting a godly example before them, leading them in family worship and regularly instructing them in the truths of the Word of God. This also means administering loving discipline, including corporal punishment, as needed. The wife must be in Scriptural subjection to her husband as head of the household. Children are to respectfully obey their parents in all things. The biblical duties of the family are in force even when the home is divided. The Christian husband must love his wife regardless of her spiritual state, and the Christian wife must likewise render to the husband her biblical duties even if he is not a believer. Single believers must keep themselves pure in this immoral age and give themselves only to a godly, growing, believer. Counsel, wisdom, and guidance must be sought by those in authority over them. In the event of believers who are widowed or divorced, the church will seek to provide the comfort and aid due them, particularly in the raising of children who are fatherless or motherless. (Deut. 6:4-9; Psa. 78:1-8; Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 29:15; 1Cor. 7; 11:3; Eph. 5:22-6:4; Col. 3:18-21; Heb. 12:7; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7)
- f) Each member is expected to regularly make use of the means of grace available to them such as personal and family Bible reading and prayer and proper observance of the Lord's Day for rest and worship. (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Psa. 1:1-2; 119:11, 97; Isa. 58:13-14; Matt. 6:6; Luke 18:1; Acts 20:7; 1Cor. 16:2; 1John 1:9; Rev. 1:10)
- g) It is the duty of every Christian, as an individual and as a member of a local church, to labor by prayer, word, and deed for the extension of the kingdom of God in ever widening circles beginning at home and stretching forth to the ends of the earth. Therefore, every member of this church is expected prayerfully to recognize and to seize every opportunity to bear witness to his faith in Christ, both by consistent Christian conduct and by the testimony of his lips. (Isa. 54:1-3; Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:15)

- h) Each member of the church is expected to render loyal obedience to all the moral precepts of God's Word in his daily life. If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in His Word, a Christian is at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God and to glorify Him in all things, a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren, a compassion for the lost, and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul. (Rom. 8:3-4; Rom. 15:1-3; 1 Cor. 8-10; Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Pet. 1:17-19; 2:16)

#### Section 6: Membership Records

The elders will keep careful records of the membership of the church including both past and present members.

### **Article VI: Church Discipline**

#### Section 1: Formative Discipline

Every disciple of Christ must be under His discipline (His instruction and correction), which is administered to each one both personally and through the church. Mutual submission to one another and to the eldership which the Lord has set over His church will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when one's failure to respond to this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary. (Acts 5:1-11; 1Cor. 11:30-32; 12:12-27; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:11-15; 5:21; 1Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25; 13:17; 1Pet. 5:5; Rev. 2:22-23)

#### Section 2: Corrective Discipline

Corrective church discipline becomes necessary whenever heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral or scandalous conduct is discovered among the membership of the church. As a general rule, an effort must be made to bring the offender to repentance through private counsel and admonition before more public steps are taken. The principles given to us in Matt. 18:15-16, Rom. 16:17-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim. 5:19-20 and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and appropriately applied to each case of corrective discipline. In some cases, public reproof may be warranted. In the most extreme cases, excommunication from the church may be necessary. (Gal. 6:1; Matt. 18:15-17; 1Tim. 1:19-20; James 5:19-20)

The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender. For these reasons, church members should pray earnestly for God's gracious, restorative blessing on those under church discipline.

As the church is under the authority of Scripture, its discipline must be according to the principles of Scripture. This includes public verbal reproof, social avoidance and withdrawal of distinctively Christian fellowship. These are intended to effect repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame. The church has no right, however, to confiscate goods, revoke conjugal rights, or inflict corporal punishment of any kind. Nevertheless, a member guilty of criminal actions may be delivered to the civil authorities according to the rule of Scripture. (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17; 1Cor. 5:9-11; 2Thess. 3:6, 14; 1Tim. 5:20; 1 Pet. 4:15)

- a) *Public reproof*: Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort before the gathered church to call an impenitent member to repentance for sin too blatant to be dealt with in an exclusively private manner. Public repentance may be necessary to deal with serious sin even where there has been private repentance. The elders may, therefore, require such a member to publicly confess his repentance before the church. The elders may administer public censure whenever in their judgment public misconduct, patterns of sin, or serious doctrinal error pose a significant threat to the godliness, unity, or testimony of the congregation. Those who humbly receive public censure, own and confess their sin and manifest a transformed life will be publicly commended for their godly repentance. If within a reasonable period of time public censure is not heeded, further discipline will be imposed. (Prov. 28:13; 2Cor. 7:7-11; Gal. 2:11-14; Titus 1:10-13)

- b) *Suspension of Privileges*: The Bible teaches that, in many circumstances, it is necessary for a public rebuke to be accompanied by the suspension of some of the privileges of church membership, such as participation in leading or teaching roles, voting and participation in the Lord's Supper. This step is intended to bring about repentance by the offender being “*put to shame*”. However, in all cases of suspension, the offender is still to be counted as a brother in Christ and a member of the church. (Rom. 16:17-18; 2Thess. 3:14-15)
- 1) Suspension is required in the following cases: one who has committed a private offense against another and refuses to repent and resolve the situation after the steps in Matt. 18:15-16 have been graciously followed; one who persists in the propagation of errant doctrines or divisive teachings or behaviors; one who is guilty of scandalous sin that has brought reproach on the name of Christ, but whose repentance is still in question; one who persists in disorderly conduct; one who shows contempt of church discipline by absenting himself from the meetings of the church, or refusing to meet with the elders so that a matter may be investigated.
  - 2) In order to be valid, suspension must be enacted at a special or regular meeting of the church in which the elders recommend suspension of privileges for the offending member. The elders must specify the grounds for discipline and what privileges are to be suspended. The suspension must be enacted by at least a two-thirds majority vote of the members present and voting. The elders may, however, at their discretion, enact a temporary suspension, for a short time, until a congregational vote can be taken.
  - 3) When the Lord blesses the act of suspension by bringing the offender to repentance, then the brother or sister will be restored to all the privileges of membership. However, in the case that, after a reasonable time, the offender does not come to true repentance, the elders will recommend that he or she be excommunicated from the church.
- c) *Excommunication*: Excommunication is the final and most serious form of corrective discipline. In cases of excommunication, the offending member is cut off from the fellowship of the church and treated as a “Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17). Excommunication must be enacted by at least a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting at a special or regular meeting. In all cases of corrective discipline, excommunication should be resorted to only after prayerful and careful admonition of the offending party. Even when excommunication must be enacted, the end goal is repentance and restoration of someone who is ensnared in sin or false doctrine.
- 1) If a member who is under suspension does not repent after a reasonable period of time, the elders will recommend that he or she be excommunicated. (Matt. 18:15-17)
  - 2) Some sins are of such a scandalous and heinous nature that preliminary steps of public reproof and suspension are inadequate to address the situation and the reproach brought on the name of Christ. In such situations, the elders will make earnest and prayerful efforts to bring the offender to repentance by personal admonitions. If these efforts are unsuccessful, the elders will recommend that the individual be excommunicated. (1Cor. 5:1-8)
  - 3) In addition to those who have persisted in sin after suspension, some errors in doctrine are so serious as to be categorized as “heresy.” These are teachings that are inconsistent with the gospel and a credible profession of faith. In the case of someone who holds and/or propagates such false teaching after earnest and repeated admonition from the elders is to be excommunicated in the same way as the person guilty of scandalous sin. (Gal. 1:6-9; 1Tim. 1:19-20; Titus 3:10)

- d) *Restoration*: Those who demonstrate true repentance after suspension or excommunication, are to be forgiven and restored to full membership. This will be done by a two-thirds majority vote at a special or regular meeting of the membership. (2Cor. 2:6-8)

## **Article VII: Church Officers**

### Section 1: General Statement

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church. He has ordained that individual churches be governed by Himself through officers whom He appoints, who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. The two kinds of church officers appointed by Christ are elders and deacons. Elders are also called “overseers” because they are charged with the oversight of the church of God, and “Pastors” because they are responsible to shepherd the flock of God. The names, “elder,” “pastor,” and “overseer” are three designations of one and the same office in the New Testament Church. The elders are responsible for the oversight and government of the flock of God. Therefore, this church’s form of government will be rule by elders. Beside the offices of elder and deacon the Scriptures acknowledge no other offices which continue in the church today. (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; Eph. 4:11-12; Col. 1:18; 1Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-7; Heb. 13:17, 24; 1Pet. 5:2)

### Section 2: General prerequisites:

- a) All officers of this church must be regular members.
- b) Any individual set apart to one of these offices must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's confessions of faith and constitution. If he should at any time move from this agreement, he is under immediate, spiritual and moral obligation to make that fact known to the elders privately.
- c) While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given to women and the wonderful assistance they may render to the officers of the church, the Bible prohibits them from holding either the office of deacon or elder. Women, therefore, will not be nominated, elected, or ordained to either of these offices in the church. (Rom. 16:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7, 11; Phil. 4:3)

### Section 3: Elders

- a) **Authority and responsibility**: The elders have a real authority as those appointed by the Spirit to govern and oversee the church and care for the souls of God's people. Their authority, however is grounded in and limited by the Scriptures, which are the only infallible and unchanging rule of practice for Christ's church. The elders are responsible, before God, for preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God, watching out for the welfare of the soul of every member of the church and giving direction and leadership to the church in all its tasks. (Acts 20:20, 28; 1Pet. 5:1-4)
  - 1) The elders are to exercise their authority under the headship of Christ with patience, sensitivity and genuine concern for the welfare of God's people. They are set an example for others to follow and to lead as those who are servants to Christ and His church. When exercising their authority, they are to seek to gain the consciences of God's people through the ministry of the Word. (Ezek. 34:4; 1Thess. 1:7-8; 2Thess. 3:9; 2Tim. 2:24; Heb. 13:7; 1Pet. 5:1-4)

- 2) The Word of God defines the sphere and limits of the authority of the elders. The elders are always bound to the Scriptures as the basis for their authority. Insofar as the instruction of the elders is in accord with the Scriptures, that instruction carries with it the authority of Christ Himself. Where the Scriptures give explicit or implicit direction to the church on any issue, this direction is to be obeyed. Where no regulative word from Christ is given, elders must exercise their authority in subjection to the general principles of Scripture and the light of nature and Christian prudence. The elders may not make all decisions unilaterally. Scripture teaches that appointment of officers and excommunication of members require the consent of the church. Congregational approval is required for any change to this Constitution (see Article XII). The sale or purchase of real estate or the taking on of financial indebtedness also require approval by congregational vote, to be taken at any properly called business meeting. Additionally, the elders should always seek the support of and input from the congregation respecting any major endeavor. (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1Cor. 5:4-5; 14:36-38; Luke 10:16; 1Cor. 11:13-14; 14:40)
- 3) The authority of the elders is limited to the sphere of the local church. They may not require consequences for sin beyond those of church discipline, invade the spheres of other ordained human authorities (husbands, fathers, civil rulers and employers), or command God's people regarding matters not specified in Scripture. They must, however, order the house of God by the application of His Word (Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Cor. 7:25-28; 35-40).
- 4) The elders are not only shepherds over the flock but are, themselves, members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is entitled to the same privileges, obligated by the same responsibilities and subject to the same discipline as are all other members of the church. Each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and accountable to the church as a whole. (Matt. 18:17; 23:9; 26:31; Acts 20:28; Gal. 2:11)
- 5) The authority of every elder (overseer or pastor) is the same. Thus, every elder has equal rule in the church, although gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from elder to elder. (Gal. 2:11; 1Pet. 5:1-2; 1Tim. 5:17)

b) Number of elders and length of term:

- 1) The Scriptures clearly teach that there should normally be a plurality of elders in every local church. However, Scripture does not specify the number of elders that each church should have, nor does Scripture limit the period of time that a man should continue in the office of an elder. Therefore, there will not be a fixed number of elders in this church, and each elder will continue in office as long as he continues to be qualified, able and willing and as long as he holds the confidence of the congregation. The church should seek to discover and formally recognize all those men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite graces and gifts, as well as desire, to serve as elders. (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5)
- 2) If, in God's providence, Sovereign Grace Fellowship were to have only one elder, the church should pray fervently that God would raise up others. The sole elder, with the consent of the congregation, is urged to seek spiritual oversight for himself and his family from the eldership of a sister church with which we have fellowship. He should seek counsel from these spiritual overseers in matters of importance in the life of the church. However, his use of such counsel deprives him of none of the authority, and relieves him of none of the responsibility, of his office as elder in this church. Likewise, his use of such counsel does not grant these spiritual overseers the authority of elders in this church or give the sister church any authoritative oversight in the affairs of this church.

- c) Qualifications of elders: Anyone desiring the office of an elder must evidence to God's people the personal, domestic and ministerial qualifications clearly set for in Scripture. (1Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)

#### Section 4: Deacons

- a) Overview and Duties: Christ has instituted the office of deacon as an aid to the people of God in general and to the elders of the church in particular. The office of deacon is a serving rather than a ruling office. Deacons are primarily responsible for assisting the elders in the practical aspects of ministry so that the elders may devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer and shepherding the flock, without undo distraction. Such practical matters normally include administration of benevolence, maintenance and improvement of the church's facilities, the management of designated business affairs and the facilitation of ministries within the church. The deacons must fulfill their duties in cooperation with and in subjection to the elders, who ultimately have oversight of all aspects of the church. (Acts 6:1-6; 1Tim. 3:10)
- b) Qualifications of deacons: Anyone wishing to serve as a deacon must evidence, to the people of God, the qualifications set forth in the Scriptures. (Acts 6:3; 1Tim. 3:8-13)
- c) Number of deacons and length of term: The number of deacons is not fixed, and the church should set apart as many men as are needed who have all the biblical qualifications for the office. The Scriptures do not specify a length of time for a man to continue in the office of deacon. Therefore, a deacon will continue to serve in this office as long as he continues to be qualified, able and willing and as long as he holds the confidence of the congregation.

#### Section 5: Appointment of officers

- a) General statement: The appointment of officers in the church is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of His church. He has, however, ordained that the church prayerfully recognize and appoint those whom He has gifted and called to these offices. Each potential officer should have a desire for the office, and the church should take pains to affirm that the man meets the necessary qualifications for the office. In no case may a man be nominated for an office without his prior consent. The elders are ultimately responsible for the installation of officers with the laying on of hands. Therefore, each officer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but also of the eldership. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never proceed without much prayerful waiting upon God, and careful consideration of the relevant passage of Scripture and thorough, objective evaluation of those being considered. (Acts 6:1-6; 1Tim. 3:1; 4:14; 5:22)
- b) Process of recognition:
  - 1) Nomination: Nominations for the offices of elder and deacon are to be made by the eldership. All members of the church are encouraged to express their views to the eldership (privately) concerning those they believe that Christ has gifted for office in the church. The elders will seriously consider the wisdom God gives to His church, as they prayerfully consider whether any of those suggested by the church members possess the gifts and graces prerequisite to the office and should, in fact, be nominated for such. (Acts 6:3-6; 14:23; Titus 1:5)

- 2) Congregational approval: When the elders wish to nominate a man for office, they will notify the congregation. The name(s) of men being nominated will be announced at least four consecutive Lord's Days prior to a congregational meeting for public discussion and congregational vote on the nominee. During this time, members have a solemn obligation to prayerfully assess the nominee in light of the relevant Scripture passages, to determine whether he meets the qualifications for the office to which he is nominated. Any member who has concerns or questions about the nominee is obligated to contact him or one of the elders. If concerns are not resolved to the satisfaction of the elders, the congregational vote may be postponed.

At the congregational meeting for the election of officers, the nominee and any immediate family members will be asked to leave the room while the congregation discusses his qualifications and fitness for office. After discussion and the return of the nominee and his family to the meeting, a written ballot will be taken. The church should seek unanimity concerning each nominee. However, a minimum three-fourths majority vote of the members present and voting will be required for the election of an officer. If there is more than one nominee at any one time, the name of each will be separately discussed and voted on.

- c) Installation: Following the election of any officer, a portion of a regular worship service will be set aside, at which time the officer will be installed with prayer and the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

#### Section 6: Review of officers

- a) All officers are appointed for life or until they either no longer desire the office or no longer meet the qualifications for office. Any officer may make request to the elders (or the rest of the eldership in the case of an elder) to be temporarily relieved of the duties of his office, if he is providentially hindered from fulfilling his duties for a period of time. If the elders determine that such a leave is advisable and that the officer's qualifications are not in question, then they will establish a reasonable period of time, after which the officer's case will be discussed again to ensure that he is qualified and able to resume his regular duties.
- b) There may be times when an officer's qualifications for office are brought into question. A congregational meeting to review the qualifications of an elder may be called by a majority of the elders (or a majority of the other elders in the case of an elder). Such a meeting may also be called by request of the church. Such request must be in writing, with the signatures of at least one-fourth of the voting membership of the church. The request must be submitted to the elders, who will call such a meeting. Any such meeting will be announced at least four consecutive Lord's Days prior to the meeting.

At any meeting called for review of an officer, the officer in question and his immediate family members will be asked to leave the room till the issue has been adequately discussed. The scriptural qualifications for office must form the basis for any discussion and/or decision of the church. The officer's qualifications must be openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect to the officer's reputation. After discussion and prior to a vote, the officer under discussion will be permitted to return to the meeting to defend himself. A vote will then be taken by written ballot. While unanimity should be sought, a minimum three-fourths majority vote of those members present and voting will be required for confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing confirmation will be immediately removed from office.
- c) Any officer may resign from his office by submitting a resignation to the elders in writing.

### Section 7: Full-time support of elders

All elders are equal in office and authority. However, they will have diverse gifts and levels of experience and ability for various dimensions of the pastoral office. Particularly, some will be more gifted and adept in the ministry of public preaching and teaching than others. The Scriptures teach that those elders who rule well, and especially those who are devoted to preaching and teaching, are worthy of full financial support. In view of this diversity of gifts and the many responsibilities involved in the pastoral ministry, it is highly desirable that, as the church's financial situation permits, at least one elder be able to devote himself full-time to the work of preaching, teaching and oversight of the church as his life's calling. (Rom. 12:3-8; 1Cor. 12:4-7; Gal. 6:6; 1Tim. 5:17-18)

## **Article VIII: Official Board of Directors**

In order to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's", the corporate board of directors of Sovereign Grace Fellowship will consist of the elders and deacons. These will annually elect, from among their number, a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The board of directors, acting as such, will perform such legal and business transactions as are specifically designated to them by the state of Pennsylvania.

## **Article IX: Ordinances**

### Section 1: General Statement

There are two ordinances of special significance that our Lord commanded us to observe, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Neither of these have any saving merit nor is any grace automatically imparted to the recipient through the water of baptism or the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, they are means of grace and powerful aids to the faith of believers who properly participate in them. They are to be observed to edification and in an orderly fashion. (Matt. 26:26-30; 28:19; Acts 8:13, 18-24; 1Cor. 11:17-32; 14:40)

### Section 2: Baptism

Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for baptism, and all such persons should be baptized and joined to a local church. Believing that baptism in water is the God-ordained sign of one's personal union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection and the door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, we will only receive into regular membership those who have been baptized as confessing believers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (however, see Article V, Section 2.3.b above on associate membership). The biblical mode of baptism is by immersion. However, a true believer whose baptism involved an irregularity of mode or circumstance may be recommended for membership at the discretion of the elders. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 8:36-39; Rom. 6:3-7; Col. 2:12)

### Section 3: The Lord's Supper

While baptism is the initiatory ordinance of entrance into the visible church and should be observed by each believer only once, the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated frequently, by the assembled church. This is a holy ordinance, to be observed with dignity and in an orderly fashion. However, the bread and the cup remain only symbols of the broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Believing that only believers who are under the government of the local church are to be admitted to the privileges of the church, and in light of the unity of the whole Body of Christ under its one Head, we invite all those believers, and only those, who are members in good standing of local churches holding to the essential doctrines and disciplines of historic Protestantism to partake of the Lord's Supper. (1Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26; Eph. 4:4-6)

## **Article X: Meetings**

### Section 1: Annual business meeting

The annual business meeting will be held on the last Monday in October. At this meeting, the annual financial report will be presented and approved. Reports will be received from the elders and deacons, along with any committee or ministry reports requested by the elders. Other business may be conducted, including but not limited to, the initial election of new officers.

### Section 2: Occasional business meetings

In addition to the annual business meeting, other business meetings may be called by the elders or by written request of one-fourth of the voting members of the church. This request must state the purpose of the meeting and be signed by one-fourth of the voting members. The request is to be presented to the elders, who will schedule the meeting. No other business will be transacted at such a meeting.

### Section 3: Voting

The voting membership of the church will be made up of all members (regular and associate) not under suspension. The voting members present at any properly called business meeting will constitute a quorum for the purposes of transacting business. In all matters of church business, we will make it our goal to prayerfully discern the mind of God, according to the teaching and principles of Scripture. However, whenever unanimity is not realized, except where this constitution requires a different proportion, a minimum two-thirds majority vote will be required to make a motion valid.

### Section 4: Notice of meetings

Except for cases where this constitution requires a longer period of time, all meetings requiring a congregational vote on any business of the church will be announced from the pulpit for at least two consecutive Lord's Days immediately preceding the meeting. Meetings where there will be no congregational vote on any matters may be called upon shorter notice at the discretion of the elders.

## **Article XI: Property and Finances**

### Section 1: Private inurement

No part of the net earning of this Church will inure to the benefit of or be distributable to its members, directors, officers, or other private persons, except that the Church will be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for the services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Article II of this Constitution.

### Section 2: Dissolution

Upon the dissolution of the corporation, the Board of Directors, after paying or making provision for the payment of all of the liabilities of the corporation, shall dispose of all the assets of the corporation to such organization(s) organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization(s) under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or corresponding provision of any future United States Revenue Law), as the Board of Directors shall determine. Any such assets not so disposed of shall be disposed of by the Court of Common Pleas of the county in which the principal office of the corporation is then located, exclusively for such purposes as said court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

## **Article XII: Amendments**

Amendments to this constitution must be approved by a three-fourths majority of the voting members present at a regular business meeting or a special meeting called for this purpose. The proposed amendment must be announced and circulated, in writing, to the congregation at least four weeks prior to such meeting.