



Covenant Community Basics

Love God.
Love Others.
Make Disciples!



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Introduction

Why this guide?

Thanks for considering joining the Grace Church Covenant Community! We believe we are part of a great mission! Loving God, Loving Others and Making Disciples of Jesus, where ever they are on their journey, is life changing for them and for us. Ultimately it impacts our community and world. To join others who believe like you do in such a cause is a significant step in your personal pilgrimage. In so doing you surrender your independence and confess that not only do you need God, you need others. It is one of those watershed moments in following Jesus. We are glad you are considering us as your friends and welcome you to explore membership in the Covenant as we follow Jesus together.

This "Guide" has two purposes:

1. To help prospective members understand what membership in the Covenant Community means
2. To serve as a reference for all members of the Covenant Community, a reminder of what we're about here at Grace

Why Membership in the Covenant Community?

Some Reasons

You might wonder, "What is the point of formal membership in the Covenant Community? If I sincerely profess faith in Jesus Christ, why is anything else needed? Isn't it enough just to attend the church services without actually becoming a member?" Here are some reasons we feel membership in the Covenant Community can help us achieve what we desire most as disciples of Jesus:

1. Membership in the Covenant Community commits me to a great mission.

Love God. Love Others. Make Disciples!

2. It commits me to a community of committed people.

Without a high level of care and commitment to God and others, we don't experience community, because shallow commitments lead to superficial relationships.

3. It helps me keep my expectations clear.

A clearly defined membership in the Covenant Community enables clarity on our common values and what we expect of each other.

4. It affirms that we hold to common values and beliefs.

Without defining our core beliefs and values, we could find ourselves playing from different "sheets of music," or building on different foundations with differing blueprints.

5. It helps us understand our calling and use gifts and abilities collectively.

In many churches, the members are the customers and the pastors are the staff, hired and expected to meet their needs. At Grace, we have a completely different understanding of what it means to be a member. Here the pastors develop us so we can reach out and lead others to be disciples of Jesus. By having a defined membership in the Covenant Community, we know who is on the team, and we can be sure they find their best "position" on the team — the place where they will be most effective and fulfilled as we work together to change our world.

6. It counts you in as a host to newcomers.

You are also the face of Jesus to every first-time visitor and newcomer to Grace, any guest to our church is your guest too.

7. It allows for ownership.

Members can participate in the internal affairs and decisions regularly made in the operations of our community.

8. It opens the door for leadership roles. The key leadership positions in the church require membership in the Covenant Community as a prerequisite.

Becoming a Member in the Covenant Community

How to Make Your Commitment

There are three steps to becoming a member at Grace:

1. **Connection and Investigation:** Work through Grace 101 and read "Community Basics". Complete the Bible Study and questions.
2. **Affirmation:** Meet with your assigned guide, process your work with them and work through any outstanding questions. When ready complete the Membership Application and discuss it with your guide.
3. **Celebration:** Celebrate your membership in the Covenant Community publicly at a weekend Worship Service.

Grace's Story

Our Journey

Our mission, values and vision are no accident. They are a result of God's shaping us through the years.

Our roots go back to the Anabaptist spiritual renewal movements of the Protestant Reformation. In spite of intense persecution, men and women were baptized on confirmation of their faith. Their desire to follow God and impact their world was so strong that hundreds gave their lives as martyrs. This passion and commitment drew thousands to follow Christ and marked the early Mennonite movement in Europe. They were marked by a desire to change the world by sharing the good news of Christ. They resolved to live at peace with all, never bearing arms. They were persecuted for their faith and it drew them even closer to God. Their impact has been felt around the world. It was from this group that the founders of our movement and our church came. With them came their dependence on God born out of the years of difficulty and their passion to truly follow Him and make a difference.

In 1961 Grace Church was begun as a response to the need in our community for English speaking ministry. The desire of the founding members was to bring across into the English language the Evangelical Anabaptist vision of the church. Up until that time German had been the dominant language of worship in our area. There was a strong desire to make disciples of the non-Mennonite English speaking families of our community.

Our first meeting place was the Winkler Bible School. (The site was opposite the current Winkler Elementary School) It was here that our original thirty-two charter members met, formed a church, had their first baptisms and called their first pastor, Bernie Loepky. He served us faithfully until 1971.

These were exciting, innovative times. In 1962 the first building was built (960 Pembina). Construction began in late September and people literally worked day and night! The building was dedicated ten weeks later on December 16! We stretched the boundaries of what was acceptable not only because we spoke English but because we embraced women in leadership and even had member meetings on Sunday afternoons! Some have said, "We might have been a touch arrogant!"

Children and youth were a rewarding part of our ministry. We were a young church and the enthusiasm of our people was contagious. We took seriously the challenge of making disciples of Jesus.

In 1971 Pastor Bernie left. John Krahn came that summer and brought with him his personal warmth for God and others. This deepened the sense of acceptance and belonging that marked our church. Many are here in our congregation today because of his warm invitations.

He also encouraged us in our stewardship. There was an unwritten understanding that 50% of all our giving should go to missions beyond the geographical borders of our church. Even when we embarked upon an education wing in the mid-seventies, our concern for lost people around the world was not forgotten. During these years a number of our congregation served and have continued to serve with MCC and other mission agencies. Our church continued to grow under his leadership. An associate pastor position was added, and the church doubled in membership. With this growth and the arrival of our third pastor, Chris Arney in 1984 we dedicated our current building to the glory of God.

Children's programs, choirs, pierogi fundraisers, care groups and a dynamic youth groups marked our experience. Our youth ministry emphasized discipleship and grew to be city wide. We enjoyed solid leadership with Lead Pastors Arnie Neufeld and Herb Franz.

But all was not well. Although the church was full we seemed to lack a common vision. Some thought we should build, others thought we should plant a church. Youth felt separate from the church. Passion for God seemed to be diminishing. We were divided over our denominational affiliation. Our following of Jesus tended to be more a matter of keeping appearances and doing the "right" thing rather than a vibrant relationship with God in which we worked with him to change our world. So, as we entered into 2014 people began leaving. Saturday Night at Grace (SNG) concluded (our service for contemporary worship) and division was experienced over pastoral leadership. With Pastor Keith's departure we stopped and realized we needed to get serious about listening to God.

In late 2017, under our Transition Pastor's leadership, we as a church took time to look back and re-surrender to God's call on us. He has taken us back to our roots. Today there is no question in our minds. We must be a community of grace marked by love, mercy and truth where searching people find hope in Jesus and those who have found Him discover their place in the larger story of His "wild" love.

Grace's Mission

Why do we exist as a church?

We believe church is about the transformation of the world! **"The church exists not only for the benefit of its members; but to equip its members for the work of ministry!"** (Eph 4:11-16) It is a means to an end not an end in itself. Jesus created the church to catalyze His Kingdom (reign) in the hearts of people here on earth and transform their lives living out his love and values in the world. It has nothing to do with church. It is as we follow Him, living and loving like he did that His Kingdom comes through transformed lives. So, our mission is to...

Love God. Love Others. Make Disciples!

Grace's Values

Who has God shaped us to be?

These values were identified in congregational conversations. They are born out of our history and God's shaping of us.

1. Experiencing God Matters

We value a personal, experienced relationship with God through prayer, study, worship and surrender. Such experiences are marked by the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ and the power of God the Father. They confirm that God is with us.

2. Grace Filled Community Matters

We value loving people just as Jesus did. Life transformation takes place through welcoming, compassionate, authentic relationships guided by the Holy Spirit, not just the imparting of information. Therefore, everything we do is done from a relational grace-filled core.

3. The Mission of Jesus Matters

We value reaching lost people through relationships with the love of Christ. Lost people matter to God and therefore matter to us whether at home or abroad.

4. Developing Disciples of Jesus Matters

We value innovative discipleship of individuals that is relational and intergenerational. It results in passionate lovers of Christ, transformed by His Spirit and empowered for ministry.

5. Our Stories Matter

We value the faith, sacrifice and struggle of those who have gone before us. Marked by a conviction of biblical authority and the gospel of Christ they gave all and lived true to His call. Such a faith heritage provides a helpful rudder in a world that is constantly changing.

6. Humility Matters

We value a posture of dependence on God and submission to one another in the love of Christ. In our brokenness we need Him and each other.

Grace's Vision

Where is God leading us?

We see a passionate worshiping community of people who are deepening in their love for God while reaching out to others with His Good News. Filled with His transforming Spirit, captivated by His love and marked by miracles, they minister and care for people with grace, compassion and power. They are a safe people who bring the lost home to God.

- **Imagine a wonderful mix of surrendered people who love God and others.**
They are no longer comfortable with the fleeting dreams of success and prosperity. They are captivated by the idea that this world is not about them, but all about Jesus. They are mesmerized by His story and His heart for their community. They gather to worship Him. They share with others of what He has done for them.
- **Imagine a people committed to authentic community.**
They love others as Christ loved them, sacrificially, graciously and with great joy. They have surrendered their independence for interdependence creating a place of belonging and safety.
- **Imagine a people empowered to fulfill Christ's mission in the world.**
They are disciples, they make disciples and they grow disciples! They lovingly hold each other accountable.
- **Imagine a people passionate for others, giving all that others might live.**
They rise to impossible challenges as called by God - whether financial or personal and make a difference.

Who are these people? By God's grace they are and will be us!

Grace's Beliefs

Our Confession of Faith

The following beliefs are at the heart of all we say and do at Grace Church. We believe in the historic Christian faith, reflected in these statements:

- We believe in the one living and true God, perfect, infinite and eternal, existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19; John 10:30; John 15:26; II Corinthians 13:14)
- We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, born of the Virgin Mary, in His perfect humanity, His atoning death, His bodily resurrection from the dead and His personal triumphant return. (Matthew 16:16; Luke 1:31-33; I Peter 3:18; Luke 24:6, 39; Acts 1:11)
- We believe that the Bible was given by divine inspiration and, in the original manuscripts, is the infallible Word of God. As such, it constitutes the only trustworthy guide in all matters pertaining to Christian faith and conduct. II Peter 1:20, 21
- We believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and a future state determined by divine judgment. (I Corinthians 15:54-57; I Thessalonians 4:13 - 18; Revelation 20:12)
- We believe a Christian is one saved by grace, whose life is transformed into the likeness of Christ by His atoning death and the power of His resurrection, and who will seek to obey the Biblical admonition of non-conformity to the world. (Ephesians 2:8 - 10; II Corinthians 5:17; I John 1:6, 7; Romans 12:1, 2) Further, we believe that there is "salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved". (Acts 4:12)

- We believe in the Holy Spirit who is one with the Father and the Son and who by means of the Word applies to our hearts the things of God. (John 14:16, 17, 26; John 15:26; John 16 7-14)
- We believe in the scriptural teaching of peace, love and non-resistance as it applies not only to carnal warfare, but to every area of the Christian's social life.
- We believe in the church as the body of Jesus Christ, a community of believers, gifted by the Holy Spirit, responsible to God and to each other. (Ephesians 4: 11-16)
- We believe in the practice of Scriptural Church discipline. (Matthew 18:15-18; Galatians 6:1)

Grace's Church Covenant

The Covenant of Grace Church

As those who have experienced the grace of a life changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to reflect the character of Christ through the pursuit of certain attitudes and actions and the rejection of others. The Scriptures refer to this reality as "living by the Spirit" (Rom. 8).

I covenant...

- To submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues (Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).
- To pursue the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and practice of spiritual disciplines (Luke 18:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 9:24- 27; Eph. 5:1-21; 1 Thess. 5:12-22).
- To follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the ordinances prescribed to His Church:
 - by being baptized after my conversion.
 - by regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through communion.
- To regularly participate in the life of Grace Church by attending weekly services, engaging in gospel-centered community and serving those within and outside of this church (Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25; Titus 3:14).
- To steward the resources God has given me, including time, talents, spiritual gifts and finances. This includes regular financial giving, service and participation in community that is generous, cheerful and voluntary (Matt. 25:14-30; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).
- By God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk in holiness in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:13-16, 4:1-3). Believers should strive to put certain attitudes and actions to death while stirring and stimulating love and good deeds through the Spirit. Below are a few examples of actions addressed in the Scriptures:

- I will practice complete chastity unless married and, if married, complete fidelity within heterosexual and monogamous marriage. Complete chastity and fidelity means, among other things, that regardless of my marital status, I will pursue purity and abstain from sexually immoral practices such as adultery, premarital sex and pornography (Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 10:8; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4).
 - I will seek to preserve the gift of marriage and agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at Grace Church before pursuing divorce from my spouse (Matt. 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10-11; for the role of the church in the process of divorce, see Paul's concern for the resolution of legal matters within the assembly of the church in 1 Cor. 6).
 - I will refrain from illegal drug use, drunkenness, gossip and other sinful behavior as the Bible dictates (Rom. 1:28-32; 13:13; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:18; James 3:3-18).
- g. To refrain from such activities that the Scriptures would deem foolish (Rom. 14:14-23).
- h. To take seriously the responsibility of Christian freedom, especially actions or situations that could present a stumbling block to another (1 Cor. 8:1-13).
- i. To submit to the discipline of God through His Holy Spirit by:
- following the biblical procedures for church discipline where sin is evident in another—the hope of such discipline being repentance and restoration.
 - receiving righteous and loving discipline when approached biblically by fellow believers (Ps. 141:5; Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; Heb. 12:5-11).
- j. To do the following when I sin:
- confess my sin to God and to fellow believers.
 - repent and seek help to put my sin to death (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5; James 5:16; 1 John 1:6-10).
- k. To submit to the leadership of the church and diligently strive for unity and peace within the church (Eph. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5).
- l. To do the following should I leave the church for good reasons:
- to notify the appropriate staff member on the campus I attend.
 - to seek another church with which I can carry out my biblical responsibilities as a believer.

Grace's Approach

How we will work together

At the core of our vision **is making disciples of Jesus**. The question is, "How will we do this?" Before we can even tackle that question, we need to answer a more fundamental one. What **is** a disciple of Jesus?

Definition:

A disciple of Jesus is not necessarily one who:

- has their life together
- has been a Christian many years
- has a church ministry
- has high moral standards
- devotes many hours to the church

So then, what is a disciple of Jesus? We suggest that a disciple is a follower of Jesus. Think of a journey...

Very simply a disciple is one who is willing to take the next step with Jesus no matter where they are on the road of life.

Taking the next step with Jesus usually means more surrender. It means letting God have his way in our lives a little more. Often that means letting go of some of our wants or desires for control and risking a step of faith. Disciples do not always know the next step, but as it becomes clear they are willing to take it. However, there is one step that is clear and absolutely essential.

What is it? It is the step that resolves the fundamental question of leadership. When Jesus presented the good news (gospel), he always confronted people with the issue of his leadership – “Will you follow me?” Whether it was the woman at the well, the rich young ruler or Nicodemus, the bottom line was the “kingdom of God” – his rule in our lives. So, to be a disciple and follow Him means we must give up our own kingdoms – whether relationships, wealth, or power – and embrace God's kingdom. The reward for taking Jesus seriously is life at a whole new level. At Grace our mission is to lead people to be disciples of Jesus. At the heart of this are the words of Jesus himself when he said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” This surrender of our lives is nothing short of conversion.

We are all at different points on our journey. Let us help you discern where you are on this relational journey with God.

An Approach to Leading People to be Disciples of Jesus

Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus. We do this by helping people, no matter where they are on life's journey to take the next step with Him. This means that we don't exist for the sake of the institution of the church. We exist to journey with you and help you clarify and respond to the very personal call that God has on your life, whether you be a skeptic or a lifelong follower of Jesus. Grace doesn't complicate your life it actually simplifies it and helps you discover what is important and what is not. It challenges you to surrender the unnecessary and focus your life. It connects you to others on the journey, helps you understand how God is shaping you, enables you to discover His call on your life and resources you to live out your calling which always involves helping others on their journey!

This is Grace! It's not more church, more activities, more religion for the church's sake – it's more of a relationship with Jesus and his followers on the journey of life.

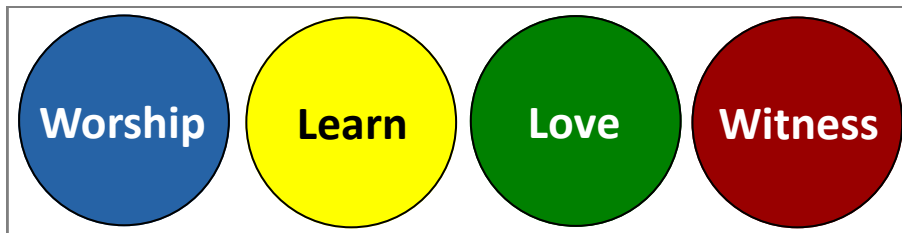
It's a place we believe Jesus would like. Grace doesn't give burdens – it lightens the load!

making disciples of Jesus

Question #1 What do we do?

We help people take their next step with Jesus! That is what discipleship is. We love, learn, worship and witness. We have the mindset that the church is a living organism - the very body of Christ. We are his hands and feet. We love God and are committed to loving and reaching others as He did.

As the living body of Christ, our church has a ministry DNA, core functions of a disciple that permeate everything we do - whether in corporate worship as the church gathers or dispersed in group gatherings, ministry teams or smaller home groups and discipleship triads or partnerships through the week.



Defining our Discipleship DNA

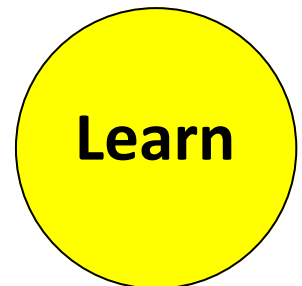
Worship: Disciples worship!

Worship is an all-of-life response to who God is for us in Christ (Romans 12:1; John 4:21-26). Just like breathing, worship can't be limited to one portion of our day or one day of our week. We're always doing it. Elements of worship include bible reading, prayer, communion, songs of praise, silence and service. Whenever we gather at Grace, in large groups or small, we worship.



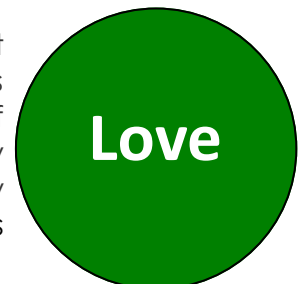
Learn: Disciples learn!

Learning is the process of acquiring new or modifying existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values or preferences about God, life and relationships. Whenever we gather at Grace, in large groups or small, we learn.



Love: Disciples love!

Love in the scriptures is exemplified in Jesus' relationships with us. It is clearly defined in 1 Corinthians 13 and is to mark our relationships with God and others. This love chooses its object with decision of will. It is not necessarily motivated by feelings and it is totally committed to seeking the person's highest good no matter how they may respond. Love is at the core of the gospel and the ethos



of what Grace is about. Whenever we gather at Grace, in large groups or small, we love.

Witness: Disciples witness!

A **witness** has knowledge of (an event or change) from personal observation or experience. They live and speak from their personal experience of Jesus and his gospel. They share with others how Jesus has changed their lives and given them hope and a future. Whenever we gather at Grace, in large groups or small, we witness.



making disciples of Jesus

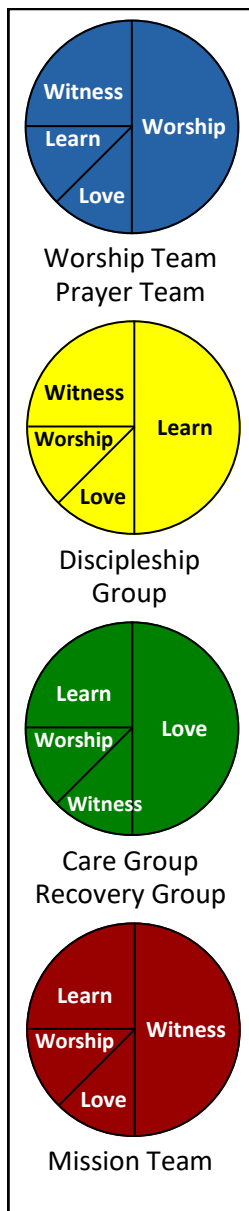
Question #2 How do we do it?

So, how does this work? (Living out our Discipleship DNA?)

Our services are comfortable for the first-timer. The atmosphere is inspiring and welcoming. People feel at home regardless of background. Newcomers begin to belong as they meet others and are welcomed by them. An intentional connection is made with them to assist them in finding their “way in” and ideally into smaller groups or other personal connections.

The Discipleship DNA also marks the gatherings of people throughout the week in smaller groups. The amount of time and effort given to each of the components determines the kind of entity or small group... e.g. a care group, a ministry team, a discipleship group, an alpha group. Even the church board is a small group. The time given to each function will always be different depending on the ministry or group but the DNA is always present!

Our worship, loving, learning and witnessing are all about loving God, loving others and helping one another take their next step with Jesus!



Grace's Leadership

How Grace is Led

The leader of Grace Church is Jesus Christ. We long as a church to hear His voice and live out His purposes in our community and world. We realize that our greatest question is, where is Jesus going and how can we follow him?

On a human level, three groups of people lead the ministries of Grace... The Lead Team, The Ministry Team and the Ministry Leaders.

Lead Team:

We believe that the church is to be led by a plurality of men and women. Their authority is expressed in servant leadership. The leaders are members of Grace who have been commissioned to give this leadership, oversight and care.

They are to use their wisdom, discernment and shepherding gifts to insure the church remains on "true north" biblically. They are the "keepers of the vision" and as such lead the church in major decision-making and strategic initiatives. In this regard they:

1. Consult with the congregation as they facilitate the overall philosophy, vision, and direction for the church. (Acts 6:4)
2. Oversee the shepherding to be sure that we are effectively achieving our mission of Loving God, Loving Others and Making Disciples.
3. Ensure that the body is being fed through insightful and accurate biblical teaching. They determine what are the major issues or essentials for Grace to uphold, while avoiding needless controversy over minor issues (Titus 1:9).
4. Ensure that the church is protected from harmful influences by confronting those who are contradicting biblical truth or who are continuing in patterns of sinful behaviour. In doing so, they are to keep closing potential entrances for Satan. (Matthew 18:15-17)
5. Ensure that the life of the church is being well managed with the assistance of other competent and godly leaders. As legal trustees for the church, they oversee legal and financial matters, and set the church management policy. Our legal documents (Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws) detail their governance duties.

Ministry Team:

The Ministry Team under the Lead Pastor mobilizes the church for ministry. They coach and support each ministry leader. Through the Ministry Team, each ministry or department within the church has the opportunity to have their views expressed and issues addressed.

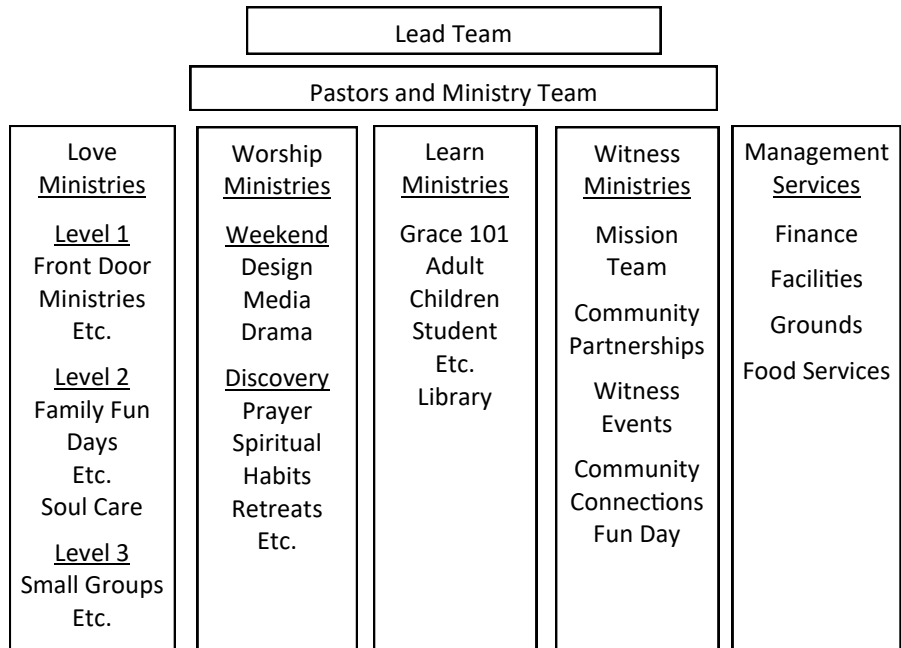
Role of the Ministry Team:

1. Oversee and support the ministry leaders under the direction of the Lead Pastor
2. Resource the ministry leaders in ongoing development of vision and future direction
3. Develop key lay leaders in their personal relationship with Christ

- Coach key lay leaders in the development of their ministry teams and planning

Ministry Leaders:

The Lead Team will establish, empower and encourage new and existing ministries, as necessary, to carry out the purpose and vision of the church. Those who lead these ministries are Ministry Leaders. They are responsible for leading their ministry and are empowered and coached by the Ministry Team for their own personal development and effectiveness.



We have a very simple structure based on the core functions of Worship, Learn, Love and Witness.

Commitments of Members in the Covenant Community

There are three key commitments each member of Grace makes:

- We are committed to the beliefs, values and mission this community of faith holds to. This means we have personally accepted God's grace and surrendered our lives to Jesus, demonstrating our willingness to follow Him in believer's baptism.
- We are committed to following Jesus as described in our Church Covenant
- We accept the Leadership Structure of Grace and willingly participate as we can to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

These commitments are critical for us. Therefore, membership in Grace's Covenant Community is not your name on a roll or roster. It is our way of saying, "Count me in. I'm not just a spectator; I'm on the team now. I identify with the mission of Grace".

Keeping Membership in the Covenant Community Meaningful

We want our membership in the Covenant Community list to accurately reflect who is a participating member (we don't have a category "inactive members"), therefore we face the difficult task of removing people's names from membership in the Covenant Community from time to time. When we do this, it doesn't mean we don't care about the person, or that we don't want the person to come back; in fact, the reverse is true. We do care, and we do want the person to be a living example of what Grace is all about. There are three main reasons for removal:

1. A pattern of nonattendance or noninvolvement. If members stop attending Grace, we attempt to contact them to inquire, resolve problems, offer help, etc. If we don't hear back from them, we assume they are not interested in maintaining their membership in the Covenant Community, at least for a time. Generally, someone will contact members after six months of nonattendance.
2. Lifestyle issues. Because our mission is to love God, love others and make disciples of Jesus Christ, we take seriously words like integrity, holiness, honesty, moral purity, authenticity. When people are not showing a commitment to living honest, moral lives, we must assume they no longer wish to be part of our mission. For example, if a member adopts a lifestyle characterized by sexual impurity, materialism and greed, racism, violence and anger, drunkenness and drug abuse, we must remove this person from membership in the Covenant Community until he or she has a change of heart. This does not mean that we expect perfection or seek to be judgmental; we are simply committed to upholding honest Christian standards and dealing directly with unrepentant, habitual, consistent patterns of sub-Christian behavior.
3. Request for a letter of recommendation. Members may move away from the area or decide they would rather choose another church home. If you're thinking about moving to another church, be assured that we understand that God uses many kinds of churches to reach and help many kinds of people. In fact, we will try to help you find another church more suited to your desires if you ask us for referrals.

We ask all members in our Covenant Community to help us in our mission in two ways:

1. If you have a problem — a problem with sin, an issue that is keeping you from attending regularly, an irresolvable conflict with a church member, a problem of physical or emotional health affecting your membership in the Covenant Community— please ask for help, and please do so sooner rather than later. Your small group leader is the first person to go to for help.
2. If you decide to discontinue your active involvement, or if you're thinking about doing so, please let us know. We'd like to be able to talk personally and honestly with you about your issues, and part on good, positive, pleasant

terms — keeping the door open for a good relationship to continue in the future.

If someone's membership in the Covenant is discontinued, he or she only needs to contact a pastor to begin the process of reinstatement.

A Special Note to Those Coming from Another Church:

If you are coming to Grace from another church, we are glad you are here. We hope that we can be of service to you, and that together we can serve God and others. Here are a several things we think might help you in joining the membership in the Covenant Community of Grace:

1. Each church is different, and we believe God loves each church just as he loves each person. We will be different from your previous church, but that's OK, we are a different church. Please don't expect us to be perfect, or just like your previous church (or, if you had a bad experience there, completely different!).
2. We'd like to recommend you send your previous church a sincere thank-you note. Try to leave them with encouragement and gratitude. That will be good for them, and for you, and for Grace as well.
3. The philosophy of ministry described in this booklet may seem different from what you're used to. We know that Grace isn't for everybody. Feel free to check us out. We won't be offended if Grace isn't the church for you; we just care that you do find a church! In fact, we'll be glad to refer you to a church more suited to your needs if you help us understand what you're looking for.
4. We do everything we can to remain "user-friendly" for unchurched, nonreligious, uncommitted people, often called "seekers." We don't "water down" the gospel, but we do seek to communicate it in relevant, culturally familiar ways. We see this as following the example of Christ himself and we feel this approach is the path God has called us to. If you have a passion to help people come to know Jesus Christ, then Grace has opportunities galore and we hope you find you can make a valuable contribution here. Your background and spiritual roots could be a great asset to people here at Grace who are new to the Christian faith. We believe that nothing could contribute to your spiritual growth more than immersing yourself in a mission like ours at Grace.

When Things Go Wrong

It's inevitable. Sooner or later, you will experience hurt feelings, misunderstandings, disappointments, mistakes, failures, or conflicts here at Grace. We wish we could promise otherwise, but this is neither the Garden of Eden nor heaven ... so we have to expect problems. Here's a principle you can depend on when problems arise: if we communicate in love, God will work through the problems. If we don't, the problems will get worse. So here are some communication guidelines to help you as a member of Grace when troubles of various sorts occur. (Notice, we said "when," not "if!")

Step 1:

First and foremost, communicate with God. Ask him to work in the situation, and our lives through the situation. We realize that every problem is a prompting to pray. (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28)

Step 2:

Try to see the problem from a higher perspective. Is this problem an opportunity — to show love, to grow in maturity, to learn patience or self-control or gentleness, to forgive, to strengthen our communication skills, to be a peacemaker, to suffer for doing what is right? On the other hand, we should also probably see this problem as a temptation — to become bitter, or to withdraw, or to escape, or to be unloving, etc. (Colossians 3:12-14, 1 Peter 3:8-14, Luke 6:27-36, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

Step 3:

Approach the right person in the right way at the right time. If you approach the wrong person, you may be gossiping or triangulating. If you approach the right person in the wrong way (with an attitude) you'll become part of the problem instead of part of the solution. If you do it at the wrong time, you make it harder for healing to occur. For guidance, read Matthew 18:15-20, Galatians 6:1-4, Matthew 7:1-5, and 1 Corinthians 13.

Step 4:

Assume the best. Most problems around here involve people with good intentions making honest mistakes, or having a bad day, or having a predictable misunderstanding, or working on a weakness or character defect. (Ephesians 4:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Step 5:

Ask questions and seek to understand. Questions will take you farther in resolving problems than assumptions, accusations, or withdrawal. (Luke 6:37-42, Matthew 7:12)

Step 6:

Be patient. The people around you, including church leaders, are just people, people like you. Part of following Jesus' commands is being as patient with others as you would like them to be toward you. (Luke 6:31, Proverbs 25:15)

Step 7:

If you can't resolve an issue on your own, our pastors are available to help you. (Matthew 18:15:20)

Step 8:

Whatever happens, please don't just give up and go away mad or disappointed when problems arise. There are no perfect churches. Jesus is changing us. Being a part of Grace is all about working with other imperfect people in an environment of God's grace.

Personal Bible Study

Study One:

Accepting Grace

Grace Church is a grace-based community. God's grace enables us to make a very important beginning spiritually. It's by grace – the word means “a favour we didn't earn” – that we start the Christian life. But God's grace involves more because He did a lot of work behind the scenes long before we responded. He literally came to our planet in the person of Jesus Christ, and by means of the death of Christ on the cross, He paid our crippling sin debt. He comes to each of us now, pursuing us even in our waywardness and points us in a new direction. His grace also has staying power. He persistently takes us the next step of our spiritual journey. He never gets tired of working with us, and he NEVER gives up on us. That's grace. Therefore, we never give up on each other.

Our Need for Grace:

Some people assume that they are not that much worse than anyone else, so they don't need any special help from God. Romans 3:10-11 says *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, there is no one who does good, not even one, ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

Put in your own words the message of this verse to those who think themselves morally "acceptable" to God?

Sometimes we're afraid to admit our sinfulness because to do so feels so hopeless. Many of us react to that sense of despair and decide to become “religious” – we try to change our behaviours so we feel and appear better. However, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."* Write a short letter to yourself explaining why you can't and don't have to earn God's acceptance.

Dear _____

Our Response to God

Once we're at that position where we've been honest about our need for God's help and forgiveness, what does Romans 10:9 say is the next step? (*"If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved)*

Describe briefly the time in your life when you gave up trying to obtain God's favour through any accomplishment of your own and rested in the work of Christ on the cross for you. If you haven't done that yet, or aren't sure if you have, note that below and discuss it with your guide.

Outward Signs

Acts 2:37-38,41 says, "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

What was the response of new believers – those who had recently received grace – that visibly demonstrated what God had done in their lives?

Romans 6:4-5 says, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." According to this passage, what does baptism signify?

Study Two:

Deepening Intimacy with Christ

Our walk with God begins by grace, and it also continues by grace. Unfortunately, just as people misunderstand the extent of God's work to initiate our Christian life, they fall into the trap of thinking their work – their following the rules – automatically produces spiritual maturity. To try to grow through one's own efforts alone is as much out of harmony with God's plan as not growing at all. Both lead to spiritual frustration.

Paul the Apostle knew well that Jesus had saved him, yet he talks of a "striving" and a "reaching" for something. Listen to what he says in Philippians 3:12-14. *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

How would you put into your own words what Paul was working so hard to do in his life?

What is Jesus trying to say about growing as a Christian in John 15:4-5? *"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

How do you reconcile Christ's command to "abide" with the strong commands to "strive" in the previous passage studied?

Tools for Intimacy with Christ

The Bible

What do the following verses teach about the importance of Scripture in the life of a growing Christian?

Psalm 1:2-3 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Hebrew 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Prayer/Solitude/Worship

Luke 5:16 says, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." What does it tell us about Jesus' prayer life and His need to get alone periodically? What are the implications for you personally?

When Growth Isn't Happening – Addressing Sin

What is the clear call of God on every believer's life and conduct in 1 Peter 1:14-16? (*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*)

1 John 1:9 describes how we are to handle sin in our lives. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

Describe it in your own words.

Relationship with Jesus leads to Action

Jesus charge to the early Christians still holds for us today. What is his plan according to His words in this passage? *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Matthew 28:19-20

Study Three:

Deepening Relationships with Others

We've seen in the previous study that God gave us his Word, the Bible; prayer, where we can talk to Him; and His Holy Spirit to live in us and help us grow. These are valuable tools. But they aren't all He's given us.

He also gave us each other.

In the body of Christ, we serve each other in various ways. This is just how God designed it. For example, we can learn when we listen to gifted teachers. When we worship together in church gatherings, we can enter a dimension of God's beauty experienced through no other means. When we sit with members of our small group, someone can powerfully remind us of what we can't see – that God is working in us,

that we're going to make it, that the affection of God is not just for "the world" – it's for me.

When we're together as fellow Christ followers, someone can literally say our name and put a voice on "You, _____ (insert your name), matter to God so much that He personalized His plan of salvation so there would be room for you." Or we can hear, "I know you're going through a tough time, but you're not alone; God is with you, and we're all with you. These are the moments of beauty that give us the hope that we can break free of the power of sin we've been imprisoned in for so long. They are the mirrors that show us there's another side to the ugliness we're so accustomed to.

Jesus came to rescue us from the "power", but He royally decrees that the people around us are His ladders of deliverance and His mirrors of accuracy. That's what "community" is all about.

The Community of Christians

The writer of Hebrews actually gave a command about community life in Hebrews 10:24-25. How would you rephrase this in modern terms? *(And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.)*

Small – not just Large

In addition to large groups, where else did Christians get together according to Acts 2:46 *(Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.)*

What do you suppose they got out of these smaller, house-sized group meetings that they didn't get out of bigger gatherings?

Christ like Attitudes in Every Relationship

Colossians 3:18-23 describes several spheres, or roles, in which we are to behave in Christ following ways. How many can you identify? List them below. *(Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh*

with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.)

What would you say is the common thread through all of them – in other words, what is Paul saying that applies to everybody on the above list?

The Price of Caring Relationships

The Bible says everything we have has been given to us by God. It's His and we are to manage and invest it for Him. He asks us to recognize this, and then keep what we need and give the rest away. He dignifies our ownership by asking – not demanding – that we consider His ownership of us and that we reconsider how we grasp what we call our own. The ultimate example is Jesus Christ.

What attitudes should characterize giving according to 2 Corinthians 9:6-9? (Remember this: *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times; having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."*)

What challenge is presented and what promise?

Study Four:

Using our God given abilities for God and the good of others.

God has given us different gifts and abilities to live out our calls of service to Him and each other. He has given us different roles so that we need each other. We need to respond to His call on us, not endeavour to do what he has asked of others. When we get to heaven He won't ask you why you weren't more like the pastor. He will ask why weren't you more like you? I loved you the way I made you and I made you for a purpose. The greatest thing we can do is gain clarity on God's purpose for us and live it out in harmony with others.

The Need for and the Privilege of Serving

Matthew 9:36-38 says, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Now imagine Jesus visiting a weekend service at Grace. After the service, you and He sit in the lobby and watch the people walk out. He sighs as He sees the streams of attendees pass by – and then says to you the exact words from Matthew 9. Explain in your own words what you think is on His mind and heart at that moment.

What was Paul's attitude toward working in God's service in 1Timothy 1:12? (*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*)

What is the ultimate reason we each have differing abilities within the church? (1Corinthians 12:4-7 says, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Every Person a Difference – Maker

What do you think Jesus meant by "bearing fruit" in John 15:8 (*This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples*).and 16-17? (*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other*)

Personal Response Worksheet

This worksheet can help you review where you are at on your journey. You will want to talk this over with your guide.

1. I am committed to the **beliefs, values and vision** this community of faith holds to. This means I have personally accepted God's grace and surrendered my life to Jesus, demonstrating my willingness to follow Him in believer's baptism and the lifestyle he has called me to.
 - A. If someone asked you to share with them how you became a follower of Christ, what would you say?
 - B. Have you ever been baptized as a believer?
 - C. Do you understand and affirm Grace's Purpose and Vision Statements?
 - D. Do you understand and affirm Grace Values and Beliefs?
 - E. Do you understand the GRACE Structure, and pledge your cooperation with church leadership?

2. I am willing to engage with Jesus and enjoy a deepening intimacy with Him.
 - A. What spiritual habits have you found helpful? Which ones have been a regular part of your spiritual life?
 - B. In what areas of your life are you most hoping to see growth in the next year? How could involvement in Grace help you?
 - C. We all make mistakes and fall in various ways each day. Do you know what to do when you disobey or displease God in some way?

3. I am willing to share in making Grace Church feel like home by:
 - Inviting and welcoming newcomers
 - Participating in a small group as circumstances permit
 - Supporting our faith community and its causes financially as God enables
 - A. Are you currently involved in a Small Group here at Grace?
 - a. If you aren't in a Small Group, what would make it easier or more desirable to be involved in a group?

- b. What other avenues for growth might be helpful for you, if a group is not an option right now?
 - B. Can you think of two to five acquaintances whom you might be able to sensitively invite to your Community Group or to a Sunday Celebration sometime soon? You might want to list them here and begin praying for them regularly.
 - C. One of the greatest challenges for Christians considering membership in the Covenant Community is moving from a consumer-mentality to a giver/servant-mentality. In other words, instead of thinking of church exclusively as a place that exists for me, I begin to think of church as a place where I give and serve. How has that journey been for you?
 - D. Have you made a decision about tithing (i.e. giving ten percent of your income to God)?
 - a. Yes. I'm committed
 - b. I'm not there yet, but I'm giving at a lower percentage with tithing in my sights as a goal for the future
 - c. I'm unable to give at 10 at this time. Financial pressure, debt or family circumstances make it difficult at this time
 - d. I've chosen to give at a level above 10%
 - e. I would be willing to receive some financial counseling at this time to help with financial planning, indebtedness or other financial burdens.
4. I am willing to discover and pursue my calling, serving God and making a difference for good as he gives me clarity, opportunity and direction.
- A. Have you been able identify your calling?
 - B. Do you understand what your main spiritual gifts and talents are?
 - i. If no, would you be willing to get some training in this area?
 - ii. If yes, what gifts do you think you have?
 - C. In what ways are you already serving here at Grace?
 - D. In what ways would you like to serve?

Covenant Community Application

Tear out and hand in to a pastor

Statement of Commitment:

I hereby affirm that I have read "Covenant Community Basics". I commit myself to the mission, vision, values, and beliefs of Grace Church, specifically, to follow Jesus and lead others to do the same. I now desire to become part of this Covenant Community. I also authorize the church to store and use the information I've provided below.

Signature of Prospective Member

Date

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Address _____ Phone (H) _____ (C) _____

Email Address _____ Occupation _____

Marital Status _____ If married, spouse's name _____

First attended Grace: _____ Year and place of Baptism _____

Birthdate _____ Wedding Anniversary _____

Check the responses you feel most comfortable with: _____

- I have personally surrendered my life to Jesus as my Savior
- I would like to give my life to Jesus and follow him as my God.
- I would like to talk to someone about what it means to follow Jesus.

Comments:

- I have been baptized as a believer
- I would like to be baptized as a believer
- I would like to talk to someone about what baptism is all about

Comments:

- I am living a lifestyle consistent with Christ's call
- I want to live a lifestyle consistent with Christ's call
- Let's talk!

Comments:

- I serve in the following areas...
- I would like to serve in the following areas...
- Let's talk!

Comments:

- I think my calling is...
- I would like help discovering my calling...
- I need a break from my calling...

Comments:

- I think my gifts and talents are...
- I would like help discovering my gifts and talents...
- Let's talk, I need a break...

Comments:

- My Small Group is...
- I have no small group...
- Lets talk....

Comments:

Further Questions or Comments:

Appendix 1: Frequently Asked Questions

Is membership in the Covenant Community biblical?...why should I join? What if I disagree with something? what's in it for me...what's in it for the church...

The questions might seem endless concerning this concept of membership in the Covenant Community at Grace...please know this up front, we appreciate your questions. In fact, we encourage them.

1. What is expected of members?

Our members make explicit their commitment to Jesus Christ and to this local church. We evaluate this through what we call the Three Commitments (Loving God, Loving Others, Making Disciples), which capture the essential “marks” of someone who is committed to following Jesus Christ. It is the commitment to this lifelong process that is solidified in membership in the Covenant Community, not a standard of perfection. To our members, the expression of these three commitments has become their way of life... in keeping with the teaching of the scriptures.

2. When should I become a Member?

There is no standard answer for this question. It's up to your personal development as you follow Jesus.

3. How long does it take to become a member?

The time commitment depends entirely on your prior spiritual development and the time you have available to complete the study and personal response in “Community Basics” and “Grace 101”. On average, completing the study itself takes about 4 hours. Whether that takes a week, a month or a season depends on you.

4. Do I have to attend a New Member seminar?

No. We only ask that you go through the Grace 101 booklet with a guide. The rest of the information and issues you need to process are in the “Covenant Community Basics”. Between this and meeting with your guide, all your questions should be answered, and you should be very clear on the commitments you are making.

5. Do I have to be a member to be a leader?

We require every Ministry Team Leader in the church to become a member, but not every member is a leader.

6. Why do I need a guide? Could I be turned away?

Meeting with a guide helps each person discuss with someone else what they have discovered about their spiritual journey while going through the Bible study and personal reflection questions in Covenant Community Basics. If becoming a member means formalizing one's commitment to following Jesus Christ in the context of this local church, then this is the time to do it.

It is not, however, about passing or failing. Going through the process will encourage you in your spiritual growth. It is intended to affirm the work of the Holy Spirit that has brought you to the point of commitment to Christ and His Church.

Occasionally, the process of becoming a member is suspended to allow time for further development on a particular issue. There may be very important practical steps to resolve (for example, if you have not been baptized as a believer)

7. I was baptized as an infant. Why do I have to be baptized again?

While recognizing for other churches the right to practice infant baptism, if it conforms to their theologies, the congregation of Grace understands the Scripture to teach only professing believers qualify for baptism.

In passages such as Acts 2:41, 8:12 and 10:47-48, it is evident that baptism follows an individual's decision to trust Christ alone for salvation. The New Testament records the baptism of adult believers only. Baptism was never intended to provide salvation for an individual, but rather to publicly identify a person with Christ.

Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have subjected themselves to His sovereignty.

It symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.

8. I'm still growing... am I ready to be a member?

It's called being human. As members, imperfect people who are committed to life in the new community join together in a local body and make that journey together. Spiritual formation is a life-long, whole-life process. We are all still growing.

Members have entered into their own journey of spiritual formation. They have fixed their eyes on Jesus, the "author and perfecter" of their faith. Though they are not where they want to be, they're not where they used to be—and they're assuredly headed where they're meant to be.

9. Why would I give 10% of my income to the church?

The Old Testament provides the backdrop for Grace's understanding of giving—instructing God's people to give the first 10% of their income back to Him. (Genesis 14:18-20; Leviticus 27:30, 32; Malachi 3:8-10) The New Testament understanding was even more communal. It appears believers had everything in common, and gave resources to the local church as it had need. We hold to the goal of a tithe: giving a tenth of our income back to the ministry of the local church.

Grace does not exclude people from becoming members who don't tithe. But we do encourage people to be moving toward tithing as a target to reach (or even exceed). We see the tithe as an outward expression of our gratitude to God and acknowledgement of our role as stewards of everything we've been given, including financial resources.

10. I'm already participating. Why Formalize It?

There is great spiritual value in making a commitment to community. Monastic communities' centuries ago recognized the all-too-human tendency to remain part of a community as long as it was comfortable or convenient. If it got too hard, rather than solve interpersonal problems, people would move on to another community. Eventually, in addition to other vows taken in monastic life, many called their people to take a Vow of Stability, saying in effect: "I will not easily leave."

In a similar way, when we commit to be a member, we say to one another, "I will not easily leave." Because of that kind of commitment, a few things are made possible: Community, Growth, Protection, and Mission

11. What's in it for me?

The primary reason to become a member is not to gain a personal advantage, but to identify with the characteristics of biblical maturity and commitment to the mission and future of this local church. Members are our vision owners or "stakeholders."

12. What if I disagree with a leadership decision in the church?

The New Testament is clear that the church is to be led by a plurality of godly leaders. We use the term Lead Team Member. The Lead Team Members are given ultimate responsibility and authority to see that the church remains on a true course biblically, that its members are being appropriately shepherded, that the body is being fed through insightful and accurate biblical teaching and that the life of the church is being well managed with the assistance of other competent and godly leaders.

In response to the biblical pattern of leadership, members of the body are taught in Scripture to lovingly support their leaders and submit to their leadership. We believe that the Lead Team, Staff and Lead Pastor of Grace Church have been called by God to Grace and to its unique purpose and vision. What makes Grace work smoothly is the

humble, servant-like spirit of these groups of people. Whether as a leader or a follower, everyone in the church is submitted to Jesus Christ.

The decisions that are made regarding the day-to-day church affairs, as well as for the future of Grace, are bathed in prayer and there is a unity among the leadership before decisions are final. Major decisions are made in cooperation with the entire covenant community as per our bylaws.

If a potential member is not in agreement with a particular decision, we invite the person to have respectful dialog with a leader or staff member.

Appendix 2: About Baptism

While recognizing the right for other churches to practice infant Baptism if it conforms to their theologies, the congregation of Grace Church understands Scripture to teach that only professing believers qualify for Baptism.

Scriptural teaching on Baptism may be summarized as follows:

1. Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have submitted themselves to His sovereignty.
2. Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and the newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.
3. Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.
4. As a biblical rite of initiation into the body of Christ, Baptism of believers is considered a prerequisite for joining the membership in the Covenant Community of the church.

Although the old covenant practice of infant circumcision is sometimes given as a rationale for infant Baptism, the biblical definition of the functions of circumcision and Baptism shows that those two institutions fulfilled different purposes in their respective covenants. The equation is never made in the Bible between the circumcision of male infants, in the old covenant, and the Baptism of born-again believers, in the new covenant. However, Grace Church encourages Christian parents to present their children for the ceremony of dedication, whereby God's blessing is formally invoked upon the children, and the parents publicly commit themselves to raise the children in accordance with the teachings of Scripture.

Because the symbolism of Baptism requires a more adult level of cognitive and developmental readiness, the Lead Team requires that children be at least 12 years old to be baptized. Proverbs 20:25 issues a significant caution against the danger of making a vow before adequate knowledge, forethought and reflection have been given. In an effort to prevent young people from making a premature commitment that they may not fully understand; this minimum age has been established.

Baptism recognizes and celebrates the redemptive life change that is continually occurring within our church. The Lead Team encourages, new believers and believers, that have not yet participated in adult Baptism to do so.

Frequently asked questions concerning Baptism

Who Should Be Baptized?

The Bible says that every person who believes in Christ should be baptized. A believer is someone who has realized that their sin has separated them from God. They have given up all personal efforts to reach God through good works or religious activity. They have concluded that Jesus Christ's death on the cross for their sins is the only thing that can bridge the gap between themselves and God. A believer is someone who has decided to trust Christ alone for salvation. If you have come to that point in your spiritual journey, then you should be baptized.

(see Acts 2:41; 8:12-13)

Why Should I Be Baptized?

First and foremost, it is to follow the example set by Jesus. "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the river."

(Mark 1:9).

In addition, Christ commanded it. "Jesus said, 'Go then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and then teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.'"

(Matthew 28:19-20)

It demonstrates that you are a believer, disciple of Christ. "We know that we have come to know Him, if we obey His commands,"

(1 John 2:3)

When Should You Be Baptized?

As soon as you can after you become a believer

"Those who believed were baptized that day."

(Acts 2:41)

"Then Philip began with the Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So they went down into the water and Philip baptized him."

(Acts 8:35-38)

What If I Was Baptized As An Infant?

In the Bible, we see parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them and prayed for them and told us to welcome them. But he did not baptize them, and he did not tell anyone else to baptize them.

So, if baptism signifies salvation (as the Bible teaches), only people who have intentionally received salvation should experience baptism. Thus, the Bible would indicate that baptism is for people who have made a decision to follow Christ.

Adult baptism doesn't belittle your childhood baptism; it is a fulfillment of your parents' hopes when they had you baptized.

Can Older Children Be Baptized?

All instances of baptism in the New Testament occur following an individual's decision to trust Christ alone for salvation. (see Acts 2:41; 8:12; 10:47-48) At Grace, that means we wait to baptize until a child is old enough to believe and understand the true meaning of baptism. We want the individual to be able to remember and appreciate this decision. We encourage all to be at least thirteen - fifteen years of age. When a person makes a decision for Christ, we then baptize them in the Christian faith after conferring with the parents.