

**THE CONSTITUTION FOR**  
**GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**OF RIVER FOREST, ILLINOIS**

**PREAMBLE**

We, the baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ, responding in faith to the call of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, and uniting together to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and carry out God's mission, do hereby adopt this constitution and solemnly pledge ourselves to be governed by its provisions. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**CHAPTER 1: NAME AND INCORPORATION**

1.01 The name of this congregation is Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of River Forest, Illinois.

1.02 For the purpose of this constitution and the accompanying bylaws, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church is hereinafter designated as "this congregation."

1.03 This congregation is incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois.

**CHAPTER 2: CONFESSION OF FAITH**

2.01 The congregation confesses the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2.02 This congregation confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

2.02.01 Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.

2.02.02 The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering all its fullness in the work of Jesus Christ.

2.02.03 Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

2.03 This congregation accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

2.04 This congregation accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this congregation.

2.05 This congregation accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

2.06 This congregation accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord- namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord- as further interpretations of the faith of the church.

2.07 This congregation confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the church for God's mission in the world.

### **CHAPTER 3: NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH**

3.01 The church is people called by God in Christ to nurture one another in faith and to bring the Gospel to unbelievers. The Holy Spirit keeps the church in historic continuity with the communion of saints from Pentecost onward till the end of time and gathers people in congregations which extend across the face of the earth.

3.02 To participate in God's mission, this congregation as a part of the church shall:

3.02.01 Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.

3.02.02 Proclaim God's saving Gospel of justification by grace through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, thereby preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.

3.02.03 Fulfill Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by carrying out all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.

3.02.04 Serve to meet human needs in response to God's love, caring for the sick and the aged, standing with the poor and the powerless, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and committing itself to these needs.

3.02.05 Nurture its members in the Word of God to grow in faith, hope, and love: to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.

3.02.06 Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the

love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.

3.03 To fulfill its purpose, this congregation shall:

3.03.01 Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.

3.03.02 Provide pastoral care and help all members to participate in this ministry.

3.03.03 Challenge, equip, and support all members in carrying out their calling in their daily lives and in the congregation.

3.03.04 Teach the Word of God by providing for the ministries of Grace School, Sunday School, Adult and Young Peoples' Education, and other programs named in the bylaws.

3.03.05 Witness to the reconciling Word of God in Christ, reaching out to all people.

3.03.06 Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and suffering, and participate responsibly in society.

3.03.07 Motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation's ministries.

3.03.08 Encourage ecumenical relationships with other congregations.

#### **CHAPTER 4: AUTHORITY OF THE CONGREGATION**

4.01 This congregation as a body shall have the supreme and final authority in the external and internal administration and management of its affairs.

4.02 The powers of this congregation are those necessary to fulfill its purpose.

4.03 The authority of this congregation rests in the congregation in meetings called and conducted as provided in this constitution and bylaws.

4.04 Only such authority as is delegated to the Church Council or other organizational units in the congregation's governing documents is recognized. All remaining authority is retained by the congregation. The congregation is authorized to:

- 4.04.01 Call a pastor and other called ministers.
- 4.04.02 Remove from office any called, contracted, or elected individual.
- 4.04.03 Approve the annual budget.
- 4.04.04 Acquire real and personal property by gift, devise, purchase, and other lawful means.
- 4.04.05 Hold title to and use its property for any and all activities consistent with its purpose.
- 4.04.06 Sell, mortgage, lease, transfer, or otherwise dispose of its property by any lawful means.
- 4.04.07 Elect its officers, Church Council, and boards and require them to carry out their duties in accordance with the constitution and bylaws.

## **CHAPTER 5: MEMBERSHIP**

5.01 Members of this congregation shall be those baptized persons on the roll of the congregation at the time that this constitution is adopted and those who are admitted thereafter, and who have declared and maintain their membership in accordance with the provisions of this constitution and its bylaws.

5.02 Members shall include the following:

- 5.02.01 Baptized members are those persons who have been received by the

Sacrament of Holy Baptism in this congregation, or, having been previously baptized in the name of the Triune God, have been received by certificate of transfer from other Lutheran congregations.

5.02.02 Confirmed members are baptized persons who have been confirmed in this congregation, those who have been received by adult baptism or by transfer as confirmed members from other Lutheran congregations, or baptized persons received by affirmation of faith.

5.02.03 Associate members are persons holding membership in other congregations who wish to retain such membership but also desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation, who accept the confessions of this congregation as stated in Chapter 2, and whose letters of request for associate membership have been received by this congregation.

5.03 It shall be the privilege and responsibility of members of this congregation to:

5.03.01 Make regular use of the means of grace, both Word and sacraments.

5.03.02 Live a Christian life in accordance with the Word of God and the teachings of the Lutheran church.

5.03.03 Support the work of this congregation and its ministries through contributions of their time, abilities, and financial support as biblical stewards.

5.04 Membership in this congregation shall be terminated by any of the following:

5.04.01 Death.

5.04.02 Resignation.

5.04.03 Transfer or release.

5.04.04 Disciplinary action (See Chapter 12).

## **CHAPTER 6: THE PASTORAL MINISTRY**

6.01 This congregation has the authority to call a pastor by a two-thirds ballot vote of members present and voting at a meeting regularly called for that purpose. Before a call is issued, the officers and the committee elected by the Church Council to recommend the call shall seek the advice and help of other Lutheran clergy and Lutheran church leaders.

6.02 Only an ordained person certified for ministry in the Lutheran church who adheres to the Confession of Faith as stated in Chapter 2 of this constitution may be called as a pastor of this congregation. Such person shall make public declaration to this effect when called and installed.

6.03 Every pastor shall:

6.03.01 Preach the Word.

6.03.02 Administer the sacraments.

6.03.03 Conduct public worship.

6.03.04 Provide pastoral care.

6.03.05 Seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the gospel.

6.03.06 Witness to the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and throughout the world.

6.03.07 Speak publicly in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming God's love for the world.

6.03.08 Offer instruction, confirm, marry, visit the sick and distressed, and bury the dead.

6.03.09 Relate to all schools and organizations of this congregation.

6.04 A pastor's specific duties, compensation, and other matters pertaining to the service of a pastor shall be included in a letter of call. When a pastor is called to serve in company with another pastor or pastors, the privileges and responsibilities of each pastor shall be specified in the call document.

6.05 The call of this congregation, when accepted by a pastor, shall constitute a continuing mutual relationship and commitment which, except in the case of the death of the pastor, may be terminated by the congregation, after seeking the advice and help of other Lutheran clergy and Lutheran church leaders, including the denominational leaders of the denomination in which the pastor is rostered.

6.05.01 The call may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

6.05.01.a. Mutual agreement to terminate the call or the completion of a call for a specific term.

6.05.01.b. Resignation of the pastor.

6.05.01.c. The physical or mental incapacity of the pastor.

6.05.01.d. Disqualification of the pastor through discipline on grounds of false doctrine, immoral conduct, or continued dereliction of duty, or inability to conduct the pastoral office effectively.

6.05.01.e. The dissolution or reorganization of this congregation.

6.05.02 Allegations or concerns regarding the pastor's physical or mental incapacity under paragraph 6.05.01.c. above, or allegations of disqualification under paragraph 6.05.01.d. above, are to be surfaced by the Board of Spiritual Life or brought to the Board of Spiritual Life by an official recital of allegations by the Church Council



or by a petition signed by at least one-third of the voting members of the congregation. Once such allegations have been raised, the Board of Spiritual Life shall appoint an investigative committee consisting of the chair of the Board of Spiritual Life, the president of the congregation, and one other voting member of the congregation. The investigative committee shall work in close consultation with leaders of the denomination in which the pastor is rostered.

6.05.03        In the case of alleged physical or mental incapacity under paragraph 6.05.01.c. above, the investigative committee shall obtain and document competent medical opinion concerning the pastor's condition. When a disability or incapacity is evident to the committee, the Board of Spiritual Life may, by a two-thirds majority vote of the full Board, declare the pastorate vacant. Should the disability be removed and the pastor restored to health, the Board of Spiritual Life shall take steps to enable the pastor to resume the ministry.

6.05.04        In the case of alleged disqualification under paragraph 6.05.01.d. above, the investigative committee shall endeavor to hear from all concerned persons, after which the committee shall present its findings and recommendations first to the pastor and then to the Board of Spiritual Life. The recommendations of the investigative committee must address whether the pastor's call should come to an end and, if so, may suggest appropriate severance arrangements. The committee may also propose other actions that should be undertaken by the congregation and the pastor, if appropriate. If the pastor and the Board of Spiritual Life, acting on behalf of the congregation and attaining the agreement of a two-thirds majority of the full board, agree to carry out such recommendations, no further action is necessary.

6.05.05 If either party fails to assent to the recommendations of the investigative committee concerning the pastor's call, the congregation may dismiss the pastor only at a legally called meeting after consultation with the leaders of the denomination in which the pastor is rostered, either by

6.05.05.a. a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting where the investigative committee did not recommend termination of the call, or

6.05.05.b. by a majority vote of the voting members present and voting where the investigative committee did recommend termination of the call.

6.06 At the time of a pastoral vacancy, an interim pastor may be appointed by the Church Council, during which period of service the interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor. The interim pastor shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection and call of a new pastor and, unless previously agreed upon by the Church Council, shall not be available for a regular call to the congregation.

## **CHAPTER 7: OTHER CALLED MINISTRIES**

7.01 The congregation has the authority to call persons into public ministry by a majority ballot vote of members present and voting at a regular meeting or a special meeting called for that purpose.

7.02 These ministers' specific duties, compensation, and others matters pertaining to their service shall be included in a letter of call.

7.03 All called ministers shall be committed to the Confession of Faith as stated in Chapter 2 of this constitution. Such persons shall make public declaration to this effect when called and installed.

7.04 The call of this congregation, when accepted by those called to public ministry, shall constitute a continuing mutual relationship and commitment which, except in the case of the death of the called minister, shall be terminated by the congregation.

7.04.01. The call may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

7.04.01.a. Mutual agreement to terminate the call or the completion of a call for a specific term.

7.04.01.b. Resignation of the called minister.

7.04.01.c. The physical or mental incapacity of the called minister.

7.04.01.d. Disqualification of the called minister through discipline on grounds of false doctrine, immoral conduct, continued dereliction of duty, or inability to conduct the called office effectively.

7.04.01.e. The dissolution or reorganization of this congregation.

7.04.02. Allegations or concerns regarding the called minister's physical or mental incapacity under paragraph 7.04.01.c. above, or allegations of disqualification under paragraph 7.04.01.d. above, are to be surfaced by the Board of Spiritual Life or brought to the Board of Spiritual Life by an official recital of allegations by the Church Council or by a petition signed by at least one-third of the voting members of the congregation. Once such allegations have been raised, the Board of Spiritual Life shall appoint an investigative committee consisting of the chair of the Board of Spiritual Life, the president of the congregation, and one other voting member of the congregation. If the called minister is rostered in a denominational body, the investigative committee shall work in close consultation with leaders of the denomination in which the called minister is rostered.

7.04.03. In the case of alleged physical or mental incapacity under paragraph 7.04.01.c. above, the investigative committee shall obtain and document competent

medical opinion concerning the called minister's condition. When a disability or incapacity is evident to the committee, the Board of Spiritual Life may, by a two-thirds majority vote of the full Board, declare the position vacant. Should the disability be removed and the called minister restored to health, the Board of Spiritual Life shall take steps to enable the called minister to resume the ministry.

7.04.04. In the case of alleged disqualification under paragraph 7.04.01.d. above, the investigative committee shall endeavor to hear from all concerned persons, after which the committee shall present its findings and recommendations first to the called minister and then to the Board of Spiritual Life. The recommendations of the investigative committee must address whether the called minister's call should come to an end and, if so, may suggest appropriate severance arrangements. The committee may also propose other actions that should be undertaken by the congregation and the called minister, if appropriate. If the called minister and the Board of Spiritual Life, acting on behalf of the congregation and attaining the agreement of a two-thirds majority of the full board, agree to carry out such recommendations, no further action is necessary.

7.04.05. If either party fails to assent to the recommendations of the investigative committee concerning the called minister's call, the congregation may dismiss the called minister only at a legally called meeting, either (a) by a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting where the investigative committee did not recommend termination of the call, or (b) by a majority vote of the voting members present and voting where the investigative committee did recommend termination of the call.

## **CHAPTER 8: CONGREGATION MEETINGS**

8.01 All meetings of this congregation shall be held at times specified in the bylaws. The president of the congregation shall preside at congregation meetings in the absence of the

president, the vice-president shall preside.

8.02 A special congregation meeting may be called by the Church Council or shall be called at the written request of fifty (50) voting members presented to the president of the congregation. A special meeting may also be called by a two-thirds majority of those voting members present at a regular congregation meeting. The call for a special meeting shall specify the purpose for which it is to be held and no other business shall be transacted.

8.03 Those voting members present shall constitute a quorum.

8.04 Voting by proxy or by absentee ballot shall not be permitted.

8.05 All actions by the congregation shall be by majority vote except as otherwise provided in this constitution.

8.06 Robert's Rules of Order (latest edition) shall govern parliamentary procedure of all meetings of this congregation.

## **CHAPTER 9: OFFICERS**

9.01 The officers of this congregation shall be a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and assistant treasurer.

9.01.01 Duties of the officers shall be specified in the bylaws.

9.01.02 Officers shall be voting members of the congregation. Associate members may not serve as president, vice president, treasurer, assistant treasurer, secretary, or deacon.

9.01.03 The president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary shall be voting members of the Church Council. The assistant treasurer may serve as a non-voting member of the Church Council.

9.02. The congregation shall elect its officers by written ballot at the congregational meeting specified for this purpose in the bylaws. Terms of office are designated in the bylaws.

9.03. No officer shall hold more than one elected office at a time.

9.04. Should an office of the congregation be declared vacant, the Church Council shall elect a successor, by majority vote, to serve until the next congregational meeting at which election of officers takes place.

## **CHAPTER 10: CHURCH COUNCIL**

10.01 The voting membership of the Church Council shall consist of the president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer of the congregation, one elected member from each of the boards of Spiritual Life, Finance and Property, and Discipleship, for a total of seven voting members.

10.02 The Church Council shall have general oversight of the life and activities of this congregation to the end that everything be done in accordance with the Word of God and the faith and practice of the Lutheran church.

10.03 The Church Council shall lead this congregation to state its mission, engage in long-range planning, set goals and priorities, oversee the organizational structure of the congregation, and evaluate the congregation's activities in light of its mission and goals.

10.04 The Church Council shall see that the provisions of this constitution and its bylaws are carried out.

10.05 The Church Council shall have oversight of the financial and property matters of this congregation.

10.06 The Church Council shall meet once a month. Special meetings may be called by the president or shall be called at the request of at least five of its voting members. Five (5) day

notice for both regular and special meetings of the council shall be given to all members of the council.

10.07 A quorum for the transaction of business shall consist of six voting members of the Church Council.

10.08 The Church Council shall provide for an annual review of the membership roster.

10.09 The Church Council shall submit an annual report to this congregation.

## **CHAPTER 11: CONGREGATIONAL BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND ORGANIZATIONS**

11.01. Congregational boards may be formed as the need arises by recommendation of the Church Council and approval of the congregation.

11.02. The Church Council shall have general oversight of all congregational boards.

11.03. Congregational committees and organizations may be formed as the need arises by approval of the Church Council.

11.04. Duties of congregational boards, committees, and organizations shall be specified in the bylaws.

11.05. All organizations within this congregation shall exist to aid it in ministering to the members of this congregation and to all persons who can be reached with the Gospel of Christ. As outgrowths and expressions of this congregation's life, the organizations are subject to its oversight and direction. This congregation at its meetings shall determine their policies, guide their activities, and receive reports concerning their membership, work, and finances.

## **CHAPTER 12: DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS**

12.01 Prior to disciplinary action of a member, the Board of Spiritual Life and pastors will

*The Constitution for Grace Lutheran Church of River Forest, Illinois, Amended \_\_\_\_\_, 2019*

attempt reconciliation following Matthew 18:15-20. Members who willfully and - persistently refuse the ministry of spiritual discipline - the goal of which is to restore the person through admonition of the Law and the Gospel - shall be considered outside the membership of the congregation. The Board of Spiritual Life and pastors will report this to the Church Council and the congregation.

### **CHAPTER 13: BYLAWS**

13.01 This congregation may adopt bylaws. No bylaw may conflict with this constitution.

13.02 Bylaws may be amended by submitting proposed changes in writing to the Church Council for review. The Church Council shall give notice of the specific changes to the congregation on the Sunday prior to the call of the motion at the next legally called meeting of the congregation. A simple majority of those voting affirmatively will approve the motion.

### **CHAPTER 14: AMENDMENTS**

14.01 To amend this constitution requires a two-thirds vote at two consecutive regular or special meetings of this congregation.

Approved by the congregation of Grace Lutheran Church of River Forest, Illinois this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2019.



Attest: \_\_\_\_\_

President of the congregation

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary of the congregation