



**GRACE
FAMILY
CHURCH**

Exploring Membership

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Introduction

Firstly, thank you so much for your interest in becoming a member of Grace Family Church (GFC). It is a great source of encouragement to us as we seek to establish a local church. We are grateful that God has led you to our community and we trust that he has been blessing you as you have been in our midst.

Ultimately, we want to encourage you in your relationship with Jesus Christ. A critical part of that relationship is finding your place in His body, the church. Participation in a local church is never meant to be a mere obligation. It is a joyful privilege in which we glorify God through fruitful service in the context of meaningful relationships with other believers. Therefore, we want to give as much of the information you need as we are able to help you determine if God is leading you to become a part of this church. Whether you decide to join GFC or to continue in membership at your current church or, if you are not a member of a local church, to join another one, we pray that God's blessings will continue to flow to you in Christ Jesus.

Grace and peace to you,

The Elders of Grace Family Church

About Grace Family Church

Mission

Our mission is to adore, display, and declare Jesus in Caymanas Estate and beyond.

Adore Jesus

Jesus is infinitely worthy of our attention, amazement, and adoration. He made us, and then after we rebelled, he rescued us at great cost to himself. We have become his people by faith in his saving work announced to us in the gospel. He is our hero and our greatest treasure. God has brought us together as a local church to grow in our love for him by seeing again and again in the gospel all that he has done, is doing, and will do.

Display Jesus

Jesus wants the world to see how amazing he is. And he is doing that through his people, the church. As we behold Jesus in his Word we are becoming more like him by the power of his Spirit. The same gospel that saved us is transforming every aspect of our lives. God has brought us together as a local church to grow to look more like Jesus and live more like Jesus so that the world will see what he is like.

Declare Jesus

Jesus wants more and more people to join his family. And he wants those in his family to grow in his grace. When we're together we declare the gospel to each other in our song, prayers, preaching, and conversations. When we're apart we declare the gospel to those God has connected us to. God has brought us together as a local church to grow in our ability and commitment to point people to Jesus clearly and compassionately.

Vision

Cultivating disciples

Our vision for our first 5 years as a local church is to cultivate disciples who together are digging deeper into the gospel, bearing the fruit of changed hearts seen in our values, pursuits, and relationships, and making disciples together as God causes supernatural life and refreshment to flow through us to our neighbours, friends, family and coworkers.

DNA

As our family grows, we want to grow in resembling one another. We're not meant to be identical, but we see recognizable traits of local churches in the Bible that we want to teach and encourage in one another. We've identified 5 "DNA markers" for Grace Family Church. These are meant to help us to have a handle on who we are and who we're becoming as we grow in grace. And just like in nature, our DNA "contains vital information that gets passed on to each successive generation."

ADORE our God

Through the gospel, God has given us eyes to see his beauty in Jesus our Saviour. He has become our "one thing" so we do everything in his name, consciously living for the glory of God.

Ps. 27:4, 1 Cor. 10:31, Col. 3:17

BECOME like Jesus

God is daily transforming those he has saved to resemble their Saviour, through his Word, by his Spirit. We will focus on responding to what the gospel tells us is true and what it calls us to do.

2 Cor. 3:18, Col. 2:6-7

CARE for others

We are called to be tangible expressions of God's love, caring for each other and the world around us with the gifts and means God has entrusted to us.

1 John 3:17-18, 1 Peter 5:2

DECLARE the gospel

The gospel is the power of God to save us and change us. We want to grow fluent in speaking gospel truths in simple and compelling language to each other and to everyone around us.

Matt. 28:18-19, 1 Peter 3:15

EXPECT our King's return

We do not live for now, but for our Saviour's glorious return. Encouraging this expectation among us will fuel our faith and love, motivate our obedience, and strengthen us in suffering.

Col 1:4-5; 1 John 3:2-3; 2 Cor 4:17; 1 Pet 1:3-6;

Mission, Vision, and DNA - Putting it All Together

How are our mission, vision, and DNA meant to work together to shape us as a community? Our mission expresses what we are seeking to do together. It serves as a *compass*, giving us direction. Our vision expresses where we see God taking us. It serves as a *picture* of the future we're moving towards together. Our DNA expresses who we are in Christ and therefore who we're becoming. These markers serve as *gauges* - indicators of what God is doing in us that we can look for in ourselves and commend and encourage in each other.

There is, of course, significant overlap between our mission, vision, and DNA - and we're convinced that that is the way it should be. So rather than thinking of them as separate ideas, it is probably best - and most helpful - to consider them to be different vantage points or angles from which to view what God is doing in and among us as a local church.

Denominational Affiliation

GFC is a self-governing, contemporary, local church, voluntarily partnering with [Sovereign Grace Churches](#)¹, a worldwide network of churches which began in the United States of America. The churches within Sovereign Grace are linked together by relationship and common doctrine, and we work together in our common passion to proclaim the gospel through the building up of current churches and the planting of new local churches. As part of our partnership with Sovereign Grace Churches, we function under the governance of [The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches](#)². Our belonging to Sovereign Grace gives us valuable accountability, mentorship, support and missions partnership.

Grace Family Church has a close association with our sister churches in the US. We are included among the churches in the Southeast Region of US due to our geographical proximity to them and we benefit from partnerships with churches in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and the Bahamas. Our prayer is that in the coming years we will be involved in planting more churches in Jamaica and in other Caribbean islands and that we will be a part of a Caribbean Region.

¹ <http://sovereigngrace.com>

² Available for download at <https://sovereigngrace.com/governance/>

Our Beliefs

Statement of Faith

Doctrine matters to us firstly, because it mattered to Jesus (John 8:32, 17:17). And we all live based on what we believe. We want the truths that God has revealed to shape our thinking and our behaviour. Then God will be honoured and we will be blessed.

Our entire statement of faith is available at gracefam.church/about/beliefs. For the sake of brevity, we've chosen not to include it in this document. But if you have not yet read through it we'd strongly encourage you to do so. It includes scripture references associated with each heading which will allow you to see the specific verses that inform our convictions.

Shared Values

Sovereign Grace is a worldwide network of churches joined together by relationship and common doctrine. Though there is some diversity between churches, Sovereign Grace is centred upon 7 core values. Our "Who We Are" sermon series will introduce you to each of these values. We don't require you to fully agree with all of them in order to be a member of Grace Family Church. But these are the values that will shape our preaching, teaching, counselling and mission. So if you have questions about, and particularly strong reservations about any of what we've taught in that series, please plan a conversation with one of the pastors before committing to membership.

"Who We Are" Series

Because of the stage we are at in planting a local church, we have chosen to do the bulk of the teaching we believe will serve you in a sermon series entitled, "Who We Are". In this series, we're covering the foundations of our convictions about the local church and membership in a local church as well as the 7 values we share with our sister churches in our denomination, Sovereign Grace Churches.

Please ensure that you have listened to all the sermons in this series. They are available at gracefam.church/sermons. They will help you to understand why we're joyfully serious about membership in a local church and the values that will shape our community.

Doctrinal Differences

The doctrinal convictions expressed in our statement of faith and shared values express our understanding from the Scriptures about important matters of faith and practice. We recognize, however, that other genuine believers would not agree with all of our doctrinal convictions.

Where doctrinal differences do not occur around essential truths — the nature of God, of man, and the gospel — we can dialogue and disagree in a spirit of unity. Where professing Christians promote doctrine which is in error in the essentials, we must graciously confront the error with truth, in humility, meekness and charity. This approach demonstrates the good fruit that sound doctrine should produce in our lives.

Sound doctrine is essential for the ongoing vitality and effectiveness of individual Christians and local churches. Sound doctrine enables us to respond appropriately to God: to worship Him in spirit and truth. Wrong ideas about God produce unacceptable worship of God: in effect, idolatry. Contrary to what we can sometimes think, sound doctrine does not quench the heart's passion for God. True and abiding affections for God that well up in passionate worship are the overflow of sound doctrine in the church.

Sound doctrine preserves the church and its message from error and heresy. It ensures that the gospel is not corrupted by the culture which it is meant to penetrate. Sound doctrine fosters stability in the Christian life and in the church (Ephesians 4:14-15). Wisdom and discernment are the fruits of sound doctrine because sound doctrine promotes a proper fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10). Worship, witness, and wisdom are all fruits of sound doctrine.

Additional Resources

Alongside our Statement of Faith and our Shared Values, there are two other statements that we have found helpful in articulating the convictions we share with other complementarian Evangelicals.

In December 1987, the newly formed Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) met in Danvers, Massachusetts, to compose the [Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#)³. In August 2017, CBMW met in Nashville Tennessee to compose the [Nashville Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#)⁴. As a church we agree with both of these statements, believing that the Bible's teaching on manhood and womanhood are part of God's good purposes for his people and reflect his glory.

³ <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>

⁴ Available at <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>

Membership and Leadership

What does it mean to be a church member?

Church membership is identifying yourself with a local gathering of believers and committing to working to ensure that all the people that are members of the church (including yourself) are living as believers. This involves loving, encouraging, serving, and warning the other members and being willing to receive the same from the other members about your own life. The commitments that we are calling our members to make are laid out in a more fulsome way below - see *Grace Family Church Relational Commitments*.

Membership and Baptism

Following conversion, the Scriptures command all believers to be water baptized:

“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.” Acts 2:38

In baptism, we identify with the Lord Jesus Christ who has saved us. It is a sign and symbol of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). Baptism does not contribute to or bring about our salvation; rather it is an outward sign of an inward reality (Colossians 2:11-12). Therefore, we believe only those with a credible profession of faith in Christ should be baptized. For this reason, while we dedicate our infants and children to the Lord, we do not baptize them.

We practice baptism by immersion, which vividly illustrates the believer’s identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is a landmark moment in our life. It marks our identification with Christ, our entrance into His body (the church), and our commitment to follow Jesus as His disciple.

Baptism as a believer is a requirement for membership. If you would like to join the church, but have yet to be baptized as a believer, we would be honored to baptize you. You can discuss this more with any of the pastors. If you believe your child has a credible profession of faith and is interested in being baptized, please speak to one of the pastors.

Membership and the Lord’s Supper (or Communion)

As water baptism signifies our union with Christ and our entrance into His body, the Lord’s Supper

signifies our on-going union with Christ and participation in His body. Jesus gave us the bread and the cup as the sign of the new covenant and for us to remember his death for our sins (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-22).

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

When we unite around the table to eat and drink, we participate in the one body of Christ. In our union with Jesus, He is spiritually present among us to bless His people. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the marriage supper of the lamb pictured in Revelation 19.

We are warned in Scripture not to eat the bread or drink the cup in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 1:27-32). So we must remember two important details about Communion:

1. *Communion is only for believers*

While unbelievers are always welcome to our service and to observe Communion, they should refrain from participating. In addition, anyone under church discipline and barred from the Lord's table should also refrain. Parents may permit their youth to participate if the youth has a credible profession of faith and has been baptized. If you're unsure about this, please talk with a pastor.

2. *We need to examine ourselves*

We don't want to partake in an unworthy manner and bring judgment on ourselves. This means we must reconcile quickly with an offended brother (Matthew 5:23-28) and repent from any known sins (Isaiah 59:2, 1 John 1:9).

Who leads GFC?

Our church, and all Sovereign Grace Churches, are governed by a team of pastor/elders serving as under-shepherds submitted to the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Saviour. The Pastoral Team is responsible for caring for and teaching the people of the church, as well as overseeing all the ministries and finances. Men that are qualified according to the Bible (cf Tit 1:5-9, 1 Tim 3:1-7) and approved by the denomination are ordained by the local church elders to serve as pastor/elders in the local church.

Grace Family Church Relational Commitments

Introduction

The following Relational Commitments⁵ are designed to help the people who attend Grace Family Church relate to one another in a way that honours God and promotes authentic relationships in the body of Christ, in accord with the Holy Spirit's activity (Gal. 5:16-22).

These commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, protecting our children, counselling, confidentiality, mutual accountability and church discipline. They do not cover every aspect of interpersonal relationships addressed in God's Word. The focus herein is on those relationship areas that often cause disunity and broken fellowship within the church.

These commitments are intended to help us build a strong community of faith. By community, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to encourage and support one another as we display God's Glory by celebrating, declaring, and living the gospel in submission to the teaching of the Bible.

We know that this kind of community isn't easy to achieve. Each of us brings our own expectations and agendas into the church. This diversity usually leads to rich discussions and creative ministries, but sometimes it can lead to conflict. As James 4:1-2 warns, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it."

At times, no matter how hard we try to build a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. Consequently, that is why we believe these relational commitments can be of great value. They pull together key principles from God's Word and serve as our relational guidelines when we encounter relational conflict. These commitments accomplish several important purposes:

⁵ These relational commitments are used by Grace City Church, Frankford, PA, one of our sister churches in Sovereign Grace and were originally adapted from Grace Bible Church of Richmond, Va. and The Peacemaker Church.

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ and bring glory to God.
- They help to prevent unwanted surprises, unmet expectations, confusion, and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide a clear direction to follow when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guidelines for how our leaders will, for example, counsel others, guard confidential information, protect our children from abuse while under the leaders' supervision, and exhort to repentance those who are not living according to scriptural commands.

As you read our relational commitments, we encourage you to study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. We want you to be confident that these commitments are based solidly on the Word of God. If your study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach us. We would be happy to talk with you about these principles.

As followers of Christ, we will do all we can to encourage you to grow in faith and godliness and to live a disciplined life that honors our Lord Jesus Christ and enhances the witness of His church.

Commitment to Biblical One-Anothering

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:1-3, 32).

Any attempt to seek unity and peace in the local church family must first begin with an understanding of the source of divisions. The Bible clearly defines the source: All conflict begins with a desire to please ourselves and not seek after God's best for us. His best is often caring for others above ourselves (James 4:1-4). The proper attitude toward others--that promotes peace and unity--is also clearly defined in scripture through the "One Anothers." The "One Anothers" are twenty-five commands that tell us how we are to treat one another in the Local Church Family:

- contribute to one another's needs (Rom. 12:13);
- spur one another on to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24);
- love one another (John 13:34-35; Rom. 13:8; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:9; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7-12; 2 John 1:5);

- be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 3:8);
- give preference to one another in honour (Rom. 12:10);
- accept one another (Rom. 15:17);
- admonish one another (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:14);
- be united with one another (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Pet. 3:8);
- serve one another through love (Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:10);
- show forbearance to one another in love (Eph. 4:2);
- be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 3:8);
- be tender-hearted to one another (Eph. 4:32);
- forgive one another (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13);
- speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19);
- teach one another (Col. 3:16);
- encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11, 14; Heb. 3:13; 10:25);
- build one another up (1 Thess. 5:11);
- help one another (1 Thess. 5:14);
- be patient with one another (1 Thess. 5:14);
- be hospitable to one another (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9);
- be sympathetic toward one another (Rom. 12:15; 1 Pet. 3:8);
- restore one another (Gal. 6:1);
- bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2);
- be humble toward one another (Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 3:8; 5:5);
- look out for one another's interests (Phil. 2:4).

Grace Family Church is committed to living these “One Anothers” in every aspect of our lives. We will not always remember all of what they require of us, but our commitment is to living in obedience to God’s word. So we will seek to know what God requires of us as situations arise and, with his help and the help of each other we commit to obeying him. Some of these commands are of a comforting nature. Others are of a corrective nature. It will take wisdom and patience in all circumstances to apply these truths at the appropriate time and in an appropriate manner. We believe that, with God’s enabling grace and with humble submission on our part, these “One Anothers” can characterize our lives. This will result in gospel-centred relationships, and it will promote peace and unity in our church.

Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9).

Grace Family Church is committed to building a “culture of peace” that reflects God’s peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that

bitterness, an unwillingness to extend forgiveness, and broken relationships are not acceptable for the people whom God has reconciled to Himself through the sacrifice of His only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14). Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honour God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us His wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to live out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

Personal Peacemaking

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words, and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting, and slander (Eph. 4:29). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.
- We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about others unless we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them. (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive (and restore) them as He has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).
- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will consider others’ interests, as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Assisted Peacemaking

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in Grace Family Church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other church leaders for assistance.
- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from Grace Family Church leaders or others they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation

or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer and make a good faith effort to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.

- If a person coming to Grace Family Church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his or her former church, or is under discipline from that church, we will require and assist him or her to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining Grace Family Church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline at the end of this document.
- If we have a legal dispute with or within Grace Family Church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we first exhaust all reasonable options for mediation and arbitration.
- Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and lead others to know His infinite love and peace.

Commitment to Preserving Marriages

So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate (Matt. 19:6).

God designed marriage to glorify Himself and to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, He established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still, others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since experienced the repentance and forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus. We want all of you to know that you are welcome at Grace Family Church.

Because Grace Family Church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and discouraging divorce. We require and provide thorough premarital counseling for all couples seeking marriage who intend to make GFC their home church. The purpose is to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are well prepared for its many challenges.

We encourage couples to nurture their marriages by actively participating in fellowship through which people can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25).

We also expect husbands to encourage one another to love, cherish, and spiritually lead their wives; and wives to respect and lovingly submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:33). Our leaders are committed to providing counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that, instead, can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness, and ongoing discipleship.

It is the Pastoral Team's biblical conviction that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. We believe divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matt. 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

Even though divorce is permissible in these situations, it is not required. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7). When divorce becomes an option, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal church discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as the Pastoral Team is involved in beginning a marriage, we believe that they should be involved when it ends. Therefore, if someone is considering divorce, he or she is encouraged to bring the situation to our pastor/elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether grounds exist to promote repentance and reconciliation, and exhaust church discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who have filed for divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court issues a divorce decree. Thus, they should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with the scriptural mandates for marriage.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. The Pastoral Team will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is biblically valid.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does Grace Family Church. God graciously extends this same love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him

(and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.

Commitment to Protecting our Children

The prudent see danger and take refuge (Prov. 27:12a).

Children are a blessing from God, and He calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a safe and blessed place for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.

However, since sin affects every person and organisation in the world, it is possible that children could be harmed, even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen within our fellowship, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children from foreseeable harm. We will be providing training for all of our Grace Kids volunteers and we are working on simple and clear policies for our volunteers that we will update as the church grows and as our ministry setting changes.

Commitment to Biblical Counseling

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships. Whenever believers are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviours through personal efforts, God calls them to seek assistance from other believers and, when needed, from church leaders who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counselling and oversight (see Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 2Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its people to seek counsel from and confess sins to each other and to our leaders. We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counselling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Unless they specifically state otherwise, none of those who counsel in this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists. We expect all counsellors to treat counsees with respect and courtesy and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity during counselling (Eph. 5:3). We also expect counsees to promptly report to the church leadership any conduct that fails to meet this standard.

To prevent counsellors from being placed in situations that might compromise their testimony or fitness for ministry, we, the members and adherents of this church, agree to the following:

- We will be willing to seek counsel with at least two counsellors when it is requested. This requirement is set in place to protect both parties from unwarranted accusation and any appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22).
- In cases where confidential information is shared in a counselling context, we will not try to compel the involved counsellor (s) to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge the confidential information in a way that will be used for selfish or personal gains (Prov.11:13, 25:9).
- In the course of counselling, if illegal behaviours are discovered, the leaders of this church have a God-given obligation to report these behaviours to the proper authorities, as the Jamaican law stipulates (Rom. 13:1). This is particularly important in situations where child abuse, neglect or abandonment is suspected or has occurred (see the Child Care and Protection Act, 2004). The counselee will be informed prior to our contacting the proper authorities.

There are occasions when the pastors do not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counselling. At such times, the pastoral team will give first priority to people who have formally joined the church (Gal. 6:10), and will seek to serve non-members by referring them to another source of godly counsel.

Commitment to Confidentiality

A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret (Prov. 11:13).

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counselling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all members and adherents are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, counsellors will carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counselling, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as is possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others in the process of helping a counselee. In particular, when, with the help of our leadership, a counsellor believes it is biblically necessary, they may choose to disclose information to others that will help the counselee, in the following circumstances:

- When a counsellor is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from the leadership of Grace Family Church, or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Prov. 11:14).
- When it is believed that the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12).
- When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20).
- When the leadership is required by law to report behaviour that is against the law (Rom. 13:1).

To allay any concerns, the Pastoral Team wants to be clear that, in divulging this information, the intent is to help, never to harm. The counselee's name will be withheld, and the issues will be discussed only in generic terms, unless it is absolutely necessary to divulge the specifics.

Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”
(Hebrews 10:24)

A Family of Disciples

God has established the church to reflect his character, wisdom, and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Ephesians 3:8-12). He loves his church so much that he sent his Son to die for her (Ephesians 5:25). His ultimate purpose for his church is to present her as a gift to his Son; thus, Scripture refers to the church as the “bride” of Christ (Revelation 19:7). For this reason, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Ephesians 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. The church is a fellowship of those set apart by God to represent him in the world, yet who still need his purifying work as they seek to live the lives to which they are called (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 John 1:8). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfect lives. However, we do confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and exhorting each other to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Hebrews 10:24-25). In short, we are called to live our lives as a family of disciples; growing together as we learn to follow the Savior in obedience and trust. Any understanding of church discipline must begin with an understanding of this joyful privilege.

God's Formative and Restorative Discipline

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as “discipline.” The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic, or harsh, as modern society often does. True discipline originates from God Himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. “The Lord disciplines those He loves” (Heb. 12:6). “Blessed is the man You discipline, O LORD, the man You teach from Your law” (Ps. 94:12). “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline” (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive, and encouraging. This activity, which is sometimes referred to as “formative discipline,” involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, fellowship, and other means of grace that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God together more wholeheartedly.

Occasionally, God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, He corrects us. God's discipline of His children is always an expression of this love, and always for their ultimate good. One way He does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back to the path of godliness. This activity, which is sometimes called “corrective” or “restorative” discipline, is also likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

“If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off” (Matthew 18:12-13).

Restorative discipline is God's activity to correct His people's thoughts, words and behaviour so they can grow in godliness and spiritual fruitfulness. God disciplines His people through a variety of means. He calls His people first to self-discipline. Each Christian is called to hear the Word of God as He reads the Bible and hears the Bible taught and applied. As he compares his life to God's Word, he adjusts himself to conform to his Savior by the conviction and power of the Holy Spirit. But we are also disciples together in the family of God; and God uses our brothers and sisters as a means of restoration and correction as well. “Brothers,” writes Paul, “if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness....” (Galatians 6:1). To be ‘spiritual’ doesn't mean that we must have it all together before we can help others. It is the privilege and responsibility of each member of the family of disciples to help each other please God. This kind of restorative care is to characterize all relationships in the church. Even the elders of the church are subject to the restorative discipline of the church. It is an important means of grace for the church.

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful, or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ, protecting others from the destructive effects of sinful activity, and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name.

The Pastoral Team of Grace Family Church recognizes that God has called us to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, we are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in Grace Family Church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

How We Practice Restorative Discipline

Jesus outlined a pathway for addressing another believer's sin in Matthew 18:15-17:

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

In this passage, which follows after the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus' instruction to the community of faith stresses both the seriousness of unrepentant sin and the significance of relationships in our restoration. If a Christian sees another brother or sister entrapped in a clear and observable pattern of sin, he should approach that person in a spirit of love and inquire about it. If private conversation does not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. “If he will not listen, take one or two others along” (Matthew 18:16). The purpose of additional appeal is to make sure that the appeal is taking place in a loving, unbiased, and impartial way. While this practice of appeal is always based on our fellowship in Christ and in light of our mutual need for grace, the failure of a brother or sister caught in sin to respond to humble and loving confrontation creates a situation that may necessitate more formal pastoral involvement.

The pastor may already be involved in a number of ways in this restorative discipline process. He may provide counsel to the person(s) who are making the appeal. He may even be part of the appeal process himself. In his shepherding role in the church (Acts 20:28), the pastor's responsibility is to make sure that the discipline is carried out in a loving and God-glorifying manner, and that the Scriptures are the standard for evaluating the issues and the discipline process.

However, it may become necessary in some cases to bring a more formal application of discipline into play. In this case, Grace Family Church has established that the pastor involved, in his capacity as an elder of the church, will first bring the issue to other elders of the church. This is important so that wise counsel can be considered in difficult situations.

It is at this point that church discipline necessarily moves from redemptive appeal to redemptive action. During this process, the pastor overseeing the discipline may take appropriate measures to clarify the issues at stake and limit the member from participation in service or fellowship with the goal of making the appeal for repentance.

A further step that may be taken is to broaden the circle of appeal to all those who could be meaningfully engaged in the restoration process. This step is in keeping with the Matthew 18:17 instruction: “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.” This may involve communicating to the church in a formal pastoral meeting the discipline process at hand. The purpose of any communication beyond those already involved is to draw in the brothers and sisters who are most affected by the person’s unrepentant sin, or who are in the position to become part of the restorative ministry. While it may be necessary due to the nature of the sin involved or the stature of the person to communicate to the whole church, in general, the approach would be to tell only what is necessary to only those for whom it is important to know.

If, after a reasonable period of this formal appeal, no repentance is forthcoming, the question of whether a person can continue to participate as a member of the church must be addressed. While the church will continue to reach out to the person, the unrepentant sinner may need to be removed from membership in the church. This difficult but important step is for the good of the person; that they might not fall into the spiritually disastrous error of believing they can live in open, unrepentant sin and still participate as a member of the fellowship of Christ’s disciples. Matthew 18:17b provides the basis for this action by the church: “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

In taking this step, the church is responding appropriately to the commitment a person has made to live in open disobedience to the clear teaching of Scripture. Removal from membership has nothing to do with “shunning” a person. It is not the rejection of a relationship but a change in the nature of a relationship. For the church, this will mean formally removing a person from the membership roll of the church, restricting them from participation in the Lord’s Supper, and excluding serving and fellowship contexts where such participation might imply that they are living in faithful obedience to God’s Word. If a person under discipline is not factious, disruptive, or a harmful influence, he is welcomed to attend all church meetings that are open to unbelievers with the exception of small groups that meet for the purpose of fellowship.

Availability of Appeal

Should the conclusion of the Grace Family Church elders still be disputed by the member who is being removed, there is an appeal process made available through our relationship with Sovereign Grace Churches. An adjudication panel of Sovereign Grace elders throughout the Southeast Region will be convened in keeping with the instructions and stipulations of Section 23 of [*The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches*](#). The conclusion of that panel will be passed on to the elders of Grace Family Church as a recommended way forward.

The Goal of Restoration

For those in a relationship with the person removed from the fellowship, love now means they are to treat the unrepentant person as they treat unbelievers. In other words, when they interact with this person they should not seek to have “fellowship” as the Bible defines it, but they should appeal for the former member to put his faith in Jesus’ work on the cross and turn from his sin. While this may create complications in friendships and even could be viewed as uncaring by the person who has been disciplined, it is truly a compassionate expression of what it means to be God’s holy people called to be a light in the world. For the individual being disciplined, the hope is that the experience of life apart from fellowship in the church will be used by God to convict them of their sin, leading to repentance and faith. When a person has been removed from the church, it is not simply a removal from one local church, but a declaration by the elders about the person’s standing in relation to God’s people (Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:18-19).

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen Grace Family Church’s ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability if discipline is in process.

Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be made effective until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If a member leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered and the pastors learn that he is attending another church, they will inform that church that the person is currently under church discipline and will ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of his sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom he has offended. The pastors will ask that church to

recognize the unrestored status of the individual and encourage the person toward repentance and restoration in the care of the pastors of Grace Family Church.

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, and our Pastoral Team confirms his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7,11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

Where known, people who have been excluded from another church because of church discipline issues will not be allowed to become members of Grace Family Church, and may not be allowed to partake of the sacraments or participate in some aspects of the regular fellowship of Grace Family Church, until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or until such time as our Pastoral Team have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

In all actions and circumstances related to restorative care, reliance for change is never based on the process or the people. The church belongs to Jesus Christ, and He is the Good Shepherd over all of its members (John 10:11-15). Reliance for change in either formative or restorative discipline is always upon the power and work of the Holy Spirit, Who ministers in the church for the sake of the glory of Christ (John 16:7-14). As Matthew 18:12-13 express above, the repentance and restoration of a brother or sister who has wandered and fallen into sin is a time of great joy for the church because it is wonderful testimony to the power of God to sanctify His people. To welcome someone back into the church family is a profound demonstration of the forgiveness that comes in the gospel (Matthew 18:21-22). It is a time to gather those who have been affected by the sin and those who have been part of the appeal process, to welcome back the person to full fellowship among the saints. While restitution and repentance may need to be carried out over time, the repentant brother or sister will be treated as a full member of the body in good standing. The restoration of repentant sinners is an extraordinary means of grace to the congregation and a profound testimony of the power of the gospel to the world.

For further reading on this subject, we recommend Part Four of [*The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches*](#). You can ask any of the elders for a copy.

How Can Members Hold Pastors Accountable?

Because a pastor is first and foremost a Christian before he is a leader of God's people, the rules of discipline also apply to a pastor. Pastors are accountable not only to their fellow pastors and to the congregation they lead but also to other pastors within our denomination. This accountability to other wise and godly pastors protects the church and her witness to the world. Pastors do have a special

role of “shepherding the flock” but every member has a responsibility to lovingly care for and hold other members accountable. (See Relational Commitments). This includes members caring for and holding pastors accountable as well.

Here are some guidelines for how a member should hold a pastor accountable:

1. It is important that each member sees it as their responsibility to do their part in protecting and caring for the church. We all need each other. Even though it may involve difficult conversations, we need to all work for the good of the church. If a member chooses to ignore or not deal with a sin they see in a pastor, then it will hurt the member, the pastor, and the church.
2. There are right ways and wrong ways to handle these situations. (See Relational Commitments) We all need to avoid gossip, jumping quickly to conclusions, and making insults and accusations. James reminds us, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).
3. Lord willing, a vast majority of these issues will be dealt with informally and privately with a conversation between the member and the pastor.
4. Unfortunately, sometimes a pastor will respond sinfully to the member and/or persist in sin after this initial, private and informal conversation. At that time, the member should involve another member of the pastor team in the situation to provide help for both the member and the pastor involved.
5. If even the other pastor’s involvement does not persuade the accused pastor, or if the other pastor joins in with the accused pastor’s sin and also responds sinfully to the member, then for the sake of the pastors and the church, the member should contact the denomination to “bring charges” against the pastor or pastors that are sinning. Any member in good standing can bring a charge against an elder according to the process outlined in Section 24 of [*The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches*](#).
6. There is a whole process in place for how to do this, and it involves a trial with a plaintiff, defendant, evidence, a panel of judges, etc. The result of the trial could be some sort of punishment against the pastor including removal from office, or he could be found innocent. The panel of judges could also make comments and recommendations pertaining to the case beyond just declaring guilt or innocence. If a member would like to pursue bringing a charge against a pastor, then they should contact the Southeast Regional Leader, Keith Collins. The phone number for the church he serves at is (504) 482-6221. He will help put you in contact with the correct people in our region in the denomination that will help you know how to move forward with bringing charges.

Notes

