

# **GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH CONSTITUTION**

## **PREAMBLE**

We, baptized members of the Church of Christ, responsible in faith to the call of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, desiring to unite 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.

## **ARTICLE 1**

The name of this congregation shall be Grace Lutheran Church of Fairmont, Minnesota.

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

This congregation shall be incorporated under the laws of the State of Minnesota.

## **ARTICLE 2**

### CONFESSONAL OF FAITH

This congregation accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole and in all their parts as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.

As brief and true statements of the doctrines of the Word of God, this congregation accepts and confesses the following Symbols, subscription to which shall be required of all its members: (1) the ancient ecumenical Creeds; (2) the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism.

As further elaboration of and in accord with these Lutheran Symbols, the congregation also receives the other documents in the Book of Concord of 1580, the Apology, Luther's Large Catechism, the Smalcaid Articles, and the Formula of Concord, and recognized them as normative for its theology.

The congregation accepts the symbolic books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, because they are the presentation and explanation of the pure doctrine of the Work of God and a summary of the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

## **ARTICLE 3**

### PURPOSE

1. The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.
2. To Participate in God's mission, this Congregation as a part of the church shall:
  - a. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
  - b. Proclaim God's saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.

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- c. Carry out Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.
  - d. Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless, and committing itself to their needs.
  - e. Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and 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.
  - f. 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. To fulfill these purposes, this congregation shall:
- a. Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.
  - b. Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry.
  - c. Challenge, equip, and support all members in carrying out their calling in their daily lives and in their congregation.
  - d. Teach the Word of God.
  - e. Witness to the reconciling Word of God in Christ, reaching out to all people.
  - f. Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.
  - g. Motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation's ministry and the ministry of other parts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.
  - h. Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.
  - i. Foster and participate in ecumenical relationships consistent with churchwide policy.
4. This congregation shall, from time to time, develop a mission statement which will provide specific direction for its programs.

#### **ARTICLE 4**

##### **POWERS OF THE CONGREGATION**

1. All power in the congregation has its source in the Word of God, which is the norm for its faith and life. All individuals and groups within the congregation shall submit to the authority of the Word; and the life and activity of this congregation and its organizations shall conform to it.
2. The powers of this congregation shall be those necessary to fulfill its purposes, as set forth in this Constitution.

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3. The powers of this congregation shall be vested in the congregational meeting, called and conducted in such manner as is provided in this Constitution, and, to the extent conveyed by this Constitution or as assigned from time to time by the congregational meeting, in the Congregation Council and committees elected by the congregation.
4. In the fulfillment of its purpose, the congregation is empowered to:
  - a. Acquire real and personal property by gift, devise, bequest, purchase, or other lawful means;
  - b. Hold title to and use this property for any and all activities consistent with its purpose;
  - c. Sell, mortgage, lease, transfer, or otherwise dispose of its property by any lawful means;
  - d. Enter into contract;
  - e. Sue and be sued;
  - f. Elect a Congregation Council and committees for the exercise of their powers and authority and require them to conduct their affairs in accordance with this Constitution and its Bylaws, and the resolutions of this congregation;
5. Real property shall not be purchased, disposed of, or encumbered in any manner except by resolution adopted by not less than a two-thirds majority ballot vote of the members present and voting at a legally called meeting of the congregation.
6. Should this congregation cease to do business and be dissolved, or should it vote to be removed from the membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, it shall do so in accordance with the constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

## **ARTICLE 5**

### CHURCH AFFILIATION

1. For the better attainment of its purpose, this congregation shall be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America or its successor and shall be on the roster of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod or its successor. It shall be subject to the policy and discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.
2. This congregation claims for itself all the rights and privileges and accepts all the duties and obligations connected with such membership.
3. This congregation covenants to support with prayer, personal service, and offerings, the common work of the Church.
4. Severance of membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America shall be in accordance with the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

## **ARTICLE 6**

### MEMBERSHIP

1. Members of the congregation shall be those who are designated as such 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.

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2. Members shall be classified as (a) baptized; (b) confirmed; (c) voting.
  - a. Baptized members are those persons who have been received by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in this congregation, or, have been previously baptized in the name of the Triune God, have been received by proper transfer from other Lutheran congregations or by affirmation of faith.
  - b. 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 member from other Lutheran congregation or baptized persons received by affirmation of faith.
  - c. Voting members are confirmed members who are in good standing, as provided in the Bylaws.
3. It shall be the privilege and duty of members of this congregation to:
  - a. Make diligent use of the means of grace, both Word and Sacraments;
  - b. Live a Christian life in accordance with the Word of God and the teachings of the Lutheran Church;
  - c. Support the work of this congregation and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

#### **ARTICLE 7**

##### **DISCIPLINE**

1. A member who advocates doctrines which are contrary to Holy Scripture and the Confessions of the Church, or who is guilty of conduct that is grossly unbecoming a member of the body of Christ, shall be subject to discipline.
2. The Congregation Council on behalf of this congregation shall administrate discipline, with the right of appeal to the congregation.
3. Discipline in the congregation shall be exercised in accordance with Matthew 18:15-18.
4. Procedures for the exercise of discipline shall be those provided in the Bylaws.

#### **ARTICLE 8**

##### **WORSHIP**

As an expression of the unity of a church in Christ this congregation recognizes the desirability of conforming to the practices of other member congregations in using such forms of worship, including liturgies, hymn books, as are recommended by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Only such variations as are authorized by this congregation shall be permitted.

#### **ARTICLE 9**

##### **THE PASTOR**

1. A pastor of this congregation shall be a person whose soundness in the faith, aptness to teach, and educational qualifications have been examined and approved by the Church, and who has been

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properly ordained; who accepts and adheres to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and of this congregation and who strives in life and conduct to be above reproach.

2. Authority to call a pastor shall rest in this congregation. Such authority to call shall be exercised by not less than a two-thirds majority ballot vote of members present and voting at a meeting legally called for that purpose. Before a call is issued, the Congregation Council, or a committee authorized by the congregation, shall seek the advice and help of the bishop of the synod.
3. Only a clergyperson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in good standing or one who is recommended for Call by the Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American may be called as a pastor of this congregation.
4. In the event of a vacancy in the pastoral office, the Congregation Council shall, in consultation with the synod bishop, provide for interim pastoral service.
5. If in the judgement of this congregation the pastor is no longer able to serve in satisfactorily, the pastor may be requested to resign in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod.
6. In the event of alleged defection in doctrine or alleged conduct unbecoming a pastor, the matter shall be referred by the Congregation Council to the bishop of the synod for disciplinary action as provided in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

## **ARTICLE 10**

### MEETINGS OF THE CONGREGATION

1. The power and authority of this congregation shall be exercised through the congregational meeting, which shall be called and conducted in conformity with civil laws and the provisions of the Constitution and By-laws of this congregation.
2. The annual meeting of this congregation shall be held on the fourth Sunday in January, or such other date in January as the Congregation Council may decide. Notice of the meeting shall be given as provided in the Bylaws.
3. A quorum for any regular or special meeting of this congregation shall be 5% of the voting members.
4. A special meeting of this congregation may be called by action of this congregation, by petition of at least 20 of the voting members, or by any one of the following: the Congregation Council, the president of this congregation, or the pastor. The president or Congregation Council shall call a special meeting upon the request of the synod bishop. Official notice of a special meeting of this congregation shall be in writing and shall be posted conspicuously in the place where this congregation customarily worships. Such notice shall state the time, the place, and the purpose of the meeting. It shall be signed by the person or persons who have called the meeting, as authorized by this paragraph. The notice of a special meeting shall also be read at all public services of the congregation held during the ten days preceding the date of the meeting. If no services are held during the stipulated time, not less than five days written notice of such meeting shall be given; provided, however, that not less than ten days written notice of a meeting called to consider a resolution requesting the pastor to resign shall be given; and further provided that a meeting called to consider the disposition or encumbrance of real property must be called and held in conformity with such provisions of civil law as may be applicable.
5. The pastor shall be notified of the time and place at which a special meeting of this congregation is to be held.
6. Only the business of which a special meeting has been called shall be transacted at the meeting.

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7. A meeting of the congregation may by majority vote recess to reconvene at a specified time and place. A meeting may also recess to reconvene upon call; provided, however, that the time and place of such a reconvened meeting must be announced at a public service of the congregation, and not less than three days written notice shall be given of the reconvened meeting.
8. Voting by proxy or absentee ballot shall not be permitted.

## **ARTICLE 11**

### CONGREGATION COUNCIL

The Congregation Council shall have general oversight of the life and activities of this congregation, and in particular its worship life, to the end that everything be done in accordance with the Word of God and the faith and practice of the Evangelical Church of America.

At its annual meeting the congregation shall elect a Congregation Council of not fewer than 10, nor more than 21 members for terms of three years each, with approximately one-third of the terms expiring annually. A member may not serve more than two consecutive terms. The pastors shall be non-voting members of the Congregation Council by virtue of their office. At its first meeting following the annual meeting of the congregation, the Congregation Council shall:

1. Elect from its own membership a president, a vice president, a secretary and a treasurer. The duties of the officers of the congregation shall be those provided in the Bylaws.
2. Elect such committees as are needed or desired and supervise their work.
3. Determine rosters of the baptized, the confirmed, and the voting members of the congregation.
4. Exercise such authority as is delegated to it by this Constitution, the Bylaws, and the resolutions of the congregation.
5. Enact continuing resolutions. Such resolutions shall be enacted or amended by a two-thirds vote of all voting members of the Congregation Council.

## **ARTICLE 12**

### BYLAWS

1. The congregation may adopt such Bylaws as may be necessary. No Bylaws may conflict with this Constitution.
2. Bylaws may be adopted or amended at any legally called and conducted meeting of the congregation by a two-thirds majority vote of those present and voting.
3. Changes to the Bylaws may be proposed by any voting member; provided, however, that such additions or amendments be submitted in writing to the Congregation Council at least 60 days before a regular or special congregation meeting called for that purpose and that the Congregation Council notify the members of the proposal with its recommendations at least 30 days in advance of the congregation meeting.
4. Approved changes to the Bylaws shall be sent to the synod.

## **ARTICLE 13**

### AMENDMENTS

1. The doctrinal basis and the confessional subscription contained in Article 2, and this paragraph of Article 13 shall be unalterable; and no amendment to this Constitution shall conflict therewith.
2. A proposed amendment to this Constitution shall be:
  - a. Read at a public service of the congregation or mailed to the voting members, not less than thirty days before the legally called meeting at which it is to be considered.
  - b. Approved without change at the legally called meeting following its announcements, by a majority vote of those present and voting.
  - c. Ratified without further change at the next annual meeting, by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting.
3. If a proposed amendment fails of adoption, it may be amended by majority vote of those present and voting; and adopted without change by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting at the next following annual meeting.