



# Constitution

## Article 1

### Name

The name of this Church is Graham Community Church of Perry, Michigan, also referred to in this document as “Graham Church” or “Graham.”

## Article 2

### Purpose

Graham is an autonomous, non-denominational church whose ultimate head is Jesus Christ and whose final authority is the Bible.

Graham Church exists to glorify and enjoy God as we make and equip authentic disciples of Jesus. Graham is a community of believers who worship Jesus, follow Scripture, love people, live generously, and depend on grace.

## Article 3

### Beliefs

The doctrinal outlook of Graham Church is expressed in the following statements.

1. **Gospel** - *The gospel is good news that God sets us free. Jesus was crucified as a substitute for sinners and rose again to give forgiveness and new life to those who believe in him.*

We believe the gospel is the central message and driving power behind Jesus' Church. The message of freedom through Christ is central to all we do at Graham. It is only through the gift of the gospel, which is the new birth, that we are able to truly enjoy a new life of obedience to God.

Romans 1:16; Philippians 1:27

**2. Scripture** - *God wrote the Bible through men and without error.*

We believe the one, true, eternal God reveals himself to humanity in creation, in Jesus Christ, and in the Bible - both Old and New Testaments. The Bible is the Word of God, and it is how people know God and his will. The Bible is inspired by God, is completely trustworthy, and is free from error in the original writings.

We believe the Bible is sufficient for all God requires us to believe and do. We must believe it as God's instruction in all that it teaches and trust it as God's pledge in all that it promises. God's people are equipped as disciples as they hear and obey God's Word.

Psalm 119:160; 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:19-21

**3. God** - *God exists eternally in a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

We believe in the one true and living God, who created the world from nothing, and governs all things at all times in all places. God is eternal, almighty, unchangeable, infinitely powerful, wise, just and holy. God exists forever as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is three distinct persons who act in unity, yet without division of nature, essence, or being. In all three persons of the Trinity, God is worthy of our worship and praise.

Genesis 1:1; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 12:29; John 1:1-4; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 1:1-3, Revelation 1:4-6

**4. Jesus Christ** - *Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He became a man, lived a sinless life, died on a cross, was buried, rose bodily from the grave, and ascended into Heaven to redeem sinful people.*

We believe Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God and is fully God and fully man, yet without sin. He was born of a virgin and lived a sinless life. He died on the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, rose from the dead on the third day, and ascended to his Father, at whose hand he makes intercession for his people. He is the only Mediator, the Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church, and Sovereign King of the universe.

Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-45; John 1:1-14; Acts 1:11, 2:22-27; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7; Philippians 2:5-7; 2 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 1:3; 9:24; 1 John 2:1-2

**5. The Holy Spirit** - *The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who applies salvation to sinful people.*

We believe that the Holy Spirit brings glory to the Father and the Son. He enlightens the minds of sinners and gives them new life in Christ. He applies Christ's saving work to believers as he regenerates, lives within, and grows them to become like

Jesus. He distributes spiritual gifts to every believer to build up the body of Christ, the church. He is the Comforter, the Spirit of adoption, the Seal of our salvation, and the One who guarantees our inheritance in Christ.

John 15:26; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 4:7-12; Titus 3:5-6

**6. Humanity** - *God creates all people in His image as uniquely male and female.*

We believe God created all people in his own image, male and female, in sinless perfection. That means every person has intrinsic value because we were made in the image of God. That image is now distorted in us, but the gospel is all about Jesus fixing that broken image and restoring what has been damaged by sin.

We believe since Adam sinned all people have a natural inclination to sin. We choose to disobey God. Every human being is born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life, and a person is totally incapable of pleasing God by themselves. This results in lives that are self-destructive and distorted as well as God's judgment and death.

Genesis 1:26; Romans 3:9-23, 6:23; Galatians 3:22; Colossians 3:10

**7. Salvation** - *All people are sinful and in need of salvation. Salvation is a gift of God, given by grace alone, and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

We believe the gospel is good news, culminating in an event in history when Jesus Christ died to accomplish salvation for people. He rescues sinful people by means of a great substitution as Jesus Christ took the believer's sin at the cross and gives in exchange his own righteousness. That achievement is offered to anyone through faith, so that when a person believes, they are counted as righteous, set free from the power of sin, and given all the privileges and joys of being a child of God in relationship with him. Those who are truly saved are kept secure by the power of Christ.

Romans 5:12; Psalm 51:4-5; John 3:16, 14:6; Acts 4:12, 10:43; Ephesians 2:8-9

**8. Church** - *The Church is the universal and local body of Christ sent into the world to display the glory of God.*

We believe the Church is made up of genuine followers of Jesus Christ who have a unique spiritual unity in Christ. The mission of the Church is to glorify God by making disciples. We make disciples through worship, prayer, the teaching of God's Word, fellowship, the use of spiritual gifts, observing the ordinances of baptism and communion, and by declaring the gospel in the world.

We believe every believer should be baptized by immersion as a symbol of their new life in Christ. Every follower of Jesus should participate in the Lord's Supper as a

symbol to remember Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection; to celebrate our unity in Christ; and to look forward to His return in victory.

Matthew 28:18-20; John 10:16; Acts 20:17; Ephesians 1:22, 5:23; Hebrews 10:25

**9. Future** - *Jesus will return to earth to judge all people and to rule and reign with his saints forever.*

We believe God, in his own time and his own way, will bring about the promised end of all things and renew the heavens and the earth. This future includes the visible and personal return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the glorification of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth.

Satan, with his hosts and all those outside Christ, will be finally separated from the presence of God, enduring eternal punishment in hell. But the righteous, in glorious bodies, will live and reign with Christ forever, serving Him and giving Him unending praise and glory. Then the eager hope of creation will be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God, who makes all things new.

Matthew 25:46; John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:12-28; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 1:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:7-15, 21:1-5

**10. Distinctives** - Graham Church believes the following

The ultimate authority of the church is Jesus Christ. The local church has the right of self-government, free from any external authority or interference. Christians should obey all commands of civil authorities which do not violate God's law. Civil government does not have the right to regulate the affairs of the church.

Marriage is an institution created by God involving the union of one man and one woman in permanent sacred fidelity. Sex is God's beautiful gift to be enjoyed between a biological man and woman in marriage. God says in Scripture that marriage is to be for life and divorce is considered adultery except for sexual immorality (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) or if an unbelieving spouse leaves (1 Corinthians 7:15). We acknowledge the pain and complexity of divorce. For more information see our position paper on marriage and divorce.

Men and women are equal in dignity and worth with different God-given roles in the church and family. All human life is precious from conception to natural death and should be protected. Elective abortion is the termination of unborn, innocent life and is a violation of God's moral law.

Civil lawsuits between Christians as a means to resolve personal disputes are prohibited in Scripture. God provides adequate resources within the local church for conflict resolution and mediation.

Since God offers redemption and restoration and forgiveness through Jesus Christ to all who confess and forsake their sin, we see every person as worthy of our compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity, even when they do not hold our values. While we will always speak the truth in love, even when it is painful to hear, we do not condone hateful or harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual. Where we disagree with someone we will always seek to persuade with kindness and compassion and due consideration to God's love for all people and our own constant need for God's grace.

This statement of beliefs does not exhaust the extent of our faith. The Bible itself speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and proper human conduct, and is the final source of all that we believe. For the purposes of Graham Church beliefs, practice, policy, and accountability, the Elder team is the Church's final arbiter on the Bible's meaning.

## **Article 4**

### **Membership**

Church membership formally identifies a person as part of the local body of Graham Church. Members have important rights and responsibilities toward the Church such as participation, attending, serving, giving, and praying, as does the Church toward its members such as shepherding, caring, and encouraging.

#### **1. Who can be a member**

Membership is based on a personal commitment of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior followed by baptism by immersion. Other forms of baptism may be considered by the Elders as fulfilling the requirement for membership. For more information see our position paper on membership. Members commit to abide by the beliefs and constitution of Graham Church.

#### **2. How a person becomes a member**

A person who wants to become a member completes a membership application and meets with an Elder. A person is admitted to membership on the approval of the Elders.

#### **3. How a member is restored**

The Church seeks to help members who are erring to restoration. The purpose of Church restoration is to gently encourage a biblical standard of conduct and doctrine in a member who errs (Galatians 6:1), to maintain purity in the local Church (1 Corinthians 5:6) and to deter sin (1 Timothy 5:20). Church restoration is the biblical, loving response to sin in the congregation.

Any member of the Church who teaches or insists on holding false doctrine, or persistently acts in a manner inconsistent with Biblical teaching, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the Church will be pursued for restoration. The procedure described in Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Corinthians 5 will be followed.

An unrepentant member is pursued privately, then warned by a group of two or three. If the member is still unrepentant, the matter is brought to the attention of the Elders. They may, upon careful and prayerful investigation, tell it to the Church, encouraging the congregation to seek repentance and restoration of the erring member. If the member still refuses to repent, they may be removed from membership by the Elders. All contact with that person from that point forward (except by family members) must be for the sake of restoration. The restoration process will continue even if the erring member seeks to withdraw from membership.

#### **4. How is a member removed**

A member can be removed from Church membership by the Elders. This occurs by transfer to another church; by a request of the member unless Church discipline is pending; if a member has an unjustified absence from Church attendance for six months or permanently relocates out of the area; or by dismissal as a final step of Church restoration.

## **Article 5 Elders**

God gives Elders to his Church to provide spiritual leadership, shepherd the members, and equip the saints for the work of ministry (1 Timothy 3:1-13). The Elders include both paid and unpaid Elders who serve under Jesus, our Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4). The terms “elder” and “pastor” and “overseer” are used interchangeably in Scripture and typically refer to the same position.

### **1. Who is qualified to be an Elder**

To be considered as an Elder, a man must have been called by God into leadership at Graham Church (Acts 20:28). He must have the high moral character and competency in pastoral ministry described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. He must be able to work as a team with the other Elders, united in theological vision, core values, philosophy of ministry, and brotherhood. He must have the ability and desire to teach God’s Word, pray, care for and shepherd the members, oversee church restoration, and lead other members by his spiritual and moral example. His public teaching and personal life must be consistent with the theological and moral beliefs of Graham Church.

### **2. How Elders are selected**

Ultimately it is God who makes men Elders by maturing, gifting, and burdening them for such a ministry (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23; 20:28; Ephesians 4:11). The other Elders

and the members recognize those whom God has called to Graham's Elder team.

If a man desires the office of Elder and he is biblically qualified, he or any other member of the Church may present his name for consideration to the Elder team. They will appraise his personal and spiritual qualifications and theological compatibility with church beliefs for a period of time (typically 6-12 months).

If the Elder team senses unanimously that this man meets the qualifications of an Elder, he will be brought before the members for affirmation. In the case of hiring an Elder from outside Graham Church, the investigation, interviews, and due diligence carried out by the Elders during the hiring, and the affirmation by the members, constitutes the above process.

The Elder team will be at least three qualified men, including those who are paid and non-paid. If an insufficient number of qualified men are available then the church is not required to have the three Elders and should seek the leadership of a biblically qualified preaching Elder (Titus 1:5). The ideal composition of the Elder team should be at least 50% men who are "independent", that is non-paid staff and not related to paid staff.

### **3. How long does an Elder serve**

Elder service continues for as long as the Elder desires the position and remains biblically qualified. Sabbaticals may be granted during which time the Elder does not actively serve on the Elder team. An Elder may resign by submitting a letter of resignation, to be approved by the Elder team.

An Elder may be dismissed from office in the following instances (this list is for example, not exhaustive): moral impropriety, doctrinal error, bringing shame to the name of Christ and/or Graham Church, incompetency, disunity with the rest of the Elders, or any failure that would lead to the process of church restoration. Any member with reason to believe an Elder ought to be dismissed should express this concern to the other Elders. Accusations against an Elder will be investigated by a group of other Elders to see if it is verified by at least two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19), credible, and whether the Elder is now disqualified and should be publicly rebuked and/or removed from office.

### **4. How the Elders function as a team**

The Elder team may structure and organize itself however it deems necessary for the sake of simplicity, clarity of communication, efficiency of the organization, and the needs of Graham Church. The full Elder team is the "Board of Directors" or "Trustees", unless a smaller group of Elders is designated by the full team for the purpose of administration.

The Elders have the primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, evaluation, and termination of church staff members, any of which they may delegate to others.

The Elders may appoint various committees and ministry leaders from within the membership. These committees and leaders will perform tasks designated and described by the Elder team and under the Elders' authority.

#### **5. When an Elder is paid.**

The Church may choose to compensate an Elder or other individual in order to minister full-time or part-time for the Church (1 Corinthians 9:3-14; 1 Timothy 5:17). Compensation is determined by a committee appointed by the non-paid Elders.

## **Article 6**

### **Deacons**

#### **1. Who is qualified to be a Deacon**

Deacons are servants to the Church and come alongside the Elders to help with the day-to-day operation of the Church, ministry, and material and financial needs. A Deacon must meet the qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

#### **2. What Deacons do**

There is no specific job description in the Bible for Deacons, but the title means "servant." Acts 6:1-6 seems to be an example of the early church appointing Deacons to help relieve church leaders of responsibilities so that leaders can pray and minister the word.

Deacons meet with the Elders as necessary to provide wisdom and help concerning the oversight of the Church facilities; financial oversight; caring ministry to those in the body who hurt; and any other responsibilities assigned to them by the Elders.

#### **3. How Deacons are selected or dismissed**

Deacons will be selected when a person is nominated by an Elder or member, observed and interviewed by the Elders for willingness to serve and biblical qualifications. The Elders will affirm and appoint new deacons.

Deacons service continues as long as they are qualified to serve and actively serve. A Deacon may resign by letter to the Elders. A Deacon may be dismissed from office by the Elders in the following instances (this list is for example, not exhaustive): moral impropriety, doctrinal error, bringing shame to the name of Christ and/or Graham Church, incompetency, disunity with the Elders, and any other failure that would lead to the process of church restoration. Any member with reason to believe a Deacon ought to be dismissed should express this concern to the Elders who will investigate and respond appropriately.



## **Article 7**

### **Meetings of the Members**

The Elders are required to annually present to the members a summary of Church finances and a budget for approval.

The Elders may call meetings of the members as deemed necessary.

## **Article 8**

### **Officers**

The Elders will designate the following state required officers: President or chairperson; Secretary of the corporation; and Treasurer of the corporation.

The Elders may also choose other officers and agents as it deems necessary. Any number of offices may be held by the same person, except that the office of president and secretary may not be held by the same person.

## **Article 9**

### **Fiscal year**

The fiscal year of Graham Church will be May 1- April 30.

## **Article 10**

### **Budget**

On an annual basis, the Elders must submit an annual budget to the members for approval (See Article 6). The budget is a projection of expenditures using the best information available. During the course of the year, the Elders may need to make amendments to the approved budget based on emergency expenses, growth, and ministry needs. Any single item that exceeds the approved budget by more than 3% must be brought to the members for approval.

# **Article 11**

## **Voting**

Member voting occurs in the following instances.

1. Budget affirmation (see article 9).
2. The hiring of paid Elders.
3. Purchase or sale of land or real estate.
4. Non-budgeted single item expenditures exceeding 3% of the annual budget (see article 9). Exceptions to this policy may be made for emergency maintenance expenses.
5. Approving any indebtedness beyond a 30-day account.
6. Dissolution (see article 15).
7. Amendments to the Bylaws (see article 19).

Member votes are announced a minimum of one week prior to the vote. Voting may be held by ballot as the Elders deem appropriate.

A quorum is necessary only in the case of the rejection of any of the above instances. A quorum is not necessary for a vote of affirmation. If a vote is taken resulting in the rejection of one of these items, an attendance record is taken. If the number of church members present or voting by ballot is less than 25% of all the church membership, the Elders are to communicate in writing to all the members the result of the vote. Within 45 days the Elders will hold another vote, or hold a member meeting to present an alternate proposal.

# **Article 12**

## **Prohibited activities**

Graham Church is prohibited from engaging in activities that are, in the determination of the Elders, inconsistent with the Church's purpose or that violate the beliefs of Graham (see article 3). Graham Church is also prohibited from condoning, promoting, or allowing any of its assets to be used for activities that violate its beliefs.

# **Article 13**

## **Mutual Interest**

All members of Graham are required to have a standard of living consistent with Scripture.

1. **Behavior.** The behavior of anyone in fellowship with Graham Church is of common interest to the Elder team and members (Galatians 6:1). Graham requires every Elder, Deacon, staff member, and church member to adhere to a lifestyle that is consistent with the beliefs of Graham (see article 3).
2. **Right to refuse service.** Therefore, Graham reserves the right to refuse service to any individual, whether member or not, that is not submitting their lifestyle to this scriptural mode of conduct. This refusal would include services, benefits, employment, and any use of church assets.

## **Article 14**

### **Employees**

Employees will be accountable to the Elders. Employees will be in agreement with the beliefs of Graham (see article 3). The duties of employees will be determined by the Elders.

## **Article 15**

### **Dissolution**

Graham Church may be dissolved by a three-fourths majority vote of the Elder team, followed by a majority vote of the membership. In the event of dissolution, all outstanding debts will be retired, including any severance of current employee(s) granted by the Elder team. The remaining church property (or properties) both real and personal, and all proceeds there from, will be given without cost to one or more like-minded churches and/or tax-exempt religious organizations which are compatible with Graham Church's beliefs. The Elder team will choose the recipients.

## **Article 16**

### **Church records**

Graham Church maintains a written policy which identifies which records are available for review and which records must remain confidential. Individuals who wish to access church financial, personnel, or institutional records may consult the policy for the proper process.

# **Article 17**

## **Indemnification**

### **1. Power to Indemnify**

Graham Church has the power to indemnify (including the power to advance expenses to) its elders, deacons, officers, employees, and agents made a party to a proceeding, provided, however, that no such indemnity shall indemnify any such elder, deacon, officer, employee, or agent from or on account of:

- a. Acts or omissions of such elder, deacon, officer, employee, or agent finally adjudged to be intentional misconduct or a knowing violation of law.
- b. Conduct of the elder, deacon, officer, employee, or agent finally adjudged to be in violation of Michigan law.
- c. Any transaction with respect to which it was finally adjudged that such elder, deacon, officer, employee, or agent personally received a benefit in money, property, or services to which such person was not legally entitled.

### **2. Permissive Indemnification**

At the discretion of the Elders, the Church may also indemnify any person who acted in good faith and reasonably believed that his or her conduct was in the Church's best interest and not unlawful.

# **Article 18**

## **Dispute Resolution**

Graham Church believes that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian Church (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-11). The Church will require its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblical principles without reliance on the secular courts.

When consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church will encourage the use of biblical principles and the avoidance of suits of law to resolve disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or non-Christian and whether individuals or corporate entities. The Elders will adopt policies and procedures to effect these requirements and desires.

## **Article 19**

### **Amendments**

Graham Church's constitution may be altered, amended, or repealed by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present at a meeting of the members called by the Elders in addition to the requirements of Article 11.