

Grace Fellowship exists to point people to Jesus making disciples who love Jesus, love people and help people love Jesus. Through the making of disciples, local churches are established. As Grace Fellowship, we have a mandate to plant multi-congregational churches as a natural outflow of committed and commanded disciple making.

## Our Story

Grace Fellowship of Saskatoon officially began as an Acts 29 church plant in the city of Saskatoon on September 2, 2008 with a passionate desire to see Jesus-exalting, Gospel-centered churches established in the city and Lord willing, beyond. To that end we began trying to cast the vision and gather a people around the call to be Jesus' church – living out our Gospel identity as a family of servants on Jesus' mission of making disciples.

Murray McLellan had been pastoring a small church and teaching in the public school in Leask, Saskatchewan, when he and his wife believed God was calling them to begin a church plant that would reproduce and plant more Gospel-centered churches in Saskatoon and beyond. Having grown up in Saskatchewan, and never having heard the Gospel until he was 24 years of age, caused Murray to have a heart for the people and areas of our province where Jesus was not known. Murray and Cheryl, along with a few from the small church in Leask, believed that to reach those areas, we needed to, like the apostles in the book of Acts, strategically start in the cities of Saskatoon and Regina. In 2007, Murray and Cheryl sold their home in Leask and moved to Saskatoon to begin the adventure. Murray continued to teach in the public school in Leask to support his family as things got underway.

Things started out slowly as we moved from a dozen or so people gathering in a home, to meeting in the Sutherland Hall for our Sunday gatherings – functioning as one Gospel Community as we now call them.

It was on January 9, 2011, that we launched Grace Fellowship in the Galaxy Theatre (currently known as Scotiabank Theatre) in Downtown Saskatoon. At that time, we had 3 Gospel Communities who came together for this larger gathering. The early months stretched our faith, as it took everything we had to cover the rent, and some Sundays we had less than 25 people, which made it a little awkward in a theatre that could easily seat 150 people. The sound equipment was basic and patched together. Yet, the consistent proclamation of Jesus and His amazing Gospel of grace, began to impact, not only the lives of those committed to partner with us in this endeavor, but others who were hearing the difference between religion and the Gospel of Jesus.

In February of 2012, along with our sister Acts 29 church plant in Regina (The Compass), we officially partnered in this Gospel mission with the C2C church planting network – a distinctly Canadian network.

God continues to gather people to partner with us as we seek to be a Christ-treasuring community, formed and sent by the Gospel on mission to the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit for the Glory of God. Our vision, from the beginning, was to plant churches that plant churches. We desired to see people come to know and love Jesus resulting in truly being a fellowship of grace-centered

congregations that share a common God-focused DNA. Grace Fellowship is a family of churches - a multi-congregational, disciple-making movement.

## **Our Structure**

### **What does multi-congregational mean?**

We think the term multi-congregational most accurately describes what we're doing. Meaning, we are a family of churches that each meet in their own time and place. Like siblings we have the same DNA but can look different. We are one organization, with one charitable number, and one bank account. While united around theology, vision and values, each congregation has a very real opportunity to customize ministry to its particular context with its particular leadership.

Rather than use the term, multi-site (one church/multiple locations), this phrase often brings to mind video multi-site and is, thus, unhelpful in describing what we do. We also avoid the phrase multi-campus as it carries many of the same connotations. We will occasionally refer to a Grace Fellowship campus if we're talking about the physical location. Otherwise we try to use the term congregation or simply, more preferably, church.

### **How does the leadership structure work?**

As each local congregation grows they will with time and leader development have their own team of local elders (staff and non-staff) that shepherd the congregation, oversee its ministry, set its budget, carry out church discipline, hire its staff and lead the mission in its community. While these elders care deeply about the overall vision of Grace Fellowship, their authority and oversight extends only to the congregation they are leading.

There is also a Grace-wide Leadership Team that oversees the church as a whole and makes decisions that impact all congregations. This team consists of one or more pastors from each congregation as well as other strategic leaders. The Leadership Team is not focused on congregation specific issues (what music to play, how to get more Gospel Communities, local contextualization etc.), but is focused on Grace-wide issues. These include for example policy, vision, acquiring property or large congregational needs, rental spaces, and planting new churches or congregations.

If push came to shove, the Leadership Team would have authority over the individual congregations. However, the system is designed to not use this authority unless absolutely necessary. In the event of a transition situation for a congregation's Lead Pastor, the local elders and Leadership Team work closely to determine a succession plan.

### **How do finances work?**

Each congregation is expected to be self-supporting. With new plants we work off a 3 year subsidy plan with the goal being that the local congregation is self sufficient by the end of year three. This means

the local salary (or salaries) are covered as well as the expenses. Obviously due to the numerous challenges in planting churches this is a general guideline and moves as required or necessary. With sustainability for each local congregation we want to see:

- Each congregation giving 10% to a centralized Outward Focused fund that supports church-planting (local and global) and community ministry.
- Each congregation also gives roughly 10-30% to Central Operations for accounting, payroll, communication, website, graphics, facility management, leadership development, and strategic planning. This percentage could change in the future to meet growing needs both centrally and in a local congregation.
- The remaining approximately 60-80% is available for the local congregation to budget and spend as needed for the local congregation. These funds pay for rent, staff support, and ministry expenses. In a very real way, this allows those giving at a local congregation to know that every dollar they give is supporting the mission of their local congregation, as even the Outward Focused and Central Operations monies are used to extend and support the ministry of the local congregation.

### **How does preaching work?**

Each congregation has regular live preaching, overseen by the congregation's Lead Pastor. At Grace Fellowship we believe in the importance of raising up and training local Elders/Pastors to highly preach and proclaim God's Word. Given this value we work closely together training and developing in this area, through ongoing development.

Most of the time (approx. 45 weeks) each congregation is preaching on the same biblical text or topic. This allows the preachers to study in advance together and share resources. It also builds unity across our congregations as everybody is tethered to the same text. When necessary, the Lead Pastor has the freedom to set the scheduled sermon aside and address an issue he or the local Elders deem important to address for that local congregation.

### **What holds Grace Fellowship together?**

As Grace Fellowship continues to grow and expand into more congregations, it is held together by three main things:

- **Covenant Relationship.** The bonds of covenant unite the congregations of Grace Fellowship beyond that of a network. Like a marriage, this bond provides the security of commitment while requiring mutual sacrifice. We are blessed by shared gifts and challenged by shared burdens. We are better together than apart.

- **Common Culture.** The core convictions of our leadership are embodied in a common culture. All congregations submit to this culture, building in harmony with it. All congregations also contribute to it, bringing new life and vibrancy by nature of their participation.
- **Established Boundaries.** These are the elements that all congregations must share. They establish boundaries within which leaders are encouraged to creatively develop teaching and practices that meet the needs of their community. These boundaries include doctrine, values, central ministries, unified ministries, and communication standards.

To help bring unity and clarity over who has jurisdiction over what, and what ministry efforts should be centralized or decentralized we utilize the following categories: Centralized, Unified, and Decentralized.

- **Centralized** - Things done the same way, overseen by a centralized department. Right now, this category includes finance, accounting, HR, facility maintenance, media and communications, pastoral apprenticeships and outward focused ministries.
- **Unified** - Things done in the same way, overseen by the local leadership. Right now, this category includes Gospel Communities (while giving freedom to what Gospel Communities look like), preaching, partnership, classes, elder processes, church discipline, biblical counselling, and benevolence needs.
- **Decentralized** - Things done in different ways, overseen by local leadership. Right now, many things are decentralized, including guest services, kids, students, music, assimilation, internships and ministries for men and women.

### **How does it actually make everyone better?**

- Lead Pastors are better because they have a team of other men in the same role who are supporting and encouraging them.
- Staff and servants are better because they have associates at other congregations who are doing similar work.
- Volunteer leaders and new staff are especially helped by the experience surrounding them in other congregations.
- Preachers are better because they sharpen each other and share ideas weekly.
- Grace Partners are better because they have more places to invite friends and coworkers who live in other parts of town to attend.
- Each congregation is strengthened by the overall reputation of Grace Fellowship. Church planters are better because they don't have to reinvent the wheel (especially with administration) and they have the support and strength of a movement behind them.

- Newer congregations are better because financing is available that wouldn't be available if they were on their own.

Grace Fellowship is structured to support the birth and sustainable health of local congregations. Our focus is not on the advancement of a singular brand or ideology, but rather on intentional investment in unique local congregations through leadership development, pastoral residencies and apprenticeships, relational networks and collectives, leadership assessments, theological education, as well as the selective provision of resources and infrastructure. These investments are made not only for the sake of Grace Fellowship congregations – existing and new – but also churches outside the Grace family that we have relationship with. We are, after all, partners in the Gospel.

(Philippians 1:3-6)

### **Truly local congregations**

Each local congregation is a unique expression of the church, sent to embody the Gospel in a particular context. Churches are living communities of unique people within a particular cultural context, gathered in a common pursuit of knowing and honouring Jesus. Therefore, we do not view local congregations simply as generic distribution centres of religious goods and services. We celebrate the truth that as each congregation is shaped by its people and context it is equipped better than anyone else for the missionary task of translating and embodying the Gospel in its neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, etc. On a broad level, a diversity of truly local congregations united in Gospel partnership brings vibrancy and health to the greater body, adding fullness to its witness.

### **The mission of local congregations**

The goal of each local congregation is to multiply healthy disciples and leaders who are released to do the work of ministry. The purpose of the local church is not to maximize numbers, budgets, or buildings. It is not even to reach more people. It is to make disciples who say with their mouths and lives, "Jesus is Lord." This is the metric by which the faithfulness and success of the church must be measured: are we making disciples? This is not the goal of church leaders only, but all members of the body of Christ. All are sent as Christ's ambassadors, called to make disciples. The role of leadership is to equip Christians for this work of spiritual multiplication. Healthy disciples make healthy disciples, who make healthy disciples... churches that plant churches!

### **The boundaries that unify local congregations**

The local congregations of Grace Fellowship build, cultivate, and contextualize their ministry within four established boundaries. The leaders of Grace Fellowship congregations are charged with the creative task of building and sustaining a healthy expression of the body of Christ in their context. To help ensure the unity of our diverse congregations – the benefits of which are discussed later – boundaries have been established that help define the space in which local congregations have freedom to contextualize their ministry.

These boundaries are meant to empower leaders with clarity, direction, and resources rather than limit them with constraints. They are in place to help the multiplication of healthy disciples and leaders who do the work of ministry in their local church. The established boundaries are found in four main categories:

1. Covenant – We are bound together as one legal entity with shared resources.
2. Beliefs and Practices – We operate from the same foundation in the Gospel.
3. Culture – We have shared values and expectations, mission and vision.
4. Communication – We speak the same language and present a consistent message.

## **The Benefits of Centralized Operations**

Central Operations provide structure, expertise, and services to support and empower the ministry of local congregations. Central Operations are structured to support and empower local congregations in the freedom that has been given to them. This is done by efficiently meeting common needs with centralized leadership, freeing congregations of the burden to dedicate energy, resources, and/or staff to meet those needs locally. Central Operations are intentionally minimal to reduce the financial burden placed on the local congregations, who contribute a percentage of their budget to fund it. Currently in Grace Fellowship, facility maintenance, media and communications, legal and finance, and outward focus ministries (missions) are a part of Central Operations.

Central Operations provides a tremendous support structure for the birthing of new Grace Fellowship congregations.

## **Our DNA**

If Grace Fellowship is going to be a movement that plants church planting churches throughout the province, there has to be a common DNA amongst all the parts. In order for our DNA to spread while not becoming diluted, all of our church congregations will be a part of the Acts 29 church planting network. In addition to Acts 29, additional partnerships such as C2C and/or denominational affiliations may be established.

## **Acts 29 Canada**

It is the desire of Grace Fellowship that each existing church and church plant within Grace Fellowship would be a full member of Acts 29 because of the theological robustness focused on Jesus' supremacy which leads to a fraternity of brothers obsessed with Jesus and His desires.

Acts 29 is a family of church-planting churches that stands in the tradition of historic evangelical confessionalism. While we believe it is vital that the elders of each of our local churches determine where they stand on doctrines of second importance, we do wish to make known our convictions on the Acts 29 five distinctive theological foundations. (Refer to Appendix 1 for detailed description of our Acts 29 distinctives and values)

## **Other Affiliations and Partnerships**

### **C2C**

This network has traditionally been focused on Canada, but has now begun to branch out into the United States. The network has a broad theological focus, but remains evangelical and has a huge desire to influence the church in Canada in a certain direction, which is unapologetically to be gospel-centred in all things.

While the primary assessment for Grace Fellowship will be Acts 29, we would encourage church plants to also be part of C2C. This could provide resourcing which will be helpful, but also for you to influence others with the DNA that you carry. C2C desires for Acts 29 to influence the network.

Each church plant may decide if they want to be part of C2C, but it is encouraged.

### **Denominational Affiliation**

Within Grace Fellowship, the denomination does not define Grace Fellowship. It is the network affiliation of Acts 29 that carries our theological agreement, not the denomination. Therefore, there is room for many of the evangelical denominations to be part of this vision.

In the same way that denominational affiliation is not an issue, it is not required for a church or church plant to be part of a denomination. For those who are part of a denomination, the aim should be to participate in denominational meetings when appropriate. Grace Fellowship local churches should aim to be model participants within the denomination.

## APPENDIX 1 –

# The distinctives and values of the Acts 29 Canada network:

## Distinctives:

### 1. We are passionate about gospel centrality<sub>1</sub>

We believe the gospel is the good news of what God has graciously accomplished for sinners through the sinless life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection of his Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, namely our forgiveness from sin and complete justification before God; this gospel is also the foundation for our confidence in the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom, and the consummation of his purpose for all creation in the new heavens and new earth.

This gospel is centred in Christ, is the foundation for the life of the Church, and is our only hope for eternal life; this gospel is not proclaimed if Christ's penal substitutionary death and bodily resurrection are not central to our message.

This Gospel is not only the means by which people are saved, but also the truth and power by which people are sanctified; it is the truth of the Gospel that enables us to genuinely and joyfully do what is pleasing to God and to grow in progressive conformity to the image of Christ.

The salvation offered in this gospel message is received by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; no ordinance, ritual, work, or any other activity on the part of man is required in order to be saved.

### 2. We enthusiastically embrace the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners<sub>2</sub>

We affirm that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, not on the basis of foreseen faith but unconditionally, according to his sovereign good pleasure and will.

We believe that through the work of the Holy Spirit, God will draw the elect to faith in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, graciously and effectually overcoming their stubborn resistance to the gospel so that they will most assuredly and willingly believe.

We also believe that these, the elect of God whom he gave to the Son, will persevere in belief and godly behaviour and be kept secure in their salvation by grace through faith.

We believe that God's sovereignty in this salvation neither diminishes the responsibility of people to believe in Christ nor marginalizes the necessity and power of prayer and evangelism, but rather reinforces and establishes them as the ordained means by which God accomplishes his ordained ends.



### **3. We recognize and rest upon the necessity of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for all of life and ministry <sub>3</sub>**

The Holy Spirit is fully God, equal with the Father and Son, whose primary ministry is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ; he also convicts unbelievers of their need for Christ and imparts spiritual life through regeneration (the new birth).

The Spirit permanently indwells, graciously sanctifies, lovingly leads, and empowers all who are brought to faith in Christ so that they might live in obedience to the inerrant Scriptures. The model for our reliance upon the Spirit and our experience of his indwelling and empowering presence is the Lord Jesus Christ himself who was filled with the Spirit and entirely dependent upon his power for the performance of miracles, the preaching of the kingdom of God, and all other dimensions of his earthly ministry.

The Holy Spirit who indwelt and empowered Christ in like manner indwells and empowers us through spiritual gifts he has bestowed for the work of ministry and the building up of the body of Christ. Although there are different understandings in our network of the nature and function of these gifts, we all recognize that they are divine provisions central to spiritual growth and effective ministry and are to be eagerly desired, faithfully developed, and lovingly exercised according to biblical guidelines.

### **4. We are deeply committed to the spiritual & moral equality of male & female and to men as responsible servant-leaders in both home and church <sub>4</sub>**

Both men and women are together created in the divine image and are therefore equal before God as persons, possessing the same moral dignity and value, and have equal access to God through faith in Christ. Men and women are together the recipients of spiritual gifts designed to empower them for ministry in the local church and beyond. Therefore, women are to be encouraged, equipped, and empowered to utilize their gifting in ministry, in service to the body of Christ, and through teaching in ways that are consistent with the Word of God.

Both husbands and wives are responsible to God for spiritual nurture and vitality in the home, but God has given to the man primary responsibility to lead his wife and family in accordance with the servant-leadership and sacrificial love characterized by Jesus Christ. This principle of male headship should not be confused with, nor give any hint of, domineering control. Rather, it is to be the loving, tender and nurturing care of a godly man who is himself under the kind and gentle authority of Jesus Christ.

The Elders/Pastors of each local church have been granted authority under the headship of Jesus Christ to provide oversight and to teach/preach the Word of God in corporate assembly for the building up of the body. The office of Elder/Pastor is restricted to men.

### **5. We embrace a missionary understanding of the local church and its roles as the primary means by which God chooses to establish his kingdom on earth <sub>5</sub>**

The church has a clear biblical mandate to look beyond its own community to the neighbourhood, the nation, and the world as a whole; thus mission is not an optional program in the church but an essential element in the identity of the church.

We are called to make Christ known through the gospel and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring his lordship to bear on every dimension of life.

The primary way we fulfill this mission is through the planting of churches that plant churches and the training of their leaders. Our aim is that Jesus Christ would be more fully formed in each person through the ministry of those churches God enables us to plant around the world.

We also believe we are responsible neither to retreat from our culture nor to conform to it, but with humility, through the Spirit and the truth of the gospel, to engage it boldly as we seek its transformation and submission to the lordship of Christ.

#### Footnotes:

1. Mark 1:1; Luke 24:46-47; John 3:16-18; Romans 1:16-17; Romans 1:18-25; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:2; 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; 9:13; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 1: 7-10; Colossians 1: 19-20; 2 Timothy 1:8-14; 2 Peter 3: 11-13; Jude 3-4; Revelation 21:1-22:21
2. John 1:12-13; 6:37-44; 10:25-30; Acts 13:48; 16:30-31; Romans 3:1-4:25; 8:1-17,31-39; 9:1-23; 10:8-10; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-13; Titus 3:3-7; 1 John 1:7,9
3. Matthew 3:11; 12:28; Luke 4:1, 14; 5:17; 10:21; John 1:12-13; 3:1-15, 34; 14:12; 15:26-27; 16:7-15; Acts 2:14-21; 4:29-30; 10:38; Romans 8:9; 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-13; 12:28-31; 14:1-33; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 3:1-5; Ephesians 1:13-14; 5:18
4. Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18; Acts 18:24-26; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1-7; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7 5
5. Isaiah 52:7; Matthew 10:5-25; 28:18-20; Luke 4:18-19; 24:46-47; Acts 28:31; Romans 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Galatians 2:10; Ephesians 3:10; 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Hebrews 10:23-25; 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10

## Values:

In addition to our distinctive convictions, these four values are what we desire would define us and we would work for and from:

### Church-Planting Churches

We will be a family of church-planting churches.

That is why Acts 29 exists. Our focus is not simply on our own congregations, but on the work of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, making his name famous to the ends of the earth. In the DNA of all

Acts 29 churches should be a deep and driving desire to see churches planted across the world, all of which are defined by theological clarity, cultural engagement and missional innovation.

We are a family of churches that are theologically aligned and philosophically diverse, and we pray that the Spirit would keep us all deeply submitted to the word of God and walking in a glad submission to the Spirit. Acts 29 is not a theological club where churches and church planters gather around theological alignment without the desire or resolve to plant other like-minded churches. At our core, we are a church-planting family. May the Spirit draw those who share this passion so we see myriads of people who are far from him, reconciled to him through Christ.

## **Holiness and Humility**

We will be known for holiness and humility.

Our desire is that our family will be comprised of godly, sacrificial and mature men and women:

- Men and women who would gladly lay down any and all of their liberties if it would serve the cause of Christ in greater ways
- Men and women who don't seek conflict but also aren't afraid of it
- Men and women who treasure Christ and his gospel above all

We desire to be faithful servants who love Jesus deeply and are quietly training, coaching and planting churches that will train, coach and plant more churches. We will continue to have our flaws and blind spots, but our deep and abiding hope is that regardless of what is said of us – even by our enemies – it will have to be said that we are men and women who deeply and desperately are invested in the Kingdom of God and are walking in holiness and humility.

## **A Diverse and Global Community**

We will be a radically diverse and global community.

It is a joy and privilege to be involved with and learn from brothers and sisters from different cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds. We also want to press into and learn from those who differ from us in practice, philosophy and culture; especially those from different parts of the world. Our desire is to find the Spirit of God working among us so much so that we see more of his glory in and through a bold ethnic harmony that reveals God's infinite worth and the power of the gospel in a visual and captivating way.

Ethnic harmony and global diversity are integral to what it means to be explicitly Christian. The Scriptures teach that there are two races—the race of the first Adam and the race of the Last Adam. It is only 'in Christ' that we are able to realize this identity. Our different cultures carry individual history, traditions and legacies, but the gospel transcends them and captures them for Christ, making us a new

people, the family of God. We continue to value what is good and right in our cultures while gladly submitting to our new family as adopted sons and daughters – co- heirs with Christ Jesus.

### **Praying for Conversions Through Evangelism**

We will pray for conversions through evangelism.

“I need to tell you about Jesus, when do you want to do that?” Words as simple as those can affect eternal change, bringing the spiritually dead to life in Christ. Witnessing the salvific work of the Holy Spirit creates in us an insatiable desire to see more and more of the same. This is why we are serious about evangelism and praying for conversions.

This cannot simply be realized by preaching sermons that are evangelistic, but rather it is a holistic approach to evangelism. We desire churches filled with those who model personal evangelism by sharing the gospel as boldly in their neighbourhoods as they do in their congregations. We desire churches filled with those who long and yearn for salvations and experience godly frustration when they are not happening. We desire churches filled with those who believe in the sufficiency of the Scriptures and in the power of the Spirit to break the hearts of the most hardened of people in their cities. We desire churches filled men and women who see their relationships with neighbours, co-workers and friends as opportunities to love supremely by praying for and sharing the best news in the universe with them. We desire churches filled with men and women who love the saving work of God so much that it would lead them to the ends of the earth, proclaiming and living out the gospel until all that will know, know.

May the Spirit protect and guide us, and may he draw many to Jesus, not only in our churches but also in and in all those churches where Christ is preached, loved and served.