



## WHO WE ARE

Grace Fellowship is a fellowship of like-minded, independent churches who exist in a voluntary interdependent partnership to help people live in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe that making disciples who love Jesus, love people, and help people love Jesus needs to be our focus. Making disciples will lead to churches being planted or revitalized, which is an important part of carrying out Jesus' mission. Our desire is to see the gospel advance and the Kingdom of God grow through healthy, vibrant, gospel centered churches.

As a family of churches, we value the strength of relationships, believing that no one should do ministry or life alone. We are better together – in a joyful partnership in the Gospel.

Being relationally driven as opposed to program or policy driven, we see that having humble, qualified, healthy, servant leaders fully submitted to the Lordship of Jesus and His Word is essential. As a fellowship we have a voluntary association focused not on organizational growth, but on strengthening and equipping. We want to see churches grow, mature, and multiply.

New church plants and existing churches that partner with Grace Fellowship are autonomous, independently led, separately operated, and accountable to their leadership. Grace Fellowship seeks to provide opportunities for church leaders to build relationships with others in ministry that will support and strengthen them in what God has called them to do. As a fellowship of churches, we develop and share resources to help each local church thrive.

Our Grace Fellowship churches recommit to partner together on a yearly basis.

## **Our Distinct DNA**

Grace Fellowship is not one church in many different locations; rather it is a family of independent (autonomous) and interdependent local churches that work together for the advancement of the Gospel. Under the local leadership of pastors/elders/overseers (three titles used of the same individual: pastor = elder = overseer), each local church seeks to love, support, and equip the others in intentional partnership.

As a fellowship of churches we have:

- A shared foundation of core beliefs, values, and family traits
- A shared vision
- A shared philosophy of ministry
- A shared strategy

**Our shared foundation of core theological distinctives** can be found in our [constitution here](#) and in our [doctrinal emphasis document here](#)

**Our shared vision** can be found [here](#)

**Our shared philosophy of ministry** can be found [here](#)

**Our shared local church strategy** is living as a family of missionary servants; disciples of Jesus who make disciples. We believe that we will best fulfill our mission and see this vision come to be as we live out our Gospel identities in Christ. [View our discipleship plan here](#)

## **Our Theological Distinctives and Shared Family Traits**

### ***God-centered***

The triune God is glorious. His glory consists in the overwhelming and overflowing beauty which stems from the sum total of all His attributes working together in perfect harmony. We want all that we are and do to focus on the glory of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We recognize God as the center of our message, the center of our lives, and the center of the entire universe,

### ***Gospel Centrality***

We believe the Gospel is the good news of what God has graciously accomplished for sinners, not instruction for what man must do to be right with God. Through the sinless life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, God has accomplished our forgiveness from sin and complete justification. 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 centered in Jesus, is the foundation for the life of the Church, and is our only hope for eternal life. A Gospel-centered life speaks to the centrality of Jesus in every area of our lives.

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, to the credit and glory of God alone; no ordinance, ritual, work, or any other activity on the part of man is required in order to be saved.

The centrality of the Gospel leads to identity based living. We see in Scripture that the Gospel not only saves us, but radically transforms us as well as giving us entirely new identities. We focus on four core identities that are given to disciples of Jesus Christ:

1. Family – God is our Father, so we love others in the church as our brothers and sisters.
2. Servants – Jesus is our King, who came to serve and not be served, so we serve the least of these as Jesus served us.
3. Learners – Disciples are learners, who seek to mature in Christ, by learning and obeying all that Jesus commands.
4. Missionaries – Jesus sends his disciples out to make more disciples and teach them how to walk with him. He sends The Holy Spirit as our power to be witnesses of Jesus in word and deed.

Grace Fellowship churches tend to focus less on programs, investing more energy in equipping and encouraging its partners to live their identities in Christ.

(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; Titus 2:11-12; 2 Peter 3: 11-13; Jude 3-4; Revelation 21-22)

## ***The Sovereignty of God***

The God of the Bible is the creator of the whole visible and invisible universe and He is the sovereign ruler of it. From all eternity, He freely and unchangeably, in His most holy wisdom, ordained whatsoever comes to pass. To use the words of Paul, God does "all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11), having sovereign control of all events from the events of rulers and nations (Daniel 4:25, 32, 34-35) to the flight of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29). In particular, God's sovereignty is worked out in the area of salvation. To ensure that the salvation of sinners abounds to the praise of God's glory, God saves His people by grace alone apart from works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The sovereignty of God's grace is seen in God's unconditional election of His people out of the mass of sinful humanity for salvation (Romans 8:29, 9:6-23; Ephesians 1:4), the glorious atonement of Christ which actually accomplishes the salvation of God's people (I Peter 3:18), the irresistible grace of God's effectual call (Romans 8:30; I Peter 2:9) and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26ff; John 3:4; Titus 3:5) which enable and move a person to respond to the gospel of Christ in saving faith, and God's persevering in grace with his saints (I Peter 1:5; Jude 1; John 10:28-30; Philippians 1:6) so that His people will in fact persevere to the end and be saved.

## ***Empowering Presence of the Holy Spirit***

We recognize and rest upon the necessity of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for all of life and ministry. 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 our Lord and his revealed will in the Scriptures.

### ***Acceptance-Driven Obedience***

Acceptance-centered obedience comes from knowing we have already been accepted; it is not obeying to be accepted. It is grace-motivated rather than fear-motivated. We obey because God loves us, not to get him to love us. We seek to please him and walk in his commands out of gratitude for what he has done, not out of fear of what he might do to us.

The Gospel of Jesus sets us free to love God because he first loved us.

### ***Ordered Equality and Distinction***

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, men and 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.

While husbands and wives are responsible to God for spiritual nurture and vitality in the home, God has given to the husband primary responsibility to lead his wife and family in accordance with the servant leadership and sacrificial love characterized by Jesus Christ.

This principle of 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/overseers (terms used interchangeably) 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 the corporate assembly for the building up of the body. The office of elder/pastor is restricted to qualified men. Any other church role, outside the scope of eldership and shepherding responsibilities, can and should be filled by men and women, leveraging the diverse gifts of all.

(Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18; Acts 14:23, 18:24-26, 20:17-36; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1-7, 4:11-16, 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; Titus 1:5-9, 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4)

### ***Jesus-centered Theology***

The Bible is written for us but not primarily about us – it is about Jesus. Christianity is essentially a Person – Jesus. John 5:39-40 is clear ...*[39] You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.* (John 5:39-40 ESV)

God, for his own delight, has revealed himself and manifested his glory ultimately in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and his complete and perfect work on the Cross through which he has established a New Covenant in his blood. (Heb. 1:1-3) Prior to the incarnation, all of history and all of Scripture had progressively been moving toward and aiming at the great day of Christ and the New Covenant reality that would glorify God forever and ever.

This was God's eternal plan, worked out through the creation of a physical world and universe; a way of going public with his glory in an incredible way for his own delight (Eph. 1:9-12; 3:8-11). This resounds to the praise of the glory of his grace!

All of God's previous revelation, including the Mosaic era, anticipated and led to the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19). Even that Old Covenant was a "shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17; see also Heb. 10:1). "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." (2 Cor. 1:20)

Thus, the pinnacle of God's unfolding revelation comes to us in the New Testament Scriptures, in the face of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament Scriptures, the Spirit, through his chosen apostles, gives us our Lord's words about the mystery of Christ, "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men" (Eph. 3:5). The two testaments proclaim the same message, but from differing standpoints. The first, sometimes using veiled and symbolic language, points forward in anticipation and the other, in clear and unmistakable terms, declares completion/accomplishment. Thus, we must read all of Scripture in light of the New Covenant, established in Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:17; Luke 10:23-24; 24:27, 44; John 5:46; 8:56; Heb. 10:7).

Dr. D.A. Carson, in *The Gagging of God* writes, "Each major strand [of biblical theology] must be woven into the fabric that finds its climax and ultimate significance in the person and work of Jesus Christ." [(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 545]

For more information on how the Bible fits together as one unfolding redemptive story centered on Jesus, view "The Good News Story" videos and resources here. (add link)



### ***The Primacy of the Local Church***

We embrace a missionary understanding of the local church and its role as the primary means by which God chooses to establish his kingdom on earth. The church has a clear biblical mandate to look beyond its own community to the neighborhood, 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.

Jesus died not to redeem random individuals, but to create a new people who treasure his glory above all else (Titus 2:13-14). That is the purpose of his death and resurrection according to the Scriptures. Therefore, participating in the new community that Jesus died to create (the church) is not really optional for those who call themselves followers of Jesus. The church is, in fact, the sole entity that God has entrusted with both the capability and the responsibility of displaying and declaring his glory to the world.

### ***Church is Family on Mission***

Paul explicitly says it's through the church that the purpose of God is accomplished in Christ (Eph. 3:7-12).

The role of the church in the mission of God necessitates that we see our life in Christ as something inseparably connected to the life of the local church. The church is not to live "like" a family; we truly are a family. Practically, this means we should probably think about our lives in terms of "we" and "us" and not "I" and "me". It is not overstatement to say our lives were designed to become part of God's new community, the church (local and universal), through which the mission of God is carried out.

### ***Biblical Cultural Engagement***

We are committed to proclaiming, embracing, and living out the full counsel of God's redemptive message as revealed to us in the Scriptures. While we are intentional about reaching the immediate culture in a relevant way, we are committed to the biblical doctrines of the Christian faith. We do not believe that effective cultural engagement must lead to doctrinal compromise. Rather we believe that faithful Gospel contextualization is what is needed to bring temporal and eternal transformation to individuals, families, churches, and communities.

### ***Theological Training***

The local church is given the responsibility to establish environments and relationships where people can be trained, grow, and be sent as disciples.

The church is to be a center of theological training and equipping men and women for the sake of ministry. Theology is taught to help disciples know God better, love Him more deeply, and follow Him with greater passion.

Theological education should engage and transform the heart through the mind. Our focus in training is reorienting disciples to true reality: God and all things in relation to God.

The discipleship of believers is more than learning. It also involves the building and nurturing of Christ-like character in the community of faith (i.e. local church).

Leaders are developed and equipped in the context of the local church.

### ***Expositional Preaching***

We believe that expositional preaching is important because God's Word alone is what convicts, converts, builds up, and sanctifies God's people (Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:13; Jn. 17:17). Preaching that makes the main point of the text the main point of the sermon makes God's agenda, and not the preacher's, rule the church.

### ***Gospel Communities***

Gospel Communities are the lifeblood of Grace Fellowship churches. This is where we live, grow, and serve on mission together. It's a community of people brought together by the Gospel, impacting one another with the Gospel, and learning to spread the Gospel in their areas of influence. It is the primary place where Scripture's "one anothers" are lived out – "love one another," "serve one another," "encourage one another" etc. Discipleship takes place in Gospel Communities, where we gather regularly for a combination of sermon discussion, sharing meals, prayer, worship, social/missional outings, and service projects.

### ***Healthy Teams***

In every area of ministry it is not good to do it alone (Gen 2:18). Even as Jesus sent out his apostles, for the most part, they went out two-by-two (Mark 6:7, Acts 13:2-3, Acts 15:40, Acts 16:1-3). It is our conviction that local churches are led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17,28, Phil. 1:1, 1 Thess. 5:12-13, Titus 1:5, Heb. 13:7,17, 1 Peter 5:1-4). Following that pattern of teams of servant leaders, we desire that when new Gospel Communities, new churches, and even new ministry directives are established, there is a team in place from the start – not just one person. While there may be a singular point-person who willingly takes on more responsibility, we believe that it is best for the health of the leadership as well as the church when the entirety of responsibility does not

solely rest on one individual. This also means that when leaders are established, they should be equipping others to lead as well and not just doing everything themselves (Ephesians 4:11-12).

### ***Local Church Leadership***

Each local church has 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.

### ***Contextual Diversity***

God has reconciled all peoples into a multiethnic family in Christ (Eph 2:11-22). God has also given us a ministry of reconciliation. This means we follow Jesus' humble example in the Incarnation. Jesus emptied Himself and came to our turf and communicated on our terms so the Gospel could be communicated without cultural hindrance. Each of our churches seek to be a welcoming community for all-comers in the places God has sent them.

Every team of leaders and cultural context is different. God will grant each group a unique combination of capacity, calling and gifting that suits the context he sends them to for the work He calls them to do there. Just like every family member has things in common while expressing their commonalities in unique ways, Grace Fellowship expects to see our common convictions expressed with great diversity and contextual consideration. To reveal this beautiful theological reality in a Canadian context, we intentionally pursue an expression of the church that reflects the ethnic, cultural, and generational diversity of the community around us.

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

### ***Kingdom Partnership***

Grace Fellowship is committed to the advance of the Gospel for the glory of God. We believe the local church is God's means for bringing this about. We see God's heart for unity in the church when we observe Jesus' prayer in John 17, and we desire to press into God's desires. We observe the Apostle Paul's "concern for all the churches," evident in both the content and tone of his letters, and this global concern was a powerful force used by God in building the early Church.

To this end we have partnered with Acts 29 Canada for the purpose of Church Planting and theological unity, in our pursuit of kingdom collaboration and concern for the world. We are open to connecting with other churches, organizations, networks, ministries, and individuals, that adhere to Christian orthodoxy, for the advancement of the Gospel. We believe it is right and good to care about all of God's church and not just our church or fellowship of churches.

(John 17; 2 Cor 11:28; Eph. 1:22-23; Phil 2:1-2; Col. 1:3, 27-28; Gal 2:10)

## **Our Structure**

Grace Fellowship is overseen by a minimum of 3 directors who are selected by the current directors and approved by the elders of all the partner churches. Directors must be current elders in one of our Grace Fellowship churches, or elder-qualified by completing the elder assessment process.

Staff may be appointed by the directors in consultation with the partner church elders for various deacon or service roles.

The directors will be responsible for the oversight of the following duties and roles:

- Assessment
- Ongoing Church Partnership
- Training
- Care of Grace Fellowship Pastors & network staff?
- Administration
- Finances
- Technological Consultation
- Multimedia
- Promotion and Marketing
- Approval of new church plants & church-planting teams

## **Current Roles and Directors**

As of 2024 our directors are:

Network Director – Murray McLellan

Executive Director – Clay Bitner

Associate Director – Mark Janzen

The Network Director oversees assessment, training, and care of Grace Fellowship pastors.

The Executive Director oversees administration, finance, technology, and promotion.

The Associate Director(s), as part of the leadership team, assist with the management of the above roles.

Our current staff roles as of 2024:

Deacon - Erwin Kroeker - Tech and equipment

Deacon - Don Elliott - Budget and administration

The Network Director and Executive Director are supported at a rate of 1 day a week or 20% time based on the 2024 Grace Fellowship budgeted amount. Changes to this can only occur by a combined agreement of the current Directors and Elders of member churches. Those serving in additional roles, would be paid at a rate for those particular tasks (book-keeping, producing strategic resources, website management etc.)

Directors for Grace Fellowship (.4 equivalent paid staff; plus .2 finances; plus around .3 for deacons. Thus the total paid staff roles for Grace Fellowship are under a full time equivalent.)

Murray - at 20%

- Assessment
- Training
- Care of elders

Clay – at 20%

- Tech oversight
- Website - *Edify* management
- Financial Oversight

Mark – volunteer

All team members

- Development of materials, resources etc.
- Approval of church plants etc.

Extra Role – Implementation of Oversight areas (Clay) - 20%

Deacons – paid for service roles (Erwin & Don)

### ***What We Do***

Grace Fellowship exists to strengthen and encourage churches towards maturity, cultivates relationships and interconnectedness among churches, helps churches keep their Jesus-given purpose and mission at the forefront, and serves churches in various other ways that transcend a single congregation.

As a group of churches we want to joyfully partner together to multiply churches, train leaders, facilitate relationships, and supplement the care of pastors.



## **Assessment of Elders**

Elders are entrusted with the glorious stewardship of leading local churches in the mandate Christ has given to the church.

Character leading to culture is key when you are not a systems driven organization. Therefore, the majority of the evaluation process of those seeking Eldership focuses on character over competence. While there is a high value placed on Biblical knowledge and accuracy, understanding of doctrine, along with the ability to teach and expound the Scriptures, a man whose competence outpaces his character is no lasting help in bringing God's Kingdom to bear (1 Timothy 3:2-4, Titus 1:6-8, Titus 2:1-8).

In addition to assessing elders, we provide licenses to marry in the province of Saskatchewan for all the elders in our network of churches.

## **Church Planting**

Churches plant churches. Church planting is initiated by the elders of a local church. Grace Fellowship wants to help facilitate that mission. A planted church is established with the intention of becoming self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-replicating in time.

Steps to churches planting churches:

- A local church's leadership team unanimously determines together a readiness to plant and communicates that to the church family for their affirmation.
- The sending church must have a remaining healthy leadership team, including a teaching elder, to remain a strong, healthy church.
- The plant team must have a plurality of Grace Fellowship elder-qualified leaders, and a launch team of ideally 20 or more core members who are committed to the vision and mission of the church plant. (Exceptions, such as in parachute plants, will be approved by the Directors of Grace Fellowship).

- The Directors of Grace Fellowship will approve the church plant team and the plan, always keeping in mind the health of the sending local church.
- The lead planter of the church planting team must successfully complete the Acts 29 church planting assessment. Grace Fellowship will work with Acts 29 to help complete any conditions.
- The church plant begins the necessary steps towards the public launch.

### **Church Revitalization or Replanting**

Church Replanting is “the rescue, redemption and restoration of a church at or near the point of death, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God, and the good of the community.” (NAMB) Replanting seeks to bring new life, a new vision, and a renewed sense of mission all centered on Jesus and his amazing Gospel. Church replanting honors the heritage and community of the legacy church, enabling the church to restart with new resources, a new name, a new philosophy of ministry, and new life.

### ***Partnership commitment***

#### *Preaching*

Each church is committed to regular live preaching, overseen by their elders. Grace Fellowship believes in the importance of raising up and training local Elders/Pastors to preach and proclaim God’s Word. We want there to be ongoing training and development in this area.

Each church has the opportunity to preach through the same Biblical text or topic as one or more of the other churches. This will allow preachers to study in advance together, and share resources. However, with the wealth of resources and backlog of sermons already preached within the Grace Fellowship churches, new churches may opt to choose a series that has already been preached in another church to glean from the resources available (Scripture videos, bumpers, multimedia, etc).

Ideally, the team developing multimedia will not be producing elements for more than one series at a time.

When necessary, the local Elders have the freedom to set any scheduled sermon aside and address an issue they deem important to address for that local congregation.

### *Making Disciples*

The goal of each local church 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 and support the planting of churches!

### *Finances*

Our new churches have the option to begin under the Grace Fellowship charitable number and bank account. As churches reach a place of sustainability they may set up their own charitable number and 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.

At no time, may a local church spend beyond their current amount funds in the bank. Each church must function within the limits of their actual revenue.

Each congregation gives roughly 10–20% to Grace Fellowship Central Operations for accounting, payroll, communication, website, graphics, leadership development, curriculum development, and strategic planning. This percentage could change in the future to meet growing needs both centrally and in a local congregation.

Additionally, the goal is that each of our churches would give at least 10% of their internal giving towards church planting and mission, with a commitment to support new Grace Fellowship church plants as a priority.

### **Affiliations and Partnerships**

Grace Fellowship churches will be a part of the Acts 29 Canada church planting network. In addition to Acts 29, additional partnerships 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 Canada 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 network of church-planting churches that stands in the tradition of historic evangelical confessionalism. Acts 29 stands on five distinctive theological foundations.

(Refer to Appendix 1 for detailed description of the Acts 29 distinctives and values)

## Denominational/Network Affiliation

Within Grace Fellowship, the denomination does not define the local church. Our theological agreement comes from being part of Grace Fellowship, 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.