

GRACE CHURCH

OF THE
ROARING FORK VALLEY

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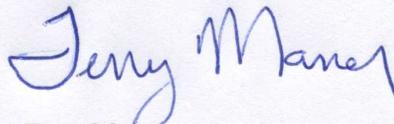
January 4, 2009

Friends at Grace Church,

The following Grace Church Constitution was written at the formation of Grace Church of the Roaring Fork Valley in October, 2002. It includes a description of the formation of Grace Church and explanations of the constitutional decisions made at that time. While this document needs to be revised to bring it up to date, the primary beliefs, practices, and mission descriptions included in this original constitution remain in effect and are useful for providing an understanding of Grace Church of the Roaring Fork Valley.

Please contact Pastor Terry Maner or any of the elders of Grace Church if you have any questions about this document and/or the beliefs, practices, and mission of Grace Church.

In Christ,



Terry Maner

Pastor, Grace Church of the Roaring Fork Valley

Constitution

For the

Non-Profit Corporation

Grace Church

of the

Roaring Fork Valley

Founded October, 2002

Constitution

For the Non-Profit Corporation

*Grace Church
of the
Roaring Fork Valley*

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A letter from the founding elders of *Grace Church* to those seeking participation in this congregation.

Dear friends in Christ,

Over the course of the last year all of us became aware that God was forming and shaping a new work of his Spirit here in the Roaring Fork Valley. While having a rich appreciation for the work of our predecessors throughout the history of Basalt Bible Church, we recognized that the "skins," – those structures, shapes, and stories governed the church in the past – were being stretched in the midst of the transformation and expansion taking place in the life and worship of the church. Prior history and past situations created prejudices which hindered the church's movement in the present and its vision for the future. Past boundaries, even those established for protection and preservation, became barriers to our freedom.

As we reflected together on our situation and the change that was taking place in our midst, two of the metaphors used by Jesus to talk about newness took on special significance. Jesus speaks in John 12:24-25 about the death necessary for transformation, saying,

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Mike Regele has applied Jesus' words to the life of the church, saying, "There are only two options: *we can die as a result of our hidebound resistance to change, or we can die in order to live.*" With great courage and selflessness ***Basalt Bible Church*** decided to embrace a death of sorts in order to be the seed for a new work. This voluntary death is not a repudiation of the past; rather, it serves as the forerunner to resurrection. ***Basalt Bible Church*** will therefore be remembered and honored not only for its life and ministry, but also for its clear demonstration of the gospel in a defining moment.

We find the second metaphor in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 9, Mark 2, Luke 5). It is the image of new wine, and the wineskins which hold it. Since new wine gives off gasses, literally expanding as it ferments, it was hazardous in the ancient world to "bottle" such wine in used wineskins; such old skins would no longer possess the elasticity necessary to accommodate the new wine. As a result, they would burst, ruining both the wine and the skins. It is for this reason that Jesus says, "new wine must be poured into new wineskins." Jesus used this metaphor to show that the Pharisees' "wineskins" – their established patterns and perspectives on the life of faith – were utterly inadequate to contain the emerging, expanding life of the Kingdom of God.

Analogously, as ***Basalt Bible Church*** began to experience transformation, leadership and congregation alike recognized that various changes would be necessary in order to allow for a natural growth in our understanding of the gospel. With respect to our ministry to members, outreach to the community, and vision for the future, it became clear that new "wineskins" were necessary. Attempting to attach a new ministry to the former one would be like sewing a new patch on an old garment, (a

similarly unpromising tactic described in the wineskin texts). Newness required freedom of movement and expansion – qualities that our brittle, old structures simply could not provide. Recognizing these dynamics of change, Basalt Bible Church acknowledged the need for a new constitution, one which could provide the flexibility necessary for a church made new.

Out of the seed of a congregation willing to die and make way for a new ministry contained by new structures, a new congregation, *Grace Church of the Roaring Fork Valley*, was born. By the grace of God and the generous, unearned gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, *Grace Church* is now established in the Roaring Fork Valley as a witness to God's grace here and throughout the world. And by God's grace we now embrace a new constitution, one fit to provide order and direction for this new work.

The word "constitution" sometimes connotes undue rigidity or formality; its application may, in practice, be perfunctory rather than passionate. While acknowledging these pitfalls, our hope is that *Grace Church* might have as its charter a document which clearly articulates our core convictions regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications for the common life of this congregation. We pray that these convictions will guide, nurture, and enhance our shared journey of faith. To this end our constitution provides statements which are *doctrinal, descriptive, doxological, and directional* in character.

Doctrinal statements establish and affirm those *core beliefs* which serve as the foundation for our common life, ministry, and worship. Based on Holy Scripture and rooted in Christian tradition, these statements give us norms for faithful belief and conduct, and they aid us in the important, ongoing task of spiritual discernment. Doctrine provides a means of separating the essential from the non-essential, the permissible from the impermissible. It also serves as a resource and a reference point for guarding the gospel and for guiding believers into the fullness of the Christian life.

Descriptive statements establish and affirm the organizational aspects of the church's life. These are intended to facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Such statements provide instructions and guidelines for maintaining integrity and order, consistent with Paul's admonition that everything be done "in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:40). The objection is sometimes heard that the church "is an organism not an organization." Yet even organisms, from simple protozoa to complex human beings, have order, structure, and design written into their being. As the "body of Christ," it is fitting for the Church to acknowledge and describe those processes, forms, and procedures which will guide and govern our congregation. No one form of church government is mandated by Scripture; even so, the biblical writings contain a wealth of practical and spiritual wisdom on such matters. Church governance can be judged to be faithful to the extent that it promotes order, unity, purity, and peace in Christ's Church.

Doxological statements reflect with awe on the nature and character of God, and on the right ways to worship him. In so doing, they affirm the *core disciplines* which mark us as disciples of Jesus Christ, and they equip us to live out his mission in the world. Spiritual disciplines are habits of life through which we may experience the joy and

freedom of life in Christ. They are a primary means by which God molds us and shapes us into the image of his Son. Liturgy likewise shapes our imagination and inspires us to serve God with our gifts. In this way, worship involves participation in communion and in community; love for God and love for neighbor are seen to be dynamically inter-connected.

Finally, in order to communicate the core realities and emphases which will mark our life, ministry, and worship during the formative stages of this new work, the constitution provides *directional statements*. These statements are *prudential* in that they represent the elders' considered judgment on the best course of present action. And these statements are *provisional*. As a new church in transition and under transformation, our constitution needs to be flexible; it must allow for the learning process to continue in areas such as doctrine, government (polity), and doxology. It must provide guidance, but allow for continued exploration and revision.

This "constitution" is being presented *in the form of a letter*—the most common literary form in the New Testament. Just as the apostle Paul communicated with infant churches in letters meant to infuse them with the story of the gospel, instruct them in the way of faith, and inspire them with the reality of "Christ in you the hope of glory," so we hope that this "letter" will spur the church on to greater depths of love for God. None of us involved in the writing of this constitution put ourselves on equal ground with the apostle Paul, either qualitatively or authoritatively. But as disciples of Christ, changed by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and devoted to the apostles' teaching, we find Paul's form to be especially appropriate for our situation, one in which our concern is to display pastoral concern and oversight rather than mere corporate management.

Our letter speaks to our immediate situation and circumstances, meant to address the church at a particular stage of her development. That fact does not minimize the content therein, nor does it imply that what is stated here won't have future value. What it does affirm is that there is a *particularity* and *prudential character* to the letter that leaves room for future revision or subsequent communication. The New Testament contains multiple letters, in some cases multiple letters to the same local church. This letter isn't exhaustive, covering all possible theological or practical content for a local church. But it is our trust that this letter is sufficient for providing the necessary foundational beliefs, guidelines, and vision for this stage of our development. The intentional reticence we display in regard to some areas allows us to begin this church with a foundation of essentials that leaves room for the embracing of specific statements, confessions, practices, and policies in the future. In this way, *Grace Church* can grow and develop her identity in an organic manner.

Our letter also attempts to speak from a context of historical Christian orthodoxy, meant to acknowledge that the church is rooted in and shaped by the theology and practices of orthodox Christian churches throughout history. *Grace Church* recognizes its heritage in the teachings, confessions, and creeds of the Christian church which express right theology, the sound doctrine emerging from reflection upon the truth of Scripture. *Grace Church* also recognizes its heritage in the practices, liturgy, and disciplines which express right action, the disciplines and deeds emerging

from reflection upon the truths of the Scriptures. Though *Grace Church* is new, it is neither disconnected from the traditions of the Christian church, nor disdainful toward the practices which have expressed orthodoxy through the ages. Rather, *Grace Church* seeks to recover historical Christian orthodoxy in theology and practice. We are part of a larger story of God's church, and understanding this fosters humility, wonder, and expectation as we discover our identity in that context.

With these foundational thoughts in mind, we turn now to our doctrinal statements.

Doctrinal Statements

Grace Church accepts as inspired and authoritative the books of the Old and New Testament, known collectively as The Bible, or Holy Scripture.

Grace Church states its faith and bears witness to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ through two foundational creeds which have informed and declared the core essentials of the Christian church for centuries: *The Apostles' Creed* and *The Nicene Creed*. These, like other confessions and creeds embraced by churches throughout history, emerged as a practical, memorable way of distilling the essence of the Christian faith.

Initially, *the Apostles' Creed* was used as a baptismal confession, and in the process of catechesis (systematic instruction of Christian doctrine). Following the lead of our ancestors in the faith, *Grace Church* will make the affirmation of *the Apostles' Creed* a standard practice at baptisms, and for the reception of members.

The Nicene Creed emerged in the fourth century out of a great dispute concerning the nature and deity of Christ. Since this issue is, even today, a source of controversy, it is fitting that we affirm the ancient teaching of the Church with this creed. It is the most ecumenical of creeds, affirmed by churches all over the world. Following the lead of our predecessors, *Grace Church* will likewise make reference to this creed as an affirmation of what we believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church.

These creeds provide a reliable exposition of what Scripture leads us to believe and do. While all creeds are subordinate standards subject to the authority of Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture, *The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds* helpfully summarize the essential tenets of the Christian faith; in so doing, they guide, direct, and equip us for the life and work of the church. Additionally, they represent the essence of Christian tradition and connect us with the faithful believers who have gone before us.

We pledge to use these creeds as a means of developing maturity and unity in our understanding of who we are, what we believe, and what we resolve to do. Our leaders will use these two creeds as teaching material for classes, groups, and sermons intended to discuss the understandings, beliefs, and practices of *Grace Church*.

From time to time *Grace Church* will utilize, refer to, and be informed by other creeds and confessions which have been embraced by churches throughout history as

statements of faith. In time, we will consider making other such creeds and confessions an integral part of our constitution.

Grace Church also acknowledges the influence of the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation on our preaching, teaching, worship, and mission. Put succinctly, the emphasis of the reformation is on *God's grace in Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures*. *Grace Church* also acknowledges the influence of what is referred to as the Reformed tradition, which emphasizes, among other things, the majesty and sovereignty of God, His initiative and grace in calling a people for salvation and service, and the centrality of Christ and his work of the cross as the object of our faith and means of our salvation. Affirmation of the particular stances of the Reformation and the Reformed tradition are not required for participation or membership in *Grace Church*, but they are nonetheless influences which are present and which will continue to influence and inform the church in the future.

One of the affirmations present in the Reformed tradition is "*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda,*" which translated means "the church reformed, always reforming." This conveys the desire of the church to, in obedience to Jesus Christ, always be open to the reform of its standards of doctrine and governance according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit. It is our hope that such availability and openness to reform will characterize *Grace Church*.

The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are found on the following page.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty
 Creator of heaven and earth.
 And in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.
 Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 Born of the Virgin Mary,
 Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 Was crucified, dead, and was buried;
 He descended to the dead.
 One the third day he rose again;
 He ascended into heaven,
 He is seated on the right hand of the Father,
 And he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Spirit;
 the holy catholic Church;
 the communion of saints;
 the forgiveness of sins;
 the resurrection of the body;
 and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
 Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
 Begotten of the Father before all worlds;
 God of God, Light of Light,
 Very God of Very God,
 Begotten, not made,
 Being of one substance with the Father,
 By whom all things were made;
 Who, for us and for our salvation,
 Came down from heaven,
 And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,
 And was made man,
 And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
 He suffered and was buried,
 And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
 And ascended into heaven,
 And is seated on the right hand of the Father;
 And he shall come again, with glory
 To judge both the living and the dead;
 Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,
 Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
 Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;
 Who spoke through the prophets.
 And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins;
 And we look for the resurrection of the dead,
 and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Descriptive Statements

For a local church to display integrity, order, unity, and humble submission to Jesus Christ and the apostolic tradition we have received, there has to be a particular form of governance embraced, maintained, and recognized as the established form of government providing order for that particular church. Sincere Christians throughout the world disagree as to the "most Biblical" form of government. The Scriptures do not prescribe any single form of government exclusively, nor do they treat governance exhaustively, but they nevertheless provide sufficient provisions for doing everything "in a fitting and orderly way" and sufficient guidelines for the selection of leaders to shepherd the church. The form of government embraced by *Grace Church* emerges out of serious reflection upon the Scriptures to give order to this church, but we regard it as neither essential to the Church of Jesus Christ nor required of all Christians.

So, acknowledging our participation in the Church universal and our respect for those whose governance differs from our own, we humbly affirm our special commitment to some of the basic principles of what is known as "Presbyterian polity." One will note that the previous sentence said "some of the basic principles," because *Grace Church* is embracing a hybrid form of that form of governance. A few statements will help clarify the form of government, the polity, that *Grace Church* is affirming.

Most people are familiar with the term "Presbyterian" in reference to the denomination known by that name. Certainly that is appropriate, as the term is associated with both the form of government and the system of doctrine embraced by those who call themselves Presbyterian. The root of this term, however, is *presbyter*, from the Greek word *presbuteros*, translated in the English New Testament as "elder." It is this aspect of the term "Presbyterian" which *Grace Church* affirms as descriptive for the form of government to which we are committed. Our church shall be governed by the presbyters, the elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament elected by the church. In this form of government, the members of the church are responsible to elect elders to whom they delegate the leadership and direction of the church. Members seek to sensitively discern and elect those with particular gifts for governing and ministry. Those elected then are to exercise leadership, government, and discipline in the local church. A government of this form is therefore *representative*, protecting the right of God's people to elect their elders, while delegating leadership to the elected elders that they might *represent* the will of Christ.

Yet another aspect of Presbyterianism is *not* currently embraced by *Grace Church*. One aspect of Presbyterian polity is the feature of the presbytery, a ruling body for a group of Presbyterian churches consisting of ministers and representative elders from multiple congregations in a district. Like the church councils displayed in the book of Acts, groups of elders from various churches congregating to resolve matters of doctrine and practice (i.e., Acts 15-16), these presbyteries provide support and judicial oversight for groups of churches. This corresponds to the interdependency and connectional nature reflected in the early church, where local churches were not independent and where local churches were referred to simply as "the church" singular (Acts 5:11; 9:31; 2 Corinthians 12:28). Seeing the local congregation as *the Church* in local expression, Presbyterian churches have embraced a system meant to reflect this

connectional quality and supply authoritative structures to sustain it. *Grace Church* has not made affiliation with such churches at this time and therefore cannot truly describe itself as "Presbyterian." Becoming a connectional church is, however, something that *Grace Church* will explore in the future.

To summarize, *Grace Church's* polity emphasizes a government by elders elected by the members of the church to be their representatives and to represent the will of Christ to them.

Who are the members of Grace Church? One becomes an active member of the Church through faith in Jesus Christ, visibly marked by a public profession of faith and Christian baptism. These are the essentials of membership and they are recognized by *Grace Church* in the reception of new members through the affirmation of *the Apostles' Creed* and the recognition or administration of Christian baptism. Every believer is part of the church as a living organism, the spiritual body of Christ through faith.

Yet the church gathered is an organization, and a public promise or "covenant" is an integral aspect of being part of an organization. As a corporation, a church must have some structure and requirements for the reception of members as a means of determining who may vote and be involved in decision-making. But beyond legal reasons, a covenant is a means of affirming one's support of the work of the church, asking for the benefits of accountability to the church and its leaders, and acknowledging one's commitment to participate actively through the use of one's gifts in the service of Christ in the church.

For those reasons, the leaders of *Grace Church* will regularly gather members and/or prospective members for instruction and exploration of what it means to be a member of *Grace Church*. Such instruction will include teaching concerning the constitution, the creeds, and the mission of *Grace Church*. Participation in seminars or classes focused on membership are an integral part of being an active member of *Grace Church*. The elders and ministers of *Grace Church* are charged with the responsibility to provide such instruction and to examine the readiness of those who apply for active membership.

Baptized persons may become active members of *Grace Church* by profession of faith (including affirmation of the Apostles' Creed), by reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ, or by transfer of membership from some other church. Members shall be formally received during corporate worship services of the church. At such time, the following covenantal questions may be asked of prospective members:

Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope except through his sovereign mercy?

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?

Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

Membership entitles the active member to participation in the worship and in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, the support of the elders in promoting Christian discipleship and the stewardship of your gifts, and the rights and privileges to vote and hold office in compliance with the constitution and by-laws of ***Grace Church***.

Who are the officers of Grace Church? Grace Church will recognize the offices of elder/presbyter (ministers of the Word and sacrament and elders) and deacons. Officers are elected by a two-thirds majority of the membership of the church present at a called meeting of the church at which there is a quorum of ten percent of the membership.

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are those whom the Lord has called and trained for the special ministries of teaching, preaching, and administration of the sacraments. It is the responsibility of such ministers to give oversight and direction for the church; to provide pastoral care, spiritual nurture, and ministry equipping for the members; to devise and implement means of outreach to the community; to participate in government; to study, teach, and preach the Scriptures faithfully; to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and to lead the congregation in worship and prayer. Ministers, together with the elected elders, form ***the session***, the governing body of the church composed of the pastor, associate pastor(s), and the elected elders. The pastor will be the moderator of the session and of all meetings of the congregation. In the absence of the pastor, the session will appoint an associate pastor or elder to moderate the session and/or congregational meetings.

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are elected by a two-thirds majority of the membership of the church present at a called meeting of the church at which there is a quorum of ten percent of the membership. When pastoral vacancies emerge or when there is a need to call additional pastors, a pastoral search committee will be formed with representation from the session, the deacons, and the membership. That committee will review and interview candidates and make proposals to the session. The session will then work with the committee to determine the nominee for the pastoral position. The session will then call a meeting for the purpose of confirming the nominee by a majority vote of the congregation.

Elders are those members of the congregation who have been recognized as those having gifts for governing and ministering who are then chosen by the people to exercise leadership, government, and discipline for the church. They are members of the session and serve alongside of the pastor(s) in the shepherding and oversight of the church. They join the pastor in the encouraging the church in worship, equipping members for service, and engaging the community with the gospel. They are called to live exemplary lives of faith, sound doctrine, and purity before the church and before the world.

Elders are elected by a two-thirds majority of the membership of the church present at a called meeting of the church at which there is a quorum of ten percent of the membership. The session will request nominations from the congregation at specific times and/or will receive nominations from members who recognize gifts for eldership in the midst of the church body throughout the year. The session will also seek to discover and train elders through instructional settings and apprenticeships. After sufficient training and examination by the session, nominees will be presented at a called meeting of the church for confirmation by a majority vote of the congregation.

The Session, as discussed above, is the church governing body composed of the pastors and the elected elders. All members of the session are entitled to vote, and all any matters requiring a vote are passed by a two-thirds majority. Among the duties and responsibilities of the session (including those specifically discussed above) are: the encouragement and leadership of Christian worship; the examination and reception of members; the confirmation of nominees for office; the affirmation of current officers for continued service; the management of corporate affairs; the instruction and equipment of members for service; the administration of ministry to those in the church, in the community, and in the world; and the leadership of the church in mission. The session is moderated by the pastor or, in his absence, the associate pastor or elder designated by the session.

Deacons are those members of the congregation who have been recognized as those having gifts for mercy, sympathy, and administration of service and chosen by the people to exercise those gifts in ministry for the church. They are under the supervision of the session, which will provide direction and delegate duties for ministry to the body and to the local community. Their core task is the ministry of mercy to the church and to the local community.

Deacons are elected by a two-thirds majority of the membership of the church present at a called meeting of the church at which there is a quorum of ten percent of the membership. The session will request nominations from the congregation at specific times and/or will receive nominations from members who recognize gifts for service as a deacon in the midst of the church body throughout the year. The session will also seek to discover and train deacons through instructional settings and apprenticeships. After sufficient training and examination by the session, nominees will be presented at a called meeting of the church for confirmation by a majority vote of the congregation.

Terms of service for church offices are three years. Upon completion of that term, if the officer seeks to continue service and the session so approves, officers may be confirmed for continued service by a majority vote of the membership, according to the guidelines of congregational meetings below.

Committees are an integral part of the leadership and service of the church, providing a means of involvement and input from the congregation which enhances the wisdom and sensitivity of the session. Committees may be formed by the appointment of the session with the assistance of nomination by the members. Committees are to be representative of the body, composed of representatives from the session, the deacons, and the congregation. They will serve the church by

researching situations, proposals, and/or candidates, presenting recommendations to the session, and cooperating with the session in the pursuit of wise decisions.

Congregational Meetings may be called for the purpose of reporting, officer election, property matters, corporate business, and pastoral matters. Such meetings may be called at the discretion of the session or at the written request of one-fourth of the membership. Public notice of any congregational meeting will be given on two successive Sundays at the corporate worship service. A quorum of ten percent of the membership is required to transact any business or confirm any nomination or decision.

For the purposes of corporate business, a subset of the session of the church will be designated as corporate officers for the church. Therefore, the elected members of the session are also elected as the governing board of officers for the corporation. The specific offices (such as President, Secretary/Clerk, etc.) will be designated at the discretion of the board.

The issues related to gender in regard to offices in the local church are a challenging source of discussion and dispute among Christians. It is our concern that many of the principles or Scriptural interpretation approaches used to defend positions on each side are suspect, requiring a renewed scrutiny and sensitive study. For the sake of initial stage continuity and peace in the church, *Grace Church* will receive elected men for the office of elder and will receive both elected men and elected women for the office of deacon. Committee limitations will only be applied for the purpose of equality of representation. *Grace Church* looks forward to future instruction and dialogue which will reassess this position and the approaches to interpretation which impact our understanding of this issue and many others.

Transition and Interim Period Specifics

Grace Church, formed in the midst of the unique circumstances discussed above, is a new church which was formed in October, 2002. Enlistment seminars at Basalt Bible Church in 2001-2002 acknowledged future, substantial changes on the horizon. The reception of newcomers led to the radical transformation and newness of the composition of the congregation. Reforms proposed by the new leadership presented the congregation with new structures sensitive to both the infant state of the church and the initiative called for from leaders in such a setting.

As mentioned above, the particular soil and setting of our formation calls for a provisional, prudential structure that can provide both sufficient order for our organization now and sufficient sensitivity to the process of maturation and expansion we anticipate in the near future. A structure sensitive to the present also must be informed and shaped by the Scriptures and the models of governance embraced by the Christian church in the past. Finally, our structures and government must provide the necessary organizing features required for legal incorporation.

The first act of organization of the Grace Church is the vote of the membership of Basalt Bible Church on October 2, 2002 to 1) form a new corporation known as Grace

Church of the Roaring Fork Valley and embrace the constitution presented for the new church, 2) *transfer the assets* of Basalt Bible Church to *Grace Church*, and 3) *dissolve* the corporation known as Basalt Bible Church. Subsequent to that vote, all members of Basalt Bible Church who 1) affirm the summary of doctrine contained in *the Apostles' Creed*, 2) have been baptized (see section on the baptism below), and 3) acknowledge and affirm this constitution as guiding, guarding, governing, giving shape to the life and ministry of this church, will be received as founding members of *Grace Church*. Those members will be acknowledged publicly at the service of worship held November 3rd, 2002. (Please note: these paragraphs will require revision in regard to the tense of the verbs following the October 2, 2002 meeting.)

Rules of incorporation in the state of Colorado require that a group desiring to incorporate name *three or more* members to be their incorporating officers, an initial board of directors necessary for the filing of an affidavit requesting incorporation. It is proposed that the current elder board and church staff of Basalt Bible Church—Bo Helmich, Terry Maner, Don Sarver, Wayne Starr, and Jim Schrock—be named as the incorporating board to fulfill this requirement.

On October 16, subsequent to a confirming vote to form *Grace Church* on October 2, a meeting will be held to elect a governing board of elders for the church. A subset of this group will be assigned offices appropriate for a corporation, such as President, Treasurer, etc. Sensitive to the newness of the congregation and the unfamiliarity that is a factor in leadership selection, the provisional process for the initial selection of a governing board of elders is as follows: 1) The newly elected incorporating officers will receive nominations from the members of *Grace Church* beginning October 2nd; 2) The incorporating officers will meet with the nominees to explore and affirm their qualifications for and interest in such service; 3) On October 16, the members of *Grace Church* will be presented with a final list of nominees for confirmation by vote. In January, 2003 after seeking nominations for the office of deacon from the membership of *Grace Church*, the elders will call a meeting to elect deacons.

In order to be sensitive to the developing, gestation quality of the church during this first year, the officers elected on October 16 will serve an initial *one year term*, allowing the members and the officers to confirm the appropriateness for extended service at the end of that term. During the course of the next year (and in the future as others seek to explore the office) the officers (and/or nominees) will engage in training opportunities through which they may learn more about the office and seek confirmation of the call to service in that capacity. The initial year will function as an *interim year*, giving the officers and the people the opportunity to grow as a community and confirm those fit for and called to such service.

This provisional, prudential means of electing officers for this interim does so reflecting the way the church thinks about church officers and their offices. First, church officers are *elected by the people*, affirming the right of God's people to elect their officers. This insures that the government of the church is *representative*. Second, in electing such officers, the church is not essentially granting them authority as much as *recognizing Christ's authority, Christ's calling, and the gifts for office given the officers by Christ*. This counters notions of appointing people to fill slots or selecting those successful in their

professions. It emphasizes the calling of the church to recognize those among them "who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Our *interim* structure allows us to elect those who have displayed these characteristics in the limited exposure time that we've had, while providing an extended time frame for discovering and confirming those who possess such gifts and qualities fit for the calling.

Doxological Statements

Central to our life as a church, corporately and individual, is worship. Perhaps the most succinct affirmation of this reality is the affirmation of the Reformed tradition found in the Westminster Catechism that the chief end of man is "to glorify God and enjoy him forever." For the Christian, worship is not an option, one of many practices to choose from. Rather worship is the very reason for which we were created. Our lives are doxology, lives lived "for the praise of God's glory" (Ephesians 1:12, 14).

When we embrace this understanding of worship, we expand our vision for worship beyond the corporate gatherings on Sundays. We demonstrate our identity as redeemed image-bearers when we glorify God in any and every aspect of life. The apostle Paul affirms this in his letter to the Romans when he says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1). In response to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, our offering is our very lives, provoking God's pleasure. "Spiritual acts of worship," therefore, can take place in church buildings, homes, workplaces, riversides, or anywhere that God is glorified and the gospel is made visible.

The early church provides a corporate demonstration of a worshipping community, witnessed through Acts 2:42-47:

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. **43** Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. **44** All the believers were together and had everything in common. **45** Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. **46** Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, **47** praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This demonstration from the 1st century church is a fitting paradigm or model for the shape of the church's "doxology," our life of worship, in the 21st century. Four components of a worshipping community displayed by the early church shape the forms and settings of living doxology for Grace Church.

Grace Church worships through the ministry of the Word. The early church is marked by a devotion to the teaching of the apostles. This apostolic witness is passed down to us through the New Testament Scriptures which, along with the Old Testament Scriptures, tell the story of God's redemption. We follow the model of the early church when we display devotion through private devotions, group studies, and participation in the preaching and teaching ministries of the church.

Grace Church confesses that the Scriptures are the Word of God witnessing God's self-revelation, and that where the Word is read a proclaimed, Jesus Christ, the Living Word, is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are our ultimate authority and source of witness for the life of faith.

Recognizing the fact that the Scriptures are the Word of God does not ignore the reality that the Scriptures are also delivered through human authors, writing using the conventions, literary styles, genres, and languages of the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world. The Scriptures contain narratives, poetry, covenants, letters, etc., displaying the Scriptures' incarnational revelation. This requires approaches to interpretation of the Scriptures sensitive to the historical setting, culture, language, literary style, and canonical context of a given text.

Grace Church affirms the centrality of preaching in the corporate worship of the church; the necessity of teaching and instruction for the equipment of Christians for life, service, and witness; and the importance of gatherings of small groups for Bible study and fellowship in fostering our devotion to the Word and the application of truth to life.

Grace Church worships through the ministry of the prayers, the songs, and the sacraments of the church. The early church is marked by a devotion "to the breaking of bread and to prayer." "Breaking of bread" seems to be associated with the Lord's Supper, and the word "prayer" is plural in the Greek text, suggesting corporate services of prayer. Other settings of prayer in the New Testament include the singing of hymns, and Paul commands the church to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Prayers, Songs, and Sacraments are an integral part of the worship of the church.

While recognizing the sacramental quality of God's action in many areas of life, we affirm the importance of two sacraments in particular: baptism and the Lord's supper (also known as Communion or the Eucharist). Grace Church recognizes all Christian baptisms performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When administering the sacrament of baptism, ministers of Grace Church shall use these words:

"[Name], I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

or

"[Name], you are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

(The latter formula emphasizes that God is the one who baptizes us into Christ.)

The invitation to the Lord's Supper is extended to all who have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign and seal of eating and drinking in communion with the crucified and risen Lord. Jesus instituted this commemoration meal with his disciples and Paul delivered to the Church the tradition he had received from the Lord, commanding that it be observed until the Lord's return. It is marked by the participation with Christ and with one another, expectation of the messianic banquet to come, and the renewing and reconciling work of God in our midst.

Prayers and songs are an integral part of the life of worship of Grace Church. These prayers and songs emerge from various sources such as the Scriptures, writings and prayers of Christians throughout the Church's history, books of worship, the ancient hymns, and contemporary songs. While the styles of prayers, songs, and hymns may vary, we will endeavor to lead the church in worship in a manner that is intelligible, edifying, and glorifying to God.

Grace Church worships through the ministry of the fellowship. The early church is marked by a devotion to "the fellowship," *koinonia*, a word emphasizing the common life of the church, its characteristic of "having all things in common," sharing. While fellowship is often limited in understanding to what we have when we gather for a meal or get-together, the scope of fellowship goes beyond that. Essentially it refers to the sharing of our lives with one another, including the sharing of our time, our resources, and our gifts. It emphasizes the participatory nature of the life of the church, one in which we see membership in the church as involving mutual participation in one another's lives. The outworking of this quality is seen through the means of hospitality and service, welcoming strangers, widows, orphans, neighbors, and brothers and sisters in Christ and sharing with them from the provisions God has given us.

This quality is also demonstrated through intentional involvement in one another's lives. This can take forms as informal and encouraging as shared meals or phone calls, or as formal and exhortational as church discipline for a brother or sister gone astray. At the heart of both forms is the dynamic of participation in one another's lives that is to be at the heart of the life of the worshipping community.

Grace Church worships through the ministry of mission. The early church is marked by new births, daily converts added to their number by the Lord. Inherent in the very life of this worshipping community was the visible reality of changed lives in their community. It was in the context of this worshipping community that the Lord added saved ones.

Grace Church emphasizes the "sent" characteristic of the church, the recognition that we are not saved only for ourselves, but are sent in the world to be Christ's witnesses. Jesus proclaims to his disciples after the resurrection, "Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, I am sending you." The Great Commission commanded the disciples and subsequently us to "go and make disciples of all the nations." Jesus last words before his ascension affirm the disciples identity as his "witnesses." We affirm a commitment to measure our faithfulness to the gospel not primarily by how many attend corporate worship, but by our ministry to the community outside of it. To that end, Grace Church seeks to equip laity for incarnational witness, sending men, women, and children into the community to be Christ's witnesses in their neighborhoods, at their places of work, at school, and throughout the community.

Directional Statements

The previous three statements have pertained primarily to the present, consisting of an emphasis upon who we are, how we operate, and what we resolve to do. It is important also that members be informed as to directions for the future, anticipated actions, emphases, influences, and discussions which will likely shape the life and ministry of the church in the days ahead.

Grace Church will be influenced by the church model known as the missional church. Informed by recent contributions of scholars and churchmen seeking to embrace and encourage a recognition of this "sent" characteristic of the church, the leaders of Grace Church are recognizing a clear framework that is shaping our church as a movement in the Roaring Fork Valley, known as *the Missional Church*. *The Missional Church* represents a paradigm shift from both traditional and contemporary church models.

British missionary Lesslie Newbigin went to India in 1950 and was involved with a church that was engaging in mission in a culture that was non-Christian. When he returned to England some 30 years later, he found that the church there also existed in a non-Christian society, but had failed to recognize that the church had lost its privileged place in society and failed to adapt to the new situation. The church ran too many of its ministries under the assumption of a Christianized society and did not really become "missional," in the sense of adapting and reformulating everything it did in worship, discipleship, community, and service in order to be engaged with the non-Christian society. While the church had developed missional strategies for reaching non-Christian cultures in distant lands, it had failed to develop such strategies and ways of thinking for their homelands. Inspired and informed by the work of Newbigin in helping the church think about being missional in the West, churchmen and scholars continue to challenge the church to reflect upon Newbigin's ideas and become missional.

As the vision and ministry of Grace Church unfolds in the days ahead, the missional church model will provide a shaping paradigm for our emerging life and ministry. It emphasizes intelligible language, engagement with the stories and storytellers of the culture, the expression of the Christian story in the language of grace and freedom, and the education of the laity for incarnational witness.

Grace Church will be open to reform in regard to our understanding and practice of the sacraments. One of the issues facing our particular congregation has to do with the understanding of Christian baptism. Previously Basalt Bible Church held to the position known as believers' baptism and excluded from active membership those who had been baptized as infants who had not been re-baptized. This position disenfranchised many who came to the church from traditions in which infant baptism was practiced and for whom re-baptism was unacceptable. Many of the positions for and against the various positions are rooted in experience and ignorance rather than serious Biblical reflection.

You will observe that our statement concerning baptism acknowledges that "Grace Church recognizes all Christian baptisms performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." This simple statement acknowledges that we will not

allow the mode of baptism to be an impediment to church membership, as long as the baptism is/ was performed according to this form. We will also be respectful of individuals and parents as they seek baptism for themselves or make sacramental decisions regarding their children. Finally, the pastors will lead the church in the exploration of the sacrament of baptism in hopes of arriving at a unified, Biblical, and respectful position for Grace Church to embrace.

Grace Church will be open to the possibility of church affiliation. Those opposing affiliation often state the potential ills of denominations, lamenting potential loss of control, or imposition of unwanted influence. Often such opposition ignores the ills of independence, the absence of checks, balances, and outside contributions that can contribute to the health and welfare of a local church. As in the case of positions concerning the sacraments, positions are sometimes embraced due to subjective experiences (good, bad, or "we've always done it this way") or selective study. We endeavor to explore the nature of the church and to allow such exploration and reflection to shape our understanding and action in this area of the church's polity.

Grace Church will provide instruction regarding Biblical interpretation which will help us reexamine various areas of the church's doctrine, governance, and practices. Inherent in each of the issues debated above is the recognition that Christians taking opposite positions proclaim their position to be "Biblical." At certain times, positions are defended based on the assumption of a "literal interpretation of the Bible." But the question of the "literalness" of one's interpretation goes much further than whether one simply "does what it says." Historical setting, language, genre, and canonical placement are but a few of the factors determining the literal sensitivity of one's interpretation. Positions on the sacraments, baptism, creation, and women in leadership are all influenced by one's hermeneutics, one's interpretive approach to the Scriptures. *The way one reads effects how one reads.* The pastors of Grace Church will lead the church in instruction and discussion concerning hermeneutics which will subsequently impact our approach to various issues facing the church.

Closing Remarks

We end this letter with the same hope and prayer with which we began, that

Grace Church might have as its charter a document which clearly articulates our core convictions regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications for the common life of this congregation. We pray that these convictions will guide, nurture, and enhance our shared journey of faith. (from the introduction)

We hope that this letter will convey the specifics of doctrine, governance, worship, and direction necessary for you to understand the core convictions which are the basis for our common life, ministry, and worship. We hope, too, that our expression of these convictions communicates both the security of acknowledging convictions that are firm and foundational, and the sensitivity of acknowledging those convictions that are flexible and in the process of formation. Finally, we hope that the "wineskins" of our

new constitution will provide a structure suitable to carry us forward as our congregation "ferments" expanding and growing in faith, hope, and love.

We invite you to join us on this journey. We are a church "on the way," and we invite you to join us as we "press forward toward the fullness of truth, toward the day when we shall know as we have been known" (Lesslie Newbigin).

In Christ,

Terry Maner, Pastor*
Bo Helmich, Associate Pastor*
Don Sarver, Elder*
Jim Schrock, Elder*
Wayne Starr, Elder*

**This constitution was drafted in October, 2002; the names listed above correspond to the founding pastors and elders of Grace Church. As of January, 2009 the elder board of Grace Church is composed of Terry Maner, Pastor; Jim Alexander, Elder; Stanley Badgett, Elder; Don Helmich, Elder; Jim Schrock, Elder; Mick Spalding, Elder; and Wayne Starr, Elder.*