

Los Altos Grace Brethren Church

Constitutional Revisions

June 2016

From time to time it's necessary to examine our governing documents and update them to reflect our present practices and understanding. To this end, the elders have produced a draft revision for your perusal and input. Our intention is to receive input over the summer, make any necessary changes and then bring the final document to a vote of the congregation this fall. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

We are addressing several areas with these changes. Some are meant to clean up ambiguous language, some changes are minor, and others delete or rework whole sections. As a governing document, our constitution establishes those things we *must* do as a church. This can have the effect of requiring us to practice certain things in certain ways even when there is no longer a need or desire to do so. Because of this, we've concluded that less is more. Removing these requirements will not prohibit us from any practice we deem good and necessary and will provide us with flexibility to organize in whatever way is most effective. Our constitution should reflect our beliefs, establish our basic organization, and provide guidelines for how we pursue our God given mission together as a family. It is our hope that these changes will accomplish just that.

Below are some examples of the types of changes the elders are recommending.

Ambiguous language:

The words church, congregation, and members, etc. were used interchangeably throughout the constitution. We have attempted to clarify which specific group of people is meant in each case.

Minor Changes:

All non-profit corporations must designate another non-profit corporation to receive their assets should the first corporation dissolve. Presently, our designated corporation is Grace Brethren North American Missions. GBNAM no longer exists. We are suggesting that Encompass World Partners, formerly Grace Brethren International Missions, as a suitable replacement.

Major Changes:

The elders are recommending the removal of the section dealing with deacons and deaconesses. There are many in our church family who are fulfilling their calling as "servants" (This is what deacon means) and we greatly appreciate all they do. Some have been formally recognized and some have not. Removing this section from the constitution will not change any of this. We will still have the ability to formally acknowledge them and organize them in appropriate ways but we will no longer be required to do so according to the prescription laid out in the document.

The elders are also recommending changes to the ways we refer to church leadership. Our understanding of Scripture leads us to believe that all believers are called (ordained) by God to do the good works which has prepared for them to do. We all have a part to play and those who lead are not meant to be “over” those who follow. We all are to follow Jesus and those He calls to lead are to do so by serving and caring for those they lead. Those whom Jesus calls to serve as leaders in the overall church family, we acknowledge as Elders. Those we’ve been referring to as Senior and Associate Pastors come from this group. There are many people whom God uses as leaders in our family. There are those who lead particular ministries like Youth and Children, those who teach and lead our Sunday Adult Communities, those who lead us in worship, and a variety of other things. Some receive financial support and some do not but they are all leaders just the same. When the church decides to provide financial support for an individual, we do so because we believe that person’s particular calling is such and the needs of the ministry are such that both would be unduly limited by outside employment. The changes we are making to this section are attempts to reflect these principles.

Our overriding goal in recommending these changes is to bring our constitution into line with our present practice and understanding.

Please feel free to contact Pastor Phil Helfer (philhelfer@gmail.com) with any questions, concerns, or recommendations you might have. Our intent is to make this process as participatory and transparent as possible.

Thank you and God bless!

DRAFT OF REVISIONS June 2016
CONSTITUTION
LOS ALTOS GRACE BRETHREN CHURCH
Long Beach, California

ARTICLE ONE - NAME

The name by which this church will be called is the Los Altos Grace Brethren Church (LAGBC).

ARTICLE TWO - STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The three principal reasons for our LAGBC's existence as a church are to: (1) exalt the Lord (Romans 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 10:31); (2) edify the saints (Ephesians 4:11-16); and (3) evangelize the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

ARTICLE ~~THREETWO~~ - STATEMENT OF FAITH

LAGBC will embrace, preach and defend the following beliefs:

1. THE BIBLE: the Word of God, the sixty-six Books of the Old and New Testaments, verbally inspired in all parts, and therefore wholly without error as originally given of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).
2. THE ONE TRUE GOD: existing eternally as three persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; Matthew 29:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).
3. THE HEAVENLY FATHER: creator of all mankind (Acts 17:29), the author of our salvation before the world began (Ephesians 1:3-6), the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:17) and, in a very special way, the Father of all who believe in Christ (Galatians 3:26).
4. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST: His pre-existence and deity (John 1:1-3), incarnation by virgin birth (John 1:14; Matthew 1:18-23), sinless life ((Hebrews 4:15), substitutionary death (2 Corinthians 5:21), bodily resurrection (Luke 24:36-43), ascension into heaven and present ministry (Hebrews 4:14-16), and coming again (Acts 1:11).
5. THE HOLY SPIRIT: His personality (John 16:7-15), deity (Acts 5:3-4), and His work in each believer; baptism and indwelling at the moment of regeneration (1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 8:9); and filling (Ephesians 5:18) to empower for Christian life and service (Ephesians 3:16; Acts 1:8; Galatians 5:22-23).
6. MAN: his direct creation in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28), his subsequent fall into sin resulting in spiritual death (Genesis 3:1-24; Romans 5:12), and the necessity of the new birth for his salvation (John 3:3-5).
7. SALVATION: a complete and eternal salvation by God's grace alone, received as the gift

of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

8. THE CHURCH: one true Church, the body and bride of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:25-23), composed of all true believers of the present age (1 Corinthians 12:12-13); and the organization of its members in local churches for worship, for edification of believers, and for world-wide gospel witness, each local church being autonomous but cooperating in fellowship and work (Ephesians 4:11-16).
9. CHRISTIAN LIFE: a life of righteousness, good works and separation unto God from the evil ways of the world (Romans 12:1-2), manifested by speaking the truth (James 5:12), maintaining the sanctity of the home (Ephesians 5:22-6:4), settling differences between Christians in accordance with the Word of God (1 Corinthians 6:1-8), not engaging in carnal strife but showing a Christ-like attitude toward all men (Romans 12:17-21), exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and maintaining a life of prayer (Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6), including the privilege, when sick, of calling for the Elders of the church to pray and to anoint with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:13-18).
10. ORDINANCES: the Christian should observe the ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are (1) baptism of believers by triune immersion (Matthew 28:19) and (2) the threefold communion service, consisting of the washing of the saints' feet (John 13:1-17), the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 33-34; Jude 1:12), and communion of bread and the cup (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
11. SATAN: his existence and personality as the great adversary of God and His people (Revelation 12:1-10), his judgment (John 12:31), and final doom (Revelation 20:10).
12. SECOND COMING: the personal, visible, and imminent return of Christ to remove His church from the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) before the tribulation (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 3:10), and afterward to descend with the Church to establish His millennial kingdom upon the earth (Revelation 19:11-20:6).
13. FUTURE LIFE: the conscious existence of the dead (Philippians 1:21-23; Luke 16:19-31), the resurrection of the body (John 5:28-29), the judgment and reward of believers (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10), the judgment and condemnation of unbelievers (Revelations 20:11-15), the eternal life of the saved (John 3:16), and the eternal punishment of the lost (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:15).

ARTICLE THREE – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

~~The three principal reasons for our existence as a church are to: (1) exalt the Lord (Romans 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 10:31); (2) edify the saints (Ephesians 4:11-16); and (3) evangelize the world (Matthew 28:19-20).~~ *(Note: Moved to Article 2)*

ARTICLE FOUR - CHARTER

Section A. - Authority

1. The primary authority by which ~~this church~~LAGBC exists is derived from the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18), the true Head of His Church (Ephesians 4:15). As such, we are an autonomous fellowship of Christians in submission to Christ through the teaching of God's inerrant Word.
2. Of our own accord, LAGBC is a member in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. We therefore recognize and sustain the obligations of mutual consent and cooperation common among the churches of this fellowship.
3. We are incorporated as a nonprofit organization formed for spiritual, charitable and educational purposes in accordance with the laws of the State of California.

Section B. - Property

1. The title of the property of ~~this church~~LAGBC will be vested in ~~the corporate body of the church, which is the~~its current membership.
2. In the event of dissolution, all property and assets owned by ~~this church~~LAGBC will become the property of ~~Grace Brethren North American Missions, Inc~~Encompass World Partners.

ARTICLE FIVE - MEMBERSHIP

Section A. - Qualifications

Membership is available to those who have accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior, ~~were baptized subsequent to salvation who have been water baptized subsequent to salvation, who are in accord with the provisions of this constitution, who willingly commit themselves to the well-being of the LAGBC family, and who have attended a new member's orientation and have been accepted by the~~ Community Of Elders.:-
~~It should be noted that all baptisms performed in this church fellowship will be by triune immersion. Furthermore, in accordance with the constitution of the National Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, only triune immersed members may represent this church at the National Conference of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. (Note: this is no longer a requirement of the FGBC)-.~~

Section B. - General Duties

Members are expected to live a holy and faithful Christian life before God ~~by striving to know and do His will.~~ Furthermore, each member will ~~function within the church~~participate in- ~~the church~~ LAGBC family by regular attendance at services ~~(including communion),~~ consistent financial support, fervent prayer, the use of time, ~~talents~~ and ~~talents-spiritual gifts~~ for the work of ministry, submission to ~~church~~LAGBC's leadership (including discipline, if needed) and the formation of godly relationships for the purpose of loving one another.

Section C. - ~~Specific~~LAGBC Privileges & Responsibilities

Each LAGBC member who is eighteen years or older has the privilege and responsibility to vote, pursuant to Article Six, Section B, on matters related to The corporate church membership will be responsible for the:

~~1. Calling of senior and associate pastoral staff.~~

21. Nomination and approval of Elders.

32. Approval of all major budgetary items (i.e., annual budget, major building projects, cumulative purchases by the Community of Elders for non-budgeted items totaling more than 2010% of the annual budget).

43. Approval of all constitutional changes.

Section D. - Privileges

~~1. All members eighteen years or older may vote on any issues requiring a congregational vote.~~

2. Any member who ~~feels a dissatisfaction is dissatisfied~~ with any aspect of LAGBC church life is to present his concern, in writing, to the Community of Elders for its attention. -The Community of Elders may then choose to respond in writing or in person to that member.

Section ~~DE~~. - Termination of Membership

Membership ~~will~~ may be terminated ~~by~~ as the result of:

~~1. Death.~~

~~12.~~ A ~~W~~ritten request ~~of by~~ the member to the Community of Elders for membership termination.

~~23.~~ Letter of transfer to another church fellowship at the request of the member to the Community of Elders. Such a letter will be granted only to a member in good standing. Such standing will be determined by the Community of Elders.

~~324.~~ A prolonged absence. In such a situation, the Community of Elders will make a diligent effort to contact the absent member for explanation. On the basis of said explanation, it will be the sole responsibility of the Community of Elders to:

- a. Maintain membership privileges.
- b. Extend associate membership privileges.
- c. Revoke membership privileges.

~~435.~~ Removal Discipline for ~~the~~ holding ~~of~~ heretical (i.e., non-Biblical) doctrines, ~~or maintaining an immoral lifestyle inconsistent with Biblical teaching, or the constant repeatedly disrupting of the peace and/or unity of the LAGBC church family~~ Such a removal will be conducted by the Community of Elders. (Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1) All such discipline will be conducted by and is at the sole discretion of the Community of Elders.

~~5. Member is deceased.~~

Section F - Associate Membership

Associate membership is available to those who wish to maintain membership in a Grace Brethren Church, but are unable to do so due to extenuating circumstances. Associate members will not have voting privileges, nor will they be counted as "members" in statistical reports to district or national organizations. Associate members may have their status "upgraded" to membership status, provided they can meet membership requirements.

| This is a special category designed for missionaries, students away at school, special family situations, shut-ins, etc., and is not intended as a “catch-all” category for non-attenders.

ARTICLE SIX - GOVERNMENT

Section A. – Community of Elders

Oversight for all affairs, administration and spiritual discipline of ~~the church~~LAGBC will be vested in the Community of Elders. The following directions apply to its oversight:

1. Nomination and Recognition of Elders

God calls and ordains men to ~~shepherd-lead~~ His people. It is the responsibility of ~~this church~~LAGBC to recognize the men God has called to be its ~~shepherds-leaders~~ as Elders. In order to fulfill this responsibility:

- a. Any member may nominate men to be recognized as Elders according to the character qualifications put forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. All nominations will be in writing and submitted to the Community of Elders.
- b. The Community of Elders will prayerfully consider all nominees and select candidates to be interviewed. The Community of Elders will then conduct a careful and confidential interview with the selected candidates.
- c. The Community of Elders will agree on those candidates it believes to be both qualified and called by God to serve in the role of elder.
- d. The Candidates on whom the Community of Elders agree and who believe they are called by God to serve in this capacity will be recommended to the congregation for recognition.
- d. A recognition form asking the question: “Has this man been called of God to ~~shepherd-lead~~ His people?” will be ~~completed by~~presented to a meeting of the ~~members of the~~ congregation ~~for their approval~~ on each candidate individually. Each candidate must be approved by 75% of those members voting in order to be recognized as a member of the Community of Elders.

2. Term of Service

All appointments as Elder will be until:

- a. The Elder ~~chooses to~~resigns;
- b. The Elder ~~leaves chooses to leave the church~~LAGBC; or
- c. The Elder is removed from service ~~according pursuant~~ to Article Six, ~~S~~section A, ~~P~~paragraph 4.
- d. ~~The Elder is deceased~~

3. Corporate Officers

The Community of Elders will select [corporate](#) officers from the church membership.

4. Removal of Elders

Any Elder or pastor may be removed from office upon recommendation by the Community of Elders and a simple majority vote of the congregation.

5. Meetings of the Community of Elders

- a. Frequency: The Community of Elders will meet as needed to conduct church business.
- b. Chairman: ~~The Senior Pastor will serve as Chairman of the Community of Elders will select an elder to serve as Chairman. It will be his responsibility to lead the meetings. Should the Senior Pastor desire, another Elder may serve as Chairman, provided there is approval by the Community of Elders.~~
- c. Secretary: The Chairman will appoint a Secretary to keep ~~detailed~~ minutes of official church proceedings.

6. Decisions of Leadership

- a. Individually: Each Elder will be responsible for decisions made in ministries within his sphere of oversight. Decisions involving money may be made, provided they are budgeted items. Non-budgeted items of consequence should be brought to the Community of Elders for approval. An Elder may always appeal to the Community of Elders for help in a decision and, in turn, the Community of Elders retains the authority to overturn an individual Elder's decision.
- b. Corporately: ~~Ideally, the~~ The Community of Elders ~~are to~~ will strive for unanimity in the decision-making process. This will require, on the part of all Elders, a listening ear, a tender heart, a flexible spirit and a biblical mindset. In times of indecision or disagreement, the Elders are to strive for unity, pray, and seek more wisdom. If a unanimous decision cannot be reached on a matter, a majority vote of 75% of the Community of Elders will be necessary to approve an item of business. A quorum of 60% of the Elders will be necessary to conduct meetings of the Community of Elders. No more than a cumulative total of 2010% of the annual budget may be spent by the Community of Elders for non-budgeted items without the approval of LAGBC members pursuant to the procedure described in Article 6, Section B congregational approval.

7. Responsibilities of the Community of Elders

- a. Generally:
 - (1) Serve as examples of godliness, 1 Peter 5:3.
 - (2) Administer church affairs well, 1 Timothy 5:17a.
 - (3) Shepherd (pastor) the flock, Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2.

- (4) Equip the saints for ministry, Ephesians 4:11-13.
- (5) Teach God's Word, 1 Timothy 5:17b; 2 Timothy 4:1-2.
- (6) Pray for the ministries of the church, Acts 6:4.

b. Specifically:

- (1) Church Administration. The Community of Elders is responsible for the overall direction and ~~program structure~~ administration of ~~this church~~ LAGBC.
- (2) Church Commissions. The Community of Elders may form (by appointment or election) service commissions covering any area of church life and ministry it deems necessary. Each commission may be made up of ~~church~~ LAGBC members and/or faithful attenders (unless otherwise specified), ~~with an Elder or deacon or other qualified person providing oversight.~~
- (3) Church Discipline. All disciplinary action of concerning LAGBC members, and any other person who desires to attend church functions, is ultimately the responsibility of the Community of Elders, including within the fellowship church will ultimately be the responsibility of the Community of Elders. This responsibility includes the membership of the church as well as any person who desires to attend church functions. This includes:
 - (a) recommended removal of an Elder, pursuant to Paragraph 4 above (1 Timothy 5:19-20);
 - (b) restoration of a person involved in sin (Galatians 6:1); and
 - (c) disfellowship of a person who refuses to turn from a lifestyle of sin (Matthew 18:15-17). Any person so disfellowshipped may not attend church functions and/or exercise any privileges of membership ~~membership (if applicable)~~ until restored.
Such a person may The Community of Elders may restore an individual to fellowship by inviting them to resume attendance, and/or be returned to membership status the membership roll and resume exercising membership privileges (if applicable) upon the Community of Elders' determination that the individual has confessed and repented from confession of and repentance from the sin(s) which brought about the disfellowship. The goal of all church discipline is restoration.
- (4) Church Membership. Responsibility for all matters and decisions pertaining to church LAGBC membership and associate membership status in this body will rest solely with the Community of Elders. ~~This includes the maintaining of accurate membership records.~~

Section B.—Deacons and Deaconesses

1.—Qualifications

- ~~1. The qualifications for deacons and deaconesses will be consistent with the qualifications outlined in I Timothy 3:8-13.~~
- 2. ~~Nomination and Recognition~~
 - ~~Following the example of Acts 6:1-6, the deacons and deaconesses will be nominated by the congregation and recognized by the Community of Elders.~~
- 3. ~~Removal of Deacons and Deaconesses~~
 - ~~Any deacon/deaconess may be removed from service upon recommendation by the Community of Elders and a simple majority vote of the congregation.~~
- 4. ~~Term of Service~~
 - ~~All appointments as deacon/deaconess will be until:~~
 - ~~a. The deacon/deaconess chooses to resign~~
 - ~~b. The deacon/deaconess chooses to leave the church~~
 - ~~c. The deacon/deaconess is removed by the Community of Elders.~~
- 5. ~~Responsibilities: The deacons and deaconesses will serve the church by providing necessary organization, oversight, leadership and/or assistance to ministry teams associated with the church.~~

Section ~~Bn-G~~ - Congregational Meetings

- 1. An annual meeting will be held for presentations such as annual reports, budget approvals, goals and such other business as may properly come before the meeting.
- 2. Special meetings may be called from time to time by the Community of Elders for extra items of business.
- 3. All business meetings will be publicly announced in at least two regularly scheduled services or in one service and mailed notification.
- 4. All ~~congregational~~ decisions requiring a vote of the LAGBC membership will be decided by a two-thirds vote of those LAGBC members present at the meeting in which the vote takes place, unless otherwise specified herein.
- 5. The presence of at least 20% of the church LAGBC membership will be necessary for the transaction of business at a congregational meeting.

Section ~~DC~~ - Church Year

~~The church~~LAGBC's fiscal year will run from July 1 to June 30. Budgets approved after the close of the fiscal year will be retroactive to the beginning of that year unless otherwise

specified.

ARTICLE SEVEN — SUPPORTED CHURCH AND CHURCH STAFF MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

Note: Leadership in the Body of Christ is an outgrowth of the call of God on an individual life. Not all leaders will need or receive financial support. Financial support is offered to those individuals whose calling is such that a lack of financial support would inappropriately restrict the leader's effectiveness in carrying out ~~their~~his or her calling.

Section A. - Senior-Supported Pastor Church Leaders

The Senior-Supported Pastor Church Leaders of the church will:

1. — Conduct the regular services of the church.
21. Be accountable to the Community of Elders or their representative.
3. — Serve in authority over other church ministries staff.
42. Qualify and serve as an Elder as a condition of his call a member of the Community of Elders

Section B. — Supported Ministry Leaders

Supported Ministry Leaders will:

1. Be accountable to an appropriate Church Leader.
2. Be selected based on calling and the needs of the ministry involved.

Section B. — Associate Pastors

Associate Pastors will:

1. — Work in conjunction with and under the leadership of the Senior Pastor.
2. — Qualify and serve as an Elder as a condition of a call.
3. — Be accountable to the Senior Pastor with right of appeal to the Community of Elders.

Section C. — Additional Staff

All additional staff will:

1. — Be accountable to appropriate leadership for ministry fruitfulness as defined in their job descriptions.

ARTICLE EIGHT - CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND REVIEW

All ~~amendments to this Constitution~~ ~~constitutional amendments~~ will require a 75% vote of ~~the LAGBC membership~~ ~~the congregation~~ present at a congregational meeting called according to Article 6 Section ~~BG~~. ~~The This C~~onstitution will be reviewed ~~from time to time~~ as deemed necessary by the Community of Elders for any needed improvements or changes.

ARTICLE NINE - LOS ALTOS BRETHERN SCHOOLS

Section A. - Ministry

The preschool and elementary school will offer a weekday educational program that emphasizes the spiritual, moral, academic, social and physical training befitting Christian growth and development. The schools will operate under ~~the church's~~ ~~LAGBC's~~ incorporation.

Section B. - Administration

The administrative heads of the schools will ~~be~~:

1. ~~bBe~~ under the daily oversight of the Senior Pastor as part of his ministry staff. ~~A~~ccountable to the Community of Elders or their representative; -

2. ~~The administrative heads are~~ ~~Be-s~~ ~~Selected by and serve at the pleasure of the Community of Elders.~~ ~~They will also be accountable to, and meet as needed with, the Community of Elders and/or their representative who will serve as a resource, a guide, and an encouragement to them in the performance of their ministry.~~

3. ~~Be m~~Members in good standing of LAGBC.

Section C. – Policies and Budgets

~~All school policies and, budgets, and personnel matters (i.e., hiring, firing, disciplinary actions)~~ will be ~~formulated in conjunction with~~ ~~reviewed and approved by~~ the Community of Elders ~~and/or their representative and will be presented to the Community of Elders for final approval.~~ ~~The Community of Elders will be consulted as appropriate regarding legal, personnel (i.e., hiring, firing, disciplinary actions) and other critical matters.~~