

## ***Preamble***

The purpose of the church of Jesus Christ both as a whole and as a local body is to manifest the gospel of Jesus Christ by word and deed. The church accomplishes this through various ministries, all of which are of equal value and based on the principle of the priesthood of all believers.

## **§ 1 Name**

The public corporation “Grace Church Vienna” is an officially recognised church and religious organization, a member of the “Association of Evangelical Churches” (Bund Evangelikaler Gemeinden, BEG) and a member of the “Freechurches in Austria” (Freikirchen in Österreich, FKÖ).

## **§ 2 Purpose**

Every action of the church serves the purpose of glorifying and worshipping God by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, by missionary work, by instruction in faith based on the Holy Bible, by fostering spiritual community, by pastoral care and counselling, by celebrating baptism as well as communion, and by serving one another and society in love and deed.

Although a public corporation, the church is a non-profit organisation pursuing church-related, educational and benevolent purposes solely for charity.

Grace Church is a multi-ethnic community of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, called with other Bible-centred churches to know our Lord and make Him known among internationals and internationally minded Austrians living in Greater Vienna.

### **Core values:**

Grace Church core values give a portrait of our fellowship and its unique character as a body of believers in Vienna.

1. We are a *worshipping* church that delights in following our Lord Jesus and we rejoice in all He is and has done for us in bringing us to Himself through His death and resurrection. ([Psalm 34:1-3](#))
2. We *study God’s Word*, the Bible, to know Him better and to have our lives reflect His character. Our deepening knowledge of our God takes place privately, in groups, and in our weekly gatherings. ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#))
3. We are a *family*, providing a sense of love, acceptance, and belonging to all who visit and attend our gatherings. We delight in encouraging one another in following the Lord. ([Ephesians 4:15-16](#))
4. We *serve* one another and our neighbours through using our spiritual gifts from the Lord Jesus Christ and by caring with His love. ([1 Peter 4:10](#))

5. Our *multi-ethnicity* demonstrates that our standing in Christ Jesus has no distinction based on race or gender. We walk together in loving unity in our Lord. ([Galatians 3:28](#))
6. We want to *grow* in our capacity to serve and in our character so we are always becoming more like our Lord. ([Colossians 1:28](#))

Our fellowship is primarily for English and German speakers who long to serve the international community of Vienna and see them come to know our Lord Jesus Christ. ([John 17:3](#))

We live, pray, and give as fellow workers with the Lord in His work in Vienna and the world. We regularly send out our members to serve Him in His harvest fields. ([1 Corinthians 3:9](#); [Matthew 28:18-20](#))

### **§ 3 Statement of faith**

In agreement with the Apostles' Creed, we believe:

#### **1. The Holy Bible**

We believe that – while retaining the human identity of each author – the entire Holy Bible (without the Apocrypha) in its source texts is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. It was given to us by God to serve as the utmost authority in all issues concerning faith, thoughts and actions. ([2 Tim. 3:16](#); [2 Pet. 1:21](#); [Heb. 4:12](#)).

#### **2. God**

We believe that there is only one true God who reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is Spirit, yet a person; eternal, omnipresent, almighty and omniscient; he is completely holy, good and just; a God of judgement as well as love, mercy and grace. ([Gen. 1:1](#); [Deut. 6:4](#); [John 10:30](#); [John 4:24](#); [Matt. 28:19](#); [2 Cor. 13:14](#); [Heb. 4:14](#); [Psalm 139:1-10](#); [Jer. 23:23-24](#); [Psalm 99:9](#); [Psalm 106:1](#); [Deut. 32:4](#); [1 John 4:8](#); [Exodus 34:6](#))

We believe in God the Father: The creator, author and sustainer of all things, including his plan of redemption for mankind. ([Gen. 1:1](#); [Rom. 8:28](#); [1 Cor. 8:6](#); [John 3:16](#); [Psalm 54:4](#); [Psalm 55:22](#))

We believe in God the Son: Through him the world was created and who, by conception through the Holy Spirit, became fully man while remaining fully God at the same time. He died a substitutionary death on the cross for the guilt of man in order to redeem him from sin and everlasting separation from God. His resurrection from the dead was bodily, and he ascended into the heavens where he personally represents the believers before the Father. ([John 1:1-18](#); [Matt 1:18-21](#); [Luke 24:39](#); [Rom. 3: 23-25](#); [John 5:18](#); [Heb. 1:1-9](#); [1 John 5:20](#); [1 Tim. 2:5](#); [Luke 24:51](#); [1 Cor. 15:1-4](#); [1 John 2:1-2](#))

We believe in God the Holy Spirit: He was sent from the Father and from the Son to glorify Christ and convict man about God's way of salvation. He indwells every believer; he seals, strengthens, guides, teaches and sanctifies the believer and provides him/her with spiritual gifts for ministry in the church. As we submit all areas of life to Christ, he is able to fulfil us more and more. ([John 14:26](#); [15:26](#); [16:13-15](#); [Eph. 1:13](#); [Rom. 8:13-16](#); [2 Cor. 1:22](#); [Rom. 15:19](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [2:38](#); [8:29](#); [Gal. 5:18](#); [Titus 3:5](#); [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#); [1 Cor. 12:11](#))

#### **3. Man**

We believe that God created man in his image and has given him reason, feelings and a free will so that he can live responsibly before God and rule over creation. Man and woman are

equal before God, but are entrusted with different roles in family, church and society.

We believe that man fell into sin because of disobedience, and therefore all mankind was completely and eternally separated from God. Man's nature, mind and deeds are now marked by sin. Due to the fall, hardship, sickness and death came into the world. ([Gen. 1:26-30](#); [Rom. 3:23](#); [1 Cor. 11:8-12](#); [Rom. 1:18-22](#); [Eph. 5:22-24](#))

#### **4. Redemption**

We believe that mankind can only be saved through God's grace by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is our mediator who completely took our penalty on himself. Everyone who, having been convicted by God's Word and the Holy Spirit – acknowledges their sinfulness before God, wilfully submits to Christ's substitutionary sacrifice and accepts Jesus as their Lord will be born again to new life and have assurance of eternal salvation. The believer experiences spiritual growth through fellowship with the Lord, obedience to God's Word, as well as prayer and fellowship with other Christians. The believer will remain subject to physical and emotional suffering; however, it is in God's hands to respond to the believer's prayer and grant healing, strengthening and growth in the midst of suffering. ([John 14:6](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [John 1:29](#); [Acts 13:38-39](#); [Rom. 4:5](#), [5:1](#), [10:9-10](#); [John 3:16](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#), [1:4-5](#); [Heb. 10:10,14](#); [Eph. 5:26-27](#); [Rom. 8:11](#); [1 Cor. 6:11](#); [1 John 5:13](#); [John 10:27-30](#), [17:1](#), [6:37](#); [2 Tim 1:12](#); [James 1:2-3](#); [1 Pet. 2:20-21](#), [3:14](#), [4:12-19](#); [2 Cor. 4:7-12](#); [Phil. 4:6-7](#); [John 14:13-14](#); [Rom. 5:3-5](#))

#### **5. The Church**

We believe in the church being a spiritual body with Christ being the head and all members being born-again believers.

We believe that the local church is a gathering of believers in Jesus Christ whose purpose is to worship and adore God, to proclaim the gospel in all the world, to practice biblical instruction (teaching), to give counsel in spiritual matters, to carry out social welfare deeds, to pray in supplication and intercession. The church has to maintain the visible signs of redemption: believer's baptism and communion. Every single local church, and primarily its elders and deacons, is directly responsible to the Lord Jesus Christ. All church members are called to follow the example set by the leadership and serve each other according to everyone's spiritual maturity, character and gifting.

We believe in the independence and self-reliance of the local church. An autonomous church is still expected to have common ground with the umbrella organization where teaching and practice are concerned.

We recognize and support the governmental authorities in their God-given role as long as none of God's laws are being violated. ([Eph. 1:22-23](#), [4:15-16](#); [Acts 2:42-47](#), [14:23](#); [1 Cor. 11:23-27](#), [12:19-20](#), [27-28](#); [Matt. 28:19](#); [1 Pet. 5:1-5](#); [Titus 1:5](#))

#### **6. Eschatology (The final things)**

We believe in Christ's visible return after times of trial, temptation and God's judgment. Christ is then going to pass final judgment on the living and the dead. In the end, God will create a New Heaven and a New Earth that will be filled with absolute righteousness. The redeemed will spend eternity in God's presence, but the unredeemed in separation from God. ([Titus 2:13](#); [1 Thess. 1:10](#), [4:13-18](#), [5:4-10](#); [John 14:1-3](#); [Matt. 24:8-31](#), [25:31-46](#); [Rev. 21:1-8](#))

## **§ 4 Membership**

Members can be regular or associate members. All members are members of BEG and FKÖ at the same time. Based on Austrian law, it is not permitted to hold two or more memberships in other registered faith communities or officially recognised churches and religious organisations in Austria. Membership of a church outside Austria does not affect a membership of a church in Austria.

Regular membership is based on a personal confession of faith, believer's baptism, agreement to the Statement of Faith and by making a binding declaration. Grace Church members are expected to attend, serve, give, support, pray, etc. similar to the example set in [Acts 2:42](#)

Associate members are:

- Children – until they have reached the age of religious accountability
- Other people (not in full agreement with the requirements of regular membership as stated above) who nevertheless consider themselves part of the local church both by making a binding declaration, and by being approved by the local church.

Admission of members:

- Applicants submit the filled-out application form and complete a membership training seminar
- Applicants share their personal confession (testimony) with the church leadership. In case of further questions, the church leadership might request for a personal interview. At least two persons of the church leadership shall be present for each interview, one of whom shall be an Elder. Such interviews shall assure the applicant of the church's interest in his/her spiritual life and to learn more about the applicant's understanding of faith and Christian experience. A further goal is to learn of the applicant's desire and commitment to participate in the life of the church and to support the church, as they are able, with their time, talents, prayers and resources.
- Applicants who meet the requirements shall be recommended for membership by the elder board and shall be formally received into the congregation during an official church meeting. The names of all applicants will be made known to the church members at least two weeks in advance by e-mail. This will allow anyone to notify the church leadership if there is an allegation which may be grounds for delaying or withholding membership.

Membership (both regular and associate) can only be practiced in one local church body which is usually situated in the vicinity of the respective member's main residence. Exceptions to the rule about residency apply to those members who have been sent out by their church to a different area of ministry either in Austria or abroad. In addition, the church leadership can issue exceptions to this rule about residency for individual members.

Membership is terminated through resignation, through death, removal from the membership list, exclusion (church discipline), being sent out to a church of similar confession or by a permanent change of residence unless it is grounded on an aforementioned exception to the rule.

## **§ 5 Church government**

The Church is governed by the church assembly and the church leadership.

## 1. The church assembly

A church that can legally vote must have a quorum. The church members together share responsibility for the local church. They are encouraged to participate in decision-making processes if possible. Every church member may suggest items for the assembly agenda.

The church assembly consists of all regular members and are entitled to vote. Associate members may participate in the church assembly but are not entitled to vote. The church leadership may grant associate members voting rights in specific cases.

The church leadership shall call a church assembly at least once a year.

The church assembly has to be announced twice and at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

Should at least 10% of regular members (in churches with less than 40 members, at least 4 individuals) request an assembly, the church leadership is obliged to call an extraordinary church assembly within one month.

Minutes of the meeting have to be taken and made available to church members on request.

A member of the church leadership usually chairs the church assembly.

The church assembly has a quorum if at least 33% of voting members are present. The church assembly should strive for consensus, but a simple majority vote will suffice if necessary. Certain decisions require a voting majority of three-quarters. Abstentions from voting do not count as a valid vote.

The responsibilities of the church assembly which require a simple majority vote are:

- Approval of the budget
- Approval of the statement of financial accounts.

The responsibilities of the church assembly which require a majority of three-quarters are:

- Affirmation/appointment and dismissal of members of the church leadership
- Affirmation/appointment and dismissal of full or part-time paid staff (e.g. pastors, counsellors), associate pastors and other workers according to § 14 "BEG Geschäftsordnung"
- Amendments to the church rules
- Dissolution of the church

## 2. The church leadership

The church leadership is the governing leadership of the church including spiritual matters. The church leadership consists of Elders and Deacons under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church.

Elders function as overseers and shepherds of Grace Church with a primary emphasis on pastoral care and discipleship, prayer, teaching, protecting the flock, and servant leadership. Deacons function as assistants to the Elders and official ministers of mercy. They serve the church through various administrative capacities so the Elders can concentrate on their role of prayer and teaching God's word (Acts 6).

### Elders

Elders serve with shared and equal authority with one another. Ideally at least three elders should serve at any time with more being added as is needed to care for the church. The elders will nominate additional or replacement elders who are then affirmed by a church assembly. If less than three elders are currently serving, the church assembly can nominate additional elders. If there is a pastor, he will be a member of the elder board, but is not considered in the target number of serving elders.

Only qualified men who are members of Grace Church may serve as elders in accordance with Biblical passages such as [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#) and [Titus 1:5-9](#). These qualifications guide both the nomination and continuation of elder service.

Specific spiritual responsibilities of elders are as follows:

- Guarding the church from doctrinal error ([Acts 20:28-31](#))
- Able to preach and teach ([1 Timothy 3:2](#))
- Shepherding and leading as a servant ([1 Peter 5:2](#))
- Meeting practical needs of church members in difficult situations ([James 5:14](#); [Acts 20:35](#))
- Maintain his own spiritual health to be a model for the church ([1 Peter 5:3](#); [Titus 1:9](#))

In addition to the emphasis on spiritual nurture, elders will have the following responsibilities:

- Represent of the church officially when needed and in legal matters
- Oversee the yearly budget and financial accounting

Elders serve for a period of 2-4 years and consideration will be given for a trial period as an elder for a shorter time of evaluation. Elders can serve for additional terms after evaluation by the other elders and by affirmation by the church assembly.

### **Deacons**

The elders appoint deacons with approval of the church assembly. Deacons should serve according to their gifting and can lead teams as needed to serve alongside them. All regular church members, both men and women, are essentially permitted to serve as deacons. The qualifications for both the nomination and continuation of deacons are found in Biblical passages such as [1 Timothy 3:8-13](#). The length of service of a deacon will be determined at nomination.

If Grace Church chooses to employ a deacon as an employee, the church leadership is responsible for providing a job description and guidance for that position.

The church leadership has to select three authorized signatories as well as one representative for external relations.

## ***§ 6 Church discipline and conflict management***

### **1. Church discipline**

The church will use biblical principles to handle members who violate the church's values or persist in sinful ways.

### **2. Conflict management**

Whenever the church is unable to resolve severe conflicts after 3 consecutive church assemblies, the BEG board or their designated representatives have to be notified. The BEG board will, in

consultation with the church leadership, attempt to find a peaceable solution for the conflict by either intervening directly or by appointing other mediators who will be approved by both bodies. It might be necessary for such mediators, counsellors or other representatives of the “Team Gemeindeberatung” to participate in church assemblies.

Should the existence of the church be at stake, the BEG board may – in order to secure the fixed and movable assets – serve in place of the church leadership until the church regains its capacity to act according to its own statutes.

## **§ 7 Finances**

The church members bear sole responsibility to raise all necessary funds. The church is liable for all financial commitments.

## **§ 8 Dissolution of the church**

The dissolution of the church can only be decided by a three-quarters majority at an extraordinary church assembly that has been called for this purpose.

The church’s assets (after the deduction of any remaining liabilities) will transfer to BEG, unless a decision is taken at a church assembly to transfer the assets to another beneficiary in compliance with § 34 -37 Bundesabgabenordnung (BAO) in which case the assets may only be allotted to beneficiaries that comply with § 34- 37 (BAO). In compliance with this regulation, the assets shall be transferred to a similar association that is recognized as non-profit, charitable or church-related according to § 34 – 37 (BAO) at the time of the church’s dissolution and may be used by these associations solely for their own purposes.

The church’s withdrawal from the BEG and FKÖ respectively can only be decided by a three-quarters majority at an extraordinary church assembly that has been called for this purpose, and only after a hearing of representatives of the BEG board.

In the case of withdrawal, expulsion or any other deprivation of the church’s legal identity, a legal successor or succession in title shall be appointed by the church assembly.

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