

## Associate Membership in the FGBC A Suggestion

*Associate Members in the FGBC are churches that fulfill the following requirements:*

- 1) **Regarding Biblical Mission** - the church is involved in mission endeavors jointly with Grace Brethren churches and ministries
- 2) **Regarding Biblical Relationships** - the church ~~has good relations with a~~ is in active partnership with one or more GBCs that is willing to sign on as a "sponsoring church"
- 3) **Regarding Biblical Truth** - the church is fully committed to the FGBC *Covenant* (Scripture as foundation and rule) and the church is committed to respect and not act in opposition to the FGBC *Statement of Faith*.

### Explanation

The need for some kind of Associate Membership has been mounting. We are getting requests and interest from several National Ministries, from EVLC leaders, and from Fellowship Council.

So far, the idea has been focused on efforts either to restructure the Statement of Faith (into different levels or tiers – with Associate Members agreeing to some but not all the levels) or to write a new document that would have different levels or otherwise separate core beliefs from other beliefs. The problem with both of these approaches is that they may be lengthy processes and they could have various pitfalls. Though I believe it is very important to come up with a contemporary writing of our shared beliefs, I think we need a simpler approach to allow for Associate Membership in the FGBC.

Here's an alternative suggestion. Let's use already existing, well understood, concepts to define Associate Membership, rather than try to come up with new documents.

First, we already have a time-proven three-prong focus as a Fellowship: **Biblical Mission, Biblical Relationship, and Biblical Truth**. Associate Members should be committed to (and already engaged in) Biblical Mission and Biblical Relationships with Grace Brethren churches.

Second, we already have a long-term distinction between our **Covenant** and our **Statement of Faith**. Associate Members should be 100% in agreement with our Covenant, and should be neither "opposed to" nor "disrespectful toward" our Statement of Faith.

In other words, they should agree that the Bible (not creeds, traditions, or hierarchies) is the final rule of our faith and practice (our Covenant). Therefore we can have profitable theological and practical dialog while we are on mission and share in fellowship together. In addition, Associate Members would not be adamantly opposed to Brethren shared teachings (Statement of Faith). For instance, one church might teach and practice only the Eucharist for communion, but would not teach "against" foot washing as a foolhardy error. Another might prefer amillennialism, but would speak of dispensationalism with respect, not derision. *This is a natural and expected attitude toward those we disagree with slightly, but want to cooperate with substantially.*

This requirement would be simple enough to be understood and practical enough to work. It also lays proper emphasis on the Mission and Relationship aspects of our Fellowship. Now practically ...

**Regarding Biblical Mission** – the Associate Member church would be required to demonstrate involvement in some ministry endeavor with GBCs. For instance, it could be partnering in mission trips to Mexico City, church planting with Go2, or shared youth outreach with a district or Momentum.

**Regarding Biblical Relationships** – the Associate Member church would ~~need a GBC or related ministry to recommend it (be a sponsoring church)~~ provide the names of one or more GBCs with which it is in active partnership (which could be verified by contacting the churches).

**Regarding Biblical Truth** – the Associate Member (its leadership) would sign a commitment to the Covenant and a commitment to respect and not act in opposition toward the Statement of Faith.