

# Declaration of Common Identity

## Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches

Grace Brethren churches are self-governing bodies of believers voluntarily associated with a family of churches called the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. These churches seek to be faithful to the guiding principle heritage of their founders, whose guiding principle which was to establish churches that were expressions of the New Testament model, both in belief and practice, rather than imitate other church bodies. We intend and desire that our Declaration of Common Identity be applied as an attraction that will draw other believers to identify and cooperate with us and we with them, not as a barrier to repel or divide.

### Jesus – His Word: Our Commitment to Biblical Truth

**The Bible.** All truth emanates from Jesus Christ, the eternal living Word, and is expressed in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament, which collectively is the written Word of God, revealed through the Spirit, and is therefore inerrant. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21).

**God.** God has revealed Himself as There is one true God, existing eternally as three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

**Creation.** Man and woman were created directly by God in His image as fully developed persons. Man was given the responsibility to have dominion over the earth, in obedience to His Creator (Genesis 1:26-27). Angels were created to be ministering spirits for mankind (Hebrews 1:14). One of these powerful angels rebelled against His creator, becoming Satan, provoking the rebellion and spiritual death of man, and becoming the prince of the world (Genesis 3:1-7, Luke 4:5-7).

**Redemption.** In order to redeem mankind from eternal separation from God, God's the Son allowed Himself to be born of a virgin and live as a human being (Luke 41:35-37, willingly laying aside the independent expression of His deity (Philippians 2:6-11), He won back what the first man lost, by suffering both physical and spiritual death on the cross, taking upon Himself the sin of mankind, stripping Satan of his authority (Colossians 2:13-15), and opening the gates of paradise to mankind by imputing on them His own righteousness (Luke 23:43, Romans 3:25-26).

**Church.** God is calling out a people for His name throughout the entire world, bringing them together into families of believers called churches (Ephesians 3:10-11). This redeemed race of people called the church was born on the day of Pentecost when believers in Jesus Christ were filled by God the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), who regenerates, indwells, fills and empowers those who receive eternal salvation as a gift of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His offering on the cross (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**The Return of Christ.** At the appointed time Jesus Christ will descend to rapture His church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). They will give account of their lives to Him (2 Corinthians 5:10), and they will be united to Him as His eternal bride (Revelation 19:9). Jesus will return to this earth with His saints and will reign for a thousand years (Revelation 19:11-20:6). After the thousand years the earth with its heavens will be purified, and the saints will live with Him forever (Revelation 21:1-4).

### Jesus – His Church: Our Commitment to Biblical Relationships

Local churches are spiritual families of believers committed to the Lord and to each other. They are visible expressions of the body of Christ for the purpose of worship, fellowship, edification, and mission. The visible symbols of this commitment and unity are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Grace Brethren churches seek to maintain the original practice of these symbols, baptizing by triune immersion in the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20), and offering their members the privilege of joyfully experiencing our communion with the Lord and with each other in their full expression: the love feast (1 Corinthians 11:24), feet washing (John 13:12-17), and the bread and cup (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

Our commitment to biblical relationships is not confined to life within our local churches. As members of the greater body of Christ, Grace Brethren churches seek to be a part of the mainstream of the evangelical movement by manifesting unity with churches of other fellowships faithful to the Scriptures, and as opportunities arise, by uniting with them in joint efforts of evangelism and service.

### Jesus – His Mission: Our Commitment to Biblical Mission

A major focus of Grace Brethren churches is missions. In the Great Commission our Lord commands us to make disciples of all nations. This is both the purpose statement and life principle of the church. Because the church is a body of called out ones through God's Spirit, her continued existence is related to her faithfulness in calling others through the gospel. According to Acts 1:8, the mission of the church begins where each church is located and extends to the ends of the earth. Because of this Grace Brethren Churches have been faithful both in seeking to evangelize those who are near, and in sending ambassadors throughout the world to bring people to Christ and establish churches.

The primary mission of the church is to call people to salvation through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To do this effectively, however, the people of the church are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. On the positive side, this means that Grace Brethren Churches seek to have active involvement in meeting the social needs of their communities and the world by manifesting Christ's love in seeking to alleviate suffering of all kings-kinds (James 1:27, 2:14-17). On the negative side, Grace Brethren Churches oppose all deviations from the standards of God's Word with respect to social issues related to the sanctity of life, marriage, and the family.

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**Comment [T1]:** "Guiding principle" is a stronger, more principled statement.

**Comment [T2]:** Copied from the longer document on "Biblical Relationships in Partnerships" to better capture the concept of a centered set verses a bounded set.

**Comment [T3]:** Grammar

**Comment [T4]:** To more clearly say that the trinity is not only about God's revelation but about his essence.

**Comment [T5]:** To clarify what we are separated from.

**Comment [T6]:** To make sure we communicate that redemption comes from faith in Jesus, not knowledge of facts.

**Comment [T7]:** To clarify.

**Comment [T8]:** Not needed and it sets a negative tone.

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**Comment [T9]:** See comment T7

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