

## **THE CORE: IT'S WHAT'S BURNING ON THE INSIDE.**

Deep in the heart of every person, at the core of every individual, is that thing which makes them tick. It is their core beliefs—their central, guiding convictions, principles, and perspectives that make them who they are. This is the core of the individual. Your core determines whether you remain strong during times of great testing and persecution. Your core determines the outcome of your life and the quality of your fruit.

What's true of individuals is also true of churches, organizations, and movements. Core beliefs and convictions are the central and most important things that determine viability, longevity, and strength of a church and a movement.

During the last 40+ years of the Great Commission church movement, there is a set of core beliefs that has guided us, shaped us, and kept us going strong. This core stands as a beacon of light shining through the darkness of this world. It is the core that guides and directs us to the fulfillment of the calling God has placed on our lives and on our churches.

The following are the core beliefs and values that have stirred Great Commission churches since the movement began in 1970. It is our hope that this booklet will be an inspiration to millions of people to live their lives for the glory of God, as we unite together to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

The Great Commission Churches Board

Dave Bovenmyer

Doug Brown

Mark Darling

Matt Gordon

John Hopley

Brent Knox

John Meyer

Tom Short

Rick Whitney

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# **GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES STATEMENT OF FAITH**

## **CONFESSION OF FAITH**

This Association shall stand in the historic continuity of the Christian faith. The following shall represent the statement of faith of the Association.

## **THE SCRIPTURE**

The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is unique in that every portion and every word was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was without error in the original manuscripts, and has been passed down to us with great accuracy. It is the supreme and final authority in faith and life in this age.

## **GOD**

There is but one God, everywhere present; infinite in power and knowledge; perfect in justice, goodness, and love; Creator of the universe; eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and the characteristics of personality.

## **MAN**

God created the first man and woman in His own image and appointed them to rule and care for the earth. They lived in perfect relationship with God and each other. God instituted marriage, which is the life-long union of one man and one woman and the foundation for bearing and raising children in a family.

## **THE FALL**

The first man and woman doubted God's goodness and rebelled against Him. In judgment, God brought death into the world and creation fell from its state of perfection. Since then, all human beings are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life and are under the wrath of God because of their sin.

## **JESUS CHRIST**

God the Father, by His own choice, for His own glory, and out of love for sinful men and women, sent his Son, Jesus, the Christ, into the world to reconcile sinners to Himself. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He was God in the flesh, both true God and true man. Jesus lived a sinless life and voluntarily suffered and died as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sins, thus

satisfying God's justice and declaring righteous all those who trust in Him alone.

## **THE RESURRECTION**

Three days after His crucifixion, God raised Jesus from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He lived and died. He bodily ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, where He, the only mediator between God and man, makes intercession for His own.

## **SALVATION**

Men and women are freed from the penalty for their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness, or religious observances, but by the undeserved favor of God alone which was given through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God forgives and accepts all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal and glorify Christ, to convict men and women of their sins, and to impart new life to all who place their faith in Christ. He permanently indwells believers from the moment of

spiritual birth, guides them into truth, and empowers them to live a life pleasing to God.

## **ASSURANCE**

All who are born again of the Spirit can, through the sure promises of God, be fully assured that God will complete the work He has begun in them. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is God's deposit, guaranteeing their eternal inheritance. Good works are not the basis for acceptance by God, but as believers grow in doing good, they grow in their assurance that they are truly children of God and that they will be with the Lord when they die.

## **JESUS' FUTURE COMING**

The Lord Jesus Christ will physically return to earth to reign in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment. The righteous will receive immortal bodies and be welcomed into eternal fellowship with God in a world where all things will be made new.

## **BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER**

Jesus commanded that those who believe in Him are to be baptized in water as a declaration of faith and a symbol of new birth in Christ. He also instructed His followers to

remember Him by partaking in the Lord's Supper, which reminds us of His death, resurrection, and future coming.

## **THE CHURCH**

All true believers, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor—people of all ages and races—make up the Church worldwide as God's family. They should gather together in local churches for worship, prayer, fellowship, and teaching, in order to become conformed to the image of Christ and to become equipped to carry out the "Great Commission" that Christ gave His followers in Matthew 28:19-20.



## **INTRODUCTION**

This booklet is a written description of the commonly held core values and practices embraced by the individuals and churches in the Great Commission Churches (GCC).

Great Commission Churches is a U.S.-based association of churches that is part of the larger Great Commission church movement worldwide. This movement began in 1970 and is today an international fellowship of church movements and ministries, in North America, Latin America, Europe, and Asia.

### **THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET**

As a movement of churches that seeks to be an active part of God's movement in the hearts of men and women everywhere, Great Commission Churches values the Scriptures as our ultimate authority in faith and practice. We also value the leading of the Holy Spirit in each individual and in each church. This paper describes—in general terms—how the individuals and churches in this movement have interpreted and applied the Scriptures and how the Holy Spirit has led this movement. To whatever extent the reader detects that this paper is inconsistent with the Scriptures we welcome input so that this movement can be more faithful to God's Word.

The purpose of this paper is to explain, not exclude; to build bridges, not walls; to inspire, not to restrict. The goal is to give an honest explanation of the commonly held values and practices of Great Commission Churches to those within as well as those outside of our movement. Our hope is that as we give a clear and honest picture of the Great Commission Churches we will stimulate an increased cooperation with believers across the globe, for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **HOW THIS BOOKLET IS USED**

1. This paper helps build cooperation between churches within our association in church planting, nationally and internationally, by clarifying our unity in our values and practices.
2. This paper provides direction for what is taught at GCC conferences.
3. This paper is a guide for developing leadership training materials in Great Commission Churches.
4. This paper serves the rest of the body of Christ who desire to learn more about the beliefs and practices of our movement.
5. This paper gives clarity to churches joining our movement as to the commonly held beliefs and practices in Great Commission Churches.

## **THIS BOOKLET AND THE LOCAL CHURCH**

Each church in our association has final human authority under Christ over its own affairs. Therefore diversity exists as to how these values and practices are applied in churches in our association. We respect that diversity. In no way is this paper intended to hinder local churches from following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Rather Great Commission Churches strongly affirms the importance of local churches obeying Jesus Christ and the Scriptures as their supreme authority.

To be a member church in our association, each church must agree to the Great Commission Churches Statement of Faith and must honor this Core Values paper. This means that—unlike with the Statement of Faith—a church may disagree with parts of the following paper and still be a member of Great Commission Churches, as long as it honors the teaching of these values and practices in GCC conferences and ministry programs.

What should a member church do if it disagrees with this paper? In such cases, Great Commission Churches first strongly reaffirms our unity in Christ with that church as partners in the Great Commission. Our unity is centered on Jesus Christ and His mission to advance the gospel.

Great Commission Churches also values the giving of mutual honor: the church honoring leaders in Great Commission Churches as they teach these values and practices in GCC conferences and ministry programs, and Great Commission Churches honoring that church as it follows its own Scriptural convictions.

If a member church disagrees with this paper, we invite dialogue for two reasons. First, it is possible that the paper will be revised after the dialogue. (This paper is reviewed regularly to make sure that it is Scriptural and that it truly reflects the views of the churches in our association.) Second, interaction on the points of disagreement will hopefully result in greater relational unity and a greater mutual understanding of the Scriptures, which will honor Jesus Christ and lead to greater teamwork for the gospel.

## **A WORD ABOUT PRACTICES**

Great Commission Churches decided to include not only values but also common practices in this paper. The description of practices serves to paint a clearer picture of how most churches in our association have lived out their values. This becomes instructional as well as inspirational to other churches. At the same time we want to make two points about practices:

1. Practices vary from individual to individual, from church to church, and from culture to culture. Therefore Great Commission Churches respects the Holy Spirit's leading of individuals and churches in how they practice their faith in Jesus Christ.
2. A concern has been raised concerning legalism. There can be a tendency to focus on the practices rather than the grace of God, to take good practices and disciplines and turn them into legalistic requirements. Our prayer to God and our exhortation to the churches is that this tendency be resisted. Instead, please view this description of practices simply as practical examples of how the grace and truth of God are generally applied in churches in our association.

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose from the dead, gave His church the Great Commission to fulfill. Our hope is that this paper will be an inspiration and an exhortation to believers in Jesus Christ to follow the Holy Spirit's leading as God multiplies Great Commission churches throughout the world.

## **CORE I: THE GRACE OF GOD**

### **VALUES**

1. God's grace through Jesus Christ is our bedrock and power supply for our salvation, our life in Christ and our ministry, both individually and as churches (2 Corinthians 9:8).
  
2. God's grace to those who believe in Christ includes the following:
  - a) Our wonderful forgiveness through the death of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7).
  
  - b) God's passionate and unconditional love for us in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:19; Romans 5:8).
  
  - c) The truth that eternal life is a free gift from God, received by faith apart from our religious or moral works (Ephesians 2:8-9).
  
  - d) The power and strengthening God gives us by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16).
  
  - e) Our glorious position in Christ as new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17).

- f) The power given by God to Christians to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, as well as to preserve us in trials and difficult circumstances (1 Corinthians 10:13).
  - g) The supernatural power to do ministry (John 15:5; 2 Corinthians 12:9).
  - h) The future grace we will receive in heaven and at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).
  - i) The grace we receive from God to meet whatever need we may have (Hebrews 4:16).
3. Grace will lead to works and result in fruit in people's lives (Ephesians 2:8-10).
  4. Those who have been born again by the Spirit are eternally secure and will not lose their salvation (Romans 8:37-39; Titus 3:5-7; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 1:3-5).
  5. We believe in a balance between God's grace and man's responsibility. We believe the Bible teaches both the sovereign grace of God and the solemn

responsibility of man to trust, obey, and serve God (Philippians 2:12-13).

## **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. When we sin, God's grace teaches us not to wallow in shame or make attempts to regain God's favor through our works, since we know we have already been cleansed by the blood of Christ once for all and are eternally accepted by God (Hebrews 10:14; Romans 8:31-39).
2. We aspire to model grace and to avoid legalism or hypocrisy so that people in GCC churches, including pastors, will openly deal with their sins, failures and weaknesses.
3. We aspire to proclaim a message to unbelievers and believers in which the grace of God in Jesus Christ is central.
4. God's grace inspires us to show every consideration to all men, knowing that we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, yet God had mercy on us (Titus 3:1-3).



5. Because of God's grace for us and in us, we aspire as a practice to go the "extra mile" in loving and serving God and people, and to have a strong work ethic in all that we do for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:10).

## **CORE II: COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD VALUES**

1. Our supreme desire is to glorify God. Our love for God and devotion to Him must be our deepest passion and greatest motivation—more than possessions, human relationships and personal accomplishments, including ministry accomplishments (Matthew 22:37-38; Philippians 3:7-8).
2. Our lives and our ministries must aspire to wholehearted devotion to God through worship, through prayer, and through studying, memorizing, meditating upon, obeying, and teaching His Word (Joshua 1:8; Ezra 7:10).
3. We value a faith-filled, childlike approach of simply believing and obeying the Scriptures (Matthew 18:3-4; Acts 17:11).

4. Christian maturity is a work of God by the Holy Spirit. We do not believe that simply being a Christian a long time makes a person mature. Nor is maturity accomplished in our own strength. Rather, yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit and submitting to, following, trusting, and obeying God and the Scriptures over time are the primary factors in becoming spiritually mature (Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 2:20; Psalm 111:10; James 1:22).
  
5. The Bible is our final authority for doctrine and practice and our instruction manual for life. It is God's revealed communication for matters of our faith, for our personal lives, for raising our families, for our behavior in the workplace, and for all ministry (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
  
6. We recognize that the Bible is sometimes difficult to understand and was written in different languages and to different cultures than our own and that we must work hard to correctly understand it (2 Timothy 2:15).
  
7. In determining truth, if there is a conflict between what we believe the Bible teaches and what we

believe the sciences or social sciences teach, we will give precedence to our understanding of the Bible (Psalms 1:1-3).

8. Obedience to God's Word is crucial to an accurate understanding of the Bible. Without such an attitude of humility, His Word becomes mere knowledge, which eventually leads to pride and possibly deception (James 1:22).
  
9. All of us are under the authority of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures as our ultimate and final authority. God has also given us human authorities that we are to honor and submit to within their God-ordained spheres of authority. Wives are to honor and submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22), children to their parents (Ephesians 6:1), church members to their elders (1 Peter 5:5), employees to their employers (Ephesians 6:5-6), and citizens to the civil government (Romans 13:1-7). In submitting to a human authority, at no time is a person to disobey God's Word.

10. We value a dependent attitude of faith, demonstrated through a reliance on God in prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-5).
11. We value a Christian life that is focused on heaven and eternal values rather than the world and the world's values (Colossians 3:1-4; 1 John 2:15).
12. We value obeying Christ Jesus in the face of opposition, with the understanding that those who desire to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).

## **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. A common practice for a member in a GCC church is to have a daily devotional time, in prayer and reading the Bible.
2. A common practice is for church members to have extended times alone with God (at times with fasting) for the sake of personal direction, encouragement, reflection, and spiritual nourishment.
3. We desire to develop our Biblical understanding in community since listening to different opinions,

experiences, and perspectives, and working them out together, inevitably give us a clearer picture of the true meaning of the Scripture.

4. It is common for Christians in GCC churches to come together for an extended time of corporate prayer, sometimes two to three hours or longer, in church meetings, pastors' gatherings, and regional/national conferences.

## **CORE III: ALL NATIONS REACHED WITH THE GOSPEL**

### **VALUES**

1. Out of our love for God and people (The Great Commandment, Matthew 22:37-40), our mission as individuals and as churches is to fulfill the Great Commission—to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).
2. While we understand that God sets apart some people in the church to be fulltime missionaries, it is also God's desire that each individual in the church personally embrace the Great Commission. All

believers are to be “on mission,” to do their part in reaching their city, nation, and the world for Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9).

3. God’s will is that while personally embracing this mission every individual work together with others as a team, serving within his or her giftedness and unique role as part of that team in fulfilling the Great Commission (Ephesians 4:11-16).
4. We believe that a key part of the Great Commission is not only evangelism, but also discipleship, where each follower of Jesus Christ is instructed to obey all that Jesus commanded.

## **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. A practice of churches in our association has been to equip and train members to effectively share their faith with nonbelievers, to sow the gospel with family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and strangers.
2. Our church members take to heart Paul’s words when he said that he “did all things for the sake of the gospel,” and consider how their life decisions regarding family, moves, career opportunities, etc.,

may affect their success in reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. Churches and members in our association seek to be “culturally relevant” to those we are trying to reach with the gospel.
4. Although we aspire to reach all generations with the gospel, we place a special emphasis on ministry to the next generation. Our two-fold strategy is to equip parents in the church to train their children and to reach unbelieving and unchurched young people through various ministries.
5. Church planting is a key strategy in fulfilling the Great Commission.
6. Participation in short-term mission teams, domestically and internationally, has been a common practice of GCC churches.
7. GCC churches practice acts of compassion and service to the poor and needy in our churches, in our local communities and beyond.

8. Based on the example in Acts 1:8, Great Commission churches have generally sought to follow a principle of progressive geographical expansion, reaching people in their city, their region, their nation, and the world.
9. In international ministry, we believe both in Christians leaving their own country to spread the gospel to other countries and in entrusting the work to nationals. Because of cultural and language factors, we prefer, whenever possible, to entrust the reaching of a particular country to the nationals who have been saved and raised up.
10. We favor an intergenerational and geographical approach, in which intergenerational churches and intergenerational regions of churches are started and built within a city, state, or nation, whenever possible.
11. Because of Jesus's exhortation in Matthew 9:38, a practice of GCC churches is to pray for the multiplication of workers who will proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.



## **CORE IV: THE CHURCH**

### **VALUES**

1. God has commissioned and established the local church as His primary means of fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission—loving God and others by winning people to Christ, building them to maturity, raising up leaders, and sending teams to start new churches (1 Timothy 3:15).
2. We believe that God sends teams of mature leaders to other cities, regions and cultures to preach the gospel, gather converts into new churches, establish them in correct doctrine and life practice, and appoint leaders for the new churches, as patterned in the New Testament. These missionary teams are to be sent out and given on-going relational support by their local churches (Acts 13:1-3, 14:21-28).
3. We value building relationships between members in different Great Commission churches and encouraging cooperation between Great Commission churches in a geographical region, as well as nationally and internationally. This is done by having conferences, prayer meetings, training events, and mission trips for mutual edification,

accountability, and outreach and service endeavors. To facilitate this, our churches partner with regional ministry teams, the national ministry team and international ministry teams, which coordinate regional, national and international mission efforts, equip church members, encourage pastors and leaders, provide accountability, and assist in leadership training (2 Corinthians 8).

4. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Head of each local church and that each local church has final human authority over its affairs under Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23, 5:23).
5. The Bible uses many word pictures to describe what the church should be and how it should function. For example, the church is described as a temple where God is worshiped, as a family, and as a body (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Timothy 3:15; Romans 12:4). In addition, the church, like an army, is to engage in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18).
6. A key verse used in churches in describing church life is Acts 2:42: "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

7. We believe that the Scriptures combined with the local church are God’s primary system for providing pastoral care and the healing of souls. While God may lead pastors to refer certain individuals to godly, Biblically based counselors as a supplement, this works best when it is coordinated with the efforts of the church and its leaders (2 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 4:15-16).
8. While God can use outside authors, teachers, and seminars to supplement the ministry of the Word in each local church (1 Corinthians 4:15), God desires the local church to be the primary source of preaching and teaching of the Scriptures for the building up of believers (2 Timothy 3:14).

## **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. It is typical for churches to organize around small groups for building friendships, Bible study, discipleship, mentoring, accountability, outreach, providing pastoral care, and developing leaders.

2. It is a common practice in churches in our association for members to be “best friends,” sharing their lives together, in community, throughout the week.
3. As an example to the world, the church is to live in integrity and holiness. In that regard, occasionally, it has been necessary to exercise church discipline for individuals who are unrepentant of known sin.
4. GCC church members are encouraged to practice tithing, financially supporting the local church leadership and church ministries by giving the first 10% of their income to the local church. In addition, the common practice is for each local church to financially support its GCC regional ministry team by tithing to that team.

## **CORE V: CHURCH LEADERSHIP VALUES**

1. Recognizing Christ as the Head of the church, we further recognize that He has appointed certain men of character to be spiritual elders, or pastors, in the local church. These men, rather than someone outside the church, have the final human authority in

their church's affairs and decisions. In addition to elders, we recognize the role of deacons in the church—those individuals who are officially appointed servants of the church (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Philippians 1:1).

2. We believe that the terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” each refer to the same position (Acts 20:17, 28).
3. The New Testament model is that of a Christ-centered submissive plurality of pastors rather than a single-pastor leadership structure (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1).
4. Elders/pastors are to be appointed based upon the character qualities described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
5. Leadership in the church must be radically different from leadership in the world. The greatest in the church must be the servant of all. Church leaders are to be humble servants, very teachable, responsive to criticism and models of always learning, growing, and improving.

6. We believe that the character qualities and doctrinal understanding needed to become an elder/pastor/overseer are best developed within the local church. We view additional training (such as that offered by Bible schools or seminaries) not as a qualification for a pastor, but rather as a possible supplement to the equipping of a pastor within the local church (Titus 1:5).
7. We value and esteem women in the church and encourage their ministry in various roles. In accordance with the New Testament, we reserve the office of elder/pastor/overseer for men alone (1Timothy 3:1, 2:12).
8. A pastor/elder is to be a servant, modeling Christlike humility, teachability and love, as well as a leader, demonstrating faith, courage, and strength in managing the church (Luke 22:26; Hebrews 13:7).
9. Elders are to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word as their primary focus in the church. Deacons are servants of the church who assist the pastors in areas that enable the pastors to

focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-6).

## **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. Churches in our association have practiced a plurality of elders model with elders having equal authority in the church, rather than a traditional senior pastor model. Some churches have chosen to select one of the elders to provide servant-leadership to the community of elders for the management of the church. Yet, even in these cases, the church is being led by Jesus Christ through the community of elders, not through just one man.
2. In GCC churches, the practice is for elders to be active as the spiritual leaders in the church, whether or not they are paid church employees.
3. Our practice in Great Commission Churches is to encourage men and women to share the Word of God with each other (Colossians 3:16)—and to do so in a way that does not violate 1 Timothy 2:12: “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.” How this verse is interpreted and applied varies somewhat from church to church and

culture to culture.

4. In Great Commission Churches our preference is to have more than one elder in each church. However, where this does not exist, our preferred practice is for that one elder to select a group of mature men to act as an advisory group in order to protect, encourage, and confirm him in his leadership of the church.
5. Although there are exceptions, our general practice is to develop and appoint leaders (elders and staff) from within the local church.
6. In training for church leadership a man who has a family, GCC churches give special attention to equipping him to lead in his home as a husband and as a father. When we evaluate a married man for leadership, we look at the strength of his marriage and his family before evaluating his ministry skills and other credentials (1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12).



## **CORE VI: ONENESS (LOVE AND UNITY)**

### **VALUES**

1. We strongly revere the “doctrine of love and unity” within all of Christendom. God desires unity between believers as a high priority, and we strive to maintain a unity with every believer, both within and without our association (Ephesians 4:3).
2. We believe that our unity must be centered in Jesus Christ and in the truth of the gospel and of the Scripture. Unity is maintained and enhanced as we believe and obey the Scriptures, unite in a common vision and follow the Lord together.
3. We value a deep “Jonathan-David” covenant love and loyalty for one another, particularly among leaders in churches, regions, nationally, and internationally (1 Samuel 18:1).

### **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. For the sake of the gospel and the Great Commission, our practice has been to avoid divisive arguments on “gray areas” of doctrine and to discuss "gray areas" in an atmosphere of grace and respect with the goal of increasing our unity.

2. When disunity arises on ministry and doctrinal issues, our practice is to encourage leaders to persevere in seeking unity so that the church can move forward.
3. When members have a disagreement with the leadership on secondary issues, our practice is to grant full fellowship to that member as long as he/she respects the teaching of the elders and does not create strife or disunity through that issue.
4. One reason that we advocate an elder-led (versus a congregational-led) structure is that it promotes and encourages unity in the church.
5. Recognizing that spiritual warfare exists and that our enemy seeks to divide, we place a high value on building and maintaining unity between elders and between their wives.
6. We promote the practice of church members being empathetic listeners, humbly seeking first to understand and then to be understood (Romans 12:15; James 1:19).

7. We promote the practice of defending, and believing the best of, one another, and not receiving an accusation against another person or an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 Timothy 5:19).
8. We seek to honor, love, pray for, and cooperate with God-fearing and Bible-believing churches and leaders locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Our goal is not to compete with other churches but to cooperate as allies in furthering the Kingdom of God.
9. In international ministry we aspire to support, cooperate with, and honor the national Christians in each country, striving for the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17. We believe that God will honor our church planting efforts as we first humbly seek counsel from and unity with national Christian leaders in each country.

## **CORE VII: RAISING GODLY FAMILIES**

### **VALUES**

1. We believe that strong families are foundational for the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development of each individual; for healthy relational patterns within the church; and for stability in society. Strong families produce strong churches and strong communities (Ephesians 5:22; 6:4).
2. We value the husband and the wife following Christ's example in loving and honoring one another sacrificially. We also promote differing but complementary roles in the family, with the husband as the head of the household, wholeheartedly laying down his life for, sacrificially loving and leading his wife, and his wife wholeheartedly laying down her life for him, honoring, supporting, and submitting to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-33).
3. We believe that human sexuality is a gift and is to be celebrated and practiced exclusively within the marriage covenant between one man and one woman. Therefore, in accordance with the Bible, we consider any sexual expression outside of or apart from that covenant (including adultery, fornication,

homosexuality, or viewing pornography) to be a sin (1 Corinthians 6:9; Matthew 5:28).

4. We believe that life is a gift from God that begins at conception and should be valued and protected at all stages of development and ability (Psalm 139:13-16).
5. We aspire to provide compassionate ministry to those who are divorced while at the same time teaching that God hates divorce and wants couples to stay married. Churches in our association (with some exceptions) generally teach that God permits remarriage after divorce in two instances—marital infidelity or if an unbeliever leaves a believing spouse (Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:15).
6. We believe that parents are primarily responsible for their child's spiritual, academic and personal development. Church ministries, including youth ministries, are intended to strengthen the parent-child relationship and to support parents in fulfilling their God-given responsibilities (Ephesians 6:4).
7. In Great Commission Churches we place a high value on men being strong spiritual leaders in their

marriages and with their children (Ephesians 5:25-27, 6:4).

## **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. Although ministry is important, we hold that one's home life takes precedence over ministry outside the home.
2. Our practice is to encourage families to be "on mission," actively involved in evangelism, discipleship, and church planting.
3. Our practice is to affirm those whom God has led to be single in a desire to have an undistracted devotion to the Lord.
4. GCC churches put a great emphasis on equipping and supporting parents as a church community to win the hearts of their children so that they will love God and love people their entire lives. In parenting their children, church members are encouraged to grow in their humility before God, their faith in Christ, their love for and relationship with their children, their faithfulness in teaching God's Word to their children, and their diligence in providing godly correction and

discipline (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:4).

5. For a two-parent Christian family, GCC churches focus on the father and mother working together as a team and on equipping the father to be the spiritual leader in training their child(ren). For a parent who is single or who is not married to a Christian, GCC churches seek to provide that parent extra support and specialized ministry as a church community (Ephesians 6:4; James 1:27).
  
6. Parents in GCC churches are encouraged to take the lead in their child's education, whether through homeschooling, Christian schooling, or secular schools. While all parents are supported in whatever educational choice they make, it has been a common practice among GCC leaders to homeschool their children, particularly in their early formative years.

## **CORE VIII: EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER**

### **VALUES**

1. While we recognize that God calls some to be workers in the gospel as a full-time vocation (1 Corinthians 9:14), we affirm the “priesthood of all believers” rather than a “clergy-laity” system. All Christians are “priests,” according to 1 Peter 2:5-9, empowered through the Holy Spirit to worship God and be workers in the church and the world.
2. The elders have the responsibility to train and equip the members in ministry, but not to actually perform the entire ministry of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16).
3. God desires each member to utilize his or her unique spiritual gifts in ministry (1 Peter 4:10-11).
4. All ministry is in vain without the help of, and our reliance upon, the Holy Spirit. He is our source of power in the church and in the believer. He is our Helper in all matters of faith, service, and direction (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).



## **COMMON PRACTICES**

1. Churches in our association seek to equip members with certain basic spiritual disciplines such as daily devotional times, serving in the church, sharing the Word with believers, and sharing the gospel with unbelievers.
2. From the example of the Jerusalem church in Acts 8:1-4, the practice of many church members has been to voluntarily and spontaneously spread the gospel to new areas and new people groups, without relying upon pastors or paid staff.
3. Though GCC would not be considered part of the charismatic movement, GCC churches emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of members and in the ministry of the church.
4. GCC churches encourage the use of spiritual gifts in their many forms. As for the sign gifts, most churches in our association have understood these gifts to be for the purpose of authenticating the message of Christ to unbelievers. For example, most would understand the gift of tongues to be the supernatural ability to speak a known language as a

sign to unbelievers (Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 14:22).

5. It is a common practice in GCC churches for believers to share communion in informal settings (homes) as well as church buildings, and for baptisms to be conducted by non-pastors as well as pastors.
6. Our historical practice is for our church's ministry to be both centralized (in a rented or church-owned building) and decentralized—ministry performed by church members in homes and in the marketplace (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 20:20).

## **CONCLUSION**

Great Commission Churches has aspired to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to put into action New Testament Christianity in today's world. The values and common practices detailed in this paper have given greater clarity to our understanding of what New Testament Christianity looks like today. As we have followed the Spirit's leading in putting into action these values and practices, God has provided grace, blessing,

and power to individuals and churches. We give God all the glory for what He has done in this movement—and, in the future, we aspire to follow Him and His Word ever more closely, so that the gospel of Jesus Christ will spread to the ends of the earth.

## **THE GREAT COMMISSION COVENANT**

As a member of Great Commission Churches, I commit to:

1. Love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.
2. Believe and follow God's Word at all costs.
3. Love and honor my fellow believer in Christ as Jesus Christ has loved and honored me.
4. Uphold the following core values of the Great Commission Churches. These core values are further defined in the Statement of Core Values included in this booklet.

### **GRACE OF GOD**

God's grace through Jesus Christ is the basis and power, not only of our personal lives, but also of our ministry.

### **COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD**

Our aspiration is that our ministries will be marked by a wholehearted devotion to God, through prayer and by studying, obeying and teaching His Word.

## **ALL NATIONS REACHED WITH THE GOSPEL**

Our ultimate goal and mission is to reach the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to make disciples of all the nations.

## **CHURCH**

The local church is God's vehicle for accomplishing the Great Commission. The church is the place for winning people to Christ, building them to maturity, raising up leaders, and for preparing church planting teams to be sent out for the expansion of God's kingdom.

## **CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

We place a priority upon raising up pastors and other leaders of Christ-like character within the local church.

## **ONENESS (LOVE AND UNITY)**

We desire our ministry to be marked by a Christ-like, selfless love, loyalty, and unity with fellow believers.

## **RAISING GODLY FAMILIES**

Strong families are the foundation for strong churches. Therefore we make it a priority to equip members and pastors in building their marriages and families.

## **EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER**

All Christians are empowered through the Holy Spirit to be workers in the church, not just the pastors. Therefore we seek to equip each member to utilize his/her spiritual gifts to serve others.

5. Strive to believe the best about any who make this covenant, to support them with a loyal tongue, and to be quick to defend them. I will be slow to accept an accusation against them and will not accept such an accusation unless it is supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If an accusation should prove to be valid, I will seek to gently and lovingly confront and restore my wayward brother to a faithful walk with Christ.
6. Love all those who make this covenant and to unite with them as fellow team members, believing in them, serving them sacrificially and holding them accountable to this covenant, as we unite together to bring glory to our Lord and to accomplish His work on this earth.