

Executive Summary of Changes

Grand Avenue Baptist Church Constitution and Bylaws

A significant clarification. Grand Avenue Baptist Church is a biblical based, mission driven, pastor led, deacon served church.

Overall assessment. The new document is a substantial governance rewrite rather than a light amendment. It preserves congregational authority over major decisions, but replaces the former Board of Overseers model with a distributed leadership structure centered on the Senior Pastor, a five-member Pastor's Council, and specialized standing teams.

Most important practical effect. Authority previously concentrated in the twelve-member Board of Overseers is divided among the Senior Pastor, Pastor's Council, Trustees, Finance Team, Pastor Wellness and Personnel Team, Deacons, and Nominating Team. The Senior Pastor retains direct authority over staff, agendas, policies, ministry licensing, and day-to-day leadership, while the congregation retains approval over major financial, property, pastoral, disciplinary, and amendment decisions.

1. Governance and Leadership Structure

- **Board of Overseers eliminated.** The old bylaws vested corporate governance, policy, financial integrity, senior pastor accountability, and many nomination functions in a twelve-member male Board. The new bylaws remove it.
- **Pastor's Council created.** The Senior Pastor and the chairmen of Trustees, Finance, Pastor Wellness and Personnel, and Deacons form a council for counsel, coordination, and accountability, meeting at least quarterly.
- **Standing teams formalized.** Trustees, Finance, Pastor Wellness and Personnel, Deacons, and Nominating become the principal standing teams, generally using staggered three-year terms.
- **Corporate offices reassigned.** The Senior Pastor becomes president; Trustee chairman, vice president; Finance chairman, treasurer; church clerk, secretary; and the Personnel and Deacon chairmen become additional vice presidents.

2. Senior Pastor and Staff Authority

- **Clarified operational authority.** The Senior Pastor determines all ministry and staff positions, selects staff, supervises them, and may dismiss them under the Personnel Policy Manual.
- **Interim authority changed.** Without a Senior Pastor, the Pastor's Council holds ultimate personnel authority and may delegate supervision.
- **Pastoral role restated.** The pastor is described primarily as shepherd, elder, and overseer, with emphasis on preaching, prayer, spiritual direction, mission, and character.
- **Pastor Search Team revised.** The Pastor's Council nominates the seven-member team plus two alternates and appoints its chairman. The old model required three Overseers and used a highest-vote election process. The new slate must include at least four men and three women. The congregation continues to play an important role by providing recommendations for potential team members and by voting to approve the proposed search team. The three-fourths call vote remains.

3. Church Conferences and Congregational Process

- **Annual meeting moved.** The annual conference shifts from a Sunday night in October to a time in September chosen by the Senior Pastor and/or Pastor's Council.
- **Member-called meeting provision removed.** The old right of 100 qualified members to request a called conference is absent; conferences are called by the Senior Pastor or Pastor's Council.
- **Notice and quorum retained.** Two weeks' notice remains the general rule, and members present and voting constitute the quorum.

4. Financial Oversight and Property

- **Finance responsibility moved.** A six-member Finance Team replaces the Board of Overseers as the principal financial body, reviewing the staff-proposed budget, reporting quarterly, maintaining policy, and promoting stewardship.
- **Approval thresholds increased.** Congregational approval for non-budgeted expenditures and budget reallocations rises from more than 3% to more than 5% of the annual budget.
- **External review standard changed.** The old annual certified audit requirement becomes an annual independent financial examination that may be an audit, review, agreed-upon procedures engagement, or other approved assessment; a full audit is required at least every three years.
- **Trustee duties clarified.** Trustees continue to act only with specific church authorization on property matters and now maintain deeds, insurance, fixed assets, governing documents, and major records.

5. Membership, Discipline, and Ministry Teams

- **Membership covenant rewritten.** The longer "Life Together" covenant is replaced by a Confess-Commit-Aspire covenant emphasizing salvation, baptism, groups, Scripture, prayer, worship, leadership support, service, invitation, unity, generosity, and mission.
- **Discipline responsibility moved.** The Senior Pastor and deacons replace the Board of Overseers. Deacons must approve discipline by two-thirds before bringing exclusion to the church; church exclusion and restoration still require two-thirds.
- **Ministry Recruitment Committee removed.** A Nominating Team now focuses on nominating standing-team members and leading deacon elections.
- **Deacon duties updated.** The new document highlights member care, widows, staff support, visitation, Sunday ministry, outreach, ordinances, conflict resolution, and discipline. During a vacancy, deacons arrange pulpit supply and help secure a Transitional Pastor with the Pastor's Council.
- **Electronic meetings authorized.** Standing teams may meet and vote electronically; attendance counts toward quorum, votes must be recorded, and the Senior Pastor or representative is a voting member of all standing teams.

6. Constitution, Doctrine, Legal Status, and Administration

- **Legal and tax provisions added.** The new constitution references the Arkansas Nonprofit Corporation Act, principal and registered offices, registered agent requirements, and 501(c)(3) status.
- **Purpose and doctrine revised.** The former five-purpose statement is replaced by the mission to reach metro Fort Smith, Arkansas, America, and the world. Scripture is expressly described as authoritative, infallible, inerrant, and sufficient; the current Baptist Faith and Message 2000 "as amended" is adopted; and fuller language is added on salvation, eternal security, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.
- **Affiliation updated.** The local association changes from Concord Baptist Association to Great Commission Baptist Association.
- **Constitutional amendment notice shortened.** Advance notice changes from one month to two weeks.
- **Policies, records, and ordination updated.** The Executive Pastor and/or Business Administrator maintains the administrative manual, while changes are decided by the Senior Pastor and Pastor's Council.

Recordkeeping duties are assigned more specifically, fiscal-year administration is added, licensing and ordination are centralized under the Senior Pastor and active deacons, and a separate ordinances section is added.

Bottom Line

The new bylaws move Grand Avenue from an overseer-board model to a pastor-led, deacon-served, team-supported, congregationally accountable model. The Senior Pastor and Pastor's Council gain greater clarification regarding leadership, staffing, policy, agendas, nominations, and administration. Specialized teams assume financial, personnel, property, member-care, and nomination functions. The principal matters members should understand before adoption are the elimination of the Board of Overseers, removal of the 100-member meeting-request provision, clarified Senior Pastor authority, higher financial approval thresholds, and the change from an annual mandatory audit to a broader annual financial examination with a full audit at least every three years.

Note: This is a governance summary for leadership and congregational review, not a legal opinion.