

Dear friend,

This booklet was designed as an interactive tool to introduce you to the Grace United Reformed Church.

You will need a pencil (or pen) for this study. There are blank spaces that you are to fill in based upon the Scripture passages that appear after the blank. All quotations from the Bible are given from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Through this study our prayer is that God will “fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1:9b-14)

In Christ's service,

The Consistory
Grace United Reformed Church
Waupun, WI

HISTORY OF GRACE URC

I. Church History – The Big Picture

The church has always existed, from the beginning of the creation of man. It is a gathering of those who are God's people. Therefore, the history of Grace URC starts with the creation of the first humans, Adam and Eve.

The church as we experience it is the New Covenant (New Testament) church, which came into existence during the first century A.D., particularly at the event of Pentecost because of the redemptive work of Christ on earth.

The New Testament church started in Jerusalem, then spread throughout Palestine unto the ends of the earth.

At first, the civil government (Roman Empire) persecuted Christians, but in the year 313 A.D. Christianity became protected by the government.

Throughout its early centuries, the New Covenant churches had to address a number of disagreements about what the Bible taught. These disputes resulted in the issuing of creeds by gatherings of church men; these gatherings were called councils. As the centuries passed, the churches strayed from biblical doctrine and practice and submitted to the doctrine and government of the Pope in Rome.

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther nailed 95 items (theses) that he thought should be debated by church officers to address errors. This was the beginning of the "Reformation."

The Reformation spread throughout Europe and then the world. Grace URC traces our history through the branch of the Reformation that spread from Geneva, Switzerland through Heidelberg, Germany to the Netherlands.

II. Reformational History – A Narrower Picture

While Martin Luther was influential in Germany, the pastor-theologian John Calvin was used by God in Geneva, Switzerland and beyond.

Contemporaries of John Calvin wrote documents that were adopted by Reformational churches. Two of these are the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). A generation later, the Canons of Dort were also adopted (1619). These three documents are called the "Three Forms of Unity." They are named after the region or city where they were published.

The Netherlands emerged as an independent country during the Reformation and embraced Reformational doctrine. Its civil government and church government were closely related, as was common during that time period.

As time passed, the churches in the Netherlands became corrupt in doctrine and practice, and the civil government exercised more and more control in the churches.

In 1834, ministers and church members seceded from (left) the government-sanctioned churches in the Netherlands. This group was joined by another group that seceded in 1886. The majority of both groups merged in 1892.

Many of the members of the seceding groups immigrated to America from the Netherlands, bringing the Reformed faith with them. From these immigrants, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) was formed in 1857 and continued to be influenced after the founding.

As time passed, the CRC became corrupt in doctrine and practice; this corruption accelerated during the 1980's and 1990's. Numerous churches seceded from the CRC and federated together in 1995/6 to form the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

III. Grace URC – The Focused Picture

Grace URC held its first worship service June 28, 1998 in Waupun, WI as a member church in the URCNA (www.urchna.org). Grace URC started after about a year of prayer, under the oversight of the Oak Glen URC in Lansing, Illinois.

For the first six years, worship services were held at the local Christian elementary school gym. In 2004, a building at 601 Buwalda Drive, Waupun, was purchased and remodeled to serve as the facility for worship, education, and fellowship. The first service was held on Thanksgiving Day, 2004.

IV. The Mission Of GRACE URC

The mission of Grace URC is to glorify God by following the command of _____ to his disciples:

Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Mat. 28:18-20

ORGANIZATION OF GRACE URC

I. Jesus Christ's Position

Christ is the _____ of the church.

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Eph. 5:23

And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. Col. 1:18

Christ is the _____ of the church. He is the only one who "goes between" God and us.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. 1 Tim. 2:5

Therefore he [Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. Heb. 9:15

Christ is our chief _____, our only _____, and our eternal _____. As prophet, Jesus is the only one who brings us the final Word from God. As high priest, Jesus is the only one who presents a sacrifice (Himself!) to pay for our sins against God and purifies us from sin. As king, Jesus is the only one who has authority over his people and who protects us.

The woman said to him [Jesus], "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." Joh. 4:19

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Heb. 4:14

*Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so."
Mat. 27:11*

Christ is the sole _____ in the church, which he rules by his Word and Spirit.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Mat. 28:18

II. Officers In The Church

Grace URC has a minister. His primary duties are _____ and the _____ of the _____.

*But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.
Act 6:4*

There are elders. Their primary duties are prayer and _____ ing the congregation.

*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.
Act 20:28*

There are deacons. Their _____ ies are prayer and managing the gifts of mercy in the congregation.

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."
Act 6:1-3*

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Each officer signs the "form of subscription" which is a vow that he agrees wholeheartedly with the doctrine contained in the Bible and the Reformed confessions and ecumenical (catholic) creeds, and that he will faithfully defend the doctrines against error. According to biblical teaching only males are to be ministers, elders, and deacons (I Tim. 2:11-3:13).

III. Congregation

These are the members, of which there are those who have been baptized and those who have been baptized as well as professed their faith. Those who have professed their faith are termed "members in full communion." Each member is considered to be _____ and _____.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Col. 3:12-13

IV. Broader Church Community

Churches gather together in order to express unity in the faith with other churches and to receive wisdom in addressing issues. These gatherings are "broader" rather than "higher" gatherings, which means that the authority of Christ is placed in the local church (through the officers), not placed in the assemblies over the local churches. This accords with what the apostle John saw: Jesus in the midst of the seven _____ not over one lampstand with seven branches; the lampstands are local _____.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest... As for the mystery of the seven stars

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that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.
Rev. 1:12-13, 20

Classis: Two members from each Consistory of other United Reformed churches in our geographical area (SD, MN, IA, MO, IN, IL, and WI) meet at least twice a year to discuss matters that could not be resolved at the local level or matters that concern the group of churches. There are nine classes in the URCNA federation.

Federation: These are all the churches in the URCNA. Two members from each Consistory are _____ with the purpose of _____ing _____ at least once every three years at a synod in order to discuss matters that could not be resolved at classis or matters that concern all of the churches in the federation.

Some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.
Act 15:1-6

Reformed Community: Presbyterian / Reformed fellowships. These are churches that agree with us in faith and practice, as explained in the Three Forms of Unity. This includes: the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in the United States, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, etc.

V. The Description Of The Church's Government

It is through the officers of the church that Jesus rules his church. This is known as the Consistorial or Presbyterian form of government (not to be confused with Presbyterian churches). In this form, Christ exercises his authority through the Consistory (which is the gathering of the minister(s) and elders in a local church).

Our form of government is not congregational, where it is thought that Jesus rules his church through the congregation. In the congregational scheme, authority arises from the people.

Our form of government is not hierarchical, where it is thought that Jesus rules his church through a central figure, e.g. the Pope in Rome. In the hierarchical scheme, authority comes from above to the local church.

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URC utilizes confessions composed during the Reformation. These are commonly called the “Three Forms of Unity” and consist of the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1619).

The Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism summarize the entire Christian faith (the catechism does this in the form of questions and answers), while the Canons of Dort focus on the doctrines of sovereign grace.

These confessions derive their authority from being in agreement with the Bible. They explain the Reformational understanding of vital doctrines taught in the Bible. The officers and members in Grace URC agree wholeheartedly with what is taught in them; we are unified in confessing the Christian faith as expressed in these confessions.

III. Christian Creeds

There are three ecumenical creeds that Grace URC also utilizes. These creeds are “catholic” in the sense that the Christian church throughout the world and for many years has held to the doctrines taught in them. The creeds derive their authority from being in agreement with the Bible. They contain the Christian faith in a summary. The officers and members in Grace URC agree wholeheartedly with what is taught in them as understood through the Reformed confessions.

The three creeds are: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

IV. Church Order

The church order is the “constitution” for the federation of which we are a member. It regulates certain aspects of the life of the local church as well as our fellowship with other churches in the federation.

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It consists of four sections: ecclesiastical offices, ecclesiastical assemblies, ecclesiastical tasks, and ecclesiastical discipline.

V. Local By-Laws

This document regulates various aspects of Grace URC as they relate to our incorporation under civil guidelines.

VI. Local Affirmations Of Faith

These are statements of biblical teaching that the Grace URC council has adopted to address contemporary issues in our society and church environment.

VII. Local Policies & Decisions

These are policies and decisions made by the Grace URC council and/or Consistory.

VIII. Song Book

Grace URC uses the 1976 (blue) Psalter Hymnal published by the Christian Reformed Church. All the songs in the book have been approved by the Consistory for use.

The front of the hymnal contains various indices. The first 310 songs are versifications of the 150 Psalms; the next 183 songs are hymns or songs taken from portions of Scripture.

After the songs are the creeds and the Reformed confessions through page 116, liturgical forms used in the life of the church from pages 121 through 180, and various prayers from pages 181 through 191.

PRACTICES OF GRACE URC

I. Corporate Worship Services

The corporate worship service is what occurs ("service") when a Christian congregation assembles together ("corporate") to meet with the triune God ("worship"). These services are governed by principles taught in God's Word (the Regulative principle, the Corporate nature of worship, and the Dialogical principle).

This is the chief way in which the church fulfills its mission given by Christ. Because of its importance, we have published a separate booklet explaining the biblical teaching concerning the corporate worship service.

II. Prayer

Prayer is vital so that the life of the church is blessed by God. Prayer is an integral part of each worship service, and each member is encouraged to pray throughout the week.

The Consistory calls prayer gatherings twice a year.

III. Catechism And Sunday School

The youth in the church belong to Jesus. Therefore, Grace URC instructs the youth in the Christian faith, principally by means of catechism and Sunday school classes (also called "church school"). This training occurs under the supervision of the elders, with the support of the parents.

The goal of these classes is the training of the covenant youth in the Christian faith with a Reformed understanding, so that they understand it and embrace it for themselves, which culminates in the public profession of their faith. If one professes his or her faith prior to completing the twelfth

grade, they are ordinarily requested to remain in catechism until completion of the twelfth grade.

Adult Sunday School is also offered with the goal of promoting continued growth of those who have already made profession of faith and are beyond the twelfth grade.

IV. Bible Studies And Societies

The Consistory oversees a men's study ("Men's Life"), a ladies' study ("Ladies' Oasis"), and a youth group. The goal of these studies is to equip further the men, women, and youth of the congregation in the Reformed understanding and application of the Christian faith as well as to promote fellowship among the congregation.

V. Family Visitation

Family visitation is when two elders or one elder and the minister travel to the home of each family and discuss spiritual matters in light of the Bible. It is part of the oversight that the Consistory exercises over the members.

The goals of family visitation are:

- Become acquainted with the home lives of members
- Discover if there are spiritual challenges in the home
- Discuss church-related issues
- Apply the Word of God to the lives of members
- Encourage each other to greater faith and faithfulness
- Pray for one another

Visitation is ordinarily performed once per year.

VI. Fifth Friday Fellowship

Fifth Friday Fellowships occur when there is a fifth Friday in a given month. Usually, a potluck meal occurs followed by a fellowship activity. The goal is to cultivate community and fellowship among the congregation.

VII. Prayer Chain

The prayer chain consists of all the households in the congregation as well as frequent visitors. To request activation of the prayer chain for an item of petition or praise, call your district elder. That elder will determine if the prayer chain should be activated, whereupon he will contact the other council members, who will contact those in their prayer chain district.

VIII. Officer Meetings

The Consistory consists of the minister(s) and elders. It ordinarily meets once a month, as announced in the bulletin. This is the ruling body of the church. These meetings are open to the congregation (except for times of executive session).

The council consists of the Consistory meeting with the deacons. It ordinarily meets once a month, as announced in the bulletin. These meetings are open to the congregation (except for times of executive session).

IX. Congregational Meetings

The congregation ordinarily meets once a year to give advice to the Consistory and/or the council regarding matters of: the budget for the coming year, election of officers, and other matters pertaining to the congregation. The advice given by the congregation is not authoritative over the council or Consistory.

All members in full communion (i.e. professing members) are invited to attend. If a member does not attend, but wish to give advice, he may submit a signed "absentee ballot."

X. Membership

Membership in Grace URC is for believers in Christ and their children.

The Bible teaches that the children of believers should be baptized, according to the command of God. When baptized children reach an appropriate age, they profess their Christian faith to the satisfaction of the Consistory, after which they profess their Christian faith in the presence of the congregation and become members in full communion, being welcomed to partake of the Lord's Supper.

New converts to the faith who have not been baptized (or have received an invalid "baptism") shall profess their Christian faith to the satisfaction of the Consistory and in the presence of the congregation. After profession in the presence of the congregation they shall be baptized, upon which they become members in full communion, being welcomed to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Those who come from other churches in the federation or from other churches united with us in faith and practice are welcomed as members in full communion after meeting with the Consistory. At the discretion of the Consistory a "new member" class might be required.

Those who come from other churches that are not united with us in faith and practice are welcomed as members in full communion after meeting with the Consistory and possibly making a public profession or reaffirmation of faith. At the discretion of the Consistory a "new member" class might be required.

XI. Property

Grace URC owns the church building and grounds as well as a parsonage.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE

I. Greeters

Greeters are members who welcome people to the worship service, directing visitors to the bulletin rack and inviting them to sign the guest book as well as informing them of the nursery.

II. Fellowship Lunch

After the morning worship service volunteers serve a fellowship lunch. This is an opportunity for fellowship and discussion.

III. Nursery

The nursery is staffed by female volunteers who are available to watch small children so that the family and congregation can worship without distraction. It is expected that at around 2-4 years old, children will have been trained by their parents to join in the corporate worship service.

IV. Janitors

The janitorial duties are performed by volunteers (for a given month) who clean the church during the week and make sure it is ready for both Sunday worship services as well as other events during the week.

V. Piano and Organ Players

Piano and organ players are church members who volunteer to play the piano or organ. Their primary role is to support the congregational singing during the service.

VI. Committees

The council of Grace URC oversees various committees related to the life of the church.

The library committee is responsible to organize the church library and monitor usage. The building committee is responsible for upkeep and changes to the church building and the parsonage. The sound system committee is responsible for operating the sound system and distributing recordings of the services/sermons. The funeral committee is responsible for coordinating matters related to the lunches commonly held after funerals.

MEMBERSHIP VOWS OF GRACE URC

Every professing member of Grace URC holds to the following vows, whether they are spoken personally in front of the Grace URC congregation or whether the member is received from another church. These vows are from page 132 in the back of the Psalter Hymnal.

I. First Membership Vow

“Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?”

By taking this first vow you pledge that you assent to all the doctrines that God teaches in the Bible without exception. By this vow you also pledge that you assent to the Reformational teaching of the biblical doctrines, as it is explained in the Three Forms of Unity. By this vow you are pledging that your assent is not half-hearted or reserved, but that it is “hearty.”

II. Second Membership Vow

“Do you openly accept God’s covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you abhor and humble yourself before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourself, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?”

By taking this second vow you testify that your trust is not in yourself but in Jesus alone. You are testifying that you are born again and not simply going through the motions of a Christian.

III. Third Membership Vow

“Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?”

By taking this third vow you affirm that your lifestyle, while imperfect, is one that matches that of a true Christian.

IV. Fourth Membership Vow

“Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?”

By taking this fourth vow you pledge to submit to the Consistory of Grace URC in the decisions it makes. This means you will honor, love, and be loyal to the elders as well as be patient with their failings, for through them God chooses to rule you (cf. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 104).

You pledge to heed their rebuke and correction when they present you with errors in your beliefs and/or in your lifestyle; this means changing your doctrine or lifestyle in accordance with the rebuke.

If you disagree with the decisions or admonition or discipline on biblical grounds, you may appeal according to the method laid out in the church order.

With these vows, the members of Grace URC give expression of and commit themselves to the unity of faith and life that God has brought about for us in Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit.