

Why does Grace Church have two Affirmations of Faith?

First, the Elders believe it is wisest to adopt a Membership Affirmation of Faith that all members would have to affirm. The aim here is to make the doctrinal qualifications for membership in the local church similar to those of the universal church. This approach is an effort to be careful to not elevate beliefs and practices that are non-essential to the level of prerequisites for church membership.

The approach was to start with the Elder and Teacher Affirmation of Faith and keep as much of it as seemed doctrinally essential to being a Christian. Therefore, members are required to embrace a shorter Congregational Affirmation of Faith, as a set of beliefs that all Christians should believe, whereas Elders and teachers are required to embrace a longer, more detailed and more robust Affirmation of Faith that carefully spells out the church's doctrinal distinctives. More on that in a moment.

The reason for this more minimal approach for church membership is due to a simple fact: we anticipate that God will continue to send us new Christians and even Christians who are teachable, but simply have not been taught solid doctrine. These would be those people God is sending to us to minister the truth of Scripture to, but could not be reasonably expected to even yet fully grasp, much less embrace with understanding, what a thoroughgoing, extensive and detailed doctrinal statement would require of them.

To expect that of them seems to be setting the bar for membership higher than Scripture does for admission into the universal church.

In this way we want to put Grace Church in a position to welcome genuine Christians into membership who clearly affirm the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, but may not have yet been exposed to and instructed in the particular distinctives that characterize the teaching at Grace.

The ministry of teaching and equipping of Christians through a comprehensive understanding of Scripture is the calling of the church, and we want to welcome those whom God would send to Grace Church to be taught, so that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth.

Second, all elders, pastoral staff, and teachers are required to be governed by The Elder and Teacher Affirmation of Faith.

Whereas church members are not required to affirm the details of the Elder Affirmation of Faith, our aim as Elders is to lead the congregation toward unity in the fullness of the truth. Out of strong desire to strive for that kind of Biblical unity, we believe that the leadership of Grace Church must cooperate in doctrinal unity.

This means that The Elder and Teacher Affirmation of Faith is the document that governs what is taught at Grace Church. All Elders, staff members, and teachers are required to adhere to The Elder and Teacher Affirmation of Faith in their teaching.

This document is a fuller and more detailed Affirmation that defines the doctrinal distinctives of Grace Church more thoroughly and carefully, and is therefore what is the standard of what is taught to the congregation by those serving in leadership positions.