



WHAT CHRIST CHURCH BELIEVES AND TEACHES

A Confession of Faith

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FOREWORD

It has been nearly thirty years since I first wrote this book.

Our founding pastor, L.H. Hardwick Jr., and I had just returned from a meeting in Chicago, where we had met with leaders of other Pentecostal churches that, like Christ Church, had become independent of their parent denomination. In that meeting, we drafted a set of doctrinal statements to define the way in which we viewed our faith.

The great creeds and confessions of the Christian faith heavily influenced us, of course, but we also referred frequently to a little book by C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

Lewis described Christianity as a great mansion filled with many rooms, each decorated differently and whose inhabitants lived by slightly different rules. He said that he wanted to write about those things common to the entire mansion, which he called *mere Christianity*.

The people in that Chicago meeting meant to move from the sectarian stance in which they had lived up to that point and embrace, as far as possible, the entire family of God. The original doctrinal statements reflect those concerns. They also reflect the theological assumptions from which we were moving at the time.

At any rate, Pastor Hardwick asked the people of Christ Church to accept the Statements as a summary of our own doctrinal teaching. So I wrote this book for our internal use, as a way to teach and discuss Christian doctrine in our local congregation.

During my many years of absence from Christ Church, while pastoring a church in Arizona, the book was reprinted a number of times. These printings allowed various people to refresh its language and to clarify its message. I have done that again with this printing.

In 2013, our congregation went through a visioning process to clarify our identity and focus for the coming years. The committee on theological identity stated simply, “The doctrinal stance of this church is summed up in the two central creeds of the Christian faith.” The two creeds to which that committee referred, the

Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, are thus the central backdrop of our faith, as they are to the theology of all Christian churches everywhere.

Each church expresses the doctrines of the Christian faith uniquely, possesses a unique corporate personality, and aims toward a unique way of expressing the common life in Christ it shares with its sister congregations.

What Christ Church Believes and Teaches attempts to express the unique characteristics of this wonderful church which so many thousands of people have called home for the many decades of its existence.

Pastor Dan Scott

Senior Pastor

Third week of Lent, 2014

WHY DO WE NEED A CONFESSION OF FAITH?

Not many people nowadays believe they have enough time to read a book about doctrine, even a small one. The word *doctrine* reminds us of wars and struggles throughout history about small theological differences. All that seems foolish and contrary to many of us now. We are rarely inclined to care much about the great theological questions that preoccupied our ancestors.

So these are not the best of times for a healthy doctrinal discussion, and this frames the inevitable questions: “Why do we need theology anyway?” “Why don’t we just love Jesus?”

That sounds reasonable until we ask, “Who exactly was Jesus?” Even an answer like “the Jesus of the Bible” doesn’t settle the issue. It only leads to other questions, such as “What does the Bible say about Jesus?” Or even, “Why is the Bible the ultimate word about Jesus?” Any answers we offer to questions about faith reveal our theological presuppositions. No one forms spiritual opinions out of thin air. They all arise from beliefs that one can, and should, examine.

All believers have a theology. Even an apparently simple statement like “I have no doctrine but love; no creed but Christ” implies a theological system that guides the faith and way of life of those who profess it. A mature believer wants to know what those implications are. He or she wants to know whether those implications can stand up to the teachings of Scripture or to the light of reason and the spirit of love.

So we begin our discussion about doctrine by realizing it is impossible to even be a Christian without doctrine. One’s doctrine may be a vaguely stated set of personal beliefs; it may be a simple acceptance of the beliefs held by one’s denomination; or, it may be an elaborate theological system one has constructed on his or her own.

At some point though, a maturing Christian learns to compare his or her personal views with those of other Christians living now and at other times in history. A Christian tries to honestly identify his or her personal biases in the light of what he or she discovers, gradually beginning to establish the core spiritual ideas that guide one’s most important thoughts and actions.

This process is not easy for most of us. Honestly examining our beliefs may move

us to make changes in the ways we think and live. This means that doctrinal study is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is a reflection upon life and meaning. Perhaps that is why so many people avoid this kind of examination.

Christians have always struggled with theology. From the earliest days of the Church, believers held diverse views about spiritual life and even the person of Christ. Some were uncertain about Christ's deity. Others were uncertain about His humanity. Early Christians had differences about which writings they should regard within the canon of Holy Scripture. They disagreed about many such things. However, over time, they began to develop a clear set of core beliefs about the person of Christ, the nature of God, and the contents of Scripture. We call the collection of the core beliefs they established *orthodoxy*.

In its attempt to arrive at these common core beliefs, or orthodox faith, the Church held several meetings called church councils. The Book of Acts tells us about the first one (Acts 15). In the next few centuries, there were more church councils. These meetings were the most important means by which early Christian leaders, usually called the *church fathers*, settled their doctrinal disputes and gave form to our faith. Although each denomination may explain the various orthodox beliefs differently, most Christians since the days of the church fathers have agreed upon the essential elements of Christian faith.

The most important statements of our common faith were first communicated through a type of poem called a creed.¹ Creeds could be easily memorized and then recited, both in public worship and private devotion. We call the earliest and foundational creed the Apostles' Creed. No one knows for sure when it was written, but early forms of it were already being used as early as AD 98. Since then, nearly all followers of Christ have used the Apostles' Creed as their core doctrinal statement. Christ Church acknowledges this commitment to our common Christian heritage by using the creed in public worship and as the foundation of our doctrinal statement.

You will discover that Christ Church, like all churches, also has a few unique beliefs and practices that give this congregation its own personality and mission. However, we intend our central emphasis always to be the doctrinal heritage common to all Christians. That is what C.S. Lewis meant by his phrase *mere Christianity*. As Lewis affirmed, that is what holds all Christians together and therefore what we view as most essential to our proclamation and practice.

Christian unity always revolves around the Person, the teachings, and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Truth. All other "truths"—even the time-honored, highly treasured Christian truths we discuss here—must point to Him.

What Christ Church Believes and Teaches then, like all statements of Christian doctrine, is a declaration of truths about the Truth. It is an attempt to discover and apply the implications of the Gospel to life. We are finite, fallen human beings. We always "see through a glass darkly," as the Apostle Paul stated (1 Corinthians 13:12).

1 The word comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning, "I believe."

We prayerfully seek to know Him and to represent Him ever more perfectly but always humbly. We do this knowing that we have not yet obtained, but nonetheless, we keep pressing forward to our high calling in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

THE APOSTLES' CREED

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Holy Christian² Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.*

Amen.

² The traditional rendering here is the word *catholic*. For further explanation, please see Article Eight.

THE NICENE CREED

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;*

*he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy Christian³ and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.*

Amen.

³ The traditional rendering here is the word *catholic*. For further explanation, please see Article Eight.

WE BELIEVE IN HUMAN WORTH

We believe humanity was made in the image of God and is the crown of creation. Human beings are now, by reason of the fall, spiritually depraved and alienated from their Creator. Apart from God's grace, we have no ability to attain our high calling.

Many Christian groups begin their theological description of human beings with *depravity*. We choose to begin elsewhere because God did not create human beings as fallen creatures. He created them purposefully and said they were good. Even when we had sinned and become subject to evil and death, God did not abandon us. He did not discard His original purpose for creating us. Human beings were created “in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:27), which is the first thing we believe should be said about human beings as spiritual creatures.

The Bible does not say of any other creatures that they are made “in the image and likeness of God.” David says it even more boldly, “You have made human beings a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor” (Psalm 8). God did not create us as mere animals “red in tooth and claw,” as the poet Tennyson wrote. We were meant to be the highest order of creation. By becoming a man, God emphasized His view of humanity by sharing our human nature. He became one of us. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells us that human beings are God’s special treasure, created to be God’s eternal friends.

Of course a Christian cannot leave it at that, and so we join other Christians in affirming that we are fallen creatures. Although human beings bear God’s image and likeness, something has gone dreadfully wrong. We are not as we should be. We have wandered away from God’s design.

The Bible teaches us how that happened in the first three chapters of Genesis. We

learn in these passages that there is a fundamental flaw in our character called *sin*. This defect is not merely something we do; it is something we are. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, human nature became spiritually depraved and alienated from the Creator. That means our spiritual life is flawed and cannot be fully trusted. We have a soul sickness that perverts our best intentions.

We use the word *alienation* to describe how we often view nature, other people, and even our own selves as something alien, something strange. In modern life we have become increasingly aware of how we are alienated from our natural environment. God and holy things also seem alien to us. We are like orphans who have forgotten the face of our Father. We have attempted to reconstruct God's image in things we have made from wood and stone. Weary from our search for God, many of us have convinced ourselves that there is no God. As a result of this depravity, we have become increasingly addicted, sad, and purposeless.

This sense of alienation from God, nature, others, and from ourselves causes great suffering. We do all we can to alleviate that suffering, but no permanent solution ever comes from human effort. All those who try to help us have the same spiritual illness.

We realize then that we are fallen creatures and thus spiritually depraved. However, we long to be better than we are. We often feel perplexed about why we remain so dissatisfied with life, even when we are apparently healthy, clothed, and well fed. We sometimes search through philosophy, religion, and even the occult because of our insatiable hunger for life and meaning. We only discover at deeper levels that we are lost and cannot find our way home.

Without help from outside the human system, we cannot discover our eternal purpose.

Christians describe the human condition as created for glory but nonetheless broken and alienated from all that would allow human beings to fully express that glory.

Christians call this doctrine *depravity*, which simply means that we cannot save ourselves. This is one of Christianity's most important doctrines. For if we are naturally good, we should be able to find our own way to God. We should be trusted to do what is good. However, if we are naturally *sinful*, even the best human being will tend to do wrong rather than good and thus requires a Savior.

Experience teaches us that this is precisely our condition. That is why most of us gradually acquire a healthy distrust of human nature, including our own. Far from provoking us to bitterness, knowledge of our depravity leads to humility, one of the most essential components of spiritual growth.

Without Christ, awareness of human depravity leads to despair. In Christ, awareness of human depravity leads to transformation.

When we realize we are lost and there is nothing we can do to help ourselves, we turn to the God who always responds to godly sorrow that leads to repentance. As we trust in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, grace begins the work of transformation

in us. God promises to complete this work He has begun in us.

We trust in God to keep His word, and so we submit ourselves to His work in us. We cooperate with Him in the renewal of our being. That is what it means to be a believer.

God is continually at work through His Word, His Spirit, and His Church to transform us. However, as long as we live, the circumstance of life will continually remind us that “all have sinned and come short of God’s glory” (Romans 3:23). We have been declared righteous by trusting in Christ, and this new reality only becomes visible as we live in harmony with God and with His people, applying our hearts and minds to understand and apply the Word of God to life. As God told Cain, “Sin is crouching at the door and desires you; you must rule over it” (2 Genesis 4:7).

Both the Bible and everyday life teach us that sin infects all of life. Furthermore, sin takes on many forms.

Families and groups of people tend to develop tendencies toward specific sins that we call *iniquity*. Entire cultures tend to pass down certain sinful tendencies from generation to generation. For this reason, personal transformation in Christ must lead to ways of identifying and renouncing not only our personal sins but also the cultural iniquities we have unthinkingly adopted from our families and other groups.

Enmity is an often quiet but deadly hostility we feel toward God, toward others, and even toward ourselves.

Dread is our fear of death and coming judgment.

All of these are fruit of human depravity and the result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience. Thankfully, as we will soon see, we have another Ancestor from Whom we have received a much greater inheritance. Whatever specific form sin may have taken in our particular life or our culture, Christ is the Great Physician Who comes to heal us of our sin.

The Bible assures us that some day all traces of sin and evil will disappear throughout the entire universe.

WE BELIEVE IN JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

We believe justification is by grace through faith in our Lord's sacrifice on Calvary.

The heart of the Christian gospel is that God forgives everyone who asks Him for forgiveness. Indeed, God not only forgives us, He *justifies* us by His grace, which means God treats us as though we were not guilty.⁴ The New Testament teaches that if God has justified us, we are now entitled to all the privileges due those who keep His law. Furthermore, this justification is not a reward for those who have been “good,” but the Apostle Paul insists it also is offered to the “ungodly” (Romans 4:5).

By His grace which justifies us, God treats us as though we are already transformed in Christ. By His grace which sanctifies us, He then gives us the power to walk into the reality of our transformation.

Grace is first a gift that we do not deserve, or unmerited favor, and it is also God's enabling power.

The Apostle Paul is the most assertive proclaimer of grace as God's unmerited favor. In his epistles to the Romans and Galatians especially, the Apostle Paul teaches that we have been saved in spite of our sins. Only the lavish, abundant love of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul says, offers us any hope of eternal salvation. Without God's grace, our attempts to become righteous are flawed and ultimately futile.

The concept of grace is difficult for many people to grasp. It seems unfair that some people work so hard to please God, only to discover that their efforts have been insufficient. It seems worse when the Apostle Paul insists that grace is for those who

⁴ This definition is found in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*.

“without works” (Romans 4:5). However, the Apostle Paul was not teaching anything other than what Jesus had already said—the kingdom of God was for “the poor in spirit,” that is to say the spiritually powerless (Matthew 5:3). To many religious people, both in the Apostle Paul’s day and in ours, this seems to be a terribly soft stance on sin.

What we must remember though is that the New Testament writers were not claiming that God was no longer concerned about sin. Sin is still as ugly and repulsive as it ever was. Sin is still an illness of soul that has eternal consequences. The reason we can be justified is not because God changed His mind about sin but because God’s wrath against sin has been satisfied in Christ, the innocent Lamb of God. To use the language of Hebrews, Jesus, our Great High Priest, has made an offering of His own blood upon the high altar of Heaven (Hebrews 10). The great debt is paid in full! We are made free from the consequences of sin by accepting God’s gift of grace.

Many Christians struggle their entire lives without ever being sure that they are truly God’s children. They want to please the Lord; however, they are painfully aware they keep falling short. They are believers but are kept in the dark about God’s great peace treaty with humanity.

After World War II, a number of Japanese soldiers were discovered who had been hiding out in the jungles for decades after the war ended. They didn’t believe the war was over. In the same way, it seems that many Christians do not believe they “have been made accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). So it is not only the unbelievers who need to hear “the old, old story.” “Those who know it best” also “hunger and thirst to hear it like the rest.”⁵ Grace and justification is thus the good news for believer and unbeliever alike.

The moment we accept God’s demand for total, unconditional surrender, we are immediately clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Philippians 3:9). Although we know by experience that we are not holy, we also know by the Word of God that Christ is holy. The holiness of Christ covers all believers so that God sees us too as holy.

Bishop G.T. Haywood wrote the song, *I See A Crimson Stream*, that early Pentecostals often sang to powerfully express this truth.

On Calvary’s hill of sorrow
Where sin’s demands were paid
Rays of hope for tomorrow
Across our paths were laid

When gloom and sadness whisper
You’ve sinned, no use to pray
I look away to Jesus
And He tells me to say

5 *I Love to Tell the Story*, Fanny Crosby

I see a crimson stream of blood
It flows from Calvary
Its waves that reach the throne of God
Are sweeping over me

Today no condemnation
Abides to turn away
My soul from His salvation
He's in my heart to stay

WE BELIEVE IN BAPTISM

We believe all God's people are called to be buried with our Lord Jesus Christ in the waters of baptism and raised to walk in newness of life.

The New Testament teaches that baptism is the way a believer publicly declares his or her faith in Jesus Christ.

We are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and express our acknowledgment of that by entering the waters of baptism. Being baptized by the *right* person or *in the right* manner is not what saves us. However, baptism is the way Jesus commanded us to confess our belief in His person, His work, and His teaching (Matthew 6:4).

Therefore, when we make our decision to turn away from our old life of sin—a decision that Christians call *repentance*—we submit ourselves for baptism. When we do this in faith, God meets us in the water to make a profound change in us. We rise from the water to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Early Christians invoked the name of Jesus in the rite of baptism, and we follow that ancient practice at Christ Church. Several passages in the New Testament mention this as an important component of baptism (Acts 2, 10, 19; 1 Corinthians 1:12–15). However, when invoking the Lord's name in baptism, we do so with the knowledge that His name represents the entire Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Christ Church practices baptism by immersion, subsequent to conversion, but recognizes all forms of Christian baptism. In other words, believers are welcome into our fellowship from any and all parts of the Body of Christ without any need for rebaptism. That said, if for reason of conscience a believer wishes to reconfirm

their faith, we honor that request. We treat such a rebaptism much like we do a restatement of vows that some people do at significant moments of their married life.

The Bible says there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). The Nicene Creed says we “acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.” So it is important for us to observe this clear statement on Christian unity.

The rite of baptism, like any other sacramental action, contains more than can be explained. One person may view baptism as an ancient ceremony, containing little personal significance in modern times. For others, it is a moment of transcendent glory and divine grace. Experience suggests each believer tends to view their baptisms with ever-greater significance as they mature in Christ. The meanings tend to unfold over time as we grow in our awareness of spiritual reality.

The Bible often reminds us that we are mortal, material creatures. That is how God made us. Evidently, it is how God intends us to view ourselves. The material world is thus our divinely appointed realm, and this is why God meets us in material things and in material ways. It is why we need such things as a Bible, wine, bread, oil, and water to express spiritual life. Our spiritual lives are meant to be embodied—fleshed out in visible and tangible ways rather than to be treated abstractly or disembodied.

When we approach these divinely appointed meeting places, called *sacraments*, with reverence and faith, we experience the presence of God. We also receive the spiritual benefits sacraments are meant to carry to us. It is in this spirit that we acknowledge baptism as a biblical sacrament, as a material form through which God does a spiritual work in those who enter it with faith, reverence, and the fear of God.

WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD WHO EXISTS AS FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in one God who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Few issues have been more controversial in the history of the Church than those regarding the nature of God. The controversies have had two root causes. The first is simply that we are finite creatures. We lack the capacity to understand the nature of God. The second is the tension between the straightforward *monotheism* (belief in one God) of the Old Testament and the more nuanced monotheism of the New Testament.

The Church had to deal with this tension early in its history. Early Christians were Jews. They had known from childhood that there was only one God. Everyday they prayed an ancient prayer, the *Shema*, that says “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). All Jews, including those who were believers in Christ, steadfastly contended for this fundamental truth about God, even at the cost of their lives.

However, early Christians were beginning to treat those writings we would later call the New Testament as part of Holy Scripture and added them to their lectionary readings for public worship. These writings required another look at the nature of God. For example, Jesus prayed to be glorified with the glory that He had *shared* with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5). The Apostle John says that “the Word⁶

⁶ *Logos* is an ancient Greek word with an almost inexhaustible depth of meaning. It is usually translated “word” but it also means “reason” and “thought.” The philosophers and the inter-testamental Jews used the word to refer to that part of God through which He created and interacted with the material world. Early Christians used the word to refer to the Son.

was God and was *with* God” (John 1:1, emphasis added). A number of benedictions used to conclude public worship, which quoted from the apostles’ writings, invoked the blessings of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁷

The more nuanced monotheism that emerged as a result of the New Testament was not really new. It had emerged in the very first Christian meeting, as Peter’s sermon at Pentecost makes clear, “This Jesus, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, has shed forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:33). Old Testament monotheism had already been evolving to accommodate what believers had learned about God from Christ, Who had resurrected and ascended into Heaven, and from the Holy Spirit, Who had come to them at Pentecost.

Nonetheless, a fundamental question posed by Christianity’s conflict with Judaism had to be answered: how could Christians affirm both the oneness and the triunity of God?

The leaders of the church called a number of councils to resolve these and other issues because they wanted Christianity to speak with a single voice about the core doctrines of our faith, especially when it came to the nature of God.⁸

Among the important results of these councils were the two creeds that most Christians use today. However, the councils also produced other doctrinal statements, many of which contain the word *persona*,⁹ Latin for “mask” or “role.” Christians gradually began to use this word in worship and teaching to confess their belief in one God who exists in three *personae*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This theological language developed as a way for Christians to remain faithful to the biblical monotheism of the Old Testament while acknowledging the differences and distinctions within the Godhead that the New Testament revealed. However, as the centuries passed, the common usage of these theological terms tended to make the original message unclear. As believers translated the creeds into their various languages, for example, the different ways the various communities understood the words and terms often led to anger, suspicion, and division. Some of the divisions that resulted remain to this day.

Through the centuries, many theologians and church leaders have tried to find clearer language to express the Christian view of God and His incarnation in Jesus Christ. Karl Barth¹⁰ suggested “modes of being” instead of “persons.” John Calvin¹¹ also searched for an alternative but did not seem to find anything better than the

7 See 2 Corinthians 13:14 for an example of an ancient benediction.

8 The church councils decided which books were to be included in the Bible, which creeds defined orthodox faith, and other important matters.

9 *Persona(ae)*, mask (worn by an actor); a. character, part (in a play), person; b. station, rank, or condition. *Langenscheit Shorter Latin Dictionary*, McGraw-Hill Book company, 1969.

10 Barth was an influential twentieth century theologian. He was the father of a school of thought called “Neo-Orthodoxy.”

11 Calvin was a reformer of the church during the early 1600’s. He is considered the spiritual father of Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

traditional term. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians have argued for a thousand years now about a single Latin word¹² Western Christians added to the Nicene Creed. Copts, Nestorians, and Armenians¹³ have argued with both Roman and Greek Christians for even longer than that.

Perhaps it is not a surprise that early Pentecostals also differed about how we should speak about the nature of God. Some believed that using the English word *person* created misunderstanding among modern people and urged the Church to return to what they viewed as simple New Testament language. Believing that the word *person* might lead to forms of *polytheism* (the belief in many gods), they abandoned the use of *person* altogether in reference to God. Christ Church was birthed out of a group concerned about this, which may become apparent when one reads our early literature.

The challenge is to affirm monotheism without promoting modalism.¹⁴ Modalism implies that God deceives us about His nature. However, as the Bible makes clear, God not only *appears* to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—He *is* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As time has passed, Christ Church has tried to deal with the issue by simply affirming the Church's ancient creeds without further embellishment.

In the end, the nature of God is far beyond human comprehension. We are not likely to ever learn how to fully describe God. Theology breaks down from the sheer inadequacy of human language and human thought to fully less express what even the Apostle Paul once called “the mystery of Godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16).

12 The word was *filioque*, meaning “from the Son,” describes how the Holy Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son.

13 These are all ancient bodies of Christians that boast of historical roots to the apostolic age. Early tradition assigns each church to some apostolic figure. The Copts represent the Egyptian church, founded by St. Mark; the Armenian Church was founded by the Apostle Thaddeus; the Nestorians separated from other Christians over the teachings of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople (declared a heretic in the third century). All these Christian bodies continue to exist in their various countries of origin.

14 Modalism is a belief that God only assumed the role of Father, then of the Son, and finally of the Holy Spirit and that He did not contain difference and distinction in His Being.

WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

We believe our Lord Jesus Christ was begotten, not created, very God of very God, truly God, truly Man. He was born of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, died a vicarious and atoning death for the sins of the world, resurrected bodily for our justification, and now reigns in glory until all things be put under His feet.¹⁵

The Nicene Creed says that Jesus was “begotten not created.” The church fathers included this statement to combat an ancient heresy called Arianism that, like other heresies, tends to resurface periodically throughout Christian history.¹⁶ Arianism describes Jesus as a created being—as the greatest created being, to be sure, but creature nonetheless. Within the system of Arianism, Jesus is a “little god.” The church fathers said Scripture did not allow for that interpretation, that Jesus was “very God of very God.”¹⁷

The Nicene Creed also says that Jesus was truly man—He not only appeared to be a man, but He actually became a man. As the Apostle Paul wrote, the Son took upon Himself the “form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). Furthermore, the apostles taught that Jesus remained a man even after His resurrection, and it is as exalted man that Jesus is our “high priest that ever intercedes for us” (Hebrews 7:25).

It was as a man that Jesus is called the son of David, the last Adam, and the perfect sacrifice. It was as a man that Jesus fulfilled all the demands of the Law. It was as a man that Jesus was “tempted in all things and yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

¹⁵ The essence of this article is quoted from the Nicene Creed, with the addition of the conclusions regarding the dual-nature of Christ made at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).

¹⁶ A very clear example of modern day Arianism is the Watchtower Society or Jehovah’s Witnesses.

¹⁷ The Nicene Creed

Jesus had flesh like ours and indeed still does. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he ascended as a glorified, perfected human being. That is what makes Christ “the first fruits of them who sleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). If He arose, we can be confident that we too will rise because He is one of us.

Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. She conceived when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her (Luke 1:35). Although God called Joseph to play a vital part in the redemption story, he was not our Lord’s biological father.

The Father of Jesus was the Lord God of hosts.

After living a life that satisfied the demands of the Law in every respect, the Lord was put to death according to the preconceived plan of God. Having no sins of His own for which to die, He offered His sinless blood to redeem sinful man, “trampling down death by death.”¹⁸ This meant that His death and suffering were vicarious, or “in the place of,” the sins of others.

Then, on the third day, Jesus arose from the dead, bodily. The same Jesus the disciples had buried three days before arose to walk and talk with His friends.

By His death Jesus justified those who believe in Him, and by His resurrection, He put death to death. In His ascension, a glorified Man became part of the divine Godhead.

Thus, we worship a risen and glorified Christ. He is no longer a baby in a manger or a dying man on a cross. As the Apostle Paul said, “We do not know Him anymore after the flesh” (2 Corinthians 5:16). In His life and death, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophesy, “The Lord said unto my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1).

Jesus now rules the Kingdom of God, which exists “in the midst of His enemies” (Psalm 110:2) until the day all things are put under His feet.

¹⁸ This language is found in ancient Eastern Orthodox hymnody.

WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe the Holy Spirit indwells all believers, conforming them to the image of Jesus Christ.

No one can come to God except by the Holy Spirit who draws him. *Regeneration* is the work of the Holy Spirit, so all believers are born of Him. Our very desire to respond to the gospel is the gift of God. Therefore, anyone who is a believer has the Holy Spirit since “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3b).

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is at work in unbelievers as well. Indeed, He is in creation itself, wooing all of nature Godward (Romans 8:22–23).

The Holy Spirit works to bring lost humanity to Christ and works within believers to bring them into Christian maturity. We can thus say that the Holy Spirit is at work where Christ is not yet named, preparing the way for the hearing of the gospel. The Holy Spirit is also at work wherever Christ is known, deepening the understanding and obedience of the gospel among those who believe and leading them to apply the gospel to the continually changing world in which believers live and work.

The Holy Spirit is thus intimately involved in the process of redemption from creation to conversion and on to our ultimate glorification. We receive “adoption as sons” by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:5–6). The Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirits that we have become God’s children (Romans 8:14–16). The Holy Spirit reveals truth (John 14:17; 15:2; 16:13), comforts,¹⁹ and teaches (John 14:25–26). The Holy Spirit joins His voice to the Church to woo all nations into a living relationship with God.

More than once the Bible describes the Holy Spirit as the *breath of God* (Genesis

¹⁹ By Comforter, we mean much more than simply one who consoles. We mean a defender against evil. William Barclay remarks that this title of the Holy Spirit, the *paracletus*, is to be understood as the divine counterpart for the *kategoros*, Satan’s title as our accuser or prosecutor.

1:2, 2:6; John 20:22). Indeed, He is as mysterious and as intimate as breath. Like breath, He is our Life. The more we submit to Him, the more we experience Him at work in and through us.

WE BELIEVE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AN ENDOWMENT OF POWER

We believe baptism in the Holy Spirit is an endowment of power, given by God to anoint the believer for sanctification and evangelism.

According to Scripture, the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are active within the body of Christ until the coming of the Lord. Furthermore, we believe the development of these charismatic gifts ought to be encouraged under the guidance of local church authorities.

We have already said that the Holy Spirit indwells all believers. In saying that, we are simply agreeing with something all Christians believe. However, Christ Church, like many Christian churches around the world, teaches that believers can experience a baptism in the Holy Spirit. We believe this to be biblically sound and historically defensible, though we realize not all Christians agree with us on this point.

The most ancient Christian groups have traditionally acknowledged the coming of the Holy Spirit into the life of a believer ceremonially. Western churches, such

as Roman Catholics and Anglicans, thus observe a ritual called *confirmation*.²⁰ The Eastern Orthodox churches call a similar ritual *chrismation*.²¹ These ancient ceremonies derive from spiritual practices established in the early centuries of our faith, long before Christians began to divide one from another. This is at least a hint about how early Christians viewed the work of the Holy Spirit as something vital and natural to their personal spiritual experience. It also implies that early Christians expected some sort of event through which they would be introduced to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Although some Christians argue that these ceremonies are little more than dead rituals, it is important to note that ritualistic observances arise from living experience. They do not just emerge out of nothing.

We do not build Christian doctrine on either metaphor or religious rite. However, these ancient confirmation rituals—existing in so many different kinds of Christian communities—do seem to grow out of a common early record of the church's experience with the Holy Spirit, witnessed in the Book of Acts.

To cite one example among many, when Philip preached to the Samaritans, St. Luke makes the comment, "All who believed his message were baptized" (Acts 8). St. Luke continues to say that "the Holy Spirit had come upon none of them."

For those who do not believe in an experience with the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion, this is a problematic passage.

If the Samaritans truly believed and had been baptized, had they not demonstrated sufficient obedience to the gospel? Why then was Philip dissatisfied with their conversion? What was lacking in the Samaritan Christian experience that caused him to call for the apostles? Further, when the apostles arrived at Samaria and laid their hands on the believers that they might be filled with the Spirit, what exactly happened?

Whatever did happen, Simon the magician, a man accustomed to all sorts of extravagant theatrics and mystical mumbo jumbo, was impressed (Acts 8:14–25). He certainly wanted to purchase the apostles' ability to confer the Holy Spirit on people.

What exactly did Simon see?

This passage becomes less troublesome when we view it the light of other passages. Taken together, the pattern for initiation into faith throughout the Book of Acts consists of conversion, baptism, and an experience with the Holy Spirit.²² Even the Apostle Paul, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, was sent to Ananias, "that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17).

Some discredit any expectation of a subsequent encounter with the Holy Spirit

20 Confirmation is a ceremony employed in most of the older Western Churches: Roman, Lutheran, Episcopal, etc. Usually it involves children who have been raised in the faith. Hands are laid on the person that he or she may be sealed in the Holy Spirit.

21 Chrismation is the Eastern counterpart to Confirmation. The various bodies of Orthodox Christians anoint with oil and say, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

22 Pentecostals are not alone in their views on this. Martin Lloyd-Jones expressed a similar view, as did G.R. Beasley-Murray in his book, *Baptism In The New Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1962.

by saying one cannot develop doctrine from the Book of Acts, but that seems to deliberately sidestep the issue. Why shouldn't we consult the earliest existing record of the Church's spiritual experiences to establish the boundaries of our own spirituality?

Judges and lawyers draw inferences about contemporary cases from the historical legal record. They build their cases from older examples of legal decisions and apply what they discover to the contemporary situations they face. We do the same when we read the New Testament epistles in light of the concrete examples offered by the Church's actual practices in the Book of Acts.

Consider, for example, how the Apostle Paul asked the believers in Ephesus, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" (Acts 19). He was responding to a similar situation Philip faced in Samaria. The Apostle Paul's response to that situation was much like Philip's and much unlike that of some contemporary Christians. The Apostle Paul wanted to know why the Ephesians, although believing Christians, had not yet experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Given the context of these passages, the evidence for an encounter with the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion seems strong. Traditionally, Pentecostals refer to this encounter as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, though other traditions may use different terminology to describe the same event. We do our best not to be contentious about this matter. However, we do insist that a living awareness of and participation in the work of the Holy Spirit is available to all God's children who ask for this in faith. We do not wish to argue about what this awareness is called or how it is theologically explained. Like so much of our spiritual life, one must "taste and see" (Psalm 34:8).

The central work of the Holy Spirit in the believer is to form in them the character of Christ. The Book of Galatians tells us the Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in all those who belong to Him. This fruit is the personality and character of Jesus. All Christians agree on this point.

At Christ Church, we teach that believers not only need the character of Christ but also the power of Christ. Although we are aware of bogus healings, fraudulent claims of supernatural power, and so forth, we also have been witnesses of the genuine works of the Holy Spirit. As a result of this openness to the Holy Spirit, many nations long resistant to the gospel have turned to Christ. For these reasons, we attempt to remain open to the work of the Holy Spirit in our local church and in our individual lives.

One major component of the contemporary charismatic movement has been a new openness to the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. Such gifts often arrest the attention of unbelievers and prepare them to receive the preaching of the gospel. The contemporary renewal of spiritual gifts has reminded us that we cannot accomplish God's work "by power, nor yet by might, but only by the Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). That is why this church gratefully acknowledges the continuing importance of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit in the life of the Church and the world.

At the same time, we realize that the spiritual gifts most essential to the work of God are not always the more exotic ones, and neither biblical list of spiritual gifts is exhaustive (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14).

While we believe in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, we also realize that undisciplined religious passion can do great harm. Therefore, even authentic manifestations of the Holy Spirit require maturity, discipleship, and accountability.

The Holy Spirit's gifts seem easier to develop than His fruit (Galatians 5:22–23). So, we include in this article a caution: while the gifts and calling of the Holy Spirit are to be developed and encouraged, they also must be developed within the local church and are subject to the legitimate authorities of that church.

WE BELIEVE IN ONE HOLY CHRISTIAN AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

We believe in the Holy Christian Church, imperfectly represented on earth by the various Christian institutions. Her unity is spiritual, her culture diverse and transitional, and her mission eternal.

Protestants, American Protestants in particular, have periodically heard calls from spiritual leaders to restore the New Testament church. Naturally, that has meant different things to different people. Nonetheless, the reason most spiritual leaders have made these calls to restore the Church is their common belief that the Christian Church achieved its most pure and ideal form in the earliest days of its existence. For many people, this implies that faithful Christians should always try to return to the governmental structure, doctrine, and culture that most characterized the primitive Church.

Not all Christians believe this, however. Protestants, for example, although agreeing that the Church must be constantly reformed and that the early church is the model for such reformation, believe that such issues as church government and style of worship have evolved to meet the needs of the times and places in which the church has been called to minister. Of course, all believers highly respect the early church. The apostles and the two or three generations that followed them were eyewitnesses to the events of the New Testament—or at least were personally acquainted with those who were. All Christians recognize that the generations closest to the time of Jesus and the apostles have a unique authority in the life of the Church.

However, some believe the Church was meant to expand upon the foundation that those generations laid. Thus, we constantly reform the Church but do not attempt to restore the first century church.

Another way of looking at the Church is to view it as a continuum of believers held together through time and space by constituted authorities and beliefs. In this view, the living tradition that derives from the early church, but which evolved through the generations, has the authority to guide the worship, beliefs, and practices of the contemporary church. In this view, the Church's development has been much like that of a child growing into maturity.

Unlike some contemporary Christians, we respect the Church's tradition at Christ Church and try to learn from it. We certainly do not disdain it. However, we do not view tradition as having an equal weight with the writings of the New Testament. Jesus Christ called the Church into being and personally appointed its first leaders. That first generation of church leaders was given the authority to write Scripture. No generation since then has held that sort of authority.

We all revere—some even venerate—the first disciples of Jesus. So for us, the primacy of that first generation is obvious but does not imply that succeeding generations of disciples were utterly without authority to apply the gospel to their own times. For this reason, we do not believe that healthy renewal requires rejecting the work and thought of every generation of Christians except for the first one.

Jesus said that He would build His Church (Matthew 16:18). That Church is the sum total of that which the Spirit has led the people of God to build. We enjoy the gains and learn from the mistakes of all generations that have constituted the Church.

Let us stop a moment to define the word *church*. We need more than one definition because there is both a *universal Church* and a *local church*. To further complicate things, we often use the word church to describe the building where we meet.

When early believers referred to the Body of Christ, which consists of people of all times and in all places, they used the word *catholic*. You might have noticed that many churches use this word when they recite the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds: "We believe in One Holy *Catholic* and Apostolic Church." We usually do not use the word catholic at Christ Church because many people commonly understand the term to refer exclusively to the Roman Catholic Church. That is unfortunate because no other word seems to carry the full meaning of all that it implies. The word catholic derives from a Greek term, *kath' holos* which means "pertaining to the whole." The idea is that all expressions of the Church connect fully to one another.

No denomination—even a large one like the Roman Catholic Church—fully embodies catholicity, and therefore does not have an exclusive right to a word that refers to Christians of all times and all places. However, words often take on a life of their own; therefore, we must adapt our everyday language accordingly. The important thing to remember is the concept of universality itself and how that impacts the way we view the congregation in which we live and worship.

First and foremost, the Church is not really an institution: it is an organism. Only God knows what constitutes the Church, and only He is certain what does not. Institutions formed to assist believers in carrying out the work of Christ are *parachurches*; “para” meaning “alongside.” Such entities are scaffolding, created to stand for a season alongside of the Church and to further its effectiveness in the world. Denominations, or so we believe, are a part of this scaffolding. They are not the Church but are connected to it and may manifest its presence in the world.

For this reason, we honor the work God has done through our historic denominations. God has used many denominational leaders to advance Christian ministry in the world. Nonetheless, we create denominations to serve Christians and local congregations of Christians. As long as they serve the gospel well, we honor them and work with them. When they seriously err, as some churches have done across all generations, we must either reform them or abandon them.

Respectfully, we say this even of those church structures that trace their historic continuity to the earliest generations of our faith. Their claims to catholicity are no more valid than that of any other body if they depart from the clear teachings of Scripture. It is a grief to all Christians everywhere that the Church has institutionally fragmented through the centuries. Despite this fragmentation, we confess there is “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” Something above and beyond all of our divisions unites us in Christ and with one another.

The Church *catholic* is a spiritual body. It is eternal and God-indwelt. In this life, we catch only glimpses of that reality. What we often experience is the all too fallible manifestation of the Church within a fallen world. The visible communities that represent the Church may make mistakes and take wrong turns.

The Lord’s words to the seven churches of Asia show how Christ continues to work through His Church even when it is less than it ought to be (Revelation 1–3). The New Testament Church is much like the Old Testament community in that regard. It consists of believers who live and work at various levels of spiritual development. The visible Church consists of tares and wheat, sheep and goats—to be sifted and sorted at the end of the age. For now, the good and the bad are woven together in such a way that complicates our view of the Church (Matthew 13:24–30, 25:31–33).

In summary, Christ has established a perfect and heavenly Church but has incarnated it within visible, fallible, and earthly expressions. That is what we mean by the phrase of this article, “imperfectly represented on the earth by various Christian institutions.” We acknowledge that even corrupt groups often contain genuine believers and that there is no entirely pure, holy expression of the Church in this age. All temporal institutions, including Christ Church, imperfectly represent the one true Church that the Bible says is “without spot, blemish, or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27).

How then can we talk about Christian unity?

Our unity cannot be based upon institutional uniformity. Christians in different

groups may worship differently and explain their faith differently and nonetheless affirm their unity with one another. Our cultural diversity, in more cases than not, is good for the work of God and allows us to spread the message of Christ to diverse peoples and in diverse languages. The miracle of Christian unity consists in this: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples because you love one another” (John 13:35).

Although the message of Jesus is the same for all eras of history, the cultures of the churches have become diverse and transitional. We have adapted to meet the cultural settings and the times in which we work. We may use incense or play a guitar to prepare our hearts for worship. We may dance. We may make the sign of the cross. We may place the pulpit at one side of the church building or at the center. We may have Sunday School or use some other method to disciple converts. These are all cultural responses to cultural needs. They are for that reason transitory. Whatever method draws people to Jesus and deepens our commitment to Christ—and that does not turn the method itself into the object of our devotion—may be used legitimately by Christians to advance the work of God.

Having said that, we must also affirm that the Church’s mission is eternal. The Lord founded the Church to be His instrument for discipling the nations. The Church embodies the Kingdom of God. It is the pillar and ground of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). It is a holy nation of kings and priests (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9).

God has chosen to work within His Church. If you want Jesus to be your King, you must live in community with His people. You must come to grips with the Church because that is where He promised to meet us (Matthew 18:20).

WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, which were given by the Holy Spirit through the agency of human writers and were subsequently gathered and established as canon by the early Christian Church. We believe the Church has no authority to enforce any doctrine or practice contrary to these Scriptures.

The most divisive theological arguments in our times are over the purpose and authority of the Bible. Several of our historic Protestant denominations have actually divided over the issues. At the heart of the controversies is the struggle over authority.

The reason arguments about the Bible are so serious, especially to Protestants, is because we are unsure where to go when we disagree fundamentally about the Holy Scriptures.

In other words, the arguments reveal a central question about the Church, namely: What is our ultimate spiritual authority? Who, or what, settles our inevitable disagreements? What is our final court of spiritual appeal? Is it our individual conscience? Is it a pope or a bishop? Is it a general assembly of believers? Is it reason, science, or tradition? Is it a creed? Scripture?

Where does the buck stop in Christian life?

The issue is not new, of course. It was a central topic of the Protestant Reformation. The Roman Church taught that Christ gave the Bishop of Rome ultimate authority over all local churches and Christian believers. The idea here is that Jesus gave the Apostle Peter earthly supremacy over the Church and that Peter's successors in Rome have received and exercised that same authority. Protestants, even those who agreed

that there was a succession of bishops, did not believe the Bishop of Rome had that sort of preeminence.

The Eastern Orthodox communities believed that final authority rested in the hands of holy tradition, mainly expressed through the decisions of the seven major Church Councils and the ongoing spiritual life of the Church through time and space. Doctrine and practice evolves, but within certain “orthodox” boundaries.

Some Charismatic bodies have seemed to say that final authority is in the hands of contemporary prophets and apostles.

Some denominations have assumed that a majority vote among duly constituted leaders determines the direction the churches within its jurisdiction ought to follow.

In contrast to all of these views on church authority, Christ Church most closely agrees with the Protestant reformers insisted that the Bible, the received canon of Holy Scripture, is the Church’s highest authority.²³

There are a few difficulties with this view, to be sure. For one thing, it begs the question about who compiled and authorized the writings to be included in the canon in the first place. The only possible answer is *the Church*. However, if the Church was the agency through which the Scriptures were given and then recognized, shouldn’t the Church still have the responsibility to interpret those writings?

It is not spiritually or intellectually honest to dismiss such questions. If the Church had never splintered into many factions with such dissenting opinions, it would make all the sense in the world to view the Church in this light—as the arbitrator and guardian of the Bible. Unfortunately, even if we insist that the Church holds this power to interpret Scripture, we often feel at a loss to define the visible body or the reasonable process that feels legitimate to enough of us to accept its conclusions. So, weighty in theory, this argument usually ends at a romantic cul-de-sac.

We all do agree that the Lord directed His apostles to write Scripture. The next question is whether that power was uniquely reserved to them. If so, then the only thing left for the successors of the apostles to do, at least when it comes to Holy Scripture, was to officially recognize the apostles’ writings.

If we are right about this, then once the scriptural canon was established, the canon itself became the voice of Jesus and His apostles to the Church. In that case, we are not free to improvise, rewrite, or ignore that established witness.

We feel that the early church leaders formally established the scriptural canon because the writings contained in it had already been accepted and revered by Christian churches since the days of the apostles. Some churches used non-canonical writings, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas* during some early days of the church. However, such writings were not accepted as widely or enthusiastically as the Gospel of Matthew, for example.

Furthermore, the Church established the canon of Scripture before fragmenting into the innumerable denominations that we have today.

²³ The term canon is defined as the “rule or standard by which something is measured.”

For all these reasons, Christ Church defines the Christian Bible as the collection of writings we call the Old and New Testaments.²⁴ We believe that this collection of inspired writings stands in authority above the Church. Pastors and other church leaders must exercise interpretive judgment in reading and teaching the Scripture but must do so within the boundaries of the common core beliefs we often call *mere Christianity*.

By giving such a high place to the Holy Scriptures, we confess the Holy Spirit's authorship through human beings and His guidance of the process that gave us the canon of Scripture we have received. The human authors of the text were sometimes unaware they were writing to God's people in all times and places. However, the Holy Spirit spoke through them in such a way that the specific issues they meant to address have proven to have universal applicability to the whole household of faith, for all times.

For us then, the Bible is to the Church something like the Constitution is to the United States. The Constitution is the foundation of American law, has developed the nature of its national life, and has molded its democratic experience. Americans settle their disputes on the basis of how they interpret the Constitution. Constitutional experts study it and apply its lessons to everyday life, and courts have a legitimate authority to settle our disputes in the light of what it says. However, one lone individual can challenge the findings of a court if he or she can demonstrate in what way the court has erred in its interpretation.

The prophet Nathan challenged King David when David had transgressed the Law of God, and Nathan held the king accountable (2 Samuel 12). In the same spirit, a Christian believer has the freedom to challenge Christian traditions or beliefs if that person can demonstrate that the Bible does not support the traditions or beliefs in question. Christ Church seeks to remain always open to such biblical challenges because we view the Holy Bible as our source and authority in matters of Christian faith and practice.

We do not disrespect the authority of church leaders, and we honor historical tradition. When there is a conflict, however, such things must always submit to Scripture.

²⁴ We view the Apocrypha as historically instructive and spiritually helpful, but—with the Church of most ages—we do not view its contents on the same level as the sixty-six books of the received canon.

WE BELIEVE GOD EQUIPS HIS PEOPLE FOR MINISTRY

We believe that the calling of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher are functional within the Body of Christ until the Lord's return. Furthermore, these ministries are gifts to the Church for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry, that the Body of Christ be edified.

We have already stated that the Lord's Apostles, those whom Christ chose to lead the Church, have had a unique place in the life of the Church. They constituted the foundation of the New Jerusalem, according to the Book of Revelation, and were given the responsibility to write Holy Scripture (Revelation 21:2). Since them, no one has had that same sort of authority. Therefore, when we refer to the office of apostle, we are using the word somewhat differently than when referring to the original Twelve Apostles.

At the same time, we insist that the apostolic office did not cease with the death of the original Apostles. It was the original Apostles who felt the need to choose someone to take the place of Judas. Additionally, the Apostle Paul and a few others in the New Testament were called an apostle.

The apostolic office seems connected to the work of founding new ministries. Apostles found and developed new communities of believers, especially among ethnic groups new to the Christian faith. Naturally then, many missionaries have manifested gifts and callings that were apostolic in nature.

Methodus and Cyril²⁵ for example—in spite of opposition from some of the

²⁵ Methodus and Cyril were missionaries to the Slavic people ca. AD 780.

church leaders of their time—established Christian faith among the Slavic peoples. They preached, baptized converts, ordained ministers, translated the Bible, wrote hymns, and even created an alphabet that Russians and other Slavic people use to this day. When the two brothers died, they left behind strong and stable churches, which is a clear and unmistakable sign of apostleship in history.

There have been many other examples of apostolic witness such as St. Patrick of Ireland,²⁶ Columba of Scotland,²⁷ and Francis Asbury in the United States.²⁸ People like them have established communities of faith all around the world and throughout history.

An apostle then is one who helps believers “set up shop.” Although an evangelist may win converts, it takes an apostle to form those believers into functioning covenant communities.

Because the word “apostle” carries connotations that we do not always wish to convey, most Christians are hesitant to use that label to describe a living Christian leader. Fortunately, the label is not required in order to do the work. In fact, the label may create needless obstacles. Regardless of the title assigned to those who demonstrate such gifts, the Church receives the blessings of apostolic gifts in every century.

We can say similar things about prophets as we have of apostles. A prophet demonstrates a divine insight into the times and often moves the Church to respond. A prophet warns, encourages, motivates, and reminds believers of the timeless values and mission of the Church. A prophetic ministry can be positive, revealing new opportunities for the Church, or negative, thundering against evil apathy. Either message can be unsettling for the guardians of the status quo. Thus, the prophet often makes us uncomfortable. Historical examples of prophetic persons are John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, John Knox, and Jonathan Edwards.

In the Book of Acts, we learn that the church in Antioch enjoyed the presence of both prophets and teachers. This is an interesting combination, which suggests that a vibrant Christian community needs various kinds of ministries even if they create momentary tensions. Prophets typically try to mobilize the Church to change in some way. Pastors often try to maintain stability and peace. Evangelists win the world for Christ. Apostles seek to establish something new. Teachers work to instruct Christian communities in the depth of the Scriptures. We are at our best when we allow all these ministries to function among us.

In a local church, people in community observe the strengths and weaknesses of their fellow congregants. Ministries can, for this reason, develop under the care and accountability of those who love them and know them best. A local congregation

26 Fifth century

27 St. Columba established a Christian community on the island of Iona and carried out the re-evangelization of Scotland from there. (There were churches there from at least the second century.)

28 Asbury was the first Methodist Bishop of the United States. He took a vow of celibacy and spent his 85 years planting churches in villages and towns of the growing American Republic.

can thus deal with an immature person with prophetic potential, for example, before he or she launches out to address the broader world. A congregation can observe whether a person who desires to be an evangelist is gifted at winning people to Christ before sending him or her out to work in other places. In order to ensure accountability and responsibility, healthy New Testament government requires the intimate community of all these sorts of ministers operating within the context of a local church.

It is obvious that our view of church government impacts our doctrinal confession. So let us look at church government before proceeding further.

In the old covenant community, God established three types of authority: prophet, priest, and king.

The prophets carried out a ministry because of a direct calling from God. They gave the people a fresh word from God. Because their ministry was charismatic rather than institutional, prophets could not pass down their position, as in the case with priests.²⁹

The priests held an office that was confirmed by their community and through which they exercised an institutional authority. They were called to care for the flock by walking with the people through the seasons of life and keeping the members of the community connected one to the other.

The king and his officials dealt with administration. These kinds of leaders are more easily identifiable because of the visible authority they embody.

In the new covenant community, there are also prophets, priests, and administrative leaders. Elders and deacons are institutional offices through which these prophets, priests, and administrators carry out their functions.

The diaconate is the first step of ordained ministry in the local and Universal Church; it is an order of ministry in its own right that is foundational and indispensable for forming healthy spiritual communities. All elders must first serve as deacons. This reveals the necessity that those who are called to lead the church must first learn the importance of serving the Church. As a result, some elders, who prove their calling by consistently caring for the people of God in ways that cultivate trust and loyalty, will go on to serve as presiding elders such as bishops or senior pastors.

Church governance, whether local or at a broader level, is the way in which Jesus Christ calls His Church to carry out the work He established the Church to do. Church leaders however are fallible human beings. They may make mistakes. They may even fall into serious error. Nonetheless, the Lord promised that His Church would ultimately succeed in the task He gave it to do because He would be leading His Church through those fallible people (Matthew 16:18).

Two thousand years of history is testimony enough that Christ has kept His promise.

²⁹ The biblical exception being the relationship between Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2).

WE BELIEVE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

We believe the identity of the Body of Christ on earth is primarily perceived through the local church. While encouraging the voluntary association of local churches, and recognizing the need of consensus on matters of fundamental doctrine and conduct, we view the local church as a sovereign entity in all matters relating to the management of its material resources and the exercise of its local polity.

In Article Four, concerning the nature of God, we encountered the Latin word, *persona*. Ancient Romans used that word to describe the mask that actors used in their dramas. A *persona* established the actor's role, especially if he were playing more than one part in the drama. It allowed an audience to identify that role the actor was playing.

By saying the identity of the Body of Christ is primarily perceived through the local church, we mean a believer experiences God's Church through his or her local congregation. The local church, in other words, is a *persona* through which the Universal Church makes its presence known within specific communities.

Understandably, some people become disillusioned after they become aware of the imperfections of church leaders or of other congregants. At one time or another, this disillusionment has happened to most of us. Nonetheless, it is a mistake to focus on these imperfect elements of local church life. We must learn how to become aware of a spiritual reality that is also a part of our local congregation. Those "two or three

gathered in His name” may be imperfect, but the Lord promised He would meet with them (Matthew 18:20). If we focus on the things we do not like about the “two or three,” we may miss the One who is there in their midst.

A church is like Jesus in the days of His incarnation. He was tired sometimes. He got hungry and thirsty. He was even tempted. In the same way, the mystical Body of Christ, whom the Apostle Paul said is “seated in heavenly places,” has been incarnated within the assembly of local congregations (Ephesians 2:6).

Because a local church consists of fallen human beings—including the people who lead it—we must take steps to ensure that the church will be governed with transparency. A local church needs checks and balances to keep fallen human nature accountable. After all, Jesus said that the Church consists of tares and wheat (Matthew 13:24–30). That is the reality of church life in a fallen world. We recognize the fallen nature of our humanity, take steps to make it accountable to God’s Word, and continually move toward transformation in Christ.

When a local church takes her mission seriously, it becomes a conduit of great blessing to those who are a part of it. Unfortunately, a local church can sometimes feel like the private property of a few powerful people. Its mission can get lost under the weight of those who seem to be protecting their personal interests instead of advancing the work of the Kingdom of God. We must remember that God gives a local church the same charge He gave to Abraham: “I will bless you so you will be a blessing and so that in you all families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:2).

Local churches are rather like the cells of a human body. They are born, flourish for a season, have a life cycle, and then sooner or later, disappear. The eternal Church they represent lives its life through them but is not limited to their time and place. However, it is the local church where God forms human beings and carries out the work of reaching all nations with the gospel.

A local church is like a research and development lab. As the world changes, local churches experiment with new ways to communicate and organize. If any of its innovations are successful, other congregations learn from its example.

Martin Luther, for example, wrote new styles of church music. As his hymns swept Northern Europe, they brought fresh life to worship in his era. We still sing some of those songs but usually stop to explain them before we do. Most of Luther’s hymns are no longer easy to understand. To insist on using them every Sunday, or using them exclusively, would create a needless obstacle as we try to minister in a very different era of time and culture. We love the man who wrote the hymns and are still blessed by their message and grandeur. We even wish to pass them on to our children because they are a valuable part of our Christian heritage. We just don’t want to choke our children on “yesterday’s manna,” to use a biblical metaphor.

In other words, local churches offer heritage and innovation, things old and things new. They are creative and dynamic gatherings of Christians within a specific time and place. They are meant to become spiritual families for believers walking

through life together and learning how to cooperate for the purpose of ministering to the needs of a lost world in the name of Christ.

Local churches cannot accomplish these things by themselves, of course. The resources and vision of a local church are simply inadequate to do all God charged His Church to do. That is why local churches usually join with other churches in formal or informal associations. That is how denominations arise. The blessing of a denomination to a local church is that a pool of resources becomes available, which might not have otherwise occurred. Also, there is potential accountability that many independent churches lack. On the other hand, a denomination can become sectarian and controlling in ways that disrupt Christian unity and the mission to the world.

Whether or not a local church is part of a denomination, it is always responsible to the entire Church of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Church is a worldwide, transdenominational, and eternal entity. Local church authorities are not free to act as though they were accountable to no one. Saying that the local church is a sovereign entity in all matters relating to the management of material resources and local polity is not the same as saying that it can exist as an isolated body. In other words, when other congregations become concerned with the doctrine or behavior of a particular local church, the leaders of that congregation are obligated to explain themselves.

When situations arise that affect many congregations, someone may call a meeting of church leaders to work on a solution. There is only One Church, and local congregations must acknowledge the ways in which their teaching and behavior may affect other congregations. When congregations disagree with one another—as they sometimes will—then they must do so humbly, ready to change course if necessary to safeguard the faith we have been given as a shared treasure. However, congregations are not identical to one another. They differ, often very considerably. It is both the differences of the congregations and the underlying unity holding them together that make for the dynamic living life of the Church on earth.

Local churches do what they need to do to meet the needs of their people in specific times and places. As they do, they remain aware of the ways other congregations throughout the world—and throughout time—have represented Christ.

WE BELIEVE LOCAL CHURCHES NEED FRIENDS

We believe in the right of local churches and ministries to form temporal institutions to assist them in carrying out the work of God. At the same time, we reject sectarianism and divisiveness as great evils.

Sectarianism may be the single greatest temptation denominations face.

Human beings are, as Aristotle famously said, “political animals.” They love to belong to groups. Early in life we learn to form clubs with secret handshakes, special rings, flags, etc. Desiring to belong is part of being human. Furthermore, we should feel good about the associations of which we are a part. Unless we see something important in the group of which we are a part, there seems little point to belong to it. However, we may take the loyalty to our group to such an extreme that it undermines God’s purpose for His Church. We know that we are falling into that attitude if we look down upon a Christian simply because he or she does not belong to our group.

The Body of Christ is too vast for us to personally connect to everyone in it. Also, the various cultures are too diverse for us to easily relate to every part of it. Therefore we tend to relate most to those with whom circumstance and providence have seemed to place us. There is nothing wrong with the fact that we most easily relate to those who think and act like us.

At the same time, God has called us into the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). We can hardly work to connect unbelievers with God if we are unable to connect believers with one another. Our country’s army and navy have differences—and even rivalries—but we count on them to fight on the same side in

the case of a war. The Church, like Israel in the Old Testament, contains groups with tribal differences. Nonetheless, we are on the same side and must strive to have unity with one another.

In short, we seek to connect our church to other churches and ministries in order to do God's work more effectively. We want to keep in mind that any such alliance is one of many and does not separate us from all other believers.

WE BELIEVE IN THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

We believe that all people born of God have equal status before and direct access to our Lord.

In the Old Covenant, the Lord called out a portion of His people to serve as priests. If someone wanted to talk to God, they went to find a priest. When they wanted to worship, they looked for a priest to help them prepare their sacrifice. One of these priests was a priest for the priests, a person we call the High Priest. There is no such holy caste in the New Covenant. All of God's people are priests, at least in the sense of having direct access to the Lord.

It is a little complicated to talk about the role of priests in the English language. Our English word *priest* is actually a shortened form of the word *presbyter*, which means "elder." So we do not have an adequate word to describe the office and responsibilities of the Old Testament priest. The French use the word *sacreificateur*, meaning "one who sacrifices." To borrow a word from another language, the ancient Romans used the word *pontifex*, which means, "bridge maker."

All such roles were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is not only the one who sacrifices; He is Himself the sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27). He not only builds a bridge; He is Himself the bridge. The only intermediary we need between God and man, then, is Jesus (Hebrews 8:6). That's why we say that all believers have equal status before and direct access to their Lord.

This is not to say that we all have the same callings or gifts, however. In the New Testament, we learn that all of God's servants have different gifts (1 Corinthians 12). All of His people must be faithful in exercising those gifts which He has given them to manage and develop. He has called some to leadership positions. Some teach,

some govern, some evangelize, and so forth. However, all exercise a priestly ministry of some sort.

This leads us to ask what it practically means for all of God's people to be priests. To whom do these priests minister? Well, they minister to their fellow believers and to those who are not yet believers. We all have blind spots and need our fellow Christians to help us on our walk toward God. A trusted brother or sister in Christ can help us see things that we cannot see in ourselves. Sometimes we also need to unload our conscience and hear affirmations of God's forgiveness from another believer. The Apostle James says that we can "confess our faults to one another that we may be healed" (James 5:16). So, while we all have direct access to the Lord, we also "bear one another's burdens" by praying for one another and encouraging one another (Galatians 6:2). That is in part what it means to be a priest.

Since the very beginning, the Church has recognized that some believers have special gifts of pastoring others. We honor those gifts and those who have them by setting them apart through ordination. When these church leaders function as priests however, they are providing an example of how all Christians are called to work.

In other words, not everyone will have a reason to serve communion, baptize, or preach. However, if and when situations arise where that becomes necessary, any Christian may perform these priestly functions.

The work of redemption through Jesus is thus carried out through human beings, the Church. The Church is meant to serve as the courtyard of heaven; the embassy of the New Jerusalem.

The members of the Church are ambassadors, priests, bridges—all sorts of metaphors are helpful here—working to connect a broken world to a healing God.

WE BELIEVE IN THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

We believe in the spiritual unity of all who are born of God. We confess even those with whom we disagree, those who do not confess us, and others whom we exclude because of our unwillful ignorance.

We have stated in Article Eight that the unity of the Church is a spiritual reality. We have also addressed unity as it refers to the Church's divergent cultures and doctrinal streams. Here, we address church unity as it relates to individuals.

Anyone who has been around very long can attest there are wide variations of ministries, personalities, tastes, and abilities within the Kingdom of God. It should be obvious to all that in any dispute, all the good and sincere people do not end up on a single side of the conflict. We are fallen creatures and never understand perfectly what the Spirit is saying to the Church. We may feel that we have received some new direction from God only to discover that another brother or sister disagrees. It can be confusing when these things happen.

When it does, we try our best to not pass judgment hastily. Even when we do not understand the doctrine or practice of some believers, we must take our time and seek reconciliation. Furthermore, we can claim those who disagree with us as a part of the Lord's family, even if the disagreement is serious enough that we find it easier to work in separate communities. This happened once in the Bible to the Apostle Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15), so we should not be surprised if it happens to us.

It does hurt us when we experience the rejection of a fellow Christian or a group of Christians. Sometimes though, we have no control over such situations and can

only manage our reactions to it. Once we understand the importance of unity in the Church, we are obligated to treat all believers with respect and love, even those who do not reciprocate.

There are a number of reasons why believers might reject other Christians. Perhaps they have been taught that all true Christians will solely belong to their group. They also may feel that true Christians will believe some doctrine they believe important, in which case those who do not believe that doctrine appear to them as at least deficient, or even as counterfeit Christians.

This article says that such judgments must be left to God. Only God knows who belongs to Him. Therefore, we should err on the side of liberality on this issue for we dare not exclude people who may be, in fact, our Father's children.

Many years ago in Western Canada, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses became convinced that their view of Jesus was deficient. They began moving toward orthodox Christianity as a result. Nonetheless, for several years they did not break with their sect. They did not know the hymns, language, and literature of the broader Christian world, and their families and old friends were within the community of Jehovah's Witnesses. They did finally make the break after many agonizing years but found it equally difficult to enter into the life of orthodox Christianity.

Had we met these people as Jehovah's Witnesses instead of the followers of Christ they had become, we might have rejected them and thought of them as heretics. Our limited judgment would have prohibited us from offering them Christian fellowship, even though they had, in fact, been born again.

To all such believers—hidden from us because of our unwillful ignorance—we seek to reach through the fog of human error and distrust and affirm that they too are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some may consider this statement too broad and open. We accept that and try to understand when people decide not to walk with us as a result. Christ Church wants to build bridges rather than walls. While not being afraid of taking a stand when a stand is required, we do not take it lightly when such a stand may separate us from others who are also believers in Christ. While we may not be able to work in close harmony with all of God's children, we acknowledge the reason to be human weakness and not Christian virtue.

WE BELIEVE IN SANCTIFICATION

We believe that those who are called by the name of Christ should depart from iniquity. Understanding that salvation from the penalty of sin only begins the process of redemption, we acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit to create in us the character of Christ.

Theological confessions do not always contain much practical help for our spiritual journey. However, we wanted to state clearly that healthy doctrine ought to lead to healthy living. Christian doctrine is not meant to be a game for speculative philosophers. We must be able to actually apply doctrine to life. We must be able to walk away from instruction asking, “How then should we live?”

Jesus does not merely offer us salvation from the penalty of sin. He works to bring us freedom from the power of sin. The effects of sin have affected every area of individual and human life, and God works to bring healing to each of these areas. He works not only to forgive us but to completely restore us to His original purpose for us.

Suppose a man sees a car in a junk yard heading toward the compactor on a conveyor belt. At the last moment the man yells at the proprietor to take the car off the belt, regardless of price. If the proprietor agrees, the car will be “saved.” It is no longer in danger of destruction. The car is still unfit to use, and the reason it was slated for destruction has not changed. If, however, the buyer takes all the dents out, repaints it, repairs the upholstery, and brings the automobile up to mechanical standards, that car becomes useful again.

The car has been “redeemed.”

The effects of redemption, just like the effects of sin, touch every conceivable area of human life. As a community of faith grows to be a viable portion of a culture, it even touches the communities in which we live.

The infusion of holiness that transforms human life comes to us through the life, the teaching, and the work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to create the character of Christ in us, which is revealed by the “fruit of the Spirit” being demonstrated in our lives (Galatians 5:22–23).

Although this article begins by stating this process negatively, saying we must depart from iniquity, our aim is most certainly a positive one: We want to put on Christ.

WE BELIEVE IN THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

We believe in the literal second coming of our Lord, the literal rule of Christ upon the earth, the resurrection of the regenerate to eternal life and the unregenerate to eternal damnation, and the ultimate victory of the eternal Kingdom of God.

We believe in the literal second coming of the Lord.

Jesus comes to us at conversion, empowers us through His Spirit, and lives with us through His teaching and the sacramental life of the Church. However, Jesus will also come again “in like manner as we have seen Him go” (Acts 1:11). The Second Coming is thus a literal event that will occur in an actual space and time.

When Jesus returns, He will rule the earth. The “kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of the Lord and His Christ” (Revelation 11:15).

Jesus already rules His kingdom, which He began to govern during His incarnation. The prophets said that the government would be given to Him and of the “increase of his government there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:7). This is already a reality, and all Christians acknowledge it, which sometimes brings them into conflict with the kingdoms in which they live. However, the Lord will one day rule visibly and literally.

The ancient prophet’s vision will be fulfilled when a day arrives in which “men will beat their swords into plowshares...and neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4). This government of peace already exists in part but will someday become fully visible to all nations.

We also believe in the resurrection of the dead, the central hope of all humanity. Christians believe that death, our last enemy, will one day be destroyed. Someday

the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more. Someday the land and sea will give up their dead. Someday the redemption of our mortal bodies will become a living reality.

Some of the resurrected dead will live forever in the presence of the Lord. Some, sadly, will be resurrected to an eternal separation from God.

Finally, we confess that history is marching toward a divinely appointed goal. The ultimate end of time and space as we know it does not depend on men and women, kingdoms, or the capricious whims of natural events. The end will come about based upon the predetermined plan of God.

Jesus told us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth even as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). One day that prayer will be answered, for the future is securely in the hands of the eternal King who rules His eternal kingdom.³⁰

Christ Church recognizes the various ways in which Christians explain the prophetic teaching of the Bible and does not view any particular school of prophetic interpretation as a test of biblical orthodoxy. We attempt to give freedom for reasonable differences while confessing together the clear message of Scripture that Jesus will return and that time will one day be no more.

30 Dispensationalism sees God's dealing with humanity in stages or “dispensations.” A central idea to this school of thought is that Israel and the Church are two separate entities. *Covenantal* theology sees all salvation-history in the light of the covenant God made with Abraham. This school of thought recognizes one covenant for Jews and Christians alike. Dispensationalists are divided into those who believe that the Lord will return before (pre), during (mid), or after (post) a seven-year period called the Great Tribulation, when Satan will rule much of the world. Christians are divided about whether the Kingdom of God will be realized in a thousand year literal reign of Christ after He returns to the earth (premillennial), whether He will return *because* the victory has been won by the Church and maintained for a thousand years (postmillennial), or whether the thousand years is a metaphor which does not mean to indicate an actual time span (amillennial).