

THE MEROLD INSTITUTE OF MINISTRY

Confessional Context

As a ministry of Harvester Christian Church, courses offered by the Merold Institute of Ministry hold to the general principles and beliefs of the Restoration Movement (Stone-Campbell Movement). Your instructor holds to the Doctrinal and Unity Statements of Harvester Christian Church. The courses will be taught within this context. This document contains the purpose, unity, doctrinal statements of Harvester Christian Church along with the Church's history.

PURPOSE STATEMENTS

To help us as a church move together in unity, all seeking a common goal and purpose, we developed the following purpose statements. Our foundation is Christ, but our purpose statements help us to understand why we do what we do here at Harvester Christian Church.

MISSION

- Leading People to Find and Follow Jesus

VISION

- Multiplying Disciples in Relational Environments

PROCESS

- Explore the Faith
- Embrace Community
- Engage in Service
- Empower Disciples

VALUES

- **BIBLICAL AUTHORITY:** “Speaking God’s Truth in Love”
We will present God’s Word with love and as the final authority for our lives.
John 1:14
- **DEPENDENT PRAYER:** “Thy will be done”
We trust that God has better plans for us than we have for ourselves.
Matthew 6:9-13
- **RELATIONAL EVANGELISM:** “Building Bridges to God”
We share the Gospel through personal relationships.
Mark 2:13-17
- **INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP:** “Life on Life”
We each pass on to others the faith that has been passed on to us.
2 Timothy 2:2
- **AUTHENTIC ENVIRONMENTS:** “Come as You Are”
We help real people connect to a real God in relevant settings.
John 4
- **SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY:** “Time, Talent & Treasure”
We have God-given gifts that are meant to bless the church and the world.
Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38; John 15:13
- **OTHERS FIRST:** “It’s Bigger than Me”
We serve because Jesus served.
Philippians 2:3-5
- **STRONG FAMILIES:** “Invest in the Next Generation now”
We are a family that prepares the next generation to take our place.
Psalm 78:1-7
- **EXTERNAL FOCUS:** “Outside these walls”
We embrace the command to go into all the world.
Matthew 28:19-20

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS: WHAT WE BELIEVE

As a church and as individuals, we want to honor God by doing things His way. If it's in the Bible, we want to do it that way. We believe the Bible is God's Word and we are to conform our lives to what it says. We believe that God's way is the **best** way.

The purpose of this section is to clearly outline what we believe as a church – our core doctrine. We must be unified in these **core beliefs**. Our doctrinal statements are truths from Scripture that form the foundation of our faith and are non-negotiable for our fellowship. Ephesians 4:4-6

1. We believe that God is the Creator and Ruler of all things. He eternally exists in three persons: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit – each with distinct attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being. God is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing and ever-present. He is perfect in love, justice, and holiness, and worthy to receive all glory, honor, and praise. Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:1-2

God the Father reigns with providential care over His universe. He is the Father of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit while still one with both as God. He is adoptive Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. John 14:6-7; 1 John 3:1

God the Son is Jesus Christ. While eternal in nature, His incarnation was conceived of the Holy Spirit and He was born of the virgin Mary. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, God in human form, and both fully God and man. Jesus perfectly revealed and lived out the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature without sin. He offered Himself as the perfect Sacrifice for sin and through His death made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin. He died for our sins, was buried, was raised from the dead, and appeared to His disciples proving His power over death and His ability to raise us up from death. He ascended into Heaven to the right hand of God the Father where He mediates reconciliation between God and humanity. He will physically return in power and glory to judge the world and consummate His redemptive mission. John 1:1, 14, 8:58, 14:9; Colossians 2:9; Philipians 2:5-7

God the Holy Spirit is fully divine. He inspired the writers of the Scriptures. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He enables Christians to understand truth. He dwells in the hearts of every Christian from the moment of salvation. He bestows spiritual gifts on believers through which they serve His church. He comforts and intercedes for them. He seals the believer for the day of redemption. He enlightens and empowers the believer in the church in worship, evangelism, and service. Acts 2:38; Romans 8:26-27; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 1:13-14

2. We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the written record of His supernatural revelation of Himself to man, absolute in its authority, complete in its revelation, final in its content, and without any error in its teaching. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21
3. We believe that all men are born with a sin nature. Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23
4. We believe in the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross to atone for the sins of mankind. Isaiah 53:3-6; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21

5. We believe in the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4
6. We believe in the literal return of Jesus as promised. John 14:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; 2 Peter 3:3-4, 10, 13
7. We believe that Heaven and Hell are real places and each of us will spend eternity in one place or the other. 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:15
8. We believe that the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life are promised to those who trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-9
9. We believe that those putting their trust in Jesus should repent of their sins, confess their faith, and be baptized into Him. Acts 2:38-39; Romans 6:3-4, 10:9
10. We believe that those who receive Jesus also receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: He marks them as the possession of God, manifests the fruit of righteousness in their character, and endows them with spiritual gifts for ministry. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 5:22-23
11. We believe that a spiritual gift is a special ability, given by the Holy Spirit to every believer, to be used to minister to others and thereby build up the body of Christ. Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Peter 4:10
12. We believe the Church is a body of Christ-followers who should live in intentional community as modeled by the first century church. Acts 2:42-47
13. We believe love is to be shown to all people as the central trait of the Christian faith. John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Peter 4:8
14. We believe the mission of the Church is to reach the spiritually lost for Jesus, to teach with the goal of forming Christ in them, and then to mobilize believers to accomplish God's purposes in the world. Matthew 28:18-20
15. We believe that unity is necessary for the church to accomplish the mission given by Jesus. Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-5

UNITY STATEMENTS: HOW WE COME TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY

The purpose of this section is to give clear positions on doctrines that often separate believers and divide churches. This is critical if we are going to be a unified body of believers. We've separated these into two categories: **Distinctive Beliefs** and **Opinions**.

Distinctive Beliefs are doctrines upon which we have taken a firm stance and by which members must abide to be part of our fellowship. Opinions are beliefs on which members can disagree and still be part of our fellowship. A clear understanding of these gives us a common language and boundaries within which we can all function together in unity.

DISTINCTIVE BELIEFS:

1. Communion & Baptism

Communion and baptism are referred to as ordinances or sacraments in the church. Churches and denominations hold to various methods and traditions in the exercise of these practices. These differences are a source of contention and division among believers.

OUR POSITION – COMMUNION

Communion, also called the Lord's Supper, is a biblically commanded memorial instituted to remind the church of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The bread and cup are symbols of His body and blood given for our salvation. It is an opportunity for personal examination and reflection as we remember the death of our Savior, Jesus Christ until His return. At Harvester, we believe that communion is a biblical mandate from Christ to His church, and is only to be observed by those who have received salvation through His blood sacrifice. In following the example of the New Testament church, communion is offered at each of our weekly gatherings. Luke 22:14-23; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

OUR POSITION – BAPTISM

We believe the Bible provides a consistent pattern of how a person comes to salvation that includes baptism by immersion with belief, repentance, faith, and confession. We emphasize the importance of baptism because of this pattern in the New Testament. As a church, we are called to be true to God's Word. Therefore, we ask that anyone who would join our church membership be baptized by immersion. John 3:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1-4, 10:9

We also believe salvation is a transaction between God and a sinner who repents. There is no third-party human involved in the transaction, and no third-party human is placed in the role of judging whether the sinner and the Savior have completed the essentials of their transaction. Therefore, we do not assume that a person who has not been baptized by immersion is categorically a lost soul in need of salvation.

2. Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings and all that we have we owe to Him. We are under an obligation to serve Him with our time, talent, and treasure. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, proportionally, and generously for the advancement of the Kingdom.

OUR POSITION is that we believe the biblical standard for giving is to practice tithing as a starting place, setting aside 10% of our income for the local church. As a lifestyle, we give offerings over and above the tithe as we practice generous giving. Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:8-10; Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

3. Gender roles

Understanding gender roles in the church is another matter of great controversy in the church today. The main issue is whether or not women are allowed into the positions of elder or lead pastor.

OUR POSITION as a church is to take a complementarian view. While we believe in the priesthood of all believers and equality with regards to oneness in Christ, this view holds to males only in church government positions, specifically elder and lead pastor – equal value, different roles. This does not exclude women from teaching, leading, or serving in other areas. 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9

4. The Family

We believe God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

OUR POSITION on the family is:

- Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race. Genesis 2:23-24; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Hebrews 13:4
- The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship is an exercise in mutual submission. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to protect and lead his family. Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7
- A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation. Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7
- Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents. Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 6:1-4

5. The Christian and the Social Order

We believe all Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society.

OUR POSITION is that in the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery,

homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; 1 Timothy 1:10; James 1:27

6. The Christian and the Church

We believe that we are “Christians only,” but not the only Christians. We believe the local church is an autonomous body which cooperates with many Christian agencies, but is regulated or dominated by none. John 10:14-16; Ephesians 5:23

OUR POSITION is that the church should seek unity with all believers in matters essential to the universal Christian faith, and contend for the liberty in all matters wherein the Lord has not spoken through His Word. Ephesians 4:2-6

OPINIONS:

1. Predestination and Free Will, Eternal Security, and Original Sin

There are two orthodox theologies that have been debated in the church for centuries. They are based on which Scriptures interpret other Scriptures, one group emphasizing God’s sovereignty and one group emphasizing man’s responsibility. Some core issues of contention are predestination, eternal security, and original sin.

Predestination claims that God in His sovereignty has predetermined the course of all human events while not excusing human responsibility. **Free will** claims that within God’s sovereignty and predetermined course, humanity can make some choices including our own spiritual destiny. Both positions can find agreement in our doctrinal statements for the sake of unity. While we will share the gospel with the urgency of choice, we will not dispute the sovereignty of God and His indisputable right to make choices.

Eternal security claims that once we are truly saved, it is impossible to lose or give away our salvation since it is based on God’s sovereign choice. Some who espouse free will claim that just as we can choose salvation, we can choose to reject it. These positions hold that one can have great confidence in their salvation understanding that a relationship with Christ is much deeper than any given choice in the moment. Both positions can find unity in our doctrinal statements trusting in Christ for security and not our works.

Original sin claims that humanity is dead in sin and therefore incapable of doing anything to reverse it. The effect of inherited sin is therefore destructive. Those who espouse free will claim that sin’s effect was corruptive to humanity as compared to destructive. It holds that while we have inherited a sinful nature, we still have the capacity to make good choices. These positions both acknowledge the Holy Spirit’s key role in our regeneration and can find unity in our doctrinal statements as we trust in God Who knows our nature better than we know our own.

OUR POSITION will be to preach and teach with the urgency of free will but with the peace that flows from a God Who is in control, emphasizing both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. We will not let Satan use our foolish pride to drive a wedge between believers using our own interpretations against us. The church’s unity is far too sacred and valuable. If you feel this position is too vague, this is not a church for you. Romans 8:15-17; 8:28-30; 15:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Ephesians 1:5-14; Colossians 1:21-23

2. Spiritual Gifts

The availability and use of spiritual gifting is a matter of great controversy in the church today. All Christians believe that God gives gifts to people for the benefit of the church. Some claim that some specific New Testament gifts such as tongues, prophecy, and healing exist today. Others claim that these particular gifts were apostolic in nature and only necessary in the church's infancy. Whether or not these gifts are apostolic is debatable. We believe that God continues to answer prayer and work miracles.

OUR POSITION is that whether or not these gifts exist today, we will not seek them out and will refrain from using them in public assembly or small groups for the sake of unity. Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14

3. End Times

We believe that God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world as we know it to its appropriate end, replacing it with a new Heaven and earth. According to His promise, Jesus will return personally and visibly to the earth. The dead will be raised and those alive will be caught up with Him in the air. The specifics of these events are a source of great debate.

OUR POSITION is that this is not regarded as a salvation issue and we are comfortable with the future being in God's mighty hands. 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

OUR HISTORY

THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

As a fledgling nation, America attracted people who sought a new life. They came from their old countries and packed their religious experience along with their possessions. Members of established denominations like Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists and Baptists brought their church doctrines, structure, practices, and disagreements with them.

In the early 1800's church leaders like Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell and Isaac Errett rejected their ties to established denominations and rallied around the idea of church unity. They believed that Jesus and His Word should be all that is necessary to carry out His mission for the church. As they taught these ideas, churches sprang up all over the young nation. These churches used Scripture rather than creeds as the basis for faith, church organization, and mission. In short, these churches sought to restore Christianity to what it was in the New Testament and not what it had become in modern denominationalism.

People responded with enthusiasm as they heard simple truths taught directly from the Bible. The churches, now called Christian Churches or Churches of Christ, grew rapidly across the nation. Simple mottos expressed the approach that the Restoration Movement embraced.

- No book but the Bible; no creed but Christ; no name but the Divine.
- Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.
- In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love.
- We're not the only Christians, but we're Christians only.

Throughout the next two centuries, the churches continued to grow, though not without challenges. Two groups of churches formed their own fellowship, leaving the Restoration Movement with three traditions. The Churches of Christ (non-instrumental), the Christian Churches (of which HCC is a part), and the Disciples of Christ all trace their roots to the Restoration Movement.

Christian Churches today form a strong brotherhood of churches around the globe. We continue to grow as a movement as we share the message of Christ with a lost world. While each Christian Church is an independent local church with local elders, we also use organizations to accomplish tasks greater than what one church can do. As a brotherhood we have conventions, colleges, publishing houses, and mission organizations that serve the churches. Our goal remains the same as those who preached on the frontier two centuries ago—to shine the light of the gospel into a dark world.