
IDENTITY
AND
COMMITMENTS



INTRODUCTION

WHO IS KING'S TABLE?

King's Table is a church that seeks to gather around Jesus and learn his teachings. Our worship & work aims to be guided by Scripture, informed by two millennia of worldwide church practice, drawn from the historic Anabaptist tradition, and shaped by and for this local body.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

When Jesus prayed for the future church, he prayed for unity: "May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me."¹ The unity of the church flows from and reflects the unity of the Trinity. We are admonished to maintain the unity of the Spirit because "there is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism."² Unity is first, but Christ's one global church also has great diversity, including the diversity represented by denominations. We hold Anabaptism as a valid expression of the one faith, a denominational perspective that can both contribute to and learn from other perspectives.

At King's Table, our identity is thus ordered:

1. Christ (the center)
2. Creeds (core historic beliefs of the global church)
3. Confessions (doctrinal understandings with an Anabaptist tint)
4. Context (life practices at King's Table)

¹ John 17:21 HCSB

² Eph 4:3-6

CHRIST

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 CORINTHIANS 3:11)

Our deepest commitment is to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to the Father he came to reveal to us, and to the Holy Spirit who is poured out upon us.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (JOHN 3:16 ESV)

THE COMMANDS OF CHRIST

Jesus himself defined the most essential commitments we can have.

Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."³

We are committed to these two commandments, to love God and neighbor, above all other commitments.

³ Mk 12:29-31

THE COMMISSION FROM CHRIST

Immediately before his ascension, Jesus gave key instructions to his disciples:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁴

We see the Great Commandments and the Great Commission as being at the core of our identity and our commitment: To love God and neighbor, and to express the love of God through being disciples of Jesus and through discipling others into the love of God and neighbor.⁵

⁴ Matt 28:18-20

⁵ “If evangelism isn’t an expression of love of neighbor, it isn’t Christian evangelizing. And love of neighbor includes not only what I say to the neighbor but how I say that.” (Miraslov Volf)

CREED

The Apostle’s Creed is ancient, in use at least by the second century of the church.⁶ While it would be easy to say only “no creed but Christ,” in reality this is impractical and impossible. Even the word “Christ” needs definition. Who is he? What did he do? Where did he come from? Is he God? If so, how? The Apostle’s Creed is a grassroots document that emerged from consistent early church summaries of the teaching of the apostles about these foundational questions of faith. Originally known only as “the rule of faith,” it was used for the instruction and baptism of new believers. It is not the only creed; the New Testament itself contains short pieces of what appear to be creedal statements,⁷ even hymns or liturgies of the church.⁸ Later creeds contained even more detail and were more formally created.

We use the Apostle’s Creed to identify us with the worldwide body of believers throughout the last 2000 years. The creed defines the basics of Christian faith; it is the traditional standard of orthodoxy. While it is not necessary to affirm every piece of the creed for salvation (consider the example of the thief on the cross), denying any piece of it places you outside the classic Christian faith as the church has unifiedly and wholeheartedly proclaimed it since the very beginning.

At King’s Table, we recite the creed together as a call to the unity which our Lord prayed for his church, to remind us that there is one global and historic church, the great tree of which we are only one twig. Here it is presented with some commentary to bring clarity to these

⁶ Ben Myers, *The Apostle’s Creed*

⁷ For instance, Philippians 2:6-11

⁸ For instance, 2 Timothy 2:11-13

core creedal positions.⁹ Our commentary has a few denominational flavors, but on the whole it defines aspects of the faith which we consider to be universal.

O1 We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

- God is our Father, who lavishes his love on us and claims us as his children. Our deepest and truest identity is that we are children of the heavenly Father, and brothers and sisters adopted into his family.¹⁰
- God is almighty, great and powerful, exalted in majesty and splendor, eternally self-existent, and head over all in heaven and on earth.¹¹
- God is the creator of the cosmos. God made everything good. He created the earth as his sanctuary where he would dwell with his people.

O2 We believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

- Jesus is God's only Son, loved of his Father and one with the Father.¹²

9 This is a practice with much historic Anabaptist tradition to commend it. Many of the early Anabaptist confessions of faith either assumed the Apostle's Creed or used it as the framework for their confessions. Some examples of Anabaptist confessions with creedal frameworks are the *Swiss Brethren Confession of Hesse* (1578), the *Dordrecht Confession* (1632), and the *Prussian Confession* (1660). Thielmann J. van Braght, compiler of the *Martyr's Mirror*, included at the end the Apostle's Creed and then three Mennonite confessions. Some even used it as an opportunity for prayerful devotion and witness; for a particularly poignant example, see "A Confession of Faith" by Jörg Maler (1554). (Tr. in *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition*, 1527-1660).

10 1 Jn 1:9

11 1 Chron 29:11, Rev 1:8

12 Matt 3:17, John 10:30, John 17:24

- Jesus is our Lord and King, the one who rules over heaven and earth, the one to whom we pledge our complete allegiance against all competing claims.
- Because he is our Lord, we walk with him in active apprenticeship to him, seeking to live lives of holiness and peace as he lived and taught.
- We are not our own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.¹³

O3 He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary.

- God is eternally the Triune God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.¹⁴
- The second person of the Trinity, the Logos, took on flesh, and was born as a human. Conceived by the Holy Spirit but born of a woman, Jesus is the God-man, fully God and fully human.¹⁵
- The Incarnation affirms the inherent goodness of the material world; the Son entered our broken world to make it whole and to reconcile all creation to God.¹⁶
- Because he took on a body, our own bodies are inextricably connected to his. What we do with our bodies matters. By his example, Jesus shows us how to inhabit our bodies in complete obedience to and unity with the Father.

13 *Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 1

14 John 17:5

15 John 1:1-18

16 Col 1:19-20

04 He suffered under Pontius Pilate.

- The salvation story is placed squarely in time, space, and history. God entered our world; he breathed our air, he ate our food, he walked the roads in Israel in the first century AD.
- Jesus was crucified under the legal authority of the state, reminding us that the kingdom of heaven will not be brought to earth by using the power of our government.
- Jesus suffered. He did not meet violence with violence, but fought for his kingdom by laying down his life. He was killed by the Romans and the Jews, thus unmasking the powers of darkness for who they really were.¹⁷
- Jesus' suffering shows that he understands our plight. The suffering of the world often has no logical answers, but Jesus took that suffering upon himself. He is our wounded healer.¹⁸

05 He was crucified, died, and was buried.

- Jesus is God's gift of lavish and sacrificial love to humanity, to save us from our fallen and broken state.¹⁹
- The cross is Jesus' divine embrace of humanity, the means by which we finally achieve our ultimate destiny – union with God. "Lord Jesus, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace."²⁰

¹⁷ Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Col 2:15 NET).

¹⁸ Heb 4:15f, Is 53:4-5

¹⁹ John 3:16, Rom 5:8

²⁰ *Book of Common Prayer*. Cf. Robert Webber, *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life*.

- The cross also calls us to unity in the body of Christ, "being in full accord and of one mind" – a costly unity only possible as we have the mind of Christ.²¹
- Jesus' suffering and death was his chosen method of decisively dealing with evil.²² The downward-upward arc of his life – humility, suffering, and death precede resurrection life and glory – are the pattern for our lives as we take up our own cross and follow him.²³

06 He descended to the dead. On the third day, he rose again.

- By descending into the realm of the dead, Jesus invaded the farthest reaches of the territory held by the Prince of Darkness. By rising from the dead, he completely overwhelmed and defeated Satan and the powers of evil.²⁴
- Jesus' bodily resurrection assures us that we will also be resurrected bodily.²⁵
- Jesus' descent to the dead shows us that there is no depth of wickedness to which we can descend that is beyond the reach of his love and mercy.²⁶
- The resurrection is the turning point of all human history, ushering in God's new world. We live in the kingdom of heaven, with its new ethic, here and now. Since we have

²¹ Phil 2:1-8

²² "[God] sent his only-begotten Son to be crucified by all the powers of evil so as to destroy them by his love, faith, and obedience" (Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* 23).

²³ Matt 5:9-11, Mk 8:31-35, Phil 2:1-11

²⁴ Cf. Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, chapter 10, "The Descent into Hell."

²⁵ Rom 6:5-6, 1 Cor 15:50-53

²⁶ Ps 139, Rom 5:6-11

been raised with Christ, we develop a mindset and lifestyle in tune with Jesus' ethics and example.²⁷

07 He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.²⁸

- Jesus' bodily ascension completes his coronation. Christ enthroned by the Father signals his complete victory over the powers of death and hell. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to him, and he rules as the rightful King of the cosmos.²⁹
- The heavenly throne room is also a temple where Christ is the High Priest. He lives eternally and intercedes for his people so that we may be saved to the uttermost. We have this hope as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.³⁰
- Jesus is paradoxically absent and present. He will never leave us, and is present through his Spirit, through his body the church, and at the Table. Yet we await his coming bodily to restore all things and dwell with his people forever.³¹

²⁷ Col 3:1-17. Cf. Michael Byrd, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, 155-158. "The resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit mean that we are called to bring real and effective signs of God's renewed creation to birth even in the midst of the present age" (NT Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 209).

²⁸ Note the shift of tenses in the creed from past to present. The past is an ongoing reality, but the shift in tenses orients us chronologically, right now, to our moment in God's story.

²⁹ Ps 110:1, Matt 28:18

³⁰ Rom 8:34, Heb 6:19-20, Heb 7:24-26

³¹ Matt 28:20, Acts 3:20-21, Phil 3:20-21, Rev 20:1-4

08 He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

- Jesus' coming again is the fulfillment of his promise to return for his bride, the church. He will dwell with us, and we will be his people. His coming, nevermore to leave, will be the fulfillment of our deepest longings, and "so we shall ever be with the Lord!"³²
- Jesus is not only the rightful King over the cosmos, he is also the great Judge who will at last eradicate evil entirely from the earth. All who persist in rebellion against the King must finally experience eternal separation from the presence of God.^{33 34} This reality calls us to repentance and obedience.³⁵
- Every human will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive his due for what he has done, whether good or evil. We therefore seek to please him in all respects, to encourage each other, to endure to the end, and to persuade others.³⁶
- Jesus himself will establish new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells, and all things will finally be put to rights.^{37 38}

³² Rev 21:2-3, 1 Thes 4:16-17

³³ "God is utterly committed to set the world right in the end . . . and that setting right must necessarily involve the elimination of all that distorts God's good and lovely creation. Judgment . . . is the only alternative to chaos" (*Surprised by Hope*, N.T. Wright, 178-179).

³⁴ Matt 25:41-46, 2 Thes 1:9. Jesus warned that the body could be thrown into hell (Matt 5:29-30).

³⁵ Acts 17:30-31, 2 Tim 4:1-2, Matt 13:36-43, Rev 21:8

³⁶ Jn 5:25-29, 2 Cor 5:9-11, 1 Thes 4:18, Heb 10:24-25, Rev 20:11-15

³⁷ Is 65:17, Is 66:22, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1

³⁸ "We therefore reject as a proud, self-confident dream the notion that people can ever build a utopia on earth" (*Lausanne Covenant*).

09 We believe in the Holy Spirit..

- We worship the Holy Spirit as Lord, and God, an inseparable and coeternal yet distinguishable person of the Trinity.³⁹
- The Holy Spirit indwells us with resurrection life, leads his children into familial experience of God with Christ, and helps us in our weakness through his intercession.⁴⁰
- The Holy Spirit is the abiding presence of Christ in the church who nurtures, comforts, guides us.
- The Holy Spirit produces in his people the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.⁴¹ He gives gifts for the work and building up of the church.⁴²

10 ..the holy catholic church, the communion of saints

- The church is a living body of faithful men and women who are gathered and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is marked by the preaching and living of Scripture, the fellowship of believers, the administration of the sacraments, and corporate worship.⁴³

39 John 15:26, Nicene Creed, 39 Articles “V. Of The Holy Ghost”, Thomas C. Oden *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* 514, 520-522

40 Rom. 8:9-10, 12-17, 26-27

41 Gal 5:22-23

42 Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11

43 1 Peter 2:4, 39 Articles XIX. Of the Church, *Dordrecht Confession*, Article 8: Of the Church, Acts 2:42, Thomas Oden 691. “[W]herever the community is gathered in its eucharistic memorial listening to the Word, there an event called ‘church’ occurs in virtue of the fact that the Lord becomes present in the assembly, testifying to himself and manifesting himself within it” (Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* Vol. 1: Seeing the Form, 515.)

- The church is holy through her union with Christ. This holiness is both gift and calling. The church is cleansed and sanctified through God’s word and the work of Christ, and called to live towards holiness with patience and repentance.⁴⁴
- The church is one. There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.⁴⁵
- The church is “catholic” or universal, forging into a single family the body of Christ, both the living and the dead, from every ethnicity and nation.⁴⁶ The church’s “borders are open, and it resists any attempts at tribalism.”⁴⁷
- The church is “apostolic,” built on the foundation of the first-century apostles and prophets. We live in continuity with the apostles, and enter a living tradition that is responsible to receive, guard, pass on, and “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”⁴⁸ The church is the community in which Scripture was formed and through which it is properly understood, preached, and lived out.

11 ..the forgiveness of sins

- “In Adam, all die.”⁴⁹ The effect of Adam’s sin means that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is no one righteous, not even one.⁵⁰

44 John 17:16-19, Eph. 4:25-26, Oden 729, 733, James 1:4, Matt 9:13

45 Eph 4:4-6

46 Acts 10:34-35, Gal 3:26-29, Rev 7:9-14, Oden 743-745

47 Byrd, *What Christians Ought to Believe* 201.

48 Eph 2:20, 2 Tim 1:14, Jude 3

49 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

50 Rom 3:23, Rom 3:9

- So “in Christ will all be made alive.”⁵¹ Only God can forgive sins, yet he freely offers forgiveness and righteousness to all who repent and believe in Christ.⁵² The forgiveness of sins has taken place, finally and fully, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, who though we were still sinners, died for us, justifying us, saving us from God’s wrath, and reconciling us with God.⁵³ We are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ.⁵⁴
- The grace and forgiveness of God train us to renounce sin and worldly passions, and to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, until the final appearing of our Savior.⁵⁵
- Our need for forgiveness does not stop when we enter the territory of salvation. Thus we strive to be a community characterized not by perfection but by a gracious and forgiving spirit toward weakness.⁵⁶
- As we have been forgiven all, so we are called to extend costly forgiveness to others.⁵⁷

12 ...the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

- When believers die, they go to heaven while their bodies decay. Heaven is a temporary home until the resurrection

of the body.⁵⁸ For those who die in Christ, it is a place of longing, rest, and worship.⁵⁹

- Death does not have the final word. As Christ was raised from the dead, so those who have died in Christ will be resurrected, complete with physical bodies no longer subject to death and decay, to live with God forever in the new heavens and the new earth.⁶⁰
- The assurance of resurrection gives us great comfort, hope, and courage in the midst of life’s difficulties.⁶¹
- The assurance of eternal life in the new heaven and new earth, where evil is banished and in which righteousness dwells, calls us to live watchful, waiting lives of holiness and peace.⁶²
- When Christ’s reconciling work is finished, the Fall and the Curse will finally be reversed. Heaven and earth will be joined together again, we will reign over a renewed creation, and we will live forever in the glorious presence of the triune God.⁶³

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 15:22

⁵² Acts 10:43, Eph 4:32, 1 Jn 1:9

⁵³ Rom 5:8-10, Heb 9:26, Eph 2:13-14

⁵⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9, Mark 16:16, Luke 7:50, Romans 10:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Luke 5:20, John 3:15-18, John 6:40, John 1:12, Acts 10:43

⁵⁵ Tit 2:11-14

⁵⁶ Rom 15:1-2, Eph 4:31-32, Col 3:12-13

⁵⁷ Matt 6:12, 14-15; Matt 18:21-35, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13

⁵⁸ 2 Cor 5:1, Phil 1:23

⁵⁹ Rev 6:9-11, Rev 7:13-17, Rev 14:13

⁶⁰ Jn 5:28-29, Jn 6:40, Jn 11:25-26, 1 Cor 15:20-22, 1 Thes 4:13-17, Rom 6:5; Is 65:17, Is 66:22, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1. “Resurrection shows that our future life entails the redemption of our bodies, not from our bodies” (Michael Byrd, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, 215).

⁶¹ 1 Cor 15:58, 1 Thes 4:17-18

⁶² 2 Pet 3:14

⁶³ Eph 1:10, Col 1:19-20, Rev 21:1-3, Rev 22:1-5

CONFESSIONS

This confessional statement gives us a general doctrinal framework flavored with our specific church practice. But in order to hold ourselves accountable to the larger body of Christ and our tradition, we also claim the *Dordrecht Confession* (1632) and hold ourselves generally under its authority. Additionally, we will submit ourselves to the statement of faith of our future church association.

This confession begins with the most fundamental (and universal) points of doctrine, and ends with those more specific to us and our tradition. That order is important.

As with most Protestant traditions, the Anabaptists created many confessions of faith in the first centuries of their existence.⁶⁴ Many, if not most, of these confessions of faith began with the Apostle's Creed, and were then expanded with denominational accents. Anabaptist confessions of faith were never enforced politically in the same way as most other Protestant confessions; they were held humbly, "under the authority of Scripture and subordinate to the unity of the Christian community."⁶⁵ We hold these articles of confession in the same way: to unify rather than to exclude, and to present our best understanding of what we as a body are called to by Christ as revealed through the Scriptures. Though the Scriptures do not change, our times and understanding do change; these confessional statements

64 For examples of influential confessions within the Mennonite denomination, see the *Schleitheim Confession/Brotherly Union*, the *Dordrecht Confession*, and the 1963 *Mennonite Confession of Faith*.

65 *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition*, 1527-1660, p.10. It is important that the order of authority in doctrine is preserved. Individuals are tempered and refined in belief by the Christian community, and the community itself is tempered and refined by the authority of scripture. The removal or reordering of these authorities will lead to heresy or unnecessary division, and indeed has done so often in the Anabaptist tradition.

will need ongoing revision to align more closely with Scripture as understood and expressed in our local context.

I. THE SCRIPTURES

We believe that the Scriptures are God-breathed and reliable, the written word of God which illuminates and leads to the Word of God incarnate. The Old and New Testaments are a unified witness to the person of Jesus and the unfolding plan of God. The Scriptures are literature both human and divine, written by human authors as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ They are written for us but not to us, being written and read in a specific cultural context; care is needed to understand them as best we can in their original context to transfer meaning as faithfully as we can into our own context. We hold the Scriptures as authoritative; they are given for teaching, admonition, for discipline and improvement, for training in righteousness, so that faith is aligned with the will and law of God.

II. HUMANITY

We believe that God created humanity as the sacred bearers of his image, and thus every human has inherent and equal value, whether male or female, young or old, strong or weak, simple or wise, born or unborn, foreign or native, regardless of any physical or mental capability, ethnicity, locale, race, creed, culture, or any other factor. The image of God is reflected in the two distinct and immutable biological realities of male and female, given for the flourishing of all people. The love of God for his church is foreshadowed in marriage, within which the gifts of sexuality and chastity are properly expressed in a lifelong covenant union between a man and a woman; and in singleness, within which the gift of total chastity allows the

66 2 Pet 1:21-21

undistracted, undivided service of God.⁶⁷ Both marriage and singleness will eventually pass away into the full union of Christ with his bride that will surpass all known loves and affections.

III. THE CHURCH

We believe that since its founding by Jesus, the church of God has been, is, and will forever be one church, built upon one foundation, which is Jesus Christ. Local churches are members of one global body, with a single head and authority, Jesus Christ.

ACTS OF THE CHURCH

We believe that the church has been commissioned by the Lord to be his visible body on the earth, serving as ambassadors of his kingdom for the good of the world.

Giving of the sacraments⁶⁸

We believe that baptism must be both internal with the Holy Spirit and external with water, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for those who have repented, believed the Gospel, and

confess their faith.⁶⁹ Through baptism, believers are brought into union with Christ and his church.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is instituted and commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ, a table of close fellowship with him and with the other members of his body. Just as the bread and wine are received physically, so also the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ are received by the believing soul spiritually in faith,⁷⁰ and we are spiritually renewed and given life by the Spirit.⁷¹ Because this is the table of the Lord which he offers to all who are his, we also welcome all to the table who have placed their hope and confidence in the Lord Jesus, have been baptized, and seek to follow him in obedience.⁷²

Going into all the world

We believe that all believers are commissioned to spread the gospel of our Lord to all, both near and far, neighbor and enemy, in order to make disciples of all nations. This act of going is not just for specially dedicated servants,⁷³ but for all the church, who go in the

67 Adapted in part from *River City Baptist Church Statement of Faith*
<https://rivercityrichmond.org/>

68 We use the term “sacrament” because it is the more ancient term for what the early church called the divine mysterion—things that were hidden but were revealed by the gospel—but without prejudice for the term “ordinance,” since we believe that the basis for sacramental practice is its institution by Christ. We accept the Augustinian definition of “sacrament” as an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, but do not believe that the sacraments themselves infuse grace by their administration. They work because God has authorized their use in the church, but only as they are received in faith by the believer.

See Gregg Allison, “The Ordinances of the Church.”

69 adapt. from *Swiss Brethren Confession at Hesse*.

70 adapt. from *Swiss Brethren Confession*

71 Jn 6:53-54

72 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. We practice open communion but still require congregational and individual discernment approaching the table. “Discerning the body” in the practice of communion means both guarding the unity of the body—no inappropriate exclusions, making “differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval” (v. 19)—and accountability—no inappropriate inclusions, as “everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup” (v. 28). The table is a place of life for those in Christ, and as such it is wrong to unlawfully withhold it. But those who eat and drink while in disobedience eat and drink judgment on themselves, and thus the table must also be approached with care. This requires self-examination, but accountability for the table also comes through the discipleship of the church, both in inclusion and exclusion. See “Discipleship in the church,” below.

73 Though the church joyfully commissions and supports those who make missionary work their vocation.

name of the Father, empowered by the Spirit, in the authority and presence of Jesus.⁷⁴

Making disciples

We believe that making disciples begins with the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ to all, the one who came to deliver and liberate his people through his death and resurrection to be the new people of God for the world.⁷⁵ In light of this good news, all believers are called and gifted in various ways both to evangelize, and to teach and encourage one another to live in obedience to all of Christ's commandments. Though some have been given special callings, the hearing, study, and proclamation of all Christ's commands is the work of the whole church, to encourage and build each other up.

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

The rule of love

We believe that relationships in the church are only rightly ordered if the ordering rule is love for one another. The founding example of Christ's love inspires us to take on Christ's humility and willingness to suffer in love for the good of his church. Love gives the other gifts and virtues effect and meaning. Without love for each other, truth will suffer and selfishness and pride will reign.⁷⁶

We believe that the church ought to serve one another, setting aside pride, status, convention, and culture for the love of one another. In the same way as Christ, the Lord and master, took up the basin and towel, we also ought to wash one another's feet; first as an act of

⁷⁴ Isaiah 61:1-3

⁷⁵ Luke 4:18-21

⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

true humility, but also as a special sign of the true washing in which through Christ's shed blood our souls are cleansed.⁷⁷

In the same love we bear each others' burdens, share resources generously, and pray for each other. In faith and reliance upon the perfect will of God we willingly anoint the sick with oil.

Spiritual gifts

God gives to his church many spiritual gifts to build the body. These gifts are distributed according to the wisdom and generosity of the Spirit and are ordered by love of God and neighbor. The diversity of gifts, ministries, and activities does not divide the church, but unifies it by giving glory to the one God who gives them.⁷⁸ If gifts are not for the common good and do not glorify God, they are not of the Spirit.

Men and women

We believe the rule of love is also essential to the flourishing of men and women in the church. Though the Fall set men and women in opposition to each other, the church is to be a witness to the perfect union that was in Eden and that will be in the new heavens and earth. In Christ the curse which creates antagonism between men and women is lifted, and they are called to serve one another, united in purpose and worship. In unique roles each equally reflects the example and image of Christ. When men and women abandon the rule of love in rebellion, their disordered conduct harms the effective testimony of the church to the Eden that is coming.

As a symbol that testifies to the present incomplete and future perfect redemption of the relationship of men and women to each other

⁷⁷ adapt. from *Dordrecht Confession*. On foot washing as a sign of the effectiveness of Christ's work, see John 13:6-10. Foot washing is a voluntary and occasional practice at King's Table.

⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

and to their God, we commend the ancient practice of men being uncovered and women covered while praying and prophesying, in humble worship before God.⁷⁹

LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

The leaders of the church are appointed to provide leadership and spiritual direction for the church. They are to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Leaders are not to be domineering but to shepherd the flock of God.

Ordained elders are men, appointed by the congregation, who meet the biblical qualifications for elders.⁸⁰ They are entrusted with “hold[ing] to the standard of sound words”⁸¹ and are responsible for authoritative teaching⁸² in the church. Other offices in the church are open to all who are gifted, called, and qualified for them.

Men and women who meet the biblical qualifications ought to be appointed as deacons and deaconesses by the church as servants to minister to the physical needs of the church, according to the requirements of scripture.⁸³

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. We leave the application of this practice to the individual conscience.

⁸⁰ 1 Timothy 3:1-6, Titus 1:7-9

⁸¹ 2 Timothy 1:13 (NET)

⁸² 1 Timothy 2:12. Other biblical titles are “overseer” and “pastor.” These men are to “give [their] attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4) and to “manage God’s household” (Titus 1:7).

⁸³ 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-6. Deacons are mature and godly men — and women (see Romans 16:1). Unlike elders, they are not responsible for authoritative teaching; but their other qualifications are similar. Deaconesses have the same calling as deacons, and are not necessarily deacon’s wives — 1 Timothy 3:11 may refer to wives or women generally.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CHURCH

Jesus called his disciples to follow him. Discipleship is learning to faithfully follow Jesus in every area of life, and is a life-long pursuit of knowing, loving, and obeying the Father. Together we pursue a path of holiness that holds back nothing in our lives. We seek to know each other deeply, and to open our lives to each other for input and prayer, so that all might be drawn continually closer to Jesus and become more like him. We recognize that any church body will have differing levels of maturity. The church graciously makes space for the immature and young in faith, seeking to guide them in the light of Christ. The church also urges the more mature to recognize that they have not arrived, and to set a humble example of growth, drawing ever closer to Jesus.

We believe that discipline is a key component of discipleship. It is only done properly in love,⁸⁴ since its goal is restoration into fellowship with Christ. Those who knowingly and rebelliously persist in sin, resisting Christ’s lordship over all areas of their life, are to be confronted and restored according to the pattern of scripture.⁸⁵ If they cannot be restored, they are to be excommunicated in the hope of their future restoration.⁸⁶

IV. THE WORLD

STEWARDSHIP

We believe that God through creation filled nature with an abundance of good gifts — the earth, the animal kingdoms, wealth and possessions. Adam and Eve, with their future offspring, were placed on the earth

⁸⁴ Psalm 94:12, Hebrews 12:6-8

⁸⁵ Matthew 8:15-20

⁸⁶ 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10-11

as God’s vice-regents to rule over the earth with the craft and care God himself had shown in creation. The Fall affected not only God’s creation gifts but our attitude towards them. These gifts are given not to be idolatrously worshipped or thoughtlessly consumed, but to be carefully stewarded, conserved, repaired, restored, built, and shared. The rule of Christ and the imitation of his love restores the relationship between mankind and creation, so that we do not worship or abuse created things, but conserve, care for, and create for God’s glory.

THE STATE

We believe that the office and the authority of the state is ordained by God for the good of humanity to advance justice, protect the righteous and punish the evil doer. Citizens owe obedience and tribute to them, as well as respect in everything that is not against God; to be subject to them, to serve them and to pray for them.⁸⁷

We believe that our final and highest allegiance is to Jesus, and that no Christian ought to participate in any act or arm of government that confuses or compromises that allegiance.

⁸⁷ adapt. from *Swiss Brethren Confession of Hesse* (1578)

We believe that the weapons of the state are “an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ.”⁸⁸ Followers of Christ are taught in his words and with the testimony of scripture not to take vengeance, to overcome evil with good, not to put their trust in princes, and to suffer wrongdoing after the example of Jesus.⁸⁹ His kingdom is not of this world;⁹⁰ our struggle not against flesh and blood, but against heavenly forces of evil.⁹¹ Therefore we reject all forms of earthly violence as effective tools of Christ’s kingdom.

At the end of days, after the final judgment, Jesus will reign over all things as king. In his final reign all violence will cease.⁹² He reigns now over his kingdom, in which we are citizens, and we live in view of his imminent return.⁹³ Christ is the firstfruit of the glorious inheritance

⁸⁸ from *Schleitheim Articles*, “VI. On the Sword.” This is the earliest Anabaptist confession of faith, and it is very practical about the applications of nonviolence (for example, not serving as a magistrate). Other later Anabaptist confessions varied in their discussion of the state and Christian nonviolence. Almost all included an article on the legitimate authority of the state. This was not only an issue of belief; many (but not all) of these confessions were public documents, some even specifically written to local or regional authorities in order to hopefully persuade them that the confessing church was orthodox. Additionally, the firm insistence on the legitimacy of state authority helped separate these Anabaptists from those radical reformers feared all over Europe as violent revolutionaries, like Thomas Müntzer or the Anabaptists of Münster. On the issue of Christian nonviolence, however, they are quite varied. *Schleitheim* (1527), *Kempfen Confession* (1545), and the *Thirty-Three Articles* (1617), among others, prohibit almost any use of the sword. The *Dordrecht Confession* (1632) is a bit more circumspect, describing only the use of the sword in personal or community vengeance. The *Wismar Articles* (1554) make an exception for a staff and dagger while traveling, and for serving in a citizen army for the national defense. The *Waterlander Confession* (1578) and the *Swiss Brethren Confession of Hesse* (1578) do not discuss the sword at all. These confessions represent about 100 years and multiple strains of thought in Anabaptist sects around the issue. Dordrecht has historically been somewhat normative in Anabaptist theology, but certainly not exclusively so.

⁸⁹ Matt. 5:38–48; Rom. 12:14–21; 1 Pet. 3:8–17; Psalm 146:3–5

⁹⁰ John 18:36

⁹¹ Ephesians 6:12

⁹² Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3; Zech. 9:8–9

⁹³ Philippians 3:20–21

of the new heavens and new earth and the resurrection; he will reign until all things are under his feet, even death.⁹⁴

CONTEXT

The church must live out its identity at the ground level. At times our congregation may agree together on certain commitments in which we discern the Spirit's calling upon our local body, particularly in areas where practical application has not been clearly spelled out in the Scripture. We do not hold these as binding upon individual consciences, nor do we see these as permanent, but rather as contextual ways of living together to enable us to focus more clearly on Christ, our center. These may also take the form of exhortation rather than formal commitment, leaving the form up to individual conscience and family discernment. If at any point local commitments become a center of gravity for us or a tool of exclusion, we are committed to abandoning them in order to fix our eyes once again on Jesus.

⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:20-26



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LAST REV.
06.07.25