

## **Covenant Church Mission, Vision, and Values Statement**

### **Our Mission:** *Why has God called us together?*

Covenant Church exists to glorify God through worshipping Him, nurturing His people, and witnessing to the world.

### **Our Vision:** *If we are fulfilling the mission God has given us, what will we look like?*<sup>1</sup>

#### **1. A church that loves to worship together.**

a. We will recognize Jesus Christ as the mediator of our worship.

Christ is the “one mediator between God and man” (1 Tim. 2:5). We are able to safely enter God’s presence, worship him, and offer “acceptable sacrifices” to God (1 Pet. 2:5) because Christ has redeemed us and made us a kingdom of holy priests. Furthermore- as the revelation of God, we see God’s glory when we behold Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). As a result, he must have a central place in all of our worship.

Some implications of this are: we will persistently point to Christ in our worship, and especially in the preaching of the Word; we will recognize Christ as the King and head of the church and as the founder and perfecter of our faith; and we will seek to know Christ through worship, and not merely facts about God or his world.

b. We will prioritize our weekly in-person Sunday worship gathering in the lives of our members.

Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds us, “not to neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” It was the pattern of the early church to honor the Sabbath by meeting on the first day of the week (see Acts 20:7) and must be all the more ingrained in our lives (as the Day draws nearer...)!

Some implications of this are: making sure other church activities never over-shadow or demand more of our energy and attention; denying that “virtual church”, though a common grace blessing, in any way replaces corporate worship; encouraging and preparing our children to be active participants in our worship services; and welcoming into worship and working hard to accommodate those who may be disruptive in worship (young children, those with disabilities).

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes this type of vision is called a philosophy of ministry or a theological vision for ministry.

c. We will call each other to true heart engagement in worship and resist the drift towards religious formalism (ie. mindless/heartless worship).<sup>2</sup>

Some implications of this are: a willingness to regularly examine and re-think existing forms and traditions; intentional preparation on the part of our worship leaders; avoidance of over-technical religious language in our services; a conscious Spirit-dependance in our worship; and an effort to teach and re-teach each generation and each wave of new members what we're doing in worship.

d. We will pursue a compelling balance between reverence and intimacy in our worship.

With our reverence, we proclaim the incredible weight of what we do in worship when we are called by the Lord of Hosts to bow in his presence along with the heavenly hosts and come before him with awe (Is. 6:1-5, Eph. 2:6, Heb. 12:22-24, Rev. 15:4). With our intimacy, we proclaim that we are a blood-bought family, united as a body to cry out "Abba" to our father (Rom. 8:15).

Some implications of this are: we will foster a healthy tension between reverence and familiarity in our congregation's worship; we will seek to reflect the order of how God speaks and initiates a relationship with his people and they in turn respond ("dialogical worship"); and we will worship in accordance with the principles God has given us in his Word (the "regulative principle of worship").<sup>3</sup>

e. We will honor the centrality of preaching in our worship.

The proclamation of God's Word has always been central to the life of his people, from Moses' proclamation in Deuteronomy, to the institution of the Levites as teachers (Lev. 10:11 but see especially 2 Chron. 17:7-9), and Ezra's reformation in Nehemiah 8. It was the primary task of the Old Testament prophets (Is. 6:8-10, Jer. 1:4-10, Ezek. 2:1-3:4) and the forerunner John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1). Jesus was anointed for the work of preaching (Lk. 4:17-19), and said that to preach was why he came (Mk. 1:38). It was a central piece of the Apostles ministry (Lk. 9:6), and they instituted a whole new office in the church to maintain its priority (Acts 6:2, along with prayer). Finally, the first generation of pastors that followed the apostles (represented by Timothy) were charged as their primary task to be constantly preaching the word (2 Tim. 4:2). If this is the primary task of pastors who Christ says are his gifts to the church to grow it to maturity (Eph. 4:11-14), then the faithful preaching of the whole counsel of God MUST have a central role in our worship.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Matt. 15:8-9 for a biblical example: "this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." "Religious formalism" is NOT referring to a formal/liturgical vs. informal style of worship, it's talking about when we don't engage in worship with our hearts and minds so that our actions and words become repetitious, mindless, and meaningless.

<sup>3</sup> Section B "The Nature of Public Worship" in the OPC's Directory for Public Worship (pp. 125-8 of the BCO) is an excellent description of some of these principles.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase, "whole counsel of God" comes from Acts 20:27 where Paul reminds the Ephesians how he did not shrink from declaring to them the whole counsel of God. By "whole counsel" Paul meant that in the 2.5 years he spent with them, he preached a balanced diet from all of God's revelation, not avoiding any difficult texts, or sticking only to his favorite topics. At Covenant we accomplish this by making the majority of our preaching expositional (working verse by verse through a book of the Bible), and by selecting books in a balanced way from the entirety of the Bible. We also take occasional breaks for topical series to make sure we teach on important areas that might not get as much attention in an exclusively expositional approach.

Some implications of this are: we will make sure our pastor(s) are able to prioritize sermon preparation in their weekly schedule; and we will encourage our congregation to attend to the preaching, “with diligence, preparation and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives” (WSC Q90);

f. We will take seriously the role that corporate singing plays in opening our hearts and uniting us in worship.

The biblical commands for corporate song (Eph. 5:18-21, Col. 3:16) and the historical significance of singing (Ps. 9:11, 18:49, 21:13, 57:9, 95:1, 149:1) demand that we embrace being a singing congregation.

Some implications of this are: our music teams and AV teams will always prioritize the support and encouragement of congregational singing; we will seek opportunities to grow the singing gifts of our congregation; solos, choirs, and instrumental ensembles will always seek to complement and be subordinate to the congregation’s corporate singing (ie. we don’t want other things to take over and become “the main event”); and our music choices will seek to promote our desire for excellent singing (ie. songs should be biblical, beautiful, and singable).

## 2. **A church that is unashamedly biblical in everything it does.**

a. We will enthrone the Bible as the supreme authority over our lives and ministry.

The written Word of God comes from the mouth of one who knows all things and cannot lie (2 Tim. 3:16, Heb. 6:18, Jn. 17:17, 2 Pet. 1:21). As a result, it is a rock to stand on like no other authority that exists (Jn. 10:35).

Some implications of this are: The Scriptures will always be our primary standard- in a different class entirely than other very helpful but subordinate authorities (eg. Westminster Standards); and we will resist allowing persecution, practical considerations, cultural influences (even “Christian” ones), or false teaching to shake us from the clear principles of Scripture.

b. We will rely on God’s Word to convert sinners, comfort the broken, challenge the proud, and train us for ministry.<sup>5</sup>

Some implications of this are: the foundation for our service and witness as a church will be study of, meditation on, and submission to the Bible; the proclamation and reading of God’s Word will have a central place in our worship service and other growth opportunities offered to members/visitors; there will be a focus on equipping members to correctly interpret and apply their Bibles to God’s world- understanding the world through the Word (not the Word through the world!).

c. We will value the Westminster Standards, our denomination’s Book of Church Order, and other historically Reformed and Presbyterian resources that serve as faithful summaries of what the Bible teaches.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jn. 20:31, 1 Cor. 10:11, 2 Tim. 3:15-17, Heb. 4:12

<sup>6</sup> Our denomination’s constitution consists of 4 books (one each for its standards of doctrine, government, discipline, and worship), which are all subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Those 4

Scripture commands us to, “Follow the pattern of sound words” and, “guard the good deposit,” (2 Tim. 1:13) as well as to, “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1). It also warns us repeatedly of false teaching arising within the church<sup>7</sup> and clearly indicates that the Scriptures can be twisted and misunderstood (2 Pet. 3:16 is sobering). As a result, we recognize the significant role that “patterns” of sound words like the Westminster Confession of Faith can play in unifying us in a common understanding of what Scripture teaches. They insulate us from the shifting winds of modern biblical interpretation and help us guard the deposit of Scripture.

Some implications of this are: we will require our officers (ministers, elders, and deacons) to study, understand, and hold fast to the Westminster Standards;<sup>8</sup> although we don’t require members to agree to these Standards, we will excitedly encourage them to explore the depth and richness of our Reformed standards and history; we will look for attempts to connect our practice and forms with the historic and global Reformed and Presbyterian church (where/when it has remained biblically faithful).

### 3. A church that is growing through the use of the “means of grace”.<sup>9</sup>

#### a. We will delight in the provision and power of God’s saving grace.

Christianity is unique amongst world religions in recognizing that man’s problem is so dire that true salvation can come only through an undeserved gift of grace. God provided this saving grace by sending Christ to die for us that he might be for us “righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). We continue to rely on him by his grace to empower us to live and grow as a Christian.<sup>10</sup>

Some implications of this are: in our teaching we will tirelessly reject the human tendency to try to earn salvation by works and will boast in our Lord alone; and we will recognize obedience as the outflow of God’s grace at work in our lives (we work as he works in us- Phil. 2:12-13).

#### b. We will look to those things with which God has promised to feed us for spiritual nourishment.

Our attention to the Word of God, prayer, and the Sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism are the ordinary ways God tells us we grow and receive his grace.<sup>11</sup>

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books are: *The Westminster Standards* (consisting of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) and *Shorter and Larger Catechisms* (WSC and WLC) in the form adopted by the OPC), *The Form of Government* (FOG), *The Book of Discipline* (BOD), and *The Directory for Public Worship* (DPW). The final 3 of those books are printed together in what is called *The Book of Church Order* (BCO). Some other examples of useful documents are: The Canons of Dordt, the Belgic Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism.

<sup>7</sup> Eg. 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:2b-5, 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:3-4, 2 Pt. 2:1-3, Jude 3-4

<sup>8</sup> All officers at Covenant must vow to “sincerely receive and adopt” the *Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the OPC* and, “approve of” the *Book of Church Order of the OPC*.

<sup>9</sup> “The Means of Grace” refers to the primary ways that God tells us he will grow us- means by which we “get ourselves into the path” of God’s grace. Throughout church history scholars have not always agreed on exactly what should be on this list, but our tradition has typically included: the Word of God (read and especially preached), Prayer, and the Sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. 15:10, “I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

<sup>11</sup> WCF 14.1, “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.” WSC Q88, “Q.

We are energized and nurtured as worshippers and witnesses by these primary gifts, and must not depart from persistently taking them up by faith throughout our exile on this earth.

Some implications of this are: we will call those who wish to grow as a Christian and serve their King to faithfully partake of these ordinary means; we will avoid elevating other potential means above these primary means or encouraging believers to pursue “extraordinary” ways of spiritual growth rather than those God has specifically given us.

c. We will recognize the foundational role of God’s Word as our spiritual food and drink.

There is nothing more foundational to the spiritual life and growth of a Christian than the faithful consumption of the Word of God. The Sacraments are explained by the Word, Prayer is a response to the Word, and the seed of spiritual life itself is the implanted Word of God (James 1:21, 1 Pet. 1:23).<sup>12</sup> The reading of the Bible, as well as personal or group study of it is important, but God commands that special attention be given to the authoritative preaching of God’s Word by his ministers.<sup>13</sup> Many implications of this are noted above under #1e. and #2.

d. We will cherish the communion with Christ we receive in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

The sacraments are two practices Christ commanded his church to partake of until he comes back. Through these sacraments, God represents, seals, and applies to us Christ and all his benefits.<sup>14</sup> They are not only deeply symbolic, but critical parts of our spiritual nourishment and growth as believers.

Some implications of this are: we will value the time spent on these ordinances in our worship services; we will seek to explain and reflect on the benefits and role of these ordinances; and we will guard these ordinances appropriately (Lord’s Supper for those who are credible believers, Baptism for credible believers and their children).<sup>15</sup>

e. We will seek to drench our ministry and each other in prayer.

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What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?  
 A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”

<sup>12</sup> Note in footnote 5 above that the ordinary means the Spirit uses to save someone is the ministry of the Word of God, so the Word is set apart from the Sacraments and Prayer as the foundational means of Grace in our lives.

<sup>13</sup> In Ephesians 4:11-14, the crucial gift God gives his church for her growth is “the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers,” whose primary task is arguably to, “preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Tim. 4:2).” Also, note 1e above.

<sup>14</sup> See Q92 of the WSC and Ch. 27 in the WCF for summaries of this teaching and Scripture references.

<sup>15</sup> Part of communicating the richness of the Sacraments’ spiritual significance is being clear that they are only for those who are visible members of God’s covenant with his people. If we downplay the entrance requirements, we downplay the meaning as well.

Prayer is the Christian's spiritual respiration (1 Thes. 5:17- "pray without ceasing"). It sustains us, shapes us, and by God's will- works to bring change in the world.<sup>16</sup>

Some implications of this are: we will seek to be a praying congregation; when facing decisions or new stages we will apply ourselves especially to persistent prayer; and we will recognize prayer as a way that God applies his grace to our lives to sustain us, shape us, and include us in his work.

#### 4. A church that is its members.<sup>17</sup>

- a. We will distinguish our true substance (members) from the tools that enable our members to glorify God.

The "tools" of our ministry are things like: our building, programs, staff positions, mission/vision statements, ministry partnerships, etc.

Some implications of this are: we will avoid pursuing or spending resources on "tools" without a clear connection to how they promote the worship, nurture, and witness of our members; and we will measure our growth and "success" based on the growth of our members,<sup>18</sup> not our tools.

- b. We will look for ways to glorify God that reflect the gifts, inclinations and maturities of our members.

Who we are is who God has brought into our midst. Our ministry goals should reflect who our members actually are and what they have been gifted by the Spirit to do.<sup>19</sup>

There is an appropriate balance here, because we trust Christ to grow and mature each member over time. Thus, it may be appropriate to pursue goals that push members to grow or to pray for the provision of new gifts or members.

Some implications of this are: we will encourage members to identify and utilize their gifts for Christ in the church and in the world;<sup>20</sup> and we will generally look to develop programs that reflect the actual gifts and inclinations of our members.

- c. We will entrust the work of ministry to our members.

Our leaders will seek to equip and train members in the work of ministry rather than doing all the ministry themselves (Eph. 4:11-14 is foundational).

Some implications of this are: we will prefer ministries that utilize members vs. outside professionals and that empower a broader number of members vs. fewer, even when those choices may mean a reduction in efficiency or quality; while doing our best out of love for Christ, we will resist a perfectionistic or professional

<sup>16</sup> Heb. 4:15-16, 1 Jn. 5:14, Is. 37:21, Dan. 10:12, and James 4:2

<sup>17</sup> 1 Cor. 1:2 and Eph. 1:22-23 along with 1 Cor. 12:12-13. WCF Ch. 25 helpfully distinguishes the "invisible" vs. "visible" church. A local church (that is faithful enough to be considered a true church of Christ), is a geographically specific part of the visible church, which "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children..."

<sup>18</sup> We refer here to both spiritual and numerical growth. Matthew 28:19 commands the church to do the work of both making and training disciples.

<sup>19</sup> Rom. 12:3-8 and Eph. 4:15-16 teach the diversity but necessity of each church member's gifts for the health of the church. Applied locally, our church must know its Spirit-gifted identity in order to operate in a healthy fashion within the global body of Christ.

<sup>20</sup> The OPC's *Form of Government*, Ch. IV, 1 says, "...since every Christian is endued with some gift for the edification of the body, he must minister this gift to the church as a faithful steward."

environment that may discourage members from using their gifts in the church; we will foster an attitude of graciousness towards members learning to teach, play music, lead a ministry area, etc; we will resist micro-management and encourage member familiarity with resources (like this vision statement!) that help us move in the same direction in a de-centralized manner.

## 5. A church where people don't get "lost".

### a. We will adopt a shepherding mindset.

The biblical symbol of the shepherd who knows, feeds, leads, and protects the flock is one of the most powerful and consistent images for caring leaders in Scripture.<sup>21</sup>

Some implications of this are: our elders will seek to lead as shepherds and our members will encourage them in that work, so that our leaders do their work with joy and our whole body is blessed (Heb. 13:17); and we will encourage the shepherding mindset to all leaders in our congregation- especially husbands and fathers seeking to know, feed, lead, and protect their wives and families.

### b. We will embrace the strength of being an inter-generational community.

The church as the "household of God" (1 Tim. 3:14-15, Gal. 6:10) is intended to be made up of saints of all ages and levels of spiritual maturity.

Some implications of this are: we will resist the creation of a church that is only welcoming to specific age-groups or spiritual maturities; we will seek to nurture the growth of both the spiritually young and mature; we will expect members to be active in ministry from the earliest years to the day of their death; we will look for ways to involve our youngest children, and have no expectation that members will ever "retire" from service to our congregation; and we will encourage older members to be intentional in replacing themselves and giving leadership to younger members while seeking new supportive roles for themselves.<sup>22</sup>

### c. We will value the vulnerable in our midst.

Vulnerable groups (eg. children, widows, orphans, those with disabilities, foreigners, downcast, and poor) are specifically identified in Scripture as deserving of special attention and care.<sup>23</sup>

Some implications of this are: we will seek to be known as a congregation that is friendly and approachable to any who join us in worship; we will be willing to "spend ourselves" in knowing and loving even those who can give nothing back; we will push ourselves to know and relate to people who are different from us; and we will embrace the ministry priorities of Christ who laid aside his teaching and healing ministry to take the infants upon his lap (Mk. 10:13-16).

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<sup>21</sup> God is a Shepherd: Gen. 48:15, Ps. 23; OT leaders are shepherds of God's people: 2 Sam. 5:2, Zech. 10:2, Jer. 3:15; Christ is the Great Shepherd: Jn. 10:11, 1 Pet. 2:25; Elders are Christ's under-shepherds: 1 Pet. 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-31. Note that the 4 categories of "knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting" used here are taken from Tim Witmer's two books, *The Shepherd Leader*, and, *The Shepherd Leader at Home*.

<sup>22</sup> Notice how multiple age groups are addressed together and envisioned as growing together within the church in: Eph. 6:1-4, Col. 3:18-21, 1 Tim. 4:12 and 5:1-16, 2 Tim. 1:5, Tit. 2:1-6, and 1 Pet. 5:5.

<sup>23</sup> James 2:14-17, 1 Jn. 3:17-18, Lev. 19:34, Ps. 82:3, Is. 1:17, Heb. 13:2

d. We will believe in the benefits of practicing church discipline.

Scripture teaches that those who are disciplined are loved and marked as true sons and daughters of God. There is hope for those who receive discipline, whereas those without discipline are hated and abandoned to their death (Prov. 13:24, 19:18, Heb. 12:5-11). Therefore, true church discipline must be a key part of a genuinely loving community, both in its informal sense (members privately exhorting, encouraging, and instructing other members) and its formal sense (elders admonishing, rebuking, suspending, and excommunicating).<sup>24</sup>

Some implications of this are: we will be willing to talk about sin in our conversations with each other; we will be willing to have others gently approach us with concerns about the consistency of our Christian walk and beliefs; we will welcome our elders' questions, concerns, and attempts to hold us accountable to the membership, marriage, and baptismal vows we have made before God and our church.<sup>25</sup>

**6. A church that is “on mission”.**

a. We will personally and corporately sacrifice to see missionaries sent out and churches planted.

Some implications of this are: we will faithfully and generously support and pray for the missionaries and church plants of our denomination, presbytery, and other faithful sending agencies; we will actively work towards opportunities to send missionaries and plant churches from within our own body; we will spend time and energy educating ourselves on the work and need for missions.

b. We will encourage and equip our members to be excited about the gospel and able to share it.

Some implications of this are: we will faithfully and steadfastly proclaim the gospel in our church; we will seek to be a church that people are willing to invite their neighbors to; we will equip members to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15); we will look for opportunities to train members in evangelism; and we will build each other up in zeal and excitement about the goodness of the gospel.

c. We will be willing to sacrifice our preferences when doing so serves the larger goal of being “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22).

There are things God tells us about being a church and how we do church that we must obey and cannot lay aside. There are other things that flow from tradition,

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<sup>24</sup> See Gal. 6:1, Eph. 4:15, 2 Thess. 3:13-15, James 5:19-20 and Heb. 10:24-25 for some likely examples of more informal church discipline, and 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 1 Tim. 5:19-20, and Matt. 18:15-20 for likely examples of more formal situations. Our approach to formal church discipline at Covenant Church is summarized in Ch. 30 of the Westminster Confession and the Book of Discipline of the OPC on pp. 91-132 of the Book of Church Order of the OPC.

<sup>25</sup> See p. 158 in our BCO for membership vows and p. 145 for the vows parents make when their children are baptized. Some typical marriage vows can be found on pp. 184-6 of the BCO.

culture, and personal preferences that may be worth sacrificing if they prevent us from being accessible to those we are seeking to convert and disciple.<sup>26</sup>

Some implications of this are: we will avoid creating “sacred cows”- ministry practices, traditions, or forms regarded as vital that are actually circumstantial; we will be willing to let go of things we personally love that stand in the way of accessibility in ministry; and we will engage the hard work of drawing clear lines between biblical standards and cultural/traditional standards.

d. We will encourage our members to balance being “in the world, but not of it” (Jn. 17:14-19).

One of the tasks of a church is to draw God’s people into worship and equip them for ministry, while leaving members with the time and energy to engage with the surrounding world.

Some implications of this are: we will avoid filling our members’ lives with so much “church” that they have no time to bless the world around them; we will maintain the narrow focus of Covenant’s mission (to glorify God through worship, nurture, and witness), and encourage members to work with and create external ministries that engage the world in ways beyond the reach and scope of our local church’s mission and vision.

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<sup>26</sup> The accessibility of God’s message is a theme throughout Scripture that begins with God’s own actions towards his creation from the very beginning- “speaking” to them and “walking” with them in the garden. He explains himself in words and a language so that they can understand and know him. WCF 7.1 describes this as God’s “voluntary condescension”, by which he crosses the great distance between himself and his creatures. We see this condescension in practice in Paul’s own missionary efforts in the 1st c., “For I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (1 Cor. 9:19 and see also 10:32).

## **Our Values:** *What are the core values we want to shape our church culture?*

### ***Worship-loving***

- We believe in the importance of a weekly, corporate, awe-filled worship of God that is Christ-mediated and God-centered, where the whole counsel of God is faithfully proclaimed, and where the whole person is captured and directed by a clear, thoughtful, and biblical liturgy.

### ***Biblically-faithful***

- We believe that God's Word is the supreme authority over our lives and ministries, the primary means God uses to convert sinners and grow saints, and is faithfully summarized in the Westminster Standards.

### ***Grace-empowered***

- We believe that we are saved by God's gift of grace and empowered to live and grow as Christians by continued participation in his ordinary means of grace: rooting ourselves in his Word, drenching each other in prayer, and communing with our God through the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

### ***Member-focused***

- We believe that the essence of the local church is its members in union with Christ being equipped and shepherded by their leaders to develop their gifts and do the work of ministry. This is pursued within the context of an inter-generational community where every member is ministered to, and our resources are used to promote the worship, nurture, and witness of our congregation.

### ***Mission-centered***

- We believe that we are to be sacrificially and excitedly focused on supporting and sending missionaries and supporting and planting churches in local and global contexts.