

BOOK OF DOCTRINES AND DISCIPLINE
FIRST METHODIST CHURCH
PLEASANTON

HOLY SCRIPTURE

The canonical books of the Old and New Testaments (as specified in the Articles of Religion) are the primary rule and authority for faith, morals, and service, against which all other authorities must be measured.

FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS FOR OUR DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

The following summaries of the apostolic witness disclosed in Scripture have been affirmed by many Christian communities, and express orthodox Christian teaching.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe 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 to the dead. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven,

Is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (universal) church,

the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED (A.D. 381)

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,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
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,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic* 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.

OUR WITNESS TO THE WORLD

1. We believe that all persons irrespective of their station or circumstances in life have been made in the image of God and must be treated with dignity, justice, and respect. We denounce as sin racism, sexism, and other expressions that unjustly discriminate against any person (Genesis 1-2, Deuteronomy 16:19-20, Luke 11:42, 19:9, Colossians 3:11).

2. We believe that life is a holy gift of God whose beginnings and endings are set by God, and that it is the particular duty of believers to protect those who may be powerless to protect themselves, including the unborn, those with disabilities or serious illness, and the aged (Genesis 2:7, Leviticus 19:32, Jeremiah 1:5, Luke 1:41-44).

3. The sacredness of all life compels us to resist the practice of abortion except in the cases of tragic conflicts of life against life when the wellbeing of the mother and the child are at stake. We do not accept abortion as a means of birth control or gender selection, and we call upon all Christians as disciples of the Lord of Life to prayerfully consider how we can support those women facing unintended pregnancies without adequate care, counsel, or resources (Exodus 22:23-23, Psalm 139:13-16, James 1:27).

4. We believe and pray that all should be allowed to freely follow their vocations, especially those who work on the frontiers of truth and knowledge and those who may enrich the lives of others with beauty and joy. We acknowledge that science and technology are gifts of God intended to improve human life and we encourage dialogue between faith and science as mutual witnesses to God's creative power (Deuteronomy 5:12-14, Luke 10:7, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 1 Timothy 5:18).

5. We believe that God has called us to share His concern for the poor. We are called to improve the quality of life and opportunities for all God's people as we share the good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed (Leviticus 19:9-10, Matthew 25:37-40, Luke 6:20-25, James 2:1-5).

6. We believe that all have been summoned to care for the earth as our common home. (Genesis 2:15, Leviticus 26:34-35, Psalm 24:1).

7. We believe that human sexuality is a gift of God that is to be affirmed as it is exercised within the legal and spiritual covenant of a loving and monogamous marriage between one man and one woman (Exodus 20:14, Matthew 19:3-9, Ephesians 5:22-33).

8. We are saddened by all expressions of sexual behavior, including pornography, polygamy, and promiscuity, that do not recognize the sacred worth of each individual or that seek to exploit, abuse, objectify, or degrade others, or that represent less than God's intentional design for His children. While affirming a scriptural view of sexuality and gender, we welcome all to experience the redemptive grace of Jesus and are committed to being a safe place of refuge, hospitality, and healing for any who may have experienced brokenness in their sexual lives (Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:9-20).

9. We believe that children, whether through birth or adoption, are a sacred gift to us from God, and we accept our responsibility to both protect and nurture the youngest among us. (Deuteronomy 4:9-10, Psalm 127:3-5, 1 Timothy 5:4,8,16).

10. We believe that followers of God have been called to exercise self-control and holiness in their personal lives, generosity and kindness in their relations with others, and grace in all matters of life (Romans 12:9-21, Galatians 5:22-23).

11. We believe in the rule of justice and law in society, in the right of individuals to follow God's call and in the pursuit of peace. (Genesis 12:1, Isaiah 11:1-9, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 2:19-10).

12. We believe the practice of the Golden Rule, treating others as we would wish to be treated, can effectively guide our social and business relationships. We seek to cultivate the mind of Christ and a heart for others (Matthew 7:12, Romans 12:1-2).

13. We believe that each person should have the right to exercise their religious beliefs without fear of persecution or discrimination. (Isaiah 1:17, Matthew 5:44, Romans 8:35).

14. We believe in the final triumph of righteousness when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of Christ, and we accept our calling to work towards that end as the light of Christ and the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16, Revelation 11:15-17, Revelation 21-22).

THE MINISTRY OF THE LAITY

God has entrusted His work in this world to the whole people of God. All Christians are called through their baptism to be in ministry to others, both as individuals and as a part of the church, using the gifts and graces with which they have been equipped by the Holy Spirit. Every layperson bears the responsibility for carrying out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), but likewise each have been given the power by God to do so. For like the variety of spiritual gifts described in the scriptures, the diversity of our outreach efforts knows no limit either when we serve Christ with joy and thanksgiving. With other heirs of the Protestant Reformation, we embrace the notion of “the priesthood of all believers” and we call upon both laity and clergy to work together in a partnership of servant hood. As suggested in Ephesians 4:12-13, Christ has not given to pastors the task of doing the ministry by themselves, but of equipping those in the church for such works of service, so that “the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

We believe that it is only as each individual, whether lay or clergy, bears witness to God's grace that the world may come to know Christ and respond to His invitation to have life in abundance. Each member is therefore expected to be a witness for Christ in the world, a light and leaven in society, and a reconciler in a culture of conflict, identifying with the agony and suffering of the world and radiating and exemplifying the Christ of hope. As the people of God, we must either win the world to Christ, or abandon it to those forces that oppose Him. Beyond the diverse forms of ministry is this ultimate concern: that all persons will be brought into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ and be renewed after the image of their creator (Colossians 3:10). This means that all Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free. Toward that end, the full participation of all who believe is vital and cannot be evaded if the gospel is to be heard and received.

CALLED TO INCLUSIVENESS

We recognize God made all creation and saw it was good. As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God's grace to the unity of the Church and to society, we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons. Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the spiritual life of the Church and its service to the community and the world. Therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The services of worship of First Methodist Church shall be open to all persons and church activities wherever possible should take place in facilities accessible to persons with disabilities.

ELIGIBILITY

First Methodist Church is a part of the holy catholic (universal) church, as we confess in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. In the church, Jesus Christ is proclaimed and professed as Lord and Savior. All people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and, upon taking the vows of membership, become members. In the case of persons whose disabilities prevent them from assuming the vows, their legal guardian[s], themselves members in full covenant relationship with God and the Church, the community of faith, may assume the appropriate vows on their behalf.

DEFINITION OF MEMBERSHIP

The membership of First Methodist Church shall include all people who have been baptized and all people who have professed their faith.

1. The baptized membership of First Methodist Church shall include all baptized people who have received Christian baptism in this congregation or elsewhere, or whose membership has been transferred to First Methodist Church subsequent to baptism in some other congregation.
2. The professing membership of First Methodist Church shall include all baptized people who have come into membership by profession of faith through appropriate services of the baptismal covenant in the ritual or by transfer from other churches.
3. For statistical purposes, church membership is equated to the number of people listed on the roll of professing members.
4. All baptized or professing members of First Methodist Church congregation are members of the church universal.

SACRAMENTAL AUTHORITY

In keeping with the historic practice of the Christian church, Pastors are ordained to oversee the Sacramental life of the church and thus have full authority to preside at celebrations of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Pastors may extend Sacramental authority to another specialized ministry setting for the purpose of celebrating the Sacraments. Such Sacramental authority is limited to the appointed ministry setting and is exercised under the oversight and authority of The Pastor.

THE MEANING OF A SACRAMENT

A Sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. God gives us the sign as a means whereby we receive this grace and as a tangible assurance that we do in fact receive it. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ are Holy Baptism and Holy Communion (also called the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist). We receive the Sacraments by faith in Christ, with repentance and thanksgiving. Faith in Christ enables us to receive the grace of God through the Sacraments, and obedience to Christ is necessary for the benefits of the Sacraments to bear fruit in our lives.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

Through Holy Baptism we are united in Christ's death in repentance of our sins; raised to new life in Him through the power of the resurrection; incorporated into the Body of Christ; and empowered through the work of the Holy Spirit to go on to perfection. Holy Baptism is God's gracious gift to us, flowing from the once for all work of Christ Jesus, and our pledge to follow as His disciples. The Baptism of young children will be supported.

THE MODE AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISM

Holy Baptism may be performed by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. The outward and visible sign of Holy Baptism is water.

Candidates are baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). The inward and spiritual grace is death to sin and new birth to righteousness by faith through union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Holy Baptism is administered among a gathered congregation. Those present vow on behalf of Christ’s Holy Church to receive the baptized into the Church universal, to grow together in grace, and to remember the profession made and benefits received in Holy Baptism. Candidates for Holy Baptism, and those presenting candidates unable to answer for themselves, shall be instructed in the Christian faith and the meaning of Holy Baptism.

Holy Baptism, as initiation into Christ’s Holy Church, occurs once in a person’s life. Holy Communion serves as the regular and continual affirmation of baptismal vows within the church. Through a service of baptismal remembrance and reaffirmation of baptismal vows people can renew the covenant declared at baptism.

BAPTISMAL VOWS

In faithfulness with early Christian practice as well as the Wesleyan tradition, those wishing to receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism within First Methodist Church shall first be asked the Baptismal Covenant questions in the Hymnal.

THE MEANING OF CONFIRMATION

Through the Rite of Confirmation, we personally renew the covenant declared at our baptism, witness to God’s work in our lives, affirm our commitment to Christ and His Holy Church, and receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands enabling our lifelong journey toward holiness. The Apostles prayed for and laid hands on those who had been baptized.

It is the duty of pastors to prepare confirmands, teaching them the basic tenets of the historic Christian faith, the history and

theology of the Wesleyan revival movement, and the practical meaning of church membership in agreement with these Doctrines & Discipline and approved catechism.

PROFESSING MEMBERS

Those wishing to become professing members of First Methodist Church may present themselves to the pastor and, after any appropriate counsel, be baptized if they have not already done so, and join by professing their faith in Jesus Christ and agreeing to the vows of discipleship. Persons may be received by transfer from other denominations in which the Lordship of Christ is affirmed. The pastor in charge has the authority to determine the readiness of any person to assume the vows of membership. A person deferred by the pastor may appeal that decision to the Staff Parish Relations Committee or its equivalent. In order to fulfill the mandate to “watch over each other in love,” professing members of First Methodist Church shall be encouraged to participate in a class meeting, small group setting, discipleship or other accountability group on a regular basis, as a key part of the fulfillment of their vows of membership.

BASIC QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ORDAINED

Those to be ordained must meet the following qualifications:

1. Have a personal faith in Jesus Christ and be committed to Christ as Savior and Lord.
2. Nurture and cultivate spiritual disciplines and patterns of holiness consistent with the General Rules, including responsible self-control by exhibiting personal habits that are conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all relationships, fidelity in a Christian marriage between one man and one woman, chastity in singleness, social responsibility, and the knowledge and love of God.

3. Have a call by God and the people of God to devote themselves to the work of ministry.
4. Be able to effectively communicate the Christian faith.
5. Give evidence of God's gifts for ordained ministry and promise of future usefulness in the mission of the church.
6. Accept the authority of Scripture; be competent in the disciplines of Scripture, theology, church history and polity; possess the skills essential for the practice of ministry, and lead in making disciples of Jesus Christ.
7. Be accountable to the church, accept its doctrinal standards, discipline, and authority, accept the supervision of those appointed to the ministry of oversight, and live in covenant with its ordained ministers.

Changes or Amendments

Changes and/or amendments for future concerns will be set out by the Church Council that has the authority to appoint a committee to take up those concerns.