

OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH



Statements matter...

By Kevin Van Wyk

Sometimes we make statements with little thought. Particularly when we are hurt or angry, we say things we don't really mean. Quite often there is just enough truth in the statement to be far more destructive than we realize. Other statements help us work together by clarifying what is important and what we do. ARC's mission statement explains our overriding purpose. Our core values articulate what is most important to us. Our vision statement gives us direction for the future. These statements should help unify the church in being who God wants us to be and doing what he wants us to do. I hope these inspire you to do what God designed you to do for the benefit of His kingdom.

Because there were many questions about our beliefs from candidates who applied for the senior pastor position, the Equipping Adults Pastor Search Team requested that the elders clarify our beliefs, particularly our stances on homosexuality and women in leadership. While our denomination has several creeds (short statements of basic beliefs) and confessions (longer statements designed to teach fundamentals of our faith), our creeds and confessions do not provide the clarity we need today regarding some controversial issues.

I did some research to see what other Reformed churches are using for statements of faith. Corinth Reformed Church, in Byron Center MI, has done a great deal of work on their statement, so with their permission, we began to create a statement of faith from theirs and address the key concerns of the search team. This turned into a rather extensive statement, which will hopefully stir conversation, reflection, and growth. It is on the following pages.

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The elders also felt our current statement on sexuality singles out homosexuality above other sins. While this was and is in response to the pressure from our culture and government to affirm alternate lifestyles, we felt the new statement better affirms the sanctity of marriage and clarifies our understanding of what the Bible teaches regarding sexual sin. It is not our intent to condemn others, but to welcome sinners to the cross where there is forgiveness and transformation for all. If you struggle with habitual sin, we want to walk with you, help you escape the bonds of sin, and equip you as a Christ-like leader. If you or a family member struggles with homosexuality, we do have resources that can be helpful in understanding how to live in grace and truth. You are encouraged to speak with me, an elder, or a staff member.

Statements matter and I hope you will take some time to reflect on our Statement of Faith. May God continue to teach and guide us into all wisdom and truth as we make his love visible to the world.

OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH

(ALTO REFORMED CHURCH)

INTRODUCTION

Alto Reformed Church adheres to the three creeds of the Christian Church—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We also hold to the historic standards of unity in the Reformed Church in America: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. In addition, the following statement of belief clarifies what we believe:

ABOUT GOD

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He is infinite, eternal, almighty, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. He is completely wise, just, and good, as well as the overflowing source of all good. He has eternally existed in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (i.e., the “Trinity”). These three are equal in divine perfections and are one God. (Genesis 1:1, 26-27; John 1:1-3; Daniel 4:34-35; Deuteronomy 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 22:13; Revelation 4:8; Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 John 4:8; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; see the Belgic Confession, Article 1; the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed)

ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit; and is fully human and fully divine. He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless human life and taught the way of God’s kingdom while performing miracles. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin by dying on the cross. He arose from the dead after three days, demonstrating God’s power over sin and death. For a period of 40 days after his resurrection, he was seen by over 500 people before ascending to heaven. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father and offers continual intercession for His people. He is Lord of all and is the head of His body, the Church. (John 1:14; Romans 1:3-4; 1 Timothy 2:5; Titus 2:13; Matthew 1:18-25; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 7:25; Colossians 1:18; see Belgic Confession, Article 10 and 19)

ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son; and is present in the world to make us aware of our need for Jesus Christ, convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He regenerates our hearts so that we can respond with faith. He illuminates the scripture. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides Christians with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. Christians seek to live under his control daily. (2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; Ephesians 1:13; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Galatians 5:22-26; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19)

ABOUT PEOPLE AND SIN

God made man male and female in His own image, as the crown of creation, that we might have fellowship with Him. Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God, incurring physical, spiritual, and eternal death, which is separation from God. As a consequence, we are marred by an inward depravity and now live under the dominion of sin and Satan. Human beings are hostile toward God and are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ. (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:3-6; Colossians 3:10; Genesis 3:6-8; Romans 5:12-21; Isaiah 53:6a; Romans 3:19-20; Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1-2; Ephesians 2:1-3).

ABOUT SALVATION

Jesus Christ is the gospel. The good news is revealed in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Salvation is a gift of grace from God to humankind, given through faith for the glory of God. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement, good works, or religious ceremony. On the cross, Jesus was our sacrificial substitute, redeeming us from the dominion of the devil, removing our guilt, and appeasing the wrath of God’s just and holy verdict against our sin. It is only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God’s sacrifice for sin that we can be saved from the wrath of God. Those who turn away from sin in repentance and look to Jesus Christ receive the gift of eternal life and are declared righteous by God. (Ephesians 2:8; Galatians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30; Romans 5:9; Romans 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:9)

ABOUT THE BIBLE *

We believe that the Bible (the 66 books of the Old and New Testament) is God’s Word, fully inspired and without error. It was written by human authors who were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that what they wrote is the Word of God. It is the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. (Mark 13:31; Proverbs 20:5; Psalm 119:105, 160; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; John 20:31; Acts 20:32; Matthew 4:4; see Belgic Confession, Article 2-7)

ABOUT ETERNITY

All of us were created to exist forever. We will either exist in union with God through the work of Jesus Christ, or eternally separated from God by sin. The place of eternal separation from God is called Hell, and it is a place of eternal punishment for sin.

Heaven is the place of eternal union and eternal life with God. Only those belonging to Jesus Christ will have eternal life in the new heaven and new earth and will live in ever-increasing joy, to the glory of God. (John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 21:27)

ABOUT ASSURANCE

Because salvation is a gift of God, the believer is secure in this salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. (John 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

ABOUT THE CHURCH

The Church is the living spiritual body of Christ on earth. Jesus is the head and the source of its life. The church is the creation of God through His Word and the Spirit, calling human beings out of sin into the fellowship of Christ's body. All true believers in Christ are members of the universal Church and should be in a vital and committed relationship with a local church so they can grow in their faith, worship and fellowship with other believers, and make a united impact upon the world. Christ has given gift ministries to the church for the equipping of his body that it might mature and grow. God's people receive pastoral care and leadership and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in his service in relation to one another and the world. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 12:12,27; Hebrews 10:23-25; Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:11-16)

ABOUT CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

The Christian is called and empowered, as a response to salvation, to live out the Great Commandment – to love God with all our heart and soul and our neighbors as ourselves; and the Great Commission – to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded us. A follower of Jesus Christ should fulfill this calling for the glory of God; seeking to be blameless in conduct, a faithful steward of his possessions, intently seeking to live a life filled with the Spirit of God and revealing the fruit of the Spirit, i.e. seeking to become more Christ-like. (Luke 10:27; Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9; Colossians 1:9-10)

ABOUT THE COVENANT

We are a covenant keeping church. God enters into a covenant of grace (an unchangeable, divinely imposed agreement) with those whom he calls to be his sons and daughters. Christ serves as a mediator of this new covenant in which he fulfills the conditions for us and reconciles us to God. Covenant people enter into this covenantal relationship through faith in Jesus Christ and express that covenant by obedience to God's commands, living our lives as His children and keeping covenant in our own relationships with our spouses, family, and all believers in all places. (Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3, 17:7, 22:16-18; Galatians 3:8-9, 14-16; Romans 4:11-12, 15:8-9; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ephesians 3:7-12; Romans 8:12-14; Ephesians 4:1, 5:21; Deuteronomy 7:9)

ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS

We believe there are two sacraments given by Christ to strengthen our faith as members of His Church.

The first is baptism which is a sign and seal of God's eternal covenant of grace for us and our children. We do not believe that the act of baptism saves a person. Baptism of an infant symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit beginning a work and inclusion in a local church family. It is not a sign of that child's salvation. Baptism of believers symbolizes the washing away of our sins through the blood of Christ and demonstrates our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

The second is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become followers of Christ. The broken bread symbolizes the broken body of Christ. The cup symbolizes the blood of Christ poured out at the Cross for our salvation. Christ is spiritually present in the bread and juice. As we partake of the Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and to look forward to the heavenly feast. (Acts 2:39; Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3; Acts 16:30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29)

Regarding who may and should participate in Communion... "We welcome all those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life. Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however, eat and drink judgment on themselves." (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 81; 1 Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32)

Paul challenges believers to participate in communion in a manner that is sincere and authentic. He writes to the church in Corinth...

"Eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in the right way. Don't do it in a way that isn't worthy of him. If you do, you will be guilty. You'll be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone should take a careful look at themselves before they eat the bread and drink from the cup." (1 Corinthians 11:27-28 NIRV)

So, we welcome any who are trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins to participate in the Lord's supper. If your child understands the above statement, they too are welcome to the table. As well, we want to urge those who trust Jesus to join with us in ministry as active confessing members. For more information, check out "Discovering Membership" on our website or at the information table.

ABOUT FINAL THINGS

When history has run the course laid out in God's divine plan, Jesus will visibly return in power and glory to judge the world and to complete his total victory over sin, death and Satan through the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the just and unjust, and the establishment of His kingdom in the New Heavens and Earth. Those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord will receive a new resurrected body and will live with him forever, serving God and giving Him unending praise and glory. Those who have not trusted in Christ will be eternally separated from God, enduring eternal punishment for sin. All followers of Christ from all history will be with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for eternity in glorious fellowship. Every tear will be wiped away and death will be swallowed up in victory! (Acts 1:9-11; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Revelation 1:7; Matthew 16:27; 1 Peter 4:5; Matthew 25:31-56; Revelation 20:11-15; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 21:1-5)

ABOUT MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

We believe that Christian marriage is a representation of Christ's relationship to His church. (Ephesians 5:21-35) Marriage was ordained by God at creation as the sacred union of one man and one woman. (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:24). All sexual relations must therefore be reserved for that union. Any expression of this gift outside of God's created order is clearly sinful and not in accordance with God's plan for sexuality (Hebrews 13:4). While God forgives those who repentant, He also calls us to leave our sinfulness behind. (John 8:11) Scripture is definitive where it declares the following behaviors as sinful:

- Fornication – sexual activity before marriage (Proverbs 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; 2 Timothy 3:6; Jude 1:4-7; Mark 7:21)
- Adultery – sexual activity with someone other than your spouse (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18; Matthew 5:27, 19:1-10, 18; Luke 18:20; Romans 13:9; James 2:11) and
- Homosexuality – sexual activity between members of the same sex (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10)

We believe pornography is destructive to the individual, the family, the church and the community; and that believers should guard against temptation. (Matthew 27-10; Galatians 5:19)

We believe singleness is a good and honorable state. (1 Corinthians 7:8)

We believe divorce is a tragic event permitted when there is sexual infidelity, spousal abuse, or desertion. (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15) God longs for us to reconcile broken relationships and desires for us to do all we can to live at peace with one another. (Romans 12:18)

We believe remarriage is permitted when an innocent party has gone through a divorce (Matthew 5:32), a spouse has died (Romans 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39), the divorce took place before a salvation experience (2 Corinthians 5:17), or appropriate repentance and restitution has been made (1 John 1:9; Numbers 5:7).

We also believe that children are a blessing from the Lord. Thus, all human life is sacred and worthy of protection from the moment of conception. (Psalm 127:3-5; 128; 139:13-16; Matthew 18:3; Luke 18:15-17)

* There are some doctrines on which two Christians may agree to disagree, even though they are in the same local church and part of the same leadership team. Examples include: the dating of events in Genesis, the order of events associated with the Lord's return, the role of women in leadership (See "[Men, Women and Biblical Equality](#)" for the egalitarian view and the "[Danvers Statement](#)" for the complementarian view) and the degree of separation from worldly practices. When teaching in any such area, it is made clear these beliefs are not essential for salvation or leadership in the church. We may state the case for our position, but we will also acknowledge that sincere and intelligent Christians hold different views. We are committed to nurturing the unity we share as the family of God, and to obeying His command to love one another. (Romans 14:1-15:7; 2 Timothy 2:23-24; Titus 3:9)

PERMISSION WAS GRANTED -

On behalf of Corinth, please feel free to use our Statement of Faith. The leaders here are Kingdom-minded, and have no issue with sharing resources and ideas (and borrowing from others, for that matter).

Thanks again for your encouragement Kevin!

Mike Gafa

Luminex Coordinator - RCA Region of the Great Lakes

Interim Administrative Pastor – Corinth Reformed Church, Byron Center MI

EXPLANATION FOR NEW STATEMENT OF FAITH

B. The Search Team requested that the elders clarify our stance on women in leadership as there were many questions from candidates who applied for the senior pastor position.

C. After much discussion the elders chose to “agree to disagree” regarding a stance on women in leadership. While Alto allows women to teach, we have not elected women to the consistory. Alto has members and leaders who disagree on this topic, thus we landed in favor of unity in spite of our differences. This is a matter for further study and discussion for our church.

D. The elders also felt our current statement on sexuality, singles out homosexuality above other sins. While this was and is in response to the pressure from our culture and government to affirm alternate lifestyles, we felt the new statement better affirms the sanctity of marriage and clarifies our understanding of what the Bible teaches regarding sexual sin. It is not our intent to condemn others, but to welcome sinners to the cross where there is forgiveness and transformation for all. If you struggle with habitual sin, we want to walk with you, help you escape the bonds of sin, and equip you as a Christ-like leader. You are encouraged to speak with an elder or staff.

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What do you believe?

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Links – Women in Leadership

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