

# **Alto Reformed Church**

## Statement of Faith



## Statements Matter...

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.

While our creeds (short statements of basic beliefs) and confessions (longer statements) teach the fundamentals of our faith, they do not provide the clarity we need today regarding some controversial issues. Our elders initially adopted this statement in 2018 with thanks to Corinth Reformed Church, in Byron Center MI, for providing much of the content. They have made small edits since then to bring clarity and address new issues. We realize these sometimes address deeply personal convictions, we believe careful study of the statements and Scriptures will lead you to affirm the statements with us.

It is not our intent to condemn others who believe differently, but to welcome sinners to the cross where there is forgiveness and transformation for all. If you struggle with some of these beliefs or habitual sin, we want to walk with you, help you, and equip you as a Christ-like leader. You are encouraged to speak with an elder or a staff member.

Statements matter and we 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.

## INTRODUCTION

Alto Reformed Church is Christian, Reformed, and Confessional. We affirm the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed as universal expressions of the Christian faith. We affirm the Belgic Confession and its appendix, the Belhar Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and its appendix, the Great Lakes Catechism on Human Sexuality, and the Canons of Dort as Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose teachings agree with the Word of God. These creeds and confessions inform and illuminate the way we understand the Bible, shape the way we live in response to the gospel, and provide guidance for faithfulness in the future. The following statements further clarify our core beliefs and how we will live.

## 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; BC 1, 8-14; HC 6,9, 20,25,94,95; 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; BC 10,19,25,26)

## 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; BC 11)

## 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, our whole being is marred by depravity and we now live in a sin-filled world. 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; BC 15,16).

## 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; BC 17-23)

## 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; BC 13,16)

## 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 in its original form. 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 life.<sup>1</sup> (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; BC 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 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 spiritual gifts 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; BC 27-32)

## 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 being and to love 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 is set apart to fulfill this calling for the glory of God; seeking to be blameless in conduct, seeking to be a faithful

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<sup>1</sup> 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 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 will be 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)

steward and seeking to live a life filled with the Spirit of God, revealing the fruit of the Spirit. In summary, we are to seek 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; BC 24,28,29)

## 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 sacrament 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 children and believers is a celebration of God's grace and covenantal promises to those who believe and their children, where we renew our vows and trust God's promises. Baptism symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit beginning a work of faith, the inclusion in a local church family, the washing away of sins through the blood of Christ, and 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, signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and look forward to the heavenly feast. (Acts 2:39; Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3; Acts 16:30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; BC 33-35)

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 Covenant Partners.

## 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 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; BC 37)

## 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 (Romans 3:10-12) and not in accordance with God's plan for sexuality (Hebrews 13:4). While God forgives those who are repentant, (John 3:36; Romans 3:22-24; Colossians 1:15-22; 1 Timothy 2:5-6) He also calls us to leave our sinfulness behind. (John 8:11) While not exhaustive, the following statements articulate the teachings of scripture on important issues today.

We believe **lust**, allowing one's mind to dwell on sexual desires outside of marriage, is sin. (Matthew 5:28; Romans 1:24; Philippians 4:8; 1 Peter 4:3) At the same time, temptation is not sin (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13), but we are commanded to flee. (Matthew 6:13; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; James 1:13-13)

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 **fornication**, sexual activity before marriage, is sin. (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)

We believe **adultery**, sexual activity with someone other than your spouse, is sin. (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18; Matthew 5:27, 19:1-10, 18; Luke 18:20; Romans 13:9; James 2:11)

We believe **homosexual** activity, sexual activity between members of the same sex, is sin. (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Kings 14:24; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; Jude 1:7)<sup>2</sup>

We believe that man was created in **God's image, male and female** (Genesis 1:27, 5:1-2; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6) Biological sex is an essential part of human identity. If someone's gender identity<sup>3</sup> ("one's internal sense of self") differs from their biological sex, we believe that God still sees them and identifies them according to their biological sex as male or female.<sup>4</sup>

We believe **singleness** is a good and honorable state (1 Corinthians 7:8) in which one is called to and able to live a virtuous life. (Psalm 51:10, 119:9-16; Romans 6:11-14, 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:13; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 5:23-24; Galatians 2:20, 5:16,22-25; Colossians 3:5)

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)

We believe **parents** carry the primary responsibility for training their children in Christ's way. (Deuteronomy 4:9-10, 6:4-9, 11:19; Proverbs 22:6; Psalm 78:5; Ephesians 6:4)

We believe all forms of **abuse**, slander, dehumanization, or oppression toward fellow humans is an affront against God's sacred image, which has been stamped upon all people. (Exodus 22:21,23:9; Deuteronomy 23:16; Isaiah 58:6; Jeremiah 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5; Matthew 5:44; John 13:34; Romans 12:10, 13:8; Galatians 5; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 3:8)

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<sup>2</sup> More information can be found at <https://cmda.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Homosexuality-Ethics-Statement-with-References-FINAL-2016.pdf>, <https://cmda.org/tag/homosexuality/>,

<sup>4</sup> This section comes from "Guidance for Churches on Membership, Baptism, Communion, Leadership, Service and Leadership For Trans\* People" (*The Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender*, 2021), available at [https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources?field\\_product\\_category\\_tid=1](https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources?field_product_category_tid=1). The author, Preston Sprinkle, provides more explanation in "**Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say.**" Additional information can be found at <https://cmda.org/transgender-and-sexual-orientation/>.