

Our hope is that this imperfect document, this jar of clay, will serve as a tool to help us hold real treasure. And that treasure is an everlasting relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This document is not intended as a substitute for relationship, discussion, and Bible study, but we do hope it is informative as an initial introduction to our beliefs and practices. Some of these topics are complex, nuanced, and controversial, and we understand that there are limits to how much we can explain or explore in such a brief document. That's where relationship, in-depth study, questions, and conversations come in. We welcome your questions and would love to engage in further discussion and study with you.

We believe that spiritual growth happens best when you invite God and other believers into your life. If you are interested in learning more about membership and fellowship in the GWC, please [contact us](#). We invite anyone who is considering placing membership in the GWC to go through a more detailed Bible study series with us—we would be honored to study the scriptures together. These Bible studies will allow you ample opportunity to cultivate deeper relationships as you ask questions, clarify, explore, and grow closer to God and to others. You can find the Bible study series [here](#), and contact us to express interest in Bible study [here](#).

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay  
to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”  
-2 Cor. 4:7

### **Greater Wilmington Church** **Statement of Beliefs, Practices and Partnership:**

For several thousand years, groups of people around the world have courageously and humbly come together, by the invitation of the Lord, to be grafted into a family of faith: Men and women, old and young, married and single, brought together by a unified surrender to live under the sovereign ways of God. The Greater Wilmington Church family is simply our opportunity to respond to God's invitation to gather around His banquet table. This invitation extends beyond cultural, economic, racial, and national lines. We believe that living within the divine embrace of our heavenly Father's love and striving to think, speak, and act within the ways of the Lord is mankind's truest and most fulfilling calling.

In many ways, the vision of the GWC family is simple: The Bible is our standard. Jesus is our Lord. The Spirit is our guide. The Father is our Shepherd. However, within these beliefs exists a complexity of truth that is often difficult to express and absorb. While divine doctrines sometimes surpass our human capacity of understanding, we also rest assured that God has given us all we need to live with a firm foundation of faith (2 Peter 1:3). We can be assured of our peace with God and we can experience a beautiful unity and respect for one another in spite of our diverse cultures, personalities, and beliefs on peripheral doctrines.

In view of this, who is Greater Wilmington Church? We are a Christian family of faith in the greater Wilmington, NC area who are saved by the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our membership to the body of Christ is based upon the Lord's acceptance of us

through Christ's work of atonement on the cross. Our unified vision is rooted in our shared surrender to the lordship of Jesus and our passionate pursuit of living out His ways, which are taught to us through Scripture. As members of the body of Christ we share in a divine bond with one another. As fellow members of Christ's body, we are called to practice sacrificial love and submission to one another. We willingly choose to set aside our individual rights for the good of what is best for the body as a whole (Eph. 5:21, Gal. 5:13, 1 Cor. 8:9, Rom. 12:10). Out of reverence for Christ, we also submit to Christ-centered, ecclesiastical leadership. We honor Christ when we joyfully follow and support the leadership of our shepherds and stewards as they follow Christ (Hebrews 13:17). We strive to prayerfully select and recognize leaders who are responsive to the church—leaders who listen to the needs and concerns of the flock and who humbly invite and embrace input.

In the hopes of cultivating a shared vision within our church family, the GWC leadership team has set forth this document with the intentions of communicating several important doctrines and practices. This work has been and will always be an interactive journey as our Christian family continues to learn, experience, and work together in our ever-changing world to best live out the ways of Christ in our time, in our city, and with this family.

What we believe...

#### **About God and Mankind:**

God our Father is the Creator and Ruler over all of the universe. The nature of God is best described in one word: love. God is sovereign and holds authority over all things, all powers, and all people. In God's loving and divine understanding and will, He created people in His image. He gave mankind a soul designed to exist in everlasting relationship with Him. In God's great love, He chose to give people free will, for without free will no true relationship could ever exist. Each of us must choose God for a relational bond to become reality—not only because we must, but because we trust and love Him. God has proven not only to be fair and just, but also to be full of grace and compassion. While God must be feared and respected, He also wants to be a friend and partner in his divine work with his children.

2 Corinthians 13:14; Genesis 1:1, 26, 27; 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; John 14:6-7; Ephesians 4:6; Hebrews 1:8; 1 Peter 1:2; Deuteronomy 6:4.

#### **About Jesus:**

We believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We also recognize Jesus as part of the triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit)—God chose to come to earth and live alongside us in human form, within the bounds of human and earthly nature. Jesus was holy and lived a sinless human life while He faced the same temptations and sufferings common to all mankind. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on the cross. He was raised from the dead after three days and won the battle over sin and death. He ascended to heaven's glory and will return again to judge the world and bring all of God's people into an eternal, heavenly reality. He is our example to follow and imitate. He is our teacher, rabbi, brother, and friend. In Jesus, we find the source of life, love, and peace with God. He is the fulfillment of scripture: the embodiment of grace and truth.

1 Timothy 6:14-15, Matthew 1:22-23, Isaiah 9:6, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Acts 1:9-11, Romans 1:3-4, John 1:1-5, 14:6-30, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 4:14-15.

### **About the Holy Spirit:**

The Holy Spirit is an equal part of the Trinity (with the Father and the Son of God) and is God's power for creation and transformation. He is present in the world to make people aware of their need for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit leads us. The Spirit also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He helps us pray. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. Since His work is to create in us the character of God, we as Christians try to surrender to the Spirit's control every day. John 14:16-17; 16:7-13, Acts 2:38, Romans 8:1-16, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Genesis 1:2, Galatians 5:22-25, 2 Peter 1:21.

### **About the Human Race:**

Men and women are made in the image of God, designed to be like him in character. Every person has tremendous potential for good and is created with a divine purpose. Unfortunately, all of us have a tendency for disobedience toward God, which the Bible calls "sin." Sin separates people from God and causes many problems in life. The Bible is filled with guidance on how to live life as God intended for His glory and for our fulfillment. Genesis 1:27, Isaiah 53:6a, 59:1-2, Romans 3:23, Luke 18:19, Psalm 8:3-6, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18.

### **About Salvation:**

Living outside of the protective and perfect ways of God is dangerous. In fact, living with sin leads us to death: emotionally, relationally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Every one of us needs saving from sin. God wants to save us. He wants to protect us and love us. He wants us under His loving and protective care forever. The amazing story of the Bible is one of God rescuing mankind from a fate worse than physical death. In short, it is God's desire that every person on earth accept His gift of salvation. Self-improvement or just doing "good things" can never cover or erase our sins—and that is why Jesus came to earth. Only through obedient trust in what Jesus has done on the cross can we obtain forgiveness. Jesus Christ is our one and only hope for forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. Acts 2:38; Ezekiel 33:11; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:23-27; John 1:12; 14:8; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; 2 Peter 3:9.

### **About Baptism:**

Baptism into Christ is repeatedly commanded in the New Testament. Baptism is an individual's faith responding to the good news of Jesus. For believers who have surrendered their lives unto the Lordship of Christ, baptism is the seminal point where faith, a decision, and action meet God's overwhelming and unmerited grace. We believe that baptism is not merely a symbolic gesture, but rather an experience of spiritual rebirth. Our immersion, or burial, in water unites us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and is the moment when our sins are forgiven and our new life in Christ begins. These blessings are gifts from the gracious hand of God, purchased by the precious blood of Christ, and our participation in baptism does not "earn" them—rather, it is the beautiful moment when we receive them. An individual must choose for themselves to be baptized. A candidate for baptism is a person who has chosen to become a disciple (follower) of Christ—in other words, someone who has come to faith in Jesus

and has repented of their sins, surrendering their lives to the lordship of Christ. Baptism is just the beginning, the moment of our spiritual rebirth—we spend the rest of our Christian lives learning and growing in our faith, love, character, and discipleship.

The New Testament is filled with examples; here are a few:

Matthew 3:16, 28:19-20; Acts... Romans 6:1-8, Ephesians 5:26, Titus 3:3-5, 8:38; 22:16, John 3:5, Galatians 3:26-27.

### **About the Church:**

The church belongs to the Lord. It is His body, and every Christian is a member of that body. It is not defined racially, socially, geographically, ethnically, or denominationally. There is only Christ's body, and He alone adds those He saves to that body. The purpose of the church is to glorify God through worship, to serve others, to live as a community of believers, and to bring others to Christ. Jesus Christ is the authority and "head" of the church, and we follow and submit to His leadership in faith.

Matthew 16:18, Romans 16:16, Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:4-6, 5:22-30; Acts 2:46-47, 20:28; Galatians 3:28.

### **About Worship:**

Worship is so much more than an hour of singing and praying on Sunday mornings. Worship is central to a relationship with God. Not only do we worship individually throughout the week as we spend time one on one with God, but we also worship as a community of believers each Sunday—and at other times when we gather together. Cultivating a mindset of continual worship will lead us to a completely new level in our walk with the Lord. Each Sunday is a chance to spend time together worshipping as a full community. When we gather together as a group, we are committed to congregational singing, scripture reading, biblical preaching, and prayer to express praise in our worship. Each week we celebrate the Lord's Supper to affirm our covenant relationship with God. We are committed to using methods and worship formats that glorify God, draw our hearts into His presence, and speak to our hearts. We desire worship that is Christ-centered, community-building, and Spirit-led, engaging us in life-changing encounters with God.

Acts 2:42-47, Ephesians 5:18-20, Colossians 3:15-17.

### **About Eternity:**

"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11-12). People were created in the image of God to exist forever. When this life ends, we will live either separated from God by sin forever, or we will live eternally with God through his grace, forgiveness, and salvation. Heaven and hell are real and eternal. To be eternally separated from God is hell. To live in God's presence for eternity is heaven. Knowing these realities, we desire to use every available resource to draw people to God and to the blessing of eternal life. The Bible exists to draw every person to God.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, Revelation 20:11-21:5, Matthew 25:41-46, 1 John 2:25, 5:11-13; John 3:16, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 4:17-5:1.

## **About Marriage and Sexuality:**

We believe in and promote traditional Judeo-Christian views of sexuality and marriage. Men and women are created by God with different biological sexual identities and each person should embrace their God-given gender assignment. We believe romantic, sexual interaction is a powerful and beautiful creation of God. However, sexual acts are bound only to those who are joined in marriage. Any sexual acts (heterosexual or homosexual) that are not within the covenant relationship of husband and wife are outside of the ways of God and not permissible for those living in the family of God.

We hold that marriage is an establishment created by God and is only between a man and a woman. A marriage is meant to honor God and bring two lives together for a lifetime partnership of love, joy, and service. A marital union is not only bound together by love and commitment to one another, but is also bound together by God himself. Therefore, the marital covenant is never meant to be broken in this life (see Matthew 19:1-12). We encourage our members with struggling marriages to seek support, encouragement, prayer, and help to strengthen, counsel, and heal their relationships. For various reasons, many faithful Christians have suffered or are suffering through the brokenness of divorce. We support and love and our members who have experienced this heartache.

We believe that singleness is also a good and godly way to live. (Consider that Jesus, Paul, Phoebe, and many other influential men and women of God were all single!) Those who live a single lifestyle, whether for a season or for life, are called to a special, focused devotion to the Lord. The choice to remain unmarried can have an amazing impact when one's hopes are set on serving God and making oneself available for his calling. Jesus himself said, "Some choose not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can" (Matthew 19:12, NLT). Living a single life in the Lord, whether for a season or for a lifetime, can be full of purpose, happiness and contentment. (See also 1 Corinthians 7:1-17. 25-40.)

While we hold strongly to the standards and definitions that God has given to us regarding marriage and sex, we also recognize that the church is comprised of people who have once lived outside of God's standards. Every one of us has been tempted and swayed to think about sex in ungodly ways. We may live with scars from our past, and may still face temptations to return to our destructive understandings of sex, sexuality, and relationship. We understand that everyone carries some degree of brokenness, and we all need continual healing and guidance in our areas of weakness. While we know that Christ's church must be a holy temple, we also believe that Christ desires the church to be a place of compassion and connection. We are committed to love and embrace anyone with any past who is looking for love, acceptance, and healing, and who humbly desires to embrace the ways of Christ.

*Gen. 2:24, Mark 10:1-10, Eph. 5:3, 1 Cor. 7:1-10, 1 Cor. 7:39*

### **About the Roles of Men and Women:**

We believe that both men and women are equals as image bearers of God. God created men and women to complement one another in our reflection of the masculinity and femininity of His divine nature. We believe that we should also surrender to the Lord's authority over creation and embrace His designation of our God-given gender. We believe that a Christ-centered marriage should embrace this beautiful complementary relationship.

We also believe that there are certain roles in the church that are to be embraced in light of this complementary design. For example, the role of elder is a male role (see Titus 1:6, 1 Timothy 3:1-7).

We believe that women should be influential and have leadership roles in the congregation. The New Testament affirms that women prophesied and prayed in first-century congregations (see 1 Cor. 11, Acts 21:8-9). We do not believe that women in modern churches today are bound to the social standards of first-century communities. Not all of Paul's direction was meant to be embraced for all social contexts for all times. In general, the GWC embraces the complementary nature of genders given to us through the divine will of God. We desire to create a diverse team of spiritual leaders, both men and women, to help guide the direction of the church.

Please see the article by Carol Swain that communicates a more in-depth understanding of implementing complementarianism in the roles of church leadership and family development.

### **About Christian Unity and Partnership:**

Christ desires unity among all Christians (John 17:20-22). He prayed most earnestly for unity in the church just before his death, knowing that disunity and dissension would be one of the biggest threats against the work of the church. And He was right in His concern! Christian church history is notorious for division and disunity. Our splintered reality of denominations, nondenominational churches, culturally secluded churches, and the churches who "don't like church" has presented us with quite a dilemma in how to promote Christian unity.

While we (the GWC) do not have the answer to how to bring all Christians in the world together, we do want to do our best to promote a faithful gospel message and humble spirit of Christian unity. Our aim is to build and grow as a nondenominational congregation (a part of the body of Christ) that fosters fellowship with all other Christians. While our closest partnerships in mission efforts will naturally be within our historic relational context, we hope that God will continue to connect our congregation with more Christian partners who have the same desire for unity. We desire to serve as bridge-builders to other churches and organizations that share similar core doctrines and principles.

John 17:20-22, Phil. 1:3-6.

### **About Greater Wilmington Church Membership:**

Everyone placing membership in the GWC, choosing to partner with this congregation under the shepherding of its leadership, is a baptized believer who affirms the following:

- 1) Jesus is Lord of my life. I surrender to following Jesus in mind, heart, and action. I believe that He is the Christ, the anointed one of God, who came to the earth to provide us with the only way to receive eternal life with our heavenly Father. *(Luke 9:23-26, John 14:6)*
- 2) The Bible is the standard of my life in Christ. I submit to the standard of the Word and welcome input into my life in how to follow the Bible faithfully. *(2 Tim. 3:16-17)*
- 3) As we strive to faithfully carry on the biblical, Christian message of salvation, I believe that one must believe in Jesus, repent of sin, and be baptized into Christ in order to receive the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal salvation. *(Acts 2:36-39)*
- 4) The church is my family in Christ. I am devoted to the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer with my brothers and sisters in Christ. I am committed to attending and participating in the meetings of the body (ex. Sunday worship, midweek services, Growth Group gatherings) as a giving and loving member of the family. *(Acts 2:42-47, Ro. 12:10)*
- 5) As a member of the Greater Wilmington Church, I realize the importance of having close relationships. I will strive to develop some deep friendships with several trusted Christians who will know the “real” me. I will be open, honest, and humbly listen to those who try to help me in the Lord. I will be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. *(Col. 3:16, Heb. 10:24-25, James 5:16, Eph. 4:2, James 1:19-20)*
- 6) As a member of God’s household, I am committed to working out conflict in the church in a respectful and biblical way. *(Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Thess. 5:15, Eph. 4:32)*
- 7) As a member of the family of believers, I will hold to God’s standard of courtship and marriage: Courtship with absolute purity and only with an equally yoked person in faith, beliefs, and biblical convictions. Marriage for life, characterized by faithfulness, unselfish love, and respect. *(2 Cor. 6:14-18, 1 Cor. 7:39, Eph. 5:3)*
- 8) I am devoted to giving my firstfruits as an act of worship to God. I will give of my talents, efforts, and finances. *(Matt. 6:25-34, Matt. 23:24, 2 Cor. 9:6-15, Mal. 3:6-12)*
- 9) As a disciple of Christ I am faithfully committed to carrying out the great commission of Christ. I will continue to learn, grow and step out of my comfort zone as I share my faith with others in hopes of leading them to Christ and helping them grow in their faith. *(Matt. 28:18-20)*
- 10) As a member of the Greater Wilmington Church, I am supportive of the leadership of the church as the leadership follows Christ. In peripheral matters of planning and organization I will be helpful in communicating needs in the church while also submitting to the decisions made that will best benefit the entire congregation. *(Heb. 13:7, 17)*

### **Statement of Partnerships**

The Greater Wilmington Church is a nondenominational congregation that works most closely with partnerships that share some of our historic relational connections. Our roots stem from a vision of Christian unity that was born in the Stone-Campbell Restoration movement of the 19th century. (See [this link](#) for more information on the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.) While we partner most closely with other local churches who share roots in this movement, we also pray with, encourage, and support the work of many others in the fellowship of believers who are striving to bring the light of Jesus to our city.



## Outlining the GWC's view of Biblical Roles in the Church

### Local Church Leadership

We believe that every soul stands on equal footing before the cross. We are all in desperate need of salvation and only receive our holiness as a gift from being cleansed by the blood of Jesus. We also believe that God expects the church to appoint and recognize proven and spiritually qualified leaders to serve in shepherding and leading in Christ's church. God has always chosen to work through and with imperfect people to serve in leadership roles. Godly leadership is meant to help teach, equip, mature, and protect the church.

Paul outlines some of the leadership roles in the church in Ephesians 4:11-13:

"So Christ himself gave the **apostles**, the **prophets**, the **evangelists**, the **pastors and teachers**, to equip his people for 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."

**Apostles:** While the apostle (messenger) role will always be needed to spread the good news of Christ, we believe that the office of Apostle is reserved only for those appointed by Jesus Christ himself to serve in the beginning stages of the church. The Apostles appointed by Jesus were given special authority as the church was in its infant stages. We do not believe that this office continued on past the time of the first-century Apostles. The authority of the Apostles does continue in the church today as we have the teachings of the Apostles given to us in the New Testament.

**Prophets:** Again, prophecy and prophetic preaching will always be needed among the people of God in the sense that men and women need to be voices that speak for the Lord. However, the recognized office of Prophet is one that is unique to a divine calling from the Lord. While we can seek to be prophetic, we cannot aspire to become Prophets. This office is reserved only for those whom God Himself appoints. We in the GWC do not seek to recognize Prophets in this age of the New Testament church. We leave the raising up and recognition of Prophet to the work of the Lord.

**Evangelist:** In the New Testament church, the evangelist was a preacher who traveled to proclaim the gospel and plant new churches. He would appoint spiritually qualified people to serve to shepherd the local church and help it mature and grow, and then he would usually travel to preach in another city. The evangelist role is still needed today. The church should continue to train, recognize, and appoint evangelists to help spread the gospel message and plant new churches.

**Pastors / Elders / Shepherds:** In the New Testament, the pastor, elder, or shepherd role was filled by spiritually qualified men who would oversee and shepherd the church. They were focused on building up the local congregation—helping it to become spiritually mature and protecting it from false teaching and waywardness. This role is vital in the health of the church today. The GWC holds that this role should continue to be filled by spiritually qualified men

who are recognized and affirmed by the congregation. In the GWC we have staff members who fill a pastor's role by committing to a full-time employment and focusing on leading and shepherding the church. We also recognize elders as part of the shepherding team; elders may or not serve on the staff, but are actively involved in the leading and oversight of the church. We do not believe that shepherding in the church is limited only to the role of elder. The role of shepherding or ministering to the needs of the church needs to be filled by many men and women in the congregation. Apart from the official office of elder, we recognize men and women in shepherding roles in the church. Some examples are ministry staff, growth group leaders, and spiritual counselors and mentors.

**Teachers:** It could be argued that "teacher" is not a distinct office, but is a role that the shepherds of the church are meant to fulfill. This understanding is accurate if we take the phrase "pastors and teachers" together—as a multi-word description for the same role: a pastor who teaches (Ephesians 4:11). No matter how Paul intended us to understand the term "teacher, we believe the need for biblical teaching in the church is of utmost importance. The GWC is committed to equipping, acknowledging, and encouraging its members to be ready and willing to teach.

**Other roles:** There are certainly other leadership and service roles in the church that are not outlined in this one passage. Paul did not intend to provide a comprehensive description of church governance in Ephesians 4. He simply outlined the necessity for spiritual leadership in the family of God. **Deacons, or servants** (1 Tim. 3:8-13), are called to fill a myriad of leadership roles in the church, ranging from worship, administration, and organizing benevolent efforts.