

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.

*"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:

FEB. 2023

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 absorb. While divine doctrines often surpass our human capacity of understanding, we also rest assured that God has given us much more than we need to live with a firm foundation of faith. 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. We believe that 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 believe that we honor Christ when we joyfully follow and support the leadership of the shepherds and stewards of the church as they follow Christ (Hebrews 13:17).

In the hopes of cultivating a shared vision within this Christian 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, 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 man-kind 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 mankind free-will, for without free-will no true relationship could ever exist. Mankind 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. Jesus, is also understood to be God, who himself chose to be with 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 God's people to heaven forever. 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 men 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 called "sin." This 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. We all need saving from sin. God wants to save you. He wants to protect you and love you. He wants you 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 everyone on earth accept His gift of salvation. Self-improvement or just doing good things can never cover or erase our sins – which is why Jesus came to earth. Only through obedient trust of what Jesus has done on the cross can forgiveness be obtained. Jesus Christ is the one and only hope for salvation and life in this life and after our physical death.

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 an individual's faith responding to the *good news* of Jesus and is repeatedly commanded in the New Testament. For believers who understand that only the blood of Jesus can wash away sins, it is the seminal point where faith, a decision, and action come together to add someone to the Church. We believe that Christian baptism is not merely a symbolic gesture but rather an experience of spiritual rebirth. Our burial in water unites us with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and declares that our sins have been forgiven and our new life has begun. We believe that an individual must choose for themselves to be baptized. A candidate for Christian baptism is someone who has become a disciple of Christ - one who has come to a faith and belief in Jesus and has repented of sins, surrendering their whole lives unto the Lordship of Christ.

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

Matthew 3:16; 28:19-20; Romans 6:1-8; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:3-5; Acts 2:38; 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 glorifying God through worship, serving others, providing a community of believers and seeking others who are lost in life. Jesus Christ is the authority and "head" of the church who follows and submits 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:

If we are not careful, the totality of church life becomes one hour each week that is labeled as "worship," when in fact worship is so much more. Worship is central to a relationship with God. Not only do we worship individually throughout the week one-on-one with God, but we also worship as a community of believers each Sunday. A continual worshipful mindset is one that will lead you to a completely new level in your walk with the Lord. Each Sunday is a chance

when we can spend time together worshiping as a full community of believers. When we get 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 also committed to using methods and worship formats that will glorify God and draw the hearts of the worshipers into the presence of God as well as encourage one another. We desire worship that is Christ-centered, community-building, and Spirit-led, engaging us in life-changing encounters with God. Worship refocuses our lives and drives all the ministries through which we endeavor to honor God and serve others.

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. We will live forever either separated from God by sin or 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 be in God's presence for eternity is Heaven. Knowing these realities, we desire to use every available resource to draw people to God and the blessing of eternal life. The Bible exists to draw you, and all of us, to God. Some passages you will want to read are:

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 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 sexual 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 firmly that marriage is an establishment created by God himself that is only between a man and a woman. A marriage is bound together not only by a love and commitment to one another, but we believe that a marital union is bound together by God, himself. Therefore, the marital covenant is never meant to be broken in this life.

We believe that singleness is also a good and godly way to live. Those who live single are called to a special, focused devotion to the Lord. The faithfully single man or woman does not experience the romantic and sexual human relationship with a spouse, but has the treasure of a singularly focused devotion to the Lord. Let's face it... married couples raising children have many practical responsibilities that a single person does not have to juggle. This choice of life can have an amazing impact if one's hopes are set on being a servant to God and making oneself available for his calling. While Christian marriage is a great and godly ambition, so also, living a single life in the Lord can be full of purpose, happiness and contentment.

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. We are a people who live with scars of the past and still face temptations to return to our destructive understandings of sex and sexuality. Tragically, so many today have suffered and are suffering through the brokenness of a failed marriage. Everyone of us have been tempted and swayed to think about sex in ungodly ways. We understand that everyone carries some degree of brokenness. While we know that Christ's church must be a holy temple, we also believe that Christ desires that the church be a place of compassion and connection for the wayward sinner. We are committed to love and embrace anyone with any past, who is looking for love, acceptance and 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 co-equals as image bearers of God. We believe that God created both men and women to compliment one another in our reflection of the masculinity and femininity of the divine nature of God. 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 complimentary nature of humanity. We also believe that there are certain roles in the church that are to be embraced with this same complimentary design. While the role of elder is a male role, it certainly does not exclude women from leadership within the church. We believe that women should be influential and have leadership roles in the congregation. The New Testament affirms that women prophesied and prayed in the congregation (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 complimentary nature of genders given to us through the divine will of God. We desire to create a team of spiritual and diverse leaders of men and women to help guide the direction of the church. We also adhere to the male role of eldership in the congregation.

(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, boy, He was right in His concern! Christian church history is notorious for division and disunity. Our splintered reality of denominations, non-denominations, culturally secluded churches, and the churches who "don't like church" has presented us with quite a dilemma in what to do 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 Christian unity. Our aim is to build and grow as a non-denominational congregation (a *part* of the body of Christ) that fosters fellowship with all other Christians. While we understand that 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 that have the same desire for unity. We desire to serve as Bridge-Builders to other Christian 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 affirm 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 Groups) as a giving, and loving member of the family. (*Acts 2:42-47 / Romans 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 / Hebs. 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 Thes. 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, with faithfulness, unselfish love and respect. (*2 Cor. 6:14-18 / 1 Cor. 7:39 / Eph. 5:3*)

8) I am devoted to giving my first-fruits 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 with hopes of leading others to Christ and helping others 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. (*Hebs. 13:7 / 17*)

Statement of Partnerships

The Greater Wilmington Church is a non-denominational congregation that works most closely with partnerships through our historic relational connections. Our historic roots and stem from a vision of Christian unity that was spawned in the Stone-Campbell Restoration movement of the 19th century. (see Wikipedia link for more info on the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement) While we partner most naturally with other local churches that stem from this movement, we also pray with, encourage, and support the work of so many others in the fellowship of believers striving to bring the light of Jesus to this city. Regionally, the GWC is currently working most closely with the Carolina's / East Georgia Partnership Group that has connections with the International Churches of Christ. While the GWC (and some other churches in this partnership group) are not officially "ICOC" churches (with representation in the ICOC delegate system), we do work in *relational* partnership within this group to support global missions and regional events. We are thrilled to have such a strong working relationship within this group that is based upon loving relationships and a shared purpose and not bound by denominational inclusion. While we naturally work within our historic relationship framework, we also have a passion for building bridges and promoting Christian unity. We sincerely hope and pray that the Lord will lead us to more and more strong local, regional and global partnerships within His Kingdom!

*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restoration_Movement

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

Local Church Leadership

We believe that every soul stands on equal footing at the feet of Jesus on the cross. We are all in desperate need of salvation and only receive our holiness as a gift from being cleansed with 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. This service 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 scripture.

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 for those that only 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 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. This role certainly continues to be a need 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 role was filled through 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 certainly vital in the health of the church today. The GWC holds that this role continue to be one 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 committing to a full-time employment and focus on leading and shepherding the church. We also recognize Elders as part of the shepherding team who 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: Arguably, this is not a separate office, but a role that is included for the Shepherds of the church... taken together as "pastors and teachers." No matter how Paul intended this to be applied, the need for Biblical teaching in the church is of utmost importance. The GWC is committed to equipping, acknowledging, and encouraging more and more of 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 outlines 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.