

**VINE
AND
BRANCH**
**COMMUNITY
— CHURCH —**



**MEMBER
CONFESSION**

Rev 8/27/24

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Our Core Values

At Vine and Branch Community Church, we are a local gathering of the universal church that is unified around the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His mission of making disciples of the nations. Together, we strive to follow God’s Word and imitate the life and example set forth for us in Jesus. We find unity and encouragement in holding to three core values and expressing them through the way we live together:

Core values

Supremacy of Jesus Christ
Authority of the Word
Redemptive Community

Expression of our values

Living out Generous Grace
Harmony in the Absolutes
Intentional Discipleship

We are Reformed

Because we believe in the authority of The Word, we trace our theological roots to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. The reformers mounted a great effort to return to the teaching of Scripture alone as authoritative over all other sources of knowledge, wisdom, and traditions of men. Because of this, our beliefs and practices emphasize supreme importance of preaching and teaching the Bible, the sovereignty of God in salvation, the sinfulness of human nature, personal conversion, and congregational worship. We recognize baptism and communion as the vital and only ordinances of the Christian faith.

We affirm the “Five Solas,” which are useful, Latin-language, shorthand phrases that summarize the key beliefs of the Protestant Reformation. These solas are:

1. **Sola Scriptura:** Scripture Alone (*2 Tim 3:16-17, 1689 Ch. 1:1,6*)
2. **Sola Fide:** Faith Alone (*Rom 3:28, 1689 Ch. 11:1*)
3. **Sola Gratia:** Grace Alone (*Eph 2:8-9, 1689 Ch. 10:2*)
4. **Sola Christus:** Christ Alone
(*John 14:6, 1689 Ch. 8:1,9*)
5. **Sola Deo Gloria:** Glory to God Alone
(*1 Cor 10:31, 1689 Ch. 23:4, Ch. 4:3*)

These Five Solas express our commitment to biblical truth and our dependence on God’s grace for our salvation. Overall, as a reformed church, we are dedicated to living out and proclaiming the truths of the Gospel as revealed in the Scriptures and passed down through the Reformed tradition.

We are Confessional

We affirm the 1689 Confession, also known as the Second London Confession or Baptist Confession of Faith. This historic confession of faith serves as an important theological guidepost, providing a Biblical, comprehensive, and historically grounded framework for our beliefs, convictions, and practices. It helps shape our understanding of essential doctrines, the authority of Scripture, the regulative principle of worship, the holiness of the Lord's Day, and the significance of the ordinances. By adhering to this confession, we honor the rich heritage of the Reformed tradition as it points to faithfully upholding the timeless truths of God's Word in our life together as a church community.

We Adhere to Biblical Leadership

Our Chief-Shepherd is Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:4; 1689 Ch. 26:4,8), and our plurality of elders serve as under-shepherds in the manner of the early church and serves the body with their various giftings. It is our conviction that this plurality is the biblical standard; and to be a “lone chief” atop a pyramid tends to lead to corruption. Elders are mature men chosen to lead and operate as examples to the church according to the guidelines in 1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4, and Acts 20:28. Deacons, in like manner, use their gifts to serve the church body in tangible ways, assisting the elders by coordinating, organizing, and facilitating; exemplifying a culture of intentional service and unity through word and action.

We are Building Christ's Kingdom

Growing Godly Culture

God's plan for humanity is to order, organize, tend, and fill the earth with His image bearers. He lays out this plan in the Dominion Mandate in Genesis 1:28, and Christ restates it in the Great Commission (Mat 28:16-20). From the very beginning, it was God's will and desire to share dominion of the planet with mankind. So, God blessed Adam and Eve, directing them to industry, multiplication, fruitfulness, and exercising dominion over creation (Gen 1:27-28; 2:15).

At the heart of the Christian Faith lies the profound and life giving truth that God came in the person of Jesus Christ and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He lived a sinless life, died for our sins according to the Scriptures; he was buried and rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3, 4). He ascended into heaven; and will return to judge the living and the dead.

While all Christians share the belief in Jesus' return, there are varying understandings regarding the events surrounding Christ's return – both in nature and timing. As a church we emphasize, and publicly teach, the absolute and unifying elements of Christ's return and the full establishment of His Kingdom, while expressing charity to one another in differing viewpoints of secondary importance.

We believe that Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth in his first coming (Mat 4:17), He sovereignly rules from Heaven (1 Pet 3:22), and His reign presently encompasses all of creation (Col 1:15-18). We believe that His kingdom is not, in nature or origin, like the fallen kingdoms of the earth (John 18:36-37), and because Jesus stated that all authority has been given to Him (Mat 28:18), He is currently the one true King over all (1 Tim 6:15, Rev 19:16). And while Christ rules over all, he does not presently rule like He will rule one day when he returns bodily, establishes His physical throne in our presence, and secures complete dominion and rule on earth as He rules in heaven.

In the meantime, we teach that all believers should strive to live out His sovereign rule in a way that reflects the reality of the Kingdom of God as it presently exists, and of which we have been made part. We do this by resting in and celebrating Christ's rule over sin and death, obeying his commands, staying on mission to disciple the nations, teaching everyone to obey His commands (Mat 28:19-20), and participation in – and joyful anticipation of – the full and complete establishment of His physical rule forever.

We believe that Christianity is much more than a private, personal religious experience and that all men in all times are required to obey and proclaim Him (Mat 10:33, 28:20). When lived out, Christ's attributes have a Kingdom-building effect on the life of the believer, family, community, state, nation, and world. Efforts to this end will start locally and move outward, like ripples on the ocean. God promises ultimate success in this great task, to the point where “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:9; 1689 Ch. 32:2). To that end we as believers are instructed to gather in family-like communities as local churches, such as ours; and expect that our prayer, “Your Kingdom to come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven” will be fulfilled in and through us as we actively and fruitfully wait for His return.

We believe that God has providentially placed and equipped us, according to His will, on earth to accomplish the works He has established for us (Eph 2:8-10; 1 Cor 12:12-26). To these ends, our discipleship focus is on the local area we reside; equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God unto maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13). Additionally, we

invest in missions around the world, assisting them in their efforts of equipping, evangelism, and discipleship.

Altogether, every local church is a part of the Holy Universal church, where Christ dwells (Mat 18:20). We recognize it is the Holy Spirit alone who calls people to himself, doing in their hearts the work that cannot be done by any convincing argument (Eph 2:8-9, 1689 Ch.10). We believe that the church is Christ's physical agent on the earth (Eph 1:22-23). Because of this, we believe that it is necessary to follow His spiritual work, operating as His "hands and feet" (Rom 12:4-5); We strive to faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, practice the ordinances of baptism and communion, lovingly practice church discipline, ordain and install Godly leadership, worship Him, and suffer for his sake.

As a church, our focus is placed squarely on discipleship (Mat 28:19). The elders aim to equip the church to do this, and every member from old to young shares in this great task. Our primary responsibility as shepherds of the church is to labor towards increasing the depth of spiritual maturation of the church (Colossians 1:8; 2:6-7), while trusting God and celebrating growth when He increases the breadth – the population of our church (Acts 2:47). We have experienced the fruit and blessings that come from intentionally obeying Jesus' commands in this manner. By the Lord's power, we are witnessing the growth and development of a mature Christian culture that is resistant to being blown about by every wind of doctrine (Heb 5:14, Eph 4:13-14), and continues to increase the reign of Christ on the earth.

Therefore, we purpose to maintain family and personal devotion to the Lord (Mat 22:37); to train our children according to the Word of God (Eph 6:4); to seek the salvation of our family and neighbors (Matt. 28:19); to be just in our dealings (James 2:8), faithful in our engagements (Gal 5:22-23), and exemplary in our conduct (2 Pet. 3:11). To abstain from all activities, habits, and lifestyles that dishonor our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10:31), cause stumbling to a fellow believer (Rom 14), or hinder the gospel witness. To be zealous in our efforts to advance the cause of Christ our Savior (Jude 1:3), and to give Him preeminence and supremacy in all things. (Col 1:15-20)

Family Discipleship

Within this global body of Christ, we believe that households function as the first, the most foundational, and primary means of individual discipleship (Deut 6:6-7, Prov 22:6). By God's design, families are the ideal environment for forging Christlike adults and form the foundation for all societies. Because of this, we believe that raising, strengthening, and maintaining Christian families is crucial to achieving the Dominion Mandate and the Great Commission. Since the Christian family ideal is not yet a

universal reality, our labors must include building up those who have not had the benefit of a Biblical upbringing (Luke 19:10).

Our church is uniquely aimed at building Christ's Kingdom by building strong family teams to live out their intended responsibilities and roles. These family teams include unmarried men and women, who have the same call to build Christ's Kingdom (1 Cor 7).

Because of the critical importance of the family, it has great power to affect the future. Because of the fall, families can bring great evil and suffering into the world through inaction or wrong action; but by the redemptive power of Christ, rightly ordered families are potent tools to fulfill God's mission; increasing peace, righteousness, and justice through the spreading of the Gospel (Is 9:6-7).

“We must have a special eye upon families, to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed. The life of religion, and the welfare and glory of both the Church and the State, depend much on family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all.”

-The Reformed Pastor, Richard Baxter, 1829

Building God's family: Men

God the Father has purposefully, in His wisdom, set up the universe to operate according to His divine order of role and responsibility.

Within this design, men are specifically created and appointed by God to lead in the church, society, and households. Within marriage, the husband's service is to function as leader, representative, and practical manager (1 Tim 3:4). They are responsible for the mission, spiritual leadership, provision, and protection, of their wives and children. Because of this, our church does not rely on the elders to organize or facilitate programs such as youth groups or women's bible studies, which tend to usurp men's roles or allow them to abdicate their duties before God. Practically, this means that programs, events, or studies are initiated by the heads of households, and guided within the safety net and theological oversight of the elders.

Young and/or unmarried men do not have an excuse for living a self-centered existence. The unique flexibility and abilities men possess outside of marriage are tools for building the Kingdom. Therefore, whether young, old, single, married, or divorced; men are particularly called to fulfill God's design and purpose in society, church community, and families. To this end, elders aim to equip and encourage all men to joyfully and effectively embrace their Scriptural responsibilities. These include

deepening their walk with Jesus Christ; investing in their church community, being respected in society, staying sexually pure, seeking marriage when appropriate, treating their fellow church members as siblings (1 Tim 5:2), tending to their work with excellence, protecting the weak, providing for those in their care, honoring those over them in the LORD, and intentionally leading within their sphere of influence.

Building God's family: Women

Likewise, in God's perfect design, women are specifically created and appointed by God to nurture, glorify, and beautify. Within marriage, wives are instructed and encouraged to joyfully embrace their responsibilities as completer, helper, companion, and supporter of their husbands. Women are also encouraged to make distinct and vital contributions in the church and local community by building and maintaining a godly household. This includes nurturing and instructing their children, developing and maintaining home industry (Gen 2:18, Prov 31), providing hospitality, enhancing and improving their surroundings, teaching children and each other, and serving those in need within the larger church body (Titus 2:3-5).

Young and/or unmarried woman do not have an excuse for living a self-centered existence. The unique flexibility and ability women have outside of marriage are tools for building the Kingdom. Therefore, whether young, old, single, married or divorced - women are particularly called to fulfill God's design and purpose in society, church community, and families.

To this end, the elders aim to foster an environment of family and multi-generational discipleship to enhance and amplify the unique gifts women provide.

All women are encouraged to joyfully and contentedly embrace their God-given responsibilities as prescribed by God's Word. These include deepening their walk with Jesus Christ; investing in their church community, staying sexually pure, seeking marriage when appropriate, treating their fellow church members as siblings (1 Tim 5:2), to be rich in good works (1 Tim 2:10), and to adorn themselves with imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Pet 3:4)



How We Do Corporate Worship

As a congregation, we worship the Lord in spirit and truth through thoughtful consideration and presentation of music, songs, readings, and prayers (John 4:24). Our goal is to be the kind of worshipers that the Lord seeks, and to create an environment that encourages our church family to engage fully in worshiping God with their mind, emotion, will, and heart (1 Cor 14:15).

True worship is centered in God's truth, as revealed in His Word. We believe that through His Word, we come to know and understand God, His redemptive works, and how He should be worshiped. This solid foundation allows us to respond to God from the depths of our hearts and minds; esteeming, valuing, treasuring, and finding satisfaction in Him.

In our worship practices, we seek to follow the teaching and principles as taught in Scripture by which God directs mankind in proper worship of Himself (1689 Ch. 22). We aim to maintain the purity and simplicity of worship, and exclude any aspects of worship that are not in alignment with the Bible. Additionally, we take seriously the call to raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4), so children remain in worship and teaching with the adults.

In our weekly gatherings we engage in teaching the Word, emphasizing God's truth, and responding to the Word through singing, collective prayer and liturgical readings. Our weekly service is a model and reminder to actively listen, respond, and live out God's truth in our day-to-day lives.

We Strive for Harmony in the Absolutes

We hold to a generous and genuine orthodoxy and believe that all Christians should be able to have fellowship with any individual or denomination within Christendom that adheres to the core absolutes of the faith.

"Absolutes" refer to the fundamental tenets of Christianity; the primary points that make up our doctrinal belief statement. Simply put: these are what one must believe and actively hold to be a Christian (Apostles Creed, 1689 Ch. 1-8). We aim to believe, live out, and function in unity around these truths. There are many convictions and preferences that various denominations and individuals can hold and not be in sin. Some examples would be credo vs. pedobaptism, God's sovereignty in salvation, worship style, view of eschatology, etc. As a church we seek to focus on harmony in the absolutes, while clearly stating our convictions for the purpose of unity in our daily interactions.

Additionally, absolutes include any clear directive in the Scripture condemning particular behaviors as sin (i.e. murder, abortion, theft, sexual sin, sexual deviancy, bitterness, malice, etc). The ditch on the “liberal” side of Christianity is where God's absolutes are demoted into mere convictions or preferences. On the other side, the “conservative” ditch is where man's convictions, preferences etc. are promoted to absolutes (as in the example provided by the Pharisees.)

Everything outside biblical absolutes are considered to be secondary or tertiary issues, and we believe that these things should not result in disunity nor take up large or primary portions of public teaching. When secondary issues cause division, we believe that it is a side-effect of not “keeping the main thing the main thing.”

Our Community Convictions

We recognize that we should be able to fellowship generally with those in the universal church who hold to the core tenets of the faith. We also believe that in order to create harmony in a local fellowship, holding to clearly defined convictions will fortify our unity, focus our efforts, strengthen our bonds, and deepen our partnership in the Gospel.

While we do not believe the following convictions are necessary for salvation, we hold to them deeply and they significantly influence the culture and leadership focus of our church. These corporately held convictions create unity and like-mindedness in the body. This list is not exhaustive, as many of our convictions are also communicated in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.

- **God's sovereignty in salvation:** God in His infinite wisdom and grace orchestrates and ensures the redemption of His people according to His divine plan and purpose.
- **Shared leadership structure among the overseers/elders:** The clearest description of leadership in the local church is a plurality of qualified men appointed to shepherd each local church (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5, James 5:14).
- **Believers' baptism:** V&B practices credobaptism, meaning we baptizing individuals who have made a conscious profession of faith in Jesus Christ as savior and LORD.
- **Believers' communion:** Our communion practices are open to all who proclaim Christ as Lord, and have made a profession of faith in Him.
- **Family discipleship:** We invest great energy and discipleship effort toward Christ-like male leadership in the home, and the husband/father serving as the primary spiritual influence. We therefore put heavy emphasis on family discipleship, family integrated worship, multi-generational ministries, and intentional programming aimed at equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12).

- **Unified eschatological focus:** Despite the diversity of eschatological views, we place our emphasis on the unifying truths that most orthodox Christians hold in common:
 - Jesus Christ will return to the earth to rule physically on earth
 - There will be a resurrection of the dead to life
 - There will be a final judgment where God will judge all people and their works
 - All true Christians will exist with Christ Jesus in an eternal state where He rules as King and is worshiped and glorified
 - There will be a new age where God will restore the heavens and earth to a perfect condition and will live with His people forever in harmony and friendship
 - Christians joyfully await the consummation of Christ and have a genuine hope in Christ's assured victory
- **Intentional church membership:** Salvation is the result of being IN CHRIST; we are placed IN his Body. Col 3:3 states, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Therefore, when we are placed IN his body (the Church) with other saved ones as members of the body of Christ, we become working, functional appendages, fit for specific purposes and works (Eph 2:8-10). Therefore, placement into the universal (unseen) church has local (seen) outcomes.

Our Commitment to the Body of Christ

We believe that it is vital for Christians to know what they believe and why they believe it. It is therefore imperative that the church leaders clearly communicate the essential elements of the faith and how they intend to apply those truths to their leadership, daily lives, and to living as a church family. That is one of the primary purposes of this document.

1 Corinthians 12:14 states, "For the body does not consist of one member but of many." The word member refers to an organic connection to a living organism, not a club association. When we use the phrase, "member of church" we are intending this meaning as described in the Bible. We therefore define membership as "An organic and formal connection to a local, tangible, body of Christ where it is openly determined and stated, 'I am committed and submitted to following Jesus with this particular group of people in the way we have corporately agreed.'" (1689 Ch.26:6)

We believe that the concept of church membership is taught explicitly in Scripture through four practical precedents set forth in various passages of the Bible:

1. **The Precedent of Identification** (1 Cor 5:12-13): Paul identifies those “inside and outside the church” and expected that the distinction was clear enough that the Corinthians could judge the difference. Additionally, in these passages, Paul communicates that if those “inside the church” are habitually acting or living like those “outside the church” and refuse to repent, then the church should respond to them accordingly. It is clear that Paul’s readers understood the distinction between who was a follower of Christ and who wasn’t, and were able to clearly identify those inside and those outside of the church.
2. **The Precedent of Leadership** (1 Pet 5; Heb 13:17, 1689 Ch. 26:8-10): Pastors and elders of Christ’s Church are exhorted to shepherd the flock that is among them, and to willingly exercise oversight. They are called to this great and glorious occupation as those responsible for the souls of people. It is clear that the leaders are tasked to care for a local people “among them” and not universally responsible for all Christians everywhere. Therefore, it is implied in these passages that the church shepherds are able to identify the specific people in their flock and those for whom they will one day provide account.
3. **The Precedent of Followers** (Acts 20:28, 1 Thes 5:12, Heb 13:17): Each of these passages were written to, or included descriptions of, various churches in different locations. In each case, the members of the church were able to identify those who served over them as leaders, and were exhorted to submit, honor, and obey them. The believers were to be “among” the leaders who would serve and give account for them, and to honor and follow those particular leaders as directed by Scripture.
4. **The Precedent of Accountability & Discipline** (Rom 12:4-5, 1 Peter 2:9-12, Matt 18:15, 1 Cor 5:12, 1689 Ch. 26:7, 12-14): When we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus we become members of His church, the body of Christ. As part of Christ’s body, we also transformed into “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that we might proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

As chosen people, we are a community set apart (holy) to be like Him. And in striving to be like God, we bring Him glory by putting His attributes on display through our words, deeds, and actions. This is a far greater calling than simply belonging to a club, fraternity, or adhering to legalistic standards. It is the invitation and command of a holy, loving, generous, Heavenly Father who calls us to embrace His character and represent Him as grateful, loving, obedient children (1 Tim 3:14-16).

Our Practice of Church Discipline:

Because of our commitment to the glory of God as the body of Christ, we practice both church membership and scriptural church discipline. We do this to proclaim His excellencies (1 Pet 2:9), to protect the church against the spread of sin (1 Cor 5:6), to save those who might go astray (1 Cor 5:5), to maintain genuine fellowship, and to display righteous conduct before outsiders which can cause them to acknowledge God (1 Peter 2:12).

All members, while of sound mind and objective emotion, submit to the authority of God's Word and living out the truth of God's Word together as stated in the specific vision of Vine & Branch Church, described in our three core values, and this document. As such, members on their own accord, agree to submit to accountability and church discipline – to be lovingly pursued by the church and its leaders if they were to ever go astray.

When those who make this commitment lose their way, forget their commitment, or willfully live incongruently with themselves and Christ, they are pursued, as requested, through the redemptive process of church discipline. The goal of church discipline is to restore the person in question to right relationship with Christ, and consequently his church. (Mat 18, 1 Cor 5, 1: Peter 4:8). In this process, members can find safety and assurance in knowing that Christ has instituted a method to rescue their hearts, minds, and souls from God's wrath (James 5:19, 20, Jude 23). In this way, church discipline serves as a tangible expression of shepherding care that characterizes the body of Christ.

Conclusion

All that is described in this document is a statement of our intent to live joyfully, intentionally, worshipfully, and humbly in a manner that reflects the living God as the very center of our life, purpose, and existence (Neh 9:28-39). Together, as a redeemed people, we desire to live in such manner as to express our immense gratitude as loved children of our Heavenly Father, where God's attributes are attractively displayed through our community to those who desperately need Him.

Revelation 21: 3 - “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

1 Peter 2:9-12 – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

1 Timothy 3: 14-16 – “I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of Godliness: ‘He was manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up into glory.’”

Ephesians 5:1-3 – “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The Gospel Summary Song

Robb Besosa & Evy Porter

Deserving wrath,
Justified by grace,
Counted righteousness,
Rejoicing in God,

Dead to sin,
Activated to righteousness,
There is one Gospel,
On which I stand.

