

PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Constitutional Change Recommended by the Constitution Committee

Article IV - ARTICLES OF FAITH AND PRACTICE

<i>Current</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<p data-bbox="165 432 459 464">A. ARTICLES OF FAITH</p> <p data-bbox="191 533 326 564">The Bible</p> <p data-bbox="212 594 784 968">We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the written Word of God, verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, true, reliable, and without error in all it addresses. We believe the Bible has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and transmitted to the present day without corruption of any essential doctrine. The Bible forever remains the unchanging and final authority for faith and living.⁷</p> <p data-bbox="212 1058 784 1125">⁷ Ps. 119:9, 89, 105; Matt. 24:35; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:25; 2 Pet. 1:21</p>	<p data-bbox="831 432 1125 464">A. ARTICLES OF FAITH</p> <p data-bbox="857 533 992 564">The Bible</p> <p data-bbox="878 594 1450 1010">We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the written Word of God, verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, true, reliable, and without error in all it addresses. We believe the Bible has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and transmitted to the present day without any doctrinal corruption. The Bible forever remains the unchanging and final authority for faith and living.⁷</p> <p data-bbox="878 1100 1450 1241">⁷ Ps. 119:9, 89, 105; Matt. 24:35; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:25; 2 Pet. 1:21, See also position paper VIII. Biblical Inerrancy</p>
<p data-bbox="191 1348 521 1379">Humanity (paragraph 2)</p> <p data-bbox="212 1409 784 1858">We believe in the historicity of the first man, Adam, who along with his wife, Eve, were uniquely created by a direct act of God as recorded in Genesis. Made in his image, they are his crowning achievement. Adam and Eve were created without sin for perfect fellowship with God and were commanded to be fruitful and exercise benevolent dominion over the earth. Humankind was created for love of God and neighbor. That love was intended to find expression in every individual and every human institution.</p>	<p data-bbox="857 1348 1187 1379">Humanity (paragraph 2)</p> <p data-bbox="878 1409 1450 1900">We believe in the historicity of the first man, Adam, who along with his wife, Eve, were uniquely created by a direct act of God as recorded in Genesis and not by a process of evolution. Made in his image, they are his crowning achievement. Adam and Eve were created without sin for perfect fellowship with God and were commanded to be fruitful and exercise benevolent dominion over the earth. Humankind was created for love of God and neighbor. That love was intended to find expression in every individual and every human institution.</p>

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ARTICLE XVI – DISTRICT CONFERENCES

<i>Current</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>2. Qualifications</p> <p>c. Ministers shall meet the following denominational qualifications:</p> <p>(1) participation in and completion of a prescribed study of the Missionary Church;</p>	<p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>2. Qualifications</p> <p>c. Ministers shall meet the following denominational qualifications:</p> <p>(1) <i>completion of the Pastor Orientation Course of the Missionary Church;</i></p>
<p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p>a. Candidates for License</p> <p>(2) Procedure</p> <p>(d) Submit a completed Application for Ministerial License Part I to the regional or district director for consideration by their regional or district board.</p> <p>Applicants for the ministry living in an area where there is no Missionary Church shall comply with steps (b) and (d) immediately above.</p> <p>Applicants for the ministry residing outside district conference boundaries may make application to the denominational office with licensing or ordination subject to the approval of the General Oversight Council.</p>	<p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p>a. Candidates for License</p> <p>(2) Procedure</p> <p>(d) Submit a completed Application for Ministerial License Part I to the regional or district director for consideration by their regional or district board.</p>

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<p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">c. Licensed Ministers</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">(2) Procedure</p> <p style="padding-left: 120px;">(a) Applicants must have completed a minimum course of study as approved by the Ministry Leadership Council; and</p>	<p>Editorial Addition of “(See Appendix I)”</p> <p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">c. Licensed Ministers</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">(2) Procedure</p> <p style="padding-left: 120px;">(a) Applicants must have completed a minimum course of study (See Appendix I) as approved by the Ministry Leadership Council; and</p>
<p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">c. Licensed Ministers</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">(3) Renewal</p> <p style="padding-left: 120px;">(b) Confirmation through the annual report that they are pursuing the completion of the ordination study course. The ordination study course must be completed within seven years of service under a ministerial license.</p>	<p>E. MINISTERS</p> <p>3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">c. Licensed Ministers</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">(3) Renewal</p> <p style="padding-left: 120px;">(b) Confirmation through the annual report that they are pursuing the completion of the educational requirements for ordination (See Appendix I). The educational requirements for ordination must be completed within seven years of service under a ministerial license.</p>

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ARTICLE XVI – DISTRICT CONFERENCES

<i>Current</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<p data-bbox="118 401 298 428">E. MINISTERS</p> <p data-bbox="152 474 646 537">3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p data-bbox="199 583 464 611">d. Ordained Ministers</p> <p data-bbox="228 657 428 684">(2) Qualifications</p> <p data-bbox="266 730 730 905">Licensed ministers of the Missionary Church who have an abiding conviction of God's call to be ministers may be ordained as ministers by meeting the following requirements in order:</p> <p data-bbox="266 951 735 1341">(a) Satisfactory service for two years subsequent to completion of the ordination study course, except for those who have been under supervision and in approved ministry during the years spent completing said course of study. At least one of the years must have been in the Missionary Church within the region or district in which they are to be ordained;</p> <p data-bbox="266 1388 721 1451">(b) Completion of the ordination course of studies or its equivalent;</p>	<p data-bbox="789 401 969 428">E. MINISTERS</p> <p data-bbox="823 474 1317 537">3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials</p> <p data-bbox="870 583 1135 611">d. Ordained Ministers</p> <p data-bbox="899 657 1099 684">(2) Qualifications</p> <p data-bbox="937 730 1401 905">Licensed ministers of the Missionary Church who have an abiding conviction of God's call to be ministers may be ordained as ministers by meeting the following requirements in order:</p> <p data-bbox="937 951 1406 1379">(a) Satisfactory service for two years subsequent to completion of the educational requirements for ordination, except for those who have been under supervision and in approved ministry during the years spent completing the educational requirements. At least one of the years must have been in the Missionary Church within the region or district in which they are to be ordained;</p> <p data-bbox="937 1425 1354 1528">(b) Completion of the educational requirements for ordination (See Appendix I);</p>

PROPOSED POSITION PAPER ON HUMAN ORIGINS & GOD’S POWER

Recommended by the Constitution Committee

The Missionary Church is passionately committed to the biblical teaching that God is the Creator of all things (John 1.3).¹ Purely naturalistic views that deny God’s role in creation stand outside the doctrinal fence posts of our denominational family. While individual pastors and churches may hold varying understandings of the specific timeline and processes God employed to accomplish the work described in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we together agree that creation was an act of God, planned and executed by God alone, out of nothing, without any pre-existing material. All of nature was created by him and has no self-organizing capacity apart from Him. As Genesis 1.1 states, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Specifically, the Missionary Church affirms the existence of one historical Adam and one historical Eve, directly and uniquely created by God. This conviction flows not only from the text of Genesis 1-2 itself, but from our commitment to the integrity of the whole fabric of biblical truth. The biblical account of humanity’s fall (Genesis 3), which resulted in our inherited sinful nature, rests upon the existence of a singular historical Adam, as does Paul’s explanation of the “first Adam-second Adam” substitutionary work of Jesus in accomplishing our redemption (Romans 5.12-19). The historicity of the rest of Genesis chapters 1-11—Cain and Abel, Noah, the Flood, the tower of Babel, and all the biblical implications that flow from those accounts – rests upon the historicity of Adam and Eve as described in Genesis 1-2. The existence of a uniquely created Adam and Eve provides integral support to the biblical claim that humanity is uniquely made in God’s image, as distinguished from all other creatures. Further, the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Luke 3 traces Jesus’ lineage through a series of historical individuals beginning with Adam. In short, removing the thread of a uniquely and directly created Adam and Eve causes the whole tapestry of biblical revelation to unravel.

We understand that a primary source of the human origin controversy among Christians is the perceived conflict between science and the biblical account. We assert that there is no ultimate conflict between scientific knowledge and biblical truth, because “all truth is God’s truth.” Science can enable us to see with greater clarity God’s glory in creation. For this reason, scripture encourages us to examine the created order for evidence of God’s invisible attributes (Romans 1.20), as well as His involvement in and with His creation. Apparent conflicts between biblical truth and scientific observation are legitimately worthy of study with a heart for understanding. We also understand that scientific inquiry is limited. For example, scientific methodology cannot prove or disprove the biblical human origins account. The Bible provides that account in the words of the “God who was there” and asks us to accept by faith that His power is sufficient to accomplish whatever His Word declares.

As Christians, we know that many historical events described in the Bible cannot be scientifically observed or explained. Science—anthropology, geology, archeology, etcetera—may corroborate aspects of the biblical record, but we accept by faith many biblical assertions that stand outside the scope of scientific inquiry. For example, we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, even though this historical event cannot be scientifically verified today.

We also believe that we who are in Christ will rise from the dead, complete with new bodies, and that all persons will live forever, either with God or apart from His presence. We believe God performs miracles. These and many other biblical truths cannot be scientifically explained. Therefore, science is a valuable and biblically encouraged tool for investigating reality, but it is not our ultimate source of truth. We are first and foremost people of faith: in God, in His Word, and in His power to do whatever He says He did, is doing, and will do.

¹ As demonstrated by the multiple references to God as Creator in the “Articles of Faith” segment of our Constitution.

ARTICLES OF PRACTICE

draft proposal from the constitution committee **for discussion only**

Introduction

Having declared in our Articles of Faith what we believe, in our Articles of Practice we declare how we should accordingly live. God calls us not only to affirm our core beliefs as the Missionary Church but to embody those truths in Christian community. As Christians, we have been called to “guard the good deposit” (2 Tim. 1:14)—that body of truth God has entrusted to our care (1 Tim. 6:20; Jude 3). Yet God has also called us to “the obedience that comes from faith” (Rom. 1:5).

Such obedience is possible only because God supernaturally produces in us a new manner of life, one governed by his Word and empowered by his Spirit. The Christian life is not a grim pursuit of legalistic righteousness. It is an abundant life in which, led by God’s Spirit, we delight in becoming increasingly conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).

When we are reconciled to God in Christ, we are made a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). As we yield our lives to the loving sovereignty of his Son, God makes every facet of our experience—whether individual or corporate, public or private—an instrument for the exhibition of his glory. Having received the Holy Spirit, we must walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and be continually filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Then our lives will demonstrate, in increasing measure, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), the unmistakable evidence of his indwelling presence.

Being a follower of Christ is more than a matter of belief; it is also a way of life. “Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus lived” (1 John 2:6). God intends us to reflect his character as “imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1). He commands us, “Be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44, 45; 1 Pet. 1:16), and He graciously empowers us to embrace a way of living that displays the image of his Son.

Exercising Personal Faith

God calls us to exercise personal faith. While the Christian life is lived in community— “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body” (1 Cor. 12:13)—we must embrace that life personally. We must respond to the gracious invitation of the gospel individually, turning from sin and embracing God, thus receiving the benefits of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13). Faith in Jesus is how we receive salvation, entering the Christian life and escaping condemnation (Rev. 3:20; John 3:18). Without such faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

To grow to spiritual maturity, every believer must cultivate a relationship with God. We affirm the need for Christians to nurture their faith through Bible reading, prayer, weekly gatherings with other believers, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines. We do not, however, consider such disciplines ends in themselves but rather means by which to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Cultivating Holiness

God calls us to a life of holiness. The Bible commands, “Make every effort . . . to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Since we have been united with Christ by faith, God calls us to follow Jesus (Matt. 5:19), imitating him in our conduct (1 Cor. 11:1) and in the attitude of our minds (Eph. 4:23).

To be holy means to be set apart from sin. We believe as Christians we have already died with Christ. We have been liberated from sin’s dominion and freed to offer ourselves wholly to God (Rom. 6:1-14). Nevertheless, we must continue to put to death sinful attitudes and behaviors (Col. 3:5). We must put off the old self and its corrupt way of life (Eph. 4:22-23). God calls us to flee immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), to resist the devil (James 4:7), and to disdain the enticements of the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16).

Holiness also means being set apart for God and his glory. By faith, we have been raised in Christ to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). We are to put on the new self (Eph. 4:24), keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 6:25), and surrender ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13). We are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:2), making every effort to cultivate godly conduct and character (2 Pet. 1:3-7), and endeavoring to love God wholly and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:35-40). A life of holiness is a life of love.

While sanctification requires our willing surrender (Romans 12:1-2), it remains, from first to last, the gracious work of God (1 Cor. 15:10). The will and the power to be transformed comes from him. “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Php. 2:13). We work, but we do so in the power he provides (Col. 1:29).

In order to fulfill our high calling, we must resist being conformed to unbiblical values and behaviors (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:17). Instead, our lives should be characterized by godliness—bearing faithful witness to Christ, consistently exhibiting his character, displaying integrity, purity, generosity, and fairness.

Since it contradicts the biblical principles of simplicity, transparency, and honesty (2 Cor. 4:2; 2 Cor. 5:11), Christians must not hold membership in secret, oath-bound societies. Nor should believers form any kind of partnerships that cause them to compromise their Christian principles (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Since we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and bought at great price, God calls us to honor him with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19b-20). The willful misuse of our bodies is irreverent and inconsistent with our standing as servants of God and is therefore forbidden. Such misuse includes all forms of sexual immorality and the abuse of any substance—whether legal or illegal—that damages health, results in intoxication, or impairs sound judgment. Self-control must be exercised in all things (Prov. 23:1-2; Prov. 23:20-21; Prov. 25:28; 2 Pet. 1:5-6).

For example, while the Scriptures do not require total abstinence from alcohol, they clearly forbid drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; Prov. 31:4-7; Eph. 5:18; Rom. 13:13; 1 Pet. 4:3). Furthermore, while we affirm the principle of Christian liberty in this matter, we also recognize that the loving exercise of personal freedom cannot supersede the biblical imperative to, “Make up

your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister" (Rom. 14:13). We also acknowledge that for some in the Missionary Church total abstinence from alcohol is a matter of conscience. Such a view deserves respect.

Living in Community

God calls us to live in community. While every believer enters the Christian life through the exercise of personal faith, God's Spirit makes them part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-14). The Bible envisions the life of faith, not only as an individualistic endeavor but also as a corporate pursuit.

God calls us to a shared life. We share a rich life of fellowship (*koinonia*) in which we devote ourselves, not to the pursuit of self-interest, but to the well-being of others. God calls us to love one another (John 13:34), serve one another (Gal. 5:3), forgive one another (Eph. 4:32), encourage one another (Heb. 3:13), pray for one another (James 5:16), submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), and build one another up (1 Thess. 5:11).

Christian community ought to be marked by compassion. The Christian life is a pilgrimage with many painful milestones along the way (Phil.1:29). The witness of Scripture is clear: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Therefore, we must learn to "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15), to bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), and to comfort the afflicted (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

God also calls Christians to pray together for healing, both for themselves and for others (James 5:13-16). God has provided for the ultimate removal of sin, sickness, and sorrow through the redeeming work of Christ (Isa. 53:5; Matt. 8:16-17), and he has promised that one day the painful effects of sin shall pass away (Rev. 21:4). In the meantime, God invites his people to ask in faith for healing now. Nonetheless, Christians must submit **themselves to God's will, recognizing that he may, for his own good purposes, choose not to heal presently (2 Cor. 12:7b-10; Rom. 8:28). Since God is the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17)**, Christians may seek medical assistance without any implication that they lack faith.

God commands all creation to worship him. "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!" (Ps. 150:6). He is worthy to receive all glory and honor and praise (Rev. 4:11, Rev. 5:12). Yet he has chosen to make himself uniquely manifest among his people as they gather in his presence (Ps. 22:3; 1 Cor. 5:4, Matt. 18:20). While we each have the privilege and responsibility to seek God individually (Mark 1:35; Matt. 6:6), we should also, unless circumstances render it impossible, seek him in community. Regular times of worship have always characterized God's people—in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:8; Exod. 23:14-17), in the time of Jesus (Luke 4:16), and in the New Testament church (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24-25).

In the Old Testament, God instituted the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship (Exod. 20:8-11; Lev. 23:3). God gave his people the Sabbath as a gift for their good (Mark 2:27), to ensure a healthy cycle of labor and rest. He also intended it for his own glory, with each Sabbath being "a Sabbath to the LORD" (Exod. 20:10). Every Sabbath served as a call to worship, with each

seventh day serving as a reminder that God was humanity's Creator, Provider, and Redeemer (Deut. 5:12-15; Exod. 16:21-30).

When the Church was formed, Christians set aside Sunday as the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rev. 1:10). Weekly Sunday worship commemorated the resurrection of Jesus, who was raised to life on the "first day of the week" (Matt. 28:1). Christians do not keep the Lord's Day legalistically—i.e., according to Old Testament Sabbath laws (Col. 2:16). Regardless of the particular day, God's people should meet regularly, with other believers whenever possible for mutual encouragement (Heb. 10:24-25), for the public reading and proclamation of God's Word (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:1-2), for corporate prayer (Acts 1:14; Acts 5:24), for worship in song (Col. 3:16), for the exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12), and for the celebration of the ordinances of baptism (Acts 2:38-41) and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-30; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Living on Mission

God calls us to a life of mission. Called to be Jesus' disciples, we are also commanded to make disciples ourselves (Matt. 4:19; Mark 8:31-38; Matt. 28:19-20). He has commissioned us to take the gospel—the good news that Jesus is Lord and Savior (2 Peter 1:11, 2:20)—to the whole world. Jesus is and always will be humanity's only Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The gospel—for every generation and culture—"is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:17). The proclamation of Christ crucified, risen, and reigning constitutes the heart of our message and mission (1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Cor. 15:1-4, 20-25).

Jesus sends us on mission (John 20:21), and He promises to be with us "always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Furthermore, he pledged the Holy Spirit's power (Acts 1:8). Every believer has a personal responsibility to make disciples who are capable of making other disciples (Matt. 28:19; 2 Tim. 2:2). We must also labor together as partners in the gospel (Phil. 1:5) and as members of one body with each part doing its work (Eph. 4:16).

While the gospel is essentially a message of what God has done for us in Christ, living faith invariably produces in us the good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10). Jesus calls his followers to be salt and light, like a "city set on a hill" (Matt. 5:13-14). Good deeds pave the way for the proclamation of the gospel (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12), and they provide evidence that we have been truly transformed by its power (1 John 3:16-18).

Building Healthy Families

God calls us to live as family. He adopts all those who receive Christ by faith (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26-4:7) and makes them members of his household (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15), thus comprising one spiritual family.

The natural realm mirrors that same order. The human family, though not immune from the effects of the Fall, remains divinely designed. Marriage has been instituted by God as a blessing, providing a stable foundation on which healthy families can stand (Gen. 2:24).

God has ordained the marriage covenant as a publicly affirmed union between one man (born male) and one woman (born female) until parted by death. This is the pattern which he commands for marriage (Matthew 19:4-6).

While the principle of mutual submission is commanded for all believers (Eph. 5:21), God has appointed the husband head of the wife (Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3). Husbands are particularly called to love their wives sacrificially (Eph. 5:25-29), live with them with consideration and respect (1 Pet. 3:7), and not be harsh with them (Col. 3:19). Wives, in turn, are called to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:6) and to show them appropriate respect (Eph. 5:33).

Sex outside of marriage constitutes sexual immorality and is clearly and repeatedly forbidden in the Bible (Mark 7:20; 1 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:19; 1 Thess. 5:19). Therefore, a couple must not live together without the benefit of a marriage covenant. Co-habitation, though commonplace, counterfeits and distorts God's beautiful and benevolent design for marriage.

The Scriptures command that a believer must not marry an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-17). Churches and parents, therefore, have an obligation to teach a biblical view of marriage and to warn believers against being yoked with unbelievers. Ministers must not knowingly officiate at the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever. Furthermore, the Missionary Church forbids ministers from encouraging, blessing, or officiating same sex "marriages" or unions. Since God intends marriage to embrace the whole of life—civil and spiritual, public and private—ministers must refrain from presiding over marriages in which couples refuse to register with the civil authorities merely for convenience or financial gain.

Though Scripture commends the married state (Gen. 1:18-24; 1 Cor. 7:2-9), it also extols singleness as a holy calling (Matt. 19:10-12; 1 Cor. 7:25-38). Jesus himself remained celibate, and everyone—even those without the gift of lifelong celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7)—experiences seasons of singleness. Jesus' example demonstrates that a single person can live a completely fulfilled life.

Since God established marriage as a lifelong union, divorce never accords with his perfect will. Christians should do whatever possible—bearing with one another, forgiving one another, and seeking reconciliation—to preserve the marriage covenant.

Nonetheless, because of human sinfulness, the marriage bond is sometimes broken. In certain situations—i.e., when a person is the wronged party in a case of sexual immorality (Matt. 5:31-32; Matt. 19:9), or when an unbeliever willfully abandons a believer (1 Cor. 7:15-16)—the Bible permits (though it never mandates) divorce.

In cases of abuse or physical danger, a person should be encouraged to seek a place of safety. The church is responsible to act redemptively and to do whatever it can to provide refuge and support (Prov. 24:11-12). Some cases may warrant either a temporary or long-term and potentially legal separation. In all circumstances, Christians should seek biblically-informed pastoral counsel before contemplating divorce.

Those who seek divorce without biblical grounds should first be admonished and, if necessary, subjected to the disciplinary process of the local church.¹ Church discipline should be undertaken to bring about repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Matt. 18:15-20) and to serve as a warning for others (1 Tim. 5:21; Acts 5:1-11).

While we acknowledge that divorce without biblical grounds is sin, we also affirm that God graciously forgives unrighteousness—divorce included—remembering that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

Children must honor (Eph. 6:1-2) and obey (Col. 3:20) their parents. Following their Heavenly Father, earthly fathers must gently shepherd their children, neither exasperating nor embittering them (Isa. 40:11; Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4). We encourage parents to bring their children up in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

While the home provides the primary place to disciple children in the faith, churches should promote healthy families where parents teach Christian truth and cultivate and model Christian character. Since God loves children and desires to bless them and have them know him (Matt. 19:13-14), we encourage the formal dedication of children to the Lord in a public service in the local church. We also encourage churches to commit themselves to disciple children by clearly communicating the Gospel to them and diligently teaching them the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:14-16).

Practicing Stewardship

God calls us to lives of faithful stewardship. Since God creates and sustains all things, everything ultimately belongs to him. As those who have been redeemed by the very blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19), Christians owe a debt they can never repay. Nonetheless, out of gratitude, they offer their very selves to him in worship (Rom. 12:1-2).

All that we have—natural abilities, spiritual gifts, material possessions, time, and our physical bodies—are gifts from God (James 1:17). We hold these things in trust, as stewards rather than owners. We must use these resources for God’s glory and the good of others, as those who must ultimately give an account of ourselves to God (Rom. 14:12).

This principle extends to the created world as well, as we honor our Creator by caring for his creation. While God gave human beings dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26), he also gave them the command to work and take care of the Garden (Gen. 2:15). We care for creation as the image-bearers of God, who providentially cares for his creation now (Ps. 104; Matt. 10:29), and who will one day free it from the decay incurred in the Fall and bring it to its intended glory (Rom. 8:20-21; Rev. 21:1-4).

Faithful stewardship also entails generosity. The obligation to live generously is rooted in God’s generous nature and in his command that we imitate him (Eph. 5:1-2). It is also undergirded by a biblical principle, “Whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Cor. 9:6). God’s people are directed to give to the needy (Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 19:17; Eph. 4:28) and to support

¹ See Article 17 of the Missionary Church Constitution.

those who give fulltime attention to ministry (Lev. 7:28-36; Num. 18:8-20; 1 Cor. 9:1-18; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17). The biblical principle of “first fruits giving” (Gen. 4:4; Lev. 23:9-14; 1 Cor. 16:2) teaches us to make giving a priority. Giving should also be sacrificial (Lev. 2:1; Lev. 3:1; 2 Sam. 24:24; Acts 2:44-45) and proportionate to our income (1 Cor. 16:2). God intends us to give, not merely out of duty, but in glad worship, for he loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). The tithe—a law that was binding on God’s people in the Old Testament—continues to provide a valuable benchmark for New Testament believers today.

While many tend to understand earthly citizenship solely in terms of civil rights, believers should also envision it in terms of stewardship. God has providentially placed his people within cultures to exert a redemptive influence (Matt. 5:14-16; Acts 17:26-27). Where citizens have been entrusted with the gift of participatory government, Christians are encouraged to take part. This may include engaging in civil discourse, voting, and seeking office at every level of government. In doing so, believers promote the common good and bring the light of the gospel and the influence of biblical principles into the public square.

We believe that God has established civil government for humanity’s benefit (Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:13-14), and that its duties of promoting and protecting good and restraining and punishing evil are divinely ordained. Christians should pray for all those who exercise civil authority over them (1 Tim. 2:1-4). They are also called to render appropriate loyalty, respect, and obedience (Rom. 13:5-7). Where the dictates of civil law contradict God’s revealed will in Scripture, Christians must choose to “obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29).

We believe that the Bible commands believers to love their enemies, to do good to those who hate them, to overcome evil with good, and to live at peace with everyone, whenever possible (Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 12:21; Rom. 12:18). Though we affirm that Christians may defend themselves when necessary, and that they must seek to rescue the defenseless (Prov. 24:11-12), they must never promote strife between individuals, groups, races, classes, and nations. Furthermore, they should seek to promote harmony and reconciliation in every relationship—whether personal or public.

The persistence of strife and warfare, however, is a result of the fallen human condition. Since government has a mandate to protect life and preserve peace, and since Christian citizens have an obligation to support and obey their governing authorities, we believe that a Christian may, with a clear conscience, participate in duly-authorized armed forces. We also recognize that pacifism has a long and distinguished history in the Church. Therefore, we respect the rights of individuals who, for consciences’ sake, refuse to participate in armed conflict.

Finally, we believe a Christian’s life should be so transparent in its honesty and integrity that one’s word can be fully trusted without the swearing of a formal oath. Nonetheless, a judicial oath may be taken without violation of the Scriptures.

Seeking Justice

God calls us to live justly. Justice is an attribute of God himself (Gen. 18:25; Deut. 32:4; Isa. 61:8). It ought, therefore, to characterize his children. Micah declares:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.
(Mic. 6:8)

Injustice anywhere is an affront to the rule and reign of Jesus everywhere. This means that our personal dealings must exhibit a commitment to the evenhandedness commended in the Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Since every person bears the image of God (Gen. 1:27; Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), we must root out of ourselves any ideology or behavior that demeans, degrades, or defiles other human beings.

We also have an obligation to pursue justice in the public sphere. In every time and culture, Christians must resist the variable winds of public opinion and recognize that God's Word alone determines what is just. Throughout Scripture, in both his words and deeds, God demonstrates his concern for the vulnerable, the helpless, and the defenseless. He cares for the weak and the fatherless, the "poor and oppressed" (Ps. 82:3). He expects his people to do the same (Ex. 22:21; Prov. 31:8-9; Matt. 25:31-46; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17-18). We have a responsibility to embrace these same values personally and to work toward their implementation in the broader culture. We do acknowledge, however, that while the Bible sets forth timeless principles and priorities, it rarely prescribes specific political policies.

Nonetheless, while the pursuit of justice is a clear and natural implication of the gospel, it should never become a substitute for proclaiming the gospel.

Finally, we would do well to remember that we are sojourners here. Our ultimate citizenship is in heaven (Php. 3:20). Paradoxically, we must "seek the peace and prosperity" of the cities to which we have been called (Jer. 29:7), all the while "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). We should pursue greater justice with diligence. While some of the world's ills can and should be alleviated, we also recognize that some will simply have to be endured (2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:19-20; Rev. 2:3). Evil will never be fully vanquished until our Savior comes in glorious power and puts every enemy beneath his feet (Php. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:23-25). "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).