

What We Believe

INTRODUCTION

We, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Sonoma County, praise God for His great salvation and rejoice in the fellowship us with Himself and with each other. We are deeply stirred by what God is doing in our day throughout our County, moved to penitence by our failures and challenged by the unfinished task of evangelization. We believe the Gospel is God's good news for the whole world, and we are determined by His grace to obey Christ's commission to proclaim it to all mankind and to make disciples of every nation. As part of carrying out God's plan, we recognize that we are called to begin this proclamation in our own Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 1:8). We affirm that this calling of God to our own cities and to Sonoma County is to be carried out in a unique way that can only be discovered and implemented as our hearts are united in the deep truths of Scripture and the transformational power of corporate prayer of individual congregations. As part of our desire to affirm our faith and our resolve, and to make public our covenant, we affirm the Statement of Faith and Intent contained in the Lausanne Covenant as our foundation of working together for kingdom purposes and for His, and His alone, glory. This theological document was developed by participants from 150 countries at the 1974 International Congress for World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, a congress called by Rev. Billy Graham. Because of its overwhelming acceptance as a document that provided a new base for collaboration, The Lausanne Covenant is being used as a statement of faith by hundreds of ministries throughout the world. Following is that Covenant, modified to our particular setting:

1. GOD AND HIS PURPOSES

We affirm our belief in the one-eternal God, Creator and Lord of the world; who exists eternally in three personalities: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are all coequal and are one God; and who governs all things according to the purpose of His will. He has been calling out from the world a people for Himself, and sending His people back into the world to be His servants and His witnesses, for the extension of His kingdom, the building up of Christ's body, and the glory of His name. We confess with shame that we have often denied our calling and failed in our mission, by becoming conformed to the world or by withdrawing from it. Yet we rejoice that even when borne by earthen vessels the gospel is still a precious treasure. To the task of making that treasure known in the power of the Holy Spirit we desire to dedicate ourselves anew.

(Isa. 40:28; Gen. 1:1, 26-27; 3:22; Ps. 90:2; Matt. 28:19; Eph. 1:11; Acts 15:14; John 17:6, 18; Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:7; 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2)

2. THE AUTHORITY AND POWER OF THE BIBLE

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice as our supreme source of truth. It was written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit and thus, because it is inspired by God, is truth without any mixture of error. We also affirm the power of God's Word to accomplish His purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women, for God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God.

(2 Tim. 1:13 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Pss. 12:6; 119:105, 160; Prov. 30:5; John 10:35; Isa. 55:11; 1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 1:16; Matt. 5:17-18; Jude 3; Eph 1:17-18; 3:10, 18)

3. THE UNIQUENESS AND UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST AND HIS WORK

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and coequal with the Father and the Holy

Spirit. We affirm that there is only one Savior and only one gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches. We recognize that everyone has some knowledge of God through His general revelation in nature. But we deny that this can save, for people suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. Jesus Christ, having lived a sinless human life and being Himself the only God-man, who gave Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and the only ransom for sinners by dying on the cross, is the only mediator between God and people. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death; He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again to earth. There is no other name by which we must be saved. This salvation is a gift from God to man; man can never make up for his sin by any self effort. Only by trusting in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, God's offer of forgiveness, can man be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life with God begins the moment one, by faith, trusts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. All men and women are perishing because of sin, but God loves everyone, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent. Yet those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal separation from God. To proclaim Jesus as "the Savior of the world" is not to affirm that all people are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather, it is to proclaim God's love for a world of sinners and to invite everyone to respond to Him as Savior and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. Jesus Christ has been exalted above every other name; we long for the day when every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue shall confess Him, 'Lord.'

(Isa. 9:6; John 1:1-5; Gal. 1:6-9; 3:26; Rom 1:3-4, 18-32; 6:32; I Tim 2:5-6; 6:14-15; Titus 2:13; 3:5; Acts 1:9-11; 4:12; John 3:16-19; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Thes. 1:7-9; John 4:42; 14:6, 10-30; Heb. 4:14-15; 2 Cor. 15:3-4; Rom. 5:1; Matt. 1:22-23; 11:28; Eph. 1:20-21; 2:8-9; Phil. 2:9-11)

4. THE NATURE OF EVANGELISM

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord He now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to Him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation, we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow Him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with His new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into His Church and responsible service in the world. (I Cor. 15:3-4; Acts 2:32-29; John 20:21; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 4:5; 5:11, 20; Luke 14:25-33; Mark 8:34; Acts 2:40, 47; Mark 10:43-45)

5. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share His concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that

evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into His kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.

(Acts 17:26, 31; Gen. 18:25; Isa. 1:17; Ps. 45:7; Gen 1:26-27; Jas. 3:9; Lev. 19:18; Luke 6:27, 35; Jas. 2:14-26; John 3:3, 5; Matt. 5:20; 6:33; 2 Cor. 3:18; Jas. 2:20)

6. THE CHURCH AND EVANGELISM

We affirm that the universal Church is comprised of all people who through faith in Jesus Christ, have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The local church is a group of believers from the universal Church who gather for worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism. We affirm that Christ sends His redeemed people into the world as the Father sent Him, and that this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world. We need to break out of our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society. In the Church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary. Local and world evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. The Church is at the very center of God's cosmic purpose and is His appointed means of spreading the gospel. But a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross. It becomes a stumbling block to evangelism when it betrays the gospel or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or scrupulous honesty in all things including promotion and finance. The Church, as an organism, is the community of God's people rather than an institution, and must not be identified with any particular culture, social or political system, or human ideology.

(John 17:18; 20:21; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 20:27; Eph. 1:9-10; 3:9-11; Gal. 6:14, 17; 2 Cor. 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:19-21; Phil. 1:27)

7. COOPERATION IN EVANGELISM

We affirm that the Church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognize, however, that organizational unity may take many forms and does not necessarily forward evangelism. Yet, we who share the same biblical faith should be closely united in fellowship, prayer, work and witness. We confess that our testimony has sometimes been marred by a sinful individualism and needless duplication. We pledge ourselves to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission. We urge the development within our local communities and Sonoma County functional cooperation for the furtherance of the Church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience.

(John 17:21, 23; Eph. 4:3-4; John 13:35; Phil 1:27; John 17:11-23)

8. CHURCHES IN EVANGELISTIC PARTNERSHIP

We rejoice that a new missionary era has dawned in Sonoma County and the world. God is raising up from churches a great new resource for community and world evangelization, and is thus demonstrating that the responsibility to evangelize belongs to the whole body of Christ. All churches should therefore be asking God and themselves what they should be doing both to reach their own area and to send missionaries to other parts of the world. A reevaluation of our missionary responsibility and role should be

continuous. Thus, a growing partnership of churches will develop and the universal character of Christ's Church will be more clearly exhibited. We also thank God for His followers who labor in para-church organizations, the business world, mass media, arts, education and the government. We encourage these individuals and local churches to engage in constant self-examination to evaluate their effectiveness as part of the Church's mission in Sonoma County.

(Rom 1:8; Phil. 1:5; 4:15; Acts 13:1-3, I Thes. 1:6-8)

9. THE URGENCY OF THE EVANGELISTIC TASK

At least 90% of Sonoma County and more than two-thirds of all humanity have yet to be evangelized. We are ashamed that so many have been neglected; it is a standing rebuke to us and to the whole Church. There is now, however, in many parts of the world an unprecedented receptivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are convinced that God is desirous of a mighty working within this County that has never been seen before. Thus, this is the time for churches and para-church agencies to pray earnestly for the salvation of the unreached and to launch new efforts to achieve evangelization of our community, and even the world. A reprioritization of our local church's budgets may be necessary to release resources for unevangelized peoples within our community. Missionary activities should flow ever more freely from and to all of our cities within our County. The goal should be, by all available means and at the earliest possible time, that every person in Sonoma County will have the opportunity to hear, understand, and to receive the good news. We cannot hope to attain this goal without sacrifice. All of us are shocked by the poverty within our community and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simpler life-style in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism.

(John 9:4; Matt. 9:35-38; Rom 9:1-3; I Cor. 9:19-23; Mark 16:15; Isa. 58:6-7; Jas. 1:27; 2:1-9; Matt. 25:31-46; Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35)

10. EVANGELISM AND CULTURE

The development of strategies for evangelization in Sonoma County calls for imaginative pioneering methods. Under God, the result will be the rise of churches deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture. Sonoma County is home to many diverse cultures which all bring a unique perspective on life and values. However, culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. Because men and women are God's creatures, some of their culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because they are fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. Our missionary endeavors have all too frequently exported with the gospel an alien culture and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture. Christ's evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God.

(Mark 7:8-9, 13; Gen. 4:21-22; I Cor. 9:19-23; Phil. 2:5-7; 2 Cor. 4:5)

11. EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP

We confess that we have sometimes pursued church growth at the expense of church spiritual health, and divorced evangelism from Christian nurture. We also acknowledge that our focus has often been on growing our local church bodies rather than building the Kingdom of God within our community. Within every community and every culture, there should be an effective training program for pastors and laity in doctrine, discipleship,

evangelism, nurture and service. Such training programs should not rely on any stereotyped methodology but should be developed to undergird and support, according to biblical standards, the Church in action within local church bodies, the family, the business world, mass media, arts, education and the government.

(Col. 1:27-28; Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5, 9; Mark 10:42-45; Eph. 4:11-12)

12. SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil, who are seeking to overthrow the Church and frustrate its task of evangelizing Sonoma County. We know our need to equip ourselves with God's armor and to fight this battle with spiritual weapons of truth and prayer. For we detect the activity of our enemy, not only in false ideologies outside the Church, but also inside it in false gospels which twist Scripture and put people in the place of God. We need both watchfulness and discernment to safeguard the biblical gospel. We acknowledge that we ourselves are not immune to worldliness of thoughts and action, that is, to a surrender to secularism. For example, although careful studies of church growth, both numerical and spiritual, are right and valuable, we have sometimes neglected them. At other times, desirous to ensure a response to the gospel, we have compromised our message, manipulated our hearers through pressure techniques, and become unduly preoccupied with statistics or even dishonest in our use of them. All this is worldly. The Church must be in the world, the world must not be in the Church.

(Eph. 6:12; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 6:11, 13-18; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; I John 2:18-26; 4:1-3; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; John 17:15)

13. FREEDOM AND PERSECUTION

It is the God-appointed duty of every government to secure conditions of peace, justice and liberty in which the Church may obey God, serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and preach the gospel without interference. We therefore pray for the leaders of our cities, counties, states and nations and call upon them to guarantee freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom to practice and propagate religion in accordance with the will of God and as set forth in 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.' We also express our deep concern for all who have been unjustly imprisoned, and especially for those who are suffering for their testimony to the Lord Jesus. We promise to pray and work for their freedom. At the same time we refuse to be intimidated by their fate. God helping us, we too will seek to stand against injustice and to remain faithful to the gospel, whatever the cost. We do not forget the warnings of Jesus that persecution is inevitable.

(I Tim. 1:1-4; Acts 4:19; 5:29; Col. 3:24; Heb. 13:1-3; Luke 4:18; Gal. 5:11; 6:12; Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21)

14. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS POWER

We believe the Holy Spirit is coequal with God the Father and God the Son. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father sent His Spirit to bear witness to His Son; without His witness ours is futile. Conviction of sin, faith in Christ, new birth and Christian growth are all His work. Further, the Holy Spirit is a missionary spirit; thus evangelism should arise spontaneously from a Spirit-filled church. A church that is not a missionary church is contradicting itself and quenching the Spirit. Worldwide evangelization will become a realistic possibility only when the Spirit renews the Church in truth and wisdom, faith, holiness, love and power. We therefore call upon all Christians to pray for such a visitation of the sovereign Spirit of God that all His fruit may appear in all His people and that all His gifts may enrich the body of Christ. Only then will the whole world become a fit instrument in His hands, that the whole earth may hear His voice.

(I Cor 2:4; John 4:16-17; 15:26-27; 16:7-13; I Cor. 12:3; John 3:6-8; 2 Cor. 2:12; 3:16-18; John 7:37-39; I Thes. 5:19; Acts 1:8; Ps. 85:4-7; 67:1-3; Gal 5:22-23, 25; Eph. 1:13; 5:1; I Cor. 12:4-31; Rom. 12:3-8)

15. THE RETURN OF CHRIST

We believe that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly, in power and glory, to consummate His salvation and His judgment. This promise of His coming is a further spur to our evangelism, for we remember His words that the gospel must first be preached to all nations and then He shall return. We believe that the interim period between Christ's ascension and return is to be filled with the mission of the people of God, who have no liberty to stop before the end. We also remember His warning that false christs and false prophets will arise as precursors of the final Antichrist. We therefore reject as a proud, self-confident dream the notion that people can ever build a utopia on earth. Our Christian confidence is that God will perfect His kingdom, and we look forward with eager anticipation to that day, and to the new heaven and earth in which righteousness will dwell and God will reign forever. Meanwhile, we rededicate ourselves to the service of Christ and of people in joyful submission to His authority over the whole of our lives.

(Mark 14:62, Heb. 9:28; Mark 13:10; Acts 1:8-11; Matt. 28:20; Mark 13:21-23; John 2:18; 4:1-3; Luke 12:32; Rev. 21:1-5; 2 Pet. 3:13; Matt. 28:18)

CONCLUSION

Therefore, in the light of this our faith and our resolve, we enter into a solemn Covenant with God and with each other, to pray, to plan and to work together for the evangelization of Sonoma County and of the whole world. We call upon others within Sonoma County to join us. May God help us by His grace and for His glory to be faithful to this Covenant! Amen, Alleluia!