

Westside Community Church Belief Statements

The foundation of our belief is Holy Scripture. Our historic theological perspective is rooted in Wesleyan/Armenian theology. Specifically, our theological understanding of the Christian faith and life is informed by the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Articles of Religion of The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, John Wesley's General Rules, his 52 standard sermons and his explanatory notes on the Old and New Testament.

- I. Church: We believe the Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Jesus Christ where the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are duly administered so that all people can experience the saving love of God. We believe it is the one holy apostolic universal church made up of local congregations which exist for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world. Therefore, we welcome and respect all people, as they are made in the image of God, offering love, support, fellowship, and the truth of God's word. Our values are defined by the Word of God and not cultural beliefs. (Matthew 16:18, 18:20; Acts 2:42-47, 9:31; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 28; Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 10:24-25)
- II. Bible: We believe the Holy Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the revealed Word of God and is completely trustworthy as an infallible guide to salvation and the life of faith. It will not fail to accomplish its purpose. It reveals to us the character of God and the nature of His relationship with humanity in absolute truth, so that we can know Him and enter into relationship with Him. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice. (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:3)
- III. Triune God: We believe in the One, Eternal, Sovereign God, Creator of the Universe and the source of everything that exists. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love. He rules with gracious regard for the well-being and salvation of humanity to the glory of His name. He reveals Himself to us as the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons, but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power. (Genesis 1-2; Psalms 135:6-7; Isaiah 25:8-9; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11)
- IV. Jesus: We believe that Jesus is God's only begotten Son. In Him, God is incarnate, taking on human form, perfectly uniting the divine and human nature. He is 100% God and 100% human. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered, was crucified, and died on the cross to provide the means of reconciliation of humanity with God. He was buried, bodily rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes on our behalf. He will return with the new heaven and new earth to eternally reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and judge all of humanity. (Matthew 1:20-23, 3:17, 27:24-26, 50-54, 58-60, 28:5-10; Mark 1:1, 11, 15:15, 24-25, 33-39, 43-46, 16:4-7; Luke 1:26-35, 2:4-7, 3:22, 23:23-25, 33, 46-47, 50-54, 24:1-8, 36-53; John 1:1-18, 34, 14:6, 19:1-19, 30, 38-42, 20:11-20; Acts 1:9-12; Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:5-8; Revelation 22:7)
- V. Holy Spirit: We believe the Holy Spirit proceeds from and is one in being, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son. Upon the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was sent to humanity to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgment and to empower us for ministry to the world. It is through the Holy Spirit that we receive God's grace. By the Spirit, followers of Jesus Christ are set apart to belong completely to God; being comforted, sustained, guided and empowered to be obedient to God's word and live for His glory. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christ followers is revealed by the presence of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The Spirit gives gifts to the faithful to be used for the edification of the Church and the growth of the Kingdom

of God. (Luke 24:49; John 14:16-17, 20:21-23; Acts 1:8, 2:1-4, 38-39; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 3:2, 5:22-25; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 John 4:13)

VI. Free Will and Original Sin: We believe that when God told Adam not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil He gave humanity the freedom to choose between God's will for our lives or our own. From the moment Adam and Eve made the choice not to trust God by eating the forbidden fruit, humanity has been broken. We believe, as a result of Adam and Eve's choice, that we have perverted God's creation and His original intent for humanity. We have descended into immorality, fallen from righteousness, become destitute of holiness, corrupted our created nature, and are continually inclined to choose evil. In our own strength, without God's grace, we cannot do good works that are pleasing and acceptable to God. Without being born again in Jesus Christ, we cannot see the Kingdom of God. (Genesis 2:9-17; 3; 8:21; Deuteronomy 3:19-20; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 14:2-3, 51:1-5; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; John 3:19-20, 7:17; Romans 3:9-23, 5:12-21; Galatians 5:13; 1 John 1:8-10; Revelation 3:20)

VII. Reconciliation Through Christ: We believe God's eternal desire to dwell and be in relationship with humanity did not change with Adam and Eve's selfish choice. From the moment God called out to them in the Garden of Eden, He has been in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. In Christ Jesus, He freely offered Himself on the cross as the perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world revealing His perfect love for humanity. No other satisfaction is required for our salvation. It is a free gift offered to all people, exclusively based on the merit of Jesus, through which we are accounted righteous before God, but it is a gift that must be accepted. We can do nothing to deserve this gift and we can never make up for our sin by way of self-improvement or good works. In faith, we accept this gift by repenting of our sin and submitting our life and will to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. At that moment, eternal life begins as we are born again into the new life in Christ. (Ezekiel 18:30-32; John 3:1-24; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 5:6-11, 6:23, 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 1:7-10, 2:1-21, 14-17; Colossians 1:19-22; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 4:9-10)

VIII. The Grace of God: We believe the grace of God manifests itself in four distinct ways: Prevenient, Justifying, Sanctifying and Glorifying. Prevenient Grace is at work in our lives even before we are aware of God and it is only through this grace that we can overcome our corrupt nature and surrender our will and lives to God in Christ Jesus. It leads us to repentance. Justifying Grace is the manifestation of a moment when we do surrender and repent, and the power and guilt of sin is defeated in our lives. Sanctifying Grace continues from that moment and does the work of transformation. The Christian life is not a "one shot" or "one stop" experience, rather it is a daily walk with God in which Christ calls us to a deep and holy life. The more we walk with Jesus, the more we become like Him. We do believe that a person can be entirely sanctified in this life, having had the very being of sin, our carnal nature, defeated and being made perfect in love. This does not mean that we will never sin again. It means that our selfish nature has been so transformed that we have learned to love like Christ, being willing to lay down our lives for another, even an enemy. Glorifying Grace is the manifestation of grace that transports us from this life into the eternal divine presence upon our physical death. We are saved by God's grace, and we continue to be saved by His grace each new day by the cleansing and renewing power of the Holy Spirit as we walk in faith and obedience. (Prevenient: John 1:9, 6:44, 65, 12:32; Romans 2:4; Philippians 2:13; Titus 2:11 Justifying: Romans 3:24, 4:16, 5:1, 10:9-10, 11:6; Galatians 2:16-20; Ephesians 1:7, 2:8-9; Titus 3:7 Sanctifying: Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:1-2, 20:26; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Matthew 5:48; John 17:15-19; Romans 3:22, 6:6, 19; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 2:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 2:11-14, 3:5; Hebrews 10:10, 14, 29, 12:14, 13:12; 1 John 3:1-3 Glorifying: Romans 5:2, 8:17-32; 1 Corinthians 15:35-57; 2 Corinthians 3:18, 4:15-5:1; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; 1 Peter 5:1)

- IX. Works Subsequent to Salvation: James in his epistle to the whole church stated that “faith without works is dead.” We know that there are no works we can perform to earn the gift of God’s Saving Grace, but we believe the works James has described as necessary are those that naturally follow our justification by faith. They are an act of gratitude for what God has done in us and for us. Given time and opportunity, we believe all Christians will reveal the evidence of their true and living faith through their good works. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, so too is a vibrant faith known by the pleasing and acceptable works that bless God, our neighbors and the world. (Matthew 5:16, 7:15-23, 12:33, 25:31-46; Luke 6:43-45; John 15:5; Romans 2:6-10; Galatians 6:9; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Titus 1:16, 2:7, 3:5-8; Hebrews 10:24, 13:16; James 2:14-26)
- X. Predestination, Assurance and Enduring Salvation: We do not believe that God has predestined some individuals to salvation and others to damnation. In the Gospel of John Jesus states, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” God predestined that in Jesus the gift of salvation is offered to all and is received through faith as we choose to believe in Jesus and surrender our will and life. Upon receiving the gift, we are given assurance of our salvation as the Holy Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are not only saved but saved to the utmost. It is available to all, and it is a gift that God will never take away from us, but it never forfeits our free will and choice. Just as we turned from our path of self-will and sin to surrender to God, we can walk away from God, depart from His grace, return to our selfish path and fall back into the power of sin. But, even then, by the grace of God, we can turn back to God and be renewed in righteousness. (Predestination: John 3:1-24; Romans 6:11, 8:29-39, 10:13, 11:1; Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:9 Assurance: Romans 5:1-5, 8:16; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 5:13 Enduring Salvation: Matthew 24:10; Romans 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:13, 4:3-4; Hebrews 3:12, 10:26; 1 John 1:9)
- XI. Eternity and Judgment: People were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life in Heaven. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence. We believe that all of humanity will stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ upon His return. Those who have gone before will be resurrected to stand with those alive before the Lord of Heaven and Earth. The righteous will inherit life eternal and the wicked will be thrown into the lake of fire. (Matthew 3:12, 5:1-20; 6:20, 7:21-23, 10:28; 12:36-37, 13:51, 18:1-6, 25:1-46; Mark 9:43; Luke 6:23, 15:7, 12:28-29; Romans 2:5-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 1:4; James 1:12; Jude 1:7; Revelation 20:12-15, 21:1-8, 22:1-5, 14-15)
- XII. Sacraments: We believe that Jesus ordained two sacraments, baptism and holy communion, as means of grace through which God works in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in Him. They are our outward participation in the inward work of Christ in our lives. (For scripture reference see Articles XIII and XIV)
- XIII. Baptism: In his Gospel, Matthew records Jesus’ command to His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His command makes clear that Holy Baptism is the mark of Christian discipleship. We believe baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian Church. While it is not required for salvation, given time and opportunity, it is expected that all who surrender their life to Christ will submit to the waters of baptism by either sprinkling, pouring or immersion. It is the outward sign of an inward commitment that signifies entrance into the household of faith, symbolizes repentance and inner cleansing from sin, and represents our new birth in Christ. Because we believe in the Prevenient Grace of God which is at work in our lives before we even know Him, we believe infants are acceptable subjects for Christian baptism, assuming they will be nurtured in the faith and led to a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as they profess their own faith and confirm their baptism.

As we believe God is the primary actor in baptism and that the work He accomplishes cannot be negated, we do not believe that those who are being confirmed or those who have walked away from Christ and returned need to be rebaptized. They simply need to remember their baptism and claim or reclaim God's gifts for their lives. That remembrance can be symbolized by sprinkling, pouring or immersion. (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38-41, 10:48, 16:33, 18:8, 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12)

XIV. Holy Communion: At the last Passover Supper Jesus shared with His disciples, He instituted Holy Communion. He blessed bread and wine as symbols of His body and blood and gave it to His disciples to eat and drink as a remembrance of Him. We believe Holy Communion is a means of grace open to all who love Jesus, repent of their sins, and seek to live in harmony with their neighbors. While it is meant to be received in a manner worthy of the Lord, the status of the one who receives is between them and God. We invite all, regardless of age or membership status, to accept their place at the table which Jesus has set for them. We do not believe that the bread and juice substantively change into the body and blood of Christ. We believe the elements are the means of grace by which we encounter the real and tangible presence of the Lord at His table. By faith, the bread we receive is partaking in the body of Christ and the cup is partaking in the blood of Christ. Holy Communion is both a sign of our redemption by Christ's death and of the love that we as Christians ought to have for one another. (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20; John 6:50-58; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:23-25)

XV. The Priesthood of All Believers and Ordination of Ministers:

In Exodus 19:6, God established Israel as a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation, in order to reveal Him to the entire world. In 1 Peter 2:9, the Apostle Peter applies the Exodus promise to all who believe in Jesus Christ. Like Peter, we believe every follower of Christ is called to ministry to proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. In Matthew 25, Jesus makes it clear we are expected to live out the faith of our baptism ministering to others as if we were ministering to Him. A follower of Jesus is a minister of the Gospel.

It is out of the body of God's chosen people that God has always called people to specific servant ministry roles. In the Old Testament, God calls individuals to fulfill His purposes: Moses to deliver His people, Aaron to lead the priests and Levites, Joshua to lead Israel into the promised land, Judges like Deborah and Gideon to deliver Israel, Prophets like Miriam, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Huldah to deliver the word of God to His people. In the New Testament, Jesus called the twelve to abandon their vocational lives and follow Him so they could help other people come to God. He commanded Mary Magdalene and the other women at the empty tomb to go and proclaim the resurrection. The Apostles raised up people like the "seven" to serve the needs of people, others like Priscilla and Aquilla, Apollos and Barnabas to teach the Gospel and encourage others, and still others like Lydia and Timothy to lead churches. All of these were members of the chosen people of God called to specific vocational ministry roles. They left everything to follow Jesus and in doing so, they were set apart and consecrated in the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe that God is still calling people into specific ministry roles. That call is accompanied by gifts of the Spirit to aid in the fulfillment of ministry, and the authority of Jesus Christ to be His leaders in the church to a broken and hurting world.

In Matthew 20:26 and John 12:26, Jesus makes it clear that all disciples as leaders are *diakonos* (servants), but the New Testament identifies two offices to lead the Church, *Episcopos* (Elder, Bishop, Overseer) and *Diakonos* (Deacons). In Acts 20:28, the *Episcopos* are identified as the overseers of the church at Ephesus. In Philippians 1:1 both the *Episcopos* and *Diakonos* of the church at Philippi are addressed by the Apostle

Paul. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul identifies the qualifications for the office of the *Episcopos* and the office of *Diakonos*. In his letter to Titus, Paul instructs Titus to appoint *Presbyteros* (Elders) in every city to be *Episcopos* of the churches. We believe scripture identifies and bestows authority in the two offices of *Episcopos* (Elder) and *Diakonos* (Deacon). In 1st Timothy, Paul states “those who serve well as *Diakonos* gain a good standing for themselves.” When discussing *Episcopos* he states, “if anyone desires to be *Episcopos*, he desires a noble task.” This gives the impression that before one can be an Elder, they must first prove themselves as a Deacon. Deacons have the same ministry roles within the church as an Elder, but they operate under the authority of the Elder who serves as the overseer of the congregation.

In Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, he defines a quality of both Elders and Deacons as being “husbands” suggesting that they are male. However, the testimony of the New Testament reveals numerous women in positions of church authority. The first person called into service by God for the ministry of Jesus Christ was Mary the mother of Jesus and she continues in a ministry role as she is named with the remaining eleven disciples in Acts 1:14 after Jesus’ ascension. Mary Magdalene and the other women at the empty tomb were commanded to go and deliver the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. In John 20:17, Jesus himself commands Mary to deliver the news to the disciples. In Romans 16:1, sister Phoebe is identified as a deacon in the church in Cenchrea, in verse three he identifies Priscilla as his co-worker in ministry and commends the church hosted in her home with her husband. In Acts 18:26, Luke describes Priscilla and Aquilla as both correcting Apollos’ understanding of the Gospel. In Acts 16:15, 40 Luke tells of Lydia, a successful entrepreneur, who converts under the teaching of Paul and hosts believers in her home. Paul affirms their support from the first day in Philippians 1:3-5. Just as Priscilla hosts a church in her home and is considered a co-worker, it is not unreasonable to assume the same is true in regards to Lydia. Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11), and Nympha (Colossians 4:15) are identified as leaders of house churches. All of this testimony couples with the numerous women used by God to help lead Israel identified in the Old Testament. In Exodus 15:20-21 we find Miriam the sister of Moses identified as a prophet leading all of Israel in worship after the deliverance from Pharaoh. In Judges 4:4, we read of Deborah both a prophet and judge of Israel. In 2nd Chronicles 34:22 the king sends his male servants to inquire of the Lord through the female prophet Huldah. This Biblical witness leads us to believe that both men and women are suitable to serve as ministry leaders in any role, including both Deacons and Elders.

Throughout scripture, the rite of ordination has been, and continues to be today, the official recognition by the people of God of an individual’s call to vocational ministry and the authority God has bestowed upon them in the service of that call. Calling and empowering are the work of God. Ordination is the work of the Church. Through the process of ordination, a ministry candidate has their belief and practice of faith in Jesus Christ examined, their calling confirmed, their character and qualifications evaluated, and their willingness to be accountable to the oversight of the church affirmed. Having been approved through the process the candidate would then be ordained by the Senior Pastor and the lay leaders of the church. A candidate for ordained ministry would first be ordained to the office of Deacon. They can serve their entire ministry careers as an ordained Deacon, but if they desire to be the primary leader of a congregation then they would further pursue ordination as an Elder.