

Vidalia Cornerstone Church, Inc.

Statement of Faith and Practice

Overview and Mission

Vidalia Cornerstone Church is a local church committed to Jesus's mission to make disciples who make an impact in the world. (Matthew 28) We accomplish this mission by helping people take their next step closer to Christ.

We believe that life transformation happens when our search for meaning intersects with God's call for all people to give their lives 'ultimate and eternal meaning and significance in and through Jesus Christ. When our stories intersect with His story, we encounter the transforming love of God which shapes our present reality and our future.

We are committed to seeing this happen now and especially in the next generation. God has given to us the privilege and the duty of passing on to the next generation the foundational tenets of our Christian faith, thereby giving our children and their children, and their children the incredible legacy of faith in Jesus Christ.

We stand on the Word of God, entrusted to us for our good by those who came before us. We stand shoulder to shoulder to make a difference for Christ in the world, our communities, our workplaces, our schools, our neighborhoods, and, most importantly in our families.

Doctrinal Standards

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, Father, all sovereign, maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who was begotten from the Father before all the ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came into existence. Who because of us men and an our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnated by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made man, was crucified on our behalf by Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and arose on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right of the Father, and is coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there will be no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, who makes us alive, who proceeds from the Father (and from the Son), who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, who has spoken through the prophets. In one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the coming age. Amen.

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Confession of Faith

1. God: We believe in the one true, holy and living God, Eternal Spirit, who is Creator, Sovereign and Preserver of all things visible and invisible. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love, and rules with gracious reward for the well-being and salvation of humanity, to the glory of his name. We believe the one God reveals himself as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinct but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power.

2. Jesus Christ: We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. As ministering Servant he lived, suffered and died on the cross. He was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from whence he shall return. He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us, and by him all humanity will be judged.

3. The Holy Spirit: We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from and is one in being with the Father and the Son. He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He leads humanity through faithful response to the gospel into the fellowship of the Church. He comforts, sustains and empowers the faithful and guides them into all truth.

4. The Holy Bible: We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice. Whatever is not revealed in or established by the Holy Scriptures is not to be made an article of faith nor is it to be taught as essential to salvation.

5. The Church: We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men and women divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment.

Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.

6. The Sacraments: We believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian's profession and of God's love toward us. They are means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him. Two sacraments are ordained by Christ our Lord, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

a. We believe Baptism signifies entrance into the household of faith and is a symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus and a mark of Christian discipleship.

b. We believe the Lord's Supper is a representation of our redemption, a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ, and a token of love and union which Christians have with Christ and with one another. Those who rightly, worthily and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup partake of the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual manner until he comes.

7. Sin: We believe humanity is fallen from righteousness and, apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is destitute of holiness and inclined to evil. Except a person be born again, they cannot see the Kingdom of God. In their own strength, without divine grace, a person cannot do good works pleasing and acceptable to God. We believe, however, a person influenced and empowered by the Holy Spirit is responsible in freedom to exercise their will for good.

8. Salvation: We believe God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The offering Christ freely made on the cross is the perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, redeeming humanity from all sin, so that no other satisfaction is required.

a. We believe we are never accounted righteous before God through our works or merit, but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

b. We believe regeneration is the renewal of a person in righteousness through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature and experience newness of life. By this new birth the believer becomes reconciled to God and is enabled to serve him with the will and the affections.

c. We believe, although we have experienced regeneration, it is possible to depart from grace and fall into sin; and we may even then, by the grace of God, be renewed in righteousness.

d. We believe good works are the necessary fruits of faith and follow regeneration, but they do not have the virtue to remove our sins or to avert divine judgment. We believe good works, pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, spring from a true and living faith, for through and by them faith is made evident.

9. Sanctification and Christian Perfection: We believe sanctification is the work of God's grace through the Word and the Spirit, by which those who have been born again are cleansed from sin in their thoughts, words and acts, and are enabled to live in accordance with God's will, and to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

a. Entire sanctification is a state of perfect love, righteousness and true holiness which every regenerate believer may obtain by being delivered from the power of sin, by loving God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving one's neighbor as one's self. Through faith in Jesus Christ this gracious gift may be received in this life both gradually and instantaneously and should be sought earnestly by every child of God.

b. We believe this experience does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes common to man, nor from the possibilities of further sin. The Christian must continue on guard against spiritual pride and seek to gain victory over every temptation to sin. The Christian must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; and the world, the flesh, and the devil are put under his feet. Thus, the Christian rules over these enemies with watchfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

10. The Judgment and the Future State: We believe all people stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation.

Wesley's Standard Sermons and Explanatory Notes

These two works serve as the standard of commentary and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. They provide a Wesleyan perspective that guides our teaching and leading.

Moral Principles

As faithful witnesses, we highlight and affirm the following moral principles that arise from our understanding of Biblical truth. We acknowledge that other moral principles merit further attention.

Statement on Equality

We believe that all persons are of sacred worth and affirm that God's grace is available to all. Therefore, we gladly welcome all who seek to grow in their relationship with God to attend worship services and participate in the church's ministries, subject to any further standards for leadership set forth herein. No person shall be disqualified from becoming a member of this local congregation based on gender, race, color, nationality, national origin, or economic condition. Scripture teaches that God created men and women in his image ("In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Gen.

1:27) and that men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God. Accordingly, the church should treat women and men equally.

We believe that both women and men are called to and gifted for ordained and licensed ministry, and both are able to hold leadership roles within Vidalia Cornerstone Church.

Statement on Marriage and Sexuality

We believe marriage and sexual intimacy are good gifts from God. In keeping with the Scriptures and historic, orthodox, Christian teaching through the ages we believe that marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union (Genesis 2:24-25; Matthew 19:5; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). We believe that God intends for his children to practice sexual purity - faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness. We believe any sexual expression outside of these standards is not in line with the teaching of Scriptures.

Statement on Human Dignity

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual or group are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of Vidalia Cornerstone Church.

Statement on Divorce and Remarriage

Our first counsel when considering divorce is always to exhaust every avenue of reconciliation. However, when a married couple is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel, divorce is a regrettable alternative in the middle of brokenness. Divorce is always less than what God intended for marriage, however, it is not an unforgivable sin. Through the process of healing and restoration, people can be restored to community and to healthy and whole relationships that may include remarriage.

Statement on Abortion

We reject abortion. We do, however, realize that there are rare and exceptional cases when the life of the mother is endangered and when this is so, encourage prayerful inquiry and counsel in those circumstances. We affirm God's grace is available to all and it is our commitment to be in ministry with and to all who have been touched by the devastating circumstances of abortion.

Theological Task and Guidelines

Theological Task

1. Our theological task is constructive in that every generation must appropriate, creatively, the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst in order to think afresh about God, revelation, sin, redemption, worship, the church, freedom,

justice, moral responsibility, and other significant theological concerns. Our summons is to understand and receive the gospel promises in our troubled and uncertain times. Our theological task is both individual and communal. It is a feature in the ministry of individual Christians. It requires the participation of all who are in our Church, lay and ordained, because the mission of the Church is to be carried out by everyone who is called to discipleship. To be persons of faith is to hunger to understand the truth given to us in Jesus Christ.

Theological inquiry is by no means a casual undertaking. It requires sustained disciplines of study, reflection, and prayer. Yet the discernment of “plain truth for plain people” is not limited to theological specialists. Scholars have their role to play in assisting the people of God to fulfill this calling, but all Christians are called to theological reflection.

2. Our theological task is contextual and incarnational. It is grounded upon God’s supreme mode of self-revelation incarnation in Jesus Christ. God’s eternal Word comes to us in flesh and blood in a given time and place, and in full identification with humanity. Therefore, theological reflection is energized by our incarnational involvement in the daily life of the Church and the world as we participate in God’s liberating and saving action.

3. Our theological task is essentially practical. It informs the individual’s daily decisions and serves the Church’s life and work. While highly theoretical constructions of Christian thought make important contributions to theological understanding, we finally measure the truth of such statements in relation to their practical significance. Our interest is to incorporate the promises and demands of the gospel into our daily lives.

Theological Guidelines

1. Sources and Criteria: We have an obligation to bear a faithful Christian witness to Jesus Christ, the living reality at the center of the Church’s life and witness. To fulfill this obligation, we reflect critically on our biblical and theological inheritance, striving to express faithfully the witness we make in our own time.

Two considerations are central to this endeavor: the sources from which we derive our theological affirmations and the criteria by which we assess the adequacy of our understanding and witness. John Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.

Scripture is primary, revealing the Word of God “so far as it is necessary for our salvation”. Therefore, our theological task, in both its critical and constructive aspects, focuses on disciplined study of the Bible. To aid his study of the Bible and deepen his understanding of faith, Wesley drew on Christian tradition, in particular the Patristic writings, the ecumenical creeds, the teaching of the reformers, and the literature of contemporary spirituality. Thus, tradition provides both a source and a measure of

authentic Christian witness, though its authority derives from its faithfulness to the biblical message.

The Christian witness, even when grounded in Scripture and mediated by tradition, is ineffectual unless understood and appropriated by the individual. To become our witness, it must make sense in terms of our own reason and experience. For Wesley, a cogent account of the Christian faith required the use of reason, both to understand Scripture and to relate the biblical message to wider fields of knowledge. He looked for confirmations of the biblical witness in human experience, especially the experiences of regeneration and sanctification, but also in the “common sense” knowledge of everyday experience.

The interaction of these sources and criteria in Wesley’s own theology furnished a guide for our continuing theological task. In that task Scripture, as the constitutive witness to the wellsprings of our faith, occupies a place of primary authority among these theological considerations. Insights arising from serious study of the Scriptures and tradition enrich contemporary experience. Imaginative and critical thought enables us to understand better the Bible and our common Christian history.

2. Scripture: We share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine. Through Scripture the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace. We are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God in our midst whom we trust in life and death. The biblical authors, illumined by the Holy Spirit, bear witness that in Christ the world is reconciled to God.

The Bible bears authentic testimony to God’s self-disclosure in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as in God’s work of creation, in the pilgrimage of Israel, and in the Holy Spirit’s ongoing activity in human history. We believe the Bible is how God most often and accurately reveals Himself and speaks to us. Furthermore, we do not believe God speaks to us in ways that contradict the clear and consistent teaching of the Bible.

The Bible is a sacred canon for Christian people, formally acknowledged as such by historic ecumenical councils of the Church. Our doctrinal standards identify as canonical thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Our standards affirm the Bible as the source of all that is “necessary” and “sufficient” unto salvation and “is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice”.

We properly read Scripture within the believing community, informed by the tradition of that community. We interpret individual texts in light of their place in the Bible as a whole. We are aided by scholarly inquiry and personal insight, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we work with each text, we take into account what we have been able to learn about the original context and intention of that text. In this understanding we draw upon the careful historical, literary, and textual studies of recent years, which have enriched our understanding of the Bible.

Through this faithful reading of Scripture, we may come to know the truth of the biblical message in its bearing on our own lives and the life of the world. Thus, the Bible serves both as a source of our faith and as the basic criterion by which the truth and fidelity of any interpretation of faith is measured. While we acknowledge the primacy of Scripture in theological reflection, our attempts to grasp its meaning always involve tradition, experience, and reason. Like Scripture, these may become creative vehicles of the Holy Spirit as they function within the Church. They quicken our faith, open our eyes to wonder of God's love, and clarify our understanding.

The Wesleyan heritage directs us to a self-conscious use of these three sources in interpreting Scripture and in formulating faith statements based on the biblical witness. These sources are, along with Scripture, indispensable to our theological task.

The close relationship of tradition, experience, and reason appears in the Bible itself. Scripture witnesses to a variety of diverse traditions, some of which reflect tensions in interpretation within the early Judeo-Christian heritage. However, these traditions are woven together in the Bible in a manner that expresses the fundamental unity of God's revelation as received and experienced by people in the diversity of their own lives.

The developing communities of faith judged them, therefore, to be an authoritative witness to that revelation. In recognizing the interrelationship and inseparability of the four basic resources for theological understanding, we are following a model that is present in the biblical text itself.

3. Tradition: The theological task does not start anew in each age or each person. Christianity does not leap from New Testament times to the present as though nothing were to be learned from that great cloud of witnesses in between. For centuries Christians have sought to interpret the truth of the gospel for their time. In these attempts, tradition, understood both in terms of process and form, has played an important role. The passing on and receiving of the gospel among persons, regions, and generations constitutes a dynamic element of Christian history. The formulations and practices that grew out of specific circumstances constitute the legacy of the corporate experience of earlier Christian communities.

These traditions are found in many cultures around the globe. But the history of Christianity includes a mixture of ignorance, misguided zeal, and sin. Scripture remains the norm by which all traditions are judged.

The story of the church reflects the most basic sense of tradition, the continuing activity of God's Spirit transforming human life. Tradition is the history of that continuing environment of grace in and by which all Christians live, God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ. As such, tradition transcends the story of particular traditions.

In this deeper sense of tradition, all Christians share a common history. Within that history, Christian tradition precedes Scripture, and yet Scripture comes to be the focal expression of the tradition. At the same time, we continue to draw on the broader

Christian tradition as an expression of the history of divine grace within which Christians are able to recognize and welcome one another in love.

4. Experience: In our theological task, we follow Wesley's practice of examining experience, both individual and corporate, for confirmations of the realities of God's grace attested in Scripture.

Our experience interacts with Scripture. We read Scripture in light of the conditions and events that help shape who we are, and we interpret our experience in terms of Scripture.

All religious experience affects all human experience; all human experience affects our understanding of religious experience.

On the personal level, experience is to the individual as tradition is to the church: It is the personal appropriation of God's forgiving and empowering grace. Experience authenticates in our own lives the truths revealed in Scripture and illumined in tradition, enabling us to claim the Christian witness as our own.

Wesley described faith and its assurance as "a sure trust and confidence" in the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and a steadfast hope of all good things to be received at God's hand. Such assurance is God's gracious gift through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

This "new life in Christ" is what we mean when we speak of "Christian experience." Christian experience gives us new eyes to see the living truth in Scripture. It confirms the biblical message for our present. It illumines our understanding of God and creation and motivates us to make sensitive moral judgments.

Although profoundly personal, Christian experience is also corporate; our theological task is informed by the experience of the church and by the common experiences of all humanity. In our attempts to understand the biblical message, we recognize that God's gift of liberating love embraces the whole of creation.

Some facets of human experience tax our theological understanding. Many of God's people live in terror, hunger, loneliness, and degradation. Everyday experiences of birth and death, of growth and life in the created world, and an awareness of wider social relations also belong to serious theological reflection.

A new awareness of such experiences can inform our appropriation of scriptural truths and sharpen our appreciation of the good news of the kingdom of God.

As a source for theological reflection, experience, like tradition, is richly varied, challenging our efforts to put into words the totality of the promises of the gospel. We interpret experience in the light of scriptural norms, just as our experience informs our reading of the biblical message. In this respect, Scripture remains central in our efforts to be faithful in making our Christian witness.

5. Reason: Although we recognize that God's revelation and our experiences of God's grace continually surpass the scope of human language and reason, we also believe that any disciplined theological work calls for the careful use of reason.

- a. By reason we read and interpret Scripture.
- b. By reason we determine whether our Christian witness is clear.
- c. By reason we ask questions of faith and seek to understand God's action and will.
- d. By reason we organize the understandings that compose our witness and render them internally coherent.
- e. By reason we test the congruence of our witness to the biblical testimony and to the traditions that mediate that testimony to us.
- f. By reason we relate our witness to the full range of human knowledge, experience, and service.

Since all truth is from God, efforts to discern the connections between revelation and reason, faith and science, grace and nature, are useful endeavors in developing credible and communicable doctrine. We seek nothing less than a total view of reality that is decisively informed by the promises and imperatives of the Christian gospel, though we know well that such an attempt will always be marred by the limits and distortions characteristic of human knowledge.

Nevertheless, by our quest for reasoned understandings of Christian faith we seek to grasp, express, and live out the gospel in a way that will commend itself to thoughtful persons who are seeking to know and follow God's ways.

In theological reflection, the resources of tradition, experience, and reason are integral to our study of Scripture without displacing Scripture's primacy for faith and practice.

These four sources—each making distinctive contributions, yet all finally working together—guide our quest for a vital and appropriate Christian witness.

Our Wesleyan Roots

John Wesley and the early Methodists were particularly concerned about inviting people to experience God's grace and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined Christian living. They placed primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action. This emphasis on what Wesley referred to as "practical divinity" has continued to be a hallmark of our faith today.

The distinctive shape of our theological heritage can be seen not only in this emphasis on Christian living, but also in Wesley's distinctive understanding of God's saving grace. Although Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in salvation by grace, he

combined them in a powerful way to create distinctive emphases for living the full Christian life.

Grace

Grace is central to our understanding of Christian faith and life. Grace can be defined as the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it. We read in the Letter to the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Our heritage is rooted in a deep and profound understanding of God's grace. This incredible grace flows from God's great love for us. John 3:16 summarizes the gospel: "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." The ability to call to mind God's love and God's gift of Jesus Christ is a rich resource for theology and faith."

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, described God's grace as threefold:

- prevenient grace
- justifying grace
- sanctifying grace

1. Prevenient Grace: Wesley understood grace as God's active presence in our lives. This presence is not dependent on human actions or human response. Wesley called this grace that is active in everyone's life Prevenient Grace. It is a gift - a gift that is always available, but that can be refused. God's grace stirs up within us a desire to know God and empowers us to respond to God's invitation to be in relationship with God. God's grace enables us to discern differences between good and evil and makes it possible for us to choose good. God takes the initiative in relating to humanity. We do not have to beg and plead for God's love and grace. God actively seeks us!

2. Justifying Grace: Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). And in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul wrote: "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

These verses demonstrate the justifying grace of God. They point to reconciliation, pardon, and restoration. Through the work of God in Christ our sins are forgiven, and our relationship with God is restored. According to John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, the image of God- which has been distorted by sin - is renewed within us through Christ's death.

Again, this dimension of God's grace is a gift. God's grace alone brings us into relationship with God. There are no hoops through which we have to jump in order to

please God and to be loved by God. God has acted in Jesus Christ. We need only to respond in faith.

This process of salvation involves a change in us that we call conversion. Conversion is a turning around, leaving one orientation for another. It may be sudden and dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. But in any case, it's a new beginning. Following Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3 :7), we speak of this conversion as rebirth, new life in Christ, or regeneration.

Following Paul and Martin Luther, John Wesley called this process justification. Justification is what happens when Christians abandon all those vain attempts to justify themselves before God, to be seen as "just" in God's eyes through religious and moral practices. It's a time when God's "justifying grace" is experienced and accepted, a time of pardon and forgiveness, of new peace and joy and love. Indeed, we're justified by God's grace through faith.

Justification is also a time of repentance - turning away from behaviors rooted in sin and toward actions that express God's love. In this conversion we can expect to receive assurance of our present salvation through the Holy Spirit "bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

3. Sanctifying Grace: Salvation is not a static, one-time event in our lives. It is the ongoing experience of God's gracious presence transforming us into whom God intends us to be. John Wesley described this dimension of God's grace as sanctification, or holiness.

Through God's sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to love neighbor. Our inner thoughts and motives, as well as our outer actions and behavior, are aligned with God's will and testify to our union with God.

We're to press on, with God's help, in the path of sanctification toward perfection. By perfection, Wesley did not mean that we would not make mistakes or have weaknesses. Rather, he understood it to be a continual process of being made perfect in our love of God and each other and of removing our desire to sin.

Faith and Good Works

The New Testament insists that faith and good works belong together. What we believe must be confirmed by what we do. Personal salvation must be expressed in ministry and mission in the world. We believe that Christian doctrine and Christian ethics are inseparable, that faith should inspire service. The integration of personal piety and social holiness has been a hallmark of our tradition. We affirm the biblical precept that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17).

Mission and Service

Because of what God has done for us, we offer our lives back to God through a life of service. As disciples, we become active participants in God's activity in the world through mission and service. Love of God is always linked to love of neighbor and to a passionate commitment to seeking justice and renewal in the world.

Nurture and Mission of the Church

For Wesley, there was no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. In other words, faith always includes a social dimension. One cannot be a solitary Christian. As we grow in faith through our participation in the church community, we are also nourished and equipped for mission and service to the world.

"From Wesley's time to the present, Methodism has sought to be both a nurturing community and a servant community. Members of Methodist Societies and class meetings met for personal nurture through giving to the poor, visiting the imprisoned, and working for justice and peace in the community. They sought not only to receive the fullness of God's grace for themselves; but...they saw themselves as existing 'to reform the nation...and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.'"

Sacraments

Vidalia Cornerstone Church recognizes two sacraments in which Christ himself participated: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

Baptism marks the beginning of our lifelong journey as disciples of Jesus Christ. Through baptism, we are joined with the Triune God, the whole of Christ's church, and our local congregation. The water and the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism convey God's saving grace, the forgiveness of our sins, and new life in Jesus Christ.

Persons of any age may be baptized—infants, children, youth, and adults. We believe children are under the atonement of Christ and as heirs of the Kingdom of God are acceptable subjects for Christian Baptism. Children of believing parents through Baptism become the special responsibility of the Church. They should be nurtured and led to personal acceptance of Christ, and by profession of faith confirm their Baptism. Parents who present their children for baptism should answer the covenant questions by affirming the following questions: On behalf of the whole church,

- Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord in union with Vidalia Cornerstone Church?
- Will you nurture the child in Christ's holy church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?

Vidalia Cornerstone Church baptizes in a variety of ways - immersion, pouring, or sprinkling.

However, a person receives the sacrament of adult baptism only once in his or her life. Acts of remembering one's baptism are encouraged so long as it is made clear a "re-baptism" is not occurring.

Holy Communion

Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper are common names for the Eucharist, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving the church offers to God for all God has done, is doing, and will do to save us and renew all things in Christ. Through offering ourselves in praise and thanksgiving, and through receiving the bread and cup- which the Spirit makes for us the body and blood of Christ - celebrating the Lord's Supper together nourishes and sustains us in our journey as disciples of Jesus Christ. As we pray together and receive the body and blood of Christ together, we are united with Christ, with one another, and in ministry to all the world.

All who love Christ, earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another are invited to join us in offering our prayer of thanksgiving and receive the body and blood of Christ-regardless of age or church membership. Wesley taught that Holy Communion was a "converting ordinance" and should not be withheld because of age or lack of understanding.

Holy Communion is to be celebrated and received regularly -- John Wesley said, "as often as [one] can."

Leadership Qualifications

1. Qualifications for Serving in Leadership at Vidalia Cornerstone Church include, but are not limited to the following:

- a. Active Member of Vidalia Cornerstone Church
- b. Commitment to following Jesus and growing in the faith through discipleship study
- c. Commitment to growing the kingdom of God through the life and ministry of the church
- d. Commitment to Vidalia Cornerstone Church through giving of a tithe
- e. Hold the congregation and its ministry teams accountable to the mission, vision, and core values that God has entrusted to Vidalia Cornerstone Church.
- f. Hold the congregation and Vidalia Cornerstone Church's ministry teams accountable to the Spirit's leading and not merely the leading of our best thinking or wisest decisions. Administrative Council members serve three-year terms and may succeed themselves.

Ordination and Licensing

The Purpose of Ordination

Ordination is the communal recognition of persons set apart for leadership and pastoral responsibility. The work of the 'ordained' is not about privilege or power, it is "call" to serve the church. "Call" is grounded in servant-leadership modeled by Jesus Christ's example to His disciples. In the midst of the disciples bickering over who would be the greatest, as well as their final meal with Jesus, "...he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him." (John 13:4-5) Foot washing was a menial task that not even Jewish servants would perform; it was reserved for gentile slaves. Jesus gave the example of those set apart for the work of God, would be grounded in service. To be ordained, is to be called to a responsibility to equip, lead, teach and shepherd God's people. Those entering into the process and seeking ordination should do so counting the cost; committing to a lifetime of conscious living of the whole gospel, and joyfully embracing God's calling. The covenant of ordained ministry is a lifetime commitment, and those who enter into it dedicate their whole lives to the personal and spiritual disciplines it requires.

At Vidalia Cornerstone Church, ordination is a formal setting apart of persons for leading the community in Word (teaching and preaching the Bible), Sacrament (overseeing the practice of baptism and communion) and Order (giving leadership and form to the church's life). Persons apply, are examined, and after recommendation of the pastors and approval of the Administrative Council, are ordained before the community of faith.

Complete education, experience and examination requirements are included in the information and application documents included in the appendix. The Administrative Council reserves the right to grant waivers for qualifications for justified special circumstances.

Ordination

The Administrative Council may ordain a person as a minister of the Gospel after first examining the applicant's background, moral and religious character, previous education, and ministry experience. Those who are ordained have responsibility for teaching, preaching, weddings, funerals, sacraments as well as oversight of other ministry staff including Licensed Pastors as assigned. Persons who meet eligibility requirements for ordination but do not have supervisory responsibility can be licensed immediately and may be ordained, without additional application requirements, upon assignment to a supervisory role. Final determination regarding qualification for ordination shall belong to the Administrative Council. Those ordained by Vidalia Cornerstone Church shall have their credentials and standing reviewed annually, by the Administrative Council for continuation or discontinuation.

Licensing

There may be those who do not feel called to pursue the educational requirements of ordination but feel called to additional ministry responsibility. For these persons there is a licensing process. The Administrative Council may license a person as a minister of the Gospel with responsibilities to lead in weddings, funerals, administer the sacraments, preach and teach and other duties as determined by the Sr. Staff. Those licensed for ministry serve under the supervision of an ordained pastor. Licenses are issued on a calendar year basis and are renewed annually upon satisfactory review and approval by the Administrative Council.

Pastor

The Sr. Pastor and Associate Pastors at Vidalia Cornerstone Church shall be ordained or licensed ministers of the Gospel. Other staff and ministry positions can be filled with people who may or may not be either licensed or ordained.

Application

An application for ordination and/or licensing as a minister of the Gospel shall be provided by the Senior Staff. A person's application shall be either approved or denied within sixty (60) days of the completion of the examination of the applicant.

Those applicants who are approved shall receive a certificate of license or ordination.

Ordination Process

1. Application: Request required information packet that includes education, experience and examination requirements. Submit completed information to the Senior Staff.
2. Interview: All applicants seeking ordination shall participate in a three-step interview process. There will be a "Chemistry" interview with those who work or will work most closely with the applicant. There will be a "Competence" interview with the Pastors and the Executive Committee of the Church. There will be a "Character" interview with a committee appointed by the Senior Pastor. The interview shall explore call to ministry, theological beliefs, and gifts for ministry both displayed and affirmed by others in the congregation.
3. Experience: Applicants seeking ordination must have 2 years' experience in ministry at Vidalia Cornerstone Church or another traditional, Wesleyan congregation. Applicants seeking Licensing must have 2 years of ministry experience.
4. Psychological Evaluation: A psychological evaluation of the applicant is required.
5. Mentor Process Spiritual Formation/discipleship process; one-year process which shall include meeting regularly with the Senior or Associate Pastor to develop his or her goals and skills through a series of time-limited, confidential, one-on-one conversations and other learning activities and resources.

Applicants for ordination must complete educational requirements and theological statements prior to interviewing. Upon completion of these requirements, and approval by the Sr. Staff and Administrative Council, as well as the completion of two years ministry experience, the minister shall be ordained by the Administrative Council and an ordained pastor of the church in the presence of the congregation.

Adopted by the Administrative Council of Vidalia Cornerstone Church, Inc. on August 16, 2022.

Appendix I - Vidalia Cornerstone Church Ordination and Licensing Requirements

Ordination Requirements

1. Bachelor's Degree from accredited and approved College/University.
2. Read, assent to and covenant to uphold the Vidalia Cornerstone Church Statement of Faith and Practice as the guide and authority for ordained and licensed ministry.
3. Complete Educational Requirements (Minimum Standards post Bachelor's Degree)
 - a. Completion of an approved theological degree from an approved seminary.
4. Be Recommended by a Vidalia Cornerstone Church Ordained Pastor with endorsing signature on the Ordination Application.
5. Complete written answers of Theological Questions.
6. Interview with the Sr. Staff and with current team members with whom the applicant works most closely.
7. Psychological Evaluation by an approved clinician prior to being considered for ordination.
8. Completion of a Mentor Process
 - a. Candidates for ordination who have completed a comparable educational requirement before arriving at Vidalia Cornerstone Church may, at the discretion of the Sr. Staff and approval of the Administrative Council, have those degrees accepted as satisfaction of educational requirements.
9. The Administrative Council reserves the right to grant waivers for qualifications for justified special circumstances upon recommendation of the Sr. Pastor or Sr. Staff.

Licensing Requirements

1. Read and assent to and covenant to uphold the Vidalia Cornerstone Church Statement of Faith and Practice as the guide and authority for ordained and licensed ministry within Vidalia Cornerstone Church.
2. Complete Educational Requirements.
3. Completion of one approved continuing education event/experience annually.
4. Be Recommended by a Senior Staff member with endorsing signature on the Ordination Application.
5. Complete written answers of Theological Questions.
6. Interview with the Senior Staff.

7. Psychological Evaluation.
8. Completion of a one-year Discipleship Process with assigned Pastoral mentor.
9. The Administrative Council reserves the right to grant waivers for qualifications for justified special circumstances upon recommendation of the Senior Pastor or Senior Staff.

Ordination and Licensing Process

1. Application: Finish application and required theological questions.
2. Interview: All applicants seeking shall participate in an appropriate interview process as outlined above.
3. Experience: Applicants must have 2 years' experience in ministry at Vidalia Cornerstone Church or another traditional, Wesleyan congregation.
4. Psychological Evaluation: Applicants must satisfactorily complete a psychological evaluation by an approved psychologist or psychiatrist prior to being considered for ordination.
5. Mentor Process (Spiritual Formation and Leadership process) with an assigned Pastoral mentor.
6. Applicants must complete educational requirements and theological statements prior to interviewing with the Leadership Team. Upon completion of these requirements, recommendation by the Senior Staff and approval by the Leadership Team, as well as the completion of two years ministry experience, the minister shall be ordained or licensed accordingly by an ordained pastor of the church in the presence of the congregation.

Appendix II - Vidalia Cornerstone Church Application for Ordained/Licensed Ministry

Name: _____

Ministry Role: _____

7. Applying for: ___ Licensing ___ Ordination

Education:

- Institution:
- Degree(s) Earned _____
- Please Provide Transcripts of any Degree Programs post High School Years of Experience in Ministry and Place(s) of Service:

Statement of Call to Ministry:

Please describe your call to ministry. Include your understanding of your gifts for ministry. (2-5 pages)

Answer the following questions on separate paper and attach to this application. (5-10 pages)

1. Theology:

- What is the nature and character of the Trinity?
- What is the nature of Christ? Why is it important that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine?
- What is the nature of the Holy Spirit?
- What is sin?
- What is God's grace? What is the relationship between God's forgiveness and God's grace.
- How does God offer salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? How do you receive that gift of salvation?
- What does it mean that we are saved by faith alone?
- What is the relationship between faith and works?
- What is your understanding of the authority of Scripture?
- How has God revealed these truths to you throughout your own life?

2. Ecclesiology:

- What is the purpose of the church?
- What is your understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion?
- How do you understand your pastoral role and authority in the church?
- What are essential values of ministry of Vidalia Cornerstone Church and how do you intend to uphold them?

3. Personal Holiness:

- What are your understandings of the spiritual disciplines? Which have been most critical to you in your own personal formation?
- Gospel identity is central to pastoral ministry. How do you understand your identity in Christ?

To the best of my knowledge, are all of the statements of belief and personal information that I have provided are accurate, true, and representative of my belief and practice.

Signature of Applicant

Date: _____

Signature of Endorsing Pastor, Elder or Leadership Team Member

I have read and fully assent to Vidalia Cornerstone Church Faith and Practice as the guide and authority for Ordained and Licensed Ministry in Vidalia Cornerstone Church Family.

Signature of Applicant

Date: _____

Signature of Endorsing Member
of Senior Staff

Appendix III - Historic Theological Sources

The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (A D 1963)

Article I - God

We believe in the one true, holy and living God, Eternal Spirit, who is Creator, Sovereign and Preserver of all things visible and invisible. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love, and rules with gracious regard for the well-being and salvation of men, to the glory of his name. We believe the one God reveals himself as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinct but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power.

Article II - Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. As ministering Servant he lived, suffered and died on the cross. He was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from whence he shall return. He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us, and by him all men will be judged.

Article III - The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from and is one in being with the Father and the Son. He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He leads men through faithful response to the gospel into the fellowship of the Church. He comforts, sustains and empowers the faithful and guides them into all truth.

Article IV - The Holy Bible

We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice. Whatever is not revealed in or established by the Holy Scriptures is not to be made an article of faith nor is it to be taught as essential to salvation.

Article V - The Church

We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.

Article VI - The Sacraments

We believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian's profession and of God's love toward us. They are means of grace by which

God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him. Two Sacraments are ordained by Christ our Lord, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We believe Baptism signifies entrance into the household of faith, and is a symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus and a mark of Christian discipleship.

We believe children are under the atonement of Christ and as heirs of the Kingdom of God are acceptable subjects for Christian Baptism. Children of believing parents through Baptism become the special responsibility of the Church. They should be nurtured and led to personal acceptance of Christ, and by profession of faith confirm their Baptism.

We believe the Lord's Supper is a representation of our redemption, a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ, and a token of love and union which Christians have with Christ and with one another. Those who rightly, worthily and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup partake of the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual manner until he comes.

Article VII - Sin and Free Will

We believe man is fallen from righteousness and, apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is destitute of holiness and inclined to evil. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. In his own strength, without divine grace, man cannot do good works pleasing and acceptable to God. We believe, however, man influenced and empowered by the Holy Spirit is responsible in freedom to exercise his will for good.

Article VIII - Reconciliation Through Christ

We believe God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The offering Christ freely made on the cross is the perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, redeeming man from all sin, so that no other satisfaction is required.

Article IX - Justification and Regeneration

We believe we are never accounted righteous before God through our works or merit, but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe regeneration is the renewal of man in righteousness through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature and experience newness of life. By this new birth the believer becomes reconciled to God and is enabled to serve him with the will and the affections.

We believe, although we have experienced regeneration, it is possible to depart from grace and fall into sin; and we may even then, by the grace of God, be renewed in righteousness.

Article X - Good Works

We believe good works are the necessary fruits of faith and follow regeneration but they do not have the virtue to remove our sins or to avert divine judgment. We believe good works, pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, spring from a true and living faith, for through and by them faith is made evident.

Article XI - Sanctification and Christian Perfection

We believe sanctification is the work of God's grace through the Word and the Spirit, by which those who have been born again are cleansed from sin in their thoughts, words and acts, and are enabled to live in accordance with God's will, and to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Entire sanctification is a state of perfect love, righteousness and true holiness which every regenerate believer may obtain by being delivered from the power of sin, by loving God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving one's neighbor as one's self. Through faith in Jesus Christ this gracious gift may be received in this

life both gradually and instantaneously, and should be sought earnestly by every child of God.

We believe this experience does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes common to man, nor from the possibilities of further sin. The Christian must continue on guard against spiritual pride and seek to gain victory over every temptation to sin. He must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; and the world, the flesh, and the devil are put under his feet. Thus, he rules over these enemies with watchfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Article XII -The Judgment and the Future State

We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation.

Article XIII -Public Worship

We believe divine worship is the duty and privilege of man who, in the presence of God, bows in adoration, humility and dedication. We believe divine worship is essential to the life of the Church, and that the assembling of the people of God for such worship is necessary to Christian fellowship and spiritual growth.

We believe the order of public worship need not be the same in all places but may be modified by the church according to circumstances and the needs of men. It should be in a language and form understood by the people, consistent with the Holy Scriptures to the edification of all, and in accordance with the order and Discipline of the Church.

Article XIV -The Lord's Day

We believe the Lord's Day is divinely ordained for private and public worship, for rest from unnecessary work, and should be devoted to spiritual improvement, Christian fellowship and service. It is commemorative of our Lord's resurrection and is an emblem

of our eternal rest. It is essential to the permanence and growth of the Christian Church, and important to the welfare of the civil community.

Article XV -The Christian and Property

We believe God is the owner of all things and that the individual holding of property is lawful and is a sacred trust under God. Private property is to be used for the manifestation of Christian love and liberality, and to support the Church's mission in the world. All forms of property, whether private, corporate or public, are to be held in solemn trust and used responsibly for human good under the sovereignty of God.

Article XVI -Civil Government

We believe civil government derives its just powers from the sovereign God. As Christians we recognize the governments under whose protection we reside and believe such governments should be based on, and be responsible for, the recognition of human rights under God. We believe war and bloodshed are contrary to the gospel and spirit of Christ. We believe it is the duty of Christian citizens to give moral strength and purpose to their respective governments through sober, righteous and godly living.

The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church (A D 1808)

These historic Christian Articles of Religion contain outdated language and statements of faith regarding issues that may no longer be considered central to the faith. While we affirm all these articles, those have been noted with an asterisk (), and have been included in their entirety for historic purposes.

Article I - Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons of one substance, power, and eternity-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Article II - Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.

Article III - Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he returns to judge all men at the last day.

Article IV - Of the Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

Article V - Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation

The Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the church. The names of the canonical books are:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, The First Book of Samuel, The Second Book of Samuel, The First Book of Kings, The Second Book of Kings, The First Book of Chronicles, The Second Book of Chronicles, The Book of Ezra, The Book of Nehemiah, The Book of Esther, The Book of Job, The Psalms, The Proverbs, Ecclesiastes or the Preacher, Songs of Solomon, Four Prophets the Greater, Twelve Prophets the Less.

All the books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive and account canonical.

Article VI - Of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses as touching ceremonies and rites doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral.

Article VII - Of Original or Birth Sin

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

Article VIII - Of Free Will

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

Article IX - Of the Justification of Man

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

Article X - Of Good Works

Although good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

*Article XI - Of Works of Supererogation

Voluntary works-besides, over and above God's commandments-which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake than of bounden duty is required; whereas Christ saith plainly: When you have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants.

Article XII - Of Sin After Justification

Not every sin willingly committed after justification is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and, by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives. And therefore, they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here; or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

Article XIII - Of the Church

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

*Article XIV - Of Purgatory

The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshiping, and adoration, as well of images as of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant to the Word of God.

*Article XV - Of Speaking in the Congregation in Such a Tongue as the People Understand

It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the primitive church, to have public prayer in the church, or to minister the Sacraments, in a tongue not understood by the people.

Article XVI - Of the Sacraments

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called sacraments, that is to say, confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel; being such as have partly grown out of the corrupt following of the apostles, and partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not the like nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as St. Paul saith.

Article XVII - Of Baptism

Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.

Article XVIII - Of the Lord's Supper

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death; insomuch that, to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of our Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshiped.

Article XIX - Of Both Kinds

The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the lay people; for both the parts of the Lord's Supper, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be administered to all Christians alike.

Article XX - Of the One Oblation of Christ, Finished upon the Cross

The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifice of masses, in the which it is commonly said that the priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit.

***Article XXI - Of the Marriage of Ministers**

The ministers of Christ are not commanded by God's law either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage; therefore, it is lawful for them, as for all other Christians, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve best to godliness.

Article XXII - Of the Rites and Ceremonies of Churches

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which he belongs, which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.

Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification.

***Article XXIII - Of the Rulers of the United States of America**

The President, the Congress, the general assemblies, the governors, and the councils of state, as the delegates of the people, are the rulers of the United States of America, according to the division of power made to them by the Constitution of the United States and by the constitutions of their respective states. And the said states are a sovereign and independent nation and ought not to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction.

***Article XXIV - Of Christian Men's Goods**

The riches and goods of Christians are not common as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as some do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.

***Article XXV - Of a Christian Man's Oath**

As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ and James his apostle, so we judge that the Christian religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the prophet's teaching, in justice, judgment, and truth.