

The Statement of Faith of Douglas Church Ruston, Louisiana

Preamble

Douglas Church is a community of believers in the triune God who have answered the call of the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus in a confused and lost world. Those who become members of Douglas Church join in our mission to love God and love others as themselves, becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, while sharing the gospel story with those He created in order to grow God's kingdom.

Our vision is to reach our community and beyond for Jesus, in union with other Christ-followers from other churches, joined together in Kingdom work. Our vow to one another as members of Douglas Church is to walk with each other through the difficult times in life without fear of judgment, to discern God's truths through his Word, to hold one another accountable to those truths, and to celebrate with each other through the victories of life.

Douglas Church is a place where every person is welcomed and has opportunity to discover and grow in their relationship with the Living God. Our life together consists of the following disciplines experienced through the Wesleyan way of serving Christ:

- 1) Weekend worship where God is exalted, fellowship is experienced, gifts are given, and the Word is proclaimed.
- 2) Small groups and classes where people can focus on the details of their relationship with God, work on areas of struggle, experience loving accountability, and share in the daily lives of fellow followers.
- 3) Outreach opportunities where we show God's love in practical ways through acts of kindness and mercy.
- 4) Mission trips where we reach beyond our community into the broader world with God's unconditional love.

This document exists to articulate the core doctrine of Douglas Church. Founded as a United Methodist congregation in 1968, Douglas Church withdrew from the United Methodist denomination in 2019. In the absence of denominational grounding, this essential document establishes foundational doctrines from which our practice grows. Following the teachings of John Wesley and our Wesleyan Heritage, the following are our beliefs:

Articles of Religion

Article I. *Of the Holy Trinity*-- We believe in the one living and true God, both holy and loving, eternal, unlimited in power, wisdom and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. Within this unity there are three persons of one substance, power and eternity — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Article II. *Of the Father*-- We believe the Father is the Source and Creator of all that exists, whether of matter or spirit. With the Son and the Holy Spirit, He made man, male and female, in His image. By intention He relates to people as Father, thereby forever declaring His goodwill toward them. In love, He both seeks and receives repentant sinners. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and love.

Article III. *Of the Son of God*-- We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God and the eternal Word made flesh. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, fully God and fully man. He died on the cross and was buried, to be a sacrifice, both for original sin and for all human transgressions, and to reconcile us to God. Christ rose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and there intercedes for us at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge all humanity at the last day. The sacrifice Christ freely made on the cross is the perfect and sufficient sacrifice for all the sin of all the people, and no other sacrifice is necessary.

Article IV. *Of the Holy Spirit*-- We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is of the same essential nature, majesty, and glory, as the Father and the Son, truly and eternally God. He is the Administrator of grace to all, and is particularly the effective Agent in conviction of sin, in justification, in sanctification, and in glorification. He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and enabling the believer to use their God-given spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit is present in the heart of every person who professes Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, bringing fruit which should be visible in the life of the believer. He comforts, sustains, and empowers the faithful and guides them in truth.

Article V. *Of the Bible*-- We believe that the books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the entirety of the Holy Scriptures. They are the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscripts and superior to all human authority, and have been transmitted to the present without corruption of any essential doctrine. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as a rule and guide for faith and practice.

Article VI. *Of the Church*-- We believe that the Christian Church is the entire body of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the founder and only Head of the Church. The Church is one, holy, apostolic, and universal (catholic) body. It includes both those believers who have gone to be with the Lord and those who remain on the earth, having renounced the world, the flesh and the devil, and having dedicated themselves to the work which Christ committed unto His church until He comes. The Church on earth is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ's instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands. A local church is a body of believers formally organized on gospel principles, meeting regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship and worship.

Article VII. *Of God's Purpose for Humanity and Salvation*— We believe that God's greatest desire is for human relationship, and that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself. We believe that this relationship is lived out through the two great commandments which require us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and our neighbors as ourselves. This commandment summarizes the divine law as it is revealed in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the perfect measure and norm of human duty, both for the ordering and directing of families and nations, all other social bodies, and for individual acts. We are required to acknowledge God as our only Supreme Ruler, and all persons as created by Him, equal in all natural rights. Therefore, all persons should order all their individual, social and political acts as to give to God entire and absolute obedience, and to assure to all the enjoyment of every natural right, and to promote the fulfillment of each in the possession and exercise of such rights.

Article VIII. *Of Marriage and the Family*-- We believe that every person is created in the image of God, and that human sexuality reflects that image in terms of intimate love, communication, fellowship, subordination of the self to the larger whole, and fulfillment. We believe that marriage and sexual intimacy are good gifts from God. God's Word makes use of the marriage relationship as the supreme metaphor for His relationship with His covenant people and for revealing the truth that this relationship is of one God with one people. Therefore, God's plan for human sexuality is that it is to be expressed only in a monogamous lifelong relationship between one man and one woman within the framework of marriage. This is the only relationship which is divinely designed for the birth and rearing of children and is a covenant union made in the sight of God, taking priority over every other human relationship. We adhere to the teachings of Scripture regarding gender identity (God created male and female humans in His image), sexual purity (faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness), sexual conduct (within the bonds of Christian marriage and mutually beneficial), the sacredness of marriage (marriage is a covenant ordained by God uniting 1 man and 1 woman for life in a single, exclusive union), and believe that any sexual relationships outside of these expressions are in conflict with the Scriptures.

Therefore, we denounce all forms of sexual immorality (cohabitation, pornography, extra-marital relationships, homosexual relationships or marriage, plural marriage, and divorce, etc.) Like other sin, none of these forms of immorality are unforgivable, so long as the individual involved has repented of the sin and asked for/received forgiveness for the sin from God.

Divorce is not part of God's original plan and is a regrettable, but not unforgivable, alternative to a broken and irreconcilable marriage relationship. Divorce is not something to be celebrated or encouraged. Douglas Church counsels anyone considering divorce to exhaust every avenue of reconciliation, including thoughtful, outside counsel. Through the process of healing and restoration, divorced individuals can be restored to community and healthy and whole relationships that may include remarriage. Divorced persons can be remarried at Douglas Church and can serve in leadership positions so long as the individuals have repented and received forgiveness for the sin of divorce and have recommitted to adhere to the Biblical standards for human relationships and marriage as outlined above.

Any minister ordained by Douglas Church will only perform marriages that adhere to the Biblical standards for marriage as outlined above. Any minister ordained by Douglas Church must adhere to these teachings of marriage and family in his/her personal life, including but not limited to, faithfulness in heterosexual, monogamous marriage or celibacy in singleness. Also, only marriages that adhere to the Biblical standards for marriage outlined above may take place on the property or in the sanctuary of Douglas Church.

Article IX. *Of Free Will and Sin--* We believe that humanity's creation in the image of God included the God-given ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus, individuals were made morally responsible for their choices. But since the fall of Adam, people are unable in their own strength to live a life free of sin or do only good works which are pleasing and acceptable to God. This is due to original sin, which is not simply the following of Adam's example, but rather the corruption of the nature of each mortal, and is reproduced naturally in Adam's descendants. Because of it, humans are very far from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit, the prevenient grace of God makes possible what humans in self effort cannot do. This grace is bestowed freely upon all, enabling all who will to turn and be saved. The Christian must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him. We believe all people are individuals of sacred worth and affirm that God's grace is available to all.

Article X. *Of Baptism*—We believe that baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace, a grace where God works invisibly in us quickening, strengthening, and confirming our faith in him. Baptism is the Holy Spirit’s work of initiating all who believe into the body of Christ, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). Baptism is an act of faith indicating one’s commitment to Jesus Christ and the beginning of a life-long discipleship journey as a follower of Jesus Christ. Baptism is not a means of salvation, rather an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s death to sin, the washing away of guilt, the new life in Jesus, and a desire to be engaged in Christian discipleship (Romans 6:3-5). The preferred method of baptism is immersion. However, those who are unable to be immersed may use sprinkling or pouring. Infants may be baptized, with their parent(s) making a commitment to raise their child (with the congregation’s help and prayers) in the ways of Christ and toward a goal of personal profession of faith by the child when he/she grows up into adulthood. Outside of infancy, only those who make a public profession of faith in Christ may be baptized. A person may only receive the sacrament of adult baptism once in his/her life. Baptisms will be conducted only by either those who are ordained through Douglas Church or by those approved by ordained ministers of Douglas Church, and preferably in corporate services of worship. In the case of imminent death, any baptized believer may conduct baptism.

Questions to be asked of believers by the pastor prior to baptism include:

1. Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?
2. Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?
3. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, putting your whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as your Lord in union with Douglas Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races?
4. {in cases of infant baptism, asked of the parents} Will you nurture your 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?

Article XI. *Of the Lord’s Supper*—The Lord’s Supper, or communion/Eucharist, is a sign of the new covenant instituted by God through Jesus Christ and is viewed as a means of grace through which God works in us. Through communion we remember the body and blood of Jesus given on our behalf for the remission of sin. We offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving for all God has done, is doing, and will do in and through us. Communion reminds us of the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, encourages the continuing work of sanctification through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and sustains us on our discipleship journey. Those who rightly, worthily, and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the cup partake in the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual manner until He comes in final victory. Those ordained through Douglas Church will

preside over communion. Any person who loves and professes Christ as Savior, earnestly repents of their sin, and seeks to live in peace with one another may receive the consecrated elements. They are invited to join us in offering a 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 simply because of age.

Article XII. *Of Equality*— We believe that all persons are of sacred worth. 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. No person shall be disqualified from becoming a member of the Douglas Church congregation, holding a leadership position in the church, or applying to become an ordained clergy based on race, color, gender (God-assigned, at birth), nationality, national origin, or economic condition. Douglas Church specifically renounces all racial and ethnic discrimination in the church and in society as a whole. In addition, Scripture teaches that men and women are equal in the sight of God. Accordingly, the church should treat women and men equally. We believe that both men and women can be called into ministry and to teach, and both men and women are able to hold leadership roles at Douglas Church.

Article XIII. *Of Human Dignity*—We believe that all persons are individuals of sacred worth and affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes toward any individual or group are to be rejected and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of Douglas Church. For these reasons, we specifically denounce child abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, sex/child trafficking, abuse of those with mental/physical differences, and any other behavior which seeks to destroy the image of God in another human.

Article XIV. *Of Sanctity of Life*— The beginning of life and ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. We affirm that abortion is always a painfully regrettable option and we reject it as a means of gender selection or as a solution to an unwanted pregnancy. We realize there are cases when the life of the mother is endangered, and in these circumstances, we encourage prayerful inquiry and counsel from medical and spiritual sources. We are committed to being in ministry to and with all persons who have been touched by the devastating effects of abortion. Douglas Church is committed to supporting ministries in our community which seek to minister to and provide for families who are facing unplanned pregnancies and making the decision to choose life for their unborn child. In addition, we affirm that suicide is always a regrettable option for those suffering from mental illness or various forms of abuse. We realize many issues are at work in the life of someone who commits suicide,

and we believe that the grace of God is more than able to meet every human in their hour of need. We are committed to being in ministry to and with all persons who have been touched by the devastating effects of suicide and supporting these persons to receive the help needed for healing in body, mind, and spirit.

Amendments- Any amendment (addition, deletion, or change) to this Statement of Faith may be proposed by any member of the Administrative Council (on their own behalf or on behalf of another Douglas Church member). Such an amendment should be proposed in writing to the Council Secretary, so that the Council members can be notified at least thirty (30) days prior to the next regular or special council meeting. After being presented to the Council, any amendments must be adopted by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership of Douglas Church at a regular annual (or specially called) meeting of the church body.

ADOPTION by Administrative Council: October 4, 2021