

**Living Hope Church
Of Bowie, Maryland**

**Statement of Faith
Membership Agreements**

The statement of Faith and Membership Agreements found in this document define requirements for membership in Living Hope Church of Bowie, MD.

January 4, 2015

Statement of Faith

Living Hope Church

The Scriptures

We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God. The Bible is the only essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Being given by God, the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation, or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture.

God is triune

There is one God: infinite, eternal, almighty, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. In the unity of the godhead there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, co-existent, co-equal, co-eternal. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, yet each is truly Deity. One God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the foundation of Christian faith and life.

God the Father

God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By his Word and for his glory, he freely and supernaturally created the world from nothing. Through the same Word he daily sustains all his creatures. He rules over all and is the only Sovereign. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is faithful to every promise, works all things together for good to those who love him, and in his unfathomable grace gave his Son, Jesus Christ, for mankind's redemption. He made man for fellowship with himself, and intended that all creation should live to the praise of his glory.

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was the eternal Word made flesh, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He was perfect in nature, teaching, and obedience. He is fully God and fully man. He was always with God and is God. Through him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in him all things hold together by the word of his power. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, and in him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily. He is the only Savior for the sins of the world, having shed his blood and died a vicarious death on Calvary's cross. By his death in our place, he revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness, and for a period of 40 days appeared to more than 500 witnesses, performing many convincing proofs of his resurrection. He ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, he intercedes for his people and rules as Lord over all. He is the Head of his body, the Church, and should be adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel he persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit a person is led to trust in divine mercy. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, brings about the new birth, and dwells within the regenerate. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son, who in turn came to glorify the Father. He will lead the Church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored, and worshiped as God the Third Person of the Trinity.

Man

God made man—male and female—in his own image, as the crown of creation, that man might have fellowship with him. Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God. Being estranged from his Maker, yet responsible to him, he became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God. This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives under the dominion of sin and Satan. He is at enmity with God, hostile toward God, and hateful of God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ.

The gospel

Jesus Christ is the gospel. The good news is revealed in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion is the heart of the gospel, his resurrection is the power of the gospel, and his ascension is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death is a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases his holy wrath. It also demonstrates his mysterious love and reveals his amazing grace. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have of glorifying God because of what he has accomplished. Therefore, we want all that takes place in our hearts, churches, and ministries to proceed from and be related to the cross.

Man's response to the gospel

Man's response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for his own pleasure and glory. It is also true that the message of the gospel is only effectual to those who genuinely repent of their sins and, by God's grace, put saving faith in Christ. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations. Biblical repentance is characterized by a changed life, and saving faith is evidenced by kingdom service or works. While neither repentance nor works save, unless a person is willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, he cannot become his disciple.

Man's inheritance through the gospel

Salvation, the free gift of God, is provided by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone turning from sin in repentance and looking to Christ and his substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life and is declared righteous by God as a free gift. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. He is justified and fully accepted by God. Through Christ's atonement for sin an individual is reconciled to God as Father and becomes his child. The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin and, via the miracle of regeneration, liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit.

Sanctification

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification and seeks to produce his fruit in us as our minds are renewed and we are conformed to the image of Christ. Though indwelling sin remains a reality, as we are led by the Spirit we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavoring to so live in the world that

all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word, and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve his people until the end, which is most certain.

Empowered by the Spirit

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well. Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.

The Church

God by his Word and Spirit creates the Church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's Body. By the same Word and Spirit, he guides and preserves that new redeemed humanity. The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve him by faithfully doing his will in the earth. This involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in all the world for a testimony. The ultimate mission of the Church is the making of disciples through the preaching of the gospel. When God transforms human nature, this then becomes the chief means of society's transformation. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church, in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer.

All members of the Church universal are to be a vital and committed part of a local church. In this context they are called to walk out the New Covenant as the people of God, and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God. The ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the church (including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and

teachers) for the equipping of Christ's body that it might mature and grow. Through the gift ministries, all members of the Church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of ministry. Women play a vital role in the life of the church, but in keeping with God's created design they are not permitted "to teach or to exercise authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:12 ESV). Leadership in the church is male. In the context of the local church, God's people receive pastoral care and leadership and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in his service in relation to one another and to the world.

Sacraments of the Church

Water baptism is intended only for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become his disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself, and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of his death and resurrection. It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death, and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin.

As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of his blood on our behalf, and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

The Consummation

The Consummation of all things includes the visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. In the Consummation, Satan with his hosts and all those outside Christ are finally separated from the benevolent presence of God, enduring eternal punishment, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with him forever. Married to Christ as his Bride, the Church will be in the presence of God forever, serving him and giving him unending praise and glory. Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

Membership Agreements

Living Hope Church

Our existence as a church depends not only on commonly held beliefs but also commonly accepted standards of moral and ethical behavior as well as commonly accepted responsibilities. We are bound to these standards because of the Bible's command to "...walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). Our obligation is to conform our lives around God and his Word and not to base our private or public morality, doctrine, or lifestyle on the current social standards of the world in which we live. This means that we must, "...not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Rom 12:1-2). Obedience and love go hand-in-hand: "And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it" (2 John 1:6).

Consequently we individually and as a church agree to the following:

The Bible. God has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ as stated in the inspired 66 books of the Bible, whose central doctrines are summarized in the statement of faith as found in section 3.1 of these bylaws. The Bible is the source of our understanding of God, of humanity, of the world, and of the church. It is the responsibility of the Church's Elders to faithfully teach truth as defined in the Bible and to apply these truths wisely to the Church community.

The Gospel. The Gospel creates the informing principle for our standing before God, how we live with our brothers and sisters, and how we live in this world. In light of the gospel of Jesus we will live together as brothers and sisters in love, just as God has loved us. We will seek their good through forming relationships that promote holiness, discipleship, worship and sound doctrine, all informed by the central doctrine of the Gospel. And we will seek to proclaim this gospel in the world.

Church Gatherings. Church gatherings are fundamental to our existence as a church, primarily as we gather for worship on the Lord's Day (Sunday) as well as in other Church-appointed meetings for the purposes of fellowship, prayer and training. We agree to make these gatherings a priority for ourselves and our families.

Church Mission. As a church we see our calling to love God through devoting our entire beings to him in a life of worship and obedience; to love one another as God has loved us through mutual fellowship, service, and care; and to love the world as God in Christ

has loved the world. We accept responsibility to pursue relationships with each other and with those in our lives who are not Christians with gospel-oriented intentionality.

Discipleship Through Relationship. Forming informal relationships that allow us to promote God's purposes for our lives and help us to bear the burdens of life in this world is an essential part of Church membership. Through encouragement and correction informed by the gospel, we endeavor to help one another to grow in our reflection of the image of Christ.

Church Discipline. We will participate in matters of church discipline if one of our Church's members refuses to uphold the clear teaching and commands of Scripture. In so doing, we will follow the rules created by the Church's Elders that shall be in conformity with rules stated in Section 23 of the Sovereign Grace Churches' Book of Church Order.

The Scriptures call every Christian to a life of holiness, forbidding believers from habitual conformity to the sinful desires and practices of the world and fallen human nature. Since sin clings so easily to the believer, Jesus, as Lord of the Church, has established means of accountability (commonly known as *church discipline*) within the local church, to guard a member of our Church from falling into impenitent habitual sins. Such church discipline, which ranges from private admonition to public rebuke and/or removal from membership in the Church, is to be motivated by a shared desire for holy lives, a loving desire to lead others to repentance and restoration, and a zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

(1 Peter 2:11, 12; 4:1-3; Romans 12:1, 2; Hebrews 12:1; Matthew 18:15-19; Romans 16:17, 18; Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 12:20-13:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12; 1 Timothy 5:19-22; Titus 3:10, 11; James 5:19, 20; 2 John 1:8-11; Revelation 2:20)

Reconciliation. We will resolve conflicts when they arise with a goal of reconciliation. If our conflict is protracted or we cannot resolve it privately, we will involve the Elders of our Church to assist us. If one of us is in conflict with one or all of the Elders of the church and we cannot resolve it in a mutually satisfactory way, we will follow the standards found in the Sovereign Grace Churches Book of Church Order sections 22 and 24.

Giving. We will serve the church's ministries through regular giving of our time, effort, and money.

Lawsuits. We will not sue one another in a civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8) unless such a suit is required in the normal process of obtaining an insurance claim. We will look to the Church's Elders for guidance in how best to resolve disputes between Church members.

Sexuality and Gender. A person's sexual nature is determined by God through his creative initiative at a man's or woman's birth. Therefore, God-created biology determines gender identity and obligates us to God and to one another in biblically defined ethics. Identity and behavior which flow from a person's sexual nature are circumscribed by God as revealed in the Bible.

Gender Roles—Family and Church. While men and women are equal before God as his image bearers in creation and equal partakers of his grace in Christ, we believe that specific gender roles in marriage and in church leadership are God's normative plan for the family and for the church. Hence, we believe in the servant-leadership role of men in both home and church, and the complementary function of women in contributing their abilities to supply the inadequacies and support the leadership of those men. We do not equate the appropriate exercise of authority with its abuse, and we reject as sinful a husband or father's attitudes or actions which cause harm or neglect. In the same way, we reject a wife or mother's attitudes or actions of disrespect, rejection of rightly exercised authority or posture of superiority as being counter to Scripture, nature, and the well-being of the family.

Sexual Practices. God limits pursuits and practices that bring sexual pleasure to the marital union. Within marriage sexual pleasure is to be cherished and enjoyed. Apart from the marital union, sexual purity includes abstinence from pre-marital sex, pornography, adultery, and homosexual behaviors. In light of current cultural erosion of sexual morality, it is essential that the Church stand firm on the Bible's teachings about sexual identity and purity.

While sexual sin is uniquely serious before God, no particular sexual sin carries greater offense to God than any other sexual sin. All sinners, including all who sin sexually, are equally in need of grace. We affirm the love of God for all who are guilty of sexual sin in any of its forms, and offer the gospel and grace of God to all who will repent of such sins and turn in faith to Christ for their forgiveness and deliverance.

(Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 3; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18, 19; 1 Peter 3:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16; 14:34, 35; Malachi 2:14-16; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

Marriage. Marriage is an institution established by God for his own glory and purposes and for the good of humanity. God established marriage as an exclusive, permanent, and conjugal¹ relationship between one person born biologically male and one person born biologically female.

Divorce. God opposes divorce. It is God’s intention that the covenant of marriage be a joyful union that endures for life. Those whom God has joined together must cleave as one flesh in faithful love that should not to be torn apart. However, a person can be an innocent party to a divorce, and therefore eligible to be remarried in only two circumstances: sexual infidelity or the refusal of a spouse who is not considered a Christian² to remain in a marriage. While permissible in such cases, divorce is not required, and should be avoided whenever reasonably possible. In all cases of marital crisis, repentance and reconciliation should be the first recourse, although all reasonable steps should be taken—including physical separation—to protect spouses from physical and/or severe mental abuse.

In addition, we believe that remarriage by those who are divorced outside of biblical warrant without repentance is forbidden by God, and is not to be condoned by his Church. The remarriage of divorced believers may be approved by the Church’s Board of Elders or the Elder-Advisory Council if they determine that there is divorce for biblical cause as defined above, and that repentance for seeking a divorce on a sinful basis has been pursued and reconciliation of the previous marriage has been considered in a meaningful way.

(Genesis 2:18-25; Proverbs 5:15-20; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:27-32; 19:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16; Ephesians 5:22-33)

Child Training and Protection. Children are a gift from God, to be cherished and enjoyed with proper training to teach them the gospel and develop their talents. It is every parent’s duty to delight in his or her children and to create a home of tender affection and love. The Holy Scriptures further mandate that parents train up their children to become responsible, mature, relationally-skilled, and faith-embracing men and women. To this end the Bible commands parents to love, nourish, teach, train, and discipline their children.

¹ “Conjugal,” meaning a union consummated by sexual intercourse which is intended for the enjoyment of each spouse and for, if possible, the bearing of children.

² This can include a spouse who has been removed from Church fellowship on the basis of Church discipline (see Matt. 18:17).

The Scriptures teach the corporeal discipline of children. Such discipline must be applied with great caution and tender care, remembering that every child is made in the image of God. Therefore the parent must apply discipline in such ways that treat the child with respect and dignity. This precludes every form of wrathful, harmful, or injurious physical discipline, and requires that parents be loving, humble, cautious, and measured in the exercise of any corporeal training.

The Church deplores child abuse in any and all of its forms, and shall make every reasonable effort to insure that its parents understand and practice parental discipline with all due regard for the safety, well-being and joy of every child. To do harm to a child is to incur the special displeasure of God.

The Church as a community endeavors to watch over all the children who attend its services and commits itself to take steps to report to the appropriate authorities any abuse—through neglect, sexual manipulation, or the infliction physical harm—when it has good reason to believe that such abuse has taken place.

(Psalm 127:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8; Matthew 19:13, 14; Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:2-10; Proverbs 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15; Hebrews 12:11; Matthew 18:2-5)

The Sanctity of Human Life. The Scriptures teach that human life, which is made in the image of God, begins at conception. This infuses sanctity into all human life from conception to natural death, or death brought about justly at the hands of a civil magistrate for capital crimes. This sacredness must extend to the unborn, to the handicapped, and to the infirm of any age all the rights and protections granted to all other human beings. It is the duty of every Christian to speak for and defend such rights in every way he or she is able.

(Psalm 139:13-16; 51:5; Luke 1:41-44; Proverbs 24:11, 12; 31:8, 9; Psalm 72:1-4; James 1:27; Genesis 9:6, Deuteronomy 17:6, 7; 19:15-20; Leviticus 19:15, Romans 13:1-4; Genesis 1:27)

Leaving Living Hope Church. We agree that church membership is fundamental to living out the Christian life. If we should choose to leave this church, we will unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of these commitments and the teaching of God's Word.