

MORNINGSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH  
ABUSE PREVENTION AND CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Morningside Baptist Church understands that there are abused persons within our community, and that some may be worshiping with us. The majority of these abuse situations have been by family and/or extended family members. Because of our commitment to care for the people of Morningside Baptist Church, we believe it is imperative to institute a policy on child abuse prevention in the church. Morningside desires to be a safe place for all children and adults. Although no organization or individual can assure complete protection, this Abuse Prevention and Child Protection Policy reflect our church's commitment to help protect children from harm. As such, this policy applies to all volunteers and compensated workers of Morningside Baptist Church.

The intent of this policy is to reduce the risk of child abuse and ensure intervention if it does occur within the church setting and among church family members. We believe that these principles serve the greater good of the Church of God. The state of South Carolina's legal requirements regarding mandatory reporting by clergy is as follows:

*Pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-420, a member of the clergy "must report in accordance with this section when in the person's professional capacity the person has received information which gives the person reason to believe that a child has been or may be abused or neglected as defined in Section 63-7-20." Likewise, S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-360 requires a member of the clergy "to report cases of suspected child abuse or neglect, including workers of the department, who has reason to believe a child has died as the result of child abuse or neglect, shall report this information to the appropriate medical examiner or coroner." A member of the clergy's duty to report however does not apply "when information is received from the alleged perpetrator of the abuse and neglect during a communication that is protected by the clergy and penitent privilege as provided for in Section 19-11-90." See S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-420.*

*SECTION 19-11-90. Priest-penitent privilege.*

*In any legal or quasi-legal trial, hearing or proceeding before any court, commission or committee no regular or duly ordained minister, priest or rabbi shall be required, in giving testimony, to disclose any confidential communication properly entrusted to him in his professional capacity and necessary and proper to enable him to discharge the functions of his office according to the usual course of practice or discipline of his church or religious body. This prohibition shall not apply to cases where the party in whose favor it is made waives the rights conferred.*

It is important to note that a member of the Morningside pastoral staff may still make a report if he has reason to believe that a child has been or may be abused or neglected even though such a disclosure may not technically be mandated by statute.

In addition to the foregoing statutory provisions, counseling relationships are governed by applicable Biblical principles. As such, persons entering into a counseling relationship with a member of the Morningside pastoral staff cannot be guaranteed absolute confidentiality. Those members of the Morningside pastoral staff who provide counseling services should take into account the relevant statutes, Biblical principles and the best interest of all involved when assessing whether to make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect.

This introduction is followed by a biblical and theological perspective on abuse, definitions of important terms, standards for appropriate and inappropriate conduct, possible indicators of abuse, and the overall policy for child abuse prevention and guidelines for the specific programs in our youth education program.

Finally, an online application and screening form (located at [www.morningside.org](http://www.morningside.org)) must be filled out by every staff member, volunteer program leader or other member engaged in ministry with minors.

## **II. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

"They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain . . ." Isaiah 11:9

The kingdom of God is described in a variety of ways throughout the Bible, perhaps none so picturesque and with so much vivid imagery as in Isaiah 11. It's a beautiful and harmonious scene, culminating in the quotation above. This passage describes not only relationships within the whole of God's creation, but also human relationships.

The fall of the human race into sin and the depravity that resulted have destroyed God's original design and intent for this world and especially for our relationships. While it is true that sin in general affects the whole of human life, few sins tear at the fabric of relationships with as much human misery and pain as the sin of abuse. Abuse distorts the image of God, devalues human beings created in his image, and devastates its victims.

The biblical record realistically portrays the presence and results of abuse among the people of God (i.e.: the story of Amnon and Tamar in II Samuel 13). Studies and statistics today indicate an incidence of abuse within the church equal to that in the general population. Where spiritual leaders within a congregation perpetrate such abuse, there is not only a terrible perversion of power, but enormous spiritual damage results as well.

Yet the Bible's message is not one of despair, but of hope! In Christ, God's world is restored, and God's kingdom comes. In His life on earth Christ was the embodiment of righteousness, justice, peace, reconciliation, and love. Through His death, He redeemed His church; by His Word and Spirit, He calls and equips us to model His kingdom until it comes in all its completion and glory.

The church is responsible for becoming a safe community that confronts sin, particularly the sin of abuse. The church seeks to bring healing to its victims and help to its perpetrators.

### III. DEFINITIONS OF IMPORTANT TERMS

- A. **Adult:** a person at least 18 years of age.
- B. **Appropriate conduct:** conduct that one could reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by the child's parent or guardian.
- C. **Child or Youth:** a person under 18 years of age.
- D. **Child Abuse:** occurs when the parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's welfare:
  - 1. Inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the child physical or mental injury or engages in acts or omissions which present a substantial risk of physical or mental injury to the child, including injuries sustained as a result of excessive corporal punishment, but excluding corporal punishment or physical discipline which:
    - (i) Is administered by a parent or person in loco parentis;
    - (ii) Is perpetrated for the sole purpose of restraining or correcting the child;
    - (iii) Is reasonable in manner and moderate in degree;
    - (iv) Has not brought about permanent or lasting damage to the child; and
    - (v) Is not reckless or grossly negligent behavior by the parents.
  - 2. Commits or allows to be committed against the child a sexual offense as defined by the laws of this State or engages in acts or omissions that present a substantial risk that a sexual offense as defined in the laws of this State would be

committed against the child;

3. Fails to supply the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or education as required under Article 1 of Chapter 65 of Title 59, supervision appropriate to the child's age and development, or health care though financially able to do so or offered financial or other reasonable means to do so and the failure to do so has caused or presents a substantial risk of causing physical or mental injury.

However, a child's absences from school may not be considered abuse or neglect unless the school has made efforts to bring about the child's attendance, and those efforts were unsuccessful because of the parents' refusal to cooperate. For the purpose of this chapter "adequate health care" includes any medical or nonmedical remedial health care permitted or authorized under state law;

4. Abandons the child;

5. Encourages, condones, or approves the commission of delinquent acts by the child and the commission of the acts are shown to be the result of the encouragement, condoning, or approval; or

6. Has committed abuse or neglect as described in subsections (a) through (e) such that a child who subsequently becomes part of the person's household is at substantial risk of one of those forms of abuse or neglect.

E. **Staff member:** any person serving at Morningside Baptist Church in an official paid capacity.

F. **Volunteer Program leader:** persons giving leadership and/or providing supervision in any of Morningside Baptist Church's children's ministries including but not limited to nursery department head, leaders and helpers, children's church and junior church (1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade) department heads, teachers/helpers, children's Sunday school department head and teachers, Kids - 4 - Truth department head, teachers/helpers, youth group leaders, bus ministry department head and helpers, and transportation providers.

#### IV. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

##### A. Prohibited Conduct

To achieve the goal of preventing any forms of abuse or the potential of false allegations of abuse, staff members, volunteer program leaders or any church member providing care for children whether paid or volunteer shall not

engage in any of the following conduct with program participants whether consensual or non-consensual:

1. Abuse of any kind, including sexual abuse;
2. Sexual exploitation or molestation;
3. Disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying pornographic material;
4. Hitting, kicking, slapping or shoving;
5. Selling, giving, or furnishing any child with any tobacco substance, alcohol, or controlled drug;
6. Swear or use obscene, foul, or sexually explicit language;
7. Demonstrate any romantic or sexual interest in a child;
8. Remove any dress clothing from another person, except when appropriately required under necessary circumstances (i.e. changing diapers);
9. Wear anything but appropriate attire in the presence of others, especially children;
10. Kiss any child or non-family member on the lips or in an intimate area;
11. Extended or inappropriate hugging or embracing;
12. Occupy the same bedroom, tent, or other accommodations with only one other child (i.e. there should be three or more people);
13. Occupy the same building, room, motor vehicle or private place with only one child except as permitted in this policy; and/or
14. Assist only one child in the restroom.

#### B. Permitted Conduct

It is quite natural, appropriate and desirable for Christians to express and share their love and affection for each other and Christ. This sharing is essential for healthy emotional and spiritual wellbeing of individuals, and for the growth and development of a loving and caring Christian community such as Morningside Baptist Church. This sharing of love is especially important to

children for their normal, healthy, and happy growth and development. The expressing and sharing of one's Christian love to a child or another adult member shall not be considered abuse or be in any way prohibited, restricted or limited by this policy. The following conduct by a staff member, volunteer program leader or any other church member whether paid or volunteer shall be considered an expression of this Christian love and not abuse:

1. Verbally expressing one's Christian love and affection to another;
2. Appropriately holding and comforting another person of the same sex *especially when initiated by the other*;
3. Sharing emotional and spiritual concerns with another person; and/or
4. Providing necessary medical care and attention to another person.

#### C. Guidelines for Private Conversations and/or Counseling

The opportunity for a church member, whether child or adult, to share confidentially his or her private and personal concerns with another member can contribute significantly to his or her spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. Indeed, this may be the only time when a person may be willing to disclose any abuse he or she may be suffering. Such private and confidential conversations are an integral part of a caring and loving Christian community. On the other hand, such private conversations create a very high-risk environment for potential abuse situations to arise. They create an ideal opportunity for: (1) abuse to occur, (2) a false appearance that abuse may be occurring, and (3) a false, but difficult to refute, allegation that an incident of abuse did occur.

Thus, there is a tension between two valuable objectives designed to reach a common ministry goal. A proper balance is difficult to achieve with any set of policies or guidelines, especially given the variety of circumstances and relationships that may exist.

Therefore, before engaging in a private conversation with another member, whether child or adult, every staff member, volunteer program leader or other member engaged in ministry should weigh and balance the following considerations:

1. **Location:** Private conversations can be conducted more safely in public and populated locations. If possible, all conversations should be conducted in a public place, easily accessible to others. Morningside pastoral staff members must be given consideration in certain private counseling situations.

2. **Necessity:** If the conversation does not involve confidential matters, but is generally "small talk", it is not necessary to be alone in a private location.
3. **Relationship:** Be sure you have a good, healthy relationship with the other person.
4. **Gender issues:** Private meetings and conversations with members of the opposite sex are more prone to abuse and the appearance of impropriety. Therefore, no less than three people shall be present in such cases.
5. **Frequency:** Frequent private conversations can create difficulties in a child's healthy development or lead to dangerous relationship dynamics among adults. Morningside pastoral staff members must be given consideration in certain frequent private counseling situations.
6. **Ability of the Care Giver:** If a person's spiritual or emotional needs are significant, the caregiver should refer him or her to the pastor. Do not overestimate your own counseling abilities.
7. **Reliability:** Consider the emotional stability and maturity of the individual. If lacking emotional stability and maturity, private meetings with that person may be dangerous because such individuals may create the highest risk of false accusations.
8. **Appearance:** Maintain an appropriate appearance at all times. Remember, words and conduct that you may consider appropriate at the time can subsequently be made to appear very inappropriate or sinister.
9. **Substance of Conversation:** The substance of the conversation should be appropriate at all times.
10. **Touching:** Although hugging another person in a public location when several others are present may be appropriate, one must exercise caution in the case of hugging the same and opposite sex. In addition, physical contact in a private, isolated location creates a very high risk of being misread and should be avoided.

## V. RECOGNIZING ABUSE

### A. Possible Indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect

The following lists include general characteristics of abused children. Any one indicator does not necessarily mean that abuse has occurred. They may also indicate stress or anxiety in a young child. However, if a number of indicators are present, it is wise to consider the possibility of abuse.

1. Possible Indicators of Physical Abuse:

- i. Unexplained bruises or welts (bruises in various stages of healing - different colors, old and new scars together).
- ii. Unexplained burns (cigarette, etc.).
- iii. Unexplained broken bones.
- iv. Unexplained cuts or scrapes.
- v. Unexplained stomach injuries.
- vi. Unbelievable explanations of injuries or claiming no knowledge of the source of injury.
- vii. Exhibits habit disorders (sucking, biting, eating disorders).
- viii. Fears adults; shrinks away from touch.
- ix. Afraid to go home.
- x. Bald spots and scalp bruises (caused by hair pulling).
- xi. Human bite marks.
- xii. Fears parent(s) or caregiver.
- xiii. Overly aggressive or withdrawn.
- xiv. Seeks more than average amounts of affection from other adults.
- xv. Lags in emotional and intellectual development.

2. Possible Indicators of Neglect:

- i. Under-fed or constantly hungry.
- ii. Constantly unclean/poor hygiene.
- iii. Unattended medical needs.
- iv. Growth rate below normal.
- v. Begging or stealing food.
- vi. Lack of supervision.
- vii. Constantly fatigued or listless.

3. Possible Indicators of Emotional Abuse/Neglect:

- i. Speech problems.
- ii. Slow mental or emotional growth.
- iii. Anti-social or destructive behavior.
- iv. Dramatic emotional swings.
- v. Low self-esteem.
- vi. Slow physical growth.
- vii. Habit of sucking, biting, or rocking.
- viii. Long-term depression.

ix. Loss of appetite.

4. Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse

- i. Difficulty in walking or sitting.
- ii. Unusual knowledge of or interest in private parts.
- iii. Bed-wetting.
- iv. Depression or withdrawn behavior.
- v. Poor relationships with other children.
- vi. Acting out adult sexual behaviors.
- vii. Indirect hints that allude to problems
- viii. Pain or itching around private parts.
- ix. Stomach aches.
- x. Sleep problems.
- xi. Sudden behavior changes.
- xii. Reluctance to go to the bathroom.
- xiii. Anxiety, irritability, constant inattentiveness.

B. Procedure for Helping Children when Abuse is Suspected

1. When you first notice or suspect child abuse and/or when the child first comes to you, be sure to take the child seriously. Do not deny the problem. Stay calm, and listen to the child. Remind the child that he or she is not at fault and that the child was right in telling you about the problem. *Do not promise the child that you will not tell anyone!*
2. Immediately and confidentially, report such a case to your direct supervisor (*nursery team leader, K4T director, Sunday school director, Jr. church director, children's church director, etc.*). They then will immediately report that to one of the pastors. The senior pastor should make an immediate report of the known or suspected child abuse to the proper authorities.
3. After reporting, respect the child's privacy by keeping the information confidential.

## VI. ABUSE PREVENTION GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

- A. Any office bearers, leaders, teachers, and anyone in a position representing Morningside Baptist Church are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse to the pastor. *It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse but only to report it to the pastor.*

B. Any allegation of abuse will be taken seriously. When making a report, the appropriate action will depend on the ages of those involved and the circumstances of the particular case. The senior pastor should make an immediate report of the known or suspected child abuse to the proper parties which include the following:

1. The church's attorney;
2. The church's insurance carrier in accordance with the church's applicable insurance policy or policies;
3. Child Protective Services (if a minor) and/or local police;
4. Parents/guardians of the allegedly offended person (if a minor);
5. The accused person after the security of the allegedly offended person is guaranteed;
6. Chairman of the Deacons and/or the whole deacon board;
7. If necessary, other people directly involved will be notified. The allegation of abuse will remain within the confidence of these parties.

The pastor will maintain records of reported allegations of abuse that must be kept secure and confidential. When the pastor leaves Morningside Baptist Church, he shall turn over pertinent records to the Chairman of the Deacons who will forward them to new pastoral staff.

C. If the initial assessment gives reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, then the alleged abuser will be suspended from serving in the congregation for the protection of all parties. If the alleged abuser is an employee or staff member, he or she will be placed immediately on administrative leave pending an investigation. If the alleged abuser is an office bearer, or a volunteer program leader, he or she will be suspended from the church position pending an investigation.

D. The church will cooperate fully with any investigation done by Child Protective Services or local police. All persons involved in a particular case, including their families, will be supported as appropriate with pastoral counseling/care throughout the hearing, investigation and/or legal processes.

In the event that criminal charges are dropped or prosecution does not result in conviction, the leadership at Morningside must decide whether the church leader is to be restored to his or her previous position or duty. *Conviction or lack of it is not the only criterion the church uses to discern ungodly conduct.* An alleged abuser is not reinstated to a previous position of leadership until the leadership at Morningside, in consultation with the police/child-protection authorities, legal counsel, and child-abuse experts, deems it safe and proper to do so.

When appropriate, those who made false allegations will be held legally and ecclesiastically responsible for their actions.

- E. If abuse is judged to have occurred, the congregation will be notified by announcement and/or by letter explaining the allegation and/or the reason for suspension and what steps have been taken. All adult members of the congregation should receive the same explanatory information. Although it should be disseminated with discretion and sensitivity, the information should not be tempered with references to a leave of absence, stress, burnout, or any other euphemism.

When an allegation of abuse becomes public knowledge outside of the church, the senior pastor will be designated to interact with the media.

The congregation will cooperate with the legal process. The abuser will be deposed from office or placed under continued suspension. If the abuser is of the pastoral staff, the constitution will be followed. On no account will he be allowed simply to move to another church.

- F. All staff and volunteer program leaders will be required to attend training sessions as needed.

- G. The procedure for entry into children's and youth ministry at Morningside is as follows:

1. Paid staff and volunteers are given the abuse prevention policy. A copy is available online at [www.morningside.org](http://www.morningside.org).
2. A person designated by the leadership at Morningside who will be responsible for all record keeping receives completed online application and screening forms. **A member of the pastoral staff and/or the person responsible for record keeping shall review the online forms** (These people may be the same person).
  - a. Form is examined for items that may raise concern.
  - b. Gaps in information are noted.
3. A member of the pastoral staff will interview volunteers whose online application and screening forms raises concerns.
4. Pastoral care and redirection will be given as needed to those who are not approved.
5. Those approved and begin service in an area of youth ministry must undergo abuse prevention training. A member of the pastoral staff will be responsible to arrange for periodic training sessions and the designated record-keeper will ensure that all volunteers have completed proper online application and screening forms and training.
6. Online application and screening forms will be kept confidential and in a secure online area using the Protect My Ministry online service. For

further accountability, they shall also be available to the appropriate pastoral staff member, chairman of the deacons or legal authorities when deemed suitable.

7. Concerns about interpretation of this policy shall be discussed with a member of the pastoral staff.
- H. The pastor will insure that there is periodic review of all abuse policies and procedures.

## **VII. ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES PERTAINING TO SPECIFIC AREAS OF MINISTRY**

- A. Only those who are members of Morningside Baptist Church may hold the position of a children's ministry director. Those ministries include but are not limited to: nursery director, children's church (k3-k5 grades) and junior church (1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades) directors, bus ministry director, children's Sunday school director, Kid-4-Truth director, youth group director, children's choir director, and orchestra director.
- B. Youth Group Abuse Prevention Policy
1. All youth group leaders must complete an online application and screening form.
  2. All youth leaders are expected to attend a training/informational/inspirational meeting during which the congregation's abuse policy will be explained.
  3. There shall be no clandestine, inappropriate one-on-one meetings between adult youth leaders and young people that may cause a misconstrued opinion from others. For further clarification, see section IV-C.
  4. Anyone not following the guidelines stated must be reported to a member of the pastoral staff.
- C. Kids-4-Truth, Children's Sunday School, Children's Church, Junior Church, Bus Ministry Youth Group Abuse Prevention Policy
1. All leaders, helpers and teachers must complete an online application and screening form.
  2. All leaders, helpers, and teachers are expected to attend a training/informational/inspirational meeting during which the congregation's abuse policy will be explained.
  3. There shall be no clandestine, inappropriate one-on-one meetings between adult youth leaders and young people that may cause a misconstrued opinion from others. For further clarification see section IV-C

4. Anyone not following the guidelines stated must be reported to a member of the pastoral staff.

#### D. Nursery Procedures

The following procedures are to be used during all services and functions when the nursery facilities are needed.

1. All workers must complete an online application and screening form.
2. All nursery volunteers are expected to attend a training/informational/inspirational meeting during which the congregation's abuse policy will be explained.
3. There should always be at least two nursery workers in the nursery whenever it is in use. Those who serve in the nursery (adults, teens) are expected to be in the nursery at their assigned times. *If unable to fulfill their commitment, they are to find a suitable substitute.*
4. Nursery volunteers are expected to be in the nursery 15 minutes prior to services or church functions unless otherwise specified and to remain until all children have been picked up.
5. Nursery volunteers are to wear the supplied smocks.
6. The adult is to supervise both the infants/toddlers and the teen helpers, making sure the safety of the children using the nursery is foremost.
7. Parents/guardians are to bring toddlers to the nursery volunteer. At this time, the child will be signed in and his or her belongings checked. At pick up time, children will be handed to the parent/guardian or other designated persons.
8. Parents/guardians of infants will be allowed to enter the nursery to remove infant outerwear (if necessary) and settle the baby in a swing, walker, crib, etc. A nursery volunteer will sign in the baby and receive belongings and instructions.
9. Parents/guardians are to label clearly all of the child's belongings--diaper bags, bottles, pacifiers, burp cloths, diapers, etc. Belongings will be stored safely.
10. If a bathroom trip is necessary, all children, and the adults serving in nursery are to go together to one bathroom, and the adult/youth volunteers are to remain in clear visibility of one another. Otherwise, no child is to be allowed to leave the nursery except at pick up time.
11. Nursery staff will sign a sheet whenever they change a diaper.
12. Toys are to be picked up and put away neatly. Any broken toys must be given to the nursery coordinator or team leader for removal or repair.

#### E. Van/Bus Drivers/Helpers

1. All van, bus drivers and helpers must complete an online application and screening form.

2. All drivers and helpers are expected to attend a training/informational/inspirational meeting during which the congregation's abuse policy will be explained.
3. All drivers must meet church requirements for the Morningside vehicle they are driving.
4. All drivers and helpers must never be alone with a minor in a MBC bus/van unless it's their own child.

### **VIII. ONLINE APPLICATION AND SCREENING POLICY**

No persons whether volunteer or paid workers, who have been convicted of a crime against a child or a violent crime against another adult, will provide services in any activity or program for children.

A copy of this policy is available online at [www.morningside.org](http://www.morningside.org) as well as a link to fill out the online application and screening form.

### **IX. CODE OF ETHICS FOR VOLUNTEERS, STAFF, AND LEADERS IN CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS AND DOCTRINAL STATEMENT**

Believing that God is calling me to serve children in this congregation . . .

1. My first priority in teaching/supervising/leading children will be to seek the welfare of the children spiritually, physically, socially, and educationally.
2. I will give the parents/guardians full information about the program I am teaching/supervising/leading, and what time it begins and ends.
3. I will arrive on time and be prepared for the activities to which I have committed. If I am not able to be present, I will find my own department leader or pastoral staff approved replacement/substitute.
4. I have read Morningside's Child Protection and Abuse Prevention Policy. I understand it, and I will live by it in my participation in Morningside's children's programs.
5. I will not do anything that will damage a child's trust. I will try to protect the child from all forms of abuse while he or she is in my care.
6. If I suspect that a child may be hurt by the abusive behaviors of another person I will report that suspicion to a member of the pastoral staff so that it can be investigated properly.
7. I will answer a child's questions openly and honestly.
8. I will endeavor to pray for each child regularly.

We believe in the Holy Scripture, accepting fully the writings of the Old and New Testaments as the very Word of God, verbally inspired in all parts in its original autographs, our infallible and authoritative rule of faith and practice.

We believe there is one God eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in the deity of Christ; His virgin birth; His shed blood for atonement; His bodily resurrection; His ascension into Heaven there to be our Intercessor; His lordship over all creation.

We believe that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, makes believers children of God through the new birth, assures them of Heaven, and by His indwelling enables Christians to live a godly life.

We believe that all men are sinners by nature and choice, sinful and lost, and have within themselves no possible means of salvation without Christ.

We believe in salvation by grace through faith; that salvation is the free gift of God, not by any virtue or works of man, but received only by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and all true believers possess the gift of eternal life, a perfect righteousness, sonship in the family of God, and the divine guarantee that they shall never perish.

We believe in the existence of Satan, the deceiver and god of this present world; that he was defeated and judged at the cross, and therefore his final doom is certain.

We believe in the second coming of Christ; the time being unrevealed but always imminent; that when He comes He will first by resurrection of the dead and the translation of the living remove from the earth His waiting church; then pour out the righteous judgments of God upon the unbelieving world, afterwards descend with His church and establish His glorious and literal kingdom over all the nations for a thousand years.

We believe that the spirits of the saved at death go immediately to be with Christ in Heaven; that at His second coming their works will be judged and rewards determined; that the spirits of the unsaved at death descend immediately into Hell until the final day of judgment, at which time their bodies shall be raised from the grave, judged, and cast into the lake of fire, the place of final and everlasting punishment.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers, that Christ is our Great High Priest and through Him every born-again person has direct access into God's presence without the need of a human priest; that the believer has the right and responsibility personally to study and interpret the Scriptures guided by the Holy Spirit.

We believe that a New Testament church is an organized body of born-again baptized believers practicing scriptural ordinances and actively engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission.

We believe in the separation of church and state; that God has ordained both, and has delegated authority to each; the authority of one must not interfere with the other; however, this does not mean that the state is to be non-religious nor does it mean that the church and its members may not be involved in the political processes of this nation.

We believe the officers of the church are Pastors and Deacons. In Scripture the Pastor is also referred to as an Elder. The two terms describe the same office.

We believe the two scriptural ordinances given to the local church are baptism by immersion of believers only, and the Lord's Supper to be partaken of by obedient Christians.

We believe that God, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, created man and woman with their own unique characteristics, designed the covenant relationship of marriage between them for their good (Gen. 2:18; Prov. 2:17), and intended marriage to be between only one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-5). Therefore, we believe that God disapproves of and forbids attempts to alter one's gender by surgery or attire (Gen. 2:24; 19:5, 13; 26:8-9; Lev. 18:1-30; Deut. 22:5; Rom. 1:26-29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4); and that He disapproves of and forbids intimate sexual activity outside of marriage as He designed it, making fornication, adultery, incest, polygamy, group marriage, homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, transgenderism, and pornography sinful perversions of God's gift of sex (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:10; Eph. 5:22-23). Marriage ceremonies performed in any facility owned, leased or rented out by this church will be only those ceremonies sanctioned by God, joining one man with one woman as that gender was determined at birth.