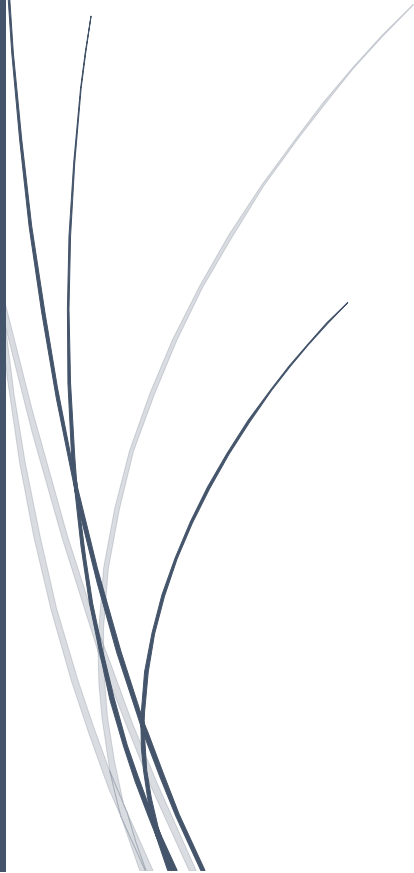




Faith and Practice

Cove Church Ministries

Approved by the Board of Directors on December 22, 2023



Introduction

This book exists to articulate the core doctrines and practices of Cove Church Ministries [CCM]. CCM was founded with the vision of catalyzing and equipping a family of churches in the Tennessee Valley. The related churches that make up CCM are united by shared values, beliefs and the mission of helping people discover hope, develop faith and demonstrate love by following the way of Jesus. The strategy of CCM allows for collaboration and autonomy across locations and teams so that each site can best engage, serve and spread the love of Christ within its respective community.

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Mission, Vision and Values

Mission

"We exist to help people discover hope, develop faith and demonstrate love by following the way of Jesus."

Vision

"Our vision is to see the Tennessee Valley transformed through the reproduction of authentic, Christ-centered communities."

Values

We recognize the body of Christ has a beautiful and functional diversity in each local church and in the wider body. Our church has a part to play in the greater work of what God is doing in the kingdom, but we are only a part and it's not for everyone. There are people in this city we can reach that no one else will. Our five values are some of the things that set us apart and make us unique. These are beyond "permission to play" values that any faithful church should be built upon as a foundation. These are unique callings that lie at the heart of Cove Church Ministries.

Always be real.

The challenges facing the Church today—pluralism, polarization and an image crisis—are daunting. But our greatest strength lies in shedding the mask of hypocrisy and confronting falsehood within religious facades (Matthew 23:27-28, Mark 12:38-40). Our approach to "Always Be Real" involves three crucial pillars. Firstly, intellectual honesty. Doubt isn't taboo at Cove Church Ministries; it's a pathway to deeper understanding. Like doubting Thomas, we embrace questions and admit when answers elude us (John 20:24-29, 1 Peter 3:15). Secondly, relational transparency. We reject hiding behind facades. Our church fosters openness, embracing imperfection, echoing the genuine connections seen in the early church (James 5:16, 1 John 1:8-9). Lastly, spiritual authenticity. We seek a raw, transformative relationship with God, echoing the honesty found in the Psalms (Psalm 51:6, Psalm 139:23-24).

Love someone. Be loved

At Cove Church Ministries, "Love someone. Be loved" is not just a value but a way of life. Ultimately, all love comes from God and we believe that God's love comes to us on its way to someone else. This means actively giving love to others while being open to receiving love from them. We find inspiration for this value in John 15:12-13, where Jesus calls us to love one another as He has loved us. Following Christ's example, we seek to cultivate a culture of love and compassion at Cove Church Ministries.

Keep moving forward.

"Keep moving forward" is more than a motto; it's a guiding principle at Cove Church Ministries. We believe the Gospel provides salvation from sin and power for new life moving towards Christlikeness. In the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:13-14, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." We are all a work in progress, but through God's grace and guidance we are able to take our next step with unwavering faith in His promises.

Think big. Be brave. Do things.

At Cove Church Ministries, we are driven by the value of "Think big. Be brave. Do things." This means daring to dream boldly, acting courageously and bringing those dreams to life. We take inspiration from Joshua 1:9, where God commands us to be strong and courageous. It's a call to action, challenging us to step outside of our comfort zones and live out our God-given purposes. We are committed to making a significant impact in our community and beyond by putting our faith into action.

Have fun.

"Have fun" is not just a value; it's a testament to the joy that fills our faith community. We celebrate life, its blessings and the joy that comes from our relationship with God. Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 reminds us that God's gifts are meant to be enjoyed. By finding joy and satisfaction in our daily lives, we honor God's goodness and share His blessings with others out of an abundance mindset. So, at Cove Church Ministries, we take delight in living life to the fullest, enjoying each moment and spreading the happiness that comes from our faith and fellowship.

Doctrine

We affirm the historical and ecumenical creeds of the Christian church. Our theology is rooted in classical Wesleyan thought and tradition. Working from these historic sources, Cove Church Ministries affirms the following doctrinal standards:

THE APOSTLES' CREED

(Traditional version)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
 creator 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, died, and was buried;
 he descended into hell.
 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.

THE NICENE CREED

(AD 381; Book of Common Prayer Translation 1979)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Bible

We believe the scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments are the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore, the Holy Spirit guided and directed human authors to communicate God's word for us through various literary genres which form a unified story that leads to Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-2). We believe the Bible is *perfectio respectu finis*, or perfect according to its purpose. As such, it is our unique and highest authority for faith and practice in the life of God's people.

God

We believe in one God, who exists in three eternal and personal distinctions revealed to us as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church uses the word Trinity to communicate this great mystery and express that the three are united as one God, while each is equally divine in being and eternal qualities. The Christian God is a personal being of infinite love, knowledge and power who is the ultimate grounding for all of reality.

Jesus

We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate Son of God who came to earth in the flesh to announce the gospel of the kingdom of God and to make provision for fallen humanity to be redeemed into a personal relationship with God. We believe Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He is both fully human and fully divine. Jesus lived a sinless life and embodies the truth about God and the truth of God. Jesus willingly died on the cross to demonstrate God's love for sinful humans, becoming an atoning sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. We believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead, conquering death and the grave. Jesus ascended into heaven, where he rules as our Lord (absolute

authority) and advocate to the Father. We trust in the promise of Christ to return to earth to enact judgment and establish the fullness of his kingdom in a new heaven and earth.

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit as an equal participant in the divine life of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is God's active presence in creation and now redemption as the promised spirit of truth, convicting the world of sin and leading people into a saving relationship with Jesus. He is our comforter and guide, living within each follower of Jesus to empower a life that reflects the lifestyle, values and character of Jesus. The Spirit birthed the church at Pentecost and is now actively working within the Christian community to empower the people of God to be Christ's ambassadors to the world and help bring about God's plan of redemption.

The Church

We believe the church, known as the body or bride of Christ in Scripture, is a spiritual organism made up of people in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, who are called to live in fellowship and worship together in the power of the Holy Spirit. Because the church has both human and divine aspects, we can recognize and be real about the failings of the human element, while also remaining hopeful concerning the divine purposes for which it was formed. We believe in the priesthood of all believers: everyone in relationship with Christ is gifted, empowered and called to serve within God's family for the sake of the mission of Christ. God doesn't have a mission for the church, but rather a church for God's mission. Ultimately, Jesus said that He would build His church and we are to be about building for His kingdom.

The Sacraments

Cove Church Ministries recognizes two sacraments in which Christ himself participated: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Respectively, these initiate entrance into the church as the body of Christ and provides continuing nourishment to the believer throughout the process of their salvation. Sacraments are a special means of grace, which John Wesley understood as "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, prevenient, justifying, or sanctifying grace" ("The Means of Grace," II.1). While sacraments themselves are not practiced to earn one's salvation, they nevertheless are channels by which salvation is accomplished by God in the lives of believers. This entails both a mystery and a promise as the words for sacrament in both Greek and Latin derivatives suggest.

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 follow our Lord in the sacrament of baptism and see it as a sign of prevenient grace at work in the life of a child born into a community of faith and justifying grace in the life of an adult visibly entering the church for the first time. 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 confirm their baptism by public profession of faith. 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, putting your whole trust in His grace and only His grace for your salvation?
- With God's grace, will you commit to following the way of Jesus and promise to serve Him as your Lord?

Cove Church Ministries baptizes in a variety of ways—immersion, pouring or sprinkling. Because baptism is a sign of grace and work of God, not humanity, it only needs to be done once whether for an infant or adult convert. However, we recognize unique circumstances where a person may feel led to be baptized as an act of obedience signifying conversion or an act of remembrance, and we would not immediately deny such a request. Still, it should be kept in mind that baptism is not something we do for God or salvation, but rather we submit to baptism under the authority of God and because of the Spirit's activity in our lives. While we must confirm this work through our faith response, the Spirit remains the effective agent of our salvation prior to, during and after our baptism.

The Lord's Supper (also called Holy Communion or Eucharist)

The Lord's Supper is another name 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. While baptism is the means of entrance into the life of faith, Holy Communion is the means by which that life is nourished and sustained. When Christ first enacted the Lord's Supper, He told his disciples, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Corinthians 11:26 ESV). Here, He infused all of time with meaning: past as we remember His sacrifice, present as we partake of the Eucharist and future as we look forward to His coming.

While we maintain that the elements of bread and wine are not physically changed into the actual body and blood of Christ, we do believe that the real presence of Christ is available during and through the Eucharist via the work of the Holy Spirit to nourish us in our inner person. 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 receiving 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. The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated and received regularly — John Wesley said "as often as (one) can."

Sin

It seems as though the word "sin" has been removed from our vocabulary, and yet its effects are still all around us. There are many ways the Bible describes sin, but most often it simply means "missing the mark." At its root, sin is the sign of a broken relationship with God. We were created to live with God and under His loving rule as we cared for one another and creation. But Adam's race rebelled, and sin was born. Sin is idolatry and it is transgression of God's holy law. Sin is all the ways we hurt one another and ourselves. Sin is not the way things are supposed to be. The consequence of our sin is both separation from God and righteous condemnation before God.

Salvation

Given the natural person's fallen state of alienation from God and moral corruption from sin, we are all in need of a Savior. God made salvation available to us by the Father lovingly sending the Son, the Son willfully coming to enact the redeeming work of Christ consisting in his life, death and resurrection. This salvation is applied

through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit and is available for all who repent of their sin and put their whole trust in Jesus as their Savior and king. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, we are saved by grace, through faith; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). We experience salvation as past (justification), present (sanctification) and future (glorification), as we cooperate with God's activity in our lives through the power of the Spirit. This is both for our good and healing, as well as God's glory, as we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ. Ultimately, our salvation lies in a renewed fellowship with God now and eternal life in a renewed creation together with all God's people.

Grace

Grace is more than mere forgiveness as wonderful as forgiveness may be. Biblically, grace is the activity of God in the life a person. We find it helpful to categorize it as prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. Wesley wrote of prevenient grace as God's activity in the life of a person prior to them coming into a saving relationship. The bottom line is that God always moves first toward us in our sin and always receives the glory for salvation. It is God's grace in our lives, through the proclamation of the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, that enables us to respond in repentance and faith, so we experience the justifying grace of God. But God's activity in our lives doesn't stop here! This is just the first half of the gospel. God's grace in the life of a believer is what teaches us to say no to sin and yes to God as we continue in the process of sanctification until the full glory of Christ is revealed (Titus 2:11-14).

Sanctification

Sanctification literally means being made holy or set apart. It is the work of God's grace through the Word and by the Spirit whereby we are conformed more and more to person of Jesus Christ as the true image of God. As Wesleyans, we believe God has not only saved us from wrath, but for holiness. This is a social holiness that is lived out in sacrificial love for others, having had a heart consumed by the love of God and for the love of God.

Eschatology

Eschatology is the field of theology that seeks to honor the teachings of the Scriptures and witness of the church concerning the end times and final consummation of the kingdom of God. Our future hope rests in the promise of Jesus to return to earth and establish God's perfect peace and justice for all time. As 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 attests, the dead in Christ shall rise and those remaining will welcome our triumphant king in the air. This will be the consummation of the

kingdom of God when creation itself will be renewed and we will dwell forever in a new heaven and new earth.

Moral Principles

Given our current time and context, we highlight and affirm the following moral principles that arise from biblical truth. We acknowledge that other moral principles merit our further attention.

Statement on Ethics

There seems to be a cacophony of voices surrounding ethical theory today. It can be heard whether listening in on conversations at a local Starbucks or while attending a high-level academic debate. Even within a particular traditional community such as the church, which should display a shared moral point of view, there appears to be much confusion. This is due to a complex web of historical, philosophical, psychological and sociological forces. It is beyond the scope of this statement to deal adequately with the whole of this unfortunate story. However, consider this powerful quote by Jurgan Habermas, a leading German sociologist and philosopher:

Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than a mere precursor or a catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, of the individual morality of conscience, human rights, democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in the light of the current challenges of a post national constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk. ("Time of Transition" (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), pp.150-151)

This perfect law of justice and love was fulfilled in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ who summed up the duty of man simply but profoundly: to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourself (Matthew 22:37-40).

Statement on 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 a local congregation, holding a leadership position in the church or becoming an ordained clergy based on gender, race, color, nationality, national origin or economic condition. CCM specifically renounces all racial and ethnic discrimination and commits itself to work toward full racial and ethnic equality in the church and in society. In addition, scripture teaches 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 ministry, and both genders can hold leadership roles within Cove Church Ministries.

Statement on Human Dignity

We firmly believe that every person, created in the image of God (imago dei), is deserving of compassion, love, kindness, respect and dignity. The biblical understanding of the imago dei highlights the inherent worth and significance of every human being, as they each reflect God's divine attributes and purpose. Therefore, we strongly condemn any form of hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed towards individuals or groups, as such actions go against the teachings of scripture and the core principles of our faith.

Statement on Marriage

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 teachings of scripture. Therefore, we denounce all forms of sexual expression in conflict with the Scriptures (cohabitation, pornography, extra-marital relationships, homosexuality, etc.). We believe that all people are individuals of sacred worth and affirm that God's grace is available to all. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, others and self.

Statement on Addiction and Recovery

Addiction comes in many forms and illicit drug use is only one of the many ways people become enslaved to their impulses. Cove Church Ministries understands addiction to be a disease that affects both the individual and the community to which they belong and is a characteristic of the brokenness of humanity that occurred in the Fall. While we denounce all forms of addiction as harmful and destructive to the addict and acknowledge the collateral damage to those in relationship with the addict, we believe in a graceful and loving stand with all those affected by addiction as we move toward recovery together. Cove Church Ministries is actively engaged in reaching those who desire recovery in order that all may come to know the freedom that is found in Jesus Christ.

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 the community and to healthy and whole relationships that may include remarriage. When people consider divorce, they should always count the cost. We encourage people to consider the devastation spiritually, emotionally and physically on themselves and on those they love. Children are often left without any input or recourse except to move on. Our ministry to the children of parents who decide they will divorce must be one of compassionate care.

Statement on Abortion

The beginning of life and the 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 do, however, realize there are cases when the life of the mother is endangered and encourage prayerful inquiry and counsel in those circumstances. We also recognize that there are many women who hide the deep pain of having gone through an abortion. We affirm that 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. Further, we affirm an ethic of life both inside and outside the womb and recognize the responsibility of the church to care for the vulnerable and orphans (James 1:27).

Membership

Anyone seeking to become a member of Cove Church Ministries is required to participate in the following process:

Section 1 Discover Class

The process of membership begins with attending a Discover class at a local church. This class is offered regularly and completing one is required for membership. A Discover class shares with potential members the history and heart of the local church as well as Cove Church Ministries. It also provides details about what it means to be a member if an attendee of the class chooses to join.

Section 2 Membership Covenant and Ceremony

“Covenant” is an English translation of a Hebrew (berit) and Greek (diatheke) word that describes a formal relationship between two parties who agree to a set of promises so they can work together toward a common goal. From Genesis on, God enters into one formal relationship after another (i.e., covenants) with various humans in order to rescue his world. Covenants contain defined obligations and commitments but differ from a contract in that they are relational and personal. They’re often accompanied by oaths, signs, and ceremonies.

- Tim Mackie, “The Bible Project”

At Cove Church Ministries, membership is a covenant. It is a formal relationship between you, God and this community of Jesus followers called Cove Church Ministries. This relationship recognizes each member as a “royal priest” in our partnership with God to reconcile His world. As a member, you are accepting Cove Church Ministries mission, vision and core values and taking on the responsibilities to serve, give, pray, connect, gather and possibly lead in its efforts. At CCM, our membership covenant is accompanied by three vows professed in public at a membership ceremony. Membership ceremonies are offered regularly throughout the calendar year.

Membership Covenant

1. Having professed faith in Jesus Christ and having previously been baptized, I believe God is leading me to become a member of Cove Church Ministries.
2. I commit to CONNECT with people in this faith family through my participation in community groups, classes and events.
3. I understand the importance of actively participating in corporate worship and commit to GATHER regularly with other members of Cove Church Ministries, to fuel my own spiritual growth and to encourage others in the same pursuit.
4. I commit to SERVE others through Cove Church Ministries, both as an act of love in this faith community and to allow God's work in my own life through my service.
5. I commit to GIVE financially on a regular basis to support the work God is doing through Cove Church Ministries.
6. I will strive for unity and peace within our Cove Church Ministries family by attempting to resolve conflict directly, quickly and kindly.
7. I will pray for Cove Church Ministries, its volunteers and staff.

Vows

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the one and only Son of God and put your whole trust in His grace for your salvation?
2. By God's grace will you seek to grow in your journey of faith, following in the way of Jesus?
3. Do you commit to actively partner with CCM in our mission to help people discover hope, develop faith and demonstrate love by following the way of Jesus?

Section 3 Membership Release

Members can withdraw their membership by written request, transfer to another church or failure to fulfill the Cove Church Ministries Membership Covenant, which will be determined by the Elder Council. Anyone who is inactive for two (2) consecutive years may be removed from membership.

Leadership Qualifications

At Cove Church Ministries, certain roles and ministry positions afford individuals significant influence over the spiritual development of other people. These roles and positions include ministry staff, platform teachers and speakers, worship leaders, community group and table leaders, ministry coordinators, prayer and care ministry providers, board members, elders, local advisors and mission leaders. We require these "Frontline Leaders" to enter a covenant which confirms their agreement to a pursuit of the below-listed lifestyle.

Frontline Leader Covenant

1. I have previously reviewed and agreed to the Cove Church Ministries Membership Covenant and professed membership vows.
2. I will, by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, strive to walk in holiness in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13-16, 1 Peter 4:1-3).
3. As a Frontline Leader of Cove Church Ministries, I will commit to the pursuit of the following lifestyle:
 1. Maintain the virtues of gentleness and respect in the midst of a society with deep racial, political and socioeconomic divides (1 Peter 3:15-16, Galatians 5:22-23).
 2. Engage in sexual relations only within the covenant of monogamous marriage between one man and one woman (1 Corinthians 6:18).
 3. Attend premarital and marital enrichment/counseling in order to create and preserve strong marriages, only pursuing the regrettable alternative of divorce when the marriage is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel (Mark 10:5-9).
 4. Abstain from the use of any illegal drugs and consume alcoholic beverages only with deliberate and intentional restraint (Ephesians 5:18).
 5. Be aware there is a responsibility that goes along with "Christian freedom," especially actions or situations that could be a stumbling block to others (1 Corinthians 8:9).
 6. Speak the truth in love, always ready to confront conflict in the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation (Ephesians 4:15).

Qualifications for Board of Directors, Elders and Local Advisory Team

Certain roles, such as those within the Board of Directors, Elders and Local Advisory Team, require character and leadership qualifications beyond those addressed in the Frontline Leader Covenant:

1. Membership in Cove Church Ministries.
2. Acceptance of and adherence to the Frontline Leader Covenant.
3. Demonstrated leadership (You don't have to look for leaders; they stand out).
4. Mature and growing faith (Not a new believer. Shows maturity as a leader and a follower of Jesus).
5. Vision alignment (Capacity to see the whole church and church family and not just one ministry area of interest or passion).
6. Wisdom, discernment and prayerfulness (Ability to engage thoughtfully and prayerfully in the consideration of matters that come before the team they serve on).

Governance

Cove Church Ministries is built around six teams who together comprise the Leadership Council:

1. The Board of Directors
2. The Elder Council
3. The Executive Director
4. The Clergy
5. The Local Advisory Teams
6. The Mission Leadership Team

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors (BOD) shall be nine (9) members. The BOD shall consist of the Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Personnel lead and five other at-large members of Cove Church Ministries nominated by the Elder Council for three (3) year terms. To ensure experience and stability, the membership shall be divided into three classes, one of which shall be elected each year for a three-year term. The Chairperson, Treasurer and Personnel lead and serve as the Executive Committee of the BOD.

The Board of Directors serves as the governing body for Cove Church Ministries and all of its ministries and local churches. The Board of Directors works in cooperation with the CCM Senior Pastor to adopt the appropriate strategies and ministries of Cove Church Ministries. The Senior Pastor is accountable to the BOD in all matters relating to the financial, legal, operational and personnel health of the organization. The Senior Pastor is also accountable to the BOD in all matters relating to the fulfillment of CCM's mission and vision in accordance with CCM's values.

The Senior Pastor and Executive Director will attend BOD meetings, but do not have voting privileges.

At its discretion, the Board of Directors may grant certain responsibilities to a Local Advisory Team related to that church's operations.

The Board of Directors shall meet as appropriate, but no less than four (4) times per year. A quorum of the Board of Directors members shall be no less than six (6)

members. Unless otherwise specified in this document, anything voted on by the BOD requires a simple majority of all in attendance in order to pass. Voting responsibilities of the BOD includes but is not limited to the following:

1. Financial decisions regarding CCM
 - a. Approval, amendment or special appropriations to the annual budget.
 - b. Approval to acquire assets not already approved within the annual budget.
 - c. Approval to sell assets in an amount greater than \$10,000.00.
 - d. Approval of annual financial review.
 - e. Approval to enter into a lease, change banking institutions, take on debt and all other financial matters.
2. Governance, legal and strategy decisions of CCM
 - a. Approval of all leadership nominations within the Leadership Council.
 - i. Election and removal of officers on the BOD.
 - ii. Confirmation and removal of Elders.
 - b. Approval to employ outside accountants and legal services.
 - c. Approval to establish or close a local church or missional campus within CCM.
3. Personnel decisions of CCM
 - a. Approval of employee benefit programs.
 - b. Amendment to personnel policies and procedures found within the employee handbook of CCM.

There are two decisions that the Board of Directors may not make without the following:

1. Amendment of Cove Church Ministries Faith and Practice, Bylaws or governance provisions requires a vote of no less than 2/3 membership of BOD and Elder Council.
2. The BOD cannot change or establish the denominational affiliation of CCM without membership approval at a duly called congregational meeting. The decision must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the BOD which establishes a period of discernment (minimum of ninety [90] days) in which the congregation is informed of the BOD's intention to change or establish the denominational affiliation of CCM. After this period of discernment, final approval requires a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of members of CCM present at a congregational meeting. Membership will be

notified of a congregational meeting at least 14 days in advance of the called meeting.

Elder Council

The Elder Council shall consist of three (3) to nine (9) members of Cove Church Ministries who shall serve on a non-rotating basis. The existing Elders in conjunction with the Senior Pastor nominate any new Elders. Members of CCM will be notified of candidates for the Elder Council and given the opportunity to provide confidential feedback to the current Elder Council before final appointment is approved by the BOD.

Once confirmed, they serve until they request to be deactivated, request and are granted emeritus status, or until the Elder Council discerns as a whole that they can be released to another ministry.

At age 65, Elders who have served 10 years may request emeritus status. If granted, the parameters of their participation include:

1. Are still considered members of the Elder Council.
2. Senior Pastor or Elder Council may request their attendance for special discernment or project considerations.
3. Attendance at year end gatherings and leadership council retreats.

The Elder Council members function primarily as *discerners* and *guardians* of the organization. They must be spiritually mature with the ability to see the whole of Cove Church Ministries while processing complex issues. They must be kingdom oriented in their thinking. They are committed to pray for the church and give wise, grace-filled yet unfiltered feedback to the Senior Pastor and Executive Director. They function as overseers for the entire organization. They are responsible for doctrine and direction of the church primarily through the following:

1. They serve as the nominating committee with the Senior Pastor and Executive Director for the Board of Directors members, with no more than one Elder being able to serve on the Board of Directors at the same time.
2. They oversee and make personnel decisions regarding the Senior Pastor in conjunction with the Board of Directors.

- a. Discharge and removal of the Senior Pastor may be effectuated by the vote of no less than 2/3 membership of the Elders and 2/3 membership of the Board of Directors.
 - b. The Elders are authorized to oversee and implement pastoral succession planning for the Senior Pastor. Hiring of a new Senior Pastor may be effectuated by the vote of no less than 2/3 membership of the Elders and 2/3 membership of the Board of Directors.
 - c. The Elders are authorized to form a pastoral accountability team from within the Foundry Network to provide outside counsel for personnel decisions regarding the Senior Pastor.
3. They oversee and make personnel decisions regarding Lead Pastors of local churches in consultation with the local church's LAT, the Senior Pastor of CCM and the Executive Director of CCM.
 4. They oversee the ordination process for clergy and provide accountability to the Senior Pastor for personnel decisions related to clergy.
 5. They provide requested counsel to the Board of Directors.
 6. They, in conjunction with the Clergy, are the sole authoritative interpreter of scripture as it applies to the church.

The Elder Council shall meet as needed, but no less than four (4) times per year. A majority of the Elders shall constitute a quorum. Any three (3) members of the Elder Council may call a meeting with notice to the Senior Pastor.

The Senior Pastor and the Executive Director will attend elder meetings, but do not have voting privileges.

Officers

Cove Church Ministries shall have a President (who shall be referred to as the Chairperson), a Secretary, a Treasurer, a Personnel Lead and such other officers as are elected. One person may be elected to more than one office, except that the offices of President and Secretary may not be held by the same person.

The Chairperson of the Board of Directors shall, unless otherwise provided by such Board, be the Chief Executive Officer of Cove Church Ministries and shall be

considered an officer of the corporation for purposes of the bylaws and for all other purposes.

The Secretary shall perform the duties normally assigned to a corporate secretary, including arranging for the keeping of minutes of each meeting of the members, BOD and appointed committees.

The Treasurer shall have general supervision over the financial affairs of Cove Church Ministries. The Treasurer shall provide financial oversight for the church including monitoring income vs. expense, approval of the annual budget, financial policy and debt management. The Executive Director is responsible for the daily operations of matters related to finances.

The Personnel lead provides oversight to the Human Resources (paid staff) affairs of the church, including hiring and firing, employee policy, compensation, benefits, performance evaluation, conflict resolution, etc. The Executive Director is responsible for the daily operations of matters related to Human Resources.

Executive Director

The Senior Pastor selects the Executive Director to assist in the supervision and management of the affairs of Cove Church Ministries. The purpose of this position is to determine programming, give vision to the various ministries of the organization, spiritually develop and provide care to the staff, submit and manage the annual CCM budget and oversee the day-to-day operations. The Executive Director is accountable to the Senior Pastor.

Clergy

The Clergy are ordained ministers of the gospel at Cove Church Ministries. The Senior Pastor leads and oversees all ordained ministers of the gospel at Cove Church Ministries. The Clergy in conjunction with the Elders are the sole authoritative interpreters of scripture as it applies to the church. Requirements and responsibilities of the Clergy are established in the Ordination and Licensing standards of Cove Church Ministries.

Local Advisory Teams

Cove Church Ministries' multisite ministry recommends the development of a Local Advisory Team (LAT) for each local church. Each local church will have equitable representation on the Board of Directors, the Elder Council and Mission Leadership Team. LAT members may serve concurrently on the BOD. The lead pastor of each local church will lead the local advisory team. The number of elected Local Advisory members will be three (3) to five (5) who shall serve terms not to exceed three (3) years. The local church's Lead Pastor, the Executive Director and Senior Pastor of CCM nominates these members, final appointment and approval is made by the BOD.

The Local Advisory Team members serve as ministry leaders for their local church. The Local Advisory Team provides support and encouragement to its pastors and ministries. The Local Advisory Team shall be consulted, or informed, of decisions made by the Board of Directors regarding its local church in a timely manner.

The LAT shall meet as needed and at the direction of their Lead Pastor, but no less than ten (10) times per year.

Mission Leadership Team

Missions at Cove Church Ministries follows the Acts 1:8 approach, supporting missions in our local church (Jerusalem), in our community (Judea and Samaria) and to the ends of the earth (international): *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Missions at Cove Church Ministries will be led by a Missions Leadership Team (MLT). The number of elected MLT members will be three (3) to nine (9) members of CCM who shall serve terms not to exceed three (3) years. To ensure experience and stability, the membership shall be divided into three classes, one of which shall be elected each year for a three-year term. The Senior Pastor, Executive Director and Local Pastors of CCM nominates these members; final appointment and approval is made by the BOD.

The MLT members have the following responsibilities:

1. Determining local and global mission partners.

2. Determining and disbursing monthly support of mission partners within the approved annual missions' budget of CCM.
3. Determining and disbursing funds from special giving campaigns.
4. Empowering, encouraging, advising, and providing support to mission's staff of CCM.

The MLT shall meet as needed and at the direction of mission's staff or the Senior Pastor of CCM, but no less than ten (10) times per year. Missions' staff will attend MLT meetings, but do not have voting privileges.

Ordination

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 but about responsibility to lead, teach, shepherd and serve. Those entering the process and seeking ordination should do so counting the cost and joyfully embracing God's calling on their lives.

At Cove Church Ministries, ordination is a setting apart of persons for leading in word, sacrament, service, compassion, justice and order. Persons apply, are examined and after approval of the Elder Council and appointment by the BOD, are ordained before the community of faith.

The Elder Council, in consultation with the BOD, reserves the right to grant waivers for qualifications for justified special circumstances.

Requirements for Ordination

The Elders 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 and sacraments, as well as oversight of other ministry staff. Final determination regarding qualification for ordination shall belong to the Elders. Those ordained by Cove Church Ministries shall have their credentials and standing reviewed as needed, but no less than annually, by the Elders for continuation or discontinuation.

Senior and Lead Pastors

The Senior Pastor of CCM and the Lead Pastor at each local church of Cove Church Ministries shall be an ordained minister of the gospel. Other staff and ministry positions can be filled with people who may or may not be ordained.

Application

An application for ordination as a minister of the gospel is provided by the Elders. A person's application shall be either approved or denied within thirty (30) days of the completion of the examination of the applicant. Those applicants who are approved shall receive a certificate of ordination.

Ordination Process

- 1. Application:** Request required information packet that includes education, experience and examination requirements. Submit completed information to the Elders with endorsement of sponsoring Pastor, Elder or Director.
- 2. Interview:** All applicants seeking ordination shall participate in an interview process. There will be an interview with those who work or will work most closely with the applicant. There will be an interview with the Pastors and the Local Advisory Team of the church where the applicant will potentially serve. Last, applicants will interview with the Elders of CCM. The interviews shall explore call to ministry, theological beliefs and gifts for ministry both displayed and affirmed by others in the congregation.
- 3. Experience:** Ordination applicants must have one (1) year of experience within Cove Church Ministries and three (3) years of ministry experience (time towards an approved seminary degree counts as ministry experience).
- 4. Psychological Evaluation:** All applicants will undergo a psychological evaluation from a licensed mental health professional.

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

Ordination Requirements

1. Bachelor's Degree from an accredited and approved college or university.
2. Agreement with the Cove Church Ministries Faith and Practice as the guide and authority for ordained ministry within Cove Church Ministries.
3. Completion of educational requirements. Following are the minimum standards, post bachelor's degree:
 - a. Master of Biblical and Theological Foundations (39-hour) from Asbury Theological Seminary, or equivalent from an approved seminary.
 - b. Master of Divinity (72-96 credit hours of theological education), preferred.
 - c. Those interested in ordination who have not completed the educational requirements should complete the Master of Biblical and Theological Foundations from Asbury Theological Seminary.
4. Recommendation by one or more of the following: Senior Pastor, Pastor, Executive Director, Elder or Director, with endorsing signature on the Ordination Application.
5. Completed written answers to the theological questions.
6. Interview with the Elders, Pastors and Local Advisory Team of endorsing church, and with current team members with whom the applicant works most closely.
7. Psychological evaluation by a licensed mental health professional.
8. Completion of a comparable educational requirement or licensure school before arriving at Cove Church Ministries may, at the discretion of the Elders, have those degrees or licensure accepted as satisfaction of educational requirements.

The Elders, in consultation with the BOD, reserve the right to grant waivers for qualifications in justified special circumstances.

Appendix I.

Cove Church Ministries Application For Ordained Ministry

Name: _____

Ministry Role: _____

Applying for: ____ Ordination

Education:

• Institution(s) _____

• Degree(s) Earned _____

• Please Provide Transcripts of any Degree Programs post High School

Years of Experience in Ministry and Place(s) of Service:

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:

- Explain the work of the Father, Son and Spirit in the way of salvation.
- Why did God become man in Jesus Christ?
- What is sin?
- What is God's grace?
- What is the gospel?
- What is your understanding of the nature and authority of scripture?
- What theological voices have influenced your understanding of theology?

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 within Cove Church Ministries 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, all 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 Director

I have read and fully assent to Cove Church Ministries Faith and Practice as the guide and authority for Ordained Ministry with Cove Church Ministries.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Signature of Endorsing Pastor, Elder or Director

Appendix II

The Foundry Network

After disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church was ratified, Cove Church Ministries was formally accepted into the Foundry Network. The Foundry Network believes and affirms the following:

1. We believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.
2. We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God.
3. We strive for ministry that is full of grace and full of truth.
4. Our priority is for the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ.
5. We are committed to reach people that no one else is reaching.
6. We are committed to relational discipleship.
7. We are engaged in being the practical hands and feet of Christ in our communities.
8. We affirm the sovereignty of God to gift all believers according to His will. It is our responsibility to equip those saints for their calling and giftedness in ministry.
9. We affirm that marriage and sexual intimacy are good gifts from God. In keeping with the teachings of Scripture historically and throughout the Church universal, we believe that marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union. We believe that God intends faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness.
10. We affirm the faith delivered to the saints as articulated in The EUB confession of Faith, the Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church and the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds.

Appendix III

Crucial Conversations

Human Sexuality

Christian teachings concerning human sexuality have never been particularly popular with the culture at large. Moreover, how the church in general has communicated and applied these teachings historically has often led to pain and alienation among persons who do not line up with a Christian ethic. At Cove, we acknowledge that this topic is a crucial conversation because it deals with a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human and is often accompanied by an intense emotional response based on a person's lived experience. With this in mind, we find it helpful to distinguish between the position we hold on this controversial subject and the posture we take when engaging persons who may disagree with us. We believe this approach follows in the way of Jesus as He consistently maintained the highest ethic aligned with God's created order and commandments, while at the same time loving and welcoming people who failed at keeping them.

First, our position on the subject of human sexuality is grounded in the created order and explicit teachings of Jesus that have been historically held as the orthodox view of the church. This view entails the belief that we were created male and female when God created humanity in the image of God, as Genesis 1:27 declares. There are therefore two distinct and equal sexes to humanity that were meant to reflect the divine nature together. In musical terms, God did not create a melody but a harmony, where two equal yet distinct notes form one beautiful song. The Hebrew word that connotes this unity of a man and woman when they unite sexually in a marital union is "echad." As Genesis 2:24-25 states and Jesus confirmed in Matthew 19:4-6, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh (echad)."

God's ideal for Christian marriage is related to His created order and is to be between one man and one woman. Marriage has a certain purpose. The "one fleshness" or "echad" that Genesis speaks about is the fusing together of two whole persons, both bodily and spiritually, to make one life together. From this union, sexual expression is to be enjoyed in the exclusive and covenantal love between husband and wife, which naturally has the potential to lead to new life in the blessing of children. And this new life can multiply, eventually birthing a society

where culture is established. In the Christian view, marriage is not just the place two people go to get their desires fulfilled. Rather, it is the place where a family is formed and covenantal faithfulness is to be lived out in response to God's mandate to fill and cultivate the earth (Genesis 1:28).

While marriage is a signpost that points us towards God's faithfulness to us and calls the church to fidelity as the "bride of Christ," it is not essential for human flourishing. Our Lord was never married and did not experience sexual intimacy, yet lived authentically in both His human and divine natures. The elevation of singleness and acceptance of sexual minorities such as eunuchs set the early church apart from its Jewish roots and Greco-Roman surrounding culture. Today, there is a powerful witness to Christ displayed by gay or same-sex attracted Christians who have chosen to remain faithful to a historic Christian ethic of human sexuality. Several of these authors and Christian leaders will be noted at the end of this paper so you can explore their stories more fully. But one theme that stands out time and again is that they have found that people can live without sex but not without love. And the greatest love to be found is the love that comes from an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ.

So, the early church was set apart from the surrounding culture by its insistence on human sexuality flourishing only within the context of the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, and by its radical inclusion and elevation of life as a single person who practices celibacy as a form of devotion to Christ. We at Cove Church seek to uphold this position as well, despite it putting us at odds with the cultural context we find ourselves in today. We likewise seek to emulate the early church as it was known for its radical grace and inclusivity to persons who had failed to live up to this ethic in the past or struggle to do so in the present. Therefore, our posture towards people who differ from us on this issue is one of love and respect, even while we hold different beliefs about human flourishing concerning sexual practice. In fact, it is our core belief that all human beings, regardless of culture or creed, are image bearers of God, that calls us to such a posture. And so, at Cove Church, we welcome all people regardless of sexual orientation or sexual identification to come and hear the gospel invitation to follow Jesus.

The reality is that we all experience sexual brokenness in one way or another and we are all in need of the transforming power of grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our culture communicates a gospel of free sexual expression and identity formation as being the way to healing and self-fulfillment. Jesus, on the other hand,

said “for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). The challenge of Jesus to surrender and self-denial hardly sounds like good news in our cultural moment. However, the reality behind Jesus’ teaching has been proven time and time again. When a person seeks to satisfy their innate desires, they will find that desire is not self-limiting. Giving the heart whatever it wants can turn our heart into a cruel master that is never satisfied.

Jesus understands the human heart and its propensity to turn good things, like sexual desire and romantic experiences, into ultimate things that we order our lives and identities around. Like other idols, these things overpromise and under-deliver when it comes to providing what Jesus called “life to the full” (John 10:10). We are convinced that the gospel of Christ is still good news to all persons regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identities. The gospel tells us that we are more than our sexual desires and that we do not need a sexual relationship to be fully alive. God’s love is deeper than our human loves. It does not discriminate and neither does it leave us unchanged. We hope to be a church of broken people helping one another experience this healing and transforming love of God as we follow in the way of Jesus together.

Finally, we recognize that other Christians have honest disagreements over how we interpret the biblical witness to inform the Christian ethic outlined above. At Cove, we seek to be a place where people can process and wrestle with these types of questions in a humble and open environment. This crucial conversation paper is just an outline and a beginning of a broader conversation that we are willing to have on a more personal basis. So, we invite you to reflect on the resources providing more context that are listed below and reach out to us with any other questions so we can keep the conversation going.

References for further study:

For the Body by Timothy Tennent

A War of Loves by David Bennett

Gay Girl, Good God by Jackie Hill Perry

People to be Loved/Embodied by Preston Sprinkle

Divine Sex by Jonathan Grant

Unwanted by Jay Stringer

Websites:

<https://www.revoice.org/>

<https://www.centerforfaith.com/about/leadership/dr-preston-sprinkle>
<https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/school-of-psychology-counseling-and-family-therapy/sexual-and-gender-identity-institute/>

Wesleyan Theology

In our Faith and Practice document of Cove Church Ministries, we affirm the historical and ecumenical creeds of the Christian church. We also specify that our theology is rooted in classical Wesleyan thought and tradition. This is an opportunity for a crucial conversation because “Wesleyan Theology” is not always easily defined. In part, this is due to the fact that John Wesley himself never attempted to write a comprehensive systematic theological treatise. Instead, we have the collection of Wesley’s sermons and explanatory notes on the New Testament. Many have sought to work out a comprehensive theology from these sources and we will include a list of resources we believe to be the best in this regard. However, for the purposes of this paper, we will confine our conversation to a few of the distinctives that set Wesleyanism apart from another theological tradition that is quite prominent in the church today: Calvinism.

It is important to note, that Calvinism and Wesleyanism are not opposites of one another. They both come out of the Protestant Reformation, and there is much common theological ground between them. In fact, in 1765, Wesley wrote a letter to his friend, John Newton, and made it clear that, regarding the doctrine of justification, he did not differ “a hair’s breadth” from John Calvin. But differences of any size do make a difference, and since clarity often comes by way of comparison, that is how we will proceed. Unlike Wesley, Calvin did set out a more systematic theology in his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Further, the main points of Calvin’s theology were solidified by the acronym “TULIP” at the Synod of Dort around 1619 in response to the teaching of a man some see as a precursor to Wesley, Jacob Arminius.

TULIP represents these Five Points of Calvinism: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints. Concerning total depravity, we along with Wesley do not have much to disagree over. Keep in mind, this doctrine affirms that sin has so infected the world and humankind that we are in complete and utter need of God’s grace and cannot enter into a relationship with God without God’s activity preemptively moving in our lives. Our real points of tension come primarily in the next three letters, with an important caveat for the fourth.

As opposed to unconditional election, understood as God electing or predestining certain individuals to eternal states of either heaven or hell solely on the basis of His will in eternity past, we believe in conditional election concerning individual persons. This condition, as we find expressly repeated throughout the Scriptures, is faith. We believe in the biblical concept of predestination as God's sovereign decree to elect believers *in* Jesus Christ (corporate unconditional election), which includes God's foreknowledge of their individual faith (conditional election). Thus, God's corporate election of a people, namely Israel and the church, is unconditional, but a person's entrance into that corporate body is conditioned by faith.

This leads to the next letter, L, for limited atonement. This is perhaps the most controversial tenant of Calvinism. Limited atonement is the doctrine that simply believes Jesus died only for the sins of unconditionally elect persons and that His sacrificial death does not atone for the sins of the whole world as implied in the Scriptures (John 3:16, Acts 2:2, 1 Timothy 2:3-4 and 1 John 2:2). Calvinists argue that universal atonement leads necessarily to universal salvation. However, we believe that universal atonement only makes salvation possible for anyone, not actual for everyone. A thorough discussion on all the aspects of the atoning work of Christ is beyond the scope of this paper, however we believe it is important to affirm one important aspect, namely the substitutionary nature of the atonement that is applied to persons on the basis of repentance and faith as mentioned earlier.

This "response-ability" of a person, the ability to respond to the grace of God with trusting obedience, is central to Wesleyan theology, and comes into to conflict with the I of TULIP: irresistible grace. For Calvinists, God's grace encompasses an irresistible and effectual call on the elect persons that God has chosen for salvation. We wonder why, if God is able to irresistibly draw persons to salvation without violating the freedom of their will, God would not do so for everyone? There is an underlying philosophical debate here on the nature of freedom and the human will (compatibilism vs libertarianism) that we do not have the space to address. However, we believe that because of God's love for us and His desired love from us in response, God will actively work on our wills but will not coerce them irresistibly. We believe this interplay between the nature of true love and freedom in authentic relationship is at the heart of how God relates to persons throughout scripture as bearers of the divine image.

As opposed to irresistible grace, Wesley focused on prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. These graces demarcate God's activity in our lives that goes

before any “response-ability” of faith that we might have, secures us within the body of Christ and empowers us towards transformation into Christ-likeness. While prevenient grace touches us all and makes us responsible before God, we are able to resist the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by the prevalence of sin and rebellion in the world today. The good news of the gospel goes out as the power of God unto salvation for *anyone* who would not resist the Spirit but repent and believe, thus continuing in the justifying and sanctifying work of grace that God desires all people to experience.

The final letter to address in the TULIP acronym is P for perseverance of the saints. As Wesleyans, we would substitute a different P word: perfection. Like Calvinists, we believe it is God who perseveres and works salvation into the life of a believer through the power of the Spirit. In this sense, we believe the salvation found in the life of the triune God is totally secure. However, we also take seriously the warnings found throughout scripture, especially in the book of Hebrews, that imply that persons can grieve the Spirit and harden their hearts to the point where they become apostate. Thus, it is necessary to see salvation as a process that is intended to not merely serve as fire insurance from hell but lead, through a transformed life, into what Wesley called “Christian perfection.” We are to be moving towards perfection in love towards both God and people in cooperation with grace through the power of the Spirit. This doctrine should not be confused to imply that Christians must be morally perfect (without sin) to be acceptable to God. Rather, it is to focus our assurance of salvation in the ongoing experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit as opposed to a momentary decision of faith in our past. There is obviously more that could be said on behalf of both Wesleyanism and Calvinism. We could go on to discuss distinctive approaches to the problem of evil and suffering as it relates to God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. But that will have to wait for a different crucial conversation or be explored in the references listed below. In this paper, we have sought to be fair and state distinctly and clearly where our differences lie concerning aspects of salvation, while briefly supporting our various positions. We certainly welcome Calvinists into full fellowship with us at Cove Church Ministries and choose to primarily focus on the common ground between us. Also, we have learned much from our Calvinist brothers and sisters and expect to continue learning from them. Ultimately, we all share in the same need of the ongoing grace of God in our lives and both seek to exalt the name of Jesus as we follow in his way together.

References for further study:

The Sermons of John Wesley by Collins and Vickers

Classic Christianity by Thomas Oden
The Theology of John Wesley by Kenneth J. Collins
Calvin vs. Wesley by Don Thorsen
Why I am Not a Calvinist by Walls and Dongell
Young, Restless, and No Longer Reformed by Austin Fischer
Free Will in Philosophical Theology by Kevin Timpe

Women in Ministry

We believe that both women and men are called to and gifted for ordained and licensed ministry, and both can hold leadership roles within Cove Church Ministries. This qualifies as a crucial conversation because there is a division within the body of Christ concerning the scriptural warrant for women to be able to preach, pastor and lead in the congregational setting. Typically, these lines are drawn between what is commonly referred to as complementarian (no women preachers/leaders over men) and egalitarian (women and men are equally gifted and able to preach and lead) positions. However, these labels can be confusing and neither completely encapsulates our beliefs on this issue. For instance, while we believe that both men and women are created equally in the image of God, we also believe that this equality does not negate the real differences between the sexes that God intended to work together to fully display and exercise authority as image bearers in the world. Therefore, we see a complementarity between men and women, but we see it as one without hierarchy in the original creation. Finally, we believe these things, not despite what the Scriptures teach, but because of what the full biblical counsel of God teaches when interpreted properly.

Often this discussion can center on a few proof texts from both sides. The texts themselves are obviously important, however when approaching a complicated subject like this that has been debated and varied in its practice within the church for many years, proof-texting tends to take scripture more out of context than within it. There will be resources attached to this paper that will exegete several of these important texts to the level they deserve but for now, we will focus on more of a survey of the biblical witness regarding women and try to illustrate a clear trajectory for their roles.

In the beginning, we read in Genesis that God created both men and women in His image and gave them both a mandate to cultivate and fill the earth together as His representatives (Genesis 1-2). After sin entered the world through what is often referred to as the Fall, God's good design in creation gets warped in different ways.

One of the key consequences outlined in Genesis 3 is the new power struggle that men and women would be subjected to. This struggle for power would lead to the subjugation of women in a patriarchal culture where the practice of polygamy and the thought of women as property become commonplace. It is important to understand, that just because the Scriptures describe the emergence of this type of culture, it does not mean that it endorses it. There are clear examples of hope throughout the Old Testament where God raises up women to be prophets, leaders, teachers and examples to learn from and follow for all of us. Here is a short list of these influential women: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Esther. The prophet Joel, near the end of the Old Testament period, prophesied of a time when God's Spirit of new creation would be poured out on all flesh. This would result in "your sons and daughters will prophesy ... even on my servants both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

When we fast forward to the New Testament, we can see this prophecy begin to be fulfilled. Going against the cultural norms of his day, Jesus did much to elevate women and set a trajectory of full inclusion in his kingdom movement. He included women in his group of traveling disciples and spoke to women, even scandalous women, on many occasions. On one of these occasions, Jesus chose a Samaritan woman to be the first person to whom He would reveal His identity and mission as the Messiah. It was women who were the last people staying by the side of Jesus during His crucifixion, and Jesus appeared to women first after His resurrection. The first people to share the gospel news that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead were women.

But what about Paul? Most of the proof texts that keep women out of the pulpit or pursuing leadership roles in ministry come from the pen of Paul. However, when we look at the broader context behind Paul's ministry, we will see how he continued the trajectory of elevating women and recognized several key leaders in the life of the early church. A key passage illustrating this is Romans 16, where Paul mentions several women who partnered with him to advance the mission of the gospel. He describes Phoebe as a deacon and "benefactor of many people including me." One of the most important theological letters of the church was first delivered to and most likely proclaimed by a woman. Other notable women mentioned by Paul include Priscilla and Junia, the latter of whom Paul seems to refer to as a fellow apostle (Romans 16:6-7).

Further, when Paul lists spiritual gifts in passages such as Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4, there is no delineation implied for these gifts such as

teaching and prophecy to be given to one sex over the other. Rather, as Joel prophesied, the Spirit had been poured out on all flesh and both men and women would be empowered and used for the cause of the gospel. This is a sign of new creation that points back to the original plan for men and women to serve together in harmony as image bearers in God's world through the power of Christ. Paul would go on to write in Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). Paul isn't dissolving the remaining differences in these groups but rather prioritizing their position as equals in the body of Christ. The seeds that Paul was planting would later grow to both elevate women and inspire the abolitionist movement which would eventually dissolve the slave trade.

But what about those passages from Paul that seem to indicate that a woman should keep silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14) and not be allowed to teach over a man (1 Timothy 2)? Again, each of these passages must be understood in light of the whole of Paul's teaching and the scriptural witness in general. As for the passage in 1 Corinthians, if taken absolutely, then women literally could not make a sound in church. However, if we look back just a couple of chapters to 1 Corinthians 11, Paul acknowledges that women are prophesying and praying aloud in the church services in Corinth. He then directs both men and women how to do this with honor concerning "head coverings" given their current cultural circumstances. (For more on this, see [this article](#) by Craig Keener.) The point here is that there are cultural and circumstantial factors that are influencing Paul's letters to these particular churches or people. This background should be taken into consideration as part of the context of these letters and caution us as we seek to apply them to our cultural moment today.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 is probably the most cited passage historically for limiting women's roles in the church, especially in circumstances where they might teach both women and men. This is partly due to the context of the passage seeming to ground its prohibition in the original created order of Adam and Eve. As mentioned earlier, it is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately address these concerns and exegete this passage fully. (We recommend [this article](#) by Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary.) However, it should be noted that the one passage in the Bible that prohibits women from teaching scripture happens to appear in the one set of letters where we know that false teachers were especially targeting and working through women. Paul is prudent to advise these women not to teach, but rather to "learn in silence." But notice this, the women are still to learn! Why? So they can keep the knowledge of God to themselves? We've already seen in

other places that Paul expected women to speak in church, that he recognized women as leaders in the church and even learned from women himself. Therefore, it would be wise to not see a contradiction in Paul, but rather seek to understand the particular context behind this letter to Timothy and follow Paul's more general rule of recognizing women as co-laborers in ministry while encouraging them to follow the calling God has placed on their lives as evidenced by the gifting of the Holy Spirit.

There is obviously much more that could and should be said on this topic and we hope that you will follow up on the resources referenced. While this is a theological position that Cove holds firmly, we recognize that there remains honest disagreement within the body of Christ on this issue and there are a variety of ways that such positions actually work themselves out within the local church setting. Some of these expressions of "complementarianism" may be healthier than others. However, we live at a time when abuse in the church continues to be a sad reality for many women. At Cove, we seek to create a culture of accountability and empowerment where both men and women are equally equipped for ministry as we follow the way of Jesus together.

References for further study:

Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy by Pierce and Groothuis

Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts by Lucy Peppiatt

Blue Parakeet by Scot McKnight

Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul by Craig S. Keener