

# First Baptist Church Maryville

## A Statement of Church Identity

This statement of church identity is provided to unify our leadership, to equip our members, and to assist our newcomers in understanding First Baptist Church Maryville. This broad statement of identity is a dynamic document designed to be updated and modified as needed to facilitate spiritual growth and maturity within our local faith community.

### I. Who We Are and Why We Exist

#### **Our Mission**

Together in Christ, we love God and others.

### II. How We Reach Our Mission

We strive to reach our mission through worship, discipleship, and missions.

#### **1. Worship**

We are a Christ-centered community committed to the worship of God. Worship occurs in both personal and community contexts, as individuals pursue the worship of God in daily life, as parents lead their children into worship, and as our faith community enters into worship together. The following can be expected in our community worship:

- Praise and thanksgiving through music and the arts;
- The proclamation and interpretation of God's Word;
- Repentance and prayer;
- The ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper;
- Baby dedications;
- The giving of our resources.

#### **2. Discipleship**

Our church family is committed to the discipleship of believers into full Christian maturity, and our structure is focused on Children, Youth, College, Adult, and Senior Adult ministries.

Discipleship in the FBC Maryville family is supported by the following elements:

- Education: Teaching and learning the Bible in Sunday School and other weekly study groups;
- Fellowship: Developing deep relationships through sharing life together;
- Compassion Care: Caring for the sick and bereaved in our church family and community;
- Integration: Helping newcomers integrate into our church family.

#### **3. Missions**

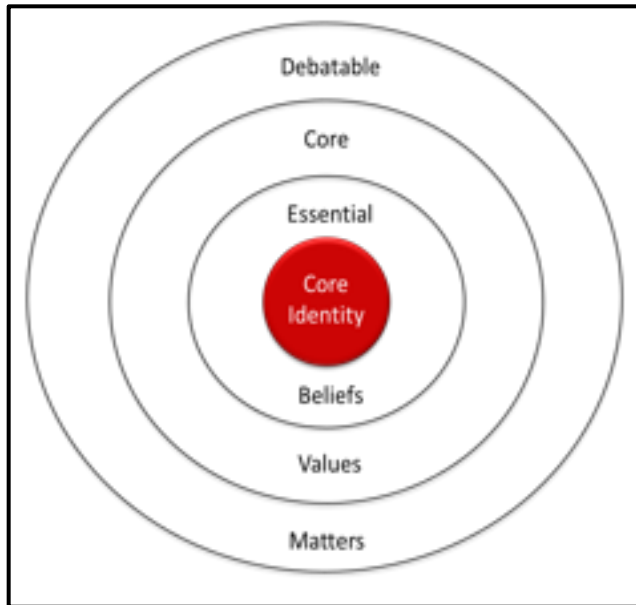
Jesus taught us that what we do "to the least of these brothers or sisters, you did to me." In response, we strive to love God and others through our missions. Our focus on missions recognizes that every believer is an ambassador for Christ. Our mission ministries are focused on the growth and advancement of God's kingdom on earth through local and global initiatives, including:

- Mercy ministries for the poor in spirit and health (e.g. home repairs, providing clean water, care of widows and orphans, adoption ministries, hunger relief, etc.);
- Evangelism by each follower of Christ sharing the gospel and their own faith story with others (e.g. Vacation Bible School, Community block parties, Community prayer walks and visitation, at work and school, and as other opportunities arise).

### III. What Our Priorities Are

#### **Our Beliefs**

We seek to maintain the dictum: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” As such, to stay focused on our Mission and Core Identity as a Christ-centered church, we recognize the distinction between Essential Beliefs, Core Values, and Debatable Matters of faith (see figure below).



Our beliefs are based on Christian doctrines held throughout church history since antiquity. These ancient beliefs are common to most Christians. Our beliefs also stand in solidarity with the historic character and trajectory of our local church. This statement of faith is not intended to be an exhaustive description of all Christian doctrines, but a comprehensive overview of our essential beliefs and core values.

#### **1. The Doctrine of the Bible**

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God written by human authors under the supernatural direction of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is an essential library of divinely inspired books that bear witness to the centrality and lordship of Christ. We do not devalue Scripture by interpreting it as a textbook, legal contract, or self-help manual. Instead, Scripture serves as the timeless spiritual guide to encourage and correct our lives of faith as we seek to follow Christ in our love for God and others.

#### **2. The Doctrine of God**

We believe in one loving God who has eternally existed in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- God the Father: We believe the eternal Father is the creator and sustainer of the universe and is perfect in holiness and love.
- God the Son: We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who is co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. All things were created by Jesus and for Jesus. Jesus is fully God and fully man. He lived, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven to demonstrate his Lordship and the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Jesus is the Savior and Redeemer of all who believe, repent, and follow his call of love in faith. He will return again to reign as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- God the Spirit: We believe that the eternal Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is present in the world to draw people to God and to restrain evil. The Holy Spirit indwells and bestows spiritual gifts to every follower of Christ. The Holy Spirit is our comforter. The Holy Spirit continues to give comfort and strength to those suffering loss of loved ones through death or divorce, and to those exposed to the many forms of abuse, prejudice or persecution. We seek to live under guidance of the Holy Spirit daily.

Though God cannot be fully comprehended by anyone but Himself, He has revealed Himself both generally through the natural world and specially through the Bible and Jesus Christ. We are blessed to live in one of the most obvious examples of God's general revelation – the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains.

### **3. The Doctrine of Humanity**

We believe that all people on earth, regardless of sex, race, age, or origin are made in the image of God and have been given inherent dignity. God has mandated for human beings to fill the earth with His glory. God gave human beings the responsibility to care and the capacity to create for the common good of all. As such, creation is not just a historical event, but continues even today. Through prideful rebellion (what we call sin), human beings are separated from God, self, and one another. All people are indeed in need of salvation in Christ.

### **4. The Doctrine of Salvation**

God saves! We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, and not through personal human effort. The Good News is that Jesus is Lord. As the only mediator between God and humankind, Christ offers righteousness and justification to all who profess faith in him. Salvation is brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit.

### **5. The Doctrine of the Church**

We believe the church is the current fellowship of Christ. The church exists to make disciples of Christ in all nations (the Great Commission) in order that we may be faithful in our love for God and neighbor (the Great Commandments). All humans are important to God, and the church is called to proclaim this to the world. We believe this includes men and women serving in all areas of Christian service. As we anticipate the return of Christ, the church shall be the salt and light of the earth, bearing witness to the world of the loving God.

## **Our Core Values**

First and foremost, FBC Maryville is a community – a family of believers. Our family of faith is unique, characterized by the following:

### **1. A Loving Community**

FBC Maryville values being a loving family of faith that serves God together. Examples of our loving fellowship include diverse activities such as church socials, Sunday School parties, mission block parties, youth sports, river baptisms, picnics, holiday programs, concerts, and mission projects.

### **2. A Learning Community**

FBC Maryville values learning. Our Sunday school classes (whether they are for 1<sup>st</sup> graders, youths, young adults or senior adults) provide challenging environments to examine the Bible and its cultural relevance for life today. In addition, many other classes are offered to mature Christians. We approach our teaching and learning with great care, study, and humility.

### **3. A Baptist Community**

FBC Maryville values Baptist distinctives, including:

- Church autonomy (i.e. the local church is self-governing in its beliefs and practices);
- The priesthood of believers (i.e. every believer has the privilege to cultivate a personal relationship with God and is able to pray to Him directly);
- Soul liberty (i.e. every person is responsible to God and is free to form his/her beliefs about God as he/she best understands Him, as long as it does not intrude or interfere with the rights of others. Based upon this distinctive, our church supports diverse organizations such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship);

- The ordinances of Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Supper (i.e. we practice baptism by immersion for those who, having made a public profession of faith in Christ, identify with His life, death, burial, and resurrection. We also regularly gather together to share the cup and bread in remembrance of our Lord's broken body and shed blood for all people).

#### **4. A Ministry Community**

FBC Maryville values ministry. We honor all people God has called to serve Him by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. We do not discriminate against women's roles in ministry; instead, we honor all women and men who contribute their gifts to the church. God can use any person, regardless of sex, age, race, or origin, and we welcome what God is always sculpting for our church. God's primary calling to salvation is always accompanied by a calling to serve Him. We believe that God wants all loving hands on deck and, as such, all believers are in ministry full time. As you leave our church parking lot, the sign says, "You are entering the mission field." This truly characterizes our mentality.

#### **5. A Hospitable Community**

FBC Maryville values being a loving, hospitable church home. We are eager to serve both church members and non-church members with hospitality. Our Family Life Center is used by thousands of non-church members per year, and we welcome them into the fellowship and warmth of our community.

#### **Our Debatable Matters**

Our church recognizes that there are always debatable matters within a family of faith. These debatable matters or second order doctrines should be expected, but should not constitute a test for Christian truth or fellowship. These doctrines may represent strong personal convictions or theological nuances, but do not define the gospel itself. As a church, we must be able to distinguish between debatable matters of faith, core values, and essential beliefs. All beliefs are not equal. It is our desire never to blur, nor overly focus on second order convictions over first order essential truths. At the same time, we recognize and will respect individual freedoms within basic Christian orthodoxy and with deference to the progressive leading of the Spirit of God.