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## STATEMENT OF FAITH AFFIRMED BY ELDERS OF CROSSWAY MILWAUKEE

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*In order for a man to serve as an elder at CrossWay he must be in agreement with the following SoF. Members are not required to affirm this in its entirety, as it is more in depth and nuanced than the SoF required for membership. Updated May, 2015.*

### **GOD**

We believe in one, and only one, true God, eternally existing in three equally divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love and glorify one another (One in essence, three in person). This God is infinitely perfect in all his attributes and is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore alone worthy to receive man's highest worship, his full allegiance, and his whole-hearted love. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning. He sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal purpose to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his own glorious grace. While the three persons of the God-head are equal in every divine perfection, they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation and redemption.

### **GOD'S WORD**

We believe that God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. God is therefore the originating and ultimate author of the biblical texts, and that these writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over everything to which it speaks. We admit that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe and obey the Word, they are nurtured in their faith and equipped as disciples of Christ and as witnesses to the transforming power of the gospel.

### **GOD'S CREATION**

We believe God created all things. All things were right and functioned as God designed them, and He declared His creation, "very good." On the sixth day God created human beings—male and female—in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, and they were assigned to serve as God's stewards of His creation – to care for, manage and govern it. They were God's people, living in holy and happy fellowship with their Maker.

Though created equal, Eve was not created as an exact replica of Adam in every way. They were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union (thus establishing the only right pattern for sexual relations for human beings). In God's wise purposes, men and women are interdependent, not simply interchangeable; they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. In marriage, God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church,

the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. Men and women are equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to engagement in family, church and civic life. However, we believe the Bible limits the office of elder to qualified men only.

#### **THE FALL**

We believe that Adam, by disobeying God and falling into sin through Satan's temptation, forfeited his original blessedness, both for himself and all his descendants. Furthermore, this act of rebellion caused tragic results on all of creation, for it is subjected to futility. From then on, all humans share in the sin of our ancestors and are sinful upon conception, alienated from God, radically corrupted in every aspect of their being (physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, socially and spiritually) and personally opposed to God. It is not simply man's sinning that is the problem, but his corrupt heart that produces the sinning – the preference of other things over God. This does not mean that he is as wicked as he can be – because God's common grace continues to prevent much evil – but that he is morally incapable of deciding to worship and follow God, because he is blind to the truth and to the goodness of doing everything from a heart of faith for the glory of God (i.e. man's depravity is not just partial, but it is total). Therefore, man is fully deserving God's righteous judgment and is condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God's own gracious intervention. The supreme and universal need of all human beings is to be reconciled to God and saved from his just and holy wrath. However, there is nothing man can do in order to accomplish this – no good deed he can do in order to make himself clean or right with God – because in order for God to be good, holy and just, He must punish evil. Man's only hope is for someone else to bear God's judgment.

#### **GOD'S RESCUE PLAN**

We believe that from eternity past God determined in grace and love to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation. We believe that God will perfectly accomplish this purpose through the incarnation, sinless life, substitutionary death, resurrection, and victorious return of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. In the incarnation, Jesus, the fully divine eternal Son of God, took on flesh, and thus became fully human without relinquishing his full deity in the least – one Person in two natures. He lived a sinless life thus perfectly fulfilling, as a human, all the requirements of God's law. He then voluntarily offered his life on the Cross in our place. Christ bore in our place the punishment due us for our sins. This is the heart of the gospel. By dying on the cross for our sins Christ satisfied God's justice and reconciled to God all those who believe. In his resurrection Christ was vindicated by the Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over us in death, and brought eternal life to all his people. He now sits at the right hand of God the Father as the mediatorial King, exercising God's sovereign rule in heaven and on earth, and He is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that this salvation from death into life is found in no place but Jesus Christ.

### **THE BENEFICIARIES OF GOD’S RESCUE PLAN**

Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross was sufficient for every individual in the history of the world. However, even though the offer of salvation through Christ can go out to every person, the effects of Jesus’ atoning work are limited in their application, meaning they are only applied to those who submit under Jesus’ lordship and place their trust in His death on their behalf with repentance and faith. (i.e. the effects of the atonement are applied to a limited group of people – those who repent and believe).

We believe man’s fall into sin rendered him spiritually dead. Therefore, by choice, man’s stubborn and dead heart will continue to resist God and the truth of the gospel, and will not turn to the Lord unless God intervenes and does something inside of man first, so that he chooses God over his rebellious ways. Thankfully, Jesus’ death did more than merely make salvation available to all who believe. His atoning death also inaugurated the New Covenant, obtaining the requirements for salvation to be effective: namely, repentance and faith. God grants repentance and faith to man, so that he joyfully chooses God. In other words, man’s choice of God is real and joyful, but it only happens because the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Triune God) regenerates his heart and removes the veil that was over man’s eyes, so that he can now see the truth rightly, and rejoices in it rather than resists it. In repentance we turn away from both our sin and any confidence we might have in our own goodness and in faith we entrust ourselves completely to Jesus Christ and what he has done on our behalf (i.e. God overcomes man’s dark heart so that he no longer resists God, but sees the grace of God in the gospel rightly, and it is irresistible).

God chooses, on His own volition, to give this great grace which leads to salvation, to rebellious sinners who would otherwise never turn to Him. God does not wait for man to meet a specific condition first, because man’s sin would prevent him from doing so. Therefore, God chose before the foundation of the world whom He would save. He elected them unto salvation, through the atoning death of Christ, which they will embrace by faith because of the grace of God given to them. (i.e. God’s election of His people is unconditional – it is not based on man meeting a requirement first).

### **THE EFFECTS OF GOD’S RESCUE PLAN**

We believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone and that when God’s grace is met by faith a person is justified—that is, his sins have been imputed to Christ and he is therefore completely forgiven, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him and he is thereby declared righteous and fully accepted by God. Furthermore, he is also adopted into God’s family whereby he experiences a new relationship with God – one as Father and child. As His child He is sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, who “baptizes” believers into union with Christ and indwells them, witnesses to him that he is God’s own treasured possession, and glorifies the Son. All this occurs the moment of salvation, upon profession of repentance and faith (conversion), and in these great acts God’s perfect justice and infinite love are simultaneously on display.

Life in this world will forever be different for this person. Though in many ways the same person, internally he has been changed and the work of sanctification began on that day of conversion. While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion which the believer is encouraged to pursue. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power, acting in the believer to encourage, guide and ultimately effect growth in Christ-likeness and Christian

witness. We believe this sanctification is a progressive work that begins at conversion and, though it is carried out by the presence and power of the Spirit, it is a work with which the individual believer cooperates especially by means of engagement in active obedience, prayer, meditation on Scripture, worship and true fellowship with other believers. Those who have been saved delight in the blessings of the New Covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation of heart that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to come. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Though indwelling sin remains this side of glory, actual growth in holiness is the norm for the Christian life.

God's grace does not stop there. It was grace that brought God's people into their salvation, and it is grace that will lead them home. During their pilgrimage on this earth, God's people must grow in obedience to God, and their faith must endure to the end. If one falls away and persists in rebellion, then this will prove he was never born again in the first place. But God works to ensure that His chosen people persevere to the end, because God will not lose any of them – they are blood-bought, and they are His (i.e. all of God's people (saints) will have perseverance of faith and obedience to the end; yet it's not about perfection, but direction).

#### **THE CHURCH**

We believe the Church is made up of all God's people through the ages who have, by faith, trusted in God's provision of salvation through Jesus' atoning death alone<sup>1</sup>. This universal church is manifested in local gatherings of believers of which Christ is the only Head. We believe that everyone who is part of the universal church should be part of a local church. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit and the ongoing witness to Christ in the world. We believe the church should neither hide from the world nor blend in with the world but should be distinctively engaged in the world as both "salt" and "light". The church is distinguished by her faithful gospel preaching, her faithful worship of God, her faithful observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, her faithful engagement in Christ's mission, her faithful obedience and, above all, by her love for God and by her members' love for one another.

We believe the Holy Spirit is active in the church corporately. He empowers the church for witness and service and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world. The gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the New Testament church are available today, serve the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed two ordinances for the local church to practice until He returns: baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that baptism is the immersion of the believer in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This water baptism is a visual sign of a person's union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. It signifies that one's former way of life has been put to death, that one is released from the mastery of sin, and that one has entered into

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<sup>1</sup> There may be differing opinions on what the Old Testament saints understood in regards to the coming Messiah. However, elders must affirm that there is one "people of God", and that there is not a sharp division between Israel of the OT and the New Testament church, as is taught in Dispensationalism.

a new life of obedience and faith<sup>2</sup>. The Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have trusted Christ for salvation and is to be observed regularly throughout the Christian life as a commemoration and proclamation of Christ's death and as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of that death. In the observance of the Lord's Supper we anticipate Christ's return, we are strengthened in our faith, and we also signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

We believe the New Testament instructs each local body to install qualified members into two offices for the care of the church: elders and deacons. Elders are to be men mature in the faith, growing Christ-like character according to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (cf. Titus 1:5-9), with the ability to teach sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it. Deacons are to be men or women mature in the faith, proven servants of others with growing Christ-like character according to 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

#### **THE WORLD TO COME**

We believe in the personal, glorious and bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ when he will exercise his role as perfectly righteous Judge and his perfect everlasting kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of all people. For those who have not been justified there will be judgment and the eternal punishment of hell. For those who are justified there will be eternal joy in the presence of God in the new heaven and the new earth. All sin will be purged away and its wretched effects forever banished. All God's people – all who have been united to Jesus through faith – will experience a radical and complete transformation into perfect Christ-likeness. On that day the eager longing of all creation will be realized and the whole earth will proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

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<sup>2</sup> Elders must affirm that baptism does not regenerate a person. However, they may hold to either a non-regenerating infant baptism, provided they understand the non-regenerating believer baptism view practiced at CrossWay Milwaukee, and can talk about it in an edifying way with congregants. In addition, they must understand and be content that we will not practice infant baptism at CrossWay Milwaukee, nor is he permitted to perform infant baptisms outside CrossWay while serving as an elder.