

# **THE CONSTITUTION OF SCHWEITZER CHURCH**

## **Preamble**

Schweitzer Church is a community of believers living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Those who become members of Schweitzer Church join in our mission of transforming lives by making disciples of Jesus Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Schweitzer Church seeks to glorify God through our shared ministries and life together in order to reach our lost and broken world.

Schweitzer Church stands in the long tradition of Wesleyan ministry extending the invitation of God's grace to all people. As Wesleyan Christians, our life together consists of the following disciplines experienced through the Wesleyan way of serving Christ:

- 1) Corporate worship where God is exalted, fellowship is experienced, gifts are given, the Word of God is proclaimed, and the sacraments duly administered.
- 2) Fellowship and discipleship ministries where people can learn to live the truth of God's Word, grow in the fruit of the Spirit, experience loving accountability, and share in the daily lives of fellow disciples.
- 3) Outreach opportunities where we both show God's love in practical ways through strategic missional ministries and declare God's goodness through evangelistic ministries.
- 4) Support and grow in fellowship with the global church to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the entire world.

## **Doctrinal Standards**

Doctrinal standards provide unity and clarity in our teaching and living. Schweitzer Church affirms the historic Wesleyan Christian faith that has been taught through the generations. To ground our teaching and Christian living, we affirm the following doctrinal standards:

### **The Apostle's Creed**

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
maker 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, dead, and buried;  
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**

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,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.  
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,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshiped and glorified,  
who 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 Standard Sermons and the Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament of John Wesley.**

## **The Articles of Religion**

### *Article 1: Faith in the Trinity*

We believe in the one living and true God, both holy and loving, eternal, unlimited in power, wisdom, and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things. Within this unity there are three persons of one essential nature, power and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

### *Article 2: The Father*

We believe the Father is the Source of all that exists, whether of matter or spirit. With the Son and the Holy Spirit, He made man, male and female, in His image. By intention He relates to people as Father, thereby forever declaring His goodwill toward them. In love, He both seeks and receives penitent sinners.

### *Article 3: The Son*

We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, truly God and truly man. He died on the cross and was buried, to be a sacrifice both for original sin and for all human transgressions, and to reconcile us to God. Christ rose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and there intercedes for us at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge all humanity at the last day.

### *Article 4: The Holy Spirit*

We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is of the same essential nature, majesty, and glory, as the Father and the Son, truly and eternally God. He is the Administrator of grace to all, and is particularly the effective Agent in conviction for sin, in regeneration, in sanctification, and in glorification. He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and enabling the believer.

### *Article 5: The Sufficiency and Full Authority of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation*

We believe the Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Bible bears unerring witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word. The Scriptures have come to us through human authors who wrote, as God moved them, in the language and literary forms of their times. God continues, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to speak through this Word to each generation and culture. The Bible has authority over all human life. It teaches the truth about God, his creation, his people, his one and only son and the destiny of humankind.

We believe that the Bible contains all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man or woman that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

We believe that the books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Holy Scriptures. The Old Testament is not contrary to the New. Both Testaments bear witness to God's salvation in Christ; both speak of God's will for His people. The ancient laws for ceremonies and rites, and the civil precepts for the nation Israel are not necessarily binding on Christians today. But, on the example of Jesus we are obligated to obey the moral commandments of the Old Testament.

The books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The New Testament fulfills and interprets the Old Testament. It is the record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is God's final word regarding humankind, sin, salvation, the world and its destiny.

The books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

#### Article 6: *Personal Choice*

We believe that humanity's creation in the image of God included the ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus individuals were made morally responsible for their choices. But since the fall of Adam, people are unable in their own strength to do right. This is due to original sin, which is not simply the following of Adam's example, but rather the corruption of the nature of each mortal, and is reproduced naturally in Adam's descendants. Because of it, humans are very far gone from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through Jesus Christ the prevenient grace of God makes possible what humans in self effort cannot do. It is bestowed freely upon all, enabling all who will to turn and be saved.

#### Article 7: *Sin*

We believe that through the disobedience of Adam and Eve sin entered the world and all creation suffered its consequences. The effects of sin include disruption of the relationship between God and humanity, deterioration of the natural order of creation, and exploitation of persons by evil or misguided social systems. The whole of creation groans for redemption. Each person is born with a proclivity toward sin, manifested in an inordinate orientation toward self and independence from God, leading to deliberate acts of unrighteousness.

The consequences of sin include a loss of fellowship with God, a self-absorption with one's own interests rather than love and concern for others, a bondage to things which distort the divine image, a persistent inability to live righteously, and ultimately everlasting misery and separation from God. The atoning work of Christ is the only remedy for sin, whether original, willful or involuntary.

#### Article 8: *Atonement*

We believe Christ offered once and for all the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. No other satisfaction for sin is necessary; none other can atone.

#### Article 9: *Justification, Regeneration, and Adoption*

We believe that when one repents of personal sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, that at the same moment that person is justified, regenerated, adopted into the family of God, and assured of personal salvation through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that justification is the judicial act of God whereby a person is accounted righteous, granted full pardon of all sin, delivered from guilt, completely released from the penalty of sins committed, by the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith alone, not on the basis of works.

We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that work of the Holy Spirit whereby, when one truly repents and believes, one's moral nature is given a distinctively spiritual life with the capacity for love and obedience. This new life is received by faith in Jesus Christ, it enables the pardoned sinner to serve God with the will and affections of the heart, and by it the regenerate are delivered from the power of sin which reigns over all the unregenerate.

We believe that adoption is the act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer becomes a partaker of all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a child of God.

#### Article 10: *Good Works*

We believe that although good works cannot save us from our sins or from God's judgment, they are the fruit of faith and follow after regeneration. Therefore they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and by them a living faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

#### Article 11: *Sanctification*

We believe that sanctification is that saving work of God beginning with new life in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit renews His people after the likeness of God, changing them through crisis and process, from one degree of glory to another, and conforming them to the image of Christ.

Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration. From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God. This sanctifying relationship with God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart to God, and empowers believers to please and serve God in their daily lives. Thus, God sets His people free to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves.

#### Article 12: *The Marriage Covenant*

We believe God instituted marriage for the well-being of humanity. While marriage is a gift given to us by God, we also celebrate that not all people will be called into marriage, and singleness is a worthy vocation that honors God.

Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong relationship of mutual love and service which the Scriptures call "one flesh." Such a marriage should be based on mutuality and partnership, patterned, not according to prescribed hierarchies, but according to the creation of the male and female, both in the image of God and the call to mutual submission as illustrated by Christ and his relationship with the Church.

Sexual intercourse is God's gift to humanity for the intimate union of a man and woman within marriage. In this relationship, it is to be celebrative. Marriage, between one man and one woman, is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within and following marriage.

We will both hold up these standards and welcome with loving kindness all who desire to worship among us. We will be a people who offer ourselves as agents of Jesus' grace and truth to others. We will trust the Holy Spirit to convict people of their sin to live in the hope of transforming possibilities and then to lead people to God's best for their lives.

#### Article 13: *The Church*

We believe that the church is created by God. It is the people of God. Christ Jesus is its Lord and Head. The Holy Spirit is its life and power.

The Church is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ's instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands. A local church is a body of believers formally organized on gospel principles, meeting regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship, and worship.

#### Article 14: *The Sacraments*

We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith. They are means of grace through faith, tokens of our profession of Christian faith, and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen and confirm our faith.

Water baptism signifies acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers as declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Baptism is a symbol of the new covenant of grace as circumcision was the symbol of the old covenant; and, since infants are recognized as being included in the atonement, they may be baptized upon the request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training. They shall be required to affirm the vow for themselves before being accepted into church membership.

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. To those who rightly, worthily and with faith receive it, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. The supper is also a sign of the love and unity that Christians have among themselves.

Christ, according to His promise, is really present in the sacrament. But His body is given, taken and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. No change is effected in the element; the bread and wine are not literally the body and blood of Christ. Nor is the body and blood of Christ literally present with the elements. The elements are never to be considered objects of worship. The body of Christ is received and eaten in faith.

#### Article 15: *The Ordained Ministry*

We believe God calls and equips women and men to be set apart for leadership and pastoral responsibility through ordained ministry. The ministry of the ordained (elders and deacons) is to be fulfilled in partnership with the laity of the church. Ordination involves a formal setting apart of

persons for leading the church in Word (teaching and preaching the faith once delivered to the saints), Sacrament (overseeing the practice of baptism and communion), and Order (giving leadership and form to the church's life). Those entering the process and seeking ordination should do so counting the cost; committing to a lifetime of conscious living of the whole gospel and joyfully embracing God's calling. The covenant of ordained ministry is a lifetime commitment, and those who enter into it dedicate their whole lives to the personal and spiritual disciplines it requires. All offices, positions, and authority of ordained ministry are open to both men and women as they are called by God.

#### *Article 16: The Second Coming of Christ*

We believe that the certainty of the personal and imminent return of Christ inspires holy living and zeal for the evangelization of the world. At His return He will fulfill all prophecies made concerning His final and complete triumph over evil.

#### *Article 17: The Resurrection of the Dead*

We believe in the bodily resurrection from the dead of all people— of the just unto the resurrection of life, and of the unjust unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection which will occur at Christ's Second Coming. The raised body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable.

#### *Article 18: Judgment of All People*

We believe that the Scriptures reveal God as the Judge of all and the acts of His judgment are based on His omniscience and eternal justice. His administration of judgment will culminate in the final meeting of all persons before His throne of great majesty and power, where records will be examined and final rewards and punishments will be administered.

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