

James River Community Church
Welcome to JRCC
1 - Statement of Faith

Bible

We believe that all of the Bible, consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, is the inspired and sovereignly preserved Word of God. It is without error, sufficient, and serves as the final authority for our faith and practice.

Triune God

We believe in one true and living God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons are completely equal in attributes, each with the same divine nature, yet they are each distinct persons. The Triune God is wise, loving, merciful, faithful, patient, abundant in goodness and truth. He is infinite in being and perfection, self-existent and self-sufficient. He is the sovereign Creator of all things, and he upholds and governs all things. He is holy, and utterly opposed to sin; yet he graciously forgives the sin of his people.

God the Father

We believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth; the eternal, almighty Lord of all. He is the heavenly Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he is the Father of His people, having given them new birth in his Spirit. He planned and arranged the salvation of His people, sent his Son into the world to save them, and adopts them into his family by his Spirit. He has reserved a place for them in his presence, and will raise them from the dead into his kingdom to reign with him forever.

Jesus Christ

We believe in the deity of Christ, in his virgin birth, in his sinless life, in his miracles, in his vicarious and atoning death through his shed blood, in his bodily resurrection, in his ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in his personal return in power and glory.

Holy Spirit

We believe in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for the salvation of lost and sinful man. We believe the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, eternally existent with the Father and the Son; who draws God's people to himself; indwells them and regenerates their hearts so that they can trust in Christ; fills and empowers them, producing fruit in their lives, so that they can grow to be more like Jesus; and seals them for the day of redemption, ensuring that they will persevere to the end.

Mankind

We believe that God created humanity, male and female, in His image, for his glory. Divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing. Humanity was created to know God, and to experience His fellowship, and to glorify him.

Sin

We believe that all mankind, beginning with Adam, have rebelled, sinned against God, and are wholly marred by sin and its consequences. For these reasons, mankind is incapable of pleasing or having a productive relationship with God without having a supernatural spiritual rebirth.

Salvation

We believe that salvation from the penalty of our sin can only be attained through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who forgives our sin and declares us righteous by his grace, and not by works, or effort, or merit. Saving faith is always accompanied by true repentance. Because of God's sustaining power, every true believer will persevere to the end.

Judgment

We believe that those who persist in their rebellion and rejection, and do not repent and believe the gospel, will experience eternal conscious punishment under the wrath of God in Hell.

Sanctification

We believe that sanctification is a progressive act of God's grace in us, conforming us to the image of his Son, starting with conversion and continuing by faith and repentance. Genuine faith and repentance will inevitably result in obedience, forgiveness, and good works.

Christian Life

We believe that the Christian should strive, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to live a godly, holy life in this present evil world. God accords to each the responsibility and privilege of discernment and the liberty of conscience which should be stewarded and exercised.

Family

We believe that God ordained marriage as a covenantal, lifelong union between one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant love between Christ and his bride, the church. God's revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage.

Church

We believe in the Church, the body of believers that God has saved, and has called out of the world to live with him under His rule. All believers are members of the universal, invisible church – the bride for whom Christ died. The local church is an earthly, visible expression of the universal, invisible Church. It is to be comprised of regenerate members, led by a plurality of elders, and served by deacons.

Sacraments

We believe in Baptism and the Lord's Supper - the two sacraments ordained by Jesus to be practiced in the church. God's people are to be baptized by true believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And they are to enjoy the Lord's Supper together regularly, as an ongoing act of remembering the death of Jesus Christ – his broken body and shed blood.

Christ's Return

We believe in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. That Jesus will return, in bodily form, to restore all things. He will gather his people, who have repented of their sins and trusted in Christ, to reign together with him and enjoy him forever. He will consign those who oppose him in unbelief to eternal conscious punishment in Hell.

Discussion Questions
1 - Statement of Faith

Consider the following questions for each of the 15 points of our statement of faith.

What is this doctrine teaching?

Why is this doctrine important?

Are there any specific words or phrases that strike you as particularly significant? Why?

What are some theological errors or dangers that this doctrine might be guarding against?

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Welcome to JRCC
2 - History of James River Community Church

James River Community Church stands in a long line of churches. A line that stretches for centuries, all the way to the early church. We love and worship the same God. We trust in the same Savior. We preach the same gospel.

When we consider the history of James River Community Church, it's helpful to look at the far view (how we are situated in that long line of churches), as well as the near view (the story of how our particular church - how it was planted, and what has taken place since then).

James River Community Church is a Christian Church.

In a sense, our church's history starts all the way back in the first century. When Jesus told Peter that He (Jesus) was going to build His church, and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). JRCC is a local expression of the universal church that Jesus is building.

Shortly thereafter, the church had developed creeds to formalize what they believe about God (Apostles' Creed in the 2nd century, Nicene Creed in 325 and 381). We stand alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the ages in affirming them.

The Nicene Creed affirms that we believe in *one, holy, universal, and apostolic* church. One church (the bride of Christ), united together through its belief in the gospel, set apart from the world through its holiness and godliness, built upon the teachings of the apostles (the Bible).

James River Community Church is a Protestant Church.

In the 16th century, through the leadership and influence of reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin, the church recovered a number of key doctrines from Scripture that had been neglected or forgotten for some time.

Among other important doctrines, there were five key statements that lay at the center of what distinguished the theology of the Reformation from the theology of the Roman Catholic church.

- *Sola Scriptura*

- Sola scriptura is the belief that Scripture is God's inspired Word. And that Scripture is the only inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church. The church takes its cues from Scripture, and not the traditions of man.

- *Solus Christus*
 - Solus Christus is the assertion that Christ alone is able to save. He is the only basis on which sinners can be justified in God's sight.
- *Sola Fide*
 - Sola fide maintains that the believer receives the redemption Christ has accomplished only through faith, and not works. That there is nothing that we can do to add to Christ's finished work. We simply trust him in faith.
- *Sola Gratia*
 - Sola gratia proclaims that all of our salvation, from beginning to end, is by grace alone, and not merit. Our salvation is a gift that we don't deserve. That was given to us by God because of his goodness, and not because of anything good in us.
- *Soli Deo Gloria*
 - Soli Deo gloria teaches that since our faith is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, that God alone is the one who receives glory for our salvation. If we contributed to our salvation in any way, or if we had earned our salvation in any way, then we would get some of the glory. As it stands, all glory goes to God.

John Calvin taught that the marks of a true church are:

- *The right preaching of the word of God.*
 - The center of every true church is the preaching of the gospel. The proclamation of the good news that Christ has died for our sins, and has taken the punishment that we deserve, that he has been raised from the dead, and that we can be saved and reconciled to God for all eternity if we turn from our sins and trust in him. In order to be a true church, you have to preach the true gospel. A congregation does not preach the true gospel is not a true church.
- *The right administration of the sacraments.*
 - Preaching the true gospel is not the *only* responsibility that a church has. (There are plenty of other organizations that are not churches that also proclaim the same gospel!) The church also has the responsibility to mutually affirm its members as belonging to Christ through the administration of the sacraments. The church baptizes those people who enter into it, and it celebrates communion together with those who remain within it. In so doing, each member (individually) is making a profession of faith to the church (collectively), and the church (collectively) is affirming the professions of faith of each of its individual members.

1890 - Mount Zion Christian Church

In 1890, Mount Zion Christian Church was planted in the Eclipse neighborhood in northern Suffolk, VA. Over a hundred years later, it consisted of a handful of senior citizens, who prayed that their building would once again be full of families with children, and that their congregation would once again send missionaries around the world.

1986 - Grace Fellowship Church

In 1986, Grace Fellowship Church was planted in Northern Suffolk. By 1995, they had grown, and were looking for a permanent place to meet.

1995 - Mount Zion Fellowship Church

In 1995, by the gracious providence of God, Mount Zion Christian Church and Grace Fellowship joined together. The new church was an answer to Mount Zion's prayer for new energy, and it was an answer to Grace Fellowship's prayer for a permanent meeting space. The new church was called Mount Zion Fellowship Church.

Along the way, Mount Zion Fellowship Church joined the *Hampton Roads Consortium of Churches*. We have a close partnership with several other local churches in the area:

- Centerpoint Community Church
- Eastside Church
- Peninsula Community Chapel
- Tabernacle Church of Norfolk
- Virginia Beach Community Chapel
- Williamsburg Community Chapel

2008 - James River Community Church

In 2008, Mount Zion Fellowship Church changed its name to James River Community Church.

Discussion Questions
2 - History of James River Community Church

What are some of the most important elements that set the Christian religion apart from other religions and belief systems?

What are some of the key distinctives of the Protestant Reformation? Why are they important?

What does it mean for a church to practice “the right preaching of the gospel”? What does it mean to for a church to practice “the right administration of the sacraments”?

James River Community Church
Welcome to JRCC
3 - Distinctives of James River Community Church

Gospel

The most important thing about James River Community Church is not what makes us distinct. It's what we share in common with every other true church - the gospel. It is that good news that we have been entrusted by God to possess, protect, and proclaim.

We seek to be gospel-centered. And the gospel informs everything that we do. The gospel is not a "ticket" to enter into the church (that is quickly forgotten once you're inside). It is the ongoing centerpiece of who we are, and everything that we do as a church.

Worship

A church, by definition, is a group of people who gather together. To listen to God's Word together. To encourage one another, so that we can endure and persevere together. One of the most important ministries that a Christian has is the ministry of attendance at the corporate worship gatherings of their local church.

In our corporate worship services, we come together as a family to read the Bible, hear the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible, and see the message of the Bible (the gospel) on display.

Preaching

The main way that God intends for His people to grow and flourish spiritually is by being exposed to His Word. To hear it, meditate on it, submit to it, apply it. The most important thing that a church can do for its people is to feed them substantive, hearty, healthy meals from the Word of God.

For the most part, we practice expositional preaching, where we work through passages and books of the Bible to consider what they mean and how they apply to our lives today.

Music

Music has a unique capacity to engage the head (intellect, knowledge) and the heart (emotions, spirit). Music, unlike other forms of content, tends to stick with us. It is easier retain content that we sing, as opposed to content that we just see or hear. It is important for music to be God-centered, Christ-exalting, and theologically rich.

Corporate worship is intended to be congregational. The most important element is the congregation's collective voice. We want our leaders to accompany (instead of perform). And we want to mobilize the congregation to lean in and sing with passion.

Discipleship

We think that spiritual growth does not happen primarily through polished programs, but through life-giving relationships.

We seek to create a culture of discipleship. Where every member of our church knows (and has meaningful relationships with) a number of other members of the church. Where members are continually looking for other members that they can teach (so that they can disciple them). Where members are continually looking for other members from whom they can learn (to be disciplined by).

We encourage people to participate in and lead small groups, so that they can seek to create and pursue these discipling relationships.

Government

We prioritize *meaningful membership*. We think that membership in a local church is vitally important. It is far more than checking a box. Or writing your name on an application. It is making a formal profession of a faith to a family of believers. And inviting them to affirm your profession of faith. So that you can live in relationship with them, as a covenant community. God calls members to walk with God, and to flourish and grow as Christians. In covenant relationship with one another. Under the authority and watchful care of the elders.

We also prioritize *careful shepherding*. We think that elders are called to actively lead the church. To teach them from the Bible. To know, counsel, and care for them. To lead them by example. We make a point to ensure that the elders can account for the spiritual well-being of every member. That every single member knows and is known by at least one elder. So that the elders can collectively exercise responsibility over the souls of every member.

Mission

God has called us, as the church, to be on mission together. We want to be active in evangelism right where we are. To seek to proclaim the gospel and represent Christ well in our respective spheres of influence. (Family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.) To help others come to know Christ. And to invite them into a church community that will encourage them, and help them to endure in their faith.

We want to be active in evangelism, ministry, and church-planting all over the world. We want to prioritize missions and missionaries in our budget. We want to cultivate and deepen relationships with the missionaries that we support.

Giving

We recognize that God has given us money, and has entrusted us to use it well for his glory. Everything belongs to him, and we are merely stewards the money and resources that God has given to us.

In view of that reality, God calls each of us, as individuals, to support the gospel ministry of our local church - by giving generously, cheerfully, sacrificially, willingly, and in proportion to what God has given us.

Discussion Questions
3 - Distinctives of James River Community Church

Consider the following questions for each of distinctives listed above.

Why is this particular distinctive important?

Does this distinctive represent a new or different perspective for you? If so, how? How does it compare and contrast with other churches that you have been a part of?

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4 - Why Membership Matters

Church membership sets our Christian life in the context of a community.

We are not called to be “Lone Ranger” Christians, and walk with God in isolation. If we do, we run the risk of looking at our own lives and souls with rose-colored glasses. And thinking that we are more spiritually healthy than we actually are.

As Christians, we are called to believe the gospel. And to make a public profession of faith to the world, and to other believers. Church membership is what happens when a community of believers (a local church) affirms that profession of faith, and declares that they determine it to be credible. Part of our assurance of salvation, as Christians, comes from the reality that there is an entire community of believers (our local church) who affirm our profession of faith. And who tell us that, as best as they can discern, they think that we are, in fact, Christians.

Church membership gives us a tangible outlet for the “one another” commands of Scripture.

The New Testament contains dozens of commands for how Christians are to act toward one another.

- Love one another. (John 13:34)
- Care for one another. (1 Corinthians 12:25)
- Be kind to one another. (Ephesians 4:23)
- Bear one another’s burdens. (Galatians 6:2)
- Encourage one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Teach and admonish one another. (Colossians 3:16)
- Welcome one another. (Romans 15:7)
- Instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)
- Serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)
- Be at peace with one another. (Mark 9:50)
- Live in harmony with one another. (Romans 15:5)
- Be humble toward one another. (Philippians 2:3)
- Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Show hospitality to one another. (1 Peter 4:9)

I imagine that many of us are probably familiar with many of these. Perhaps they do not seem particularly novel or ground-breaking. But consider for a moment - how are we

supposed to obey these? Who are the “one-another’s” in our lives that these verses are referring to?

There are over 2 billion Christians in the world. The vast majority of them don’t speak your same language. Surely we can’t be expected to fulfill *all* of these commands toward *every single* Christian! How can we love someone we’ve never met? How can we welcome and show hospitality to someone that we will never meet? How can we teach and encourage someone who we cannot communicate with?

Church membership makes these commands real and tangible. I can’t possibly love every Christian, but God has put me into a particular community, and called me to love those particular people. I can’t possibly teach every Christian, but there is a circle of Christians in close proximity around me (my fellow church members), and there are people in that circle that I can teach. I can’t welcome every believer into my home, but I can certainly invite a church member over for a meal sometime in the next month.

Church membership establishes formal relationships of authority and accountability.

If a person attends a church, but never becomes a member, that church never really has any formal authority, when it comes to shepherding their soul. Any more than a restaurant has any formal authority over its regular customers. That person can listen to the sermons, or receive counsel from members or elders if they see fit. But they have not actually made any formal commitment to do so. And if the church seeks to confront them about something in their life, they don’t have any meaningful authority to appeal to.

Church members, on the other hand, have made a formal commitment to the church. And have come under the authority, and instruction, and discipline of the church. They have given the church permission to shepherd them, and to exercise spiritual oversight over them.

Church membership gives clarity to who the elders are will give an account for.

Without a formal structure of church membership, the elders can never really know who exactly they are called to lead and shepherd. And exactly whose souls they will give an account to God for.

Church membership helps elders know who exactly it is that is under their care. Who they should be primarily looking out for. Leading. Feeding. Caring. Protecting. Biblical church membership helps elders do the job that God has called them to do. And it assures the members that the elders have a formal responsibility to do so.

Church membership gives meaning to (and is necessary in order to practice) healthy church discipline.

Part of what it means for a person to become a part of a local church, and to come under its authority, is that you commit to believing the gospel and living a godly life into perpetuity. And if they do not, then it is the church's responsibility to confront them, shepherd them, help them, guide them. And, if necessary rebuke them. Or even remove them from membership as an act of discipline.

If the process of church discipline culminates in the removal from church membership, then it presupposes that a formal membership structure exists in the first place. (You can't be removed from something that you were never actually a part of!)

God calls churches to keep watch over their members, and this includes the process of church discipline when necessary. And the only way for a church to be obedient to this calling is to have meaningful church membership.

Discussion Questions
4 - Why Membership Matters

What does it look like for a church to practice church membership in a healthy way?

What are some reasons why it is important for a local church to have a healthy practice of church membership?

How can a healthy practice of church membership help a church to accomplish its mission more effectively?

What are some dangers and risks for a church that does not practice healthy church membership?

How can an unhealthy practice of church membership (or a failure or refusal to practice church membership at all) inhibit a church from accomplishing its mission?