

St. Matthew Church Belleville, Illinois Doctrinal Statement

Who We Are

St. Matthew Church is a unique assembly of believers living under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Since its founding, St. Matthew Church has been a lighthouse for the gospel in West Belleville, the Metro East and throughout the world.

St. Matthew Church stands in the long tradition of Wesleyan ministry and the teachings of John Wesley. It extends God's grace to all people and seeks through personal and corporate evangelism to introduce people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

St. Matthew Church was founded as a Methodist church in 1956, which later became the United Methodist Church in 1968. St. Matthew Church withdrew from the UMC in 2023. This action caused church leaders to develop the following foundational principles as a means of establishing our identity as to who we are and what we believe.

St. Matthew Church exists to help people to **know** the Lord Jesus Christ, to **grow** in His grace, and to **go** in His name to love and serve others.

What We Believe

We uphold ten core beliefs as essential to our Christian faith. These relate to God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, et al. Our emphasis is on things that unite us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, not on secondary issues that have the potential to divide us.

The Bible itself is the sole and final source of all that we believe. We do believe, however, that the following accurately represents the teaching of the Bible and is therefore relevant to those who are part of St. Matthew Church.

In addition to these ten items and the practical moral and social principles which follow, we also believe in and accept the historic statements of the Christian faith as found in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

If you have questions about what it means to trust in Christ for salvation, or if you are struggling with what to believe about God and Christianity, please contact us at 618/397-5994. At St. Matthew Church, we are all pilgrims on a spiritual journey.

We don't have all the answers to all of life's questions, but with the Bible as our guide, we would be delighted to counsel and pray with you as you move forward on the path to knowing Jesus.

The following does not exhaust the extent of our faith, but it summarizes important subjects which are essential to what we believe and who we are.

1. God

We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unit of three equally divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself.

2. Jesus Christ

We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, fully God and fully man. He died a substitutionary death on the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice both for original sin and for all human transgressions and to reconcile us to God. Christ was buried, but after three days in the grave, He rose bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven. There He intercedes for us at the Father's right hand until He returns as both Redeemer and Judge at the last day.

3. The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit who is of the same essential nature, majesty, and glory as the Father and the Son. He is truly and eternally God. In all that He does, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of guilt and of sin and warns of the judgment to come. He provides regeneration for those who are not in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. He baptizes believers into union with Christ so that they are adopted into God's eternal family as heirs with Christ. He indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for holy living and sanctification.

As He does so, the Holy Spirit provides an on-going assurance of our salvation.

4. The Bible

We believe the Bible is the Word of God. We believe that God has spoken through both the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the

New Testament which constitute the complete and final Word of God. We believe that the Holy Spirit authored the Scriptures as He “breathed out” the very words to human authors so that the Bible is infallible.

God the Holy Spirit continues to lead and direct through the Scriptures to every generation and culture. Because He is its source, the Bible is the complete revelation of God’s will for salvation and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor must be evaluated. Therefore, the Bible is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

5. The Church

We believe that the true church is comprised of all who have been justified by God’s grace through faith in Christ. They are united by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ of which He is the Head. The local church is the visible group of believers which is to preach and teach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and live in obedience to the Scriptures as it meets regularly for worship, training, nurture, fellowship and evangelism.

6. Sin

We believe that man was created by and for God. We believe that through the disobedience of Adam and Eve sin entered the world and all creation suffered its consequences. Every person is a sinner by nature and practice. By man’s disobeying God, every person incurred physical death and spiritual death which is separation from God. Every individual is born with a bent towards sin which manifests itself in deliberate sinful acts and independence from God. The atoning work of Christ is the only remedy for sin.

7. Atonement

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was offered once and for all for the sins of all mankind. Those who exercise saving faith and place their trust in Him and in His blood which He shed on Calvary are declared righteous. They are thus saved for this life and for eternity. Through personal faith in Christ, and by God’s grace, they enter into a right relationship with God and are part of His family forever.

8. Justification

We believe that when a person trusts the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, at that moment he is justified, regenerated and adopted into the family of God. He then receives assurance of salvation through the witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

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

9. Sanctification

We believe that sanctification is that saving work of God beginning with new life in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit conforms His people to be like Christ. Sanctification begins when a person exercises saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and is regenerated and justified. From that moment on, there is a gradual ongoing sanctification as the believer walks with God. The believer “grows in grace” as he obeys the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Although in this life believers will never be free from the pull and lure of the “old nature,” those in Christ are called unto holiness and holy living. Therefore, believers are not to walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit and to live in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

We believe that good works are important and should be evident in the life of every believer, but they are never the means of salvation. Nor do they contribute to it in any way.

10. Christ’s Return

We believe in the personal, bodily and imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy. It is a major motivation for holy living and provides a zeal for sacrificial service and for evangelism.

How We Live Out Our Faith

1. Sacraments

We believe that water baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the sacraments of the church. Also known as ordinances of the church, these sacraments do not save and are not essential to salvation.

Water baptism is to be administered to believers as a declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and of their desire to walk in newness of life which Christ desires and enables. Because we are buried with Christ in baptism, the preferred mode is by immersion.

We practice both baptism and dedication of infants. Baptism is a symbol of the new covenant of grace just as circumcision was the symbol of the old

covenant. Since infants are recognized as being included in the atonement, they may be baptized upon the request of parents or guardians who will commit to their training in the Christian faith. They will be required to affirm their faith in Christ before being accepted into church membership.

The Lord's Supper is a testimony of our redemption and to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It is something that we do regularly in remembrance of Him until He returns. The Lord's Supper is also a sign of the love Christians have for each other and the unity we have in Christ.

2. The Church

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, the church universal, His bride, of which He is the Head. The true church is seen in local churches such as St. Matthew Church whose membership should be comprised only of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Christian Service

We believe that enabling gifts for service are bestowed by the Holy Spirit on all who are saved. Although there is a diversity of gifts, each believer is energized by the Holy Spirit and therefore called to a place of service of His divine choosing.

4. Giving

We believe that every believer is a steward of what God has entrusted to him or her. As stewards and managers, all of us own the same amount: zero. We are just responsible to manage different amounts for God. We believe that it is a privilege and holy duty of each person to give as God provides and in proportion to his or her income.

We believe that tithing is giving one-tenth of one's income and is a place to start. As believers grow in grace and seek God's direction, they may want to consider moving beyond the tithe through gifts and offerings.

Our primary financial support of St. Matthew Church is through tithes and offerings, but above and beyond that giving, we believe God can and will direct in support of other agencies and missions for evangelization and spreading of the gospel, for teaching and preaching the Word of God at home and abroad, and for caring for those in need.

Social and Moral Principles

1. The Sanctity of Life

St. Matthew Church is pro-life. We believe that God is the source of all life and that every life is important to Him and therefore of great value. We believe that life begins at conception and it is not ours to determine if and when to end a life.

In this area, and in all that we do at St. Matthew Church, we are determined to extend God's grace and mercy to those affected by abortion. We believe God's forgiveness and healing are available to all who have experienced the trauma of abortion.

Because we are pro-life, we will endeavor to support those individuals and organizations that are working to promote life.

2. Marriage and Human Sexuality

We believe that marriage is a part of God's creation which He called "good." Marriage within the church is a rite founded by God who made us male and female. We also believe that marriage is a sacred institution which reflects the mysterious and wonderful bond between Christ and His church.

From a secular or civil viewpoint, marriage is a contract between two persons, but we believe it is much more than that. It is a holy covenant between one man and one woman that finds its divinely intended expression as the "one flesh" covenant union of husband and wife. Accordingly, we will only authorize and conduct heterosexual marriages.

We believe that all people are individuals of sacred worth and value and that God's grace is available to all. We welcome all to St. Matthew Church without regard to national origin, color, race or sexual preference. However, we believe that God intends for His children to practice sexual purity and faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness. It is our firm conviction that church membership and leadership are limited to those who meet these standards.

3. Divorce and Remarriage

We believe that when a couple is considering divorce, they should exhaust every avenue of reconciliation. However, if they are estranged to the point where reconciliation is not possible, then we recognize that divorce is a regrettable alternative to continuing the marriage relationship.

Based on the Scriptures, we believe that marriage is always preferable to divorce. Divorce is always less than what God intended for marriage, but it is not an unforgivable sin.

By God's grace, and through a process of healing, forgiveness and restoration, people can be restored to healthy and whole relationships that may include remarriage.

4. Addictions and Dependency

We believe addictions to alcohol, illicit or recreational drugs, and pornography are harmful and contrary to biblical teaching. We also understand that people make mistakes and that addictions and bondage cannot simply be prayed away.

We believe that deliverance from these and other addictions is possible for believers through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. That's why we proclaim the good news that there is hope and healing in Christ for the addict, regardless of the addiction.

At the same time, we realize it is very difficult for an individual to achieve freedom in Christ by themselves.

That's why St. Matthew Church supports and encourages participation in Celebrate Recovery as a powerful support group for addicts and their families.

Approved by the
Administrative Board
March 28, 2023