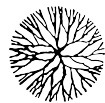


IRONWOOD CHURCH

Covenant Membership Packet



January 2024

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ARTICLE 1: LOVE

Summary

Love is at the center of the universe and at the center of Ironwood Church.

Detail

From eternity past, the One God exists in three persons as an eternal communion of perfect love. Out of the overflow of that love he created the world we inhabit, such that relationship is woven into the fabric of all that exists. This relational vision for creation implicates our understanding of sin; at the heart of humanity's rebellion, there is relational discord with God which reverberates through the whole of the universe. Sin is, among other things, the obstruction of love. God's instruction to his covenant people, the Law, was designed to teach fallen people how to love; the end, or purpose, of the law is love. God, in Christ, does what the Law has failed to do, showing us in the flesh what the fulfillment of the Law looks like. Love is not merely revealed in ink on a page but in the person of Jesus.

Jesus shows us how love is truth-telling, humble, sacrificial, considerate, hospitable, hostility-absorbing, non-reactive, lower-place-taking, honest, initiative-taking, thoughtful, serving, forgiving, and, ultimately, substitutionary. Love necessarily spills out into public life; justice is what love looks like when it moves through a society. Where people love their neighbors as themselves, there will be a society that is moving towards justice. Love pursues the other; we must have connection with people who are not like us in order to love like Jesus. Love is not blind; it enables us to see and empathize with the perspectives of others. Love is not in a hurry; it is pleased to take the time to cultivate relationships rooted in trust and respect.

The Lord, who is love, defines love. If we are to follow Jesus, love is the only way. This relational lens shapes our approach to doctrine and practice as Ironwood Church.

Scripture

- 1 John 4:7–11 / Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
- Matthew 22:37–40 / He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
- John 15:12–14 / "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.
- Philippians 2:3–7 / Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
- Romans 8:3–4 / For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

ARTICLE 2: MISSION, VISION & STRATEGY

Summary

Ironwood Church exists to birth and strengthen healthy disciples.

Mission

Jesus gave his church a mission: to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20). A disciple is a student, a learner; someone who is following Jesus and who simultaneously learning how to follow Jesus, better.

Vision

Ironwood Church is named for the Ironwood Tree, which is a “habitat modifying keystone species” native to the Sonoran Desert. In other words, other plants thrive because of the Ironwood’s strength. It’s a slow growing tree with extremely strong wood, able to fruitfully endure the extreme weather of the desert.

The big tree by our lobby entrance is an 80+ year-old Ironwood and a fitting picture of who we are as a church. Like the Ironwood Tree, the thriving of the church contributes to the thriving of our community. And, like the tree, we are most interested in growing strong and healthy.

Strategy

- **We enjoy Jesus together.**

Jesus isn’t just somebody we believe in, but somebody we delight in.

- **We fight for kids and families.**

Families are one of God’s first and best gifts. In a world that minimizes families and kids, we fight for them.

- **We bring light to darkness.**

All of life is all for Jesus — and he is forming us into faithful disciples in every area of life in the midst of our dark and darkening world.

- **We give it away.**

God’s love led him to give his very best: his only Son. We imitate his generosity through partnering in Jesus’ local and global mission.

- **We serve like crazy.**

In a world that’s obsessed with self, we follow Jesus in the way of service. We mobilize volunteers to use their gifts and grit to serve the church and community.

ARTICLE 3: IRONWOOD CULTURE

Summary

The culture that embodies our beliefs is vital to what makes us a people.

Detail

“Culture is a set of beliefs made visible,” to paraphrase Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck. Beyond our written statements, what we truly believe and value will show itself in our actions, especially our actions toward one another. In any group, a culture emerges over time through particular language, rituals, and humor, among other things. Values and expectations become collectively agreed upon, although they often go unspoken. Every family or organization develops a culture of its own.

Obviously, no culture can be adequately summed up concisely. However, we believe that the following statements offer insight into some of the foundational beliefs that take shape within Ironwood Church:

1. Soft Hearts and Steel Spines

The Scriptures describe Jesus as “full of grace and truth.” Another way to say it is that he had a *soft heart* and a *steel spine*. We too are pursuing soft hearts — filled with love, curious about people, eager to forgive, and not taking ourselves too seriously. And we seek steel spines — courage, unwavering conviction, toughness in a hostile world, and always taking God seriously.

2. All of life is all for Jesus

Faith in Jesus cannot be relegated to a private experience on Sundays; it is fundamental to our day to day lives. There is no area in all of the cosmos¹ that is exempt from Christ’s reign.

3. We take God seriously but not ourselves

Chronic seriousness is often a symptom of chronic insecurity. There is one LORD over all who demands our loyalty and even he told jokes and went to parties. We are free to have serious fun.

4. We have nothing to prove and no one to impress

As a people saved by grace, we are enabled to be free from striving to maintain our reputations and appearances. We live for an audience of One and trust him with our image.

5. There are no little people and no little places

Every single person is made in the image of God and deserves to be treated with the dignity with which we would treat God himself. There is no hierarchy when it comes to our humanity.

6. We are called to do the Lord’s work the Lord’s way

Ends do not justify means; the outcomes belong to the Lord. We will treat one another like holistic humans and not compromise on this in order to seek results or growth.

7. Life is naturally supernatural

God meets us in the ordinary — bread and wine, homes and hallways, ink and page, and in conversations and hugs. Creation is charged with God’s presence.

¹ *cosmos* is a broad term that refers to all of reality, or all that exists—the sum total of everything in the here and now

ARTICLE 4: WHY MEMBERSHIP?

Local church membership is about visibly embracing the reality of your status as a member of the Father's family, a member of Christ's body, and a member of the Spirit's missional people. As a family, membership is a key space in which we are known and loved. As an organization, membership is the stewardship and administration of our diverse-and-collective gifting. Membership is an informed commitment to the doctrine and vision of Ironwood Church, a willing submission to the leadership of the church, and an intentional embrace of your role in the body of Christ.

A Family, Not a Club

Say the word "membership" today, and many think of subscribing to Netflix or joining a gym: paying dues to a club that gives you benefits. So talk of "church membership" can be confusing. This is not the biblical image, however; it's about joining not a club but a family.

It's an invitation to belong.

Jesus invites us into "the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19), and being a family member is different from being a club member. Family is based not around performance or paying your dues but belonging—you're still stuck with that awkward uncle who says all the wrong things at Christmas dinner and that sister who still owes you money because you're bound together by blood.

The Church is a family bound by blood—the blood of Christ—that draws us into the home of the Father, united in the power of his Spirit.

We Need Each Other

The primary New Testament image for membership is that of a body (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). This was a common ancient image for families and nations: sharing a common life and identity together under one head, or leadership. Jesus joins us to himself and makes us members of his body, the body of Christ, under his leadership as our royal head.

We are one body, with many parts (1 Cor 12:12). This means each have gifts to bring to our common table. Becoming a member means we see ourselves as contributors not consumers. We see our church less like a restaurant and more like a potluck: less a place we come to be served and consume to our preferences and more a place we bring the unique person we are and gifts we've been given to contribute and share with our family table.

We need each other. Similar to how "the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor 12:21), so we as members of a local church body need one another if we are to live into the fullness of life that Jesus desires for us as his people. Becoming a member means moving towards each other, committing to community. When conflict arises, we think the best of each other, compromise when necessary, and stay at the table together.

A table with Jesus at the center.

We share life together. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26). We are called to live interdependent with, rather than independent from, one another—rejoicing and suffering together, as a church family.

Union with Christ means union with the body of Christ, sharing life together with his people in the power of his Spirit. Jesus uses the members of his body to minister to us, shape us, and form us as a people marked by the love of God.

Why is commitment important?

Membership is a covenant between committed people and the leadership of Ironwood Church. The weight of entering into a covenant may be diminished in our culture where promises are made casually and broken vows are the norm. But we use the language intentionally to communicate that membership is to be entered into with sobriety and commitment. This commitment goes two ways.

People are significantly less likely to grow as disciples if they leave when things become hard and Ironwood Church is committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ who live out the difficult implications of the gospel. This means that we strive to help you grow in maturity and holiness. This means that sometimes you will be challenged by things you hear from the pulpit or from across a table. Sometimes you will be called to step outside of your comfort zone. Sometimes decisions will be made that don't align with your preferences. You will, inevitably, experience conflict.

Your first inclination may be to bail as soon as you get uncomfortable. Past experience may tell you that the slightest conflict equals the end of relationship. If all you are doing is dating the church, without investment or commitment, you may be tempted to simply move on as soon as the initial fondness starts to fade. After all, there's another church down the road. But just like in the covenant of marriage, growth happens when we stay true to our commitment, address sin and conflict, and allow ourselves to be challenged and stretched. That's where sanctification happens. That's where disciples are made. That's also where real joy is found.

How does membership impact the church?

The church is called to participate in God's redemptive mission, rooted in worship of our Lord, displaying his restorative power. The local church is called to be a gospel-centered, intentional community with a mission and purpose.

This call to be on mission is not limited to pastors, church staff, and small group leaders. All believers have a part to play. In fact, scripture tells us that leaders within the church are called to "equip the saints – believers - for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God..." (Eph 4:12-13). Essentially, we are called to function as one body, made up of many members, with Jesus Christ as our head, working together to grow into maturity (1 Cor 12:12-31). When all believers – not just church staff – embrace the importance of their role in the church community the body of Christ is able to function with all of the faculties with which it is supplied. And when each part is working properly, the body grows into health and strength (Eph 4:16).

This means that while we affirm people's freedom to engage in the local church at their own pace, we feel compelled to challenge believers to become active, committed participants rather than remaining passive observers and consumers. Their intentional participation in the local body of Christ is simply too important for their own health and the health of the body.

Here's how this relates to membership: if we are going to function as one body on mission together, it helps to know who belongs to and is committed to the body. This is why John Piper states, "It's very hard to do what the Bible calls a church to do unless it knows who are the members and who aren't."

Membership provides a way to determine who is committed to the mission, doctrine, and values of Ironwood Church – our local expression of the body of Christ. Such delineation is not meant to be elitist or divisive. It is not meant to create different classes within the body. Rather, it simply recognizes that there are people within any expression of the body of Christ at varying levels of commitment – and that's OK. But as an intentional community with a mission and purpose, it is helpful to know who is committed and who is simply curious.

Is formal church membership biblical?

The body analogy in Scripture has both a global and a local meaning. In Ephesians, Christians are described as global members of the body of Christ where Jesus is the “head.” But 1 Corinthians 12 talks about Christians as local members of the body of Christ, where the body is made up of eyes, ears, hands, and feet. The Bible does not explicitly command formal local church membership, though the principle of church membership is found in a number of ways in the Scriptures:

- Throughout Old Testament history, God made a clear distinction between his people and the world (see Lev. 13:46, Num. 5:3, Deut. 7:3).
- The Israelites repeatedly entered into formal covenant with each other and with God, sometimes putting it in writing, though they already had the assurance that they were God’s chosen people (Neh. 9:38-10:39, 2 Kings 11:17; 23:1-3, 2 Chron. 34:29-32).
- Christ says that entering the kingdom of God means being bound to the church “on earth” (Matt. 16:16-19; 18:17-19). Where do we see the church on earth? The local church.
- The New Testament explicitly refers to some people being inside the local church and some people being outside (1 Cor. 5:12-13). This is much more than a casual association.
- The church in Corinth consisted of a definite number of believers, such that Paul could speak of a punishment inflicted by the majority (2 Cor. 2:6).
- Not only does the New Testament speak of the reality of church membership, but its dozens of “one anothers” are written to local churches, which fill out our understanding of what church membership should practically look like.

SECTION ONE: BELIEFS

In this first section we look at the core, foundational beliefs that we hold to at Ironwood Church. John Frame states, "Theology is the application of God's word to our lives in all situations." In other words, what we believe will shape how we live. By entering the covenant relationship of membership, you are affirming the Doctrine and promising not to be divisive regarding the Biblical Convictions.

DOCTRINE

ARTICLE 5: REVELATION

Summary

God has reliably revealed himself to us in history through his Creation, in the Bible, and, ultimately, in the Person of Jesus.

Detail

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 has 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. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and 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 every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness inhibit the possibility of knowing God's truth completely, 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 do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel. This Word yields to us the True Story of the whole world.

Key Points

1. We cannot know the infinite God fully, so we should be humble but we can know Him accurately, so we should be confident.
2. To disobey or disbelieve Scripture is to disobey or disbelieve God.

Questions for Reflection:

1. If Christianity is built on revelation and not on speculation, how does that affect the way we seek to follow Jesus?
2. If truth is ultimately revealed in a person (Jesus), how does that change our approach to growing in the knowledge of God?

Scriptures:

- 2 Timothy 3:16–17 / All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.
- 2 Peter 1:20–21 / ...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
- 1 John 1:1–2 / That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

ARTICLE 6: TRINITY

Summary

There is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Detail

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

Key Points:

1. Each of the three persons in God is fully and eternally God.
2. God perfectly knows all things, sustains all things, and rules over all things.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does the fact that God, being three in one, is absolutely beyond our ability to totally comprehend him affect our relationship with him?
2. If God has always perfectly existed in relationship as an eternal communion of love, how does that influence our sense of God's love for us?

Scriptures:

- Deuteronomy 6:4 / Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
- Matthew 3:16–17 / And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”
- Matthew 28:19 / “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”
- 1 Peter 1:1–2 / Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.
- John 10:29–30 / My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.
- 2 Corinthians 13:14 / The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

ARTICLE 7: HUMANITY

Summary

God created humanity very good and as male and female: equal and complementary.

Detail

We believe 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, serving as God's agents and representatives to care for, manage, cultivate, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways.

Key Points:

1. Men and women are created beings designed to be dependent on God.
2. Men and women are to partner together in developing creation.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How do you see our culture either dismissing or overemphasizing the sameness and/or differences of males and females?
2. How does the fact that humans are to be God's agents on earth cause us to rethink our individual purposes?

Scriptures:

- Genesis 1:27–28/ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
- Genesis 2:18–23 / Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.
- 1 Corinthians 11:11–12 / In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

ARTICLE 8: SINGLENES & MARRIAGE

Summary

Marriage is designed by God to be one man and one woman for life.

Detail

Not all persons are called to be married; singleness is a vocation of dignity, value, and worth with its own ways to serve the kingdom of God and contribute to the life of the world. In many ways, singleness can be a preferable calling in God's Kingdom.

Marriage is an institution of creation. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other, as male and female, in a "one flesh" union with both a *unitive* dimension (the ability to unite two bodies as one), and a *procreative* dimension (the vehicle through which children are brought into the world).² Marriage is thus the foundation for family, the sacred building block of society that builds up humanity, and designed to image God in a covenant of faithful love. Jesus affirms the "one flesh" union of male and female as the normative pattern for sex and marriage and highlights the sacred indissolubility of the bond.

Marriage is also an image of salvation, designed to display Christ and his Bride, in faithful love, mutual service, and an unbreakable union that brings life to the world. God ordains that spouses assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church: the husband taking initiative to love, care for, and serve his wife, while she lovingly and willfully follows his leadership as they partner to shape the culture of their home.

God intends sex to be only practiced within marriage and prohibits any sexual activity outside of this one-man and one-woman covenant (such as, pornography, adultery, pre-marital sex, same-sex sexual activity). As followers of Jesus, we give our bodies to God, pursuing sexual fidelity as an avenue of faithfulness.

Key Points:

1. Marriage is an image of the gospel.
2. Sex of any kind is to be practiced only within the covenant of marriage.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does rooting marriage in creation, rather than in societal norms, change our perspective?
2. How does seeing sex as an aspect of creation challenge both religious and secular assumptions?

Scriptures:

- Matthew 19:4-6 / Jesus answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.
- Ephesians 5:31-32 / "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.
- 1 Corinthians 7:6-9 / Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.

² "One flesh" is used in the Bible to describe the union of a couple, with the related language of "flesh and bone" used to describe the kinship bonds of children and descendants who arise from that union (cf. Gen. 29:14; Jdgs 9:2; 2 Sam 19:12)

ARTICLE 9: FALL

Summary

Creation's original goodness is corrupted by sin; all humans are sinners in need of God's grace.

Detail

We need to be reconciled with God. We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by rebelling against God through Satan's temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, relationally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God's own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself. Humanity's rebellion does not only affect humanity; it disintegrated the whole of creation and subjected it to futility. Sin now is contained within the mores and structures of both biology and society. While the creational structures of the world remain fundamentally good, the distorting power of sin means they have been radically misdirected.

Key Points:

1. We are sinners by nature and by choice.
2. The just penalty for our sin is God's wrath.
3. The brokenness of our world is the result of sin.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does the doctrine of the Fall make sense of the evil we see in the world?
2. Why is our culture so resistant to the concept of sin?

Scriptures:

- Genesis 3:1–7 / Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.
- Romans 5:12, 19 / Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.
- Romans 8:20–22 / For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

ARTICLE 10: ELECTION

Summary

God unconditionally chose his people to be saved by the work of Jesus.

Detail

We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. This election is not only a privilege, it is a responsibility; in love, God commands and implores all people through the church to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

Key Points:

1. God does the work of saving and cleansing those who put their hope in Jesus.
2. All people are invited to repent and believe.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does the doctrine of election require us to be humble?
2. Why might we be resistant to the idea that God unconditionally chose us?

Scriptures:

- Ephesians 1:3–10 / Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
- Acts 17:30–31 / The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.
- Acts 13:48 / And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.
- Romans 9:16 / It depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.
- John 6:37 / All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.
- John 15:16 / You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.
- Philippians 1:29 / For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake
- Isaiah 49:6 / I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

ARTICLE 11: GOOD NEWS

Summary

The gospel is the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Detail

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God's very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is:

- Christ-Centered — centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central; the message is “Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised.”
- Biblical — his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures
- Saving — Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God.
- Sanctifying — the grace of God applied by the Spirit trains us to renounce ungodliness.
- Historical — if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others.
- Apostolic — the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events.
- Personal — where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved.
- Communal — God is saving a people, not just a smattering of individuals.
- Political — Jesus is the True King, announcing that the Kingdom of God has come near.
- Cosmic — Jesus is comprehensively restoring all of Creation.

Key Points:

1. The gospel is not advice; it is news.
2. God uses the gospel to transform us.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are some reasons we might prefer good advice over good news?
2. Why is the historicity of the gospel the foundation of Christianity?

Scriptures

- 1 Corinthians 15:1–8 / Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.
- 1 John 1:1–4 / That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
- Mark 1:14–15 / Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

ARTICLE 12: JESUS

Summary

Jesus is fully God and fully human; the only one in whom salvation is found.

Detail

We believe that, in love for us and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah (Savior-King) of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As our Mediator, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God's sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, appeased God's wrath, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was proved righteous by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. No human being can ever boast before him.

Key Points:

1. Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.
2. Jesus lived a sinless, perfect life of obedience to the Father.
3. Jesus died as a substitute for sin and reconciled to himself all things.
4. Jesus physically rose from the grave.
5. Jesus is King over all of creation.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why are some people okay with believing in a higher power, but offended by Jesus?
2. Why is it important that we see Jesus as both human and divine?

Scriptures

- John 1:14 / And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- Matthew 1:18 / Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 / For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- 1 Timothy 2:5 / For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.
- Matthew 28:18 / And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
- John 14:1-3 / "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

ARTICLE 13: JUSTIFICATION

Summary

Sinners can be justified, that is, made righteous, by faith in Christ alone.

Detail

We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully released the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Christ was freely given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own. This justification is solely of grace in order that God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a passion for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

Key Points:

1. Jesus' death on the cross is freely credited to all who trust in him and his work.
2. Jesus' righteousness is freely credited to all who trust in him and his work.
3. The free gift of justification motivates us towards obedience.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is justification by grace alone through faith alone radical in our "prove yourself" culture?
2. How is it that justification being solely of grace can motivate us towards obedience?

Scriptures

- Romans 3:21–31 / But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.
- Titus 2:11–14 / For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 / For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- Genesis 15:6 / And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

ARTICLE 14: HOLY SPIRIT

Summary

The Spirit renews the hearts of God's people, empowers them in holiness, and convicts the world of sin.

Detail

We believe that salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ and, as the "other" Advocate, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work gives new life to spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

Key Points:

1. The Holy Spirit applies the work of Jesus to His people.
2. The Holy Spirit empowers believers to live like Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit applies salvation to His people, causing them to be born again.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives change our day-to-day experience?
2. How does the sovereign distribution of gifts by the Holy Spirit lead us to embrace biblical community both for our sake and for the sake of our neighbors?

Scriptures

- Ezekiel 36:25–27 / I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.
- John 14:16–17 / And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.
- 1 Corinthians 12:1–11 / Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

ARTICLE 15: KINGDOM

Summary

The Kingdom of God has come near in Jesus and remains present in the power of the Spirit.

Detail

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world nor become indistinguishable from it. Rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world anticipating the redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

Key Points:

1. The Kingdom of God is already present but not-yet fully realized.
2. The Kingdom of God continues through Jesus' people actively demonstrating and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom.
3. Good works are what the Kingdom of God looks like and are evidence of saving grace.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does the already-and-not-yet-ness of the Kingdom give us both courage and sobriety?
2. If people are saved out of Satan's dark kingdom and into the Kingdom of God, then how does that change the way we view people who are our "enemies"?

Scriptures

- Matthew 22:36–40 / "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
- Mark 1:14–15 / Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
- Matthew 5:13–16 / "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."
- Galatians 6:10 / So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

ARTICLE 16: CHURCH

Summary

The people of God are gathered in local congregations as signs, agents, and citizens of the Kingdom.

Detail

We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; having been made new, they are reigning with Christ over the powers of sin and death. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, her members' love for one another, and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace. He has not only brought about peace with God but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as the presence of God's in-breaking kingdom, and as a sign of God's future new world when her members live for the service of one another and their neighbors rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

Key Points:

1. God has chosen to continue his work on earth through the church.
2. Jesus not only died to reconcile us to the Father but also to reconcile us with one another.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does the doctrine of the church contradict our culture's radical individualism?
2. What are some of the practical ways we can serve as signs and agents of God's Kingdom?

Scriptures

- Ephesians 2:14-16, 19-22 / For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
- Matthew 28:18-20 / And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- John 13:34 / A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

ARTICLE 17: RESTORATION

Summary

Jesus will return in the flesh to renew his creation and banish the unrepentant.

Detail

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, at which time he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be finally and fully established. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. All evil will be wiped away, all brokenness healed, and all injustice rectified; the entire fabric of creation will be renewed having been healed in Christ. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all; his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his indescribable holiness and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

Key Points:

1. There will be a physical resurrection of both the saved and the condemned.
2. Those who have set themselves unrepentantly against Christ and his kingdom will experience eternal, conscious punishment in hell.
3. God will renew creation, and his people will live forever in the new heaven and earth.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How will the return of Jesus be simultaneously terrifying and exceedingly joyful?
2. How does the certain hope of the return of Jesus enable us to endure suffering?

Scriptures

- Revelation 19:11–16 / Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.
- Revelation 21:1–5 / Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”
- Ephesians 1:9–10 / Making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
- Luke 12:4–5 / I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

CONVICTIONS

The following are practical issues that we have chosen to take positions on out of our conviction that Scripture gives clear guidance to each. All theology is practical, but because these issues deal more specifically with the nature, organization, and functioning of the church we have chosen to place them in their own section, distinct from the broad theology outlined in the Doctrine section.

ARTICLE 18: ORDINANCES

Summary

We believe there are two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Detail

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

We practice "believer's baptism," meaning that baptism is appropriately administered by full immersion and only to those who give a thoughtful profession of faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that baptism should come after faith in Jesus rather than before. For this reason, we will not baptize infants or small children that are unable to make a thoughtful profession of faith. We understand that some within our church family may have different convictions about the value of infant baptism. Therefore, we will not necessarily exclude from membership those who do not agree with our position on baptism and refuse to be baptized as believers, though we do expect that they have a theologically defensible reason for holding to infant baptism and that they will not allow this non-essential issue to cause division.

Key Points:

1. Baptism is a sign of initiation into God's family.
2. The Lord's Supper (Communion) is the sign of covenant remembrance for Christians.
3. Both ordinances are commanded in scripture, but neither is necessary for justification.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why are public ordinances a vital part of following Jesus?
2. How do the physical, tangible elements of the ordinances help build up our faith?

Scripture

- Matthew 28:18–20 / And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- Romans 6:3–5 / Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
- Matthew 26:26–28 / Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
- 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 / For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

ARTICLE 19: CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Summary

Ironwood Church is overseen by a plurality of male pastors/elders.

Detail

The complementary nature of men and women requires that we partner together to love and lead the church. The consistent pattern in the New Testament is that qualified male pastor/elders shepherd each local body of believers. Pastors/elders are called to a number of formal and specific duties, including: prayer and Scripture study, caring for the people in the church, equipping the church to do ministry, giving an account to God for the church, living exemplary lives, preaching and teaching, praying for the sick, and teaching sound doctrine and refuting error at the corporate level.

While the office of pastor/elder is reserved for men, to serve as “fathers” of the church family, the role of women as “mothers” of the church family is equally necessary and invaluable. Because men and women are complementary, it is essential that pastor/elders seek out formal and informal input from their sisters in Christ. Female leaders are also called to the task of committing themselves to prayer, Scripture, and exemplary obedience as they equip the church through leading, training, praying, and teaching within the various ministries of the church.

Key Points:

1. Ironwood Church is not a congregational-led church with member voting.
2. We emphasize plurality at every level of leadership.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are some of the reasons that plurality is always a good idea in leadership?
2. What are some of the unhealthy views of authority that we must resist as Ironwood Church?

Scripture

- 1 Timothy 3:1–7 / The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.
- Hebrews 13:17 / Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.
- 1 Timothy 5:17 / Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.
- 1 Timothy 2:10–15 / Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.
- Romans 16:1, 3–4 / I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae...Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

ARTICLE 20: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Summary

Church discipline is the process of confronting sin to achieve repentance and restoration.

Detail

The bride of Christ is not nor has it ever been perfectly faithful; she has been shamefully complicit in society's sin and has thereby harmed people, her witness, and the name of Jesus.

For this reason we commit to the practice of Church Discipline. The informal process of church discipline happens any time a believer confronts another believer about his or her sin and encourages repentance. The formal process of church discipline typically begins when the individual in sin is unwilling to repent over an extended period of time. Thus, most formal church discipline is not as much about the sin as it is about the hard-hearted unwillingness to repent of sin. The process of church discipline concludes when the believer either repents or is formally removed by the elders from participating in the church. Additionally, those who intentionally stir up divisions in the church should be disciplined with greater swiftness.

The leaders of the church are not exempt from this process. For this reason, we emphasize plurality at every level of our organization. Leaders of the church are to be disciplined with an even greater swiftness and publicity, as sin in leadership severely harms the local church.

Key Points:

1. God does not allow the church to tolerate willful, unrepentant sin.
2. There are informal and formal dimensions to the the discipline process.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do we resist the idea of discipline?
2. What will it take for us to walk in the habits of informally disciplining one another?

Scriptures

- Galatians 6:1 / Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.
- 1 Corinthians 5:1-7 / It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
- Romans 16:17 / I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.
- Matthew 18:15-17 / If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

ARTICLE 21: CHRIST AND CULTURE

Summary

We are called to love our neighbors and our neighborhoods with conviction and civility.

Detail

From the beginning, humanity has been called to be culture makers: to subdue and have dominion over the rest of creation. When sin entered the creation, the society-building project did not end; it simply changed directions. Instead of building a world meant to glorify the Father, sinful humans sought to glorify themselves. All societies have elements of good, as fallen humans are still in God's image, but nonetheless are fundamentally rebellious from the heart.

Jesus' reign is absolute and universal; every single part of creation is accountable to Jesus as Lord. Jesus, in both his miracles and his teaching, pushed back the effects of the curse on individuals, societal structures, and the natural world. Now, by his Spirit, he continues his comprehensive and redemptive work on earth; participation in the Way of Jesus cannot be contained to the private realm but implicates every arena of public life as well. Though all things will not be renewed until the final and triumphant return of Jesus, in the meantime, love requires that we seek the flourishing of our neighbors, societies, and cultures.

Rather than secluding ourselves from the world, love takes the first step as we move towards our neighbors with sobriety. We engage our world with both conviction and civility, soft hearts and steel spines because pluralism, systemic idolatry, and brokenness are our present realities. Though ultimate failure is the norm until Christ's second coming, the Spirit sometimes blesses our obedient efforts.

Key Points:

1. Humans are culture makers.
2. Systems and structures, past and present, have been shaped by the corrupt hearts of sinful humans.
3. Followers of Jesus work to influence society with convicted civility.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does both your responsibility to love and your inability to change people make you feel about engaging with the world around us?
2. How does the tension of conviction and civility shape our public engagement?

Scripture:

- Genesis 1:28 / And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
- Genesis 11:4 / Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."
- Jeremiah 29:4-7 / Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.
- Acts 16:20-21 / And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."

ARTICLE 22: THE BODY, SEX, AND GENDER IDENTITY

Summary

The body is sacred—including its sexed nature—and a fundamental aspect of our identity.

Detail

Our bodies are sacred. We are not just persons who *have* bodies; we *are* bodies. Body and soul share an integral union, mutually integral to our personhood: we are embodied souls, and ensouled bodies.

The body's sexed nature, as male or female, is not only significant but bound up with our creation in the image of God. Jesus reaffirms the diversity of the sexes as ethically significant and grounded in the structure of creation. Jesus also recognizes the exception of those "born eunuchs" (which is analogous, if not equivalent, to intersex conditions) while simultaneously affirming the male/female binary as normative for creation. Christ's incarnation and resurrection affirm the body's foundational significance.

Followers of Jesus ought to identify in accordance with our bodily sex, not present ourselves in ways that will intentionally introduce confusion as to our identity as male or female, and not seek to alter our body's sex through hormone therapy or sex-reassignment surgery.

We recognize some of our members are born with an intersex condition (a *biological* reality) and others experience gender dysphoria (a *psychological* reality): both of these are *real* and *can be painful*. If this is you, you are loved by God, created with dignity, value, and worth, and an invaluable part of God's world and church. We want to walk with you, love you, and serve Jesus together, as a church family where there are no "second-class citizens," only image-bearers who are members of Christ's body.

While our conviction is that gender should be understood *within* (rather than in *addition* to) one's biological sex, there is great flexibility in how one expresses their gender, so long as one is not deliberately seeking to identify or present themselves in opposition to their bodily sex. King David was a "real" man when he wrote poetry and played the harp; Deborah was a "real" woman when she led Israel into war. Jesus wept over Jerusalem like a mother hen (Matt. 23:31); the woman of Proverbs 31 buys property, runs a business, has a strong back, and provides for her family.

We cannot expect those who have rejected Jesus as Creator and Redeemer to live in line with the Creator's order and purpose. God calls us to exercise judgment with one another in our church body, pressing each other towards holiness in the way of Christ, and trust him to deal with those outside.³

Scripture

- Genesis 1:27 / So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
- Matthew 19:4, 11-12a / Jesus answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female... not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth"
- Deuteronomy 22:5 / A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.
- 1 Corinthians 5:12–13a / For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.

³ "Can I call someone by their preferred pronoun when it differs from their biological sex?" We believe this is up to the conscience of the individual. For a "yes" perspective, see, "What Pronouns Should Christians Use for Transgender People?" by Greg Coles (available at www.centerforfaith.com). For a "no," see, "He, She, Ze, Zir: Navigating Pronouns" by Andrew T. Walker (available at www.erc.com).

ARTICLE 23: OUTWARD FOCUS

Summary

We are gospel-centered and outward-focused.

Detail

From the beginning, the purpose of humanity was outward focused. Adam and Eve had a calling, a vocation, to exercise dominion over creation, what theologians have called the Cultural Mandate, uncovering and developing its latent goodness as image bearers of God Most High. Yet, shortly thereafter, Adam and Eve chose to hide, to turn inward, away from the task the God of the universe had given to them. Rather than love the Lord, they chose to use creation as a means of separating themselves from the Father. The brokenness that ensued from their rebellion is what created the need for redemption in the first place.

God's mission is cosmic in scope because sin is cosmic in scope. The gospel must not be reduced to an evangelistic tool or confused as an ambiguous self-help mantra. It is the true story of the whole world and shapes our understanding of who we are, why we're here, where we're going, and what it all means.

In that gospel story, sin is worse than we tend to think: it is more than merely individuals doing bad things; it is cosmic disintegration. Our God is on mission to heal creation. God also has a people, and we, as his people, are called to participate in that mission. Wherever the curse of sin is found, there is our invitation into God's mission of redemption, both in terms of working against the ways that we have organized ourselves sinfully as a society and in terms of how we have built our lives apart from the Lord as individuals. We are a sent people, charged by Christ himself to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, to make disciples and teach them to obey all that he commanded. We are missionaries, every one of us.

Our goal is both to invite people into the community of believers and to send the church out to be with non-believing people – in their families, workplaces, schools - as true followers of Christ. For this reason, we focus on equipping and training people for the work of ministry rather than keeping them busy with church functions and activities. We want our people to live their real lives with gospel intentionality and be equipped and freed to do just that. We, by the grace of God, can still participate in exercising dominion over creation as we love our neighbors not only by doing “good works” but also by doing “good work” in the places to which God has sent us.

It would be easy for us to turn inward, huddle together in a safe community, and celebrate ourselves. But that is not what we're called to. We're called to “Go.” And so we will go, honoring Jesus as King in every aspect of our lives, bringing the good news to everyone who has ears to hear, and striving to see the restoration of our families, cities, businesses, the arts, and beyond.

Scripture

- 1 John 3:18 / Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
- Genesis 1:28 / And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”
- Genesis 12:2 / And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
- 1 Corinthians 10:31 / So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- Matthew 28:19–20 / Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

ARTICLE 24: THE POOR & OVERLOOKED

Summary

God's people are called to love the last, the least, and the lost.

Detail

God's prioritization of the poor and overlooked is a theme on display throughout the biblical story. In the Exodus, God's foundational act of salvation, he saves an enslaved people from the sins of their oppressors. In the Law, he repeatedly calls his people to pay significant attention—both personally and politically—to what theologians have called the “Quartet of the Vulnerable”: widows, orphans, sojourners, and the poor. In the Prophets, he gives warning and rebuke to those who have oppressed the vulnerable or turned a blind eye to the plight of those in need. In the Wisdom literature, he gives insight regarding the complicated nature of both wealth and poverty. In the Epistles, he repeatedly calls his Church to care for the last, the least, and the lost.

In his infinite wisdom the triune God decided that Jesus would take on flesh into a community that was a religious and ethnic minority, into citizenship in a low-influence city, and conceived by unplanned pregnancy into a powerless, sojourning, low-income family. For this reason, among others, Jesus equates kindness to the poor and overlooked with kindness to him.

In the Gospels, to be in proximity to Jesus was to be in proximity to the poor and powerless. In his public ministry, he heals the sick, cares for the poor, feeds the hungry, and ministers to the suffering. Jesus regularly shares meals and spends time with those considered outcasts. Rather than clamor for fame or influence with those in the seats of power, the Savior is content in the company of fisherman and tax-collectors, servants and widows. Jesus does not overlook the people whom society overlooks. There are no God-forsaken people or places.

Jesus' coming kingdom will bring about the ultimate restoration of creation from every dimension of sin's curse: spiritual and psychological, bodily and ecological, economic and socio-political. As the Church, we are called to embody Christ's kingdom today: through concrete acts of compassion, tangible ministries of mercy, and prophetic witnesses of justice. These serve as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom that, upon King Jesus' return, he will bring in fullness.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think human society tends to prioritize the wealthy and disregard the poor?
2. What difficulty or benefit might moving toward the Quartet of the Vulnerable bring to the church?

Scripture:

- Matthew 25:40 / the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’
- Leviticus 23:22 / And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.
- Proverbs 14:31 / Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.
- Galatians 2:10 / Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.
- Zechariah 7:9–10 / Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.
- Luke 14:13 / But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.

ARTICLE 25: RACISM

Summary

Racism is the sin of partiality manifest in hearts and societies on the basis of skin color or ethnicity.

Detail

God created one human race made in his image that contains a plurality of ethnicities designed to reflect the unity, equality, and distinctiveness within the Trinity. When humanity rebelled against God, the earliest consequences were division between God and humanity and between one another.

Humanity, as a fruit of their ethnocentrism and egocentrism (including many Christians in history), assigned different “races” different degrees of humanity and dignity. Because God hates racial division and ethnic hostility, we grieve them and desire to help undo their harmful effects wherever they exist.

Many Christians, especially and including our own Reformed tradition, perpetuated, promoted, and profited from evil, racist systems for centuries, and, as members of one body united across time and space, we lament and grieve the sins of those who have come before, whether sins of commission or omission.

In its fullness, the Kingdom of God will not have these hostile divisions. But until we experience the fullness of that Kingdom, Ironwood Church aspires to be a foretaste of Christ’s multi-ethnic Kingdom at every level of membership and leadership. We rejoice that the gospel of Jesus provides the resources to not only heal humanity’s division from God, but also from one another.

Key Points:

1. There is one human race.
2. Sinful humans divided humanity into various races and assigned them different degrees of dignity.
3. The Kingdom of God is and will be multi-ethnic; ethnic harmony was God’s idea first.
4. We are complicit to the degree that we are indifferent to areas of division and hostility or abdicate our responsibility to be a blessing and thus make peace with a sinful status quo.
5. Social evil will not end until Jesus returns; we strive anyway to be foretaste of the New Creation.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think issues like racism tend to become partisan political issues?
2. What are the dangers of overemphasizing or underemphasizing our ethnicities?

Scripture:

- Daniel 9:4–5 / I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.”
- Ephesians 2:14–16 / For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.
- Romans 10:12 / For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.
- Galatians 2:11–13 / But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

ARTICLE 26: DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Summary

Divorce is always a tragedy, but is sometimes permitted because of adultery, abandonment, or abuse.

Detail

Jesus affirms marriage as a divinely ordained institution, grounded in the structure of creation, and commands regarding the sacred nature of its union, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6). Yet Jesus and the New Testament also recognize circumstances in which divorce may be permissible. While divorce is always a result of sin (whether from one spouse or another), it is not always sinful.

Biblically, divorce is permitted, but not required, on the grounds of sexual immorality (*porneia*) or abandonment. We believe physical, sexual, and other types of abuse may be considered a form of abandonment. Stopping abuse may require separation and may lead to divorce. Marriage reconciliation can be the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work, but it may not always be wise, possible or biblically commanded.

Does the Bible allow for remarriage following a divorce? Paul answers this question in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, saying that in cases of unbiblical divorce the individual should either remain unmarried or pursue reconciliation. If the divorce was biblical, remarriage is permissible. Every situation is unique. Therefore, we would recommend that those who are concerned about their situation meet with a pastor to receive personal care and biblical direction.

Finally, our convictions about divorce and remarriage lead us to a few important applications as a church. In order to preserve healthy marriages, we will require pre-marital counseling as a prerequisite to being married by an Ironwood Church pastor, we will offer counseling and equipping to help strengthen marriages, and we will initiate church discipline on individuals or couples who are pursuing an unbiblical divorce.

Scripture

- Malachi 2:15-16 / Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts.”
- 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 / To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

OPEN-HANDED ISSUES

The following are issues that we consider “open-handed,” meaning that while individuals within our leadership and church may have convictions about them, they are secondary issues and freedom should be given within our church to hold different beliefs as long as the beliefs remain within the spectrum of biblical Christianity.

We have simply named the issues below and given a clarifying statement to ensure that we are clear about what we would not consider to be within the spectrum of biblical Christianity.

ARTICLE 27: SIGN GIFTS

Statement: While we believe “sign gifts” to be an open-handed issue, we do not believe that the gift of tongues (or any other individual spiritual gift) is required as an evidence of salvation.

ARTICLE 28: THE MILLENNIAL REIGN

Statement: While we believe “the millennial reign” to be an open-handed issue, we do not believe that Jesus has already returned or that there are “two peoples of God.”

ARTICLE 29: AGE OF THE EARTH

Statement: While we believe “the age of the earth” to be an open-handed issue, we do not believe in atheistic or naturalistic evolution.

**SECTION TWO:
MEMBERSHIP
COVENANT**

ARTICLE 30: MEMBERSHIP POLICY FOR LEADERS

Based upon our convictions regarding membership, we have the expectation that those who are in a leadership role at Ironwood Church be official, covenant members of the church.

Membership allows us to operate from a common foundation, bringing unity and clarity through which we can grow and be effective. If our leaders are not unified in mission, doctrine, and values, we will inevitably face unnecessary conflict, confusion, and frustration as we do the work of the ministry together. But a common foundation allows for a diversity of gifts to flourish and for the church to function as a body with many unique members working in harmony.

Who is considered a leader?

Not all leaders have titles. There are many men and women who shape culture and influence lives at Ironwood Church without formal recognition. What's more, everyone is called to exhibit positive leadership at some point and in some context, whether in the home, at work, or in the church.

As it relates to this policy however, we are strictly concerned with those men and women who are formally recognized by the pastors/elders of Ironwood Church as leaders over specific aspects of ministry. This includes but is not limited to individuals who:

- Teach the Bible
- Lead Ministry Teams
- Lead Students
- Lead Groups (Small Groups, Men's Ministry Leaders, Women's Ministry Leaders, etc.)
- Serving as the Lead Teacher in Kids' Classes

Why is membership essential for leadership roles?

- Leaders, above all, need to be committed to the mission, doctrine, and values of the church. The church's pastors and elders are tasked with the responsibility of shepherding the church body, overseeing the congregation, and protecting the church from error, false teaching, and division. Membership provides a means by which the pastors and elders can assess whether potential leaders are committed and on the same page.
- Leaders need support. Requiring leaders to be members empowers them to do their ministry knowing that they are legitimately representing the church's leadership and have the full support and affirmation of the pastors and elders.
- Leaders need accountability. Requiring leaders to be members strengthens the church's ability to pursue discipline should a leader begin to stray from the faith. This should not be taken as a threat. Rather, it should bring comfort to those who desire the church to be faithful.

ARTICLE 31: LEADERSHIP'S COVENANT PROMISE

With the help of the Holy Spirit, the church leadership at Ironwood Church covenants the following:

1. We commit ourselves to lovingly care for you and seek your growth in Christ (Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12).
2. We covenant to provide teaching and counsel from the Scriptures (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18) and that this teaching will span the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20: 27-28).
3. We covenant to help you in times of need as your needs are made known (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35; James 2:14-17).
4. We covenant that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-13 & 5:17-22, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4).
5. We covenant to pray for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).
6. We covenant to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Gal.6:1).
7. We covenant to seek God's will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
8. We covenant to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church membership (1 Co. 11; Philip. 3:17; 1 Tim. 4:12).

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

ARTICLE 32: MEMBER'S COVENANT PROMISE

With the guiding help of the Holy Spirit, I, the undersigned, covenant the following:

1. I am a Christian who has been saved from my sins by the grace of Jesus Christ. I have been baptized, or plan to be baptized next time the church does baptisms, as a testimony of my identification with the body of Christ and obedience to the Scriptures.
2. I agree with the Doctrine of the church as outlined in this packet.
3. I understand the Convictions of the church as outlined in this packet and I agree not to be divisive on these issues. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Heb 13:7; Eph 4: 1-3).
4. ATTEND. My journey in Christ will be evident through my regular participation in the corporate worship services and having consistent involvement in a biblical community (Ps 119:97,105; Acts 2:42-47; Heb 10:23-25).
5. INVITE. I will personally participate in Jesus' mission on earth through being an agent of blessing to my neighbors and through inviting others to follow him (Gen 12:1-3; Matt 28:19-20).
6. SERVE. I will strive to properly manage the resources God has given me, including my time, body, gifts and talents. I commit to using the spiritual gift(s) God has given me for the building up of the church (1 Pet 4:10-11; Rom 12:1-8; 1 Cor. 12: 7-13).
7. GIVE. I will strive to properly manage the resources God has given me, including finances and possessions (Eph 5:15-18; Romans 12:1-2; Eph 4:1-16; Gal 5:22- 26; Prov 3:9-10). This includes regular giving to Ironwood Church that is both sacrificial and cheerful (2 Cor 8 and 9).
8. PRAY. I will regularly pray to the LORD for myself, my family, my neighbors, my city, my church, and my leaders (1 Tim 2:1-2; Jas 4:8).
9. FOLLOW. I covenant to follow Jesus and the leaders God has placed over the church to the best of my ability and to submit to the biblical procedures of church discipline if the need should ever arise (Matt 18:15-17; Gal 6:1-5).

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

ARTICLE 33: HOW TO LEAVE A CHURCH WELL

You may be joining Ironwood from another church in which you were either a member or heavily involved. In addition, the time may come when it's necessary for you to leave Ironwood Church to join a community elsewhere. Because we value commitment and investment in the church, we believe strongly that the transition from one church to another is a significant event. We have compiled the five steps below in order to help you walk through the transition process well for the sake of your own health and the health of the body.

1. Have a good reason for leaving.

Before you go, evaluate whether your reasons are good, legitimate and God-honoring. The reasons that people leave churches are many. Some are good, some are bad, and many are hard to discern. Check your pride in the decision. Ask yourself whether you are running from conflict or reacting to unrealistic expectations. If you are unsure, it would be wise to seek good counsel from godly friends or church leaders who can help you think through the process.

2. Communicate your decision to leave with the appropriate leaders.

If you're an active part of the church, leaders will need to know you're leaving. If you are serving, communicate it to your ministry team leader. If you are in a Small Group, communicate it to the leader. If you are connected to an elder or pastor, communicate your decision to them. Personal communication is preferable to written communication, but make sure you communicate.

3. Tell these leaders the truth about why you're leaving.

If you have legitimate reasons to leave then you have nothing to hide or worry about. If the reasons for leaving will sting church leadership, deliver it in the spirit of Proverbs 27:6, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Don't couch the real, sometimes-difficult reasons behind a bunch of spiritualized nonsense. God may use your reasons for leaving to help the church or its leaders.

4. Appropriately transition or conclude your ministry commitments.

If you've been an active part of ministry, your role will need to be transitioned. Hopefully you've been training and developing somebody to take your place anyway. But if you haven't, give your leaders an appropriate time to find others to serve in your capacity. This period shouldn't drag on, but you also should not just drop the ball on the people you've been committed to.

5. Leave graciously.

Ray Pritchard writes: "[Leaving] graciously means you refuse to speak evil of those who remain in the church. Look forward, not backward. Focus on your new church, not your old one. Think carefully before you speak about your former congregation. Don't say anything that could be remotely construed as criticism. Even casual comments could stir up needless controversy. Let the Golden Rule guide all your comments public and private."

Conclusion

If you've read this material and realize that you didn't leave a church well in the past, it might be wise to circle back to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. If you have gossiped or stirred up division, you should make it right. In the end, remember that Jesus loves the church you're leaving and the one you're going to — his blood was shed for both. Both churches are part of his bride. Do his bride the honor of leaving well.