

2014

# Safe Harbor Church Position Papers



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# **SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

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## **Safe Harbor Church Position Papers**

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## Abortion

### SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPER

January 2014

The position of Safe Harbor Christian Church regarding the issue of abortion is that human life begins at the point of conception, and that voluntary abortion is therefore akin to murdering the life of an innocent person. All sin, even murder, can be forgiven because of the atoning death of Jesus Christ, so our message to those who have had abortions is one that emphasizes the seriousness of sin and the availability of God's grace to all.

We have come to the conviction that life begins at conception because of our understanding of God's Word. The Old Testament legislated that if two fighting men hit a pregnant woman and cause a miscarriage, the punishment was "life for life" (Ex. 21:22-25). David said in Psalm 139, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:13-16). The baby in Elizabeth's womb (John the Baptist) "leaped for joy" when Elizabeth saw Mary and heard the good news that Mary would bear the Christ child (Luke 1:44). The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that we are human and have a human soul even before we are born.

Scientific discoveries in the modern era have confirmed the truth of God's Word. We now know that there is no organizational change needed for an embryo to become a fully formed human being. At the point of conception, something inexplicable - almost miraculous - occurs. The egg and sperm die and a completely new organism is born - an organism which only needs the right environment to become a fully formed human being. Now more than ever we can be confident that life truly begins at conception and that abortion is taking the life of a human being.

Meanwhile, the practice of abortion has become increasingly prevalent in our society. Twenty- seven to thirty-three percent of all pregnancies end in abortion. Abortion is no longer a last resort in a dire situation, but is often a preferred method of birth control. The most common reasons people give for choosing abortion are the high cost of children, the interference children cause in one's lifestyle, the burden of single parenting, and pressure from sexual partners to terminate the pregnancy. There have been innumerable consequences of this devaluing of human life. For example, since the legalization of abortion, child abuse has increased 400-500 percent in the United States.

The Bible says that sex is to be reserved for marriage because of the intimacy of the sexual relationship and the prospect that a child will result. Scripture and experience both

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teach that the healthiest environment for child rearing is a loving, two-parent home. Seventy percent of abortions take place in the wombs of unmarried women. The relationship between sexual promiscuity and abortion is clearly correlative. A person should not engage in sexual relations unless he or she is willing and able to support the life of a child. Children are intended to be a blessing from God to a loving husband and wife. The only birth control method with 100 percent surety is abstinence.

Even so, when an unmarried person becomes pregnant, God's grace can still cover that sin and bring good out of evil. The unmarried parents may decide they are mature enough to care for the child, get married, and raise the child together. Grandparents may step into help. And adoption is often a difficult but loving option for these children. There are hundreds of thousands of married couples on adoption waiting lists who would love to adopt and love a baby that someone else was unable to care for.

Safe Harbor Christian is attempting to respond to the abortion issue with both truth and love. It is our conviction that the church should serve as a conscience in the community, speaking out about moral issues from a biblical perspective. We are convinced that abortion on demand should not have been legalized and that our communities have suffered because of these poor judicial decisions. However, we also acknowledge that repairing the damage that has been done may require many complex political maneuvers that could sap our energies and take us away from our primary mission. The best and perhaps fastest way to stop abortions is not through legislation but by winning people to Jesus Christ and changing one heart at a time.

In addition to speaking out about legislative issues, we at Safe Harbor feel a strong call to minister to those who find themselves dealing with a crisis pregnancy. We recommend you seek support from several crisis pregnancy centers in the Louisville area which offer ultrasounds, pregnancy tests, maternity clothing and pre-abortion counseling for expectant parents. These centers not only offer alternatives to abortion, but also lend ongoing support and encouragement for those in need.

We also support and encourage the members of our church who are involved in adoption efforts both at home and abroad. We also recommend a post-abortion support group to minister to those who carry the guilt of an abortion in their past. Largely ignored by a hard-hearted culture that attempts to tell them they have done nothing wrong and ignores their pain, these women have found truth and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

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## **What is the Denominational Background of Safe Harbor Christian Church?**

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Safe Harbor Christian Church is an independent, non-denominational Christian church affiliated with the independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (instrumental). We consider ourselves an evangelical church (see the position paper, “Is Safe Harbor Christian Church an Evangelical Church?”) because we agree with the basic doctrines that characterize evangelicals, beginning with the Bible as God’s inspired Word and our source of authority.

The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are a loose fellowship of churches that trace their heritage to the Restoration Movement of the early 1800s. Christian leaders like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone and others of that era began to decry the divisiveness occurring among denominational churches and dreamed of a time we would all be unified in Christ. The Cane Ridge Revival (1801) and the Second Great Awakening gave a spark to their movement. Many people were turning to Christ, and many churches were turning toward unity, even to the point of changing their names to “Christian Church” or “Church of Christ” to reflect their desire to join with one another in exalting Jesus Christ. According to historians, the Restoration Movement “spread across the frontier like wildfire.”

The movement had some lofty goals which continue to this day: To free Christianity of creeds, traditions and denominational distinctives that divide us; to restore doctrinal purity by using the Bible only as the source of authority; and to unify all Christians for the purpose of evangelizing the world. “We are not the only Christians,” they said, “but Christians only.”

Tragically, the movement experienced its own divisions in the early 1900s. Today there are three primary groups of churches that trace their history to the Restoration

Movement: The Disciples of Christ, the independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, and the non-instrumental Churches of Christ. Safe Harbor Christian is considered a part of the independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, joined loosely by our history and an annual convention — the North American Christian Convention. The NACC is a non-voting convention open to the public, where Christians from around the world gather for the purpose of revival and edification.

Because the churches in our movement remain independent, the doctrines and practices of individual churches can vary widely and we do not agree on all issues; neither do we necessarily agree with everything the founders of the movement wrote or believed.

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However, we at Safe Harbor want to continue to hold high the goals and ideals of the Restoration Movement. In light of our goals, we are encouraged by the spirit of unity that exists among evangelical Christians today. It is exciting to see Christians from various denominational backgrounds worshipping and studying together at Christian concerts, Bible studies and evangelistic meetings. Many are determined to be known primarily as “Christians” who hold to the authority of God’s Word. Though they may not consider themselves a part of the Restoration Movement, and we may disagree on some important doctrinal matters, we are happy that so many have caught the spirit of the founders of our movement and are attempting to exalt Jesus Christ above all.

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## BAPTISM

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According to our understanding of the New Testament, here are our answers to several important questions regarding baptism.

Who should be baptized? All those who are willing to repent of their sins and confess their belief in Christ should be baptized (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38-39).

How should we be baptized? The word for “baptism” in the New Testament is the Greek word baptizo, which means “to immerse in water.” The New Testament says baptism represents the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-5). Baptism serves as a symbol of the burial of the old self and the resurrection of the believer’s soul to walk in life with Christ. Therefore, at Safe Harbor, we baptize people by immersing them in water.

When should we be baptized? A person should be baptized at the time he or she trusts in Christ. The Bible teaches we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but in the New Testament church, a person’s baptism was always the first expression of faith, not separate from it. So baptism was not just a symbol or a memorial of faith, but was intended to offer a means of union with Christ and a benchmark of transformation, marking the place and time a person made a commitment to Christ (Rom. 6:1-8). At Safe Harbor Christian, we are attempting to restore the original intent and practice of baptism. Therefore, we ask a person to be baptized at the point that he is ready to make a commitment to Christ.

Why should we be baptized? A person should be baptized to follow the example of Christ (Mat. 3:13-17), to obey Christ’s command (Mat. 28:18), to accept forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), to express trust in Christ (Acts 8:12-13), and to testify to God’s work in his or her life (Rom. 6:1-8; Gal. 3:27). Baptism also serves to cleanse a guilty conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). The Holy Spirit prompts individuals to recognize their sin and guilt. The only method by which the human soul can be wiped clean of sin is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27-10:7). This “washing away” of sin is most clearly symbolized in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Since one of the biggest obstacles between God and man is human pride, baptism also offers a venue by which believers humble themselves before God and others and admit their need for Christ’s redemption (James 4:6). In addition, baptism meets a God-given human need for expression. Everyone needs an outlet for emotion, or an expression for an impression. Baptism is the outlet for an expression of faith in Christ.

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The act of baptism cannot save an individual. We are saved only through accepting Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Baptism demonstrates the believer's acceptance of Christ and is the point of time when the believer receives assurance of his or her faith. Those who were never baptized by immersion but were sprinkled for baptism as infants rest in God's merciful hands. We hope that Jesus will say to any person who has truly submitted to him but was not taught about immersion, "Your faith has saved you." Yet someone who understands Christ's command to be baptized and refuses to obey should not consider himself to have submitted to Christ.

Should a person ever be re-baptized? Any person who has trusted in Jesus as the only Son of God and who has willingly been immersed into Christ may become a member of Safe Harbor Christian Church whether the baptism occurred at Safe Harbor or elsewhere. Rebaptism is encouraged for those who lack confidence in their initial baptism experience because they don't remember it, they were coerced, or their heart was not right with God at the time. Anyone who has fallen into sin after having been baptized should repent and seek forgiveness, but rebaptism is not necessary (Acts 8:13-24).

Must a person be baptized during a worship service? No. Baptisms at other times are acceptable (Acts 8:38; 16:33), but baptisms during worship services are encouraged at Safe Harbor because they provide the opportunity to testify to your faith and show humility.

Paul exhorts all believers to unite, for we are all of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). Regardless of our particular beliefs regarding the mode of baptism, it is important for all Christians to seek unity as representatives of Christ's body. We believe the source of unity is the truth of God's Word, and we pray that baptism will be a place of unity, not division, among believers (John 17:17-21).

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## Capital Punishment

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Safe Harbor Christian Church does not take an official church position on the issue of capital punishment. We believe Christians are allowed to disagree on this issue and we do not require members or leaders to hold to a specific position regarding capital punishment. Using the Bible as our guide, it has been the primary teaching of our leadership that the government has the God-given right to execute justice, even to the point of capital punishment. Below is an explanation of the reasons for this conviction, as well as some biblical admonitions to governing officials regarding this and other issues of morality and justice.

Every human life is precious, having been made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Long before God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, God instructed all human beings not to shed innocent blood and indicated that those who did so forfeited their right to life. In Genesis 9:6 God said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." The enactment of capital punishment elevated the value of human life and satisfied the need for justice. Many generations later, in the New Testament, the authority of the government was verified when Paul wrote that the government is established by God. Though the government of which he spoke was the pagan Roman government, he validated their right to bear and use the sword. He wrote, everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer (Rom. 13:1-4).

Capital punishment, then, is morally justifiable only when a God-ordained government implements it in order to execute justice. If either of those factors is not present, if it is a vigilante authority or the punishment is not deserved, and then capital punishment is unjustifiable.

Someone may ask about Jesus' commands not to judge others and to turn the other cheek. Jesus was not referring to the execution of justice by a God-ordained government. If he was, then the principle of forgiveness would apply not just to capital punishment but to

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all matters of criminal justice. We would need to throw open all the prison doors and close down the criminal courts. The passages in which Christ exhorts everyone to practice forgiveness refer to the attitude of individual Christians toward other individuals. We believe that the entire New Testament contains the words of Christ, inspired by his Holy Spirit. So Christ, through the apostle Paul, gave government the right to bare the sword, showing that there is a difference between the duty of individual Christians to forgive offenses and the duty of government officials to execute justice.

Some may ask, "But what about the criminal's soul?" Capital punishment need not lessen a criminal's opportunity to hear the Gospel. In fact, those who are facing capital punishment are often more receptive to the Gospel than those who remain in jail under a life sentence. Thus, Christians should respond to this issue by providing intense ministry and evangelism to criminals on death row. God desires all men to repent and be saved, and Christ's forgiveness is extended to those facing capital punishment. Our efforts to allow an individual to live a few more days on earth are fruitless compared to the value of sharing the hope of eternal life with him or her.

Our governing authorities would be wise to remember the Bible's exhortations regarding the enactment of justice. Two biblical principles are especially applicable in the issue of capital punishment. First, the Bible encourages swift justice: "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong" (Eccl. 8:11). Allowing an individual to wait for years on death row is unfair to all: the tormented criminal awaiting his sentence, the victim who hungers for justice, and the potential victims of murderers not deterred. The Bible demands that judges thoroughly investigate each case and commands them not to convict on circumstantial evidence; but assuming a fair trial has been given, the punishment should be enacted swiftly so that human life is elevated and the hearts of the people fear justice instead of murder.

Secondly, the Bible commands governments not to show favoritism (Lev. 19:15). A government that punishes one wrongdoer but allows another to be set free because of his financial means or racial advantage is not acting justly. Government officials who abuse their God-given authority in such a way will some day give account before a just and holy God for their actions. The answer to such injustice is not to set all criminals free, but to begin immediately to enact justice on all wrongdoers without showing favoritism.

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## **Cohabitation**

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Safe Harbor Christian Church considers the Bible the inspired Word of God and therefore our guide in matters of sex and marriage. The Bible says that the only proper place for sexual expression is marriage (Exodus 20:14; Deut. 22:21-22; Heb. 13:4). Marriage is defined as being between a man and a woman who have committed to a lifelong relationship (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-6; please see the position paper, “Divorce and Remarriage” for more information about marriage). Any sexual relationship outside of marriage — whether premarital, extramarital or homosexual — is considered a sin. Therefore, Safe Harbor Christian Church does not permit a church member to live with someone to whom he or she is not married when such a relationship could result in the temptation to sexual sin or the appearance to others that a sexual relationship exists.

Even when a cohabiting relationship is intended to be platonic, we would advise against an unmarried, unrelated man and woman living together. (Likewise those tempted toward homosexuality would be wise not to cohabit with those of the same sex and should instead elect to live alone or with close family members. Please see our position paper on Homosexuality.) It is our position that a heterosexual cohabiting relationship, even when celibacy is intended, invites too much temptation (1 Cor. 6:18), and does not properly avoid the “appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22, KJV).

Cohabiting couples are welcomed to attend services at Safe Harbor Christian Church. When someone in an inappropriate cohabiting relationship expresses a desire to commit to Christ or become a member of the church, he or she will be encouraged to find a separate residence and refrain from the sexual relationship until a marital commitment is complete. When the candidate demonstrates a willingness to refrain from inappropriate cohabiting and commit to sexual purity, he or she can be baptized and accepted into membership. If a Safe Harbor member is found to be in an inappropriate cohabiting relationship, he or she will be asked to separate himself or herself from the relationship by taking residence elsewhere until marriage. Any cohabiting couple desiring to be married at Safe Harbor or by the Safe Harbor minister will likewise be instructed to separate until the wedding ceremony.

Studies of cohabiting couples have proven the wisdom of God’s Word. Brad Wilcox, assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Virginia, has done extensive research on the family and has verified the following regarding cohabitation:

-Individuals who cohabit before they marry face a significantly higher chance of getting divorced than those who do not cohabit. Married couples where both spouses have

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cohabited are between 33% \*and 50%\* more likely to divorce than married couples where neither spouse has cohabited.

- Long-term cohabiting couples are much more likely to break up than married couples.\*
- Women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to suffer physical and sexual abuse than women in marriage relationships.\*
- “Cohabiting couples are less satisfied than married spouses with their partnerships, are not as close to their parents, are less committed to each other, and, if they eventually marry, have higher chances of divorce.”\*

\* 1 Andrew J. Cherlin. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage* (revised). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

\* 2 Edward Laumann, John Gagnon, Robert Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The Social Organization of Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

\* 3 Julie Brines and Kara Joyner. 1999. “Principles of Cohesion in Cohabitation and Marriage.” *American Sociological Review* 64: 333-355.

\* 4 “Jan E. Stets. 1991. “Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53: 669-680 and Linda Waite. 2000a. Chapter on marriage. In Linda Waite, ed., *The Ties that Bind*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

\* 5 Steven L. Nock. 1998. *Marriage in Men’s Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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## Communion

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A fundamental goal of Safe Harbor Christian Church is to bring unity to all Christians while standing firm on the truth of God's Word. It is our conviction that the two goals work in tandem, that returning to the fundamentals of God's Word will bring unity to the churches. Therefore, we are attempting to restore the doctrine and practices of the New Testament church not only because we believe the Bible to be our source of truth, but also in hope that such restoration will bring unity to all Christians.

It is our goal, therefore, to imitate the New Testament church in our observance of the Lord's Supper. Because the New Testament and other historical documents indicate that the early church observed the Lord's Supper every week (Acts 20:7), we also participate in communion every week during our regular worship services. Because the New Testament does not dictate how often a Christian should take communion (Jesus simply said, "As often as you do this, do it in memory of me"), we do not consider the rate of observance to be a test of fellowship. If an individual Christian or another congregation decides to take communion more or less often than once a week, or on a different day of the week, this should not be cause for division. However, we do believe that the Lord's Supper has real spiritual significance for the Christian, and therefore to observe communion only periodically seems unwise. Theologians have never argued that worshipping or taking up offering once a week is too often, and in the same way we believe that weekly is not too often to remember the sacrifice of our Lord for us.

Safe Harbor does not accept the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation - the belief that the bread and wine literally turn into the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. The Bible refers to communion as a memorial (Lk. 22:19) and a participation in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). Jesus said "This is my body" while he was yet among them, so it seems obvious he was speaking symbolically and the Bible never refers to communion as a re-sacrifice of Christ. In fact, the New Testament says Christ died "once for all" (Heb. 7:27) and refers negatively to "crucifying Christ again," reserving this term for apostates who attempt to return to Christianity (Heb. 6:6). Jesus did say, "My body is real food and my blood is real drink" (John 6:5 5), but later he indicated to his disciples that he was speaking spiritually (John 6:63). Therefore we do accept that communion has real spiritual significance, providing real spiritual nourishment to the Christian, but this is done without a literal transformation of the elements into the body and blood of Christ.

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According to the New Testament, participation in communion serves several purposes. Each participant is challenged to “examine himself,” remembering the sacrifice Christ made for him or her on the cross (1 Cor. 11:28-29). Beyond personal experience, however, the Lord’s Supper is also a “communing together” with other believers, an intimate time of fellowship when we declare our unity through Jesus Christ. “Because there is one loaf,” Paul wrote, “we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor. 10:17). In addition, the proclamation of the Lord’s Supper reminds believers of Christ’s imminent return. “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

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## Divorce and Remarriage

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The Bible says that the institution of marriage was created by God (Gen. 2:21-25). Therefore we believe God's Word should be our source of authority for defining marriage and setting the boundaries for the marriage relationship. The Bible says that God intends for marriage to be a monogamous, life-long, loving relationship between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt, 19:6). Marriage is the highest of all human relationships, provided by God as the best environment for relational intimacy (Gen. 2:18, 25) and child rearing (Gen. 1:27-28). The love between a husband and a wife is to be an illustration of the love and faithfulness between God and his people (Mal. 2:13-16; Eph. 5:22-33).

God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), but because of the influence of sin in the world (Jesus called it "the hardness of your hearts" in Matt. 19:8), the Bible makes some concessions for divorce and remarriage. The Scriptures give two justifiable reasons for divorce: adultery (Matt. 19:9) and abandonment (1 Cor. 7:15). Divorce is allowable in the case of marital unfaithfulness because the marriage covenant has been broken, but this is a concession and not a command. God still hates divorce, and if at all possible, if the unfaithful spouse shows signs of repentance and a willingness to recommit, we encourage the innocent party to seek forgiveness and restoration.

The Safe Harbor elders have identified five scenarios under which a person who has been previously married may marry again. Any Safe Harbor Christian member desiring to be remarried by one of our ministers or in our building must meet one of these five criteria:

- The former spouse has passed away (1 Cor. 7:39).
- The divorce occurred prior to salvation (2 Cor. 5:17).
- The former spouse has remarried (Deut. 24:1-4).
- Abandonment by the former spouse (1 Cor. 7:15).
- Adultery broke the marriage covenant (Matt. 19:9). When the one desiring to remarry was the guilty party, there must first be signs of repentance and a desire to reconcile with his or her former spouse. If the former spouse is unable or unwilling to reconcile, then after prayer and godly counsel we may allow the person to remarry.

We recognize that these biblical parameters do not allow divorce under other circumstances where divorce might seem warranted. The Bible does make a distinction between physical separations and divorce (1 Cor. 7:5), so we would counsel people in

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certain difficult situations that physical separation may be warranted until a godly counselor advises otherwise.

We counsel those who recognize they were remarried outside of the biblical boundaries to repent of their pattern of divorcing and remain faithful to the one to whom they are currently married (Deut. 24:1-4). The grace of Christ can be extended to those who have been divorced for unbiblical reasons. Those who have made wrong decisions in the past cannot undo their mistakes, but must be faithful to Christ in the situation in which they currently find themselves.

Questions often arise as to whether a person who has been divorced is eligible for a leadership position at Safe Harbor Christian. Because the Scripture says that an elder must be “the husband of but one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2 - literally “a one-woman man”), some contend that a person desiring to be an elder or pastor in the church must not have been divorced. It is our position that a divorce in a person’s past does not automatically exclude him from future church leadership. The passage in 1 Timothy 3 also says that an elder must not be given to drunkenness or violence. Most Christians agree that if a man got drunk or was in a fight many years ago as a youngster, that event should not disqualify him from leadership. The nature and circumstances of the offense and the length of time of proven credibility are all taken into account in determining whether a person is qualified for a leadership position. The same should apply to a person’s past divorce. If murder didn’t disqualify Paul from becoming an apostle and missionary after a decade of proven credibility, a divorce in someone’s past shouldn’t automatically disqualify that person from serving as a church leader.

We have instituted several policies and practices to help protect the members of our church from the trauma of divorce and to hold high the ideals of biblical marriage and sexual purity. We require sessions in a premarital class before couples can be married at our church or by one of our ministers. We frequently preach about marriage, and we attempt to confront and counsel those whom we know are unfaithful to their spouses. Any person in a leadership position at SHCC who is undergoing separation or divorce, whether innocent or not, is asked to step aside from his or her position of authority for a period of time so that full attention can be given to the crisis at hand and nothing will hinder the ministry of the church. Unmarried couples who are cohabiting are asked to repent of their sexual impurity and separate before they may be married in the church or by one of our ministers. Cohabiting couples desiring to become members of the church must separate or get married before membership is granted.

According to Jesus Christ’s instructions in the Bible, Christians must live in a manner distinct from that of the world. Christians are commanded to hold to a higher standard of moral virtue and purity, guided by the principles of God’s Holy Word. We have instituted these guidelines and practices in an effort to help our members to reflect Christ’s love for the church in their marriages.

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## **Eternal Security vs. Conditional Salvation**

### SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPER

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How much confidence can a person have in his eternal destination? Once you say you believe in Jesus Christ, is your salvation secure no matter how you behave? What if you change your mind and say you no longer believe? Our position at Safe Harbor Christian Church is that this is an important issue, but not an essential doctrine foundational to the church. When discussing this issue and other similar issues, we would be wise to remember a popular Christian slogan: “In doctrine, *unity* in opinion, *liberty*, in all things, *love*.” We believe Christians have the freedom to disagree about this issue. Therefore, Safe Harbor Christian Church does not take an official church stance on the issue of eternal security.

We believe that a person is saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8). A person who does not have faith in Christ, or is living in rebellion against him, should not expect to be saved, regardless of his past (Heb. 3:8,12; 10:26; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Some will say that such a person “was never saved in the first place,” because God knew in his Sovereignty that the person would reject Christ in the end, Whether the person was saved then lost, or never saved in the first place, is not clearly addressed in Scripture, and both sides of the debate can point to Scriptures to defend their position. The Bible says God is Sovereign and knows the future. But the Scripture also warns the saved person against falling away (2 Tim. 2:12-13; Heb 2:1; 3:8-12; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; 3:17). The argument may simply be semantic because the end result is the same on both sides: a person who once believed but has become apostate is not saved. Nearly all Christians agree on this point. Some believe that once you are saved you may live an unrighteous life or even reject Christ without losing your salvation; but they are ignoring a vast amount of biblical evidence to the contrary, and such teaching has dangerous consequences.

Because of the Scriptures mentioned above and others warning the saved person against falling away, the primary teaching of the leadership at Safe Harbor has been that it is possible for a person to lose his or her salvation through rebellion. Salvation is the free gift of God, available to all, and God desires that all be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Every individual has the choice to accept or reject God’s offer of forgiveness. Once a person is saved, that salvation cannot be lost through one sin, or even a series of sins. But, as Hebrews 10:26 says, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth,” we may get to a point where our hearts are so hard that we reject Christ and want no part of his salvation any more, at which point, “no sacrifice for sins is left.”

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Jesus said in John 3:16, “Whoever believes in [Son} shall not perish but have eternal life.” The word “believes” in the original Greek is in the present tense, denoting continual action. Whoever “continues to believe” will have eternal life. Someone who believed as a youngster but rejects that belief in later life should not expect to be granted the promise of eternal life. God is not going to force anyone into heaven against his or her will.

The traditional teaching at Safe Harbor in this area has been one of conditional salvation: you are saved as long as you continue to believe and unless you become an unbeliever or “apostate” (one who rejects his faith). But a person is not required to agree with the leadership’s position on this doctrine in order to become a member or even to be eligible for a leadership role. However, we do ask those who hold to eternal security to be respectful of the leadership’s position and to seek to honestly present both sides of the issue when teaching on this subject.

We also believe that it is important to remind every Christian that if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, your salvation is secure. If you are a sincere believer, then questioning your salvation is wrong. It is not a sign of humility or showing your awareness of your sins; to question your salvation shows a lack of faith in the promise of God to save you. It is often a sign that you question whether God is big enough or gracious enough to forgive your sin. If you trust in the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, then you should have assurance of your salvation (1 Jn. 5:13). If you have wandered from the Lord, then you should repent and return to Christ lest you harden your heart, reject him and lose your salvation. Peter warned us to be on guard lest we be carried away by evil men and fall from our “secure position” (2 Pet. 3:17). Rest assured, your salvation is secure, as long as you remain in faith. Your God is big enough to forgive your sins.

Some — even in our own church body — may disagree strongly with our traditional teaching on this issue. We hope that shows our tolerance toward those who disagree, and we hope that those who disagree will show the same tolerance to us. Let us humbly admit that there are mysteries in Scripture which will not be fully understood until the return of Christ, and let’s renew our commitment to practice love and tolerance toward fellow believers who do not agree with us on secondary doctrines. Jesus prayed, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23).

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## Is Safe Harbor Christian Church ‘Evangelical Church’?

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January 2014

Safe Harbor Christian Church considers itself an Evangelical church. By that, we mean we align ourselves with other Bible-believing Christians or “evangelicals.” An evangelical is generally considered to be a person who believes the Bible to be the true Word of God and the foundation for the Christian religion.

Several attempts have been made to list the fundamental or essential beliefs of evangelicalism. Though the lists may differ slightly, evangelicals are largely in agreement, and the nine truths listed below, though sometimes worded differently or in a different order, are uniformly agreed to be necessary doctrines of a “Bible-believing” church because of the clarity of Scripture on these issues and the intertwined nature of each doctrine with the others. For example, if you believe the first doctrine - that the Bible is the inspired, and inerrant Word of God - then consistency will demand that you accept the other eight as true because of what the Bible claims.

Some will attempt to claim we are not an evangelical church because we do not agree with other evangelicals on every doctrine. But within evangelicalism there are many factions and denominations, each of which has their strong opinions and beliefs about matters that lie outside of these nine essential doctrines. The nine truths, however, are common denominators among us all; the only necessary qualification for rightly deserving the term “evangelical” is adherence to these nine doctrines.

The question often asked, then, is whether evangelicals (or any of the factions among us) consider themselves the “true Christians.” Though we disagree strongly with other evangelicals on matters that lie outside these nine doctrines, and we consider some of those matters of grave importance, we view other evangelical churches as existing within the larger umbrella of “Christianity.” Because evangelicals agree that the Bible is God’s Word and our final source of authority, it is our hope that as we grow in our knowledge and understanding of God’s Word, we will grow closer to the unity Christ intended for his Body of believers. However, if a church rejects one or more of the nine essential teachings, it is doubtful that they will be able to hold to the rest because of the intertwined nature of the teachings. Such a group would not therefore be considered evangelical, and we would question whether such a group could genuinely consider themselves “Christian.”

The nine essential teachings of an evangelical church are as follows:

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- The infallibility of Scripture. We believe the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by the hand of men. The claims found in Scripture are absolutely true; therefore, to reject any portion of that truth is tantamount to rejecting the whole truth.
- The historical creation of man. Man did not accidentally evolve, but was created specifically by God and made in his image.
- The sinful nature of humanity. While evolution teaches that man is constantly improving, the Bible teaches that humanity is denigrating. Men and women were created by God in perfection and given the opportunity to choose good or evil. Since the fall of man, in which Adam and Eve chose to turn from God, every human being has been born with a predisposition to sin. Man chooses to disobey God, and is thus separated from him.
- The absolute deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the unique Son of God, and one of three essential parts of the Trinity. As God, Jesus is perfect and without sin.
- The virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah prophesied Jesus' miraculous birth 600 years before it occurred, and the angel Gabriel announced his arrival to Mary. Evangelicals accept that if God created the earth, he will have no problem impregnating a virgin with the Savior of the world.
- The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. Jesus' death on the cross was able to atone for the sins of the world because he is God. He was sinless on earth and took the punishment of guilty sinners upon himself so that repentant believers might be forgiven.
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection was both a result of his deity and a proof of his deity. Only God could raise himself from the dead. Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves that he can keep his promise of a resurrection of all the dead when he returns.
- The return of Jesus Christ. Upon his return, Jesus will bring with him the souls of believers who have died. Those believers who return with him will then receive a renewed and resurrected body. The believers who are alive on earth when he returns will ascend into heaven with Christ and their fellow believers.
- The resurrection and assignment of all people to heaven or hell. This is commonly called "Judgment Day." The evangelical church accepts literally the Bible's warning of a place of eternal punishment or "hell" for the unrepentant who reject the offer of salvation given by Jesus Christ. On the other hand, heaven is the eternal reward for those who accept the atoning, substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on their behalf. Thus, the hope of every evangelical Christian is that upon death, he or she will be with God and his or her loved ones in heaven.

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## **Homosexuality / Marriage, sanctioned church usage**

### SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPER

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Safe Harbor Christian Church is an evangelical church, maintaining that the Bible is God's Word and our final source of authority in doctrine and practice. Therefore, it is the stance of our church that homosexuality is a sin against God but is not an unforgivable sin (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:18; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). We believe that God calls those engaged in homosexual behavior to repent of their sin and commit to celibacy. Christ said to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). In the same way, Christ calls those engaged in homosexual sin to repent and accept Christ's love and forgiveness. Paul reminded the Corinthians that those engaged in certain behaviors, including "homosexual offenders," who refused to repent, would not inherit the Kingdom of God. But then he added, "such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The wonderful message to the person engaging in homosexual behavior is that through the power of Christ he or she can change. The temptation may remain, but the Holy Spirit can give you the power to remain celibate and pure.

Christians should therefore reach out to those engaged in homosexual behavior with Christ's message of love and forgiveness without endorsing the behavior. If you discover that your child is addicted to drugs, the loving thing to do is to express compassion and understanding, and to help him overcome his addiction. The same should be our attitude when we discover that a loved one is addicted to a sexual sin. Safe Harbor Christian Church offers counseling to those who struggle with homosexuality and other sexual sins. And there are other ministries that reach out to those struggling with homosexuality, including Crossover Ministries and Exodus International.

Those engaged in the homosexual lifestyle are welcomed to attend services at Safe Harbor Christian Church. If a person expresses a desire to commit to Christ or become a member of the church and is involved in an inappropriate sexual relationship, whether homosexuality, adultery, cohabiting without marriage, or other, he or she will be encouraged to commit to a life of sexual purity. Any person willing to make such a commitment and abstains from their previous life style can be baptized and accepted into membership. If a Safe Harbor member is found to be engaged in sexual sin, he or she is asked to repent and commit to sexual purity. Those willing to repent are guided to counseling services that are available to help them overcome their temptations. Those unwilling to repent are asked to withdraw their membership.

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Just as a loving parent should extend mercy and truth to a child addicted to drugs, so we believe a loving church should extend both mercy and truth to those who have been engaged in homosexuality. Anyone struggling with this area of his or her life needs to know that Jesus Christ offers forgiveness and access to power through the Holy Spirit to live a life of freedom and sexual purity.

## MARRIAGE SANTIONED AND CHURCH FACILITIES USE

Addendum 8/22/2016

The bible says that the institution of marriage was created by God. Gen 2:22-25 Therefore we believe that God's word should be our source of authority for defining marriage and setting boundaries for the marriage relationship, The bible says that God intends for marriage to be monogamous, a life-long, and loving relationship between a man and a woman. Gen 2:24, Matt 19:6

Safe Harbor's policy is simply that marriage is between one man and one woman. We define man as (male) status given a birth. We recognize no other status a legitimate. We define woman (female) status given at birth. We recognize no other status as legitimate. Any category of relationship other than SHCC recognized as legitimate will not be given permission to us the church facilities for marriage and/or marriage celebrations or functions.

The following categories are not legitimate and will not be permitted to use the SHCC facilities for the purpose of marriage, marriage celebrations, or functions: Transsexual, transgender, gay, or lesbian.

Anyone may be refused permission to SHCC facilities usage based on concerns that the elders may have with individual's based on behavior, beliefs or character.

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## Is Jesus the Only Way to Salvation?

SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPER

January 2014

The position of Safe Harbor Christian Church on any issue, including this one, is rooted in our understanding of the Bible. God's Word tells us that God loves us and wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). However, the Bible tells us that not everyone will be saved (Matt. 7:2 1) and that salvation is only promised to those who follow Christ (Jn. 14:6). Below is an article written by Bob Russell on this subject that explains well what the Bible says regarding Jesus being the only way to salvation. Difficult questions may arise when this topic is discussed, like what happens to a person who never hears about Jesus, and what exactly happens to those who are lost. The Bible does not clearly answer some of those questions. We know there is a place of eternal punishment for those who rebel against God (Matt. 25:46), a place where each person is judged fairly in accordance with what he or she has done (Lk. 12:47-48). When questions are left unanswered, the Bible leads us to trust in a God who is both perfectly loving (1 in. 4:8) and perfectly just (2 Th. 1:6). But Scripture clearly teaches that we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23), and that only through the atoning death of Jesus Christ do we receive the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life (Jn. 3:16; 14:6).

Bob Russell's (Southeast Christian pastor) Article for the August 5 2003 issue of Lookout Magazine:

"Do All Roads Lead to Heaven?" Luke 13:22-30

The second-best-selling author in the world (behind John Grisham) is Paulo Coelho. His books have sold more than 18 million copies — more than a million in the United States. His fans include Madonna, Julia Roberts, and former president Bill Clinton. In his books Coelho proposes an amalgamation of world religions. "I believe that each and every religion, when chosen with sincerity, leads to the same God," he concludes. This syncretism (saying there is some good in all religions so let's combine the best of them) is becoming the popular approach to religion in this age of tolerance.

Many people believe there are different ways to get to heaven. Like various roads up a mountain, they all lead to the peak. (Never mind that most religions outside of Christianity don't even include beliefs about heaven at all! They don't want to go to heaven, but people try to send them there anyway!) According to a George Barna poll, 44 percent of Americans say that all people experience the same outcome after they die, regardless of their religious beliefs. About 63 percent of Americans contend that if a person is good enough, he will earn his way into heaven. A third of "born again" Christians accept this notion!

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But what did Jesus say? Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” (Luke 13:23). Notice Jesus’ sobering response. First, Jesus indicated **THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO BE SAVED**. “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door...” (Luke 13:24a). Jesus said the door is narrow. There aren’t many ways to get to heaven — there’s only one. It’s not by living a good life or believing in a Supreme Being, but by believing in Jesus Christ as God’s Son and trusting his death on the cross to save you. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No

one come to the Father except through Me” (Jn 14:6) To tell people there is only one way to get somewhere is not intolerant if it’s the truth; instead, it helps them eliminate the possibility of going the wrong way!

Secondly, Jesus said **ONLY FEW WILL BE SAVED**. “. . . many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to” (Luke 13:24b). It’s not just the Hitler’s, Manson’s, Jezebels, and Judas Iscariots who will be lost. According to Jesus, the majority are not going to make it to heaven. (See also Matthew 7:13-14).

Jesus also implied that once the opportunity to be saved is over, **THERE WILL BE NO SECOND CHANCE**. “Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from’” (Luke 13:25). Just as God shut the door to Noah’s ark and no one could enter once the rains began, you won’t have a second chance after you die or after Christ returns. Hebrews 9:27 says that man “is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

Jesus warned that **SOME WHO HAVE A SURFACE ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIM WOULD BE LOST**. “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’” (Luke 13:26-27). Not everyone who calls himself a Christian and goes to church will be saved. Salvation is promised to those who trust Jesus and seek to follow his commands. (See also Matthew 7:21).

Finally Jesus forewarned us that **AN AGONIZING ETERNITY SEPARATED FROM GOD AWAITS THE LOST**. “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out” (Luke 13:28).

Let’s say you’re a passenger on the Titanic. You feel the ship’s collision with the iceberg and you go up on deck to see what the problem is. You hear one man say, “The ship has hit an iceberg. We’re going to sink in a matter of hours. We must get as many people off the ship and into lifeboats as possible.”

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Another man says, "It won't sink! This is a huge ship! Don't spread gloom!"

Another says, "There will be other ships coming. We have plenty of time to transfer to other boats. Lifeboats are dangerous. Let's wait."

Another says, "Let's get a crew and go down to patch the hole. We can save it ourselves."

Which of those voices would you believe? What would you do about it? Since the first few lifeboats have plenty of room, your answer will determine the destiny of you and your family.

Then suppose you discover that the man who said the boat is going to sink within hours is the man who designed the boat and he has surveyed the damage. The other three are just passengers. Now which of the three will you listen to? If you have wisdom, you'll listen to the designer of the boat. Even though his message sounds negative, his honesty will save you. Keep in mind that Jesus Christ is the one who designed this world. He's the only one who came back from the grave and said, "I've surveyed the damage down there, and here's how you can be saved." All other voices you hear are mortal human beings. To whom will you listen?

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## **Racism**

### SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPER

January 2014

The stance of Safe Harbor Christian Church on the issue of racism is that racial prejudice is a sin that can only be eradicated through the powerful grace and love of Jesus Christ, and that the church should be a frontrunner in the fight against racial division. The New Testament makes it clear that all people, regardless of racial background, are one in Jesus (Gal. 3:28), and we are commanded not to show favoritism (James 2:1-9). Heaven is to be filled with people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 7:9). If we will be spending eternity together in heaven, we would be wise to learn how to get along on earth! It is Safe Harbor’s belief that God’s creation of all races were of His divine plan therefore we love and accept His plan for humanity.

It is our conviction that the most successful way to overcome racism is to win people to Jesus Christ and allow him to transform their hearts and minds. Our primary goal, then, is to transform lives so that people are surrendered to Jesus Christ and their hearts are changed. In addition, we have sought as a church to fight against racism in several ways, including instructing our members to love one another and those outside our fellowship regardless of race, encouraging minorities to be involved in leadership and service in our church, and participating in unity services with local congregations including those of diverse race.

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## Speaking in Tongues

### SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPER

January 2014

Safe Harbor Christian Church does not practice “speaking in tongues” in our corporate worship services. We do not believe that speaking in tongues is necessary to prove the presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). However, we do not withhold membership from those who believe they have been given this gift, if they agree to exercise their gift *privately*. Below is a brief explanation of this issue from our perspective.

The Greek New Testament word often translated “tongues” literally means “languages.” Acts 2 describes “speaking in tongues” as a miraculous gift given to the disciples so they could communicate the Gospel in foreign languages. Jews from many different nations heard the disciples speaking “in their own native language” (Acts 2:8). The disciples were not babbling or communicating in an unknown angelic language, but rather speaking intelligible languages they had never studied. The miracle had a two-fold purpose: 1) to more quickly spread the Gospel to those of different languages; and 2) to prove the reliability of the apostles’ message. (Since the New Testament hadn’t yet been written, there was nothing to verify the apostles’ bold claims about Jesus Christ.)

However, unlike the Acts 2 example, the “speaking in tongues” practiced today is usually not understandable in any language. It is often called a “prayer language” or an “angelic language,” only understandable by God. Some charismatic Christians say that the ability to speak in tongues is a test of one’s faith or a test of the true filling of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that all Christians will receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), but that not all Christians will speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

Other Christians claim the practice of speaking in tongues is ungodly and that those who advocate it are teaching a “false doctrine. They oppose speaking in tongues because the miracle cannot be verified since the individual is claiming to speak in an “angelic” or “unknown” tongue. To the opposition, these unsubstantiated “miracles” seem to devalue the original Acts 2 miracle, which was verified by people from different languages. Also, the pagan religions often practice “babbling,” where the worshipper makes strange, uncontrollable utterances to their god. “Speaking in tongues” seems to some people like nothing more than an imitation of this practice. Since God is a God of order and truth, speaking in uncontrolled, incomprehensible utterances seems ungodly.

However, in 1 Corinthians 14:2, Paul mentions the type of “prayer language” that charismatic’ claim to be speaking. He says, “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.”

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He takes three chapters, 1 Corinthians 12-14, to explain how we should view the supernatural gifts, especially the gift of speaking in tongues, and how they should be used in worship. He asks that we not all speak in tongues during corporate worship lest the world think we are out of our minds (1 Corinthians 14:23), and that we do all things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). He says that intelligible words are more beneficial to the church, (“... in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Corinthians 14:19), but we are not to forbid speaking in tongues. He emphasizes that the spiritual gift of love is the “greatest gift.”

We should not flippantly assign the term “miracle” to something that is not. Yet neither should we put God in our box and claim that He can only work the way we think He should. Some will try to point to Paul’s claim in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that “tongues... will be stilled” as proof that “speaking in tongues” was a temporary spiritual gift to verify the Gospel message before the New Testament was written. This ideology states that since we now have God’s Word, we no longer need the miraculous or supernatural gift. (The same is said of the supernatural gifts of prophecy and healing.) It is true that those gifts are not needed to verify the message of the Gospel because the New Testament is sufficient. (See also Hebrews 2:3-4.) But if God wants to allow someone to speak in an angelic tongue or a foreign language, He can do that as well today as He could in the New Testament.

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul repeatedly emphasized that the spiritual gifts should promote unity in the church rather than disharmony. Because this is not a clear-cut biblical issue, we do not forbid members to speak in tongues. However, to maintain unity and harmony at Safe Harbor Christian Church, we ask that they agree to do so privately, that they not interrupt the worship service in exercising their gift, that they refrain from encouraging others to speak in tongues, and that they not use their gift as a test of faith. Romans 14:22 might be wise advice in this matter: “So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.”

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## The Role of Women in the Church

### SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPERS

January 2014

The goal of Safe Harbor Christian Church is to base our position on women's role in the church — and all doctrinal matters — on our understanding of the Bible rather than popular opinion or contemporary culture. Therefore the elders of Safe Harbor Christian Church have determined that the role of elder, preacher and other roles that could be construed as holding spiritual authority over both men and women should be filled by qualified spiritual men and are not open to women. Because our position is somewhat counter-cultural and can be controversial, we will seek below to explain our position in greater detail and articulate the reasons for these conclusions.

Women have always played a valuable role in the church. The Bible says that the prophetess Anna identified Jesus as the Messiah and spoke about him to all who would listen (Lk. 2:36-38). Christ's ministry was financed in part by his female followers (Lk. 8:2-3), and Jesus often elevated the status of women, treating them with dignity and respect when the surrounding culture treated them as property. In the early church women prayed, prophesied, disciplined future leaders and hosted church services in their homes. The Bible says that men and women are equally important and loved by God. Each gender was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and there is no distinction in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Nevertheless, among evangelical Christians (that is, Christians who consider the Bible to be God's Word and the determinant of our doctrines and practices), opinions vary widely as to what the Bible actually dictates regarding the eligibility of women for positions of authority in the church. Most of the controversy arises from efforts to determine when a biblical directive applies to all cultures and when it applies only to the culture for which it was originally written. For example, when Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11 that a woman should not pray or prophesy with her head uncovered, did he intend that to be a command for all women of all cultures to follow, or did it only apply to the women of his day? In many churches around the world, even to this day, women wear some kind of head covering in worship, out of respect for this passage.

Determining when something is a permanent principle and when it is only a temporary cultural application to a larger principle is not always an easy assignment. A good dictum to follow is, "a permanent principle if possible, a temporary cultural application if obvious." For example, in the instance noted above, in Paul's day a woman who prayed with her head uncovered was considered immodest and non-submissive to her husband's authority. Such is not the case in our culture today.

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If Paul had been addressing a culture where it was considered immodest for a woman to cover her head, he surely would have commanded the women not to cover their heads while praying or prophesying. The principle of modesty and purity is greater and more important than the legalistic adherence to the specific command. What is considered immodest will vary from culture to culture, so the principle of modesty should be applied wisely in every circumstance but the application will not always be the same. Therefore, women in our church are not required to cover their heads during the worship services, but they are encouraged to dress modestly.

A more difficult Scripture to interpret is Paul's directive in 1st Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." Was that a temporary command because of the cultural understanding about women of the day, or was there a timeless principle involved? And if there is a timeless principle, what exactly is it? Does this mean that no woman should ever have any authority of any type over a man and must never speak in a man's presence? That legalistic application doesn't seem likely to be God's intention in light of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians where women are praying and prophesying, and other New Testament Scriptures where women are serving, hosting churches in their homes, and even teaching (Ac. 16:15; 18:26; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5; Rom. 16:1). However, Paul's explanation in 1 Timothy 2:13 and following goes beyond culture to the very makeup of males and females, and Paul hints that the marital relationship is a factor in his directive. So there seems to be more than just culture at stake. There is an overriding principle — primarily male headship in the home — that is driving Paul's specific directives.

Therefore, it is the stance of Safe Harbor Christian Church that though the cultural applications may change slightly, there is a principle in the New Testament that men are to be the leaders of the church. The role of elder or pastor is described as being a male role, and there is no example of a female pastor in Scripture. Though we may not fully understand why the Bible directs the leaders to be male, we can speculate: Imagine the confusion that could arise if a husband is called by Scripture to be the spiritual leader in his home (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18), but his wife is also his pastor. The lines of authority would be muddied, and disorder could result.

Hence, the leaders of Safe Harbor Christian Church have decided that the office of elder and the preaching staff and that of our *primary*\* Adult Bible Fellowship classes (because those leaders play a significant pastoral role in our church) will be filled by adult males who have the spiritual qualifications necessary to lead the church. Roles like committee chairpersons, choir directors, bookstore managers, and others, are open to qualified men and women. In our worship services, women are permitted to pray, sing, share testimonies and speak occasionally from the pulpit.

# SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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It is our conviction that the overriding principle of 1 Timothy 2:12, one of male headship in positions of spiritual authority, is not violated by an occasional testimony, prayer, song or speech from a female in our worship setting.

For reasons we may not fully comprehend, reasons that according to Scripture are rooted in our very “maleness” and “femaleness,” the Bible commands wives to submit to their husbands, and therefore, directs that the elders be men. But it should be noted that the Bible does not command women to be submissive to men in general, or prohibit them from holding government office or otherwise being in positions of authority. Asking wives to submit to their husbands should not insinuate that wives are less valued than their husbands or less capable of leadership. Jesus, who submitted himself to God (Philippians 2:6-8), is not less important or less valued than the Father. In fact, we respect him all the more because of his willingness to submit for a time, to take on a role of a servant, out of love for us.

Because of the interpretive challenges inherent in this debate, we do not require our members to agree with the elders’ conclusions regarding women’s role in the church. However, we do ask that our members obey the elders’ directives and submit to their conclusions without divisiveness, recognizing that these are difficult decisions to make. We will continue to seek God’s guidance and grow in our understanding of God’s Word in this and all doctrinal matters.

*\*primary-* under the direction of elder, women will be encouraged to teach in some directed adult studies and classes.

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## Alcohol

### SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH POSITION PAPER

January 2014

Safe Harbor Christian Church does not require its members to be total abstainers. The Bible indicates that drunkenness, not alcohol consumption, is a sin (Eph. 5:18). However, because of the pervasiveness of the problem of alcoholism in our culture, we require leadership in Safe Harbor to be ever vigilant in any computation of alcohol so as not to cause a falling away from their role as models of Christian behavior by themselves or others.

Because alcoholism has become a blight of our culture, the issue demands closer attention. Alcoholism is the third largest health problem in the United States. A study by The Ohio State University Extension reports that adolescents who drink are four times more likely to become alcoholics than adults.’ Teens fifteen and older who drink alcohol are seven times more likely to have sexual relations than those who do not drink.” Alcoholism influences men and women from every social and cultural sector. Nationwide, there are 10 million adults and 3.3 million teenagers struggling with alcoholism.”

The Bible does not regard wine as evil, but drunkenness is forbidden. In Ephesians 5:18, the Apostle Paul exhorts us, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” However, it is important to understand the cultural background of the biblical admonition. The alcoholic content of most drinks in the first century was probably half of similar drinks today.” Wine was used to kill infecting agents in drinking water, so it was commonly diluted to make it go farther. Alcohol consumption in the time of Jesus was vastly different than it is today—liquor was far less potent, often used medicinally, and usually diluted. Therefore, because of the increase in the potency of alcohol today and the decrease in the need and benefits of alcohol in our culture, total abstinence may be the wisest course of action.

That is why we ask every Christian to consider becoming a total abstainer from alcohol. Alcohol can negatively affect your health, lower your inhibitions, and diminish your Christian witness. Abstaining from alcohol ensures that you will never become an alcoholic, and abstinence sets a positive example for your children and others.

Safe Harbor Christian Church will endeavor to help with counseling services to help those dealing with addictions to alcohol or other drugs. Most importantly, Safe Harbor offers alcoholics a relationship with Jesus Christ.

# **SAFE HARBOR CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

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Alcoholics often turn to the drink in order to fill a void in their lives. That's why Paul encouraged us not to get drunk with wine, but instead be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit can fill the void in the alcoholic's life, a void that no amount of alcohol could ever fill.

'McCowell, Urvia and Ted Futris: "Adolescents at Risk: Alcohol Use", The Ohio State University Extension ©2002 [www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famljfe](http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famljfe)