

**WHAT OUR  
CHURCH BELIEVES**



*A Brief Statement of the  
Essential Beliefs of the  
Evangelical and Reformed Church*

## General Statement

Every Christian Church holds to certain fundamental articles of faith. In the early Church "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" The Acts 2: 42. On this basis they were all united at the first. But soon differences developed. Parties sprang up among them which threatened to divide the body of Christ. Paul labored incessantly to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Differences arose because of different emphases and interpretations of certain basic beliefs and practices. These pertained principally to forms of government, to modes of worship, to statements of doctrine and to piety or the way of life. It is around these four factors that all differences between religious groups, from the beginning until now, have developed. If we want to know what is distinctive in any one of the many denominations of Christendom we can discover this by studying its attitude with reference to polity, cultus, doctrine and piety. Prior to the Protestant Reformation in 1517 there existed only two main streams of the Christian Church, the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation opened the way for the rise of a great variety of denominations and sects, each and all of which claim to have found and to hold that which is regarded as essential in the scheme of salvation and in the practice of true religion.

## Our Church

*The Evangelical and Reformed Church* is one of those historic bodies that had its origin during the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century. In 1934, two denominations, the Reformed Church in the United States and the Evangelical Synod of North America, which had been founded in America, the former in 1725, and the latter in 1840, united

into one body, the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The two bodies brought their respective beliefs and practices into the new union. A statement of doctrine was formulated setting forth the theological position; and a system of rules and regulations was wrought out whereby the denomination is governed in its organization and methods of work.

### **Fundamental Beliefs**

True to the Protestant principle that the Bible is the only rule of faith, our Church believes in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It believes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and contains all that a Christian needs to know about God and His Son Jesus Christ. It adheres to the ancient formula of faith, called the Apostles' Creed. It accepts as interpretations of the Bible and of the Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, Luther's Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. In a sense, therefore, it is a Confessional Church, but allows full liberty to members to adhere to any one of these interpretations, according to the individual conscience, but the final norm is the Word of God.

### **On the Church**

Our Church believes that the Church of Jesus Christ is a divine-human institution, founded by Christ Himself for the purpose of carrying forward His life and work through all time and throughout the world. The Church is therefore regarded as the "body of Christ," an extension of His incarnation through history. It is composed of human beings who have entered into a fellowship with Christ and with each other to extend His Kingdom upon earth through the preaching of the Word and the use of the holy sacraments.

In order to render this service an outward organization has been found necessary. This organization is constituted of ministers and

members. It has established a form of government, called "Presbyterial," which simply means that it recognizes the eldership as the ruling body of the Church. It believes in an educated ministry—persons duly ordained to preach the Gospel and to shepherd the flock of Christ.

It believes that membership in the Church confers certain privileges and involves certain responsibilities on the part of those who have joined the fellowship.

It believes in a democratic form of organization wherein each member has a part, though this part is generally performed through chosen representatives. This organization includes the Consistory or Church Council, the Synods and the General Synod. In this way the Church is a part of a world-wide community, holding fellowship with all believers in other communions.

In its worship our Church allows full liberty. While it has a Book of Worship for use in its congregations, it does not make such use mandatory. If congregations prefer a liturgical service, or a free service, they are accorded full freedom, so long as the essential parts and the dignity of true worship are maintained.

### **On the Sacraments**

Our Church accepts the two sacraments instituted by Christ, viz.: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Our Church practices Infant Baptism, but also provides for the baptism of adults. The mode of baptism is that of sprinkling rather than of immersion. It, however, recognizes the validity of baptism by immersion. The meaning of baptism is twofold. It is both a sign and a seal. It is a symbolic act indicating the washing away of sin, and the dedication to a new life. In the case of infants the parents or sponsors take upon themselves the vows to renounce all worldly ways and to nurture the child in the doctrines and duties of our religion. After

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## On the Christian Life

Our Church expects its members to lead a Christian life. Their conduct should conform to the standard set forth in the Word of God. They are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Christians have duties as well as privileges. Their lives should be a continuous gratitude to God for His salvation. Therefore the Church expects its members to pray, to read the Bible, to attend public worship, to give generously for the support of the Gospel and to labor earnestly for the extension of the Kingdom.

They are to be supremely loyal to Jesus Christ and useful citizens in the State. Our Church has expressed itself definitely on social and moral issues, such as marriage and divorce, the Sabbath, intemperance, civil liberties, the profit motive, racial problems and similar questions, believing that a deep-rooted identity with the life and spirit of Christ will lead the Christian to the doing of God's will in all the relationships of life.

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