

See introduction video

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What is a confession and how does it function in the Presbyterian Church USA?

THE PURPOSE OF CONFESSIONAL STATEMENTS

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in The Book of Confessions. In these statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Reformed Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers.

What is the Confession of Belhar?

The Confession of Belhar is a powerful confession of Christian faith that emerged in South Africa during the years of Apartheid. It is named for the city in South Africa where it was first adopted. It is a statement that focuses on three themes, Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice, in a church environment where racial separation made it impossible for brothers and sisters in Christ to worship together or come to the Lord's Table together. Churches around the globe have recognized the power and theological insight of Belhar as an expression of Scriptural truth for their own contexts.

Why should we, 21st century North American Presbyterians care?

The Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar has proposed that the General Assembly adopt an Accompanying Letter to express its conviction that Belhar is important for our church. It begins with these words:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is again facing a critical time in its history. We are rent apart by division and schism, we have yet to directly confront and confess the racism that has been a significant force in our own history, and we have shown a failure of resolve to make courageous stands for justice. We believe that the Confession of Belhar, a profound statement on unity, reconciliation, and justice in the church, comes to us as a word from God for this particular time and place for the PC(USA).

We understand confession as both the church's response to human sin and as witness to our faith. Confession by the church is necessary because sin is present in social injustice and our conscious or unconscious participation in human suffering. Confession is not a way to cast aspersions or in any way denigrate, castigate, or delimit any person or group of persons. We the church are called to confess sin because the Word of God as revealed in and through the life of Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures calls us to bear witness to a just, loving, and compassionate Creator.

Wednesday August 10th – Part 2

We believe that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

- John 17: 20 - 23

We believe that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways;

a. that we love one another.

- Colossians 3: 12 – 16

b. that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another;

- Philippians 2: 1-5

c. that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another;

- 1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 13

d. that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind;

- Ephesians 4: 1-6

e. we have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope;

- 1 Corinthians 10: 16 – 17

f. together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ;

- Ephesians 3: 18 – 20

g. together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity;

- Galatians 6: 2

h. together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ;

- 2 Corinthians 1: 3 – 4

i. that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another;

- 1 Corinthians 12: 24b – 28

j. that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;

- Ephesians 3: 14 – 20

