# EXPLORING THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

## PROPOSITION STATEMENT

*The Book of Confessions* is a part of the Presbyterian Church (USA) constitution that contains doctrine establishing historical accounts of faith so that leaders of today’s church can benefit from the collective wisdom of those who came before them in their present and future decision-making.

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| CONTEXT / AUDIENCEThis lesson plan is intended to be used in a session meeting to begin a series of classes teaching thevarious confessions. This lesson is an overview of all of theconfessions, serving to introduce briefly each one, and then therewill be sessions that follow to go into depth on each of the 12 confessions. |  | OUTLINEOpening PrayerOpening Questions Lesson (main points):1.What is the Book of Confessions?2.What Confessions are in it?(brief overview of the 12)3.What is it useful for?Closing GameClosing Prayer |

## MATERIALS NEEDED

Book of confession for each

member

Sticky notes or index card (for personal note taking) writing implements Print out of Appendix A for

each person

Print out of Appendix B per person/group (scissors or

pre-cut)

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| LEARNING GOALSExplain what the Book of Confessions is The significance to the PCUSAName what the Book of Confessions containsName the confessions and basic information about each (see overview pages attached) Review the location of each in the Book of ConfessionsExplain what the purpose of the Book of Confessions is in the church (pertaining to ordination) Freedom & variety and authority and unity(pertaining to ordination) Instructing, leading, and those who guide the church Other works of the church  |
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| OPENING PRAYERGod, create open hearts and minds in us so that we might hear andunderstand the true intent behindthese confessions as we study them and learn how they fit into our daily lives as the Church.  |

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| OPENING QUESTIONSWhy do we have this collection of confessions?Has anyone read this book before?Can anyone name any of them?Is this something all Christians have or just Presbyterians?What is a Creed? What is a Confession? What is a Catechism?  |

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| WHAT IS THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONSDefine Confession (BoC p. v) Statement of beliefAddress how the PCUSA came to be with rejoining the North and South presbyteries and the brief statement of faith confession. (BoC, p. v and p. 308-318) |
| WHAT IS IN THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS Name the confessions found within this Book of Confessions(BoC p. xv - xvi)How to navigate the Book of Confessions“The Book of Confessions should guide every area of our daily lives.” (p. xxiii)It is foundational for who we are as a church (It is the first part of our constitution) |
| WHAT IS ITS USE/PURPOSEThe Book of Confession and Ordination \*The Church does not require its members to accept the church’s confession to obtain membership but to obtain ORDINATION “to ensure that those who lead the church do so in faithfulness to its doctrine and form of government, the church does require ordained ministers, elders, and deacons to declare their adherence to the confessions of the church.”(BoC p. xix)Freedom and Variety in the church (p. xx)Authority and Unity of the church (p. xxi)Other Guidelines --> “It is important to emphasize that it is not only individual ordained persons but also general assemblies, presbyteries, and synods that are to be instructed, led, and continually guided by the church’s confessions.” (BoC p. xxii)Other important uses for the Book of Confessions in the Church Ministry in generalWorshipPreachingChristian Education Pastoral CareEvangelism and MissionAdministration |



#  THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

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| THE EARLY CHURCH (ECUMENICAL CREEDS)Nicene Creed This was the first official doctrinal statement of the whole Christian church. It was accepted and used by all three major branches of Christianity: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.**Background:** The ancient church confessed Jesus Christ’s humanity and divinity. Most churches in the world affirm this creed.**Date:** 4th century**Big Question:** Who is Jesus? How is Jesus related to God the Father? **Quote:** “God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, Begotten and not made.” |
| THE EARLY CHURCH (ECUMENICAL CREEDS)Apostles’ Creed This is the best-known confessional statement. It was likely in question-and-answer form originally. The sacrament of Baptism was the context from which this was developed. **Background:** This creed is used widely in Protest and Catholic communities. It is our oldest creed. **Date:** 8th century**Big Question:** What are the most basic things Christians believe?**Quote:** “I believe . . .” |
| HISTORIC CONFESSIONS FROM THE REFORMATIONThe Scots Confession This is the first Reformed confession written in English. It is also known as the charter of the Church of Scotland. The Scottish parliament, at the end of their civil war in 1560, invited John Knox and 5 colleagues who, over the course of 4 days, composed a confession of faith for the church and nation since Scotland was a church and nation (as they were a church-state)**Background:** It was written as a theological foundation for Scotland and ratified by the British Parliament, the Scots Confession reflects a deeps trust in God’s presence **Date:** 1560**Big Question:** How will the church of Scotland be faithful and distinct?**Quote:** “Give thy Servants strength to speak thy Word with boldness.” |
| HISTORIC CONFESSIONS FROM THE REFORMATIONThe Heidelberg Catechism This one has the most personal language and contains a series of questions and answers. There are three main sections; the first covers sin and guilt (questions 3-11), the second covers grace which God gives(questions 12-85), and the final section expresses gratitude to God mainly through prayer (questions 86129)**Background:** It was the fight over the meaning of communion that led two young men to write a catechism that was acceptable to both Lutherans and the Reformed churches. **Date:** 1563**Big Question:** What is the foundation for all Protestant believers? **Quote:** “That I am not my own, but belong - body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Savior, JesusChrist.” |

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| HISTORIC CONFESSIONS FROM THE REFORMATIONThe Second Helvetic Confession This is longer than the Reformed creeds and creates an ecumenical spirit. It has two main sections: the first on theology and the second on the church, ministry, and sacraments. **Background:** This helps the Reformed churches express their theological beliefs and practice their faith.**Date:** 1566**Big Question:** How do Reformed Christians Explain and Practice our beliefs? **Quote:** “They are Christ’s Disciples by preserving the bond of peace and holy unity.”  |
| THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDSThe Westminster Confession of FaithThe Shorter Catechism The Longer CatechismThe Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechism’s are best known of the Reformation era creeds by most presbyterians. The Shorter Catechism summarizes what is contained in the Larger Catechism. It contains information on what Christians are to believe (questions 1-38) and the duties of Christian life (39-107).The Larger Catechism serves as a guide for pastors in dealing with doctrines stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith.**Background:** In 1643, the English Parliament established a distinctly Presbyterian model for governance and liturgy of the church in England and abroad.**Date:** 1647**Big Question:** In a broken world, how do we live according to God’s will and respond to God’s grace?**Quote:** “What is the chief end of humanity? Humanity’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. |
| CONTEMPORARY CONFESSIONSBarmen Declaration The writers of the Barmen Declaration protested Nazi interference in church affairs and pointed out Nazi errors in the Nazi-inspired “German Christian” movement that took place. Basic questions underpinning this movement were: who is Lord: Hitler or Jesus? Is it the State or God? and what is the relationship between the church and the state? **Background:** It was written in response to the rise of Nazi Germany, and the churches and church leaders that embraced it faced persecution and death.**Date:** 1934**Big Question:** If Jesus Christ is our Lord, can we support Nazi doctrines?**Quote:**  “We may not keep silent since we believe that we have been given a common message to utter in a time of common need and temptation.” |

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| CONTEMPORARY CONFESSIONSConfession of 1967This confession was modeled after the Barmen Declaration, which clarifies faith in the face of issues within the church and society. This was the first Reformed statement to name and confirm the social problems of its era. The confession is broken into three parts: 1. “God’s Work of Reconciliation” through the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. 2. “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” which includes the mission of the church (society) and the equipment of the church (preaching, teaching, and sacraments). 3. “The Fulfillment of Reconciliation” in the totality of human life in its environment and the entirety of God’s kingdom. **Background:** This confession is in response to deep-seated problems (racism, poverty, and violence); the confession called the church to work for repentance and reconciliation. **Date:** 1967**Big Question:** How does the church respond to a changing world?**Quote:**  “In the power of the risen Christ and the hope of his coming, the church sees the promise of God’s renewal of our life in society and of God’s victory over wrong.” |
| CONTEMPORARY CONFESSIONSA Brief Statement of Faith This confession results from the REUNION of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States. **Background:** After over 100 years of division the two Presbyterian Churches having been divided since the Civil War in the US reunites resulting in the Presbyterian Church (USA)/ PCUSA / PC(USA). This statement expresses our sharedidentity and faith. **Date:** 1983 (not adopted until 1991)**Big Question:** How do we celebrate the reunion of two long-divided denominations?**Quote:**  “In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.” |
| CONTEMPORARY CONFESSIONSBelhar Confession South Africa instituted Apartheid, a system of laws that separate people by race (1948-1994). Established by the Dutch Reformed church, racial segregation prevented people from worshipping together and sharing communion together. The global church was named apartheid status because the gospel was at stake and needed to be reclaimed. This confession was an outcome of this in the early 1980's. The themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice serve as a call to action and transformation. **Background:** was written in response to apartheid (a system of laws that gave privilege to white South Africans), the confession calls the church to work for justice.**Date:** 1986 (adopted 2016) **Big Question:** What does the church do when sin constructs unjust systems of oppression**Quote:**  “The variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.” |