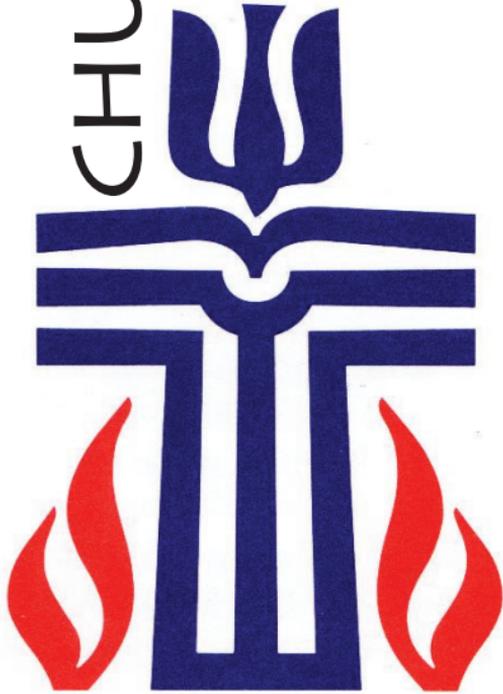


CONFESSIONS  
OF THE  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
USA



BANNERS

## **THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CONFESSES ITS FAITH**

through the creeds and confessions contained in The Book of Confessions. These confessions help the Presbyterian Church explain:

- who and what it is
- what it believes and
- what it resolves to do

These confessions were written over time and in response to specific world events. As such they have interpreted, defended and proclaimed biblical faith, bearing witness to the community of saints who have gone before us and continue to inspire us to speak and live with conviction into the challenges of a new day. Confessions serve to interpret the written word as it points to the Living Word, Christ.

In celebration of this tradition, we display banners of the nine creeds and confessions contained within the Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the sanctuary. They are:

- Nicene Creed (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Apostles' Creed (early church)
- Scots Confession (Scotland, 1560)
- Heidelberg Catechism (Germany 1562)
- Second Helvetic Confession (Switzerland, 1561)
- Westminster Confession of Faith (England, 1643)
- Theological Declaration of Barmen (Germany, 1934)
- Confession of 1967 (USA)
- Brief Statement of Faith (USA, 1991)

# NICENE CREED



In 312, when Constantine won control of the Roman Empire, he attributed his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ. *One God, one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor* became his motto. He soon learned that “one faith and one church” were fractured by theological disputes across the land, so he called a council in Nicaea in 325 to draft a creed that would be commonly confessed by all Christians. The council met again in 381 in Constantinople to revise and expand that creed, resulting in what we now know as the Nicene Creed. It is the most ecumenical of the creeds.

**The Cross which is also a Sword** A symbol for the Emperor Constantine and his successors, because he called the ecumenical council which began the process of thinking that resulted in this creed, because he was the first Christian emperor and because he began the tradition of imperial Christianity. The cross is central here because the doctrine of Christ is central in the Creed.

**The Green Triangle with Three Symbols** The doctrine of the Trinity is formalized in the Nicene Creed.

**The Hand Reaching Down** God the Father.

**The Chi Rho Monogram** The first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, used by Constantine on shields and helmets of his army.

**The Dove** The Holy Spirit.

**The Crowns** The rule and glory of God.

# APOSTLE'S CREED



Although not written by the apostles, this creed reflects the essence of early Christian beliefs and was repeated orally, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments to transmit the faith throughout the western church. There is no record of the use of this creed in Eastern Orthodoxy. Candidates for membership were asked to profess their faith by repeating this creed as they joined the church through baptism. Used in some form as early as 180, it continued to evolve attaining its present form by the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

**The Somber Brown Color** The difficulty and rigor of early Christianity under persecution; also, the monastic tradition.

**The Purple Arches** The entrances to caves or catacombs, where early Christians met in secret: also, the shape of Gothic church windows.

**The Fish** An ancient symbol for the Christian faith, perhaps a secret code. Letters of the Greek word for fish can be used as first letters in the phrase, "Jesus Christ God's Son Savior."

**The Chalice** The Lord's Supper, and thus the earnest and simple fellowship of the early church.

**The Upside-Down Cross** Peter, chief of the apostles, who in legend, is said to have been crucified upside down because he thought himself unworthy of a death like his Master's.

# SCOTS CONFESSION



When the new Scottish Parliament declared Scotland a Protestant nation after winning bloody civil wars with Queen Mary's Catholic French-supported troops in 1560, it commissioned six clergy including John Knox to frame a confession of faith. John Knox had studied under Calvin and other Reformed theologians and sought to develop a statement consistent with the Reformed faith but relevant to Scotland. This confession includes bold language about the saving providence of God and God alone, the enduring nature of the church, the infallible Word of God, Jesus Christ as "our brother, our pastor, and the great bishop of our souls", and the "right administration" of the only two sacraments "instituted by the Lord Jesus:" Baptism and Communion.

**The Blue of the Shield** The background color of the Church of Scotland.

**The Tartan X-shaped Cross** A form called St. Andrew's Cross, he being the apostle who brought the gospel to Scotland. The Hamilton clan tartan honors the first martyr of the Scottish Reformation, Patrick Hamilton.

**The Celtic Cross** Another ancient form associated with Christians of the British Isles.

**The Ship** A symbol for the Church.

**The Bible and the Sword** Paul called the word of God "the sword of the Spirit;" the sharpness of John Knox's preaching of the Word was major power for reformation in Scotland.

**The Burning Bush which is Not Consumed** Reminding us of Moses' Sinai experience, a symbol of God's presence and call.

# HEIDELBERG CATECHISM



Completed in 1562, this catechism, a confession framed as questions and answers, was commissioned by Frederick the Elector to be drafted by two men: Zacharias Ursinus, professor of theology, and Kaspar Olevianus, preacher to the city of Heidelberg. Its purpose was to develop a statement of belief that would be acceptable to both Lutherans and Reformers in Germany as tensions between the two groups had become intense. It received wide acclaim throughout Germany, Austria, Holland, Hungary, Scotland, Canada and the United States. This confession sought to emphasize common ground: belief in the Triune God, the Ten Commandments, salvation in Christ by grace alone, yet the language surrounding the sacraments, particularly the Lord's Supper remained distinctively Reformed.

**The Regal Red and Gold** A tribute to the rule of Frederick III, who ordered the writing of the Catechism for followers of John Calvin in Germany.

**The Crown of Thorns, the “German” Cross and the Tablets** Symbol of Misery, Redemption and Thankfulness, the three basic themes of the Catechism. The tablets stand for the Ten Commandments, which appear in the Catechism where it teaches that obedience is the proper form of thankfulness.

**The Two Lights and the Fire** The Trinity, with the Hebrew name of God on the left orb, the Greek monogram for Jesus on the right orb, and the flame standing for the Holy Spirit. There is a long discussion of the Trinity in the Catechism.

# SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION



Written in 1561 by Heinrich Bullinger, minister of the church in Zurich, Switzerland, as a well formulated pastoral legacy he intended to leave to the church of Zurich, this confession became public when used to defend Frederick the Elector in his heresy trial in Germany. After receiving the Heidelberg Catechism, Lutherans in Germany deemed it too Reformed. This confession used more moderate and accommodating language, thereby exonerating Frederick in 1566. Meanwhile, Switzerland adopted the Second Helvetic as their confession of faith. It then received wide acceptance throughout Europe and beyond, being translated into French, English, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, Arabic and Turkish.

**The Blue and White** Heraldic colors of ancient Switzerland.

**The Cross** Again dominant on this banner because of the extensive discussion of salvation in the Confession.

**The Hand and the Burning Heart** A traditional symbol for John Calvin, father of Presbyterianism in its Swiss homeland.

**The Lamp** Knowledge and discipline, two of the themes of the Helvetic which make it unique.

**The Shepherd's Crook and the Pasture** The pastoral ministry and flock's care for its own members.

**The Chalice and the Waves** Holy Communion and Baptism.

# WESTMINSTER CONFESSION



Distinctively English in tone and content, the Westminster Confession was commissioned in 1643 and concluded in 1649 by an assembly of 151 people: 30 members of Parliament, and “learned, godly, and judicious divines.” The assembly was commissioned by the English House of Commons for the purpose of “settling the government and liturgy of the Church of England (in a manner) most agreeable to God’s Holy Word.” Representing a systematic approach to Protestant thought that incorporates rationalism and scholasticism, it was brought to New England by the Puritans and adopted in 1729 as the confessional position of the newly organized Presbyterian synod in the colonies. The providence of God, authority of Scripture, and piety in worship are key themes of this faith statement.

**The Three Long Panels and the Maroon Triangle** The Trinity.

**The Eye** God’s providence and control of all life and history, a dominant theme of Westminster.

**The Crown** God’s Rule.

**The Open Bible** The authority of the written Word, basic to this Confession’s teachings.

**The Alpha and the Omega** The A and z of the Greek alphabet, the first and last, referring to Christ and his death for us as central to our faith.

# THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN



Written in 1934 by a group of church leaders in Germany in defense of the Lordship of Christ over and against the tyranny of the state and its co-opting of the church, this declaration challenged the union of Christianity, nationalism and militarism most German Christians took for granted. One hundred thirty-nine delegates, comprised of ordained ministers, church members and university professors, met in Gemarkte Church, Barmen, in the city of Wuppertal. The declaration proclaims boldly the church's freedom in Jesus Christ who is Lord of every area of life, thereby condemning the German Christian accommodation to the Nazi regime. The signers of this statement of faith did so at great risk to their reputations and very lives.

**The Swastika Crossed Out and the Cross Rising** A protest and witness against Nazi tyranny and any effort to take the role of God and control of the church

**The Fire** The suffering and death which follows from defense of the faith against tyranny, as for some of the Barmen signers. But the cross survives such persecution and crisis of war, rising out of the flames.

# CONFESSION OF 1967



In response to the turbulent decade of the 1960s, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA (UPC USA), produced this statement of faith. In 1956, the General Assembly of the UPC USA began to call for a revision to the Westminster Confession, seeking contemporary language and expressions of faith. A committee labored with this task for seven years. The next several years witnessed amendments, additions and changes, resulting in 90 percent of the presbyteries voting to approve the Confession of 1967 at the 179th General Assembly in 1967. The key Scripture of this confession is "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself..." (2 Corinthians 5:19) and it thematically proclaims the church's faithful and active witness to the modern world.

**The Blue, The Red and the Gold** Colors of the official seal of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

**The Golden Down-reaching Hand** Repeated from the Nicene Banner. God, relating to God's world.

**The Crown** (repeated from the Westminster Banner) **and the Nail-scarred Hand** The death and victory of Christ as he reconciles the world.

**The Four Hands of Different Colors, the Clasped Hands and the Green Circle** The reconciled world at the foot of the cross, God's act of reconciliation being the starting point and theme of the Confession of 1967.

**The Stars and Planets on the Blue Background** The Space-Age setting of this Confession.

# BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH



In 1983, the Presbyterian Church (USA) was formed by the reunion of the UPCUSA and the Presbyterian Church in the United States, prompting a new declaration of faith, purposefully designed for use in worship. Issues of gender and ethnic equality and environmental justice emerge in this statement as it bears witness into culture. Adopted into use in 1991, it is the most contemporary of the faith statements in the Book of Confessions of the PC(USA).

**The Cross** A rainbow of colors representing the celebration of unity with the diversity of cultures and races living in Christ.

**The Blue Background** Symbolizes the universe as the light of the Word of God bringing us together.

**The Earth** Cracks symbolizing our divisiveness and diversity, yet our faith unites us with the one universal Church.

**The Secure Hands of God** Remind us that he who holds our world together in turmoil will unite us in grace of Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of our knowledge of God's sovereign love and our living together in the Holy Spirit.

**The Presbyterian Church (USA) Symbol of a Brief Statement of Faith** The descending dove represents peace and the baptism of Christ. The open Bible symbolizes the Word of God. The Font recalls the Sacrament of Baptism, while the table recalls the Sacrament of Communion, and the pulpit, the preaching of the Word. The flames represent the burning bush and Pentecost. The overall image suggests the human figure with stretched out arms.

WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH



1500 SCIO CHURCH ROAD  
ANN ARBOR, MI 48103  
734.761.9320  
[WWW.WESTPRESA2.ORG](http://WWW.WESTPRESA2.ORG)