

# UPLIFT Newsletter

AUGUST 2015

\*\*While this article is long, it seeks to be thorough. Please make the time to read it.

It's been a little over a year since the General Assembly met, and we're still spending time and energy on the fallout of its actions. Of my 33+ years of ordained ministry, this past year has been one of the most painful and disappointing. But then again, that's all part of being a family. What one member does effects others. The way one chooses to act puts a strain on those around them. Difference of perception drives a wedge in relationships. Promotion of personal agendas disrupts the peace, unity and purity of the church. As Augustine once said, "The Church is like Noah's ark. If it weren't for all the water on the outside, you couldn't stand all the stink in the inside." There are days we must look like a sad bunch of children in God's eyes, but no matter how sad we may look, we are still God's children. It's that knowledge that has given me the strength to get through some days. Ultimately we are each accountable for our actions and inactions, and as long as there is purity in our motive and integrity in our behavior we are being true to our call.

The Session has asked me to recap highlights of our journey as a congregation since last summer. Within ten days of the Assembly, we held an informal gathering after worship to discuss decisions made by the 654 elders and ministers elected by their presbyteries to attend the meeting. Those who voted were not the paid staff who carry out the administration duties of the Office of the General Assembly, rather they were members of the 171 presbyteries that make up the Presbyterian Church (USA). While serving as representatives of those presbyteries, they were not required to vote the way a majority of people in their presbytery feel, rather they were called to vote the way they felt the Holy Spirit was at work in their conscience.

To be sure, the Spirit is discerned differently at times. Few families I've known agree on everything. So it is with the church universal, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the local congregation. But when we disagree, we talk things out. Sometimes that dialogue leads to new understanding and sometimes it leads to agreeing to disagree. The challenge is to not let our disagreement separate us from the love of Christ.

The General Assembly (by a 61% -39% vote) took an executive action, called an authoritative interpretation, to remove the ban that prohibited any Presbyterian ministers from being a part of any service that united same gender couples. In turn, they gave permission for any Presbyterian ministers to perform, and any Presbyterian church to host same gender unions in states where it is legal. Our Session took immediate action to declare that no same gender unions would take place on our church property. At the same time, I made it clear that I would not perform any such ceremonies here or anywhere else. The General Assembly made it clear that no local church could or would be required to allow its property to be used for such ceremonies and that no Presbyterian minister would be required to perform such ceremonies.

By a vote of 71% to 29%, the General Assembly voted to ask presbyteries to vote on changing the definition of marriage in our constitution from being "between one man and one woman" to being "between two people (traditionally between a man and a woman)." During the year, each presbytery voted on that proposed change. Our presbytery, Kiskiminetas (made up of the Presbyterian churches in Indiana, Armstrong, Jefferson, Clarion and Elk counties) voted by a 70%-30% margin to maintain the Biblical definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman. That was a clear statement as to where we stand. Sadly, a majority of presbyteries around the country voted differently and so the definition was changed. That change however does not in any way require us to change what we believe to be true and do anything that is contrary to our conscience. Who we are and what we believe has not changed.

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By a vote of 333 to 331, the General Assembly voted to divest stock holdings from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions because of their investment in and profiting by what are perceived as non-peaceful pursuits in Israel and Palestine. While as a congregation we were about to invest some of our restricted funds in the Presbyterian Foundation, we have instead chosen to invest those funds in Thrivent Lutheran portfolios. The Session heard your concerns about divestment and responded by placing our funds in financial vehicles that are more supportive of Israel's place in God's plan.

Per Capita literally means "per head." It is an assessment whereby each person in a community pays the same amount to support the cost of basic services rendered. You do that in your local municipality. We also do that in the church. The General Assembly, the Synod and the Presbytery are each levels of church governance. They each have administrative expenses in the course of carrying out their work. The church takes those expenses and divides them equally by the number of people being served. In 2015, the per capita assessed for each active member of the church was \$27.05 with \$7.07 per person going to the work of the General Assembly, \$2.20 per person going to the work of the Synod and \$17.78 per person going to the work of the Presbytery. Many members pay their own per capita assessment over and above their financial contributions to the church. Some ask that church funds be used to cover their share. Because of their displeasure with actions at the General Assembly, some have intentionally withheld their per capita for 2015. In your offering envelope box, you each received a slip of paper that you could return to the church expressing your wishes. In order to honor your desire, the Session has stated that it will withhold the remittance of funds where such has been requested. If you said that you do not want your General Assembly per capita paid, not one penny of your contribution will be sent for General Assembly use. The Presbytery has also declared that none of its funds will be used to make up the difference. Again, not one cent of your contributions are going to the administration of the General Assembly unless you have specifically stated that you want them to. The same is true with the Synod and Presbytery if you so designated.

There has been concern that some of the mission money sent to the General Assembly is being used toward "liberal" causes. In response to that concern, the Session has designated where our mission money is used. Our contribution to GA mission is used only toward educational mission in Ethiopia, medical mission in Bangladesh and agricultural mission in Haiti. We have highlighted these missionaries in previous newsletters and will continue to make you aware of their ministries. The Session assures you that our mission support reflects our congregational values.

There was concern about a report made to GA about the issue of gun violence. While this report's point of view is different from many of those in the pew it is only a report. It in no way requires church members to change.

At each turn, the Session has heard your concerns, discussed the issues and responded as the responsible leaders you called and elected them to be. While some congregations in the presbytery received little or no information about the issues, you have been offered a number of resources. In an effort to be transparent, we have encouraged dialogue with leaders of neighboring congregations. In the Fall, we took the initiative of inviting all the churches in the presbytery to come here to discuss where we've been and where we're going. There were about eighty in attendance. That gathering led to a second time of conversation that was held in Plumville. Both times, leaders from our congregation were instrumental in making things happen.

In an effort to reverse the actions of the GA, a group of ten elders and ministers from our presbytery (5 of whom are from our congregation) met numerous times to compose an overture to restore to our constitution the traditional definition of marriage. It is built upon the foundation of Scripture and the confessions of our church. In September, the presbytery will vote on whether or not to send that overture to General Assembly. If possible, we will seek another presbytery to concur with it, and if one does, it will become a part of the business considered at the 2016 GA to be held in Portland, OR. To my knowledge we are the only one of the 171 Presbyteries to take initiation in crafting such an overture.

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Seeking to be faithful, a few weeks ago we invited The Rev. Dr. Ralph Hawkins of Shenango Presbytery to come and speak to a gathering of 90 elders and ministers in our Fellowship Hall about a new organization called The Fellowship Community. This is a national ministry birthed by the union of two conservative, evangelical groups: Presbyterians for Renewal and Fellowship of Presbyterians. It is committed to staying within the Presbyterian Church (USA) while working to help congregations grow in their understanding of who Scripture calls us to be and what faith in Jesus Christ calls us to do. It is not a reactionary group, defining who we are not. Rather it is a network of like-minded people of faith living out the Gospel in such a way we bear witness to the world so they come to know who we are. Our Session has taken action to unite with hundreds of other Presbyterian congregations taking this stand. We have made a commitment to be a part of this network for one year, and should we find the relationship edifying, we will renew that partnership when the time comes. A copy of the Covenant can be found in this newsletter.

As your pastor, I am proud of the leadership shown by the elders of this congregation. They have wrestled with the issues and made some tough decisions. From all you have read, I hope you can see how they have responded to the concerns of the church. There was not always agreement in the midst of discussion, but everything was done openly and in a spirit of love. To be sure, they have modelled integrity in the household of faith and I hope you respect their faithfulness.

Please continue to pray for this congregation and for the Presbyterian Church. Again and again the Bible tells us that the ways of the world and the ways of God will clash—so we should not be surprised when there is conflict. As you study the issues, read the original reports and do not base your decisions on second hand information. Any time you need specific information, please don't hesitate to call me and I will be happy to seek out the documents for you. At the same time, I would appreciate seeing any documents that you have found helpful.

We live in changing times, but God changeth not. Stand boldly in the truth. Proclaim faithfully what is right in the sight of God. Do all things in a spirit of love and show forth the grace that you've been shown.

In Christ,

*Pastor Jim*

## Worship Assistants—10:00 a.m.

### August 2 Communion

Liturgist: Alice Santoro  
 Acolyte: Cole Stuchal  
 Flowers: Gene & Chery Artman  
 Projector: Kayla Moran  
 Audio: Tyler Moran

### August 9

Liturgist: Mary Anzelone  
 Acolyte: Chase Stuchal  
 Flowers: Naomi Sigafos  
 Projector: Blake Tonkin  
 Audio: Mitchell Tonkin

### August 16

Liturgist: Bonni Dunlap  
 Acolyte: Olivia Eckenroad  
 Flowers: Bill & Deb Lint  
 Projector: Jonathan Clayton  
 Audio: Jaison McKinney

### August 23

Liturgist: Bobbi Monroe  
 Acolyte: Brylea Borbonus  
 Flowers: Jeff & Rose Lewis  
 Projector: Mary Anzelone  
 Audio: Alex Baker

### August 30

Guest  
 Minister: Rev. Ron Libengood  
 Liturgist: Rick Shoemaker  
 Flowers: Rick & Willa Shoemaker  
 Projector: Kayla Moran  
 Audio: Tyler Moran

### August Treasurer's Helpers

Joanne Torrance & Naomi Sigafos

## Scripture Texts for August

2 Ephesians 4:1-16  
 John 6:24-35  
 9 Ephesians 4:25-5:2  
 John 6:35, 41-51  
 16 Ephesians 5:15-20  
 John 6:51-58  
 23 I Kings 8  
 Ephesians 6:10-20  
 30 Guest Minister  
 Rev. Ron Libengood

## September

6 James 2:1-17  
 Mark 7:24-37

## Gracious Separation Policy

If a congregation in Kiskiminetas Presbytery seeks to leave the Presbyterian Church (USA) there is a process that must be followed. This process has been approved by the presbytery and those seeking dismissal are bound to follow it. The document can be found by Googling "Kiskiminetas Presbytery Gracious Separation Policy." It is there in pdf form. You can also contact the Presbytery Office in Yatesboro at (724) 783-7196. By contacting them you will be sure to get the most accurate of information emailed or sent to you.

## Our Church.com (r-church.com)

Our new website is up and running and its quite a site to behold. We want to thank Janet Smith and Jill Wolford for their many hours of gathering information and working with the designer. We hope it will keep our church family informed and at the same time be a way to invite others into our ministry. Please take a look at it and let us know what you think.

## Vacation Bible School 2015

We had a wonderful Vacation Bible School in June. Over fifty people took part. Check out the bulletin board for pictures. The smiles on the children's faces say it all. We give a special thanks to Jen Borbonus for her coordination of the variety of gifted volunteers who made things happen. We're already looking ahead to next year.

## Thank You

Bobbi and Pastor Tim would like to thank all those who sent kind greetings and congratulations on the occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary. The wonderful thing about notes and cards is that they can be enjoyed again and again. Please know that your thoughtfulness is appreciated—and pray for Bobbi as we go for the gold.

## Immunization Clinics

The PA Department of Health is providing a public immunization clinic at the Blairsville Community Center. Several dates are scheduled: August 19, September 16, October 21, November 18 and December 16. Each clinic will be held from 9:30—11:30 a.m. If you have questions or would like to schedule an appointment, call the PA Dept. of Health at 724-357-2995.

## A Message from Africa

The Rev. Steve and Brenda Stelle, missionaries we support in Ethiopia, are back in the US for two months sharing stories of their work there. One opportunity to hear them will be on Tuesday, August 18 at 5:30 p.m. at the Sandy Lake Presbyterian Church in Mercer County. If you would like to go and hear them speak, please let Pastor Monroe know. It would be nice to take a carload. Steve and Tim were college and seminary classmates.

## Secretary on Vacation

Jill will be taking a well deserved vacation from July 30– August 7. We wish her safe travels and thank those who have volunteered to staff the office in her absence.

## Essential Tenets

A "tenet" is a basic core belief that is held by an individual or a group. It is part of that which defines who they are. Included in this newsletter is a piece called "Essential Tenets." It explains those beliefs shared by those who are a part of The Fellowship Community. You can also learn more about the organization by visiting their website—[www.fellowship.community](http://www.fellowship.community). Click "about", then go down to "community members" for a list of who else (individuals and congregations) around the country have joined.

## Mandatory Reporter Training

According to our Book of Order, all ministers, elders and deacons in the church are considered mandatory reporters of child abuse. The presbytery has provided the 3 hour training required by Act 31 and 126. Pastor Tim and two elders attended this. We are in the process of putting together that same training here at the church. It is approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. We hope to open it to all churches in the area in an effort to make our community a safer place. We are working in partnership with The Alice Paul House of Indiana. The training is set for Thursday, September 17 from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

## A New Look

By the time you read this, the new carpet in the sanctuary should be installed. We thank all those who supported this project with their gifts of time and money.

## News from Church World Service (CWS)

This year CWS has provided many items for economically disadvantaged and homeless people. Most recently, for example, in Salt Lake City, Utah, 450 heavyweight Blankets were distributed by Crossroads Urban Center to the disadvantaged and homeless in the region, and in Moravia, New York, 120 heavyweight blankets, 60 School Kits and 120 Hygiene Kits were distributed by Good Shepherd Catholic Community to disadvantaged families. In 2014, CWS provided some 3,220 blankets to disadvantaged and homeless people in the U.S.

## Mission Giving Thank You's

Thank you for your recent donation of \$500 to Habitat for Humanity of Indiana. We especially appreciate support from repeat donors such as you. We have selected Leann Coleman as our next partner family. She has two young boys. The house is a couple blocks from their future junior high school. We hope to complete the house before the holidays. Donations such as yours allow us to renovate or build simple, decent houses for low-income working families who cannot afford conventional financing. Your donation will be used to buy building materials for our project.

Sincerely yours,  
George Rittenberger, Treasurer

Thanks to your recent gift of \$500, homeless families will have a safe, warm place to sleep until they can get back on their feet. Your willingness to help homeless families in our area weather this crisis in their life makes a difference. Your donation will help us continue to provide families with basic necessities like food and blankets as well as give us the resources to teach them the life skills that they need to maintain their independence after they leave the program. To date we have provided services to 33 families. Eighty three percent of our families have been able to maintain their permanent housing after leaving our program. Our agency is supported by donations and fund raising efforts. Generous donors like you are the key to our success and make it possible for Family Promise to provide local children and families in need with assistance and critical services.

Sincerely,  
Carole Reed, Network Director  
Becky Driscall, Board Member

## Walk for a Wonderful Life

The Suicide Task Force of Indiana County will host the 3rd Annual Walk for a Wonderful Life Sunday, September 27 beginning at Mack Park Grandstand. Registration will begin at 1:00 p.m. and the walk begins at 2:00 p.m. Registration fees (donation) of \$15 for those ages 13 and up. A free t-shirt will be guaranteed to people who pre pay the registration fee by August 31st. Proceeds from this event will benefit STF Community Awareness Programs.

## Compassion International News

Dear United Presbyterian Sunday School,

I say hello to you with lots of love, in the name of Jesus. Thank you very much for your letter because I feel excited to know that you pray for me. I want to talk to you today about my household. I live with my mom, my dad and my sister, and I help to do our house chores, such as making our beds and sweeping our house, among other things. What kind of house chores do you use to do? My house is built with bricks and cement blocks, and it is painted black and green; the place I like the most in my house is our living room because we use to get together in order to listen to music and share our free time as a family. I ask you to please pray for me because I will start studying soon so I will be able to fulfill this purpose. Of course, I want you to please pray for my parents and my extended family, so that our dear God strengthen us in each trial we may face in life. Have you faced any trials in life? I think about you with all my affection, and I want to express my gratitude to you for your sponsorship, your letters and your prayers for us. I invite you to read Romans 12:10. I say goodbye for now with a warm hug.

From your friend and brother,  
Jeferson Morales

## Newsletter Deadline

Please have articles to be published in the September issue of the UPLIFT Newsletter to the church office by Sunday, August 16. Thank you.



As summer comes to an end and we see the changing of the leaves to the bright colors of autumn, it reminds us of all the wonderful things God puts before us each and every day.

It is always exciting as we prepare to begin another year of Sunday school, especially with, but not exclusive to, the younger children. They are always so bubbly to come back and learn more about Jesus and get involved in Sunday school. The teachers do an Outstanding job and are devoted to teaching the word of God, from Preschool through the Adult classes.

**SEPTEMBER 13, 2015..FIRST DAY OF SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES (9:45-10:45 AM)**

**Christian Education Meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM.**

(These are open meetings to those who have an interest in our Christian Education program)

**“DON’T MISS THIS UPCOMING EVENT”**

**FALL FUN FEST**

**October 10, 2015..3 to 5 PM**

**Watch for more information in September’s Uplift**

**VBS 2015 UPDATE**

“Words cannot express the heartfelt thanks that I need to give to the many volunteers for Vacation Bible School. Everywhere I went throughout the week, children were learning, listening, and having a good time. I could not have done it without each and every one of you. It’s all for the kids!”

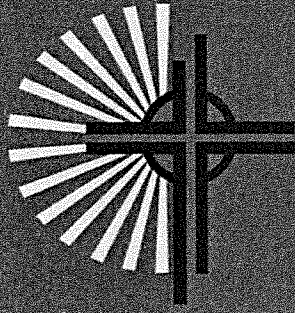
Thank you so much,  
Jen Borbonus

**“OUR NURSERY NEEDS YOU”**

**PLEASE CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING 1 HOUR EVERY 5 TO 6 SUNDAYS SO WE CAN KEEP IT OPEN.**

**Please see Deb Lint for further information or to schedule a date.**

\*Questions or Concerns regarding this or other Christian Ed items, see Deb Lint Chairman.



# Essential Tenets

Presbyterians have been of two minds about essential tenets. We recognize that just as there are some central and foundational truths of the gospel affirmed by Christians everywhere, so too there are particular understandings of the gospel that define the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. All Christians must affirm the central mysteries of the faith, and all those who are called to ordered ministries in a Presbyterian church must also affirm the essential tenets of the Reformed tradition. Recognizing the danger in reducing the truth of the gospel to propositions that demand assent, we also recognize that when the essentials become a matter primarily of individual discernment and local affirmation, they lose all power to unite us in common mission and ministry.

Essential tenets are tied to the teaching of the confessions as reliable expositions of Scripture. The essential tenets call out for explication, not as another confession, but as indispensable indicators of confessional convictions about what Scripture leads us to believe and do. Essential tenets do not replace the confessions, but rather witness to the confessions' common core. This document is thus intended not as a new confession but as a guide to the corporate exploration of and commitment to the great themes of Scripture and to the historic Reformed confessions that set forth those themes.

The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Each member of the church glorifies God by recognizing and naming His glory, which is the manifestation and revelation of His own nature. Each member of the church enjoys God by being so united with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit as to become a participant in that divine nature, transformed from one degree of

glory to another and escorted by Christ into the loving communion of the Trinity. So we confess our faith not as a matter of dispassionate intellectual assent, but rather as an act by which we give God glory and announce our membership in the body of Christ. We trust that when God's glory is so lifted up and when His nature is thus made manifest in the life of the body, the church will be a light that draws people from every tribe and tongue and nation to be reconciled to God.

## God's Word: The Authority for Our Confession

The clearest declaration of God's glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written. The Son eternally proceeds from the Father as His Word, the full expression of the Father's nature, and since in the incarnation the Word became flesh all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are offered to His disciples. The written Word grants us those treasures, proclaims the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and graciously teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son. We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God's Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.

We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God's Word. The Spirit will never prompt our conscience to conclusions that are at odds with the Scriptures that He has inspired.

The revelation of the incarnate Word does not minimize, qualify, or set aside the authority of the written Word. We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the Book of Confessions as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.

## **Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries**

### **Trinity**

The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who is both one essence and three persons. God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth and all beauty, of all love and all life, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, nor are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.

God has no need of anyone or anything beyond Himself. Yet in grace this Triune God is the one Creator of all things. The ongoing act of creation is further manifested in God's gracious sovereignty and providence, maintaining the existence of the world and all living creatures for the sake of His own glory. He is the Holy One, the ground of all being, whose glory is so great that for us to see Him is to die. Yet He has made the creation to reflect His glory, and He has made human beings in His own image, with a unique desire to know Him and a capacity for relationship with Him. Since our God is a consuming fire whom we in our sin cannot safely approach, He has approached us by entering into our humanity in Jesus Christ.

### **Incarnation**

This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human. As to His divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in every way but sin, of one substance with us, like us in having both a human soul and a human body. As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. As to His divinity, His glory fills heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross in our place.

We confess the mystery of His two natures, divine and human, in one person. We reject any understanding of the communication of attributes that must result in a blending of the two natures such that Jesus Christ is neither truly God nor truly human. We insist upon sufficient distinction between the two natures to preserve the truth of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, nor one who has merely been sent from God. Rather, in His coming we have seen God's glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God's very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity. This is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence.

This mystery of the incarnation is ongoing, for the risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human. He is bodily present at the right hand of the Father. When we are promised that one day we will see Him face to face, we acknowledge that it is the face of Jesus of Nazareth we will someday see. The one who, for us and for our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.



Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless when He ascended into heaven, but would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit as a comforter and advocate. We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit. He comes to us as He came to the gathered disciples at Pentecost: to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to accompany us in mission.

## **Essentials of the Reformed Tradition**

### **God's Grace in Christ**

God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebellion against God's will. God created human beings from the dust of the earth and His own breath, to be His images and representatives, conduits of God's grace to the creation. Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness. God also created human beings to speak His grace and truth to one another, to be helpers who are fit for one another, so that our social relationships would strengthen our ability to serve and obey Him. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to engage in relationships of tyranny and injustice with one another, in which power is used not to protect and serve but to demean. God further created human beings with the capacity for relationship with Him, with His law written on our hearts so that we had the ability to worship Him in love and obey Him by living holy lives. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to hate God and our neighbor, to worship idols of our own devising rather than the one true God.

As a result of sin, human life is poisoned by everlasting death. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God's design. We are not merely wounded in our sin; we are dead, unable to save ourselves. Apart from God's initiative, salvation is not possible for us. Our only hope is God's grace. We discover in Scripture that this is a great hope, for our God is the One whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

This grace does not end when we turn to sin. Although we are each deserving of God's eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin. Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give. All humanity participates in the fall into sin. Those who are united through faith with Jesus Christ are fully forgiven from all our sin, so that there is indeed a new creation. We are declared justified, not because of any good that we have done, but only because of God's grace extended to us in Jesus Christ. In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children.

Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for He is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with Him that a believer is able to know God as Father. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth about the Triune God, fully and perfectly revealed, for only He is the Truth, only He has seen the Father, and only He can make the Father known. Only Jesus Christ is the new Life that is offered, for He is the bread from heaven and the fountain of living water, the one by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together. The exclusivity of these claims establishes that God's love is not impersonal, but a particular and intimate love in which each individual child of God is called by name and known as precious; that God's love is not only acceptance, but a transforming and effective love in which His image within us is restored so that we are capable of holy living.

### **Election for Salvation and Service**

The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy. Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone

of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

We are all sinners who fall short of God's glory, and we all deserve God's eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God's presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God's consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others.

We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost. The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world. Christ sends us into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Christ has commanded us. We are now in service to God's plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God's kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

### **Covenant life in the church**

We are elect in Christ to become members of the community of the new covenant. This covenant, which God Himself guarantees, unites us to God and to one

another. Already in the creation, we discover that we are made to live in relationships to others, male and female, created together in God's image. In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father. Our faith requires our active participation in that covenant community.

Jesus prays that His followers will all be one, and so we both pray and work for the union of the church throughout the world. Even where institutional unity does not seem possible, we are bound to other Christians as our brothers and sisters. In Christ the dividing wall of hostility created by nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and language differences is brought down. God created people so that the rich variety of His wisdom might be reflected in the rich variety of human beings, and the church must already now begin to reflect the eschatological reality of people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation bringing the treasures of their kingdoms into the new city of God.

Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. First, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the word proclaimed may indeed become God's address to us. The Spirit's illuminating work is necessary both for the one who preaches and for those who listen. Second, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs that are linked to the things signified, sealing to us the promises of Jesus. In the Baptism of infants, we confess our confidence in God's gracious initiative, that a baby who cannot turn to God is nonetheless claimed as a member of the covenant community, a child of God, cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit; in the Baptism of adults, we confess our confidence that God's grace can make us new creations at any stage of our lives. In the Lord's Supper, we confess that as we eat the bread and share one cup the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ, so that His resurrection life may nourish, strengthen, and transform us. Third, the community of the Church practices discipline in order to help one another along the path to new life, speaking the truth in love to one another, bearing one another's burdens, and offering to one another the grace of Christ.

## Faithful Stewardship of All of Life

The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king – reflected in the church’s ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders. We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ’s offices within the world beyond the Church. Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news. Every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world. And every Christian is called to participate in Christ’s priestly, mediatorial work, sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God’s blessing and offering intercession to God on behalf of the world. We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ’s life.

Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God. We reject the claim that love of any sort is self-justifying; we affirm that all our affections and desires must be brought under God’s authority. We reject the claim that human souls are unaffected by the fall and remain naturally inclined to God; we affirm that soul and body alike must be cleansed and purified in order to love God properly. We reject the claim that the life of the mind is independent from faith; we affirm that unless we believe we cannot properly understand either God or the world around us. Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the ongoing project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.

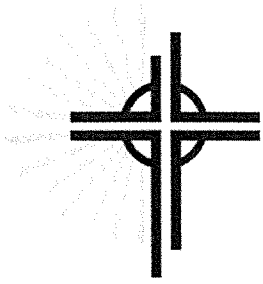
## Living in obedience to the Word of God

Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer – both individually and together – should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of

the world. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments. We therefore hold one another accountable to:

1. **worship God alone**, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;
2. **worship God in humility**, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments;
3. **eliminate** from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;
4. **observe** the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;
5. **give honor** toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the Church;
6. **eradicate** a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.
7. **maintain chastity** in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;
8. **practice right stewardship** of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;
9. **pursue truth**, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;
10. **resist the pull** of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God’s holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God’s will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.



# Covenant for Presbyterian Congregations

Individually or in congregations, we are a covenant people—with God and with each other. A covenant acknowledges that something beyond us is more important than ourselves. It is only in the keeping of such commitments however, that meaningful communities are formed and life in the church flourishes. When one part of the Body rejoices, we all rejoice and when one part suffers, we all suffer: *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* (1 Corinthians 12: 12, 27)

1. **Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** (Philippians 2: 9-11)

Because Jesus Christ is Lord, we will seek to be subject to him in all areas of life: (Matthew 22: 37-40)

2. **You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.** (1 Corinthians 6: 19b-20)

Because our lives are not our own...

- we will take responsibility for our thoughts and actions: (1 Timothy 6: 11b-12)
- we will make the glory and enjoyment of God our focus: (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q-1)
- relying on the Holy Spirit, we will rejoice in the Lord at all times: (Philippians 4: 4-7)
- Scripture will be our final authority in all decisions, choices, and actions: (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

3. **Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.** (Acts 20:28)

Because the church is not our own...

- we will actively support, pray for, and encourage the ordained leaders of our congregation, serving when called in accordance with our spiritual gifts: (Hebrews 13:7)
- we will fulfill our part of the baptismal covenant, nurturing children and those new in the faith: (Deuteronomy 6: 6-9)
- we will hold personal preferences lightly and guard the good of the whole: (Philippians 2: 1-4)

4. **The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it...** (Psalm 24:1)

Because the world is not our own...

- we will commit to a biblical tithe, joyfully giving additional offerings whenever and wherever possible to support the work of the gospel and the welfare of God's people. (2 Chronicles 31:12)

- we will consider our tithes and gifts as an expression of gratitude to the One who has been extravagantly generous toward us: *(Psalm 116: 12, 17)*
- we will be faithful stewards of God's creation; we will treat the creation as a gift to be cared for and used in ways which honor and glorify the Creator: *(Genesis 2:15)*
- we will behold the creation as a 'theater of God's glory', praising God for every reminder of his presence and love: *(Psalm 19:1)*
- we will honor the sanctity of human life above the claims of human freedom: *(Psalm 8: 4-5)*
- we will treat others with respect, honoring the image of God in them, however broken; we will seek God's peace and biblical reconciliation in all times and places: *(1 Peter 2:17)*
- we will sacrificially provide for the needs of the poor and the oppressed, the neglected and the abused, the widow and the orphan: *(Isaiah 58:6-7)*

**5. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. *(Galatians 5: 22-23)***

Because the Holy Spirit nurtures new and fruitful lives...

- we will yield to the work of the Spirit to be transformed from the inside out: *(Romans 12:1-2)*
- we will pray that God's transforming work in our lives will serve him: *(Ephesians 2:10)*
- we will set our eyes upon Jesus so that we may become what we see in him, for the good of the church and the glory of God: *(2 Corinthians 3: 18)*

**6. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. *(Hebrews 12: 1-2a)***

Because we do not journey through this life alone, but in the company of others and under a great cloud of witnesses...

- we will be an encourager of our brothers and sisters: *(Hebrews 3: 13)*
- we will gather regularly with our brothers and sisters for worship, hearing the word of God, participating in the sacraments and preparing to be sent into God's world: *(Hebrews 10: 24-25)*
- we give others who sign this covenant permission to both nurture and admonish us as we strive to keep the promises we make here to the glory of God: *(Proverbs 1:5)*

We, the Session of \_\_\_\_\_  
Church

\_\_\_\_\_ enter into this covenant on behalf of our congregation.  
City State

\_\_\_\_\_  
Moderator Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk of Session Date