

# CONFESSING PEACE

A project of the Peacemaking Committee of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### NICENE CREED

For us and for our salvation  
Jesus came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is the significance of the plural language in "for **us** and for **our** salvation?"
- What does "and became fully human" mean? Why does it matter that Jesus was really one of us?
- What does it mean to "look for" the resurrection and the life of the world to come?

### APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the

dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why did Jesus have to descend into hell?
- What is the "holy catholic Church," and what does it mean to claim membership in a universal Church?
- What is the "communion of saints"? How do we/do we not have communion with others?
- The Apostle's Creed is unique in that it is used by churches from different denominations and different cultures around the world. How does this unite us as believers in Christ, and challenge our tendency to isolate from one another?
- Discuss the following statement:

*Whatever else we might believe as Christians, our belief in our Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - unites us and gives us a sense of purpose and unity. Peace comes through our remembering our common belief in our Triune God.*

#### SCOTS CONFESSION

The chosen departed are in peace and rest from their labors.

Those who eat and drink at that holy table without faith, or without peace and goodwill to their brethren, eat unworthily.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How has "free will" influenced peace in our modern time/world?
- Once "victory over death" was realized, why haven't we been a more peaceful world?
- What peaceful good works come from the Holy Spirit within us?
- What does Jesus' interaction with Judas reveal about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

- Is communion at the Lord's Supper invalidated when we do not have communion with one another?

## HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Q. What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

A. That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Q. What does the Law of God require of us?

Jesus Christ teaches this in a summary in Matthew 22:37-40: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

Q. Who is [our] mediator who is at the same time true God and a true and perfectly righteous human?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is freely given to us for complete redemption and righteousness.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *What is your only comfort, in life and in death?*  
Explain how everything must fit God's purpose for my salvation.
- What is meant by the dominion of the devil?
- *What does the Law of God require of us?*  
Why does this confession say all the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments?
- *Who is (our) mediator who is at the same time true God and a true and perfectly righteous human?*  
How is Jesus Christ our mediator, both in a spiritual sense, but also in a political, cultural and theological sense?

## **SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION**

...those who are such in the Church have one faith and one spirit; and therefore they worship but one God, and him alone they worship in spirit and in truth, loving him alone with all their hearts and with all their strength, praying unto him alone through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator and Intercessor; and they do not seek righteousness and life outside Christ and faith in him. Because they acknowledge Christ the only head and foundation of the Church, and, resting on him, daily renew themselves by repentance, and patiently bear the cross laid upon them. Moreover, joined together with all the members of Christ by an unfeigned love, they show that they are Christ's disciples by persevering in the bond of peace and holy unity.

In the letter to the Corinthians the apostle says that the Lord gave the ministry of reconciliation to his ministers. And what this is he then explains, saying that it is the preaching or teaching of reconciliation. And explaining his words still more clearly he adds that Christ's ministers discharge the office of an ambassador in Christ's name, as if God himself through ministers exhorted the people to be reconciled to God, doubtless by faithful obedience. Therefore, they exercise the keys when they persuade [others] to believe and repent. Thus they reconcile humanity to God.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- What does it mean to have "one faith and one spirit" amidst differing theological and political opinions?
- How do we seek righteousness through Christ our Mediator?
- How is the Presbyterian Church (USA) "preserving the bond of peace and holy unity?" How are we not?
- What does the ministry of reconciliation look like?
- How is reconciliation with God linked to reconciliation with our neighbor?

## **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH**

This infallible assurance [of grace and salvation] doth not so belong to the essence of faith but that a true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties before they be partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given them of God, they may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto.

### **CONFESSING PEACE**

And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure; that thereby their heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How is one enabled by the Spirit to “know the things which are freely given to them of God?”
- Name the conflicting difficulties in your own setting. How is God with you in the midst of them?
- How does one make their calling and election sure?
- Are our “hearts enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost?” What blocks us from opening our hearts to God and others?

#### SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise towards humanity, in the estate wherein they were created?

A. When God created humanity, God entered into a covenant of life with them, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding them to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

Q. 20. Did God leave all humankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A. God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

Q. 36. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?

A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification are: assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

Q. 42. What is the sum of the Ten Commandments?

A. The sum of the Ten Commandments is: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *"God...elected some to everlasting life"*  
As Presbyterians, who do we believe the "some" are? How does God's agency of election change our actions towards others?
- What does it mean that Jesus brought us into an "estate of salvation?"  
How does this change the way we live?
- How does God bring us "peace of conscience?"
- Who are our "neighbors," and how do we show the love of God to them in our daily lives?

## LARGER CATECHISM

Q. 145. What are the sins forbidden in the Ninth Commandment [you shall not lie]?

A. ...all prejudicing of the truth, and the good name of our neighbors as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably...

Q. 194. What do we pray for in the fifth petition?

A. In the fifth petition (which is, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"), acknowledging that we and all others are guilty both of original and actual sin, and thereby become debtors to the justice of God, and neither we nor any other creature can make the least satisfaction for that debt: we pray for ourselves and others, that God of his free grace would, through the obedience and satisfaction of Christ apprehended and applied by faith, acquit us both from the guilt and punishment of sin, accept us in his Beloved, continue God's favor and grace to us, pardon our daily failings, and fill us with peace and joy, in giving us daily more and more assurance of forgiveness; which we are the rather emboldened to ask, and encouraged to expect, when we have this

testimony in ourselves, that we from the heart forgive others their offenses.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is peace one of the decrees of God?
- What prevents us from being peaceful?
- What is the difference between Christ's peace and grace?
- How is repentance a form of peace?
- How does peace relate to God's moral law?
- How is peace a benefit of Christ's mediation?
- What is meant by "Peace be with you"? Does your church say this in worship? How is this reality lived out, not just in word, but in deed?

#### THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN

As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

"Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt. 28:20.) "The word of God is not fettered." (II Tim. 2:9.)

The church's commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and Sacrament.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- This confession was written in direct response to the tyrannical power of

the Third Reich in Nazi Germany during World War II. Many of its authors paid for these powerful words with their lives.

How does this change the significance of these words for you? How are you putting your life on the line for the sake of God's freedom and grace?

- What "false doctrine" (areas of our lives we try to keep from God's grace) do we need to reject as individuals and as the Church?
- How are you living out Christ's commission to go and share the good news of God's free grace?
- How is God calling you to resist lesser powers that claim control of God's grace and freedom?

## **CONFESSION OF 1967**

The risen Christ is the savior of all people. Those joined to him by faith are set right with God and commissioned to serve as God's reconciling community.

The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of all in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they have to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. Their strength is in their confidence that God's purpose rather than human schemes will finally prevail.

To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as God's reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares God's labor of healing the enmities which separate people from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- This confession arose in the midst of national tensions about race, war, oppression and human rights. How are those tensions still present in our nation and world today? What might we confess as truth in that place of tension?
- How are you serving as God's reconciling community?
- Name practical ways members of the Church can be emissaries of peace in everyday settings.



- How does calling for peace put us at odds with unjust powers and principalities?
- What is God's message of reconciliation? How can it heal the enmities that separate us from one another?

## **A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH**

We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father.

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image,

male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community.

But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation.

Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage

to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- What is sovereign love?
- What does it mean to violate the image of God in others and ourselves?
- How does God act with justice and mercy to redeem creation?
- How does the Spirit unmask idolatries in Church and culture?
- What does it mean to hear voices of peoples long silenced?
- How are you and your church working with others for justice, freedom and peace?
- How do we peacefully attain diversity without divisiveness?
- What is preventing our world from loving each other and living in peace?

## BELHAR CONFESSION

We believe

that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

We believe

that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- This confession arose out of apartheid South Africa, as a statement against the forced separation of peoples on racial grounds, especially when reinforced by Christian faith. How do you see racial divisions in our own country? How do people use their faith to either support it, or speak out against it?
- How is the church blessed to be a peacemaker?
- What is the balance of being a witness both by word *and* by deed?
- What does it mean that God's lifegiving Spirit has conquered the powers of irreconciliation and hatred? Why do people still hate today?
- Where are people of color being discriminated against in our country and community?
- How is your church reaching across racial lines for the sake of Christ's message of reconciliation?