

Patrick James “P. J.” Southam – Ordination Questions

1. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
I do, I will, and I ask God to help me.

I first answered that question in 1988 when I was ordained as a deacon. I never saw a copy of the Book of Confessions and wasn't really aware of them other than the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. It wasn't until my seminary studies that I actually read and studied them, and came to love them. I believe in their wisdom so much that I indexed our confessions by Scripture reference in order to use them in my preaching and teaching. I found in my first call that the confessions are largely unknown to ruling elders and deacons. I undertook to make them easily accessible. And so I compiled selections to be read a little bit each day over the course of a year. I hope it is helpful.

Bible reading and studying are essential to me and are part of my daily devotion time. In reading and studying both the Bible and the confessions I am impressed by the sincere attempt at the writers of the confessions to be faithful to the Bible. I am grateful to be part of a *sola scriptura* branch of Christianity that considers the Bible to be our guide for faith and life, and whose founder John Calvin so deeply immersed himself in it for his work.

2. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
I do, and I ask God to help me.

This is the question that almost makes me want to cry. I say that because I love Jesus and I love his bride. I consider it a huge blessing to be allowed to pronounce the Aaronic benediction every week knowing that God absolutely loves these people. Jesus loves his church! Despite her spots, blemishes and imperfections, Jesus loves his church, and so do I.

In the last two to four decades (or more) we have been torn apart and thrown accusations at each other of not working for (name one – peace, unity, or purity). From the very book of Acts onward we see an at-times unpeaceful, disunified, and impure church. And we see faithful Christians trying to work together, correcting the erring, lifting the fallen, and binding the wounds of the wounded. Yet the way things are is not the way they have to be and so we make this promise at each installation.

The Bible contains God's truth, and so we continue to be guided by it and continue our imperfect but holy work of loving each other and trying to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church.