

## Renewing Our Vows

### Why We Became a "Confessing Church"

When it was announced during both services on May 20 that our Session had unanimously approved (on May 10) a motion to join the Confessing Church Movement within the Presbyterian Church (USA), the response from the pews was extremely positive. It has been suggested that the response may have been due more to the word "unanimously" than to what had been decided. Perhaps.

Since that time, there has been talk and rumors of talk among the members of our church indicating that not everyone is happy with this decision. Much of this unhappiness comes from not knowing exactly what this movement is all about, and why we got involved.

According to The Layman Online, as of August 16 "The Confessing Church Movement within the Presbyterian Church (USA) had grown from 1 to 759 congregations, representing in excess of 250,000 members, in only 20 weeks. What does that mean to us? What is this movement all about?

### What It Is and Isn't

The General Assembly of 1994 declared, "our Reformed faith is precious to us, and that we intend to hand it down to the next generation: our children and our grandchildren." Unfortunately, the policies and practices of the General Assembly Council, including the one this past June, continue to go against such essential tenets of our faith as those emphasized the Confessing Church Movement.

The General Assembly Council does not require anyone in its employ, or commissioned in its name, to uphold and proclaim the Church's confession that Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all. In various publications and official activities that are promoted by the General Assembly Council, the "new truths" of our culture take the place of Scriptural truth. This has been especially true when it comes to the clear teaching of Scripture regarding sexual morality, which is constantly challenged in regards to ordination standards.

The Confessing Church Movement is a grassroots response to this erosion of commitment to our Presbyterian-Reformed heritage--a tradition that lifts high the sovereignty of God, the Lordship of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. It is not an effort to divide the PCUSA, nor is it an attempt by the "religious right" to impose its agenda on the church. By stating the three "essential tenets," churches and individuals (conservatives, moderates and liberals) are renewing their commitment to the confessional nature of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The three statements, or tenets, of the movement are:

"Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all and the way of salvation."

"Holy Scripture is the Triune God's revealed Word, the Church's only infallible rule of faith and life."

"God's people are called to holiness in all aspects of life. This includes honoring the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, the only relationship within which sexual activity is appropriate."

Although these three tenets are at the center of the movement, there is no single "Confessing Church" resolution, nor is there a call to create a new confession for the Church. Some sessions are adopting the resolution of the Summit Presbyterian Church, the church where the movement began. Others are using generic resolutions provided by the Presbyterian Layman. Many are writing their own resolutions to reflect their congregational stand.

### **Why We Joined**

When elders and are ordained they make certain vows in the presence of the congregation. Among other things, they affirm that: 1) they trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the Head of the Church; 2) they accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word; 3) they accept the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church, and agree to be "instructed and led by those confessions" as they "lead the people of God."

By declaring our commitment to this movement we are, in a sense, renewing our vows as elders. As stated in the "Preamble" of our resolution:

"We have made this decision out of our concern about the course which elected officials of our denomination are following. Many actions which are being promoted and sanctioned by those elected officials stand in opposition to "the faith once delivered" as stated in Scripture, the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order.

"By this resolution we reaffirm our commitment to the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the Book of Confessions, and reflected in the Book of Order, as standards for the guidance and governance of the church, "subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him."

In drafting our resolution, supporting material from the Bible, the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order were included as endnotes, to represent the Scriptural and Constitutional support for each statement. Also, none of the statements in this resolution are at odds with the "Theological Statement of Belief" that was included in the Mission Statement drafted seven years ago by the previous PNC.

There are many other questions regarding this decision that have not been addressed, either in person or in this article. With that in mind, there will be a box in the narthex in which you can place your questions, comments and concerns. These will be reviewed and answered at the open-forum meeting scheduled for October 7th, following the 11:00 service. For those unable to attend, an informal report of the proceedings and answers given will be made available.