

A DECLARATION OF FAITH

Chapter One - The Living God

(1) We believe in one true and living God.

We acknowledge one God alone,
whose demands on us are absolute,
whose help for us is sufficient.
That One is the Lord,
whom we worship, serve, and love.

(2) God is greater than our understanding.

We do not fully comprehend who God is or how he works.
God's reality far exceeds all our words can say.
The Lord's requirements are not always what we think is best.
The Lord's care for us is not always what we want.
God comes to us on his own terms
and is able to do far more than we ask or think.

(3) God makes himself known in Jesus Christ.

Jesus' involvement in the human condition is God's involvement.
His compassion for all kinds of people is God's compassion.
His demand for justice, truth, and faithfulness is God's demand.
His willingness to suffer rejection is God's willingness.
Jesus' love for the very people who reject him is God's love.

(4) God moves in history with his people.

Jesus Christ stands at the center of the biblical record.
The Bible is the account of God's word and action in history,
together with his people's response in faith.
It tells how the Lord has moved with Israel and the church
towards the kingdom of God,
his just and loving rule over all.
It is the story of the one God,
who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
That story is still unfolding
and in faith we make it our own.
It forms our memory and our hope.
It tells us who we are and what we are to do.
To retell it is to declare what we believe.

(5) God is at work beyond our story.

We know that God is not confined to the story we can tell.
The story itself tells us God works his sovereign will

among all peoples of the earth.
We believe God works beyond our imagining
throughout the universe.

(6) We acknowledge no other God.

We must not set our ultimate reliance on any other help.
We must not yield unconditional obedience to any other power.
We must not love anyone or anything more than we love God.

(7) We praise and enjoy God.

To worship God is highest joy.
To serve God is perfect freedom.

Chapter Two - the Maker and Ruler of All

(1) God created and rules in love.

God created all the worlds that are
and upholds and rules everything.

We affirm that the universe exists
by the power of God's Word and Spirit.
God has chosen to give it reality
out of the love we have come to know in Christ.

God still works
through the processes that shape and change the earth
and the living things upon it.
We acknowledge God's care and control
in the regularity of the universe
as well as in apparently random happenings.
There is no event from which God is absent
and his ultimate purpose in all events is just and loving.
That purpose embraces our choices
and will surely be accomplished.
The Creator works in all things
toward the new creation that is promised in Christ.

(2) God sustains the goodness of creation.

God called all he had made good.

We declare that the universe of matter, energy, and life
is God's good creation in all its parts.
Even though evil has emerged within God's creation,
we may work and play in it
and explore it with wonder and joy.

Evil is whatever works against the loving purpose of God for human beings and all creation.
Natural forces may have evil effects.
Sinful human choices produce evil results.
Evil may become institutionalized in our social structures.
The power of evil to hurt and destroy,
to cut off the possibilities of full human life,
calls into question the power and goodness of God.
Whether we understand evil personally or impersonally,
we cannot explain how it originated in a world made good.
But we can affirm that evil is God's enemy as well as ours.

In Christ, God shared our agony over evil
and broke the back of its power
by bearing the worst it could do.
God works continually to overcome evil.
In the end it will be utterly defeated.
Therefore we have courage to endure evil,
to learn from it, and combat it.

(3) God made us to care for other created things.

God made human beings along with all the other creatures
and charged them to care for the earth
and all that lives on it.
We acknowledge we share in the interdependence
that binds together all God's creation.
Yet God gives us power to rule and tame,
to order and reshape the world.
We hold the earth in trust
for future generations of living things.
The Lord forbids us to plunder, foul, and destroy the earth.
The Lord expects us to produce, to consume, to reproduce
in ways that make earth's goodness available to all people
and reflect God's love for all creatures.
The Lord bids us use our technical skills
for beauty, order, health, and peace.

(4) God made us for life in community.

God created human beings with a need for community
and with freedom to enter into it
by responding to their Maker with grateful obedience
and to one another with love and helpfulness.
We believe that we have been created
to relate to God and each other
in freedom and responsibility.
We may misuse our freedom and deny our responsibility
by trying to live without God and other people

or against God and other people.
Yet we are still bound to them for our life and well-being,
and intended for free and responsible fellowship with them.
Since every human being is made
for communion with God and others,
we must treat no one with contempt.
We are to respect and love all other people
and ourselves as well.

(5) God made us male and female.

God made human beings male and female
for their mutual help and comfort and joy.

We recognize that our creation as sexual beings
is part of God's loving purpose for us.
God intends all people -
whether children, youth, or adults,
single, divorced, married, or widowed
to affirm each other as males and females
with joy, freedom, and responsibility.
We confess the value of love and faithfulness
and the disaster of lust and faithlessness
in all our associations as women and men.
Our creation as males and females must not serve as a pretext
for dominating, hurting, betraying, or using each other,
for denying anyone's rights or rewards
or opportunities to develop potential to the full.

We believe that marriage is a good gift of God.
The covenant of wife and husband
to love and serve one another faithfully
is intended to reflect the faithfulness of God.
God gives us the gift of sexual union
to be the sign of that mutual and lasting covenant
and a means whereby we may share in creating new life.
If married partners become parents,
their care for their children
is intended to reflect God's love and discipline.
When we fail each other as parents or partners,
we are called to forgive each other as God forgives us
and to accept the possibilities for renewal
that God offers us in his grace.

(6) The human race has rejected its Maker.

Though they were made to be like God,
man and woman broke community with God,
refusing to trust and obey him.
Their community with each other was broken

by shame and murder, lust and pride.

We confess that in all generations
men and women have rejected God again and again.
At times we seek in pride to become gods,
denying the good limits that define us as creatures.
At other times we draw back in apathy,
refusing to fulfill our human responsibilities.
The antagonisms between races, nations, and neighbors,
between women and men, children and parents,
between human beings and the natural order,
are manifestations of our sin against God.

Chapter Three - God and the People of Israel

(1) God chose one people for the sake of all.

To the world in its rebellion and alienation
God promised blessing and restoration.
The Lord chose Abraham and his descendants
as bearers of that promise for all peoples.
They had done nothing more than others
to deserve the Lord's favor,
but God loved them and made them his own.

We acknowledge God's freedom and grace.
Though we are unworthy,
the Lord has made us his own in Christ.
God has chosen us as his servants for the sake of the world
and destined us to be his daughters and sons,
giving us love and life,
calling us to worship and honor him.

(2) God delivered his people.

When Abraham's descendants were slaves in Egypt,
God heard their cries and prayers.
God remembered his promise
and sent Moses to free them from bondage.

We declare God's steadfast love and sovereign power.
The Lord can be trusted to keep promises.
The Lord still acts in the affairs of individuals and nations
to set oppressed and persecuted people free.

(3) God bound his people to himself in covenant.

Freed slaves became the people of God
when they accepted the Lord's covenant.
God charged them to respond to his rescuing love
by obeying his commandments.
Their life together was to express
the justice and compassion of their holy God.

Since we, too, are the Lord's covenant people,
we know we must be holy as the Lord is holy.
We must keep God's commandments,
not in order to earn or compel the Lord's favor,
but to reflect the character of God
and to be his grateful and loving people.

(4) God blessed and judged his people.

The Lord's care sustained the people of Israel.
God gave them a land where they could celebrate his goodness.
The Lord established their kingdom
and promised a ruler from the line of David
to reign in justice and peace.
When God's people worshiped the gods of the land,
when they put their trust in military alliances,
when they failed to do justice and oppressed the poor,
God sent the prophets to condemn their sins and to call the people back to obedience.
There were times of repentance and reform,
but in the end their kingdoms fell.

We declare God's goodness and justice.
God has blessed us beyond our deserving.
When we forget the Lord and worship our possessions,
when we fail to deal justly with the poor,
when we seek security no matter what it costs others,
we can expect God's judgment upon us.

(5) God did not forsake his people.

God restored some of the people to their land
and left others scattered over the earth.
In a time of exile and alien rule,
the Jews survived and multiplied.
They enriched the whole world:
they compiled the Scriptures, preserving God's Word to them;
they sang their songs of praise and lamentation;
they sought wisdom, examining God's ways in the world;
they searched the mysteries of rising and falling kingdoms
and set their hope on the kingdom of God.

We testify that God is faithful.

Even when we are faithless, God remains faithful.
The Lord still brings from oppressed and uprooted peoples
riches of insight and daring visions
that can judge and bless the world.
We can have confidence in God's coming kingdom
even in the darkest times.

Chapter Four - God in Christ

(1) God sent the promised Deliverer to his people.

Jesus, the long expected Savior,
came into the world as a child,
descended from David,
conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of Mary, a virgin.
He lived as a Jew among Jews.
He announced to his people
the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace on earth.

We affirm that Jesus was born of woman
as is every child,
yet born of God's power
as was no other child.
In the person and work of Jesus,
God himself and a human life
are united but not confused,
distinguished but not separated.
The coming of Jesus was itself
the coming of God's promised rule.
Through his birth, life, death, and resurrection,
he brings about the relationship between God and humanity
that God always intended.

(2) Jesus lived a truly human life.

Jesus was what we are.
He grew up in a family and a society
troubled by the common problems of the world.
His knowledge was limited
by his time and place in history.
He felt deeply the joy of friendship
and the hurt of being rejected.
Jesus prayed,
struggled with temptation,
knew anger,
and was subject to suffering and death.
He was like us in every way except sin.

Jesus was what we should be.
He served his Father with complete trust
and unwavering obedience.
He loved all kinds of people
and accepted their love.
In constant dependence upon the Holy Spirit,
Jesus allowed no temptation or threat to keep him
from loving God with his whole being
and his neighbor as himself.

We recognize in Jesus what God created us to be.
He exposes our failure to live as he lived.
He demonstrates the new humanity
God promises to give us through him.

3) Jesus was God in the flesh.

Jesus Christ overthrew evil powers
that enslaved and degraded people,
yet he made no use of power to protect himself.
He healed those who were sick in body and mind,
yet he did not avoid pain and suffering for himself.
He commanded his followers to place loyalty to him
above loyalty to family and country,
yet he lived among them as a servant
Jesus taught with authority,
challenging many time-honored customs and ideas,
yet he submitted to humiliation and death
without a word on his own behalf.
He forgave sinners,
yet he was counted among sinners.

We recognize the work of God in Jesus' power and authority.
He did what only God can do.
We also recognize the work of God in Jesus' lowliness.
When he lived as a servant
and went humbly to his death
the greatness that belongs only to God was manifest.
In both his majesty and lowliness
Jesus is the eternal Son of God,
God himself with us.

(4) Jesus died for sinners.

Religious leaders hated Jesus
because he criticized their hypocrisy
and reproved their neglect of justice and mercy.
They charged him with blasphemy and sedition
when he claimed to speak and act with God's authority.
One of Jesus' followers betrayed him.

Others abandoned and denied him
because they were afraid to stand with him.
Civil authorities condemned him
because he provoked unrest among the people.
He was sentenced, mocked, beaten,
and crucified as a common criminal.

We confess that in the execution of Jesus
the sin of the human race reached its depths.
The only innocent One was condemned and put to death,
not by the sinfulness of one nation,
but by the sinfulness of us all.
In the presence of Jesus,
who lived out what God wants us all to be,
we were threatened beyond endurance.
Blinded by our rebellion against our Creator,
we killed his Son when we met him face to face.

We believe that in the death of Jesus on the cross
God achieved and demonstrated once for all
the costly forgiveness of our sins.
Jesus Christ is the Reconciler between God and the world.
He acted on behalf of sinners as one of us,
fulfilling the obedience God demands of us,
accepting God's condemnation of our sinfulness.
In his lonely agony on the cross
Jesus felt forsaken by God
and thus experienced hell itself for us.
Yet the Son was never more in accord with the Father's will.
He was acting on behalf of God,
manifesting the Father's love that takes on itself
the loneliness, pain, and death
that result from our waywardness.
In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself,
not holding our sins against us.
Each of us beholds on the cross
the Savior who died in our place,
so that we may no longer live for ourselves,
but for him.
In him is our only hope of salvation.

(5) Jesus is our living Lord.

Jesus was dead and buried,
but God raised him from the dead.
The risen Lord appeared to his followers.
They recognized him as their Master
who had been crucified.
Before Jesus left them,
he commissioned them to proclaim to all people

the good news of his victory over death,
and promised to be with them always.

We are certain that Jesus lives.
He lives as God with us,
touching all of human life with the presence of God.
He lives as one of us with God.
Because he shares our humanity
and has bound us to himself in love,
we have an advocate in the innermost life of God.
We declare that Jesus is Lord.
His resurrection is a decisive victory
over the powers that deform and destroy human life.
His lordship is hidden.
The world appears to be dominated by people and systems
that do not acknowledge his rule.
But his lordship is real.
It demands our loyalty and sets us free
from the fear of all lesser lords who threaten us.
We maintain that ultimate sovereignty
now belongs to Jesus Christ
in every sphere of life.
Jesus is Lord'
He has been Lord from the beginning.
He will be Lord at the end.
Even now he is Lord.

Chapter Five - God the Holy Spirit

(1) The Holy Spirit is God active in the world.

By the Spirit God raised up leaders and prophets in Israel.
By the Spirit Jesus was conceived, baptized, and empowered.
By the Spirit the risen Christ is present with his church.

We affirm that the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life,
the Renewer and Perfecter of God's people,
the One who makes real in us what God has done for us.

(2) The Holy Spirit renews the community of faith.

Israel did not cease to be God's people.
Yet out of Israel a new people was formed.

The Spirit came with power to the followers of Jesus.
Led by the apostles they began to proclaim with boldness
the new thing God had done in Christ.
They began to experience in their fellowship
a new quality of common life.

We believe that by the power of the same Spirit
the church can be set on its way again,
even when it seems beyond hope of renewal.
We are grateful heirs of reformations and awakenings.
We are faithful to the reformers of the past
when we hold ourselves open in the present
to the reforming and renewing work of the Spirit.

(3) The Spirit enables people to become believers.

The Spirit enabled people of all races, classes, and nations
to accept the good news of what God had done in Christ,
repent of their sins,
and enter the community of faith.

We testify that today this same Holy Spirit
makes us able to respond in faith to the gospel
and leads us into the Christian community.
The Spirit brings us out of death into life,
out of separation into fellowship.
The Spirit makes us aware of our sinfulness and need,
moves us to abandon our old way of life,
persuades us to trust in Christ and adopt his way.
In all these things we are responsible for our decisions.
But after we have trusted and repented
we recognize that the Spirit enabled us to hear and act.
It is not our faith but God's grace in Jesus Christ
that justifies us and reconciles us to God.
Yet it is only by faith that we accept God's grace
and live by it.

(4) The Spirit helps believers grow in the new life.

The Christian fellowship was not a society of perfect people.
The struggle between the old way of life and the new was severe.
Yet the Spirit produced among followers of Jesus
love, joy, peace, and victories in the battle against evil.

We believe the Holy Spirit works today
whenever believers grow toward maturity in Christ.
As long as we live we struggle with sin,
but the Spirit's presence assures us
God will complete what he has begun in us.

(5) The Holy Spirit equips the Christian community.

The early Christians recognized
a diversity of abilities and functions
as gifts of the Spirit.
Some were tempted to use these gifts

to serve their own needs and ambitions,
to form elite groups who looked down on others.
But the gifts were given for the common good,
to build up the community in love
and to equip it for its mission in the world.
We are convinced that the Holy Spirit
still calls people to various offices in the church
and gives diverse gifts to believers.
We are to use them to speak and embody plainly
the gospel of Christ in the world.
No gift is of value without love.

(6) The Holy Spirit unifies the Christian church.

The diversity in the early church
caused tension and conflict.
Yet the Spirit bound them into one body,
enriched by their differences.

We know that the same Spirit gives us a unity
we cannot create or destroy.
The Spirit moves among us
not to end diversity or compel uniformity,
but to overcome divisiveness and bitterness.
The Spirit leads us to struggle against
the lines of race and class,
the ambitions of competing parties,
the loyalties to individuals and traditions,
that divide us.
The Spirit impels us
to make the unity of Christians
visible to a divided world,
and assures us that we shall be one.

(7) The Holy Spirit is free.

The Spirit created readiness for the gospel
where the first Christians least expected it.
The Spirit often thwarted their plans
and led them in new directions.
They could not coerce or restrict the Spirit

We affirm the Spirit's freedom.
The Holy Spirit works in the church
but not on our terms or under our control.
The Holy Spirit works beyond the church
even among those we suspect or scorn.

(8) The Spirit is one with the Father and the Son.

In the presence of the Holy Spirit
the first Christians experienced God's own presence,
not a power different from God or less than God.
In Jesus Christ they met God himself,
not a second God or one who is only like God.
Yet they worshiped with the people of Israel
one God alone.
Reflecting on this mystery,
the ancient church formulated the doctrine of the Trinity.
We believe with the church through the centuries
that God is what he has shown himself to be
in his story with his people:
One God who is the Creator and Sustainer,
the Savior and Lord,
the Giver of life within, among, and beyond us.

We affirm the unity of God's being and work.
We may not separate the work of God as Creator
from the work of God as Redeemer.
We may not set the Son's love against the Father's justice.
We may not value the Holy Spirit's work
above the work of the Father and Son.
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God.

We affirm richness and variety in God's being and work.
We may not deny the real distinctions in God's unity.
In his eternal being and in all his activity,
the one God is always and at the same time
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Six - the Word of God

(1) God makes himself known through his Word.

God has not waited to be discovered.
The Lord has taken the initiative
and addressed his Word to humankind in many ways.
Through the Word of God the world was created.
The Word became flesh in Jesus Christ.
Through the Word of God the New Creation is being formed.

We believe God's Word is God's communication to us.
Although God is free to speak to us in unexpected ways,
we confidently listen for his Word
in Jesus Christ,
in holy Scripture,
in preaching and the sacraments.

(2) Jesus Christ is the living Word of God.

The Word which was with God from the beginning
was embodied in Jesus Christ.

We hold that what God says to us and does for us
centers in Jesus Christ our living Lord
as he is remembered, known, and expected.
In Christ God's Word of acceptance takes flesh:
by grace through faith
we are set right with God,
adopted as children of God,
not because of anything we have done,
but because of what Christ has done.

In Christ God's Word of demand is lived out:
to love God and neighbor as he did
is what God requires of us.
The Spirit adds no different Word from God,
but leads us deeper
into the truth of God uttered in Jesus Christ.

(3) The Bible is the written Word of God.

Led by the Spirit of God
the people of Israel and of the early church
preserved and handed on the story
of what God had said and done in their midst
and how they had responded to him.
These traditions were often shaped and reshaped
by the uses to which the community put them.
They were cherished, written down, and collected
as the holy literature of the people of God.

Through the inward witness of the same Spirit
we acknowledge the authority of the Bible.
We accept the Old and New Testaments as the canon,
or authoritative standard of faith and life,
to which no further writings need be added.
The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
are necessary, sufficient, and reliable
as witnesses to Jesus Christ, the living Word.
We must test any word that comes to us
from church, world, or inner experience
by the Word of God in Scripture.
We are subject to its judgment
all our understanding of doctrine and practice,
including this Declaration of Faith.
We believe the Bible to be the Word of God
as no other word written by human beings.

Relying on the Holy Spirit,

who opens our eyes and hearts,
we affirm our freedom to interpret Scripture responsibly.

God has chosen to address his inspired Word to us
through diverse and varied human writings.
Therefore we use the best available methods
to understand them in their historical and cultural settings
and the literary forms in which they are cast.
When we encounter apparent tensions and conflicts
in what Scripture teaches us to believe and do,
the final appeal must be to the authority of Christ.
Acknowledging that authority,
comparing Scripture with Scripture,
listening with respect to fellow-believers past and present,
we anticipate that the Holy Spirit
will enable us to interpret faithfully
God's Word for our time and place.

(4) Preaching communicates the Word of God.

In different styles and ways,
believers have related Scripture
to the situations in which they lived.
The Spirit has given them power and boldness
to speak God's Word through their words.

We believe that the preaching of the Word
is an event in which God himself confronts us.
As the gathered community speaks to God in worship
we expect God to speak to us in preaching.
Preaching can take a variety of forms.
When it is faithful and obedient
the Holy Spirit uses it to convert unbelievers,
to strengthen believers,
to form and reform the church.

We hold that teaching goes hand in hand with preaching.
It prepares people to hear the Word of God
and enables them to reflect and act on it.

(5) The sacraments confirm the Word of God.

In his history with his people in the world,
God has often made material things
channels through which his grace is understood
and powerfully experienced.
Out of the life and ministry of Jesus,
the Church received baptism and the Lord's supper
as special sacraments of God's saving action.

We believe that in the washing with water
and in the eating of bread and drinking of wine
the Holy Spirit demonstrates and confirms the promises
of the embodied, written, and preached Word
with vividness and power.

In these concrete human actions
believers declare their acceptance of the promises
As the Word is acted out in the sacraments
so the sacraments are to be accompanied by the Word.

We believe that in baptism
the Spirit demonstrates and confirms God's promise
to include us and our children in his gracious covenant,
cleansing us from sin,
and giving us newness of life,
as participants in Christ's death and resurrection.
Baptism sets us in the visible community of Christ's people
and joins us to all other believers by a powerful bond.
In baptism we give ourselves up in faith and repentance
to be the Lord's.

For both children and adults, baptism is a reminder
that God loves us long before we can love him.
For both, God's grace and our response to it
are not tied to the moment of baptism,
but continue and deepen throughout life.

We believe that at the Lord's supper
the community of believers is renewed
by the memory of Christ's life and death,
by his real presence in the power of the Holy Spirit,
and by the promise of his coming again.
Christ makes himself known to us in the breaking of bread.
He offers us his body broken for our sake
and his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.
We accept his promises and gifts
and depend on his life to sustain ours.
In turn we offer ourselves in thanksgiving
to the risen Lord who has conquered death.
So we celebrate his victory here and now
and anticipate the joyous feast in his coming kingdom.
Reunited around one loaf and cup,
we receive strength and courage
to continue our pilgrimage with God in the world.

Chapter Seven - the Christian Church

(1) The church is founded on Jesus Christ.

Gathered around the Word and sacraments,

those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,
together with their children,
have formed a corporate, visible body
in pilgrimage with God across the centuries.
The church has sought to order its life and ministry
in obedience to the teaching of the first apostles.
It has attempted to carry out Christ's commission
in various institutional forms and structures
that demonstrate both continuity and change.

We acknowledge that Christ chooses to be known in the world
through this community of ordinary people,
therefore we dare not despise or abandon the church.
Christ is the head of the church,
therefore we are responsible to Christ
when we make policy and decisions in the church.
Christ is the foundation of the church,
therefore it will not fall despite our weakness.
We are confident that the Lord of the church
will judge and defeat our sinful intentions and actions,
help us in our weakness and blindness,
and use the church to accomplish his purposes.

(2) The church is marked by the Holy Spirit.

Across the centuries since the church was founded,
the Spirit has formed and identified it.
We recognize the true church of Jesus Christ
wherever the work of the Spirit is evident:
in preaching and sacraments,
in the new life and continuous growth of believers,
in the sharing of spiritual gifts and material things,
in mission and service to the world.
The boundaries of the church are not clearly known to us,
but God knows those who are his.

(3) The Christian church arose within Israel.

The followers of Jesus
remained at first within the people of Israel.
As persons from all nations joined them,
they were separated from the Jewish community.
Yet they continued to accept Israel's story as their own
and to consider themselves part of the people of God.

We can never lay exclusive claim to being God's people,
as though we had replaced those
to whom the covenant, the law, and the promises belong.
We affirm that God has not rejected his people the Jews.
The Lord does not take back his promises.

We Christians have often rejected Jews throughout our history with shameful prejudice and cruelty.

God calls us to dialogue and cooperation that do not ignore our real disagreements, yet proceed in mutual respect and love. We are bound together with them in the single story of those chosen to serve and proclaim the living God.

(4) The church encounters other faiths.

The church has often lived and worked among those who do not share the Christian faith. It has been sometimes corrupted and sometimes helped by other religions, and by secular faiths and ideologies. In turn it has affected them for good or ill.

We do not fully comprehend God's way with other faiths. We need to listen to them with openness and respect, testing their words to us by God's word. We should be loving and unafraid in our dealings with them. We know God calls us to share the gift of Christ with all who will receive it. We are confident God judges all faiths, including our own.

(5) The church exists within political communities.

Throughout its history the church has struggled to be faithful to God in political situations: under persecution, or as an established arm of the state, or in separation from it. God rules over both political and religious institutions. We must confuse neither with the kingdom of God. We must not equate the Christian faith with any nation's way of life or with opposition to the ideologies of other nations. We hold Christians are to be law-abiding citizens unless the state commands them to disobey God, or claims authority that belongs only to God. We must not allow governments to impose Christian faith by legislation, nor should we demand undue advantages for the church. The church must be free to speak to civil authorities, neither claiming expert knowledge it does not have, nor remaining silent when God's Word is clear.

(6) The church has its ongoing story with God.

The church's story with God did not end

with the latest events recorded in Scripture.
Across the centuries the company of believers
has continued its pilgrimage with the Lord of history.
It is a record of faith and faithlessness, glory and shame.
The church has been persecuted by hostile societies,
but it has also known times of privilege and power
when it joined forces with dominant cultures.
It has sought holiness
through separation from society,
as well as through involvement in the world's affairs.
It has experienced life-giving reformations.
It has known missionary expansion throughout the world,
but also periods of dwindling resources and influence.
It has divided into rival orders, sects and denominations,
but it has also labored for cooperation and union.

We confess we are heirs of this whole story.
We are charged to remember our past,
to be warned and encouraged by it,
but not to live it again.
Now is the time of our testing
as God's story with the church moves forward through us.
We are called to live now as God's servants
in the service of people everywhere.

Chapter Eight - the Christian Mission

(1) God sends the church into the world.

God has not taken his people out of the world,
but has sent them into the world
to worship him there and serve all humankind.

We worship God in the world
by standing before the Lord in behalf of all people.
Our cries for help and our songs of praise
are never for ourselves alone.
Worship is no retreat from the world;
it is part of our mission.

We serve humankind
by discerning what God is doing in the world
and joining him in his work.
We risk disagreement and error
when we try to say what God is doing here and now.
But we find guidance in God's deeds in the past
and his promises for the future,
as they are witnessed to in Scripture.

We affirm that the Lord is at work,

especially in events and movements
that free people by the gospel
and advance justice, compassion and peace.

(2) God sends us to proclaim the gospel.

God sent his Son
to proclaim release to those who are bound,
to announce that God's promised kingdom is at hand,
to urge everyone to repent and believe the good news.
The Lord is moving toward the time
when the glorious liberty of the children of God
will be manifest throughout the whole creation.
We testify God is at work here and now
when people obey Christ's commission
to witness to him and make disciples of all nations,
when they spread the good news by their words
and embody it in their lives.

We believe that God sends us
to tell all nations
that Christ calls everyone to repentance, faith and obedience.
We are to proclaim by word and deed
that Christ gave himself to set people free
from sin and self-hatred,
from ignorance and disease,
from all forms of oppression,
and even from death.
We are to offer them in Christ's name
fullness of life now and forever.
We must not distort the gospel
by weakening its promises or demands,
by identifying it with oppressive structures,
by pointing to ourselves instead of Christ.
We must not restrict our proclamation
to persons just like ourselves.
We invite people everywhere
to believe in Christ and become his followers.
We urge them to join us in telling others the good news
and in struggling for justice, compassion, and peace.

(3) God sends us to strive for justice.

God has reached out to those who suffer injustice
and defended the excluded, the poor, and the hungry.
The Lord is moving toward the time
when justice will roll down like waters
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

We are persuaded God is at work here and now
when people deal fairly with each other
and labor to change customs and structures
that enslave and oppress human beings.

We believe God sends us to work with others
to correct the growing disparity
between rich and poor nations,
to achieve fair legislation justly administered and enforced,
to make the operation of courts and penal institutions
more just and humane.

We are charged to root out prejudice and racism
from our hearts and institutions.

We are commissioned to stand with women and men
of all ages, races, and classes
as they struggle for dignity and respect
and the chance to exercise power for the common good.

We must not countenance in the church and its institutions
the inequities we seek to correct in the world.

We must be willing to make such amends as we can
for centuries of injustice which the church condoned.

(4) God sends us to exercise compassion.

In his concern for justice in the social order
God has never forgotten the needs of individuals.
In the end the Lord will judge all persons
by the simple, unremembered acts of kindness
they did or failed to do
for the least of their sisters and brothers.

We acknowledge God is at work here and now
when people show personal concern for each other
and work to make helping agencies,
including the church itself,
more compassionate.

We believe God sends us
to risk our own peace and comfort
in compassion for our neighbors.

We are to give to them and receive from them,
accepting everyone we meet as a person;
to be sensitive to those who suffer in body or mind;
to help and accept help
in ways that affirm dignity and responsibility.

We must not limit our compassion to those we judge deserving,
for we ourselves do not deserve the compassion of God.

(5) God sends us to work for peace.

God has brought out of the horrors of warfare
the judgment and deliverance of nations.
Yet the Lord has condemned the atrocities of war
and warned his people not to trust in military might.
The Prince of Peace does not bring in his rule by force.
The Lord is moving toward the time
when nations will not learn war any more.

We affirm God is at work here and now
when people are ashamed of the inhumanity of war,
perceive the threat of annihilation
that hangs over the human race,
and seek other ways of settling international disputes.

We believe God sends us
to minister to people on all sides of wars:
the victims,
the participants,
and those who in conscience refuse to participate.
It is our duty to attack the causes and roots of war,
to unmask the idolatry
that places national security above all else,
to urge all nations to devote to making peace
the resources, intelligence, and energy
that have gone to making war.

Chapter Nine - Christian Discipleship

(1) Christ calls us to be disciples.

In forming his people and sending them into the world
Jesus called individuals to be disciples.
They were to share the joy of his companionship,
to understand and obey his teachings,
and to follow him in life and death.

We confess that Christians today are called to discipleship.
Life shared with Christ and shaped by Christ
is God's undeserved gift to each of us.
It is also God's demand upon every one of us,
never perfectly fulfilled by any of us.
Forgiven by God and supported by brothers and sisters,
we strive to become more faithful and effective
in our daily practice of the Christian life.

(2) Christ calls us to live in disciplined freedom.

Jesus came to set people free
by the power of the gospel.
In so doing he did not abolish,

but fulfilled the law and the prophets.
Through his teaching and the teaching of the apostles
he showed what it is to be free and obedient.

We declare Christ has freed us
from trying to save ourselves by obeying the law.
He restores to us God's law as a gift and delight.
The law describes concretely the shape of our freedom.
When we accept its discipline,
it keeps our personal lives from being chaotic
and increases our effectiveness in the church's mission.

(3) Christ calls us to live in the presence of God.

Jesus lived with a constant sense of his Father's presence.
He put God's claim on his life above all else.
He joined others in God's worship and praise.
He drew strength from the Scriptures.
He prayed and taught his disciples to pray.

We believe Christ gives us and demands of us
personal lives that are centered in God
and open to God's reality and rule.
Christ teaches us
to put obedience to God
above the interests of self, family, race or nation;
to offer God joyously
our money, ability, and time.
It is part of our discipline
to observe a day of worship and rest,
setting aside our own working to enjoy God's work,
celebrating with sisters and brothers the Lord's goodness.
We need constantly to search out God's way in Scripture,
not expecting detailed directions for every decision,
but relying on the Word to tell us who God is,
to press God's present claim on us,
and to assure us of God's grace and comfort.
We are charged to pray for ourselves and others
with gratitude, boldness, and persistence,
confident that God hears and answers our prayers
in ways best for us all.
Life in God's presence issues in life for others,
for if we do not love sisters and brothers whom we see,
we cannot love God whom we do not see.

(4) Christ calls us to live for our neighbors.

Jesus broadened the definition of neighbor
to include those ordinarily despised and excluded.
His life in behalf of others

led to persecution and death.
He commanded his disciples to live the same way.
We believe Christ gives us and demands of us
lives that recognize all people in all cultures
as our neighbors on this planet.

Christ teaches us
to go beyond legal requirements
in serving and helping our neighbor,
to treat our neighbor's needs as our own,
to care passionately for the other's good,
to share what we have.
It is part of our discipline
to live in simplicity,
avoiding greed and luxury
that threaten our neighbor's survival.
We are obligated to speak the truth in love,
to listen with patience and openness,
to love our enemies,
to accept the risk and pain
which love involves.

(5) Christ calls us to pilgrimage toward the kingdom.

Jesus announced the coming of God's kingdom
and its hidden presence in the midst of the world's kingdoms.
He taught his disciples to seek God's kingdom first.

We believe Christ gives us and demands of us
lives in pilgrimage toward God's kingdom.
Like Christ we may enjoy on our journey
all that sustains life and makes it pleasant and beautiful.
No more than Christ are we spared
the darkness, ambiguity, and threat of life in the world.
We are in the world, but not of the world.
Our confidence and hope for ourselves and other people
do not rest in the powers and achievements of this world,
but in the coming and hidden presence of God's kingdom.
Christ calls each of us to a life appropriate to that kingdom:
to serve as he has served us;
to take up our cross,
risking the consequences of faithful discipleship;
to walk by faith, not by sight,
to hope for what we have not seen.

Chapter Ten - Hope in God

(1) God keeps his promises and gives us hope.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

God kept his promises.
All that we can ever hope for
was present in Christ.
But the work of God in Christ is not over.
God calls us to hope for more than we have yet seen.
The hope God gives us is ultimate confidence
that supports us when lesser hopes fail us.
In Christ God gives hope for a new heaven and earth,
certainty of victory over death,
assurance of mercy and judgment beyond death.
This hope gives us courage for the present struggle.

(2) All things will be renewed in Christ.

In Christ God gave us a glimpse of the new creation
he has already begun and will surely finish.

We do not know when the final day will come.
In our time we see only broken and scattered signs
that the renewal of all things is under way.
We do not yet see the end of cruelty and suffering
in the world, the church, or our own lives.
But we see Jesus as Lord.
As he stands at the center of our history,
we are confident he will stand at its end.
He will judge all people and nations.
Evil will be condemned
and rooted out of God's good creation.
There will be no more tears or pain.
All things will be made new.
The fellowship of human beings with God and each other
will be perfected.

(3) Death will be destroyed.

In the death of Jesus Christ
God's way in the world seemed finally defeated.
But death was no match for God.
The resurrection of Jesus was God's victory over death.
Death often seems to prove that life is not worth living,
that our best efforts and deepest affections go for nothing.
We do not yet see the end of death.
But Christ has been raised from the dead,
transformed and yet the same person.
In his resurrection is the promise of ours.
We are convinced the life God wills for each of us
is stronger than the death that destroys us.
The glory of that life exceeds our imagination
but we know we shall be with Christ.
So we treat death as a broken power.

Its ultimate defeat is certain.
In the face of death we grieve.
Yet in hope we celebrate life.
No life ends so tragically
that its meaning and value are destroyed.
Nothing, not even death, can separate us
from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

(4) God's mercy and judgment await us all.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
God has already demonstrated his judging and saving work.
We are warned that rejecting God's love
and not caring for others whom God loves
results in eternal separation from him and them.
Yet we are also told that God loves the whole world
and wills the salvation of all humankind in Christ.

We live in tension between God's warnings and promises.
Knowing the righteous judgment of God in Christ,
we urge all people to be reconciled to God,
not exempting ourselves from the warnings.
Constrained by God's love in Christ,
we have good hope for all people,
not exempting the most unlikely from the promises.
Judgment belongs to God and not to us.
We are sure that God's future for every person
will be both merciful and just.

(5) Hope in God gives us courage for the struggle.

The people of God have often misused God's promises
as excuses for doing nothing about present evils.
But in Christ the new world has already broken in
and the old can no longer be tolerated.

We know our efforts cannot bring in God's kingdom.
But hope plunges us into the struggle
for victories over evil that are possible now
in the world, the church, and our individual lives.
Hope gives us courage and energy
to contend against all opposition,
however invincible it may seem,
for the new world and the new humanity
that are surely coming.

Jesus is Lord!
He has been Lord from the beginning.
He will be Lord at the end.

Even now he is Lord.