

## SESSION 2: **A COMMON COMMITMENT**

### **OUR CONFSSIONAL HERITAGE**

Many people are confused by talk of “confessing,” “confessions,” and “confessional” churches. Both inside and outside the church confession is ordinarily associated with admission of wrongdoing and guilt: criminals “confess” that they have committed a crime; famous people write “true confessions” about their scandalous lives; persons visit a “confessional” to tell of their sin. In Christian tradition, however, confession has an earlier, positive sense. To confess means openly to affirm, declare, acknowledge or take a stand for what one believes to be true. The truth that is confessed may include the admission of sin and guilt but is more than that. When Christians make a confession, they say, “This is what we most assuredly believe, regardless of what others may believe and regardless of the opposition, rejection, or persecution that may come to us for taking this stand.

These affirmations of the church’s faith always have three reference points: God, the church itself, and the world. Confessions of faith are first of all the church’s solemn and thankful response to God’s self-revelation in scripture, expressed with a sense of responsibility to be faithful and obedient to God under the guidance of God’s Holy Word. Secondly, in a confession of faith members of a Christian community seek to make clear to themselves who they are, what they believe, and what they resolve to do. Finally, Christians confess their common faith not only to praise and serve God and not only to establish their self-identity but to speak to the world a unified word that declares who they are and what they stand for and against. Confessions thus have a social and political significance as well as an understand of God through the Bible and the application of God’s Word to a historical moment.

**Our confessions also contain three catechisms:** *The Heidelberg Catechism, The Westminster Shorter Catechism, The Westminster Larger Catechism*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Occasion</b>	<b>Key Issue</b>
4th Century	The Nicene Creed	The Emperor Constantine, having made Christianity the official religion of the Empire, wanted doctrinal agreement to strengthen the power of the church as a cohesive element for the Empire.	This short creed is concerned with the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity.
5th Century	The Apostles' Creed	This creed is based on a baptismal creed used in Rome at the end of the second century, and reflects doctrines current at least by the end of the first century. It was affirmed by those seeking membership in the church through baptism, and later was used more widely by the church.	A brined general statement of Christian belief based on a trinitarian outline.
1563	The Heidelberg Catechism	The area around Heidelberg, Germany had both Lutheran and Reformed influences, as well as, a considerable Catholic population. Frederick III ordered the writing of this catechism in order to have a definitive doctrinal statement to settle the unrest of his kingdom. The two men he asked to write this statement had been influenced by the Swiss Reformation and they produced a strong Reformed confession.	The catechism is divided into three sections: Of Man's Misery, Of Man's Redemption and Thankfulness.
1646	The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Longer and Shorter Catechism	The writing of this confession was commissioned by the Long Parliament in England as a means of articulating its Protestant viewpoint against the Catholic King Charles. The assembly, chosen by Parliament, included members of the House of Lords, the House of Commons and ministers.	The Westminster Assembly chose not to use a historical framework for its doctrinal statement, but rather to set down its confession in abstract terms in order to be more precise. The confession opens with a chapter on the Holy Scripture,

			and indication of the importance of Scripture. The sovereignty of God and His covenant with man are major themes. Two-thirds of the confession deals with the Christian life indicating the importance of a life obedient to God's will.
1934	The Theological Declaration of Barmen	This statement was made by the German Confessional Churches (Lutheran & Reformed) in the face of the rising power of Hitler and his attempts to make the church subservient to the state. The declaration sets six statements from Scripture against six false doctrines current in the Germany of that day.	Jesus Christ is Lord.