

## CONFESSIONAL BANNERS

Sometime after The Book of Confessions was adopted following the merger between the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1958, Richard K. Avery, pastor and Donald S. Marsh, choir director, of the Port Jervis Presbyterian Church in New York, devised eight banners portraying the symbolic meaning of the confessions.

The 180<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1968 referred to the Office of the General Assembly for action the inclusion in The Book of Confessions color photographs and explanations of the symbolism. Since then, congregations throughout the General Assembly have taken up the project to make these banners for use in their own churches.

At the reunion of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1983, it was resolved that a new statement of faith be written and included in our ninth confessional document. "A Brief Statement of Faith" became part of The Book of Confessions upon approval by the 203<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly in 1991. A banner designed by Gay M. Sorenson, a member of the First Presbyterian Church, Port Charlotte, Florida, to symbolize this document, was included The Book of Confessions, beginning with the 1997 edition.



## **THE APOSTLES' CREED**

**THE SOMBER BROWN COLOR:** The difficulty and rigor of early Christianity under persecution; also the monastic tradition.

**THE PURPLE ARCHES:** The entrances to caves or catacombs, where early Christians met in shape of Gothic church windows.

**THE ANCHOR CROSS:** Security in Christ, as found by the apostles, some of whom were fishermen.

**THE FISH:** An ancient symbol for the Christian faith, perhaps a secret code mark. letters of the Greek word for fish can be used as the first letters in the phrase "Jesus Christ God's Son Savior."

**THE CHALICE:** The Lord's Supper, and thus the earnest and simple fellowship of the early church.

**THE UPSIDE DOWN CROSS:** Peter, chief of the apostles, who, in legend, is said to have been crucified upside-down because he thought himself unworthy of a death like his Master's



## **THE SCOTS CONFESSION (SCOTLAND, 1560)**

**THE BLUE OF THE SHIELD:** The background color of the Church of Scotland.

**THE TARTAN, X-Shaped CROSS:** A form called St Andrew's Cross, he being the apostle who brought the gospel to Scotland. The Tartan, or plaid, is that of the Hamilton clan in honor of the first martyr of the Scottish Reformation, Patrick Hamilton.

**THE CELTIC CROSS:** Another ancient form associated with Christians of the British Isles.

**THE SHIP:** A symbol for the Church; the Confession contains a remarkable, strong doctrine of the Church.

**THE BIBLE AND THE SWORD:** Paul called the word of God "The sword of the Spirit," and the sharpness of John Knox's preaching of the Word was a major power for reformation in Scotland.

**THE BURNING BUSH WHICH IS NOT CONSUMED:** Reminding us of Moses' Sinai experience, thus a symbol of God's presence and call: the chief symbol of the Church of Scotland.



### **THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM (GERMANY, 1563)**

THE REGAL RED AND GOLD: A tribute to the rule of Frederick III who ordered the writing of the Catechism for followers of John Calvin in Germany.

THE CROWN OF THORNS, THE "GERMAN" CROSS AND THE TABLETS: Symbols of Misery, Redemption and Thankfulness--the three basic themes of the Catechism. (The tablets stand for the Ten Commandments, which appear in the Catechism where it teaches that obedience is the proper form of thankfulness.)

THE TWO LIGHTS AND THE FIRE: The Trinity--with the Hebrew name of God on the left orb, the Greek monogram for Jesus on the right orb, and the flame standing for the Holy Spirit. There is a long discussion of the Trinity in the Catechism.



## **THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION (SWITZERLAND, 1566)**

THE BLUE AND WHITE: Heraldic colors of ancient Switzerland.

THE CROSS: Again dominant on this banner because of the extensive discussion of salvation in the Confession.

THE HAND AND THE BURNING HEART: A traditional symbol for John Calvin, father of Presbyterianism in its Swiss homeland.

THE LAMP: Knowledge and discipline, two of the themes of the Helvetic which make it unique.

THE SHEPHERD'S CROOK AND THE PASTURE: The pastoral ministry and the flock's care for its own members.

THE CHALICE AND THE WAVES: Holy Communion and Baptism.



**THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION AND  
THE SHORTER CATECHISM (ENGLAND, 1646)**

THE THREE LONG PANELS AND THE MAROON TRIANGLE: The Trinity.

THE EYE: God's providence and control of all life and history-a dominant theme of Westminster.

THE CROWN: God's rule.

THE OPEN BIBLE: The authority of the written Word, basic to this Confession's teachings.

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA: The A and Z of the Greek alphabet, the first and last--referring to Christ and His death for us as central to our faith.



### **THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN (GERMANY, 1934)**

THE SWASTIKA CROSSED OUT AND THE CROSS RISING: A protest and witness against Nazi tyranny and any effort to take the role of God and control of the church.

THE FIRE: The suffering and death which follows from defense of the faith against tyranny, as for some of the Barinen signers. But the cross survives such persecution and the crisis of war, rising out of the flames.



### **THE CONFESSION OF 1967 (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

THE BLUE, THE RED AND THE GOLD: Colors of the official seal of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

THE GOLDEN, DOWN-REACHING HAND (REPEATED FROM THE NICENE BANNER): God, relating to His world.

THE CROWN (REPEATED FROM THE WESTMINSTER BANNER) AND THE NAIL-SCARRED HAND: The death and victory of Christ as he reconciles the world.

THE FOUR HANDS OF DIFFERENT COLORS, THE CLASPED HANDS AND THE GREEN CIRCLE: The reconciled world at the foot of the cross - God's act of reconciliation being the starting point and theme of the Confession of 1967.

THE STARS AND PLANETS ON THE BLUE BACKGROUND: The Space~Age setting of this Confession.





### **A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH**

**THE CROSS:** A rainbow of colors representing the celebration of unity with the diversity of cultures and races living in Christ.

**THE BLUE BACKGROUND:** Symbolizes the universe as the light of the Word of God bringing us together.

**THE EARTH:** racks symbolizing our divisiveness and diversity, yet the faith we confess unites us with the one universal Church.

**THE SECURE HANDS OF GOD:** Remind us that He who holds our world together in turmoil will unite us in the grace of Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of our knowledge of God's sovereign love and our living together in the Holy Spirit.

**THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA):** Symbol of A Brief Statement of Faith has a prominent position on this banner. This symbol represents the descending love of peace and the baptism of Christ. The open Bible symbol is the Word of God. The Font recalls the Sacrament of Baptism, while the table image recalls the other Sacraments of Communion, the Last Supper, and the pulpit as the preachy of the Word. The flames represent the burning bush and Pentecost. The overall image suggests the human figure with stretched out arms.



### **THE NICENE CREED (4TH CENTURY)**

THE CHURCH IS ALSO A SWORD: A symbol for the Emperor Constantine and his successors because he called the ecumenical council which began the process of thinking which resulted; because he was the first Christian emperor and because he began the tradition of imperial Christianity. The cross is central here because the doctrine of Christ is central in the Creed.

THE BLUE TRIANGLE AND THE THREE SYMBOLS WITH IT: The doctrine of the Trinity formalized in the Nicene Creed.

THE HAND REACHING DOWN: God, the Father.

THE CHI RHO MONOGRAM: Christ - the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, used by Constantine on shields and helmets of his Army.

THE DOVE: The Holy Spirit.

THE CROWNS: The rule and glory of GOD.