

**I.004 REPORT**  
**MINISTERIAL TEAM: BELHAR IMPLEMENTATION**  
**PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY BOARD**  
**March 22-24, 2017**

Presenting Question: <i>What strategic steps should be undertaken to resource mid councils and Worshiping communities desiring to implement the vision of a fully inclusive church informed by the Belhar Confession</i>
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Members: Patsy Smith, Chair; Mark Brainerd, Co-Chair; Rosemary Mitchell, Staff; Ellen P. Cason, James Foucher, Chad Herring, Maggie Jorgenson, Nicholas Yoda
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<b>Project Began: September 2016</b>
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<b>Project Ended: March 22, 2017</b>
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**Recommendations:**

**That the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board:**

- 1. Encourage the Shared PMA/OGA Office of Mid Council Relations to promote, over a designated period of implementation (a year, a decade), use, engagement, and dissemination of currently available resources (booklets, pamphlets, web links...), exemplars of implementation activities, and access to the Confession of Belhar resource page [www.pcusa.org/belhar](http://www.pcusa.org/belhar), with continual updates as materials are developed.**

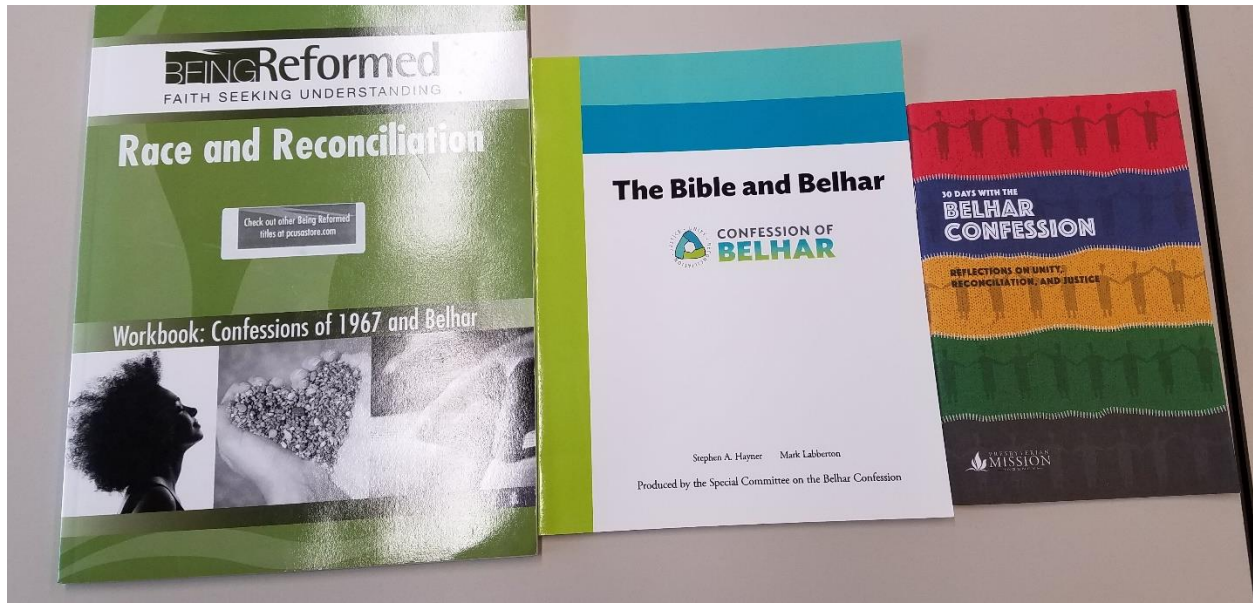
**Rationale:**

Mid-Councils have indicated a lack of resources for ‘getting started’ or lack of ideas about what to do. Survey results indicate mid-councils may not know what resources are available or may not be confident to ask for what they may not be able to afford. A source listing will help to build team, communications, connections, and support between and among Mid-councils, PMA and OGA.

Quotes and considerations from the survey:

- Belhar doesn't seem relevant here as we're almost all white
- We're struggling to stay afloat here and so can't devote time and energy to this
- I'm not sure what it means to implement a confession or why it's any more important/urgent to do so with Belhar than with Westminster
- How do we access Belhar-related resources including those mentioned in the survey?

Especially inform Mid-Councils of how to obtain resources (free, downloads, low cost, cost assistance, and the like). Examples include Confession of Belhar implementation programs and resources:



2. **Encourage the PMA to promote integration of the Confession of Belhar into the worship and study life of mid-councils and in PMA Board meetings over year(s) or the next decade to celebrate its implementation.**

**Rationale:**

Belhar is a Confession about which to be excited in the hearts and lives of congregations and Worshiping Communities. The recommendation calls for team development, connectivity, and implementation based on PMA and OGA suggestions for litanies, hymns, and other ways of implementing and celebrating all elements of the Confession(s).

Sample Presbytery Meeting Program from Florida Presbytery ([Attachment A](#)).

Samples from Hudson River Presbytery

Church Flyer: Belhar for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ([Attachment B](#))

Press Release November 2016: Should Religion Tackle Societal Issues? ([Attachment C](#))

3. **Request Mission Engagement and Support Staff to conduct intentional interviews with staff of non-responding mid-councils: use same mid-council survey questions to gain insight into opinions and activities related to Belhar Implementation; and foster continuous engagement with PMA.**

**Rationale:**

Continuing the effort to contact the *non-responders* works toward *inclusion* and provides opportunity to build a communication pathway so that even more voices are heard.

The *Importance* of Belhar Implementation response map ([Attachment D](#))

The *Engagement* in Belhar Implementation response map ([Attachment E](#))

## Methodology and Rationale:

1. The Team assessed current engagement of mid-councils and congregations with the Confession of Belhar.

### Methodology:

Design and distribute a Mid-Council Survey – worked with Research Services and Mid-Council office to design and distribute a survey to assess how Mid-Councils have used, are using, or plan to engage with the Confession of Belhar (Deborah Coe, Perry Chang, and Sue Krummel).

Include questions regarding Belhar implementation in the Clerk's Annual Questionnaire – worked with Research Services to include specific Belhar-related items in the planned questionnaire.

The questions in summary were:

- Are you familiar with the Belhar Confession?
- Prior to this survey, were you aware that the Belhar Confession had been added to the *Book of Confessions*?
- How likely are you to include The Belhar Confession in your congregation's ministry, such as a worship and/or Christian Education programming?
- ...would you be willing to share what you have done as a resource for others?

Outcomes: results summary received and reviewed. Key points emerged regarding...

- descriptions of programs and study opportunities created by mid-councils
- information on what resources have been/are being used
- how current resources are being used
- level of interest and engagement
- awareness of available webpage: [www.pcusa.org/belhar](http://www.pcusa.org/belhar)

2. The Team reviewed current resources to gain information regarding resources and format(s) available.

- Charles Wiley, Theology, Formation and Evangelism provided background, and described available resources. Examples are:
  - *Lenten Reflections on Belhar*, edited by Kerri Allen and Donald K. McKim, introduction by Allen Boesak. Witherspoon Press/Congregational Ministries Publishing. \$12.95 each. Available at <http://www.pcusastore.com/Products/9781571532220/lenten-reflections-on-the-confession-of-belhar.aspx>
  - *30 Days with the Belhar Confession: Reflections on Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice*. Presbyterian Peacemaking Program PDS 24358-16-004. A companion piece containing Scriptures reflective of Belhar Confession themes such as unity, reconciliation and justice. Contains suggestions for prayer and reflection for

greater engagement with the Belhar Confession. \$1.00 each. Available at <http://store.pcusa.org/2435816004>

- *The Bible and Belhar (Confession of Belhar)*. Stephen A. Hayner and Mark Labberton PDA 21162-13-006. Provides accompanying Scripture for sections of the Belhar, the accompanying letter, and questions for discussion. Available for download at <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/bible-and-belhar/>
- *Being Reformed - Faith Seeking Understanding: Race and Reconciliation*. Congregational Ministries Publishing PDS 680854. A study of The Confession of 1967 and the Confession of Belhar. Available to Borrow at <http://resource.moravian.org/ResourceView/1/6323>
- *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Antiracism Study Guides*. A six-week study guide focusing on racism, the church, the Bible, and the United States. Available for download at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-community-antiracism-study-guides/>
- Belhar Web site – Charles Wiley provided an update on revisions to web site following General Assembly approval of Belhar. The site is currently *live* and will be continually updated as resources become available. The web site team will add resources from mid-councils and links to other informative sites:
  - Confessing our Faith with the Belhar and Accra’ Confessions
  - Belhar Confession and Points of Connection with the PC(USA): Some Moderatorial Observations, Neal Presa, 2013.
  - Create easier-to-locate links regarding Belhar resources (PMA and OGA)
- Rev. Dr. Rhashell Hunter, Director of Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries provided connection between Belhar and various overtures approved by General Assembly
- Vince Patton (who has since left PMA) – provided connection with Diversity Team
- Mark Hinds, Theology, Formation, and Evangelism - provided complimentary copies for team of Lenten Reflections on Confession of Belhar

**Logistics, if applicable:**

- Next Steps:

Project Begins: <b>March 2017</b>	Project Ends: <b>June 2017</b>
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- Financial Implications:

Total Cost: \$ _____	
Amount within existing budget: \$ _____	Amount in addition to existing budget: \$ _____
Notes:	Notes:

**Follow-up to be Done:**

Examine results of the Clerk's Survey, comparing responses and geographic response areas with findings of the mid-councils' survey. That information is not yet available.

**As a result of this work, do you have any suggested questions for future Ministerial Teams?**

Intentionally examine the health of the connectional system with specific attention to mid-council engagement.

Intentionally examine issues associated with communications within struggling Presbyteries and with non-responding presbyteries relative to engagement, interaction, and implementation of the Belhar Confession and the global (starting at home) mission of PC(USA).

Intentionally increase communication with presbyteries, especially non-responding presbyteries. The intent is for PMA / OGA to reach out and touch mid-Councils regarding opinions, status, and sustainability. The aim is to avoid the limitations of engaging only with those who contact PMA / OGA (online or by phone or letter).

# Attachment A. Presbytery Meeting Program from Florida Presbytery

2



**Order of Worship  
Presbytery of Tampa Bay Stated Meeting  
Thursday, November 17, 2016  
First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland, Florida**

## GATHER IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Prelude "Christ, You Are the Fullness"  
*by Jayne Latva* Scott Ziegler

Call to Worship Libby Shannon  
Leader: The Lord be with you.  
**People: And also with you.**  
Leader: Lift up your hearts.  
**People: We lift them to the Lord.**  
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Prayer of Invocation

\*Hymn #430 "Come Sing, O Church in Joy"  
Affirmation of Faith Norm Hatter  
*from The Confession of Belhar*

Leader: We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

**All: We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.**

Leader: We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;

\*Indicates congregation standing, as able

**All: That unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain; that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;**

Leader: That this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;

**All: That this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.**

Leader: That true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

**All: JESUS IS LORD. To the one and only God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

## GOD'S WORD PROCLAIMED

Scripture Reading Matthew 8:5-11, 13  
Sermon Marsha Rydberg  
**"Beginning with Jesus"**

# Attachment A. Presbytery Meeting Program from Florida Presbytery

3

## GIVE THANKS TO GOD

Offering Kathy Broyard

Offertory Improvisation on "Love Divine" Scott Ziegler

\*Hymn #592 **"The Doxology"**

\*Prayer of Dedication

Installation of the Moderator and Vice Moderator David Baker

We are called by God to be the church of Jesus Christ, a sign in the world today of what God intends for all humankind. The call of Christ is to willing, dedicated discipleship.

Our discipleship is a manifestation of the new life we enter through baptism. Discipleship is both a gift and a commitment, an offering and a responsibility.

Mike Loudon and Libby Shannon, the grace bestowed upon you in baptism is sufficient for your calling because it is God's grace. By God's grace we are saved, and enabled to grow in the faith and to commit our lives in ways which serve Christ.

Mike, God has called you to particular service as moderator of this Presbytery. Libby, God has called you to particular service as vice moderator of this Presbytery. Show your purpose, now, by answering these questions:

- Who is your Lord and Savior?
- Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word and showing his love?
- Do you welcome the responsibility of this service because you are determined to follow the Lord Jesus, to love your neighbors, and to work for the reconciling of the world?
- Will you serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love, relying on God's mercy and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit?

(Addressing the presbytery)

- Do you, members of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay, confirm the call of God to our brother, Mike Loudon, as Moderator and our sister, Libby Shannon, as Vice Moderator, in the service of Jesus Christ?
- Will you support and encourage them in this ministry?

Charge and Blessing Marsha Rydberg

Prayer of Installation John Fullerton

4

The Lord's Supper  
Invitation to the Table  
Prayer of Consecration and The Lord's Prayer  
The Communion  
Prayer of Thanksgiving

Jill Duffield

## GO IN GOD'S NAME

\*Hymn #376 **"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"**

\*Benediction Mike Loudon

Postlude "Toccata in D"  
by Gordon Nevin Scott Ziegler

***Today's offering is designated for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to help recovery efforts of those impacted by Hurricanes Hermine and Matthew.***

## Participating in Worship Leadership

Reverend David Baker, Stated Clerk and Communications Director, Presbytery of Tampa Bay  
Reverend Libby Shannon, Associate Chaplain Eckerd College  
Reverend Norm Hatter, Honorably Retired  
Elder Marsha Rydberg, Moderator, Presbytery of Tampa Bay  
Reverend Alex Sosa, Pastor First Hispanic Presbyterian Church, Tampa  
Reverend Dr. John (Mike) Loudon, Pastor First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland and Vice Moderator of Presbytery of Tampa Bay  
Elder Ann Wortman, Presbyterian Church in the Highlands, Lakeland  
Reverend Dr. John Fullerton, Pastor St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Dunedin and New Port Richey; Chair of the Coordinating Team, Presbytery of Tampa Bay  
Reverend Dr. Jill Duffield, Editor and Publisher of The Presbyterian Outlook  
Kathy Broyard, Executive Director Florida Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Network  
Scott Ziegler, Organist First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland  
Dr. Daniel Gordon, Director of Fine Arts First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland

# Belhar\* for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Panel Presentations with Q&A

**November 6<sup>th</sup> 2-4**

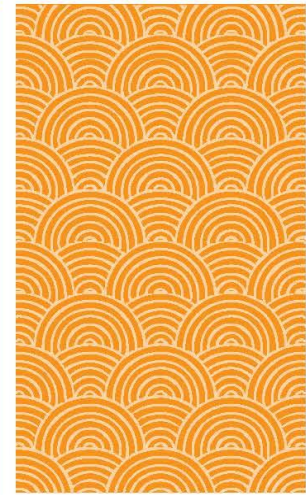
**Germonds Presbyterian Church**

39 Germonds Rd, New City

[germondschurch.org](http://germondschurch.org)

(845) 623-2120

Childcare available



\*The South African Belhar Confessional declaration was composed to address Apartheid. Panelists will each present a different issue they believe must address in our own context.

Contact:

Rev. Dr. Laura Krauss  
pastorlaura@germondschurch.org  
Germonds Presbyterian Church  
39 Germonds Road  
New City, NY 10956

For IMMEDIATE Release:  
November 4, 2016

**Should Religion Tackle Societal Issues?:  
Belhar Confession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*New City, New York -*

The Belhar Confession, adopted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa, directly challenged the Apartheid system. Does religion in America, in Rockland County, also have courage to address their own contemporary societal issues as a spiritual matter?

In the spirit of the prophetic statement by South African Christians over three decades ago, Germonds Presbyterian Church is sponsoring a panel discussion. Invited local religious leaders will be highlighting contemporary social problems of great concern to them. An open Q&A session will follow the presentations. The general public is encouraged to attend and participate in the conversation.

Moderator: Rev. Dr. Laura Krauss

Panelists:

Dr. Allan Janssen  
Rev. Dr. Lori Knight-Whitehouse  
Dr. Travis E. Jackson  
Rick Ufford-Chase  
Dr. Robert Trawick  
Rev. Dr. Susan de George

Issues:

Belhar's Historical Context  
White Privilege  
Educational Segregation and Integration  
Immigration Rights  
Palestinian - Israeli Issues  
LGBT Rights

Panel Presentations with Q&A

November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2 – 4 pm

Germonds Presbyterian Church  
39 Germonds Rd, New City, NY  
(845) 623-2120

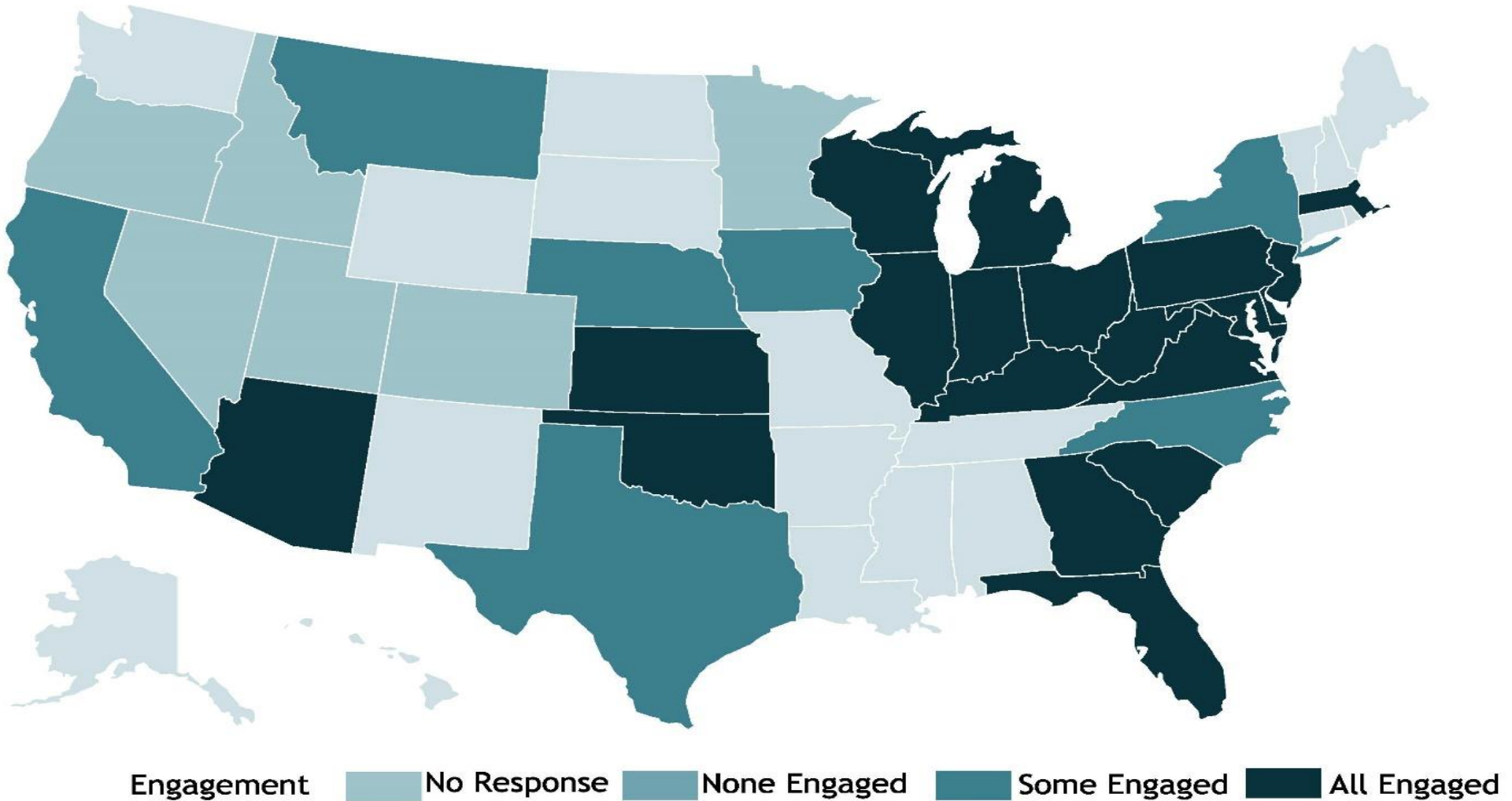


Childcare Available



Attachment E. The *Engagement* in Belhar Implementation response map

# Mid-Council Belhar Engagement By Respondent's State



**ITEM I.401  
FOR INFORMATION**

**CONFESSION OF BELHAR**

How should the church respond when sin disrupts the church's unity, creates division among the children of God, and constructs unjust systems that steal life from God's creation? Members and leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa faced these questions under apartheid, a system of laws that separated people by race from 1948–1994.

Apartheid formed a racially stratified society. Those with the lightest skin tones were offered the greatest protection and opportunity. Non-“white” persons were separated into three categories; each skin tone step away from the “white” category represented a decrease in governmental protections and opportunities. Racial separation was established by law and enforced through violence. Non-white citizens lived with constant and intrusive police presence and interference in the daily functions of life. Those who protested risked punishment, imprisonment, and even death.

The roots of apartheid go back in South African culture and church for several centuries. The Dutch Reformed Church embodied racial separation when it formed three “mission” churches in the late nineteenth century, each categorized by its racial identity. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church was formed for people designated as “coloured” (biracial). The church's complicity with racial separation kept Christians from worshipping and coming to the Lord's Table together. The white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) created an elaborate biblical interpretation and ideology that supported racial separation and then the formal apartheid policies.

The Dutch Reformed Church's active participation and theological defense of apartheid moved the global church to name apartheid a *status confessionis*—a conviction that the Gospel was at stake and thus the faith needed to be proclaimed. Leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church wrestled with this situation theologically and practically. One outcome of their struggles was the emergence of the Confession of Belhar in the early 1980s.

The Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the church that succeeded the Dutch Reformed Mission Church after apartheid, has offered the Confession of Belhar to the global Reformed family as a gift, believing that the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice issue a call from God to the whole church toward holy action, transformation, and life.

The Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar recommended that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) add Belhar as part of its Constitution because it believed the clarity of Belhar's witness to unity, reconciliation, and justice might help the PC(USA) speak and act with similar clarity at a time when it faces division, racism, and injustice.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved the Confession of Belhar as part of the *Book of Confessions* at the 222nd General Assembly (2016)

**CONFESSION OF BELHAR**

September 1986<sup>1</sup>

**10.1**

Revelation 21:6–7

**We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

**10.2**

Matthew 28:19–20

**We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

**10.3**

Ephesians 2:13–20

**We believe**

Ephesians 4:11–16,  
Psalm 133

John 17:20–23

John 13:34

Colossians 3:12–16

Philippians 2:1–5

1 Corinthians 1:10–13

Ephesians 4:1–6

1 Corinthians 10:16–17

Ephesians 3:18–20

Galatians 6:2

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

1 Corinthians 12:24b–  
28, Ephesians 3:14–20

1 Corinthians 12:4–11,  
Romans 12:3–8

Galatians 3:27–29

- that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;
- that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways;
  - \* in that we love one another;
  - \* that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another;
  - \* that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another;
  - \* that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind;
  - \* have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope;
  - \* together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ;
  - \* together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity;
  - \* together know and bear one another’s burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ;
  - \* that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another;
  - \* that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;
- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church;

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<sup>1</sup> This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

10.4

**Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

10.5

**We believe**

2 Corinthians 5:17–21

Matthew 5:9, 13–16; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1–5

Romans 6:12–14, Colossians 1:11–14

James 2:8–9

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ;
- that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells;
- that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

10.6

**Therefore, we reject any doctrine** which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

10.7

**We believe**

Isaiah 42:1–7

Luke 6:20–26

Luke 4:16–19

Luke 7:22  
Psalm 146

James 1:27

Micah 6:8  
Amos 5:14–15, 23–24

Psalm 82:1–5

- that God has revealed God’s self as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged
- that God calls the church to follow God in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged;

CONFESSION OF BELHAR 10.4–.6

Leviticus 19:15

- that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

**Therefore, we reject any ideology**

**10.8**

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

**10.9**

Acts 5:29–32;  
1 Peter 3:15–18

**We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

**Accompanying Letter to the Confession of Belhar<sup>2</sup>**

*This letter was a statement made upon the adoption of the Confession of Belhar  
by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa*

1. We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgment, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. Along with many, we confess our guilt, in that we have not always witnessed clearly enough in our situation and so are jointly responsible for the way in which those things which were experienced as sin and confessed to be sin have grown in time to seem self-evidently right and to be ideologies foreign to the Scriptures. As a result many have been given the impression that the gospel was not really at stake. We make this confession because we are convinced that all sorts of theological arguments have contributed to so disproportionate an emphasis on some aspects of the truth that it has in effect become a lie.
2. We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. Being fully aware of the risk involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way. An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before men that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes. Yet, having said this, we know that our deepest intentions may only be judged at their true value by him before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne and before men. We plead, therefore, that this confession would not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives. Our earnest desire is to lay no false stumbling blocks in the way, but to point to the true stumbling block, Jesus Christ the rock.
3. This confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no one will identify himself with this objectionable doctrine and that all who have been wholly or partially blinded by it will turn themselves away from it. We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine and know that many who have been conditioned by it have to a greater or lesser extent learnt to take a half-truth for the whole. For this reason we do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honor, integrity, and good intentions and their in many ways estimable practice and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know we are not liberated by the seriousness, sincerity, or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation. Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation, that true reconciliation which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures. And while we do so we are aware that an act of confession is a two-edged sword, that none of us can throw the first stone, and none is without a beam in his own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct which work against the gospel are present in all of us and will continue to be so. Therefore this confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soul searching together, a joint wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in a broken world. It is certainly not intended as an act of self-justification and intolerance, for that would disqualify us in the very act of preaching to others.
4. Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. We know that such an act of confession and process of reconciliation will necessarily involve much pain and sadness. It demands the pain of repentance, remorse, and confession; the pain of individual and collective renewal and a changed way of life. It places us on a road whose end we can neither foresee nor manipulate to our own desire. On this road we shall unavoidably suffer intense growing pains while we struggle to conquer alienation, bitterness, irreconciliation, and fear. We shall have to come to know and encounter both ourselves and others in new ways. We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society which have developed over many years. However, we confess that for the sake of the gospel, we have no other choice. We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice. Accordingly, our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead

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<sup>2</sup> While not of constitutional character, the following letter accompanies the Confession of Belhar to explain the context of the confession.

**CONFESSION OF BELHAR 10.4–.6**

to salvation. We believe that this is possible in the power of our Lord and by his Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.

