



Week of Prayer 2020

The church of Jesus Christ

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Themes

Day 1: The church of God, with Christ as Head

Day 2: Chosen and eternally gathered together as a holy community, protected by God himself

Day 3: Called as one church to the ministry of unity and reconciliation

Day 4: Gathered together in the body of Christ – one, with many members

Day 5: The church, called to the ministry of justice

Day 6: Sent as witnesses to the truth of the gospel

Introduction

The Week of Prayer at the beginning of the year gives congregations an opportunity to become still and to prepare prayerfully for the new year and all its “activities”. It is also possibly a good time to stop and think about who we are and what our calling is. Strategic planners and business leaders know that a successful organisation that wants to make an impact needs to have the answers to two questions. “Who are we?” and “why are we here?” are crucial for an organisation that wants to stay focused with relevant and realistic dreams. These questions deal with identity and purpose. In the church we talk about identity and calling.

Any community of believers continually needs to ensure that we can answer these questions honestly and sincerely. A community therefore also needs to reflect on

how these answers influence and guide our nature, understanding of our calling and ministries. Often the church (at all levels) is seen to be devoting a vast amount of time and energy to legal aspects and the “correctness” of what should be happening in the church. Sometimes hardly any time or energy is spent trying to understand who God intends us to be. When we understand that better, we can use that understanding to guide our time and energy towards our calling. Neglecting proper and continual reflection on our identity and calling inevitably leads to the absence of fulfilling, renewed and growing ministries.

One way we understand and refer to ourselves is as the “professing church”. We believe that we profess our faith based on our understanding of the Holy Scripture and assume that it then directs our existence and life of faith as a church. The three formularies of unity, namely the Code of Dordt, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic (Nederlandse) Confession, form the base of our confessions of faith within our sister churches. Together these represent what we believe about a number of issues important to our faith. The Confession of Belhar, also part of the confession of faith of the United Reformed Church of South Africa, enriches these confessions and emphasises tangible ways to live out unity, reconciliation and justice. It is surprising how many members no longer pay much attention to these confessions of our church. There may be various reasons for this, but they are not relevant here.

During the Week of Prayer 2020 we want to look at what we believe and profess about the church, on the basis of our confession of faith texts. We want to give congregations the opportunity to reflect together about the identity (who are we?) and the calling (why are we here?) of the church. Although the intention is that our reflections will incorporate our confession texts, it is important to be aware that this is not intended as a complete handling of the themes of the texts. There is so much to cover; this guideline can touch on only some of the aspects, and not in great depth. Those whose interest is stimulated can use the guideline as a starting point for deeper study, both personally and in groups. In preparation for the Week of Prayer, it will indeed be of value to read the relevant passages from the confessions of faith together with the Bible texts.

May the Lord direct and bless our combined reflections, prayers and subsequent expectations, and may the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be glorified thereby.

General approach and structure

Each meditation will refer to one or more selected Scripture texts. The structure of the guideline for each day's meditation will follow more or less the following format:

- We believe ... Here the confession of faith texts are cited and the reference within the text is given as far as possible.
- We understand ... Here we aim to attempt to explain how the text and citations can be understood.
- Our calling, here and now ... Here we try to connect the abovementioned with our current context and challenges.
- We promise ... Here we have the opportunity to commit ourselves anew to living in a tangible way what we believe and profess to the glory of the Lord.
- We pray together ... Here we confess daily our inadequacy in the light of the passages, thank God for what we are able to profess and pray about related matters.

Abbreviations are used to refer to the confessions of faith:

HC – Heidelberg Catechism

CD – Canons of Dordt

BC – Belgic Confession

CB – Confession of Belhar

(If a printed copy of the confessions of faith is unavailable, they can be downloaded at: <https://www.kerkargief.co.za/formuliere/>)

Day 1: The church of God with Christ as Head

Ephesians 1:10–13; 20–23; 4:15–16; Colossians 1:15–18

1. We believe ...

The church belongs to God and he rules his church through Jesus Christ, the Head of the church.

[**HC** – Question 50 and Question 54; **CD** – Chapter 1, point 9; **BC** – Article 27; **CB** – Article 1 and 5]

2. We understand ...

We profess and understand that the church came into being only through the mercy and love of God. God in his love chose believers and gathered them together.

Through salvation in Christ Jesus and the seal of the Holy Spirit we became part of the people of God. From the beginning it was God's intention that everything and everyone would be united under one head. Everything and everyone was made subject to Christ by God, as God appointed Christ as the only head of his church. Therefore the church can only belong to God and be ruled by God alone. As covenant people we belong to none other than God.

Our readings emphasise three points, among others: (1) God's decision from the beginning that Christ is the head of everything and everyone, and especially of God's people; (2) through the redemption of Christ we become part of God's people; and (3) this loving and merciful action of God to establish his church through and in Christ should be praised and honoured at all times.

It is not sufficient just to read or talk about this. We must believe it, inwardly digest it and hold fast to it. In some ways it is the core of our existence. Yes, our deepest identity lies in the truth that we belong to God, are subject to God's sovereignty and exist in and through God's love. We cannot just take it for granted without realising that our existence as people of God depends on an indescribable sacrifice on the part of God's Son. If we do not grasp and value this, we may easily exchange it for something else along the way.

How often are planning, ministries, management and relationships in the church based on the accepted idea that people are the actual authority in the church? How often is the agenda of the church not driven by position, money or alliances? All as though what is written in our readings has no power or authority any more. As though they are not part of God's timeless truth! It is easy for the church of God to be hijacked by men and women of authority. Similarly we see daily how the identity and calling of the church are undermined by politics, tradition, prominent families, social considerations and many other convictions.

Paul reminds us here that Christ is the Lord, the only head of the church. We must honour, worship and follow only Him.

3. Our calling, here and now ...

It is important to understand that our calling, here and now, is closely connected to our understanding of our identity. Only when we understand and welcome it, does our calling start becoming clear. Paul encourages us to believe and accept this core aspect of our identity: we belong to God in Christ Jesus, the Head of the church. He encourages us further to praise God in his majesty, to believe in God, to stay with the

truth in love, to grow towards Christ and to build up the body for the benefit of one another.

It may not be so easy to live out this identity in today's circumstances. There is so much that distracts our attention, so many teachings that confuse our understanding and so many challenges that test our faith so that it is sometimes almost impossible to hold onto this truth and live according to it. Yet our hope lies precisely in the fact that, despite our unbelief, through God's action we are able to know this truth and can be part of it. Through the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, our identity as a "people who belong to God" is sealed.

Therefore our church government cannot be rooted in positions and structure. These things are merely functional. God is our government.

4. We promise ...

What then should we do now? Where is this truth driving us? In the light of this truth there is actually only one thing to do, and that is to bow down under the headship of Christ and to profess that we belong to God.

Therefore we profess again:

- Lord God, you chose us and gathered us as your children under the sovereignty of Him, who laid down his life for us, Jesus Christ, your Son.
- We commit ourselves to You in Christ Jesus, through your mercy and through the work of your Holy Spirit and your Word.
- We confess that our devotion to laws, positions and structures clouds our judgement and leads us into the temptation of sometimes sidestepping your sovereignty.
- We promise to set aside all the other ways we regard ourselves and to see ourselves anew as God's people who belong to God.
- We promise not to appropriate your sovereignty ourselves.
- We promise not to treat others or to behave in the church as if they or the church belong to us and fall under our authority.
- We promise to prayerfully, decisively and actively dismiss and resist any power that denies this truth or sows confusion.
- We promise daily to honour with our lives the triune God to whom we belong, and to sing your praises continually.

- We subject ourselves to your authority – now and every day.

5. We pray together ...

- We thank God that we can belong to Him.
- We confess that we sometimes act as if the power and authority of the church belongs to us.
- We pray that we will believe and accept the truth that we are God's.
- How does the authority and sovereignty feature in our own lives?
- We pray that this truth will become more evident in our church life and in our personal life.
- We submit prayerfully to the sovereignty of Christ and pray that the church will submit more and more right now.
- We pray that our approach to church life and our ministries for this year will proclaim the ownership and sovereignty of God, even if it is difficult for us to distance ourselves from our own ideas.
- We pray that the sovereignty of God in Christ will overlay every sphere of our society.
- We pray that the sovereignty of God will be progressively established, not just in the church but in politics, the economy and other parts of society.
- We ask God to help us to be faithful to our promises.

Day 2: Chosen and eternally gathered together as a holy community, protected by God Himself

John 10:28–30; Romans 8:29–39; Romans 9:29; Ephesians 1:4–14

1. We believe ...

Through his Spirit and Word, God chose and gathered together believers in one body. God did this through the blood of Jesus. This is the consequence of God's eternal love. As a holy community, chosen and gathered together by God, the church has existed since the beginning of creation and will exist forever because God Himself protects the church as a community of believers, a holy community.

[**HC** – Question 54; **CD** – Chapter 1, point 7, Chapter 2, point 9, Chapter 5, point 15; **BC** – Articles 27 and 28; **CB** – Articles 1 and 2]

2. We understand ...

Wow! How privileged are we? Not only did God choose and gather us, his church, together but also gave us the unbelievable and undeserved privilege of one day conforming to the "image of his Son" and becoming Christ's brothers and sisters. Is this possible! As chosen children of God the Word promises us justification and "those he justified, he also glorified" (Romans 8:30). This blessed selection – this setting apart into one community of believers and holy ones – is grounded in the blood of Jesus and is sealed and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. So we become God's people, as he has already appointed us. What an unbelievable gift!

Being part of this chosen holy community means that Christ has given us eternal life (John 10:28). Nothing can take it away. We should not have the slightest doubt. In Romans 8:33–35 Paul emphasises this assurance that when God in Christ has set us free, there can be no charge or judgement held against us any more. The resurrected Lord pleads continually for us to God our Father. Here the promise of John 10:28–30 confirms that Christ will not allow his children to be lost. He knows that no one can be snatched from the Father's hand. Those whom the Father has given him are indeed "greater than all". Nothing and no one can separate us from this love of God. What a wonderful and blessed assurance to have. Not only were we chosen from before the creation of the world, but we are also protected for eternity. God himself has done this in Christ. Why would God not want to do it? In Romans 8:32 Paul argues that God, who did not spare his Son for our sakes, will certainly not withhold

any of his other gifts and mercies. How could he pay such a high price for us if our eternal preservation did not matter?

In the light of these readings how can we think of ourselves as anything other than chosen, redeemed and holy children of God? Thus our identity is further enriched and strengthened. Not only do we belong to God, but we are a redeemed community of holy believers in the eternal protection of our God. What an assurance and encouragement!

3. Our calling, here and now ...

There is something that we must not overlook in these readings. In Ephesians 1:13 Paul mentions something that we should stop and take note of. Here we read, in the middle of God's merciful election, that we can miss this truth and privilege if we do not believe when we hear the gospel of redemption. The promises are there. The assurance is given. And God's Word is trustworthy. Paul tells the congregation at Ephesus that they, when they came to faith by hearing the truth, became part of God's people. Some of us still need to come to faith. Others may remember that at some stage they believed but have moved away from their faith. We now have the chance to accept this truth in faith and to confirm our belief. It is absolutely necessary to do this, otherwise it means one of three things: (1) we do not really believe what we have read here; (2) we have doubts about it because of things we have encountered along life's path: or (3) we do not realise that this wonderful treasure came at a high cost, and therefore we cheapen the gift by not reacting to it.

Our being chosen has further implications for us as a church. To be holy is to be set apart – set apart for God and for the calling and purpose which God has in mind for us. In Ephesians 1:4 Paul says that God chose us to live holy and irreproachable lives before God. This implies that we as a church community and as individuals should live our daily lives to God's honour and praise, so that no blame can be brought against us. To be holy and irreproachable requires us to hold tight to our salvation so that we can resist the temptation to sin. It also demands of us that we live at a moral and ethical level in such a way that our lives and redemption in Christ are above suspicion.

It has the further purpose of bringing this piece of good news in a tangible way to others who have not yet received the message of salvation. Therefore the church of the Lord and his children cannot be associated with anything that pursues self-interest and the approval of the world. Mercifully we are not alone in this. The Word promises that God will protect us. Yet we must be careful not to find ourselves in

situations, relationships and places where we are moving away from God's protection. It is essential that we are reminded daily that our identity lies in God's choosing, redemption and setting apart. We need nothing else to confirm our worth. We do not need to do anything that is against the will of God just so we can be accepted. We have been chosen, "greater than any other", by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, this gathering together means that we cannot just practise an isolated "I and my Lord at home" faith life. It was God's purpose that we would exist as a community in Christ. My absence or sporadic presence in the life of the congregation cannot possibly be a powerful witness to this gathering together of a community of believers. We are gathered together and serve God together as well.

4. We promise ...

We profess:

- Lord God, You have chosen and gathered us together as your children under the sovereignty of Him who gave his life for us, Jesus Christ, your Son.
- We commit ourselves to You in Christ Jesus, through your mercy and the work of your Holy Spirit and your Word.
- We promise as those set apart for You to live holy and irreproachable lives, and thus to preach the message of salvation through our lifestyle.
- We promise not to be driven by programmes and world agendas, but to understand our true calling in the nature of our identity – God's people, chosen, set apart, a holy community of believers.

5. We pray together ...

- We thank God that we can belong to Him, chosen, set apart, and gathered together as a community of believers.
- We thank God that He has called us to faith and keeps our faith.
- We confess that we often forget about our identity and nature and then live like people of the world who have never received salvation.
- We confess that often we cannot be distinguished from the world because we often live, work and engage with our community according to worldly expectations and standards.
- We ask God to help us every day to live more in the truth of his Word and according to our true identity.

- We pray that this will determine our church life and that this year our approach to our church and ministries will confirm our character as a holy community of believers.
- We ask God to help us to be faithful to our promises.

Day 3: One church called to the ministry of unity and reconciliation

Matthew 5:9; 1 Corinthians 5:17–21; Ephesians 2:11–22; 4:1–4; Philippians 2:1–4

1. We believe ...

The church, which was established through the mercy of God in Christ, is one, universal church that exists in the unity of faith. This one, universal church is not confined to place, time or person, but exists throughout the whole world and for all time. This unity is achieved through the reconciliation of Christ and is both a gift and a commission/command to the church. Therefore the church is called to the ministry of reconciliation and to active striving towards a visible unity.

[**HC** – Question 54; **CD** – Chapter 2, point 9; **BC** – Article 27; **CB** – Article 2]

2. We understand ...

Christ's death on the cross breaks down any possible division between us. Any division that still exists is manmade and not in keeping with the heart of the gospel. In the body of Christ everyone is gathered together irrespective of race, gender, nationality, language, social or economic class, or whatever category of distinction might exist. Breaking down boundaries and bringing people together is evident in the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry. Look at how little he was bothered by social norms and expectations; instead he focused on the heart and honour of God and the need and salvation of the people. He is our peace and he also "proclaimed the good news of peace" (Ephesians 2:17).

For Paul this unity of the body of Christ is extremely important. He continually emphasises unity in and with Jesus Christ, and calls on the congregations to strive towards unity and to live it out visibly. The Lord Jesus also prays insistently in John 17:21 for the unity of his followers so that the world can believe. Paul's motivation for his call to unity is very simple: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4–6).

Through his death Christ put an end to enmity, and achieved reconciliation between man and God. He is our peace. Therefore Paul can ask the congregation at Ephesus to focus on the unity which is forged among them by the Spirit. Children of the Lord, who strive for unity, live in peace with one another. According to Matthew 5:9,

children of God are distinguished as peacemakers. Yes, we as sisters and brothers, family members in the household of God, actually have no choice in this matter.

3. Our calling, here and now ...

It does happen that children of the Lord sometimes experience conflict and division, for whatever reason. Yes, even children of the Lord can sometimes fight hard and fight dirty. Add to this the divisions in the world, the ongoing rabble-rousing and suspicion in society, the constant emphasis on our differences and the ego-driven agendas that keep the fires of hate and divisiveness burning. Paul spurs us on in these circumstances to embrace our new nature, reconciled in Christ with God and others, and to remember that the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to us. As envoys of Christ we have no other message for a divided and broken world – Christ has already paid the price for the peace and restoration of this world.

Within the household of God, the church, we must pursue peace, unity and reconciliation with great dedication.

For Paul it is much more than just talk. It is an attitude to life, a way of life in accordance with the calling that the church of God received. He points out that unity is achieved and preserved through modesty, humility, friendliness, patience, loving endurance and peacefulness among the children of the Lord. When we live together as like-minded family – one in love, heart and striving – we are aware that the concerns of others are more important.

We cannot continually move from one fight to another in the church. Our being together is not supposed to create battlefields for one another. To live in unity means that often we need to follow the middle path. But we are called actively and fearlessly to oppose any doctrine, structure or action that attempts to sabotage the unity and the ministry of reconciliation of God's church. We must resist anything that threatens this unity and peace and focus on like-minded and reconciliatory living. We must also be prepared to be envoys and instruments of reconciliation.

4. We promise ...

- We promise to remember that on the cross Christ reconciled us with one another and with God.
- We promise to remember that peace and reconciliation are given to us both as a gift and a command/commission.

- We undertake as new people in Christ to live forgiving, peace-loving and reconciliatory lives, because we remember what we were before we found salvation in Christ.
- We will devote ourselves to mutual peace and reconciliation.
- We will strive to give more substance to our spiritual and structural unity as the church of the Lord Jesus.

5. We pray together ...

- We thank God that Christ Jesus reconciled us with one another and with him.
- We honour God for his Spirit which binds us together in unity.
- We confess that we are often only concerned with our own interests. We forget that we have been set free in Christ and then we forget that we have received the ministry of peace and reconciliation as both gift and command/commission.
- We ask God to show us where we have not yet forgiven, where we still threaten unity, where we still need to reconcile. We ask too that He will help and guide us in this.
- We pray for greater unity in his church – within congregations, within each sister church, between the sister churches and for the universal church throughout the world.
- We ask God to show us how we can integrate this command regarding unity and reconciliation in our congregational ministries.

Day 4: Gathered together in the body of Christ – one, with many members

1 Corinthians 12:4–31; Philippians 2:5–8; Ephesians 4:11–13

1. We believe ...

The church is the gathering together of believers, all together and each individually, as members of the one body of Christ; blessed with particular gifts, willing to serve each other in love and peace, to the benefit and salvation of one another and to the glory of God.

[**HC** – Question 54 and Question 55; **CD** – Chapter 2, point 9; **BC** – Article 28; **CB** – Article 2]

2. We understand ...

Paul uses among others the image of the body to describe the nature of the church. Just as the human body has different members joined together in one body, so the church as the body of Christ also consists of many members. These members are each blessed with particular gifts and each is given a specific purpose and task. Each member's nature, gift and purpose is so designed that the members complement and support each other so that the body is complete and functions properly. So everyone in the congregation of God has received from God gifts, talents, a passion, time, money or other presents to use in service to each other and to God. The gifts of each member benefit the other members. Each member is thus in him/herself also a gift to the body and to others, and all need one another. It was God's will to gather us together in this way and for us to give ourselves as gifts to each other.

The building up and calling of the body of Christ is the work of the triune God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 that the Holy Spirit gives the children of God their gifts, that the Lord himself gives their commission to each member and that God enables us to use these gifts to achieve powerful outcomes. Each member and the gifts with which each is blessed naturally only come into their own when the body exists and functions in unity. This unity becomes a reality when the body, and every member of the body, is drenched in the Holy Spirit.

The special gifts of the members should not result in division but should rather strengthen unity. We must also not serve our own self-interest with our gifts. They are for the well-being and growth of the body, the church of God. Whatever our gift

and calling may be, they are always in service to God and others, to God's glory. In Philippians 2:5–8 Paul focuses attention on the example of Christ as the measure of our attitude within the body and in relationship to our calling and service. He exhorts the church to adopt the same attitude as Christ's: humble, serving, sacrificial and obedient to the Father – all to the benefit of maintaining his body. Yes, he came to be a slave for us, enduring humiliation, and in obedience accepted even death, for the benefit of the salvation, unity and growth of his body.

3. Our calling, here and now ...

Not only is every member called to unity and devotion to one another and to God, but each also receives the command to be part of one another in peace and pain. This places a considerable responsibility on the church to care for one another pastorally, to admonish one another and to lift one another up to the glory of God.

This understanding of our church life requires us to gain clarity about our joint and personal calling in the world today. The body of Christ does not serve only one another, but is actually also there to take the gospel of Jesus Christ, his salvation, to the world in word and deed. This becomes possible when we devote ourselves to the "best" gifts God has given us. We cannot all have all the gifts. One member cannot possibly be the whole body. When everyone discovers his/her gifts, gets clarity about his/her calling and follows and serves Christ in humble obedience, then the body comes into its true strength. Only then does true unity come to the fore. Only then are we in a position to be a believable witness to God's love in this world. When we do not do this, the body suffers the effects of jealousy, dysfunctionality, confusion and ultimately disintegration.

To take the reality of different gifts and commands for every member seriously means that we then need to reflect on how we think about and organise our ministries. The church's way of being and functioning are not primarily determined by structures, but by the church's identity and calling. It is articulated through the composition and nature of the body and of every member that makes the body complete. There is one thing we need to fully understand and to help one another to remember: the church belongs to God. Christ is the only Head, and therefore the church exists and functions to honour Him by striving to grow towards Him. It is not therefore about the church itself, but rather about the God of the church and the body of Christ which has been joined together by the Spirit.

4. We promise ...

- We commit ourselves anew to unity and mutual commitment as members of the body of Christ.
- We promise prayerfully to seek renewed certainty about our gifts and calling to serve God and one another in love, to the glory of God and the redemption of others.
- We promise to examine our daily lives carefully and to reflect on our place and role in the body, and to devote ourselves to our best gifts. We cannot be everything. We need one another.

5. We pray together ...

- We thank God that we can be one in his body.
- We thank God for his gifts which we receive so abundantly.
- We thank God that he chooses us, as broken and imperfect people, to be part of his work here on earth.
- We pray for greater unity within the body of Christ – in congregations, circles, synods and also ecumenically across the earth.
- We pray for a deeper understanding of our gifts and calling, and for willingness and devotion to build the church as members of the body.
- We pray for renewal in our lives and in our congregations, and that our ministries will testify to this renewal.

Day 5: The church, called to the ministry of justice

Isaiah 1:16–17; Matthew 5:34–37; Luke 4:16–19; Luke 6:20–26; Romans 6:13–18

1. We believe ...

That God wants to bring about justice and true peace to all people. The church stands steadfastly where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged.

[CB – Article 4]

Although the Confession of Belhar raises the matter of social justice more explicitly, we cannot assume that the other confession of faith texts ignore it completely. My choice to deal with social justice is related to the approach of the Week of Prayer, namely to reflect on the identity and calling of the Church.

2. We understand ...

That God has always stood, and still stands, against injustice, exploitation and oppression, as preached throughout the whole Bible. He is the God who reveals Himself as the One who wants to bring about justice and peace among all people. In a world full of injustice, oppression, exploitation, division and impoverishment, God stands indisputably with those who are suffering.

In the testimony of Jesus' earthly ministry we notice that he often shows compassion for people in need – spiritually as well as physically. We see him feeding people, clothing them, healing them and saving them. Luke 4:18–19 presents his concerns about the salvation and care of people in need as the manifesto of his calling and ministry.

Matthew 5:20–26 is another illustration of Christ's heart when the needs of others are concerned – it is indeed a question of the heart for Him. When someone pronounces blessings over another, it is a heartfelt prayer to God to give that person his grace. Christ's earnest prayer is that people, in spite of their pain and suffering, should experience the blessing – the shalom – of God.

Sometimes this agenda of justice becomes so spiritualised that any reference to social justice as part of God's agenda is viewed as almost unbiblical. It is interesting that Calvin in his *Institutes* (3.8.7) suggests that our labour is not just in the defence of the gospel, but also for the protection of the good and innocent against the works of the evil one. Therefore he reasons that God's kingdom will also have a social and material expression. He warns, however, that it needs to be independent of any

political agenda. Social justice is a matter of God and his church. We can find the agenda for this only in his Word. Any other approach needs to be subject to this.

3. Our calling, here and now ...

Like Calvin, the Confession of Belhar calls on the church, on the basis of scripture, to stand with God and the oppressed and the wronged against the structures and practices of inequality, injustice, oppression, impoverishment and ill-treatment. The church of God cannot stand for a spiritual justice which treats the injustice in this world as simply a political and social problem. For God the ministry and embodiment of justice is also the witness of salvation and of a restored people (Isaiah 1:16–17). Here it is also more than just doing good. Firstly, it is about abiding by the law and secondly about living in enmity against injustice and oppression. It is more than just preaching against these things. The church is required to do. This “doing” of justice has both temporary and eternal value. In fact, according to Matthew 25:34–46, it is the means of separating the sheep from the goats. Can we afford to put our eternal salvation on the line through our lack of compassion and disobedience?

We live in an appallingly unequal society where violence, abuse, poverty, injustice, corruption, capture of institutions and apathy abound. A society where discrimination on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality and other considerations is still the order of the day. Similar circumstances were also prevalent at the time Jesus came to the earth, and in the midst of all these things he fearlessly spelled out his agenda for his ministry. Today God expects us to show the same fearlessness in our preaching, our daily walk and in the ministries of the church. It is our task to care for the orphans and widows. It is our calling as God’s people to stand with Him, and with the wronged, against injustice. Through the ministry of justice our redemption and salvation gain greater meaning. Through the ministry of justice our unity is strengthened and deepened. God has equipped us as the body of Christ by blessing us with a multitude of gifts. When God asks us to stand with him in this, he has also made it possible for us to do it.

It is the church’s prophetic calling, through word and deed, to bring this message of justice and righteousness to the highest levels of political and economic structures. It is her calling to help to transform these systems into instruments of greater justice. The church, however, must be watchful against being dragged into the agendas of these structures.

4. We promise ...

- Firstly, it is necessary for us to confess to God that we have sometimes become deadened to matters of injustice, with the result that we have not always stood with the wronged and against injustice in a meaningful way.
- We commit ourselves to a deeper awareness of the injustice which exists all around us.
- We commit ourselves to a deeper sensitivity to the needs of others.
- Let us also acknowledge thankfully the signs of justice that are already present, commit to promoting justice, and rejoice together about this.
- We commit ourselves to stand with God where He stands with the wronged and against injustice.
- We commit ourselves to the confession that we belong only to God and that our loyalty to this ministry does not lie primarily in political or economic spheres.

5. We pray together for ...

- We pray for the needs of the world and that God's kingdom of justice and righteousness will become more visible now.
- We pray for the renewal of our political and economic dispensations so that everybody will experience God's care through them.
- We pray for the preservation of the faith of those who are challenged by injustice and oppression.
- We pray for greater obedience, willingness and fearlessness in the church to make a tangible difference in this world, to help convert it to being a space of greater equality and justice, even if we have to stand against the powers and authorities of this world.

Day 6: Sent as witnesses to the truth of the gospel

Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8; 13:26

1. We believe ...

The calling of the church as witnesses to the truth of the gospel – the good news in Christ – is emphasised throughout the confessions of faith. We believe that the message of salvation and exhortation was entrusted to the church of the Lord Jesus, and that the church is called to preach this message in obedience, through word, sacrament and deed.

[**HC** – Question 54 and Questions 69, 75, 77; **CD** – Chapter 1, point 14, Chapter 2, point 5, Chapters 3 & 4, point 17; **BC** – Articles 30 and 36; **CB** – Article 4]

2. We understand ...

God did not only make the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ known to the church, but He also entrusted it to the church (Acts 13:26) as treasure which needed to be shared with the world. The contents and core of this message is that Christ died for us on the cross and that everyone who believes this truth and accepts Christ will be saved. While this is a free gift from God, everyone has to accept it and believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Earlier we learned that this salvation in Christ Jesus is precisely the core of our identity, but it is also the core of our calling. Our greatest calling then becomes to live thankfully in response to this redemption. Through this the body grows to greater maturity and can lead others to new insights and salvation. Holding fast to the truth of this salvation protects us from the onslaughts of false teachings and keeps us on solid ground.

Before Jesus' ascension, just before the establishment of the New Testament church, He gave his children the commission to be witnesses to this Good News. In Matthew 28:20, as well as in Acts 1:8, He gives the assurance that He will be with us for all eternity. Indeed, through his Spirit He is not only with us as we carry out this commission but he also gives us the power to do it. This message of salvation is definitely not meant just for our own benefit, but must be preached throughout the whole, wide world.

Any teaching that does not preach free, undeserved salvation by grace is contradictory to what we profess and preach. The church is therefore called to teach the children of God in the truth of the gospel so that this truth can combat heresy. This also helps the body to grow to greater maturity and steadfastness.

The full extent of the redemption that we preach takes shape in our unity, reconciliation, community life and commitment, our service to one another and to God, and in living out the ministry of justice. We preach it when we as children of the covenant administer or receive baptism, and come to sit at the table of the Lord. For that purpose we are empowered by the Spirit and the Word.

3. Our calling, here and now ...

We ourselves need to believe and understand the message to the degree that God intended in order to preach the truth of salvation. Therefore the community of believers need to constantly immerse themselves in the Word of God. How can we testify to something we have not experienced ourselves, and if we do not know or understand its content? Without building up the body by prayerfully studying God's Word, we remain an immature lot who can be tossed back and forth by every wind and wave. Without this prayerful study we will never truly understand and accept our identity and calling.

This maturity and growth in the Word is necessary to combat heresy and also to free us from heresy. In a world of so many heresies and spiritual gods, our preservation is in the growth of the body through the knowledge and preaching of the truth that God has given us.

As a community of believers who through the loving mercy of God have been gathered together and protected by Him, we are called to be witnesses to this mercy and love in a loveless world full of half-truths and lies. We are called to tell the truth in love, and yet to be bold when the honour of God is at stake. We are called to live in this truth so that our actions of love, service, humility, peace, reconciliation and justice honour God, while at the same time proclaiming the new reality to others so that they too will have the desire to know God. Our witness, here and now, must be so believable that the world will believe in Christ, that they will see the living Christ in us. Yes, through our witness, the world should see that the church is different, because we belong to the "wholly other" ("Ganz Andere").

4. We promise ...

- In response to our salvation and in answer to our calling as witnesses to the truth of the gospel we promise to take God's Word seriously once again.
- We promise once again to allow the Word and the Spirit to renew us.
- We promise to study and live the Word together so that the body of Christ will grow to greater maturity and be a believable witness of salvation.

5. We pray together ...

- We thank God for his Word and sacraments, for the message of salvation which we have received as both gift and calling.
- We pray for deeper insight into the Word.
- We trust God to teach us through his Word and to help us to grow to greater maturity.
- We pray for greater devotion to and obedience in our calling as preachers of the message of salvation.
- We ask God to reveal his will to us as it relates to our calling to be witnesses in our surroundings, here and now.