Confession of Faith

Confession of Faith 3
Renewing Our Sense of Purpose 4
I Believe 6
When Should You Make Confession of Faith? 7
Preparing to Make Confession of Faith 9
I Will Serve the Lord 10
Devotional—Complacency in Zion: The Prophecy of Amos 12
Trusting 14
Mothers in the Bible 15
Church News Back Cover

A Protestant Reformed Youth Magazine
beaconlights.org
EDITOR
Brendan Looyenga, brendan.looyenga@gmail.com

CONTENTS COMMITTEE
Doug Mingerink (Managing Editor), dmingerink@gmail.com
Joshua Harris (Contributing Writer Correspondent), joshua_neath@sky.com
Aaron Van Dyke (Contributing Writer Correspondent), asv27@students.calvin.edu
Ashley Huizinga (Promotions Manager), promotions@beaconlights.org
Jake Dykstra (Business Manager)
Leah Vanden Berg (Secretary), leahvb02@gmail.com

BUSINESS OFFICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS
Jake Dykstra
PO Box 37
Hudsonville, MI 49426-0037
(616) 916-4192
subscriptions@beaconlights.org

EDITORIAL POLICY
Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is $15. Please send all business correspondence, address changes, and subscriptions to the business office.

The articles of Beacon Lights do not necessarily indicate the viewpoint of the Editorial Staff. Every author is solely responsible for the contents of his own article. Beacon Lights encourages its readers to contact the business office with any questions or comments. Letters may be edited for printing. We will not publish anonymous letters, but will withhold names upon request. All submissions should be sent to the editor six weeks prior to the publication date and must be written in Microsoft Word format. If any material of Beacon Lights is reprinted by another periodical, we will appreciate your giving the source and forwarding the printed periodical to the business office.

BEACON LIGHTS ONLINE
www.beaconlights.org

CHURCH NEWS ANNOUNCEMENTS
Melinda Bleyenberg, dmbleyenberg@gmail.com

EXECUTIVE FEDERATION BOARD
Jesse Bomers (President)
Michael Talsma (Vice-President)
Emily Hiemstra (Secretary)
Brice Van Overloop (Treasurer)
Courtney Spronk (Vice-Secretary)
Caleb Moelker (Vice-Treasurer)
Leah Kuiper (Event Coordinator)
Andy Peterson (Youth Coordinator)
Zachary Kuiper (Event Coordinator)
Rev. Cory Griess (Spiritual Advisor)
Prof. Brian Huizinga (Spiritual Advisor)

PROTESTANT REFORMED SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A function of the Young People’s Federation Board. Funds for this scholarship should be sent to the treasurer, Jon Pastoor
7137 Rolling Hills Drive
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(616) 821-8165

Magazine design by Erika Kiel
Typesetting by Bob Vermeer
CONFESSION OF FAITH

One of the greatest evidences of God’s blessing in a church is the public confession of faith by young people in that congregation. For the pastor, elders, and parents this is cause for great rejoicing! It is the visible fruit of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of young people, blessing the many years of instruction and catechism teaching that they have received. But what does confession of faith mean for you personally? Maybe you haven’t really given it much thought and simply view it as one of the many “next steps” in your life. Like so many other events, it’s just another box to check as you make your way through adolescence:

- Graduate from grade school
- Begin high school
- Turn sixteen and get a driver’s license
- Start first job
- Complete all of the necessary catechism classes
- Make public confession of faith

Or, maybe you have been considering confession of faith very carefully and are left with a lot of questions unanswered. When should I make confession of faith? How do I know I’m ready? What does confession of faith say about me and the church to which I belong? The goal of this issue is to look more closely at what it means to make public confession of faith and to help answer some of the questions you may have been pondering as you begin to consider making this public confession for yourself.

As you continue to mature in your faith, make it your prayer that the Lord will grant you conviction of heart that when asked the following three questions, you are able out of strength in Christ to answer: Yes!

1. Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian Church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?
2. Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto and to lead a new, godly life?
3. Will you submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent (which may God graciously forbid) to church discipline?

When reading through this issue, remember the words of Christ in Matthew 10: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

This month we are excited to welcome three new members to our Beacon Lights staff. Dr. Brendan Looyenga has accepted the position of editor for the magazine. Dr. Looyenga is currently a member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church where he attends with his wife Kelly and their five daughters. He has taught at Calvin University for the past eight years and is in the process of moving from the academic world into commercial biotechnology research and development. We have been encouraged in the past by Dr. Looyenga’s writing, and we are thankful for his willingness to serve in this capacity. We desire that you pray for him and his family as he completes the transition from reader to leader.

Aaron Van Dyke and Joshua Harris are also joining us on the Beacon Lights staff, having agreed to take on the position of writer correspondents. Aaron is currently a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church and is looking forward to beginning his first year of instruction at the PRC seminary this fall. Josh has been a member at Hope Protestant Reformed Church for the past two years after he moved to west Michigan from Wales, United Kingdom. Josh is currently attending Grand Valley State University where he is studying Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences. We thank these two young men for their desire to serve you, the readership of Beacon Lights. If you have an idea for an article you’d like to see written or would be interested in writing for the magazine yourself, don’t hesitate to contact one of these two young men.
This editorial marks the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Beacon Lights. As noted in the Issue at Hand prior to this article, there has been a significant turnover in the magazine staff over the past few months. A new editor and two new contributing writer correspondents have taken up their roles as of this issue. As a staff, we give thanks to God for the continuity of the work that this represents. For the past 80 years, God has provided writers, editors, and the financial means necessary for ongoing publication of a unique magazine that belongs to the Protestant Reformed Churches, specifically through its ownership by the Young People’s Federation. And because God’s grace to his people has sustained publication of Beacon Lights to this point, we can be assured it will continue to serve his purposes and witness to his glory regardless of what men and women serve on the staff now and in the coming years. We trust in God to sustain our efforts, not the editor or the staff members that serve on behalf of the Federation of Young People.

As we enter this new chapter for Beacon Lights, it is good to remind ourselves of the purpose and goals toward which we are working in the Lord’s name. These goals were published along with the very first issue of Beacon Lights in January of 1941 and are listed as follows:

1. To unite all Protestant Reformed Young People’s Societies so that they may work in close unity and secure a sense of solidarity.
2. To seek the mutual edification of the members of this Federation and to strive for the development of talents as becomes Christian young people.
3. To strive to maintain our specific Protestant Reformed character with a united front.
4. To promote the welfare of the Protestant Reformed Churches, in which we have a name and a place.

These four statements represent a sort of “checklist” to which we should be held accountable on a regular basis. We will briefly reflect on each of them in the light of Ephesians 4:1–16. Take a moment to get your Bible out and read through this passage. Then follow along as we discuss how the goals of the Beacon Lights magazine align with the word of God.

Verses 1–6:

In the first place, the purpose of Beacon Lights is to provide unity and solidarity to the young people of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is not just a goal, but a command that comes to us directly from God. We must exert ourselves diligently (endeavor!) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3). The basis of that unity is revealed by the Spirit in our text (vv. 4–6). We share the same triune God (one Spirit, Lord, Father), confess the same truth in doctrine (one faith), and participate in the same sacraments (one baptism) as one another. This unity is worked by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, gives us faith to believe as “one body,” and empowers all of the work we are called to do in God’s kingdom.

As we work together as young people to seek unity in the church of Jesus Christ, we should not ignore the manner of life that accompanies God’s gracious gift of unity. The first two verses of the text give us a clear picture of what that manner looks like: humility, meekness, longsuffering, and patience motivated by love. In our writing and in the conversations generated by articles in Beacon Lights,
these characteristics ought to be the things that describe our interactions. We must speak the truth of God’s word, which includes warnings about the temptations we face as young people and the false teachings that seek to turn us away from God. But we must always do so in a spirit of love (v. 15). Love boldly addresses sin, temptation, and the lies of this world, but it does so out of humility and meekness that realizes we ourselves are sinners saved by grace. With a proper view of our own dependence on the saving work of Christ, we can seek patiently to bring others to a right understanding of God’s word out of love for their souls.

**Verses 7–12:**

In the second place, the purpose of *Beacon Lights* is to seek for the mutual edification of Christian young people by developing the talents that they have individually been given by God. God graciously gives every one of his children different gifts and abilities according to his purpose (v. 7). Some of these gifts and abilities are more prominent and visible within the church (v. 11), while others seem to be less important. But no matter what we think about the various gifts and abilities we were given, all of them have the same purpose within God’s kingdom—they are for service.

Service to God and to his church is why we are called to develop our talents. When pressed into the service of our Lord and his kingdom, these talents function to edify other believers (v. 12). No matter how gifted he or she might be, no one individual in the church is sufficient to serve in all of the different roles given in our text and elsewhere in Scripture. It is the collection of gifts, abilities, and resources that we are given as a body which together serve to glorify God most completely. This is what Paul means by “the perfecting of the saints” (v. 12). Not that we are made perfect in the sense of becoming sinless, but instead that we become complete as a body made up of many members who share the common purpose of glorifying God in his church.

Do you have a gift for writing? Are you good at organizing information or keeping track of details? Do you have a particular interest in explaining God’s word? Are you keen to lead others? Do you love fellowship with other young people? If you can answer ‘yes’ to any of these questions—not just the first one!—there is a place for you to serve in *Beacon Lights* or within the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People. And if the answer is ‘no,’ then seek to serve God and his church in another way and look to be edified by reading the content of our magazine.

**Verses 13–15:**

In the third place, the purpose of *Beacon Lights* is to maintain the specific character of our denomination as we represent ourselves to others through writing. This might come as a surprise to young people who usually associate the specific doctrinal character of the Protestant Reformed Churches with other publications aimed at an adult audience. Shouldn’t doctrinal issues be left to *The Standard Bearer* or *Sword & Shield* where adults can work through the details of the Reformed faith represented in our denomination? The answer must be a resounding ‘No!’

Our text is helpful here because it demonstrates that progress in the life of a believer at every stage must be characterized by a concern for doctrinal truth as well as practical application of that truth. As a young person reading this magazine, you probably aren’t a young child anymore, and you should not be content to remain in a spiritually childish condition either. Having been edified by God’s word through regular preaching and catechism instruction, you already have the doctrinal foundation to your faith. Your calling, however, is to continue to grow in “the knowledge of the Son of God” with Christ himself as your measuring stick (v. 13). The purpose of this growth is to provide a stable defense against the “cunning craftiness” of Satan and the world who seek to deceive you (v. 14). This is why *Beacon Lights* must seek to expose every “wind of doctrine” that blows around us while speaking the truth in love as a witness to young people within the Protestant Reformed Churches and in the broader world around us (v. 15). Let us together “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

**Verse 16:**

The fourth and final stated purpose of *Beacon Lights* is to promote the welfare of the Protestant Reformed Churches where God has graciously placed you as young people. We can be brief here because much of what was discussed already applies to this goal. As we seek unity in the church, as we develop our talents for the purpose of service within the church, and as we grow in spiritual knowledge through God’s word, we can expect the welfare of our denomination to be promoted. In verse 16, the apostle Paul compares this process to the physical
conditioning of a human body. When all the parts of that body are properly connected and functioning, ongoing exercise will continuously build up its health and strength. In the same way, active and energetic engagement of church members in the roles to which God has called them will promote the health and strength of a denomination.

But that isn’t all we must say because the text closes with a final, critically important reminder. If we begin to believe that the visible efforts exerted by young people in the Protestant Reformed Churches are ultimately what is building up our denomination, we will fail. Instead, it is our “head, even Christ” who makes the body of believers in a church or denomination to increase and grow up into him. This is our hope and our assurance as God’s people, young and old: we are one in Christ, who makes the body capable of “edifying itself in love.”

Beacon Lights is written for young people and by young people striving to serve God through his church, but it is in Christ that we can be assured this magazine will be unto God’s glory.

Ryan Kregel

I BELIEVE

The familiar words of Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism are beautiful. In summary, they are: “I am not my own, but I belong to my Savior.” When we make confession of faith publicly, we are saying not only “I belong to Jesus,” but also “I belong to the body of Jesus Christ, his church.” While this means that you are now part of the church universal, it also implies membership in a local congregation. This is readily apparent by the fact that the one making the confession is doing so standing in front of a body of believers in a local congregation. What also leads us to see that a public confession of faith implies membership in a local congregation is the nature of the three questions asked of the confessing member. Each question asked of the one making public confession of faith implies membership in a local congregation.

Question 1: “Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?”

This question asks if you agree with what your church teaches and the doctrine it confesses to uphold. Is what your church upholds the true doctrine of salvation? That salvation is all of God through Christ. Christ is the focus. Paul addressed the Corinthian church with this concern. He had heard that there were divisions in the church that produced a party spirit among its members, with some following Peter, some following Paul, some following Christ, and some following Apollos (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul’s answer? Christ is not divided. We are all one in Christ because he is the head of his body, the church, of which we are all a part. Paul described that unity earlier: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (v. 10). The unity of believers in a local congregation is centered upon a scripturally grounded, common confession of Jesus Christ as the one who purchased the salvation we all share.

Question 2: “Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life?”

The question is then asked, will you uphold this doctrine in your life? Not, do you bring mere lip-service to that doctrine, but does it “adhere” to you in such a way that you will reject anything that attempts to degrade that doctrine? And will you live out of that doctrine? Paul exhorted the members of the Philippian church to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). You have been given salvation, now by his Spirit in you, live a life worthy of the name of Christ. Paul addressed the Colossian believers similarly: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving (Col. 2:6–7). You have been taught in your church the doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ, “so walk ye in him.”
Question 3: “Will you submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent (which may God graciosly forbid), to church discipline?”

The first part of the vow you are about to take upon yourself explains your belief of the doctrine taught in your local church congregation to be the true doctrine of salvation. In the second part of the vow, you pledge to practice that doctrine in your daily life. The final part of your vow binds you to submit yourself to the government of the local congregation of which you are a member. The elders of that congregation have oversight of your life. By taking this vow you are willingly subjecting yourself to their judgment of your walk. If you live in unrepentant sin, you will be placed under discipline. This is what you tell the elders to do when you make public confession of faith. Your vow binds you to their judgment.

Submission to church government includes not only your local congregation, but also the higher assemblies—classis and synod. How you speak of the decisions made by these bodies is governed by your public confession of faith. How you speak of the bodies themselves—suspicion and distrust or respect and humility—is governed by your public confession of faith. You took a vow to submit to their authority. If a decision is made at any level of church government that you feel is in error, you may protest or appeal as is your right (responsibility, even) according to Article 31 of the Church Order. However, when the final judgment is made on your protest or appeal, it is “settled and binding.” The word “binding” means that you—as a member of the denomination of churches that made that decision—are bound to submit to the judgment that was made.

Making public confession of faith is a weighty matter. It is not merely sitting before the elders and answering a bunch of questions, then answering three questions on a Sunday evening in front of the entire congregation. It is much deeper than that. You are taking vows upon yourself. Vows that bind you to believe, live, and submit as a member of a local body of believers, which is a part of the church universal, the very body of Jesus Christ.

Ryan is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church and a teacher at Adams Christian School in Wyoming, Michigan.

From the Pastor’s Study Rev. David Noorman

WHEN SHOULD YOU MAKE CONFESSION OF FAITH?

When it comes to the timing of a young person’s confession of faith, it’s understandable when a young man or woman wonders, “When is the right time? Is it when one completes catechism curriculum? Is there a certain age?” The title of the article should indicate to you that the right time to make confession of faith is a personal matter, “When should you make confession of faith?” Only you, dear reader, can answer that question for yourself, and I’m glad for the opportunity to help you do so.

Pastoral Encouragement

I want to begin by giving you my own pastoral encouragement: Make confession of your faith and seek admission to the Lord’s Supper as soon as possible. Don’t wait for your friends and classmates. Don’t wait for someone else to tell you it’s time. Don’t wait for a life-changing experience. Confess your faith when you are ready, and when you are ready, don’t delay.

When a pastor and consistory look out over the young people in their congregation, they are never concerned or troubled when young people appear to confess their faith and ask to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper, but they rejoice and give thanks to God! On the other hand, when young people do not come, the consistory is concerned. In fact, the consistory is duty-bound to point those who do not confess to their obligation to do so.

At the same time, we must always be careful not to be rash or hasty, especially with something as serious as confession of faith. Don’t delay, but don’t rush. Making confession of faith involves making weighty promises before God and God’s people. “Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” (Eccl. 5:5).
Three Questions

The three questions for public confession of faith provide more concrete help to lead you to make confession of faith at the right time. When you can answer those three questions truthfully and sincerely, then it is the right time to make confession of faith and seek admission to the Lord’s Supper.

When you can acknowledge the truth and believe it sincerely, then it is the right time to confess.

The first question has to do with doctrine, “Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?”

Notice that the church does not require you to be an expert in that doctrine. Nor are you required to be able to describe all the ins-and-outs of every truth of God’s word. What is necessary is acknowledgment of the essentials of the doctrine taught in your church, and the personal conviction that what is taught in your church is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. By the time you have completed your class on the Heidelberg Catechism, you have been introduced to the true and complete doctrinal of salvation. By the time you have completed Essentials of Reformed Doctrine, you are even more thoroughly acquainted with it. Confession of faith requires you to acknowledge that doctrine as God’s truth.

You should know that when you confess your faith before your consistory, your elders and pastor are not looking for someone who has all the answers. They want to know that you believe. They want to hear a confession of your faith in your God—that you hold for truth all that God has revealed in his word, and that you are assured in your heart that the promises of the gospel are not only for others, but for you.

When you are resolved by the grace of God to adhere to the truth, to defend the truth, and to walk according to the truth, then it is the right time to confess.

The second question has to do with your resolve, “Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life?”

A resolve to adhere to the doctrine you believe involves committing your whole life to your confession, rejecting all that is repugnant to (in conflict with) the doctrine you confess, and leading a new, godly life—a life that proceeds from faith, a life of daily conversion, an antithetical life.

Again, a consistory is not looking for a perfect person, or someone with a spotless track record. If so, none would be admitted into the communion of the church, not even your pastor or your elders. A consistory wants to know that you understand what God requires of you as a fully communicant member, and they want to know that you are wholeheartedly committed to doing it.

When you can truthfully and sincerely submit yourself to the authority of Christ in his church, then it is the right time to confess.

The third question has to do with an essential aspect of church membership, “Will you submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent (which may God graciously forbid), to church discipline?”

To answer this question requires an understanding of Reformed church government. You need to understand your responsibilities and your privileges as a member. The four sections of our Church Order give a good outline of church government: what office-bearers are and what their duties are; what the assemblies are and how they work; the rules governing our worship and sacraments; and the practice of Christian discipline. Make sure that you have at least a basic understanding of what you are committing to when you promise to submit to church government and church discipline.

Once more, you don’t need to be an expert in these things, but you need to be able to answer the question truthfully and sincerely. Will you submit to church government? Will you follow the order our churches have adopted? Will you take heed when the elders call, even if they call to admonish you? Even if they need to bring you through the different steps of discipline?

The very fact that you may be facing this question of when to make confession of faith is a good indication that your faith is maturing, and that you understand the obligation and privileges of church membership. Let the words of Christ encourage you to confess, without hesitation or shame, what you believe: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32).

Rev. Noorman is the pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.
PREPARING TO MAKE CONFESSION OF FAITH

A significant time in your life is the period in which you prepare to make confession of faith. Your preparation for this vow must be taken seriously. It is vital to live with both eyes on the goal of that preparation, which is, of course, the confession. Though your confession of faith is certainly not the final goal in this life, for you must always seek to cling tighter to Christ by faith, our focus here is on that time before you make confession of faith and how you prepare to confess your love for the Lord Jesus Christ before the world. Let’s consider this preparation with respect to self, doctrine, peers, and God.

Preparing with Respect to Self

It would be good for us to begin by using the words of the form for the administration of the Lord’s Supper. “First. Rightly to examine ourselves.” Though the right to partake of the Lord’s Supper is something that proceeds from making confession of faith, it is vital for the child of God to examine himself and to cry out to God, “remember not the sins of my youth” (Psalm 25:7). As you mature in the faith, the Spirit will make you to realize the guilt of your sins and work in you to truly repent of those sins. This repentance manifests itself in the putting away of those sins and an earnest desire to walk in the way that is set before us by the law of God. The believer sees that he cannot do these things in and of himself, but with the eye of faith, he looks to Christ who alone is the Way and the One whose righteousness has been graciously imputed to him. Preparation of oneself to make confession is therefore evidence of the faith that has been given to a regenerated believer, and it is by this faith then that he looks to Christ alone as the one who has breathed life into his undeserving and lifeless soul.

Preparing with Respect to Doctrine

The first question you will be asked at your public confession of faith is whether you believe that what is taught in your church represents “the true and complete doctrine of salvation.” In order to answer this question truthfully and in the affirmative, you must know the doctrines you are confessing. First and foremost, it is in God’s word that you will be able to learn the complete doctrine of salvation, which includes the wonderful truths that make up who God is and what he has done for us in Christ. Whilst making confession of faith, I recall meeting with an elder in the church to discuss the articles of the Belgic Confession, which are a good summary of our Reformed beliefs. Along with confessions, there are many good Reformed books that set out the doctrines to which we hold and explain them based on scripture. Among the most important of these are the doctrines of justification and sanctification, which are of paramount importance. These truths make up the gospel in which we rejoice, and the joy of our salvation flows out of them as we see the wondrous work of Christ Jesus all the more.

Preparing with Respect to Peers

Your preparation to make confession of faith must also extend beyond yourself. The way you speak, whom you keep company with, the things you listen to, and the things you do in your spare time are all important aspects of this preparation. A desire to praise God will radiate from your soul and will have an effect on your everyday life and decisions. Part of examining yourself, therefore, includes a search for those things which are a hindrance to your relationship with God. Scripture calls us to “put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11), which harm our relationship with God. In this we are made to submit to Jesus Christ, who is our mediator and our deliverer from all our sins.

The calling to put away those things that hinder our life with God must be met with a response that seeks to honour his name in the friendships that we establish. There are people in your life who will tempt you to let down your guard and break the vows you take by making confession of faith. As has been alluded to elsewhere in this month’s edition, this vow is before the face of God and is of great significance. It is a vow which states before the world that you belong to Christ Jesus, your faithful savior. To hold onto friendships that will tempt you to break this vow is something you need urgently to re-evaluate. The calling you are given, then, is to establish friendships which encourage you to walk worthy of the vow you take. You are to surround
yourself with others who have a fervent desire to speak of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His is the name that is to be upon your lips, and you are to speak of the “hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Young person, take action!

Prepare with Respect to God in Prayer

A fundamental truth for us to understand is our complete and utter dependence upon God for all things. Christ is the one by whom we have been given all the blessings of salvation, and it is from the hand of God that we receive our daily bread. It is God who causes us to cry out in despair for the sake of our sins. It is God who works in us, his elect people, to lift up our eyes to heaven and to see the One whose name deserves praise and worship, for he is the God of our salvation. What a privilege it is that we have been given the gift of prayer to speak with our heavenly Father. He hears our prayers and he answers them according to his will. Our prayers will not twist his arm, nor will they change his mind, but he gives us those things which we need in the way of prayer (Heidelberg Catechism LD 45 Q.116). A Christian who does not seek his Father in prayer has clearly not learned to trust God with a faith that believes his promises. God will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those who ask of him out of a true faith. We are to rely upon him to build that faith which is to be confessed.

This life of putting on the new man and putting off the old is not a one-time thing you do only before making confession of faith. It is also not something that you should wait to do until after making that confession. Your calling lies in the present and cannot simply be left for another day. Look to Jesus Christ for the help and strength that you stand in need of. He earned all things for us by his willing sacrifice, and by his death our sins have been nailed to the cross. Prepare yourself then in terms of self, doctrine, peers, and in prayer before God. Prepare for the day in which you are to confess his most glorious name before all men.

Josh is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan and a writer correspondent for Beacon Lights.

From the Pastor’s Study Rev. Garrett Eriks

I WILL SERVE THE LORD

Yes! With this one-word answer, public confession of faith is made. When this “yes” is declared by a young person standing in front of the congregation during a worship service, a vow is taken. A promise is made before God and the congregation. Promising to do something before God is worthy of serious consideration because of the consequences of breaking that promise. When we stand before the church, we must mean what we say! In our day, many people make promises tongue-in-cheek—they do not really mean what they say. Easily one takes a vow and then breaks that vow with all kinds of excuses. We need to be reminded that when we make confession of faith, we had better mean what we say.

What is a vow? A vow is a public promise made before God and the church to live by God’s truth, for the glory of his name. Such a promise has a covenant character. This means it is an aspect of the covenant life God graciously establishes with us when he unites himself to us in Christ. Included in the vow made at confession of faith is a promise before God to live obediently in our relationship of fellowship with him. It is important, however, to understand that this vow does not mean that we are accepting God’s offer to make Christ our savior. Nor does our vow bring us into fellowship with God. Instead, our vow is a promise that describes how we will live in our covenant relationship with him by his grace.

The idea of making a vow is based on the activity of Almighty God himself, who promises to bless his people. He promises to save us, forgive us, and live with us forever! When he promises to do something, the promise-keeping God swears to do these things. He swears by himself, as we read in Hebrews 6:13, “For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.”

In scripture, we find God’s people vowing to serve the Lord in response to his unfailing promises to love them. This was done by God’s people together in 2 Chronicles 13:12–15. Here the people
of Judah responded to God’s word by promising to live thankfully and obediently before God. There were also personal, individual vows that saints made in the Old Testament. For example, Samson took the vow of a Nazarite, promising that he would not drink strong drink, touch a dead body, or cut his hair in devotion to God. Similarly Joshua, as an old man, stood before all Israel and vowed, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”

When we make confession of faith, we stand with Samson and Joshua promising to serve the Lord. But there is more. The content of our promise to serve God is described by our answers to the three questions that the minister asks before the congregation. We confess that we believe that the doctrine taught in this church is “the true and complete doctrine of salvation.” We promise “to adhere to this doctrine, to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life.” And we promise to “submit to church government, and...to church discipline.” With the “yes” of confession of faith, we promise to serve the Lord, the God of our salvation, in all of these specific ways.

The child of God takes such a vow willingly and joyfully. Why? We know God’s love. We know the joy of his salvation. We know his faithful promises are for us personally. Knowing the undeserved, unmerited grace of God that saves us from sin and fills our hearts with the hope of everlasting life, we want to serve the Lord. We gladly, with heartfelt conviction, want to stand before God, his people, and even before a sinful world, promising to serve him and him alone. In fact, this may be one of the ways you know that you are ready to make confession of faith. You are able to say, “I want to devote my life to the God of my salvation!”

At the same time, we make our confession of faith before God knowing our inability to keep these promises perfectly in our own strength. We are reminded of this in the life of Samson. Once he became an adult, it did not take Samson long to break his vow (Judges 14). It was bad enough that he sought a wife from the Philistines, but he made things worse by violating his Nazarite vow. Remember how the Lord gave Samson strength by the Spirit to kill a lion on his way to visit the Philistine woman he wanted to marry. On the return trip to Israel, Samson broke his Nazarite vow, touching the dead body of the lion in order to harvest honey from its corpse. Samson also broke this vow by drinking alcohol at his wedding feast. He broke his vow still further when, finally, he gave in to the nagging of Delilah and told her the source of his supernatural strength—his strength would be gone if his hair was cut, which she did. Time after time, Samson broke his vow as a Nazarite.

We learn from Samson that breaking a vow is serious business. To break the vow of confession of faith is something that God does not take lightly. It is a violation of the third commandment, which is explained in Lord’s Day 37 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Violating our vow at confession of faith is an act of despising God’s name, a direct attack on that which God holds most holy. We tremble to know that the vow-breaking weakness found in Samson is found in every one of us.

So let me end by providing some hope as you think about the seriousness of the vow of confession of faith. As you take your vow, know that there is hope in Jesus Christ. Where we are unfaithful to these vows, he is faithful to forgive when we confess our sins. And having been forgiven, we also receive from Jesus Christ alone the strength to renew and keep our vow. We cannot keep these vows in our own strength. Our help and strength are found in Christ alone, the one whom we confess as our savior and Lord. When we confess that we believe the doctrine taught in the church, we are confessing that in Christ alone is strength to be faithful to these vows.

For those who have confessed their faith, be strong and courageous keeping your vows in the power of Christ. For those thinking about confession of faith, may the Lord prepare you to take these vows knowing your dependence on Christ.

Rev. Eriks is the pastor of Unity Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
The reign of Jeroboam II in the kingdom of Israel was characterized by great prosperity and peace. Although it sounds like a good thing, this time of prosperity had the negative effect of giving the nation of Israel a false sense of security. They assumed that their economic and political success was evidence of God’s dwelling with and blessing them, but they were in fact far from God. The nation was deeply entrenched in sin. The aristocracy enjoyed every luxury available while oppressing and enslaving the poor and seizing what little possessions or property they had left. Money was a prevalent god, and idol worship was widespread and even intermixed with the so-called “worship of Jehovah.” There was no evidence of love for God or love for the neighbor among the people. This led to a false and hypocritical form of religion that was devoid of any personal relationship with God or true turning from sin.

It was into this environment that Amos was called to be a prophet. His duty was to expose the sins of the people and show them just how displeased God was with the spiritual state of Israel. Amos did not come from a family of prophets, or even from the nation of Israel. He was a herdsman from Tekoa, a village about ten miles south of Jerusalem in the nation of Judah. Yet God chose him to be the messenger who would warn Israel of the coming judgment and their need for repentance. It is interesting to notice the image of a lion that is used several times throughout the book to signify the Lord and his judgment, beginning with “The Lord will roar from Zion” in Amos 1:2. This is an illustration that Amos would have understood well as a herdsman who needed to protect his animals from dangerous predators.

Undoubtedly, the beginning of his prophecy, where Amos methodically proclaimed God’s judgment on all of Israel’s neighbors, was popular with the people. But once he turned to exposing the sins of Israel, he faced great opposition. We read about some of this conflict in Amos 7:10–17, where Amaziah, one of the false priests, accuses him of treason. It is always easier to hear about the sin of the world than the sin that is found in our own hearts. But it is especially vital for believers to be aware of their own sinful natures and their need for a savior. As Amos 3:2 makes clear, God’s judgment for sin is far more severe on those who know his law and choose to forsake it. God had chosen Israel to be his peculiar people out of all the nations and had given them specific commands to follow in his law. As a result, they had a higher degree of responsibility and accountability before God than the pagan nations that surrounded them. Amos 6:1 warns, “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria.” Simply being a part of the nation of Israel did not make the people exempt from God’s judgment for their sin, just as merely being a member of a true church does not save believers today.

But the purpose of reading harsh truths, such as Amos 6:1 and other warnings of the prophets, is not to cause the true children of God to doubt their salvation. Rather, it should prompt the believer to carefully examine his own heart and turn to God in repentance. Where does your assurance of salvation come from? Do you find your security in your place and name in the local church? Do you find your security in your financial status or the influence that you have? Or do you place your trust wholly in your heavenly Father and what he has accomplished on your behalf by the death of his Son on the cross?

These are important questions for a young person, who is contemplating making confession of faith to consider, along with the question of why she desires to publicly confess her faith. Is it simply because of tradition? Is it because your parents said that you should or because your friend is doing it too? Is it because you are about at that age where people will start to talk if you don’t? Or is it because you have a
personal relationship with your heavenly Father and truly desire to take up your place as a full member of a true, local church? Romans 10:9–10 promises, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

In chapter 4, Amos reminds the people of all the ways that God had chastened them in the past, which they had foolishly ignored. Like a father who firmly but lovingly corrects a beloved child, God often uses trials and suffering to draw wayward believers back to himself. In Israel’s case, however, these previous judgments had not resulted in repentance or turning from sin. Amos prophesied that God was going to do something even more drastic. He was going to get their attention by stripping away all of the things in which they sinfully trusted—their money, their power, their political peace, and even their place in the land of Canaan. We know from history that this was not a vain threat. Ultimately, the nation of Israel did not listen to the warnings of God provided through the prophets and various forms of chastening, and they were exiled to Assyria in 722 B.C. as judgment for their sin.

But God also used these events to preserve a remnant as he had promised. After many preceding chapters describing judgment, we find a wonderful promise of hope and blessing for God’s covenant people in the very last verses of the book of Amos. The gospel message that Amos proclaimed to the Old Testament saints is the same message that comes to believers today—judgment for sin, mercy for sinners, and restoration for God’s people. While we do experience some measure of this restoration while still on this earth, the final, full restoration will happen when Jesus comes again. It will be even greater than the beautiful, earthly picture of prosperity that we read about in Amos 9. It will be even greater than anything we can imagine. “But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

So, take heed to the warnings of the book of Amos. As you read through it this month, pray along with the psalmist David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me…Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (Psalm 51:10, 12).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Plan</th>
<th>Sing or pray Psalter #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 8</td>
<td>Read Amos 1:1–2; 2 Kings 14:23–29</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9</td>
<td>Read Amos 1:3-8</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 10</td>
<td>Read Amos 1:9–12</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 11</td>
<td>Read Amos 1:13–2:3</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 12</td>
<td>Read Amos 2:4–8</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13</td>
<td>Read Amos 2:9–16</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14</td>
<td>Read Amos 3:1–6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>Read Amos 3:7–8; Matthew 23:29–36</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 16</td>
<td>Read Amos 3:9–12</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 17</td>
<td>Read Amos 3:13–15</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18</td>
<td>Read Amos 4:1–5</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 19</td>
<td>Read Amos 4:6–11</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td>Read Hebrews 12:3–13</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 21</td>
<td>Read Amos 4:12–13; Psalm 135</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>Read Amos 5:1–7</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 23</td>
<td>Read Amos 5:8–17</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24</td>
<td>Read Amos 5:18–24</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 25</td>
<td>Read Amos 5:25–27; Acts 7:37–53</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>Read Amos 6:1–3</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 27</td>
<td>Read Amos 6:4–7</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 28</td>
<td>Read Amos 6:8–11</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29</td>
<td>Read Amos 6:12–14</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30</td>
<td>Read Amos 7:1–3</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
May 31  Read Amos 7:4–6  Sing or pray Psalter #23

June 1  Read Amos 7:7–9  Sing or pray Psalter #21

June 2  Read Amos 7:10–17  Sing or pray Psalter #98

June 3  Read Amos 8:1–14  Sing or pray Psalter #123

June 4  Read Amos 9:1–6  Sing or pray Psalter #138

June 5  Read Amos 9:7–10  Sing or pray Psalter #222

June 6  Read Amos 9:11–12; Acts 15:12–21  Sing or pray Psalter #232

June 7  Read Amos 9:13–15  Sing or pray Psalter #214

Poem Thelma Westra

TRUSTING

I do not know the path, O Lord,
Thou hast ordained for me,
But foll’wing, trusting in Thy word,
Thy truth shall make me free.
O Lord, help me to understand
When troubles come my way,
That I am guided by Thy hand,
I’m Thine—let come what may.

All things together for my good
Are working, day by day,
I must not question, but I should
Rejoice, give thanks, and say:
“O Lord, teach me to love Thy will,
My own to cast aside;
For Thou alone my needs can fill—
In Thee, O Lord, I hide.”

Thou seest my many sins, but through
The blood of Thy dear Son
I have forgiveness, and I too
When my life’s race is run
Will dwell forever in Thy sight
And praise Thee endlessly,
In that blest land that knows no night,
At home at last with Thee.

On April 2, 2021, our Lord took Mrs. Thelma Westra home to be with him in glory. Mrs. Westra was a frequent contributor of poems and other written work to Beacon Lights over the past several decades. We publish this poem in memory of her God-given gift with words, which she used to provide inspiration and comfort for many saints in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15).
“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her” (Prov. 31:28).

In the United States, we celebrate Mother’s Day, a day to celebrate mothers and grandmothers. As Christians, we especially celebrate our godly mothers and grandmothers.

The Bible tells the story of many faithful covenant mothers:

- Eve, the mother of all humanity.
- Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who believed God’s promises and gave birth to Isaac when she was old.
- Jochebed, Moses’ mother, who hid her son so that he wouldn’t be killed by Pharaoh.
- Deborah, a mother in Israel who was both a judge and prophetess.
- Hannah, who prayed for a son, and God answered her prayer by giving her Samuel.
- Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.
- Eunice, Timothy’s mother, and Lois, Timothy’s grandmother, who both helped raise Timothy to be a godly man who became a minister in the early Church.

Many more examples of faithful mothers in the Bible could be added to this list.

On Mother’s Day, did you take the time to praise your mom for all that she does for you? Take the time to give her a hug and tell her thank you for all that she does, and not just on Mother’s Day but all year round. She cleans up after you, makes sure you have a lunch for school, and washes your clothes. But, more than any of that, she teaches you the Bible. She makes sure you know your catechism and Sunday school lessons. She sings Psalter numbers and hymns with you while you are learning them for school programs and Sunday School programs. She is faithful in teaching you about Jesus.

Tricia is a member of Unity Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
BAPTISMS
“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14
The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Declan Gene, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Ellen Brummel—Calvary, IA
Easton Jeffrey, son of Mr. & Mrs. Zach & Dallas Zylstra—Crete, IL
Finn Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Lee & Lauren Wiltjer, Jr.—Crete, IL
Emberly Sutton, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ross & Brittany Kooienga—Georgetown, MI
Chase Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Rachel VanDonselaar—Georgetown, MI
Rhett Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan & Susan Lubbers—Georgetown, MI
Natalie Elaine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Sarah Hopkins—Hudsonville, MI
Lydia Jordan, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan and Jori Kuiper—Hudsonville, MI
Blake David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian and Danae Westra—Hudsonville, MI
Jake Allan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Caitlyn Krygsheld—Peace, IL
Jane Louise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brandon & Breanna Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Joshua Francesco, son of Mr. & Mrs. Marco & Paula Barone—Southwest, MI
Gabe Robert, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Haley Van Ginkle—Heritage, SD
Liliana Noelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Deanna Langerak—Southeast, MI
Blair Eloise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Emily Boersen—Southeast, MI
Henry Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Annie Ophoff—Southeast, MI
Olive Eloise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Natalie Hiemstra—Trinity, MI
Curtis Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Natalie VanOverloop—Zion, MI
Ella Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Rachel Van Baren—Zion, MI
Elias Thomas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Thomas & Abigail Pastoor—Zion, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32
Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Dakota Huizinga—Georgetown, MI
Chloe Beute—Georgetown, MI
Charlie Kamps—Southwest, MI
Nick Ophoff—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Brent Bertsch & Miss Leah Tracey—Loveland, CO