

Theoacademy

BEING PRESBYTERIAN

PREPARATION FOR ORDERED MINISTRY

Session 5: Being a Confessional Church

Theocademy

A ministry of the
Synod of Mid-America

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Getting started

Before watching the video, consider the following questions.

- When you're faced with a difficult decision, who/what do you turn to for guidance?
- What experience do you have with the Confessions of our Church?
- Why is it important for us as Christians to be able to state what we believe?

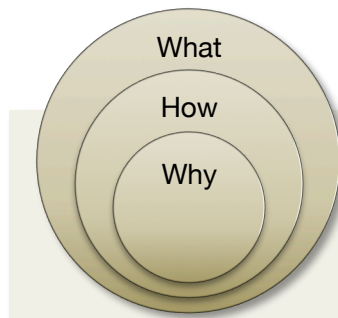
During the video

As you watch the video, answer the following questions.

- In what way does the *Book of Confessions* “guide” us in our understanding of scripture? In what ways can it be understood as a “conversation partner?”
- Why are there so many creeds and statements in our *Book of Confessions*?
- How can we make sense of the times when the documents come into apparent disagreement?
- What are some of the reasons or situations for the drafting of a new statement/confession of faith?

Why we have confessions

In the PC(USA), we have this book with eleven different declarations that were drafted over the course of almost two millennia. They represent a variety of cultures and historical eras, use a variety of approaches and tones, and discuss a variety of topics. But one central characteristic draws them all together: they all are statements of *belief*. Now, when we mention the word *believe* in today's society, we're often talking about a future (uncertain) possibility. But that's not what the men and women meant when they drafted the documents in our *Book of Confessions*. For them, it meant something much more significant – their declarations of *belief* described their foundational understandings of the way God works in and through the world.



But what purpose do these *beliefs* play in our lives? Author Simon Sinek, in the second most-watched TED talk to date, helps us understand the importance of beliefs in what he calls the “Golden Circle.”¹

What describes the actions that you or your group undertakes – for example, the products a company markets or the events a ministry group coordinates.

How describes the plans or strategies by which these actions get done – for example, the style of music at a worship service or the type of curriculum used for Sunday school.

Why describes the purpose, cause, or belief that fuels the whole process – it's the reason an organization exists or a person gets out of bed in the morning.

Sinek argues that while pretty much everybody knows *what* they're doing, fewer people and/or organizations think about *how* they're doing it, and shockingly few actually understand *why*. Thus, we tend to live our lives backwards – we waste time and energy worrying about and trying to coordinate the *whats* rather than letting them fall into place naturally when we truly understand the *whys*.

In small groups, recall a recent congregational event that has happened at your church, and think about it in terms of the Golden Circle.

- **What** was the event? What took place during that time?
- **How** did it happen? What choices regarding format or strategy were evident to you?

¹ Simon Sinek. *How Great Leaders Inspire Action*. Delivered September 2008 at TEDx Puget Sound. Available online at http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.

- **Why** was this event undertaken? What foundational beliefs or values fueled these efforts?
- **Which way do you think the event was conceived?** Did the coordinators start with *what*, or did they start with *why*? What difference would it have made if they had started in the opposite direction?

Why-fueled ministry

Right before Jesus ascended to heaven, he gave his disciples one final directive. We can find it at the end of the gospel of Matthew, and we often refer to it as “The Great Commission:”

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20, NRSV

Let’s take this mandate and look at it through the lens of the *Golden Circle*.

- **What** does Christ call his followers to do?²
- **How** are we to accomplish this task? What methods and/or strategies are we to implement?
- **Why** are we to undertake this task? What “foundational understanding of the way God works in and through the world” fuels our efforts?

² As a bit of help here: In the original Greek of this passage, only one verb is in the command form – *make disciples*. Although English translations usually give the impression that “Go” is also a command, it’s actually better translated as, “As you are going.”

- Why is this *why* crucial to keep in mind as we're going about our mission as the Church?

Creeds: expressing our *whys*

So, how do creeds play into this whole idea? From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have encountered major events or ideologies that have prompted us to gather together and discern the *whys* of our faith. Creeds, confessions, and doctrinal statements stand as testimonies of these gatherings. These declarations of belief also help us recognize that while the *whats* and the *hows* of our times and contexts may change, the *whys* remain constant. We'll dig into the creeds themselves in the next session, but for now we can learn from their commitment to "shoring up" the foundations of the Christian faith that we build upon in our own lives and contexts. Let's try out this kind of thinking for ourselves. Find a partner, and talk through the following questions.

- Name one foundational belief – one *why* – of the Christian faith.
- *How* is (or might be) that belief reflected within the life of this congregation?
- *What* kinds of activities express this belief? Are there ways in which these activities might better represent the *why* of the belief they express? If so, *how*?

Personal reflection

After the session, complete the following statements.

- One *why* that fuels my ministry is:
- That *why* translates into the *hows* and *whats* of my life in the following ways: