

# *"Here We Stand"*

## Bethlehem Presbyterian Church

### *Philippians 1:27*

“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that...I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

### **We Proclaim and Uphold**

*the following theological truths from the Bible...*

- \* The glory, mystery and work of the one and only God, known forever as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- \* The all-powerful, all-wise and loving God of the universe as Lord of all Creation.
- \* That humanity was created by God to love and enjoy Him forever.
- \* That humanity, in its arrogance and pride, rebelled from God’s perfect will and intention for Creation. That rebellion has resulted in a humanity alienated from God. This rebellion continues today as an inherently sinful humanity seeks to go its own way.
- \* That out of God’s overwhelming love and grace, God became human in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
- \* That forgiveness and salvation are through Christ alone.
- \* That the salvation received through Jesus Christ is through God’s grace alone – that there is nothing that we can do to earn or deserve God’s grace.
- \* That God’s holy, inspired, and revealed Bible is the sole guide and authority for our faith and is sufficient, in and of itself, to instruct, correct, and train in all areas of faith and practice.
- \* That God’s word is authoritative in our lives and, as God’s people, we are to be obedient to His Word.
- \* That God calls those whom He has chosen for salvation and service.
- \* That we have been called to live in a community of people, bound together by God’s gracious action, who find their identity, purpose and communion in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.
- \* That we have been called to be faithful stewards of all that God has given to us.

## **We Believe**

*the following ethical and moral responses to these biblical truths....*

- \* That, being created in the image of God, life begins at conception.
- \* That God desires for all people to live pure and holy lives as followers of Jesus Christ in all areas of our lives and in all aspects of our relationships, including the Biblical requirement of faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman and purity in singleness.
- \* That the purpose of the Church – the “bride” of Christ – is to honor, love and serve God in faithfulness through the actions of worship, service, education, missions, evangelism, fellowship and nurture.
- \* That our churches exist for all who live in brokenness and would find wholeness in Jesus Christ through humility, repentance, and God’s grace.
- \* That as members of the Church – Christ’s “body” – we have been called to love, encourage and support one another.
- \* That leadership is a calling from God, not a right to be claimed, and that those called to leadership in God’s Church strive to live in obedience to His Word.

## **We Invite**

*all who would come....*

All those who are broken, all those who have sought meaning in the things of this world and found them wanting, all those in need of identity and purpose to visit our church families as, together, we seek to honor God, grow into the likeness of Christ, and live in the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

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**I Timothy 6: 11-12** “Pursue after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith....”

# Bethlehem and The Presbyterian Church (USA)

## Preamble

The history of the Christian Church, and its predecessor, Israel, is filled with glorious moments – moments punctuated by sparkling individual examples of faithfulness and moments of miraculous corporate courage and obedience. Sadly, almost from its inception, the collective gathering of God’s chosen people has also been an arena for dissension, contentious debate and overtly sinful behavior. The very human people of God have been exactly that – very human.

Throughout history the church has divided and divided again over theological issues. In 1054, the “Great Schism” occurred, dividing western Christianity from its eastern Orthodox brethren. In 1517, the western Christian church was further divided by the Protestant Reformation. Since that time, Protestant denominations have multiplied exponentially.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a long history of formation, division, and partial reunion. Throughout all of the changes God has managed to use this broken, sinful, human institution to further His will and design for the world. The denomination, while significantly marked with wonderful moments of faithfulness and service also continues in the sad historical legacy of human brokenness. For some, the level of current sinfulness within the denomination is so complete that their individual and corporate consciences no longer allow them to affiliate with a denomination that they believe has turned their back on the historic, reformed, orthodox faith. Others believe that God is not yet done with this denomination - that the Presbyterian Church (USA) “candlestick” (Rev. 1:12, 20; 2:5) has not yet been removed and that repentance, renewal, and faithful revitalization is still possible in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Due to the current era of denominational error and fresh commitments to that which the Bible clearly declares to be sin and falsehood, Bethlehem Presbyterian Church is in need of a clear and compelling statement of commitment, purpose, direction and affiliation. Even among those in the PCUSA who seek to be faithful to the Scriptures as God’s revealed will for humanity, there are differences of opinion concerning how to respond to the current Presbyterian crisis. There are many who believe it is time for their church to leave the denomination; hundreds of congregations have already done so, with certainly more to follow. There are others who feel called to stay within the Presbyterian Church (USA) and witness to God’s call to Truth, Grace, and Holiness. We should assume that both sides are seeking to be faithful. Both sides have an earnest desire to honor God, and proclaim Jesus Christ.

The Session of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church believes that it wiser for us to affiliate with another branch of Presbyterianism with whom we have more in common at the level of some very basic beliefs.

From Bethlehem's theological vantage point, it appears that for decades there has been a theological erosion and compromise in the commitment of the denomination to its historic, essential tenets of the faith. While acknowledging that theological diversity can be a healthy value, there is a concern that in an absolute commitment to diversity, Bethlehem believes the Presbyterian Church (USA) has been willing to strongly commit to only the lowest of the commonly held theological denominators. Bethlehem is tremendously concerned that fundamental commitments to the historic, confessional proclamations regarding the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Atonement, the nature of the Trinity, the authority and inspiration of Scripture, and the nature of Sin have been compromised. In addition, Bethlehem is extremely concerned about the denomination's positions regarding issues related to the recent removal of ordination standards that specify Biblical sexual behavior within its leadership.

### **A Statement of Commitment**

Given our level of concern, and looking to move forward faithfully in these theologically muddy waters, the Session of Bethlehem has discussed our ecclesiastical options. We recognize and regret that Bethlehem has not always been faithful in its obligations to the denomination in the past. But now the Session of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church affirms its plans to move this congregation forward toward dissolution from the PCUSA. It does so with a tremendous sense of concern for the theological health and vitality of the denomination. It does so with strong sense of pastoral concern for any members of the Bethlehem church family who might disagree with this commitment. The Session of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church commits itself to the greater cause of Christ outside of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for the following reasons.

### **Principles Governing Our New Direction**

1. We humbly acknowledge our own short-comings imperfections, errors, and sins. We do not feel called to cast stones or to "rail against the apostate ones," as if we were some band of self-righteous Pharisees.
2. We DO feel the need to associate ourselves with others who clearly and unashamedly go to the Scriptures to seek God's holy will for our lives and for the Church, that we might receive encouragement and accountability as together we intend to live as the Lord has set before us, and so we are exploring our options.
3. We look with great distress, not with some pompous glee, at the self-inflicted wounds of the PCUSA. We grieve that the PCUSA has placed itself under the warning of Isaiah 5:20, *"Woe to those who call evil "good", and good "evil"; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitterness."*
4. We will continue to pray for the PCUSA, especially mindful of those orthodox believers who have chosen to remain in a theologically hostile environment, seeking to faithfully exercise a prophetic ministry to those who teach false doctrine and who promote immoral behavior within the church.
5. We have no desire to inflict pain or vengeance upon those in the PCUSA who have wounded us terribly with their misleading this branch of the Presbyterian church as they

have so recently allowed and promoted (and continue to do so) what the Church throughout history has identified as heresy and immorality.

6. In the interim, until Bethlehem can determine our future affiliation, our Session is still in control of all Bethlehem finances. Unlike many presbyteries, the Presbytery of Charlotte allows individual congregations to designate wholly, or in part, all expected financial support of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. Bethlehem also reaffirms its commitment to designated giving and we will only financially support ministries and programs in accordance with our historic confessional positions.
6. We remain free to preach and proclaim Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice, the reality of the Resurrection and the truth and authority of the whole Word of God.
7. The intention of Bethlehem's Session is to "shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God." [I Peter 5:2]

### **Bethlehem Action**

In this action, Bethlehem is committing itself to the principles of truth, obedience, accountability, love, grace, forgiveness, perseverance and is patterning itself after the example of the New Testament Church that received from Jesus the principle of separating from those who are unrepentantly at odds with God's Word [Mt. 18:17]. We fully recognize that not everyone may agree with this commitment and the actions that will flow from it. However, the mission and momentum of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church can no longer be held captive to the PCUSA's man-invented theological and behavioral notions of the day. We will stand on these principles regardless of the specific issue at hand.

*We the people of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church  
affirm our continuing commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, wherever that may lead.*

*We the people of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church  
are committing ourselves to this community and area  
as one of the mission fields in which we will be engaged.*

*We the people of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church  
are committing ourselves to a clear and unequivocal theological proclamation –  
rooted in the historic, reformed faith – and  
to a life witness grounded in biblical truth.*

*Perhaps most importantly, we the people of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church  
are committing ourselves to functioning in such a way  
that an observer could not help but say about Bethlehem that they love God and they  
love God's people, as they seek to live out a life of Truth and Grace.*