



# First Presbyterian Church, Mt. Holly

## Our Faith Statement—An Overview

### Introduction

We affirm the following distinctives as important in the sense of being profitable and health-producing for Christians to believe. We are further convinced that as one comes to appreciate these beliefs, he/she will grow to love and honor the Lord Jesus Christ more fully and understand more richly what it means to live by His grace.

Acceptance of all these distinctives, however, is not required for membership in First Presbyterian Church. One can join and be a participating member of the church without holding to any but the evangelical distinctives mentioned in the first section of this statement. Elders and deacons, however, must hold to all these distinctives.

It is our absolute and unwavering conviction that to be strong in truth without being gentle in manner is unbiblical. It is also our profound conviction that to be gentle in manner while not adhering to scriptural truth is also unbiblical. By God's grace, we desire to be both as we press on in the Lord's glorious design for First Presbyterian Church to be used "to equip His people to delight in His glory and declare that glory to the nations!"

### We are Evangelical

To say that we are evangelical means that we take our stand with those who believe in what are called "the fundamentals" of the Christian faith: the existence of the triune God, the complete humanity and deity of Jesus Christ, the virgin conception of Christ and His incarnation as the eternal Son of God, the utter sinfulness of all humanity, the substitutionary death of Christ as the only way of salvation, the physical resurrection of Christ, His sure return, salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ alone, and the infallibility and divine authority of the Bible as a faithful and true guide to what we are to believe and how we are to live.

We joyfully affirm our unity with those from every tradition and denomination that hold these fundamentals, including those true believers in Christ who are members of denominations or churches with which we might have certain theological or doctrinal disagreements in other areas.

## **We are Evangelistic**

This means we take seriously the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Without compromising the sovereignty of God, we affirm the responsibility of each person to repent and believe on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We further affirm our responsibility to extend the message of the Gospel as a call to salvation to everyone who hears its message. To this end, we call all, without distinction, to drink freely of the Water of Life and to live eternally in the presence of their Creator.

This privilege and responsibility is realized not only in our immediate context, but also in the mandate from our Lord to declare His glory to the nations. Therefore, we seek to provide regular opportunities for the community of believers at First Presbyterian Church to go on mission to other parts of the world.

## **We are Reformed**

The word "Reformed" can be defined simply in two ways: (1) It is a reference to our historical link to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and describes us as heirs of the tradition that comes from Luther, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, and other Reformers of the Church. (2) The word "Reformed" is used most commonly to refer to certain theological distinctives that have marked Reformation believers, particularly those who embrace what have come to be referred to as "the doctrines of grace."

These distinctives can be summarized by our glad affirmation of the responsibility of every person to repent and believe, and that it is God who, by His sovereign grace, draws men and women, otherwise dead in sin, to faith in His Son. By this faith alone are God's people justified.

Reformed distinctives include the sovereignty of God in His creation, providence and election of believers apart from any merit of their own; the irresistible grace of God provided for and preceding the faith of the individual; the sufficiency of God's grace apart from which every person is dead in sin and wholly defiled in all his/her faculties of soul and body; the efficacy of Christ's death for all those who believe in Him by grace; the safe-guarding of all those for whom Christ died for eternal life.

We desire and seek to hold to our Reformed convictions humbly, recognizing the sincerity and earnestness of godly men and women who hold to other positions.

### **We are Committed to Doctrinal Soundness**

This is primarily expressed by means of a doctrinal statement that we believe is a good and accurate summary of the Bible's teaching. We certainly recognize that our expression of biblical truth is not flawless, yet we believe it to be a carefully worded summary of the Bible's content. We believe it is important to note that every church has a doctrinal confession or statement, even though some may claim they have "no confession but Christ" or "no creed but the Bible." Every church summarizes its convictions in some form in order to distinguish its members from those who are not believers or those who do not embrace their church's distinctives.

We further recognize that knowledge alone leads invariably to pride. It is our sincere desire to affirm truth in genuine Christian love. We believe that truth properly applied will issue forth in the affections of the heart being stirred to obedience, thus yielding a life that glorifies God. Such a God-glorifying life is the very purpose for our existence.

### **We are Covenantal**

To say we are covenantal means we believe that the unifying principle in the Scriptures is the glory of God's grace in the one covenant of grace that God made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and finally, and most importantly, in Jesus Christ. The covenant is God's pledge to His people of a relationship of loving loyalty throughout eternity.

To speak of the unity of the covenants means that there is, and always has been, only one way to salvation in both the Old and New Testaments—that is, by God's grace alone through faith alone. This covenantal understanding of the Bible is in distinction from any system of organizing the Scriptures that would attribute differing ways of salvation to a succession of historical biblical eras.

### **We Seek to be Centered on God's Glory.**

We believe that God's glory consists of the overwhelming and overflowing beauty that stems from the sum total of all His attributes (e.g., His love, wrath, mercy, justice, etc.) working together in perfect harmony.

We believe that we exist to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. This belief is inevitably expressed through praise. We praise what we enjoy because our delight is incomplete until it is expressed in worship.

## **We Are Presbyterian**

This concept refers to our form of governance. We believe that the most clear biblical pattern is for churches to be governed by elders who lead jointly by what we refer to as a Session.

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*For more detailed descriptions of the beliefs outline above, please refer to the Essential Tenets of our denomination, ECO, A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians at <http://eco-pres.org/essential-tenets/>.*