

Confession of Faith 2023

1 The Triune God

In the name of God, we declare and confess before men that we believe in the only true God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that these three are one—the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Ghost equal in essence or being with both; that this triune God created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, visible as well as invisible, and furthermore sustains, governs, protects, and supports the same.

2 Jesus Christ, the Son

We believe in Jesus Christ; that He is very God and man; that He became incarnate by the power of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary and was born of her; that He is the Savior and Mediator of the whole human race, if they with full faith in Him accept the grace proffered in Jesus; that this Jesus suffered and died on the cross for us, was buried, arose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God to intercede for us; and that He shall come again at the last day to judge the quick and the dead.

3 The Holy Spirit, Comforter and Guide

We believe in the Holy Ghost; that He is equal in being with the Father and the Son, and that He comforts the faithful, and guides them into all truth.

4 The Church

We believe in a holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

5 The Holy Bible and Salvation

We believe that the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God; that it contains the only true way to our salvation; that every true Christian is bound to acknowledge and receive it with the influence of the Spirit of God as the only rule and guide; and that without faith in Jesus Christ, true repentance, forgiveness of sins, and following after Christ, no one can be a true Christian.

6 The Salvation Message

We also believe that what is contained in the Holy Scriptures, to wit: the fall in Adam and redemption through Jesus Christ, shall be preached throughout the world.

7 The Christian Ordinances

We believe that the ordinances, viz. baptism and the remembrance of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, are to be in use and practiced by all Christian societies; and that it is incumbent on all the children of God particularly to practice them; but the manner in which ought always to be left to the judgment and understanding of every individual. Also, the example of washing feet is left to the judgment of every one to practice or not; but it is not becoming of any of our preachers or members to traduce any of their brethren whose judgment and understanding in these respects is different from their own, either in public or in private. Whosoever shall make himself guilty in this respect shall be considered a traducer of his brethren, and shall be answerable for the same.

Our Core Values

1 We Adhere to the Confession of Faith

The United Brethren Confession of Faith, adopted in 1815, states the core doctrinal beliefs to which all United Brethren conferences, churches, and members must adhere. On many theological and social issues, people of equal Christian commitment and insight may interpret the Bible differently, and we allow room for that. But when it comes to the simple statements contained in the Confession of Faith—on God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Bible, salvation, and the ordinances—we do not allow diversity. As such, it is our denomination's key unifying document, our line in the sand which must not be crossed.

2 We Respect Unity Amidst Diversity

The United Brethren church began with two very different men, Martin Boehm and William Otterbein, who realized that on the essentials of the faith, they were alike—that they were brothers in Christ. They differed in church background, in temperament, in stature, and in the finer points of theology. But when it came to the core of what it meant to be a Christian, they found unity.

This spirit has characterized the United Brethren church over the years. We prefer to allow diversity when it comes to worship style, Bible versions, military service, social and political action, church programs, method of baptism, end times scenarios, and other issues, as long as the positions taken do not clearly conflict with God's Word or our Confession of Faith.

In the same way, we let churches and national conferences organize in the way they think will best fit their vision, needs, and culture. We don't want our mission to be hindered by man-made structures. We also realize that a persecuted, underground United Brethren church will look much different from a United Brethren church in a free society, and that various cultural issues will cause further diversity. Our mission must take precedence over methods.

Yet amidst this diversity, we expect unity. We stand firm on biblical absolutes, allow freedom where the Bible allows freedom, and seek to maintain unity when disagreements arise.

3 We Seek the Lost

The United Brethren church began as a movement of people with a passion to reach lost people. They were willing to do whatever would bring people to Christ. As people accept Christ as Savior, we then lead them further down the road of discipleship, which includes baptism, training in righteousness, the use of spiritual gifts, and holy living.

We believe in a radical conversion which results in a transformed life. This goes beyond head knowledge, beyond church attendance, beyond practicing the sacraments. Christ's presence in a Christian's life is demonstrated by a lifestyle of faithfulness and obedience to God.

4 We Demonstrate Social Concern

We must not only seek the salvation of our fellow human beings, but show genuine concern for their total well-being. We recognize our responsibility to victims of poverty, prejudice, injustice, and other forms of human suffering.

The poor will always be among us, and we cannot ignore their plight; the Bible clearly states our obligation to those living in poverty. But there are many others, whether they are poor or

not, whose situation requires our aid. They include persons in prison, immigrants, widows, orphans, the unborn, the handicapped, the homeless, the elderly, and victims of abuse. We also respond corporately to large-scale tragedies, giving sacrificially to help victims of natural disasters or social strife.

Demonstrating social concern also involves raising our voice against injustice and prejudice. We stand against discrimination, slavery, and injustice, insisting that equal rights be granted to everyone. We advocate fairness in the workplace, in the courts, and in all other settings, and seek the end of any discrimination based upon racial, national, economic, or social differences.

5 We Preserve Our Christian Witness

We believe that our lifestyles need to reflect God to other people. For that reason, we will make choices, sometimes stated through national conference moral and social standards, to behave in certain ways which identify us as Christians and protect the integrity of Christ's church. These choices will vary from culture to culture, and may involve participating or not participating in certain activities. While we resist legalistic rules, we value a lifestyle which clearly honors Christ in the eyes of others, both Christians and nonChristians.

6 We Protect the Family

God instituted the family as our main social unit, and it is within the family that children are to be created, nurtured, and trained. Families come in many forms, but all need to be regulated by God's Word. A husband and wife must remain faithful and loving to each other, and faithful and loving to the children God has entrusted to them. We realize we must constantly resist the forces attempting to undermine the strength and integrity of marriages and families, and the design outlined for them in God's Word: a married husband and wife, and any children they might have.

7 We Esteem Each Other

We are a connectional church. As United Brethren people across the world, we recognize that what happens in any of our churches matters to each of us. We are concerned about the welfare of sister churches not only in the next town, but in other countries. From Central America to West Africa to the Far East to North America, we are part of each other. We help each other, we learn from each other, we esteem each other, and we cooperate with each other to accomplish more for the Kingdom than we could by ourselves.

In the same vein, we value "the counsel of the brethren," meaning the collective wisdom and advice of our fellow believers. While individuals may not agree with the decision of a committee, commission or conference, or with a stand taken by the conference or denomination, unity demands that we respect that corporate view as the counsel of the brethren and follow it. We believe in holding each other accountable to the standards set corporately.

8 We Link with the Larger Church

We value connections with Christians outside of the United Brethren family. We are not separatist in mentality or practice. Rather, we intentionally develop connections with other Christian denominations and groups which are similar in purpose and spirit, so that we can more broadly advance the work of the Great Commission and impact our world.

DISCIPLINE REVISION: HRTF Proposals

Discipline Revision Proposals from the Human Reproduction Task Force

Insert the following as a new paragraph in the chapter “Family Standards.”

¶133 The Beginning of Life

1. In human procreation, God invites us to participate in his good work of creation in a unique and significant way. Human life is God’s gift, and it is sacred at every stage from its end to its earliest beginning.
2. The Church bears living testimony to the sacredness of life by:
 - a. Promoting the flourishing of every person’s life through works of justice, mercy, and evangelism.
 - b. Standing with and for those whose lives are vulnerable. Never is a human life more vulnerable than during its beginning.
3. God values each human being in their full humanity at every stage of their life. Therefore, we are committed to promote human flourishing at every life stage and to protect the lives of all human persons through their entire life span beginning at the moment of conception. Scripture portrays this in at least four ways.
 - a. Every human is made a bodied person in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27).
 - b. God provides for each person throughout the course of their life, regardless of accomplishments or faith, sustaining life by sending rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45).
 - c. God loves each and every human person, shown most clearly in God’s saving mission through the Incarnation of God the Son: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16).
 - d. God’s salvation entails the restoration and renewal of the whole person, shown through the full, authentic humanity of Jesus the Messiah (Hebrews 2:5- 18).
4. God’s people bear testimony to the sacredness of life by caring for pregnant women as well as the unborn. No other human relation shares the characteristics of a pregnant woman and the human life she carries: one life biologically dependent upon another human life, and neither life more intrinsically valuable than the other.
5. The physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a pregnant woman are significant in the best of circumstances.

These needs are even more acute in circumstances when pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or when continuing a pregnancy places a woman’s life at risk. During such unimaginably difficult times, the Church envisions and strives to embody the love and tenderness of God for the weak and the vulnerable just as it does when promoting and protecting the lives of the unborn.

Replace the current statement on Family Planning with the following, and place it after the statement on “The Beginning of Life.”

¶134 Family Planning

1. Children are a gift from the Lord. We recognize the family as an environment of unique nurture and support in which all members together pursue their calling in Christ Jesus.
2. Children may be received into the family in a variety of ways, including natural conception, assisted reproduction, adoption, and foster care. These aspects of reproduction and growing families are some of the deepest and most meaningful aspects of our lives. In this light, they can also be the most painful, complex, and difficult.
3. Believers may for valid reasons determine not to have children, or to place a child for adoption. For those who choose to have children, if there is a desire to time pregnancies or to space children a certain number of years apart, that is a decision parents are free to make, and through prayer and discernment they may wisely plan for the addition of any children God blesses them with. (Proverbs 16:3; James 1:5)

Insert the following as a new paragraph in the chapter “Family Standards.”

¶135 Adoption and Foster Care

1. As believers we have the privilege of being adopted into the family of God.
2. In scripture we see the heart of God for the fatherless and are told to fight and care for the orphan (Psalm 146:9). The church is encouraged to do this, in parenting or support roles. Valuable avenues to family growth may include embryo, private, international and domestic adoption, and foster care.
3. Often there is some aspect of loss and tragedy included in situations of adoption and foster care, and the responsibility to provide care can be challenging and difficult. The church is encouraged to be equipped, and offer emotional and financial support as they are able, in providing for the needs of these children and parents (Isaiah 1:17). In doing so, Jesus’ value of children is lived out, and is considered the same as caring for Jesus himself (Matthew 18:1-6).

Insert the following as a new paragraph in the chapter “Family Standards.”

¶136 Infertility

1. We recognize the pain and grief that accompanies infertility and empathize with couples affected by it.
2. Couples affected by infertility may request the elders gather together to lay hands on them to pray for healing (James 5:14).
3. Infertile couples are advised to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit (James 1:5) and supportive church community in moving forward with faith in considering methods to welcome children into their family, including assisted reproductive technology, adoption, and foster care.

Insert the following as a new paragraph in the “Family Standards” chapter.

¶137 Assisted Reproduction

1. Assisted reproduction includes the use of medical procedures or technology to aid human procreation.
2. The use of assisted reproductive technology may take a variety of forms, which will necessarily change as new procedures develop. Therefore, rather than addressing the nature of specific procedures, the church advises its members to prayerfully consider the following guidelines when deciding whether to make use of assisted reproductive technology:
 - a. Its use should be motivated by love.
 - b. Its use should bring glory to God.
 - c. Its use should protect and preserve life from the moment of conception.
 - d. Its use should promote justice toward and prevent the exploitation of each person involved in the process.
 - e. Its use should protect the integrity of the family.

Replace the current statement on Abortion with the following.

¶138 Abortion

1. We believe that human life is sacred from the moment of conception until natural death. Consequently, abortion cannot be recognized morally and scripturally as a means of birth control.
2. We are aware that any consideration of abortion occurs in a place of crisis and significant consequence, and that forgiveness is available in Christ.
3. The church recognizes that abortion may be medically necessary in rare and tragic circumstances, taking into account the life of the mother and baby.
4. The church needs to demonstrate sensitivity and care toward those who have had abortions in the past in order to facilitate an atmosphere of grace and healing.

Insert the following as a new paragraph in the Family Standards chapter.

¶139 Human Reproduction and the Responsibility of the Church

1. Scripture is clear that God's church is responsible to bring Jesus' love, light, hope, and healing to people who are hurting, struggling, and in need while also maintaining deeply biblical convictions about human life and reproduction. These two convictions are not in conflict. They are to be simultaneously embraced and held in creative tension in order for the Church to be a faithful witness to the world.
2. We understand that a deep range of emotions pertain to reproductive issues. The Church's commitment is to:
 - a. Be a generous support in bearing the burdens of those in trial or crisis (Gal. 6:2; Rom 12:15).
 - b. Show extravagant welcome (Romans 12:13; 15:7), companionship (Romans 12:10), and sacrifice (Hebrews 13:16) to those in need.
3. While maintaining our compassion and support for people during difficult and often confusing reproductive crises, we must always maintain our commitment to the authority of Scripture (Isaiah 40:8, 2 Timothy 3:16). At times this may necessitate embracing convictions that contrast with prevailing cultural and social norms and rejecting certain reproductive technologies or procedures.
4. It is our high view of God's gift of life (Psalm 139:13-16), the sacredness of the human body (Genesis 1:26-27), and the beauty of God's design of human reproduction (Genesis 1:28, 2:23-24) that compels us to maintain and celebrate our biblical convictions about human reproduction as we care for and value the least of these.