

Sermon**“The Confessions of 1967 Revisited”**

In Approving the Confessions of 1967, the United Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted its first new confession of faith in three centuries. The turbulent decade of the 1960’s challenged churches everywhere to restate their faith.

In 1956 during the 168th FA the United Presbyterian Church received an overture asking that the Westminster Shorter Catechism be revised.

The 170th FA proposed instead that the church draw up a “brief contemporary statement of faith.” A committee (appointed by the assembly labored at the task for 7 years. At the 177th GA in 1965 the commissioners vigorously discussed the committee’s proposal and sent an amended draft to the church for study. Sessions, congregations and Presbyteries suggested changes and additions to the document. In response a newly appointed committee of Fifteen made revisions to the statement.

The 178th Assembly debated the draft, accepted it and sent it to the Presbyteries for final ratification. 90% of the Presbyteries voted approval. Final adoption of the Confessions came in 1967 during the 179th General Assembly.

The Confessions of 1967 modestly were built around a single passage of Scripture: found in Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth (5:19) “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.”

WHAT WERE THE CONDITIONS AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS WHICH PERCIPITATED OR TRIGGERED THE NEED FOR THE CHURCH TO RESTATE IT’S FAITH?

In a society impregnated with racism and class-ism, blacks and other minorities, and the poor were subjected to discrimination and cruelties of bigotry in every sector of the nation (North South, East and West) Social unrest in cities and towns threatened to undo the modest gains the country had made from the recession following world war II, and the recovery from a war driven economy.

The Civil Rights movement of the 60’s, under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, and others, the conscience of many in the nation was pricked.

The sight of cities burning, looters stripping stores and warehouses of everything of value; massive numbers of blacks men women and children, and their supporters being beaten by batons, bitten by dogs and thrust about by water hose; the “Sunday morning massacre” – of four little girls in a Birmingham Church, as the result of a bomb planted by members of the

Klan; the news of a white stay-at-home mother being murdered as she drove along a back road on her way back to her home in the north.

The nightly depiction on TV of the hatred and violence perpetrated against persons and property had a profound effect upon the conscience of America society. Churches and religious organizations awakened and convicted by the Holy Spirit of God stepped forward and joined massively in the stride toward justice and equality.

The United Presbyterian Church with strong voice and action challenged its congregations and presbyteries to exercise its true calling to be reconciled to God. Hence, the Confessions of 1967.

This action by the Presbyterian in adopting the Confessions was one of the motivating factors which inspired me to transfer my membership from the American Baptist Convention to the United Presbyterian Church in 1968.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as his reconciling community. The community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares his labor of healing the enmities which separate men from God and from each other.

THE CHALLENGE WE FACE IN 2007 AND BEYOND.

The Church must continue to combat racism. Racism is still alive. It is not as overt as it was in the 60's and 70's, but it is entrenched institutional racism.

Congregations must be intentional in inviting and person who don't look like them, and talk like them to become a part of their worshiping community. Sunday morning – 11:00 A.M. Continues to be the most segregated hour in America.

Equality (equal treatment under the law) continues to evade Blacks and other minorities. Unemployment and under-employment remains high among minorities, especially black males.

The church must be the voice of conscience as our nation grapples with a proper response to the influx of illegal aliens into the country, especially the 11 million plus who are currently here.

WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we

are Ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:17-21)

Rev. Howard Bryant

The Presbytery at Worship, March 27, 2007

First Presbyterian Church in Avenel