Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

The Faith We Affirm Together (1968)

(Adopted by Assembly in 1968 as a contemporary statement of faith, drawing the Church's attention to its purpose, 'the instruction of its people and the guiding and ordering of its life.' B.B. page 64.)

The negotiating Churches accept one another as belonging to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, the witnessing Church of the centuries. They recognise that, in the course of history, the Christian Faith has been interpreted in a variety of ways, declared in confessions and in formularies. They welcome the contribution that each Church will make from the riches of its particular heritage.

They acknowledge also that Christian truth is not to be confined to any one historic or contemporary interpretation and that the Church is always under obligation to study the Faith, to be willing, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to receive new insights, and to proclaim the Faith in words and in deeds relevant to the needs of the age.

They confess that differences of interpretation exist already within each of the communions taking part in the negotiations and they share the conviction that liberty of conscience to interpret the Faith once committed to the Church must be permitted within the fellowship of the Church united.

They claim that the united Church, in dependence upon the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, has the right to formulate, adopt, modify and interpret supplementary doctrinal statements, always in agreement with the word of God received in the Bible and witnessed to by the creeds of the Church. Final decision in all matters of the Faith is the responsibility of the Church.

These Churches, as they prepare to enter union, now declare together the faith they hold in common.

- The Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand
- The Church of the Province of New Zealand
- The Congregational Union of New Zealand
- The Methodist Church of New Zealand
- The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand,

each, as part of the Church Universal worshipping one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and holding to the apostolic Faith as expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, with joy reaffirms its belief in the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, and sets forth the substance of its faith in the following declaration:

1) The Standards of the Church

In creation and in history God reveals Himself to men, but supremely has He spoken in Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The Bible is unique as the inspired record and interpretation of what God has wrought for our creation, preservation, and redemption, above all in His act of self-giving and of self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, anticipated in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New.

The authority of the Bible depends ultimately upon God, and its witness within the Church in every generation is verified to faith by the Holy Spirit as the authentic word of God. It is the responsibility of the believing community, the Church, to interpret the biblical witness.

The books called the Apocrypha witness to the faith and thought of the people of Israel in the centuries immediately preceding the coming of Jesus Christ. Important as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New, they nevertheless are subordinate to the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments. From biblical times the Church has confessed its faith in its hymns, liturgies, theological systems, confessions, and creeds. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are recognised as witnessing to and as safeguarding that Faith which is continuously confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the experience of the Church. Uniting the Church today with the faith of Christians of all ages, and in every place, they are accepted as having an authority above that of the later formulations.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration, the Thirty-nine Articles, the Standard Sermons and Notes on the New Testament of John Wesley, the Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell, are held in honour as embodying traditions now merged in the united Church. Since they arose to meet special situations in history no finality can attach to them. Nevertheless, in so far as they are consistent with the teaching of the Bible and of the Creeds, they will enrich the united Church's understanding of its faith and mission. It is the right and duty of the united Church to use this historic witness to the Christian Faith, of which this present declaration "The Faith We Affirm Together" is a contemporary expression, for the instruction of its people and the guiding and ordering of its life.

2) God

There is one living and true God.

God is love and makes Himself known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit-One God, the Trinity.

God the Father, Creator and Ruler of the universe, has made all things for His glory, and has sent His Son into the world to reconcile the word to Himself, having prepared the way through His people, Israel.

Jesus Christ, the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, born in the fullness of time of the Virgin Mary, is, in the mystery of the Incarnation, truly God and truly Man. In His life and teaching He revealed God's holy will, fatherly love and saving purpose. Though sinless, He died on the Cross for our sins. He was raised from the dead in triumph over sin and death to reign as Lord. He is exalted as our Advocate and Intercessor. He will come again in glory as Judge and Saviour to accomplish the final victory.

God the Holy Spirit is at work in the world and in the lives of men leading men to repentance and to faith in Christ as Saviour, bringing assurance of sonship, producing Christlike character, guiding, empowering and uniting the Church in love and in the service of God and man.

God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – has made all things, has redeemed mankind, and sanctifies His Church.

3) Man

God has created man in His own likeness. He has endowed him with freedom and responsibility with reason and moral judgement, with power to love and need to be loved. Man is made for fellowship with God as son and with man as brother.

Man, however, defies in pride and disobedience the divine intention for his life. Thus, by sin, he is alienated from God. The result is disorder, frustration, conflict, and spiritual death. All men are guilty before God and fall under His judgement.

4) New Life in Christ

God, who first made known His redemptive purpose for sinful men through His election of Israel, declares through the Gospel of Jesus Christ His love for the world and His desire that all men should be saved. In Jesus Christ He has revealed man's true life and brought into being the new humanity. Men are able neither to reconcile themselves to God nor in their own strength to fulfil the divine purpose for which they were created, but God by His grace calls, justifies, reconciles to Himself and sanctifies those who respond to Jesus Christ in repentance and in faith. This new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, who initiates and sustains the new life in the fellowship of the Church by enabling men to believe, and to share in the victory of Christ.

5) The Church

The Church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Community of the Holy Spirit through which God continues His reconciling work in the world.

- The Church is called to be one because it is one family under one Father, whose purpose is to unite all men in Jesus Christ our Lord.
- The Church is called to be holy because it is set apart by God for Himself through the Holy Spirit to be His people in the world.
- The Church is called to be catholic because it is for all people, and for all times, holding the Christian Faith in its fullness.
- The Church is called to be apostolic because it is sent to preach the Gospel in the world, and to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over the world, receiving its authority from Jesus Christ through His Apostles.
- The Church is the community in which believers are nourished in the Christian life, fellowship and hope by means of the proclamation of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, participation in the Lord's Supper, common prayer and other ordinances of the Church. In the Holy Spirit, members of the Church share in the Communion of Saints.

6) Sacraments of the Gospel

The Sacraments of Holy Baptism and of Holy Communion, appointed by Jesus Christ, are, in the power of the Holy Spirit, visible signs and effective means of grace.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of union with Christ, of forgiveness of sins, of death to sin and of rebirth to eternal life through Him. By this Sacrament we are admitted into the household of faith for the life-long service of Jesus Christ.

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper or of Holy Communion is a sign and seal of the covenant of redemption. It is the Thanksgiving or Eucharist in which the Church remembers with joy the Incarnation, Christ’s perfect life on earth, His sufferings, death, resurrection, reign and presence. In this liturgy the Church repeating Christ’s word and action shows forth His death until He comes, pleads His sacrifice, proclaims His victory over evil, and in Him shares together in life with God. Partaking in faith we receive Him to our nourishment and growth in grace, presenting ourselves in Him a living sacrifice to God. In response to grace, we renew our covenant and communion with Him and also with those gathered in faith at the Lord’s Table and with all God’s company in heaven and on earth. Christ thus restores the penitent, assures them of God’s steadfast love and draws them closer to Himself and to the whole Church.

7) The Ministry

The Church’s ministry derives from Jesus Christ, its risen and exalted Lord, the Head of the Church. Christ’s ministry is prophetic, priestly and kingly and by the Holy Spirit is continued through the Church which he sends among men as the servant people of the servant Lord. By virtue of their membership of His Church, His people are called and commissioned to share His ministry in, to and for the world. The Church is thus called to a life of ordered yet varied service in which every member shares.

For the good ordering of this ministry God gives to the Church some to minister in special ways. These are set apart, ordained, and sent as were the Apostles, for a particular ministry within the general ministry of the Church, to build up the Church and to equip all members for their task. This particular ministry exercises the functions of proclamation, service and oversight and is expressed in a form including elements that are episcopal, presbyteral and diaconal.

8) The World and the Church

The world, which was created for the glory of God and which is the object of His love, is the sphere of the Church's mission. God calls men to use all His gifts in accordance with His creative purpose The Church therefore welcomes all the light that science can throw on the universe and its working.

Human society, however, gives clear evidence of man’s alienation from God in its divisions and in man’s abuse of God’s good gifts. Nevertheless Jesus Christ is Lord over all life, individual, social, national and international, and the Church is His servant people, called in a divided and estranged world to declare the Gospel and to share in His ministry of reconciliation. Its vocation in the world is so to witness to Jesus Christ that all men may come to fullness of life in Him.

9) The Christian Hope

Man is created to glorify God and to share in His divine life. The fulfilment of this purpose is assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For those who are in Christ eternal life begins on earth and continues for ever in the presence of God and in the company of all His people. At a time He Himself appoints God will bring to fulfilment all that He has begun. Christ Himself will be revealed in power and victory and glory. All men will be judged by God in Christ in the light of His perfect knowledge, holiness, and love. The destiny of those who reject Christ remains in the hands of God. The end of history will see the victory of Christ, the overthrow of evil and the triumph of God’s love.