

Statement from the Shepherding Council of the Presbytery of Long Island

Adopted by the Shepherding Council on March 31, 2025

Presented to the Presbytery of Long Island at its Stated Meeting on May 3, 2025

Guided by the Holy Spirit, our presbytery follows Christ by partnering with congregations, communities, and individuals to embody God's inclusive love and justice in an ever-changing world.

In the Presbyterian tradition, confessional statements are made by communities of faith in particular times and places who feel called to bear witness to God's truth and grace. "In these statements, the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as its actions....They claim the truth of the Gospel at those points where their authors perceived that truth to be at risk." (*Book of Order*, F-2.01)

As part of the Body of Christ, we seek to bear witness to God's truth and grace in the communities of Long Island. We do so imperfectly, embodying also the sins, temptations, and abuses that characterize human life. We are diverse in our life experiences, our racial and ethnic identities, our first languages, our economic resources, our countries and religious denominations of origin, our political affiliations, and our family configurations. We celebrate and are strengthened by our unity in diversity and strive, with the Spirit's help, to follow together the Christ who showed us how to love God and love our neighbor, in whom we see the very face of Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46).

As Presbyterians, we exercise and uphold principles of shared authority and governance, where decisions are made in gathered councils and not by any individual. The Constitution of our denomination includes commitments to elections by the people, collective discernment and corporate judgment, and due process. We take seriously the lessons of history, recognizing "the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny" (*Book of Order* F-2.05).

Above all, we study and are guided by our scriptures, which testify to a God of love for and faithfulness to all people, all nations, and all of creation.

Therefore, at this particular moment in time in the United States of America, we reaffirm what we believe, and what we are called to do, with words from the confessional statements of our ancestors in faith:

- "In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve." (*A Brief Statement of Faith*, 1983).
- "We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust." (*The Scots Confession*, 1560)
- "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death." (*The Theological Declaration of Barmen*, 1934)
- "We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the church's vocation as well. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State." (*The Theological Declaration of Barmen*, 1934)
- "We believe that God has revealed God's self as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged...that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right; that

the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream; that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.” (*Confession of Belhar*, 1986)

- “The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it.” (*The Confession of 1967*)
- “The reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God’s good creation.” (*The Confession of 1967*)
- “In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.” (*A Brief Statement of Faith*, 1983)
- “With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.” (*The Confession of 1967*)

Because they are not consistent with our faith, we therefore reject:

- the equating of Christianity with the nation
- the elimination, dismantling, or underfunding of programs that protect and help poor families and children, both in the United States and around the world
- the erasure of history—whether in a museum, in digital spaces, in schools, or in government—because that history lifts up the diverse experiences of people in our country
- any dehumanization of people, including but not limited to immigrants, women, LGBTQIA+ people, and people of color
- the unjust detainment and deportation of residents and students without due process and/or based on their beliefs or participation in the constitutionally-protected right to protest
- the disproportionate influence of wealth on the electoral process and public policy
- the degradation of God’s natural creation

