

Questions for Further Reflection – The Belhar Confession

1. The three main themes of The Belhar Confession are Unity of the Church, the ministry of Reconciliation, and the Justice God Desires in the World. Which of these three themes are most interesting to you? Why? What did you learn from Pastor Tim's presentation that most surprised or intrigued you?
2. The Belhar Confession has a lot to say about the unity of the church and how it is a gift from God. Pastor Tim said unity does not mean uniformity, but that by focusing on Christ we are united in the midst of, across, and in spite of our differences. Name something that has been a gift to you and enriched your life that has come from an individual or group that is different from you. How has it enriched your life? Why do you think Christians have had such an immense difficulty honoring Jesus' request for unity? What are some impediments to unity in the church? Name some specific examples of disunity among Christians. In what ways is unity a gift? In what ways is it an obligation?
3. Read Luke 4:14-30. Think of your own cultural context – who are the people about whom Jesus (quoting Isaiah) speaks? In other words, who are the poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed in your world? In our congregation? How do you respond to them? In what ways are you seeking reconciliation with them? What happens when Jesus finishes speaking? Why do you think the people reacted the way they did? Identify a justice issues that concerns or interests you. How is it being addressed in your community? In what ways could you help? If our congregation took seriously the words of Belhar – *God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, in in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged.* – how would it seriously change our priorities?
4. The first step in racial reconciliation is recognizing the need for reconciliation. Why is it so difficult for people to acknowledge this need? Why do you think white people in our country are so reticent to admit and accept their privilege and participation in systems that continue to oppress people of color in our society? How might Belhar Confession help with this problem? Some in our country have suggested that the fact that we elected a black president and that there are prominent people of color in entertainment and the media (Don Lemmon, Oprah Winfrey, Viola Davis, etc.) means that we aren't racist. What do you think?
5. Do you think our church is a safe place for people who might feel excluded elsewhere? Why or why not? How might we provide a safe space for those who feel oppressed or wronged? How do we create a culture where everyone feels free to share their expression of pain and anger without feeling defensive?
6. List situations you can think of in which the behavior of Christians has damaged the credibility of the Gospel. List situations where Christian congregations and individuals have borne witness to the light of Christ. Someone once said that to be an agent of change you must "start where you are, use what you know, and do what you can to make a difference." What are some things you can do where you are and using what you know to what you can to make a difference? What about our congregation?