



Equipping Us for Ministry in the 21st Century: Monthly Foundations Focus 2019-20

Introduction

Over the next year we, as a Presbytery and as individual churches, are invited to explore together a portion of our Book of Order: The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, as a way of equipping ourselves for ministry in the 21st century. As you may remember, earlier this century the Book of Order went through a period of reformation which culminated in the adoption in 2011 of the New Form of Government (often called “nFOG”). One of the changes which came with this was the formation of a new section on the foundations of Presbyterian polity. This was created from a variety of sources including Scripture, documents from the early Christian church and Reformed tradition, and early portions of the former Form of Government, all identified as foundational principles and placed within the context of God's mission for the church in the world.

This may sound like a daunting task and yet actually there are only three chapters in this section and we will be focusing our energies on two of those. Often the content of these chapters is skipped over, but they provide us with a view of the riches of being Presbyterian. Studying them with the Holy Spirit working in and through us may open us to new ways of being Presbyterians together. We may become better equipped for our ministry ahead as we read, discuss, pray, and even sing about our foundations. The texts of key parts of the Foundations, along with reflection questions and a prayer, are included in the monthly resource below. We hope you will use this resource in committee and session meetings, group gatherings, classes, and personal spiritual moments.

Know that as you are doing this, so are your brothers and sisters throughout the Presbytery of the Miami Valley.

We are grateful to Ministers of the Word and Sacrament Linda Niece and Kelley Shin and Ruling Elder Gidget Collins for collaborating in the preparation of this resource for our churches.

*The Leadership Council
Presbytery of the Miami Valley*

MAY 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

First, read F-1.01 of the Book of Order: “God’s Mission”

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God’s kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord’s favor upon all creation.

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God’s mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God’s love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God’s mission.

Then discuss these questions:

1. Each of us is called to be part of God’s mission to the world in Jesus Christ. How do your gifts, individually and as a church, fit into God’s mission?
2. Since we have no “higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever,” how are you finding joy in God in your daily life?

PRAYER Holy God, what a joy and privilege it is to be called to be part of your mission in this world through our Lord Jesus Christ. May all we do, in word or in deed, be glorifying to you. And may our lives individually and as the Body of Christ be living examples of your love and grace. Amen.

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JUNE 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

**First, read the following three parts of F-1.02 of the Book of Order:
“Jesus Christ is Head of the Church”**

F-1.0203 Christ Gives the Church Its Life

Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ’s will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

F-1.0204 Christ Is the Church’s Hope

In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope, and that the Church, as Christ’s body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.

F-1.0205 Christ Is the Foundation of the Church

In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Christ God reconciles all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross (Col. 1:19–20). In Christ’s name, therefore, the Church is sent out to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation with God, with others, and with all creation. In Christ the Church receives its truth and appeal, its holiness , and its unity.

Then discuss these questions:

1. How can we individually and as the Body of Christ bear witness to the good news of reconciliation with God, with others, and with all of creation?
2. What is keeping us from living freely “in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God?”

PRAYER God of all creation, we praise you for sending Jesus Christ to be head of the church and Lord of our lives. Forgive us for the many ways we deny you that place in our church and in our lives. Send your Holy Spirit to comfort us and call us back to your loving care and guidance. Amen.

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JULY 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

First, read the following part of F-1.03 of the Book of Order: “The Calling of the Church”

F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ

The Church is the body of Christ. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27–28):

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God’s transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.

Then discuss these questions:

1. We are the Body of Christ. Pick one of these gifts and share how your church is sharing that gift in your community and world:

- Community of Faith
- Community of Hope
- Community of Love
- Community of Witness

2. In what ways has Christ given you or your faith community the strength and gifts you need for the work of the gospel? Share some tangible ways you have felt Christ’s empowering Spirit.

PRAYER Lord Jesus Christ, we are humbled to be called your people. We are delighted to be the Body of Christ. And yet, so often, we confuse your ways with the ways of the world. Mold us and empower us to be the Body of Christ, with all the gifts of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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AUGUST 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

First, read the following parts of F-1.03 of the Book of Order: “The Calling of the Church”

F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church

With all Christians of the Church catholic, we affirm that the Church is “one holy catholic and apostolic.”

a. The Unity of the Church

Unity is God’s gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Just as God is one God and Jesus Christ is our one Savior, so the Church is one because it belongs to its one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Church seeks to include all people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone. There is one Church, for there is one Spirit, one hope, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:5–6).

Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one. To be one with Christ is to be joined with all those whom Christ calls into relationship with him. To be thus joined with one another is to become priests for one another, praying for the world and for one another and sharing the various gifts God has given to each Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not destroy unity in Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and to deepen communion with all other churches within the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

b. The Holiness of the Church

Holiness is God’s gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Through the love of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God takes away the sin of the world. The holiness of the Church comes from Christ who sets it apart to bear witness to his love, and not from the purity of its doctrine or the righteousness of its actions.

Because in Christ the Church is holy, the Church, its members, and those in its ordered ministries strive to lead lives worthy of the Gospel we

proclaim. In gratitude for Christ's work of redemption, we rely upon the work of God's Spirit through Scripture and the means of grace (W-1.0106) to form every believer and every community for this holy living. We confess the persistence of sin in our corporate and individual lives. At the same time, we also confess that we are forgiven by Christ and called again and yet again to strive for the purity, righteousness, and truth revealed to us in Jesus Christ and promised to all people in God's new creation.

c. The Catholicity of the Church

Catholicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God overcomes our alienation and repairs our division.

Because in Christ the Church is catholic, it strives everywhere to testify to Christ's embrace of men, women, and children of all times, places, races, nations, ages, conditions, and stations in life. The catholicity of the Church summons the Church to a deeper faith, a larger hope, and a more complete love as it bears witness to God's grace.

d. The Apostolicity of the Church

Apostolicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God sends the Church into the world to share the gospel of God's redemption of all things and people.

Because in Christ the Church is apostolic, it strives to proclaim this gospel faithfully. The Church receives the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ through the testimony of those whom Christ sent, both those whom we call apostles and those whom Christ has called throughout the long history of the Church. The Church has been and is even now sent into the world by Jesus Christ to bear that testimony to others. The Church bears witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things new, and is still at work in the world. To be members of the body of Christ is to be sent out to pursue the mission of God and to participate in God's new creation, God's kingdom drawing the present into itself. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the Gospel of Jesus Christ as received from the prophets and apostles, and stands in continuity with God's mission through the ages.

The Church strives to be faithful to the good news it has received and accountable to the standards of the confessions. The Church seeks to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance,

acceptance of Christ alone as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples.

The Church is sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;

sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service; and

participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world.

Then discuss these questions:

1. In which of these "Marks of the Church" is your church shining forth and staying strong? Share examples of that mark which are working in your church:

Unity of the Church

Holiness of the Church

Catholicity of the Church

Apostolicity of the Church

2. In which of these same "Marks of the Church" is your church struggling and needing strengthening? In what ways might you strengthen that mark?

PRAYER Sweet Holy Spirit, we need your presence and power to be who we are called to be and to live out the Marks of the Church in tangible and life-changing ways. Give us discernment and love in our striving to be the true church of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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SEPTEMBER 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

First, read the following two parts of F-1.03: "The Calling of the Church"

F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church

Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the

Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever:

the Word of God is truly preached and heard,
the Sacraments are rightly administered, and
ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.

In our own time, we affirm that, in the power of the Spirit, the Church is faithful to the mission of Christ as it:

Proclaims and hears the Word of God,
responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and
inviting all people to participate in that new creation;

Administers and receives the Sacraments,
welcoming those who are being grafted into Christ,
bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection,
anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and
committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized
and
the hungry; and

Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ,
living in the strength of God's promise and
giving itself in service to God's mission.

F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church

The Great Ends of the Church are:

the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
the maintenance of divine worship;
the preservation of the truth;
the promotion of social righteousness; and
the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Then discuss these questions:

1. The word "end" is best understood in this context as goal, purpose, or reason for being. In light of this, what ends do you see requiring more of our attention as we move into the future, and why?
2. How do the Notes of the Reformed Church and the Great Ends of the Church compare with the mission statement of your church? with the mission statement of the Presbytery of the Miami Valley?

PRAYER God of Our Lives, focus our attention on the great ends of the church, so we can better understand how we may be the hands, feet, hearts and voices to do your mission in the world. Amen.

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OCTOBER 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

**First, read the following part of F-1.04 of the Book of Order:
“Openness to the Guidance of the Holy Spirit”**

F -1.0401 Continuity and Change

The presbyterian form of government set forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is grounded in Scripture and built around the marks of the true Church. It is in all things subject to the Lord of the Church. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ draws worshiping communities and individual believers into the sovereign activity of the triune God at all times and places. As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him. United with Christ in the power of the Spirit, the Church seeks “not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

Then discuss these questions:

1. In the last twenty years what changes have you experienced brought on by the Holy Spirit within your own church, within the Presbytery of the Miami Valley, and within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?
2. How do you discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in your congregation and in the Presbytery?

PRAYER Gracious God, as we seek new direction, help us always to follow the lead of Jesus working through the Holy Spirit to discover the will of God for our lives and our community of faith. Amen.

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NOVEMBER 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

**First, read the following part of F-1.04 of the Book of Order:
“Openness to the Guidance of the Holy Spirit”**

F – 1.0403 Unity in Diversity

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:27–29).

The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.

Then discuss these questions:

1. What are the barriers to unity and diversity in your church? our Presbytery? the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)? and out into God’s world?
2. How might the guidance of the Holy Spirit set us on a more inclusive path?

PRAYER Loving God, make strong in our hearts what unites us; build bridges across all that divides us; help us to begin to celebrate our differences and to see them as reflections of your multi-faceted love. Amen.

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DECEMBER 2019

Chapter 1 -- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

**First, read the following part of F-1.04 of the Book of Order:
“Openness to the Guidance of the Holy Spirit”**

F – 1.0404 Openness

In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God’s mission in the world. In Christ, the triune God tends the least among us, suffers the curse of human sinfulness, raises up a new humanity, and promises a new future for all creation. In Christ, Church members share with all humanity the realities of creatureliness, sinfulness, brokenness, and suffering, as well as the future toward which God is drawing them. The mission of God pertains not only to the Church but also to people everywhere and to all creation. As it participates in God’s mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:

a new openness to the sovereign activity of God in the Church and in the world, to a more radical obedience to Christ, and to a more joyous celebration in worship and work;

a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity;

a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God’s activity in the world; and

a new openness to God’s continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical, that it might be more effective in its mission.

Then discuss these questions:

1. Why is it important for us to be open to the Holy Spirit today?
2. How do we as a church remain ever ready to move in new directions in response to the Spirit’s leading?

PRAYER Sing a prayer for openness. *Open My Eyes, That I May See* (Hymn 324 in the Presbyterian Hymnal, Hymn 451 in the Glory to God Hymnal, and also found in other hymnals used by Presbyterian congregations).+++++

JANUARY 2020

Chapter 3 -- PRINCIPLES OF ORDER AND GOVERNMENT

First, read the following part of F-3.01 of the Book of Order: “Historic Principles of Church Order”

F-3.0101 God Is Lord of the Conscience

- a. That “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men (The word “men” throughout this quotation from the eighteenth century should be understood as applying to all persons) which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”
- b. Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.

Then discuss these questions:

1. God alone is Lord of the conscience is interpreted “as my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Only God is Lord of it. Only God’s Word has the right to bind it.” In other words, if a community standard is contrary to my informed understanding of God’s revealed will in Scripture, God sets me free to dissent from it. In light of this understanding, what does God alone is Lord of Conscience mean to you?
2. Are there any issues or standards on which you have been guided to dissent? What are they and why?

PRAYER Holy God, you guide us as we work together for the betterment of our church, our presbytery, and our world. Open our hearts to your teaching, and our conscience to your will. Thank you for giving us free will to know you, love you, and honor you with our beliefs and work. Amen.

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FEBRUARY 2020

Chapter 3 -- PRINCIPLES OF ORDER AND GOVERNMENT

**First, read the following part of F-3.02 of the Book of Order:
“Principles of Presbyterian Government”**

F- 3.0202 Governed by Presbyters

This church shall be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament). Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and guide in its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament shall be committed in all their work to teaching the faith in word and in deed and equipping the people of God for their ministry and witness.

Then discuss these questions:

1. How do ruling elders go about discerning and guiding our congregations in their faithfulness to the will of God?
2. How do ministers of the Word and Sacrament equip the people of God for their ministry and witness? What are some of the ways that equipping the people may need to change as we move into the future?

PRAYER Holy Father, be present with those who are gathered to learn about our Presbyterian government with humility and readiness of heart. Bless our churches and presbytery as our presbyters seek to guide, strengthen, nurture, teach, and equip them for the journey ahead. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Church’s hope and foundation. Amen.

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MARCH 2020

Chapter 2 -- THE CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS

First, read the following -- F-2.01 of the Book of Order: “The Purpose of Confessional Statements,” and F-2.02: “The Confessions as Subordinate Standards”

F-2.01 The Purpose of Confessional Statements

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in the *Book of Confessions*. 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 by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Reformed Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers.

The creeds and confessions of this church arose in response to particular circumstances within the history of God's people. They claim the truth of the Gospel at those points where their authors perceived that truth to be at risk. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They appeal to the universal truth of the Gospel while expressing that truth within the social and cultural assumptions of their time. They affirm a common faith tradition, while also from time to time standing in tension with each other.

F-2.02 The Confessions as Subordinate Standards

These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The church is prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions. Moreover, the process for changing the confessions of the church is deliberately demanding, requiring a high degree of consensus across the church. Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*, that is, “The church

reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God” in the power of the Spirit.

Then discuss these questions:

1. How have the confessions been used in your instruction in confirmation class, to be a church member, or in preparation as a ruling elder and/or minister of the Word and Sacrament?
2. How many confessions/creeds are there? Which one is your favorite and why?

PRAYER O God, who sent gifts of the Holy Spirit to those first saints, we know you continue to send gifts to us. Our prayer is that you will claim us anew, and allow us to hear the whisper of the wings of your Spirit dove. Our confessions are beloved communications. Help us to listen to the words more carefully and grow in our faith to help others hear the good news. In your precious name, Amen.

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APRIL 2020

Chapter 2 -- THE CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS

First, read the following -- F-2.03 of the Book of Order: “The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Church Catholic,” F-2.04: “The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Protestant Reformation,” and F-2.05: “The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Reformed Tradition”

F-2.03 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Church Catholic

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) witnesses to the faith of the Church catholic. The confessions express the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church in the recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ.

F-2.04 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Protestant Reformation

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) upholds the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is God’s grace in

Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone —embody principles of understanding that continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith.

F-2.05 The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Reformed Tradition

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who in Christ and by the power of the Spirit creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love. Related to this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:

The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;

Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;

A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation; and

The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.

Then discuss these questions:

1. What do the watchwords – grace alone, faith alone, and scripture alone – mean to you?
2. Acknowledging the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny still present in our lives today, in what ways do we seek justice and live in obedience to the Word of God?

PRAYER Lord, we know that praying is the most effective way to invite you to work in our life. The majestic words of our confessions are the work of many hands, those known and those anonymous. Bless our work as we continue to live out these confessions. Help us to live in unity with each other, for we know each person is a child of God. In your gentle spirit we pray, Amen.