

Putting Faith into Words

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As someone who helped write and form the Shenandoah Confession of Faith, it might be too much to say that I am formed by the confession since *I* helped form *it*. In the confession, we (the drafting committee) did our best to put words to our inner convictions about how we hope to live out our faith in its most perfect form. In truth, I would like to think that is how we approach all confessions of faith — not as statements of final authority that we should fit ourselves into, but as reflections of community values and dreams.

That said, reading and reflecting on the Shenandoah Confession, and all confessions past, present, and future, can open our eyes to the faith and convictions of others. From that point, we may allow ourselves to deepen our commitment to our own faith values, and consider new dimensions of our ever-evolving, personal faith. The Shenandoah Confession is not meant to cause an end to the conversation. Communities of faith will always attempt to articulate their values and beliefs. But, as with all confessions before us, the Shenandoah Confession is meant to invite others into conversation with us, and invite others to have these conversations with their own communities of faith.

One of the strongest missional themes throughout the Shenandoah Confession is the expressed desire to live out faith in practice. All of the articles, in some shape or form, talk about how we as believers are supposed to relate to the people around us. In some cases, this takes the form of striving to love people who are different from us, while in other articles it's a focus on supporting community efforts that bring the work of God into fruition. Our faith is not just a set of beliefs and inner convictions, deeply personal and individual feelings that we hold, but something that we live out. As Christians, we are called to look at the life and teachings of Jesus and cannot help but let that flow into our relationships with those around us.

It might seem cliché to state that “people will know we are Christians by our actions.” This is an often overused phrase serving as an excuse for us to stay in our comfort zones. But the Shenandoah Confession is not calling for us

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to simply live our lives as quiet followers of the Good Shepherd. It is a call to action. It is a cry calling us to attend to our communities. Our neighborhoods are still full of violence and oppression, even at the most basic levels, as seen in an overdependence on slave labor for basic consumer goods, energy from countries that horde the wealth, parts of town that we are afraid to enter, and people at church whom we refuse to talk to.

Yes, it may be cliché to say that people will know we are Christians by our actions, but that is what the Shenandoah Confession is calling for. The question is, are we living out our faith to such a degree that it's working? Can the average person tell that something is different about us because we are Christians? Are we letting the power of the Holy Spirit give us the strength to go beyond our comfort zones and risk the humility of serving as the hands and feet of Jesus? Or are we content living our weeks in relative comfort, and limiting worship to Sunday morning gatherings? Living out our faith takes small, simple, and often scary steps.

I see the Shenandoah Confession as a reflection of this generation's desire to go beyond abstract theology, finite words, and endless debates, putting our faith in Jesus as our living redeemer into action. I confess that I personally fall short of these lofty goals, but by writing down what I believe within the fellowship of community, and sharing it with others, I have made a first step.