

**1. Who do you believe to be head of the church?**

Jesus Christ is the one and only eternal head of the church.

**2. In what ways does the one who you believe to be the head of the church function in that capacity?**

The head of the church demonstrated the way to live in full accord with the will of God by honoring and glorifying God with perfect love and selfless obedience. This testimony serves as a vision and a model for all people. Being, “Conformed in the image of Christ,” means seeking greater and always increasing conformity to God’s will, the way Jesus did. Jesus may have lived the perfect human life but it is misguided and futile for people to seek this goal. Jesus never asked people to be perfect. He knows people will always fall short of this goal. Instead, he asks us to love God actively and above all else and he showed us it is possible and demonstrated how to do it.

The head of the church gave us the Spirit of truth, who speaks from within, teaching and leading people according to God’s good will and infinite wisdom. In our culture, this still small voice competes with overwhelming amounts of background noise and relentless distractions. As a result, we may fail to hear God’s voice clearly and isolating it from the crowd of voices usually takes time and practice. It is time well spent however, because those who hear and obey God’s voice enjoy lives characterized by purpose, fulfillment, and unceasing worship.

The head of the church enables people to have close communion with our God and with our neighbors. A part of human nature rejects these relationships and actively seeks to subvert them. Through the forgiveness offered to us by the person and work of Jesus Christ, we are free from the bonds of a corrupted and rebellious nature to love God and each other.

The head of the church inspires the hearts and guides the minds of leaders, lay and ordained, to fulfill their personal and corporate vocations. The kingdom of heaven is advancing and God calls people to participate in individual tasks and team-based work to move toward this vision.

**3. How are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal and God’s Word to you?**

The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the self-revealed witness to God’s desire to love and never give up on people and creation. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the culminating act of God’s love. The subtitle to my favorite children’s Bible is, “Every story whispers his name.” This statement is true and relevant. Our God makes promises and keeps them, finds people without hope and rescues them, and wants to know us and be our God. The Bible tells the story of this God using many different forms but the message is always the same. God loves all that he created and no obstacle, not even death, is greater than his love. This truth forms us and serves as the cornerstone of Christian faith. When we read the Bible in worship or study it at home we are not merely telling a story from the past. Whenever we tell God’s

story we become caught up in it, as God's grace and revelation come to us, as part of God's continuing story of loving grace. The cohesive, divinely revealed story it tells and the way God continues to speak through it make the Bible a one-of-a-kind source. It is, therefore, indispensable and authoritative to my own life and the life of the church.

4.

**A. Discuss how the essential tenets of the Reformed faith, as expressed in the confessions of the church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, have meaning for the church and for you.**

The essential tenets of the Reformed faith are enduring theological principles that are a product of worshiping communities who have engaged the world at the often messy intersection between church, and its Biblically rooted ideals, and culture, and its fickle and rapidly evolving ideological currents. Many of the essential tenets have remained constant for millennia, Trinitarian belief and the divinity of Christ for example, but the list has also evolved as Christian people have endeavored to respond faithfully to their culture in light of God's word to them and the tireless work of sharing the gospel and making disciples.

In the past, when the church has lost its way or needed to be reminded of the core beliefs that provide a framework for its identity, the essential tenets have helped light the path for the way home by offering concise articulation to our fundamental beliefs about God. The essential tenets, as they are found in the Confessions and Book of Order of the PCUSA include the trinity, incarnation, salvation by grace through faith, scripture is the Word of God and our only rule of faith and obedience, sovereignty and providence of God, the election of the people of God for service as well as salvation, God's involvement in the covenant community of God's people, faithful stewardship, the recognition human sin, and the commitment of believers to justice, liberation, and obedience. These principles continue illuminating the path home for God's people today.

The various Confessions included in our Constitution highlight Biblical theology as it has been applied by particular communities of faith to the mission to which they have been called. Understanding the historical and cultural background in which they were written increases the impressive intellect and faithfulness displayed in these documents. While they are indeed profound and enlightening, it is right that our polity considers the confessions "subordinate standards" of faith and practice, because the Bible is the primary tool with which we are called to engage our culture. God calls us first, as he did our forbearers, to the difficult work of seeing our culture through God's eyes, offering grace, critique, and guidance to a world that is lost and in desperate need of the hope and healing only God can give. I believe this is a faithful interpretation of the notion "once reformed always reforming."

**B. How will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?**

In the verses of his song entitled, "Creed," Christian recording artist Rich Mullins recites the words of the Apostles Creed. In the chorus of the song he sings his own words, "I believe what I believe is what makes me what I am. I did not make it. No, it is making me. It is the very truth of God. Not the invention of any man." These sentiments are true. Beliefs matter. Christian identity is shaped by the covenantal story of God with

us. When we tell God's story, we also learn our story. In the same way, Christian identity is also transformed by God's ways and truth, revealed especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I will tell God's story and invite others to join me. I will preserve and teach others about God's ways and truth. I will lift up and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I believe it is good practice for pastors, elders, and members of session to read and study our Book of Order together, annually, if possible, but at least once during their active cycle in leadership. Many will balk at the suggestion from a pastor to spend their time reading a text called, "The Book of Order," but to judge this book by its cover, and thereby presume it is a stodgy resource best used as an occasional reference, is to neglect a powerful and practical text which expresses the essential tenets of Reformed faith and Presbyterian Polity, often in beautiful prose.

The Directory for Worship, in particular, is a joy to read. I have recommended it to church members who have asked for reading suggestions, I have used it in teaching Sunday School with Senior High students, I have even kept a copy on my bedside table from time to time. In the future I would like to offer classes and occasional sermon series' based on insights articulated in the Book of Order.

**5. Are there aspects of PC(USA) theology and polity as contained in the constitution of the church with which you are in disagreement in belief or nonconformity in practice?**

No. My beliefs and practices conform fully to the theology and polity of the Constitution of the PCUSA.

**6. With regard to your answer in question 5, will you be governed by the PC (USA)'s Polity and Discipline?**

Yes, I accept and submit myself to the governing and disciplinary policies of the PCUSA.

7.

**A. In your own life, how will you seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ?**

Jesus instructed and enabled his followers to know, love and obey God, to love each other, to make disciples, to strive against sin, to accept God's forgiveness and forgive others, and to worship. I will do everything possible in my everyday life and in my pastorate to achieve these ends. I will seek to know and obey God's Word by reading, studying, and applying scripture to my life. I will make disciples by preaching and teaching God's Word and by inspiring others to participate in mission. With God's help I will confront or turn away from sin in my life. I will forgive others as God has forgiven me. I will do my best to cultivate and exhibit a life of unceasing worship and gather to worship in community as a leader and a worshiper.

**B. How will you seek the Lord Jesus Christ in loving your neighbors?**

When the lawyer asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" I think he was hoping Jesus would identify a small group of people. Instead, Jesus implied that everyone is his neighbor and he should love all people, including strangers and enemies. This challenge is monumental. Loving my family and friends means sharing my life,

struggles, and joys and requires patience, forbearance, and mutual understanding. Loving strangers and “the least of these” often involves identifying a need, having real concern for their lives, demonstrating God’s grace through compassionate action, and safeguarding the image of God in them. I am still learning to love my enemies. Jesus shows us the way but it is not easy. Forgiveness and courage, grounded by God’s promises, are essential tools for this task.

### **C. In working for the reconciliation of the world?**

The reconciliation of the world is God’s work and I am a willing and humble participant in it. To this end, I watch closely for God’s action in the world and get involved in it. I listen for God’s voice because I want to be ready and able to respond and to fulfill the role God has called me to perform.

God has called me to serve as a pastor and church leader. God loves the church and is actively using the faithful people in them to transform and reconcile the world. As a church leader, I have agreed to be on front lines of this work by preaching God’s Word, teaching God’s story, giving counsel, serving others, administering sacraments, and worshiping God.

### **8. How do you stay energized in order to serve with intelligence, imagination and love?**

I stay energized for service by maintaining intentional stewardship of my body, soul, and mind. Regular physical exertion and outdoor recreation, planned exercise, commitment to making informed and healthful nutritional choices, and being chased by my boys all work to keep my body in good condition.

Along with the Christian disciplines noted above, music plays a significant part in the health and vitality of my soul. Listening to music, singing an old hymn in a church choir or by myself in the car, humming a moving melody, discovering a new favorite song, and playing my acoustic guitar have a profoundly restorative effect on my soul. My love of music is one of the richest gifts God has given me.

I try to keep my mind healthy and active by reading a wide variety of books including theology, nutritional science, history, child development and parenting. I also enjoy writing, stimulating conversation, and occasionally watching documentary films.

### **9. What are your beliefs and practice regarding fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, and chastity in singleness based on the following references.**

I was twenty-three when my wife and I married. We have now been married for more than nine years and we have learned, through experience, a great deal about the demands and blessings of a committed covenantal relationship. In our life together we have relocated five times, we have struggled to tactfully manage the relational demands of family and friends, we enrolled and graduated together from seminary, we have worked low wage jobs and begun professional careers, we have been blessed with two children and leaned on each other for support and encouragement while learning the exhaustive ropes of parenting.

We have encountered and handled these highs and lows together, playing to win and refusing to give up. On this journey we have grown in respect for each other, our

love has been tested, refined, and strengthened, be and loved each other as sincerely and totally as we are able. our intimacy has grown deeper and more profound. I have loved my wife and cherished our life together for nine years. I will always love and honor her and work to strengthen our life together. I believe God created my wife and I to be married to each other, that God helps us to honor the covenant we have made and that God honors our relationship by blessing our life together.

While it's conceivable that God calls a small number of people to a life of chaste singleness I believe faithful marriage is God's plan for most people. God designed committed married life and healthy sexual desire, and its physical expression in the context of a married relationship, as the fullest and most intimate enactment of love available to human experience. God loves the people he created and gave us the great gift of committed married life for our good. I believe God's desire is for most people to accept this gift, to make and uphold a covenantal relationship with one person, and that God blesses this relationship and uses it to make two become one.

The rising divorce rate stands in direct contradiction to all the above and raises numerous complicated issues for pastors. The theologian in me wonders, if God calls people to married life and blesses it, why more than half of all marriages end in divorce. The counselor in me wonders if the odds of success could be increased by offering comprehensive preparation for married life to engaged couples and additional resources for help and healing to people in troubled marriage relationships. The family advocate in me wonders how I might help when a marriage is blindsided by infidelity, broken by divorce, and children are separated by custody rights. The cultural observer in me wonders about the long term effects soaring divorce rates will have on the future of committed relationships and family life in our country. The Bible teacher in me wonders why Jesus permitted divorce in cases of adultery and didn't mention spousal abuse. I don't have the answers to these questions but I will do everything God requires of me to restore marriage according to God's design.