

Dr. Matilde Moros
Witnessing the Confession of Belhar
a Gift to and from the Presbyterian Church USA [PCUSA]
Contribution at the Belhar Conference 26.1.2019 in Detmold

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Thank you for inviting us to this important consultation on the Confession of Belhar as the Church of Lippe discerns how to understand this gift from our South African family. Sending two representatives from the PCUSA to the Church of Lippe means that we, the PCUSA, acknowledge the reconciling power of the gospel, and how the Confession of Belhar leads us to ministry together.

Cliff Kirkpatrick and I recognized deep seated racial divisions that continue in our country and our national church when we were both were commissioned in the twenty first century by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA to serve as Co-Moderators of the second Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar. In our denomination, we represent great differences and diversity in regard to race. I represent the four to six percent non-white members of the PCUSA.

The Confession of Belhar is for us not only an adopted confession for our denomination, it is personal. If for Cliff Kirkpatrick and his generation growing up in the deep south of the US meant that he was raised during a time of legal segregation among the races, for me and the next generations it has meant that racism and anti-immigration sentiments continue to plague the nation, the church, and our own families. As a mother of African American/Latino children, the high rates of official violence and rampant racism impact our everyday lives. As someone who grew up in Latin America, at a time of political violence in which people could be considered dangerous for almost anything I recognize the similarities between racial and ideological when people's very lives are at stake. The segregation of people because of ideologies of superiority is also a part of the church, and we must confess that in Christ we will not succumb to this.

I consider the Confession of Belhar to potentially become a global Reformed confession with particular implications to each place where it has been gifted. After our sister Church in South Africa offered the gift of the Confession of Belhar, the PCUSA's General Assembly in 2008 formed a first special committee on the Confession of Belhar to study how the confession might be the church's response to the ongoing racial issues in the U.S. and instructed it to study the confession. Much like your church in Lippe, the PCUSA debated and deliberated, similarly to what you are doing, over theological meanings of confessions, and what this gift entailed.

When the second special committee was formed, we were commissioned to create resources and to communicate with the larger church so that our 2/3 majority vote from Presbyteries would be an informed vote. Given that our group had a mixture of representation from all over the country, with various church expertise, we produced a large number of materials for different parts of our church, and different ways in which our church engages new information. Following the Reformation's example of making the scriptural text accessible, so too we produced information to make the Confession of Belhar accessible to our church membership, including among others: study guides, bible studies, worship supplements and a video.

We bring you our resources to share, and you may find these through our website:

WWW.PCUSA.ORG and by searching Belhar. Please explore, there are varied other materials that you may find on the main web page.

One example of a material that has been used in first conversations about the Confession of Belhar is our brochure: "Frequently Asked Questions About the Confession of Belhar":

http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/belharbrochure.pdf

We produced a congregational workshop:

http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/belhar_workshop_design.pdf

We also produced a video with Presbyterians from the PCUSA reading in their own voices with a U.S. English accent, and an appropriately PCUSA reality, the words of the Confession of Belhar:

<https://vimeo.com/97751502>

We are only beginning to discover the many layers of the gift from the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, (URCSA) to the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) and the Reformed world. We pray for your process and may God guide you in your deliberations.

In service to Jesus Christ, Matilde Moros, PhD