

**Comparison of Basic Beliefs and Viewpoints of Three Presbyterian Denominations:  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians  
(ECO), and Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)**

At the request of Mid-Council leaders in the Presbyterian Church (USA) this comparison chart has been developed. Every effort has been made to make this as accurate as possible, using the official documents of each denomination as sources.

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<b>Issue</b>	<b>PC(USA)</b>	<b>ECO</b>	<b>EPC</b>
<b>When did the denomination come into existence in its current structure/form?</b>	<b>1983.</b> The PC(USA) claims continuity back to the founding of the Synod of Philadelphia in 1706. In 1983 the United Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Presbyterian Church in the United States reunited to form the PC(USA).	<b>2012</b> (and is still being formed)	<b>1980</b>
<b>Does the denomination list what it considers to be essential tenets of the faith? (Essential tenets are foundational beliefs.)</b>	<b>Not in Detail.</b> One of the ordination vows for PC(USA) officers is “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable exposition of what Scripture leads us to believe and do?” The themes of the Confessions are listed in F-2 of the “Form of Government”—Trinity, incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ, grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone, and 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	<b>Yes.</b> Its essential tenets are attached.	<b>Yes.</b> A summary of its essential tenets are attached.

	sovereign righteousness and love.” That chapter is attached.		
<b>What are deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders asked in their ordination vows about Scripture?</b>	“Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ universal, and God’s Word to you?”	“Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?”	“Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?”
<b>What are deacons, elders, and pastors asked concerning Jesus Christ as Savior?</b>	“Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?”	“Do you believe in One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?”	To affirm without exception the essential tenets, including the statement on Jesus Christ (see attached).
<b>Is the incarnation (that Jesus is fully God and fully man) upheld?</b>	<b>Yes.</b> The official statements of the PC(USA) uphold this.	<b>Yes</b> (included in its essentials)	<b>Yes</b> (included in its essentials)
<b>Is substitutionary atonement by Jesus upheld?</b>	<b>Yes.</b> The official statements of the PC(USA) uphold this.	<b>Yes</b> , in the ECO’s <i>Book of Confessions</i> . There is no specific mention of the substitutionary atonement in summary of its essential tenets attached.	<b>Yes</b> (included in its essentials)
<b>Confessions/Creeds</b>	<b>8 confessions plus 3 catechisms</b>	<b>8 confessions plus 3 catechisms</b> (same as PC[USA])	<b>Westminster Confession of Faith</b> (The EPC lifts up only one confession.)
<b>Are women ordained into leadership positions?</b>	<b>Yes.</b> The belief that women can be ordained into leadership is required to be affirmed by all ordained leaders and congregations.	<b>Yes.</b> Like the PC(USA), the view on women’s ordination is required to be affirmed by all ordained leaders and congregations.	<b>Yes and no.</b> “The Evangelical Presbyterian Church has chosen to leave this decision to the Spirit-guided consciences of particular congregations concerning the ordination of women as Elders and Deacons, and to the

			presbyteries concerning the ordination of women as Teaching Elders.”
<b>Affirms the view that marriage is between one man and one woman?</b>	<b>Yes.</b> This is the official position of the denomination. The understanding of Christian marriage is currently being studied in the PC(USA).	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Are ordained leaders expected to live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness?</b>	The PC(USA) has decided to practice mutual forbearance toward each other and other councils of the church regarding ordination.	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>View on abortion</b>	<b>“Abortion ought to be a last resort, because life is sacred to God.”</b> In its resource for women facing problem pregnancies, the PC(USA) writes that the church “would like to support you as you make decisions about your pregnancy” and explores three options: 1) keeping the baby; 2) making an adoption plan; and 3) having an abortion.	<b>Has no formal stand.</b> On FAQs about the ECO, one will find statements such as “ECO clearly states that all human life is sacred, from conception until natural death,” but no formal statement is available on its website, nor does this broad statement suggest how the ECO would deal with rape, incest, and life of the mother situations.	<b>Should be legal only to protect the physical life of the mother.</b>
<b>Per capita (request for funds to help pay for administrative costs of denomination)</b>	<b>Yes.</b> It is currently \$7.02 per member and is voluntary.	<b>Yes.</b> It is 1% of church budget and is mandatory.	<b>Yes.</b> It is \$17 per member and cannot become mandatory, per polity.
<b>Ownership of congregation’s property</b>	<b>Congregations hold property in trust for the use and benefit of the PC(USA).</b>	<b>Congregation owns property.</b>	<b>Congregation owns property, and this provision cannot be changed.</b>

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS

#### 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,<sup>a</sup> 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.

#### 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<sup>b</sup> in the recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adop-

tion 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,<sup>c</sup> faith alone,<sup>d</sup> Scripture alone<sup>e</sup>—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,<sup>f</sup> holiness,<sup>g</sup> and providence of God<sup>h</sup> who in Christ and by the power of the Spirit creates,<sup>i</sup> sustains,<sup>j</sup> rules,<sup>k</sup> and redeems<sup>l</sup> the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love.<sup>m</sup> Related to this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:

The election<sup>n</sup> of the people of God for service as well as for salvation<sup>o</sup>;

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<sup>p</sup> and tyranny,<sup>q</sup> 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.

## **Evangelical Presbyterian Church's Essentials of Our Faith**

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith:

1. We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!
2. Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
3. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.
4. Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.
5. The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.
6. Jesus Christ will come again to the earth—personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20)
7. The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to “Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.” He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10)

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

## The 19 Key Points of Evangelical Covenant Order Of Presbyterians' Essential Tenets (to read the entire statement, go to <http://eco-pres.org/theology/essential-tenets/>)

1. The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.
2. We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.
3. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who is both one essence and three persons.
4. Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human.
5. The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.
6. The risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human.
7. The same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.
8. We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.
9. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebellion against God's will.
10. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God's design.
11. In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God.
12. Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.
13. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost.
14. In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.
15. Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline.
16. The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king—reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.
17. Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God.

18. Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.
19. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments.