

MMU – August 31, 2026

Note from Lisa – What I am/What we are

In the past few months, I've encouraged each Session member to review The Foundation of Presbyterian Policy in the Book of Order. This section highlights our shared mission, fostering a sense of purpose and unity in serving God's calling. In section F-1.0304, we read about "The Great Ends of the Church." Last week, I gave a quick review of the first three of the great ends. This week, I'll look at the final three: the preservation of the truth, the promotion of social righteousness, and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world.

Jesus told us he is the way, the truth, and the life. The truth Jesus was talking about was the Word of God. We do not need to preserve the Word of God; God preserves that Word for all ages. Rather, this great end reminds us we are to preserve the truth in our engagement with others and in our interpretation of God's Word. When we talk about preserving the truth, there is a lot of disagreement about what the truth is across various topics. But the Bible reminds us that faith is not about having all the answers or understanding all truth, but about trusting in God and opening our hearts to God's Word. The Bible is full of stories of people who thought they knew the truth only to have God open their eyes to a bigger truth. Only by trusting in God can we have the faith that opens us to God's truth in our lives and in the world.

As a church, we need to preserve the truth by continually listening for the Spirit's guidance to enlarge our understanding of it. In addition, we need to seek the truth in all matters, including matters of discipline. In the Presbyterian Outlook, James Evinger wrote about adding "truth" to the Rules of Discipline. He put it this way: "By exposing falsehood, truth affirms the essence of our beliefs as a faith community. Preserving the larger truth of our faith in a God of love and justice is a spiritual step towards restoring the bonds of trust betrayed in the name of Jesus Christ. By revealing the significance of the acts of commission and their adverse effects, we preserve the truth. In doing so, we preserve our integrity." (The Presbyterian Outlook, An argument to add "truth" to the proposed Rules of Discipline edits. James S. Evinger. Published: June 6, 2022, updated: June 8, 2022. <https://pres-outlook.org/2022/06/an-argument-to-add-truth-to-the-proposed-rules-of-discipline-edits/>).

The fifth great end, promoting social righteousness, is the call for us to a way of living. We are called to do more than think about social righteousness; we are called actually to practice social righteousness. Social righteousness and social justice are closely tied in the Bible, but they are not the same. C. Scott Pryor, in his article “Social Justice and Social Righteousness: Virtues, Systems, and Structures, writes about the theology and history related to social justice and social righteousness. He states:

...justice prevents harm and restores what is owed; righteousness promotes good and sustains what is life-giving. Justice is indispensable, but righteousness is ultimate. The just person does right by others; the righteous person does right for them. To cultivate both virtues together is to participate in the divine ordering of creation, in which “righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne” (Ps. 89:14).¹

Our modern confessions – The Barmen Declaration, the Confession of 1967, and the Belhar Confession – point us not only to seeking and preserving the church’s truthful mission but also to acting in ways that promote social righteousness.

Finally, the church is called to exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven in the world. We are called as the church to not merely point to the Kingdom of Heaven, or talk about God’s Kingdom, but to exhibit it in all that we do and all that we are. That means every time we gather, we should be able to show the world the love of God and the beauty of all of God’s creation. It means that when we are working towards social righteousness, preserving the truth, and gathering in fellowship, the world should glimpse God’s grace and mercy. In all that we do, we are to share the gift of God’s love with all who see how we act and who we are.

I encourage you to read and study our modern confessions to get a better understanding of how we are to be in the world.

What I am, what we are, is Presbyterian, more than people who use a particular form of government to be the church, but rather a way of serving God’s mission in the world.

¹ Pryor, C. Scott, Social Justice and Social Righteousness: Virtues, Systems, and Structures (October 01, 2025). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5554559> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5554559>