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From the Heart of God



**A Study of the
Belhar Confession**

From the Heart of God



A Study of the Belhar Confession

by Susan Damon

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Prologue

The Belhar Confession has its roots in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. This “outcry of faith” and “call for faithfulness and repentance” was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) under the leadership of Dr. Allan Boesak. The DRMC took the lead in declaring that apartheid constituted a *status confessionis* in which the truth of the gospel was at stake.

The Dutch Reformed Mission Church formally adopted the Belhar Confession in 1986. It is now one of the “standards of unity” of the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). The Belhar’s provision of a framework for confronting the sin of racism has made possible reconciliation among Reformed churches in southern Africa and has aided the process of reconciliation within the nation of South Africa.

But the Belhar’s relevance is not confined to southern Africa. It addresses three key issues of concern to all churches: unity of the church and unity among all people, reconciliation within church and society, and God’s justice. As one member of the URCSA has said, “We carry this confession on behalf of all the Reformed churches. We do not think of it as ours alone.”

The Belhar Confession

1. **We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.
2. **We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe

- that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;

- that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;
- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;

- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

3. We believe

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells;
- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of non-reconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. We believe

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;

- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

5. **We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

Note

This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive-language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA).

Using This Study Guide: Advice for Group Leaders

Unity, reconciliation, justice: these are the central themes of the Belhar Confession. It's our prayer that as your group begins this study, each member will embrace these themes as guiding principles for your work together. We pray you will experience

- **unity**, so that disagreement is not cause for division but an opportunity to reexamine one's own position, to understand and appreciate differing viewpoints, and to practice love, respect—and unity!—despite those differences.
- **reconciliation**, so that all participants may embrace one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, turn away from past divisions, and commit, with God's help, to seeking understanding and common ground.
- **justice**, so that you allocate your time together fairly, allow everyone equal opportunity to speak, and listen to every viewpoint with respect.

Living out the Belhar Confession's principles of unity, justice, and reconciliation within your group offers possibilities for healing, personal transformation, and powerful witness in your congregation and in the world to the grace and power of God.

Course Materials

For this study, you will need the following materials:

- one copy of this study guide for each participant
- one copy of the course DVD
- for each participant or household, one copy of the free thirty-day devotional that accompanies this course.

These resources are available from Faith Alive at www.FaithAliveResources.org or 1-800-333-8300.

You will also need

- a DVD player
- a whiteboard, chalkboard, or newsprint to use in brainstorming activities.

When additional supplies are required, they are listed in the session plan.

Tips for Getting the Most Out of This Study

- **Distribute materials early.** If at all possible, distribute the study guide and devotional to participants before the first session. Encourage everyone to complete the pre-session activities for Session 1 (reading the Belhar and reflecting on the questions).
- **Prepare.** Sessions will be much more fruitful if participants come prepared. Encourage everyone to use the daily devotions and to spend at least half an hour on the pre-session activities. Leaders should read through the session materials in advance, select activities, and make sure they have needed materials on hand.
- **Extend a warm welcome.** Make sure everyone in your group feels welcome and included. If participants don't know each other, make time for introductions or consider wearing nametags.
- **Be flexible.** Feel free to adapt this study to the backgrounds, needs, and interests of your group and to your available time frame. Don't feel obliged to discuss every question; choose what will best engage and challenge your group.
- **Lead by example.** During group activities, leaders should be ready to "break the ice" if others are hesitant to share responses.
- **Stay on course.** Remember that the goal of the study is to engage with the themes of the Belhar Confession without getting bogged down by specific issues on which there is disagreement.
- **Be sensitive.** Take the pulse of your group as you go. If people are feeling uneasy about a particular issue, step back from the material and explore those feelings. Participants approach issues from differing backgrounds and perspectives, and will have different understandings of the issues and biblical texts. Take that as positive evidence of Reformed Christians seeking to make the Belhar their own!
- **Pray!** Pray daily for the members of your group, for your group as a whole, and for other groups throughout the denomination engaged in this study. Make it a priority to pray at the beginning and end of every study group session.

Guidelines for Constructive Communication

Review these guidelines at the beginning of your first session, and perhaps at each subsequent session, to set the stage for positive dialogue:

Speak for yourself, not for others. Use “I” statements.

Do not interrupt when others are speaking.

Listen carefully to others’ viewpoints; listen to learn and to understand, not to refute.

Paraphrase what you heard another say before responding to it.

Don’t label people. Don’t single out any individual as representing a group or point of view.

Address differences and challenge behaviors and ideas. Do not question another’s motives, intentions, character, or worth.

Don’t lay blame on yourself or others.

Don’t personalize issues.

Assume that others in the group are of equally good faith and conviction.

Avoid unsubstantiated comments such as “People are saying.” Instead, offer specific facts or names to support your views.

When you disagree with someone else’s point of view, go on to say what you believe and why.

Look for points of agreement.

The purpose of dialogue is to be open to the possibility of developing a new position together and hold on to the hope inherent in continuing the conversation.

After you leave, do not identify persons when discussing what is said in the group.

—Sources: *Managing Church Conflict*, by Hugh F. Halverstadt, and “Guidelines for Dialogue with Civility” from the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism

Introduction

In 1986 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church adopted the Belhar Confession in response to apartheid, a policy of racial segregation supported by the white Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. The Belhar later became one of the standards of unity (alongside the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism) for the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, a merger of the racially mixed (also called “colored”) DRMC and the mostly black Dutch Reformed Church in Africa.

The confession addresses three main issues: (1) the unity of the church, (2) reconciliation between Christians, and (3) the justice God desires in the world. No other major confession combines these three issues. The historic Reformed confessions (written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) say very little about the unity of the church and make no reference to the biblical calls for reconciliation and justice.

Though the Belhar emerged from the crucible of apartheid, it makes no explicit mention of apartheid, except in an explanatory footnote. The implications of the Belhar Confession are far wider than its original context; thus, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa has offered the Belhar Confession as a gift to the entire family of Reformed churches worldwide.

In this study we will explore the major themes of the Belhar Confession and ask how the Belhar speaks to us as North American Reformed Christians. The URCSA views the Belhar as both a staff for the church to lean on and as a measuring stick to gauge how well the church lives up to what it professes.

As you participate in this study, ask yourself, How might the Belhar guide and challenge the Christian Reformed Church to more faithfully bring the light of Christ into the darkness of our world?

A Statement of Introduction by the CRC and the RCA

From the very beginnings of the church, often in times of crisis or threat, Christians have sought ways to say to the world, “Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, this is who we are, what we believe, and what we intend to do.” These statements of faith, including the ecumenical creeds and the historic Reformed confessions, though centuries old and far removed from their place of origin, still guide our understanding of Scripture, and of faith today, and of the life they call us to live.

In the late twentieth century the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa, like Christian leaders centuries before them, stepped forward to confront yet another critical issue that threatened the very core of the gospel message. The church and the society in which it ministered were torn by internal conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and the subjugation of the disenfranchised. From this crucible of suffering emerged the Belhar Confession, a biblically based doctrinal standard of justice, reconciliation, and unity. This confession is intended to guide not only the personal lives of God's children but also the whole body of Christ as it speaks and lives out God's will—"to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly" with God (Mic. 6:8).

Like the confessions that preceded it, the Belhar Confession becomes a gift from a particular expression of the church to Christians in other parts of the world—a testimony for all of God's people in our time. South Africa is not alone in its journey with conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and the subjugation of the disenfranchised. The history of oppression in our own countries and the reality of racism and injustice in our own time call for the voice of the Christian church to be heard with unmistakable clarity—to confess that the Lord of life, who entrusted to us the "message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19), is the Lord of our hopes and aspirations for a just and reconciled people.

Our South African brothers and sisters have asked us to join them in confession, forgiveness, and healing by formal adoption of the Belhar Confession, that we might together say it aloud and live by it. May our prayer as we respond mirror the words in the "Accompanying Letter" to be read as a preface to the confession: "Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. . . ."

—Adopted by the synods of the CRC and the RCA in 2009

Statement Introducing the Belhar Confession to the CRC by Synod 2009

As Synod 2009 brings the Belhar Confession before the church for consideration, synod shares with the whole church the profound nature of this moment in the life of the church and therefore one that must not be entered into lightly but rather with godly fear and trembling, humbly trusting that we will be faithful to the gospel. With these understandings synod proposes to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church.

Since Scripture is the only rule of faith and practice, our confessions are and must be historic and faithful witnesses to Scripture. Synod observes that the Belhar Confession truly expresses the biblical goals of unity, reconciliation, and

justice; the church's commitment to these goals; and the fact that "true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church" (The Belhar Confession, Article 2).

Synod further observes that, as a faithful witness to Scripture, the Belhar Confession does not negate the biblically derived statements of synod on homosexuality, including those of 1973 and 1996. Finally, synod recognizes that injustice and enmity between peoples are two dimensions of all-pervasive human sinfulness, for which every human being needs Jesus Christ as Savior.

For Further Reading

Read a report on the Belhar Confession from the CRC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee at www.crcna.org/pages/belhar.cfm (search "Belhar Confession Report," then click on "IRC Appendix").

Important Dates in Belhar History

- 1652 The Dutch form a station at the Cape and introduce slavery.
- 1857 The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa decides to have separate services for “colored” members (though discrimination at the Lord’s Supper is already occurring).
- 1881 The Dutch Reformed Mission Church is established by the white Dutch Reformed Church for people of color.
- 1951 The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa is established for “blacks.”
- 1978 The Dutch Reformed Mission Church and Dutch Reformed Church in Africa decide to work for unity, an ideal that took sixteen years to fulfill.
- 1982 The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declares a *status confessionis* concerning apartheid. (*Status confessionis* is a Latin term meaning “that which is foundational for belief and behavior” and must be affirmed by professing members of the church.) WARC calls apartheid a heresy and suspends the white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Later that same year, the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (meeting in Belhar) also declared a *status confessionis* regarding apartheid, and drafted what later became known as the Belhar Confession.
- 1986 The Dutch Reformed Mission Church formally adopts the Belhar Confession as its fourth standard of unity, alongside the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.
- 2009 The Christian Reformed Church’s synod proposes to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the CRC.
- 2010 The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America officially adopts the Belhar Confession as its fourth confession.

The Belhar: What Is It? Why Does It Matter?

Session Goals

In this session we'll think about the role of confessions in our Reformed tradition and listen as people engaged in various ministries within the CRC share their personal journeys with the Belhar.

“As we think of the Belhar Confession within the Christian Reformed Church—how we might use it and how we might engage with it—it's important to recognize that we don't do this alone, that confessions are documents and thoughts that unite us with others—with other churches, but even more so with other denominations. As we think about the fact that there are well over 80 million Reformed Christians around the world, we need to find ways in which we can engage with them, ways in which we can share commonality. I think the Belhar can serve us well in that capacity.”

—Jerry Dykstra, executive director
of the Christian Reformed Church

Pre-Session Activities

- Read the course introduction (p. 13), the introductory statements from the CRC and RCA (pp. 13-15) and the prologue to the Belhar (p. 5)
- Read the Belhar Confession in its entirety (pp. 5-8).
- Reflect: What are your hopes, fears, and expectations as you begin this study of the Belhar Confession? What would you like to know when you have finished the study? What do you hope will change, in yourself or in your church, because of the study?
- Respond: Which of the Belhar's three main themes (Christian unity, reconciliation, and justice) most interests you personally? Why?

Session Opening

Prayer and Song

Open your session with prayer, followed by singing or reading responsively the hymn “This We Believe,” which is based on the themes of the Belhar Confession. (Suggested tune: CRUCIFER, also used for *Psalter Hymnal* 373, “Lift High the Cross.”)

Refrain:

This we believe: our God, the Three-in-One,
makes us the Church through Spirit and the Son.

Gathered, protected by eternal grace,
and joined as saints from every land and race. *Refrain*

We bring the world the liberating Word
that reconciles wherever it is heard. *Refrain*

We must reveal lives giving, whole, and just
to faithful people trapped in broken trust. *Refrain*

We face earth's powers, stare down pain and death,
to bring Good News with all our strength and breath. *Refrain*

—James Hart Brumm

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please contact Permissions@BrumhartPublishing.com.)

Share Pre-Session Experiences

If your group received this study guide in advance, share reflections on the daily devotions and the pre-session activities. What did you learn? What most challenged you? What raised questions for further exploration?

Video

Watch the Session 1 video segment on the course DVD. Share what spoke to you most powerfully, and tell why.

In-Session Activities

Choose as many of these activities as your timeframe allows.

Activity 1

The CRC subscribes to three ecumenical creeds (creeds common to many Christians): The Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. It also subscribes to three confessions (also called the three Forms of Unity) that are distinctively Reformed and shared by a number of Reformed denominations. Using a whiteboard, chalkboard, or newsprint, name the three confessions and jot down what you know about each.

Activity 2

Study the chart below, which outlines the main features of the CRC’s confessions. What are some of the things you notice?

Standard	Birthplace	Date	Context	Purpose
Heidelberg Catechism	Heidelberg, Germany	c. 1563	Requested by Elector Frederick III, ruler of the German province of Palatinate, to provide a basis for Reformed theological instruction in the church	To teach
Belgic Confession	The Netherlands	1561	Severe persecution of Reformed churches in the Netherlands (including Belgium) by its then Roman Catholic government	Sent to King Philip II to protest the cruel oppression and to prove to the persecutors that Reformed Christians were not rebels, but law-abiding citizens who professed true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures
Canons of Dort	Dordrecht, The Netherlands	1618-1619	Severe disagreement in the church over key issues of theology	To affirm the principal beliefs of Calvinism: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and the Perseverance of the saints (T.U.L.I.P.)

In 1986 the CRC adopted *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*. This “testimony of faith for our times,” unique to the CRC, addresses modern issues but does not have the status in the CRC of the creeds or confessions. As an indication of the ongoing nature of this testimony, it was substantially revised in 2008 to continue to address contemporary issues that emerge in the church.

Testimony	Birthplace	Date	Context	Purpose
Our World Belongs to God	North America	1986, 2008	The increasing secularization of modern life and culture	To set forth a biblical and Reformed statement of faith that also addresses contemporary issues such as racism, abortion, pollution, sexism, and human sexuality

Activity 3

Compare the overviews of the three confessions and *Our World Belongs to God* (above) and the Belhar Confession (below). How is the Belhar like the CRC’s current confessions? How is it like the contemporary testimony? How is it different from both?

Confession	Birthplace	Date	Context	Purpose
Belhar Confession	Belhar, South Africa	1982	Unjust, racist system of government in South Africa called apartheid	In opposition to apartheid, to affirm the unity of the church, reconciliation between peoples, and God’s justice for the poor and destitute

Activity 4

Read and discuss:

From the very beginnings of the church, often in times of crisis or threat, Christians have sought ways to say to the world, “Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, this is who we are, what we believe, and what we intend to do.” These statements of faith, including the ecumenical creeds and the historic Reformed confessions, though centuries old and far removed from their place of origin, still guide our understanding of Scripture and of faith today, and of the life they call us to live.

—From “A Statement of Introduction by the CRC and the RCA” (see p. 13)

- What do you think it means that the most recent of the CRC’s three confessions was written in 1619? What does it say, for example, about how we view confessions in general and how we view our three current confessions specifically?
- Each of the CRC’s three current confessions arose in a specific context, in response to a specific need. What sorts of circumstances, if any, might warrant adoption of a new confession by the CRC?
- What does it say to you that the URCSA adopted the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession, alongside the three that they share with the CRC and other Reformed denominations?

Share

What are your hopes, fears, and expectations as you begin this study of the Belhar Confession? (If your group is large, you may want to break into smaller groups to discuss this, and then reconvene to share your responses.)

Options for Further Discussion

- What does it mean to be a “confessional church”? Name other denominations that are “confessional” and denominations that are not. How do you feel about the fact that Reformed churches, including the CRC, are confessional churches?
- The historical rallying cry of Reformed Christians is “*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*” (the church reformed and always being reformed). Some add the words “*secundum verbum Dei*” (according to the Word of God). In your view, what do these ancient words mean with respect to our confessions? (An interesting discussion of this Reformed watchword can be found at www.pcusa.org/today/believe/past/may04/reformed.htm)
- Did you learn “the catechism” as a young person? In your opinion, does the CRC today generally place more or less emphasis on teaching/learning the confessions than in the past? How do you feel about this? What role could/should confessions play in our church today? What opportunities might the Belhar offer for greater understanding of and appreciation for our confessions in general?
- What is your initial personal response to the following statement?

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) has given the Belhar Confession as a gift to the worldwide Reformed community because the use or application of this confession in the life of the church is far wider than its original context. The URCSA has asked Reformed churches around the world—by way of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC)—to consider adopting the Belhar Confession so as to make it a part of the global Reformed confessional basis.

—*Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 197-200; *Agenda for Synod 2003*, pp. 235, 246; *Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 592.

Personal Reflection

What have you learned from this session? What difference might it make in your life?

Closing

Spend a few minutes in prayer (led either by the leader or by participants), asking God's Spirit to guide your group as you seek to explore difficult issues with love and respect.

Digging Deeper

- During the coming week, read *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* in its entirety. Compare it to the Belhar Confession. How are the two statements of faith similar? How are they different? (The 2008 revision of "Our World Belongs to God" is available online at www.crcna.org/pages/our_world_main.cfm, or in print from Faith Alive at www.FaithAliveResources.org or 1-800-333-8300.)
- Learn more about the CRC's current creeds and confessions by visiting www.crcna.org and clicking on "Beliefs."
- Research the confessions of other denominations, both Reformed (for example, the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and the Presbyterian Church in Canada) and non-Reformed (e.g. the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). What commonalities do you find? What differences?
- Visit the website of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa at www.vgksa.org.za to learn more about this denomination and its life with the Belhar Confession.
- Visit the CRC's Belhar main page at www.crcna.org/belhar (click on the "History" link for information on the history of the Belhar, including its history in the CRC).
- Conduct a survey at your church or among your friends, family, and acquaintances. Ask: What do you know about your denomination's confessions? How important do you think confessions are for the church today?

- Ilan Ossendryver is an Israeli photojournalist. Here's a brief excerpt from his writings about growing up white in South Africa:

Distinctly, I remembered the days when around my house, in the White suburbs where the quietness of the day would be broken by loud whistles and shrieks of "Run!" Then came the ugly Bedford trucks carrying police. They would brake with a screech and out would pour police with batons and whips in hands, running after terrified Blacks, mostly old women. They would be caught and violently shoved in the back of the waiting Bedfords. Then it would be quiet again until the police came around again to search for Blacks without permit-passes to be in White areas.

I remember the day I wanted to play jazz in my garage with the gardener, who was a jazz musician. When I got around to asking him to come play, he said he couldn't because he was Black and that according to the laws of Apartheid, it was forbidden to socialize with Blacks in White areas. The laws of racial segregation. I remember being extremely angry and confused. As a White living in South Africa, it became difficult to look into the eyes of the Blacks, the African majority ruled by the White minority.

—Ilan Ossendryver (taken from a web posting
at www.ic-creations.com)

Reread this piece and try to visualize the setting from which the Belhar emerged. How does this narrative make you feel?

Notes