

Leader Guide for Study 2-Affirmation of Faith

Introduction:

Affirmation of faith is the collective expression of the church's most basic and deeply held beliefs. The whole church body usually reads, recites, or sings historical statements of basic Christian truths that believers in all times and places can profess. These might include the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the Athanasian Creed.

The affirmation can occur in different parts of the service, such as after the call to worship, after scripture readings, or after the sermon. It can instruct children and newcomers on the most basic and fundamental beliefs of the church, while also enabling the church body to center and calibrate itself to the core tenants of the church. Irish liturgy introduced an Affirmation of Faith after the opening hymn to provide an appropriate transition from praise to confession and instruction.

Part 1: What does it mean?

What is a creed?

Answer: A creed is a simple, profound summary of what we, as Christians, believe the Bible teaches. It comes from the Latin root "credo", meaning "belief."

Scripture:

Read Deuteronomy 6: 4-5:

⁴"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.^[a] ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deut. 6:4-5, ESV)

Deuteronomy 6 contains the first profession of faith in the Bible. It contains a basic fundamental truth affirmed in the Old Testament and carried over into Christianity.

What does the passage affirm about the faith of the Israelites? What does it instruct the Israelites to do?

Answer: There is only one God and you shall love him with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.

Read the Apostles Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic* church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places*

What are some fundamental Christian truths being affirmed in the Apostles Creed?

Answers:

- I believe in God who created heaven and earth.
- Jesus is his only son conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.
- Jesus died under Pontius Pilate and descended into hell.
- On the third day he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven
- Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father and he will judge the living and the dead.

- I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

This last bullet could be unpacked in discussion to a greater extent, although the details of each of these individual affirmations might differ significantly depending on the traditions each person in the group is familiar with. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity and was present prior to Jesus' ministry on earth and works in our hearts today to guide and live out our faith. The forgiveness of sins affirms that our sins are forgiven through confession and repentance. We believe in the resurrection of our bodies at death and an everlasting life thereafter.

What does the creed teach us about our faith?

Answer: It teaches us about who God is and what He has done/does for us daily as the Triune God. It also emphasizes that our faith is focused on God and the Trinity rather than anything else (e.g., ourselves).

Part 2: Why do we practice it?

Through the affirmation of faith the contemporary church expresses its connection to the ancient churches and its solidarity with believers around the world.

What are some other purposes of the affirmation of faith?

Suggested answers:

- Renew our convictions
- Attest our continuing belief in the historical truths of Christianity
- Indicate our support of those who have been persecuted for their faith
- Humble ourselves before the truths of Scripture
- Provide testimony of our faith to our children and the watching world
- Declare our loyalty to God
- Renew in heart and mind the truths on which we will base our daily lives and on which we have staked the eternal destiny of our souls

When you profess the affirmation of faith with the congregation and recognize that Christians all over the world are also professing the same affirmation, how do you think that could help connect Christians around the world through our faith? Do you feel this could be a powerful act of faith?

Part 3: How do we practice it?

We've discussed various creeds integrated into the service as a way of affirming our faith. What are some other ways to affirm our faith during worship?

Answer:

- Reciting key passages of scripture that affirm our core beliefs
- Hymns or songs that summarize core beliefs
- Catechisms and confessions that summarize a church's beliefs (often recited during sacraments like baptisms or Communion)

During worship, we often stand and say the affirmation in unison with the pastor and the rest of the congregation. Sometimes the congregation also sings an affirmation in unison.

How could we integrate affirmation of faith into our daily lives?

Suggested answers:

- Read parts of the Bible that affirm some of our core beliefs (Deut. 6:4-5 (the first confession practiced); 1 Kings 8; Ephesians 2:4-10)
- Read appropriate creeds, confessions, or catechisms during the week (Westminster Confession of Faith <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith/>, Westminster Shorter Catechism)

<http://www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php>

Conclusion:

The affirmation of faith is a corporate recitation or song laying out core Christian beliefs. It serves the purpose of connecting the contemporary church with the ancient church, it can instruct children and newcomers on the core beliefs of the church, and it can renew our commitment to the core tenants of the faith. The affirmation is often professed in unison through reciting a creed or singing a song. Key parts of Scripture, Confessions of faith, and the Westminster Catechism also serve as useful affirmations of faith.