

FAITH STATEMENTS BIOS RESUMES

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THE REV. ANN M. PHILBRICK

Statement of Faith -- Ann M Philbrick August 2017

My name is Ann, which in Hebrew is Hannah, which means grace. And it is the grace of God through Jesus Christ that has animated my spiritual journey from the start. My statement of faith is thus rooted in that experience and that concept.

I believe in God the Creator, who is our Mother and Father.

God is the power of love and creative energy that began, made alive, and still moves all of creation. God brought human beings into being as part of that creation; and like a parent, has cared and continues to care for us, nurtures us, teaches us, and releases us into the world to live and serve in the midst of creation. God is active in our history and in our lives today. True strength, direction, purpose and care are all rooted in God.

I believe in God the Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is truly human and truly God. That ancient statement best captures the essence of the mystery of the incarnation. God lived as a human being in order to feel and understand what it is to be human and to show us how to live and love and die. In Jesus Christ, who died on a cross, God died and demonstrated the depth of true sacrificial love, empowered the depths such love to wipe away all debts, and showed us we are not alone. In Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead, God turned the ultimate defeat into the ultimate victory.

I believe in God the Sustainer, who is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God's presence in the world and in active communication and relationship with us. We know our Creator and Redeemer through the Spirit. We receive God's nurture and care through the sustaining power of the Spirit. We receive God's gift of grace through the communicating power of the Spirit.

I believe the Church to be the Body of Christ.

As Paul says, the church is an whole organism with many parts. All the members are the many parts and they together make up the body. Metaphorically and physically, the church represents Christ to the world. Each member is a vessel of Christ's love and service. Each member is called to serve one another and the world. And together, as a community of believers, the members live out their trust in God through Jesus Christ.

I believe the Bible to be God's word to us.

The church has heard God speak through the canon down through the ages and ascribes authority to it. By faith, I hear God in it and claim that same authority. Human and divine activity are intertwined in the formation of the canon. Texts written in a time not our own can still speak to us through personal study and critical use of exegetical tools. The church studies the bible to learn of our God to whom the Bible witnesses.

I believe the two sacraments -- the Lord's Supper and Baptism -- to be strong symbols of God's grace.

In baptism, the community of believers accept God's promise of love -- for the infant and for the adult. The symbol of water reminds us of the chaos that would be our lives without the grace and love of God. In the Lord's Supper, the church remembers Christ's sacrifice and suffering. The bread and wine symbolize the sustenance we receive from Christ's presence. When we receive them we say to God and to the world, 'I believe.'

Short Bio - Ann M Philbrick August 2017

I was born and raised in suburban Philadelphia. My family attended Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church where I was baptized, confirmed, and eventually ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament. I went to college in New York and North Carolina and then went directly to seminary. I received my Master of Divinity degree from Princeton and later my Doctor of Ministry degree from McCormick. Ordained by the presbytery of Philadelphia in 1982, my first call began that same year in Madison, WI. I served as associate pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church for over 8 years. I went on to serve as pastor at Christ United Presbyterian Church in Carnegie, PA for 4 years. Next I was associate general presbyter at National Capital Presbytery for 8 years. I then launched a consulting ministry with a friend which lasted for 9 years. I served on the national level of our denomination for 6 years and am currently back to doing independent consulting and coaching. I love to hike and garden and I currently live in New Orleans with my wife, Kim Rodrigue, and our dog, Boudreaux.

THE REV. SUSAN M. LOPER

Statement of Faith **Susan Patrick Loper**

I believe in one God, whom we know as Father (Creator), Son (Redeemer), and Holy Spirit (Sustainer). One God; three persons. At least to me, a mystery!

The Bible is the authoritative and indispensable witness to the mysteriously unique, holy, yet passionate relationship between God and the human race and, for that matter, all of creation. From Eden to Golgotha to Patmos, God has sought to be in a loving, just, and merciful relationship with us. The Bible is as relevant today as it was when it became canon. Within this love story is the truth that we humans constantly turn our backs on our Creator, sometimes unwittingly and sometimes fully cognizant of our actions (or inactions). This fractures the perfect relationship we had with God “in the beginning.” Yet God has pursued us, remaining faithful to us even when we have not remained faithful to God. In fact, God remained faithful to us to the point of becoming one of us in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus we meet God face to face. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” is not just poetic beauty—it tells us to the length to which God will go to save us from ourselves. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, as fully human as he is fully God. Another mystery, at least to me! It is this Jesus who restores the fractured relationship we know as sin, which occurred with the first humans and continues on with each one of us. That restoration came about as Jesus lived in perfect relationship with the One he called, “Abba, Father” even when it meant offering his life so that we might **have** life! God was reconciling the world to God’s self through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And, as Paul reminds us, we now have been given this ministry of reconciliation—all of us who claim we are Christ’s. As necessary as Jesus’ death was to pay for our lives, so was his resurrection. God raised Jesus on the 3rd day that we might understand *and believe* that death no longer binds us—it is no longer the end of us.

I believe in God the Holy Spirit, the great Comforter and Sustainer of us all. The gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God breathed new life into those who could not imagine how powerful the love of God is. Whether we are like the disciples hiding in the upper room or whether we’re like those who seem to be constantly confronted and bombarded by the sin and suffering we know in the world today, this love inflates our sagging spirit and instills a boldness within our fearful frames that we never knew was possible. In other words, the Holy Spirit is here to wipe away our tears and strengthen us in our walk of faith.

With the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles came the gift of the Church to the world. Here, then, is Christ’s community, dependent of him for its life, its ministry, its future. The Church, then, becomes the witness to the love, peace, and justice of Jesus Christ in a broken and hurting world. We in the church are called upon to live in such faith that we seek to reflect Jesus’ teachings in what we do and what we say, whether it’s within the confines of the church OR outside the doors in all our day to day dealings. This is a tall order that of us fall short of accomplishing. Yet, through the sustenance offered us by the Holy Spirit, we persevere. Guided by scripture, prayer, and our traditions, the Church is reformed, yet always reforming. The

Church remembers that at all times and in all places, God continues to “do a new thing.” Its relationship with God is vibrant, not static just as our relationship with God should always be vibrant and not static.

The worship of God is the work of the people. Here, God is not the Actor but the recipient of our love, our praise, our repentance, and our devotion. We are nurtured in our worship by both Word and Sacrament. By continually recalling the gracious gifts God has given us-especially the gift of Jesus Christ-our gratitude spills over into action. Christ is present with us in the sacraments of Baptism and Lord’s Supper. Each is a visible sign of God’s abundant grace. In baptism we receive new life as we are welcomed into the household of God, the Church. As one person aptly put it, “In baptism our identity as children of a new way (of life) is revealed.” No matter how old or young we are at the time of our baptism we become new people, and we’ve been welcomed into a very special community.

In the Lord’s Supper we publicly remember with gratitude and thanksgiving God’s redemptive acts throughout human history, and how Jesus offered his very life for us. How God shattered the bonds of death and raised him to new life offers hope to and for God’s people. In the very act of breaking the bread and sharing the cup, in the call to remembrance, Christ is among us. Is it no wonder, then, that one of Eucharistic liturgies begins, “Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God.” Indeed it is!

Praise God, from whom ALL blessings flow! Amen.

Susan P. Loper Resume

Name: Susan Patrick Loper

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Education: College (now the University) of the Ozarks, Clarksville, AR. 1979

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, M. Div. 1982

Family: married to Edward Loper, also a Presbyterian Teaching Elder. We have two children: Tim, who is single and lives in Utica, New York; Abby, who is married with a 4 month old daughter. They live in Slidell, LA.

Service to the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Elected ruling elder, Lawrenceville, Illinois Presbyterian Church around 1976

Youth Advisory Delegate, General Assembly, 1975

Ordained Teaching Elder, February 21, 1982 Lawrenceville, IL.

Co-Pastor, called by Utica Presbytery (N.Y.), 1982-1986. There were four churches, two of which I was assigned to: Remsen Federated Church (federated with American Baptist) and South Trenton Presbyterian Church.

Co-Pastor, Sauquoit, New York, 1986-2002. The co-pastorate dissolved within the year. My husband decided it was either the marriage of the pastorate. We chose the pastorate. In total, I was the pastor at the church for approximately 16 years.

Chairperson, Committee on Ministry

Moderator, Utica Presbytery, 1988-89 term

Delegate, General Assembly, 1989

Interim Administrative Assistant/Committee on Ministry Liaison, Utica Presbytery, 2003-4, while the presbytery searched for a new executive presbyter.

Interim Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Westernville, NY, 2004-2006

Southern Comfort Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Group Volunteer Gautier, Mississippi in February of 2006 after Hurricane Katrina. It was there that I first began to understand that God was calling me to the Gulf Coast.

Part-time Interim Pastor, Stone Presbyterian Church, Clinton, NY, July 2006-November 2006.

Interim Pastor, Northminster Presbyterian Church, May 2007 to July 2008

In October of 2006 my husband moved to Marshall, North Carolina where he became the Designated Pastor. Although I diligently worked/searched for a call, every door was shut until March of 2007 when the executive presbyter of Western North Carolina casually mentioned that some friends of his belonged to a church in Pearl River, LA and that they had searched high and low for an interim pastor. Since it was only 1 ½ years after Katrina, clergy were reluctant to relocate to the area. I was not! While visiting our son in New Orleans, I was interviewed by the interim search committee, who invited me to be their interim pastor. My main task was to be head of staff to the Montessori pre-school and restore a positive relationship with the staff and between the school and the congregation. For 13 months I had the privilege of doing just that, as well as provide pastoral care and lead worship among God's people at Northminster Presbyterian Church. During that time, a small group of our congregation also committed to meeting with other small churches, mostly from New Orleans, to work with Tom Bandy on church growth. This did not go over well with the Northminster congregation. We all want growth (or 'enlarging the critical mass' as one parishioner put it) but no one wanted to do the work behind enlarging that critical mass. The congregation discovered that even though we thought we were open to change, we really weren't. Not at that time. When Northminster called an installed pastor, it was time for me to go. At that time I was approached by several members of the PNC at Slidell First Presbyterian Church to submit my PIF to their search committee. I thought this was unwise at the time, thinking it would be pitting the congregation that I just served against the congregation that I would be going to serve. So I moved back to North Carolina. The week that I packed up to move back to North Carolina our daughter, a new graduate of Nazareth College in Rochester, NY moved into my apartment. She now teaches at Bonne Ecole Elementary School in Slidell and is an elder at Northminster. God had it figured out long before we were aware of it!

Pastor, First United Presbyterian Churches of Carthage and Warsaw, July 2009 to Present.

Between July of 2008 and March of 2009 I tried once again, unsuccessfully, to find a congregation to serve in close proximity to my husband. After casting my net further (and with a prayer that God would send me some place warmer than upstate New York and near water) I received a call to be designated pastor turned installed pastor to the First United Presbyterian Churches of Carthage and Warsaw, Illinois. God answered my prayers in ways that were different than what I was expecting: Illinois IS warmer than upstate New York, although it still gets brutally cold and we are near a body of water, the Mississippi River. What a sense of humor our God has! For the past 6 years I have been privileged to serve these two congregations (it's not a yoke, they just share me). I love them dearly, and we have a good working and playing relationship. Each congregation has grown in ways they never expected: Warsaw had 1 child when I arrived. We started a prayer group and for over a year prayed that God might bless us with children. We now have 5 rocking chairs in the back of the sanctuary that are used on a regular basis. We've started a wee-ones Sunday school class, where the youngest this past year was 1 ½ with the majority being 2 years of age. It's chaos, and we love

it. The challenge is to continuously meet the needs of these little ones and their families while ministering to a rapidly aging rest of the congregation.

The Carthage congregation has not grown numerically, but they have become very much a missional church reaching out to people our community has little to do with. Over the last few years we have started a community garden, the bounty of which we take to the community food pantry and to some of the senior citizens in our congregation who don't get a lot of fresh vegetables; we've also started two support groups---one for caregivers of loved ones with dementia and one for loved ones of people who are incarcerated. In addition, we have a weekly clothes closet which has clothing, emergency diapers and formula for families in Hancock County and have two lay-led Bible studies. We also have a "cross ministry". You can ask me about that one. I've rambled on far too long.

Both congregations are also involved in raising funds for Heifer International. We do this in increments of quarters. Each and every Sunday, children or those young at heart, go through the congregations and collect quarters to put in specially made "Heifer Tubes" which hold approximately \$100. The goal of each congregation is to Fill the Ark. This means we'll raise \$5,000 each for Heifer. One church is over halfway there; the other not far behind. To me, these ministries--each and every one--in both congregations--is a miracle, being as we only have between 35 and 50 in attendance at each church on a given Sunday. That's a whole lot of dedication!

As you can tell, I am very proud of these brothers and sisters in Christ and all the ways they have responded to God's call to be the hands, heart, and feet of Jesus to their communities. I love them, and they think I'm kind of special, too. But the one thing that I've come to the realization about is that sometimes God's call kicks us down the road when all we want to do is stay 'in our happy place.' I believe that's what is happening to me. Personal circumstances have caused me to make the painful decision that for the welfare of my husband and the good for our family that it's time to move back to Louisiana, where Ed (my husband) and our daughter and her family currently reside. We'd planned on retiring in the Slidell area and purchased a home in December of 2014. But the diagnosis of Parkinson's disease in my husband, and the fact that some days are really good and others not so much, make me realize that God again is using these personal situations to stretch my comfort zone and my spirituality enough to reply when called, "Here am I. Send me."

THE REV. STEVE WALLACE

A Statement of Faith

Steve Wallace
Baton Rouge LA

October 5, 2017

Respectfully Submitted,
For Your Consideration

I believe in a holy, righteous, sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God, revealed through a glorious creation, the coming of the Living Word Jesus Christ, the instructive testimony of the Written Word, the counseling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the work of redemption within and through the Church in the world: the revelation of one God in three persons, purposeful and sure.

I believe God created “the heavens and the earth” and is sovereign over everything and everyone, directing and equipping humankind to care for and act as stewards of that creation. I believe God has called us into personal relationship by grace through faith, one broken by sin, but restored through Jesus Christ, our Savior, a picture of God’s love, mercy and grace.

I believe Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, the Living Word, fully human yet fully divine. I believe Jesus was born of a virgin, suffered for the sake of humankind, was crucified, was buried, and yet rose again. Though tempted as we are, I believe Jesus was sinless and thus a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Having ascended, Jesus remains our intercessor, an advocate on behalf of those who trust Christ as Lord. As recorded in the Gospels, I believe Jesus is the way to salvation, the embodiment of truth, and the very essence of life.

As Jesus taught the disciples, I believe the Holy Spirit serves as the Comforter, the Counselor, a teacher and guide. By the indwelling presence of the Spirit in our lives, every follower of Christ is gifted to serve the Church and all those to whom God has called us to minister. Through the power of the Spirit of God, I believe the people of God act as the voice and the touch of Christ, called to bring light into darkness.

I believe God established the Church, proclaimers of the Light of Christ and the Lord’s Body. I believe, as part of God’s family of faith, we are called to make disciples, baptize them into the faith, and teach them as Christ did the Twelve. Therefore, as Jesus trained them and sent them out in the first century, I believe—as the Lord’s disciples in our own day—we are called to extend mercy in the present: food for the hungry, something to drink for the thirsty, respite for the weary, a home for the homeless, clothes for the needy, care for the sick and hurting, and grace and understanding to those imprisoned or bound by any of the distinctive shackles of our time.

As the people of God, I believe we proclaim the truths of Scripture and see God shape us into the likeness of Christ, even as we follow the will of God revealed within it. We pray. We declare our thanks for God’s goodness, and we invite the Lord’s direction. We gather together in worship and study, fellowship, service and mission. I believe we purposefully declare the truth of Christ, the light of the world and the hope for all humankind. We declare the good news “of the gospel, the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” It is to this mission I believe we have been called: to “live as Christ” in our personal lives, in our families, within our communities, to a nation and a world that groans, even as we join in the hope promised by the kingdom Christ brought to us, and the kingdom to come in our eternal home.

COLLEEN EARP

Statement of Personal Faith
Colleen Earp
October 21, 2017

I believe in God in Three Persons, who created, who creates, and who will create. While I cannot fully understand the mystery and intricacy of the Holy Trinity, I have faith in God, Christ, and Holy Spirit as one living force in my life and in my world.

Jesus Christ is the head of the church. Christ saved me through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus is my teacher, a seeker of justice, a peacemaker, and a great example of putting faith into action.

Holy Spirit is the presence of my living God and the resurrected Christ. Holy Spirit acts as my guide, my comforter, my advocate, and creates and sustains my community in this world.

The church is the body of Christ, living, breathing, and leading in this world. To me, church is a community of learning and support, inspired by our Triune God, shown along the way by Holy Spirit. The church is not fully united, because it is led here on earth by humans, who are imperfect, but the goal of the church is to be continually seeking unity of all of creation—church, people, and planet.

The Bible is the inspired word of God, transcribed by humans in a particular time and place. Full of wisdom and inspiration, it is an important tool for learning and growing, not for hurting. It is our responsibility to bear in mind that Christ alone is the head of the church and that God continues to reveal new things to us every day.

I am a child of God, created for such a time as this, seeking to do God's will for myself and my community here on earth. I seek to reflect the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in all I say and do. I believe that my salvation is not dependent on my time and effort here on earth, but rather that I should respond faithfully to that amazing grace to serve and work for the Lord ceaselessly, loving both neighbor and enemy.