

Presbytery of St. Augustine
Minister Member Information

Roger Dunnavan
Joyce Lieberman
Debra Henning
Chris Lieberman
Ron Watson

STATEMENT OF FAITH
Rev. Dr. Roger L. Dunnavan

The author of Hebrews writes concerning faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Indeed, the entire Christian faith is a conviction of things not seen, and the assurance of things hoped for. It is a certainty about the mystery of life and all creation, and that there is a Creator behind all creation, and that this Creator became human in Jesus of Nazareth. Genesis 1 says: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a somber void and darkness covered the face of the deep.” John I says: “In the beginning was the Word (Jesus Christ) and the Word was God. He (Christ) was in the beginning with God.” This statement is based on a conviction that the scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, and that God speaks to us through the scriptures. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity moves and convicts us of the truth of the scriptures. John Calvin says, “The Holy Spirit is the bond which unites us with Christ. This is the result of faith produced by what he calls the “secret operation” of the Holy Spirit. (Institutes of Theology, p. 461)

We obtain the benefits of faith when we receive the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, through repentance and forgiveness of sin. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (I John 4:10)

There are two sacraments which we Presbyterians practice: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. “They are the visible signs and seals by God in order that by their use he may the more fully disclose and seal to us as the promise of the gospel,he graciously grants us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.” (Heidelberg Catechism, p. 38). I believe that both infant baptism and baptism of believers are acceptable, as both are mentioned in the scriptures.

The Church consists of all of God’s people who are “called out” (ecclesia”) to be Christ’s followers and ambassadors as well as being agents of reconciliation. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and he has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” (II Cor. 5:18; Confession of 1967, 9.07)

The Church, is the Body of Christ, (Ephesians 4) proclaiming the coming of God’s Kingdom in its fullness: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the good news.” (Mark 1:14, NRSV) Jesus also announced the coming of God’s Kingdom in Luke 4 at the outset of His ministry at Nazareth, his hometown. The Kingdom represents the triumph of God over all that resists His will and disrupts His creation.

I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. “With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (A Brief Statement of Faith, p. 268)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Submitted by:

Rev. Dr. Roger L. Dunnavan, Honorably Retired
May, 2017

JOURNEY OF FAITH
Rev. Dr. Roger L. Dunnavan

Phase I.

My journey began when I was born into a Presbyterian family in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1937. My parents brought my sister and me to worship and Sunday School regularly. We attended the Macalester Presbyterian Church, which at that time was a “fairly strong” church with two pastors and a Director of Christian Education.

My father taught Sunday School, sang in the choir, and was an Elder. In later years, my mother became an Elder and was active in the Woman’s Association. During this time, I believe I was being nurtured in the Christian faith and life through their teaching, love, and guidance.

Phase II.

Upon graduation from Central High School, St. Paul in 1955. I attended Macalester College in St. Paul, MN and became very active in religious groups and activities. Through conversations with and among college faculty and the pastor of the Macalester church, I came to a gradual conviction that God was calling me into some form of full-time Christian service. I graduated in 1959 with a major in History and attended Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, graduating in 1962 with a Master of Divinity degree. I was ordained by the Presbytery of St. Paul on June 24, 1962. In 1984, I received my Doctor of Ministry degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Phase III.

Congregations I have served:

- Pastor, Memorial Presbyterian Church, Alburtis, PA; 1962-1965 (145 members)
- Associate Pastor, Camp Hill Presbyterian Church, Camp Hill, PA; 1965-1970 (1700 members)
- Pastor, Westminster United Presbyterian Church, Bradenton, FL; 1970-1980 (700 members)
- Pastor, Wekiva Presbyterian Church, Longwood, FL; 1980-1990 (1250 members)
- Served three different churches in the Presbytery of West Jersey until I was Honorably retired in June, 2004. I have served as Interim Pastor in five churches in that presbytery since then.

My faith was challenged and deepened through each congregation I served as being a parent of three children, bringing its own special challenge! I believe I have been a faithful, committed pastor through the years-- preaching the gospel, teaching, leading worship, pastoral care, administration, fund-raising, and promotion of church programs and activities. I enjoyed the challenge each church brought. I enjoyed working in two building programs at the Wekiva church--the Sanctuary and Education Building.

Retirement years brings its own unique challenges and circumstances, but also brings with it numerous opportunities for service to our Lord, to congregations, and to the communities in which we live. Gathering people in, fund-raising, and promotion of church programs get my juices flowing!

To God be the glory!

My faith in Jesus Christ is the rock upon which my life rests. Even before memory or comprehension could take form, I was marked as Christ's own in the waters of baptism. As I grew, the Church taught me, by word and deed, about Jesus Christ leading me to the day when I responded to God's gracious gift of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the faith into which I was baptized and answering God's call to joyful discipleship.

I believe Jesus is the Christ, God's own beloved One, and the Savior of the world. Fully human, Jesus walked this earthly life serving God faithfully and showing us the way to abundant life. Fully divine, Jesus is God-with-us, the Word of God who came to dwell among us. His very life given reconciles us once and for all to God, whose ultimate expression of love and grace overcame the power of death through Jesus' resurrection, giving us the gift of new life.

I believe in the living God, Creator of all that is, "whom alone we worship and serve." God's love for humankind from the beginnings of creation and throughout all of history is marred by human sin, separating us from the one and only God whose love and faithfulness has remained steadfast. God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ restores that broken relationship and sets us free for a new, right and loving relationship with our God and with one another.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the very life breath of God that empowers us to live in faithfulness. The Spirit comforts, convicts, strengthens, encourages, sustains, and enlightens us in our daily discipleship, enabling God's people to do more than could ever be asked or imagined.

I believe the Bible to be the "unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal" and God's Word to me. The Bible teaches us about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. As we read, hear, and study, God's Word, with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Bible speaks directly to us and guides us in understanding God's will and purpose for the individual, the church and the world. God's Word continues to be spoken in the Church today where the Scriptures are read and the Word is rightly preached.

I believe that "Christ calls the Church into being" and gives it all that is necessary to be the Church in the world. The Church is the body of Christ in and for the world and is a community of "faith, hope, love and witness" where the Word is read and proclaimed, bread is broken, and believers are sent out into all the world to proclaim the good news of the gospel, baptizing in the name of the "Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

I believe that the Sacraments are the Word of God enacted and sealed by the Church. In the waters of baptism, God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ is offered making us one with Christ and with the Church of every time and place. In the breaking of bread, God's sustaining grace nourishes us for lives of faith and service in Jesus Christ. Every time we stand at font and table, we are reminded of God's gift of grace given in Jesus Christ. Marked as Christ's own and nourished in God's Spirit, the Church goes out into the world following our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in gratitude and praise.

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My Faith Journey

Joyce Lieberman

May 2017

Baptized as an infant in a Methodist Church in Portland, Oregon, I attended the nursery and church school on occasional Sundays. But with a working mother and an agnostic father, my church attendance was sporadic at best and pretty much ceased in elementary school. In some respects, though, this early church experience of watching, listening and wondering prepared the ground for my later faith formation.

Late in my middle school years, my yearning for something to occupy myself on Sunday mornings led me back to the church. Each Sunday morning a school bus made its way through our neighborhood, picking up kids for church school at the nearby congregational church. My friends were going, why couldn't I? I begged, pleaded, and eventually wore my mother down until I could leave my house on Sunday morning, board that bus with my friends, and go to church school all by myself.

It was at this UCC congregation that I learned the Bible stories, sang the hymns, prayed the prayers, recited the creeds, and worshipped. I attended youth group, ice cream socials, church suppers and summer church camps. This was the church home where the faith expressed at my baptism became my own faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and was publicly expressed on a Palm Sunday morning in my eighth grade year. This was the place that taught me about being church, the good and not-so-good:

- There is a great gift in having loving and committed adults who are willing to walk alongside those exploring the faith, while there are some who are were always considered outsiders (newcomers, divorced, working mothers, and unaccompanied children (that was me!)) who cannot find a ready welcome;
- Opportunities offered to express faith by leading and teaching younger children help prepare leaders in the church, while there are those who question and limit the leadership of women who could not serve on the consistory of the church;
- Worship and study, fellowship and service can be the conduit for the Spirit to each deep into one's soul, while enforcing phrases like, "We don't do that here" and "We always do it this way" have the power to stifle the movement of God's Spirit.

After high school, a year of reflective work, prayer and exploration took me to a new church home in a Presbyterian Church that supported my spiritual journey. A call to ministry began to emerge in my life but I had no models nor mentors to guide me beyond traditionally defined paths: nursing or teaching. I chose nursing as my ministry vocation. All through college and even after beginning to work as a nurse, I continued to serve, alongside my husband, Chris, in volunteer and paid positions within the church: with a new church development in Tempe, Arizona, with children and youth at a suburban church in Vancouver, Washington, and as youth advisors at a downtown church in Portland, Oregon. While ministry could happen within the context of nursing, it was this involvement in church that give the fullest expression to my faith.

It wasn't until we moved to San Francisco for Chris to attend seminary that I saw a clergywoman for the first time, and it was then that I knew my vocational call was not to minister as a nurse but to be a minister in the church. By God's hand, all the pieces fell into place, as a candidate for ministry, with seminary studies, working nights at the hospital, and throwing a baby into the mix during my last year of seminary. I graduated with a Masters of Divinity, was examined by Cascades Presbytery, and ordained at First Presbyterian Church, Portland in June 1983 where I served as associate pastor for pastoral care for ten years.

When it was time to move one, we had a one-year sojourn in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at Harvard Divinity, which allowed my husband to discern his future vocation. Parsing obscure Greek verbs did not entice, so we returned to Portland, where I served as an interim pastor of a small redeveloping inner city congregation, while we actively searched for God's next call to ministry for us to serve together as co-pastors. We hoped to stay near family in the Northwest, but were committed to being open to wherever God would call.

As we were flying into Albuquerque, New Mexico to meet with the search committee of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Chris looked out the window and saw the vast brown of the high desert and said, "Let's not get off the plane." However, basking in God's good humor and grace, we answered God's call to move to this high desert to serve as co-pastors. Albuquerque became our home (our son still lives there) where the ministry was fruitful and a joy (most of the time). It was also here that my love for the way we do things as Presbyterians blossomed. When I was asked by the chair of the presbytery personnel committee to apply for the stated clerk position, I laughed out loud. He assured me the committee was quite serious and saw, in my, the gifts to do this work. Again, in God's good humor, I answered that call and served as stated clerk of the Presbytery of Santa Fe during my last two years in Albuquerque.

After thirteen years, God called me to higher council ministry in the church. Again, we moved, this time to Louisville where I served the denomination, first, in the Office of Vocation working with the call process and presbytery committees on ministry and for the past four years as Director of Constitutional Interpretation in the Office of the General Assembly. There I learned much, appreciated the tree top view of the church, enjoyed resourcing mid councils, congregations and pastors, and continued to find an elegance in our polity that helps us be the church of Jesus Christ. I also found a church home in Bardstown Road Presbytery Church, where my husband, Chris, served as pastor for eight years.

God has again called and I have answered to serve as the Executive and Stated Clerk of the Synod of South Atlantic. I am excited about moving away from the tree top/denominational view of the church and getting back nearer the ground where the ministry of Jesus Christ is lived out, to see how the Spirit is moving in our congregations and presbyteries.

Over the years, God has called and we have answered, knowing that God goes before and behind us all the way. And in answering that call we have found church homes and communities where Jesus Christ is Lord and ministry happens in Christ's name, all to the Glory of God.

Rev. Debra Shevlin Henning
Statement of Faith
May 2017

I believe that all of life belongs to God. There is no part of human life or of creation that is not of urgent concern to God. God has always been and continues to be involved in creation and history. From my belief in God's sovereignty come three convictions that govern my life. First, that God takes better care of us than we are able to take of ourselves. Second, there is no telling what God will do in my life, in the life of the church or in the world, but that God's activity can be counted upon to be for the benefit of creation. Third, I believe that it is God's grace that has brought me safe this far, and it is God's grace that will lead me home.

I believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to rescue sinners, to redeem the least, the lost, the last and the powerless. I believe that Jesus is God's Word in human form. In Christ we can see what God is like. Jesus loved all kinds of people; he was compassionate and endlessly forgiving, committed to the truth and passionate about justice. Jesus Identified with all persons, confronted them with who they were and who he was and called them to new life. In his death, he completed his identification with humanity. In his resurrection he offers new life to all humankind. Christ continues to work in the world in this way. Christ has called the church into existence for these same purposes, and calls us to live in the joyous reality of God's grace and love.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is God acting in the world today. I believe that it is by the power of the Spirit that God speaks, transforms lives and communities and institutions. The Spirit speaks and acts through a variety of ways; through the scripture, through people, through the events that happen to us, through creations, (through lions and tigers and golden retrievers) through art and music, through science, probably through our dreams, as well as in ways I cannot begin to imagine.

I believe that the scriptures are our guide for faith and life. By the power of the Spirit, these ancient documents speak God's Word to us today. They speak a Word of salvation, a Word of challenge, a Word of love, a Word of judgment, a Word of grace, a Word of reproach, a Word of Hope, a Word that tells us how to live for Jesus Christ; for others and for the world, a Word about how to live a life of trust in God's providence. I love the scriptures. I am continually astounded by what I read, as well as how texts so familiar that we can recite them without thinking, can suddenly speak a new and transforming word.

I believe the church is the body of Christ in the world. I also believe it is a human institution, with wounds and flaws and scars. I think our task is to view the life and actions of the church through the lense of the third chapter of the Book of Order. It would be appropriate to ask "Does this action/statement/policy reflect that the church is a provisional demonstration of what God intends for humanity? In my lifetime the

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its processors denominations have had moments when they have been God's prophetic voice in the world. There have been times when the church has lost its way; when it has focused on its own existence, rather than living for the world. Clearly, our church is having some difficult times in these days. Nevertheless, it is still Christ's church and Jesus Christ does not forsake those he has called to be his own.

Finally, I believe in wonder. Most of the time when I look at the world around me and my life and the lives of those I love and the lives of those around me, I marvel at what God has done and continues to do. I cannot wait to see what God will do next. And I know that even in the worst of times, God is with us, and with me, and will finally redeem those times and all time.

Faith Journey
Debra Shevlin Henning
May 2017

I am a child of the covenant. My family's life centered around the church. I have been a Presbyterian all my life. I do not remember a time when I was not a Christian. I understood from a very young age that the singing of the hymns in church praised God and lifted me up. I always knew that Jesus loves me, and that Jesus Christ is Lord.

I had six surgeries before I was five years old to correct a club foot. In those days, what is now considered same day surgery kept people in the hospital for a week. It was very frightening for a little girl, so I prayed constantly that God would take care of me. My experience then, and since has been that God did indeed take care of me; that God takes better care of me than I am able to take of myself.

My parents had a deep concern for social justice. They took part in civil rights marches in the sixties. In the seventies, their Bible study group created a drug counseling program in the small town where we lived, that was initially housed in the church. The program has expanded since then into a faith based counseling center, working with kids and families. My three brothers and I have always known that we are expected to care about issues of justice.

I went to College at the College of Wooster in Ohio, where I majored in music and speech. During the summers I was a counselor at the Presbyterian Conference Center in Holmes, New York, working with kids from eight years old through high school. It was there that the glimmerings of a call to ministry began to form, although I did not recognize it. But I loved it. I loved working with kids. I loved the challenge of teaching how to apply what we believe to this concentrated experience of community.

After I graduated, I went to graduate school to Georgetown to study language and linguistics. I left after a semester. It became clear that was not the direction for my life. I moved back to Long Island with no clear idea of what I was going to do. A job fell in to my life as a youth director in a Presbyterian Church on Long Island. I loved it. Shortly after that my father died suddenly of a

heart attack. It was the worst thing that ever happened to me (although I do understand that it happened to him.) It was my faith, and the people in the church that enabled me to get through that. It was maybe the first time my beliefs in a gracious God were tested. I found that everything I believed held me together, along with the loving care of church members I had known all my life.

I began to think that I could be a minister and work with kids if I wouldn't ever have to preach. The idea of preaching was very scary. Then I started thinking that I could probably learn to do that competently in order to do what I believed God was calling me to do.

Princeton Theological Seminary was a hundred miles from my home. So I drove down there one day, and met with the admissions director, who enabled me to articulate what I had not yet formulated. I applied and was accepted and started seminary the following fall. I knew one clergywoman who had struggled very hard to find a call. My mother was instrumental in getting approval for her ordination. There was not much support for women going into ministry in the late seventies, although we were the second wave of women. I am extremely grateful for those early clergywomen, who were all brilliant and strong and determined. I know very well that their struggles enabled me and my contemporaries to follow our calling. We stand on the shoulders of giants. In seminary, I developed a love for the scripture, and found that the Bible formed me and transformed me.

My first call was to Russellville, Arkansas, as an associate pastor to work with kids. I loved working with the youth groups and the adults and immersed myself in my work. My responsibilities included preaching once a month. To my surprise, it turned out that I was good at it. I discovered that I was most alive in the whole process of studying, and reflecting on the passage of the day, and making the connections that would bring these ancient texts to life in the twentieth century. I was invited to join a lectionary study group, and those men became mentors and colleagues and friends. I am still grateful to them.

After a short time as an associate in Maryville, Tennessee, I was called to be pastor of three rural churches in northeast Louisiana. In those churches I found incredible faithful people who loved me and taught me more about how

to live a Christian life than I gave them about anything. There I developed a rhythm for studying and writing and pastoral care. I married someone who was very supportive of me. I loved my life there. There were difficulties- Louisiana was/is extremely racially segregated. I had to learn how to balance my northeastern liberal upbringing with the realities of racism in the rural south.

My next call was to a midsize congregation in Little Rock. Grace Presbyterian Church was organized in the early sixties and was very active in the issues of desegregating the Little Rock schools. That church understood that its ministry was to the community as well as to its members. After learning about and studying and experiencing the labyrinth, we built one. I find that the walking meditation of the labyrinth is transformative.

While I was in Little Rock, I got a divorce. And again, the church got me through that very difficult time.

I married my husband Steve a few years later. Steve raised lions and tigers. I have always loved animals, but from him and from the big cats I learned in a new way how all life matters to God. It was an amazing experience.

I was the pastor of the Ormond Beach Presbyterian Church for a couple of years. After I left there, I have worked with Steve as a graphic designer. We moved to Pierson and after a year or so going to the local Methodist church, I began attending First Church, Crescent City. It is a small church. Worship was very nourishing, however; the pastor was a good preacher. I began to sing in the choir and playing the hand bell choir. Occasionally, I filled the pulpit. It was good to part of a congregation. When I broke my hip, they were wonderful to me.

When they invited me to work with them I was honored to accept. I find that I am alive in a new way as I once again enter into the rhythm of church life, studying, preaching, praying with the people, and working with the life of the congregation. I am very grateful that God has called me to serve there.

I know that I am extremely blessed. My family has always loved and supported me. The church has nurtured me. I received a privileged education.

I have served churches of faithful, loving people. In the dark and painful times in my life, the Lord has held me together.

I want to live a life of joy, of gratitude, of hearing and speaking the truth. I want to glorify and enjoy God. I want to enable people to recognize grace in their lives. I hope I manifest the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. I find that my relationship to Jesus Christ is strengthened and that I am transformed by the study of the bible.

I have been married for nineteen years to Steve Henning. We have two Old English Sheepdogs, and a St. Bernard. I am the youngest of four kids and the only girl. I love the Lord, I love the church, I love my family and my friends. I am committed to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Statement of Faith – Chris A. Lieberman

[Jesus] answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you neighbor as yourself.” –Luke 10:27 (NRSV)

The touchstone of my faith and theology is summarized by the call to love the Lord with all of one’s heart, and understanding, and strength; and to love one’s neighbor as oneself. This expression from the canon of scripture has captured my imagination and provided a channel for my commitment and compassion.

My faith is rooted in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that through Jesus Christ salvation has come into our shattered world. Because in Jesus, the Way of the Living God is fully revealed. Jesus is the good news that God does not condemn the world but acts in compassion to share life without end.

My faith leads me into a trust relationship with God, the source of all life. I trust in God who is at work in the world to make –and to keep– life in all the wonder of its rich diversity. God is the One who is behind all, before all, and among all that is. I know of God through the revelation of Scripture and through God’s continuing revelation in my life. To hold to God in this faith relationship is to rely on the fact that God is with us, and to live in the certainty that the realm of God is at hand as a present, as well as a future reality.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to empower us to life with the faith of Jesus Christ. Through faith, people can join together as the Body of Christ and live as children of God. I hold the sacraments of the church –baptism and communion– to be both a sign and a seal by which believers are formed and reformed by God’s Holy Spirit. The same Spirit rules our faith and life in Christ through scripture.

Scripture as an authoritative witness to God, belongs to the whole people of God and needs to be interpreted in, by and for communities of faith. For example, how do we respond to an awareness that scriptural texts have served not only God’s noble causes but also to legitimate war, promote racism, exploit nature, sustain inequality and dehumanize indigenous peoples throughout the world. My call as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be a participant in local and global communities seeking justice and wholeness for all. Theological reflection must be liberating for all as an expression of the reality of God incarnate.

Faith in the Living God is a dynamic, life-giving power in which I seek to live and move and have my being. Faith invites me into a community in which nothing is too high to be envisioned, too hard to be endured, too good to be hoped for, or too precious to be given away as a gift from God.

Journey of Faith – Chris A. Lieberman

The journey of my life has been a journey into the boundless depths of God’s love. I grew into a world that people professed was created in goodness by a God who was both loving and present. I experienced that reality, surrounded by the open beauty of backyard forests, riverside playgrounds, untamed beaches; and reflected by my parents and grandparents, churches, pets, family and friends. I grew up trusting and experiencing that God was present. The tension of my childhood was looking out from my home in Sherwood Forest and seeing other children of God struggling in centers of poverty like Detroit, or trapped in the war-torn chaos of Vietnam. The nagging question for me was “If we can overcome extraordinary obstacles and put people on the moon, why can’t we solve ordinary problems that separate so many people in our everyday lives.” A big part of my formative years was traveling with my family for nine summers to various colleges and universities where my father worked in summer research programs. I had the luxury of having a “home-base” during the school year, and then the adventures of travel during the summer vacations.

One of the crossroads in my life was leaving a career position with the Postal Service to take a volunteer position in a classroom with mentally retarded children. What a shock! I went from an environment in the Post office where I felt like a machine, to an environment in a special education classroom where I wondered what it was to be human. Beyond the first impressions –and my fears– I discovered more love, and trust, and a greater sense of community, than I had ever experienced. Their gift to me was a deepening appreciation of what it means to live out one's love of God and neighbors in the daily challenges of life.

Following this positive experience, I felt called to ministry as a Volunteer in Mission at Charles Cook Theological School in Tempe, Arizona. This was a tremendous opportunity to experience the Presbyterian concept of “mutuality in mission” where both those who *give* and those who *receive* are blessed by the interaction of transforming love.

I was married in 1975 to Joyce, who has become a spouse, soul mate, and a colleague in ministry. Between us, I am forever rediscovering the rich diversity and surprising gifts of divine grace within our relationship. Another turning point in our lives was spending four years at San Francisco Theological Seminary and then serving for ten years as Associate Pastors of First Presbyterian Church of Portland, Oregon. We loved our time in Portland and could have stayed, but I took an opportunity for further graduate studies in Boston. Then we relocated with our family to the high dessert of New Mexico for 13 years with Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque. Following that, Joyce followed a sense of call to serve the denomination in the Office of General Assembly in Louisville and I moved as the “trailing spouse.” I thought I would be lucky to eventually get some sort of job, but ended up with a call to serve again as a pastor with the congregation of Bardstown Road Presbyterian Church.

Again following a sense of call, Joyce moved to Florida (to serve as the executive/stated clerk with the Synod of South Atlantic) and I followed her. Within the twists and throughout the turns of this sojourning I’ve discovered my job is quite simple and can be done from anywhere. I find myself in an ongoing conversion experience of giving more and more of my life (heart, soul, mind, strength) to bear witness to the God of love with a particular place and time. It brings me to the Presbytery of St. Augustine and it brings me great joy in the mix of life with faith.

Ron Watson
Statement of Faith
September 2017

I believe in the one Triune God, known to us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I believe that God loves us, loves us, loves us. I believe that God does not love sin, but God does love sinners. I believe that it is this love that bridges the chasm created by our own sin between us and God. Through this love flows God's grace, wherein Christ Jesus, God's only begotten Son, became one of us. Fully human and fully divine, he revealed the love of the Father, though we killed him for it. He showed us how to love each other, and died for us, taking our place and becoming the expiation for our sins. In his resurrection, we share the gift of eternal life. I believe that Jesus is preparing a place for all who believe in him and will receive us unto himself so that we can be together. I believe that Jesus is the living Word and always existed, being of one substance with the Father. I believe, that through Christ, those who ask forgiveness from their sins will receive it. I believe that God sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, on the day of Pentecost. The giver and renewer of life, "claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church." (from a Brief Statement of Faith, 62-64) I believe that the same Spirit who inspired prophets and apostles continues to rule our lives today. I believe in the authority of God's scripture and that this good news should be proclaimed and lived. I believe that God loves justice and righteousness. I believe that God is working God's purpose out through God's creation. I believe that God calls us to be merciful, to right wrongs, to fight for equality, to give living bread, to seek food and clean water for all, to give the disenfranchised a voice, to share the Gospel message with the world. I believe in a sovereign God who was, is, and shall be. I believe in a holy, apostolic, and universal church. I believe that all believers are known as saints, and that these saints, both living and dead, are connected in mystic sweet communion. In life, in death, in life beyond death, we belong to God.

My Journey of Faith
Ron Watson

I have no memory of living in Memphis, but, like my father, I was baptized there, at Idlewild Presbyterian Church, by Dr. Paul Tudor Jones. But my mother, father, and sisters, were all born in Columbus, Georgia. Though we were living in Tennessee, my father had timed his vacation from work in his residency as a physician with my mother's pregnancy so that I might be born in Columbus as well. That is what the city meant to my father and my family. What meant the most

to me about that city was it's iconic landmark and clock tower, First Presbyterian Church. I can remember being in the nursery, children's church, then attending church every Sunday worship service, sitting at attention, on the third pew on the right. The Watsons didn't miss church, even for vacation. We came back on Saturdays, and we were in church on Sundays. And of course, we were also present every Wednesday night. When I became old enough, Sunday night youth groups were added to my spiritual regimen, as well as church camp and a spot on the presbytery's youth council. I sang in the adult choir when I was old enough to drive myself to rehearsals. I never missed Sunday School either.

I clearly see why people pine for the 1960's and 70's in church terms with families whose faith was built in the bedrock of the church. My childhood sounds idyllic. It wasn't. My parents divorced in the middle of all of that; yet the church nurtured me when I struggled with my family. I have spoken only so far of Christ's body, the church, and not specifically of Christ, because this is the way he was first known to me. I have known and always have known Jesus Christ and what he has done for me through his church. I cannot remember a time when I doubted Jesus, asked troubling questions about Jesus, or misunderstood the grace I know in my Lord and Savior. For me, "second birth" was always "second nature." Knowing the love of Father, Son, and Spirit has sustained me and will always sustain me. The story of my call into the ministry is perhaps a bit more interesting.

My calling into the ministry began at age 12. My piano teacher, a good Methodist, said to me, "I think you would make a wonderful minister." She was a bit of a mystic in this regard as she told each of her pupils what they should do with their lives. I asked around. She had told each one of us something different. She had only mentioned the ministry to me. I distinctly remember a few years later, driving past the St. Simons Presbyterian Church on vacation, and knowing in my heart, "I will be a minister here someday." (I would later indeed serve that church for 5 years as their associate pastor). But the most compelling part of my call story happened my sophomore year in college. I was now mostly convinced that I was being called into the ministry. My Bible seemed to keep opening itself to 2 Timothy 4. So in my discernment process, I asked our campus minister to meet with me so I could discuss this with him, and he agreed to see me at 4 pm the following Wednesday. I showed up on time, and he didn't. I waited for an hour. Nothing. (Cell phones would not be invented for a few more years). I went back to my Citadel barracks room, devastated, that this surely was a sign that I had misinterpreted God's plan for my life. I stared across the parade ground at the chapel as the sun began to set and its reflection bounced off the copper plating beneath the roof line back across the parade ground, something I had witnessed many times. Suddenly, I noticed that the cross itself began to shine brightly right into my room.

Made out of a dull and non-reflective plastic, illuminated only at night, I thought my eyes must be playing tricks on me. The cross continued to shine just as brightly. At that moment, the phone rang. It was the campus minister, apologizing for running late and urging me to come and see him. I knew before I arrived at his office what my future would be, serving the Lord as a preacher, teacher, and giver of pastoral care.

And so, I have been answering this call into the ministry for 29 years and counting, and I will continue to answer this call as long as God wills it. My wife Jules, a child of the manse, has been doing this longer than I have. I am a sixth generation Presbyterian, on my mother's side, and I pray that my children, should they have children, will give our Presbyterian faith to the eighth.