

Appendix H  
New Minister Information

1. Joe Reggin, First Green Cove Springs, Interim Pastor
2. Walk Jones, First Ocala, Interim Associate Pastor
3. Conrad Sharps, Amelia Plantation Chapel
4. Ruth Elswood, Honorably Retired / Parish Associate at  
First St. Petersburg (within bounds of Tampa Bay Presbytery)
5. Dale Ambler, Honorably Retired
6. Brian Lays, Riverside, Pastor

## Faith Statement

Joe Reggin

I believe in a sovereign God who rules a universe in which statistical probability is a reality. God's rule is not anxious; God does not "micro-manage." Or over-function; therefore, God does not decide each individual circumstance, or possible outcome, within the universe. God is transcendent. Although I believe God can be experienced in the natural world, a truer understanding of God comes only in God's self-revelation, through the Word made flesh, the word written and the Spirit. For me, there is no metaphor of God (rock, shepherd, father or holy other) that is completely adequate. To settle on one metaphor as the definition of God, is, for me, the biblical definition of idolatry. I believe God is joyful, loving, tender, forgiving and compassionate. I believe God also allows us to live in and with the consequences of our decisions and actions. I believe we see this reality in God's creation and in God's self-revelation in Christ's life, death and resurrection.

I believe Jesus was and is the Christ. As the Christ, Jesus was fully human and fully divine. I believe human folly tends to emphasize one nature over another. When we allow such, I believe, we deny the experience and witness of the early church and Scripture. I believe it is in the life, death and resurrection of Christ that we find the fullest, expression of what God created us to be as human beings. In Christ, God brings us redemption (the discovery of our true selves in the process of our interdependence with God and one another). Redemption is that, which we cannot work for, or accomplish for ourselves.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer of all life. It is through the working of the Spirit that God gives the gifts of life and faith. It is the Holy Spirit who calls, inspires and equips the saints of God for ministry in the world. It is the Spirit who leads us in the way of Christ and sanctifies all, through the reconciling victory of Christ over sin, death and hell. I believe it is this process of sanctification (of growing "to put on Christ"), which needs to be emphasized as a primary goal of our faith.

I believe the Church Militant is the body of Christ in the world. Although the Church has often shown itself to be corrupt and self-indulgent, filled with anxious members, it is none the less that body whom God has empowered by the Spirit to act with Christ's authority in the world. Although the church can be, and often has been, a joyless, judgmental, inflexible and far too flawed institution, we are those whom God calls children and family. The church is the body that seeks to faithfully interpret the Scripture as a witness to the Word of God made flesh. The church offers the sacraments as symbols that direct us to the joy, hope and peace that comes in the knowledge that everywhere and always we belong to God. "...whether we live or we die, we belong to the Lord." Thanks be to God!

## Joe Reggin Faith Journey Statement

I was born in St. Augustine Florida in 1952. At the age of two, I was taken to Cocoa, where I grew up along with NASA. As I got older, I watched Snarks to Space Shuttles being launched. (I especially enjoyed the launches that involved explosions!) In Junior High School I developed a passion for astronomy and wound-up working as an unofficial lab assistant in the small observatory at Brevard Community College (as it was then called).

The little contact I had with the Christian Faith growing up took the form of a racist, hard core hell fire and damnation tradition that is part of the stereotype of the old south. Since my interests and passions ran to technology, math and science, I had no connection to the Christian Faith; or any religious tradition. This began to change shortly after high school. I took a job as a health care worker for a man who was a quadriplegic. Being in a situation where I was daily confronted with the issues of life and death had a significant impact on me. In this experience, I began to learn the difference between fact and truth. I discovered that although empiricism is the best method for establishing facts, it is a less supportive discipline in a search for truth. As I began to explore the usual questions older adolescents/younger adults ask, I experienced a growing awareness of the importance of faith. I also began to see the value of having a faith tradition and experienced a growing awareness of what I later learned was a call.

After two years of employment in home health care, I made my way to Tampa where I soon enrolled at the University of South Florida. My original plan was to major in electrical engineering, as a basis for doing graduate work in astrophysics. As I prepared to enter college, I also considered joining a church community. The hurdle that presented itself was found in the question of which church. I wound up joining a PCUS congregation. I began to learn about the Reformed Faith that had a long and cherished tradition of connection to the academy. Discovering a faith tradition that valued education and study was something amazingly new to me. This had the effect of deepening my sense of call and opened me to consider that I might have a call to service in the church. I began my work at USF, and within a few months also enrolled as a candidate, so I could explore this sense of call. Because the church was a different place in the 1970's, I also had to have a liberal arts degree; so, I changed my major to sociology. I began my vocation in the church when I was hired to work as a church custodian.

After graduation from USF, I attended Columbia Seminary for two years. During college I had discovered the work of Thomas Merton and found myself drawn to a life of contemplation. While at Columbia, I also spent time at a Trappist monastery near Conyers. My experience of visiting and working with the monks at Conyers brought me to the realization, as Merton said, that although I liked aspects of the contemplative life, I had no call to make it a vocation. I found I had significant disagreements with the Roman Church in the areas of theology and polity (which for me have been confirmed in recent actions of the Roman church). This experience deepened my appreciation for the Presbyterian Church and our traditions. After two years at Columbia, I developed interests which led me to Louisville Presbyterian where I received my M. Div.

While at Louisville, I worked as a student Interim Pastor in a local Presbyterian Church. I developed a sense of the importance of the interim period in the life of a congregation. The former Pastor of this congregation had been removed from the pulpit by action of the presbytery. What made a lasting impression on me was the deep level of grief and sorrow I found in the members of the church over the brokenness of their relationship with their former Pastor. In this experience, I began to develop an awareness of the importance of resolving past emotionality in the context of a congregation's transition from one Pastor to another. I learned that the way we, as individuals and as groups, transition to adapt to change is vital to the health of the church as an organization. (See: William Briggs.)

Following my graduation from Louisville, I made my way to Chicago, Illinois where I became the Installed Pastor of the Chicago Lawn Presbyterian Church. Early in my time in Chicago, I was invited to join a clergy group, whose membership was composed of about twelve other Presbyterian Pastors, all of whom had many years of experience in the specialized work of Urban Ministry. Along with the congregation of the Chicago Lawn Church, these caring friends and colleagues taught me about being a Pastor in the PC(USA). Their care and support of me in my first professional experience continues to be a great gift to this day. Perhaps the most important thing I learned from my relationship with all these wonderful, Christian people is that ministry is not a task to be managed alone! It was in Chicago that I also had my first, personal experience of decline in the church. This congregation was organizationally dying in large part because it was located in a neighborhood that was predominantly Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. Working with members of the presbytery over several years, a merger with a nearby Presbyterian congregation was proposed. Two years later, Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church began with a new Pastor. I discovered that I had, at the end of the day, become a de facto Interim for the members of both congregations, which allowed them to call a Pastor who would lead them to a new vision of the future.

I left Chicago and spent the next fifteen plus years as an Installed Pastor, working with congregations in St. Augustine and Northeast Georgia Presbyteries. In this period of time, my work was focused primarily in transitional ministry and continued to develop skills in conflict management. During these years, I also began training with Dr. Pete Steinke. Through this training, I was introduced to Bowen Family Systems Theory. This eventually led me to the Center for Family Process, where I have studied since 2009; with occasional stops at the Bowen Center at Georgetown University and the Kansas City Center for the Family. It has been in the context of my study of Family Systems that my spiritual and vocational life has become most clearly focused. My study has provided a foundation for my vocation as a Pastor, for my development of being a self and has provided a hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture in the context of a relationship to God in Christ that provides a deeper sense of the church as "the Family of God."

I became a dedicated Interim Pastor in 2004. It is in this context of my sense of call to Interim Ministry that I have come to work with the congregation at Green Cove Springs. I come to this call with a good deal of excitement and anticipation. This is due in part to the reality that this may be my last experience before I retire. I imagine that I will work at some level after I retire; however, I have a sense that working in retirement will be a fundamentally different experience. It is my hope that I might continue to be of service after I retire; however, it is also my hope that I can bring more of a focus on my life and my own, personal interests after retirement. It is my hope

that I can manage creating an appropriate distance from the church in the near future, to give room to those whose are now called to face the problems that will clearly need to be addressed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have great hope in those who will come after me, that they will do better than I have done. I have a hope that I can relinquish my position to make room for these new leaders; yet, also have energy and room to continue my own self-development and faith development. I have hope that I will continue to know and experience the abundance of life that is God's gift to us all in Jesus, our Christ.

Statement of Faith by Walk C. Jones  
February 2020

I am Presbyterian through and through. The Confessions express the fullness of God and Biblical theology far better than I can write or speak.

I believe in the Triune God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit: God of the Bible, who is far larger and more magnificent than we can comprehend!

Jesus was fully human and fully God: he wept and burned with righteous anger. As a child he puzzled and frightened his parents. He spoke with a new authority. I imagine that Jesus laughed heartily with a child on his knee or while telling disciples about camels fitting through the eye of a needle. Jesus is the best example we have of who God is and how to be best adult human. We should strive to be Christ-like: weeping with those who weep, overturning tables of moneychangers who have moved commerce into sacred spaces, laughing with one another, knowing scripture, and praying daily.

The only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ, who is both judge and redeemer. At our best, we allow him to make judgments while we err on the side of welcome and grace. Just as Jesus talked theology with a woman beside the well, we should welcome into the church those on the margins of our society.

The Holy Spirit set the church on fire at Pentecost, and empowers the church today. He is our counselor, comforter, guide and friend. I pray that the Holy Spirit is the source of my preaching and worship, the engine for the church, the wind beneath our wings. The Spirit sanctifies Christians and the Church, making us better than we can ever do ourselves.

The Church is a gift from God. Just as the Spirit spoke collectively to the Apostles, the Spirit guides the church through Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and Assemblies. We gather at the Table, where through the Holy Spirit, Jesus sits with us, and we -- in heaven and on earth -- are the Body of Christ. This spiritual meal nourishes us to do the Church's work on earth. In Baptism a congregation welcomes children and adults into our fellowship and seals us members of the Body.

When I first started serving as a chaplain I realized I need a congregation to regularly worship and study with. I longed for fellowship. My relationship with God has grown and deepened while I have been in conversation with a spiritual director for the last 4 years. My study of the Bible has deepened as I read it for spiritual insight, in addition to study for teaching and preaching.. The Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament (our Protestant canon) point us towards Jesus Christ and teach us to live in service to God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is The Word, the meaning of things (John 1).

Humanity is sinful and capable of doing great damage to one another and God's creation through carelessness, disregard, or intentional evil. We bully with our words and actions, which is wrong. God has given humanity free will and let's us reap the consequences of our actions. Science is real and is the best system people have developed for testing and proving our understanding of the world around us; the findings of the scientific method help us better understand God's creation.

Jesus will come back to judge us, but we do not know when. Jesus said that only the Father knows the day and hour of the Son's return. Any preacher who claims to know when Jesus will return is not a prophet, but is seeking profit. We need to live as if each hour is our last. I believe and preach the whole Bible and the long history of Reformed theology.

My Faith Journey, by Walk C. Jones

My family has been Reformed and Presbyterian as far back as we know. I was raised in Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, a church that surrounded my family with love when my parents divorced in the early 1970s, then when my father re-married a few years later. I was loved, nurtured, and challenged to take Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. When I was a leader on the presbytery youth council I felt a strong call to ministry. My pastor suggested Presbyterian College in South Carolina and I attended there, majoring in Political Science and learning how to write and think. I studied in Europe and in Washington, DC, expanding my horizons and seeing the Church in new and ecumenical ways. I interned for a congressman and Bread for the World. God used many experiences to call me to become a Candidate for Ministry and attend Louisville Presbyterian Seminary immediately after college.

Seminary was a great challenge; I took Clinical Pastoral Education my first year and it really stretched my knowledge of myself and ministry. I married my college sweetheart and we began life in Louisville between my first and second years at LPTS. After working in a church and on campus I completed my M.Div., and was called to serve The Presbyterian Church on Edisto Island, in South Carolina. Nancy and I moved our few possessions into the beautiful manse on the 'island that time forgot.' Shortly after I was ordained Hurricane Hugo swept through and I began a lifelong interest in disaster response and pastoral care after trauma. The congregation taught me to be a pastor as Nancy and I began a family.

After five years God called me to St. Andrews Pres. in Apopka, near Orlando. Suddenly we were in the suburbs of 'Tomorrowland' but there were still storms, pastoral care, and opportunities to grow in knowledge and ministry. I became a chaplain to the Orange County Sheriff's office and served on the Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM), writing my D. Min. dissertation at Columbia Seminary on pastoral care after trauma. I picked up another unit of CPE and enjoyed being near my in-laws in Orlando.

Later God called me to serve the Presbyterian Foundation where I was a development officer traveling across the South teaching stewardship and selling church mutual funds. Our years in Oxford were very happy ones as I was in the Volunteer Fire Department and our children were in elementary school. Nancy was elected to Session of First, Oxford and we grew in our faith and service to the church. It was heartbreaking when the Foundation downsized me, announcing my layoff on Ash Wednesday. But soon God called me to serve a church in Pensacola, FL.

I was very involved in the community: Rotary Club officer, Sheriff's chaplain, and CPE for a third unit. I started in Toastmasters and this business-oriented club helped me improve my preaching and storytelling. Hurricane Ivan destroyed our city and I chaired the presbytery's response commission, using knowledge from my D.Min. and previous disasters. My favorite



activity was pastoral care of the congregation and being home during my children's teenage years. Later God used my love of pastoral care, chaplain experience, and clinical credentials to call me back to Orlando as chaplain at Westminster Towers. It was good to be near Nancy's aging parents. I completed another unit of CPE, this time with hospice. I began seeing a Spiritual Director and later became one after three years of study with the ecumenical Audire program in Orlando. *Audire* is Latin for listening [the program began at the Roman Catholic retreat center.]

After moving back to Orlando, as I was visiting many different churches, I longed to be part of a congregation. Nancy chose Park Lake Pres. in Orlando. She has twice been elected to Session and become a very effective and active Ruling Elder. Our children have grown up; two now have children of their own and I agree with those who say grand-parenting is the best!

A few years ago, the grass looked greener across the street and I applied to become Director of Church Relations for Westminster. I loved traveling around Florida and strengthening our relationships with the synod and several denominations, but I did not realize how much I would miss pastoral care and ministry.

God has called me back to a congregation where I will use my pastoral care, chaplaincy, Toastmasters, spiritual-listening, and other skills as interim Associate Pastor at First, Ocala. To God be all the glory.

## **Statement of Faith, Conrad Sharps**

I believe in one true God, who is the all-powerful, totally sovereign Creator of all things. I believe in God's most perfect son, Jesus Christ, in whom my salvation rests, who came to this life and lived as a human being. He is the Word, God incarnate, the way, the truth and the life. In his ministry he taught us the ways of God, he healed us and ministered to all areas of our lives: physical, emotional, and spiritual. He was crucified and died; yet God raised him from the dead. Through our faith in his mercy and his promise of life for those who believe in him we may abide and be assured of our eternal salvation.

The life of Jesus Christ points to the kingdom of God and eternal truths upon which I believe the ministry of the Church should be based. First is the proclamation of the gospel and the demonstration of the love of God for all people. Second is the mandate to help those in need, especially those who are unable to help themselves. Third is the need for an active faith. I believe passionately that our deeds must match our creeds as we seek to share the good news of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit is the ever-present reality of God working in lives and in our world. The Holy Spirit is life-giving, filling us with meaning and purpose. We are empowered and nurtured by the Holy Spirit not as an escape from the world but to the joy of experiencing fullness in it through faith. The Holy Spirit is the source of truth, which empowers us to live our faith and binds the people of God together as the Body of Jesus Christ.

The people of God, the Church, are called out of the world by the Holy Spirit to be God's people, to worship God, to be strengthened and nurtured together in order that we may be joyfully sent back out into the world to share the Good News of the gospel and to be God's agents of reconciliation. The PC USA Book of Order reminds us that the Church is the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all humanity; a sign in and for the world of God's new reality in Jesus Christ. I believe the Church is the most important institution on this side of glory.

Scripture is the divinely inspired Word of God that witnesses to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. It is the Word of God because it was written with the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must read, interpret and seek to live with the help of the same Holy Spirit, remembering that the message of scripture is Jesus Christ, the living Word who is one with God and the Holy Spirit. As a Christian, Christ has authority over my life by the guidance of scripture and the inward witness of the Holy Spirit.

The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are outward signs by which God seals on our consciousness the promise of our salvation in Christ and sustains and nurtures our faith. The sacraments sustain believers in communion with God and the Body of Jesus Christ. Christ is present by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, we are, by the power of the Holy Spirit, cleansed by the water as a sign of new life in Christ and our union with him. In the Lord's Supper, we partake of the bread and the cup that assures believers of the sustaining love and presence of Christ. Christ is the true substance of both sacraments; their purpose is to offer and present God's grace confirmed through the outward signs of water, bread and the cup. No human words, however, can ever fully express his union with the devout, which by its very nature is incomprehensible.

As Christ's disciples we have been given true life, freedom and hope. The Kingdom of God is a reality, which we, as the Body of Christ, are joyfully invited to make known. We as the Church are blessed and challenged as we are called to be a visible demonstration of the Kingdom of God.

## **Faith Journey, Conrad Sharps**

The earliest memories of life I have include those of the First United Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We lived in close proximity to the church in apartment houses owned by my parents, thus my father was frequently called upon for advice or assistance in matters related to the church's physical plant. In fact, there were times growing up that I believed my father worked for the church.

Freedom to roam the building and grounds of that old church gave me great joy as a child. I knew the location of every secret door. I knew how to access the organ pipes. I knew where the chains and pulleys hung in the basement and where coal was sent shooting down into the coal bins. I even dared to climb into the pulpit and turn the pages of the "big Bible." Church was not a once a week episode for my family, it was our life, a place I felt at home. Church was for me both warm and inviting, yet holy and special.

Every Sunday and Wednesday people came together to make my "playground" come alive. Not only were the buildings special, for the people who worshiped and served there made this church a place where I sensed the presence of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives. This was especially true of the Wednesday Night Youth Club program (a forerunner of the popular LOGOS program). Here I learned the joy of worship, Bible study, and what it means to be part of the community of faith.

In my mid-teens, my family moved to Florida, but I never left behind the seed of faith nurtured and confirmed from the earliest days of my life. Throughout my teens I remained very involved in church youth programming, worship and service.

Upon graduation from high school I went to work for my father framing houses. This only guaranteed that I would soon discern the need for higher education. While in college I began to sense a call to ordained ministry. This was confirmed my senior year through an independent study program offered at a small, local Presbyterian Church where I led a youth group, assisted in worship and even preached one Sunday.

After completion of my college degree I entered Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Initially, I believed my call was to campus ministry. This led me to an intern year as a campus pastor at St. Andrews Presbyterian College and an additional year of work/study at the University of Louisville's Ecumenical Center. It was while serving there that I met my wife of thirty-five years: Lauren Ford Sharps.

Despite my focus on campus ministry, God in God's great wisdom called me to a small church in Faison, North Carolina, where the people patiently and lovingly nurtured my growth as a parish pastor.

I have served the church for over thirty-five years in many different ministries: a small, rural church in North Carolina; a rapidly growing resort town church in Fernandina Beach, Florida; a large corporate size church in Birmingham, Alabama; an older church facing transition in Pittsburgh and now a small interdenominational church on the southern end of Amelia Island, Florida.

In the churches I have served I have always sought to foster ministries known for warmth, hospitality, a priority for mission and a true sense of the ever-present Spirit of God. I believe it is outreach and mission that defines us, more so than the theological and cultural differences that often divide us in this world. I believe it is our love for God and neighbor that makes the living presence of Jesus Christ evident in our midst. And for the people I have served I will be eternally grateful for their abiding faith, acceptance, and patience as we sought to glorify and serve God together.

Soli deo Gloria

**Ruth Elswood**  
**Statement of Faith**  
**May 2020**

I believe in one triune God, who, as Mother/Father God, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Holy Spirit teaches us by example to live together in harmony. I believe that I belong to God, who is the source of all life, who brought order out of chaos, and who continues to love and nurture all creation. In understanding this, I feel profound joy.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It is central to my belief that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Christ's incarnation, his taking on human flesh to live among us and with us, gives hope and comfort to all God's children. I believe that Jesus Christ knows what it means to experience joy and despair, love of family and love of humankind, indeed the full range of human emotions. I believe Christ's incarnation is what allows us as human beings who fall short of the mark in so many ways, to feel Christ's presence with us in all we do. By his death, Christ saved us from our all our sins, from the major acts of betrayal of love that we commit to all those daily shortcomings that we, as human beings cannot alone leave behind. I believe that I am saved by grace alone, by the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, given to Christ's disciples through his breath, the source of life. The Holy Spirit is my comforter and my guide, enlightening scripture to show the path to joyful Christian living, constantly within and around us, ever there when human resources fail. I believe the Holy Spirit guides the hands and hearts of God's people so that we may bring God's presence to others, and offer hope and healing.

I believe in the revelation of God's liberating message through Jesus Christ as revealed to us in scripture. Scripture is authoritative not as a coercive voice in our lives,

but rather as a means to guide us as we learn how to follow Christ's example to heal the broken and liberate the captive, to try to love as Christ loved. Through the stories of the Old and New Testaments, through Christ's words and teachings, scripture leads us to serve, to love, to uphold and to work to bring God's kingdom to this broken world.

As a child of God, the God who knit me together in my mother's womb, who knew me even before my birth, I am saved by grace. Through baptism we leave behind the old world of sin and separation and begin a new life, washed clean by the baptismal waters. Jesus gave us both the example of baptism and the command to go forth and baptize others. In baptism, we die and rise with Christ, forgiven and cleansed; we are reborn in the renewing life of the spirit, and we become a part of the community of God's people.

I believe in the community and communion of the people of God. I believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit in community. I believe that God's presence is with us as we praise and worship, as we partake of the bread and wine, the body of Christ and the cup of salvation. The Lord's Supper is God's gift to us, and, as we celebrate it together, Christ is present with us in community through the Holy Spirit.

In all these things I find an abundance of joy and hope, and I pray that I may help others to know the great joy of trusting in Jesus Christ.

Amen

## **Ruth Elswood – Journey of Faith May 2020**

I began my spiritual journey in the Methodist faith, attending church with my mother and sister in our local chapel in a working class neighborhood in Manchester, England. There I attended Sunday School and learned Bible stories, sang hymns, and was part of a small, but strong community of caring Christians. Since all state schools in England are required to teach religion, my education in Bible stories and church affairs continued throughout my childhood and adolescence with a Church of England orientation. After I left home to attend college at the age of 18, I no longer attended church. Most young people in my friendship circle were unchurched in the sixties and seventies. But the church remained a part of the background of my life. I was married in the Methodist church I had grown up in, and most of my friends had church weddings.

I returned to regular church attendance in the 1980s when a friend invited me to go along with her. I became a Unitarian Universalist for the next twenty years, and was very active in religious education and in social justice matters. Although Unitarian Universalism celebrates many religious traditions, I held onto my basic Christian beliefs. In 2004 I took the position of preschool director at the First Presbyterian Church in Gainesville and began to attend church services there. At about that same time in my life, one of my daughters was having problems with drugs and alcohol. Despite everything I tried to do to control the situation and to help her, only deep prayer and faith in God's healing power brought about her path to recovery. My understanding of God's part in her healing and recovery, and in my acceptance that there are some things only God can accomplish brought me into a much deeper relationship with God.

I became a member of the Presbyterian Church and, after some years, began to feel the call to study God's word and God's ways in seminary, not knowing quite what kind of vocational call I would seek. While at Austin Presbyterian Seminary, I became involved in a visitation program in which a group of seminarians joined local activists in weekly visits to women who were in immigration detention nearby. In this work, we "came alongside" women from many different countries who were separated from their families, and who did not know when or if they would see them again. This work was instrumental in my sensing a call to serve in pastoral care with people going through some of the most difficult times in their lives.

As I responded to this call to serve, I spent almost a year during my time in seminary training as a chaplain at Tampa General Hospital. I have worked my entire adult life as an educator of young children and their families, work that can be demanding and exhausting. I have never, though, worked harder than I did as a

hospital chaplain. My call to pastoral care ministry was confirmed during this time serving in the hospital. After graduating, I was ordained to a position as a chaplain for long-term care facilities. During my first year of ordained ministry, I served also as interim solo pastor in Jasper, Florida, where I discovered that I also loved to preach the gospel. Since then, I have served two large congregations – in Ocala and St. Petersburg - as Parish Associate. In my ministry in these churches I served the elderly, the sick, those close to death and their families, and families in crisis. I initiated GriefShare ministries in both of these churches, a ministry I feel called to continue when God shows the way for me to provide this service. I was also blessed to be able to preach at both FPC Ocala and FPC St. Petersburg on average once a month.

While I am now seeking honorably retired status, in no way do I feel that my time of service to the church is at an end. Family circumstances require that I take a break at this time from active ministry, but I feel certain that God will call me once again to serve God's people. I pray that I will be ready to hear that call, and that God will give me the strength and the means to answer and to serve.

## **Statement of Faith**

Rev. Dale F. Ambler

June 11, 2020

I believe in the One Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who first chose me as his child. Through Jesus, fully human and fully God who dwelt on this earth, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will seek to live my life with a focus on glorifying and enjoying God forever. It is by God's grace and love that results in gratitude in my life and actions.

It is this gratitude that guides my life actions within the community of faith we know as Christ's church. I seek to live my life that is foundationally grounded in Scripture with regard to providing focus for my life and relationships, what I believe and informing my actions as a servant to my Risen, Living Savior.

The Word of God is the authoritative witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The church, its confessions and form of government are subordinate to Christ Jesus our Lord. Within these words is the living presence of the Holy Spirit that continues to illumine God's living Word to us today through Scripture faithfully read and proclaimed and sacraments rightly administered. This community of faith desires to not only hear but also receive God's truth and in so doing, we respond in our witness in the world. Here in worship the faith community is transformed and renewed into a people that can fully understand the significance of the reconciling work of Christ. Strengthened and nourished through proclamation of God's Word and celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper we are equipped to go into the world to be Christ's presence by the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's mission.

I fully affirm the beliefs of the Reformed tradition beginning with the simple confession that I am a broken individual who falls short of God's glory. This affirmation lifts up as the pinnacle of my belief that God is sovereign, perfect in righteousness and love, incomprehensible and pure holiness. It is only by God's grace, mercy and steadfast love through the cross of Jesus that I am redeemed including all, who by faith through the Holy Spirit in their lives, claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Only in this way is my or anyone else's eternal salvation possible.

Knowing these truths, I seek to live my life as a disciple of Jesus, one who is not only a follower and witness to the living Christ but one who is also an ongoing student of this same Jesus, in this world relying on God's Word, the Bible, which comes alive in revealing God and his desire for myself through the Holy Spirit, and that guides me on my Christian journey. By God's help I pray that I will be able to live a life that is grounded in Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (NRSV)



## **Journey of Faith**

Rev. Dale F. Ambler

June 11, 2020

I have been asked to provide a journey of faith that includes my personal background, calls received, current sense of call and God's presence throughout. I'll begin with my wife, Tari, whom I met at Purdue University as members of the marching band. Married in June 1982, we just celebrated, by God's grace, 38 years of marriage but I like to include the time from September 1978 when we had our first date...so, 42 years of life together. We have two children who are both creating their own life stories. Lisa, 32, lives in Morris Illinois and is a very talented interior designer specializing in bathrooms and kitchens. Brian, 34, lives in Dublin Ohio with his wife Kelly. Brian is a computer specialist and Kelly is a store manager for Bath and Body Works.

Tari is a registered pharmacist who worked in the hospital environment for several years until Lisa was about 2 at which time we jointly thought the vocation of full-time mom was a higher calling in life. While many today are not able to do so, we have been richly blessed knowing that our kids never spent a day in day care but always had one of us home with them for their growing up years.

My journey in the working world began in the nuclear energy field as my studies at Purdue were in Health Physics/Radiological Engineering. For nearly 28 years, I worked my way up and through the corporate management organization at two nuclear plants and the corporate nuclear office. I had some fascinating and challenging opportunities including leading two different Radiation Protection Departments, as well as the Licensing & Regulatory Assurance Departments at two different locations. I think two of the more interesting "jobs" have included being certified as a Senior Nuclear Reactor Operator and the working corporate senior manager representing the interests of the nuclear fleet of 11 reactor sites with industry representatives and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Washington D.C.

Sometimes, however, one's working life can lead one to certain realizations. While in a training program for the next group of executives, I will never forget the hearing the words of the CEO who said, "I don't want to hear my senior managers complain about quality of life...you will have quality of life when you retire". That was November 2006 in Philadelphia at the Sofitel Hotel and I believe it was one of those God moments, you know, when God gets your attention. In short, after a great deal of prayer and discernment, I turned in my resignation and left the company I started with on June 11, 2007...13 years ago to the day as I write this. I was 47 years of age. Being a man of faith for as long as I can remember, the discernment process of next steps was not yet finished.

In July 2008, I was sitting in the pews of First Presbyterian Church of Joliet, our home church as a family from 1992, for the ordination service of Jeff Warrick who is currently serving a church in Nebraska. Interestingly enough, Jeff, left his long-time company of employment to enter into ordained ministry. I still remember where I was sitting when I clearly "heard" God's call to do the same as Jeff. Having been active in the government of the local church as Deacon and Elder

still didn't prepare me to understand fully the depth of this new call from the sixth pew from the back on the aisle. To aid the discernment process, I sought out the insights of a few trusted friends to help in validating this call.

There was one person remaining in this journey...Tari. While driving to visit Lisa at Illinois State, I took the opportunity to engage her in this call. I figured at 65 mph she would jump out of the car. Tari was not the least bit surprised and, together, we made plans to visit McCormick and Dubuque Seminaries.

Both schools had their individual strengths and weaknesses, however, two individuals really helped in solidifying God's plan for me. Dr. Lyle VanderBroek, Professor of New Testament) at Dubuque and John (I simply can't remember his last name), Moderator of the CPM in Blackhawk Presbytery at the time. I was accepted at both schools and really hoped that McCormick, because of its proximity to home, would be the choice. You all know what happens many times in prayer/discernment...the answer you want or hope for isn't always the one you get.

In September 2009 I started my three-year seminary journey at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. I was a commuter student which meant I spent Monday-Thursday on campus and Friday-Sunday working at First Presbyterian Church-Joliet as a "seminary intern" but in reality, having many of the duties of an associate pastor. Three years later and ~38,000 miles traveled between Shorewood, Illinois and Dubuque, Iowa, I earned my M.Div.

Having graduated, I began the process of seeking a call and God led me, of all places, to First-Joliet. The call was rather specific in regard to evangelism and growth. As many pastors know, an older congregation is sometimes, let's say, reluctant to change opportunities. In hindsight, I am convinced that the purpose of this call was for me to use strength of relationships developed over the years and my background to help the Senior Pastor, Craig Herr, lead the church in a new direction. As the Associate Pastor, my primary focus was on new opportunities for congregational study, worship and fellowship through the Night Deacons, and the Growth and Parish Councils. I had a wonderful 10 years serving in this manner.

In December 2008, after having recently attended a mandatory boundary training program for Blackhawk Presbytery pastors, I came home to Tari with another call from God. Having worked nearly 40 calendar years, this training course showed me that the real number of effective years worked, based on hours per day and week, exceeded 60 years. The question placed on my heart by God was in regard to my time spent with Tari. Marriage is more than just the number of years cobbled together over time.

So, after prayer and discernment, I informed Craig and the Session of my intent to retire from day to day working/paid ministry in order to spend more quality time with Tari. Now, I believe that a pastor never really retires but that we evolve and transform as God does the shaping. I was active with Blackhawk with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry as well as a couple of special task forces over the past several years. Additionally, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and state-wide shelter in place orders went out across the country, there were a number of individuals in the community where Tari and I lived who were struggling. For about 40 days or

so, I used FaceBook as a platform for a daily “thankfulness journey” devotional and incorporating pictures from a recent trip to Israel. So, pastoral ministry comes in many forms beyond the day to day church-proper type of vocational work.

As Tari and I transition here in Ocala Florida, we will begin the search for a new church home as the gathering of God’s people is vital and important. I expect I will “find” something to do in the church God leads us to. Tari and I were active in Mission Bible Church in Minooka Illinois after leaving First Joliet working with the Food Pantry as well as being asked by the pastoral staff to help facilitate some learning opportunities on Sunday morning. Additionally, during the shelter at home order, the pastoral staff asked I would be willing to make some phone calls to members of the church and just check in to see how they were doing. Let’s be honest...what pastor doesn’t like to talk!

Going forward, I am sure I will be involved with the government of the church at the presbytery level should opportunities arise once we are settled here. Tari and I are in the process of building a new home at On Top of the World with an estimated completion of January 2021 so I am anticipating these next several months to be a tad busy. Knowing that as God leads though, there are sometimes detours in our plans so I will continue to listen and discern.

I look forward to a conversation with you in the near future. If you should need to contact me ahead, please feel free to use either of the following methods:

eMail: [DFAPURDUE81@GMAIL.COM](mailto:DFAPURDUE81@GMAIL.COM)

Cell: 815-953-1383 (text or call)

Blessings in Christ Jesus,  
Dale

### **Faith Statement: Rev. Brian Lays**

I believe in one Almighty and Eternal Triune God, Lord of all creation, who is one in substance, yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Father, who made all things, visible and invisible; whose will is both inscrutable and trustworthy; who governs all things with the power of love, wisdom, and faithfulness; who holds us as a mother holds her newborn child.

I believe in the Son, Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, eternally begotten of the Father, coequal with the Father with respect to his substance. For us and for our salvation, the Father sent the Son to live and work among us. Jesus is fully human and fully God, revealing to us who God is by word and deed, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and embodying its humble posture by associating with the overlooked and hurting. Those he came to save sought to crucify him, and Jesus willingly gave up his life. He was crucified, suffering the depths of human temptation and pain, yet without sin, and was buried. Three days later, the Father raised Jesus from the dead, giving him a new body, physical yet imperishable. Jesus ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father. Through Christ's atoning work, the world is reconciled to God through Christ's forgiving of sin, which breaks the reign of all evil powers, and initiates the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life. The Spirit makes the work of Christ effectual by revealing to humans our sin, eliciting our faith in Christ, and empowering our repentance to a transformed life. The Old and New Testament Scriptures are the unique and authoritative word of God, and are together a witness to the revelation of salvation in Jesus Christ. The authority of the Bible is derived from the Holy Spirit, who illumines its meaning and empowers the church to obey in faith and hope. The Spirit grafts Christians into the one Universal Church, of which Christ is the Head. By the Spirit, the Church joins in Christ's mission to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed to the ends of the earth and to establish reconciliation among all peoples. The Church is called to true preaching of Scripture and proper administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, by which the Holy Spirit uses the common elements of water, bread, and wine to nourish us spiritually, and usher us into the Kingdom of God.

When Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead, the redemption won through Christ's work will culminate in the reconciliation of all things. Justice will be achieved, evil will vanish, and all brokenness will be healed. God's people will be resurrected with imperishable, physical bodies, and the Church Triumphant from every nation will be united in eternal life to forever praise, love, and celebrate God. Until that day, we live without fear of any created thing, for nothing can separate us from the love of God.

## Faith Journey: Rev. Brian Lays

I was raised in a Christian household, and was baptized as an infant at Wellshire Presbyterian Church in Denver, Colorado. Though my family was always involved in the life of the church, I wasn't particularly engaged in my faith until the summer before I began high school. Then, on a mission trip to Mexico, the profound faith of my friends became something I desired and began to pursue. Ever since, my spiritual pilgrimage has progressed through a series of stages, which have emerged from and built upon one another. During confirmation class as a high school freshman, I first sensed a call to ministry. I took my faith into my own hands, telling everyone about my new interest in Jesus. Faith seemed easy and straightforward: I read the Bible frequently and prayed morning and night. Though I knew so little at the time about the complexities of faith, I recall these days of simple trust in God with great fondness.

As I entered college, my faith grew tremendously as I discovered my love of study and plunged into the depths of Christian knowledge. There was so much to learn, so many ideas to consider! Soon, though, God ushered me into a season of despair and doubt. Faced with a series of painful losses, I struggled to trust God's work in my life. I learned to pray even when I thought God wasn't listening. I emerged from this "dark night of the soul" feeling capable and sure of myself, and the last two years of college were full of joy. I discovered the richness of the fellowship of Christian community, and felt as though I finally lived fully as myself. After I graduated, I worked full-time at a church in Colorado, and my call to ministry was re-affirmed through the mentorship of the congregation and pastor there. I felt confident and accomplished, eager to begin seminary and the next chapter of my life.

If college was a period of discovering my capabilities, what I *can* do, seminary was a period of discovering my limitations, what I *cannot* do. On paper, this spiritual paradox is difficult to detect: my grades remained high and my professional experience grew at a rapid pace. However, I would come to the painful realization that I cannot control everything that happens in the world around me. Sometimes life *happens* to us, and the most challenging learning for me during seminary would happen outside the classroom: My father died slowly of cancer in my second year, and my favorite professor and mentor died suddenly of a heart attack less than a year later. Grief crippled me for a time, and I prioritized weekly counseling and spiritual direction to guide me to the foot of the cross, where I felt helpless but embraced. I learned to depend upon God for strength as I had never needed to before. I realized that when I am weak, Christ is strong in me and for me. Perhaps most importantly, I became acutely aware that no success in this life comes apart from the grace of God, upon whom I am utterly dependent and apart from whom I can do nothing.

Yet seminary was also a joyful time in countless ways. Pittsburgh is a great city in which to be a Presbyterian, and I was fortunate to benefit from marvelous mentors and pastors throughout my years there. I also discovered my love for global Christianity, and participated in multiple partnerships through my seminary with churches around the world. A summer intensive took me to Costa Rica to study Reformed theology with 35 students from 16 countries. It was there that I met Sunelle, a South African who I would

eventually marry. My sense of call to ministry grew deeper, and I matured in my conviction that God will sustain me through thick and thin.

After completing my Masters of Divinity, I remained in Pittsburgh for another year in order to complete a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and a Masters of Theology. This was surely the most productive year of my life, as I also served as a temporary youth director at a church on Sunday evenings and preached nearly every Sunday morning in the Pittsburgh area through pulpit supply connections. I needed whatever income I could earn, because I was going to South Africa to see Sunelle whenever possible!

I left Pittsburgh eager for what God had in store: Sunelle and I were engaged, and as we prepared to be married, I had to choose between two very different jobs. One would send me to Zambia to teach at a seminary, through a fellowship at Madison Ave. Pres in New York. The other would send me to Birmingham, Alabama to serve as an associate pastor. My love of the global church and ecumenism gave Zambia a great deal of appeal. But, feeling called to ultimately to serve as a senior pastor and eager for some stability as I entered marriage, I accepted the call to serve at Independent Presbyterian Church (IPC) as an associate pastor for pastoral care.

Ministry at IPC has been exciting, complex, and beautiful. I've learned an enormous amount about how culture is shaped and embodied in a church. Challenges related to power struggles among wealthy parishioners have taught me valuable lessons. Our vibrant worship program, which consists of two traditional morning services, an evening contemporary service, and a Wednesday chapel service, has given me many opportunities to preach, write liturgy, and design various worship services. Pastoral care among people of all ages, but especially older adults, has blessed me with opportunities to build meaningful relationships with people in some very poignant times. Just recently, as I transitioned to a new role as director of Christian Education, I've had the opportunity to do much more preaching, and to work with a larger staff of nine dedicated, creative people. Throughout my years at IPC, I've discovered the importance of sincerity and transparency in ministry: relationships with people go a long way, and my own faith is crucial in sharing in the faith journeys of others. I've been fortunate to serve Christ alongside marvelous, experienced colleagues who share abundant wisdom with me throughout our ministry together.

I believe that the work of pastors is to embrace and equip: to convey the love of Christ for all people who connect with the church, and to prepare each member for discipleship and ministry in their own lives. Life in large churches with theological diversity is not always easy, but I've come to believe that conflict, if navigated well, can ultimately edify a congregation for more faithful discipleship. To engage with the task of relational ministry, a pastor must maintain both a thick skin and a soft heart, navigating conflict with compassion and patience, without resentment. Churches bring together people who might not otherwise associate with one another, and sometimes pastors don't see the best side of people. Still, there is no greater privilege than to observe the work of the Spirit in a person's life, to help a person discover God's will, or to observe a person growing in Christian faith.