

Thom Burleson - Statement of Faith

I believe in God the creator of all and in the innate goodness of creation as a reflection of its Creator. Nothing exists outside of God. Like God, creation is not stagnant, but is full of the newness and vibrancy of life. It is in the love and the absolute free grace of God that all things find meaning. God delights in what God has wrought. To us God is a mystery, which we continually seek to understand through relationships and personal and scriptural narratives, but we will never fully understand the totality of the heart, mind, and will of God. Because God is living and active in the world, the revelation of God will continue throughout the existence of humankind and beyond.

I believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the anointed of God, the embodiment of God's boundless grace. Through the sinless life of Jesus, we find focus and connection with God. Christ is the door that opens the way to a closer relationship with God. As disciples, we follow the example and teachings of Jesus; living the life of the servant, loving God with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul and loving our neighbor as ourself. Through the cross of Christ, sin is overcome and we are set free to embrace a life of love because we know that God first loved us.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the sustainer of all creation. The Spirit does not control, but allows for the possibility for both sin and sanctification to enter into the relationship between God and creation. The Spirit empowers; keeping creation connected, continually calling it into relationship with God and with each other. The Spirit inspires through the giving of gifts and vocation; calling us to wholeness as God intended.

I believe the church to be the Body of Christ, empowered by the Spirit both individually and collectively. The church is called to use the gifts and talents bestowed by God in the furtherance of the servant ministry of Jesus Christ. The church is joy and challenge. The church is not perfect, and, like the people within, is stained by sins of commission and omission. Just as each Christian journeys in their faith, so does the church; constantly confessing its sin and reforming towards grace in its corporate journey. Baptism unites the body by presenting a responsibility born of God's grace, bonding each member to one another and to God in Christ. The Eucharist strengthens and renews that bond, reminding us that Christ is the ever-present head of the church.

Thom Burleson - Biography

I was born into a Presbyterian family and was baptized as an infant in the Presbyterian Church that my grandmother and other relatives had founded. Like most children born into the church, as a child I participated in all the different aspects of church life: Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Children's Choirs, Christmas pageants, and the various community good works. I went through confirmation and, like so many teenagers, began to fall away from the church. Partly because of gaining teenage independence, but mostly because of what Christianity had begun to mean to me. This was the heyday of the televangelist and their peddling of salvation. In my black and white teenage thinking, I became more and more convinced that what the televangelists were selling honestly reflected what Christianity was all about... self-involved hypocrites who were only interested in individual salvation/heaven. I had grown up in the church, but I had not grown up in the faith.

Even while I was doubting my own religion as viewed through this twisted lens, I nevertheless found myself very interested in world religions. While attending UNC at Chapel Hill, I found myself in some type of religion class every semester. There was something attractive to me about the ideas and concepts within religions, although at the time I couldn't adequately express why. Graduating with a degree in education after a miserable student teaching experience, I didn't see myself going into the school system. But I still understood myself best as a teacher. After some preschool work and other life missteps, I somehow hit upon the idea of being a Christian Educator. Again, although the church I attended as a teenager had two, I was unaware of their existence. But, this idea hit a chord and in a few months I visited schools, made application and found myself at Princeton Theological Seminary.

It was then I had a spiritual awakening and finally came to understand this faith I had been confessing with my lips all my life. I graduated with the firm understanding of myself as a Christian Educator. Knew this was my calling for life. I would never become a minister. Not me. No way. No how. Four years later, I returned to Princeton with a wife and a young son to receive my MDiv and become ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. As an educator I had hit the glass ceiling quickly and could not serve fully the people I had come to love.

I was at my first call in Sparta, NC for eight years. In this small rural community, I focused on raising my young family, now having grown with a daughter, and working in the community for the common good. My DMin focused on the creation of a county wide food closet and how small, rural churches could work together for the people of the community. We left Sparta for a church in Kentucky, where I had hoped to be at least until my children were college age. But, I ended up learning the hard lessons of what it was to be an unintentional interim. Soon we found ourselves back in Sparta in a house we could not sell during the recession and I began doing intentional interim work. Interim work has broadened my vision of what it means to do church. None of the four churches I have served so far have been the same. Each are full of potential and the challenges that derail a church from doing ministry. I have enjoyed having new ministerial challenges.

Now in our twentieth year of marriage, my wife and I have just taken our son to college and are raising a teenage daughter. We recognize that one chapter of our life together is all too quickly coming to an end, but we are finding excitement as we look forward to something new beginning.