

I believe in God. To make such a bold statement infers that there is a Creator of design and purpose which displaces non-Presbyterian words such as fate, coincidence, luck and chance.

Although I may gaze upon a starry summer night sky as a witness to the majestic mystery of God I am confidently aware that this God seeks me out.

God is of ultimate concern for me not because God is a “supreme being”, a “higher power” and Creator of all humanity. God is of ultimate concern because God has created ME. The cosmic God is of such importance to me that God knows me and meets me within the common places of life.

When all of the adjectives have been put in place I am humbled to realize that I rest in the mystery of the Creator who loves people such as myself.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is the full face of God. He becomes human from the pure fellowship with God. God becomes completely human, and yet divine, in Jesus Christ. The Christmas story defines the Son of God as one who mysteriously comes to us from outside of anything we know into a dimension where we are completely known and loved.

To talk of Salvation-history without talking about Jesus Christ is to talk of breathing without air. From his earliest years of working within his father’s carpenter shop to His later years of teaching, healing, and loving beyond boundaries He has taught humanity how to most fully live.

In His moments of testing and to his crucifixion He has taught us the path of servanthood, the necessity of forgiveness and how to die. In the fullest moment of the Gospel and His resurrection He has shown us the promise of what lies ahead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit as the active verb of the Risen Christ. It is the Holy Spirit which guides, directs, opens and closes doors, disturbs and becomes the living and active Presence of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is a person, not simply an experience, not an *it* who bestows upon all gifts. (Gal. 5: 20-22)

I believe that the Holy Spirit which guided and granted to the early Church a sense of boldness continues to do so. In the fellowship of forgiven sinners the living Christ is present by His Spirit today. Now, as members of Christ’s Church we become the body by which the Spirit speaks to the world. We become an active demonstration of the transforming grace of Christ.

The Church is no less than the faithful in Christ who hold in their spiritual pockets not a great idea but rather a great, corporate relationship with a Savior. That relationship is shared with others who live in Christ and this exciting interchange keeps the faithful watching and working for a Kingdom purpose larger than ourselves.

However broken and sinful all of us who consist of the Church, we cannot help but to love the church. God has yet chosen this earthly vessel to best reflect our encounters with Christ and our work and witness for peace and justice within the world.

Providence has been the road sign of my faith journey and when I stumble and fall I bleed Presbyterian. My life blessing began being born into a home of Christian parents, my father being a Presbyterian minister. My mother, now 101, resides at Sunnyside Presbyterian Home in Harrisonburg, Virginia. I am one of five Presbyterian clergy with my father and father-in-law (now deceased) being clergy, my sister serving Franklin Presbyterian Church and my brother-in-law serving as co-pastor at Highlands Presbyterian.

Following seminary years at Princeton I was called to Petersburg Presbyterian Church, Petersburg, West Virginia, where I pastored for eleven years. The joys of pastoring in a small town were rich but when the Potomac River overflowed its banks in 1984 this crisis moment for the community also ultimately opened a door for me to receive a call from Avondale Presbyterian Church in Charlotte. I pastored this congregation for a period of 31 years and retired from labors of committee meetings, teaching, preaching and pastoral care in 2017.

After a short three month stint of working for my brother-in-law driving truck for the US Postal Service I was called by Central Steele Creek, Charlotte, to serve as their Interim pastor. A door opened and I found myself wondering what God had in store.

Now another door has opened to serve as Interim at Little Chapel on the Boardwalk. Again, wondering what God has in store.

My life partner is Nadja Sefcik-Earl who is an aquatics instructor and who has a love for music playing flute and handbells. She understands the pastorate well and holds an equal devotion to the Church. Teaching in the public school system for over a decade as a specialist in reading skills she loves reading and, when time allows, gardening. We have been blessed with two children, Mackenzie Sawyer and John Thomas Earl. Mackenzie and her husband Matt, who reside in Wrightsville Beach, will give birth this December to our first grandchild. Just another extension of God's providence and grace at work.

At the end of the day my wife and I have been enormously blessed and how does one say 'thank you'?

Ordination Questions: Select two of the nine ordination questions.

Question: *Do you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?*

At the heart of my belief is the message that Jesus Christ is Lord. Every act of ministry is a witness, directly and indirectly, of this truth. Jesus is the most perfect image of a transcendent God and the full, complete continuation of the love of God. He is mystery who is not only human but divine.

As Truth, He enters into my life and the life of others. He displaces my own ego-driven self and desires with centering upon him within the community of the faithful in all times and places which is His Church.

Any commitment directed to Him is an awareness that God sent his only Son to die for us so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. I believe the focus of all ordination questions resides first upon our answer to the question: "Who is Jesus Christ and do you trust in Him?"

Question: *Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?*

By the very nature of our call as ministers of Word and Sacrament, and the vows of our ordination, we are charged with the responsibility of working together as the Body of Christ. Christ calls us to a work of unity which addresses and overcomes the fragmentation within our lives and in the world.

While there is a necessity for diversity within the church there is little room for division. Recently I officiated at the funeral of Betty Marshall who is the sister of John Spong. She a very conservative Christian. He not so. Yet it is difficult to explain the love that this sister and brother had for each other. Their differences in theology were not a reason for dividing the love which welded them into Christ and into each other.

It is God who provides the spiritual strength of reconciliation and forgiveness and the dynamic of the New Testament is permeated with the stories and examples of Jesus. The world is fractured which emphasizes the greater need for peace, unity and purity *within* the church. The continued work of all who seek to serve God, and surrender to Christ, holds at its core the promise of a peace within a fractured world and a purity which transforms.