

Steven E. Fitzgerald

Statement of Faith

I believe in the Holy Trinity; God as Creator, Jesus as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Sustainer.

God is transcendent and Creator of all that is, was and ever shall be, both visible and invisible. God is holy, sovereign and active in the world today, but is also mystery. God created humankind as the crown of creation in God's own image and likeness. God's nature is love, and God's character is relationality, for God said, "Let us create them in *our* image, according to *our* likeness." Since God is love and created us in relationship with others, we are designed to be in loving relationship with God and neighbor (humanity and all creation). While humankind was created good, with the ability to live in the grace and presence of God, temptation challenged us to want more than enough. So humankind sinned seeking equality with God and the Scriptures record the story of God's desire to redeem us from our malignant desires and trajectories, ultimately leading to God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ.

God lived in our midst, as the Word became flesh, to show us clearly how to live, dying for us on the cross, resurrecting and ascending for us, thus conquering sin and death. Jesus is fully God and fully human. Jesus is life and the life is the light of the world. In Jesus, I am reconciled to God. I am saved by grace through the faith of Christ, and thus am to abide in Jesus as He abides in me. I am called to abide in His love. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, which is his body.

The Holy Spirit is God's very breath of life that dwells in me and intercedes for me with sighs too deep for words. The Holy Spirit is God within me guiding and counseling me to be rightly connected to God and neighbor. The Spirit grants insights as I study, reflect, meditate and pray on the written and living Word of God, and then take time to listen to others insightfully.

The Bible is God's love story that gives direction to my life, what to believe and how to live without falling back into slavery to the things and ways of the world. The Bible is perfect for faith and practice and is the written and authoritative word of God.

The sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are infused with the Spirit of God. In baptism God seals me and claims me. I acknowledge that God, through Christ, did for me what I could not do for myself, redeemed me from sin and bondage. I confirm God's claim on my life as I seek to lead a life immersed in faith, service and stewardship. In Communion I partake of the New Covenant in Christ, thus offering myself to be taken, blessed, broken and given.

Based on scripture and the life and works of Jesus, God has called me to "listen, learn and link to God and neighbor in order to fulfill the Great Commission according to the Great Commandment.

Journey of Faith

I was reared in the Presbyterian Church from birth. Both of my parents were active in many programs and areas of service: choir, Session, and various committees. I was also active in discipleship and children/youth programs through high school (I taught Sunday School when I was in 11th grade to a group of blind children from the Governor Morehead School for the Blind). That was a highlight in my high school years.

During high school I also became active in Campus Life and loved the leadership (college students from NC State University) that helped my faith become more real and tangible. In Campus Life, the leadership was transparent and vulnerable, as were peers in the group. That became meaningful in my comfort level with ecumenism.

During college, at Appalachian State University (ASU), my sanctuary was more connected to nature and less so in buildings or denominations. I ventured into backpacking and then snow-skiing in a large way (worked at Beech Mountain for three years in a row). I visited a couple of churches in Boone, including the Presbyterian one, but didn't find the worship invigorating. However, I attended church when home in Raleigh, but became much more grounded in prayer as I tried to discover Jesus's presence while learning to live on my own. I did have a small group of college friends that shared our journey of faith together: stories, faith understanding and hopes and challenges.

After I matriculated from ASU, I met the woman who would become my wife and we started worshiping between White Memorial Presbyterian Church and First Baptist Church (where both her mother and father were on staff) in Raleigh. We met with both pastors and conversed about how to make things work with two different denominations. The two pastors were close friends, had similar theological stances, but both suggested putting roots down in one particular church. We ended up attending her parents church and then helped them establish a new church in North Raleigh, Greystone Baptist.

During my years as a young adult, I worked in the investment field, but struggled with the heavy focus on money as *the* definition of success (bank accounts, cars, homes, trips, etc.). I branched off from my employer and began my own Registered Investment Advisory in 1984. Things went really well for a few years, but then my income took a nose dive due to unforeseen economic issues. This led me in to a nosedive financially and spiritually. The next few years were wilderness years that led me into deeper reflection and theological challenges. I moved to Charleston, SC, with my wife and young child, took a new job, and lived with in-laws for a period of time. This was a "dark night of the soul" time for me, but it was during this wilderness time that I decided to attend my in-laws church, (a church with very few children and young adults our age). I attended primarily to give and help out of gratitude for my in-laws unconditional love. I was not looking for "what they could do for me." I ended up becoming the youth group leader and it was a time of huge spiritual growth. It was in the midst of that experience that God called me to seminary and I changed careers at 31 years old with a wife, three children and quite a bit of debt.

My faith has continued to grow through the years, and a great seminary experience helped that. I was the first student to apply to the first moderate Baptist seminary formed in Richmond, VA in rented space from the Presbyterian School for Christian Education (PSCE). After twenty-three years as a moderate (CBF — Cooperative Baptist Fellowship) pastor, I felt it was time to answer God's call to come home to my Presbyterian roots. I was never totally comfortable in the Baptist theological world, but gained many wonderful experiences and blessings during my time of service. I continue to grow and believe deeply in lifelong learning (my D.Min. advisor is in charge of "lifelong learning" at Columbia Theological Seminary now). I continue to be excited about the new ways that God and neighbor will challenge me to listen, learn and link and hopefully grow in divine and human favor (but not in all humans favor)!

Ordination Questions (2)

Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

I have and will continue to seek to follow Christ, love *all* others and work for reconciliation of the world through the specific vision and mission God has given me. That vision is based on Luke 2:41-52, a text in the Bible that discusses how Jesus grew in divine and human favor (Luke 2:52). Since Jesus is God with us, this is indeed how I deem I should strive to grow. Without getting into an exegetical essay, I share that what jumped out at me was that while Jesus participated in the regular rites and rituals of his faith, he grew by listening and asking good questions, which helped him learn and link in divine ways to both God and neighbor. I follow Christ by listening and asking good questions of God and neighbor, thereby learning more about God and others before I try to link/connect in healthy, faithful and effective ways that lead to loving reconciliation.

The most difficult part of keeping this vow for me is when anxiety of others prevents them from being open to any conversation at all. I have discovered that through “open ended” questions, I can better determine whether or not another person is ready and willing to engage in becoming transparent and vulnerable. I do get frustrated when there are some that are never ready for that!

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

I have worked hard at learning how to do this over the past 31 years. I have had some real challenges because every church I have served has had more than one opinion on everything. That is not bad, but healthy and helpful behavior doesn't happen by accident. I have learned, and continue to seek learning, how to encourage good behavioral health in the church system. In dealing with one on one communications, it is wise to establish a “behavioral covenant” early in a call with the Session, and then share it with the congregation. This works better than waiting to bring it forward after there is a heated issue with high emotions. In that case, it can then be deemed a personal attack on someone who is engaged in unhealthy/unhelpful behavior. In dealing with corporate crisis, I have learned methods to deal with an issue that allows all sides of the issue to be addressed, without enabling one or two individuals to dominate and dictate results (6 Hat Theory, or Parallel Thinking). I have used this on numerous occasions and taught it to others. I also believe that the unity and purity of the church is best promoted and maintained with there is a clear and specific vision and mission unique to the particular congregation. As long as the congregation takes ownership in this vision and mission, it can be regularly referred to as a reminder of the three primary questions that need to be answered: Why are we here? Who is our neighbor? And what are we called to do?

I can best accomplish these when I am responsive and not reactive to anxiety: tone, rate and volume; being self-differentiated; keeping the vision and mission of the church ever before me and in conversations. It is always my goal to understand another person, even if we agree to disagree. The purity of the church is maintained where there is a healthy and helpful understanding of the body, mind and spirit belonging to God/being a temple of God. I best accomplish that through regular spiritual formation practices and healthy retreats that are renewing.