

## A BRIEF BUT SINCERE STATEMENT OF FAITH

Stephen Adamson Hundley (D.Min)

I believe in the sovereign God who created this universe and called it good, and who created all people to love as God's beloved children. I believe in God who, in spite of humankind's rebellious and sinful nature, was revealed clearly and decisively in Jesus Christ as full God and fully human, making reconciliation with God and humankind a reality for all who believe. I believe in the Holy Spirit who is God present with us, and who gives life, renews and sanctifies God's people.

I believe that the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience. I believe that the scriptures are the inspired witness of the revelation of God who acts in history. I believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit, God illumines our minds and hearts and speaks to us through the scriptures as they are faithfully read and interpreted, making them the Word of God for us today.

I believe Jesus Christ has instituted in His Church two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. As sacraments of Christ's church they are the testimony of God's good favor towards us, confirmed by an outward sign which mutually testifies our commitment toward God. Apart from the Word and the Holy Spirit at work in us, these sacraments would lack credibility and meaning. Baptism is a sign and seal of our acceptance into the fellowship of the church by which we are engrafted into the Body of Christ. We celebrate the Lord's Supper as a perpetual memory of the death of Christ for our salvation. In the Lord's Supper we experience the presence of the resurrected Christ with us; the bond of unity we share in and with the community of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit and the assured hope in Christ's coming again.

I believe the mission of the church is to proclaim, in word and deed, the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ. The church serves as the body of Christ in the world. This is to say that where the church is, Christ is. As the Body of Christ, the church becomes the bearer of God's grace in the world. The church is the extension of Christ's life and work in the world today. I believe all the members of Christ's church are called to be "priests" or ministers of God's grace.

## MY JOURNEY OF FAITH

I grew up on a farm in the mountains of Virginia. I was baptized as an infant at Fincastle Presbyterian Church (PCUS) and attended Galatia Presbyterian Church (PCUS) as far back as I can remember. I am blessed to say that there was never a day I did not know Jesus. Growing up in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, I had a deep love of God's creation. Early in my life I told the Lord that I wanted to be a wildlife biologist, so God answered that prayer by making me a Presbyterian minister, teaching me the importance of specificity in prayer.

I was junior in high school when I stopped running from away from God's call, and began to consider just how relentless the "Hound of Heaven" can be. After sharing my apprehension with my high school guidance counselor (who also happened to be a member of a Presbyterian Church), she invited me to attend a special service at her church to hear Dr. Myron Augsburger, the President of Eastern Mennonite College. Never before had I felt so sure that God was speaking directly to me. When he ended his sermon, Dr. Augsburger invited anyone to come forward who felt that God was calling them into some branch of full-time Christian service. Before I realized what was happening I had left the back pew where I was hiding and was standing in front of the church dedicating my life to full-time Christian service, though I didn't know at the time what that might mean.

I later shared this experience with my pastor who invited me to go with him to an upcoming presbytery meeting. Explaining to me that such a meeting was a regional gathering of pastors and elders for worship and the business of the church, I jumped at the chance, thinking that all those church leaders in one place would cause it to glow with the Spirit of God! By mid-afternoon, I was totally disillusioned from all the bickering and fighting. Stepping outside and sitting on the porch for some much-needed fresh air, I was joined by a wise, old retired pastor who told me not to fret over all that dissention. He assured me that pastors were like manure. "You spread them out, they do a lot of good. You get them all in one place and they pile up and make a big stink."

Still unsure of God's calling, I attended Montreat-Anderson College (Presbyterian Junior College). While there, I found myself thrown into various leadership roles, which seemed to assure my advisors of my future calling even though I still had my own

reservations. At the end of my second year, the college president approached me and suggested I take a summer job he had set up for me, serving as Youth Director at a large Presbyterian Church in southwest Virginia. The job not only entailed leading the youth, but also filling in the pulpit and taking on pastoral duties when the pastor was on vacation. The members of that church were very supportive and encouraged me to pursue God's calling. As strong as this outward calling appeared to be, my own inner calling was still waning.

Following that summer, having graduated with a AA degree from Montreat, I enrolled at Eastern Mennonite University. My two years at EMU did much to both affirm and solidify my reformed belief and my love for the Presbyterian Church, while giving me a deep appreciation for Christians of other traditions. During that time, I had the privilege of working with Dr. Don Allen, pastor of Trinity Presbyterian House Church and the author of "Barefoot in the Church."

Having served as a counselor at a Presbyterian Church Camp for 2 years right out of high school, I returned to the camp setting as a swimming and skiing instructor at West Central Educational Center where I met my future wife, Elaine. We were married the summer I graduated from EMU, and that fall, I enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in VA. While attending Union, I served one summer as an intern minister at Bethesda Presbyterian Church in Aberdeen, NC under Rev. Dr. Pete Neill. (It was during that summer that I received the sage advice or should I say, warning, that: "I was running for the office of God when there was already one damn good incumbent.")

Following my second year at UTS, I spent one year as intern-associate pastor at First Presbyterian Church, Kings Mountain, NC as part of the Doctorate of Ministry Program. During that year, I completed my D. Min. thesis: "Counseling the Terminally Ill and Those Grieving."

As graduation from Union approached, and my inner calling confirmed, I remembered the challenges my home pastor faced having served a 2-church yoked parish. So once again I was so bold as to tell God that I did not want 2 churches. Ever faithful, God answered my prayer once again. I did not end up serving a 2 church field, but a 3 church field, where I preached 9:00, 10:15, and 11:30 every Sunday morning for 5 years.

Serving as pastor of 3 churches taught me the importance of caring for one's own spiritual health. I realized after the first year that burning myself out, and would not survive as another unless something changed. It was during this time that I realized the importance of beginning my day reading at least 3 chapters a day from God's word and praying, a practice that I kept up throughout my ministry.

From there I went on to serve as Head of Staff of Prospect Presbyterian Church (the founding church of Davidson College) for 9 years; Head of Staff for First Presbyterian Church of Newark, Delaware for 11 years; and Head of Staff for First Presbyterian Church, Great Falls, Montana for 12 years.

In 2013 I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. One year after surgery, the cancer showed signs of returning and I was forced to face 36 treatments of radiation. The radiation drained my energy, and it was clear after a year or two that I was not about to serve First Presbyterian, Great Falls with the energy and drive I was used to having. Having served many years on COM, I had witnessed more than a few pastors ride a church into the ground because of their own lack of energy and refusal to retire. Not wanting to fall into that same trap, I chose to retire earlier than I had previously planned.

After 1 ½ years of retirement, I am happy to say that I have regained some of the energy that I have lost and have been praying that God would show me what God would have me do. While I am thoroughly enjoying retirement, with your guidance, I am confident that I will be able to discern God's will for this new chapter in my life and ministry.