

A Song of Faith

A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada L'Église Unie du Canada

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PREAMBLE

This statement of faith seeks to provide a verbal picture of what The United Church of Canada understands its faith to be in its current historical, political, social, and theological context at the beginning of the 21st century. It is also a means of ongoing reflection and an invitation for the church to live out its convictions in relation to the world in which we live.

The church's faith is grounded in truths that are timeless. These truths, however, must be embraced anew by Christians of each generation and stated "in terms of the thoughts of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs" (Statement of Faith, 1940).

This is not the first time the United Church has formally expressed its collective faith. In the Basis of Union (1925), in the Statement of Faith (1940), and in A New Creed (1968), the United Church stated its faith in words appropriate to its time. This current statement of faith is offered within that tradition, and in response to the request of the 37th General Council (2000) for a "timely and contextual statement of faith" that especially engages "the church in conversation on the nature of the church (ecclesiology), ministry and the sacraments."

This statement of faith attempts to reflect the spirit of The United Church of Canada and to respond to various defining elements in our social, political, and historical context, including the place of the church in society, the cultural and intellectual setting in which we find ourselves, the meaning of "truth," the impact of the market economy on our daily lives, and the growing issue of the meaning of "security." These contextual elements are further explored in the appendices to this document.

This is not a statement for all time but for *our* time. In as much as the Spirit keeps faith with us, we can express our understanding of the Holy with confidence. And in as much as the Spirit is vast and wild, we recognize that our understanding of the Holy is always partial and limited. Nonetheless we have faith, and this statement collects the meaning of our song.

God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.

Yet,
in love,
the one eternal God seeks relationship.

So God creates the universe
and with it the possibility of being and relating.
God tends the universe,
mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.
God enlivens the universe,
guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.

Grateful for God's loving action,
We cannot keep from singing.

With the Church through the ages,
we speak of God as one and triune:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
We also speak of God as
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer
God, Christ, and Spirit
Mother, Friend, and Comforter
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,
and in other ways that speak faithfully of
the One on whom our hearts rely,
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe.

We witness to Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.

God is creative and self-giving,
generously moving
in all the near and distant corners of the universe.
Nothing exists that does not find its source in God.
Our first response to God's providence is gratitude.
We sing thanksgiving.

Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery,
of living things, diverse and interdependent,
of complex patterns of growth and evolution,
of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls,
we sing of God the Creator,
the Maker and Source of all that is.

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,
who is both in creation and beyond it.
All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.
All creation is good.
We sing of the Creator,
who made humans to live and move
and have their being in God.

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.
We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

Made in the image of God,
we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God.
Yet we choose to turn away from God.
We surrender ourselves to sin,
a disposition revealed in selfishness, cowardice, or apathy.
Becoming bound and complacent
in a web of false desires and wrong choices,
we bring harm to ourselves and others.
This brokenness in human life and community
is an outcome of sin.
Sin is not only personal
but accumulates
to become habitual and systemic forms
of injustice, violence, and hatred.

We are all touched by this brokenness:
the rise of selfish individualism
that erodes human solidarity;
the concentration of wealth and power
without regard for the needs of all;
the toxins of religious and ethnic bigotry;
the degradation of the blessedness of human bodies
and human passions through sexual exploitation;
the delusion of unchecked progress and limitless growth
that threatens our home, the earth;
the covert despair that lulls many into numb complicity
with empires and systems of domination.
We sing lament and repentance.

Yet evil does not—cannot—
undermine or overcome the love of God.
God forgives,
and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings
with honesty and humility.
God reconciles,
and calls us to repent the part we have played
in damaging our world, ourselves, and each other.
God transforms,
and calls us to protect the vulnerable,
to pray for deliverance from evil,
to work with God for the healing of the world,
that all might have abundant life.
We sing of grace.

The fullness of life includes
moments of unexpected inspiration and courage lived out,
experiences of beauty, truth, and goodness,
blessings of seeds and harvest,
friendship and family, intellect and sexuality,
the reconciliation of persons through justice
and communities living in righteousness,
and the articulation of meaning.

And so we sing of God the Spirit,
who from the beginning has swept over the face of creation,
animating all energy and matter
and moving in the human heart.

We sing of God the Spirit,
faithful and untameable,
who is creatively and redemptively active in the world.

The Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy
not only in what is familiar,
but also in that which seems foreign.

We sing of the Spirit,
who speaks our prayers of deepest longing
and enfolds our concerns and confessions,
transforming us and the world.

We offer worship
as an outpouring of gratitude and awe
and a practice of opening ourselves
to God's still, small voice of comfort,
to God's rushing whirlwind of challenge.
Through word, music, art, and sacrament,
in community and in solitude,
God changes our lives, our relationships, and our world.
We sing with trust.

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word
passed on from generation to generation
to guide and inspire,
that we might wrestle a holy revelation for our time and place
from the human experiences
and cultural assumptions of another era.
God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

The Spirit breathes revelatory power into scripture,
bestowing upon it a unique and normative place
in the life of the community.
The Spirit judges us critically when we abuse scripture
by interpreting it narrow-mindedly,
using it as a tool of oppression, exclusion, or hatred.

The wholeness of scripture testifies
to the oneness and faithfulness of God.
The multiplicity of scripture testifies to its depth:
two testaments, four gospels,
contrasting points of view held in tension—
all a faithful witness to the One and Triune God,
the Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.

We find God made known in Jesus of Nazareth,
and so we sing of God the Christ, the Holy One embodied.

We sing of Jesus,
a Jew,
born to a woman in poverty
in a time of social upheaval
and political oppression.
He knew human joy and sorrow.
So filled with the Holy Spirit was he
that in him people experienced the presence of God among them.
We sing praise to God incarnate.

Jesus announced the coming of God's reign—
a commonwealth not of domination
but of peace, justice, and reconciliation.
He healed the sick and fed the hungry.
He forgave sins and freed those held captive
by all manner of demonic powers.
He crossed barriers of race, class, culture, and gender.
He preached and practised unconditional love—
love of God, love of neighbour,
love of friend, love of enemy—
and he commanded his followers to love one another
as he had loved them.

Because his witness to love was threatening,
those exercising power sought to silence Jesus.
He suffered abandonment and betrayal,
state-sanctioned torture and execution.
He was crucified.

But death was not the last word.
God raised Jesus from death,
turning sorrow into joy,
despair into hope.
We sing of Jesus raised from the dead.
We sing hallelujah.

By becoming flesh in Jesus,
God makes all things new.
In Jesus' life, teaching, and self-offering,
God empowers us to live in love.
In Jesus' crucifixion,
God bears the sin, grief, and suffering of the world.

In Jesus' resurrection,
God overcomes death.
Nothing separates us from the love of God.

The Risen Christ lives today,
present to us and the source of our hope.
In response to who Jesus was
and to all he did and taught,
to his life, death, and resurrection,
and to his continuing presence with us through the Spirit,
we celebrate him as
the Word made flesh,
the one in whom God and humanity are perfectly joined,
the transformation of our lives,
the Christ.

We sing of a church
seeking to continue the story of Jesus
by embodying Christ's presence in the world.
We are called together by Christ
as a community of broken but hopeful believers,
loving what he loved,
living what he taught,
striving to be faithful servants of God
in our time and place.
Our ancestors in faith
bequeath to us experiences of their faithful living;
upon their lives our lives are built.
Our living of the gospel makes us a part of this communion of saints,
experiencing the fulfillment of God's reign
even as we actively anticipate a new heaven and a new earth.

The church has not always lived up to its vision.
It requires the Spirit to reorient it,
helping it to live an emerging faith while honouring tradition,
challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement,
for we are called to be a blessing to the earth.

We sing of God's good news lived out,
a church with purpose:
faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
gifts shared for the good of all,
resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,
fierce love in the face of violence,
human dignity defended,
members of a community held and inspired by God,
corrected and comforted,
instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
creation's mending.
We sing of God's mission.

We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.
For the sake of the world,
God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry.
In the church,
some are called to specific ministries of leadership,
both lay and ordered;
some witness to the good news;
some uphold the art of worship;
some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering;
some build up the community of wisdom;
some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.
To embody God's love in the world,
the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship
of all believers.

In grateful response to God's abundant love,
we bear in mind our integral connection
to the earth and one another;
we participate in God's work of healing and mending creation.
To point to the presence of the holy in the world,
the church receives, consecrates, and shares
visible signs of the grace of God.
In company with the churches
of the Reformed and Methodist traditions,
we celebrate two sacraments as gifts of Christ:
baptism and holy communion.
In these sacraments the ordinary things of life
—water, bread, wine—
point beyond themselves to God and God's love,
teaching us to be alert
to the sacred in the midst of life.

Before conscious thought or action on our part,
we are born into the brokenness of this world.
Before conscious thought or action on our part,
we are surrounded by God's redeeming love.
Baptism by water in the name of the Holy Trinity
is the means by which we are received, at any age,
into the covenanted community of the church.
It is the ritual that signifies our rebirth in faith
and cleansing by the power of God.
Baptism signifies the nurturing, sustaining,
and transforming power of God's love
and our grateful response to that grace.

Carrying a vision of creation healed and restored,
we welcome all in the name of Christ.
Invited to the table where none shall go hungry,
we gather as Christ's guests and friends.
In holy communion
we are commissioned to feed as we have been fed,
forgive as we have been forgiven,
love as we have been loved.

The open table speaks of the shining promise
of barriers broken and creation healed.
In the communion meal, wine poured out and bread broken,
we remember Jesus,
We remember not only the promise but also the price that he paid
for who he was,
for what he did and said,
and for the world's brokenness.
We taste the mystery of God's great love for us,
and are renewed in faith and hope.

We place our hope in God.
We sing of a life beyond life
and a future good beyond imagining:
a new heaven and a new earth,
the end of sorrow, pain, and tears,
Christ's return and life with God,
the making new of all things.
We yearn for the coming of that future,
even while participating in eternal life now.

Divine creation does not cease
until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration
with the common ground of all being.
As children of the Timeless One,
our time-bound lives will find completion
in the all-embracing Creator.
In the meantime, we embrace the present,
embodying hope, loving our enemies,
caring for the earth,
choosing life.

Grateful for God's loving action,
we cannot keep from singing.
Creating and seeking relationship,
in awe and trust,
we witness to Holy Mystery who is Wholly Love.

Amen.