

Statement of Faith

Ron Sylvester

I believe the Bible, comprised of the sixty six books in the Old and New Testaments, is the only inspired, inerrant, infallible and authoritative Word of God.

I believe the Bible reveals the eternal and unchanging nature and character of the Living, Tri-une God who alone is worthy of our worship.

I believe the Triune God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, created all that is visible and invisible; and that the crown of His creation is mankind who, though sinful, bears His image.

I believe mankind sinned against God and is, therefore, corrupt and rebellious in his natural state.

I believe God in His perfect love for mankind enacted a gracious plan to save man from his rebellion and reconcile a people to Himself.

This plan determined before the beginning of time necessitated that God, Himself, revealed as Jesus, would be born of a woman, a virgin, under the Law, fully man and fully God, to live sinlessly among us, die a vicarious, sacrificial death upon the Cross making atonement for our sin, and by His shed blood, resurrection and ascension to the Father justify and draw all who believe and accept God's love so manifested into an eternal, covenant and familial relationship.

I believe this plan is effected in an individual's life only when by God's grace through faith the Holy Spirit or third person in the Trinity regenerates one to new life "in Christ."

I believe the Holy Spirit indwells a believing individual and sanctifies that life in this present evil world. He equips us to serve His purposes by His power and through the use of the spiritual gift(s) with which He endows us.

I believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in Christ which is the Church. Membership, not worship, in a local, visible church should be restricted to those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

I believe the local church is vested with the responsibility to provide opportunity for corporate worship, spiritual growth of believers, and witness to the world of the truth about life and God. Two ordinances which are useful to these ends and obligations of the church before God are Communion and Baptism.

I believe in the personal glorious return of Jesus to earth to culminate history.

I believe in the resurrection of all mankind. Those who accepted the love of God in His plan of salvation through Jesus will be ushered to glory, and those who refused or ignored it will be eternally separated from God, which is damnation.

To God Be the Glory

"A Testimony of God's Workmanship"
(Ephesians 2:10)

I was raised by hardworking, lower middle class parents who had no education themselves but loved my brothers and I sacrificially. They would have done anything they could to improve their children's lives. They could not, however, give us what we most needed because they themselves had not come to realize God's love for them in Christ. I remember at an early age being brought to Sunday School by my friend's mom, who was a Sunday School superintendent. I loved learning about Jesus. When I was in junior high school youth group became an important activity of mine. High School broadened my horizons vastly. I had a thirst for learning and a fervor for friendships. My closest friendships were those in our church youth group and scouts. Both were related to the church. It seemed God was drawing me to Himself long before I knew He wanted a personal relationship with me. At the end of my freshman year I recognized my need to give my life to Christ, and did so at a youth retreat. I had no idea what a relationship with Christ would be like or where it would lead me. I did not understand that it would change my ways. In the Fall of my sophomore year a new youth pastor came to our church. He immediately challenged me to think more seriously about the ramifications of a faith in Christ and a relationship with him. He prompted several of us to advanced studies of Scripture and intrigued my thirst for learning more about Christ. By the end of my sophomore year I concluded I ought to relinquish my career plans in law and commit to serving him in a pastoral capacity. God used my youth pastor, the pastor of my church, parents of friends, and other adults in the church to confirm this decision. I joined an evangelistic team and found great satisfaction in sharing my faith with others.

I went to college intent upon preparing for ministry. While in college I sought opportunity to serve Jesus in a youth ministry venue. I worked in a summer camp and with church youth groups.

During my first year of seminary at Bethel in Minneapolis, my parents came to realize God's love for them in Christ. In 1973 I graduated from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. Having been married now for three years to Paula, we sensed God leading to serve Him among the people at Medway Village Church in Medway Ma. God did some amazing things in Paula's and my lives as we served Him there. Most importantly, He gave us four wonderful children to care for and raise to know Him. He continuously and graciously blessed us and the people. He prompted and made it possible for the church to plant a daughter church in Mendon MA. Near the end of our tenure there He permitted us to serve Him in a pulpit exchange with a pastor in Australia for six months. That was a tremendous privilege. Next, He led us to East Glenville NY to serve Him in the capacity of senior pastor among the people there. Again, He allowed us to plant another daughter church in Malta NY. He has renewed our passion for missions through regular short term mission trips. He has raised up people through mentoring to seek vocational service to Himself. For eleven years the people at EGCC allowed me the latitude necessary to teach as an adjunct faculty member at Berkshire Institute for Christian Studies (BICS). This was an invigorating and fulfilling honor.

We left East Glenville after nearly twenty three years and embarked upon a new ministry. After completion of my training with IMN (Interim Ministry Network), First Church in Boxford, MA. us "called" us to serve the Lord among them as an intentional interim pastor. This was a new sort of ministry for Paula and I. It involves caring for and guiding churches in a transitional time between "settled" pastors. God gave us two wonderful years at First Church, and then they received their next "settled" pastor.

Moving back to Massachusetts was a gift which God afforded Paula and I. It meant we could be in geographic proximity to our adult children and their families. We bought a home in Hudson, MA. and are nicely situated to spend meaningful time with our four granddaughters.

It has been a remarkable adventure to walk with Christ, and an undeserved privilege to serve Him. I realize I have been blessed to be a blessing. My life verse is Philippians 1:20 "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." I await His next assignment.

Humbly and Gratefully,

Ron Sylvester

Local Church Autonomy

At the heart of Congregationalism is the concept of the autonomy of the local church. In the spirit of the Cambridge Platform of 1648 and the Savoy Declaration of 1658 the local church was to be free of synod or any ecclesiastical authority outside of itself. Jesus Christ alone is the head of the local assembly of believers, and each visible assembly is complete as a church in itself. I heartily accept this form of church polity.

This view of the local church conducting its own affairs on this basis places great responsibility upon the membership of the local church. The local membership must set its policies, establish its ministries and determine its outreach, with the oversight of chosen elders. The weight of these decisions before God for the sake of prospering the Kingdom of God should bring the believers in each visible fellowship to their knees in prayer, seeking God's power and guidance. His guidance is amply broadcast in His Word, the Bible.

For these reasons it is imperative that members of the local church be regenerated or redeemed people of The Book and prayer. This view underscores the importance as well of the "priesthood" of all believers. Each believer is a stakeholder in the matters of the church. When issues arise it is as a whole people gathered that the will of God for that body is affirmed by vote in a duly called meeting. No person should approach such meetings without having given the issues much prayer beforehand. The obligation of each member, then, is to vote as it seems best to honor God after having sought His will in prayer and scrutiny of the scriptures.

Tasks of the Interim Journey

I. History:

Every congregation has a story. That story includes fact and fiction, strength and weakness, help and hurt. All of it has formed and shaped the congregation's present circumstance. An interim can help to "read" that story, objectively sorting through fact and fiction, strength and weakness, help and hurt. Familiarity with the history enables the congregation to see itself more accurately in the scheme of God's Kingdom, and get a better grasp on its mission.

II. Identity:

Identity is important. If we don't have an accurate view of who we are it leads to illusions and dreams more so than obedience and mission. Identities change through the years. Ever hear someone say "they're not the man they once were"? It's true of congregations as well. Gifting, programs or ministries, and circumstances all change with time. It's important to ascertain "who" we presently are before God now. Community needs evolve, and people's perception of effective ministry change. Hopes for the future, past experiences, and present realities all combine to make us who we are now.

III. Leadership:

Stability requires vision and understanding of present circumstances. Leadership has to provide it. If the leadership cannot make sense of the past, present and future; the church family becomes insecure. Weariness or inflexibility needs to be acknowledged and dealt with for the sake of the church family and the individual leaders. Creative, supportive ways need to be devised to help where changes, or additions are advisable.

IV. Associations:

In a time of transition much energy and attention is committed to "surviving." This inward focus may leave important relations unattended. It might be participation in the larger body of Christ that suffers or it may be that "needs" among us go unnoticed. It's important that during this transitional time all relations are accounted for.

V. Commitment to the Future:

When these other areas of concern during a transitional time are addressed effectively; the congregational is ready to move ahead to a new era in its ministry. A search team can know what sort of person would be best suited to join the church in its mission and serve the Lord alongside them as a coach.

An interim pastor can objectively guide the church family through its transitional time from the end of its former pastor's ministry til the onset of a new "settled" pastor. Focusing upon these five above areas as tasks to be addressed; He can help the church to be ready to embrace its future with less impact from past incumbrances. The interim comes among the fellowship, and works with the current leaders. He does not come to displace present leadership, or to impose himself upon the congregation. He ought to disavow interest in serving as the church's next pastor. Biblical models are seen in the ministry of Moses in the wilderness preparing Joshua and the people for the promised land, and John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord.

- * Thoughts have source in "Temporary Shepherds" by Roger S. Nicholson



Certificate

Transitional Ministry

Ron Sylvester

Successfully completed the Interim Ministry Network course of instruction in transitional and interim ministry. Class room hours: 60
Integrated Fieldwork hours: 35

Cynthia Huber
Executive Director, Interim Ministry Network
October 30, 2013
Date of Issue

Interim Ministry Network, 5740 Executive Drive, Suite 212, Baltimore, MD 21228