

## Autobiographical and Faith Statement for Cheryl R. Peoples

I was baptized when I was an infant in the United Methodist Church and grew up in a family that was at church every time the church doors were open. I have believed that Jesus Christ was my Lord and Savior as far back as I can remember and that faith is unshakable. When I was ten years old, I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. I replied, "A Methodist Nun." It was the only way I had to say that I knew I was called by God to something in the church. I went through Confirmation and joined the church when I was in fifth grade. When it came time to pick a college I went to Southwestern at Memphis (a Presbyterian College in Memphis Tennessee, now named Rhodes College) where I majored in English Literature because I loved both reading and writing. I met my future husband, John, while at college and we were married between my junior and senior year. While in Memphis, we attended Idlewild Presbyterian Church. In my senior year of college, I went to the Career Guidance Office and took vocational tests. The results were that I should be a "Priest, Rabbi or Religious Leader." I thought, "Yeah, right!" threw the results away and went to work doing the books for a clothing store and then managing a gift shop. John had job offers in Memphis and in my hometown of Dyersburg, Tennessee after graduate school. Our agreement was that if we moved to my hometown, he would become Methodist and if we moved to his hometown of West Memphis (outside Memphis), I would become Presbyterian. He took the job in Memphis and I became Presbyterian the same week it was announced in our congregation that the former northern and southern Presbyterian churches were re-uniting to become the PC(USA). I consider this part of God's providence in my life since I discovered that though having grown up in a Methodist home, my soul resonated with the Presbyterians. Over the next few years we had two children, both boys, named Taylor and Anderson. Taylor was a perfectly healthy child and we had no reason to expect any different with our second child but when Anderson was born two years later, there were complications. He was rushed to the NICU at a different hospital from where he was born and we settled into the routine of visiting him day and night for three weeks. Taylor stayed with my parents during this time and spent his second birthday away from us. This time was very stressful for us all. One day, we went to visit Anderson and were told we could not go in. His lung had deflated and they were trying to revive him. When the procedure was finished and it appeared he would live, we were allowed in to the room. It was hard to find our child under all the tubes and equipment. I prayed that if he could not live without pain that God would allow him to die and return to Him. After I prayed, I felt as if an electric blanket was being wrapped around my shoulders and I clearly heard, "Whether he lives or dies doesn't matter. He is mine and all will be well." I knew that whatever happened I had a promise to hang on to. I promised God if I could stay at home with the boys until Anderson went to school, I would do anything God wanted – not out of obligation or as a bargain but out of gratitude for God's blessing. Anderson did get better and our lives progressed. John worked at St Jude Children's Hospital doing budgeting for the hospital and I stayed home with the children and volunteered at the church. I taught every class except the "Over 75 year Old Men's Class" in our congregation. I was also the Sunday School Superintendent and VBS Director at various times. I was very happy in my role and enjoyed that time greatly. As Anderson got ready to begin kindergarten, I began praying and asking God what I should do next. Over the course of a month four different people independently told me they thought I should go to seminary and work in the church as a career. I kept praying, "God, I need more direction." Finally, my Mom (who did not really believe women should be ministers) and I were driving down the street and she turned to me and said, "I don't know why I am telling you this, but you should be in seminary." At that point I said, "Okay, God, I get it." Because John felt he had a vocation at St. Jude Children's Hospital and there are no other branches of the hospital he could transfer to, I enrolled at Memphis Theological

Seminary. It is a Cumberland Presbyterian Seminary but the dean at the time, Don McKim, was a PC(USA) minister and professor. Memphis Presbytery was comfortable with me attending there and I became first an Inquirer and then a Candidate to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. I began seminary to get my MRA but within three weeks changed to get my M.Div. I worked at my church ten hours a week as the DCE throughout seminary and graduated with a 4.0 GPA. I was ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament on December 14, 1997. My first call was to Farmington Presbyterian Church as the Associate Pastor. I worked with youth and was Chaplain to the Pre-School. Two years later, my husband and I decided that if we were ever going to leave Memphis it was a good time to do so before our children began high school. We moved to Christiansburg, VA in 2000 where I became the Associate Pastor for Christiansburg Presbyterian Church. I have always known that at some point I would like to be a solo pastor but have been in no hurry to move since I believe strongly that the best ministry happens as relationships have the opportunity to develop and that takes significant time. I attended a CREDO Conference that was being put on by the Board of Pensions of our denomination and while there gleaned through the process that God was calling me to be a solo pastor. Through much prayer and with the support and encouragement of family and friends I entered the search process and am now happy to be the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Ulysses in Trumansburg.

## Bryan Bond's Statement of Faith and Biographical Information

I believe in the historical creeds of the church - Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed, and I hold, in good faith, to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism. I am sure that I would not subscribe to every word or phrase in there, but I definitely hold to that which is vital to our Reformed, historic faith. I believe the Bible to be the Word of God, the fall of man to be an actual historical event, and that Jesus the Savior of the world and that His death on the cross and perfect life was efficacious for all who believe to reconcile us to God. I am open to additional creeds being added to the church which address issues that the other creeds did not deal with, such as injustice and racial reconciliation and acts of mercy. I am also open to adding to the current creeds in a similar fashion, realizing that each generation must define and clarify what the gospel and the kingdom of God is to them in the current time and place that they are living. I have carefully read the Book of Order and am in glad agreement with that as well.

I come out of a tradition that tends to be extremely linear and rational in it's thinking and systematizing as well as being very conservative in almost all areas. While I do tend to be more of a "conservative" and evangelical in my theology, I am definitely more of a "liberal" when it comes to social and even political views - a strange mixture indeed! I do affirm women in pastoral ministry and leadership in the church as being biblical. I come to the PCUSA and to Geneva Presbytery to serve, to learn, to fellowship, to minister, to unite, and to love - even in disagreement when and if that should arise. I am privileged to join you as we work for the advancement of the gospel and the implementing of God's Kingdom. Blessings to you - Rev. Bryan Bond

## Biographical Information for Nancy Meehan Yao & James Yao

Jim grew up on Long Island. His mother is from Indianapolis, and was a church organist and choir director. His father is Chinese, grew up in Shanghai, and later came to the US to attend college. Jim was baptized Presbyterian, but grew up in the RCA. He attended RPI and was in Information Technology for 28 years.

Nancy grew up in Poestenkill, New York, a farm town east of Troy. Her mother and sister still live in the area. She attended Russell Sage College and New York University. She was an early childhood and Head Start teacher for over 20 years. Nancy, too, was baptized Presbyterian but grew up in the RCA.

We met in church and have been happily married for 28 years. The first 16 years we lived and worked in the Capital District. During this time we both became ordained elders and deacons. Jim's work brought them down to St. Augustine, Florida in 1997 where we joined a Presbyterian Church. Following a call to ministry, we attended Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia and graduated in May.

We have two musical sons. John, who attended Colgate University, is a graduate student in music composition at the Crane School of Music (SUNY Potsdam). James is a senior at St. Olaf College where he is majoring in music education focusing on vocal/choral music.

Jim has been singing in church choirs since he was 9. In Florida he sang with a community chorus and local opera group. He also plays flute and a little piano. Jim enjoys walking dogs and reading mystery novels, and has a strong interest in science.

In her spare time, Nancy enjoys reading, knitting and quilting. Favorite authors include Mary Doria Russell, Julia Spencer Fleming, and women ministers who blog.

**Nancy Meehan Yao**

**Faith Statement 2009**

In life and in death, we belong to God.

I believe in the Triune God, maker of all that is, the One Jesus called “Abba”, Father. God loves us with the persistent, steadfast love of a Father; and like a Mother, God will not forget us or forsake us. I believe in God who is far above any limited understanding, any limited language or ideas about self-hood or time, any limited human attempt to grasp God. God is—and we are to “be still and know that [God] is God.” (Psalm 46) I believe that in the beginning, God created—and called it good. God is creating still. I believe that humans, in their sinfulness, pull away from God, deny God, try to undo what God has done, and worship other things that are not God. God who made mercy and action manifest in history is acting still. We are God’s children, called to live lives of gratitude for the gift God has given us in Jesus Christ.

In life and in death, we belong to God.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior. Humanity rebelled against our Father and against God’s good gift of the law. In sovereign love, justice, and mercy, God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be with us. Fully divine, Christ was fully present with God before the foundations of the world. (Ephesians 1:4) Fully human, Christ knows our weakness and sorrows, knows what it is like to be lonely, to be cold and hungry, to feel abandoned and betrayed. Like us in every way except for sin, Christ proclaimed God’s amazing love and the expansive justice of the realm of God. In his death on the cross, Christ redeemed us once and for all. In his death and resurrection, Christ defeated death and brought new life to all who trust in Him. In the totality of his life, death, resurrection and ascension, Christ is the firstborn of a new inbreaking. Christ lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, the Triune God.

In life and in death, we belong to God.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the One who enlivens our hearts, who makes us to search for God, who empowers us and the Church to be the very body of Christ for the world. The Spirit binds us in the bond of love, breathes in us and on us, revealing God’s word to us, pushing us to do new things, to be a people renewed and transformed according to the word of God. In Trinity, God lives in community, and we are called to do the same and be the same. The church is called to be the demonstration of God’s kingdom in the world. Women and men, children of God, are called to live in obedience and radical love, witnessing to God’s goodness and forgiveness in both word and deed. We wait with eagerness, on tiptoe, until that day when Christ will come again, and God’s kingdom will be here on earth as it is in heaven.

## **Faith Statement for James Yao**

I believe in one God self-revealed in three persons, whom scripture and the church traditionally have called Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I believe in God, the Creator and Source of all things,

loving parent,

creative Word,

untamed wind

who was before time and history,

is with us now,

will be after the end of time,

who made the universe,

the galaxies and planets,

the oceans and continents,

blue skies and thunderstorms,

who made creatures of the sea, air, and land,

an extravagance of species,

to swim, crawl, walk, and fly

who created human beings in God's image,

male and female,

a rainbow of colors,

to be God's adopted children

who spoke through the patriarchs, matriarchs, and prophets of old,

promising to love us always,

asking only that we respond in love,

doing justice,

loving kindness,

and walking humbly with God

who grieved when we turned away to worship other gods,

planning in the fullness of time,  
the reconciliation of the world,  
through God's own Son.

I believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ,

the good shepherd,

the bread of life,

the living water,

the Word through whom the heavens and the earth were created,

who became fully human,

flesh and bones and blood,

who entered our world like us,

a helpless baby,

growing up and learning,

who showed us by his own example how to live worshipful lives,

loving God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind,

loving our neighbor as ourselves,

who suffered a painful and shameful death on a cross,

executed like a common criminal,

abandoned by his friends,

rejected by the world

who in dying defeated the powers of sin and death,

who being raised from the dead promises us eternal life,

not because we earned it,

but as a gift of pure love,

for the whole world

who ascended into heaven,

fully divine,

our Lord and Savior,

who will come again.

I believe in God the Holy Spirit,

our Advocate,

our Comforter,

wind and flame,

who hovered over the waters at creation

and gave power to the prophets' words,

who assures us in baptism

that we are part of God's family, the church,

who calls us to worship God not just Sunday, but in all we do,

in gratitude for what God in Christ has done for me,

to continue his ministry in the world today giving

food to the hungry,

drink to those who thirst,

clothing to the naked,

shelter to the homeless,

who reminds me

"That I belong...in life and in death...to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ,"

who makes me

"wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Christ."

I believe that God through the Holy Spirit calls women and men together to be the Church,

the body of Christ,

a community of faith,

a partner with God in mission,

a witness to God's inbreaking reign,

to be a "provisional demonstration of what God intends for all of humanity,"

revealing the new creation begun in the life, death, resurrection

and ascension of Jesus Christ,  
living as one body in communion with one another and with Christ,  
experienced every time we gather to worship and hear the Word,  
confirmed by the Holy Spirit when we celebrate the Eucharist,  
a promise and foretaste of the feast of love which we will celebrate when  
Christ comes again,  
valuing the diversity of gifts and uniqueness of its members,  
worshipping and working together in joy,  
to carry out a ministry of reconciliation,  
sharing the good news of Jesus Christ,  
revealed in Scripture,  
proclaimed as the Word of God,  
made sure by the Holy Spirit,  
sealed in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist,  
welcoming all who trust in this good news,  
confirming their inclusion in God's grace through baptism,  
encouraging their response in a life of faithfulness, discipleship and  
participation with the church in God's mission to the world,  
lifting up the disenfranchised and marginalized,  
speaking truth to power,  
praying and caring for all creation,  
suffering in solidarity with the world even as it offers hope.

## Statement of Faith by Rev Joseph Tagliaferre

I believe in God, who made the heavens and the earth. God made man and woman in the image of God and desires a relationship with all humanity.

I believe in Jesus, Gods son, both human and divine. Jesus was the grace and love of God personified in our world. If we believe in Jesus, our sins are forgiven through him, and we have communion and fellowship with God. Jesus was raised from the dead and thus provides for us the assurance that our relationship with God will continue throughout eternity. Jesus spent his life on earth, living the will of God for his life, in the life he lived; we see an example of how we should live.

The Holy Spirit is God's presence moving in the world today. The spirit works in the hearts of the people of the world to provide a way to know God intimately in our spirits. Those that believe in God find the Holy Spirit to be a comfort, and a source of strength and assurance.

The church is the body of Christ on earth. The church is God's hands, feet, eyes and ears in the world. The church is called to proclaim the good news of Christ and Gods love. This is done in a variety of ways including but not totally inclusive by teaching, worship, prayer and mission. When the church does these things it becomes the true instrument of blessing to the world, but it is at its best work when reaching out to those in need through mission work. In an every changing world the church is challenged to remain relevant while maintaining the basic tenants of our historical roots.

The Bible is the inspired word of God, recorded so that we might understand the history of our relationship with God and teaches us about the relationship between God and humanity throughout the ages, and provides us with guidance for our daily lives.