

Statement of Faith **Andy Cooke**

I trust, follow, and love the triune God, who loved me first and who is continually revealed to me through Scripture, the Body of Christ, and the creation.

God created and continues to create all that is, including humankind who are made in God's image. While God creates and it is good, humankind obscures what is good through sin. My response to God's creation is flawed and sinful, so I have to trust God to help me respond. Even if my response were not sinful, my understanding of God's creation is as limited as the pot's understanding of the potter. Knowing this, I can do nothing but trust God. I trust God as creator and I trust God as redeemer. I trust God more than I trust myself.

Christ's incarnation is the most awe-inspiring event that God has ever shown me. There was no more powerful way for God to express love for creation than to self-empty, become fully human, walk among us as a teacher, and then die and rise from the grave. The incarnate Jesus tells us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him. As his follower, I commit myself to his teaching in all aspects of my life and work. Trusting in God, I am a follower of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the promised advocate that guides my words and actions, for without the Holy Spirit I cannot even say that Jesus is Lord. The Holy Spirit brings together the Body of Christ, leads worship in Word and Sacrament, and empowers us to love wherever we go. Just as the Holy Spirit completes the community of the Trinity, so does the Holy Spirit empower us to full communion and community in this world. Trusting in God, as a follower of Christ, I love through the Holy Spirit.

As I trust, follow, and love God, I look ahead in hope to the redemption of creation when every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea, and all that is in them sings together with one voice the praises of our God forever.

Journey of Faith

Andy Cooke

I don't remember being baptized at Chadbourn Presbyterian Church in Chadbourn, North Carolina on July 8, 1979, but I am sure that it happened because I have a certificate that tells me so. I don't recall the first time that I attended Reid Memorial Presbyterian Church, but I do know that the people in that community of faith nurtured me from an early age. I can't tell you when I first knew that I was held firmly in the loving embrace of Jesus Christ, but I can tell you that I have never known anything else.

The beginning of my journey of faith is hazy and I am grateful for that. It means that my parents instilled faith in me and that the church did what it was supposed to do. I spent my youth participating in the life and work of the church and it formed me in more ways than I could ever know. Of particular importance to my journey was the New Wilmington Missionary Conference, an annual PCUSA conference in Pennsylvania. It was there where I initially discerned a call to vocational ministry while I was still in high school.

Several other communities of faith in high school and college sharpened this sense of call. I am especially grateful for the Presbyterian Student Center at the University of Georgia, which helped me to claim faith as my own in new ways while I was an undergraduate student. It was during this time that I served as Youth Director at Friendship Presbyterian Church—the community that first nurtured me as a leader in the church (thank you for tolerating my first sermon).

Upon graduating from college, I moved to New Jersey to study at Princeton Theological Seminary. I enjoyed being a student during this time, and I am grateful to the communities that allowed me to serve and grow as a leader, namely Frenchtown Presbyterian Church, Nassau Presbyterian Church, and the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. After graduation, I received a fellowship to study homiletics at St. Mary's College at the University of St. Andrews in St. Andrews, Scotland, where I worshipped at St. Leonard's Parish Church.

In 2005, I was ordained in Northeast Georgia Presbytery to serve as Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Athens. In my three years there, I was inspired by the faith of the members of that congregation that first helped me to learn how to serve as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament. In 2008, I felt a strong call to serve as Campus Minister and work among students at the University of Georgia, which I did for the next decade. The students showed me how to be fearlessly faithful and creative as we sought to follow Christ together. During those years, my family and I were active at Oconee Presbyterian Church, where I also served as Parish Associate. Simultaneously, I have served for several years in various leadership roles in Northeast Georgia Presbytery and preached in 31 of its congregations. The presbytery has also been a community of faith that has affirmed and supported me in my journey of faith.

In November 2017, I was married to Katelyn Gordon, who was serving as an Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte. In April 2018, I concluded my call as Campus Minister and moved to Charlotte. In the last several months, I have worshipped at First Charlotte while searching for a call. To my surprise, the next step in my journey does not have me leaving

Northeast Georgia Presbytery. Instead, I am returning home to serve as Co-Pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church, the same congregation where I went to preschool over 30 years ago. Across all of these communities of faith, my faith has ebbed and flowed in ways that I could not have imagined. When I have not been able to pray, they have prayed for me. And when they have not been able to pray, I have prayed for them. My journey could not have happened without the Body of Christ around me. This is true in the high moments like the births and baptisms of my sons, Miller and Mattox, or my marriage to Katelyn. This is also true in the low moments, like the end of my first marriage or the funerals that have been gut wrenching. Somehow, I continue to develop capacities that I could not have imagined. Somehow, the Body of Christ still does what it is supposed to do. And somehow, the journey never gets old.