

Susan Murray – Statement of Faith 2024

I BELIEVE IN:

1. God

I believe in a triune God: an omnipotent, all-loving Creator; Jesus Christ, who was God in human form walking among us, who sacrificed himself for us; and the Holy Spirit, God present with us as guide and comforter. Other world religions have varying beliefs, and I respect their right to have their own faith beliefs. They may have a different understanding of the same God I worship, or they may have been misled. I believe it is not my place to judge others and their religion unless it is harmful to others.

2. We Are All Children of God

I believe everyone is a child of God; everyone alive now or at any time in history is, was, or will be loved by God. I believe salvation is available to anyone. I know Jesus Christ was Jewish and Christianity is rooted in the Jewish religion. It is wrong to attempt to use Christian faith to condemn Judaism. Using religion to justify war and persecution of others is an abomination of religion and against God's will, whether it was the Crusades of the Middle Ages, Catholics and Protestants fighting in Ireland, or the ongoing bloodshed in the Middle East.

I believe we are not to judge anyone else's heart, evaluate whether they are sinning, nor insert ourselves into God's role of judgment. We should worry about the plank in our own eye rather than being hypocrites speaking against the speck in someone else's eye. When I preach in a PCUSA church, I have a responsibility to share the Good News of God's love. I can point out what all of us, most especially me, should strive towards in our faith journey. However, I cannot condemn, judge, or forgive on God's behalf. I can and do share the message that God has forgiven us in the form of a declaration of pardon.

3. God Has Requirements for Us

Micah 6:8 describes how we are to act: *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* Yet all of us fall short of this requirement and sin. Sin separates us from God's love and harms our relationship with God. None of us can earn salvation by our works. Our human desires, such as greed, envy, lust, and jealousy, cause us to sin and separate us from God's love. But we can have a relationship with

God by having faith, humbly seeking forgiveness, and receiving the gift of Jesus Christ's death for our sins.

While we fall short in works, we should still strive to do justice, love kindness, and love all our neighbors. We do this not for a reward from God or praise from others, but as a response to the love and forgiveness we have received from God. Sharing our gifts, both material and abilities, with others is a chance to demonstrate what it means to be a Christian and participate in a small way in achieving God's will on Earth.

4. *We Should Trust God's Will*

We cannot fully understand God's will and wisdom. Why evil is allowed in our world, why sometimes a miracle occurs, but much more often why the laws of nature and random chance controls events is beyond our human understanding. While we may not understand God's way or God's will, we can stand on the promise that nothing in life or in death can separate us from God's love.

5. *The Bible*

I believe the Bible is a vital part of Christianity. It is full of guidance for how to live, songs of praise for God, examples of the faith journey of others, covenants from God, and testimony to holy miracles. The Bible has been compiled and translated by humans. Passages are influenced by human bias and limited understanding. Letters were written to specific communities of faith, facing a specific challenge in the past. While they are helpful documents, they are influenced by a different (and often oppressive) culture and during a time with a more limited understanding of the world and science. There are books of the Bible that attempt to explain complex events such as the creation of the universe and the revelation of the second coming of Christ. It would be folly to literally interpret time or symbolism when studying the Bible. I strongly believe the Bible should be a tool to learn about God, not a weapon to be used against others.

6. *Prayer and Worship*

I believe prayer is a vital part of our relationship with God. It allows us to praise God and to ask God for blessings for ourselves and others. God is not Santa Claus; prayers are not our wish list on Amazon.com. In the Lord's Prayer, we are taught to acknowledge that we should seek God's will, not our own. I believe that worship is also a part of our relationship with God. It

is an opportunity to praise God, learn about God, and build community with other Christians. I believe that Christianity is a journey, and we should nurture our faith, seek God's will, grow in our knowledge, and use our gifts towards God's kingdom on Earth.

7. Sacraments

The PCUSA church has two sacraments: communion and baptism. Both are important parts of our faith journey. Jesus called us to "do this in remembrance of me," so it is right that we remember his death for our sins and our salvation in the sacrament. With communion, we should also reflect on our faith and relationship with the Holy Spirit, who is present in our lives. Holy Communion is also a reminder of the Second Coming of Christ.

Baptism is a moving sacrament in which parents or adults publicly pledge to raise their children or to live their own lives as Christians, following Jesus' teachings with the help of the Holy Spirit. As a parent, I found baptizing my children to be a time of gratitude to God for allowing me to be a mother to both of my children (one from a complicated pregnancy and one from adoption) and for the gift of grace we receive from the death of Jesus and the guidance we receive from the Holy Spirit. I was baptized in a Presbyterian Church as an infant. I believe that I have reaffirmed the vows made by my parents when I joined the church and have been ordained and installed in leadership positions within the church.

End Notes

Section 1 God

The Brief Statement of Faith uses the term triune God. The first chapter of John describes the Word, Jesus, was with God in the beginning. John 14:26 explains that God will send the Holy Spirit to us. All the confessions proclaim the trinity (BOC xvi).

Section 2 We Are All Children of God

Matthew 7:3-5 is the reference for the plank in our own eye versus the speck in someone else's eye. John 10:16 is when Jesus talks about "other sheep". W-3.0305 describes how we should preach the good news of our risen lord. W-3.0205 calls for the declaration of forgiveness. The Barmen and Belhar confessions are PCUSA's statements against the German Nazi party and Apartheid; they speak against using faith to suppress and kill others. The Brief Statement of Faith states we are all equal in God's image (lines 29-32).

Section 3 God Has Requirements for Us

Matthew 7:15-20 describes that we are known by our fruits. The Heidelberg Catechism and other Catechisms discuss the 10 Commandments and what they mean. Matthew 22:36-40 is where Jesus shares the two greatest commandments, love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself is in Heidelberg Catechism 4.004 and The Larger Catechism 7.232. The 2nd Helvetic Confession 5.117 speaks about Good Works.

Section 4 We Should Trust God's Will

The book of Job is a lengthy discussion of this concept. 1 Corinthians 13:11 is a brief statement that for now we see as a child or one looking into a dim mirror. Nothing can separate us from God's love is in the Bible (Romans 8:38-39) and the Brief Statement of Faith 11.5.

Section 5 Bible

The Book of Confessions page viii warns against picking verses to confirm personal desires or opinions. The Confession of 1967 9.25-9.30 explains the Bible. It includes the statement "The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ." The Larger Catechism has a question on how the word of God is to be read, 7.267.

Section 6 Prayer and Worship

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 states we should pray without ceasing. The Lord's Prayer is held up as an example of how we should pray (Matthew 6:9-13 and the catechisms).

Section 7 Sacrament

Luke 22:19 and 25 are scriptures that retell the Last Supper and foretell the Second Coming of Christ.