Statement of Faith

A course in Calvin's Theology left me with the desire to never again read the Institutes in full. But it did leave me permanently with Calvin's definition of faith. which my preceptor required us to memorize: "Faith is that firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us. based upon the freely given promise in Jesus Christ. both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit." Even 25 years out of seminary, I can recite that sentence in my sleep. The more I think about it. the more profound it becomes. So I offer it as a partial structure for my statement of faith.

Firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence: I am loved by the God who is both unfathomable and as close as my next breath. My faith is a knowledge "that is almost too wonderful for me." This means that in the face of evil. sickness. accidents, and injustice, I can still affirm that God is for us, in the most powerful and the most basic ways we can imagine. It is my job as a faithful person to witness to and wrestle with the problem of pain and sorrow alongside my fellow travelers on this journey. Not to pacify with platitudes of empty promises but to stand with them in darkness and doubt, even if only to say, "Lord, have mercy."

Based upon the freely given promise in Jesus Christ: Jesus. the living and real Jesus of Nazareth. the Messiah. called Christ, is my Lord and Savior. my Brother. and my Friend. I have met him in dreams and in meditation; he has spoken to me in prayer. I know his voice; I trust him utterly. He has a fabulous sense of humor. He is the ruler of my life. He is the ruler of the world. May he come again in glory.

Both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit:
I am led by the Holy Spirit, who speaks in paradox and coincidence and many voices- of people. The wind in the trees. music. There are times when I have spoken or understood with Wisdom not my own. There are times when my heart has resonated with the Word, a sunset, a touch. This is the Spirit revealing Herself. Godself to me.

I trust the creeds as statements of faith written by people in different times and cultures. I trust the Church, often fallible, as the faithful witness of God's presence in the world. I believe and trust that the people of God are holy creations. made in God's image and holding the Divine spark within.

I believe in the certainty of the resurrected life before and after death. I trust that the words written in the Bible are the Living Word, revealed anew by the Holy Spirit, and inspired, even through the historical lenses of misogyny and racism.

I believe that God's salvation plan is for all people, no matter by what name they call their creator- Abba, Allah. Love. Mother. Jehovah, or the Heart of the Universe. We are called by God, who is faithful and benevolent, who freely gives in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, who reveals. and seals us in grace with love.

Spiritual Autobiography: Rev. Leslie Mott

Raised in the reformed tradition and under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church

(U.S.A.), I can say that I have not really known another spiritual home. Even when I was wrestling with, and rejecting, the theology of my childhood faith, questioning God's goodness, and avoiding church attendance, I knew that it was a place that somehow was waiting for me.

A pivotal time in my first few decades was the illness and death of my father when I was a child, followed by subsequent losses, illnesses and death in the family. At the age of 16, following my grandmother's diagnosis of terminal pancreatic cancer, I distinctly remember the moment that I said "no" to the usual and customary religious platitudes that had surrounded me for years; from well-intentioned and well-meaning people, to be sure. But I was wrestling with the profound questions of theodicy, and I had no language or maturity or adults willing to be present for it.

Even then I was in church; in choirs and youth group and in worship. But something did not match up, and in college I left active membership. I began seeing a counselor, a Methodist pastor, in my mid-twenties who helped me a great deal.

Almost immediately I went back to church, invited into the choir and to be a Deacon. This time I had the community and the wisdom of people around me, in the church and outside of it, to finally begin to unlearn and learn anew a theology that incorporated both suffering and joy, disillusionment and hope.

I continued the learning in Seminary, with internships and Clinical Pastoral Education including time as hospice chaplain, where possibilities for ministry widened. I was ordained to be the Helen Carnell Eden Chaplain at Wilson College right here in Carlisle Presbytery in 1999. From there I did solo pastoral ministry in New York for many years, trained as an Interim Pastor and served Presbyterian and UCC churches, received a Synod Innovation Grant for the formation of the Pastoral Sabbath at Stony Point Conference Center, and trained for and received certifications in Spiritual Direction, as well as becoming Registered Yoga Teacher and a Focusing Professional.

Most recently, after a finishing a call as Interim Head of Staff at First Presbyterian in Traverse City, Michigan, I was called to serve as the Temporary Executive Presbyter for the Presbytery of Detroit which was, and still is, under an Administrative Commission. In a time of great turmoil, conflict, and disorder, my work and presence enabled the Presbytery to experience a shift in how they were together becoming the Body of Christ. My willingness to listen, to hear criticism and mistrust, to dismantle systems that were not working, to adjust expectations, to build relationships, to

navigate differing views and to be an active presence in the churches of the Presbytery was essential in restoring relationships. While their process is ongoing, I recognized that I was the right person at the right time for that initial work.

The call to First Presbyterian Church of York leads into similar territory; conflict, and anxious system, the building and rebuilding of trust, financial and structural analysis, and the discernment of the congregation to a renewed sense of identity and call.

God's grace has always manifested itself in perfect timing and right action. My call has been to listen, to discern, to pray, and to trust. Even in these challenging times, I remain hopeful and confident in God's unfailing love for us all.