

## Statement of Faith

by Rev. Gary Willingham-McLain

God created the universe, and God created us. Not just back then, but also right now, always and in every moment, God is creating, sustaining, and recreating us. In the future God will one day bring into being the perfect new creation. God's kingdom will come on earth even as it is in heaven! All history is in the hands of God the Father. We call God "Father" because Jesus called God "Father." A loving parent, a holy majesty worthy of our highest feeling, a judge that gets everything right, an all-powerful force, a compassionate Person always reaching out to reclaim us—such is the Father Almighty, the first person of the Triune God!

Jesus Christ is God's desire to reach us strained to the point of breaking—broken, in fact, on the cross for us in love. Jesus is God self-disclosing and speaking his heart to us. Jesus is God sharing himself with us and making the great Mystery of God as clear to us as is possible on this side of seeing God face to face. The Word became flesh! Jesus teaches us kingdom living, or how to live inside the effective will of God. In his life, he displays God's heart as he heals, teaches, corrects, leads, commands nature, and serves the poor. Jesus shows God's heart, because quite simply Jesus *is* God. The Son of God was always God. But the Son of God in becoming Jesus is especially God *for us*, revealed most dramatically in what he did to heal us from our self-destructiveness. That self-damaging the Bible names as sin. Sin is disobedience of the loving Father who made us, and it kills (deadens us spiritually, emotionally, relationally—in every way). Sin's wage, its payback, is indeed death. But Jesus took all our tragic self-harm on himself. Paying the price for sin, he took on himself our lostness and our alienation, so we could be saved and healed and redeemed and reclaimed and restored and refreshed, and welcomed into the embrace of God forever. In Christ, we are chosen by grace through our faith in him. And in and through Jesus's resurrection from death, we will one day have resurrection bodies alongside his. How amazing is all that?

The Holy Spirit of God is God with us now, revealing Jesus to us, bringing God intimately into our experience to transform us more and more into the image of Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God creates and nurtures the church of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit increasingly fills all we do, as we open ourselves to the Spirit's work through obedience and the spiritual disciplines. This is our God, the only God, one God in three persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

I believe in the high authority of the Bible; it is the written Word of God pointing us to the Living Word. The Word calls us to follow Jesus. Along with many other practices in obedience, the special church practices of the holy sacraments are instituted by Christ's words. Baptism and communion deepen our faith in God's adopting and saving us. Baptism is the visible sign of the invisible reality of belonging to God, of being adopted into the family of God. Communion is the visible sign of not only the invisible reality of our being saved by Jesus's sacrifice but also the invisible reality of our spiritual lives being nourished by his sacrificial love. And as God the Father sent God the Son to us, so God's Word sends us out, too, in love to others. We are sent in love to do evangelism and to do justice. Christ-centered evangelism (being used by the Spirit to make disciples of Jesus) and Christ-centered justice (being used by the Spirit to help bring in God's loving kingdom here on earth, now, even as it is in heaven)—both and together offer the world the well-being and peace that come only from God.