

NACC Responses: Faith Talk Questionnaire

Our Current Context

1. What images, beliefs, and practices most sustain your faith?

Answer Those which most clearly reflect God:

- a. Our Father: loving, nurturing, and, when necessary, chastising
- b. His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ: who has, through his incarnation and suffering, paid the price for our fallenness; victorious over sin; our advocate with the Father
- c. The Holy Spirit our Comforter: working among us to unite us to Christ, and, through him, to eternal life with the Father.

We are sustained in our faith as we apply this Trinitarian understanding of God to all we experience and do as Christians - meeting God in the sacraments, praying to him, worshipping him, praising him, serving him and our neighbours.

2. What is happening in the world to shake your faith?

Answer Our faith is unshaken. However, our trust in our denomination has been tested by (1) Its current unwillingness to affirm, unequivocally and unapologetically, the Trinitarian God described above, (2) Its current reluctance to accept scripture as "the only infallible record of God's gracious revelations, and as sure witness of Christ" (Basis of Union), and (3) Its capitulation to those conventional "wisdoms" which assert: the equal validity of all religions, the denial of obvious scriptural truth, sexual license, the blurring of sexual differences, the redefinition of marriage, etc.

the faith of your congregation?

Answer See above.

the faith of others around you?

Answer See above.

3. In what ways are these issues calling into question your understanding of God, Jesus, the Trinity, sacraments, ministry, and the church?

Answer How we understand these matters is not in question. Briefly put: we stand firmly on Holy Scripture and the collective wisdom of the Church Universal. In particular, we affirm the wisdom granted the Church through its two thousand year reflection on Scripture. This wisdom is summarized in such historic statements as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Most immediately, we stand firmly within the Reformed Tradition of that Church's wisdom, well expressed in the "Doctrine" section of the *Basis of Union*.

4. Are there theological principles from particular scriptural themes or traditions (e.g. creation, the wilderness wandering of the people of Israel, the exile of Babylon) that give guidance to our current situation?

Answer We understand scripture to be God-given, and that everything, in both Testaments, is there by his will. The themes suggested above are all subsets of scripture's central, unifying theme, which is God's consuming love for his creation, and his refusal to let it perish - even at the cost of the cross. Further, in this, he has a particular purpose for humanity, which is to act as his stewards in that creation. The particular calling of the Christian Church is to act as "a light to the nations", drawing the whole human race into fellowship with him and into an understanding of itself as his stewards on earth.

Comment: We are surprised that this question's sample "themes" do not include any that refer explicitly to Christ - the atonement, and the promise of resurrection, for instance.

General Council Direction

Church

1. What relationship might there be between church and salvation?

Answer As the Body of Christ, the Christian Church is his visible presence on earth. Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, its core task is to make the news of salvation available to all. This it can do only through the power of the Spirit, expressing God's

encompassing love and his wish that all people be saved. The Church does this through what it is, what it says, and what it does.

2. Can we as Christians be open to other faiths? Does such openness threaten the integrity of our particular Christian beliefs? If we can be open, how do we do this?

Answer We can accept that God, in his creation of the universe, offers all people persuasive evidence of his power and majesty. Many religions demonstrate such an understanding of him. However, we believe the one true and complete revelation of the *heart* of God has been given us in Jesus Christ. The Christian Church is called to offer that Good News to those of other faiths (or of no faith) through mutually respectful interaction. Mutual respect requires that we act with love, honesty, and clarity. It also requires that we speak from a firm understanding of the faith entrusted to us, and of how it is centred on Jesus, the Christ.

Ministry

1. What is or should be the relationship between designated ministries (ordained, diaconal, lay pastoral, student supply, etc.) and the laity?

Answer Everything we do flows from *shared* responsibility. As individual parts of The Body, we owe each other loving support, loving admonishment, loving advice.

2. How is the role of a designated ministry different from that of the ministry of the whole people of God (that is, everyone)?

Answer In our tradition, designated ministries are understood to be in partnership with the laity. Even particular responsibilities based on the possession of special expertise are always shared to some extent with others. Before God, none stand over others. Humility is required of us all.

Sacraments

1. Do you think that there would be occasions when it would be appropriate for people other than the ordained, diaconal, or otherwise licensed minister to administer the sacraments?

Yes, we believe there may be such occasions.

2. How do the sacraments proclaim our theology?

Answer If the practices associated with baptism and communion point to Christ, if they underline what he has done for us, if they emphasize our relationship to him and to the Father, then they point to the theology of the Church. If they do not, they point to an empty gospel of self-sufficiency and worldliness: thus one is baptized into something other than Christ; thus the eucharist does not provide the true spiritual nourishment that alone comes from God.

3. How do you relate the sacraments to your understanding of God?

Answer Faithfully performed, they point directly and powerfully to Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension - that is to God's intent that we all return to him.

Other

What other questions do you have that you would like the Statement of Faith to address?

A fundamental flaw in the questionnaire is that it does not seem to expect responses on such fundamental matters as, for example, God's grace, human sin, our need for repentance, our hope of resurrection, our duty to work for the extension of God's Kingdom.

Historical and Contemporary Considerations

1. Are there elements of the historic expressions of faith that you would like to see considered? Are there elements of contemporary expressions that you would like to see considered?

Answer See the answer above. In fact, we see no need at all for "a new statement of faith". The "Doctrine" section of the Basis of Union remains the United Church's best summary of its foundational beliefs, and it possesses a unique legitimacy - including in Canadian law. Whatever our church has to say about its faith must necessarily be congruent with that.

2. Are there fresh concepts you would like to offer for our consideration?

Answer No.

3. Are there guiding theological principles from our scriptural traditions (e.g. creation, the wilderness wandering of the people of Israel, the exile in Babylon) that you find pertinent?

Answer Principle #1 - Each scriptural theme cited tells us something of God and of our relationship with him. Principle #2 - No single theme (or even group of themes) gives us the full picture. Principle #3 - It is only by faithful engagement with *all* of Scripture that we can hope to come close.

Style and Format

1. How would you imagine using a Statement of Faith?

Answer We would not use a new faith statement if it conflicted with the doctrinal statements in the Basis of Union.

2. Is there a particular format that you would find most useful? Some suggestions we are currently working with are
 - a summary for easy reference or liturgical use
 - availability on the Web with hypertext
 - graphics and pictures
 - appendices of historical documents and biblical references

(No suggestion)

3. What else would you like to tell the Committee on Theology and Faith?

Answer This is another defining moment in the life of the United Church. At issue is whether we have the nerve to be fully and distinctly Christian.