

Our Words of Faith

*Cherished,
Honoured,
and Living*



A resource document prepared
for the remit (January to May 2012)
concerning
the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union
of The United Church of Canada

February 2, 2010

In August 2009, meeting in Kelowna, British Columbia, the 40th General Council adopted the following proposal:

That the 40th General Council 2009

- i) in the area of Doctrine, The United Church of Canada recognizes the primacy of Scripture, with the “Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union,” “1940 Statement of Faith,” “A New Creed,” and “A Song of Faith,” each being recognized as a “subordinate standard” of the United Church as contemplated by Declaration 3(b) of The United Church of Canada Act.
- ii) declare that “Doctrine” of the United Church for all purposes in the Basis of Union, By-Laws, and Appendices of *The Manual* be those subordinate standards, subordinate to Scripture, that are so approved by the United Church in accordance with the conditions contained within The United Church of Canada Act; and
- iii) authorize a remit to Presbyteries and to Pastoral Charges to test the will of the United Church with respect to these declarations and recognition.

Motion: John Young/Doug Wright

This remit is what is known as a category three remit requiring that a study process be available in the church for two years prior to its release. The formal remit will be issued by the Executive of General Council between January and May 2012. This background document is provided to the church to enable it to prepare for the remit and to encourage study of its implications.

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1. Why Are We Going through This Process?

The 40th General Council that met in Kelowna, British Columbia, in August 2009 approved a motion to add to the Doctrine section currently in the Basis of Union three other doctrinal statements that General Councils of the United Church have approved since 1925.

Those three statements are the **Statement of Faith** (1940), **A New Creed** (adopted in 1968; revised in 1980 and again in 1994), and **A Song of Faith** (2006). For this proposed action to take place, the General Council authorized remits, which are votes by presbyteries and, in this case, also by pastoral charges, on whether to add some or all of these three statements to the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union.

This background document is intended to help your pastoral charge's session, church board, or church council as you prepare to vote on whether to include these other doctrinal statements in the Basis of Union.

The Process

When the United Church wishes to change The Basis of Union, which functions as its constitutional document, a number of steps must take place before the proposed change can be adopted. First, a General Council must approve the proposed change. Then the proposed change is sent to presbyteries and, in instances such as this, to the session (or the equivalent body, which may be a church council or church board) of each pastoral charge for that body to vote on.

This referral to presbyteries and sessions (or equivalents) for a vote is called a **remit**. If a majority of the presbyteries and a majority of the sessions (or equivalents) vote in favour of the proposed change, then the next meeting of the General Council must also vote one more time in favour of the proposed change in order for it to take effect. Only if an absolute majority of the presbyteries and an absolute majority of the sessions (or equivalents) vote in favour of the proposed change can the subsequent General Council consider ratifying that change—not just a majority of those who vote. In other words, the failure of a presbytery or session (or equivalent) to vote is in effect a negative vote.

The Basis of Union

The United Church of Canada came into being in 1925 as a result of a union of the Congregationalists, the Methodists, two-thirds of the Presbyterians, and a group of Union Churches (primarily in western Canada). These founding groups joined on the basis of an agreement worked out over a decade earlier by a Joint Union Committee representing the Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. That agreement, known as the Basis of Union, outlined in a general way the shape this new United Church would take.

The **Basis of Union** functions as the United Church's constitution. Most countries outline their basic structures and principles of governance in a constitution, and changing that constitution is a complex process. Usually such a change requires the support of at least a majority of a country's smaller governing units. Countries also have legislative bodies, such as Canada's federal Parliament.

These legislative bodies pass laws that apply those general governing principles to particular situations. Those laws are relatively easy to change. For example, any session of the Canadian Parliament can change any of the national laws or statutes, provided these changed laws do not alter the constitution.

In the same way, the United Church has not only its constitutional document (the Basis of Union) but also a number of by-laws that have been passed over the years by the denomination's national governing body, the General Council. While any General Council can change the by-laws, the Basis of Union can only be changed when a majority of all presbyteries—and when they also are required to vote, a majority of all sessions (or equivalents) —vote in favour.

2. How Does The United Church of Canada Express Its Doctrine?

The remit that will be before the church in 2012 invites us to renew our self-understanding as a Reformed community of faith. It tests our willingness to adopt each proposed statement as it might have been received at the time of its formation. The remit recognizes, in the tradition of Reformed communities throughout the world, that the church's formal beliefs can be expressed anew in each generation in ways that are both faithful to scripture and reflect the language and meaning of the time.

The remit asks us to expand the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union by adding further statements of faith. These additional statements have each, in their time, been formally approved by the actions of a General Council. The remit will test the church's agreement to include each of them in the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union following the 20 Articles of Faith. Regardless of outcome, this process will engage us in a conversation about the beliefs of the church, and whether any or all of the proposed statements are approved, it will confirm the importance of doctrine as a living expression of faith within the church.

What Are Subordinate Standards?

Many Reformed churches use the term **subordinate standards** to refer to their major statements of faith. Formally, we can say that a subordinate standard is a statement of faith, one that is "in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures" but subordinate to scripture, broadly consistent with other faith statements acknowledged by the Reformed tradition, and reflecting the Reformed commitment to engaging the present time and age.

In many Reformed churches, subordinate standards are added over a period of time to the church's confessions. The Presbyterian Church in Canada, for example, added to the Westminster Confession (adopted 1875) two further subordinate standards: the Declaration Concerning State and Church (1955) and Living Faith/Foi Vivante (1998).

The federal Act that established the United Church made reference to subordinate standards as follows:

That nothing in this Act contained shall be deemed to limit the independent and exclusive right and power of the United Church to legislate in all matters concerning its doctrine, worship, discipline and government, including therein the right and power from time to time to frame, adopt, alter, change, add to or modify its laws, subordinate standards and formulas, and to determine and declare the same or any of them, but subject to the conditions and safeguards in that behalf contained in the Basis of Union.¹

The remit reintroduces the concept of subordinate standards. It defines the relationship among the various faith statements of The United Church of Canada. There is also a deeper meaning we will

1. Section 28(b) of The United Church of Canada Act.

be invited to reflect on: Have these statements touched our hearts? Have they taken on meaning in our daily lives? As we will be asked later in this document, have any or all become cherished, honoured, and living?

What Are the Implications of the Remit?

The remit assumes that all confessions and statements of faith are subject to the primacy of scripture. This principle is embedded in the Basis of Union: “We affirm our belief in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the primary source and ultimate standard of Christian faith and life” (Basis 2.0).

The remit, then, seeks to test the will of the church to add additional subordinate standards to the existing Doctrine section of the Basis of Union. In doing this, the General Council seeks to ensure that the 20 Articles will continue to be affirmed as a foundational document of faith in the church, one that is subordinate to scripture.

In our Reformed tradition the faith of the church is always renewing itself and always reforming. The 40th General Council wishes to test the will of the church by identifying the Statement of Faith (1940), A New Creed (1968), and A Song of Faith (2006) as additional subordinate standards in the United Church and to do so by explicitly including them in the formal doctrine of the United Church.

One implication of acknowledging more than one subordinate standard is that the standards would be seen to be “in dialogue” with one another. For example, when presbyteries examine candidates for ministry to determine whether they are “in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine” (*The Manual* 026(c)), both presbyteries and candidates would take into consideration all of the faith statements the United Church acknowledges as its formal doctrine.

Another implication of acknowledging more than one subordinate standard is that the United Church would be declaring its openness to affirming other subordinate standards in the future.

As is true with most Reformed churches’ experience, confessional statements are never entirely consistent. There are always sections that are inconsistent or in conflict with others. However, this is the nature of subordinate standards. They reflect the limits of human concepts and words for expressing profound truths about God. They invite a dialogue of faith between the present and the past and between expressions of faith that are different in their language and concept, but they always point beyond themselves to deeper truths.

In summary, the remit before the church reflects the Reformed practice of adopting additional subordinate standards from time to time. The proposals to include A New Creed and A Song of Faith as subordinate standards acknowledge current expressions of faith now widely in use across the church. The additional inclusion of the 1940 Statement of Faith acknowledges that it was used widely in the United Church into the 1970s. It reminds us that subordinate standards represent the desire of the church to give expression to its faith in its day, and that the theological journey of the church continues over time.

3. The Study Process for *Our Words of Faith: Cherished, Honoured, and Living*

The Task at Hand

Between January and May 2012, each pastoral charge and presbytery will be asked in the remit whether to include each of three statements in the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union.

From the beginning, The United Church of Canada has lived a creative tension between streams of our heritage. Part of this mix includes progressive activism with less emphasis on traditional Christian doctrine. Another part of our heritage is small “c” catholic theology, in which the validity of The United Church of Canada rests in the broad historical and ecumenical traditions of the Christian Church. There is also a tradition of faith lived primarily through worship and prayer. Every variation and combination occurs among individuals and communities.

At its best the United Church has found creative ways to encourage activism, historical faith, and spirituality, each nourishing the others. At its worst, one has dominated or one has been de-emphasized to exclusion.

The premise of the Basis of Union is that the scriptures are the primary source of faith and doctrine. The Basis of Union was written and adopted in 1925 with the belief that it reflected and was—to use the language of another era—subordinate to the scriptures. This remit process does not alter this premise.

This remit process asks whether other statements of faith and creeds can be added to our understanding of faith, not as alternatives to scripture and doctrine but as more contemporary expressions of members of the United Church living as activists, people of faith, and one small branch of a larger faith community rooted in scripture.

Presbyteries and sessions (or equivalents) will be invited to vote separately on each of three expressions of faith that are widely separated by time, style, and content:

- Statement of Faith (1940)
- A New Creed (1968; rev. 1980, 1994)
- A Song of Faith (2006)

Please read these faith statements, and be prepared to discuss the following:

1. Does each expression reflect continuity with The United Church of Canada of previous generations, as expressed in the Basis of Union and ultimately in scripture?

2. Does each expression reflect the practice of The United Church of Canada as you experience it today?
3. Does each expression reflect the faith of your worshipping community?

Further Questions That May Guide Your Conversation

Each of these statements of faith has its own particular character, use, and place in the church's life. Each speaks to its time and context in its own way. How can we cherish, honour, and actively engage one another through more than one statement of faith?

Review each statement (1940 Statement of Faith, A New Creed, and A Song of Faith) and the documents about it, and consider these questions:

- Is it a cherished, honoured, or living statement of our faith?
- What theological principles or expressions of faith does it offer?
 - Are they authentic expressions of the faith held by others in The United Church of Canada?
 - How does the statement of faith reflect the way we talk about faith, think about faith, and live our faith?
- Does this statement describe a common United Church understanding of God, God's purposes, and God's mission?
 - Is it helpful to you on your own faith journey?
 - Does it reflect the dynamic of faith in your congregation?
 - Does it seem to encompass the faith of other United Church congregations?
- Does this statement contribute to our understanding of differences in The United Church of Canada?
- Does this statement have a role in reflecting the continuity of faith in our denomination?

The Subject of the Remit

Should this statement be included in the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union?

4. The Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union

Introduction to the Doctrine Section

The formal discussions among Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists about “Church Union” began in 1904 and concluded in 1908. One of the five sub-committees into which the Joint Committee on Church Union divided itself had the task of writing the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union.

The members of the sub-committee, in writing the Doctrine section, kept a number of principles in mind:

- First, they decided to set out “the substance of the Christian faith, as commonly held among us.”² In other words, they did not try to describe all aspects of church doctrine but only to outline what they judged to be the key points of the Christian tradition.
- Second, they asserted that they saw scripture as “the primary source and ultimate standard of Christian faith and life,”³ meaning they also recognized that any “faith statement” or “statement of doctrine” was always a “subordinate standard” (i.e., subordinate to scripture).
- Third, the members of the sub-committee did not see themselves as creating something new when writing the Doctrine section but, rather, as standing in a tradition that stretched back to the beginning of the Christian Church and, indeed, beyond it to the people of Israel. That tradition included the great creeds of the Christian Church during the early centuries of its existence, as well as the doctrinal and creedal statements made during and since the Protestant Reformation by the various denominations that were coming together. They understood the Doctrine section as a contemporary effort to state “our common faith” in the context of the age (the early 20th century) and the particular purpose of bringing these denominations together in a United Church.
- Fourth, as Thomas Kilpatrick (a member of the Doctrine Sub-Committee) asserted in a book on the Basis of Union, sub-committee members believed that while the Christian tradition contained eternal truths, the particular words used to express those truths were time-bound. He wrote:

Let it further be noted that this doctrinal statement makes no claim to infallibility or finality. The substance or essence of the Christian faith is here, communicated to believing men by the Word and Spirit of God, and received by them in loyalty and humility. But the form of human speech in which they convey their message to the church and the world has the imperfection, which must belong to all efforts to express in forms of human thought, and language, meanings that are eternal, and divine. Creed revision is the inherent right, and the continual duty, of a living Church. This is our “Confession of Faith.” We are conscious of limitations and inadequacies in the intellectual form of our statement. It will be the duty of those who come after us to find a more fitting intellectual expression for the unchanging and inexhaustible truth of the Gospel.⁴

2. “The Basis of Union, 2.0,” *The Manual*, 2007, 34th rev. ed. (Toronto: United Church Publishing House), p. 14.

3. Ibid.

4. Thomas B. Kilpatrick, *Our Common Faith* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1928), pp. 63–64.

In composing the Doctrine section, the sub-committee looked in particular at two then-contemporary Presbyterian statements of faith, one from the Presbyterian Church of England and the other from the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. They also, however, drew one article largely from a Canadian Congregational document and gave attention to historic Methodist concerns at various places in the Doctrine Statement.

The Doctrine Sub-Committee accomplished its task with relative ease, especially in comparison with subsequent efforts at church union in other parts of the world. Those involved in the process between 1904 and 1908 attributed that relative ease to the fact that theological developments during the latter half of the 19th century had brought the three denominational traditions much closer together, in terms of what members of each denomination believed, than had been the case at an earlier time in history.

The Doctrine Sub-Committee was also influenced, as was the whole movement toward Church Union in these three denominations, by the conviction that Canada, in the midst of dramatic population and industrial growth in the early 20th century, needed a strong national Protestant church to help the nation meet the challenges of the early 20th century. While theology or church doctrine was regarded as important, the movement toward Church Union was motivated primarily by the practical gains that could result from a union of these three denominations.

The result of their work was a preamble that set the Doctrine section in the context of the centrality of Jesus Christ for the Christian tradition, the primacy of scripture, and the tradition of the Christian Church as found in earlier statements of doctrine. Following this preamble, the sub-committee set out 20 Articles that, in its judgment, outlined key aspects of the Christian tradition and also represented “the common faith” of the uniting churches in the early 20th century.

Note: The Doctrine section of the Basis of Union is not the subject of this remit. It is offered here as background material only.

Text of the Doctrine Section

Doctrine

2.0 We, the representatives of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational branches of the Church of Christ in Canada, do hereby set forth the substance of the Christian faith, as commonly held among us. In doing so, we build upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. We affirm our belief in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the primary source and ultimate standard of Christian faith and life. We acknowledge the teaching of the great creeds of the ancient Church. We further maintain our allegiance to the evangelical doctrines of the Reformation, as set forth in common in the doctrinal standards adopted by The Presbyterian Church in Canada, by The Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec, and

by The Methodist Church. We present the accompanying statement as a brief summary of our common faith and commend it to the studious attention of the members and adherents of the negotiating Churches, as in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

- 2.1 **Article I. *Of God.*** We believe in the one only living and true God, a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being and perfections; the Lord Almighty, who is love, most just in all His ways, most glorious in holiness, unsearchable in wisdom, plenteous in mercy, full of compassion, and abundant in goodness and truth. We worship Him in the unity of the Godhead and the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons of the same substance, equal in power and glory.
- 2.2 **Article II. *Of Revelation.*** We believe that God has revealed Himself in nature, in history, and in the heart of man; that He has been graciously pleased to make clearer revelation of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and that in the fullness of time He has perfectly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. We receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and life, a faithful record of God's gracious revelations, and as the sure witness of Christ.
- 2.3 **Article III. *Of the Divine Purpose.*** We believe that the eternal, wise, holy, and loving purpose of God so embraces all events that, while the freedom of man is not taken away, nor is God the author of sin, yet in His providence He makes all things work together in the fulfilment of His sovereign design and the manifestation of His glory.
- 2.4 **Article IV. *Of Creation and Providence.*** We believe that God is the creator, upholder, and governor of all things; that He is above all His works and in them all; and that He made man in His own image, meet for fellowship with Him, free and able to choose between good and evil, and responsible to his Maker and Lord.
- 2.5 **Article V. *Of the Sin of Man.*** We believe that our first parents, being tempted, chose evil, and so fell away from God and came under the power of sin, the penalty of which is eternal death; and that, by reason of this disobedience, all men are born with a sinful nature, that we have broken God's law, and that no man can be saved but by His grace.
- 2.6 **Article VI. *Of the Grace of God.*** We believe that God, out of His great love for the world, has given His only begotten Son to be the Saviour of sinners, and in the Gospel freely offers His all-sufficient salvation to all men. We believe also that God, in His own good pleasure, gave to his son a people, an innumerable multitude, chosen in Christ unto holiness, service, and salvation.
- 2.7 **Article VII. *Of the Lord Jesus Christ.*** We believe in and confess the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, who, being the Eternal Son of God, for us men

and for our salvation became truly man, being conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, yet without sin. Unto us He has revealed the Father, by His word and Spirit, making known the perfect will of God. For our redemption, He fulfilled all righteousness, offered Himself a perfect sacrifice on the Cross, satisfied Divine justice, and made propitiation for the sins of the whole world. He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, where He ever intercedes for us. In the hearts of believers He abides forever as the indwelling Christ; above us and over us all He rules; wherefore, unto Him we render love, obedience, and adoration as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

- 2.8 Article VIII. *Of the Holy Spirit.*** We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who moves upon the hearts of men to restrain them from evil and to incite them unto good, and whom the Father is ever willing to give unto all who ask Him. We believe that He has spoken by holy men of God in making known His truth to men for their salvation; that, through our exalted Saviour, He was sent forth in power to convict the world of sin, to enlighten men's minds in the knowledge of Christ, and to persuade and enable them to obey the call of the Gospel; and that He abides with the Church, dwelling in every believer as the spirit of truth, of power, of holiness, of comfort, and of love.
- 2.9 Article IX. *Of Regeneration.*** We believe in the necessity of regeneration, whereby we are made new creatures in Christ Jesus by the Spirit of God, who imparts spiritual life by the gracious and mysterious operation of His power, using as the ordinary means the truths of His word and the ordinances of divine appointment in ways agreeable to the nature of man.
- 2.10 Article X. *Of Faith and Repentance.*** We believe that faith in Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive Him, trust in Him, and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered to us in the Gospel, and that this saving faith is always accompanied by repentance, wherein we confess and forsake our sins with full purpose of and endeavour after a new obedience to God.
- 2.11 Article XI. *Of Justification and Sonship.*** We believe that God, on the sole ground of the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ, pardons those who by faith receive Him as their Saviour and Lord, accepts them as righteous, and bestows upon them the adoption of sons, with a right to all privileges therein implied, including a conscious assurance of their sonship.
- 2.12 Article XII. *Of Sanctification.*** We believe that those who are regenerated and justified grow in the likeness of Christ through fellowship with Him, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and obedience to the truth; that a holy life is the fruit and evidence of saving faith; and that the believer's hope of continuance in such a life is in the preserving grace of God. And we believe that in this growth in grace Christians may attain that maturity and full assurance of faith whereby the love of God is made perfect in us.

- 2.13 Article XIII. *Of Prayer.*** We believe that we are encouraged to draw near to God, our Heavenly Father, in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and on our own behalf and that of others to pour out our hearts humbly yet freely before Him, as becomes His beloved children, giving Him the honour and praise due His holy name, asking Him to glorify Himself on earth as in Heaven, confessing unto Him our sins, and seeking of Him every gift needful for this life and for our everlasting salvation. We believe also that, inasmuch as all true prayer is prompted by His Spirit, He will in response thereto grant us every blessing according to His unsearchable wisdom and the riches of His grace in Jesus Christ.
- 2.14 Article XIV. *Of the Law of God.*** We believe that the moral law of God, summarized in the Ten Commandments, testified to by the prophets, and unfolded in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, stands for ever in truth and equity, and is not made void by faith, but on the contrary is established thereby. We believe that God requires of every man to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God; and that only through this harmony with the will of God shall be fulfilled that brotherhood of man wherein the Kingdom of God is to be made manifest.
- 2.15 Article XV. *Of the Church.*** We acknowledge one Holy Catholic Church, the innumerable company of saints of every age and nation, who being united by the Holy Spirit to Christ their Head are one body in Him and have communion with their Lord and with one another. Further, we receive it as the will of Christ that His Church on earth should exist as a visible and sacred brotherhood, consisting of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, together with their children and other baptized children, and organized for the confession of His name, for the public worship of God, for the administration of the sacraments, for the upbuilding of the saints, and for the universal propagation of the Gospel; and we acknowledge as a part, more or less pure, of this universal brotherhood, every particular church throughout the world which professes this faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him as divine Lord and Saviour.
- 2.16 Article XVI. *Of the Sacraments.*** We acknowledge two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which were instituted by Christ, to be of perpetual obligation as signs and seals of the covenant ratified in His precious blood, as a means of grace, by which, working in us, He doth not only quicken but also strengthen and comfort our faith in Him, and as ordinances through the observance of which His Church is to confess her Lord and be visibly distinguished from the rest of the world.
- 2.16.1** Baptism with water into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is the sacrament by which are signified and sealed our union to Christ and participation in the blessings of the new covenant. The proper subjects of baptism are believers and infants presented by their parents or guardians in the Christian faith. In the latter case the parents or guardians should train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and should expect that their children will, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, receive the benefits which the sacrament is designed and fitted to convey. The Church is under the most solemn obligation to provide for their Christian instruction.

- 2.16.2** The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of communion with Christ and with His people, in which bread and wine are given and received in thankful remembrance of Him and His sacrifice on the Cross; and they who in faith receive the same do, after a spiritual manner, partake of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to their comfort, nourishment, and growth in grace. All may be admitted to the Lord's Supper who make a credible profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus and of obedience to His law.
- 2.17** **Article XVII. *Of the Ministry.*** We believe that Jesus Christ, as the Supreme Head of the Church, has appointed therein an ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care and a diaconal ministry of Education, Service, and Pastoral Care, and calls men and women to these ministries; and that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognizes and chooses those whom He calls, and should thereupon duly ordain or commission them to the work of the ministry.
- 2.18** **Article XVIII. *Of Church Order and Fellowship.*** We believe that the Supreme and only Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ; that its worship, teaching, discipline, and government should be administered according to His will by persons chosen for their fitness and duly set apart to their office; and that although the visible Church may contain unworthy members and is liable to err, yet believers ought not lightly to separate themselves from its communion, but are to live in fellowship with their brethren, which fellowship is to be extended, as God gives opportunity, to all who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.
- 2.19** **Article XIX. *Of the Resurrection, the Last Judgement, and the Future Life.*** We believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust, through the power of the Son of God, who shall come to judge the living and the dead; that the finally impenitent shall go away into eternal punishment and the righteous into life eternal.
- 2.20** **Article XX. *Of Christian Service and the Final Triumph.*** We believe that it is our duty, as disciples and servants of Christ, to further the extension of His Kingdom, to do good unto all men, to maintain the public and private worship of God, to hallow the Lord's Day, to preserve the inviolability of marriage and the sanctity of the family, to uphold the just authority of the State, and so to live in all honesty, purity, and charity, that our lives shall testify of Christ. We joyfully receive the word of Christ, bidding His people go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, declaring unto them that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and that He will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We confidently believe that by His power and grace all His enemies shall finally be overcome, and the kingdoms of this world be made the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

5. Introductions to Statements under Consideration in This Remit

Introduction to the 1940 Statement of Faith

The 7th General Council, meeting in 1936 in Ottawa, received a resolution (called a “memorial” at that time) from London Conference regarding a new statement of faith and referred it to the Commission on Evangelism and Social Service. In its subsequent report to the Council, the commission declared that “the time is opportune for the preparation of a Statement of Faith that shall embody in concise and intelligible form what we in The United Church conceive to be the substance of Christian belief.” This action led to the creation of a Commission on the Statement of Faith and the approval of that statement by the 9th General Council in 1940.

But why did the United Church want a new statement of faith only 11 years after it had been formed? Why did London Conference think, and the Commission on Evangelism and Social Service agree, that “the time [was] opportune” for a new statement of faith so soon after it had approved the Doctrine section of its Basis of Union? Unfortunately, the *Records of Proceedings* of the 7th to 9th General Councils offer no direct answers to these questions.

The resolution adopted by the 7th General Council does, however, contain one hint in its call for a statement of faith “in concise and intelligible form.” These words suggest that some in the United Church regarded the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union as neither concise nor intelligible. The records of the Commission on the Statement of Faith confirm this suggestion. The minutes of a joint session of the commission’s central and eastern regional committees, held in Montreal on November 20, 1939, report that D.L. Ritchie, dean of United Theological College,

presented the view that the Basis of Union was incorporated in the Act of Parliament under which union was established and that it would not be wise at this time to consider any major departure from the basis. While he realized that there were fine items of doctrinal statement in the Basis of Union he doubted if it were sufficiently well woven together. In his opinion, the Basis of Union was more confusing than helpful, and therefore a briefer statement for the average member was required.

The minutes report no disagreement with this view by other members of the commission.

It is also important to note that although formally adopted in 1925, the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union had in fact been substantially written by 1908. By 1936, then, it was almost 30 years old. While 30 years is not very old for a statement of faith, far-reaching social, political, and economic turmoil marked the years between 1908 and 1936, provoking far-reaching cultural changes in a relatively short period of time. World War I, the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism all contributed to major shifts in European and North American culture. The events of this period, and what they revealed about the extent of human greed and violence and the limits on “progress” by human efforts, led many Christians to reassess their beliefs about, for example, how God is revealed and the depth of human sinfulness. And by the middle of the 1930s, many in the United Church had begun this kind of theological reassessment.

Another factor in the 1936 decision to develop a new statement of faith was how the first generation of United Church members saw the status and function of the Basis of Union. The United Church of Canada Act preserves “the independent and exclusive right and power of the United Church to legislate in all matters concerning its doctrine, worship, discipline and government, including therein the right and power from time to time to frame, adopt, alter, change, add to or modify its laws, subordinate standards and formulas,” thereby indicating that the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union was regarded as neither fixed nor final (a point made by Thomas Kilpatrick, as noted on page 9). Richard Roberts, who was the United Church’s ninth Moderator (1934–36) and a member of the Commission on the Statement of Faith, similarly expressed this view of the role and limits of statements of faith. In an unpublished essay written about 1930, he said:

We have reached a point at which we seem to have covered the whole gamut of the special emphases that called the various communions of Protestantism into being; and the hour is come at which we should gather them all, so far as we may, into a single testimony. We are the heirs of the *whole* Christian tradition; and it is for us to gather up the broken lights, the scattered experiences, the partial emphases which make the Christian thought of our time a sort of crazy and bewildering patchwork into a living unity. It is an enormous task; but the world is young. But we shall probably have to build and to discard many a system of theology before that day comes; and if we can only get this fixed in our minds, the world will be saved a good deal of trouble. The harm of a system begins just at the point when we come to consider it final. . . . But a system is never the end of the road. It is rather a wayside inn, a bivouac.⁵

With this conviction about statements of faith being essential but never final, and in light of the devastating events of the period from the start of World War I to the start of World War II, the 9th General Council approved the new statement of faith in 1940.

Introduction to A New Creed

The process that led to the development of A New Creed began in 1965, when the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual proposed a new order of service for baptism and asked the Committee on Christian Faith to review and comment on it. In the conversation that followed, the place of the Apostles’ Creed was questioned, and the need for a brief, modern profession of faith to be used as an alternative was suggested. The Sub-Executive of the General Council granted permission to the Committee on Christian Faith to draft such a profession of faith. Before the committee could begin this work, however, Guelph Presbytery asked the Sub-Executive to refer to the committee a similar task, namely, to write “a modern creed in modern language.” This request from Guelph Presbytery likely reflected not only the wish by many in the United Church for an alternative to the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds for use in worship but also the broader ferment in ecumenical liturgical renewal in the 1960s. As a result, the Sub-Executive expanded the committee’s mandate:

5. “Wheels and Systems: A Plea for Another Theology,” p. 11.

1. To examine the status and authority of the classical creeds in The United Church of Canada today.
2. To collect and examine representative modern statements of faith.
3. To attempt to formulate a modern credal statement suitable for use in the liturgy, with special reference to the new order for the administration of the sacrament of baptism.⁶

Creeds tend to be brief expressions of faith to be recited in worship or baptism, often from memory, while statements of faith tend to be longer, more detailed expressions to be used for educating members and others inside the community and for communicating the community's beliefs to those outside the community. In many respects, however, creeds and statements of faith are similar: both are ways of using words to express the beliefs of a religious community, and both can powerfully shape the faith identity of individuals and communities.

The committee presented its final report to the 23rd General Council in 1968. It recommended that the following creed be included as a contemporary expression of Christian faith in the new worship books that were soon to be published by the United Church. This new creed would accompany the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and others.

Man is not alone; he lives in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,
who has come in the true Man, Jesus, to reconcile and renew,
who works within us and among us by his Spirit.

We trust him.

He calls us to be his Church:

to celebrate his presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil.

We proclaim his Kingdom.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, he is with us.

We are not alone; we believe in God.

The General Council decided "that the new Creed be referred to the Committee on Christian Faith with the request that it be re-drafted in a manner that will give more adequate expression of the Christian Gospel for our time, and that the Committee report to the Executive of General Council which shall have power to issue." It is worth noting that it was not the intention of the General Council to give this statement of faith the name "A New Creed." The adjective "new" quickly became associated with it. It is also known within the church and ecumenically as the United Church Creed.

6. *Record of Proceedings of the 23rd General Council 1968*, p. 311.

The committee redrafted the new creed, and the General Council Executive approved it. This edition was published in *Service Book for the Use of Ministers Conducting Public Worship* and *Service Book for the Use of the People* (both published in 1969). Ten years later it was suggested that the creed be rewritten to use inclusive language. As a result, the following version of A New Creed was approved in 1980:

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the church:

to celebrate God's presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Before it took the form we know today, A New Creed was changed one more time. In 1994, Toronto Conference petitioned the 35th General Council to "amend the United Church creed to explicitly acknowledge our responsibility for the integrity of creation and our place in it." The General Council approved this motion, the task was referred to the Committee on Theology and Faith, and Moderator Stan McKay asked former Moderator Walter Farquharson to suggest some phrases to the committee for its consideration.

In October 1994, the committee recommended to the Executive of the General Council that the phrase "to care for creation" be added immediately after the phrase "to celebrate God's presence." The Executive concluded that the phrase did not adequately convey humanity's interrelationship with creation and asked the committee to do more work on this possible addition. At the next General Council Executive meeting in March 1995, the committee recommended that the phrase "to live with respect in creation" be used. This time the Executive agreed, and in the motion approving the change noted that "the inclusion of the phrase 'to live with respect in creation,' continues our attempt to live out the apology to First Nations peoples, it calls us to care for a creation of which we are a part and the phrase acknowledges respect for self as integral to respect for creation."⁷

7. Minutes of the Executive of the General Council, March 1995, p. 72.

Introduction to A Song of Faith

A Song of Faith is intended to provide a verbal picture of what The United Church of Canada understands its faith to be at the beginning of the 21st century. It is a means of reflection and an invitation for the church to live out its convictions in the current theological, social, political, and historical context.

The genesis of this 2006 statement of faith was threefold. First, the writers of the Doctrine section of the Basis of Union indicated when they wrote it in 1908 that it was a piece for the time, and that with their blessing, following generations should craft statements that were true to the particulars of their own time. Second, questions had arisen about the relevance of the Doctrine section and the 1940 Statement, and concern about how those statements of faith could be both affirmed and credited for their foundation of contemporary formulations of faith. Third, over the years the United Church had made statements about sexuality, scripture, and interfaith relations, among many things, but had not addressed or summarized them in one place.

Maintaining an orthodox understanding of the Trinity, the humanity and divinity of Jesus, and the call to reach out to one another, the poetic structure of A Song serves to include many theological perspectives. Although the faith of the church is grounded in truths that are timeless, A Song acknowledges that not all people of faith see truth in the same fashion. Many hold living with difference as a defining mark of the United Church. Relationship, conversation, understanding, and growth are held to be significant outcomes of a church that embraces diversity. The United Church has a long tradition of spiritual freedom, and this statement of faith, like its predecessors, was not seen in any way as a condition of membership within The United Church of Canada. While not *prescriptive*, which is to say it does not tell church members what they must believe, A Song does attempt to articulate in an orderly and evocative way what the church believes, based on its actions, its discourse, and its relationship to the Christian tradition in general and its own history in particular.

A Song was written with an understanding that each generation has fresh perspectives, challenges, and mission. This statement is clearly a testimonial from a particular time and place. It is intended to be timely and contextual, part of the whole of who we are. It is not a statement for all time, but for this time.

A Song of Faith took six years to compose. Consultations were held across the United Church. Groups and individuals were asked for input on a study document called *Faith Talk I*; later they were asked to assess a draft statement of faith in *Faith Talk II*. Presentations were made in congregations, presbyteries, Conferences, and our colleges. Proud to be an action-oriented church, members were asked to consider the expression of words that sum up our life of faith. The 16 writers of the statement represented a broad range of United Church membership, as is our current practice. They read historical and contemporary creeds. Sister denominations, Canadian and abroad, and interfaith neighbours commented on the statement to determine whether it reflected the contemporary United Church they knew.

The name of the statement came late in the writing. United Church people often tend to *harmonize* their points of view rather than sing in unison. To many, statements seem directive rather than

expansive or open-minded; poetry, on the other hand, can be evocative and can deepen faith. For these reasons, the writers decided to use the metaphor of song, and named the new statement *A Song of Faith*.

Set, then, in a poetic manner, *A Song* has found its way into liturgy. It appears in communion, baptism, funeral, and Sunday services. It was never intended to replace the United Church Creed, which remains our common liturgical expression of faith.

A statement of faith in the Reformed tradition is not necessarily identical to the particular faith expressions of individual members. Giving voice to the diverse understanding of our denomination, it means different things to different people. This is the genius of our time: holding faith together despite and even because of our differences. Such is the character of our church as we have nurtured it. Such is the evocative, rather than definitive, nature of *A Song of Faith*.

6. Statements of Faith under Consideration in This Remit

1940 Statement of Faith

Preamble

It is the purpose of this Statement to set out briefly and simply the substance of the Church's faith.

No attempt is made to answer all the questions which devout men may reasonably ask in regard to God and man and salvation. But we believe that we have included what is essential to the life of the Church. If our purpose were apologetic we should have to use more of the language of modern science and philosophy. Because our purpose is affirmative we have as far as possible adopted rather the language of Scripture, a language which matches the supreme facts it tells of, God's acts of judgment and of mercy.

The Church's faith is the unchanging Gospel of God's holy, redeeming love revealed in Jesus Christ. It is declared in Scripture; it is witnessed to both in the creeds of the Universal Church and in the Confessions of the Reformed Churches; and it is formulated for a specific purpose in our Basis of Union. But Christians of each new generation are called to state it afresh in terms of the thought of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs. This we have attempted to do for the people of The United Church of Canada—seeking always to be faithful to Scripture and to the testimony of the Universal Church, and always aware that no statement of ours can express the whole truth of God.

I. God

We believe in God, the eternal personal Spirit, Creator and Upholder of all things.

We believe that God, as sovereign Lord exalted above the world, orders and overrules all things in it to the accomplishment of His holy, wise, and good purposes.

We believe that God made man to love and serve Him; that He cares for him as a righteous and compassionate Father; and that nothing can either quench His love or finally defeat His gracious purpose for man.

So we acknowledge God as Creator, Upholder, and Sovereign Lord of all things, and the righteous and loving Father of men.

II. Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, Who, for us men and our salvation became man and dwelt among us.

We believe that He lived a perfect human life, wholly devoted to the will of God and the service of man.

We believe that in Him God comes face to face with men, so that they learn that God loves them, seeks their good, bears their sorrows and their sin, and claims their exclusive faith and perfect obedience.

We believe that in Jesus Christ God acted to save man, taking, at measureless cost, man's sin upon Himself; that the Cross reveals at once God's abhorrence of sin and His saving love in its height and depth and power; and that the Cross is for all time the effectual means of reconciling the world unto God.

We believe that Jesus was raised victorious over death and declared to be the Son of God with power; and that He is alive for evermore, our Saviour and our Lord.

So we acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God Incarnate, the Saviour of the world.

III. The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit by whom God is ever at work in the minds and hearts of men, inspiring every right desire and every effort after truth and beauty.

We believe that the Spirit of God moves men to acknowledge their sins and accept the divine forgiveness and grace.

We believe that the Spirit was present with power at the beginning of the Church, enabling the disciples to bear witness to what they had seen and heard, filling them with love of the brethren, and hope of the coming Kingdom, and sustaining them in the sense of Christ's continuing presence in their midst.

We believe that by the same Spirit the Church is continually guided and empowered, and her members fortified against temptation, fear and doubt, and built up in faith and holiness unto salvation.

So we acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of life, through whom the creative, redeeming love of God is ever at work among men.

IV. The Holy Trinity

Knowing God thus, as Creator and Father, as Redeemer in Christ, and as Holy Spirit working in us, we confess our faith in the Holy Trinity.

So we acknowledge and worship one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

V. Man and Man's Sin

We believe that God gave to man, as He did not to the lower creatures, capacity to share His thought and purpose, and freedom to choose whether he would or would not love and serve Him.

We believe that man has used his freedom of choice for low and selfish ends, thus estranging himself from God and his brother-man, and bringing upon himself the judgment and wrath of

God, so that he lives in a world of confusion and distress, and is unable of himself to fulfil God's high purpose for him.

So we acknowledge man's sin, God's righteous judgment, and man's helplessness and need.

VI. Redemption

We believe that in the greatness of His love for man God has in Christ opened up a way of deliverance from the guilt and power of sin.

We believe that Christ, by living our life without sin, by dying at the hands of sinful men with faith unshaken and unflinching love, has done for man what man could not do for himself. On the Cross He bore the burden of sin, and He broke its power; and what He did there moves men to repentance, conveys forgiveness, undoes the estrangement, and binds them to Himself in a new loyalty.

We believe that by His resurrection and exaltation Christ stands victorious over death and all evil, and that He fills those who commit themselves to Him with such grace and strength that in Him they too are conquerors. His redemption of man is at once an awful mystery and a glorious fact; it is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes.

So we acknowledge the unmerited love and the mercy of our God in giving His only-begotten Son that we might not perish, but have everlasting life.

VII. The Church

We believe that the Church, the society of the redeemed, was brought into existence by God Himself through the work and risen power of Christ, Who in calling men into fellowship with Himself calls them by the same act into fellowship with one another in Him.

We believe that the Church is the organ of Christ's mind and redemptive will, the body of which He is the Head. Under Him the Church is called to the proclamation of the everlasting Gospel with its offer of salvation, to the worship of God, Creator and Redeemer, to the loving service of mankind, and to the care and nurture of the flock.

We believe that all members of the Church are one in Him, and that the life of the Church in every age is continuous with that of the first apostolic company. The groups commonly known as "churches" are called to share in the life of the whole Church, of all ages and of all lands, entering freely into the full heritage of thought, worship, and discipline, and living together in mutual confidence.

We believe that for the fulfilment of her mission in the world God has given to the Church the Ministry, the Scriptures, and the Sacraments.

So we acknowledge one holy, catholic, apostolic Church, the Body of Christ, the household and family of God.

VIII. The Ministry

We believe that God has appointed a Ministry in His Church for the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the pastoral care of the people.

We believe that the Church has authority to ordain to the Ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands those whom she finds, after due trial, to be called of God thereto.

We believe that, for the due ordering of her life as a society, God has appointed a government in His Church, to be exercised, under Christ the Head, by Ministers and representatives of the people.

So we acknowledge the Holy Ministry appointed by God for the spread of the Gospel and the edification of His Church.

IX. The Holy Scriptures

We believe that the great moments of God's revelation and communication of Himself to men are recorded and interpreted in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

We believe that, while God uttered His Word to man in many portions progressively, the whole is sufficient to declare His mind and will for our salvation. To Israel He made Himself known as a holy and righteous God and a Saviour; the fullness of truth and grace came by Jesus Christ. The writings were collected and preserved by the Church.

We believe that the theme of all Holy Scripture is the redemptive purpose and working of God, and that herein lies its unity.

We believe that in Holy Scripture God claims the complete allegiance of our mind and heart; that the full persuasion of the truth and authority of the Word of God contained in the Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts; that, using Holy Scripture, the Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

So we acknowledge in Holy Scripture the true witness to God's Word and the sure guide to Christian faith and conduct.

X. The Sacraments

We believe that the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are effectual means through which, by common things and simple acts, the saving love of God is exhibited and communicated to His people, who receive them in faith.

We believe that in Baptism men are made members of the Christian society. Washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit signifies God's cleansing from sin and an initial participation in the gifts and graces of the new life. The children of believing parents are baptized and nurtured in the family of God so that they may in due time take upon themselves the yoke of Christ.

We believe that the Lord's Supper perpetuates the fellowship between Christ and His disciples sealed in the upper room, that at His table He is always present, and His people are nourished, confirmed, and renewed. The giving and receiving of bread and wine accompanied by His own words signifies the gracious self-giving of Christ as suffering and living Lord in such wise that His faithful people live in Him and He in them.

So we acknowledge Baptism as God's appointed means of grace at initiation into the Christian fellowship; and the Lord's Supper as His appointed means of maintaining the fellowship in health and strength, and as the act of worship in which the whole soul of man goes out to God and God's grace comes freely to man.

XI. Christian Life and Duty

We believe that the Christian life is the life lived in fellowship with Christ and His Church. It begins with repentance and faith. In repentance men turn from sin to serve the holy and forgiving God with new and glad obedience. In faith they entrust themselves to Christ and rest upon Him alone for salvation.

We believe that by the teaching and example of Jesus the Holy Spirit shows men the way and the end of the Christian life, what it means to love God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves.

We believe that Christian men are called to abide within the fellowship of the Church, to maintain its peace and unity, and to give diligent heed to prayer, to the reading of Scripture, to common worship and the sacraments.

We believe that they are likewise called to live as those who are of the Kingdom of God, and to seek His righteousness both in individual and social life, serving their fellowmen in love for Christ's sake, and striving and waiting in prayer for an ordered common life where the will of God for the well-being and peace of men shall be done over all the earth.

We believe that in denying themselves and in following Christ men are enabled by the Spirit of God more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness; that they are, under the hand of a faithful Father, in labour, love, and duty, in suffering, sorrow and defeat, renewed in the inner man after the image of the crucified and victorious Christ; and that they receive in this life a foretaste of the final redemption, assurance of the divine favour, peace and joy, and the confidence that He is able to keep them to the end.

So we acknowledge the Christian life as the life lived within the family of God, with the graces and privileges, the duties and discipline, through which the Christian man grows up in all things into Christ.

XII. The Consummation

We believe that the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, following on His crucifixion, gives assurance that the long struggle between sin and grace will have an end, the Kingdom be revealed in its fullness, and God's eternal purpose accomplished.

We believe that God will judge all men by Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.

We believe that, while salvation is offered to all, God does not take away or override the freedom with which He has endowed men. If they stubbornly refuse His mercy and prefer sinful ways they shut themselves out from the light and joy of salvation and fall under the righteous judgment of God.

We believe that those who accept the offer of salvation and persevere in the Christian way do after death enter into the joy of their Lord, a blessedness beyond our power to conceive. They see God face to face, and in the communion of saints are partakers with the Church on earth of its labours and prayers.

So we acknowledge the righteous and merciful judgment of God, and we wait for the coming of the Kingdom which shall have no end.

“We know Whom we have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him.”

“To the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.”

A New Creed (A United Church Creed)

We are not alone,
we live in God's world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

A Song of Faith

God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.

Yet,
in love,
the one eternal God seeks relationship.

So God creates the universe
and with it the possibility of being and relating.
God tends the universe,
mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.
God enlivens the universe,
guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.

Grateful for God's loving action,
We cannot keep from singing.

With the Church through the ages,
we speak of God as one and triune:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
We also speak of God as
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer
God, Christ, and Spirit
Mother, Friend, and Comforter
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,
and in other ways that speak faithfully of
the One on whom our hearts rely,
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe.

We witness to Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.

God is creative and self-giving,
generously moving
in all the near and distant corners of the universe.
Nothing exists that does not find its source in God.
Our first response to God's providence is gratitude.
We sing thanksgiving.

Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery,
of living things, diverse and interdependent,
of complex patterns of growth and evolution,
of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls,
we sing of God the Creator,
the Maker and Source of all that is.

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,
who is both in creation and beyond it.

All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.

All creation is good.

We sing of the Creator,
who made humans to live and move
and have their being in God.

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.

We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.

We can grow in wisdom and compassion.

We can recognize all people as kin.

We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

Made in the image of God,
we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God.

Yet we choose to turn away from God.

We surrender ourselves to sin,
a disposition revealed in selfishness, cowardice, or apathy.

Becoming bound and complacent
in a web of false desires and wrong choices,
we bring harm to ourselves and others.

This brokenness in human life and community
is an outcome of sin.

Sin is not only personal
but accumulates
to become habitual and systemic forms
of injustice, violence, and hatred.

We are all touched by this brokenness:
the rise of selfish individualism
that erodes human solidarity;
the concentration of wealth and power
without regard for the needs of all;
the toxins of religious and ethnic bigotry;
the degradation of the blessedness of human bodies
and human passions through sexual exploitation;
the delusion of unchecked progress and limitless growth
that threatens our home, the earth;
the covert despair that lulls many into numb complicity
with empires and systems of domination.

We sing lament and repentance.

Yet evil does not—cannot—
undermine or overcome the love of God.

God forgives,
and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings
with honesty and humility.

God reconciles,
and calls us to repent the part we have played
in damaging our world, ourselves, and each other.

God transforms,
and calls us to protect the vulnerable,
to pray for deliverance from evil,
to work with God for the healing of the world,
that all might have abundant life.

We sing of grace.

The fullness of life includes
moments of unexpected inspiration and courage lived out,
experiences of beauty, truth, and goodness,
blessings of seeds and harvest,
friendship and family, intellect and sexuality,
the reconciliation of persons through justice
and communities living in righteousness,
and the articulation of meaning.

And so we sing of God the Spirit,
who from the beginning has swept over the face of creation,
animating all energy and matter
and moving in the human heart.

We sing of God the Spirit,
faithful and untameable,
who is creatively and redemptively active in the world.

The Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy
not only in what is familiar,
but also in that which seems foreign.

We sing of the Spirit,
who speaks our prayers of deepest longing
and enfolds our concerns and confessions,
transforming us and the world.

We offer worship
as an outpouring of gratitude and awe
and a practice of opening ourselves
to God's still, small voice of comfort,
to God's rushing whirlwind of challenge.
Through word, music, art, and sacrament,
in community and in solitude,
God changes our lives, our relationships, and our world.
We sing with trust.

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word
passed on from generation to generation
to guide and inspire,
that we might wrestle a holy revelation for our time and place
from the human experiences
and cultural assumptions of another era.
God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

The Spirit breathes revelatory power into scripture,
bestowing upon it a unique and normative place
in the life of the community.
The Spirit judges us critically when we abuse scripture
by interpreting it narrow-mindedly,
using it as a tool of oppression, exclusion, or hatred.

The wholeness of scripture testifies
to the oneness and faithfulness of God.
The multiplicity of scripture testifies to its depth:
two testaments, four gospels,
contrasting points of view held in tension—
all a faithful witness to the One and Triune God,
the Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.

We find God made known in Jesus of Nazareth,
and so we sing of God the Christ, the Holy One embodied.

We sing of Jesus,
a Jew,
born to a woman in poverty
in a time of social upheaval
and political oppression.
He knew human joy and sorrow.
So filled with the Holy Spirit was he
that in him people experienced the presence of God among them.
We sing praise to God incarnate.

Jesus announced the coming of God's reign—
a commonwealth not of domination
but of peace, justice, and reconciliation.
He healed the sick and fed the hungry.
He forgave sins and freed those held captive
by all manner of demonic powers.
He crossed barriers of race, class, culture, and gender.
He preached and practised unconditional love—
love of God, love of neighbour,
love of friend, love of enemy—
and he commanded his followers to love one another
as he had loved them.

Because his witness to love was threatening,
those exercising power sought to silence Jesus.
He suffered abandonment and betrayal,
state-sanctioned torture and execution.
He was crucified.

But death was not the last word.
God raised Jesus from death,
 turning sorrow into joy,
 despair into hope.
We sing of Jesus raised from the dead.
We sing hallelujah.

By becoming flesh in Jesus,
 God makes all things new.
In Jesus' life, teaching, and self-offering,
 God empowers us to live in love.
In Jesus' crucifixion,
 God bears the sin, grief, and suffering of the world.
In Jesus' resurrection,
 God overcomes death.
Nothing separates us from the love of God.

The Risen Christ lives today,
 present to us and the source of our hope.
In response to who Jesus was
 and to all he did and taught,
 to his life, death, and resurrection,
 and to his continuing presence with us through the Spirit,
we celebrate him as
 the Word made flesh,
 the one in whom God and humanity are perfectly joined,
 the transformation of our lives,
the Christ.

We sing of a church
 seeking to continue the story of Jesus
 by embodying Christ's presence in the world.
We are called together by Christ
 as a community of broken but hopeful believers,
 loving what he loved,
 living what he taught,
 striving to be faithful servants of God
 in our time and place.
Our ancestors in faith
 bequeath to us experiences of their faithful living;
 upon their lives our lives are built.
Our living of the gospel makes us a part of this communion of saints,
 experiencing the fulfillment of God's reign
 even as we actively anticipate a new heaven and a new earth.

The church has not always lived up to its vision.
It requires the Spirit to reorient it,
 helping it to live an emerging faith while honouring tradition,
 challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement,
for we are called to be a blessing to the earth.

We sing of God's good news lived out,
a church with purpose:
 faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
 gifts shared for the good of all,
 resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,
 fierce love in the face of violence,
 human dignity defended,
 members of a community held and inspired by God,
 corrected and comforted,
 instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
 creation's mending.
We sing of God's mission.

We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.
For the sake of the world,
 God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry.
In the church,
 some are called to specific ministries of leadership,
 both lay and ordered;
 some witness to the good news;
 some uphold the art of worship;
 some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering;
 some build up the community of wisdom;
 some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.
To embody God's love in the world,
 the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship
 of all believers.

In grateful response to God's abundant love,
we bear in mind our integral connection
to the earth and one another;
we participate in God's work of healing and mending creation.
To point to the presence of the holy in the world,
the church receives, consecrates, and shares
visible signs of the grace of God.
In company with the churches
of the Reformed and Methodist traditions,
we celebrate two sacraments as gifts of Christ:
baptism and holy communion.
In these sacraments the ordinary things of life
—water, bread, wine—
point beyond themselves to God and God's love,
teaching us to be alert
to the sacred in the midst of life.

Before conscious thought or action on our part,
we are born into the brokenness of this world.
Before conscious thought or action on our part,
we are surrounded by God's redeeming love.
Baptism by water in the name of the Holy Trinity
is the means by which we are received, at any age,
into the covenanted community of the church.
It is the ritual that signifies our rebirth in faith
and cleansing by the power of God.
Baptism signifies the nurturing, sustaining,
and transforming power of God's love
and our grateful response to that grace.

Carrying a vision of creation healed and restored,
we welcome all in the name of Christ.
Invited to the table where none shall go hungry,
we gather as Christ's guests and friends.
In holy communion
we are commissioned to feed as we have been fed,
forgive as we have been forgiven,
love as we have been loved.
The open table speaks of the shining promise
of barriers broken and creation healed.
In the communion meal, wine poured out and bread broken,
we remember Jesus.
We remember not only the promise but also the price that he paid
for who he was,
for what he did and said,
and for the world's brokenness.
We taste the mystery of God's great love for us,
and are renewed in faith and hope.

We place our hope in God.
We sing of a life beyond life
and a future good beyond imagining:
a new heaven and a new earth,
the end of sorrow, pain, and tears,
Christ's return and life with God,
the making new of all things.
We yearn for the coming of that future,
even while participating in eternal life now.

Divine creation does not cease
until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration
with the common ground of all being.
As children of the Timeless One,
our time-bound lives will find completion
in the all-embracing Creator.
In the meantime, we embrace the present,
embodying hope, loving our enemies,
caring for the earth,
choosing life.

Grateful for God's loving action,
we cannot keep from singing.
Creating and seeking relationship,
in awe and trust,
we witness to Holy Mystery who is Wholly Love.

Amen.

7. Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Reformed tradition?

The Reformed tradition is one of the strands of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. While the Presbyterian and Congregationalist roots of The United Church of Canada are more formally identified as Reformed, the Methodist tradition also espoused Reformed principles. A key descriptive characteristic of the Reformed tradition is found in the phrase “Once reformed, always reforming.”

2. What are some other Reformed churches?

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), of which the United Church is a member, is a fellowship of 75 million Reformed Christians in 214 denominations in 107 countries. Its member churches are Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, and United churches. They share common roots in the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox, and others. Other examples of Reformed churches are, in Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Christian Reformed Church, and in the United States, the United Church of Christ. In June 2010 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches will merge with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

3. What about our Methodist roots?

Historically, Methodism and Reformed beliefs have been distinguished most directly by the emphasis on free will versus predestination. The denominational lines between these traditions were crossed in the formation of The United Church of Canada, in part because by the later part of the 19th century such distinctions were losing their significance. All three founding churches acknowledged their “allegiance to the evangelical doctrines of the Reformation.”

4. Will there be one remit or three?

The writing team explored in depth the General Council resolution authorizing the remit. It was clear to the team that the content of the study resource would be affected by whether there would be one question to include all three statements in the Doctrine section or three questions dealing with each statement separately. The final decision on this will be made by the Executive of the General Council. The recommendation of the writing team to the General Secretary is that there be three questions to the remit. The team offered this position out of awareness that the remit is about recovering the Reformed tradition of subordinate standards, in which the doctrine of the church continues to be renewed. The team proposes that the three statements be treated separately, each on their own merit as to whether they have become “cherished, honoured, and living” expressions of faith. This, the writing team believes, is consistent with the recovery of the meaning of subordinate standard—that is, dealing with each statement as it would have been at the time of its original approval. The writing team believes this is also consistent with the spirit and intent of the General Council resolution. The General Secretary approved the writing team’s request to draft the text of this study resource on this understanding.

5. What is a category three remit?

When the General Council authorizes a remit, it also determines the category to which the remit will be assigned. There are three categories of remits in the United Church. Category assignment is based on the significance of the proposed change to the denomination. Category one remits involve wording or editorial changes. Category two remits concern changes that are significant but not denomination-shaping. Category three remits may be generally described as making substantive changes that affect who we are as a denomination. Category three remits include changes that affect the Articles of Faith, alter significantly the structures of the United Church, redefine our understanding of ministry, or alter our understanding of who is a member of the church. There is a different process to be followed for each category of remit. Category three remits require the longest period of study and information-sharing before voting takes place. Only category three remits may be sent to pastoral charges in addition to presbyteries.

6. Why do only sessions (or their equivalent) get to vote? Why not the whole congregation?

The Basis of Union functions as the United Church's constitution. It sets out the rights and responsibilities of the different governing bodies, or "courts," within the church. Under the Basis of Union, the session (or its equivalent) has been given oversight of the spiritual interests of the pastoral charge. The session votes on remits on behalf of the pastoral charge as part of its oversight of spiritual matters. This oversight responsibility was specifically given to the session (or its equivalent) in the Basis of Union and may not be delegated to the congregation or any other body. The session (or its equivalent) may wish to consult with the congregation about the remit. It may choose to hold a congregational meeting, and may even ask the congregation to vote so that the session (or its equivalent) learns the views of the congregation. Such a vote would only be for the information of the session (or its equivalent) because the session (or its equivalent) is not obliged to vote in accordance with the congregation's views. The session (or its equivalent) must still make the actual decision on the remit for the pastoral charge.

7. What happens if this remit fails?

A proposed change to the Basis of Union that fails to get a majority of votes of presbyteries or of pastoral charges can be resubmitted to presbyteries and pastoral charges if a subsequent General Council decides to authorize another remit on the same subject.

8. When do we vote?

The remit will be formally sent out to the church in January 2012, with a deadline for response by May 15 of that same year.

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