



“This I believe” Faith Statement

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To determine where you are, it is often helpful to determine where you have come from. In my case, my spiritual journey began growing up on a farm outside of a small town in western Texas. I was raised Southern Baptist. Like all good Baptists, I was saved and baptized at the age of 12 during a weeklong revival meeting with emotional hymns being sung and the preacher pleading for us "sinners" to come forward, repent, and get everlasting life. Other than that experience, I mostly attended church activities because that is where most of the girls in our community were. I was far more interested in girls than religion as a teenager.

I began having doubts about the Baptist Faith when every year just before the Jr/Sr Prom, we would have a sermon on the evils of dancing. I could never understand how dancing was sinful, but taking my date to the drive-in movie and then going parking afterward was the only other alternative. When I went away to college, I left many things behind, including my Baptist faith.

During my college years and the first decade after college, I was "un-churched" – although if you would have asked me what my religion was during college, I would have probably said Presbyterian because I thought that sounded much "cooler" than Baptist, Methodist, or Church of Christ which were the only churches in my small home town. After college and grad school, I moved to Houston, TX and got very involved in liberal political and social causes. That is where I met my first Unitarians – they seemed like "my kind of people" so even though I only attended a few times I listed Unitarian as my religion.

In 1983, I moved to Birmingham, AL because of a job change. I had some concerns about moving to the Deep South. One of my friends in Houston advised me to find the UU Church in Birmingham. If there were any liberals in town, she said I would

find them there. I visited the UU Church the first Sunday that I was in town and quickly joined. Not only did I find people who shared the same values that I had, but I also found a spiritual home where I felt comfortable.

Since then, I have moved to 6 different cities for career reasons and my retirement. With every move, the UU Congregations became my community and where I have found many close friends.

I have certainly come a long way from the 12 year old "born again" Christian that I was many years ago. Nowhere is that evolution greater than in my belief about what being a Christian means. I do **not** believe that "Jesus" is my savior and that by believing in him I will have ever lasting life. I **do** believe that the teachings attributed to Jesus contain very good ethical messages that can help us lead better lives if we follow his teachings of love and forgiveness. Based on this, you could call me an "Ethical Christian". I also believe the same is true of other prophets and leaders of other world religions such as Buddha, Mohammad, Confucius, and many others. I believe that we are all on a journey to find our own truths and there is great wisdom to be gained from any sources.

I do wish I could believe in life after death, but I can't find scientific evidence or logic to support that belief. I guess we will all find out the answer eventually.

The question of belief in God is more complex. I don't believe in a god that is responsible for everything that happens on earth; one that protects us, punishes us, and micromanages all aspects of life. Seeing all of the pain and suffering in this world, that kind of god would either be cruel or incompetent. I do believe in the power of nature, the laws of physics, and evolution of life. If you want to refer to all of this as "God" then I am fine with saying I believe in "God".

In thinking about what else I believe, I looked at our 7 UU principles. Of those, there are two in particular that stand out for me. The first is "The inherent worth and dignity of every person". I grew up in an era where blacks and Hispanics were discriminated against. I was fortunate to grow up in a family where that was not tolerated. I had the opportunity to grow up in a multicultural community where my first grade class was 50% Mexican American and was a member of the first

graduating class from my high school that contained an African American. I was raised by a mother that was a very bright and determined career woman at a time when that was unusual. I had the opportunity in the 1970's and 80's to be part of the movement for Gay rights and other minority rights. I came into the workplace and into a management role at a time when I could make a difference by giving women equal opportunities on my staff. Much of my career success was because of the women that I promoted and gave opportunities to. They did a great job and were responsible for much of my career advancement. For these reasons, fighting for the "worth and dignity of every person" is something I believe in very strongly.

The other UU principle that I feel strongly about is "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part". For the past 30 years I have been an environmental activist. I believe very strongly that we need to protect our planet and eco systems. I try to contribute to protecting the environment through working to elect good environmental candidates to public office and lobbying elected officials to pass laws to protect our environment. I believe that we have an obligation to future generations to leave them a world that is as good or better than the one we inherited. Since my retirement and move to Asheville in early 2008, I have had more time to both enjoy our beautiful mountains and work to protect them.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my beliefs with you today.