

# Ordination Paper

Theological Perspectives  
In "Conversation" with  
The UCC Statement of Faith rev. 1981

For review by  
The Committee on Ministry  
for the  
Central Association

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## Foreword

There is a yearning in the hearts of human beings to know God; to know that there is a God; to feel a connection to the creator of the Cosmos.

When, like Job, we are allowed a glimpse of God's majesty and mystery, we are forever transformed.

### JOB 42:5 - 6\*

Hearing of you didn't prepare me for

Seeing you face to face.

All that I am melts away to nothing in the face of all that you are.

Sighing, I surrender.

You swallow me up

Consuming me until nothing of me remains but ashes.

Like the Phoenix, from the ashes I will arise anew.

Forever changed.

\*Original interpretation by C. Steinbrecher

***"We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ, and to your deeds we testify. You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image and set before each one the ways of life and death. You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin. You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles."***

### **Who is God?**

God's story begins as so many good stories do...in the beginning. And in the beginning of God's story, God created a garden and filled it with all manner of good things. All different birds, animals, and fish...all different grains, fruit trees, berry bushes, vegetables, flowers, and every variety of all things. And in the midst of this garden of plenty, God planted the Tree of Life. From the beginning, God has set before us a feast for our bodies and our souls. From the beginning, God has offered us life in the midst of abundance.

In the Garden, God invited Adam to know all creatures intimately, to know them by name. Just as God knows our name in the womb, God intended Adam to name and know and care for all created beings just as God knows and cares for even the fallen sparrow. There is a great trust in sharing your name, in knowing a name, in giving a name. God's intent for humanity was not ownership. It was and is relationship, welcome, and family. To know all creation by name is not dominion, it is intimate relationship and sacred responsibility.

God's story is a story still in progress. The world around us is constantly changing in the never-ending seasons of life, decay, death, and new life. Out of the rubble of the worst earthquake, the most devastating floods, the most ferocious fires, living green can push its way out of the darkness into the light. The world within us is also always in the process of decay and renewal. Skin sloughs off, hair falls out, calories are burned and fat goes on or off our bodies, things are learned and things are forgotten. Our experiences inform, shape, and change us. I am not the person today that I was yesterday. I am not the person in this minute that I was in the minute that has just passed. The entire universe is still expanding and growing, with even stars decaying, dying, and being born anew. How can this not reflect God's nature as always in the process of creating?

I believe that God lives within every moment of possibility, in each moment of leaving behind and moving forward, decaying and renewing, death and re-birth. In every instant as we become new, God is inviting us into relationship, inviting us into God's intentions for all creation, inviting us into the eternal process of resurrection.

### **What does it mean to be created in God's image?**

When my son was three, he asked me, "What does God look like?" I gave him the answer that I had given his sister when she was his age. I said, "God is like the wind. We can't see the wind but we can see the wind going by when the trees sway or when the autumn leaves go skipping across the lawn. We can feel the wind when it blows across our skin. God is like the wind. We can't see God, but we can

know that God is there." My son was quiet for a moment and then he said, "But what does God LOOK like?"

Three year old children think in very concrete ways and it is difficult for them to imagine a being that is unimaginable, or how to touch the intangible, or how to love the unknown. It is equally difficult for adults! It can take a lifetime of grappling to achieve even a glimpse of God. No image is adequate in conveying the essence of God and yet we persist in trying. There is a great human yearning to know our creator. This yearning is similar to the desire of some adopted children to see their birth parent's face so that they can examine it and look for glimpses of their own face and know they are related, to see themselves in someone else, to feel that special connection.

We often think of God as being the spark in us. We look for God within our "selves". How limiting for God, how confining to have to fit within our flesh. How small that makes God seem. We try to fit God into our way of being, to contain God in a church or temple, to bring God down to our size, to make God look like us. God is too immense to be reflected by any single being. To truly see God, we must rend the veil in the temple from top to bottom in order to free God from our limited human imaging. The challenge is to become a spark within God, to see how we can reunite with God, to fit ourselves inside the infinity and the immensity of God.

To know what God looks like, we must look into the faces of every person we meet. We must look at each sunrise and each sunset. We must look into the darkness of night and the terror of storms. We must look at towering trees and especially gaze into still waters. We need to think beyond each one of us being a reflection of God and see that all of humanity and all of creation together are God's face. When we can love our neighbor, not as we love our "self", but love our neighbor who is our "self", then we will begin to see God's face more clearly. To see God's face, is to see that God is the world, and the whole world is God.

### **What is sin?**

For some, "sin" as part of the human condition was exhibited in Adam and Eve's rebellious choice to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. I wonder if it was actually the finger-pointing when God showed up that reveals our darkest sin. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, and neither of them took responsibility for their own actions. I wonder if we might still be in the Garden if they had stood together before God, admitted their mistake and asked God to forgive them. I wonder if it was turning on each other, putting their own "self" ahead of the "other" that hurt, and angered, and disappointed God so deeply. Their first action upon discovering "self" awareness was to protect their own "self" at the cost of their relationship with each other and with God.

When Adam and Eve became selfishly aware of "self", they shattered the perfect unity of creation and we all became broken fragments of God's reflection. Our knowledge of our "self" as separate from God's "Self" creates a gaping emptiness in humanity that we have spent our existence trying to fill. In focusing on our "selves", we become blind to the face of our parent and creator. Each time we think "I", we create, "they". God's "I am" includes all that is, was, and will be. Our "I am" blocks full relationship with God and turns everything around us into "other". Our "I" orientation separates us and creates boundaries in our thinking and our way of living that isolate each one of us from God and creation.

From this sin of self-centeredness, rather than God-centeredness, comes evil in the form human systems of dominion and oppression. Eve was the first scapegoat to be singled out as inferior, but it was only the beginning of a trend. The elevation of "Man" over "woman" and all creation, has evolved over time to dominion of one race over another, one country over another, one small group's desires taking precedence over another group's needs. One example of this is the diverting of necessary drinking water and crop irrigation from poor farmers and villages in India to wealthy vacation resorts for use in decorative fountains, lush golf courses, and wealthy gated communities. Only by coming together with all creation will we begin to once again reflect God's wholeness and move toward establishing the "Kin"-dom of God on earth. It is in coming together in unity that we will begin to piece together the shattered reflection of God.

"In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself."

One of the challenges of relating to God is this, how can we achieve familiarity with mystery? How can we know the unknowable? God answered that challenge with Jesus. What does it tell us about God that God would put on flesh and come meet us face to face? Jesus as Divine and Human lets us begin to imagine how we are related and how we are to relate to God and each other. In talking about Jesus, we must remember that Jesus' story is a trilogy, not one book written on the cross. In looking at Jesus' life, Jesus' death, and Jesus' resurrection we can begin to see the full story.

### Jesus' Life

Jesus was God's eyes in the world and he SAW people. Imagine what it felt like to come face to face with Jesus, to have him notice you. What it was like to be that person living on the fringe, standing alone in a doorway, or sitting on the ground with your back to a wall, forgotten, poor, crippled, sick, or just different. Then, suddenly, you see two eyes looking at you, not sliding past you, not avoiding you, not erasing you, but looking at you and in you and through you. Imagine those eyes filled with welcome, and love, and acceptance.

Jesus was God's hands in the world reaching out to touch the untouchables bringing healing sometimes simply with the acknowledgement that all are worthy of God's love. Jesus was God's feet walking into places that others shunned or ran from. He walked with those who walked alone. He walked into the den of thieves. He walked into the presence of the ruling powers. And he walked into the darkness of pain, abandonment, and death.

Jesus didn't only reach out to the poor. Zacchaeus the tax collector wasn't poor. The rich young man didn't follow, but Jesus invited him to come along. They were part of the oppressive system but Jesus reached out to people where they were. Jesus calls those on "top" into solidarity with those who are not. He offers those on the "bottom" liberation and tells them they are worthy. He calls all humanity to be in radical relationship with each other and with God. Systems of oppression imprison us all in different ways, although, some of the prisoners are much more comfortable than others. But if one is diminished, we are all less than we can be.

Jesus was God's heart in the world challenging oppression; teaching us about divine love including loving even our enemies; and showing us how to live our lives centered on God. Jesus was fighting

against suffering and so suffering as God's requirement for redemption does not make sense to me. One of the things that should happen when we look at the cross is that we be repulsed by the suffering that we see, not feel encouraged or compelled to embrace or accept suffering in any way.

### **Jesus' Death**

In dying the shameful death of a slave, Jesus gave a face to every victim of exploitive, predatory systems that human beings create and that all of us, often turning a "blind eye," participate in sustaining. Jesus held up the mirror of Truth and showed us quite clearly how we exploit and use the least among us for our own comfort and gain. And we killed him for it. Until we speak for all humanity, until we value all human experience, until we focus on cooperation and relationships rather than hierarchical structures that privilege a few or systems that encourage "us" against "them", we are not fully hearing Christ's message. Jesus offers us the cross as the place where we can rally and where we can meet as one. Jesus calls us to the cross not to suffer, but to bear witness and to finally unite in a resounding cry of "enough!"

Jesus was crucified but we are still crucifying. In Abu Ghraib, one of the soldiers who had worked there for many months was walking through a cell block. She glanced into one of the cells and saw a tortured prisoner hanging with arms wide spread in shackles, head hanging down, with blood streaming down his face. She stopped dead in her tracks and could not look away. She later said that she saw Jesus hanging there and she thought to herself, "My God, what are we doing?" She was one of the soldiers who came forward to instigate change. When we can see Jesus' face on every victim, we can begin to experience the true "Kin"-dom of God.

Jesus saves us with his dying breath. Redemption comes in the moment of grace when Jesus asked God to forgive us. The message of the cross is that in spite of the worst that human beings could do, Jesus spent his final moments living love and forgiveness. That Jesus was willing to fully experience being human, to intercede for us in that moment of death, to forgive us with what he thought was his last breath, that is what I see when I look at the cross. Jesus' willingness to accept death underlined his life and gave his words truth and import. By dying for what he taught, he made what he taught worth dying for...worth living for...worth the struggle. In taking on the suffering and sorrow of the world, he showed us all the way to Salvation. Love and forgiveness.

### **Jesus' Resurrection**

The cross doesn't reveal God's nature; it exposes the worst in human nature. Hate, betrayal, abandonment, jealousy and cowardice represented by the cross are juxtaposed with the grace, devotion, love and forgiveness of our suffering Savior who hangs there. The resurrection is where we see the magnitude of God's love and power – healing, forgiveness, and affirmation of life. Looking at the Resurrection takes us beyond human control and understanding into the realm of the mysterious and the miraculous. God showed his power and love by resurrecting Jesus as an exclamation point for his ministry, teaching, and obedience to God; to underline LIFE; to express emphatically, "No more!"

We must all unite in rebelling against inhumanity, within ourselves and when we see it in the world around us. Jesus came to fix our broken relationships. The work of Christians is to build relationships that reach across color, gender, sexual preference, country of origin, age, and personality. Jesus is the

bridge between all people and the bridge between all people and God. Jesus is the axis and the intersection of the possible and the impossible.

We can only achieve the Kingdom of God when all oppression has been defeated and when all social systems become cooperative relational systems based on mutual care and concern. This is a transformation of humanity that can only be achieved through inner and outer change; through relating to "other" as "self;" to see "same" and not "different;" each uniquely human but one humanity. With Christ's resurrection, God seals the new covenant, God gives us the sign of a new promise - the promise of Emmanuel - that God will always be with us.

Our work as Christians is to follow Christ and be God's eyes in the world and see the suffering of others; to be God's hands and reach out to those who have fallen or are stumbling; to be God's living, breaking heart in the world and love, love, love one another. When one human being reaches out to a fellow human being that is where God is. That is the hope and promise of resurrection in Christ Jesus. That is where Jesus is calling us to be. The cross forces us to once again stand naked, as in the Garden. Instead of revealing our naked bodies, it reveals our naked souls. The cross is where the human and divine hang in suspense, in excruciating tension forcing us to consider and choose which nature we wish to rule the decisions in our lives.

The cross shows us the worst human response to uncomfortable and painful truth. The cross reminds us that the knowledge of good and evil is within us. We sometimes want to see ourselves on the cross, Jesus suffering with us. Jesus doesn't call us to see ourselves on the cross. Jesus doesn't call us to weep for him. Jesus calls us to look carefully at the hammer in our hands and see who we are nailing up there in his place. Jesus calls us to weep for them. "You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant, faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races."

In the beginning, the winds of God blew across the waters of chaos and things began to happen! God blows breath into Adam's nostrils and a lump of clay becomes a human being! That holy expelling of God's essence into all creation is the thread that ties all things together. The Holy Spirit of God is the gift that sustains, energizes, and weaves together all that is. The Spirit flows in us, and through us, and pours out from us. The spirit pushes and pulls, carries, stings, and inspires. The spirit of God led Moses and Joseph; poked and prodded the prophets; led Saul and Sarah; inspired Elijah and Elisha. The spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness for forty days and nights to wrestle with Satan in preparation for his ministry on earth.

According to Luke, when he ascended, Jesus sent the disciples, to Jerusalem to wait. There was no priest, just disciples, including women. They gathered in a house in the middle of a dense urban location, not a temple, not a distant mountain top. They gathered as a community to wait and pray. There was no intercessor, all waited together. And then the day of Pentecost came! Just as in the beginning of creation, when the winds of God swept over the face of the waters, the wind of God filled the house.

And just as God declared, 'Let there be light', there were tongues of flame as the spirit filled those present. The entire gathered community participated in this baptism of fire that didn't burn flesh, but

instead ignited hearts, a burning flame that set their faith on fire. God's law was being burned into warm hearts rather than carved on cold stone.

All receive the Holy Spirit, and the first gift given was speaking in all languages. They were bound together by the presence of the holy spirit; woven together into one body; carrying a universal message to be shared with all nations and with all people, because all were welcome in this new creation. That outpouring of spirit was wind and fire, loud talk, buzzing confusion, public debate, and loud declaration. A community of faith was born.

In his parable of the wineskins, Jesus says that new wine will burst old wineskins. In the story of Pentecost, the disciples ARE the new wine - bursting forth to break old conventions, to break down the barriers between people, and most importantly, to break down the barriers to relationship with God. They burst forth from the house where they have been waiting and fermenting. The spirit has broken in and the disciples come bursting forth!

The spirit drives the Jesus movement public. For the first time, the disciples come charging out from behind closed doors into the debate. The spirit leads them into conversation with the world. They are no longer observers. They are no longer students. Its graduation day. Holy commencement! Their ministry has begun!

It is time for us to listen to the call of the spirit and join in the public debate. We are living in a time in human history where humanity is finding itself being reluctantly drawn into a world-wide conversation. Human beings are being forced to consider each other in new ways even as we resist the growing realization that we are painfully dependent upon the earth and upon each other. We need to remember we are also dependent upon God. Our media and technology are making it harder for us to ignore the needs and pain and suffering of others. The world needs to rethink who and how we are to be together. It is a time to change habits. It's time for a new conversation. It is time for a new creation.

The Holy Spirit is God's still, small voice whispering throughout scripture and sounding God's call in our deepest heart. It is the spirit that fills and sustains us just as God filled the widow's empty vessels. The spirit is where we can feel God's movement in the world. The spirit makes our inner branches tingle and sway with the knowledge that God is here, God is now, God is with us...God, Emmanuel. The time to burst forth has come!

### **Trinity**

Jesus as a manifestation of God's Word made flesh is unique in that specific combination, Word and flesh. Somehow like God and somehow, like us. The Word as part of God expressed through the person of Jesus. Adding the Holy Spirit into the discussion creates a complex mystery called the Trinity. What does this relationship between Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost reveal to us about God's nature?

The trinity weaves together known and unknown, knowable and unknowable, finite and infinite; with the breath and movement of the spirit of communion flowing in, between, around, and through it all. The trinity shows us that God is relationship and reveals the process of a relational God. The trinity is an illumination of God's ongoing and unending process of creating, redeeming, and sustaining.



God is living and acting in all moments; dwelling within each instance of our individual existence within all creation. Creation seems solid around us but as Science dives deeper into the unseen world; we have discovered that when we look at the smallest, minutest particles, they are all dancing together in space. It is only their mutual attraction and agreement that seems to be holding things together in the shapes and forms that we perceive so solidly around us. In that space between the particles of stardust that are in all things, God waits for us in a cloud of possibilities.

In the place between heartbeats, God calls us into deeper relationship, allowing us the free will to say "yes" or "no." The challenge for Humanity is to develop the "mind of Christ", to empty of "self", and live with deeper and deeper awareness of what God's intentions are for us in every moment of our lives. We must learn to say "yes" to God with each heartbeat. The dance of creation is this process of saying "yes" or "no" to God's invitation instant to instant. The more we say, "Yes", the more we live into God's intention for us and the more difficult it becomes to say "no."

Nature lives more in tune with God's intentions. God's intention for a rock is to be a rock and rocks are more content and cooperative than human beings. Jesus lived most perfectly into God's intentions and is our example for how we can move into God's intention for how we can be fully human. Living into the "yes" of God can create a trajectory in our lives allowing us to live more and more into relationship with God and creation; to become part of the living, breathing, ever-expanding trinity; to at last become sparks within the interwoven unity of God, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

Trinity is movement and flow. It's an illumination of how God is relational. We have a place in that flow. The trinity opens to include us in the process of connecting and relating and is mutually changeable and adapting. Christ is indwelling in God; the spirit is indwelling with God and Christ; we are in communion with Christ; and therefore with God and the Spirit. Each is unique and all are a part of the other. This is how the Trinity continues to expand.

When we look at a river, we see a river; but the river we are "seeing" changes in every instant we are looking at it. When we step in the river we change the river. It must accommodate our presence by flowing around us. In turn, the river changes us. It makes us wet or cold or warm. It presents force of resistance that impacts how quickly or slowly we walk. We are not the same when we exit the river as when we entered the river. We are wet, or weary, invigorated, or hotter, or colder. But the river is still the river, and we are still ourselves. We have been affected, altered, and moved by the other. God calls us to insert ourselves into the divine flow of Trinity; to become a part of God's cosmic body and enter into the ever-expanding circle of divine relationship.

God influences but does not command. God is eternally improvising within every moment of possibility within every relationship with every created being. In the Trinity, we can see the minutia and the majesty, the closeness and the immensity, intimate knowing and unknowable mystery. The greatest revelation of trinity is that God's nature is intricately intertwined and inseparably relational with all that is.

"You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and to resist the powers of evil."

### **Discipleship and Service**

In one of my Field Education interviews, the Pastor asked me if I thought you could be a Christian by yourself. I told him I didn't think you could. Of course, he asked me why. I told him that I believe that Christ calls us to be a community of faith. Jesus told us to love, not just God, but our neighbors and our enemies. He gathered disciples around him. He walked among people. He touched them and laid hands on them. He went to their homes and shared meals with them. He always noticed the people in the back of the crowd. Jesus promised that when two or more gathered in his name, he would be present.

Service is in the small interactions, the small acts of kindness and sharing between human beings. That is where I have most felt the presence of God. Meditation and prayer can provide refreshment and relaxation, a renewal of connection to the 'source' of the spirit, but for me, spiritual growth happens in community, caring for others, listening to other people, giving them time, love, and attention. The pouring down of the living flame of the Holy Spirit happened when all the disciples were gathered together in one place. It is when Christians work together in discerning God's purpose that we become one body in Christ. A body is made of many parts, not one part isolated and alone.

What was it the disciples waited for all their lives that they saw in Jesus? What was it that inspired them to throw down their nets, abandon family and all that was familiar to them, and follow a stranger? Was it simply that he notice them? That he looked at them with love and saw their unique value and beauty as a child of God?

In one of my classes, someone told a story of a missionary working with young girls who were prostitutes. The missionary was teaching them how to read and write and trying to provide them with food and medical care. The missionary had to travel for a time and when she returned the girls surrounded her and clung to her. They said, "We missed you so very much. There was no one to see us with God's eyes." Christ calls us to see each other with God's eyes, to see each person as one of God's beloved children.

### **Proclaim!**

Several years ago, during a Lenten study, we were asked to write something we wanted to offer to God on a card and carry it with us as part of our prayer practice for Lent. Recently, I came across that card tucked in a book. It said, "I want to live my faith out loud." Here I am, a few short years later, being allowed the privilege of not only publicly witnessing to the gospel but being given the honor of preaching and teaching the gospel as well.

It has been such a joy to study scripture! It has awakened in me a passion to invite other people into scripture and bring it to life. I want people to know the stories and the history of our faith – to have a sense of their Christian roots and heritage. I want them to feel a connection to their Biblical ancestors and discover that those stories of "old" are still our stories today. I see the Bible as a running conversation with God: the dramatic and relevant story of human beings trying to understand how to be in relationship with God. I want to invite today's Christians to enter into the conversation where God is still speaking.

Most recently, scripture has come alive for me in my Chaplaincy hospital unit. I have met the Jobs wailing forgotten and alone, waving their fist at God and demanding to be heard and noticed. The Jacobs wrestling with the unknown through the long night and trying to see if there might be a blessing in the dawning day. The Rachels who are lamenting lost children or lost childhood or loss of those days of young motherhood. The Prodigal sons and daughters who have not yet turned their faces toward home and may never turn back. The widows, the orphans, and the strangers. The lost and found lambs. The absence of God and the presence of God. Lament and rejoicing. Blessings and curses. The shaken fist and the open heart. In this work with the sick and infirm, in this place of death and healing is living scripture - the living, breathing, smiling and weeping faces of scripture. In here, I come face to face with God every day.

"...to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory. You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end."

### **The Sacraments: Baptism**

One of my favorite things to do as a child was to swim. One of my favorite things to do when swimming was to blow out all the air in my lungs and sink to the bottom of whatever body of water I was swimming in and see how long I could float there. Just float, immersed completely in the water. In clear swimming pools, I would try to lie on my back and watch the sunlight dancing on the surface. In a pond, I would look for a cloudy glimpse of the sun. I never sank so deeply that I couldn't see light shining through. Sound was muted, it was so peaceful and quiet, watching colors sparkle on the surface. I would hang weightless, suspended, unmoving, my hair floating around me like a cloud with a life of its own.

As a child I certainly never thought of my floating game as returning to the womb. With my adult eyes, I can see myself returning to that original world of complete immersion in water. I can see the pouring out of my last breath as a symbolic death, a submersion and return to that element in which we are carried and develop; waiting until the last possible second then bursting to the surface to gasp deeply that life-giving breath; then going under, floating, and bursting forth again and again and again. We are conceived and nurtured in water. We are then expelled rudely into air and greeted by the light of sky-fire. We end up in the earth after expelling our last breath. We are elemental and we partake of the elements. The seasons of our lives and all creation are a part of the story of Baptism.

The Bible says, "Go forth and baptize" and there has been much discussion through the ages as to whether that means all people or consenting adult people. I can think about saying "no" to those infrequent church attendees and their beloved bundles of joy, but it grates too much against the welcome in my core to believe that I could turn someone away. The meaning of our faith changes with our experiences. An infant Baptism can enrich and deepen the community experience and their commitment to faith and to the family and the child. Older children and adults can have a more personal experience and understanding but we never understand everything or know everything there is to know about what it means to be a Christian or to be fully human in the way God intends. Baptism seals us to God and invites the Holy spirit into our lives. My faith tells me that is all I need to do - the rest is up to God.

Baptism is the joyful welcome of budding souls of all ages into Christian community, whether they have just been born or whether they are breathing their last breath. Baptismal welcome is a gift to be freely given and joyfully celebrated. Baptism connects us to our most ancient roots. As the water is poured or sprinkled, it links us to all those who have come before and all those who will come after, all those in our local church community and all those around the world. Baptism is radical welcome to the Christian community of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Jesus taught that no one can see the kingdom of God without being spiritually born anew...that seeing the kingdom of God requires rebirth, a new way of living, a birth not related to flesh but to the spirit. In Baptism, we remember Christ's sacrifice to deliver us from sin. Baptism is how we remember that death of our old self is required for spiritual growth. Baptism is how we remember that we are welcomed into Christ's resurrection promise of new life with God.

### **The Sacraments: Communion**

I love making homemade bread. I love mixing the ingredients together and then dumping the sticky mass of dough onto my floured counter. I love taking that clump of improbable matter into my hands and kneading and kneading the dough until it becomes smooth, and cohesive, and elastic. I love checking the covered basket and watching the dough rise and push up the covering cloth to just the right height when I know it is ready for the next round.

My whole family loves the smell of the yeast while the dough is rising, promising the tasty bread to come. And nothing beats the rich smell of the bread baking! Everyone runs to the kitchen when the bread comes out so we can crowd the counter together and cut off thick pieces and spread the butter and watch it melt into the hot, airy, heavenly manna! My son calls it, "that delicious bread you make."

When I am making bread, I think of all the women back through millennia who have made bread and I feel a great connection to those women of all ages doing this same simple act in such a variety of ways, and shapes, and flavors. My son loves to make bread with me. At least, he likes to mix the ingredients and then play with a chunk of the dough. I look ahead to the day when he might make bread, perhaps even taking down the bowl that I have always used, and read the book that is always open on the counter as we prepare this simple, special treat together.

This sense of connection with past and future that I experience in my bread baking is one of the things that I bring with me to the Communion table. The story of the table reminds us of our ancient ties to Hebrew scripture, reminds us that Jesus' ancestry is ours as well. Not "old" and "new" stories, but the continuing story of human beings struggling to understand how to relate to one another and to the fullness of God, stories that intersect at the table. The table speaks of ancient and new; hunger and nourishment; welcome and betrayal; selfishness and selfless sacrifice. The table is where the ordinary is transformed and becomes extraordinary. The table speaks of what "Was", what "Is", and what "Will be!"

Justice springs from the radical welcome of the open communion table. All must be invited to the feast, each getting a share, each being nourished and cared for, room made for all. Only when all of God's children are fed, clothed, nursed, taught, loved, and cared for, will there be peace in the world. Then we will discover that God's Kingdom was always at hand if we had all joined hands and reached for

it together. Peace is not something to be negotiated in treaties between diplomats. Peace flows like a river from forgiveness and love. Peace will only flow from a world in which there is God's justice for all.

We are reminded when we eat the bread and take the cup that we are loved. The breaking of the bread reminds me that Jesus was broken and it is in our own breaking that there is room in our hearts and souls for God to enter and transform us. It is in our breaking that our spirits are freed.

Past, Present, and Future meet at the table where Jesus said we should gather and "Remember." From that table we look back with the wisdom of all those who have come before us. We look ahead with the eyes of children, filled with wonder and excitement at the mystery and promise of the life which lies ahead. Jesus said, "Remember." Remember our Christian story found in the Cup of Salvation...found in The Bread of Life. The most delicious bread. Can you taste it?

### **Life in God's Realm**

Last January, I went on a family retreat on Cape Cod. During our free time, I ended up at a large pond and I stood leaning on a tree, watching a gaggle of geese. They were swimming and honking and some were diving. They would be there one minute, then gone the next. I thought about how the geese spend most of their lives on the water, having all their needs met – sustained, nourished, sheltered, and 'held up' by the water.

As one small bird dove beneath the surface, I thought, that is what God wants for us, to live on and in the Living Waters, to immerse ourselves and find sustenance, to go deeper and deeper and immerse again, and again, and again. Until God is no longer a spark in us, but we become a spark in God...living within God, feeling united with all creation, drinking deeply of those Living Waters until our spirits, our souls, our hearts, thirst no more.

What can we know of God? Jesus dying on the cross tells us that God is compassionate, forgiving, and loving. The presence of the Holy Spirit tells us that God is with us, and in us and flows through us lifting, sustaining, prodding, liberating, and connecting us all.

God calls each of us, in every moment, in between every breath we take, to see others with God's eyes; to smile at others with God's mouth; and to love as God's heart in the world. In every moment of every day, God calls us to enter an ever-expanding Trinity linked together by loving hearts and touching hands. What can we know of God's nature? God is Love.

"Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen"