

**FAITH STATEMENTS FROM CONFIRMANDS, MAY 31, 2009**  
**First Congregational United Church of Christ**  
**Corvallis, Oregon 97333**

**Tim Thornton**

Now I do believe in God, don't get me wrong, I just have my doubts like the rest of us. He is in all of us no matter our skin color, gender, age or our interpretation of God. There are so many questions I have on my quest to find God and my church, although I have gotten a lot of help from my mentor, Jim Ballard, my parents, and our pastor Ryan. One of those that has me stumped is how or why did humans come to be. Now some people and Ryan say God is not omnipotent but almighty, so then if he is not all knowing then how did he create our bodies to be able to live and how did he make this earth so that we could live like we do now a days. Also if God was all knowing, why then did he not prevent natural disasters and diseases from killing so many people. These questions and others keep me up at night and are constantly stuck in my head.

God wants us to be free and to screw up and to make our own choices and not to live in other people's lives. Hearing about other people and how they see God, made me think twice about my own views and how I see God. Is God human? Does he have human traits or even human terms or is he just extraordinary, or different or special. I don't know who to go to for the answers to these questions because no one really actually knows. I know it will take time to figure out these answers so I will wait.

In order to live my life, I have to be true to myself and to what is right even though I am very self-conscious and want to be different. I care about what other people think about me. I want to live like my parents and not like people who worry about their situation all the time and only focus on what is wrong in their lives. Rather than being one of them, I want to help those who live on the streets. Everyone I have met has affected me and changed me. I know this will stay the same as I go on throughout my life. Understanding what they mean and what they say helps you to further understand yourself. Also being with people who view their life in a similar way, makes it easier to understand yourself. Although different views would help me also figure myself out.

On my journey in life it's important for me to meet new people, share ideas with them, and to understand them, and to experience life from their point of view. That is why I am choosing to stay with this church, not only because I want to follow my parents or my sister, but because I can see myself here and enjoying it way more than any other church. It's the people and the experiences that make it all worth it.

**Eric Mason**

About ten years ago I was baptized at the Campton Congregational Church in Campton New Hampshire. I was five or six at the time and didn't really know what was going on, I didn't know what significance a baptism would have. I wish that I could have a better understanding of what a baptism was and what god meant to me. For me God is a god is an essence and is everywhere. I think that god wants us all to be different I think god wants different nationalities different, I think he wants us to look differently talk differently and even worship in different ways. I think god wants us to be different so we can learn to let the differences not bother us. I think that god wants us to not focus on what makes people different but focus on what we as a world have

in common and what we can all do to make it a better place.

I want to be a part of the United Church of Christ because I believe the UCC is the most progressive branch of the Christian faith. What I mean is the UCC is accepting to anyone who wants to come, we are very accepting to people who are gay or lesbian, who have differences in opinion in government or other social issues, and I want to be a part of an accepting church. I would like to join this church because I think I could make a difference in our church, I am a good worker and I like to help people, I also think I could have some good ideas that could help the church and the people that the church helps. One question that I still have about Christianity is how I can use faith to help me more in everyday life and help others.

### **Laural Goldner**

When I think about faith statements, the first thing that comes to mind is a statement of beliefs, so I'll start with that. To me, the most important belief I have about my faith is that I believe in reading the Bible for the lessons and underlying truths in the stories, not for specific details and literal truths. This belief is important to me on a personal level because all of my close friends that are Christian read the Bible very literally, so I've always seen my view as something that set me apart. Being around them, I've often questioned the way I read the Bible, but this is the way that makes the most sense to me. It really helps me to apply the morals and lessons to my own life and to different circumstances and situations, because I know they aren't dependent on the little details. I think the underlying truths are the most important part of the Bible, so that's what I focus on. For example, I do believe God created the world, but I don't believe in Creationism. I think God caused the Big Bang to occur and guided the process of evolution along so that we could be here today. While religion isn't something that's easy or even possible to completely understand on human terms, I still think it's important to ask questions and not believe everything in the Bible word for word.

Another thing I believe is that all religions that work for good are just as valid as Christianity. I think that Jews, Muslims, Christians and people of other religions are worshiping the same God as I am, just in different ways. This is a big part of why I am uncomfortable with the idea of evangelizing, or trying to convert other people to Christianity. First of all, I don't know everything about my own religion, so I'm hesitant to force it on someone else. I just don't see anything wrong with another person practicing a different religion if that's the way they can best connect with God, even though that way might be different from mine.

I first came to this church five years ago, in 5th grade, and I'll be the first to admit that I didn't want anything to do with church back then. There's no way I would've seen myself ever choosing to be confirmed or even considering it. The thing that changed my mind the most about joining this church is the congregation here. In a word, I would say this congregation is supportive. I know there aren't any two people here with the same exact beliefs, and there are definitely people with beliefs very different from mine. But I also know that whatever I believe now, the church will accept that and support me as I keep learning. At the confirmation retreat, we talked about how this church has a free theology, in that Liz and Ryan preach about what they believe more than what they think everyone else should believe. I really like this because I think religion is too complex and personal to say that everyone should just believe whatever they are told, and not question any of it. This isn't to say I don't learn anything at church, because I am always learning new ways of understanding the Bible, and new ways of toying with the idea

of God.

One thing I've noticed about the people at this church is that they are passionate about all kinds of issues in the community, and they work hard for social justice. The best part about this is that people bring their passions to church to share with others, and to get other people involved. Because of the passion this church has for helping people in need, I've learned about ways to help out the homeless, and volunteered at Stone Soup, which is something I never would have considered doing if it weren't for this church. I think the thing I bring to this church, along with the rest of the youth is energy. This might not sound that impressive, but I think it's important for the church to have energy and enthusiasm to carry on projects like volunteer activities and mission trips.

When I started going through confirmation, I really doubted that I would end up getting confirmed, because church hadn't been a huge part of my life before, and I wasn't sure I wanted to make such a public affirmation of my faith. But going through this has taught me a lot about faith and God, and I know that this is the kind of church I want to belong to because it allows me to believe what seems right to me. I know I have way more questions now than I did just a few months ago, but this is fine with me because going through confirmation showed me the best way to learn about God is to struggle with hard questions, and that even if I don't come up with a definitive answer, I end up with a better understanding of God. I hope becoming a part of this church will help me to learn more about Christianity as well as other members of this church.

### **Grant Thackray**

So. What's up with that God fellow, anyways? Who is he? Why's he here? *Is* he here? What's he look like? Why did he have to invent mosquitoes? Many people over many centuries have quibbled mercilessly over these questions, quick to try and prove his existence, or disprove his existence, or disprove the guy who disproved his existence. During our whole Confirmation process, we were asked to quibble between ourselves on these matters, and I won. So, that means I'm right and they're all wrong. Don't listen to them.

For me, one of the strongest evidences towards the whole "God" theory is the absolute complexity of the natural world. There are so many tiny seemingly inconsequential interlocking pieces in the way the Universe works that if even one of them were different, life as we know it would not exist. For example, water is the only substance whose solid form is less dense than its liquid form. If water obeyed the guidelines like everybody else, ice would form on the top of the ocean, then sink to the bottom. Soon, layers and layers of ice would build up, and eventually the entire planet's oceans would be solid ice. If the entire ocean was ice, the little single-celled organisms would not be able to survive, and thus would not be able to evolve into humans. You wouldn't think it matters, but it does. Somebody up there had to be watching over the assembly line to make sure that that tiny little detail and the trillions of others like it fit together properly.

Another thing that I've noticed that simply amazes me are the rules that exist for math, music, cooking, etcetera. We didn't make them! I'm pretty sure that there is no example of advanced quantum trigonometry or renaissance concertos or three-course gourmet dinners being done by squirrels, or dung beetles, or any animal for that matter, but there are rules that have existed since

the dawn of time that govern this subject that we seemingly made up. No matter what you try, the square root of negative one is never going to equal three, and you can't just bang on the piano and get a song that sounds good. God obviously planned ahead when he was making the Universe so that fourteen billion years later, pepperoni pizza would actually taste good.

You may have noticed at this point in my spiel that I refer to God as a "he." I'm terribly sorry if this offends anybody, but I believe that God is a reflection of all living creatures. God created us in his own image, and we all look different. That means, obviously, that God looks like all of us at the same time. If you are an Asian male, you may see God as an Asian male. If you are a black handicapped pregnant woman, maybe you will see God as the same. But! Maybe you have an image of God that is not the same as what you look like. If you're someone of a different religion, you will see God as your religion tells you to. If you're an avid fan of The Far Side, you probably see God as a old guy in a cloak with a white flowing beard and a unibrow. Let's say you simply adore the movie "Bruce Almighty." To you, God might look like Morgan Freeman. Maybe, for whatever reason you choose, you choose to imagine God as a giant floating wad of spaghetti. Good for you! To you, God looks like spaghetti.

Now, all joking and witty comments aside, many people believe that God is not a laughing matter. I, however, am not many people. I believe that although God should be taken seriously, he is not watching our every move so he knows if we're worthy to be let into heaven. Our lives should be sprinkled with times of worship, but we should also spend time being ourselves! God didn't put us here to sit down here and stare up at him! God put us here to frolic and prosper and become a civilization! Now here's a nice metaphor for you. I see God as the lovable father with a mustache, who sits in his deck chair and laughs merrily as his children play in the yard, but will step in when somebody's about to get hurt. Occasionally he will scoop up one of his trillions of children, be them human, animal, or extraterrestrial, and he will bounce them on his knee or tell them a story. Sometimes these stories are simply pondered and then forgotten, and sometimes someone will write a bible about them.

Now that brings me to another point. The bible. Now, the people who wrote the gospels might have been told them by God, or they might have just been very wise and caring people who felt that they needed to send the message of kindness and purity to the world. *Or*, they could have been blathering idiots who spent a little too much time at weddings, if you know what I mean. But whatever the fact may be, the Bible is a wonderful work filled with many symbolic passages and heartfelt messages to humankind. I do find it hard to believe that archaeologists have for some reason not been able to find evidence of a gigantic planetary-wide flood that killed everyone on the Earth hundreds of years ago—but it must have happened, because it's in the Bible! One of my favorite quotes about the bible is that "the bible is not a direct fax from heaven." The bible was written by men, and edited by men, and maybe had bits of chapters ripped out of it because they spelled the king's name wrong by men. Being Christian is not about reciting bible verses, it's about *being* what the bible verses *tell* you to be.

That's why I want to join this church. I look around and see people striving to make the world a better place, not telling people that thousands of years ago a talking snake gave a magic apple to a rib lady that made her notice she wasn't wearing pants and if you don't believe that then you're going to die. Here at the First Congregational United Church of Christ, I know that I can believe

what I want to believe, and nobody's going to force anything else down my throat. The people I see before me in this congregation are some of the most wonderful people I have ever met, and I'm glad that the Earth has had a chance to have them on it for a while. That makes me feel like this is a place that I could come to for the rest of my life, and I probably will.

### **Carl Lucker**

To me, faith is a journey. You never know what's coming next, or even where you're going. On this journey, the Holy Spirit is the scenery, the bible is the guidebook, God is the compass, Jesus is the tour guide, and faith is the path itself. There are no trail markers on this path; it's up to you where you blaze your trail. No matter where this path leads you, you are in a better place when you reach the end, if it is reachable at all. Faith is a constant struggle, and frankly, I don't know where I stand. On one side is the belief in all things in the bible and spiritual, and on the other, a deeper understanding of faith itself is needed. I feel as if I want to believe everything the church as a whole has to offer, but I feel it difficult to relate everything, and sometimes anything the church teaches to my life.

The reason I am standing here before you this morning is that I desperately want to believe, to understand faith in its entirety; but sometimes that's the hardest thing I ever have to do. Faith itself is a broad topic. There are everyday happenings that make me feel so connected to something so complex that I have to stop for a second and think to myself, "Did that really just happen?" Then there is a wider understanding that everything is connected in one way or another, and everything happens for a reason. I don't believe this. I like to believe that I am in control of my own destiny, and I have trouble with the concept that something bigger is controlling my actions. So it seems to me like something bigger is not in fact controlling me, but generally pointing me in the general direction down the path of faith, and life. Part of this "bigger thing", in my mind, would be God.

I'm not sure if I believe that God is all powerful, as some scriptures suggest. The bible said that God created us in God's image, so with that understanding, I believe God to have human-like flaws. God is adaptable, he learns from his mistakes. This is suggested where God apologizes and says he will never flood the earth again. Maybe God has a little voice inside his head saying, "ya know, that probably wasn't such a good idea. Maybe you shouldn't do that again."

The whole concept of God is really interesting to me. When I think of God, I think of an old, tall guy with a white beard, and long flowing hair in this cloudy, airy sort of place. God is easy to dismiss, forget about, or not believe in altogether; because the concept is so confusing to a lot of people. But to me, believing in God makes God real, it gives me hope, and reassurance that I am safe. Believing in God is important because it helps me get closer to that deeper understanding that I so crave. The understanding of the questions that haunt mankind as a whole: why are we here? Where did we come from? What's next?

That's enough about God for now; on to the son of God, Jesus. I believe that Jesus was a man, a great man, the son of God and a really good teacher. I find it hard, however, to believe some of the things I hear that he did, like walk on water, feed a mob of people with just a couple of fish and a loaf of bread, or even physically heal the blind. It is ironic though, that I do believe the Easter story, and the resurrection; or maybe that's just because I like Easter eggs.

I am 100% sure that if I could physically or metaphysically see Jesus, as a person, that I would

have an instant revelation, and suddenly believe all thing things I have heard about Jesus. But until then, I am just stuck wanting to believe.

But maybe the most important thing about Jesus isn't that maybe he healed a bunch of people and stuff like that, but instead the knowledge that he passed on through his teachings. If everyone paid attention to what Jesus was trying to teach, the world would be a much better place.

Finally, there's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is very personal to all of us. We all have our own definition of the Holy Spirit, and to be completely honest, I haven't the slightest idea what mine is. I need a real deep experience is to even remotely understand the Holy Spirit, and how it affects me.

Now I think it's about time to answer the question I know is troubling you all. Am I being confirmed as a member of the United Church of Christ? The answer is... .. YES!!!! I am in fact being confirmed, as a member of this congregation. There are a plethora of things I can both gain and contribute to this congregation, and to this church. For example, as for what I can contribute, a lot of members of this congregation, as well as my honors international literature and studies teachers, tell me I am an excellent speaker and I have an excellent speaking voice. So I guess I can contribute by talking a lot... I'm sure there are other ways I can contribute... so uh... just let me know when you think of some. As for what I can gain from this church, a great sense of community, where a can share my troubles and accomplishments, as well as a deeper understanding of where on this path of faith I am on, and where I want to go.