

LABORING TOGETHER: THE PROCESS OF CREATING OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH

JOSH BLOUNT

"Cause me to walk in your truth, and teach me – for you are the God of my salvation. For you I wait all the day long." (Psalm 25:5)

If there were a single verse that best captured the heart behind the writing and ratification of our *Statement of Faith*, this prayer of David's would be a strong candidate. Writing, editing, and affirming together our *Statement of Faith* was motivated by the desire to carefully and faithfully reflect the Lord's truth, the truths of our salvation.

The writing of our new *Statement of Faith* to replace the old version began in 2013 with the ratification of our new polity and the formation of a national Theology Committee, chaired and led by Jeff Purswell. The Theology Committee was tasked with evaluating the then-current *Statement of Faith* and considering whether an expanded, rewritten version would serve our union of churches.

When that evaluation led to an affirmative answer, the actual writing began.

The Start of the Work

After deciding upon the structure of the new document and sketching out

the rough form it would take (a process which took several months), the members of the Theology Committee divided up section headings and began the process of writing, editing, and rewriting initial drafts.

The first significant date was our Council of Elder's (CoE) meeting in 2015 when the Theology Committee submitted drafts of three sections – "The Person of Christ," "The Triune God," and "The Scriptures" – to the CoE. But that raised its own questions: if the CoE approved these, were they then effective immediate as our binding *Statement of Faith*, even though they represented only a partial rewrite of a much longer final document? Should they be plugged, section by section, into the old document until it was totally rewritten? And how could we best involve the feedback and counsel of all Sovereign Grace elders, not merely those on the Theology Committee?

Working with the Polity Committee and the CoE, a process was created whereby the Theology Committee would write new sections each year, submit them to the CoE, and then open a period of feedback from every elder team within Sovereign Grace. After that period, the Theology Committee would edit the sections to incorporate the feedback and then submit the newly revised sections at the following CoE for provisional approval. The final ratification would wait until all sections had gone through the full writing, feedback, and rewriting process.

A Yearly Rhythm

This became the yearly rhythm of the Theology Committee and the Council of Elders: submit the previous years' edited and rewritten sections for provisional approval, as well as submit new sections to open the feedback process.

The 2016 Council of Elders provisionally approved "The Person of Christ," "The Triune God," and "The Scriptures," while receiving "Creation, Providence and Man," "God's Sovereign Purposes," and "Man's Sin and Its Effects" to begin seeking feedback. In 2017 the Council approved those documents and received the next four new sections. 2018 saw the last three sections were submitted to the Council to open the feedback process, and these sections were approved at the 2019 Council.

However, with the entire document completed over a six-year process, at that time, the Theology Committee asked the Council and received a final year to edit the entire document, making stylistic edits and ensuring that nothing

significant had been omitted. The 2020 Council of Elders was thus set as the date for approval of the final document by the CoE, who would then send it to each Regional Assembly of Elders for ratification. If three-quarters of the regions voted to affirm the new *Statement of Faith*, it would become the binding confessional document for Sovereign Grace Churches.

Zoom at Its Best

However, as readers will undoubtedly remember, 2020 was a year of oddities and exceptional circumstances! Our Pastors Conference, and thus the 2020 Council of Elders, could not meet in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and so the final CoE vote took place in a Zoom meeting.

While no one would have chosen this route, there was something at least oddly familiar about the *Statement of Faith*, born out of dozens of Theology Committee Zoom meetings, receiving its final authorization in a Zoom meeting! By the grace of God, that milestone in our history as Sovereign Grace Churches was marked by total unanimity.

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One by one, men from the United States, Mexico, Canada, and Australia, some relative newcomers to Sovereign Grace and others who had seen its fledgling beginnings decades before, all gave their affirmation to this new document expressing the beliefs we hold most dear: the truths of our salvation, and of the God of our salvation. The ratification by the Regional Assemblies was likewise unanimous.

And so, our new *Statement of Faith* became the Sovereign Grace *Statement of Faith*.

A Shared Conviction

As one who has been on the Theology Committee from its very start, I know I speak for all the past and current members in giving much credit where much credit is due. Without the leadership, theologian's mind, and pastor's heart of Jeff Purswell, our *Statement of Faith* would not exist. Jeff,

from all of us, please receive our gratitude and affection!

And now the Sovereign Grace *Statement of Faith* exists, not merely as the work of any individual or committee, but as the common conviction of all Sovereign Grace elders, present and future. We believe these things to be true, revealed by God. As ordained men, we commit ourselves to them and place ourselves under them. To the Lord alone belongs the evaluation and the fruits of this process of writing a statement of faith and the final product.

And so Psalm 25:5 makes a fitting conclusion as well: may the Lord continue to lead us in his truth, and teach us, for he is the God of our salvation, for whom we wait. Both now and forevermore!

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