

**From:** Eaton, Philip  
**Sent:** Monday, April 19, 2004 1:20 PM  
**To:** !Fac/Staff (restricted)  
**Subject:** A Message From President Philip W. Eaton - 4/19/2004

**TO: Faculty and Staff**  
**RE: A New *Statement of Faith* for Seattle Pacific University**  
**DATE: April 19, 2004**

Over the last year and a half quite a number of people have been working with me to draft a new *Statement of Faith* for Seattle Pacific University. I am pleased now to send you the *final draft* of this new statement for your review and reflection. Let me explain a bit about the process and the purpose of this statement.

At the State of the University Address in September 2002, I announced the need to write a new *Statement of Faith* that could further clarify our Christian identity and anchor our unique community of faith. We had just approved a new *Mission Statement* for the University, a moment of culmination for all of the work we had done to articulate a vision for the future of Seattle Pacific. It was now time to state clearly our Christian identity.

At the time we shaped the *Mission Statement*, I argued hard to keep the language of our Christian identity spare and concise so that any outside audience could easily understand what we are all about. I felt we should not confuse others with insider's language about the nuances of our faith traditions. As a result, all we say about our Christian purpose in the *Mission Statement* is that we are a "premier Christian university." How we specifically define the meaning of Christian there is left open. I believe this will serve us well with the various and broader constituencies with whom we engage.

At the same time I felt very strongly we should take the next steps to rewrite a *Statement of Faith*. I believe these two statements should complement and support one another. This work had not been done for many years, and when we gathered together all of the various faith statements in use around campus, we discovered about eight versions. It was time to focus anew our thinking and create a definitive statement to center our community.

How will such a *Statement of Faith* be used? Part of the uniqueness of Seattle Pacific is our willingness and eagerness to draw our people from a wide range of Christian traditions. This has always been so for SPU. It is part of the ecumenical spirit of the Wesleyan tradition, and we value that diversity a great deal. But we also need clarity at the center. I always say that I am less interested in defining the boundaries than I am in being clear about the center. What is it that draws us to a common faith and life in Jesus Christ? A big task to be sure, but that's what we have tried to do in this statement.

We will use this statement in our hiring process, just as we have done in the past. When asked about our Christian identity by others outside our community, this statement will clarify. When we need to get our theological bearings on some discussion or reflection, the statement may be useful. A "premier Christian university" has an obligation to say what we mean by Christian, and this is what we set out to do in this statement.

I am grateful to the Faith Statement Task Force for their faithful and good work throughout. The members of this widely representative group were Mark Abbott, Gerard Duguay, Marj Johnson, Don MacPhee, Les Steele, Rick Steele, the Faculty Chair, and the ASSP President. I also felt strongly that we needed to draw from the expertise and wisdom of the faculty of the School of Theology, and many of them contributed generously and willingly. I am especially grateful to Dr. Rick Steele for his contributions and for his ability to listen to his colleagues and translate their input into a congruent whole.

Now I present this statement to the broader SPU campus community. While I am not at this point interested in much more wordsmithing, if you have thoughts to share with me or any member of the committee, I would welcome them. As soon as the campus community has had a chance to read and reflect on the statement, I will then send this draft to members of the Board of Trustees for a second reading in preparation for a vote of approval at the May 21, 2004 board meeting.

I hope you are as pleased as I am with this new *Statement of Faith*. This now gives us an anchor to guide our work for this very unique Christian community we call Seattle Pacific University. As many of you have heard me say over the last few months, I have come to believe in the distinctiveness of what we are trying to do at Seattle Pacific. I believe this statement represents one more way by which we articulate the unique work we are trying to accomplish.

Here then is the final draft of the Seattle Pacific *Statement of Faith*:

***A Statement Of Faith For Seattle Pacific University***  
**Final Draft Proposed by Philip W. Eaton, President,**  
**and the Faith Statement Taskforce**  
**April 9, 2004**

***Faith And Mission.*** At Seattle Pacific University, we seek to ground everything we do on the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a claim is both personal, a commitment by members of our community, and institutional, a corporate aspiration that has guided this institution from its founding. Even while we endorse the rich diversity of the Church throughout the world, we anchor our faith on the vibrant center of Jesus Christ, the authority of Holy Scripture, and the tradition of the Christian Church throughout history.

Our mission at Seattle Pacific University is to engage the culture and change the world, through competence, character, wisdom, and community. We believe our faith in Jesus Christ is the informing and sustaining power through which we fulfill this distinctive calling.

*Our position of faith within the Christian Church is shaped in four ways:*

**1. *We Are Historically Orthodox.*** We affirm the historic Christian faith, as attested in the divinely inspired and authoritative Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized, for example, in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. We affirm that God is triune, and that the three divine Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are coequal, coessential, and coeternal. We affirm that by the grace and power of God the universe was brought into being, is continually sustained and governed, and will ultimately be brought to its promised consummation. We affirm, further, that we human beings are created by God in God's own image to be stewards of creation, and that we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love others as ourselves—but in these divinely appointed tasks we have failed, so that we are now subject to judgment and death. Yet we rejoice that God's grace is available to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and that through faith in Christ we are delivered from sin and death and empowered by the Holy Spirit for lives of joyful obedience to the Father. Finally, we respond to the Spirit's call to participate in Christ's body, the church; to embrace Christ's mission to the world; and to live in the hope and assurance that Christ's return will bring to completion God's saving work.

**2. We Are Clearly Evangelical.** We stand within the broad evangelical tradition of Christianity and, as such, we joyfully accept the task of proclaiming the evangel—God’s good news—to the world. We understand this to mean that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of the world and that he alone can liberate broken and fallen human beings from sin and death. We lift high the authority of holy scripture as divinely inspired, embraced by the church as central to our understanding and witness. We affirm that the Holy Spirit works in human hearts to kindle faith in Jesus Christ, to restore people to a right relationship with God and each other, and to begin transforming people into the likeness of Christ. And we believe the gospel promise that light, health, wholeness, and peace are abundantly available to everyone who asks. Yet we also believe that we are called to practice what we preach: first, by cultivating vital Christian piety; and second, by engaging the surrounding culture through public testimony and loving service.

**3. We Are Distinctively Wesleyan.** Standing within the Wesleyan holiness branch of historic and evangelical Christianity, and recognizing the Free Methodist Church as our founding denomination, Seattle Pacific University is informed by the theological legacy of John and Charles Wesley. We share their conviction that God’s saving purpose is the renewal of human hearts and lives in true holiness through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. We are shaped by their emphasis on the importance of the human response to the Spirit’s renewing work, including the vital role of the spiritual disciplines and practices—such as prayer, meditation, worship, Scripture study, charitable giving, public testimony to Christ’s saving love, and loving service to those in need— all of which serve as means of God’s grace. Above all, we embrace the Wesleys’ hope that God’s transforming love is offered to all persons, addresses all areas of life, and will not rest content until it has redeemed the whole creation.

**4. We Are Genuinely Ecumenical.** As heirs of John Wesley’s catholic-spirited brand of Christianity, we seek to gather persons from many theological and ecclesial traditions who have experienced the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We believe that theological diversity, when grounded in a common and vital faith in Christ, enriches learning and bears witness to our Lord’s call for unity within the church. We are also well aware of other dividing walls that separate people from one another, walls that Christ desires to break down—walls of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, and class. We believe that Christ calls us to value diversity and to seek ways for all persons in our university community to grow in their individual giftedness and to contribute in meaningful ways to our common life and work. Thus, in all of our diversity, we are centered in Christ, and called by him to shape, model, and participate together in grace-filled community.

**Therefore,** we commit ourselves to this faith, and to these shaping influences that define our community of faith, and we pledge ourselves, with humility and conviction, to live as best we know how in loving relationship with Jesus Christ and in faithful service to others. This we believe to be the defining center of our lives and the guiding aspiration of our life in community at Seattle Pacific University.

**2004 Faith Statement Taskforce Members:**

Phil Eaton, Chair  
Mark Abbott  
Gerard Duguay  
Doug Downing  
Marj Johnson  
Don Mac Phee  
Les Steele  
Rick Steele  
Bri Clark

