

Jean Silva's Faith Journey/Statement

My faith journey has taken me from my early days of understanding faith as moral conduct to understanding it as a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ who is intimately involved in my daily life. The trip has also made me realize that God not only calls me to serve the Church, but in that call, serves and nurtures me into a deeper faith that equips me for the next calling and sustains me through rough times. And in this journey, God is a God of surprises and humor. Every time I make a pronouncement or plan, God shows me a more excellent way!

I grew up in a Presbyterian, church-going family. Both of my parents were cradle Presbyterians. My parents encouraged my three brothers and me to be involved in the life of the church through youth group and choir. Adults at my church encouraged me in church leadership when I was an officer in my youth group and was nominated by my church to serve on the Presbytery Youth Planning Council (Florida Presbytery). The love and dedication shown to me and the rest of the youth at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Pensacola shaped my faith and my call to service in the Church. Also instrumental in forming my faith and calling were my paternal grandparents who constantly talked about their faith. My grandmother played the organ for \$1/year at First Presbyterian Church in DeFuniak Springs, FL, and my grandfather was often pulpit supply at their church and taught a Bible study every Sunday afternoon at nearby Gillis Chapel. Though my parents were quieter about their faith, their faith was evident in their conduct and decision-making. My father, a radiologist, spoke of God in terms of "our Maker" - Maker of the human body and of creation. When surveying the Gulf of Mexico and the beautiful white beach, Dad often said, "How can anyone look at creation and not believe in God?" My mom's love and giving nature embodied God for me, and she was the first one to recognize my call to church work. I ignored her pronouncement even as I was majoring in religion at

Davidson College because "even if I don't know what I'll do with it, I'll benefit from studying the Bible." I couldn't see being a minister and I thought that seminary was the only path... until I was asked to apply for my first DCE position.

Every single church-related position I've held was a result of being asked to apply - what I consider a call from the faith community. These positions include: DCE of Christ Episcopal Church, Trinity Presbyterian Church, and Grace Presbyterian Church, and Hunger Action Enabler and later Associate for Education and currently as Associate Executive Presbyter for the Presbytery of Florida. Even today, I marvel at how God called me through people in the faith community and in my life circumstances to nurture me along the way in order to serve the Church in different capacities. I have struggled at times with the notion that the call from the faith community is always present "for the workers are few," but as I grow older, it's clearer to me that my calling was not just from the faith community but from God.

God has often used circumstances, people and timing to help me discern my service in the Church. One such encounter was when my family returned to Pensacola after moving for 8 years wherever the Navy sent my husband Joe. I had pronounced firmly that a church position was neither possible nor preferred; after all, I enjoyed attending my hometown church, and I didn't want to go anywhere else. I began my job search one Sunday morning, leaving for church discouraged from what I saw in the classifieds. Right after worship, Frank Beall, my pastor growing up, pulled me aside and asked if I'd serve as the interim DCE at Trinity. I was flabbergasted. I had dreamed of working for my home church for over a decade. I was struck by the timing – the job search had begun that very morning! I served there for 5 wonderful years.

God's sense of humor never ceases to amaze me. God has taught me again and again that my plans for my life are not God's plans. As soon as I make a pronouncement – "I will marry a

tall, southern Presbyterian and have lots of kids, “(I married Joe, a short, California Catholic, and we had two children, Joe and Katherine); “I am through with church work” (At one point after that pronouncement, I held three part-time church positions!); “My marriage is going to make it” (it began unraveling within days) – God always reveals a better path than I can imagine – even when it leads to the pain of divorce, because, through that ordeal, I have grown closer to God, leaning on Him and trusting Him more than I had without the experience.

God has a plan for every life and equips us every step of the way if we remain open to the Holy Spirit, and in the process we are richly blessed by the people we encounter. God led me to ChristCare small group ministry training at the same time that I learned of my best friend’s breast cancer. ChristCare training equipped me to deal with her death and my parents’ cancer. God has always placed people in my life who comfort and sustain me through tough times.

I believe that God is showing us a new way to be the Church, calling us to return to the vision of the early Church in Acts. Small group ministry, mission-oriented evangelism and gift-oriented ministry are key to church transformation. I see my role as one of working with people for the transformation of lives and congregations by moving from the focus on church membership making to focusing on disciple making. It is primarily a process of continual discernment of God’s will for our lives and God’s will for the covenant community in a given place. It is stepping out in faith, knowing that God is there with us, showing us the way if we but stay open to His leading.

I believe in the triune God - God the Father, Parent, Maker of all good things; and in Jesus Christ, God’s unique Son, our brother and friend; and the Holy Spirit that is closer than breath, and a constant reminder that in life and in death we belong to God.

God has a plan for each of us, speaking to us daily in surprising ways. As a result of my faith journey to this point, I am no longer bashful, but excited to share my encounters of God with others. I live with the confidence that God will show us a better way than we can imagine - a more excellent way. Thanks be to God!!!