

**The Phoenix Affirmations
Longer Version 3.7**

The public face of Christianity in America today bears little connection to the historic faith of our ancestors. It represents even less our own faith as Christians who continue to celebrate the gifts of our Creator, revealed and embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Heartened by our experience of the transforming presence of Christ's Holy Spirit in our world, we find ourselves in a time and place where we will be no longer silent. We hereby mark an end to our silence by making the following affirmations:

As people who are joyfully and unapologetically Christian, we pledge ourselves completely to the way of Love. We work to express our love, as Jesus teaches us, in three ways: by loving God, neighbor, and self.

(Matt 22:34-40 // Mk 12:28-31 // Lk 10:25-28; Cf. Deut 6:5; Lev. 19:18)

LOVING GOD INCLUDES:

Affirmation 1: Walking fully in the path of Jesus, without denying the legitimacy of other paths God may provide humanity;

Matthew 11:28-29; John 8:12; John 10:16; Mark 9:40

As Christians, we find spiritual awakening, challenge, growth, and fulfillment in Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection. While we have accepted the Path of Jesus as *our* Path, we do not deny the legitimacy of other paths God may provide humanity. Where possible, we seek lively dialog with those of other faiths for mutual benefit and fellowship.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found wherever love of God, neighbor, and self are practiced together. Whether or not the path bears the name of Jesus, such paths bear the identity of Christ.

We confess that we have stepped away from Christ's Path whenever we have failed to practice love of God, neighbor, and self, or have claimed Christianity is the *only* way, even as we claim it to be *our* way.

Affirmation 2: Listening for God's Word which comes through daily prayer and meditation, through studying the ancient testimonies which we call Scripture, and through attending to God's present activity in the world;

2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 13:12

As Christians, we listen for God's Word in the living presence of the Holy Spirit, praying every day, and discerning God's present activity in our world. We also study and revere the ancient records which we call Scripture, recognizing that they have been formed within distinct historical and cultural contexts, yet have been informed by God's Spirit, which transcends all ages and times. Most of all we seek the meaning of salvation, of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as it is presented in the Scriptures and discerned in daily life.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers engage in daily prayer and meditation, as well as personal and community study and interpretation of Scripture, as central ways God's continuing voice is discerned in everyday life.

We confess that we have moved away from Christ's Path when we have claimed that God's Word is restricted to that which may be contained in a written document, or that either the recording of God's Word in Scripture, or our interpretation of it, are infallible. Further, we have moved away from the Path when we have allowed the mere fact of Scripture's fallibility, or our own, to dissuade us from seeking God's Word in Scripture, prayer, and reflection on daily life.

Affirmation 3: Celebrating the God whose Spirit pervades and whose glory is reflected in all of God's Creation, including the earth and its ecosystems, the sacred and secular, the Christian and non-Christian, the human and non-human;

Genesis 1:31a; Psalm 96:1,11-12; Acts 17:23

As Christians, we seek to act as righteous stewards of the earth and its ecosystems. We celebrate the reflections of the Creator's glory in both the sacred and secular, human and non-human, Christian and non-Christian.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers act as caring stewards of the earth, and where the presence of the living Christ is celebrated wherever Christ's spirit manifests itself, transcending all preconceived human categories.

We confess that we have stepped away from this Path when we have ignored our role as stewards of the earth, or have interpreted Scripture in a way that fails to account for the sacredness of the earth or the integrity of its ecosystems. We have further moved away whenever we have claimed that the glorification and praise of God is limited only to that which is consciously and overtly Christian.

Affirmation 4: Expressing our love in worship that is as sincere, vibrant, and artful as it is scriptural.

Genesis 2:7; Exodus 31:2-51; Revelation 18:22

As Christians, we strive to respond to God's artistry in Creation by integrating the arts in worship, education and proclamation. We encourage the reclaiming of artistry and artistic expression in all Christian endeavors, both personal and communal.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers make sincere and vibrant worship of God as central to the life of their community as Jesus did. We further affirm artistic expression as a way of reflecting God's creativity, joy, and prophetic voice in what may be seen, heard, felt, tasted, sung and spoken.

We confess that we have moved away from Christ's Path when we have failed to make worship the product of our best efforts to experience and express love for God, neighbor

and self in community with others. We have moved further from this path when we have considered the arts as trivial or merely tangential to the life of a mature Christian community.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR INCLUDES:

Affirmation 5: Engaging people authentically, as Jesus did, treating all as creations made in God's very image, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental ability, nationality, or economic class;

Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:3-7

As Christians, we welcome those of every race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental ability, nationality, and economic class into the full life of our community.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers uplift and celebrate the worth and integrity of all people as created in God's very image and likeness. We further affirm that Christ's Path includes treating people authentically rather than as mere categories or classes, challenging and inspiring all people to live according to their high identity.

We confess that we have stepped away from this Path whenever we have failed to recognize the essential goodness of God's Creation by treating some classes of human beings as more godly than others. We have moved further from Christ's Path when we have treated people superficially, as objects to be used rather than human beings with depth and distinction.

Affirmation 6: Standing, as Jesus does, with the outcast and oppressed, the denigrated and afflicted, seeking peace and justice with or without the support of others;

Micah 6:8; Luke 12:48

As Christians, we advocate and care for those who experience oppression and poverty, either physically or spiritually, within our faith communities, our country, and the world. We

recognize the local congregation as the primary context for offering such care, even as we seek to extend it beyond our faith communities into the wider world.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers honor the essential unity of spirit and matter by connecting worship and theology with concrete acts of justice and righteousness, kindness and humility, with or without the support of others.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have suggested that Christianity is concerned with only the spiritual in contrast to the material, or vice-versa. We have moved further away when we have celebrated blessings given by God without also acknowledging responsibilities that come with blessing.

Affirmation 7: Preserving religious freedom and the Church's ability to speak prophetically to government by resisting the commingling of Church and State;

Luke 20:25; 1 Peter 2:17

As Christians, we strive to live as responsible citizens of our country, just as we seek to live as Christ's disciples. We celebrate the separation of Church and State as much for the protection of the Church, and other faith communities, as the State.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers honor the role of the State in maintaining justice and peace, so far as human discernment and ability make possible. We affirm the separation of Church and State, even as we endeavor to support the state in as far as Christian conscience allows.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have confused the role of the State with that of the Church. We have moved further from the Path when we have renounced the Church's calling to speak prophetically to the State by suggesting that the

Church should or could take on the nature, tasks and dignity which belong to the State, thus becoming itself an organ of the State.

Affirmation 8: Walking humbly with God, acknowledging our own shortcomings while honestly seeking to understand and call forth the best in others, including those who consider us their enemies;

Luke 18:9-14; Luke 6:27-29; Galatians 5:22-23; John 15:18-19

As Christians, we recognize that we are misfits both with respect to God's Realm and the world. We are misfits with respect to God's Realm in that we rarely live up to the principles and ideals we espouse. We are misfits with respect to the world in that the ideals for which we strive frequently do not conform to the ways of the world.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers love those who consider them their enemies as much as they love themselves, striving humbly to embody the "fruits of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have promoted a notion that people of faith are morally or ethically superior to those without faith. Further, we have moved away when we have supported any cause, no matter how just or righteous, without reflecting the "fruits of the Spirit" toward all.

LOVING OURSELVES INCLUDES:

Affirmation 9: Basing our lives on the faith that, in Christ, all things are made new, and that we, and all people, are loved beyond our wildest imagination – for eternity;

Psalm 22:27-29; Psalm 23:4-6; Psalm 139:7-12; John 3:16-17; Romans 14:7-11; Philippians 1:20-26

As Christians, we bear witness to, and nurture faith in, all persons who are hungry for, or open to the revelation, love, and salvation of God in Christ. We do not seek to evangelize those who have no desire to explore the Christian Path. We trust, rather, that God's love, grace and invitation, has been, and will be, revealed in other paths, witnesses and times.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers are continually discovering, and rediscovering that they – and all people – are loved beyond their wildest imagination, and they determine to live their lives according to this discovery. We find in this discovery and surrender the very essence of salvation, which is a process, not an end-point, within an eternal journey.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path whenever we have denied God's love for all people, or have denied the effectiveness of God's eternal will that all be saved. We have moved further from Christ's path when we have not actively born witness to God's love and grace with those who seek it.

Affirmation 10: Claiming the sacredness of both our minds and our hearts, recognizing that faith and science, doubt and belief serve the pursuit of truth;

Proverbs 1:20-22; 1 Corinthians 3:18-19; 1 Corinthians 14:15

As Christians, we seek to develop intellectually as sincerely as we seek emotional development. We further seek to clarify that the truths contained in Scripture are not conveyed primarily through scientific revelations, but through wisdom which may be gleaned frequently in story and song, symbol and parable.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers value the pursuit of wisdom, which is found at the intersection of head and heart, where God seeks relationship with the human soul.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have denied either the role of the mind, or that of the heart, in the seeking of wisdom. Further, we have moved off the Path when we have denigrated the role of doubt or pursuit of scientific knowledge as if they were enemies rather than allies of faith.

Affirmation 11 Caring for our bodies, and insisting on taking time to enjoy the benefits of prayer, reflection, worship and recreation in addition to work;

Exodus 5:4-8; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19

As Christians, we strive to embrace and embody ways of living that promote the health of the body, the joy of living, and the benefits attained when work is combined with rest and recreation, reflection and prayer. We do this for our sake, for the sake of others, for the sake of the earth, and for the sake of Christ.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers care for their bodies as temples of the holy, and take time to pray and play, to worship, and to reflect, as essential parts of their vocation.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have supported the ethics of Pharaoh over the ethics of God by promoting systems of production and consumption without attending to the disciplines of rest and recreation, reflection and prayer. We have further moved from the Path when we have denigrated or abused our bodies, or those of others, or denied the rights and responsibilities of others to make decisions about how they care for the bodies God gave them.

Affirmation 12 Acting on the faith that we are born with a meaning and purpose; a vocation and ministry that serves to strengthen and extend God's realm of love.

Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 5:15-16; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31

As Christians, we practice prayer as a daily discipline, seeking in prayer both to enjoy God's presence and to discern God's will for our lives and our faith communities. We accept it as one of our highest responsibilities and privileges to help those in our communities of faith discern God's direction for their lives, and to celebrate and value their discernment in the worship and missional life of the church. In every available way, we seek to help people develop and use their diverse callings as an expression of their faith.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where all of Christ's followers are understood to be called into a ministry. God's intention for us can be found and followed, however haltingly and imperfectly, in obedience to the guidance and insights, which come in prayer. We hold this conviction to be true of the Church as well as of each of its members.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have claimed that one form of ministry is any higher or more sacred than any other, in or outside a church. Further, we have moved from the Path when we have failed to concretely value meaningful input and participation by both laypeople and clergy in the worship and mission of our communities.