

A STATEMENT OUTLINING THE THEOLOGICAL COMPASS WHICH GUIDES THE PLAINS CHURCH

MARCH 2022

GOD

God is the Creative Spirit, whose essence is love. God's relationship with the world is one of compassion along with a desire for justice for the most vulnerable and for Creation. God is neither male nor female. God is more than human labels or titles. Hence, the Bible encourages a variety of names for God. ie. Creator, Refuge, Word, Father, Mother Eagle, Mother Hen, Midwife, God, Lord, Savior, Rock.

JESUS

God's beloved Son & first-born child of Mary, who embodies God's love for all people. Jesus was human and so he died. We find in his cruel, and unjust death, God identifying with our suffering. We find in his risen life, God's affirmation of life and God's judgement over evil. Jesus words and acts of mercy towards the most vulnerable shows us that God is on the side of those the world considers least, less and last. Our path of service is to follow Christ's example. "For when we do an act of mercy to one of the least of these, our brothers or sisters, we do it to Christ." ref. Matthew 25:40

SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit refers to God as God's presence is sensed and discovered in Creation, in God-Believing folks and in whomever the Spirit chooses. We cannot control nor define the Spirit, for God is a mystery and Other than us. God's Spirit can be discerned in the people, words and acts of compassion, kindness, justice seeking, good will, and in confrontations against evil powers.

BIBLE

A library of books written by the ancient Jews and Christians who were inspired by God to record their people's relationship with God in their times. Baptists recognize the authority of the Scriptures as a primary source for informing and inspiring our faith. It is where the story of Jesus' life, ministry and the beginnings of the early church are recorded. At Plains we hold some parts of The Book to be more authoritative than other parts. We highly honor the parts which we find are consistent with Jesus' 2 teachings and example of a self-less, giving and forgiving God, who welcomed all people into the circle of care including: poor, sick, dying, wayward, women, children and foreigners/gentiles. The Bible contains words attributed to God but the Book is not to be worshipped. THE WORD of God, says the Bible is Jesus. (John 1:1) The Bible is an incredible library of books, letters, histories, and poetry written by people through whom God communicated messages of love & judgement, gave rules for living in loving relationship & responded to sin with forgiveness and offered second chances. Christ and his command to his friends to love each other as he loved them, is the lens through which we interpret his story and the ministry that the Church should and is doing now.

INCLUSION

In our life together as a Baptist congregation we recognize God's loving leadership over the church. "Jesus is Lord", the earliest church in ACTS, declared. However, Plains is part of that ecumenical movement that realizes that God's will and work is not nor ever was contained in one religion, denomination or by any special collection of churches which hold certain doctrines or practices sacrosanct. Historically and currently Plains church is associated with the Elgin Baptist Association and the Baptists of Ontario and Quebec. Plains has evolved a more progressive, or open-minded theology and inclusive posture than some of our Baptist cousins. Like many churches our members come from a variety of denominational backgrounds, including R.C. and UCC. We hold a progressive posture toward issues, such as women in Ministry & leadership . Our attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues and people are less dogmatic and more inclusive than the CBOQ's official stance. Plains has a history of inclusivity regarding its leaders. The congregation has welcomed into their midst a black Canadian Pastor, (1959- 61)a divorced pastor (1979-86) and a female pastor (1990-2022). Marital status or

gender has not been a factor influencing standing as a church member or lay leader. Patriarchy and the resulting inequality between genders was the collateral damage of sin entering and harming human relationships. (Genesis 3)

SALVATION

We believe in salvation, that is, forgiveness of sin, it is God's gift of grace given to the world through his Son, Jesus. (John 3:16) At Plains we acknowledge that each person will have their own views about God, the work of the Cross. As Baptists, we uphold the individual's right to discern the scriptures and God's will for their lives, themselves. However, as a community of Faith we choose to lift up Christ's emphasis of putting people before keeping rules, and putting grace over law.

COMMUNITY

Plains is a community which celebrates volunteers, which its members are. We enjoy marking life's big events and transitions together. Members faithfully contribute to the wider mission of the church. We support local agencies, like the Food Bank and we support the wider mission of the Baptist and world community by supporting CBM and CBOQ along with other ministries, as we are able. Historically Plains has been more committed in her support of local mission over international. The church has always valued the spiritual upbringing of the children, youth and adults through Sunday School, Youth group and Adult study groups. These ministries have waned over the past 3-5 years, and were stymied in part due to the pandemic. However, the Plains has always included people of every age and stage in its scope of care and hopefully, this will continue.

ORDINANCES

On the first Sunday of each month we gather at the Lord's Table to remember his death and rising and to celebrate our belonging as God's family of faith. The church baptizes new believers by immersion and rebaptizes people who feel the spiritual need to be immersed. The church also welcomes people into membership by profession of faith, without baptizing. We also accept members who transfer from another Christian church. Sometimes another mode of baptism is used (sign of the cross in water on forehead) for special circumstances. The guiding philosophy for baptism is that the amount of water or the mode is not the most important thing. What is important is the person's desire to follow Jesus and to commit themselves to a deeper walk with God.

CONCLUSION

For many years, Plains was small, rural church where (almost) everybody was related to each other. For decades the church building was the hub for youth and social events as well as a worship space. That sense of community unity, and the warm friendly atmosphere that is felt when anyone comes through the door, is one of this church's greatest assets. It's surpassed only by the love of God that meets us, feeds us, and sustains us and then sends us on The Way.

This Statement was compiled at the request of the Plains Search Committee

March 8, 2022

The Rev. Margaret A. Bell, Pastor