

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit:** I believe that the Spirit was present *with, in,* and is *of* Christ, manifesting God in the world. The Spirit is Christ's abiding presence. It is personal, displaying the mystery of personality yet free of distortion. As a Person of the Triune God, the Spirit is deserving of personal address and reference. I believe such address in either masculine or feminine character is consistent with the Spirit's revelation of itself in scripture, in the church, and in the human heart. S/He enlivens, and lives within the hearts of the faithful. S/He woos the human heart toward God. S/He acts in the transformation of thought and human will into love of truth and service to humankind.

**The holy catholic church:** I believe that the church catholic, bound by the Holy Spirit, is the mystical and worldly community of persons who confess like experience of renewal, both as individuals and as a community, through encounter and relationship with the resurrected Christ. The church is a community of sinners, commissioned by and ever dependent upon Christ. Worship, prayer, and service shape its life. Its marks are marks of longsuffering in a world in which it is peculiar. Its unity is universal and ecumenical, and its hope is for the conversion and benefit of the world.

**The communion of saints:** I believe that the joining together of God's people is not limited by the present, but collects the past and includes the future. Such communion collects the earliest of those who responded in trust to God's self-disclosure and looks forward to the inclusion of all. It is identified, characterized, and provided for even in these times by the Apostolic witness to Christ. From such communion, guided and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, has come the scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. These testimonies uniquely identify, characterize, and provide for the people of God. Their reliable witness reveals the God to whom they are a response. I also believe the sacraments, the life of prayer, and the work of service to be significant meeting places for the saints.

**The forgiveness of sins:** I believe God created us to love God and enjoy Him (i.e. Christ) forever. Perfect joy is in ordered and complete service to God. Such service, while a duty and radical demand, is a free choice. To choose any thing, or action, or motive that separates one from God's purpose is to miss the mark, and thus a sign of our sin. All we do is tainted by such sin. Left to ourselves, therefore, we will destroy ourselves. Yet God's property is always to have mercy. For God has not left us alone. God forgives and restores, not through simple excuse, but through the painful carrying of our rejection and the evil of the world. God bears our rejection on the Cross, and shows the glory of saving Love in Christ's resurrection and in the Spirit Christ gives.

**The resurrection of the body:** I believe that while dwelling among us as Jesus, God took on a human body. I believe that in raising that body from the tomb, God showed its value as divinely loved creation. I believe that in God's realm our bodies are and will be present, whole and rendered as God created them—spiritual and full of Christ's Spirit. Life is Christ. And Life is a mystery. Life is a unity, just as God is One. And God works through eternity for our healing. God's affirmation of bodily life, therefore, revolutionizes the mission of the church, for it calls the attention of the church to the real and unacceptable sufferings of the body—in poverty, injustice, violence, hunger, abuse and misuse.

**And the life everlasting:** I believe that when Creation, including human being, is restored to communion with God through God's action it is made whole. Such wholeness coheres with the purpose and meaning of all that is, and is with God eternally. Life that rejects God inevitably separates itself from its own unity and its health. It destroys and is destroyed. Still, to life and to the desire for new life God's answer is always *yes*. For God has chosen Creation for Life.

I believe in the transforming power of God's Spirit for the lives of individuals, for the community of believers, and for the world. I believe in the love of the Parent-God and the life and work of Jesus Christ, God's Child, for our salvation and liberation. I believe that life lived rightly is lived in communion with Christ and love for neighbors. God's presence alone is adequate compulsion, and reason, to desire God. God is worthy of love and created us in the image of Love. **All praise to God!**

## **Rev. Wesley D. Avram**

### **Narrative Biography**

Born and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan, to a Presbyterian mother and Romanian Orthodox father. I spent formative years in the Episcopal church, in a small and loving congregation. I later joined a large United Methodist congregation in Rochester, Michigan, where I maintained membership until joining the PCUSA during seminary. I did undergraduate studies in Speech and Religion at Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois, and at the University of Sussex, in England. I did an MDiv at Princeton Seminary, where I was elected a seminary Advisory Delegate to the reunion General Assembly in 1983 and to the Seminary Conference, helped to organize the seminary's Cross Cultural Training Program, received the Roberts Middler Preaching Prize and the Graduate Study Fellowship for the Pulpit Ministry. Spent a fellowship year in the Middle East, studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Inter-faith Academy of Peace at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, on the West Bank. Middle East concerns have been a part of my ministry. After that time overseas, I did a PhD at Northwestern University, writing on the integration of rhetorical theory and philosophical theology. While at Northwestern I was Interim Executive Director (part-time) and then resident staff at the Northwestern University Christian Ministry and taught in Northwestern's School of Communication. Between 1990 and 1996 I was the College Chaplain and Lecturer in Rhetoric and Religion at Bates College, in Lewiston, Maine. I then became the Senior Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette, Illinois, just north of Chicago. While in Wilmette, I offered guest lectures at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and Lexington Theological Seminary and taught a Lilly funded parish-seminary course on theology and money. In 2000 I joined the faculty at Yale Divinity School as the Clement-Muehl Assistant Professor of Communication and Assistant Professor in the Institute of Sacred Music--teaching homiletics, practical theology, and directing the Y.D.S. Initiative in Religion, Science and Technology. I edited *Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities* (Brazos Press, 2004) and authored *Where the Light Shines Through: Discerning God in Everyday Life* (Brazos Press, 2005). In 2006 I accepted a call to become the Senior Pastor of the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, and then in 2009 accepted a call to become Senior Pastor of the Pinnacle Presbyterian Church, in Scottsdale.

I'm married to Lynne Allen Avram, who is a registered nurse specializing in cardiac intensive care and in recent years doing home health care. We have two sons, Andrew and Paul, who are 13 and 11 in 2009. In addition to normal parenting adventures, we have become particularly interested in alternative treatments for children with autism spectrum disorders.