

RE-ENCOUNTERING THE APOSTLES' CREED  
IN AN EMERGING CHURCH CONTEXT

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“Though astronomies change, the stars abide...”

-Harry Emerson Fosdick

## ABSTRACT

### RE-ENCOUNTERING THE APOSTLES' CREED IN AN EMERGING CHURCH CONTEXT

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For a variety of reasons, many churches in our cultural moment do not include creeds in their corporate worship. Some associate creeds with the disastrous hubris and overreach of the Modernist church as it attempted to nail down, and be the arbiter of, what is true. Others see them as simply boring and irrelevant relics of a bygone era and style. Yet in their right place, creeds have an important role to play today, framing the story of faith, and declaring the central core of what the local worshipping community holds in common with the church across the ages. Just as the lyrics of a song can seem lifeless without the music, so too, creeds can seem lifeless when extracted out of the life of faith.

In 2005 I led a team to design a new emerging church worship service for the First Presbyterian Church of Ambler which was called *SouthRidge*. As the service flourished and the liturgy began to settle into a familiar pattern, I noticed that the service was consistently devoid of creeds. There was a sense that something was missing, yet many in our new, young congregation had a distaste and distrust of prescribed corporate readings said by rote. We wondered if there were new ways of experiencing the Apostles Creed that might make it more accessible to a new generation.

In 2013 I led a team from our church to explore new ways of experiencing the Apostles' Creed. We developed eight different encounters with the Creed for both corporate worship and on-line resources. In particular, we found the encounter we called a "Creedal Testimony" to be a highly helpful way to experience the Apostles' Creed. This paper examines the history of the Apostles' Creed, the development and use of the eight encounters we created, and evaluates the impact these encounters had on our local community. The paper concludes with some tentative suggestions as to which of these encounters may be most helpful to other faith communities.

## CONTENTS

FIGURES .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Chapter	
1 THE CREED AS FORGOTTEN RELIC IN MY EVANGELICAL TRIBE.....	8
2 THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	19
3 RESEARCH PLAN AND METHODOLOGY .....	41
4 RESEARCH RESULTS .....	55
5 EVALUATION.....	98
Appendices	
1 INITITAL LAC LIST OF POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS .....	124
2 PRE-PROJECT SURVEY .....	128
3 POST-PROJECT SURVEY.....	132
4 ON-LINE RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE GIVING CREEDAL TESTIMONIES .....	137
5 AN IMAGE DRIVEN INTERACTION WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED .....	145
6 WORSHIP SERVICES DESIGNED AROUND THE APOSTLES' CREED.....	149
7 WEBSITE PROVIDING ACCESS TO SERMON SERIES PODCASTS .....	156
8 WHICH ENCOUNTERS WERE REPORTED MOST / LEAST EFFECTIVE.....	159
9 A COMPARISON OF OPINONS PRE AND POST PROJECT .....	160
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	162

## FIGURES

1.1	A Typical <i>SouthRidge</i> Service Order of Worship.....	10
1.2	E.P.I.C. Aspects of a <i>SouthRidge</i> Worship Service .....	12
2.1	A Comparison of the Apostles’ Creed with Hippolytus’ Baptismal Rite.....	23
2.2	Changes in the Apostles’ Creed Over Time .....	26
2.3	The Family Tree of Trinitarian Denominations.....	31
2.4	The Relationship Between Belief, Behavior, and Belonging.....	35
3.1	Encounters One through Five .....	48
3.2	Encounters Six through Eight .....	50
3.3	Planned Setting and Number of Occurrences for Each Encounter .....	51
4.1	The Components of a Creedal Testimony .....	58
4.2	A Typical Reflection Station Using a Scroll Block .....	69
4.3	Scroll Block Design for the Coat Rack Encounter .....	73
4.4	Video Used as the Backdrop for the Stations Portion of the Service .....	81
4.5	Web Page for Accessing the “Five Things” Encounter .....	91

## INTRODUCTION

### **My Journey Part 1: Rejecting The Faith**

“Well, maybe there is a God, but I certainly don’t believe any of that Jesus junk!” This was the line I yelled at my mother, and it cut her to the heart. Like many an eighteen year old, I thought I was being original and enlightened in making such a pronouncement. I had grown up in the Episcopal Church, went to church every Sunday, had gone through confirmation and found the whole “Christian thing” irrelevant. Going to church was something nice, respectable people did, and I was not sure I wanted to be one of them. I assumed that there was much hypocrisy – people dressing up and smiling during church then cutting each other off as they tried to get out of the parking lot. I remember listening to the priest going through the ritual of preparation for the Eucharist in a sing-songy voice. It seemed as if he were reading from a cookbook and there was some necessity to say all the words in the book in order for the spell to work. It seemed that he tried to get through the words as fast as he could – as if he was saying to the congregation “I know this is boring but it has to be done.” I remember standing, kneeling, bowing, trying to follow the liturgy and thinking we were all sheep mindlessly going through these motions... because we had been told “this is the way we do things.” I remember being a very young boy, maybe six years old, going up to the front to sit facing the congregation for the children’s message. A well-intended lady was asking us questions and trying to make some spiritual point. I had no idea what she was talking about, and I remember



feeling actual resentment, thinking ‘*Why are you asking me a question I could not possibly know the answer to?*’ I also resented being on display and being expected to perform for the adults in the pews. By the time I was a teenager I hated church. It seemed not only old fashioned; it seemed to have nothing to with anything I actually cared about in real life. It seemed fake. For many years I have had a particular scene in my mind that seems to sum up what I thought Christianity was like at this point in my life (and sadly, perhaps this is what Christianity appears to be in some quarters):

A community is gathered, sitting in a circle for some kind of religious ceremony. I am a young boy who is part of the circle. In the center of the circle a priest or shaman is doing incantations. He is wearing fancy, intricate robes. He is wearing a mask. He seems both scary and pious. He is gesturing and dancing and reciting very important religious texts in a very serious and dramatic voice. Everyone is nodding their heads in agreement. As he works his way around the circle, he gets to where I am sitting. Suddenly, while no one is looking, he bends down to me, lifts up his mask, and whispers in my ears in a low voice “None of this is real...”, and then he quickly slides his mask back down and resumes his loud voiced liturgy and dancing as if he had never spoken to me.<sup>1</sup>

Years later I would come across a verse in scripture that seemed to capture this kind of religion: “Holding to the outward form of religion but denying the power thereof.”<sup>2</sup> No doubt, I was less than fair in my assessment of my elders, but one thing was clear: the religion in which my parents raised me, made no sense to me. In the past I have described my stance at that point in my life as hovering between atheism and agnosticism. However, recently, I have come to believe that a more accurate description was what the *Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life* has dubbed: None. Nones are those who view themselves as disaffiliated with any particular

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<sup>1</sup> This scene in my mind was no doubt inspired by a similar scene in C.S. Lewis’ fantasy “*A Pilgrims Regress*”

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5

religious/anti-religious group. They are not seeking, and are not, in fact, interested in the question of God. When given a choice of a religious label from atheist to committed theist, they often choose none of the above.<sup>3</sup>

## **My Journey Part 2 – Accepting The Faith But Rejecting The Liturgy**

The first night I was away at college, I found myself lying on the quad looking up at the stars with some new-found friends. One of the guys, Jim, said, “I have a question.” He went on: “When you look up at the stars like this and think about the whole world, doesn’t it seem really unlikely that it is all here just by chance?” I wanted to find beer and girls, Jim wanted to talk about God. Jim was a young, passionate, evangelical Christian who was determined to share his faith with anyone he could. Surprisingly, we became friends and, not so surprisingly, had many vocal arguments. I remember once after he challenged me to read the book of Romans with him, yelling at him in a college dorm hallway “If that is what your God is like, I don’t want any part of *your* God!”

When I went home for Christmas Break that year, my mom informed me that the Episcopal priest’s son, who was a few years older than I, was coming over for dinner. I was mortified. I thought: “That guy is a dork.” My mom sought common ground, saying “Well, he plays the guitar too.” For years I had been in rock bands, and at that moment had a small sound studio in the basement where I was recording some (rather raunchy) new songs I had written. I thought “Sure, I’ll play the church boy some of my new songs.” After dinner I did, imagining he would be horrified by the lyrics. He said nothing

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<sup>3</sup> The Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, “Nones” on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation”, October 9 2012 <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/10/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf> (accessed December 28, 2014). See also James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014).

about the lyrics but complimented me on the music. Then he picked up my acoustic guitar and began singing a song in a language I did not recognize. It was beautiful and haunting. I asked him what language he was singing in, and he just smiled. Later he would explain that he had been singing in tongues in spontaneous worship. At the moment he asked me if I would like to go over to his house for a beer. “A beer – well he can’t be all that bad,” I thought. I went over to his house and while there, had an intense conversation. He asked me questions that cut to my heart; questions I would later realize were similar to those evangelist Bill Bright (founder of Campus Crusade for Christ) included in his tract “The Four Spiritual Laws.”<sup>4</sup> I can even now only say that it seemed that the Holy Spirit came over me and convicted me. Before I knew what I was doing, I was asking Jesus into my heart as my Lord and Savior. Back at college I continued to pursue the stereotypical decadence of a partying freshman, while I also pondered what my Christmas Break experience had meant. I dated a Catholic girl, and so went to Mass on and off with her for four years. It reminded me of my own church – it made no sense to me. One Friday night walking across the quad to a party, I heard people jamming on acoustic guitars to *The House of the Rising Sun*. This song had been a center piece of my own band’s repertoire in high school. But as I drew closer I realized they were singing different lyrics to the melody, lyrics I didn’t recognize. Intrigued, I walked into the house and discovered I had landed in a gathering of the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship. The strange lyrics I had heard came from an old song I did not recognize, called *Amazing Grace*. It may be hard to believe that a person who was dragged to church for his entire childhood never heard the song *Amazing Grace*. It is possible that at some point I was in the presence of the song, that the words were sung in the same space where I stood, but I

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Bright, *The Four Spiritual Laws* (Colorado Springs: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1952), 1.

never heard it, I never encountered it, I have no memory of it. Yet here were people my own age worshipping with music I loved. I heard and pondered the words of the song for the first time in my life. There was no shaman, no formality, just average people who seemed to believe that the whole God thing was actually real. Over the next couple years as I graduated college and took a job as an Electrical Engineer in the Philadelphia area, my faith continued to grow, but I was not yet committed to a particular church. I just knew it could not be like the church in which I grew up; it had to be more like what I had experienced in college. I had grown to believe that formal liturgy was a stumbling block – an idol which kept people from hearing the simple truth of the gospel and reading the Bible for themselves. I thought there was so much going on in the fussiness of the religious rituals that the good news got lost. Creeds were man-made substitutes for the Word of God, and formal prayers were dead, not the real thing.

My journey through the American religious landscape brought me to diverse expressions of the church. I attended a charismatic Pentecostal church for two years where much of the service was spontaneous singing in tongues, and the focus was on prophecy, healing and deliverance from demons. From there I went on to several years in a Conservative Baptist church (which did not believe in sign gifts) where the focus was on disciplined discipleship and male only leadership. I attended several non-denominational churches where the focus was on doctrine and evangelism. Around this time I met my wife who had grown up an independent fundamentalist Baptist. Her experience there had almost caused her to lose her faith. Together we were seeking a church that was both committed to the trustworthiness of scripture and open to women in

leadership. We finally ended up in the Presbyterian Church, PC (USA) where I have been for the last twenty years.

### **My Journey Part 3 - A New Look At Rituals And Creeds**

In this long journey through so many different expressions of the Christian faith, my understanding of doctrine, liturgy and ritual has evolved. There came a moment after many years as a Christian when I picked up an old Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* that was lying around my parent's house. As I read it on that old familiar sofa, I thought, "Oh my gosh, the gospel is here, it's all here, it's been here all along, and it is beautiful!" I wondered how I had missed it for so many years. After twelve years as an Electrical Engineer, having a sense I was being called to full time ministry, I became the full time Director of Youth and Young Adult ministries at a Presbyterian Church. There came a moment in that ministry when I realized that as I was designing youth events with music, games, a talk, and prayer, what I was really doing was creating a liturgy. The goal was to take people through a series of steps that (hopefully) helped them encounter God. There was a flow and internal logic to the movement of those components that either worked or did not. Students voted with their feet, and I paid attention to what resonated with them and what did not. In some ways they were even more ritualistic and traditional than their elders – if you did the same retreat twice, suddenly it was a tradition. I began to see that even in the non-liturgical/spirit-led churches I had attended there was a liturgy – just a very simple one, whether the participants were willing to admit it or not. Much that seemed spontaneous in such churches was not, and much that seemed rote in more thickly liturgical churches could be quite moving in a particular occurrence. I began to

ask how the things I had experienced as dead, rote, rituals could be re-appropriated for a new generation.

At the same time I became aware of how much division there was in the church, and how my fundamentalist friends and mainline friends viewed each other as totally foreign, as “the bad guys.” My own Presbyterian denomination began fracturing over doctrine and social issues. The joke when it was time to leave a party became: “Let’s act like Presbyterians... and split!” I began to wonder, with so many different ways of doing church, “Is there anything we can point to and say ‘that’s it - there’s the church’”? Are there only the socially constructed tribes of denominations, or is there such a thing as *the holy catholic church* – a collection of saints across time and cultures and denominations? Is there one bride of Christ? If so, what is it, and how could I recognize it? Of course, this is a question as old as the Church itself, from the Diocletian controversy, to Calvin’s focus on the visible versus invisible Church, right up to our present moment. At this point, I became fascinated with the Apostles Creed. How was it that so many denominations including the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and most Protestant churches could all embrace the statements found in the Apostles Creed despite their many differences?<sup>5</sup> Was this apparent agreement a matter of doctrine, or of ritual, or of both? These questions were not just theoretical to me – they affected both my understanding of the Church and what it meant for me to be a Christian. My spiritual journey described above and this particular set of questions would have a profound impact on my understanding of the ministry context for this project.

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<sup>5</sup> Although the Orthodox church does not use the Apostles’ Creed formally in their liturgies (preferring the eastern version of the Nicene Creed), it does embrace the beliefs found in each line of the creed, and a number of the early writers discussed in Chapter 2 were the forefathers of the eastern church.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**THE CREED AS FORGOTTEN RELIC**  
**IN MY EVANGELICAL TRIBE**

**Where Are We?**

Prior to the start of this project I found myself in a problem much of my own making. I had been called as the Associate Pastor to the *First Presbyterian Church of Ambler*, Pennsylvania, with the explicit mandate to start a contemporary service. Prior to my coming to the church, it had two traditional worship services on Sunday mornings, one at 9:30 a.m. and one at 11:00 a.m. Both followed the same liturgy with the exception that the choir sang at the larger 9:30 a.m. service.<sup>1</sup> The Church celebrated The Lord's Table once a month. The day I completed a demographic survey of the congregation, I found there was only one person in attendance between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, and that was the Youth Director's wife! The church was aging and had seen the writing on the wall. There was a consensus - "if we don't turn this trend around we will die." I put together a team and the Church gave me great latitude to create a new service designed to attract new people. Given my background as described in the introduction above, it may come as no surprise that one of my favorite passages in our church constitution says:

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<sup>1</sup> Several older members from the 11:00 service told me they felt "like second class citizens" because the choir did not sing at that service.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) acknowledges that all forms of worship are provisional and subject to reformation. In ordering worship the church is to seek openness to the creativity of the Holy Spirit, who guides the church toward worship which is orderly yet spontaneous, consistent with God's Word and open to the newness of God's future.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, according to our constitution, the only fixed requirements for a worship service that does not include baptism or the Lord's Supper are: "The Scriptures shall be read and proclaimed...Prayer shall be offered...The tithes and offerings of the people shall be gathered."<sup>3</sup>

I took this freedom quite literally and led a team that came up with a liturgy with the steps shown in Figure 1.1 on the next page. We made sure to express many of the pieces of a traditional Presbyterian service such as *Confession of Sin* and *Assurance of Pardon* somewhere within the service – they just were not lifted up as individual components. The only moment the congregation said anything in unity (other than singing) was the benediction ("And now may the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you until we meet again"). Using this format as a foundation, in 2005 the *First Presbyterian Church of Ambler* launched a new worship service called *SouthRidge*. We were convinced that local people already thought they knew what our church was about – and weren't interested, so we wanted to brand the service as something different. We wanted a name that was easy to remember, connected to a real place, and also had a theological connotation. The church is located on South Ridge Ave. *SouthRidge* was meant to be an outreach ministry to the un-churched in general and younger generations in particular.

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<sup>2</sup> Presbyterian Church (USA), *Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly [PCUSA], 2013), sec. W-3.1002.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



Element	Typical Length	Lead By	Notes
Worship in Music and greeting	20 minutes	Worship Band	Contemporary/Alternative music with video projection. About half-way through the set, the congregation takes a moment to greet each other and introduce themselves, while the band plays instrumentally. The start of a new song cues the body return to congregational singing.
Prayer	5 Minutes	Worship Assistant - Member of the Congregation	Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Includes long sections of silence
Announcements	2 Minutes		Focused on ways to get connected to the church and its mission
Offering	4 Minutes	Worship Band, Soloist, or Video Presentation	A musical piece performed for the congregation to the glory of God. Often includes showing images from recent mission events
Scripture and Sermon	28 Minutes	Pastor	Highly visual using both video projection and physical objects. Both narrative and teaching oriented
Stations	10 Minutes	Video mash-up created for the particular service includes video, music, text – usually scripture and a prayer or question	The congregation disperses and travels to various stations. Stations Include: 1. Prayer Station with cushions 2. Votive Candles 3. Art Station with works selected based on particular week’s message 4. Reflection Station: An enclave with physical elements and experiences based on the particular week’s message. Five identical copies of the Reflection station were set up around the sanctuary. 5. Remain in the pew and meditate on what is being projected.
The sacrament of The Lord’s Table		Pastors and Members – Two Teams of two	Done every Sunday. Done by Intinction at stations near the table. The Pastor would tear a piece of bread from a large loaf for each person and hand it to them with words such as “the bread of life” or “Jesus broke his body for you.”
Re-gathering Song		Worship Band leader	As a cue that stations time is coming to an end, transition from video mash-up to live performance. Usually an acoustical refrain from the Worship set
Benediction	1 Minute	All	The congregation stands, holds hands, and says the Benediction over each other.

**Figure 1.1 A Typical *SouthRidge* Service Order of Worship**

We tied the service to imagery from wilderness adventures, and noted on our website that when seeking full exposure to the sun in the mountains, one goes to the south ridge. In this new service we were seeking full exposure to Jesus, the Son of God.

As I mentioned above, the Church gave us great freedom for the design and liturgy of the service. While the traditional service of the church included choir, organ, and a standard Presbyterian liturgy with communion once a month, the *SouthRidge* service included a worship band, the use of video and audio mash-ups, contemplative stations, and communion every week. We intentionally designed the sermons to be both multi-sensory and catechetical. In the middle of each service, we provided a designated block of time, which we called Stations, where people could choose what they wanted to do – physically moving to the Lord’s Table or one or more of the five different station opportunities outlined in Table 1.1<sup>4</sup>

I found what I thought a helpful rubric for thinking about the design of the worship service in a work by futurist Leonard Sweet. In *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World*, Sweet argues that the church needs to be “E.P.I.C.”<sup>5</sup> By this he means that a vibrant postmodern church needs to be:

Experiential – Not limited to propositions, but pursuing whole person encounters

Participatory – The congregation seen not as passive observers but as co-creators/doers

Image-Driven – Rich in visual imagery and metaphors

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<sup>4</sup> A good sense of this service can be gleaned by watching the mini-movie created for this project (Encounter 5) starting at time marker 1:20 and ending at time marker 2:08. It can be seen at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MUL6\\_5z6wY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MUL6_5z6wY) (accessed 1/15/2015).

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century World* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 31-48.

Connected – Providing a sense of community and connection – a sense of belonging

As shown in the table below, *SouthRidge* is a particular implementation (with modification) of E.P.I.C. worship.

<b>E.P.I.C. Worship is</b>	<b>As opposed to</b>	<b>SouthRidge Implementation</b>
<b>E</b> xperiential	Limited to propositions and head knowledge	SouthRidge attempts to use all the senses – sight, sound, taste, touch and feel. Stations often include incense, art, tactile experiences of manipulating objects and tasting the bread and drink. The service has an intentional beginning, middle, and end, but the congregant often literally comes around the corner and encounters something unexpected – as in the case of reflection stations set up in enclaves. We strive to create space for a wide range of emotions and self-discovery within the service. The sermons are narrative and often interactive. However there is an intentionally didactic aspect as well.
<b>P</b> articipatory	Passive observation of the action going on at the front of the sanctuary	Here we make an attempt to keep the locus of action for the service at the pew, not at the front of the sanctuary. The band is off to the side, and congregational singing is typically highly participatory. Congregants decide how they will use the Station time and get up and move around – participating in the construction of their own experience. There is usually some form of response or next step offered that a person can pursue during the week. At least three people are up front leading each week, and members of the laity are always part of the worship leadership team. Pastors sit within the congregation when not leading.
<b>I</b> mage Driven/Rich	Limited to text and linear presentation of ideas	We put great time and effort into the selection of imagery used during the prelude, the sermon, and the station time. Often I spend one third of sermon preparation time on the selection of images and objects used to convey the message/story. I do however couple this with intentional teaching centered on the Scriptures.
<b>C</b> onected	Private religious experience isolated from interaction with others.	The service begins with low interaction. Half-way through the worship set, individuals greet one another. We attempt to focus announcements on ways to get connected with each other through social events or hands-on mission. The service ends with congregants literally connected by holding hands to give each other the benediction.

**Figure 1.2 E.P.I.C. Aspects of a *SouthRidge* Worship Service**

The gathering thrived, and folks from a wide variety of church backgrounds as well as those with no church affiliation began to attend. Within a couple years

*SouthRidge* attendance was overtaking (what had been seen as the main) traditional service. Thankfully, because of careful cross-pollination between the services through a shared coffee hour, shared mission trips and shared governance in committees and Session, the church has remained one, cohesive community.

While we celebrate the Lord's Table every Sunday, most other traditional liturgical elements of the universal church, such as The Lord's Prayer and the declaration of the Apostles' or Nicene Creed had not been a regular part of the *SouthRidge* worship service.

### **The Problem With Grooves – How Our Liturgy Remained Creedless**

Within a year of starting *SouthRidge*, a friend at *Vision Video* (a producer of Christian films) asked me to collaborate on creating a discussion guide for a video project they were developing on the Apostles' Creed. They wanted their project to become a nine hour, seventeen session curriculum based on each line of the creed. For each line of the creed, the film team interviewed fourteen established theologians from a wide range of denominations and backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. They edited this film in such a way that for each phrase of the creed, the viewer heard these theologian's reflections side by side (without commentary), hearing it from different angles, different voices, different continents. I remember looking at the raw footage one night, hearing these older saints from around the world expressing their understanding of the meaning of the creed, practically finishing each other's thoughts, and thinking "*there IS a communion of the saints, there IS a holy catholic church, and I am seeing it right here.*" Of course there was a wide

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on the theologians participating in this film see [https://www.visionvideo.com/detail.taf?\\_function=detail&a\\_product\\_id=34614](https://www.visionvideo.com/detail.taf?_function=detail&a_product_id=34614) (accessed January 15, 2015).

range of interpretations and emphases, but there was so much in common in their thoughts that I was actually moved to tears by the sense of unity I experienced that night.

And then the irony hit me. Here I was thinking deeply about the centrality of the creed, but not incorporating it into the very liturgy I had been given the freedom to create! What was going on? As I look back now, I think several factors were at work that created a non-creedal groove that was hard to escape. First, I may have been overly influenced by the desire to reach those young people who did not like formal liturgy. I remember one young woman, Katie, who, like me, had left a very formal liturgical denomination, had had a conversion experience, and was thrilled by what we were trying to do in our church. She saw her faith as new and fresh and was very excited about it. She joined us just as I was experimenting with including the creed in our service. She said:

“I love your service but every time I hear people saying the Apostles’ Creed I just want to run out of the church screaming with my hands covering my ears...it reminds me too much of the dead religion of my past... all these people saying these words all at the same time, not even thinking about what they are saying...”

She never did get connected to our community even though a number of her close friends did.

Second, my own visceral reaction to the sound of a typical collective recitation of the creed may have played a part. Perhaps because of my own childhood experiences of feeling alienated during church services, the thing that most often comes to my mind when I hear a large group of people declaring the Apostles Creed together is a scene in the science fiction series *Star Trek* where the zombie-like Borg all declare in a droning unison “You will be assimilated!”<sup>7</sup> It just did (and sometimes still does) sound creepy to me. Perhaps it reminds me of mindless brainwashing, uncritical compliance, or perhaps I

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<sup>7</sup> *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, “Q Who,” Season 2, Episode 16 (originally aired May 5, 1989).

am unnerved by the implicit power at work in getting a large group of people to say the same scripted mantra all at the same time. I found myself in the ironic situation of loving the words of the creed but dreading its use in worship. I know that many people find it beautiful and encouraging to hear their brothers and sisters all say the creed in unison, but what about those of us like Katie and me who have such a strong urge to run?

### **A Preferred Future**

I wondered if the Creed could be re-appropriated, encountered in a new way that would make sense to people like Katie and me. But even if such a re-appropriation were possible, how could we incorporate it into our *SouthRidge* liturgy in a way that made sense and was true to that liturgy? I had a hunch that I was not the only one in our community who was interested in such questions and the possibility of a different future for the way we did worship. From time to time throughout the first years of the *SouthRidge* service, I had occasionally heard people mention a sense of loss over the lack of more formal elements in the service. For example, Deb, a woman in her fifties who had grown up Lutheran and was part of the *SouthRidge* launch team, said “I do miss saying things like the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed...I don’t know, there was something about all saying it together every week that I miss...a sense of unity.” Since our local community had already demonstrated that it had the internal resources needed to create a new, dynamic worship service, it seemed reasonable to me to believe that the same community could come together to bridge the gap between that service and classical liturgical resources.

In September 2012, I asked a diverse group of individuals who attend *SouthRidge* to spend a Sunday afternoon talking together about the future of the American church in general and the *SouthRidge* service in particular. Our discussion began with two open ended questions:

1. If you had to list two concerns you have about the state of the church in America today, as well as one positive change you see, what would they be?
2. We currently have very little content in the *SouthRidge* service liturgy that explicitly links us to the church across denominations, around the world, or the historic church across time. For example, the Apostles Creed and the Lord's Prayer are used around the world every Sunday and have been for over a thousand years, but we do not include them in our worship. What advantages or disadvantages could you imagine arising from including such things in our Sunday Morning worship?

With regard to the first question, members raised the concern that the American church is drifting away from authentic faith on a number of levels. Karen, a magazine editor in her late twenties, was concerned that authentic faith is devolving into the politics of the left and the politics of the right. Sarah, a Chemical Engineer in her thirties, was frustrated by what she perceived to be a tendency of denominations and local churches towards "pettiness and disagreement over details rather than focusing on things that really matter." John, a business owner in his fifties with a Charismatic background, said "my concern is that we are drifting away from the creeds and the word being central." Using his own words, he went on to describe this as a drift towards what American sociologist Christian Smith has called 'Moralistic therapeutic deism.'<sup>8</sup> Redmond, a recent college graduate with an Anabaptist background, said we have become obsessed with listening

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<sup>8</sup> *Moralistic therapeutic deism* is a term that was first introduced in the book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005) by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. The book is based on a research project, "National Study of Youth and Religion," privately funded by the Lilly Endowment. Smith and Lunquist see it as a drift from classical Trinitarian confessional faith towards a self-help approach with a vague understanding of God.

“to our heart instead of things outside of us. God has given us his word, and other people – things outside of ourselves to communicate truth to us...God came to us as Jesus incarnate –something outside of ourselves.” Luke, a young PhD candidate at a Catholic seminary with a southern Baptist background, felt “our general distrust of institutions cuts us off from the ability to submit to something larger than ourselves – such as the central teachings of the church.”

With regard to the second question, about incorporating things such as the Apostles Creed in our *SouthRidge* worship service, Sarah, recounting a conversation she had with women at a retreat the night before, said:

Concerning the questions about incorporating these elements... the key is whether or not they are used in a way that becomes too ritualistic or rote. The women who had come from highly liturgical backgrounds who were used to doing it ritualistically said “It’s just words...I try to make it mean something for me but it’s hard because to me... it just the words we say... and it makes me sad because everyone else around me is just saying the words and just breezing through them.” But, on the other hand, if we could be a place who says these things as not just words - what kind of powerful impact could that have on people who have experienced it as just words? ...They come here and we say it and we mean it.

Kevin, a father of five children in their twenties, wanted the church to communicate

in a way that my kids can understand... The world is using every effective means of social media to get their message through but the church is sitting on its hands...people are naturally more attracted to what is new and different and changing... how can we communicate the unchanging faith of the church in a way people can hear it?

Redmond noted that the Apostles Creed becomes empty ritual when “it floats above the life of the faith community – unconnected to what is happening in real life.” On the positive side, Luke argued that the creed

can be used to destroy the dualistic idea we have separating our body and our soul. We are saying it, we are using our lips and our ears, we are hearing others



saying it, we are doing it together, and our faith is becoming embodied as a community.

Many of the concerns raised in the first question appear to be connected to the opportunities identified in the second. On one side, liturgical elements were always meant to be the passionate expression of the real life faith of the community. On the other side, they also reflect the ballast that keeps the community centered on the triune God who is, rather than on one of the many other idols available in our culture. One of the conclusions that arose from this conversation was the conviction that we should pursue ways of incorporating the Apostles' Creed into the life of our community. We agreed that including the creed could provide a missing source of vitality, support, and connection within the congregation. Further, implemented in the right way, it could serve as a crucial corrective to the forms of drift identified by participants. However, it also became clear that we needed to create new "on ramps" that could make the Apostles' Creed accessible to a new generation. When I heard *Amazing Grace* but encountered it in a new way, coupled with a familiar rock tune, I really heard it for the first time. Perhaps new encounters with the Apostles' Creed could similarly help people experience it as more than "just the words we say."

The participants shared a wide range of ideas about how to make the Apostles' Creed a vital gift to the worshipping community. The group agreed to work together as a team and to serve as the Lay Advisory Committee for this project. Our goal was to create new encounters with the Apostles' Creed and to try to discern which ones the worshipping community found most helpful. The first step was to take some time to think about what the Apostles' Creed is, how it developed over time, and to discern what theological and biblical resources would be appropriate for the project.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **The Creed As Story**

During the journey outlined in the Introduction, I encountered people who took very different stances towards the Apostles' Creed. On one hand were those who considered themselves non-creedal and who would say things like

“We have no other creed than the bible...It makes us grieve when denominations use creeds instead of the Bible alone...Churches that use creeds have replaced the Bible with a human creed...Creeds don't explain scripture, they replace scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand were those who used creeds regularly in congregational worship and often had their children memorize them in Sunday school or confirmation class. These folks said things like

"The question is not whether one will have a creed or not have a creed. The only question is what creed one will have. Creeds and confessions are necessary to a proper understanding of scriptural authority. Without the use of creeds, it is impossible to establish objective doctrinal boundaries within the church... The ecumenical creeds represent the hermeneutical consensus already reached by the Church. They declare the basic essential truths which have been confessed by all Christians from the first days of the Church until today. They represent that which the entire Church has seen in Scripture"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mt Airy Church of Christ, Philadelphia, Pa., <http://www.mtairychurchofchrist.org/about> accessed September 27,2014. Linked to <http://www.bible.ca/sola-scriptura-creeds.htm>

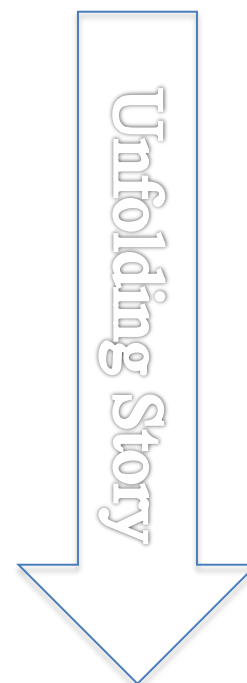
<sup>2</sup> Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape Of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 277, 280.

While both camps appear deeply concerned about doctrine, it seems to me that there is more going on in the Creed than simply serving as a place holder for a bundle of doctrinal propositions. Rather than focusing on individual statements in an atomistic way, consider the bigger picture of the overall flow of the Apostles' Creed as laid out below.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
 creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
 born of the Virgin Mary,  
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
 was crucified, died, and was buried;  
 he descended to the dead.  
 On the third day he rose again;  
 he ascended into heaven,  
 He is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
 and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 the holy catholic Church,  
 the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
 the resurrection of the body,  
 and the life everlasting. Amen



In addition to being organized in paragraphs around the work of each member of the Trinity, the Creed also appears to me to be inherently narrative, telling a story in sequence. Its first line echoes the first line of the first book of the bible (Genesis 1:1) with the creation of the world by God. Its last lines echo the last book of the bible, Revelation, with the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. The order of lines in the creed follows the same general outline as the story reflected in the canonical arrangement of books in the bible – from a focus on God the Father in the Old Testament, to the story of

Jesus in the Gospels, to the outpouring of the Spirit in the book of Acts, to the works of the Church in the Epistles, to the end times found in the book of Revelation. The Creed zooms in on (privileges) a pivotal scene in the story – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Christians have traditionally seen the birth of the church as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that came after the ascension of Jesus (as reflected in the book of Acts), and we see this sequence as the next step in the Creed. Similarly, the church has understood the end of the world to be a time of resurrection when Jesus will come back again to judge the living and the dead (as reflected especially in the gospels and the book of Revelation). Thus, the Creed appears to tell the story of the Christian church, albeit in a much abbreviated, crib notes sort of way. I will discuss possible reasons for this sparse nature of the Creed later. But first, I must raise a practical question: Christians through the ages have assumed they hold a story in common with each other and with Christians of other ages and cultures. But inherited stories tend to evolve over time, and even when they don't, they tend to be heard differently in different generations. Does the version of the Apostles Creed we have today connect in any meaningful way to the story as it was understood and told by the first Christians? Is it reasonable to think today, as the first Christians did, that in some sort of approximate way we can have access to “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints...”<sup>3</sup>?

### **The History Of The Origin, Development And Use Of The Creed**

The preamble to the Apostles' Creed in my denominations' “Book of Confessions” states “Although not written by apostles, the Apostles' Creed reflects the

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<sup>3</sup> Jude 1:3

theological formulations of the first century church.”<sup>4</sup> This claim seems reasonable when we consider the writings of early Christians. For example, somewhere around 180 CE we find Irenaeus of Lyons, Gaul (120 CE – 202 CE) saying that the church “preserves this creed of ours.”<sup>5</sup> He then summarizes these beliefs in a way that sounds very close to the Apostles Creed:

The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father "to gather all things in one," and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess" to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all...<sup>6</sup>

Similar credal confessions can be found by Ignatius of Antioch circa 107 CE<sup>7</sup>, Tertullian in North Africa in 200 CE<sup>8</sup>, Hippolytus of Rome in 215 CE, and Gregory the

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<sup>4</sup>Presbyterian Church (USA), *Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly [PCUSA], 2004), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 1.26.5 trans. J. Pelikan, *Credo – Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies* 1.10.1-4 ( ANF 1:330), ed. and trans. R. Alexander, *Ante-Nicene Fathers 1* (Raleigh, NC: Ex Fontibus Company, 2010) , 67.

<sup>7</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistola Ad Tralliano*, cap 9, quoted in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes Volume 2*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), 11. Schaff remarks that although the passage from Ignatius is not a formal creed, “it shows what facts of the gospel history were most prominent in the mind of the famous bishop and martyr Ignatius.”

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian *De Virginibus Velandis*, cap. 1, as quoted in Schaff, 17.

Great of New-Caesarea circa 270 CE.<sup>9</sup> Thus we seem to see a common concern appearing in the dispersed early church. The exact origin and development of the creed may never be fully known, but several significant markers give us a good sense of its general shape. For example, compare the baptismal formula of Hippolytus from circa 215 CE to that of the Apostles Creed as received by Rufinus circa 390 CE as shown in Figure 2.1 below.

Baptismal Formula of Hippolytus of Rome Circa 217 CE. <sup>10</sup>	Apostle's Creed Circa 390 CE <sup>11</sup>
I believe in God, the Father Almighty,	I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
And in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,	And in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord; who was born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,
and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried,	Was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was buried,
and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven,	The third day he rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven;
and sat down at the right hand of the Father and will come to judge the living and the dead.	and now sits on the right hand of the Father from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and in the resurrection of the body <sup>12</sup>	I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body.

**Figure 2.1 A Comparison of the Apostles' Creed with Hippolytus' Baptismal Rite**

This early “creed” of Hippolytus was used within the liturgy of a baptismal service for new converts to the faith. It was declared in a call and response form between

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Thaumaturgus, untitled work circa 270 CE, quoted in Schaff, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition* 21.12-18, trans B.S. Easton (Cambridge: The University Press, 1934), 46-47. Easton argues that it is reasonable to believe this formula was in use thirty to fifty years before the 217 CE dating of this writing.

<sup>11</sup> We have Latin & Greek copies from Rufinus in about 390 CE. Rufinus, *Commentarius In Symbolum Apostolorum*, trans. J.N.D. Kelly (New York: Newman Press, 1954), 9,17.

<sup>12</sup> Note that the phrase “forgiveness of sins” is not included here. But the very act of baptism is a sign of the forgiveness of sins and immediately after this formula, as part of the same baptismal formula, Hippolytus says “Then the bishop, laying his hand upon them shall pray, saying: O Lord God, who hast made them worthy to obtain remission of sins...”

catechumen and the priest. Thus, while later creeds arose out of officially called councils, the Apostles' Creed appears to have arisen organically out of worship, and even in the brief summary above we find varieties of it dispersed in local communities of modern day France, Italy, Turkey, and Africa. Irenaeus claims

although there are different dialects in the world, the power of the tradition is one and the same. And in no other manner have either the churches established in Germany believed and handed down, nor those in Spain, nor among the Celts, nor in the East, nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor those established in the middle of the world.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, there were most likely cultural and contextual pressures at work shaping the content of the creed. Tertullian refers to his creed as “the Rule of Faith” indicating it forms boundaries.<sup>14</sup> The quote from Irenaeus above come from a tract he entitled *Against Heresies*, Hippolytus is best known for his major work *Against all Heresies*, and Tertullian wrote at least five papers against people he considered heretics. Most scholars agree that early Christians felt a need to define themselves – both in terms of what they were for and what they were against. One religious teacher that Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus all opposed in their writings was Valentinus who apparently believed that Christ only appeared to be an actual man and did not really suffer, for he “possessed a body of heavenly or spiritual flesh not received from Mary...his birth was passing through the Virgin Mary as water through a pipe, neither receiving nor borrowing anything from her.”<sup>15</sup> Valentinus takes this dislike for the human body further by claiming that Jesus “digested divinity; he ate and drank in a special way, without

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<sup>13</sup> Schaff, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Schaff, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel R Streett, "They went out from us: The identity of the opponents in First John," *Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, no. 177 (January 2011): 46.

excreting his solids.”<sup>16</sup> When one looks at the lines of the Apostles Creed, we find an implied stance against this gnostic understanding, for Jesus was the son of Mary who “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” In about 107 CE Ignatius writes that Jesus “truly was born both of God and of the Virgin...truly took a body; for the Word became flesh and dwelt among us without sin...ate and drank truly, truly suffered persecution under Pontius Pilate, was truly [and not in appearance] crucified and died...”<sup>17</sup> Ignatius seems to be taking a stance with the word “truly” against those like Valentinus who said that Jesus “appeared” to do these things. While many of these thinkers spend a good deal of ink defining the faith by what they were against (I will call this *via negativa*), in the case of the creed, (and especially in the context of worship), the focus was much more on the celebration and joy of what they were for (*via positiva*). This stance will be key to the proposal I make on page 36 below.

### **Later Development Of The Creed**

Since its original emergence in Ante-Nicene times, the wording of the Apostles Creed has evolved somewhat over time as shown in Figure 2.2 on the next page. The variations reflect the changing sensibilities and insights of different cultural contexts over time. As shown by the phrases I have italicized in the middle column of Figure 2.2, the received version of the middle ages can be thought of as adding (what seemed at the time as) explanatory glosses which flesh out the implications of the shorter, earlier Roman symbol. However, the emphasis on Jesus’ decent in to Hell is not found in any of the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 46. It should be noted that our understanding of Valentinus is a bit vague as most of what we know of his teachings come from those who opposed him.

<sup>17</sup> Schaff, 11-12.



proto-creeds I am aware of. This tilt likely corresponds with a medieval interest with the theological concept known as “the harrowing of Hell.”

<b>Apostles’ Creed - Old Roman</b> (by 390 AD <sup>18</sup> )	<b>Apostles’ Creed - Received</b> (460A.D. <sup>19</sup> - 753 A.D.)	<b>Ecumenical Version</b> (1988) <sup>20</sup>
I believe in God The Father Almighty	I believe in God The Father Almighty <i>Maker of heaven and earth</i>	I believe in God, The Father almighty Creator of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord	And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord	I believe in Jesus Christ God’s only Son, Our Lord,
Who was born by the Holy Ghost Of the virgin Mary	Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost Born of the virgin Mary	Who was conceived By the Holy Spirit Born of the Virgin Mary
Was crucified under Pontius Pilate  And was buried	Suffered under Pontius Pilate Was crucified dead And buried <i>He descended into Hell</i>	Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, died, And was buried; He descended to the dead.
The third day he rose from the dead	The third day he rose from the dead	On the third day he rose again;
He ascended into heaven And sitteth on the right hand of the Father	He ascended into heaven; And sitteth on the right hand Of God the Father Almighty	He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand Of the Father
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead	From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	And he will come to judge The living and the dead.
And in the Holy Ghost	I believe in the Holy Ghost;	I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The Holy Church	The Holy Catholic Church The communion of saints	The holy catholic Church the communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins;	The forgiveness of sins	The forgiveness of sins
The resurrection of the body (flesh).	The resurrection of the body (flesh).	The resurrection of the body
	<i>And the life everlasting.</i>	And the life everlasting.

**Figure 2.2 Changes in the Apostles’ Creed Over Time**

<sup>18</sup> We have Latin & Greek copies from Rufinus in about 390 AD.

<sup>19</sup> We have a very close example from Faustus of Reiz, about 460 AD, and a copy written by Pirminius prior to his death in 753 AD.

<sup>20</sup> From the English Language Liturgical Commission, 1988.

At the same time, it should be noted that all the ante-Nicene authors mentioned above embraced the concept of the harrowing of Hell, yet thought it not crucial for inclusion in the creed. In fact, when I read the wide ranging second order theological conclusions of Christian theologians from most any age (and particularly the philosophical speculations of the early writers discussed above), I am impressed by how circumscribed and restrained the Creed has remained up through the present day. In our own time, the 1988 ecumenical version reflects a more restrained approach, “replacing “He descended into Hell” with “He descended to the dead.”<sup>21</sup> In addition, this version avoids using a male pronoun for God to promote the idea that God is beyond male and female, and using the word Creator rather than Maker to emphasize that God is not a builder who makes from preexisting matter, but rather a God that creates *ex-nihilo*. In conclusion, what I see is an incredibly stable core of the Creed over the last two thousand years – a creed that apparently has remained meaningful to many people across multiple cultures and contexts across the ages.

### **The Relationship Between Creed And Scripture**

The relationship between creed and scripture is more complicated and interesting than it might appear on the surface. In my Reformed tradition arising out of the *Sola Scriptura* mindset of Luther and Calvin, we say that we always start with scripture first. However, this is a theological priority not a historical one. We have seen that it is reasonable to believe that a rudimentary form of the creed was well established in at least some parts of the church by 180 CE. And yet, while texts suggest that the gospel core of

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<sup>21</sup> This is an internally consistent approach since it makes where Jesus descended to (“the dead”), match where he rose from (“the dead”).

the canon was established by this same time<sup>22</sup>, by most accounts the final canon of the full New Testament did not begin to be formally settled until circa 360 CE.<sup>23</sup> This means that some form of the Apostles' Creed was being used in (at least baptismal) worship for well over one hundred years before Athanasius finalized his canon list. This seems to indicate that those who were making the determination of the canon were informed, and their thinking likely shaped, by the creed. In other words, it is likely that the creed helped shape the contents and thus the emphasis of the New Testament. Rather than the creed being added on later, after scripture, it actually interacted with and preceded the settling of the New Testament canon. In my estimation, this is one more reason that the Apostles' Creed moves from a relic or by product of the faith to a much more central location in my own faith.

On the other hand, each of the ancient sources quoted above states the primacy of the scripture over the creed elsewhere in their writings. They view the creed as a trustworthy summary of the scriptures and the Apostles teaching. They do not cleanly divide scripture from tradition but rather see both as arising organically out of the ministry of the Apostles. Thus their job is to faithfully pass on to future generations what was passed on to them. This is in keeping with the very spirit of 1st Corinthians 15:1-4 where Paul says:

Now, brothers {and sisters}, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand... For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins

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<sup>22</sup>So Origen (about 240 CE) from the account of Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History, vi. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament – Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 7. Many scholars look to the list that occurs in Athanasius' *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* in 367 CE.

according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

Paul views himself as a middleman, passing on to others what he received. Similarly, Jude 1:3 says “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints...” This faith was apparently shared by the community and rather than being something original to the author of Jude, is something with which both he and his community have been entrusted. In both scriptures, the writers view themselves less as authors and more stewards of a gift that has been passed down to them. I too feel this responsibility to pass on to others what I received, and I sense this in the ancient writers quoted above as well. The image of a runner in a race receiving the baton from one that came before and passing it on once her leg of the race is over seems appropriate. This does not require holding a belief that there is some hermetically sealed pure doctrine untainted by culture or context that is cleanly passed from generation to generation without encumbrance.<sup>24</sup> Rather it seems that we all (the writers quoted and myself) would look at the Apostles’ Creed and say ‘yes, this is the heart of the matter, this is where I have chosen to wage all my chips... this is for me the Good News.’ Good news is what comes to us from the outside – it is not something we deduce for ourselves from what we can see within our own horizon. News is always told as a story – it is news because it is a story that tells us something we did not already know. News is passed on to us by others. For two thousand years, with little variation, Christians have seen the

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<sup>24</sup> In fact, the writers I have been quoting such as Irenaeus and Tertullian point to actual messy human tradition and history as the source of their knowledge and interpretation of scripture - in contrast to the Gnostics whose very complicated theological system of Aeons seems to skip over tradition and history, pulling the scripture out of its Jewish roots and Patristic context, treating it as some pure, spiritual, heavenly text untainted by the dirty realities of a corrupt world created by the Demiurge.

Apostles' Creed as a worthy vehicle or medium through which to pass the good news of the gospel.

With the possible exception of the “descended into Hell” gloss mentioned above, each phrase of the Creed is easily drawn from scriptural sources, often using the very phrasing found in scripture.<sup>25</sup> Thus while the historical relationship between scripture and creed is more nuanced than often thought, the very sources of those creeds viewed them as secondary, helpful tools for being able to read the “plain meaning” of the scriptures. They might say the creed functioned much like reading glasses – it was not the text itself, but rather a tool that allowed one to see the text in focus. The lens of the creed privileges the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the center of the scripture story and of God’s self-revelation. This is a focus with theological implications – the work of Jesus Christ is claimed to be the center of the story.

### **The Relationship Between Creed And Church Doctrine**

By one rough estimate there are about forty thousand Trinitarian Christian denominations in the world.<sup>26</sup> Even those who consider themselves non-creedal would affirm the basic ideas found in the Creed. In other words, if we approached a traditional Mennonite or Baptist with the baptismal questions of Hippolytus, they would answer

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<sup>25</sup> Although Irenaeus and other early writers embraced the theological concept of ‘the harrowing of hell’, they did not deem it necessary to include it in the earliest proto-creeds or even the old Roman Symbol of 390 CE. The scriptural basis for this stance is scant with an oblique reference in 1 Peter 3:19-20.

<sup>26</sup>The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population, December 19, 2011," <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/ChristianityAppendixB.pdf> (Accessed January 15, 2015). The report includes the following quote: "The figures on Christian movements in this report were commissioned by the Pew Forum from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon–Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass. CSGC researchers generated their estimates based in large part on figures provided by Christian denominations and organizations around the world. CSGC has obtained denominational membership information from about 41,000 organizations worldwide."

“Yes” to each of his three questions. Modern non-denominational evangelical churches that don’t embrace creeds usually have a church statement of faith which includes all the basic ideas of the creed. Such statements of faith typically go far beyond the concerns of the creed, often including statements about the nature of the scriptures, the nature of the Eschaton, and what a person must do to be saved. Again I am struck by the understated, restrained nature of the Creed given the breadth of opinions on many theological issues we find in the works of the early Christian writers quoted in this paper. The fact that such a huge number of denominations, with all that divides them, and with all the areas of theology where they think each other in error, can all still embrace the phrases of the Apostles Creed should give us pause. Could it be that the many branches of the Christian family sprout out of the trunk of the earliest church – passing through this most basic/primitive of Christian affirmations as suggested in Figure 2.3 below?

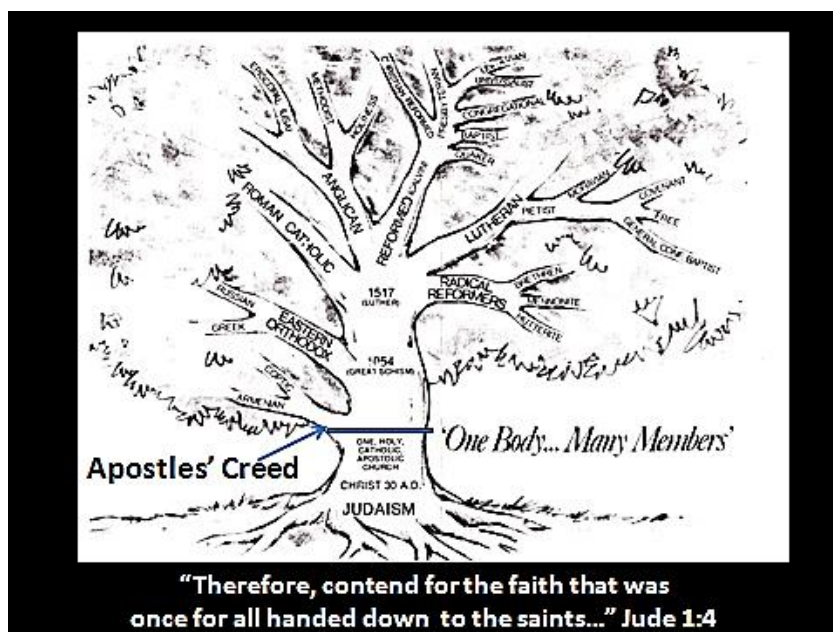


Figure 2.3 The Family Tree of Trinitarian Denominations<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Source: Adapted from <http://www.covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2010/04/onebodymanymembers.jpg> (accessed January 15, 20115). There has been

Any attempt to depict such ideas is fraught with the possibility of distortion or at least emphasis arising out of one's own situatedness. For example, it seems likely that if this diagram was made by someone from the Orthodox or Roman Catholic traditions, the branches might be organized in a different way, perhaps with their own denomination rising straight from the root and the other denominations breaking away from them.<sup>28</sup> Further, such an image might imply that the Apostles Creed represents the original pristine doctrine from which all have fallen away and therefore the goal is to try to return to the sure foundation of that pristine belief/age. Rather, I believe the staying power of the Creed and its importance for the church in all ages lies in both the spaciousness of its minimalist/multivalent nature and its effectiveness as a ritual act in public worship.

### **The Creed As Multivalent Symbol**

Because the phrases of the creed are so short they allow for a diversity of interpretations. The creed talks about the crucifixion of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins but does not expand into a particular theory of atonement. The Creed intentionally lifts up the Holy Spirit but does not expand into a particular Pneumatology. Thus a wide range of churches and denominations can embrace the Creed despite their different conclusions on these matters. There is space in the creed for a wide range of second order doctrines. This ability to hold together multiple (and sometimes conflicting) values is a primary power of any good symbol. When we think about a peace treaty or an agreement of sale, the binary

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much recent interest in religious groups not included in the family tree shown above – groups such as those led by Valentinus. This image and my discussion are limited to groups self-identifying as Trinitarian.

<sup>28</sup> For a striking example of this natural tendency, compare the time line of church history at <http://saintignatiuschurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/timeline.html> to the one at <http://abbey-road.blogspot.com/2012/10/are-catholics-christians.html> (accessed January 15, 2015).

clarity of the contract (there is peace or there is not, the property is sold for a specific amount or it is not) veils or perhaps demotes the fact that the parties involved may have very different understandings of what the contract means. To one party of the peace treaty it might mean “finally an end to useless bloodshed” while to the other it might mean “we won!” To one party of the agreement of sale it may mean “I am finally closing this chapter of my life so I can move on,” while to the other it means “I got this house for a steal!” The same act of signing the paper means different things to the different parties. Effective symbols allow people to come together on a general idea who might otherwise fight about the specific implications and meaning of that idea. The incredible theological diversity found in churches who recite the creed is evidence that the creed often is working in this symbolic way.

The sparse, crib-note style of the Creed may also act as a regulating function against story creep. I mentioned above that stories tend to evolve as they are passed down from person to person, generation to generation. My own concerns and sensibilities might cause me to pass on the story in a skewed way that emphasizes the aspects that were most important to me, but which ignores or downplays aspects that did not seem important to me. Over time, some parts of the story might grow and expand while other parts wither or drop off completely. The terseness of the Creed gives space (and permission?) for those in a particular cultural moment to take its basic form and build upon it – fleshing out particular aspects that are important to them. But that same terseness keeps that shift from being passed on, allowing the next generation to start at the beginning again, adding their own emphases particular to their new context.



In addition, because the creed paints in such broad strokes, it may provide a source of unity in our particular cultural moment. In thinking about Christian expression that makes sense to those with postmodern sensibilities, Robert Webber writes

“The kind of Christianity that attracts the new generation of Christians and will speak effectively to a postmodern world is one that emphasizes primary truths and authentic embodiment. The new generation is more interested in broad strokes than detail, growing faith than to a static fixed system, and more visual than verbal with a high level of tolerance and ambiguity. It is at these points that the link between ancient tradition and the new generation can be made.”<sup>29</sup>

To me the creed has the potential to contribute to this link if experienced in a meaningful way.

### **The Relationship Between Doctrine, Behavior And Community**

The communal declaration of the Apostles Creed in public worship involves issues of belief, behavior and belonging. In her critique of Modernistic approaches to disciple making, Diana Butler Bass argues that the Modernist model of right belief leading to right behavior which leads to belonging/acceptance in the faith community needs to be reversed.<sup>30</sup> I diagram her model this way:

**Belief->Behavior->Belonging**

needs to change to

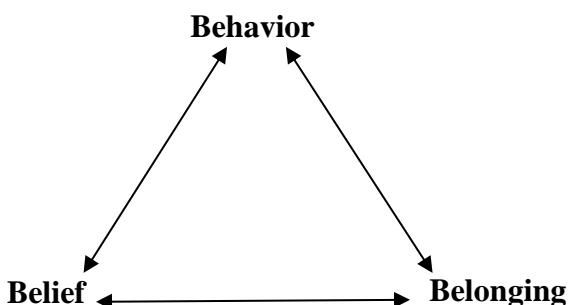
**Belonging->Behavior->Belief**

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<sup>29</sup> Robert E. Weber, *Ancient Future Faith – Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 208.

I think she is right that “actions shape faith... behavior opens the door for believing,”<sup>31</sup> but that her view is as flawed as the older model she critiques because she also assumes a linear and episodic progression. A more helpful way to view this relationship might be:



**Figure 2.4 The Relationship Between Belief, Behavior, and Belonging**

In my own experience, none of these components is a once and over event. One can legitimately begin at any starting place. There is not a neat linear sequence from one to the other. Each informs the other. Imagine a spiral through time where all three of these components are continually interacting in an unpredictable order. Together over time they build habits of body, heart, and mind. This flow can either draw a person closer to the Christ or draw her away from the Christ, depending on the content of the particular beliefs, behaviors, and community. While standing up to declare the Apostles’ Creed in public worship involves belief, behavior, and belonging, clearly the main accent is on belief - in a declaration that begins “I believe...” While some Modernists have reduced belief to clear and detailed sets of logical propositions (and gone on to build multi-tiered theological structures from them), some Postmodernists have downplayed the need and role of doctrine as if belief could exist without convictions about how the world actually is. There is a third way.

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

## **An Approach For Our Time: The Creed As Story – Revisited**

I was deeply moved when I first encountered the recently discovered Easter sermon from Melito, bishop of Sardis - written sometime before his martyrdom in 177 CE. The following excerpt, while long, is included because it will be important for one of my chief working presuppositions for this project.

"What new mystery, then, is this?  
 The Judge is judged, and holds his peace;  
 the Invisible One is seen, and is not ashamed;  
 the Incomprehensible is laid hold upon, and is not indignant;  
 the Illimitable is circumscribed, and doth not resist;  
 the Impossible suffereth, and doth not avenge;  
 the Immortal dieth, and answereth not a word;  
 the Celestial is laid in the grave, and endureth!

What new mystery is this?  
 "The whole creation, I say, was astonished;  
 but, when our Lord arose from the place of the dead,  
 and trampled death under foot,  
 and bound the strong one,  
 and set man free,  
 then did the whole creation see clearly that for man's sake  
 the Judge was condemned,  
 and the Invisible was seen,  
 and the Illimitable was circumscribed,  
 and the Impassible suffered,  
 and the Immortal died,  
 and the Celestial was laid in the grave.

For our Lord, when He was born man,  
 was condemned in order that He might Show mercy,  
 was bound in order that He might loose,  
 was seized in order that He might release,  
 suffered in order that He might feel compassion,  
 died in order that He might give life,  
 was laid in the grave that He might raise from the dead.  
 On these accounts He came to us;  
 on these accounts, though He was incorporeal,  
 He formed for Himself a body after our fashion,

appearing as a sheep, yet still remaining the Shepherd;  
 being esteemed a servant, yet not renouncing the Sonship;  
 being carried in the womb of Mary, yet arrayed in the nature of His Father;  
 treading upon the earth, yet filling heaven;  
 appearing as an infant, yet not discarding the eternity of His nature;  
 being invested with a body,  
 yet not circumscribing the unmixed simplicity of His Godhead;  
 being esteemed poor, yet not divested of His riches;  
 needing sustenance inasmuch as He was man, yet not ceasing to feed the entire world  
 inasmuch as He is God;  
 putting on the likeness of a servant, yet not impairing the likeness of His Father.  
 He sustained every character belonging to Him in an immutable nature:  
 He was standing before Pilate, and at the same time was sitting with His Father;  
 He was nailed upon the tree, and yet was the Lord of all things.<sup>32</sup>

This sermon, written about 150 years before the council of Nicaea, clearly already contains all the concepts found in the middle “Jesus” paragraph of the Apostles’ Creed. But there is more than doctrine going on here. I hear great joy, wonder, and openness to mystery in this Easter sermon - yet it is the very theological points of the creed that seem to generate such passionate worship. His doctrine is his worship. His doctrine acts as glimpses into a larger narrative. This sermon is filled with both theological claims and a sense of wonder and mystery. Savage and Presnell quoting recent thinkers argue that one source for the appropriation of theological knowledge is “Abductive Reasoning” where “the discourse of the communicator seizes the imagination of people and transports them from their current thought and imagined world to another, with transformative results.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha: With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans* trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 1. No doubt some of the beauty of this poem can be attributed to the translation choices of Stewart-Sykes.

<sup>33</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 57.

That is certainly what happened to me the first time I stumbled upon Melito's sermon. It seems to me that Abductive reasoning is exactly what Melito is doing - ironically, with doctrine! When I consider our current cultural moment, Dorothy Sayers seems almost prophetic when she argued more than sixty years ago that:

Official Christianity, of late years, has been having what is known as "a bad press." We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because the preachers insist too much upon doctrine - "dull dogma," as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man - and the dogma is the drama.<sup>34</sup>

It seems that for Melito, like Sayers, the dogma is the drama. A motivation for the current project is the conviction that this approach towards doctrine is helpful in our current cultural moment and that there may be ways of appropriating the Apostles' Creed that can help us encounter this drama, this narrative which is the Christian story.

Although the Apostles' Creed could be used in as a kind of *via negativa* - stating what Christianity is not, and thus implying who is in and who is out, it seems this *via positiva* role - focusing on the mystery and the wonder of the story is the primary use for the ancient thinkers quoted above. Certainly as converts entered into the baptism of Hippolytus, they were primarily declaring what they stood for. Certainly Melito's sermon is declaring his wonder and awe over who and what the Son of God is - each statement is *via positiva* - the Son of God was both this and that - at the same time.

In my own Presbyterian tradition we focus on the idea of Confessions - the idea that we declare who we are as a community through shared statements. Confessions are written declarations of a faith community, and we list the Apostles' Creed as one such confession.

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<sup>34</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Hargourt, Brace and Company, 1949), 3.

In

confessional statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation... The confessions are not confined to the past, however; they do not simply express what the church was, what it used to believe, and what it once resolved to do. The confessions address the church's current faith and life, declaring contemporary conviction and action.<sup>35</sup>

Thus while an ancient creed such as the Apostles' Creed cannot be removed from the cultural context in which it arose, it still can speak to and help the church today. Its story is composed of dogma fragments ("On the third day he rose again"), but as we have seen, the very brevity of these fragments gives space for mystery, shifting emphases, and broad acceptance across denominational lines.

### **Sparse Wording Helps Shelf Life And Transmission**

What if the difference between Melito's Easter Sermon and the Apostles' Creed is not so much one of ideas as of function? Melito had the luxury of time and performance to craft a beautiful picture. The Creed is a set of stripped down phrases from which the beautiful picture can be reconstituted. Consider a comparison to the use of dehydrated food in backpacking and wilderness travel. The reason the food is dehydrated is so that it is light, easy to carry and will remain fresh and nutritious until the time it is needed. Eaten as it is, it is definitely dry, boring, and unenjoyable. But once water is added, the entire experience is changed – wonderful smells, tastes, and flavors arise. What if the purpose of the Apostles' Creed's incredibly brief and abrupt style was similar – to make it easy to carry: easy to remember and to keep intact, so that wherever one went with it,

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<sup>35</sup> PC(USA) Book of Confessions, viiii.

it could be unpacked there, reconstituted in that new context to elicit the drama and the mystery of Melito's sermon. Thus the Apostles' Creed is not the story as much as the crib notes to the story – raw ingredients that allowed the believer to recreate the story wherever they went.

Additionally, as mentioned above, standing together to corporately declare the Apostles' Creed in public worship involves more than affirming received doctrine – it is a ritual act and as such includes not only statements of belief, but also bodily behavior (I stand, I speak), and issues of belonging (We are all saying this together – inferring that we hold something in common). But some ritual acts simply work better than others in a given cultural moment and context. By work better I mean, at a minimum, that participants find the act helpful and in keeping with “the faith once entrusted to the saints.”<sup>36</sup> This project will explore how a particular worshipping community experienced new ritual encounters with the Apostles' Creed - in the hope of discerning which ones the community found most helpful.

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<sup>36</sup> Jude 1:3.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH PLAN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **The LAC**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) I chose to plan, execute, and evaluate the project was a diverse group of men and women. Since our goal was to find new encounters with the Apostles' Creed within an emerging church context, I chose individuals who were attracted to that style of worship (i.e., were already attending the SouthRidge service), regardless of age. I did not limit the team to church members, rather to those who attended on a regular basis. I intentionally included people who had diverse denominational and career backgrounds. The denominational backgrounds included Episcopal, Non-denominational, Pentecostal, Baptist, Catholic, Brethren, and Presbyterian. Careers included Magazine Editor, Chemical Engineer, Financial Advisor, Carpet Cleaner, Grant writer, Theological PhD student, and the director of Youth Ministries at our church. I was trying to gather a wide range of personality types and worship backgrounds because different people experience symbolic/ritual expressions in different ways, and I wanted the LAC leadership to include that diversity. For example, people who are highly analytic might find one kind of encounter helpful, while people who are highly intuitive might find another kind of encounter helpful.



### **Causal/Predictive Puzzles: If We Add This To Worship, What Might Happen?**

The Apostles' Creed has had a position of honor throughout history as described in Chapter 2. Yet, as we will see below, many today experience it as “just words” and reciting it as “just going through the motions.” What might happen if we created new ritual frameworks in which to encounter it? Further, if we did create new ritual frameworks, which of these encounters would the congregation find most helpful? These are the primary questions that I will address in this research project. This project entails what ethnographer Mary Clark Moschella calls a “Causal/Predictive Puzzle” where the primary question is “How does this impact that?”<sup>1</sup> Rather than assuming we already knew what would work and what would not, we took a prototyping approach – “let’s try different approaches and see what happens.” Rather than assuming we already knew what would be helpful, we decided to create a number of different types of encounters and then to listen carefully to what the congregation told us about their experiences with those encounters.

### **First Step Towards Designing Encounters – Discerning The Shape Of Helpful Ritual**

A number of theoretical issues arose as we began to sit down and think about the practical issue of designing new encounters with the Apostles' Creed. For example, consider the way the Apostles' Creed is often experienced in typical creedal American churches: at a particular (often set) point in the worship service, the congregation stands up and recites the fixed words of the creed. Then they sit down. This act seems to fit well

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice – An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 77.

into anthropologist Ray Rappaport's general definition of a ritual: "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers."<sup>2</sup> Standing to declare the creed in public is a performance, and the sequence of statements is both fixed and not encoded by the performers. If the public recitation of the Apostles' Creed is a ritual act, then what actually occurs in a particular moment is about more than simply the words on the page; the full cultural/ritual/liturgical context of the experience is part of the encounter and therefore part of the meaning. Our bodies are involved: we stand, we use our lips to declare, and we hear our neighbor's voices with our ears. Our relationship with the person who leads the congregation can impact our interpretation of the act. What is said before and after the creed (and how it is said, and by whom) can also influence how we interpret and experience the creed. The proclamation of the creed is a ritual - but is it a good ritual? We use the word good in many ways. When we reflect on a particular ritual occurrence, we may say it is good because it is emotionally moving, or because it effectively conveys an idea, or because it is non-coercive and promotes virtue. Our LAC discussed what kinds of things made a ritual occurrence good in each of these three areas.

First, with regard to emotional experience, beauty is often in the eye of the beholder. For example, within a group of people who engage in a particular ritual, one person may find the experience profoundly moving while another person finds the exact same experience dead, or may describe it as just going through the motions. As a pastor, I hear these kinds of comments on an almost weekly basis. Clearly how people are wired, their past experiences, and what they are dealing with in their own lives at the particular

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<sup>2</sup> Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 25. Rappaport's pioneering work in the study of ritual and ecological anthropology contributed to the field of ethnography.

moment they participate may affect how they experience the ritual. Still, a large percentage of the congregation may have the sense that a particular ritual event has either been done well or done poorly. Overall they may find it more moving and helpful, or more awkward and empty.

Second, with regard to efficacy, we must remember that symbolic acts are multivalent; therefore, a ritual may not actually communicate what the ritual broker thinks it communicates. Philosopher of communication theory, Marshall McLuhan, said that “The medium is the message,” by which he meant that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message and therefore conveys meaning as well.<sup>3</sup> If a leader recites the Apostles’ Creed in a monotone, sing-songy voice, she may think she is declaring the great truths of the faith but what actually comes across might be: “this is boring religious nonsense that has nothing to do with your real life.” If a person recites the Apostles’ Creed in a language his listeners don’t understand, listeners may not receive what the speaker is trying to transmit. The form of the act must be congruent with the intended message and the message must be encoded in a language the participant/observers understand. On the other hand, the multivalences of a symbolic act are part of its power, as described in Chapter 2. If a symbolic act could be reduced to nothing more than precise words, there would be no need for the act. There is always some disconnect between the intent of the ritual broker and the experience of the participant. However, some symbolic acts might resonate with people from a particular cultural context better than other symbolic acts. In terms of efficacy, while a good ritual always involves some

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<sup>3</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994), 7.

amount of ambiguity and mystery, it must also in some partial way, make sense to those involved.

Finally, a ritual can either be a source of liberation or a source of coercion and conformity. If I am reciting the Creed with a group and have my doubts about its claims – do I feel pressure to comply and say things I don't believe, or does it lift me up and support me when I am feeling weak and unsure? It depends.

Tom Driver (the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology and Culture Emeritus at Union Theological Seminary) refers to one variable: the role of ritual brokers (such as priests and shamans) – the one or ones responsible for instantiating a ritual experience.<sup>4</sup> Such a position carries with it great responsibility and power. Part of the responsibility of the ritual broker is to make sure that the act conveys or supports virtuous behaviors and ideals. As an extreme example, Nazi pageantry and ritual was incredibly moving emotionally, executed with great skill and effort - and obviously quite far from virtue.

Our LAC had hoped to create encounters with the creed that were good in all three senses of the word described above. I asked one member of the team, (who had just returned from a Woman's Retreat where participants had discussed the creed) about new approaches to the Apostles' Creed. She said:

Concerning the questions about incorporating these elements... the key is whether or not they are used in a way that becomes too ritualistic or rote. The women who had come from highly liturgical backgrounds who were used to doing it ritualistically said 'It's just words...I try to make it mean something for me but it's hard because to me...it's just the words we say...and it makes me sad because everyone else around me is just saying the words and just breezing through them.' But, on the other hand, if we could be a place who says these things as not just words - what kind of powerful impact could that have on people who have experienced it as just words? ...They come here and we say it - and we mean it.

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<sup>4</sup> Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites – Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 73.

Our LAC wanted to find ways of encountering the creed which would make it more than “just words we say.” We also wanted to find ways of encountering the creed which were not coercive yet were compelling. Once again, I found Sweet’s acronym E.P.I.C. helpful, and shared it with the LAC. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Sweet suggests that a vibrant postmodern church needs to be:

Experiential – Not limited to propositions, but pursuing whole person encounters

Participatory – The congregation seen not as passive observers but as co-creators/doers

Image-Driven – Rich in visual imagery and metaphors

Connected – Providing a sense of community and connection – a sense of belonging

Though Sweet was arguing for what would make a postmodern church vibrant as a whole, we saw these concepts as helpful guidelines in the design of specific ritual acts involving the Apostles’ Creed. These parameters would tend to make a ritual act not only compelling for a postmodern participant, but also might help mitigate some of the power issues of the ritual broker described above. For example, by finding ways of making it clear in each encounter that a person had the right to decide whether or not they wanted to participate, we hoped to create experiences that were more encouraging and less coercive.

### **Brainstorming Ideas**

On November 25, 2012, the LAC spent a lunch and long afternoon together discussing our project. Rather than trying to jump immediately to technical solutions, I

tried to create a generative listening environment where we took the time to engage with one another. Our discussion floated around three basic questions:

1. For you, what is the Creed and what does it do?
2. What should we consider when creating encounters?
3. How can we help people engage with the creed in various settings:
  - a. Within corporate worship
  - b. Within Reflection Stations (an intentionally full body experience)
  - c. In settings outside of corporate worship

I have included details of the insights gained from this discussion in Appendix 1.

Following that discussion, we began to brainstorm different types of new encounters with the Apostles' Creed and came up with an initial list of twenty-five possible encounters (also included in Appendix 1). We tried to think about E.P.I.C. encounters that:

- Took into account multiple learning styles/intelligences
- Took into account the sensibilities of Moderns, Postmoderns, and Millennials
- Were do-able within the time and resource constraints of this project
- Could be evaluated in some way
- Were portable across ministry contexts
- When put together created an eclectic set of on-ramps – rituals that provide easy access to the creed. We wanted to create encounters for different contexts - some targeted at corporate worship, some are targeted at individual members located in cyberspace. We wanted to identify some encounters that we could easily and quickly implement, as well as some which were more involved and labor intensive.

Because we had to limit the project to a reasonable scope, over the next couple of weeks, members of the LAC considered these twenty-five possibilities and voted for their five favorites based on the following criteria:

1. Those you personally would most enjoy doing
2. Include one you think would be best as part of corporate liturgy
3. Include one you think would be best for someone to experience alone, perhaps at their computer.

This approach avoided group-think and was an attempt to find a reasonable number of encounters that diverse people were passionate about rather than an averaged set of encounters that the majority found least objectionable. We tallied the results and identified the five encounters the LAC felt most excited about pursuing.

### The Specific Plan We Developed

Encounter	Description	Intent
<p style="text-align: center;">#1 Creedal Testimony within Corporate Worship</p>	<p>Each Sunday a different individual comes to the front and shares a few brief sentences about their own personal faith journey which intersects with some aspect of the creed, and then concludes their testimony with “My name is _____, and I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth and in Jesus...”, declaring the entire creed as their own.</p>	<p>The community experiences the creed corporately but by hearing someone else make it their own creed. This fosters community and intimacy (getting to know each other’s stories and names) while linking the church’s universal creed to the experiences of individual lives.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">#2 Reflection Station - A Coat Rack encounter</p>	<p>An experience specifically designed for the Stations portion of the SouthRidge service described in Chapter 1. An individual follows a several step interaction with a coat rack. Several coats are nearby or on the rack. The coat rack represents the creed – the skeletal, primary concerns of the faith upon which are hung secondary concerns such as convictions about morality, social justice, or understandings of the sacraments. The experience, like the creed itself, allows for multiple interpretations within broad boundaries. For example, one might notice the rack gives the</p>	<p>An individual contemplates the relationship between core faith commitments and secondary entailments – some of which extend the trajectory of the faith and others which distort it. It provides an opportunity for an individual to consider whether they have been acting as if some secondary commitments were core to the faith, and vice versa.</p>

	beautiful coats form and keeps them from getting crumpled, while ugly coats obscure the rack and keep people from encountering it.	
#3 Arts Station / On Line Meditation – “Praying the Apostles Creed”	A series of twelve scenes which include a phrase of the creed, and an image tied to that phrase. We will implement this resource in three ways: As a series of PowerPoint slides to lead the congregation in reciting the creed corporately (phrase and image), As a series of printed images for our arts station (phrase, image, and suggested short prayer), and as an on-line meditation where the user steps from screen to screen as they feel ready (phrase, image, prayer, and links to two to four scripture references [which pop up as help tips when users hover the mouse over them], optional sound track created by our worship band).	This encounter is the most portable in that the planners can use the same development work for multiple encounters: corporate liturgy, personal contemplation of a physical art form during stations, and personal contemplation alone from an on-line resource. Note that we would add different amounts of information depending on the emphasis towards worship or catechesis. The intent is to move a person beyond simply reciting the words of the creed towards iconic meditation and prayer about real world concerns.
#4 Corporate Worship Service - Ordered around the Apostles Creed	Develop a particular Lord’s Day service that flows in the same order as the Apostles Creed (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Sanctification, and Eschaton) and which highlights the triune nature of God and the universal nature of the church. We will incorporate multiple art forms and learning styles.	Primary goal is to show how the Apostles Creed tells the story of redemption, and to provide corporate worship of God focused on attributes revealed in each step of that story. A video of the sermon created for this service may become an on-line resource
#5 A Visual Midrash on the Apostles Creed based on geographic locations	We collect a large number of video clips of diverse people declaring a phrase of the Apostles Creed in different locations. The emphasis is the location (for example “Maker of Heaven and Earth” could be filmed in Grand Canyon, while “Communion of the Saints” might appear from Fifth Avenue, New York City). The final video will step through each phrase of the creed in order, based on a bricolage of video fragments.	This encounter will be highly participatory – potentially by people around the country. The finished project will be used as part of worship in our particular context and made available for others to use as well. The intent is to create an experience that deepens the viewer’s and video creator’s sense of the universality of the church and the potency of the creed by linking each phrase to thought-provoking locations.

**Figure 3.1 Encounters One through Five**



As we will see in Chapter 4, some of these encounters evolved as the project unfolded.

In addition, we added the following three encounters as the project unfolded:

Encounter	Description	Intent
<p>#6 Sermon Series</p>	<p>A four part series on each section of the Apostles' Creed</p>	<p>We realized that the most typical mode of sharing ideas in a worship service was the sermon, and we wanted to be able to listen for how people experienced our new encounters in relation to this traditional approach</p>
<p>#7 "Five things I used to say that I don't say anymore:"</p>	<p>Five brief <i>YouTube</i> vignettes moving from the most basic religious questions to the reasons for the creed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>"I'm not religious"</i></li> <li>2. <i>"I don't believe in Faith, I believe in Science"</i></li> <li>3. <i>"I'm not into Organized Religion"</i></li> <li>4. <i>"I'm don't need doctrines"</i></li> <li>5. <i>"The Apostles' Creed is about old religious metaphysics, not about living faith today"</i></li> </ol>	<p>As we began the project we realized that many people did not have the most basic theological scaffolding that would speak to why the Creed might matter. A twenty-five minute sermon in a church service was likely not going to be attractive to many people. These short clips, lasting about three minutes each, could be a helpful introduction to some people.</p>
<p>#8 An Apostles' Creed Invitation to the Lord's Table</p>	<p>A liturgical act of gestures and words that involve the table, cup, and bread as a way of communicating the meaning of the Lord's Table and how it connects to the larger Christian story found in the Creed.</p>	<p>This encounter arose organically in the midst of worship. It was done several times in worship and captured in a <i>YouTube</i> video.</p>

**Figure 3.2 Encounters Six through Eight**

Adding new encounters with the Apostles' Creed was a way to imprint something fresh on the homeostasis of the worship service and thus, to some extent, the church system. Our plan was to follow the basic research methodology: intervening, observing

what happens, and then interpreting what we observed. Because our church has both a traditional service and the alternative *SouthRidge* service, we wanted people at both services to experience this change. We developed a schedule for introducing each encounter as shown in the table below.

Encounter	Primary Location	Number of instances
#1 Creedal Testimonies	Worship Services	Fourteen Different individuals on fourteen different Sundays over the course of a year
#2 Coat Rack Reflection Station	Worship Services	Two consecutive Sundays at the <i>SouthRidge</i> service
#3 Praying the Apostles Creed	On-line Website	Several invitations and links from other locations
#4 Creedal Worship Service Liturgy (Two versions - one for the traditional service and one for the <i>SouthRidge</i> service)	SouthRidge Alternative Service Traditional Worship Service	One time each service
#5 Creed Video	Service and On-line	Shown once during both worship services, then encouraged with on-line links
#6 Sermons on the Creed	Worship Services	A four part series at both worship services
#7 "5 Things I used to Say"	On-line - Website and Facebook	Several invitations and links from other locations
#8 Creed Lord's Table	Worship Services	Four times at each service over the course of a year

**Figure 3.3 Planned Setting and Number of Occurrences for Each Encounter**

### **Plan For Collecting And Evaluating Narratives**

Our plan was to continue to listen to the congregation over the year of implementation, and to collect narratives both in casual exchanges and in longer taped interviews with congregants. In addition, the very form of the Creedal Testimonies would

involve hearing people's personal faith stories. Our general goal was to observe change and discern transformation. But with such a large number of people involved and the additional specific goal of understanding which encounters the congregation found most helpful, what additional methods could we use to evaluate the project? The work of Mary Moschella offered a way forward. When discussing "Causal/Predictive puzzles" like this project Moschella argues

If you are working on a predictive puzzle, reaching greater numbers of people helps you establish more credible conclusions....Sometimes people are willing to express things in writing that they are not yet able to say out loud...surveys can be done anonymously...Many excellent research projects include both a large survey sample and a smaller number of qualitative interviews that help elucidate the findings.<sup>5</sup>

We decided to take this approach. Gathering pre-project surveys and post-project surveys (before and after snapshots) could be another way to try to look for change. But what kind of surveys should we use?

### **Slices And Bags**

Moschella argues:

After you have become familiar with your data...you can start the process of sorting the data into categories or groups (but)...how do you come up with the categories or bags by which you organize your data? ...Allow the data themselves to suggest the categories or groups...Most pastoral ethnography involves a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning...Participant observation tends to lend itself to this kind of back and forth: your experience of a social setting works on you while you are working on understanding it. The data you collect and absorb through experiencing the setting will suggest bags and slices, while at the same time your questions and deductive reasoning may produce more ideas about how to sort or measure your data.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Moschella, 78.

<sup>6</sup> Moschella, 169-171.

She goes on to say “you ask a question, offer a theory or a hunch – a hypothesis – and then line up the data in such a way as to test the theory. If your research is a predictive puzzle, you will likely be using this approach.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus surveys that focused on open-ended questions but included information that allowed us to group comments into slices and bags seemed like an approach that would work. But Moschella suggests that the data themselves may suggest the categories or groups. So rather than developing the post-encounter survey before the project began, we would wait till the end, see what unfolded, listen to narratives, then develop a survey that would help us sort stories and comments into those slices and bags.

In summary, we planned to gather data from five primary sources:

1. In-depth one-on-one interviews with a manageable subset of participants.
2. Stories from casual conversations that arose with participants along the way as they experienced various encounters. These conversations would often occur in the halls or at coffee hour following a Sunday morning encounter.
3. Insights from the LAC and myself as participant observers.
4. Narratives revealed in the Creedal Testimony encounter.
5. Pre and Post project surveys given to all who participated in one or more encounters.

### **The Launch Of The Project**

For several weeks, starting April 28<sup>th</sup> 2013, we included inserts in church bulletins, made announcements during worship, and sent church-wide emails out, inviting people to agree to be part of the project. Seventy four people agreed to participate and took the pre-encounter survey on SurveyMonkey (included in Appendix 2) prior to the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,171.

season of encounters. Throughout the months, as people participated in different encounters we would listen for how they experienced them. Once the congregation had been exposed to the full schedule of encounters listed in the table above, we would do a follow-up survey to listen for additional insights in to any possible change as a result of these interventions.

On May 5, 2013 we began our season of exposing the congregation to our eight new encounters with the Apostles' Creed. In Chapter 4 I will discuss both what happened during the implementation of these encounters, and provide excerpts from the many conversations and comments we received from participants. I will then draw some tentative conclusions from this data in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

#### **PLAN FOR GATHERING STORIES**

Once we had designed our initial set of new encounters with the Apostles' Creed as described in Chapter 3, we had to come up with methods for listening with regard to how the project was beginning to have an impact on the community. What sources could give us hints as to how these general/public encounters intersected the actual lives and personal experiences of congregants? As detailed below, we found the first source in the very structure of one of our encounters – the Creedal Testimony. We gave the participants a chance to reflect on their own life stories and then share them with the congregation. In addition, I was able to do debriefings with participants to listen for their narratives about making this presentation. I also did personal interviews with fourteen other congregants. These conversations usually lasted about an hour and a half, and (as discussed below) often led to pastoral care opportunities. In addition, I had numerous conversations with each member of the LAC along the way, in which they shared their experience of this process.

Because we were creating liturgical experiences for corporate worship, we wanted to try to understand which encounters were most helpful to the widest range of personality types. How people who were highly introverted or restrained experienced encounters was just as important as the opinions of those who were highly verbal or

expressive. Some people were clearly not comfortable with one-on-one interviews and had trouble expressing themselves, yet we needed their input if we were to try to understand the entire community. Because of this, we also included pre-encounter and post-encounter surveys as a way for people to talk about what they had experienced. Seventy-four people took the initial pre-project survey. Of these, fifty-one also took the post-project survey about twelve months later. This implementation period (May 5, 2013 to June 30, 2014) was significantly longer than a typical Doctor of Ministry project and I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 5.

In this paper, the Pre-project survey is in Appendix 2 and the Post-project survey is in Appendix 3. Finally, we had input from unexpected sources such as emails and conversations that naturally arose through the project. The following is a summary of what happened when we implemented each of our eight encounters.

### **Encounter 1 - Creedal Testimony Design And Implementation**

The Creedal Testimony was an invitation for church members to share their own life stories with the congregation and to connect them in some way to the Apostles' Creed. We approached about twenty people who were comfortable with public speaking and represented a wide span of the congregation with regard to age, time in the congregation (from lifetime members to less than two years attendance), gender, marital status, and ethnicity. Fourteen people agreed to share their testimonies before the congregation. An additional person who witnessed the first Creedal Testimonies asked if he could give one and we included him in the schedule. The first Creedal Testimony occurred on May 5, 2013 and the last occurred on May 11, 2014. The very act of asking

people to participate in this event opened up rich opportunities for interaction. A number expressed thankfulness for being asked to participate, with the phrase “Thank you so much for thinking of me” used by multiple people. One woman who had come out of a church where women were not allowed to be involved in church leadership said:

I was praying this morning about my testimony, thinking about it and writing some things down. I'm excited to share how meaningful the creeds and spiritual community was for me when I came to South Ridge six years ago, and even more today. I will be happy to share that!

After it was over she wrote:

I LOVED doing it. BTW, A few years ago [I was asked] if I would like to be a prayer leader during worship and I wasn't quite sure, given where I was at the time, but if you ever need someone to fill in when the regulars can't I would be happy to do that. Seeing all those dear faces and worshipping together like that was a real blessing for me. I felt, during and once I was done, that we, altogether, called forth something that is holy. It was like a spiritual high, if that makes sense.

As we began creating a schedule for presentations, participants naturally asked for guidelines for how they should prepare their presentations. One young, single man contemplating what he might say asked:

I want to talk about how I'm kind of a denominational mutt - baptized Catholic, formed in an Anabaptist church, finally a member of a Presbyterian church - and how this has made me so thankful that we believe in the holy Catholic Church. Would that work?

Another woman, Amy, was deeply moved by the fact that two young boys in our congregation were struggling with Progeria.<sup>1</sup> Out of the eighteen children in the United States with progeria, two of them are in our congregation. Congregational concern for these boys and their family was always in the background of church life during the course

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<sup>1</sup> Progeria is an extremely rare genetic disease that causes the rapid aging and premature death in children.



of this project. She had decided to create a charity to help them and raise money and awareness by hiking 100 miles on the Appalachian Trail.<sup>2</sup> She wrote:

I've been thinking a great deal about what I might say were I to commit to offering a creedal testimony and the one thing that I keep coming back to is the Spirit's calling that I've felt to complete the hike that I'm planning in honor of Nathan and Bennett for Progeria research. I'm not sure if that would be an appropriate experience to tie the creed to. Can you offer some guidance as to whether or not you think that might be appropriate? I don't want to dwell too long on it if I'm going in the wrong direction & I want to be able to give you an answer by Sunday if possible. I've attached my thoughts as they stand at present.

I told her I thought it was a wonderful idea, and she went on to develop her Creedal Testimony around her hike. We wanted to give these soon-to-be leaders enough structure to help them with their planning but without prescribing the particular way they should connect their life story to the creed. We therefore created a website resource page for the use of Creedal Testimony participants. You may find these webpages reproduced in Appendix 4. The form detailed in that location is greatly simplified in Figure 4.1 below.

STEP ONE – Personal Testimony	The leader shares their name and a little bit about themselves and their connection to the church to give the listeners some context. The leader then shares an experience/testimony of some kind.
STEP TWO – The Transition Hinge Sentences	A somewhat fixed statement that ties the testimony to the creed and cues the congregation that they are about to declare the Creed together.
STEP THREE – Lead the Congregation	The leader invites the congregation to declare the creed

**Figure 4.1 The Components of a Creedal Testimony**

After multiple Creedal Testimonies, we came to see that the key elements were: the preparation for the Leader (shown in Appendix 4 which the congregation did not

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this remarkable effort see <http://www.myfoxtwincities.com/story/25754856/hike-for-hope> (accessed 1/15/2015).

experience), and the Transition Hinge (which cued the congregation that they were going to be given a chance to join in). As shown in Appendix 4, the recommended Transition Hinge was:

*"Because I do believe in the power of the gospel to change people's lives  
and because I believe the Apostles' Creed brings us back to the center of the gospel,  
I invite you to join me  
as I join our brothers and sisters across the ages and around the world  
in declaring the Apostles Creed -  
as my own creed,  
pausing after each phrase, saying..."*

Participants often modified this sentence slightly to better engage with their own particular story. Since one of the goals of this project was to contribute to catechesis in the Church, the web-based resource reprinted in Appendix 4 included not only instructions on how to create a personal Creedal Testimony but also an explanation of the theology behind the idea of the encounter. A number of people reported that they found both this resource and the act of preparing to give the creedal testimony very helpful.

### **Encounter 1 - Creedal Testimony Presenter Experience**

I spent time with those who had given Creedal Testimonies, and helped them to debrief their experience. Many agreed with Andy that "It was a good experience for me...albeit a little nerve racking." For me, one delightful aspect was the variety of testimonies - a demonstration of the incredibly wide range of ways to enact this encounter. It gave these leaders an opportunity to reflect deeply about their own narratives and then share some portion of that story with the congregation. James, in his late twenties, wrote:

As soon as I read the description of the creedal testimony, I wanted to bring a unique perspective in my testimony. Two topics immediately came to mind: my

father and my isolation (sometimes self-imposed, sometimes a result of being Korean-American). When I helped out with communion a couple weeks ago, it dawned (or re-dawned) on me how intimate communion is. So afterwards, just thinking about my dad, isolation, and communion made me remember that story I ended up sharing. I was afraid that three minutes might have been too short, so I worked hard to pare down my story to the bare minimum. I don't think I got across very well how neglectful my dad could really be. I wanted to insert the fact that my father traveled abroad most months of the year for his retreats, too, or that he missed more graduations and *Tae Kwon Do* belt tests than he attended. Or I could've talked about the theological differences he and I have, and how that really strained our relationship in college. I'm afraid I just came off as a brat who didn't like his hard-working pastor-father instead of someone who's been hurt by the negligence of a workaholic, emotionally repressed father.

Carolyn, a woman in her fifties wanted to connect her Creedal Testimony to what she had been studying. She wrote:

I have been doing some reading by Richard Rohr and Nadia Boltz-Weber: that has greatly impacted my faith journey this past year. Reading Nadia's book "Pastrix" really spoke to me about the power of spiritual community...She says that you have to be deeply rooted in tradition to innovate with integrity. She likes that the liturgy (and creeds such as our beloved Apostles Creed) has its own integrity and doesn't demand ours to be meaningful. That's where my thoughts were coming from when you invited me to kick off the credal testimonies. It was interesting that you asked me to do that during a week that I was so pumped about how liturgy is such an anchor to our spiritual connection to each other. And then I got to share it with my congregation! That was awesome for me!

Yet what she actual shared with the community was deeply personal:

Today I would like to share with you how I came to this church over six years ago. It was by invitation from [a church] family. They invited me to come with them to check out a church they had heard good things about. They heard that the Holy Spirit was present and moving in the congregation. I was, at that point, without a home church and I felt lost, not only without a church home, but with deep sadness as I was grieving the loss of some of my closest relationships. My faith was in a state of free fall and I was searching to find a little piece of hope to hold on to and carry me through the week. I came often by myself and would sometimes sit in an inconspicuous place, drinking in the music, being lead in prayer, the sermon, the simple but beautiful sacrament of taking communion, the offering; these are some of the anchors of our faith practices. I needed all of this to remind me that although I felt alone in my loss, I was and am, in fact, not alone, but I am surrounded by people who each week, in this place and in many places around the world, reconnect with the God of the Universe. That even when He feels a universe away, He is, in fact present and as close as my own breath. I

know because I see it, hear it, and taste it each time I am at church. This is the unfathomable mystery of God found in spiritual community.

Ruth, a college professor who had almost lost her faith in her college years said:

[Delivering a Creedal Testimony] caused me to think about where my faith is now with respect to affirmation of the creed and then to reflect on how I got to this place. I recalled both hindrances and facilitators of my faith across the years of my spiritual journey. I especially remembered a crisis of faith in college and what helped me to hold on at that time. That got me thinking about how common my experience may be with others, especially how Christian faith can be challenged during the college years. I've had recent conversations with parents of college age children or recent college graduates. They've shared great pain at seeing their kids wandering from the faith. So I wondered if my testimony may be helpful to those experiencing a crisis of faith, or to their loved ones.

As I wrote the testimony it became clear to me that our faith is not in anything we can do (i.e., the strength of our beliefs or our acts of devotion). Rather, my faith is in Jesus Himself, who has been faithful to me. I wanted to show that the creed bears witness to who Jesus is, and that one can affirm it incrementally. My hope was that idea would be of help to others who may fear that faith is "all or nothing." I think the verse that describes Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith speaks to the fact that human faith is not of ourselves (He is author), nor can we grasp it completely (He is finisher). These thoughts came to mind as I wrote, and tried to get them into the brief testimony for others to consider (and hopefully be encouraged by).

Sharon, when asked what it was like to give a testimony said:

It did occur to me that my words could be pretty boring. I have often wished that I had a "mountain top" experience, where God's grace hit me like a ton of bricks, but my journey has been so quiet....no dramatic coming to the truth. I certainly wondered if such a ho-hum testimony would mean much to anyone. I wonder how many people have had faith journeys similar to mine...Sunday school background...regular church attendance...no periods of doubting...I suspect many. In that case, hearing that not everyone has a Hollywood-worthy conversion story validates where you are and how you got there. I don't know how much of an impact my own testimony had on everyone else, but it meant something to me!!

Rob, a father of a blended family of seven told truly funny stories about his wife and his adventures trying to find a church before they ended up at our church, he concluded with his own hinge statement this way:

When you have the opportunity to visit different churches and different denominations you realize that on any given Sunday, our song, our bible verses, our sermons and our choirs are different. Some churches are thriving, some struggling, some have flat screen TVs and some a simple bulletin board. But we, all in unison say what we believe. It is the single most unifying part of service. So with all the churches both near and far, let us now say what believe with all Christian churches on this day...

Leslie, a woman in her twenties who is our Director of Youth and Young Adult ministries focused on one particular line of the creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit..." She said:

This was a major decision that had to be made in a timely manner to accommodate for all of that...And for the life of me, I could not figure out where God was calling me. I remember spending months in prayer and in return I got complete silence. This was one of the most frustrating and confusing times in my life. I wanted to do what God was calling me to do, but felt as if he was not telling me what that was...However, what I learned that night is that the Holy Spirit had been at work my whole life, I was just not recognizing His craftsmanship...All the while I thought I didn't have a real story, my story is actually God's and how God has *always* been there. And that's story enough. So now, when I say the Apostles' Creed, I am reminded that, yes, I believe in and will do my best to give the credit and glory to the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. If you would join me...

One of our goals in the design of Creedal testimony was to create a sense of unity and community not only by declaring the creed together but by hearing someone's story, learning their name, and getting a sense of familiarity with them. One wrote:

I loved getting the chance to share about myself with the community, it lead to conversations and connections that otherwise would probably not have happened. The actual "doing" was kind of a blur...

Another said:

I had a lot of people come up to me and shake my hand and thank me. A lot of the people I had never met or talked to before. Mostly they thanked me for standing up and sharing, not necessarily telling me they liked what I said.I guess that's the point on some level, just the fact that someone from the congregation is getting up and talking about a personal experience and tying it into the Creed is the main thing. Most people probably won't have a revelation or really even remember what I said after they leave church but they'll remember I got up and talked and said the creed, it's almost putting a face on the Creed and bringing it home to Ambler.

I asked participants to reflect on how they had experienced the act of giving their Creedal Testimony. Redmond said:

As a more "meta" point, I honestly thought (at first) that these testimonies were mostly going to be a dud, probably because I thought they would be so cookie-cutter (pick a line, tell a little personal anecdote, say the creed together). But I was surprised; both in planning this talk myself, and in listening to others, that people really had **something to say**. And I'm glad I was there to listen! The question I started with that left me hesitant and skeptical was: "How do I try to proof-text and demonstrate that this ancient faith statement applies to my life?" But the answer I found was so much less sterile: "We've been living out bits of this creed all along, unaware that that's what was going on."

Marilyn, a woman in her seventies who had gone to our church since a young child said:

I thought it was a wonderful exercise and it felt so freeing to speak aloud "in public" what I feel so strongly in my heart.

Katie, a young woman who had only been attending our church for a year wrote:

I just wanted to again thank you so much for allowing me to share my faith journey for the glory of God today. Thank you also for always being in our corner. You are truly a blessing, and I wanted to let you know that as nervous as I was speaking up there, when I looked at you while speaking, my nerves really calmed. Thank you for all you do!!

### **Encounter 1 - Creedal Testimony Congregational Experience**

We also wanted to know how the people who heard these testimonies experienced them. In a number of cases people in the congregation reported being deeply moved by hearing others share their creedal testimonies. One mother of teenagers, who was visiting, asked for a copy of Ruth's creedal testimony to give to her teenage children who were just entering college. In her testimony Ruth had talked about growing up as a fundamentalist, almost losing her faith in college, and what had allowed her to hold on and come out the other side with a deeper commitment to Christ.

Mike, a skeptic agnostic and former Catholic is married to a woman who started attending *SouthRidge* a couple years ago and has been rapidly growing in her faith.

Mike agreed to attend church with her the Sunday Ruth gave her Creedal testimony.

Several weeks later I took Mike out to dinner to talk about faith and life. Unsolicited, while we were talking about something else he blurted out:

What is in it for me, what is to be gained by pursuing Christianity? The suffering I have seen makes it impossible for me to believe in a sentient God.<sup>3</sup> Can you be a Christian without thinking that Jesus is divine? But... I *was* spellbound by [Ruth's] creedal testimony. That's my story. That's what happened to me, I just don't know if I can come out the other side the way she did.

Immediately after the worship service, another woman walked up to Ruth, hugged her and said "Thanks... I needed that!" Another wrote her later saying:

Just had to drop you a line to let you know your testimony this morning was amazing. You are so articulate and clearly, an excellent writer. You should publish what you delivered today! Your message really spoke to me – I hope I remember it when my kids are in college and are questioning their faith. :-)

When I sat down and talked to individual congregants in extended conversations about their experiences with the encounters, many commented on the Creedal Testimonies. Jan, a single woman in her late sixties who had been part of the church for years and previously had served as the head of adult education said:

I think the two most effective encounters for me were probably either the sermon series or the creedal testimonies. And I think that's OK because the sermon series is, you know, explaining how it came to be and the import of it and what's behind it and what it represents and then the creedal testimonies are the application so they go hand in hand...I think it is courageous for people to get up and tell their faith stories. I wish we did more of that. I would like to hear your (the pastor's) creedal testimony! But I think when members kind of stand up and are counted...I think we need to do more of that...I think it might make it easier for us to be more...more evangelical, to be better disciples... if we had a story... if we understood what our own stories were. To witness... because in our Christian Adult Education we don't do that anywhere...I think it would be nice to be a little

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<sup>3</sup> Both Mike and his wife had worked at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and witnessed great suffering.

more introspective individually, and self-reflecting and a little less smug about our own situations... in order to grow. I think a lot of people think they are just fine where they are and don't need to grow.

Sarah, a chemical engineer in her thirties who had shared her Creedal Testimony said after hearing another person's Creedal Testimony:

John's Apostles' Creed testimony was powerful...I don't remember now exactly what he said... it may not even be impactful because of the creed but because it's a challenge to hear someone stand up and talk about their personal faith. "Wow, faith is real to them." Hearing someone who is not the pastor intentionally linking their life story to the creed is powerful...especially if the person can recite it from memory so it seems like they are claiming it for their own... They need to be able to say it confidently. When I did it someone said "I can really tell that your faith is real and not just a thing that you do." I see value in that. The creed can be something you carry along with you so you are ready when you need it. There is a beauty in that. I like that it has been vetted.

As we listened to people's stories I wondered how much their previous life experiences influenced which Encounters they found most effective. This question most often came to me when I sat down with couples and heard them tell their stories side by side. Rick, a middle aged engineer who was deeply committed to our church said:

My dad moved all over the country installing Radar systems for RCA (those structures that look like golf balls), so I went to many kinds of churches. These included Baptist, Assembly of God, Pentecostal, Methodist...Testimonies were very common within the churches I attended. They were often small...I think the people sharing themselves and sharing that relationship is important...it doesn't have to be in mass, and maybe it is better in a small group environment, people are more willing to share and are a little more receptive to hear in those environments. I don't see that in the Presbyterian Church... it is a little more structured... In larger groups you share a smaller piece of the experience... if that makes any sense. It opens people a little more about themselves.... I didn't have that lightning bolt experience. For me growing up I didn't have that experience. I kept looking for it. I struggled with what to believe...It was not until I went into the Military and attended evangelical small groups that I made a firm commitment... I would go to these [fancy] churches with all this extravagance and structure and feel nothing. When I did start going to chapel on base – it was very simplistic. It was a shared space so it had to be sparse. But at the same time I felt more at peace there and it had more influence than if I had been in a structured, fancy church.



Rick's wife, Deb grew up in a much more liturgical church. She said:

I was born and raised Lutheran, always went to the same church. In fact, I went to the same church from the age of two till after I was married. There was never a time when I didn't believe, I had three years of catechism, and one of them was devoted completely to the Apostles Creed – learning about it and committing it to memory.

She talked of how meaningful the Lord's Table, the Lord's Prayer and saying the creeds were for her. When I asked Rick about which encounter he thought was most effective he said: "I certainly think the Creedal Testimonies have a little more significance. And maybe that's just because of my background." When I asked Deb which of the encounters were most meaningful for her she said:

The one that had the most impact on me was the one you did at communion where you did the words of institution. That was memorable for me and I enjoyed that presentation of the words of institution. Usually it can sound kind of rote –these are the words we say every week... The least effective for me was displaying the images when we say the apostles Creed (Encounter # 3) only because I close my eyes when I say it... it is more like a prayer to me... so I never see the images...

Cindy, a middle aged physical therapist told the story of her life and her conversion and then went on to say why she found Creedal Testimonies the most effective encounter:

When my parents got married they decided they would NOT have religion in the house. I had no exposure to church except when my Grandmother took me. I entered high school without any regular faith. Both my parents were alcoholics. There was divorce, adultery, drugs... it was pretty dysfunctional. In my twenties I had a calling – a sense I was sought after... I had a friend that had lent me *Mere Christianity*.<sup>4</sup> I think I was just at college, when I decided I wanted to be baptized... I went to my Grandmother and told her I wanted to be baptized. On a Sunday [the minister] sprinkled water on my head and when I left I didn't feel any closer to God... I didn't feel I knew God. When I was in graduate school I started going to Duke Chapel regularly. Then I met Mark [her soon to be husband] whose dad was a preacher, I went to a bible study with colleagues and learned more and more. One day my Bible Study leader asked me if I had ever studied baptism –we looked up every verse on baptism... my heart was pricked. I understood God loved me... so I was [re-] baptized with those women. I worshiped in the Church of Christ for many years... In regards to the encounters

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<sup>4</sup> A book by C.S. Lewis.

with the Apostles Creed...I would say what probably moved me the most were the personal testimonies... Personal testimony was most helpful because I always think when someone speaks from the heart, it always gives me pause. I feel like I am hearing about an intimate moment and that is meaningful... [When it comes to the Apostles Creed Encounters and other elements of worship] everybody comes to the table with their own perspectives... I think you cannot enter into a discussion of your likes and dislikes without discussing your past... now how are they connected?...I am sure I have trust issues – so if I can see a genuine person up there – it means more to me than a video because I know [the video] is scripted. So if I can see a testimony and know it's real...I have an undercurrent of uncertainty with me from my parents not being dependable [So I ask myself] “does it feel like a salesperson, trying to force a tear, or does it feel like that's what they really are saying?” That person is an extension of me...that could be...a representative of a regular person...we don't have maybe the seminary degree...but we have the connection to God...And that is what is important. You are personalizing the creed so it doesn't feel as mechanical...someone is demonstrating their connection with it. It's funny because you don't want just one or the other – just the personal thing or just the liturgy.<sup>5</sup>

I was deeply moved by Cindy's story and especially her ability to think about how her personal story might influence which encounters she found most helpful. Another person also picked up on this theme (of genuine expression in the moment versus premeditated presentations) when they wrote:

I loved the personalized expression from each person about the creed and their testimony. They varied a lot, and each was effective. I picked the movie as least effective for me (though I didn't think it was a bad movie), because it was scripted and therefore less spontaneous and personal than all the other choices.

According to our plan, we used a post-project survey as a way of further exploring what we were hearing in personal narratives. Comments about the creedal testimonies included:

The creedal testimonies were most effective because they came from people just like me and so I found them easy to apply to my own life. The mini-movie was least effective, because I found it difficult to follow.

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<sup>5</sup> This was a very long conversation and I have just included those parts of the conversation that seemed pertinent to this discussion.

I can identify with the words and experiences of others and that is important to me. I like to see and hear what others say. It gives credibility to the understanding.

The testimonies given by members of congregation seemed very genuine and believable. I feel faith is how we live and show love to our fellow man.

Really enjoyed hearing from the perspective of those sitting in the pew next to me.

For me, I got insight into the individuals giving the testimonies rather than the creed usually.

The creedal testimonies were most powerful for me because they gave opportunities to hear a variety of people put in their own words what the creed means to them. Rarely do we hear public witness like this from ordinary members of the church. (Typically only the pastors proclaim the faith this way). So this helped me know in more depth the faith of several brothers and sisters, and their witness encouraged me.

Stories were most effective - to see how people's lives (people that I know) were connected to the creed.

One fifty seven year old man who attends *SouthRidge* wrote “The testimonials I thought made the biggest impact. When it comes to choosing presenters I believe the younger, the better in today's world.” We received very little negative feedback on the Creedal

Testimony encounter. Two comments in this vein we did receive were:

The least effective encounters were the testimonies because they are limited by time (naturally) and scope. The sermons can more fully explore many aspects of the topic, from various perspectives, and is on more solid theological foundation.

Some of the testimonies were very powerful, others were much less successful.

I will draw some tentative conclusions about the use of Creedal Testimonies in Chapter 5.

## **Encounter 2 – The Coat Rack Reflection Station**

As discussed above, one of the unique aspects of the *SouthRidge* Lord’s Day service was the use of Reflection Stations. Reflection Stations were private alcoves where

a person could follow guided steps through an experience that we designed to help them think about the particular sermon given that day. We used rice paper room dividers to create five identical alcoves that became personal spaces around the sanctuary. Our intent was to give each participant a chance to step away from the communal experience and common space into a personal time and space with God before returning to corporate worship. During the Stations time in the service described above, people moved around the sanctuary, and often there was a short line of people waiting at each Reflection Station. Below is an example of a typical reflection station (not the Coat Rack encounter)<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 4.2 A Typical Reflection Station using a Scroll Block**

<sup>6</sup> The Coat Rack Reflection can be seen in action briefly in the movie we made (Encounter 5). The picture above is from another Reflection station with similar attributes.

Note what we call “The Scroll Block” in the front center. Each face of the block has written instructions for the next step in the experience. The idea is to help worshippers “be here now.” Rather than letting their eyes skip ahead through the instructions, they see only one step at a time. When they feel ready, they rotate the block and read the next step. The LAC wanted to see how we could use this element of our worship as an Encounter with the Apostles Creed. One member of the LAC, Redmond, took the lead in designing and implementing this station. His idea was to have people experience putting coats on a coat rack as a way of thinking about the way the Apostles Creed can function in our lives. He sent out the following email to the LAC:

Dear Team,

I have a question for you, and a request! I'm working on the Stations for this Sunday's South Ridge service, and we're going to go with the Coat Rack idea we had discussed. One week we'll view the creed as the central framework that anchors and supports the most beautiful things in life, and another week we'll view the creed as the skeleton that we misuse to prop up the most ugly and hateful parts of who we are.

But it would be great to get some input from you! So, first, a question:

- a. What do you think of as the healthy implications and fruits that arise from the good news of the Apostles' Creed?
- b. What do you see as false gospels or hitchhiker causes that try to get legitimacy by attaching to the creed, or which climb up the creed like a choking vine which eventually smothers and kills the very thing that was supporting it?<sup>7</sup>

When I joined the team in brain storming these ideas for Redmond, I had a moving experience that I felt I need to share with the team. I emailed them and part of what I wrote was:

Redmond asked us to contribute ideas for what kinds of things get support and structure (the coats) from the found foundation/skeleton (the coat rack) of the Apostles Creed. Here is what I came up with as I stopped and thought about it:

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<sup>7</sup> Email sent May 15 2013.

**Hope, Perseverance, Care of the Creation, Forgiveness of others, Self-Worth, Redemption of the Past, Personal Identity, The local church, experiencing time as a story instead of a dwindling resource.**

Now here is the interesting part: I was in a grumpy/overwhelmed mood before I sat down and thought about these implications. The very act of thinking about them and naming them put me in a good mood and changed my perspective on my day, my work, myself. It drew me back into the story. This is exactly the kind of thing I am hoping for – for each of us. I will try to touch base with you next week to see which aspects of the project you are most interested in fleshing out.

Again, I was surprised at the insights that arose unexpectedly from the very act of implementing the encounters.

Our original intention was to create two different reflection stations on two separate Sundays – one that showed the Creed as a skeleton or frame that holds up and gives shape to the coats of good things such as the fruit of the spirit, and one that showed how the Creed could be obscured and hidden by evil “coats” – things such as materialism and racism that are often propped up with religious talk. However, while we did end up implementing the positive Coat Rack station, we never did implement the negative Coat Rack station. There were several reasons for this. First, by this time we had reached the end of the school year schedule and, in order to give our set-up teams a break and avoid burn out, it was our tradition to only include Reflection Stations during the school year and take a break in the summer months. Second, I may have been a little discouraged by the lack of response I sensed to our first run. Finally, and most importantly, I had a pastoral concern. In our design we were imagining a consistent stream of experiences that parishioners would encounter from one week to the next. As they were exposed to the whole of the project, they might be able to see each encounter within the context of the whole. But we forgot what our *SouthRidge* congregation is actually like.

One of the striking differences between our traditional service consisting of mostly older people who have gone to church all their lives, and our *SouthRidge* service which consists mostly of younger people who are either new to church or have been part of many different kinds of church is: consistency of attendance. At *SouthRidge* it is typical of people who consider themselves dedicated regular attenders to actually only attend two or three times a month. This means rather than experiencing a sense of flow and continuity from week to week, they tend to experience each worship service as a “one off.” There is not much sense of continuity, and I cannot assume when I preach a series that everyone remembers what was said the previous week – because they may not have been there. We forgot about this when thinking of the two-part Reflection Station encounter. I was working with a congregation full of people who had very little exposure to the creed, who often (see comments later in this paper) were suspicious of creeds. If the only Reflection Station they encountered was one that could be construed as “Creeds are bad because all kinds of bad things get attached to them”, was that actually helping people? What message would actually be sent to a person by the act of hanging a coat marked “Racism” on a rack called “Creed” and then hanging “Materialism”, “Ecological Destruction”, and “Pride”? This was meant to be a powerful symbolic act, and in my mind it was. It would have been perfect in a larger context with more time. If both Stations could have been done on the same day, if there had been time to discuss and debrief and tease out from the author what he had been trying to communicate in this work of art, it could have been very rich. But in the truncated, isolated location, as a disconnected event in a worship service with no chance to debrief, I felt it was likely to send the wrong message. There were several times during the course of this project where

the needs of the people and the need not to make their worship time a conduit for my project agenda required me (in my pastoral opinion) to hold back on things I would have wanted to do for the project.

As we began to implement the positive Coat Rack station, we secured five coat racks, lots of coats, and set up five identical reflection stations for the worship service. The reason for multiple sites for Reflection Stations was to try to insure that there were enough opportunities for everyone who wanted to encounter the experience within the limited (about twelve minutes) time allotted for Stations within the worship service. We decided to do the station that reflected the positive use of the creed first. After receiving feedback from the group, Redmond came up with the following image to be applied to the four sides of the scroll block:

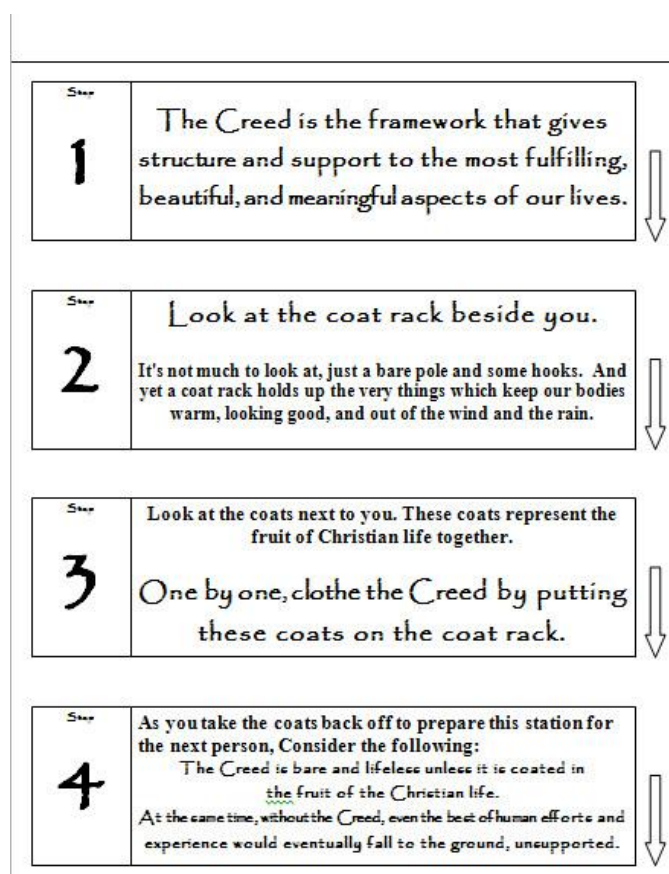


Figure 4.3 Scroll Block Design for the Coat Rack Encounter



Reflection Station ideas can get very involved and may require the building of custom items. One of the things I loved about this design was its implementation which was very simple and stripped down – a coat rack, some coats, and the scroll block were all that we needed to implement the idea.

We included the positive Coat-Rack Reflection Station as part of the worship service on May 19, 2013 which was Confirmation Sunday, the day we structured the entire worship service, including this Reflection Station, around the order of the Apostles Creed (See Encounter 4 below). Afterwards we considered the possibility that it had been such a busy Sunday (lots of extra visitors due to the fact it was Confirmation Sunday), that the Reflection Station might have been lost in the shuffle. We decided we should run the positive Coat Rack Reflection Station again so that more people could participate in it. We incorporated it in worship a second time two weeks later.

The effectiveness of the Coat-Rack Reflection Station encounter was difficult to evaluate. Because participating in Reflection Stations was an optional part of the worship service, only a small percentage of the congregation took advantage of them on a given Sunday (typically, about twenty percent of the congregation, or twenty five people). Of the fifty people who took both the Pre-Encounters and Post-Encounters survey, only twelve experienced this Reflection Station, making it the encounter experienced by the least number of respondents. In addition, unlike most other encounters, the positive Coat Rack station was only intended to be experienced once (although, as noted above, we ran it twice in the hope of giving more people a one-time experience). In general, the people I spoke to did not rank it near the top. Rick said: “The least effective encounter for me was ‘The Coats’ because I didn’t quite understand the

symbolic nature of it.” Cindy said “The least helpful was the reflection station. In general, Reflection Stations are a little to new-agey for me. They sounded a little bit like the Unitarian church where they were worshipping the shape of rocks.” Christina, in her mid-twenties said:

The Coat rack was the least effective, because it was so different. I couldn't tell you how it connected to the creed... I couldn't tell you because that is not the way I learn. The most effective for me was the sermon series because that is the way I learn. I am an artist, but I learn linearly. I want deductive logic. Also it was my least favorite because, as a teacher, I look at the amount of work it took versus how many people participated, and got something out of it. In my opinion it was too much work for the result.

One financially successful young woman engineer said

The coat rack didn't do anything for me – I am not good at abstract thinking and symbolism. These are good words on the coats but the coats don't look pretty – they were kind of grungy - so that was confusing to me. It was a lot for me to process, it was not my style. Hopefully you are getting feedback from people who are not so “Engineery”. The reflection station purpose needs to be able to be stated in a single sentence. This station was more open ended. I am drawn more to reflection stations that are more action than contemplation oriented.

No one who experienced the project mentioned the Coat Rack encounter as effective or meaningful either in personal interviews or in surveys. The fact that less than a quarter of the participants in the study experienced this encounter and that (like the Creed Movie) it was intended to be experienced only once may have contributed to the low response. I realized that while, as seen from the quotes above, this experience was too far outside the box for some, for me it was one of the most insightful encounters that the team developed, and one of the ones I was personally most excited about, as I had less influence on the design of this encounter than any of the others.

### **Encounter 3 – The Image Linked Creed and Online Meditation**

The idea of this encounter was to link an image with each line of the creed. This was in keeping with the notion of E.P.I.C. worship as described on page 18. It would allow the congregation to experience the creed in multiple dimensions and hopefully work against saying the words merely by rote. For corporate worship, we developed a series of *PowerPoint* slides with one phrase and an associated image on each slide. This sequence can be found in Appendix 5 below.

We projected these slides on a front wall of the sanctuary any time the congregation recited the Apostles Creed. In the case of the *SouthRidge* service, during the course of the project, this included services where either someone gave a Creedal Testimony, or we celebrated a baptism. Finally, we turned the same set of images into a series of webpages to create an on-line meditation which was available from May 5, 2013 to June 30, 2014 . In our on-line implementation, the user could pause on a particular phrase and image as long as desired, and then click a NEXT button to move on to the subsequent phrase of the creed. For each image, we added a suggested personal prayer that the user could use to connect the line in the creed to real-life concerns. The prayers were located to the far right of the screen in a small font so that people who just wanted to focus on the images would not be distracted by them. These prayers can be seen in Appendix 5. We also added the option of listening to meditative music. Because music that is meditative to one person may be distracting to another, we used an approach that allowed people to select music from a wide range of choices. As there has been a growth on the web of what is known as “Soak Music” – instrumental music intentionally written

for private worship, we linked our website to such a resource.<sup>8</sup> We made the Apostles' Creed meditation available on both the church's website and the project website.<sup>9</sup> However, as is true for ritual in general as described in Chapter 3 above, the intended message of the symbol maker is not always the message received by the symbol perceiver. John, a young financial executive said: "Least helpful was the pictures for the online meditation. The way people learn... I am more a number and words person than an images person." Deb, the woman who had grown up Lutheran said:

The least effective for me was displaying the images when we say the apostles Creed ... only because I close my eyes when I say it... it is more like a prayer to me... so I never see the images!

As with the other encounters, responses were varied. After using the on-line version, a woman in her sixties wrote: "The meditations gave me time to reflect on each part of creed." When asked which encounter she found most helpful, another wrote "I really liked how you personalized the online mediation where we'd add our own prayers." On the other hand, another person said "I felt like the 'five things' videos were raw and personal in a profound way. The pictures [in the on-line meditation], to me, felt less moving because they seemed a bit canned." About half the people who responded to us found this encounter the least helpful of the encounters they experienced.

#### **Encounter 4 – Worship Service Ordered Around The Creed**

We designed two different types of worship services around the flow of the Apostles' Creed. The first was a *SouthRidge* worship service format, and the second was

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.soaking.net/launchplayer\\_instr.htm](http://www.soaking.net/launchplayer_instr.htm) (accessed January 15, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> At the time of the writing of this paper, this meditation was still available at [www.TheCreedProject.com](http://www.TheCreedProject.com).

a Traditional worship service format. In our desire to tie these services into the life of the church, we timed them for Confirmation Sunday. We also coordinated the service with the timing of the Apostles Creed sermon series so that the sermon would be on the holy catholic church, since Confirmation was about welcoming people into the holy catholic church as active members. In our congregation's tradition, Confirmation Sunday is when students (normally in ninth grade) are received into the church after a year of preparation in a confirmation class Sunday School. This class included a study of the Apostles' Creed and asked each student to create his or her own statement of faith. After being examined by the Elders, the students affirm their faith in a public worship service by responding to questions (similar to entrance into the early church as discussed in Chapter 2). Often the service will include baptism of those students who have never received that sacrament. A focus on the creed of the church seemed appropriate for this day, not only for the connection with baptism but also as a culmination for the students of all they had learned during the year.

We decided to include members of the confirmation class as leaders in worship. We hoped that having students declare the meaning of each section of the creed would help link their classroom experience to the public worship of the gathered community. However, deciding in which service to celebrate the confirmation liturgy is a tricky question in a dual-culture church such as ours. In prior years, out of a desire to honor tradition and an awareness that some confirmation families attended the Traditional service, the liturgy of confirmation had always been held in the Traditional service. This year however, since all confirmation families normally attend the *SouthRidge* service, we decided to celebrate the confirmation liturgy in that service. As a way of including the

Traditional service in the event, we introduced the confirmation students in the Traditional service (we had them stand up front and introduced them by name), and we invited the confirmands to serve as readers in the Traditional service. Because both services on that day contained a number of common elements and were both structured around the creed, we hoped that might be a further sign of unity.

I have included the planning outline for the *SouthRidge* worship service in Appendix 6 A, and the bulletin for the service is in Appendix 6 B. This service contains many more elements than is typical for a *SouthRidge* service, and we had to work hard to keep the length of the service reasonable. As can be seen from the bulletin, we tend to keep the service order which the congregation follows very simple so that with verbal and visual cues there is no need for a congregant to look at the bulletin in order to participate in worship. As can be seen from Appendix 6 A, the service moves through major sections:

- A. God the Father
- B. God the Son
- C. God the Holy Spirit
- D. The Holy Catholic Church
- E. The Forgiveness of Sins
- F. Returning to the Glory of God with singing

I have included the bulletin for the traditional service in Appendix 6 C. The goal was to keep traditional components but use them in a new order. For example, in traditional Presbyterian worship, elements known as “The Confession of Sin” and “The Assurance of Pardon” are at the front of the service. Since “The Forgiveness of Sins”

appears towards the end of the Apostles' Creed, we moved it to that location in the worship liturgy. To try to honor the traditional feel despite the introduction of many new elements, we refrained from showing the Rich Mullins creed video during the Offertory, and instead placed an Organ piece there.

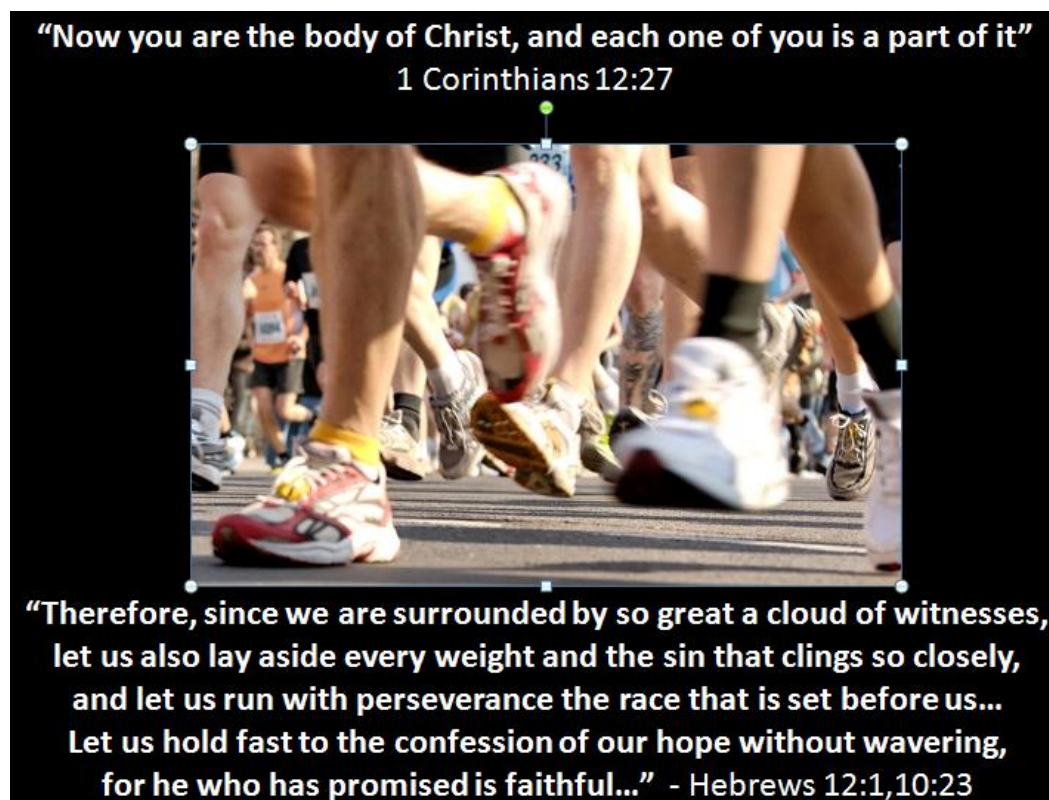
On May 19, 2013, the congregation experienced both the Traditional service and *SouthRidge* service versions of the Apostles' Creed liturgies. As mentioned, it was a very busy day with many things happening. Yet both services seemed to go off fairly smoothly. Considering that the service order was unique and differed from our normal routine, participants agreed there was a logical flow and the services unfolded in a natural progression. It was a particularly moving Sunday for me, as my own daughter, Grace was being confirmed and was one of the readers. As has happened more than once, I wept over the beauty of the creed video by Rich Mullins during the SouthRidge offertory! I tried to tie my sermon on the church to themes and projected images that would make sense to teens.

Each Sunday at *SouthRidge* we create a video mash up that sets the background environment during the portion of the service we call Stations. This looping video usually includes animation, music, and scriptures and phrases that tie into the theme for the day. A freeze frame of the video created for this particular Sunday is shown in Figure 4.4 on the next page. The image in the middle was a looping video of a foot race. The sound track was Josh Garrels' eclectic/joyous song *Be set free*.<sup>10</sup> The verse from First Corinthians was meant to be a celebration and declaration to the confirmands of their new

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<sup>10</sup> Artist: Josh Garrels Album: Lost Animals Released: 2009

status (they had just been welcomed into the church)<sup>11</sup>, and the scripture from Hebrews seen in Figure 4.4 was a reprise from the text preached in the sermon (Hebrews 11:36 – 12:15) about what it meant to be the church together. There was a general sense of excitement at both services.



**Figure 4. 4 Video Used as the Backdrop for the Stations Portion of the Service**

After the second service (the *SouthRidge* service where confirmation took place), many families were milling around and they were taking lots of family pictures. At the end of both services I stood out in the Narthex, near where people exit, but far enough away that people were able come up and talk to me if they wished to. A number of people

<sup>11</sup> On the slide there is a bit of a play on words as the word "Now" is used in the sense of "Since" in its original setting in the text of 1 Corinthians.



came up and shook my hand with various brief messages that could be summed up as “That was great!” But getting a deeper sense of how people experienced the services was difficult. After the first (traditional service), most of us involved were quickly moving to re-configure the sanctuary for the second service, and so I did not have time for long conversations. Following the second service, many families focused on pictures before a celebratory lunch with their new confirmands. This included me. I felt it was important to place my daughter’s special day over soliciting feedback on my project.

Our follow-up discussions with people about their overall experiences of the encounters we created did not occur until months later, and by far, this was the encounter people remembered least. Only thirty of the fifty people in the Post-Encounters survey remembered experiencing it, and only three people listed it as the most effective encounter. One participant said to me “I think the order of the service was too big picture for me.” No one listed this encounter as most effective, and it received the least positive or negative comments. As I sat with people and asked them about it several months later, most of them said something similar to: “I remember it was Confirmation Sunday and I was thinking of it more as a Confirmation Sunday than a Sunday where the unique order was due to the Creed.” I will have more to say about this and our lack of immediate follow-up in my evaluation in Chapter 5.

### **Encounter 5 – A Visual Midrash – The Apostles Creed Movie**

This encounter, more than any other, evolved as the project unfolded. In our early discussions we had very ambitious goals – the idea of trying to crowd source footage and create a video using scenes from multiple locations, possibly from around the world. As

time went on and we designed and implemented other small scale encounters, this goal lost traction with the group. We did not seem to have the capacity within the LAC to pull off such an ambitious project without dropping all the other projects we were pursuing. We decided to scale back the video to using a wide variety of people from our own congregation (rather than crowd sourcing footage). We did an initial video shoot during a week in the life of the church. We asked some people on the spot to participate on a Sunday morning and we invited others during standing meetings which occurred during the week at the church. I created cue cards with statements and questions, and one of the members of the LAC, Kevin, shot the film. He then did a quick, first pass at a movie. It had some good moments. However, the small set of people with whom I previewed it did not find it compelling. While there were some good shots in it, overall it did not feel professional enough, was very long, and many of the people filmed came across as awkward. Further, as it happened from the somewhat arbitrary method we used to recruit people to film (a week night when the Men's bible study was meeting), the vast majority were older white males. We originally hoped that this movie might become an on-line resource that could resonate with younger, social media-savvy viewers. Those in the LAC who saw our first pass felt it was just not going to be effective. We discussed how high the bar has been set in our culture regarding the quality we expect to see in on-line videos. I know that I too felt somewhat discouraged, and without making a conscious decision, we put this project segment on the shelf as our attention moved on to other Encounters. Toward the end of the project timeframe we had to produce some sort of video to honor the original project proposal. We decided to scrap seventy percent of the original film footage and begin again. We decided to focus on four things:

- Live footage from an actual *SouthRidge* worship service – scenes of people actually worshipping and participating.
- The unique imagery of the stained glass in our church which told the story of the gospel visually
- Three young hosts from our congregation who appeared throughout the film rather than a large number of random people saying lines for the creed
- An outdoor scene shot in our local area that would drive home the major metaphor of the film and the project – like the tightly packed gear carried in backpacking, the very brevity of the creed allowed it to be transported and passed on to others. This was especially fun for me because I got to involve my two teenage children in the project. Kevin shot scenes of the three of us in a nearby park in order to simulate a backpacking journey.

The title of the mini-movie was set as “The Apostles’ Creed – Carrying the Story that Carries Us.” We wrote a new script and a new filming schedule began. Kevin did a great deal to empower me in the project, including buying the church a *Mac Pro* computer, and getting me lessons on Apple-based film editing software! Some joy and hope began to return to me for this effort as I realized that it, more than any other encounter, incorporated the most talents from the largest number of the LAC team:

- Kevin shot all the video.
- Luke wrote and recorded a very experimental sound track used as the background for the entire movie. We actually edited the movie length to match the duration of his piece.
- Redmond and Sarah were two of the three hosts that appear in the movie.
- Leslie is co-leading the Lord’s Table in scenes from worship.
- Scenes from Redmond’s “Coat-Rack” reflection station are in the footage.
- The entire LAC reviewed and critiqued the film in the editing stage.

One day around Easter I was walking towards the sidewalk at our church on a beautiful spring day. Looking up I saw a white flowering tree against a bright blue sky. I just stopped, stunned by its beauty. It was just around the time we were thinking about “the family tree” of the catholic church. I quickly took out my iPhone and shot a short video of the tree. This scene became the first and last scenes of the film. We hoped this footage and the surreal music of the soundtrack that opened the movie would intrigue viewers. During the final scene, Redmond looks up from an unseen text he is reading and looks straight into the camera as he says

I belong to that community of people - from every tribe and nation  
over the last two thousand years - who have dared  
to make this story... their own.

Although it was quite subtle, I was hoping that some viewers would catch that he was doing what his words were saying – moving from a written text to a declaration of his own. Luke’s composition was eight minutes and thirty seconds long. Even with this length, it was difficult to include many scenes, and only about ten percent of our original footage made it into the film.

After many hours of tinkering and editing, we posted the final version on YouTube.<sup>13</sup> We then showed it during Sunday Morning worship services at both the Traditional and the *SouthRidge* settings on June 15, 2014 (Trinity Sunday). As you will see in Chapter 5, one of the challenges with such an Encounter is that most people are only going to watch something like this once. It was more like a heady documentary than a fun music video – it did not lend itself to repetitive play back.

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<sup>13</sup> You may find at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MUL6\\_5z6wY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MUL6_5z6wY) (accessed on January 12, 2015).

We received a number of brief comments such as "The video is awesome!" While one person said "The movie was a great way to simplify the ideas of the creed...good work all around!" Another said "The mini-movie was least effective, because I found it difficult to follow." Another person wrote

I loved the personalized expression from each person about the creed and their testimony. They varied a lot, and each was effective. I picked the movie as least effective for me (though I didn't think it was a bad movie), because it was scripted and therefore less spontaneous and personal than all the other choices.

One young man in his mid-twenties who found the movie very effective said "I like the analogy of comparing the creed to a tent...I also like that we stress that the creed is shared by all branches of Christianity. It makes me feel connected to my Catholic and Orthodox brothers and sisters." Jan, quoted above said: "I do remember the video and I remember the backpacking in the video and I thought that was a very good image." A man in his mid-thirties who does not belong to our church and watched the video on-line found this the most effective encounter (of those available on-line) and wrote after watching the video:

There are such varying world views among believers, so many different experiences, priorities, and preferences. There must be some common thread if there is any hope for unity and vitality among Christians. Unity based on political or moral ideologies sucks the life force from the church and is ultimately a false unity as it is based on the creation of an 'other'. The gospel is GOOD news because it welcomes, it enfolds, and it brings unity and life...I've been thinking a lot about unity and disunity in the church a lot over the last several years. It's been encouraging to meditate on what binds believers together and on what brings life to the church. It's also been a good reminder and a gentle admonishment not to get too caught up in my own experiences, perceptions, and ways of interpreting scripture but to extend grace to those with whom I may disagree...Overall, this was a great experience. Inspiring, encouraging, challenging. Just great. Thank you!

A seventy one year old woman who attends our Traditional service said:

The only suggestion I have is that in the video it might have been more powerful if you had used more of a variety of people, ages, etc. Don't get me wrong, I thought it was powerful, but I think it could have been more so if used more members of the congregation--old, young, etc.

A twenty-one year old man wrote "I thought the Creed Movie was awesome but I think it emphasized the Creed over the power of God somewhat and that is why I found it less effective." A woman in her mid-forties from the traditional service "Video was very well done! I marked least effective only because I found the personal testimonies amazing. I learned a lot from the people that were selected about their testimony." Another told me that a weakness of the video was knowing that it was staged and edited and therefore felt less authentic than hearing a person share their testimony in person. One person who listed the movie as the least effective encounter simply wrote "I really did not feel a connection to the movie." A twenty eight year old woman who attends our traditional service wrote:

While I thought that the video was well done, if it is to be a tool in sharing the foundations of our faith with all people, I think it would be important to have all demographics represented. The testimonies were often meaningful when someone a little older was able to share how the creed has impacted their lives. The video seemed to be focused on my age bracket only.

While some found the chopping up of the creed in to lines and hearing it declared multiple times by the three different speakers unhelpful and distracting, one elderly woman wrote:

I actually think it would be effective if during the service, the Creed was not recited in its entirety but rather if each week we would break it down into parts as was so well done in the Creed video - say a phrase followed by a brief reference to its meaning. That would move it from rote recitation to a more thoughtful consideration.

A fifty five year old woman who regularly attends *SouthRidge* said "The videos and meditations made me really think about the Creed for the first time in a long time." One

woman from our congregation came up with an application for the movie we had not thought of: “I thought the mini-movie was very well done and will benefit those outside of our church as part of our outreach or part of new members’ class.” I will talk more about this last suggestion in Chapter 5.

### **Encounter 6 - Sermon Series**

Although I had intended to do a sermon series on the Apostles’ Creed during the course of this project, I had not originally thought of it as an Encounter since sermons are a very well established element in public worship services. But the congregation experienced them as new encounters with the creed, and said so. Further, we were just beginning to video record our sermons and put them on line when this project began. Thus these sermons were a resource that naturally fit in with the other online resources we were creating to help people engage the Apostle’s Creed. The five sermon series was presented on consecutive Sunday mornings from May 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 to June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013. The reader may find a copy of the on-line pages that summarized and linked to the sermon podcasts in Appendix 7. This on-line resource was available both to church members and others who came upon it through web search engines. As of the time of this writing, it is still available online.<sup>14</sup>

There is a general belief in some areas of the church that the age of long sermons has passed. And yet a casual review of some of the largest, fastest growing churches in America shows typical sermon lengths of forty minutes. In my own ministry and ministry context, the sermon as proclamation of the word remains a priority and the average length of each of these sermons was twenty-five minutes. In this setting, the most popular

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<sup>14</sup> It can be seen at [www.TheCreedProject.com](http://www.TheCreedProject.com) (accessed January 15, 2015).

encounter after Personal Testimonies was the sermon series. In fact, twenty-one people identified it as the most effective encounter, and only three listed it as the least effective encounter. One thirty-six year old man who attends *SouthRidge* put it this way:

The least effective were the (creedal) testimonies because they are naturally limited by time and scope. The sermons can more fully explore many aspects of the topic, from various perspectives, and are on more solid theological foundation.

One sixty-six year old woman from the traditional service wrote:

I believe sermons are effective because they allow space to consider where your personal beliefs and faith fit, they allow the space to own and to challenge - although while you can engage within yourself, at times the lecture nature of a sermon thwarts that desire to immediately engage the lecturer.

Other comments included:

I would say that the sermons were the most effective for me. They demonstrated that the creed is a summary of the faith and used as teaching.

The sermons were an in-depth teaching with examples and conversational in tone.

The sermons were most effective because they clearly explained the creed.

Pastor Langdon has done a great job especially in the sermons of illuminating the value of the creed and making it come alive.

The sermons went in depth into the concepts.

The sermons were most effective because they validated my feelings.

When I sat down to talk with a young woman in her twenties who had recently graduated from the honors college of a local university, she was quite direct in her thoughts about preachers and preaching:

The most effective [Encounter] for me was the sermon series because that is the way I learn. My background at college put me into an academic mindset, so for better or worse, I come to church with a note book and after church we talk about it like we would talk about a lecture. With some pastors I need to filter it through. When are sermons ineffective? When a pastor is stupid! I have an ear for hogwash, or for someone who hasn't thought through their argument. I feel fortunate that we have two really good pastors. When I hear them preach, I



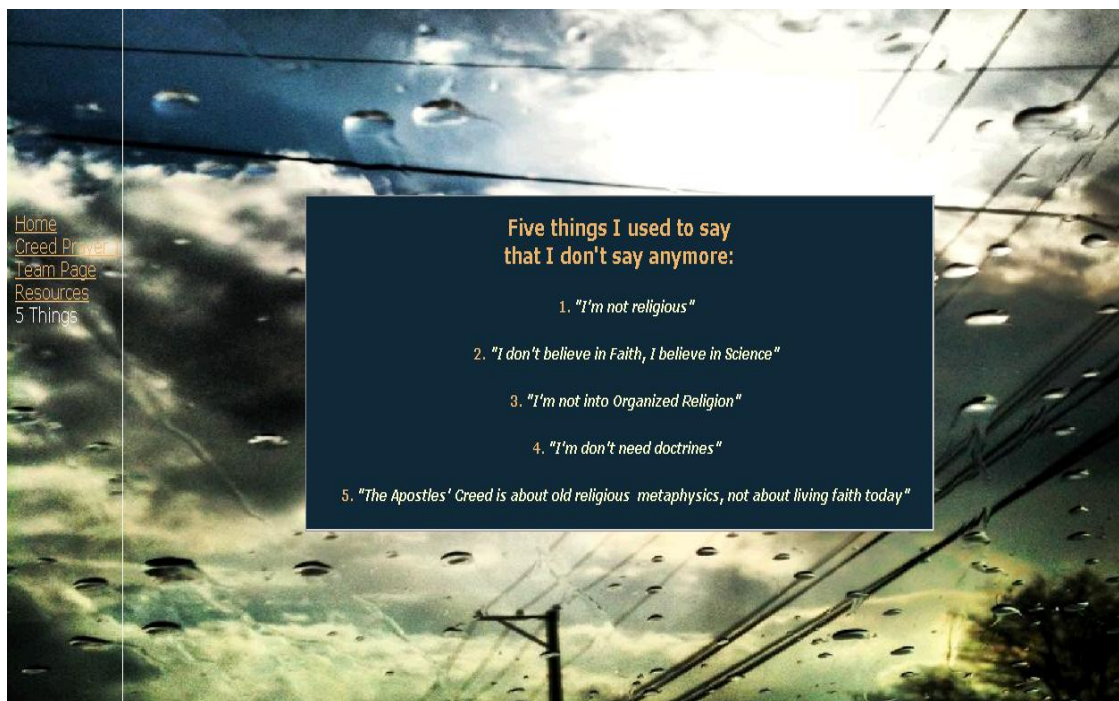
always know what the point is. Sometimes in other places I don't know what the point was. The thing about the sermon is that it is not dependent on all the peripherals. If you were talking out by the dumpster it would still be the same, it would still be good.

We did not receive any negative comments about the sermons. At the time, I was concerned about issues of power and loyalty – how do you tell your own pastor you don't like his sermons or did not find them helpful? I will discuss this more in Chapter 5. On the other hand, we added the anonymous survey and made people understand it *was* anonymous so we could receive the kind of negative feedback people are sometimes uncomfortable sharing. However, we did not get any negative comments on the sermons there either. Individuals have continued to download the sermon podcasts long after the project ended.

### **Encounter 7 – Five Things I Used To Say That I Don't Say Anymore**

As the project went on, I was able discuss matters of faith with people in a safe, open environment. In this setting, it became apparent that many did not know how they thought about some of the most basic questions of faith, let alone the nuances and implications of the Apostles' Creed. There were people who thought there was an inherent conflict between faith and science; that being religious meant people were somehow cut off from the reality of modern culture, that there was no connection between reasonable thinking and religious beliefs. This was apparent as I sat talking to a group of teenagers preparing for confirmation, and this seemed very natural to me for people at that stage of life. But having such conversations with people in their twenties, thirties, and forties caused me to think that some ground work or back story resources could be helpful to some. So I created five short, quirky YouTube videos and, on June

22<sup>nd</sup> 2013, made them available via Facebook and our Creed project website under the title “Five things I used to say that I don’t say anymore.” The website menu page used to access them and shown in Figure 4.5 below:



**Figure 4.5 Web Page for Accessing the “Five Things” Encounter**

There is a logical procession of five steps in the videos from the most basic questions of belief and unbelief to the reason for creeds and confessions. Because this resource provided foundational ideas for why the Apostles’ Creed even mattered, and because they were on-line sources located with our other Apostles’ Creed resources, it seemed natural to view them as another Encounter. Although several people made comments and a number re-posted this resource on their own Facebook pages, it did not exactly go viral. The total number of views for the five videos at the time of this writing was just over 500, or an average of 100 per video. Since this Encounter was only available on-line, a little less than half of our participants experienced it. Sometimes

responses were not what we were hoping for. One man in his late twenties who was coming out of addiction and reconsidering the possibility of faith re-posted the first video on his Facebook page. A friend quickly posted the comment “This is F{}ing creepy.” On the other hand, one person who participated in the project thought the five videos were the most effective encounters and said “I felt like the ‘Five Things’ videos were raw and personal in a profound way. The pictures [The On-line Meditation Encounter], to me, felt less moving because they seemed a bit canned.”

### **Encounter 8 – The Lord’s Table Enacted With The Creed**

This is the one encounter that spontaneously arose in the midst of the project season in June 2013. With my head full of the project and the creed, one Sunday morning I got up to do the liturgical segue to the Lord’s Table. As I walked towards the table, I believe I was thinking about how the table portrayed and enacted a central theme of the creed – the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. As I looked down at the bread, I suddenly started declaring the creed as I handled the elements. I did not know quite what I was doing or what would come next. There seemed to be a natural connection between the basket, bread, cloth, cup, and pitcher on the table, the collection of believers gathered, the huge tall stain glass windows behind me and the table that laid out in imagery the story of the Bible from Creation to Revelation, and the early morning light streaming from it on to the table. Afterwards a number of people came up to me and mentioned how moving it was to them. Over the next couple weeks, people would go out of their way to mention how powerful the experience was. One of my favorite experiences occurred several months later in a discussion with a businessman. He was the

retired president of a bank, a numbers guy who had a hard time talking about spiritual matters. In the nine years I've known him I never heard him speak of the contents of his own faith. But that afternoon he took the initiative to say to me "That thing you did with the Apostles' Creed at the Lord's Table...that was really neat...I never thought about it that way." We went on to repeat this enactment at the Lord's Table four times during the year of the project.<sup>15</sup>

Comments of those who participated in our study had a wide range. In fact, thirteen people cited it as the most effective encounter and nine cited it at the least effective encounter. Comments from those who found it meaningful included a twenty one year old man who said:

The Lord's Table video really showed the powerful image of the bread and Body of Christ, wine and Holy Spirit and is inherently very powerful. I thought the Creed Movie was awesome but I think it emphasized the Creed over the power of God somewhat and that is why I found it less effective.

One of the participants said to me "I found the Lord's Table encounter very moving. It was very visual for you to stretch your hands like the cross... wrapping the bread almost like swaddling cloth –that was very helpful." A thirty-five year old woman who attends *SouthRidge* who said this was the most effective encounter for her went on to say: "The Lord's Table is holy and brings a weight of its own." Another young woman said:

I think the most effective encounter was acting out the creed at the Lord's Table. It makes you think about the Lord's Table differently and it makes you think about the Apostles Creed differently. It taking two things that are rote but doing them in a way that neither is rote anymore. It is visual.

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<sup>15</sup> I posted an example of this at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN67zMnXiAo> (accessed January 12, 2015).

Those who found this Encounter least effective said things such as "I've seen you do the Lord's Table Encounter before, and once you've seen it, it starts to become more routine." An elderly lady from the traditional service said:

For me the least effective Encounter was the Lord's Table presentation. It felt staged and unnecessarily dramatic - I found the movements of the arms and the hands holding the bread to be a distraction and almost an annoyance.

Perhaps the most enjoyable reason I heard from a person who disliked the creed came from Beth who was quoted above:

The encounter I found least effective was when you did the creed motions at the Lord's Table. I am a sign language person so that was very distracting. I can't help but notice when people are saying words but making the wrong motions!

### **Listening For New Experiences With The Creed**

We wanted to know if members of our congregation believed that their encounters with the Apostles' Creed during the course of this project had changed the way they experienced the creed. About a quarter of them said something similar to "Not Really", and about three quarters of them said "Yes", and then went on to explain the change they perceived. Many of those who said no explained that they had learned the creed as a child, had always known and used it, so that nothing really changed in their perception. A typical response when asked if anything changed was:

No, not really. I had to memorize the Creed when I was confirmed, so I know it well. But I liked the sermon and testimony emphases on taking us back to the Creed and the essentials of our beliefs.

However one person said the encounters had not changed their perception for a different reason:

No, I think there is a real divide in the perception of the Creed between those with real faith and those of us with doubts. Reciting the Creed seems to reinforce my

doubts and makes me feel like an outsider and phony for declaring beliefs that I do not yet fully embrace.

I will discuss the importance of keeping recitation of the creed voluntary in Chapter 5.

As stated above, about three quarters of the participants said the experience was significant in some way. As I pondered all the ways people had told us the Encounters changed the way they experienced the creed, I began to see these many comments clustering around a few common themes: “New Appreciation”, “Unity”, “Owning the Story”, and “Doctrine.” In Moschella’s terminology, the many comment snippets are the “Slices” and my common themes are the “Bags.” I will evaluate these in Chapter 5.

### **Congregant Reflections On The Project As A Whole**

When we asked how worshippers experienced the project as a whole, one twenty-six year old man who attends *SouthRidge* said:

I think, overall, it was done well. I did feel the more personal and raw the projects, the stronger they felt. The staged moments were sometimes easy to spot, which was not really that big of a deal, but I really enjoyed when it seemed fresh. I responded to people responding to the creed for themselves in that moment.

Other comments included:

I was moved by the testimony of the various speakers and charged to think more carefully about what the Apostles Creed means to my life now.

What stuck out most to me was the fact that a different portion of the creed was highlighted and meant something different to each person who shared.

The variety of experiences was very helpful, as we were offered a number of vantage points from which to experience the creed in new ways. Sometimes ‘familiarity breeds contempt,’ boredom, or inattention. The varied experiences made the creed come alive...because they invited us participate with the creed in different ways than our usual way--of rote recitation as a congregation.

Even participating in the follow-up survey process was a helpful experience for some. The email that invited people to take the follow-up survey included links to the various resources that we had created for this project. We offered congregants who chose to do so the opportunity to re-experience the Encounters (such as podcasts of sermons and YouTube videos) before taking our survey. One congregant who experienced the Encounters was living in India by the time she received the follow-up survey email. After completing the survey she emailed me and wrote:

Done! I was happy to do this. There is an isolated feeling here in India because there are so few signs of Christianity. The other day I was in a car and saw some nuns. Wanted to get out and hug them. It was nice to get this email and track back to the website and its resources... So, we need more sermon podcasts to be uploaded! When there is time in the morning, before work and the real heat sets in, there is a small park I like to visit nearby with peacocks. It's nice to watch them in the trees, and listen to a podcast. The podcasts are like an anchor...

One of our goals was to see which encounters were helpful to the most people. We also wanted to see which encounters people found least helpful. We asked all fifty-one people who took both the pre-encounter survey and the post-encounter survey to tell us which Encounter they found most helpful, which they found least helpful and why. I summarize the results in Appendix 8. It shows that the encounter reported as most helpful to the most people was the Creedal Testimony followed by the Sermon series. The least helpful encounter was reported to be The Order of Liturgy (offered once), followed by the Coat Rack Reflection Station (offered twice). Congregants had limited exposure to these encounters when compared to the multiple occurrences of creedal testimonies and sermons (although each sermon was unique, I preached them in a five-week series). The Encounters with the most divergent opinions (those that were cited most as being both most effective by some and least effective by others) were The Lord's Table (Encounter

8) and the Creed movie (Encounter 5). As can be seen from the quotes above, the high popularity of the Creedal Testimonies and the Sermon series was in keeping with the stories people shared with me in the personal interviews. In Chapter 5, I will consider the implications of all these findings, and draw some tentative conclusions.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **EVALUATION**

#### **Modes Of Evaluation**

Savage and Presnell argue that “It is necessary at times to retreat from the actualization of faith in a practice of ministry in order to re-imagine the story and to listen again to the narratives of context.”<sup>1</sup> After the year of exposing our congregation to the eight different encounters described in Chapter 2, we brought the project to an end. It was time to evaluate if anything had changed and what we might learn from this experience. We had several sources from which to draw. First, we had the large number of narratives and comments we had received from the congregation as seen in Chapter 4. Next, we had the pre and post-encounter surveys that appear in Appendices 1 and 2. Third, we had indirect indicators, such as number of hits or downloads on internet resources. Finally, we had our own reflections on the experience. In this chapter, using all of these resources, I will try to answer four questions:

1. Were there any signs of change in individuals or the system, particularly in the areas of vitality, unity, and catechesis?
2. Which encounters did people find most helpful and why?
3. Did we discern any transformation in the context or ourselves?

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<sup>1</sup> Savage and Presnell, 123.

4. How could we apply this work in other ministry contexts?

### **Observing Change In The Congregation**

Savage and Presnell suggest pursuing “a form of evaluation that consists of two distinct parts. One part is observing change...The second part is discerning transformation.”<sup>2</sup> One of the goals of this project was to try to observe change in catechesis, unity, and/or sense of vitality in the congregation in the hope of discerning transformation in the community. Savage and Presnell argue that one way of “obtaining a holistic sense of the emergence of the new within the ministerial context” is to take a functionalist perspective, evaluating “how the combining narratives of the context fit together pre- and post- project...It builds on the sense that if one component of the system is changed, that change affects the whole.” By introducing new encounters with the Apostles Creed into the corporate worship of the congregation, we were changing one component in the church system. Savage and Presnell further note that this functionalist approach “allows the researcher to discern ‘unintended’ consequences that may have emerged by the programmed initiatives.”<sup>3</sup> This is the approach I will take here and I will identify a number of unintended consequences in the discussion that follows.

As noted in Chapter 4, when asked questions like “Did anything change for you as a result of being part of this project?”, about one quarter of the respondents said something similar to “No, not really.” However, the rest of the participants did report experiencing some type of change. As I pondered all the ways people had told us the

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<sup>2</sup> Savage and Presnell, 124.

<sup>3</sup> Savage and Presnell, 128.

Encounters changed the way they experienced the creed, I began to see these comments in clusters around a four common themes: “New Appreciation”, “Unity”, “Owning the Story”, and “Doctrine.” As noted in Chapter 3, ethnographer Mary Moschella argues:

The data you collect and absorb through experiencing the setting will suggest bags and slices, while at the same time your questions and deductive reasoning may produce more ideas about how to sort or measure your data.<sup>4</sup>

I see the four clusters above as the bags in Moschella’s approach. When I extract slices from the narratives we heard into these four bags, I discern transformation. To demonstrate this, I will examine each in turn below.

### **1. The bag of “New Appreciation”**

In the following narrative slices (each from a different congregant), I observe a change in appreciation for the creed, knowledge of the creed, and understanding of its contents:

I used to think it wasn’t really important.

It has become more familiar.

I remember it now. I bring it to mind when I get confused about things.

I feel that the Apostles Creed has become more important to me than it had before this year. I have more of an appreciation for it.

I am listening to it and thinking about it now rather than rote repeating it.

It is a living Creed, not just a rote liturgy.

[The Encounters] enhanced my awe for how much is beautifully packed in so few words. The sermons also increased my understanding of the doctrines laid out in the creed, since these were elaborated a phrase at a time. I now grasp the magnitude of what was accomplished in the church’s adoption of this brief statement of faith.

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<sup>4</sup> Moschella, 169-171.

I used to say the creed but it was just a bunch of words. Now it lives in me and I don't just say it but feel it.

I take it more seriously now, not just another thing to recite.

Yes, it has changed and, as I said above, I now use it in my daily prayer life to focus on what is most important.

I felt both challenged (to think more critically of taken-for-granted beliefs) and encouraged in my faith. Like any relationship (e.g. marriage) it is good to get to the basics of that relationship, to be reminded of the simple but strong foundations of that relationship (e.g. love and trust). As I meditated on these exercises I was reminded of these building blocks of my faith of the love that God has for me and the trust that I have in him.

I feel in the past my experience ...did not involve true acceptance...words came out of mouth, not the heart. It helps me clarify what I believe, rather than what I don't believe and to remind myself these are more than just words.

[The Encounters] made a creed which I said by memory more personal and now it gives me other ideas to call to mind.

[The Encounters made me think about] the way the apostles creed is just as true today as it was when it was first created and how it connects us to the first Christians.

I know most of the creed now.

[The Encounters helped me see that the creed] touches others in unique ways and therefore is still a tool that can be used as a basis of our faith as well as a stepping off point to growth.

I am more comfortable saying the Apostles Creed this past year than I had been before that. It seemed less formal and not said in rote fashion. When I say it now, it seems to have more meaning.

In the change reported by participants above, I see transformation. Comments such as “Now it lives in me and I don't just say it but feel it”, “I am more comfortable saying the creed”, “I take it more seriously now, not just another thing to recite” and “I now use it in my daily prayer life to focus on what is most important”, imply that the location of the creed in the participant’s imagination has changed. The relationship

appears to be more intimate and more important to the participant. Thus their relationship with the creed has been transformed.

## **2. The bag of Unity**

In the following narrative slices (again, each from a different congregant) I observe a change in understanding of how the creed can contribute to the unity of the church:

I see more how it can unite us all; I felt more connected to my fellow worshippers.

I'm more respectful of it; I understand its purpose and how it is important to my faith and the unity of the church.”

It does read dry so it can be hard to appreciate. But it serves very well of a reminder of the core foundation of faith. As people and Christians we have very different preferences and opinions. But on the essentials we must be united. This serves as a good core to unite on.

I like that we stress that the creed is shared by all branches of Christianity. It makes me feel connected to my Catholic and Orthodox brothers & sisters.

In today's world it seems we're constantly polarized by politics, sports, social issues, and other things. It's good to see common core beliefs that should unite and motivate us, together.

The Apostles Creed gives a concise summary of the essentials of the Christian faith. In a time when there is so much debate and division in the Church, the creed invites us to what we can hold in common--which is crucial to our unity in Christ. It also gives us a core which can be taught to the next generation. Our ability to pass on the beauty of the faith, so that it goes down deep into our children's lives, is a test of the vitality of the Church.

It made me appreciate my Christian heritage more and feel more connected to the saints in church history.

The Creed really binds us together.

The concept of the Holy Catholic Church, previously I thought it meant a denomination only but now know it means all one church.”

I now have a greater appreciation and awareness of how we are all much the same in our personal faith journeys. The same as those one thousand years ago and those sitting beside us. The things that are important, the struggles, the role the church plays in our lives everything is much the same. Despite technology, medical breakthroughs, scientific discoveries, social status or education, privilege or poverty the message that the creed represents spans all that.

I felt more connected to my fellow worshippers through the testimonies. It exposed to how we're each different in our expression of faith, but connected through Christ and the creed.

[The encounters helped me see] that our faith is what binds us together. Everyone has totally different experiences in life, and therefore totally different encounters with Christ. Yet the consistency of our faith is still able to shine through. We believe in the same basic foundational principles of our faith, even though we have experienced them in different ways. The creed is a binding agent in that way.

That we all come to faith through the paths that God has planned for us - unique as each of us.

It showed how we are all coming at our faith from different angles but are really connected at the same time. We are all learning and should not be afraid that we will feel or look 'dumb'.

I've been thinking a lot about unity and disunity in the church a lot over the last several years. It's been encouraging to meditate on what binds believers together and on what brings life to the church. It's also been a good reminder and a gentle admonishment not to get too caught up in my own experiences, perceptions, and ways of interpreting scripture but to extend grace to those with whom I may disagree.... Overall, this was a great experience. Inspiring, encouraging, challenging. Just great. Thank you!

In the change reported by participants above, I see transformation. Comments such as “we struggle to deal with other issues currently debated in the church”, “in today's world it seems we're constantly polarized”, and “in a time when there is so much debate and division in the Church” suggest a preexisting sense of anxiety. Our denomination is currently deeply divided over several social issues. Some churches have broken off to form a new denomination. However, comments such as “It's been encouraging to meditate on what binds believers together and on what brings life to the

church”, “it makes me feel connected”, and “it's good to see common core beliefs that should unite and motivate us, together”, suggest a sense of hope and encouragement.

Thus the internal transformation I discern is reduced anxiety and renewed hope as participants experience the creed as a way to help us move forward together despite our differences.

### **3. The bag of owning the story**

In the following narrative slices (again, each from a different congregant), I observe a change in understanding of how the story of the creed intersects with the participant's life story:

[The encounters] help me think about the creed more slowly, which in turn, helps me to internalize it. When I do this, I am able to see how it has played a part in my own story.

[The Encounters ] made the creed more ‘alive’ to me and given me more to hold on to during everyday living ...makes me feel tied to all those who believe the creed.

I now see it as more than a doctrine. It shows us who we are living for and why...it affects how we live...it unifies us also.

After hearing the testimonies, I'm more convinced that the creed is important to the lives of people in my church...regular people I know.

I really enjoyed hearing people's testimonies of how they apply the creed to their daily life.

I realized how practical the creed is for everyday life. I say it now daily during my prayer time and find reflection on each part really prepares my heart for prayer. That it isn't just some words you learned by heart and can say on request. That it can be a deeply personal statement of your personal faith and can be with you on your life's path at all times.

I began to see the creed less as a relic that is important merely because of the weight of tradition, and more as a compass that could actively guide us through the twists and turns of life today. I wouldn't say that I can see any specific

changes in my actions that I can directly tie to this experience, but I can see differences in my viewpoint and understanding.

Hearing people's personal story in their testimony was helpful in thinking about my personal story.

In the slices captured above, phrases such as "it has played a part in my own story", "it is helpful in thinking about my personal story", and "it can be with you on your life's path at all times" indicate a perception of life as a journey or story. They also indicate a sense that the creed is part of that story. Further, drawing from the Unity narratives above, the participants had an increase awareness of themselves as part of the bigger story of the united church down through the ages. I see this as a transformation in the perception of self – seeing one's self as more connected to the creed in everyday life and more a part of the story of the larger church down through the ages.

#### **4. The bag of the doctrine of the gospel**

In the following narrative slices (once again, each from a different congregant), I observe a change in awareness of how the creed can be used to communicate the gospel:

I enjoyed thinking about the creed through the lens of "dehydrated" gospel, or bare essentials. That made the connection with the bible clear, but also showed why the creed was needed, and a reasonable theological choice.

[I didn't change] too much, but I think it is very important for Christians, especially in America where many can't even articulate the gospel, to hear the basic doctrine of our beliefs.

I look at the Apostles Creed as a statement that sums up what it is that I believe as a Christian and this statement is more important to my life now as a Christian. [The encounters] opened my eyes to the succinctness of the creed and a way to help show others our beliefs. Use it as hints to expound on when given the opportunity.

On a concrete level, I learned (or in some ways reconnected with) much about the Apostles Creed - and in some ways the experiences took me back to my own



Confirmation classes ( three hours for about 32 Saturdays for each of two years). I would not say that anything changed for me; I believe that faith should always hold an element of skepticism - that balance between doubt and certainty - because it is through skepticism that we question.

In this last quote I discern change in the sense of a new awareness based on rediscovery. Statements as simple as “I know most of the creed now,” and “I remember it now, I bring it to mind when I get confused about things,” indicate a degree of learning. Perhaps the most moving comment for me in the area of catechesis came from a church member who said about the creed:

It gives us a core which can be taught to the next generation. Our ability to pass on the beauty of the faith so that it goes down deep into our children’s lives is a test of the vitality of the church.”

### **Summary Of Changes Observed**

The narratives above suggest transformation in the area of unity and at least a sense of change (growth) in catechesis. Change in vitality of the church has been more difficult to discern. I have a growing sense that we can have unity in the creed in the midst of a very turbulent time in our denomination (as captured in the narrative quotes above). It seems to me that this unity might contribute to a sense of vitality. As seen above, “encouraged” is a word often used by participants. For me, such hope is a key component of vitality. When asked how invigorated people felt about their faith, phrases such as: “it enhanced my awe for how much is beautifully packed in so few words”, “I felt both challenged and encouraged in my faith”, “I was reminded of the love that God has for me and the trust I have for him” suggest excitement and invigorated faith. One congregant who represented a number of others suggested that the project introduced new energy into the congregation:

Trying different methods to touch people's heart, mind and souls was a great approach. Don't know what was the most effective or if it was just the combination of techniques. No matter what, the end result was awesome. Thank God and thank you!!

Comments such as “The Encounters made the creed more ‘alive’ to me and have given me more to hold on to during everyday living...it makes me feel tied to all those who believe the creed” and “It shows who we are living for and why...it affects how we live...it unifies us also” imply to me that, whether or not there was increased vitality at a systemic level, there certainly was on an individual level.

### **The Encounter Found Most Helpful By The Congregation**

We hoped to identify those encounters most likely to be useful to the church at large, and so we were interested in understanding which encounters the congregation found most helpful and why. The recurring theme in our personal interviews as seen in Chapter 4 was that the Creedal Testimonies were highly effective. The survey results seen in Appendix 5 confirm this perception. We were looking for encounters that were not only deeply moving for some, but also were not distracting (or considered least effective) for others. The Creedal Testimony was one of the encounters with the lowest number of votes as least effective. Perhaps the most powerful evidence for these results comes from the following comments from various congregants:

I think [the Creedal Testimonies] were all valuable and should happen as often as people feel led to do them.

I find the idea of acknowledging and discussing God in our midst very moving and invigorating. I love the concept of ‘God sightings.’ That was a thread that ran through the youth group a few years back.

Great project. Wouldn't mind the faith testimonies continuing. Maybe monthly?

As the quotes above suggest, people requested (without solicitation) that we continue Creedal Testimonies in the future. Creedal Testimonies were the only encounters that participants requested that we continue. There appear to be several reasons why this might be so. First, as we saw repeatedly in the data in Chapter 4, people liked that it was “people just like me” who were leading them, rather than the pastor. One typical comment was:

The creedal testimonies were most powerful for me because they gave opportunities to hear a variety of people put in their own words what the creed means to them. Rarely do we hear public witness like this from ordinary members of the church. (Typically only the pastors proclaim the faith this way). So this helped me know in more depth the faith of several brothers and sisters, and their witness encouraged me.

Another person said that when they witnessed a Creedal testimony, it made them think:

That person is an extension of me...that could me...a representative of a regular person...we don't have maybe the seminary degree...but we have the connection to God...And that is what is important.

I had anticipated that people would find personal testimonies effective, but I had not grasped how important it would be that non-clergy be the ones to share. All signs I received from the congregation suggested a respect and love for the clergy, and yet this idea of non-clergy testimony was deeply important to them.<sup>5</sup> I see here a clear example of the hunger for the Participatory component of Sweet's E.P.I.C. worship. Second, hearing another lay person talk about both faith and doubt seemed to encourage people in their own faith. We often heard comments such as:

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<sup>5</sup> In this comment I was trying to be open to any power issues, divisions, or tensions dividing me as ordained clergy from those in the congregation that might have exaggerated this desire for non-clergy representation up front. My sense that none of this was in play was confirmed by the congregation's response when I took another call to lead another church just after the completion of this project. The kind, encouraging, and thankful response from the project congregation to me at my departure was quite overwhelming.

The testimonies were helpful. Hearing how others view their faith makes me understand better the doubts that everyone has.

Their witness encouraged me.

The Creedal Testimonies were most effective because they came from people just like me and so I found them easy to apply to my own life.

As I consider this last quote I hear echoes of my own faith journey as mentioned in Chapter 1 when I experienced hearing faith from fellow college students who were just like me. Third, the congregation told us that they experienced the creedal testimonies as diverse and interesting, rather than rote repeats of the same idea with difference faces.

One person said:

I honestly thought (at first) that these testimonies were mostly going to be a dud, probably because I thought they would be so cookie-cutter (pick a line, tell a little personal anecdote, say the creed together). But I was surprised...people really had *something to say*. And I'm glad I was there to listen!

Another member said:

It was a good mix of ways to present the creed... the presenters themselves and their various "takes" on it were most impressive. I was glad that they weren't "religious" but personal and direct in sharing.

From a pastoral perspective, I see at least two additional practical advantages of incorporating Creedal Testimonies in corporate worship. First, as discussed in Chapter 2, if there is some benefit in anchoring personal beliefs to the faith of the church, then the personal aspect of the Creedal Testimony may help people take their spiritual vitamins. By this I mean that we are naturally drawn to personal stories, and if that awakens us and prepares us to hear the formal creed of the church, then so much the better! When teachers use songs or images to help students encounter difficult or dry content, it is not an act of "bait and switch", but rather of creating easier access to the content. Second, at an almost opposite pole, the Creedal Testimony can awaken those lulled to sleep by

familiarity with thick formal liturgy with “everything in decency and in order.”<sup>6</sup> I have sometimes experienced carefully prepared liturgies and creeds as disconnected from the raw messiness of actual discipleship in the real world. Personal testimonies are always messy and often disturbing because they come from real, lived lives. By linking the creed to personal testimony, we create a jolt, a dissonance which must be wrestled with. These struggles pull both the scriptures and the creeds out of the safe, well-worn interpretations we have given them. When the scriptures and creeds feel settled, when we think we have them all figured out, they can no longer shake us or teach us anything new. For me, Creedal Testimonies have the potential to awaken us to the tension and vibrancy already latent in the creed, waiting to be heard with fresh ears. Thus perhaps it can help re-center both those of us who lean towards emotional testimonies and those of us who lean toward traditional and predictable liturgy.

Finally, there are some practical advantages to the Creedal Testimony encounter in terms of a liturgical act. It requires very little in the way of materials and preparation. Because the testimonies are always resident to the local congregations and contexts, this encounter is easily transferable to other ministry contexts. The preparation for giving a Creedal Testimony often gives Pastors a wanted excuse to interact with the parishioners giving the testimony, and what the parishioner shares in their testimony may open up new avenues for further conversation.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:40 that “all things should be done decently and in order.” However, my Presbyterian denomination has made this such a mantra that sometimes it seems to mean that everything should be predictable, normal, and civilized. I am not sure I would assign such words to the work of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Second Most Effective Encounter**

As seen in Chapter 4, the congregation reported that the second most effective Encounter was the sermon series. In addition to the actual content of the sermons, I think there were several other factors that helped people experience the sermon series as so engaging. First, it was the format most familiar to both the presenter and the congregation. This seemed to be particularly helpful for people who appeared to have a low tolerance for change. Comments such as “Reflection Stations were a little to new-agey for me. They sounded a little bit like the Unitarian church where they were worshipping the shape of rocks” suggest that sometimes in our attempt to be creative or innovative we go beyond what will resonate with some people. The low number of people who typically participate in Reflection Stations (about twenty percent of the congregation) seems to bear this out. When comparing the sermons to other encounters, one person said “the sermons can more fully explore many aspects of the topic, from various perspectives, and are on a more solid theological foundation.” The familiarity of the sermon form allowed me to be comfortable in my own skin and also allowed the congregation to spend less time thinking about the novelty of the act and more time thinking about the message itself. One congregant said “The sermons were in-depth teaching with examples and conversational tones.” Second, I made a serious effort to construct sermons that were E.P.I.C. The sermons contained many narratives and were highly visual. Typically I would project about ten images during the course of a sermon. The reader may find samples of the images I used in Appendix 7. One congregant wrote “Pastor Langdon has done a great job especially in the sermons of illuminating the value of the creed and making it come alive.” Most sermons included several questions for

people to wrestle with as well as ways to think about applying the message to their lives. A member said “I believe the sermons are most effective because they allow space to consider where your personal beliefs and faith fit, they allow the space to own and to challenge.” Finally, because the sermon was the focus of the service at *SouthRidge*, the music sung, the reflection station of the day, and the video mash-up used during Stations served to support the message I delivered. Thus it had supporting actors that helped make the message both clearer and more memorable. One congregant said “The sermons were most effective because they clearly explained the creed.” Multifaceted sermons take a good deal of time to prepare and it can be a challenge for busy pastors to create such sermons from scratch. I am hopeful that the posting of these sermons both as audio podcasts and YouTube videos could provide a starting place or framework for others to use in constructing their own sermons.

For me personally, the feedback we received was an indicator that my sermons are basically on the right track and reaching a healthy percentage of the congregation. While it is possible that those who did not agree to participate in the survey might have a different opinion, we received no indication of this.

### **Less Effective Encounters**

As I review the data on less effective encounters, a shortcoming in our methodological approach becomes apparent. In many of the interviews we asked people which encounters they found most effective and least effective and then we delved into why that might be so. This means we gathered a lot of feedback about the encounters graded highest and lowest, but little from those in the middle. In retrospect, it would have been better to step through each encounter with an individual, listening for any

comments she or he might have had, even if the encounters did not stand out for them. Similarly, in the on-line surveys we asked people to identify and comment on the encounters they found most or least useful. Given this shortcoming in analysis, once we got beyond the two most effective encounters, it became difficult to evaluate which encounters come next: the Mini movie (Encounter 5), The Lord's Table (Encounter 8), and "Five Things I used to Say" (Encounter 7) all had similar responses. I will discuss each of these in turn. Some found the mini-movie to be helpful and I believe it will have longer staying power than some other encounters. One member of the congregation said the movie "was very well done and will benefit those outside of our church as part of our outreach or part of new members' class." This was an application of the project we had not anticipated.

As seen in Chapter 4, the Lord's Table enactment of the Creed (Encounter 8) drew the widest range of impressions (people tended to either really like it or really not like it). For example, one person said "I found the Lord's Table encounter very moving" while another said it was the "the least effective encounter...It felt staged an unnecessarily dramatic...almost an annoyance." As a liturgical resource it has the advantage of requiring no props or special equipment – just the words and the gestures of the celebrant. Based on the comments we received, I think the act had value but should be used sparingly. One person said "once you've seen it, it starts to become routine." It might be most appropriate in a liturgical context where it aligned directly with the theme of the service rather than included without explanation. For example, it would fit well in the middle of a sermon series on the Apostles' Creed similar to the one provided in this project.



The “Five Things I Used to Say” short videos (Encounter 7), while helpful to some, did not catch on in cyberspace in any significant way. One person said the “videos were raw and personal in a profound way.” Another who saw the first installment on a Facebook page wrote “This is really, really GOOD! I can think of several people I would like to send it to and with whom I believe it would resonate. This is a wonderful gift...Thank you.” We were trying to leverage the YouTube platform’s easy search capacity, and there were other shares, but the videos did not go viral. In hindsight I have noticed how often I have been disappointed or annoyed to find a YouTube video, only to realize the file is a fixed image with audio. It would have taken significant resources and time to create a story line video to accompany this audio – far beyond the scope of this project. However, looking back, it might have been worth the effort to shoot a video of a close-up of someone giving the talk in a very welcoming conversational way. It is possible that just having an animated human face instead of a fixed image would have made it easier for people to engage with the video.

### **Least Effective Encounters**

One of the real surprises to me was how low people ranked the effectiveness of the On-line meditation (Encounter 3); I found this approach to the creed to be meaningful. In fact, of all the encounters we created, the one I continue to use in my own devotions is the On-line meditation. I have a strong introvert leaning on the Myers-Briggs scale and I deeply enjoy quiet times alone with the Lord to contemplate my faith, . I like open-ended encounters that feel like an invitation to explore such as reflection on a piece of art where there is no right answer. This was what we were trying to create when,

without explanatory commentary, we matched striking images with lines of the creed. It would have been interesting to see if there if introverts and extraverts experienced this encounter differently. A young financial executive said “Least helpful was the pictures for the online meditation. The way people learn...I am more a number and words person than an images person.”

I also loved the Coat Rack encounter, and yet the larger congregation deemed this experience as another least effective event. This serves as a reminder to me that just because I like something, that doesn't mean the congregation will agree! It is a hard thing to separate one's own likes and needs from those of the congregation, and pastoral leadership requires us to speak in ways, and provide experiences, that resonate with the actual people of our congregations. My impression is that a 'do no harm' approach does not require excluding such encounters from worship. In other words, if certain open ended, “artsy” experiences do no harm for most of the congregation (they could take them or leave them, they don't find them distracting or annoying) and yet are deeply meaningful for a minority, they may still be worth pursuing. This is especially true if you are attempting to draw new people into your congregation. For example, if you are located near a college of the arts and want to attract those students to worship, you might offer such encounters knowing that for much of your current congregation they are neutral, while for some students they could be the very avenue into the community that they need.

The liturgical act of ordering the worship service around the creed (Encounter 4) still holds promise for me as an occasional event. As mentioned in Chapter 5 we thought it would be effective and efficient to combine this effort with Confirmation Sunday. In

retrospect, I do not think this was a good idea – there was simply too much going on that day for people to focus on the encounter. One person said “I remember it was Confirmation Sunday and I was thinking of it more as Confirmation Sunday than a Sunday where the unique order was due to the creed.” Further, we did not prepare adequately to capture the congregation’s impressions in a timely fashion. Because of this, few people remembered more than the general outline of the service and we did not record enough narrative data to draw in-depth conclusions on this encounter.

### **Other Results**

One side effect of the project was helping people feel connected to the church. In Chapter 4 I noted the congregant in India who was encouraged by the podcasts. Another person reported:

I'm excited by incorporation of modern media like mp3 podcasts, YouTube, Facebook and even Twitter (never thought I'd say that.) Sometimes we miss church, some people have to work, but these technologies can still connect us and allow us to grow and learn.

While downloads of sermons and movie views have not gone viral, it has become clear that a significant number of people outside the project and outside our congregation have and continue to be exposed to the on-line resources we created. As of the time of this writing, downloads continue albeit at a slow pace.

Looking at the larger context, the strongly positive response to creedal testimonies described earlier indicates that the congregation is open to permanent change to its liturgy, i.e. the occasional inclusion of creedal testimonies going out into the future. The comment from a congregant that our movie encounter “was very well done and will benefit those outside of our church as part of our outreach or part of new members’ class”

suggested an application we had not thought of. The movie could be a resource to both Confirmation classes and New Member's classes. As a way of supporting my denomination, I will be making the movie available to local churches (the Presbytery of Philadelphia) to see if it might be helpful to other congregations.

### **Looking For Hints Of Transformation**

Savage and Presnell argue that in the evaluation of a ministry project:

Transformation refers to a change in structure, appearance or character for the better... We do not propose that we can measure transformation on an absolute scale... The evaluation is tentative, provisional, and modest. One should always be aware that 'nothing gets solved for very long'... [Instead,] one seeks to assess what tools or skills were imparted, what new relationships were forged, what systemic changes occurred that will affect the future of the context beyond the newly established condition. We are more interested in the web of relationships and the growth of participants individually, or the context collectively than in a mere change of condition.<sup>7</sup>

As noted above, I do discern transformation in some individuals in the way they now see their lives as part of the story of the creed or in others in the way they now see the creed as a source of unity, and therefore of hope, in a time of upheaval and uncertainty at the denominational level. In light of the results reported above, I see the degree of transformation produced by this project at the congregational level to be modest. However, I can say that the congregation is now one where Creedal Testimonies seem normal, expected, and welcome. This is a structural transformation in that the congregation's sense of what are appropriate liturgical components for corporate worship now includes Creedal Testimonies. Further, the web of relationships within the congregation seems to have grown modestly as a result of the project. This is captured well in what Andy said after giving his creedal testimony:

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<sup>7</sup> Savage and Presnell, 124-126.

I had a lot of people come up to me and shake my hand and thank me. A lot of the people I had never met or talked to before. Mostly they thanked me for standing up and sharing, not necessarily telling me they liked what I said. I guess that's the point on some level, just the fact that someone from the congregation is getting up and talking about a personal experience and tying it into the Creed is the main thing. Most people probably won't have a revelation or really even remember what I said after they leave church but they'll remember I got up and talked and said the creed, it's almost putting a face on the Creed and bringing it home to Ambler.

### **How The Project Impacted The LAC And Me**

Several members of the LAC said directly to me how much being part of the LAC meant to them. Kevin said:

It was a positive experience both listening to the group trying to shape their thoughts as well as trying to verbalize my own to the insightful questions and challenges you posed in the process. It reminded me that I am not challenging myself enough. I have a greater appreciation of how hard it must be at times for people in your leadership position. I particularly enjoyed the shaping the video into a "Journey based" creed vs a structured recital of beliefs.

Sarah said:

I enjoyed the experience of being on the LAC for the following reasons: I got to know a few people better, I got some insight into what the HECK one might do in order to get a DMin, I was challenged to think differently (i.e. not like an engineer), and I have a broader perspective on what will make the church relevant to future generations, due to our conversation and your research.

In addition, I was deeply moved by Luke's reflections. He had just come to our Philadelphia faith community from the South and was just starting to attend our church when I asked him to be part of the LAC. He wrote me after the project, saying:

During my participation in the Creed project, I felt very surprised at myself as a participant. I am not often one to speak very openly about foundational Theological issues within a church community. I feel like my experience is somewhat different from a lot of people whom I end up attending church with, and I don't wish to overcomplicate things with my concerns. However, in the context of our meetings, I felt like I realized that I had a different set of concerns than others in the group (some related to age, some related to previous

Theological study, and some related to my past in the Southern Baptist church, or other experiences) and Langdon invited me to share those thoughts freely. The ultimate end result of the project was a mixture of everyone's unique perspectives, and I feel like a part of myself made it into a much broader and attractive final result. This was very nice for me to see. I would say this project encouraged me to share myself and my gifts with the Church more freely, and also to allow space for receiving the same from others. This is significant for me, as I have not been very open with church communities since some traumatic past experiences, and I hope I can work toward healing that distrust, and replacing it with a confidence in my own welcomed place within the broader ecclesiastical community.

The idea that participating in the LAC could be such a helpful (healing?) experience for someone was not something I had expected and is one of the most precious results of this project for me personally. When I asked Redmond how being part of the project impacted him he said:

Interacting with a group of different kinds of people from our congregation – having to sit there and listening to them both when I agreed and disagreed. We talk about theoretical learning styles but to sit in a room with someone who says “No, that doesn’t do anything for me” was powerful. It’s rare in the church that the goal is to do some good thinking and get something done – in Sunday school we do good thinking but don’t get much done, when we make a meal we do something but don’t do much thinking. Creating the Reflection Station where I didn’t just think about an idea but had to turn it into something physical, real, using my own coats from my closet to create a time limited event for others.

I appreciated Redmond’s insights. I had not thought about how the very act of working as the LAC, wrestling over different interpretations and approaches could contribute in its own small way to the unity of the church. In Redmond’s description of the project as an opportunity to combine thinking and doing; even including the intimacy of one’s own clothing, I hear rekindled vitality on a personal level.

Looking back about a year after the project, John said

Thanks for including me in this process. When Marie and I were in Jamestown, Virginia we visited the rebuilt settlement. In the church on the right side of the center cross was the Apostle’s Creed written on a tablet, on the other side were the Ten Commandments. This was from 1619 or something like that. I marveled at it because it was pretty much the same as it is today some 400 years later. To say

that paying close attention to the Apostles' Creed has had a profound impact on me would be an understatement. I think of it often, I sometimes meditate on it as I go to sleep. I also occasionally use the creed in my defense of the Gospel. Marie [the director of Children's ministry at the church] is in the process of teaching the Apostle's Creed to the kids; I believe this is a result of your shining the light on this precious statement of faith. I hope this helps, it has surely helped me.

Having an influence on John's devotional life is encouraging; having an influence on the curriculum of the Children's Ministry was an outcome we had not anticipated!

As for me, it was invigorating to work with volunteers that I truly respected and admired. I have a tendency to work on my own rather than working collaboratively. As I wrote this paper I went back to many old emails, comments, videos, and the sounds of these friends' voices. I listened to interviews I had done with them almost two years ago. It made me deeply thankful to have been able to work with them side-by-side. It was a great reminder of the both the power and the joy of collaborative work. The project has affected me in several other ways as well. First, it has reminded me how diverse the body of Christ is and how my ways of learning are not always other's ways of learning. It has reminded me to be intentional in my ministry to communicate in multiple ways as one size does not fit all. Further, as a person with an engineering background, I am quick to see the real benefits of linear logical thinking and might tend to privilege a modernist mindset, giving it free passes when it doesn't deserve it. Although I always saw a postmodern approach as a helpful critique that could somewhat mediate the Modernist tendency towards hubris and lack of self-awareness, I had never seen it as an adequate replacement, and I was suspicious of a postmodern approach to research. But in the act of writing this paper, through being trained to change phrases like "it was decided that" to "I decided to", I experienced firsthand how this approach can produce a more honest and a more modest work when used appropriately.

The project allowed me to deeply probe something with which I am fascinated – the Apostles’ Creed. The movement from a bundle of doctrinal propositions to the story we are living in is a profound one, and in fact, one that is hard to express with propositional words! Perhaps a congregant caught it best who said after the project: “I now see it as more than doctrine. It shows us who we are living for and why...it affects how we live...it unifies us also...it has played a part in my own story.”

One of the unintended consequences of the programmed initiatives that we used in this project is a change in my sensitivity to how important it is for the congregation to see non-clergy, “regular people like me” sharing their faith stories “from the front.” As a result of this project, I have an increased confidence in the usefulness of the Creedal Testimony, and the appropriateness of trying to share this liturgical act with other congregations.

## **Epilogue**

Looking back, one of the unique aspects of this project was the long length of its implementation phase. By the end of June 2013 we had completed implementing instances of each encounter except the Mini-movie (Encounter 5). In retrospect, we were overly ambitious trying to create so many encounters. I had been hopeful that this failure to produce Encounter 5 would be viewed as part of the learning experience of the project. However, my original faculty advisor felt we could not close the implementation phase without presenting this film. It took us several months to make a new version of the film. Between that, my scheduled three month Sabbatical that summer, and then the death of my faculty original advisor after a heroic battle with cancer, a large pause occurred in the



project implementation. Since I had no faculty advisor, I requested that I take a leave of absence so that I could start up again with the next cohort in order to gain a new faculty advisor for the writing phase. During the leave of absence, I felt adrift and conflicted, saddened by the loss of my mentor and frustrated by no clear path forward. In May and June of 2014, we presented the film to the congregation and distributed the post-project survey. I am thankful to my new faculty advisors for helping me to pick up the project again so that I could bring it to completion.

Since completing the project, I have left the church and taken a new call to be the lead pastor at another Presbyterian church in the Philadelphia area. This church does not have anything like the *SouthRidge* service described above; rather it has one blended service. As I have begun to sit with people in this new congregation and listen to their stories, I am hearing a polarity: some wish the blended service were “more traditional”, while others wish it were “more contemporary.” The attendance has dropped off greatly for a variety of reasons over the last ten years, and the number of younger people attending is low. The number one leadership competency the church was looking for in their new pastor was “Hopeful.” As I look back at the introduction of this paper and what I have learned in my own journey through traditional and contemporary worship, through thickly liturgical and minimally liturgical churches, I am hopeful I can bring a sensitivity towards the concerns of the various constituencies gathered under the one roof of this church. It appears to me that the very things we hoped our project would bring – an increase in vitality, unity, and catechesis in the congregation - could thus be helpful in this new setting. Starting next month, we will be doing our first Creedal Testimony in this new congregation. I am planning to use the Mini-movie the next time we do a new

member's class. I am starting a six week sermon series on the Apostles Creed this coming Sunday and we are currently porting the On-line meditation to the new church's website.

I am excited about the possibility that the work of this project could provide helpful resources to a new congregation.

## APPENDIX 1

## INITIAL LAC LIST OF POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS

This paper summarizes the 11/25/2012 discussion between John, Karen, Kevin, Langdon, Luke, Rem, and Sarah on creating encounters with the Apostles Creed. Comments have been organized in three sections:

1. What is the Creed and what does it do?
2. What should we consider when creating encounters?
3. How can we help people engage with it?
  - a. Within corporate worship
  - b. Particularly within Reflection Stations
  - c. In settings outside of corporate worship

**1. WHAT IS THE CREED AND WHAT DOES IT DO?**

In the ancient church, the creed was used for worship, for teaching new converts and for protecting the church from drifting away from the gospel.

Every time we share our faith, we are creedal – we are summarizing how we have internalized the teachings of the church. In that moment, the act is highly personal / experiential and tethered to the teachings and convictions of the church across the ages. Embracing the creed moves us from what scripture says to what I believe/we as the faith community believe.

The text of the creed co-mingles history and the miraculous (crucified, third day rose again)

The text of the creed spans from the Cosmic (maker of heaven and earth) to the specific (suffered under Pontius Pilate – a particular person in a particular place at a particular time)

The creed offers great Diversity within unity: When every major denomination (Catholic, Orthodox, and every form of Protestantism from high church Episcopal to a charismatic home fellowship) can affirm the creed it allows an incredible diversity of race, language, worship style, and theological interpretation. At the same time it provides a unity of conviction: i.e. Jesus really did die and rise again.

In fact, the four gospels show this unity within the creed – they are diverse and unique – they pursue different concerns – yet all four fall within the theological framework of the creed. The very shape of the scriptures demonstrates diversity of expression and concern within the overarching commitments of the creed.

The creed provides a broad trajectory and direction for the church without trying to nail down every detail – it is a broad path within which many can walk at their own speed and with their own style. It is also the boundary of the path – defining when you are on the way and when you are not. It is a song for the path – each phrase is an incentive for the redeemed to break out in praise.

The creed is a pair of reading glasses that allows us to see the scriptures and the story of redemption clearly - it is not the thing, it is the means by which we perceive the thing. On the other hand, it is the accumulated wisdom of the church through the ages – the most cogent, time-tested summary of the gospel we have. It is both precious and authoritative. It offers a form of accountability – this is who we are, this is what we believe – will you as a leader affirm this? Will you as a member affirm this? This is the way we are going – do you want to join us?

Because the creed is **declarative** (it unapologetically declares particular theological commitments), **experiential** (we choose to profess this out loud), and **communal** (we say it together and it allows for a wide range of diversity of both styles and convictions) it is accessible and helpful to Moderns, Postmoderns, and Millennials – if the right on-ramps are provided.

## 2. WHAT ARE SOME CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS?

Any text, image, music we add to a phrase of the creed is an interpretation, a particular take on that phrase. Used well, it can steer a broad phrase like “I believe in the Holy Spirit” in a healthy, orthodox trajectory. Used poorly, it communicates bad theology. In terms of propagating the creed, You can either:

1. Do it Explicitly - have people stop and focus on the creed – place it front and center of attention, or
2. Weave it into the ethos and the liturgical acts of the community – it is the (unseen) commitments that frame what we do and why we do it.

To make it engaging/meaningful to folks in our current culture, our on-ramps should be E.P.I.C. (Experiential, participatory, image driven, and community building)

## 3. HOW CAN WE HELP PEOPLE ENGAGE WITH IT?

### Within Corporate Worship:

1. Say it slowly – stop to focus on the images and implications of each phrase
2. Change the order – start with the end, or start with the present (I believe in the Holy Spirit/Holy Catholic Church) and move back towards creation and forwards towards the Eschaton
3. String together scriptures that point to the same ideas found in each phrase of the creed
4. Break it up into natural sections that are declared/experienced at the beginning, middle, and end of the worship service.
5. Have the order of worship follow the order of the creed.
6. Act out the creed in the Instantiation of the Lord’s Table
7. Each week a different person gets up and declares “My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I believe in God the Father...” This brief testimony would include a personal story of their own faith experienced coupled with the communal creed of the church – the personal and the universal tethered.

8. Sign Language the creed – either live, or on a video: slowly with words appearing beneath the signer.  
Also , we could “write on” the video - mark it up with notes that explain each movement – such as an arrow that points to when she signs a sash as a sign of royalty.
9. Ambient music
10. Music used to tell the story – movements of the creed (Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Eschaton)
11. Demonstrate its importance by intentional multiple viewpoints each week

**Particularly within Reflection Stations:**

12. Reflection stations that express an interpretation of each line, or the six “I believes”
13. Have a pair of Binoculars focused in at the cross or other object and have the person look through them. The creed allows us to see clearly the shape, movement, and message of the scriptures – the story of redemption
14. Etched words of creed on base platform upon which other items stand – illustrating creed as foundation
15. Coat rack – that coats are hung upon – to demonstrate the creed is the central core tenants upon which many other conclusions and implications are hung. These secondary convictions can be both beautiful and ugly, both things that lead us towards the gospel and away from it.
16. Art Station: a poster for each phrase of the apostles creed that includes an image and possibly a verse or prayer

**Local / Global Ideas**

17. Break it into daily devotions – perhaps six “I believes” of the Creed followed by a Sabbath. Perhaps include a different prayer for the day based on each of the six phrases.
18. and 19. Create a song that either
  - a. Helps people memorize the creed – a learning device
  - b. Helps people worship through the creed – becomes their vocabulary of prayer
20. \* Create an on-line meditation that includes an image for each phrase. A person steps through the experience screen by screen as they feel ready, much like <http://www.sacredspace.ie/daily-prayer>
21. Find out how many different languages are spoken in our church – Cut and splice a video that has each phrase said in multiple languages.
22. A social media resource where people could Midrash on each phrase of the creed. In other words, people would be able to post in their own words what comes to mind as they reflect upon the creed and those posts become a resource to others – taking them deeper into the implications of the creed.
23. \* Video or Sermon – that tells the story of the faith: “What if there really was a God – who created both the ancient stars and the heart beating with me?” What if rather than being cold or uncaring, God actually loved us, the way a parent loves their child. . . .” And then at the end declare the Apostles Creed so that people see – that is what the creed was saying all along. . .

24. Create a video resource that has multiple people expressing the creed but the focus is in the location of the person saying it more than the diversity of the people saying it. The location could speak to the particular phrase being said. {Implementation Idea :} Set up a social media contest where you challenge people to send you videos of people saying the creed from the wildest, craziest, most beautiful places (example: “Maker of Heaven and Earth” from the Grand Canyon, “Communion of the Saints” from 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the holy catholic church from a bunch of people stuffed in a telephone booth) Make it fun and adventuresome, then do slicing and dicing to show multiple locations for each phrase of creed.
25. Liturgy: Do the Creed as Questions and Response

APPENDIX 2  
PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

## Apostles' Creed Survey #1

There are 13 questions. Some questions ask you to choose between fuzzy choices - just pick the one that comes closest to what you think.

Thanks for taking the time to do this !

### 1. How old are you ?

### 2. Are you:

- Male  
 Female

### 3. Which service at our church do you attend most ?

- 9:30 Traditional  
 11:00 SouthRidge  
 I don't attend your church

### 4. How long have you been a Christian ? (Check all that apply)

- All my life  
 less than a year  
 less than five years  
 Since my baptism or confirmation  
 Since I asked Jesus into my heart as Lord and Savior  
 I don't currently consider myself a Christian

### 5. At this moment in time, how invigorated do you feel about your faith ?

- I don't have a faith  
 I am barely holding on to my faith  
 My faith has been stuck in neutral for a long time  
 My faith is slowly growing  
 I am excited and passionate about growing in my faith

Other (please specify)

**6. How confident would you feel to give an answer if you were asked to give a basic explanation as to why the Trinity and the Cross are important to everyday life ?**

- No confidence at all
- I could take a stab at it, but my answer would be somewhat disjointed
- I think I could do a pretty good job at giving an answer
- I think I could explain them both completely
- I don't actually think the Trinity and the Cross are important to everyday life

**7. When you think about the local church you attend, how much unity do you sense about beliefs ?**

- I don't attend a local church at this time
- Agreeing about beliefs is not very important to me
- The church is very divided over many beliefs
- The church is divided over certain issues but not the core Christian doctrines
- There are various strongly held opinions but the church is united on core Christian doctrines
- The church seems very united both on core Christian doctrines and other issues

**8. When you think about the church of Jesus across the ages and around the world, - how strongly do you feel you belong to it - how confident are you that God sees you belonging to "the body of Christ ?"**

- I am not worried about such things
- I don't think I belong
- I have significant doubts about whether I belong
- I have some doubts but I am pretty sure I belong
- I am very confident I belong

**9. Did you grow up reciting the Apostles' Creed ?**

- Yes
- No



**10. If you had to rank the following as to which is the most important (or most interesting) part of being a Christian with 1 being the most important, what would you say ?**

<input type="text"/>	Beliefs/Knowledge
<input type="text"/>	Experiences/Belonging
<input type="text"/>	Behaviors/Action/Morals

**11. Which of these best describes how you experience the way the Apostles Creed is usually used in a worship service ?**

- Our church does not use the Apostles' Creed
- It just seems like a ritual we do
- It says important stuff but saying it together can seem awkward
- I usually experience it as meaningful
- It is one of the most important things we do in worship

Other (please specify)

**\*12. As much as you can remember about the Apostles Creed, how does it strike you ?**

**(Check all that apply)**

- I can't remember much about it at all - I forget what it says
- It is a list of stand-alone doctrines and beliefs that have been bundled together
- We have the bible so I don't see why we need creeds
- It is a concise statement of the most important Christian beliefs
- It is an example of dogma and rigidity from a bygone era
- It seems somewhat random - I don't see why some of these things were put in while others were left out
- It is the telling of the story of the gospel
- It doesn't seem to have much to do with the rest of the worship service
- It beautifully sums up the foundations of my own personal faith
- It opens us up to the mysteries of God and existence
- It closes us off from the mysteries of God and existence
- It doesn't seem to have much to do with living everyday life
- The words used seem weird and/or patriarchal
- It captures the very core of what are the essential convictions of Christianity
- There are times when it really bothers me / annoys me to say the creed in church
- Christianity is about loving people & God so I don't see why people get focused on doctrines & creeds
- There are times when I am doubting or struggling that hearing others declare the creed encourages me
- It seems static and disconnected from the vibrant, spontaneous, spirit led life of faith
- It helps keep the church centered on Christ & "the faith once given" instead of drifting to something else

**13. Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your thoughts about the Apostles' Creed or experiences you have had with the Apostles' Creed ?**

APPENDIX 3  
POST-PROJECT SURVEY

## Apostles' Creed Survey PART 2

Thanks for your help - your effort at answering these questions will influence the success of this project!

There are 15 questions. Your answers are anonymous.

This survey is for folks who have done two things:

1. Taken the initial survey (Part 1)
2. Then participated in at least 2 of the 8 activities in Question #1 below.

\* There is still time to participate in these activities or review them at [www.TheCreedProject.com](http://www.TheCreedProject.com)

Just open a new tab on your browser, review the materials there, then continue with this survey. If it has been a while since you participated, please do take a moment to refresh your mind :-)

**\* 1. Listed below are the 8 possible activities you could have experienced during the course of the last twelve months.**

**Please check the ones you actually experienced, then, of those, choose one you considered MOST EFFECTIVE and one you considered the LEAST EFFECTIVE activity.**

	Experienced	Most Effective	Lease Effective
[1] Creedal Testimonies - by members of congregation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[2] Mini Movie - "Carrying the Story that carries us"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[3] Online meditation - an image for each phrase of creed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[4] Sermons on the Creed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[5] The Lord's Table - Pastor says each phrase of creed w/bread & cup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[6] Church Service Liturgy - Worship service organized around creed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[7] Reflection Station - Hanging coats on coatrack at SouthRidge service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[8] "5 Things I used to say" - 5 short youtube messages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If most or least effective, why ?

## Apostles' Creed Survey PART 2

2. How old are you ?

3. Are you:

Male

Female

4. Which service at our church do you attend most ?

9:30 Traditional

11:00 SouthRidge

I don't attend your church

5. How many personal Creedal Testimonies did you hear ?  
(videos of them are available at [www.TheCreedProject.com](http://www.TheCreedProject.com))

None

1

2-3

4-8

6. How many sermons on the Apostles' Creed did you hear ?  
(Audio and Video Podcasts are available a [www.TheCreedProject.org](http://www.TheCreedProject.org))

None

1

2-3

4-8

\*7. What thoughts/insights came to you as a result of being exposed to the various Apostles Creed experiences? Did anything change for you ?

8. At this moment in time, how invigorated do you feel about your faith ?

I don't have a faith

I am barely holding on to my faith

My faith has been stuck in neutral for a long time

My faith is slowly growing

I am excited and passionate about growing in my faith

Other (please specify)

**Apostles' Creed Survey PART 2**

**9. How confident would you feel to give an answer if you were asked to give a basic explanation as to why the Trinity and the Cross are important to everyday life ?**

- No confidence at all
- I could take a stab at it, but my answer would be somewhat disjointed
- I think I could do a pretty good job at giving an answer
- I think I could explain them both completely
- I don't actually think the Trinity and the Cross are important to everyday life

**10. When you think about the local church you attend, how much unity do you sense about beliefs ?**

- I don't attend a local church at this time
- Agreeing about beliefs is not very important to me
- The church is very divided over many beliefs
- The church is divided over certain issues but not the core Christian doctrines
- There are various strongly held opinions but the church is united on core Christian doctrines
- The church seems very united both on core Christian doctrines and other issues

**11. When you think about the church of Jesus across the ages and around the world, - how strongly do you feel you belong to it - how confident are you that God sees you belonging to "the body of Christ ?"**

- I am not worried about such things
- I don't think I belong
- I have significant doubts about whether I belong
- I have some doubts but I am pretty sure I belong
- I am very confident I belong

## Apostles' Creed Survey PART 2

**\* 12. As much as you can remember about the Apostles Creed, how does it strike you ?  
(Check all that apply)**

- I can't remember much about it at all - I forget what it says
- It is a list of stand-alone doctrines and beliefs that have been bundled together
- We have the bible so I don't see why we need creeds
- It is a concise statement of the most important Christian beliefs
- It is an example of dogma and rigidity from a bygone era
- It seems somewhat random - I don't see why some of these things were put in while others were left out
- It is the telling of the story of the gospel
- It doesn't seem to have much to do with the rest of the worship service
- It beautifully sums up the foundations of my own personal faith
- It opens us up to the mysteries of God and existence
- It closes us off from the mysteries of God and existence
- It doesn't seem to have much to do with living everyday life
- The words used seem weird and/or patriarchal
- It captures the very core of what are the essential convictions of Christianity
- There are times when it really bothers me / annoys me to say the creed in church
- Christianity is about loving people & God so I don't see why people get focused on doctrines & creeds
- There are times when I am doubting or struggling that hearing others declare the creed encourages me
- It seems static and disconnected from the vibrant, spontaneous, spirit led life of faith
- It helps keep the church centered on Christ & "the faith once given" instead of drifting to something else

**\* 13. In what ways (if any) do you think a renewed appreciation of the Apostles Creed could contribute to the unity, vitality, and teaching of the church ?**

**14. Since taking the first survey, has the way you think about the Apostles Creed changed in any way ? If so, how ?**

**Apostles' Creed Survey PART 2**

**15. Finally, as you think about the various encounters you experienced ( Creedal Testimonies, Video, Sermons, etc.) do you have any suggestions as to how any of them could have been done better, or been more effective ? Do you have any other comments you would like to share with us ?**

That's it - thanks so much for taking the time to do this !

## APPENDIX 4

## ON-LINE RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE GIVING CREEDAL TESTIMONIES

## Creedal Testimony



Picture Source: <https://indefenseofwomen.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/bearing-testimony-boyd-k-packer> (accessed January 1, 2014).

Thank you for being willing to share a little bit about yourself and to lead our congregation in the Apostles' Creed. You will find everything you need to prepare here on this page. If you have any questions, just contact Pastor Langdon - he would love to help you. There are two sections to this page. The first section, **How to give a Creedal Testimony**, will give you the practical steps you need to create your testimony. The second section, **Why do a Creedal Testimony**, will give you the theory behind what we are trying to accomplish. Some may find it helpful to read this second section first.

### How to do a Creedal Testimony

You will speak for about three minutes and then invite the congregation to join you in reciting the Apostles creed. Here are the steps to take to prepare your presentation:

#### 1. Prepare, practice, and pray

The most difficult thing about a creedal testimony is keeping it brief without making it feel rushed. This can only be done with preparation and practice. Some people may feel it is less genuine to carefully prepare, and think it will be better to just "wing it." The opposite is usually true - the more you prepare, the more your nervousness will



disappear and the more effectively you will be able to communicate what you really want to say. People who wing it almost always go longer than people who prepare. **Actually practice your testimony out loud and time it. It must take you less than three minutes to get to the start of the creed.** The time you take to do the difficult job of chopping and rewriting to get to that point will result in a much more powerful presentation. Spend time praying about what you should say - listen to the leading of the Spirit. Ask God to use your testimony to his glory.

Include the following components in your testimony:

## **2. Say your name**

The goal is to say your name in such a way that people can remember it. A very effective way is to say your name slowly and state your first name twice as follows: "Hi. My name is Sarah. Sarah Dence. Today I would like to share with you..."

## **3. Introduce yourself**

We remember people's names better and feel more permission to approach them to talk to them when we know a little bit about them. Share things that help people know who you are and where you fit into our church. You could pick 2 or 3 of the following in order of priority:

- a. How long you have been part of the church and one or two things/groups you are involved in at church
- b. If you were brought to church by friends, name them. If your spouse or family comes to church, name them.
- c. How you ended up at our church
- d. What town you live in and how long you have been in the area
- e. Where you work and what you do (in layman's terms we can understand :-)
- f. One or two things you love to do - hobbies or pursuits

## **4. Share ONE experience or an insight**

This can be anything that points people to God and prepares us to declare the creed together. Here are some especially helpful things to share:

- a. An experience from a recent mission event including how it made you think about God or being a Christian
- b. An experience from some other kind of recent church activity (men's breakfast, small group, chili cook-off, etc.) that pointed you to God.
- c. A bible verse you recently read including what it made you think of and how it applied to your life
- d. An experience where you saw another Christian in action and how it impacted you / what you learned from it
- e. An idea about what God is like or what the Christian life is about that recently came to you
- f. An experience from everyday life that you felt God used to teach you something

The key here will be to narrow this down to as few sentences as possible, making it descriptive so we can feel what you felt, and making the point clear so we understand how it relates to God or the life of faith.

### **5. Include the Hinge to the creed**

The next two-three sentences need to tie what you just shared to the creed and to let people know that the creed is coming. The first sentence will vary depending on what you have shared. It will often take a form like this:

*This experience/insight has reminded me that God is at work here and now  
and that I am part of His family.*

The second sentence is somewhat fixed because it needs to accomplish some specific theological goals. Please say something either identical to, or very similar to the following:

*"Because I do believe in the power of the gospel to change people's lives  
and because I believe the Apostles' Creed brings us back to the center of the gospel,  
I invite you to join me  
as I join our brothers and sisters across the ages and around the world  
in declaring the Apostles Creed -  
as my own creed,  
pausing after each phrase, saying..."*

### **6. Lead the congregation in the Creed**

We want to make it easy for people who don't know the creed to join in, and we don't want to confuse people who have it memorized one way when we use slightly different words. Therefore it is important that it is available in written form exactly as you intend to recite it. Usually, the lines of the creed will be projected on the wall. An image will be shown with each phrase to help people think about what they are saying. **Contact the pastor in charge of your service ahead of time to confirm how the creed will be presented.** Other options include printing it in the bulletin, or reading it from the hymnal (it is located in the first few pages).

Your job is to slow them down, to pause after each phrase so that rather than rattling off the lines by memory; the congregation is able to reflect on each phrase. When we are up front we tend to speak quicker than we should. Speak each line clearly, pausing at each comma, and then count "one one thousand, two one thousand" before saying the next phrase. The form we will usually use is as follows (each blank line indicates a switch in the image shown).

**I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of Heaven and Earth**

**I believe 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, died, and was buried;**

**He descended into hell.**

**On the third day he rose again from the dead,**

**he ascended into heaven,  
and now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,  
from there he shall come again, to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

**the holy catholic church,**

**the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. AMEN.**

### **In Conclusion**

Obviously, it is important that you can say these things as your own - that you actually agree with the hinge statement and the Apostles Creed. If you cannot in good conscience say these things as your own convictions - we apologize for putting you in an awkward and unfair position. Just let us know, and we will ask someone else - no worries! If Christianity is about anything it is about honesty and we never want to put you in a position where you are being asked to say things that you don't agree with. Reading the rationale for the Creedal Testimony below may be helpful to clarify whether leading a Creedal Testimony is a good fit for you.

## Why do a Creedal Testimony?

The goals of a creedal testimony are:

1. The community experiences the creed corporately - but by hearing someone else make it their own personal creed.
2. The creedal testimony fosters community and intimacy (getting to know each other's stories and names)
  - while linking the church's universal creed to individual lives.

We are asking you to put together two things that are often separate in a church service - a personal testimony, and the congregation's shared declaration of a fixed creed. Let's look at each part., first the testimony and then the creed, and then finally, how they go together.

### Testimony

When you share your own personal story of faith with the congregation, a number of important things can happen:

#### 1. You build community.

People learn your name and a little bit about you. This seemingly small step is actually incredibly important in building a sense of community in our congregation. We need to begin to get to know each other and each other's stories. Your willingness to share sets an example for the rest of us to follow.

#### 2. You strengthen other people's faith.

You probably don't feel like you are such a spiritual giant that you should be sharing your testimony - that is exactly why we asking you to share it! We want to be an authentic community where we see small but real glimpses of the gospel in ordinary people's lives. Giving your testimony doesn't mean you have it all worked out or you don't struggle with doubt - it means you feel you can share one small story, or one small insight that has been helpful to you and could be helpful to others. When we share our own struggles and doubts and convictions - it is a gift to others. It normalizes their own experience. Many will think - "Hey if an ordinary person like them can love Jesus, maybe I can too!"

#### 3. It can help your own faith.

Having to take the time to sit down and really think about what you want to say can help you think about what you really believe. For many, just getting in front of others is a step of faith! Hopefully all of us will feel the need to pray long and hard before our testimony, and any excuse to pray is a good thing!

#### 4. You point people to Jesus.

As you prepare you should work hard to draw attention not so much to yourself as to where you see God at work. When you do this, you give a gift to the rest of us. The point of your testimony should in some way point people to Jesus. We constantly need to return our gaze to our savior, to be encouraged to follow after him. Hearing another

person say it helps us in our own walk. Your testimony can be a gift to others and bring honor to Jesus.

## **Creed**

When we declare the creed together as a congregation, a number of important things can happen:

### **1. We are reminded what church is all about**

We all know that unity is important for any community, but what exactly is a church to unify around? What is it that holds us together? A love of traditions, a love of beautiful church buildings, a love of music, a shared economic/cultural standing? Enjoying doing mission projects together? While all of these things may be important, none of them can keep a healthy church growing for long. What we all hold in common is the conviction that "Jesus is Lord!" The beautiful, world changing thing about Christianity is that it is our love for Jesus that unites us. This means that we can see as our true brothers and sisters - people we normally might not hang out with. It cuts across economic divisions, racial divisions, (and perhaps most amazing) aesthetic divisions, and unites us as the body of Christ. Without a creed, there is no agreement as what the center is or should be. Without the creed, we pledge loyalty to nothing bigger than ourselves and our own fleeting interests and opinions. Declaring the creed is an act of associating ourselves with something outside of ourselves - a community that already existed and already had rules and convictions before we ever came upon the scene. Declaring the creed together declares what the core of our community is all about. It reminds us what the center, the focus, and the priority of our church should be. It declares, with agreed upon words, that Jesus the head of the church, and that his life, death, and resurrection are the center of the gospel.

### **2. We confess publicly what we personally believe**

Romans 10:8-10 declares:

*The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:*

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

*For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

There is something vital about being willing to declare your faith out loud in public. When we say the Apostles Creed as our own creed, and mean it, we are confessing our faith, we are declaring - "It is here that I am hanging my hat - here is where I am waging all my chips." Jesus said in Mark 8:38:

*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

We need to speak up about Jesus and our allegiance to him. God wants to pull us out of our comfort zone and the lie that faith is supposed to be personal and private. Christianity requires us to publically state our faith with our own lips.

### **3. We are encouraged when we doubt.**

But what about those days when we are full of questions and doubts? What about those days when we don't know what to believe? Most of us would admit that we are inconsistent - our emotions and convictions fluctuate from day to day. When we are in the dark, and can't see anything clearly, we need to remember, to hold on to what we once knew, when we were in the light and saw things clearly. Reciting the creed is a gift to people like us. Some days I say it to the world as a statement of my faith, other days I say it to myself as a reminder of "the faith once given." Sometimes I can't even say it, and hearing my brothers and sisters around me declare the faith gives me strength and hope that one day my convictions will return.

### **4. We make the main thing the main thing - once more.**

All of us have convictions and each of us sees different parts of the Christian life as more or less important. We all drift from the priorities of Jesus in one way or another. But it is worse than that. All of us tend to drift away from "the faith once given" (Jude 1:3), to create a religion of our own that feels more comfortable, more reasonable, that doesn't cause us to struggle. Declaring the creed as our own creed re-centers our faith and reminds us which parts are the essentials. The creed brings us back to the core of the gospel message.

### **5. We pass the treasure of the gospel on to the next generation.**

Teaching our children to be good and kind is a beautiful thing, but it is not enough. It is not the gospel. It will not keep them in the church. We may be satisfied and comfortable with an unarticulated gospel; we may find comfort and enjoyment in being part of a church community and have no interest in its theology. But this will not help anyone else know Jesus - especially our children. What changes lives, what gives hope and meaning and purpose to living is the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. All other ground is sinking sand. With all the aspects of Christianity that change from age to age, from culture to culture, the focus of the gospel message does not. Saint Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,  
that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...*

Each of us who takes upon ourselves the name Christian has the same responsibility as Paul - to take what we have received and to pass it on to others, especially the next generation. The Creed is both a compact way to transmit the biblical message and a learning tool that can be unpacked to point people to the amazing breadth and depth of the gospel that is found in the scriptures.

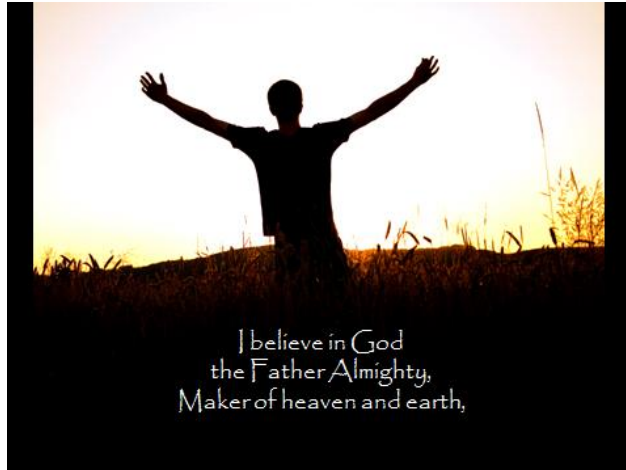
### **Creed and Testimony Together**

In our particular cultural moment there is a tendency to approve of personal testimonies as "genuine" and see written creeds as "artificial, rigid, and promoted by those in authority to force conformity." There is a popular statement "Mission unites but doctrine divides." But as we have seen above, this simply is not true. At its best, the creed represents the summation of personal experiences and convictions of the entire church over 2000 years, beginning with the apostles themselves. At its best, the creed gives the reason and the power to pursue mission in the first place. We are whole people - we need experiences, reasons, convictions, and the experience and knowledge of others to grow into healthy disciples of Jesus. Personal experience was never meant to be separated from the doctrine of the church. The two go hand in hand, building each other up. A Creedal Testimony is an attempt to reconnect experience and doctrine, the individual and the community, doctrine and mystery. By tying the two together, we point people beyond ourselves to the one "in whom we move and have our being." The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are meant to be the center of our shared faith. It is meant to be the center of our individual lives as well. Our hope and our prayer is that by combining creed and testimony into one liturgical act, we will create a juxtaposition, a tension that returns each to its original function of drawing us closer to the Triune God - that we might be changed and used for His glory.

## APPENDIX 5

## AN IMAGE DRIVEN INTERACTION

## WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED

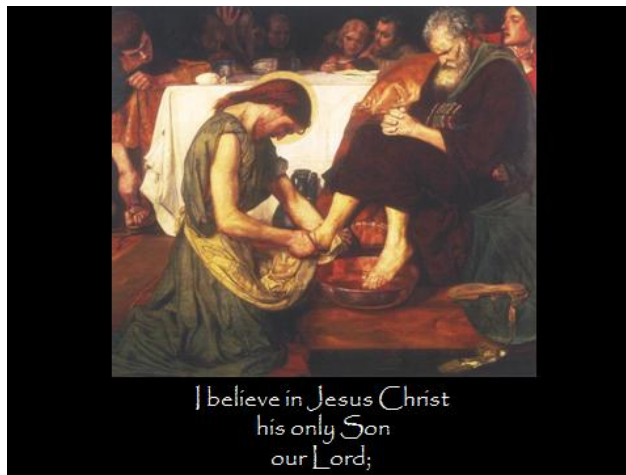


"God - you made everything,  
and at this very moment ,  
the world exists  
and my heart beats within me  
only because you say 'Let it be.'"

I take a moment to thank you for  
the good things of Creation...

The scriptures tell me that rather than being some  
impersonal force, you are like the perfect, loving  
parent. Please help me to experience you that  
way..."

You are God and there is no other -  
I worship you as Lord of all..."



"You broke into space and time  
to show us how to live -  
teach me your ways..."

Please give me wisdom  
in the following area of my life...

Please be Lord over every area of my life..."





Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
Born of the Virgin Mary;

"Jesus - you are the Word made flesh  
- God with us.

Mary is my role model for she said  
'Let it be unto me  
according to your word...'

Lord - this day, not my will, but thy will  
be done in my life..."



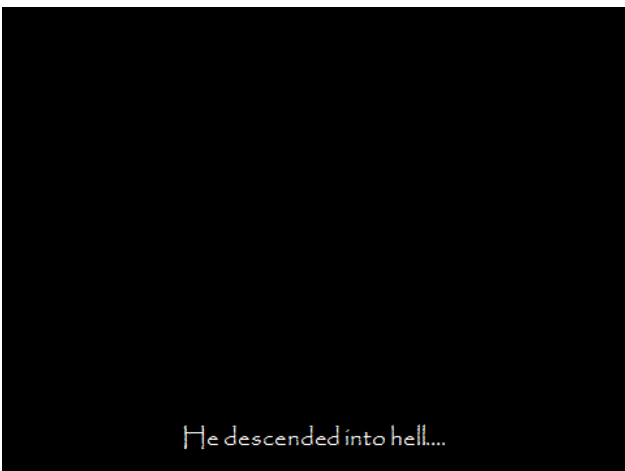
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified,  
died,  
and was buried;

"Jesus - you are the Lamb  
who takes away the sins of the world..."

You chose to die not only as an example  
of sacrificial love, but also to take the weight  
of our sins upon yourself- that I might not  
carry them one moment longer...

Thank you for what you did for me.

I pause to give you honor and glory  
- worthy is the Lamb who was slain..."



He descended into hell...

"Jesus - your life was real,  
your suffering was real,  
your death was real.

Wherever I go, even death,  
you have already gone through it,  
and you will walk with me through it.

I take a moment to name the fears  
I am dealing with today and give them to you -  
for the scriptures tell me

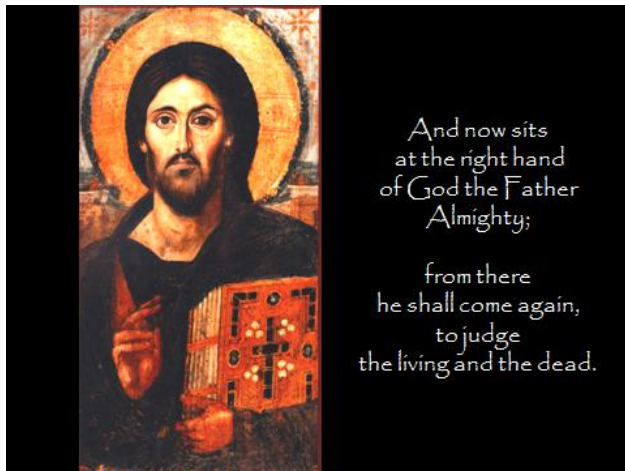
"Cast all your cares on him  
because he cares for you..."



"Jesus - you are the victor  
over Sin, Death, and the Evil One.

You bring new life and healing in your wake.

You are worthy to be called Lord  
and I praise you  
for who you are..."



"Jesus - you are, even now,  
interceding on our behalf before the Father.  
I lift my prayer requests up to you now..."

You will come back as the judge  
who sets things right  
and brings justice to the oppressed.

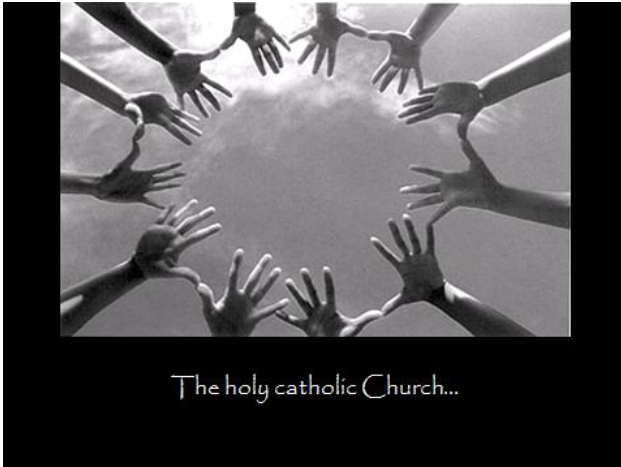
I take a moment to pray  
for this broken and hurting world...



"Holy Spirit, you are the Lord of Life.  
Fill me with your power,  
Steer me with your wisdom,  
Lead me as I yield to you -

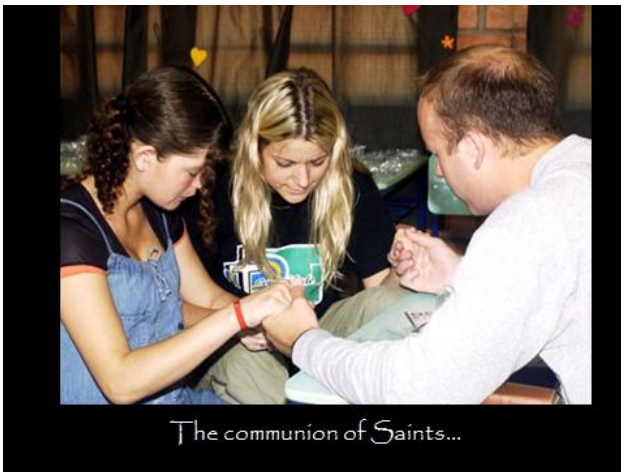
that I might be used by you  
in this world for good -  
that my choices might bring glory  
to the Triune God...

I ask that you would fill me  
with your presence  
and the Love of Jesus  
in the following situation ..."



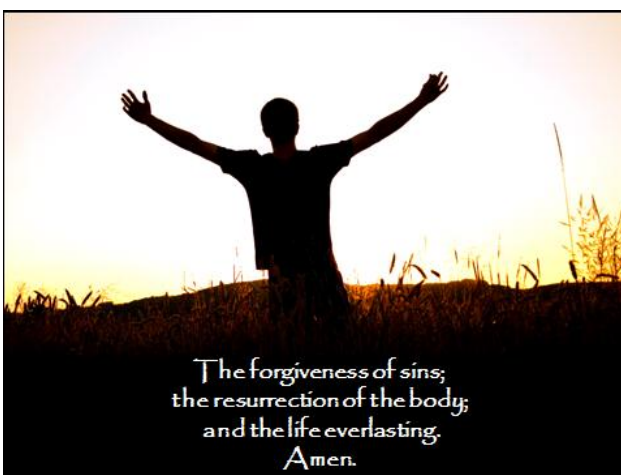
“Lord - this is your church, not our church.  
You call us to be your body together.  
I pause to pray  
for the protection and purity of the church...”

I pray for the flourishing  
of the following ministries  
of your church...”



“Lord, I thank you for the witness of all the faithful  
Christians that have come before me - those who  
have helped me to love you...”

I pray for the following Christians -  
that they might grow in their love for you...”



Jesus - thank you for forgiving my sins  
and giving me eternal life.  
You have wiped my slate clean  
that I might begin again with you - this day.

Thank you for reminding me how the story ends -  
Love wins.

Go with me now as I go out into the world in your  
name-

In the name of the Father,  
and the Son,  
and the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

## APPENDIX 6

## WORSHIP SERVICES DESIGNED AROUND THE APOSTLES'S CREED

**A: Southridge Worship Service Outline**

**WELCOME** and Explanation of the Creed service structure by Langdon

**READING #1 “We believe in God...”** – read by Langdon

We believe in God  
the Father  
the Almighty  
the Maker of Heaven and Earth

Come, for this hour we share, let us worship God together !

**PART ONE OF WORSHIP SET** – 2 songs on God as creator  
– led by Worship Team

Our Great God (Todd Agnew Writer(s): Johnny Mac Powell, Fernando Ortega  
Copyright: New Spring Publishing Inc., Word Music LLC, Dejamesolo Music)

Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

**READING #2 “We believe in Jesus Christ...”** - read by student 1

We believe in Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God,  
our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended into hell.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead...

That is the story of the Son of God - according to the words of the Apostles Creed.  
Now listen for how this story can become our story in the words of the songs we  
sing next.

**PART TWO OF WORSHIP SET** – 2 songs focusing on Jesus  
– led by Worship Team

Revelation Song

In Christ Alone

**READING #3 – “We believe in the Holy Spirit”** - read by student 2

We believe in the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who moves us and animates us. It is the Spirit who calls to us and weaves us together as the body of Christ. Therefore, as ambassadors of Christ led by the Spirit, would you please take a moment to greet those around you and welcome them to worship.

(the congregation greets each other and then the band begins to play the next praise song instrumentally - drawing the gathered back towards worship)

**PART THREE OF WORSHIP SET** – 1 song focused on the Holy Spirit –

Send your Rain

**PRAYER – focus on ACTS and Holy Spirit as counselor** - Worship Ldr

(Normally in this spot we do Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.

Today the prayer of confession is moved to a later part of the service below).

**ANNOUNCEMENTS** - Worship Ldr

**READING #4 “We believe in the Holy Catholic Church”**

“We believe in the holy catholic church, and the communion of saints.

We don’t believe the church is a non-profit organization of volunteers, rather, we believe it is the gathering of the saints - initiated by God. Of the church across the ages, we are just that small part which is currently visible during this moment in history. As the church, we pool our resources together to be used by God to make a difference both here in Ambler and around the world. So let us continue to worship now by giving generously with our tithes and our offerings...”

**OFFERATORY** – Creed Video – Rich Mullins “I Believe”

from the 2003 DVD *Pursuit of a Legacy* Reunion Records

**SCRIPTURE AND SERMON** “The holy catholic church...”

Hebrews 11:36 – 12:15 - Langdon

(Video of this sermon is available at [www.TheCreedProject.com](http://www.TheCreedProject.com))

**BAPTISIM** of Confirmation Student L.M. - Ryan

**CONFIRMATION LITURGY** – Ryan, Langdon, Leslie

**STATIONS** (introduction focuses on the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting)

- The Sacrament of the Lord’s Table
- Art Station – Paintings and Images from the Apostles Creed On-line meditation lined up in order

- Prayer Station - kneeling pads before the Celtic Cross with candles
- Votive Station - Tea light Votive Candles with lighters behind the Communion Table
- Reflection Station – The Creed as unseen skeleton of Christian Life – The Coat Rack encounter

Background Music during stations: Quiet / Acoustic instrumental version of “Our Great God” from start of stations all the way through Assurance of Pardon below –  
Worship Band

#### **Reader #4 - “We believe in the forgiveness of sins”**

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. First John 1 says

*“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”* (1 John 1: 8-10)

Part of being the church is belonging to the fellowship of those who are willing to admit their sins. In this silence let us review the past week and if we find things there we need to confess, let us name them to God now. Let us pray...

{Stand in silence until pastor speaks}

#### **CONFESSION OF SINS – Ryan**

(note: formal confession of sins and assurance of pardon are usually identified movements in the South Ridge service. Normally they are part of the general prayer of the people earlier in the service)

#### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON – Langdon**

#### **CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE**

Reprise of Our Great God – Worship Band leads

#### **BENEDICTION – Langdon**

## B: Southridge Worship Service Bulletin

Welcome to  
**South Ridge**



Sunday May 19th 2013

Sunday Morning at First Presbyterian Church of Amblers:

**9:30 Traditional Service with Choir**

**10:30 Café in Fellowship Hall**


**11:00 South Ridge Service with Band**

Please remember to silence all electronic devices.  
[www.SouthRidgeWorship.com](http://www.SouthRidgeWorship.com) 215-646-3030

### Welcome to South Ridge

We are glad you are here to seek and worship God with us this morning! South Ridge is not a typical church service, but don't worry, you won't need to know any secret handshakes - we'll lead you through each step of our hour together. Today is a special service because the order of our worship has been intentionally designed to follow the order of revelation found in the Apostles Creed. Our order will be:

- Gathering
- Worship in Music & Creed
- Prayer
- Offering
- Sermon
- Baptism of Louisa Mulbua<sup>h</sup>
- Reception of Confirmation Class
- Stations<sup>1</sup>
- Benediction



If you are new to South Ridge, the pamphlet *Stations: A Field Guide* which is located in your pew rack will give you an overview of this part of the service.

**\*PARENTS:**  
Our **Nursery** welcomes infants and toddlers and is located in the main hallway on the 1st floor, Room 101.  
**Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade** begin in worship. During the announcements, children will be invited to meet their teachers in the back of the Sanctuary. Classes are located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. If you are visiting today, please fill out a **Children's Ministry Welcome Card** and send it with your child/ren to Sunday school. (See greeters). **Worship Packets** are available for your children at the back of the Sanctuary.

<sup>1</sup> See the Stations brochure for more information. At the Lord's Table you will receive a piece of bread, that you then dip into the cup yourself.

## Missions & Community:

- ◊ **Young Adults Small Groups** – are up and running! If you want to get involved, contact [young-adult-leaders@googlegroups.com](mailto:young-adult-leaders@googlegroups.com)
- ◊ **King's Cross Study Group with the Pastors**  
This Thursday at Pastor Langdon's house 7PM – 8:30 PM  
If you haven't come before, email him at [Langdon@fpcAmble.org](mailto:Langdon@fpcAmble.org).
- ◊ **May 24<sup>th</sup> – Annual Church Camping Trip** – see below.

## Prayers:

We are called to be a community that prays for each other. If you have a prayer request, write it on the back of a Yellow Response Card & place it in the offering basket.

### Sermon

## The holy catholic church...

Hebrews 11:36 – 12:15

Langdon Palmer

For a **PODCAST** of this sermon go to [www.SouthRidgeWorship.com](http://www.SouthRidgeWorship.com)

GET CONNECTED: Join the FACEBOOK Group 'First Presbyterian Church of Amble'  
OCCASIONAL RAMBLING TWEETS – send the text message: 'FOLLOW Langdonp' to the number 40404

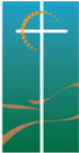
### Hebrews 11:36-12:15 (NIV)

<sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

<sup>12:1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children— "My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; <sup>6</sup> for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts." <sup>7</sup> Endure trials for the sake of discipline, God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup> Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup> Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. <sup>14</sup> Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled.



## C: Traditional Worship Bulletin




**FIRST CHURCH AT WORSHIP**  
 A Congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
 Ambler, Pennsylvania

May 19<sup>th</sup> 2013  
 Traditional Service - 9:30 a.m.  
 South Ridge (Contemporary) - 11:00 a.m.

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Please remember to silence all electronic devices.



**PRELUDE**

**INTROIT**

**NOTE:** This morning's service follows the order of the Apostles Creed

**OPENING SENTENCES** (from Psalm 136 and Psalm 147)  
*We believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and Earth.*  
 Great is our Lord and mighty in power, his understanding has no limit.  
 He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.  
 By his understanding He made the heavens,  
**His love endures forever.**

He spread out the earth upon the waters,  
**His love endures forever.**  
 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.  
**His love endures forever.**  
 Give thanks to the Lord of lords who alone does great wonders.  
**This is the day the Lord has made –**  
**Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Let us worship God!**

**\* HYMN # 482 Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty**

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**INTRODUCTION OF THE 2013 CONFIRMATION CLASS**  
 [Once the Confirmands return to their seats, the children participating in Sunday School are dismissed]

*We believe in Jesus Christ...* Student Name

**ANTHEM** "In Christ Alone"  
 Sanctuary Choir  
 (include lyrics)

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER**

*We believe in the Holy Spirit...* Student Name

**\* THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

**\*HYMN# 321 Holy Spirit, Truth Divine**

*We believe in the holy catholic church...* Student Name

**SCRIPTURE LESSON Hebrews 11:36 – 12:15 (NRSV)**

**SERMON** The holy catholic church  
 The Reverend Langdon Palmer

*We believe in the forgiveness of sins...*

Student Name

\* SILENT CONFESSION

\* ASSURANCE OF PARDON

\* OUR RESPONSE #579

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
And to the Holy Ghost:  
As it was in the beginning  
Is now, and ever shall be,  
World without end. Amen, Amen.

OFFERTORY

\* DOXOLOGY #592

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

\* PRAYER OF DEDICATION

*"We believe in the resurrection of the body..."*

Student Name

\* HYMN #141 "A Hymn of Glory let us sing"



\* BENEDICTION


POSTLUDE


\*Indicates to please stand if you are able.

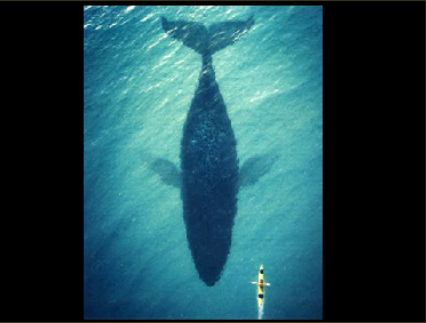
## APPENDIX 7


## WEBSITE PROVIDING ACCESS TO SERMON SERIES PODCASTS

	<p><b>The Apostles' Creed Revolution</b>  a six part audio and video podcast on the story of the cosmos</p> <p>Click on a podcast below to listen or watch</p>	
Title	Media	Additional Resources

<p><b>1</b>  <b>The Story of the Cosmos... Dehydrated</b>  Apostles' Creed - God the Father</p> 	<p><a href="#">Video Podcast</a>  <a href="#">Audio Podcast</a></p>	<p><b>Isaiah 45:2-22</b></p> <p>When we hear great news, ever notice how the whole world seems to change? We look at everything, not just the news, in a different way. What if the most exciting news we could ever hear has been at hand all along, lying in the corner, covered with dust, dismissed by us as unimportant and irrelevant? What if we mistook the Apostles Creed for a somewhat arbitrary bundle of religious doctrines and propositions when in fact, it was the very story of the cosmos... dehydrated? Join us as we discover the incredible drama going on all around us when we put on the glasses called "The Apostles Creed."</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2</b>  <b>The Gap in the Creed</b>  Apostles' Creed 2 - God the Son - Incarnate</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">Audio Podcast</a></p>	<p><b>John 1:1-18</b></p> <p>Why is there such a gap in the creed between the birth of Jesus and his death? Doesn't it matter? Of course it does, but the creed is focused on the question that comes first while we focus on the question that comes second. All religions have lists of morals and stories about their leaders. The creed is focused on what sets Jesus apart from all other leaders the world has ever known - and that begins with WHO he actually is...</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b>  Apostles' Creed 3 - God the Son - Victorious</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">Video Podcast</a>  <a href="#">Audio Podcast</a></p>	<p><b>Revelation Chapters 1 &amp; 5</b></p> <p>Why did Jesus have to die? Why does the creed say "descended into hell"? Is it OK for the church to use military metaphors when we talk about what Christ has accomplished? Today we look into the amazing imagery of the book of Revelation to get a deeper understanding of the meaning of the phrase "He descended to Hell. The third day he rose again..."</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>4</b>  <b>Why so many religions in the world?</b>  Apostles' Creed 4 - God the Holy Spirit</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">Video Podcast</a>  <a href="#">Audio Podcast</a></p>	<p><b>Matthew 3:16-4:11</b></p> <p>This intense sermon explores the Trinity, the spiritual world, temptation, and how believing in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit both brings you much closer to all the other religions of the world and at the same time sets Christianity completely apart as something different than anything else that has ever been proclaimed in the history of the world. This is a heavy sermon but it covers a lot of ground and gives a great overview of why the Trinity is the central idea of the Christian faith.</p>
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## 5

## Apostles' Creed 5 - The Holy Catholic Church



[Video Podcast](#)

[Audio Podcast](#)

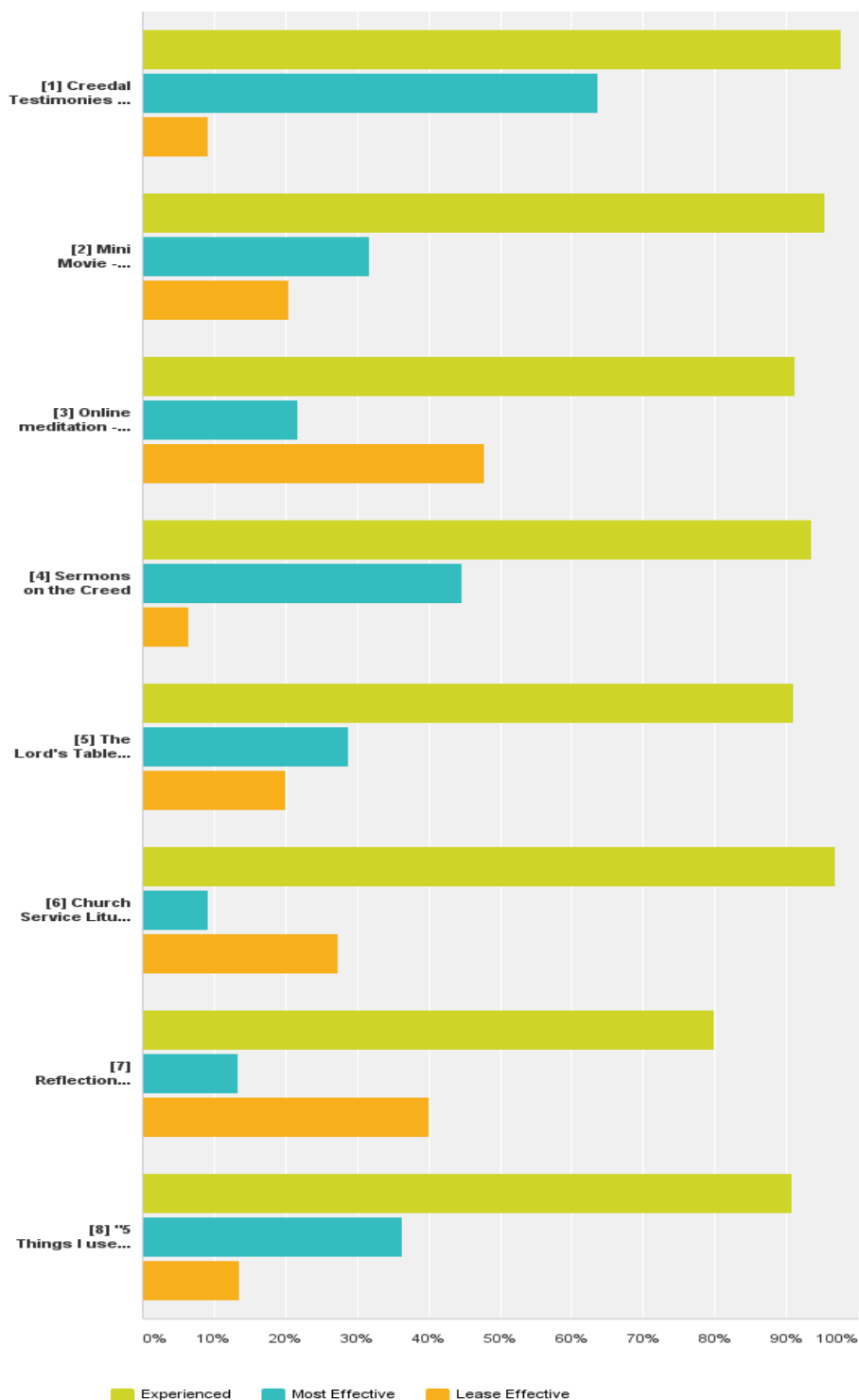
## Hebrews 12

What is the church? How we answer that question will impact many things including how we view ourselves and what we are doing. We look at three images and the amazing teaching of Hebrews 12 and discover the beauty of what the creed means when it says "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church and the Communion of the Saints"

## APPENDIX 8

## WHICH ENCOUNTERS WERE REPORTED MOST / LEAST EFFECTIVE

Survey results of 49 people who responded to the question in the Post-Encounter Survey



## APPENDIX 9

## A COMPARISON OF OPINIONS PRE AND POST PROJECT

**A: Statements Put To Congregation BEFORE project to AFTER project**

Congregants were asked to check off any of the following statements about the Apostles' Creed that they agreed with - both before the project began and then again after the project ended. See the results on the following page.

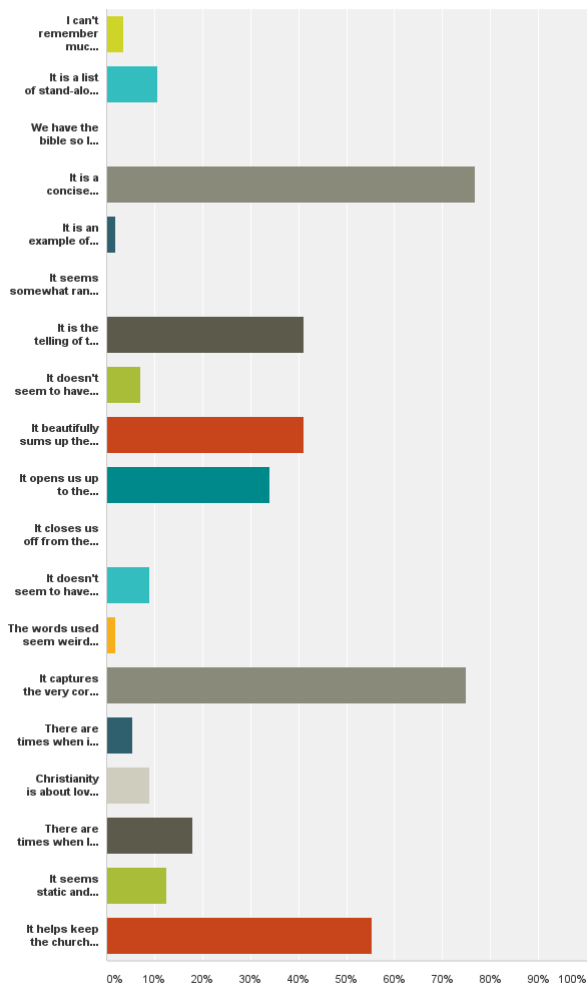
1. I can't remember much about it at all - I forget what it says
2. It is a list of stand-alone doctrines and beliefs that have been bundled together
3. We have the bible so I don't see why we need creeds
4. It is a concise statement of the most important Christian beliefs
5. It is an example of dogma and rigidity from a bygone era
6. It seems somewhat random - I don't see why some of these things were put in while others were left out
7. It is the telling of the story of the gospel
8. It doesn't seem to have much to do with the rest of the worship service
9. It beautifully sums up the foundations of my own personal faith
10. It opens us up to the mysteries of God and existence
11. It closes us off from the mysteries of God and existence
12. It doesn't seem to have much to do with living everyday life
13. The words used seem weird and/or patriarchal
14. It captures the very core of what are the essential convictions of Christianity
15. There are times when it really bothers me / annoys me to say the creed in church
16. Christianity is about loving people & God so I don't see why people get focused on doctrines & creeds
17. There are times when I am doubting or struggling that hearing others declare the creed encourages me
18. It seems static and disconnected from the vibrant, spontaneous, spirit led life of faith
19. It helps keep the church centered on Christ & "the faith once given" instead of drifting to something else

## B: Chart Of Responses Before And After Project

### BEFORE

Q12 As much as you can remember about the Apostles Creed, how does it strike you ?  
(Check all that apply)

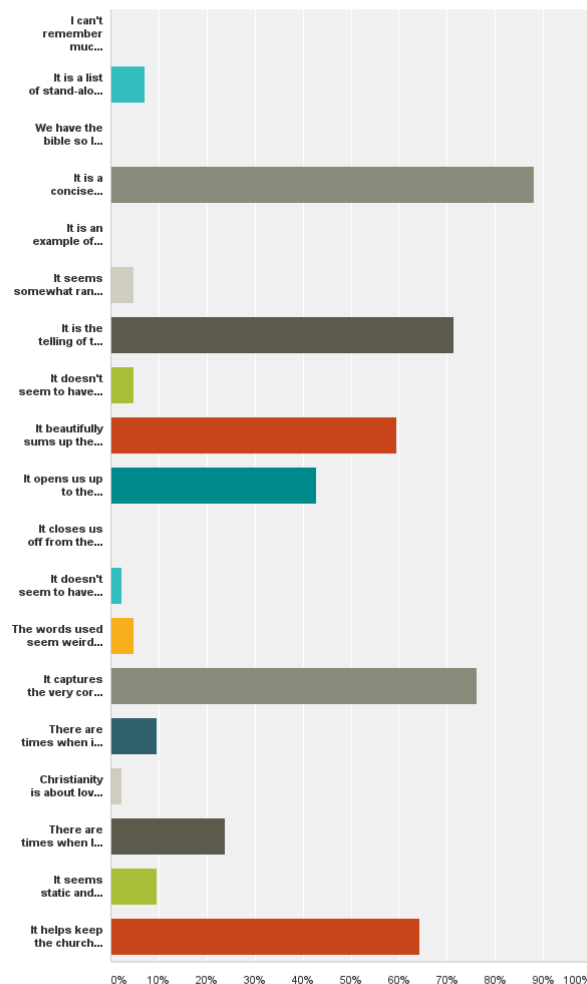
Answered: 56 Skipped: 0



### AFTER

Q12 As much as you can remember about the Apostles Creed, how does it strike you ?  
(Check all that apply)

Answered: 42 Skipped: 0





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