

Transcript of webinar regarding the proposed change to the ACOP Statement of Faith

Vanessa Mehrer: Well, welcome. We are so glad you took the time to come and join us today for a very important discussion. Just a few housekeeping items. We're going to keep our mics muted just to diminish any background noises or any distractions. There will be a time for question and answer at the very end of this webinar today. So should you have a question, at the very bottom of your screen, you should see a Q&A button. If you don't see that, it will be located in your more, if you just run your cursor along the bottom, you can put your question in there and then we will take some time at the very end of today's webinar to address your questions. Should you need to leave at any point today, we just want to let you know that this is being recorded and it will be made available on the faith and life and theology page within our ACOP website. So, welcome. Today we are exploring the proposed changes to our statement of faith regarding the nature of God. I will be your host today. My name is Vanessa Mehrer. I am part of the faith, life, and theology team. And I would just take a moment to introduce our panel and our guests to you today. We have Nik Amodeo. Nik grew up and pastored within ACOP for years. He holds a master's from Regent College in spiritual theology and is currently completing a Doctor of Ministry. Nik is currently pastoring a lead pastor at Anchor Church in Regina. And along with pastoring, Nik teaches Bible studies, theology, and pastoral formation as an adjunct faculty member at Eston College. So, welcome, Nik. We're glad you're here. Next we have Wes Mills, who is our president. No, nothing needs to be said after that. We're so glad that Wes is here with us today. And Elmer Chen, thank you so much for being part of our team and our panel. Elmer is an associate professor of counseling psychology at Providence Seminary. He holds a master in counseling from Providence and a PhD in theology from the University of Birmingham. And he was also, it's really interesting to note, a former instructor at Eston College. So we're very happy to have Elmer sitting with us on our panel today. and Verner Drost is our regional director of Quebec and Maritime region and overall just a really great guy. Verner, we're so glad to have you with us. And you will notice at the bottom of your screen just a name, Jerry Schuetz. Jerry is helping out today. He is our producer and he will be working in the background today helping me host you. So I am very glad that Jerry is here today. So thank you. We hope this session will offer clarity, context, and theological insight and we recognize that conversations like this can carry weight and at times tension. And so our hope today is to create a space that is thoughtful, respectful, and grounded in our shared commitment to Christ and to one another. And so with that being said, I would like

to start with Wes. Wes, our first set of question goes to you. And our question for you today is why change the wording on the article on the nature of God within our statement of faith. Why does this matter now? You know, how did we get to this point? Could you share a bit of the history about what has prompted the desire to seek a change?

Wes Mills: Thanks Vanessa. Welcome everyone. Good to be together in this way. Uh let me just begin with a little bit of history. ACOP is the product of a merger between the Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada and the Evangelical Churches of Pentecost in 1954. One group had a Unitarian or a oneness view and the other group had a triune view of the nature of God. And so a compromise of sorts was established or was reached uh in the statement that came about in 1954 as part of the abbreviated statement of faith. And it was we believe in the existence of one true God who revealed himself to this world as the father, the son and as the holy spirit. And this was enforced from 1954 till 1996. And in 1996 at the conference and I'm going to read to you from the minutes of the conference. It says the articles of faith and the bylaws incorporated into the charter in 1921 were amended and expanded to encompass a wider interpretation of doctrine and structure within this growing fellowship. So there was a desire at that point to have more clarity about our statement about the nature of God. And so at that conference we adopted the statement that we currently have which is we believe in the eternal existence of one true God who is father son and holy spirit. As that time it was seen as a less ambivalent statement about the nature of god. And I think what has brought us to this point today is the same thing that brought us to this point in 1996. And that was to expand and to encompass a wider interpretation of doctrine. And since I be was first elected in 2004, I said that I wanted ACOP to build a bigger tent and I wanted us to be in the mainstream of evangelical and Pentecostal theology. So that's I think what brings us to this point today.

Vanessa Mehrer: Wes, thank you. When we're looking at these proposed changes, is there a problem that we're trying to prevent or solve with within these changes?

Wes Mills: Sure. So the nature of God is a first order belief for most Christians. How we think about God is really significant. Whether we like it or not, how evangelicals talk about the nature of God has become a bit of a shibboleth. And if you're not familiar with the Old Testament story, you can read it later in Judges 12 where people weren't allowed to pass by if they couldn't say shibboleth just right. And that's what's happened. Whether we like it or not, the reality in within evangelical and Pentecostal circles, the terminology that we use

with the larger body of Christ, people understand it to mean certain things. An oversimplification of this might be this. If the whole body of Christ agreed that the color of the sky was blue and we said, "No, it's aqua, we see it differently. We see it as aqua." It would be kind of absurd. And I know that's an oversimplification, but I think we need to keep in mind that we're trying to use language that's understood in the larger body of Christ so that people can understand who we are and what we believe. In my paper that I wrote, I hope you've read it. There are some practical reasons why we need to address this. We have donors contacting our office concerned about our statement about the nature of God and wondering if they should support global workers. So, it's valid. We've had parents calling and exploring if they should send their children or their youth to Street Invaders because they wanted to know what we believed about the nature of God. And individuals considering becoming part of ACOP and churches considering partnering with us all take a very close look at what our statement of faith says about the nature of God. So I think that's kind of why it is important. It's that's those are the problems we want to solve.

Vanessa Mehrer: So then you've touched a little bit on the problems we want to solve and you've also highlighted a little bit of that this is a response to something you know. Is this a response to something inside our churches or outside of our churches? I think you've kind of touched a bit about people calling in.

Wes Mills: Yeah. Well, I mean it's for both. We don't insist that local churches have the exact same statement of faith that ACOP has. We have to agree to one another's statements in order to be in partnership. But we don't insist on having exact same statement. So most churches that I'm aware of that have moved on have developed a statement that is very much in keeping with this the statement that we've come up with about the nature of God and there is some global implications for us as well. So, you know, we've had global workers around the world for many years and in many places they left behind the same kind of ambivalent statement about the nature of God and they've been talking with us and saying um help us with this, help us understand this, give us better knowledge because they're feeling isolated and their context. So, we do think it's important that we solve it both internally and externally.

Vanessa Mehrer: So when we're talking about uh changing the wording on the nature of God, beyond the you know trying to prevent or solve a problem and it is a response to

something um how does this speak to who we are as ACOP today?

Wes Mills: Sure. So, I I've taken some time to look through what we call the interactive questionnaire that all new members fill out when they're applying to become members of ACOP and about the question about the nature of God gives them four options as to how they see the nature of God. And 90% of people choose an option that's in keeping with the statement that we're presenting today. So, it tells me that there's opportunity for people to want to say it a little differently than we're saying. It doesn't mean we've changed our belief, but it's the way we're stating our belief that's changing. You know, we proposed the change in 2024. You know, 49% of people wanted to see the change and 51% didn't. So, there's tells me there's appetite for change. And I think looking back, we didn't have a strong option we were giving people. I think over the past two years as the faith, life and theology committee has worked really hard, we've come up with a statement that that is a better statement that describes how we see God and the nature of God.

Vanessa Mehrer: That's wonderful. Nik, uh this question is to uh directed towards Nik. Nik, for people that are wondering about the faith, life, and theology team, could you kind of talk to us a little bit about how did we put this national team together?

Nik Amodeo: Yep. Thanks, Vanessa. Good to be with everyone. Hope you're doing well and hope you can hear me. Okay, back in 2024, uh, I talked to Wes about proposing a ministry initiative that could help focus on, spiritual formation and theological vitality for ACOP. To work on resources and learning together and also to look at the statement of faith if we felt there was there was a need to adjust something and that was coming from Wes or from the trustees. So that's how it started. It was a desire to put together a team from across the fellowship nationally kind of open that up to whoever felt they'd like to be part of that and uh we started talking and discussing and getting to know one another. So that's how that team was first formed and that that then led us into Wes saying you know hey we'd like to look at this statement again and have a team that's can prayerfully over months sort of discern language and wording and start to put something together. So that's how the team first came about. Though it would have been late 2024 and then we've been working on this over the months since then.

Vanessa Mehrer: Wonderful. So, we've had some very smart people working on the rewarding of this. Me excluded. So, I would like you to take a minute just to talk to us about how did you arrive at the current proposed wording?

Nik Amodeo: Yeah. The first thing we wanted to make sure is that is that when we feel, if there's a desire, to make a change to the statement of faith and that's coming from the president or coming from the trustees or there's a sense that's a desire to begin to work on that there's some sort of process that we go, is there a good reason for doing this? Right? And so one of the things we did early on was say, let's make sure there's good qualifying scenarios for ACOP that would be, that would warrant, us potentially making a change as opposed to just someone saying we got to make a change and you know somehow that just sort of gets sort of pushed along. So we talked about three different scenarios, and the first scenario was that we believed older language in a particular article would need updating in order to clarify the original intent. So, say there was words in an article of the statement of faith and we were finding that people were misconstruing the meaning. We felt the meaning was clear, but it wasn't clearly being communicated. That would warrant us going back to perhaps adjust something to make sure the original intent was clear. Okay, so that'd be the first reason. The second reason to possibly alter the statement of faith would be to add or alter a specific article because we realize as a fellowship we're facing a new situation. So, we did this in 2006 when we added a new article on the sanctity of marriage, right? We realized in Canada as a culture, it's important for us as a church to have something clear in our statement of faith about what we believe in terms of marriage. And so statements of faith are meant to be not set in stone forever. It's okay if they change because we want them to be useful and accurate to say what we what we intend for them to say for the time that we're living in. And so that's a great example, the this the sanctity of marriage statement of we needed to open this up and put something there. And I would say this is a bit of a side note, but we probably as a fellowship in the coming years and maybe in two years from now we can revisit this, but another area where we possibly could use another new statement, a new article would be on the sanctity of life. And it may be important for us as a fellowship to have those discussions about is this worth including in our statement of faith to say we believe in the sanctity of life from conception to natural death right regarding abortion and euthanasia something to that effect. So there's that's a reason to open up the statement of faith to change. And then the third reason to open up the statement of faith to change is to say we believe a present article doesn't faithfully express the biblical teaching that we as ACOP as a community are interpreting. And so we see if you look in Wes's essay that he wrote and you compare the previous statements of faith that ACOP has had, you can see that there's been change over time. And the change doesn't necessarily mean that

it's bad. It doesn't mean we're moving away from scripture. It doesn't mean that what we originally thought wasn't good, but we recognize it's okay to make adjustments over time depending on the context. And so if you look back at the previous statements of faith, there was sections about foot washing for instance, right? And we realized over time that doesn't really need to be in the statement of faith per se. We'll let that be a sort of a local church can decide that. It's not a central article for Christian doctrine or for ethics. So those are the reasons for working on a change. And as Wes explained to us what he was encountering as people were talking to head office and as Wes was engaging with other Pentecostal or evangelical groups uh kind of on a world stage, we were realizing the language in our statement of faith was being misconstrued at times that it was maybe more ambiguous than we realized. And so, Wes spoke to us about saying, you know, it may be a good time for us to address this and you know sort of shore it up a little bit so it's so it's clearer. So that's how we uh originally arrived at the current wording and then well that was the like the impetus for how we started to think about the current wording and then what happened specifically is that of the faith and life team we set up a writing team of people who would work specifically on wording and that was, people who were credentialed or ordained in ACOP and that would be like myself, Elmer worked on it, Verner worked on it and specifically going over wording. So that was sort of brainstormed over here and then our suggestions would go back to the faith and life team for consultation, go back for more revision, back and forth as we prayerfully discern does this make sense for us? It wasn't just one guy in a corner writing something and going this is what it should be. And that's not just opinionated people. Wasn't just some it wasn't just Nicholas somewhere just saying this is what it is guys. And uh and then that would go to Wes. Wes is also on the faith and life team. So he's part of all those discussions. It would go to Wes. Wes would share that with the trustees and the regional directors. We'd get feedback from them. We would rehash things again back to the faith and life team for prayer and feedback and adjustment. And then eventually when Wes and, I believe it would be the trustees, I suppose or Wes and the regional directors, when we felt there was a good sense that this could work well for us we would send that out to the fellowship and that's where we are now for discernment and for prayer and for feedback. And I think it's really important as a fellowship that we make that space for discussion and to hear questions and to hear concerns that are raised and to discuss why would we put it this way and not this way because it matters and also we're a fellowship together and we want to you know we belong to each other and we value how the spirit speaks through each other and so we want to make space for those sorts of discussions and that's part of what we want to do today is to give room for that.

Vanessa Mehrer: Right that is beautiful. So this this is open to the whole panel, this question, we're going to kind of shift gears and we're going to actually look at what does the new language actually say so for our panel. Let me Nick, Wes, Elmer, and Verner, can you parse this out for us?

Elmer Chen: Yeah, I can help you with that, Vanessa. So, let's read the proposed wording here and it'll be prefaced with "we believe". Okay. And the article says in the one true God, the creator and lord of all things, who lives eternally as the father, the son, and the holy spirit, each distinct and fully divine. So, this is what we've arrived at in the course of our drafting and dialogue and receiving feedback. First phrase, in the one true god, you've noticed we've moved from the word existence, sorry let's start, yeah we moved away from the word believing in the eternal existence to believing in the one true God directly. So rather than believing in existence we're believing in God. So grammatically, this, rather than focusing on this one intellectual aspect of belief, it opens up to believing in God which can have relational implications. It can have spiritual implications. Jesus said just to believe in me. He didn't simply to say believe that I exist. He wanted us to trust him and so forth. So that's part of the reason there we've affirmed one god according to our tradition, uncompromisingly monotheistic, rather than, and guarding against polytheism, against tritheism and so forth. One true God. The words that we place before the word god is important. There is only one true God. If we start adding other descriptors, one holy God for instance, one powerful God, it opens up for other kinds of interpretations. Okay, so there is only one holy God. Is there another god who is not holy? Are there many gods who are not powerful? And so this is a way of ensuring that we have strict monotheism, according to scripture. Creator and lord of all things, identify as God's unique position as he is God and no one else is. He rules, he reigns and he has the power and he has the right and the authority to rule over our universe, who lives. So we've moved away from the language of exists, existence, to use the language of God as one who lives. This is in accordance with scripture. Scripture speaks of God as the living God. And so this moves away from kind of a dry purely philosophical intellectual affirmation to saying he is the living God. He is personal. He is the one who loves us and who gives us life. He is the living God and the source of life. Eternally, the word eternally designates God's unbounded nature with respect to time. So he lives eternally. He has always lived and it also points forward to our statement, to the trinitarian piece of this, that God has always been father, son and holy spirit. This is not a temporary manifestation. Father, son and holy spirit. This is traditional trinitarian language. God is, and I just wanted to add here this is relational language, God is father, the father is father to the son. The son is son to the father. The spirit is the breath and the life that comes from God. And so this is relational language. The fact that we have

father, son, and holy spirit living eternally as such, shows us that God really is love, eternally love. And this is the foundation of all of reality and how we are to live. So, coming down to the final phrases here each distinct, to say that father son and spirit are distinct from one another is first of all to say that these terms are not interchangeable. You cannot say that the spirit died on the cross for you. You cannot say that the son sent the father or that the holy spirit poured out the father on the day of Pentecost. That's simply not true. And so the father sent the son. The father sent the spirit. And if you're western, the son sent the spirit as well. And so it also affirms the distinction of persons, father, son, and spirit. three distinct persons but one God. And we chose not to include the term persons in here because persons has been a term of contention in the ACOP, suggesting to some people if there are three persons we must have three gods, which is simply not what we want to say. And so, in order to sidestep that controversy while still achieving our goal of affirming the threeness of God as trinity, we chose simply to say that each is distinct and fully divine, that father, son and spirit are co-equal with God in keeping with historic Christianity. We guard against aranism that denies the deity of Christ. We guard uh against pneumatism which denies the deity of the spirit. We guard against subordinationism which says well the son and the spirit are divine but not quite as divine as the father and we guard against all that by saying each is distinct and fully divine. So that's the statement that we propose.

Vanessa Mehrer: Thank you for walking us through that Elmer. This question is for Verner. Verner, many statements on the nature of God refer to persons and essence. Was there a reason we didn't use these terms in the proposed amendment?

Verner Drost: Thanks for the question. It's a really good question. I also want to comment on the beautiful trees in your document and that's lovely. I don't know if everybody can see those lovely trees, but that just adds such warmth. Vanessa, thank you.

Vanessa Mehrer: I think that was all Nik.

Verner Drost: Was that you, Nik? Was that you? Oh my goodness. Look, Nik from a New Brunswicker that loves trees. That just warmed me up. And yeah, there you go. But I just want to say I think Elmer touched a little bit on why we did that. One of the main sources of confusion today in in understanding the early Christian church doctrine of the nature of God is this word is use of the word person. In modern English, the word person carries a

different feel, a different meaning than it did when the nature of God was first defined by the early church. As you know, words have a tendency to evolve and take on a new sense of meaning. Especially when they are translated from the Greek to the Latin to English to Spanish to French. So to properly understand what the early church was trying to say, we need to understand the context of the original meaning. Today when we use the word person, because we're such an individualistic society, we think of an independent individual with a separate center of consciousness and will. We think of someone who exists on their own and we often say I am my own person. It's kind of like we're trying to identify ourselves as separate and the plural of the word person is people. And so, the moment we think of, you know the word person, or three persons, we almost start thinking that we're defining three separate beings or three gods and that's not at all what the intent is. That is tritheism, as Elmer mentioned before, that's not the historical Christian church and what they were defining about the nature of God. The early church used the word hypostaseis, which is the Greek word for that or the Latin word persona. And the term did not mean independent individuals as we understand them today. Instead, three distinct identities within one God. That's what they were trying to say. Each fully God, not a third each of God. Like it's not like the father's a third, the son is a third. They're all fully God. And they described it as one essence. *ousia* is the Greek word. Three-person hypostaseis. A helpful way I think of thinking about this today is God is one being existing eternally as the father, the son and the holy spirit distinct yet not separate individuals. So if we if we take the modern word persons and apply it to the nature of God and that's not just, there's theologians across all the spectrum of Christianity that are that are pointing this out that we need to understand the word person in the light of what the original church history was thinking. And so sometimes that word persons kind of gives you that tritheism three gods understanding and it and it's objectable for people because it makes them start thinking well are you are you believing in three gods. But if we remove the distinction part as you and as Elmer pointed out, distinct, each distinct then we end up with modalism which is one person appearing in different roles. And the historical intent of the church was to avoid tritheism, modalism, and Arianism. And so that that's kind of the idea as to why we said how can we word this to still hold to what the original thought was and yet avoid the word person. And the word essence has a little bit, not as quite as strong, but it also feels different today when we say things like the essence of leadership. We were thinking almost as a the characteristic of leadership. Whereas the reason why the early church used the word essence was more than anything to define that the son and the holy spirit had the same exact eternal divine nature as the father. So, what they were trying to say is the son and the spirit were no less and no different from God than the father. And whereas today when we think of essence we almost think of character. So, we tried to avoid these words just to make it as clear as possible for today. I think, I hope that answers the question.

Vanessa Mehrer: Yeah. Well done. I think that there's also, and this can be open for our whole panel to answer. I think the questions we have when we look at the proposed wording and we look at our statement of faith is what implications does this have on me? What implications does this have on my church as a pastor or leader within ACOP? What implications would this have on me or our fellowship?

Elmer Chen: And so can I backtrack and make just one more comment on person? The Latin word persona originally meant mask, a mask that a dramatist a player wears in order to portray a particular character and they might wear multiple masks on stage. So, in the early church the as the west and the east were dialoguing in different languages, the eastern fathers were actually concerned that the western word person is too modalistic rather than veering towards tritheism. And so they had the opposite interpretation of the word person. But as we use the word today it primarily means that you a person is a center of relationship. You are a relating thing, so that we can have this relational being within the one God who shares the one essence. So just wanted to clarify that.

Vanessa Meherer: You know that's great context for what we're talking about. Nik, maybe you could talk to us a little bit about this. Okay, so we've got all of these changes, we're doing all of this work. What are the implications for us?

Nik Amodeo: Yeah, I think I think the implications are, I guess the first thing I would say is there's a desire to again update language so it speaks clearly about what we believe. That's important and I think, to Wes's point, it will help when people ask what does ACOP believe . To give clarity around that and also to have language that kind of makes sense to others who maybe are from the outside looking in going what do we mean by that? So, I think that that can be helpful in terms of the fellowship. Then I also wanted to say broadly not just the implications of like what does this specific statement mean for us, but what are the implications of making changes to a statement of faith because I think there can be a sense that any change to a statement of faith can change what makes us unique. Right? We have a shared history as a fellowship and are we losing something particularly if we change wording or if we kind of open this thing up and start adjusting things. And the first thing I would say is, I just really want to emphasize again that any desire for updating the statement of faith or revising it comes from a deep love for ACOP and for its history and for its mission for the gospel of Jesus Christ for its people. That it's a desire to love and care for

us and to be on mission together with what God is doing. So, that's I think worth saying just the heart of why we come at this.

Vanessa Mehrer: You touched on a word, history, and so I just kind of wanted to draw a little bit of that. So maybe Wes, you can speak to this. Is, you know, when we think about history, does moving towards this new wording mean we're turning our backs on history to become just like every other denomination or how would you look at that?

Wes Mills: Do we want to be like other denominations? The core essence of what evangelicals and Pentecostals believe, I think we share that. We share all of that together and we want to share that because that's what the distinctives are. However, we have some unique things that we bring to the table that maybe aren't as core as the nature of God, but they're important to us. So, things like the grace of God, you know, that means the world to us and that's who we are. I had a conversation with Lorne Pritchard. Some of you remember Lorne Pritchard, but Lorne Pritchard was my pastor when I was a boy. He taught at Bible college, at Eston College as well as Jubilee Bible College. And I had a conversation about with him about the statement of the nature of God. And he said, "I think that it was a desire to exalt the name of Jesus, that it was a desire to be Christocentric in all that we did." Well, that doesn't change. That's who we are. We still believe in in the name of Jesus, and that's one of our defining things. So, I think yes, it does make us similar to other denominations, Pentecostal evangelical groups, but we're still carrying a distinctive that's uniquely ours.

Vanessa Mehrer: Excellent. Any other thoughts on that question?

Nik Amodeo: I just wanted to note, I remember last year in Surrey, there was concerns just because it came up, because we were talking about changes, and we did make changes to the water baptism statement and the spirit baptism statement at that point. But there's a fear that any change can lead to a slippery slope, right? Are we making changes just to fit our modern culture? And will that slowly turn into something that's, what we would say a sort of progressive ideology, and turn us into something else. And I remember to back in 2024 we were in Surrey just kind of tracing even in other denominations how they started to make changes and then like look at where they're at today. And I would say to that point, simply making the change, to want to update the language, doesn't necessitate that we are moving away from the core essence of Christianity or that we're sort of compromising for

the culture. In fact, in this case updating our language is a desire to be more biblically and theologically precise. And so if anything, rather than it being a slippery slope down the hill, we're kind of saying, actually, we want to make sure we're not sliding anywhere and we're going to take a big step back up the hill and just say here's where we are. And so I know there can be that fear. But it doesn't, you know, a change doesn't necessitate a dangerous precedent towards uh a sort of ideology that would move us away from the core of Christianity. And I think actually what we're doing here is looking at the culture around us in some ways and we're shoring that up and we're saying actually this is what we believe. We want to be deeply Christian. We're not moving from that and here's the language we're using to describe that. And I would also say that if there's people who go, you know, I prefer the old wording and I feel maybe uncomfortable with some of this, would I still be welcomed in ACOP? And I would just say very encouragingly, yes, you belong in ACOP. And you know, if you prefer the old wording, you are still welcomed here. And I love how Wes has used the language over the years of a big tent that there's a range or, and Wes, maybe you can speak to this, but there's a breadth and diversity within ACOP that we acknowledge and we celebrate together. And so the wording may feel strange to some. For some it'll feel, they feel really good about it, you know, and there's some of that. And that was the case in some of the current wording. You had that as well. But know that just because you may feel unsure about some of this language, it doesn't mean you're not welcomed or can't be part of ACOP anymore. And maybe Wes, maybe you can follow that up just a little bit. And that's probably better coming from you in some ways than just coming from me.

Wes Mills: Well, I echo exactly what Nik said. It doesn't change anything in terms of our relationships. It just changes how we're stating some of them publicly so that other people can understand the language that we're using. So, this is not something that should exclude anyone. And I'm sure that you know on all of this all of the points of our statement of faith maybe all of us would state them a little bit differently or put a little different emphasis on them, but we've agreed together that this is who we are and this is what this is what keeps us together but we're just feeling that on this point we need to make clarity make it clear who we are uh you know not just only within but without as well.

Vanessa Mehrer: So Wes, you had spoken a little earlier in our conversation about people who had phoned the office and people from outside of ACOP. So why does it matter what people outside of ACOP think about what we believe?

Wes Mills: Well, I think it's a little bit about context. I think historically we defined ourselves by how we were different from other people and how we were different from other denominations. I think that today in the secular culture that we're in, we're looking for ways to say, how are we more alike? How can we be more aligned? Whether that's, you know, with other Pentecostal groups or with our evangelical brothers and sisters, how can we be more aligned? Because the secularness of our society demands that. So, and you know, Jesus prayed that we would be one. And I think that's important to recognize that. So what happens outside of us? I mean, as I mentioned, support for missionaries, engaging with our programs, people coming in and being part of our fellowship, churches joining us, all of those things are real issues that I have dealt with over the past 22 years. And I feel like we need to make a statement that would help us be seen more in the mainstream of evangelical and Pentecostal theology.

Vanessa Mehrer: Thank you very much. Any other comments from our panel?

Verner Drost: Yeah. The other day I came across my application to join the ACOP in 1980 and it was very funny when I read it my answers and so on. At that particular time I was, I would define myself then as a diehard oneness, argumentative, stubborn kind of person. I had a beautiful heritage and a wonderful family and wonderful people that love Jesus. But just saying the word trinity for me at that time was almost like saying a bad word. But I joined the ACOP and since then I've had a journey all the way to the point that I would define myself as a trinitarian, fully committed to that statement of faith and all the time as my journey went through, over the past what 1980 to now is what 40 years. It makes me feel quite old. But I remember I'd sign my statement, my renewal every year and I'd cross out words on the statement of faith say I disagree with this one. I agree with this one. I don't agree with this one. And never ever did anybody say you're not welcomed here. And I don't think that we should be afraid of that. What joins us is our fellowship, our love together, and our respect and our love for Jesus. And I don't think that anybody needs to be afraid of that ever changing.

Vanessa Mehrer: That's beautiful.

Elmer Chen: A statement of faith is not primarily a way to keep people out. The function of a statement of faith is really to help people understand who we are as a community. and so

it has to do a number of things. It has to check a few boxes. One being biblical accuracy and theological accuracy. But it also has to reflect the history of the group as we've talked about, as has been said by Wes and Nik. And it also has to reflect the current culture of the fellowship. And so we've kept these things in mind in the process of drafting the document, receiving feedback. We wanted to make sure that this not only reflects what we believe the Bible teaches, it also reflects who we are as a community, as a fellowship today. And so that's what we're trying to present here with these words.

Vanessa Mehrer: Excellent. Thank you very much panel. We have a few questions from our participants. So, I'm just going to open these questions up to the panel and whoever would like to answer them. We're going to start with a question here. What are some practical steps that ACOP is offering to help people walk through these theological points even further than you know, having this webinar or posting our resources on the faith life and theology page in our ACOP website? What are some practical steps that you know you could give us as tools to help walk our people through this?

Nik Amodeo: Yeah, I can speak to that. I think our desire, part of my vision, for the faith, life and theology team is that as ACOP, we would work on statements like this, whether it's amendments or releasing resources that we'd be able to resource the fellowship well. And so we've got a couple of essays that went out. But I think what we'd like to do following this webinar is have it posted for review again on our faith, life, and theology page. But I think what we'd also like to do is say, here's, you know, here's books that speak to this that would be helpful. Here's resources that could be helpful for you or for your church as you're having discussions and thinking about it. So, we don't have, I can't point you to something immediately right now, but I think our desire is to have it be ongoing resourcing and conversation. And so, we've talked about a few books as a team that we think would be good to recommend to churches and pastors who want to go deeper on this. And I think we've had conversations about that. So there will be things coming out I would say in the next few months or even in the next couple weeks as we get ready for conference for those that want to dive deeper.

Vanessa Mehrer: Excellent. One other question we have here is why would we not talk about three persons? I think we touched, I think Elmer, touched a little bit about this. However, this question is alluding to the EFC statement that says, "The EFC believes in one God who is creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and existing eternally in the loving

unity of three equally divine persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." So why would we not talk about the three persons like that?

Wes Mills: I can speak to that. I have to sign that statement of faith every year on behalf of ACOP because we're part of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. I don't feel that statements is offensive to us or is in any way diminishing of what we believe, but because of our history, we've chosen not to use the words persons. And if you look in the dialogue, there's a lot of people saying, boy, that's just not the best word we could find to use these days. So what we've done is tried to create something that's acceptable to our body but also in with the understanding that it's a trend that, and any book that you read about the trinity you will find the authors saying well person was a good word, it's probably not the best word anymore. So it's certainly an issue that is in the larger body of Christ. Maybe Verner you can comment on that.

Verner Drost: If you look at most organizations, they all will have a little different way of wording all of that. I think we would just, we wanted to, extend a bridge that would be a soft landing that other denominations or fellowships in the evangelical Pentecostal circles would say, "Yeah, you know, I like this." I actually contacted a few theologians. I was surprised they actually answered me. N.T Wright. I was shocked that he answered me, and I just threw it at him and he said, "You know, I like that." And this is a pretty prominent trinitarian, I think he's Anglican, theologian that many people read his material and respect him a lot. And he looked at it and he said, "Hey, you know, that's great." I told him what we were trying to do, trying to find a way to avoid words like person and essence that would not be a stumbling block in any of the circles that we were in. And he and another couple, I forget the other two, but they were recommended as top theologians in universities said, "Yeah, I think I think that's good." So, it's something that we can live with, something they can live with and that we can as, Wes said, I think it's important that we understand that we are part not only of the ACOP body of Christ, but we are part of the body of Christ all over the world. And the fact of the matter is 98% and that's an accurate figure, 98% of all the world of Christianity, holds to a trinitarian way of thinking. And only in the last 70-80 years has there been this move towards a oneness, especially among Pentecostals, some of which would actually believe that all trinitarians are not saved. And so that's not a camp we want to be in. I don't know if that answers the question at all.

Wes Mills: The other theologian we talked to was David Reid, right? An eminent Pentecostal theologian and has written lots about Pentecostalism and if anybody knows he's a Canadian and well read, well versed in theology.

Elmer Chen: Yeah. I think the way we've worded it here lives eternally as father son and spirit and distinct fully divine. This is a clear affirmation of the trinity that I think would pass that test with 98% of trinitarians in the world. But it also it's also a way of trying to be sensitive to those who might still chafe at the term persons. And so we're trying to accomplish two goals here of trying to be theologically accurate but also sensitive to our history.

Vanessa Mehrer: So in just in the last couple of minutes that we have, I have two more questions that I would like to ask you. Elmer could you speak to the word divine compared to deity?

Elmer Chen: Okay. Divine and deity are essentially synonymous. Essentially synonymous by saying that each person is fully divine. We are saying that each person is fully God. There might be subtle connotations that are different. But I mean a deity is someone who is worshiped. I would not I would not think that the difference is significant here. If you think about a world view that we label as theism, the idea that there's a deity who created the world but is now uninvolved with our world. Deity is a broad term. Divine, I think divine speaks more specifically that each is God in the fullest sense. That would be my interpretation.

Vanessa Mehrer: Yeah. Thank you. One last question. I'm going to see if I can get this one right. See if I understand this correctly. In recognition of the origin of ACOP and Frank Small's legacy, what are some thoughts on this being an ordinary resolution? So, asking for a majority above 50% compared to a special resolution requiring a two-thirds majority. Does that make sense, Wes?

Wes Mills: Yeah, I can speak to that. When the bylaws were submitted to Corporate Affairs Canada, anything related that requires a supermajority is outlined in the bylaws. It states

that. So, we're just following what our bylaws say. They say that it's a simple majority that's needed. So there are some things that need a super majority, but this is not one of them.

Vanessa Mehrer: Wonderful. Well, I wanted to take some time, that concludes our webinar. I wanted to say thank you so much to our panel for joining us. You have put in a lot of hard work, and it has been very thoughtful and thought-filled, and so I want to say thank you. Thank you to our attendees who took the time to out of your day to join us for this really important discussion. We are really grateful for the way that you've engaged with thoughtfulness, respect, and care. And as we continue moving forward together, may we be a people committed and to extending grace and in doing so, ignite hope in our churches and across our fellowship. Wes, would you pray for us as we move out today?

Wes Mills: Well, thanks Lord for ACOP. Lord, this fellowship has played a part in all of our lives and we care about it and we care about its future and we pray that as we consider this change that you would guide us by your spirit that we would be open to what your spirit would say to us. We pray that you would help us to love one another as you've loved us and help us to continue to be in relationship with one another in Jesus name. Amen.

Vanessa Mehrer: Thank you everyone for attending. Again, this will be posted for review on the faith life theology page within our ACOP website. We hope you have a terrific week and we look forward to seeing all of you at our May conference where we get to celebrate as a fellowship. So have a wonderful day everyone.