

Ordination Paper

Andrew Ponder Williams



My Faith Journey

Let's start at the beginning. I was born in Mexico, Missouri, on September 18, 1990. Mexico was the only town with a hospital near the six churches my parents were serving. My borning cry was an echo of the ministry of my parents and the beginning of my upbringing as part of their witness. Now I rejoice in the opportunity to witness through my ministry here in the United Church of Christ.

As a child of the Church I am able to reflect back on many specific moments in which I felt the Spirit of God at work through me. In elementary school I participated in many Bible studies with adults in the church. Once while Dad was leading the study someone came by the church in urgent need of pastoral care. My Dad stepped away and needed someone to lead the rest of the study. Someone jokingly suggested I do it since I was the pastor's son, even though I was only in third grade. It was the last session of our study and we were to offer a prayer for each participant. I stepped up as invited and led a prayer for each participant, sensing the Holy Spirit was providing the words. After we were finished, I sensed that the adults in the class no longer treated me as a child, but recognized that I had spiritual gifts and a distinct call. Since that moment I have sensed the Holy Spirit at work in me and through me in times of prayer, especially in communal and congregational prayer when there was uncertainty of how we move forward.

In nearly 40 years of ordained ministry Dad had not missed a Sunday due to illness. However, the summer between my high school graduation and freshman year of college, Dad knocked on my bedroom door at 6:30 am and asked for my help. He handed me his sermon, inviting me to drive down the hill two blocks from our parsonage to the church in Kansas City to lead both worship services. When members of my home church thanked me for stepping in,

many also shared that they saw me as called to be a pastor. Honestly, I was not thrilled by this, since I was preparing for my freshman year of college and trying to explore various possibilities. I also knew in my soul that I was called in that moment, but fully aware of the pain I would go on to endure if I fully embraced this affirmation and moved forward at that time.

My ministry and exploration of call has led me to study at the base of mountains and serve a community on the shores of California. Although I was unable to fully answer my call in the United Methodist Church due to its inability to embrace LGBTQ persons, I was able to serve and grow through many meaningful experiences that have prepared me for life as a pastor. Many moments of empowerment have brought me to this ministerial journey in the UCC, including leading the UMC General Conference Committee on LGBTQ inclusion, advocacy on Capitol Hill, participating in a climate change march at the United Nations, and learning in Hawaii about the need to seek justice for indigenous peoples.

You might wonder how I balanced all these experiences and lived into them even though the path was always so precarious. It is my faith that has guided me and illuminated each step. This light has helped me to see and to understand that the work for justice beyond the walls of the church is slow. And the pursuit of justice within the church is often even slower. Yet through it all God continues to lead me to pursue ministry, and for ministry to shape my life in most meaningful ways. When I was active in the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society, focusing on Indigenous and Native American Justice, I got to travel around the country. The last such meeting brought me to Phoenix. While here I met an amazing Catholic Filipino man and student at Arizona State University who has become my loving husband and companion for my life in ministry.

In many regards I am so fortunate to be part of God's beloved diaspora. Since my home tradition has become so lost, I have taken the initiative to work with and explore other denominations over many years. I am blessed beyond measure to have found a faith home here in the United Church of Christ in the desert diaspora of the American Southwest. Thanks to my journey of discernment and connections with many traditions, theologies, politics, and visions, I know this is where I am called to serve as a pastor.

Formation Process of the UCC

I appreciate the process of formation of our United Church of Christ because we have the shared faith of many parts coming together as one. As Roger Shinn pointed out in "Historical Reflection on the Statement of Faith," it was written prior to the Constitution of the new denomination, included contributions from representatives of all the predecessor traditions, and set the tone for all that came after.

What inspires me about the UCC Preamble is its recognition of the central mission of the church. Our oneness in Christ is the heart and soul of this document and lays the foundation for all the aspects of our shared ministry and witness.

This preamble resonates with my call to ministry in a meaningful way: "It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God." I believe the preamble challenges us to live out our faith with responsibility. Each generation is called to convey the gospel in ways that intrigue others. I feel that a major aspect of this responsibility is to be among the ministers of my generation who share the unconditional love of God with all people, especially those that the church was not reaching in previous generations--by consequence of overlooking them or dismissing them.

Structurally the preamble challenges us all to place our union in Christ over details of institutional structure. This has enabled our United Church of Christ to progress in a way that many more rigidly structured denominations are unable to do. The words of the preamble help us to “express more fully the oneness in Christ of the churches composing it, to make more effective their common witness in Him, and to serve His kingdom in the world.” Our process prioritizes an effective common witness to share the love of God. Our system in which local churches, associations, and conferences have voluntary relationships and covenants with our larger denomination prevents stagnation in our spiritual and moral growth. As our church continues efforts to be inclusive and justice-centered, congregations who find themselves at odds with the denomination’s witness can receive leadership and challenge from the larger church.

I resonate with our Statement of Faith’s emphasis on God’s call for us as the church and as individuals who comprise the ministers, both lay and clergy alike. As the Statement of Faith says, “God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ’s baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.”

This section is inclusive of the tasks of Christian service and also offers powerful imagery of what it all means. Our service to all people, the highs and lows of our spiritual journeys, and our proclamation of the gospel to all is the way we accept Christ’s invitation to eat at his table of justice and reconciliation. Furthermore, we affirm our union in Christ as a larger denominational body with a spirit of ecumenism and interfaith collaboration through all these ways of living our call to be the church. When we accept Christ’s invitation to eat at his table we embrace that it is Christ who makes this invitation and that it is not our role to choose who is included, but that it is our responsibility to make sure all the children of God receive the invitation.

UCC Traditions

The Evangelical tradition continues to challenge our unified church to embody the transformative experience of being people of faith. It specifically contributed the importance of Confirmation instruction, which in my ministry with youth is something our congregation values a great deal. The Evangelical tradition also hosts the influence of Pietism in our larger tradition, especially the importance of the heart over the head, as well as the Irenic spirit that calls us to work towards peace and refrain from conflict. Furthermore, our Evangelical roots continue to call us to share the gospel with people who have not encountered it, or in our case today, have encountered a compromised and narrow version of it. We are called by this branch of our UCC family to be in mission with and evangelize to our neighbors with a message of hope and invitation. The Evangelical tradition's struggles throughout its history with abusive hierarchies in Europe also continues to inform the independent nature of our polity and our desire to be connected through covenant and relationships, not by a heavy top authority.

The Reformed tradition is a meaningful connection to the reformation itself and the theological movements that shaped our tradition and many others. Their Biblical faith led to strong laity who were able to think for themselves and not rely on institutions to inform their faith. That spirit of free thinking continues to be encouraged in our UCC today. Furthermore, we are enriched by the Reformed Church's understanding of communion as being more than a memorial meal, highlighting that Christ is also present with us in the sacrament. We also find our passion for union revealed in the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 when Christianity was defined as a "Godward orientation of the soul." This focus on the larger church and not just individual congregations calls on us even nearly 500 years later to focus our shared ministry towards God through efforts for mission and peace.

The Congregational tradition provides for so much of our polity and how we covenant to one another at each of our local churches and how our local churches covenant with one another. Jonathan Edwards' emphasis on the social redemption of humanity continues to challenge us to bear witness to the shortcomings of priorities of our culture. Furthermore, the deep commitment to abolition has led to our modern dream of liberation for those oppressed by narrow theologies, socio-economic boundaries, racism, and all other dehumanizing forces. We also find in the Haystack Meeting history a legacy from the Congregational tradition of our continued commitments to mission movements. Neo-Orthodoxy as established in 1927 presents theology that continues to differentiate us from other liberal faith traditions and inspires me in my ministry. Yes, Christ is our teacher, but Christ does not just teach the way, but is the way. This informs our distinct understanding of salvation, especially for our larger society, which is quite different from other liberal traditions such as Unitarian Universalists.

The Christian tradition brought into our combined family congregations and communities of color. Whereas the Congregational tradition held deep convictions about abolition and efforts for equity, the Christian tradition engaged communities of color in developing a movement for humanitarian reform and called clergy of color to pastor, beginning with Isaac Scott in 1852. In the Six Principles adopted at the 1820 First United General Conference we see again the message of Christian unity echoed as it was by our Reformed tradition. It also calls for the individual interpretation of scriptures, which is a key part of who we are today.

What I sense as the weave of these traditions and the hidden histories of our church is a movement of ecumenism led by the Holy Spirit that is distinct to our church in its current form, and has also been present in each predecessor tradition. In these stories of all our parts, it is

revealed today why, despite our smaller denominational size than many of our partner traditions, we are consistently calling other mainline traditions together to act for justice and to share ministry. Our collaboration specifically with the ELCA, Presbyterian, and Disciples of Christ is a way we honor the roots we share with them through the branches of our United Church of Christ family tree.

Sacraments

In the life of our church the sacraments affirm the covenants we have with God and with one another. Whatever the custom of the local church or pastor leading the sacrament, we as a family together experience God's unconditional love and ongoing call. Through Baptism we are forever marked as a child of God who is furthermore called to a life of ministry. Through Communion we affirm these calls, recognize that together we are called to witness cooperatively, experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, and honor the meaningful sacrifices of Christ that were a result of his steadfast faith and commitment to justice.

Both of our sacraments are inherently intergenerational. Persons of all ages are able to participate, and through the sacraments we are able to honor and understand that each person has gifts to share regardless of age and experience. We also are able to see, by gathering around the Baptismal Font and the Communion Table, that the Holy Spirit calls us to live out our faith in community. Each time another is baptized and each time we share communion we are showing honor to all who have formed us in our faith across the generations.

In this time of pandemic, I have broadened my understanding of how we live into our baptism across our lifetimes. We often think of baptism as an outward sign of an inward grace. I increasingly think of wearing a mask as an outward sign of an inward grace as well. Baptism marks the beginning of a life in which we are each invited to showcase this inward grace. In the

pandemic it might be a mask that signifies God's grace is guiding us to care for the wellbeing of all in our midst. In the streets it might be a Black Lives Matter protest sign as we offer witness that God can work through all of us to end racism. In the holding of the hand of someone in physical or emotional distress we share that God's grace can comfort and heal. Baptism is the beginning of a life well lived and God's grace lived out.

Our distinct understanding that we all have Baptismal calls adds another layer of significance and meaning to the sacrament of Baptism, and also to Communion. Each time we share in communion we are inviting God to continue to inspire us and guide us to live our Baptismal calls to ministry. By sharing communion together we also are recognizing, celebrating, and affirming the Baptismal call that we each have, and embracing our greater witness because of our unique gifts, understandings, and experiences. Furthermore, even when we are apart from the larger body of the church and we have Communion with just a few persons, our connection and covenant with one another through the Holy Spirit is at work through the sacrament.

As a people of ecumenical spirit, Baptism and Communion are threads that interweave us into the church universal. Whether other religious entities have the same ecumenical understanding or not, through the Holy Spirit we are affirming our oneness in Christ across all traditions and faiths. Our sacraments also ground us in the rich history of our faith and empower us to experience firsthand that God's work continues in us and through us.

In both sacraments we also recognize that a life of following Christ's teachings may likely include challenges, hardships, and sacrifices. We embrace that our journeys with God are purposeful and lead us to understandings and ways of living that are sometimes judged and put down by misguided forces in our midst. However, these sacraments remind us we are unified and

belong to one another. This spirit of unity and these moments in which we see God in each other, and also see each of us renewing our commitment to a life of faith give me hope anew that we can model for the world why a life in ministry together is so transformational.

Theology

I would like to focus on the UCC theology regarding Christ and God. The very existence of our church as a denomination is rooted in our understanding of Jesus Christ alone being the head of the church. This belief empowers us to be a diverse body because our authority, union, and spirit are grounded in Jesus Christ. Our polity is this belief lived out. The structure of our church is rooted in our belief that Christ alone is the authority that leads us. By putting our trust in Jesus Christ fully we are not only united, but uniting.

We embrace that the ecumenical spirit of our union in Jesus Christ is something that continues as our presence together and out in the world is working to heal the brokenness of the church universal. For me as a pastor this means that I will enter ecumenical work to share our progressive understanding of faith, and also to be a bold witness for God's desire to work within us and through us to heal our communities of all the misguided divisions that alienate and dehumanize.

Our theology regarding God is distinct among other Christian traditions, and I find meaning in our faith in God's continuing testament. It begs the question of other traditions who do not share our approach about the purpose of faith. If we were to regard our Christian beliefs as something completely focused on the words and times of over 2000 years ago, how are we supposed to be led by the Holy Spirit in our Christian living and service today?

So many denominations and Christian traditions get stuck because the way they read scripture is narrow in scope and lacks an understanding of context. As the United Church of

Christ, we do receive scripture analytically, but also believe these words inspired by God are not finished revealing new meaning for us. Our exegesis is rooted in each generation experiencing these words anew. I believe that this foundational aspect of our theology as a united church is why we are refreshingly inclusive and able to lead the Christian faith with mindfulness and embrace the world God calls us to serve.

Although our understanding of God's word is open and thoughtful and revelatory, we remain grounded in our pluralistic history as a church. By avoiding a formulaic test of faith, we focus on the doctrines and statements of faith of our present denomination, and also those that informed the path of our predecessor traditions. Our affirmation of the creeds of the earlier church adds further significance to our faith in God's continuing testament. Together we have a theological foundation rooted in the early church that is given new life and light by our emerging understanding of scripture and testament today.

UCC History and Unification

Perhaps the best way to describe the unification process is to look first at what came before. Prior to the formal union of the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical Reformed Church into the United Church of Christ there were the mergers of the two traditions that comprised each of these predecessor denominations. I believe this bold ecumenism was guided by the Holy Spirit, guiding the formation of meaningful relationships, partnerships, and shared ministries. What once seemed stark cultural and theological differences that kept groups separate became something to share together in union in order to enrich the experience of faith for all in the church. Furthermore, differences of language and cultural traditions faded over time as members of congregations of these differing traditions created community together.

The unification process of our United Church of Christ denomination as we know it today began in St. Louis with a study group of Evangelical Reformed and Congregational Christian clergy. Together they realized that although their traditions had meaningful historical, cultural, and theological differences, they themselves, and in many respects their congregations, had a sense of familial Christian kinship with one another. I point to this moment as the heart of our church's origin and I believe it captures much of our vision for this day. Unlike many Christian denominations that have a narrower path focused more strictly on a consistent theological movement, we recognize ecumenism to be the theological and cultural basis of our being one.

The formal unification of the United Church of Christ created a new Christian institution, and also a landmark ecumenical moment for Christianity in America. Gunneman quotes the following from the Christian Century in his introduction: "We believe the emergence of the United Church of Christ will stand as a milestone in our spiritual history ...The radical significance of the event in Cleveland was that in it American Protestantism had turned a corner." (from First Page of Introduction)

In this union the two denominations brought shared value of missions, distinct significance in the history of Christian faith, and similar understandings of connection and autonomy. What led a publication like the Christian Century to call the moment a "milestone in our spiritual history" is that each of the two predecessor denominations and the traditions that comprised them contributed distinct theologies and cultural customs to the united church. Each tradition had played a different part in the history of faith from the Reformed tradition's tangles with Lutheranism over hundreds of years, and the Congregational tradition's understanding of Neo-Orthodoxy in the 20th Century.

As Walker points out in Chapter Two of *The Evolution of a UCC Style*, our church's roots present a challenge. Although we are diverse in belief and thought, our tradition is comprised of European-centric culture and theology. "The assumption of cultural superiority, more precisely Anglo or German-American (both Saxon) cultures, colored the encounter of all four churches with those outside European-America. Efforts to convert the Other grew out of their fears that other cultural expressions would somehow erode American social and political institutions in addition to their convictions that Christians should convert and transform the world for spiritual ends." (Page 37 of Chapter 2)

In order to live into our stated commitment to be a multiracial and multicultural church we must recognize our origin is rooted in a framework that views diversity acceptable when it stems from cultural differences within Europe, but was fearful of diversity grounded in parts of the world beyond the continent of Europe. A challenge for us in our ministry is to broaden our inclusive soul as a denomination so that it has a fully open heart.

My husband is Filipino and continues to faithfully practice a Catholic-based prayer life. Part of why the Catholic faith continues to be a bedrock in his life is that Catholicism at its best immerses itself in a culture. The liturgies and iconography that are tools in his spiritual life are also expressions of what he culturally values. For us in the UCC we are called to overcome this limitation in our origin story of a shared fear of diversity that was perceived as a threat to the European-American way of thinking and functioning. God's dream for us is not that we would convert people from other cultures out of fear of the change they represent, but out of our desire to be inclusive and to share our understanding of a nurturing God with all people. As our nation struggles to embrace its diversity and live into pluralism, our church's ecumenical spirit and commitment to interfaith interconnectedness is more essential than ever.

Clergy and Laity

In the UCC we believe we all have a call. Our baptism formally brings us into the family of the church and also into the ministry of the church. What I love about this process is that as I share my call with others, I learn about their calls as well.

Yes, ordained pastors are “set apart,” not for the sake of reverence, but for the purpose of service. Ordained persons are called to journey with all laity and to lead the church with them. The lay leadership of each congregation and ministry work together to vision and determine their purpose and priorities. The ordained are then called to accompany and guide their congregations in living out the call they have received as a people from God. The ministry of the ordained is distinct, but not more important than the ministry of the laity.

The importance of seeking ordination in the UCC is to respond to the need of the church to have persons who entirely dedicate their vocation to their call. God’s call for the church and our congregations needs persons willing to dedicate their lives to service. Furthermore, pastors are called to care for the lay ministers of the church along their journeys. The ordained are to serve the church through carrying out many aspects of the church’s ministry, including to care for the congregation in times of illness, grief, crisis, and need. Pastors also counsel and encourage the laity as they explore the ways God is calling them to carry out the church’s mission.

As the Ministerial Code states, we are to “cultivate a culture of call by nurturing the gifts of others in the Church and joining their gifts with mine in seasons of change and continuity for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ and the health of the Church.” Our Ministerial Code calls us to humility in our ministry. We are not called as pastors to flaunt our own gifts and center the life of the church on our vision alone, but to create a collaborative and caring culture in which we celebrate and nurture the gifts of all persons in ministry with us. We are also called to recognize

the seasons of change and continuity and to make sure we guide our congregations in responding to the changing needs of the world. Presiding over the sacraments helps pastors live out our purpose to provide continuity in worship and ministry. By baptizing and sharing communion we are blessed with the opportunity to continue the culture of call and the recognition of all our gifts in ministry together.

Justice and Witness

I believe justice is a vision that Christians understand in different ways, but that we are all called to contribute to and live out. The reality that we have different understandings of what justice is and what it entails is certainly a challenge for us as we try to bring about the changes God is calling on us to make, but also means we get to bring our own passions and baptismal call to justice ministries. We can each pursue experiences and opportunities in which we can get to know the stories of people who need our witness and advocacy.

About advocacy: it is my preferred concept for how we live out our call and commitment to justice. I know, love, and respect many who focus more on activism in forms such as protests and civil disobedience. I certainly admire and believe in this type of justice-seeking ministry. However, I challenge folks I work with to be advocates. I believe advocacy is more interpersonal and challenges us to develop a kinship with one another. It is one thing to protest as an activist to end the drilling for the Dakota Access Pipeline. It is quite another to answer the call to be an advocate and to build a relationship with a Native American person or community who is negatively impacted by the injustice of the pipeline. Through such relationships, God transforms and humbles us while we work for justice. Furthermore, through developing such a relationship we can become mindful of what our new friends in Christ truly are hoping for and develop an understanding of how we can advocate for them further. I also think that a pastor challenging

a congregation to be advocates is more transformative and provides a deeper faith-forming experience.

Another example is LGBTQ advocacy. As a gay married man, I value all people who are willing to march with me for my rights. However, what if there is still heteronormative bias in the hearts of those marching? Don't we as people who are passionate about justice need relationships to further grow in our understanding and unconditional love and acceptance of others? This is where advocacy comes in and where I have seen persons in the church transform their perspectives and have increasingly inclusive hearts.

For my congregation there are many ways we work together to be advocates for people in different situations. I worked with a family in Mesa who had an elderly disabled father and three young children. The city had shut their water off in the extreme heat of July and they came to the church in November seeking assistance. Immediately I contacted multiple city agencies on their behalf as their advocate and made it clear our church would not accept this type of unbelievable disregard for the basic right of this struggling family to have running water in their home. It ultimately led to us take our advocacy to City Hall, and it worked because we made it clear that as Christians we refused to allow our community to determine who is and who is not worthy of water. Our church practices activism by participating in marches and meaningful exhibits of our commitment to justice, but we also follow these activities up with meaningful dialogue and relationships.

Authorization for Ministry

We recognize and honor that each person lives out and lives into a ministry, whatever their vocation. As I look through the roles for authorized ministers in the UCC I see clear ways to serve that fit my call.

I am called to pastor local congregations. I am called to walk alongside members of local churches as they serve their communities and witness for justice. I am further called to care for them and to work to inspire them as they live out their baptismal calls. I believe my call is inclusive of serving as a settled pastor as well as a transitional and interim pastor, but I am primarily called to pastor in a settled role. My experience with consulting with churches in transition makes me passionate about both preparing churches for a settled pastor and also serving as a settled pastor myself to help each church live into its vision.

Furthermore, as a Pastor I want to be part of creating and leading ministries that bring our local churches together to reach new people with God's unconditional love. My experience as a campus minister is something I hope to continue to share with our UCC conferences and congregations as we all work to create new expressions and faith communities. I hope to continue serving on the ASU campuses, and also to work with local churches on best practices for supporting, engaging, and inspiring young people.

Autonomy and Covenant

I understand autonomy and covenant through the framework of responsible freedom. It reminds us of the free will that God gives us as individuals. Yet, although we are free as persons, we are called to live in community and to practice accountability and relationship with one another. Our covenant with each other, our congregations with other congregations, entities of the church with other entities of the church, clergy with their conferences and their congregations, is an expression of love that helps us recognize that we share deep roots. However, the autonomy of our congregations and of many aspects of our ministries and organizations empowers us to express and share God's love in meaningful contextual ways.

Our freedom to believe and live out our lives in keeping with our understanding of God's will for us is a powerful part of our UCC faith journeys. We all know that the best journey is one in which we have others to walk alongside us. Certainly there are segments when we best walk alone for our own self-discovery, but ultimately we are called to share our witness and collaborate and grow with others so that we can most effectively minister.

The autonomy of our local churches means that they can innovate and contextualize their ministries. Thanks to our larger covenantal relationships they can share their learnings with our larger church, as well as the joy that comes from their ministries.

The other entities of our denomination can be guided by the Spirit to proclaim and live out their understanding of faith and what they feel God is revealing to them through their ministry. Thanks to the covenantal partners in the larger church, they can then come back and inspire the rest of the church. The autonomy sets them free to be prophetic, while the covenant brings them back to the church to inspire others and motivate us on the parts of the path of the journey of faith we share.

My Call to Local Church Ministry

I believe the local church is the home for our hearts: A spiritual home that is inclusive of hearts that are hopeful and healing, hearts that are confused and conflicted, and even hearts that are breaking or broken. The church is also where our hearts and the deepest convictions and shortcomings of our souls can be challenged. The local church is the place where we are invited to be interpersonal and live into soulful restoration through relationships with one another.

In the family of faith we are called to journey with one another and to know each other as friends. As a pastor it is my hope to create a culture of intergenerational friendships and connections that are rooted in God's unconditional love for each of us. This is how we live out

our mission as the local church to know God's love in our community of faith and to make God's love for all known beyond our walls.

The church is a place where we bring our full selves, including our differences. I believe a healthy church is one in which there are profound and meaningful differences of perspective and opinions regarding current events, beliefs, and how we carry out our ministries. Conflict in the local church is inevitable and I am committed to respectful communication and dialogue. Through my previous consulting ministry I have journeyed with many churches living with tension regarding who they are and who they believe God is calling them to be. As a pastor I will seek to not patch over or avoid a conflict. I do not believe it is my role to align dramatically with one side.

I believe my call in these situations is to guide us in finding our footing and to recognize we are grounded in God's love. In the midst of conflict I seek to help us all understand that we have strong opinions and expectations regarding our church because our congregation means so much to each of us. We love our church. We might hold significant disagreements about aspects of ministry, but it is because we share a powerful appreciation for our beloved faith community. As a pastor I actually find hope in the midst of many conflicts because it illustrates the strong level of commitment and passion there is amongst the congregation for the ministry we share.

I have been asked to share here what my dream role and setting would be. I am hopeful for the opportunity to pastor many different kinds of churches in many different kinds of places. I hope for a setting where I can serve as the solo pastor, senior pastor, or co-pastor for a people who are open to growing in their faith with me. I seek a church who respects my role as their pastor, but also embraces my humility, honesty, and humor. I pray for the opportunity to pastor

a congregation that is seeking a nurturing spiritual leader that tends to the needs of the members, but is also eager to invite and witness to the neighborhoods in our midst who we don't know yet.

I view who I am and my approach to ministry as a bridge. I am so tempted when writing this section to use *but* to separate my thoughts, but *and* captures what I hope to convey. I am young *and* deeply rooted in the traditions of the church. I am LGBTQ *and* have experience journeying with those who have struggled to fully embrace people like me. I am mainline theologically *and* am passionate about ministry that helps us all find the middle where we can discover God's shared purposes for us. I love to lead worship *and* value the important administrative functions we must do to carry out our ministry together. I love living into my unique role as a pastor *and* collaborating with other staff and lay leadership.

Worship & Preaching

This intentional season of discernment has been an incredible time for me to explore and live into my distinct style of preaching. Shortly before becoming a Member-In-Discernment I decided to try and preach a sermon at Desert Palm using just an outline of my key points. I had always wanted to try this as I am very present when I am offering a sermon to the extent that my own fully prepared remarks can get in my way. I sense the Holy Spirit adding wisdom and profundity to my message when I leave space in the script for the Spirit to share. During this process I have been working to grow this approach as my style in both video and in-person formats. I also preach from an outline so that I can make eye contact with the congregation as much as possible so each person gathered can know that the message is for them.

My hoped-for outcome of each message I share is that regardless of where someone was spiritually before worship that through the sermon and the traditions of the church they will find a center from which they can understand God's guiding in their life. I also hope that each person

senses the joy that immerses my soul and sustains me when I share a message and that this joy will be present with them throughout the week ahead.

I believe that my preaching and the words that I share are guided by the Holy Spirit because often I feel extremely challenged by what I express. It is my hope that those who hear my messages come to understand that they are part of the eternal story of the people of God. I hope that they understand that this is a story of love and they have a role in this story as God's beloved.

My sermons are intended to help the local church find our shared footing so that we can focus on what God is inviting us to center ourselves on as a community. We each come from different realities and backgrounds and identities and that diversity is what makes the church so meaningful and transformative. I believe that this diversity is most impactful when we can center ourselves on specific dreams that God has for us as a family of faith. I view the sermon, the sacraments, and the full service of worship as the space where we celebrate our diversity and find our spiritual center as the people of God.

The Marks of Ministry

There are three Marks of Ministry I would like to highlight here in this paper as I believe they speak specifically to some of my greatest joys in ministry and what I hope to share with all who I have the joy of serving alongside.

Two marks showcase my passion for Advocacy. These marks are Working Together for Justice and Mercy, and Participating in Theological Praxis. I have had formative opportunities to advocate for a wide spectrum of policies and changes through the church.

This advocacy has led me to value profoundly the theological diversity of the church. Just because we don't think alike does not mean that we can't find the common ground to seek

change together. I believe our theological differences embolden our shared witness on the most meaningful matters of the day because it helps us shine light on matters beyond politics: matters that are rooted in God's expectation that we care for and respect everyone as God's beloved.

I have participated in advocacy at the local level in Kansas City where I was successful in demanding sidewalks and safer infrastructure for low-income neighborhoods in the inner city. On the federal level I have advocated on Capitol Hill in Washington for our government to increase funding to support family planning resources and initiatives in other countries where women are especially marginalized. On the international level I have advocated at the United Nations for the rights of indigenous persons and communities as they face renewed threats of exploitation and displacement by international conglomerates.

I am not only passionate about advocacy because I believe in the things I have worked to witness about, but because as a pastor I believe I can engage and mobilize the local church around advocating for our neighbors in our unique contexts. Perhaps we overthink church growth sometimes. I can point to many instances in which the church coming to know its community made people beyond the church feel cared for and helped them to understand that Christians are called to care. This led them to give the church a chance.

The other Mark of Ministry I believe distinctly captures my call is Building Transformational Leadership Skills. I give God thanks for many formative opportunities I have had to grow as a spiritual leader. Although I was not able to answer my call to ministry fully in the United Methodist Church, I bring 15 years of denominational leadership experience as a youth, college student, and young professional.

In the United Methodist Church I served as a delegate and committee chair at the 2012 General Conference for the committee tasked with finding a breakthrough regarding the church's

division over LGBTQ inclusion. I am proud to share that the committee I chaired did vote to eliminate the homophobic doctrine, but unfortunately the plenary session did not accept the committee's recommendations. I also served as the Rules Committee Chairperson for the South Central Jurisdiction for eight years where I helped to oversee the elections of bishops and the assets and properties of the region. I am honored in 2021 to serve as a delegate to the UCC General Synod from the Southwest Conference and am excited to carry forward my passion for the larger church.

In California I had the joy of getting to know many different congregations and their leaders through my consulting ministry where I focused on church growth, communications, leadership development, and other needs. This was an incredible experience in that I got to share what I knew based on my experience, but I also got to learn from each congregation and person I served. I bring all these learnings and resources with me now as a pastor called to serve in parish ministry.

At Arizona State University where I serve as the UCC Campus Minister I am on the Executive Team for the Council of Religious Advisors. I am active in this ecumenical and interfaith body to show our UCC commitment to these collaborations and to witness to the larger faith community about the importance of being inclusive and respectful of the diversity of our students and their identities, cultures, and experiences. I have learned so much through this experience about the impact of our UCC witness and our call through our local churches to unite the larger church.

Pursuing Peace with Justice

I have lived in California twice, but in the Golden State only once. I lived in a small town in central Missouri called California when I was a toddler. While we were living there a mass

shooting occurred in which five people were killed. In a small town like California that meant everyone was directly connected to someone who perished in the violence. While the news media invaded the town and law enforcement searched the community, the assailant broke into the home of Dorothy, the organist for the congregation my Dad was pastoring at the time.

The assailant was going to steal her car and flee, but she put a stop to that as it was the first new car she had ever owned and was very proud of it. Still there was more to the story. Beyond her attachment to her new car was the work of the Holy Spirit that guided her in calming the man down and allowing him the space to process what he had done to the point that he stopped his series of violent acts and turned himself in peacefully. Preceding this, she offered a prayer for him before they broke bread together with a simple meal she lovingly prepared.

Throughout this particular year of ministry I have found myself struggling to support others through the tensions of our times. I can't imagine the strength and clarity that someone like Dorothy who sat with someone in that level of crisis must embody, but I imagine Dorothy would share my belief that in such moments the Holy Spirit guides us in our words and actions. In the midst of pandemic and partisanship it is easy to feel hopeless and helpless in our ministry. I at times have felt out of sorts because my commitment to a Christ-centered life of pursuing peace with justice seems increasingly out of place in our world. As I reflect on this further, however, I realize that sense of displacement is why I have so much passion and perseverance to live out my call because I know God has work for us to do.

As I live into this ordination journey I am realizing more and more that part of God's purpose for my life is to be a presence that deescalates and disarms. I am called to discourage violence and oppression, and to help disentangle the forces that promote and perpetuate the hatred all around us. I also recognize that this aspect of my call to ministry is really challenging.

I recently asked one of my mentors if she thought being a pastor in this time and place was impossible because the forces that divide seem so strong. She conceded it may well be impossible, but therein lies our call. We don't serve a God whose dreams for us are based on our definition of what is and is not possible, but on our calling to respond to the needs of the world. As a pastor I never abandon my role to care for the spiritual needs of others, and that specifically means not responding in-kind to provocation. The church has a unique duty because we are called by God to help all people find the center through which we can see past the fog of our prejudices. In these times it is clearer to me than ever that if we don't offer the ministry of de-escalation no one else will.

Why I Have Hope

I have been asked a lot throughout my Member-In-Discernment process about my consistently positive spirit and what that says about my call to ministry and how I approach ministerial leadership. I think my hopeful heart remains optimistic because of the ways I consistently experience the hope of the resurrection through the relationships I have with others through my ministry.

When Christ died, they all truly thought it was over and that there was no future to their movement. However, Christ's resurrection reunited those who were inspired by Christ's life. Every relationship that stemmed from that moment of hope and new life then led on to new relationships with persons who had not even known Christ when he was alive. Fast forward over 2000 years later and I believe each relationship we have in the church comes from that moment. Every connection we as Christians make with one another is of and because of Christ.

I know many of us are wary like the disciples were when their friend died. So often we feel that the church is over, but we ought to know better. Unlike the disciples at the time of

Christ's death, we know the resurrection comes after the suffering and sense of profound loss. We must have faith in our relationships and answer God's call to build meaningful friendships through which we can live out and share God's unconditional love.

While reflecting on this process I celebrate a renewed sense of centeredness in my spiritual life. I am arguably the most healthy physically and spiritually I have been at any point in my life. My hopeful spirit has been emboldened by the Member-In-Discernment journey, and my renewed commitment to spiritual practices has led to healthy habits for the mind and heart alike. I ride my bike nearly every day now and find time for peace with God in my desert garden. I stand taller than I used to knowing that I am living out the call God has for me, whereas for many years you might have noticed I had a posture in which I appeared to be carrying the weight of our world.

Since our home is at a higher elevation, we are fortunate to be able to see the city lights at night in the valley below. Just a year ago the lights of the cities in our view were of a warm and sometimes dim tone. Now about half of the street and freeway lights we can see are a brighter and more illuminative tone. It's remarkable how different the mountains and the buildings and highways look down in the valley with a new shade of light. For me this illustrates how God is shining a new light on many of the challenges and circumstances of our time. After more than a year of pandemic we see more clearly the consequences of our society's sinfulness that plays out through racism and other forms of oppression. We in the Church are called to acknowledge the new light, and to be willing to look at all it reveals so we can be part of the transformation God is asking us to lead.

Throughout this process, and this past year specifically, God has illuminated the needs

of this world for me in a new way so that I might come to understand how to make a difference in my ministry through the church. I give God thanks for this time and for all of you who are part of this exciting time in my journey. I hope I will continue to have the honor and pleasure of your company and witness as the path continues.

Friends, let's journey together. Let's walk side-by-side knowing that Christ is walking alongside us too. We needn't be afraid of walking through the darkness for we know that God will illuminate exactly what we need to see in order that we will be Christ's Church in this century and forevermore.

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