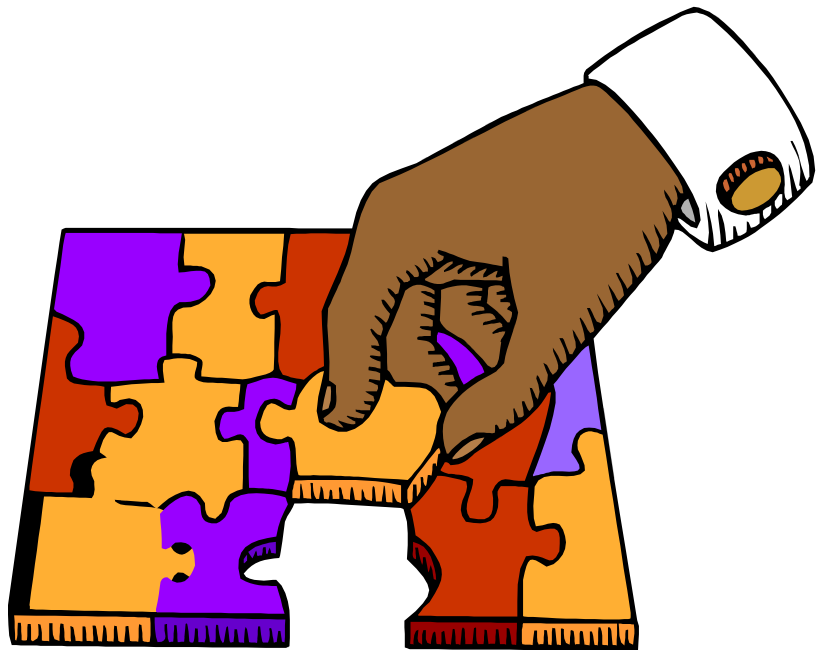


A Piece of God's Puzzle

Ordination Paper

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Introduction

“It is difficult enough, day by day, to try to envision and understand God’s overall plan for us. It’s especially hard when tragedies occur, or when we must face major disappointments. How can we learn to accept and deal with unfolding events that are not always to our liking? How can we gain increasing trust in God’s sometimes seemingly mysterious ways? What helps me is to try to change my perspective of myself, acknowledging first that I am but one of millions upon millions of God’s children. I stand back and try to see myself and the things that happen in my life as an infinitesimal part of God’s limitless and ever-changing universe. When I get into that reflective frame of mind, I then visualize myself as a small tile- a single tile in a splendid and beautiful mosaic of God’s creation. If I come in really close, focusing only on myself, all I can see is the single tile. However, if I step back and broaden my field of vision, I am able to imagine the entire mosaic in all its glory and perfection. When I can do this, it invariably helps me again to accept myself and what occurs in my life as a necessary part of God’s larger plan. You are only one part, but an integral part of God’s glorious mosaic.”¹ This reveals what I know God has chosen me to do and that is to become one piece of the many brilliant pieces of art that needs to shape up and become a servant unto him.

Biographical Statement

At the age of nine, my father died in a car accident. Prior to that, my mother suffered a stroke at the age of twenty-nine that left her paralyzed on her left side. When my father died my mother had the responsibility of raising seven children alone. She did the only thing she knew and that was to draw her strength from God.

Growing up with a mother who was forced into the role of primary provider for seven children was a delight. The delight came in knowing that in spite of what we didn’t have; my mother always made sure we had the one thing that would keep us in the time of need and that was God. My childhood was good, considering the circumstances of losing my father and my mother being handicapped. Not until I became an adult did I

¹ Author Unknown

fully understand and know that my mother was considered handicapped. Growing up she was just mother, the person who managed the house and made sure that we knew how important it was to have faith and believe in the wondrous works of God.

Christian Pilgrimage

When I became a teen, I continued to grow in the Lord, still wanting and yearning to learn more about the word of God. By now my mother began to let us go to church with our friends and other family members. I was exposed to the Baptist, Pentecostal, Catholic and African Methodist Episcopal traditions. It was during a visit to my neighbor, the Rev. John McClellan's church, Mt. Olive AME Church, that I met my future husband Samuel Southern. While attending Mount Olive AME Church, I was awed by the style of worship that I was unaccustomed to. The order of service was more on the line of a catholic mass, quiet and very conservative. There were no drums, tambourines or outward expressions of worshipping God; yet the more I went the more I saw how it was the same. The same God was being lifted up, the style was just different. At Mt. Olive I soon became involved in the choir and other ministries of the church. The seeds that my mother planted were being watered and were beginning to sprout. After attending Mt. Olive for a number of years, I was invited to visit a church that I had never heard of, Trinity United Church of Christ of Chicago. Trinity was literally located blocks from where I had grown up as a child. My first time at Trinity UCC was a unique experience for me. My soul yearned for more; I needed to experience this again. Weeks later I joined TUCC and immediately became involved in finding out what the United Church of Christ was all about. It was at Trinity that the plant that had been watered in my earlier life began to take shape and grow branches. When I joined the choir, the branches began to take form, as I listened more attentively to the words that I was singing. While ministering to others through song, God was ministering to me, preparing me for something greater. I began to notice a change in myself, feeling that something was missing yet I didn't know or understand what that something was. But something was missing. The

revelation came when the choir joined Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr.; in Detroit, at the Rev. Dr. Charles G. Adams' church. It was early in the morning; my roommates were still asleep so I dressed and went down to the restaurant in the hotel. I ordered myself a cup of tea and sat and thought about my life and what was happening to me. I still didn't understand, but I knew something was going on. I looked about sipping my tea, and the Lord began speaking to me saying, "I have something bigger planned for you and your life." I looked around and knew that I was the only one sitting there but the voice was very clear and the message was heard. Another stem was beginning to sprout or another piece of the puzzle was being dropped into the frame. My tenure as an ordained deacon at TUCC was one of the best times of my life. I experienced the miracles of God up close and personal. A transformation had begun to take place in my life. I was growing in God's grace by being a servant, one who was called to serve the people of God.

When Rev. Dr. Ozzie E. Smith Jr.; was called to Covenant United Church of Christ, my family and I went to join him and the CUCC family. At Covenant, I became one of the ordained deacons of the church; God was again using me to serve God's people. The feeling that God was calling me to something higher was evident and weighing heavily on my soul. During a Rejoice in Reading session where, Rev. Dr. Samuel De Witt Proctor's book *The Substance of Things Hoped For* was being discussed, Dr. Proctor talked about his life growing up and his call to the ministry. As I began to read, I distinctly remember hearing God's voice and I knew that God's call to me, was not just to be a Deacon, but to the ministry. When I realized this I thought about some of the things that had transpired in my life, the mistakes that I had made and my not feeling worthy of this call. I began to pray and remember the lessons my mother taught me growing up. I reflected on what I had learned from my father-in-law, the Rev. Millard F. Southern Sr.; I thought about what Rev. Wright preached about and I thought about what Rev. Ozzie said. But it was not what they said that helped me see what God was doing, it was the word of God that convicted me. I was scared. What would my

husband, my children, my family or my friends think? As I read my Bible and prayed about what it was that God was calling me to do, I realized that what people thought didn't really matter. "I had decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back."² Those whom God calls God will equip. My husband said I had to do what God was calling me to do and he would support me in my call to the ministry. During my seminary years, I had some mountain highs and valley lows, but through it all God did what God promised, God never left me. This was another piece of the puzzle.

The Bible

The Bible is the book of books; it guides my life on a daily basis. It's the one book that I can read and get an understanding of whatever I'm going through whether it's sickness, family drama, church stuff, economics or everyday living. The Holy Bible is the book that completes my daily living. The Bible helps me make it through good days as well as bad days. In these turbulent times that the world is facing, the Bible should be the basis for one's thinking and or doing. One of the most asked questions among ministers today is; how can we present the Bible to some and the Bible to others in a language where those who are lost will find hope? The generations of non-churched individuals we are attempting to bring to Christ are the baby boomers, Generation X and hip-hoppers. Some baby boomers were raised to believe they only needed to get a good education, make a lot of money and give only to self. How do I/we relate the Bible to them? When these same individuals are faced with everyday issues such as the stock market crashing, losing jobs, foreclosure and being single, do I continue to tell them God will make a way? No, I believe I must do something else; I have to be able to reach and connect them with something else. What is that something else? For me it's taking the Bible and making it real and relevant with today's times, through words, visuals, and personal connections. I must be able to break down the barriers of interpretation by applying daily events, life incidents and historical content to my Interpretation of the scriptures. The lens I use to interpret the scriptures must not be a one-sided lens but a lens that has

² Carpenter, Delores. The African Heritage Hymnal. Ed. Nolan Williams Jr. Chicago, Gia Publishers 2008. p 400.

the ability to see both the biblical and contemporary side of the story. I must make it plain to those who are seeking, those who are confused and those who just want to know who God is and the relevancy of the Bible, not diluting the words, teachings and historical values of the Bible, instead presenting the Bible in today's terms for all who seek the kingdom of God. Having them read the books of Job or Esther, for example, without being able to explain to them in a language with which they are familiar would probably be futile. I believe time is of the essence when it comes to saving souls and bringing people to Christ through the teachings in the Bible. This can be done by any translation possible, whether it's the NIV, The Message, NRSV or the New King James Version. As for me, the Bible is the main source for shaping my theology and what my calling means. The Bible informs my theology of preaching by showing me examples of those who were considered the "least of these", and their triumphs through the works and words of Jesus Christ. For example, Esther, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are examples of those who may have been considered, by some, as the "least of these." The story of the nameless woman at the well is quite similar to many women in today's society; women who have had numerous partners throughout their lives and not one was their legal spouse. These women are being ridiculed through name calling and finger pointing by others who have chosen not to have a forgiving heart. They need to know and understand, in spite of who they were in the past and what they may have done, God is always there to aid them in their time of need and to offer forgiveness, grace and mercy. Early in my life, as I mentioned previously, I believe God was preparing me for this moment, when God pulled me out from among the people to serve at church in various capacities. He was pruning me, cutting away the dead branches and getting the weeds out of my trunk. One of my greatest challenges will be getting my parishioners to read and explore the Bible with me on a daily basis. Getting closer to God through daily reading will assist them in seeing how God prepares and prunes you to become lifelong believers of God's word and works.

Clinical Pastoral Education

What happens to a person who is suddenly thrust into a situation to do something they don't want to do? A situation they've heard only negative things about and the only good thing they heard about this particular situation is that the end is the best part. What do you do? How do you handle going into Clinical Pastoral Education with all these preconceived ideas floating in your head? When I interviewed for the position I spoke about the things I heard. The Rev. Dr. Gale Kennibrew, former vice-president of Mission and Spiritual care at Advocate South Suburban Hospital, explained to me this experience was something I needed to find out and judge for myself and not rely on what others said or thought. I needed to be open and let God move and direct me in this process, and I did just that. CPE was an inconvenience; inconvenient because God put me in places I would never had expected to go or experience on my own. Although inconvenient and uncomfortable, it was through CPE that I had to come to grips with some of the black holes that had been lurking in my soul for many years. Moments of my past had to be relived, regrets had to be revisited again and some things I decided to let lie dormant and unresolved were opened for review and many were resolved. CPE showed me that God was indeed still in the blessing and forgiving business for someone like me as well as the patients I ministered to at the hospital on a daily basis. What I thought was going to be a regimented inconvenience turned out to be one of the best times in my seminary life. CPE opened many avenues for me to reach, teach and preach to patients and family members who were suffering from an illness, loss of a loved one or just needing someone to talk with and or listen to about something. Preaching was done during our weekly chapel service which was broadcast throughout the hospital. Without the experience of CPE I would still be carrying around my own stuff, which needed to be discarded, so that I could become the servant that God called me to be. You see, I believe in order to fully serve God one has to get rid of the baggage that keeps us from getting closer to God. CPE showed me again that if God could use anything God could use me.

Boundaries

Boundaries are guidelines and limitations that are placed upon everyone who comes in contact with another human being and or thing. Limitations are set to ensure that the rights of you and others are not violated in any shape, form or fashion. For instance boundaries as it pertains to ethical issues, confidentiality, sexual misconduct and or harassment of parishioners or others within the church setting are necessary. We all have boundaries and limitations in our everyday lives and it's important that we practice those rules which have been set forth for us. Boundary training is essential for anyone going into any form of the ordained ministry. I remember early on when I was ordained a deacon we were given a list of what we could and should do when we visited someone in the hospital or in their home. We were instructed not to take anyone with us, not to overextend the visit, not to ask personal questions; and not to accept money, with the exception of tithes and offerings. Boundaries are a necessary protection for you and the person you are visiting. Boundary training, which the denomination provided, informed new material, reinforced old material and reassured us that most of the concerns of ministers were understood and being heard. Boundary training was a way to flush out any misconception that I may have had about what I should or shouldn't do with parishioners, their family members or other clergy. It also dealt with my limitations and or limited capacity to deal with certain situations. In addition it showed me even further the need for self-care for myself as a minister, wife, mother and daughter. Boundaries remind me that I can't be everything for everyone all of the time.

Ethics

Working with parishioners in the church requires a trusting relationship. It is very important that I remember and adhere to the boundaries that I have been taught thus far. Ethically I am required to uphold the Code of Conduct for Ministers as outlined by the United Church of Christ. Additionally I have a set of ethics that were instilled in me by my mother and others who have influenced me up to this point in my life. I am bound ethically first by God and secondly by the UCC to perform the duties of a minister with the highest regard to the word of God and the rules set forth by the denomination.

I know without a doubt that with the help of God that I am capable and willing to ethically serve the people of God in the capacity as a minister within the UCC.

Baptism

“and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”³

I believe that a person needs to be baptized once in his/her life. If a person who was baptized as a child insists upon being baptized again as an adult I would grant them their request. Baptism is an outward sign of inward grace. Baptism is a sacred time, a time where the church community is praying and praising the newness of the person being baptized. It is also a time to witness and affirm what God is doing in that person’s life. At Covenant United Church of Christ, we have baby dedications. This is where the parents, god-parents and other members of the village publicly announce to God and the church that they are making the parental decision to dedicate their babies to God. It is also a time to witness and affirm what God is doing in that person’s life. Later on when a child becomes a pre-teen, we have confirmation classes and they are confirmed. What is the difference? The teens are now at an age where they understand the concept of what it means to give your life to Christ and to follow in God’s ways. The teens are able to tell their family and friends of their experience as a Christian and what it means to them. Prior to this, many were going on what their parents had told them, they now have an opportunity to express for themselves what God means to them. This is done in a variety of ways. For instance, confirmation class, and confirmation camp with other clusters of the UCC along with personal journaling of their experience. If a person has not had confirmation and is of age and have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they can be baptized by sprinkling or immersion. I also believe in

³ New International Version Bible, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1998. I Peter 3:21 p. 34.

infant baptism. Prior to my completing CPE I kept vacillating with infant baptism. Is it necessary? Would God recognize this form of baptism? It was during my CPE training that God revealed to me just how important infant baptism is. How can I who publicly announces God cares for all children as well as adults, refuse to baptize an innocent infant? It is my spiritual duty as a minister to inform the parents that I would honor their request and baptize their baby if it is their desire to do so.

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of God’”⁴

The Lord’s Supper

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." ²⁷Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."⁵

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is administered once a month in most UCC churches. This is done on the first Sunday of the month at Covenant United Church of Christ. This Sunday has been set aside to confess, acknowledge and partake symbolically in the Lord’s Supper. We as Christians are charged with remembering his death, burial and resurrection as we celebrate communion.

The wine symbolizes the blood of Jesus; blood that was shed for the remission of our sins. The bread/wafer represents the body of Christ broken and wounded for our transgressions. When we receive and/ or administer communion to a congregation we

⁴ New International Version Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1998. Mark 10: 13-14 p.35.

⁵New International Version Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1998. Matthew 26:26-29 p. 23.

are asking them to reflect on their past and present actions. It is a time when the parishioners can collectively and individually ask for forgiveness of their sins and their failure to be the person that God has called them to be in this world.

Communion is also a time to receive the grace that God promised us. Dr. Joanne Terrell asks the question in her book entitled, *Is There Power in the Blood?* My answer to her would be, "Yes", "there is power in the blood".

When you receive the blood of Jesus through the Lord's Supper you are receiving God's spiritual power, and thanking God for all that God has done for you through Jesus Christ. This is also a time where everyone can get intimate with Jesus, telling Jesus all of our problems and shortcomings, knowing that our sins will be forgiven if we just repent. That is why I believe the partaking of sacraments can be both public and private. Communion should empower us to go beyond the walls of the church to embody Christ ministry in the community and in the world. In other words we too are called "... to preach good news to the oppressed... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners". (Is 61-1 NRSV)

Theological Influencers

The first person to influence me theologically has to have been my mother Patricia Shepard. My mother set the foundation for my theological background, by making sure that I knew who God was. Some nineteen years later, another layer of my theology was being added, by my father-in-law, the Rev. Dr. Millard F. Southern. It was he who introduced me to the teaching, preaching and life of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. Southern, a social justice minister, began to share the word of God with me from a justice point of view. He encouraged me where my mother left off, exploring the word of God from a different lens, a lens that allowed others to view me and me to view them from various angles. It was my father-in-law who instilled in me a saying that has assisted in keeping me grounded in the word of God and my calling: "It's not what a person says, but it's what a person does that counts". As I look back over my life I have indeed been blessed to study and learn from some of the greatest theologians of all

time. For example, Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., and the Rev. Dr. Ozzie Smith Jr. have greatly influenced my theological studies. It was Rev. Wright who watered the seed that God had planted some years back, Rev. Wright who gave me ministry opportunities and taught me to listen to God to hear what God was calling me to do. Rev. Wright taught me and countless others to not be ashamed of who we are because of where you are and not to forget where you came from. Rev. Ozzie Smith gave me an opportunity to explore and use the gifts that I have been blessed with, by allowing me to assist youth with educational goals and aiding those who are ill. Rev. Smith has mentored me during the past fourteen years through sermons and discussions. It was through his tutelage that I was introduced to the teachings of Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor. During my reading of Dr. Proctor's book *The Substance of Things Hoped For*, I began to identify with and accept the call that God had placed on my life. Each of these theologians mentioned have assisted in shaping my own personal theology as of today. During a particular period in my faith journey with seminary, in-care and now through the ordination process what they have taught me through their own books, lectures or personal consultations has been invaluable. During this period of my life a paradigm shift had begun, the puzzle seemed to get more complicated, more pieces were being added.

My Theology

Theology, what is that? Theology comes from the Greek words Theos (deity) and logos (discourse), having to do with the existence and nature of the divine. I believe in God and Jesus the Son of God. My theology is that of social and educational justice and it must be a part of who I am and what I stand for. This means that I must be willing to stand up for the less fortunate and to be the voice for the voiceless. I must reach back into my ancestral roots and take up the cross similar to the cross that Jesus took up and educate the less fortunate to the best of my abilities. I will work with people God has ordained me to work with. I will work alongside the people in the community where I work, where I live and those whom I come in contact with on a daily basis. Together we

will work through the injustices that prevail in our neighborhoods, and with the help of God, we will prevail and liberate the people of God.

I was pleased with the comments that Dorothy Solle said as it pertains to Theology and more specifically Black Theology. She stated: “The language of theology challenges social structures, because it is inseparable from the suffering community. Theology which does not articulate the suffering community, does not speak from it, think from it, feel from it, is *de facato* a theology of oppression”.⁶

In addition to Solle, Migliore was very candid about his opinion on the various tasks of theology and he pointed out that theology is a continued process.

Migliore stated that: “Christian theology has many tasks. This is evident both from a reading of the history of theology and from the wide variety of current understandings of its nature and task, some theologians today contend that the task of Christian theology is to provide a clear and comprehensive description of the Christian faith. Other theologians emphasize the importance of translating Christian faith into terms that are intelligible to the wider culture. For others theology is defined as broadly as thinking about important issues from the perspective of Christian faith. And still others insist that theology is reflection on the praxis of Christian faith within an oppressed community”.⁷

I feel that my theology is one where I will be evolving in the work of the Lord, continually. Taking the many tasks that God gives me and going into the fields to labor with the people, providing them with examples of God’s love in what I say and how I live daily. I must continue to be diligent in my studies, working with all individuals. It’s a time where you can commune with God and God’s proposed plans for your life of ministry and also a time where I must be able to extrapolate the real from the surreal; in addition it’s a time where the person and the cross meet up.

African Americans, people of color and persons whom society has labeled as the “have nots” have suffered at the hands of the oppressor for hundreds of years, but yet, they

⁶ Solle, Dorothy. Thinking about God. Maryknoll, NY: 1991. p.97.

⁷ Migilore, Daniel., Faith Seeking Understanding, Introduction to Christian Theology. Erdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids Mich. p. 132, 1991.

shall not be moved. This unmoving attitude and strength is where I find myself at the apex of a situation, where I am prayerfully and willingly doing the work that God has called me to do and that's to preach/teach the gospel to all people regardless of a particular theology. God has called me to preach/teach, in season and out of season. *I know God didn't call me to be just a mere mark on the bench, but someone God knew and who in turn knows God. With this knowledge, God provided me with the capability to leave an impressionable mark on the bench. I want my mark to be of good measure for someone else.*

What Ministry Is to Me

“Liberation is knowledge of self; it is a vocation to affirm who I am created to be. Furthermore, it is clear from divine revelation as witnessed in scripture that authentic liberation of self is attainable only in the context of an oppressed community in the struggle of freedom. Because God's freedom for humanity is the divine liberation of the oppressed from bondage, human freedom as response to God's gracious liberation is an act for our sisters and brothers who are oppressed. There can be no freedom unless the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, and justice is given for the poor”.⁸

I feel that part of my calling is to help educate women and girls who are challenged by society. It is my intention to get people, especially women of color, to understand that the oppression suffered by some of our sisters in the Biblical days does not have to be lived out today. It is important that when they hear a scripture being quoted in the Bible that it is not taken out of context in a way to demean or keep them in bondage. Such as women keep silent in the church which is being used against women even in our contemporary times. They must hear it from someone who knows and understand about the perils of not having material things, but who knows how to obtain spiritual things, which are of God. Such as the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting and meditation. They should have someone they can learn to trust and grow with them. Someone who is neither afraid nor ashamed to go into the trenches with them, I must

⁸ Cone E. James. God of the Oppressed. Orbis Books; Mary Knoll New York. 1997. p134.

be willing to share with them the possibilities that are available to them. In order for a people to be free, their mind must be working in conjunction with their body. We serve a liberating forgiving God who has paved the way for countless people who have been oppressed and downtrodden by individuals that have taken the Bible out of context and used it for their own kingdom building. No, I know I can't do this alone and I also recognize that God didn't call me to be a super saint or super woman. Ministering to others through shared ministry, includes going into the communities outside of the walls of the church and using the gifts and talents that God has given me.

Statement of Faith

The United Church of Christ Statement of Faith exemplifies what it means to be a servant and follower of Christ. I believe we must begin with the question; what is faith? "Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen".⁹ The United Church of Christ had the vision and fortitude to believe and understand the power of God and in its Statement of Faith embodies the work that we as servant leaders should carry out in our everyday lives. As I read the words I began to envision how life would have been without my accepting Jesus as my personal savior; my life would be quite different. But since I did accept Jesus as my personal savior and I promised to devote myself to him by accepting my call to ministry, the words have a special meaning to me.

The United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, like the Bible, does not exclude individuals based upon their ethnicity, and/or gender. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"¹⁰.

⁹New International Version Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1998. Hebrews 11:1 p175.

¹⁰New International Version Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1998. Galatians 3:28 p.

<p>We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to his deeds we testify:</p> <p>He calls the worlds into being, creates man in his own image and sets before him the ways of life and death.</p> <p>He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin. He judges' men and nations by his righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.</p> <p>He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.</p> <p>He calls us into his church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be his servants in the service of men, 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.</p> <p>He promises to all who trust him forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, his presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life</p>	<p>I believe and know that God is indeed the Father of my Jesus. I can testify to God's existence because of what God has done in my life. .</p> <p>Through my ancestral lineage I see the resemblance of God. The skin, hair and physique of all whom I come in contact on a daily basis are a constant reminder of how God created all of us differently, but in God's image. In creating us, God also gave us the Ten Commandments as a way of living our lives. In these commandments God shows us how we can be saved and live the life God promised us we would have.</p> <p>God judges us for what we say, how we act and how we treat our fellow brothers and sisters. As a called servant of God, I must remember in my daily prayers to ask God to guide my tongue and remember that it's not my will but God's will that must be done.</p> <p>God gave us a present called the Holy Spirit. This gift was freely given and it is intended for us to pass on.(because to whom much has been given much is required , Luke 12:28) In the passing on we are ordained to establish and partner with people of faith regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, or sexual orientation.</p> <p>What is the cost of serving God? When we are called by God to serve and not be served, we become agents of change. Our acceptance of the cost is nothing compared to the price that Jesus paid on Calvary for all of us. So, therefore as agents it is our sworn duty to carry out the word of God in season and out of season, to those we like and those we may not care for, sharing God's sacraments with them and also proclaiming the gospel of Jesus to them.</p> <p>In the end God promised to be with us, once we asked for forgiveness of our sins. God will never leave us nor forsake us. The United Church of Christ Statement of</p>
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<p>in his kingdom which has no end.</p> <p>Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him.</p> <p>Amen.</p>	<p>Faith gives hope to those who are seeking salvation. It combines the working and teaching of God's words in a manner that is non-threatening and non-judgmental to all those who are striving to become believers and disciples.</p>
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United Church of Christ History and Polity

The United Church of Christ is unique in many ways. Its uniqueness is due partially to how the denomination came about some fifty-two years ago. The UCC came about at a time when the civil rights of humans were being violated, when particular ethnic groups were considered less than their fellow brothers and when white was considered right. But, God being God had other plans, another piece of the puzzle. In 1931 two very different churches merged, the Congregationalist and the Christian. Congregationalists were not tolerant of individuals who were highly steeped in their religion. On the other hand the Christian church was considered to be excessive in their biblical beliefs. The Evangelical and Reformed merger happened in 1934 when two German immigrant groups came together as one. In 1957 the United Church of Christ was formed; this formation came as a result of individuals recognizing that God was indeed the tie that binds. These were Christian men and women of God who knew and understood the larger view of the puzzle that God was forming. This great formation came into fruition when four separate, but equal denominations, Evangelical & Reformed church and the Congregational & Christian Churches decided after much praying and consulting with God and one another to become one. Each denomination in their own right had contributed to the communities and were agents in doing the work of God, but something was missing. They believed that in order to be free all of God's people must be free, not just the privileged ones. The Reformed were liberal in their thinking, progressive in their actions and the Congregational Christians were of the same spirit. But something was missing. Instead of them all fighting for the same injustices

separately, they along with their leaders at the time decided to join forces. With this joining of four to become one, the word of God was going to be strengthened in all that was going to be said and done. This union crossed ethnic and social economic lines, and people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds could now worship together for a common good. The progressive whites who knew and understood that when God created men and women of various shades it was not for one to be more superior than the next one; God intended for us all to be equal. This union also produced scholars of the Bible, individuals who were strong in their intellectual beliefs as well as their faith belief. This birth of the UCC brought liberalism, socialism and a great sense of spiritualism. The heart of the UCC since conception has been in the community amongst the people and it has not changed from that first day. Due to its commitment, diligence and proven track record of not forgetting any one, being as Howard Thurman says “for the persons whose backs are against the wall,” the UCC is a large piece of the puzzle that God has created for God’s people. I am proud to say that I have been a member of the United Church of Christ for the past twenty-five years and I am duly proud to have been called by God to preach the gospel within the United Church of Christ. The United Church of Christ represents for me all that I believe God has called us to be including never putting a period where God has placed a comma.

Why UCC?

The United Church of Christ has developed a distinctive set of values and features which separates them from some of the other Christian denominations. This is due primarily to their willingness to listen to the voice of God, rather than to the powers that be, and to include people from all walks of the earth, Jews, Gentiles, Blacks, Whites, Latinos, heterosexuals, gays, lesbians, bi-sexual and transgendered, in the belief that we all are created in the image and likeness of God. You don’t have to belong to a particular ethnic group, your socio-economic background does not count, you can have a degree or no degree, and all are welcomed into the United Church of Christ. Because of the UCC’s intentional determination to be a denomination for all people, their inclusiveness,

social activism and their stance for justice are the reasons I want to be ordained as a minister of the gospel within the United Church of Christ

My Call

Currently I am the Minister of Education at Covenant United Church of Christ, where Rev. Dr. Ozzie Smith is the Senior Pastor. For the past seven years, I have had the honor of guiding the post secondary education for many of the teens and young adults at Covenant. I have initiated programs that have been beneficial to school age children ranging in age from five to twenty-three. Some of the programs have included week day and Saturday tutoring, ACT/SAT prep, assessment counseling, financial aid assistance and scholarship search. Many of the high school seniors have had the opportunity of being offered hundreds of thousands of dollars for academic scholarships to attend colleges and universities. This position has been a blessing to me; it has enabled me to share my passion of education with the families of the church and community. Currently I am overseeing a group of teens who have been called to ministry. They are being offered a safe place to experience what God has for them, while they explore and discern their individual calls to ministry. This project has led to my broadening the educational spectrum at CUCC. Covenant Church, the community and surrounding high schools have come together to fight collectively for educational rights for all students within the community. This call will further enable me to continue working with the church, community and families in preparing students to become better students academically as well as socially and spiritually. Ordained ministry will give me an opportunity to administer the sacraments of Jesus Christ within the walls of the church as well as outside of church during hospital and home visitations. I see my call as the education/visitation minister as another piece of the great puzzle that God is calling me into and my heart and soul, says "yes".

