

THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS OUR SONG

ORDINATION PAPER OF MICHAEL D. JACOBS

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THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS OUR SONG

Family History

My journey began on February 17, 1955, as the eldest of three siblings, born to the union of Betty and Isom Jacobs Jr. I was born, raised and have spent the majority of my life, living on the South side or South suburbs in the Chicago area.

My nuclear family is extremely important to me. My parents worked hard to provide for us. My mother returned to school in 1965, completed her bachelor's degree and later her master's. I have always admired my father for supporting my mother's desire to go back to school. That for me was a significant role model example. My father was confident enough in himself as a man to not be threatened by his wife's pursuit of an education. It was a double celebration in June 1968 as my mother received her bachelor's degree from Chicago State University and five days later I graduated from 8th grade.

My two brothers and I had a ball when we were children. We always come together when we need each other. My brothers and I would have a rollicking time using our imaginations to invent games and other ways to entertain ourselves. We learned to share because for most of our childhood we shared one bedroom. I did not get my own room until my parents bought their home in 1971, so it was not until my senior year of high school that I was able to have my own space (an important change as it happened prior to going away to college). My family life was foundational in my understanding of what it means to be family but we were not a regular church going family.

Religious Development

My mother is the primary person responsible for teaching me about God, Jesus and Christianity early on. I have a two volume set called *The Bible: in Stories and Pictures* that my

mother gave me when I was a very small boy. The first volume is the Old Testament and the second volume is the New Testament. She used to read to me from that Bible until I was able to read myself. I remember going to Liberty Baptist Church with my mother as a child. Liberty had junior church in the lower level, while the adults worshipped in the sanctuary. My father was never much of a “church” guy even though he was made to go to church as a young man growing up. My mother was raised in Liberty Baptist Church. What I remember most about Liberty was attending Vacation Bible School some summers.

However I think my real awakening to Christianity happened when I began attending Sunday School at Lilydale Baptist Church. The enjoyable thing about going to Lilydale was that one of my elementary school classmates, Lloyd Phifer, and his family were members of the church. I thought Lloyd was cool and therefore if Lloyd was going to church then church must be cool. One of my neighbors, Mrs. McCullough, was also a member of Lilydale Baptist Church and Mrs. McCullough was determined to get me “saved.” Her husband was an associate minister at the church. I would run errands for Mrs. McCullough and she would talk to me about God while writing out the list of things she wanted me to get from the store. When I was twelve years old during spring vacation from school Mrs. McCullough took me to a revival at the church. There was one particular moment at the service when the preacher asked the congregation if they believed in Jesus Christ. I raised my hand, but Mrs. McCullough admonished me, saying “you are a sinner.” I remember feeling bad when she said that to me because it was not like I had never been exposed to Jesus. I would attend church sporadically at best during the next few years.

In the fall of 1972 after graduating from high school, I went away to a small liberal arts college near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Carroll College at the time was affiliated with the

Presbyterian Church and each student was required to take an introductory religion class. That class introduced me to the Dead Sea Scrolls. I was not the best student back then so in a feeble attempt to cover-up my lack of preparation for the final exam I wrote in my blue book, “this class has made me become an atheist.”

Oddly enough during this time one of my high school buddies, my best friend Mike Brown, began writing to me about his involvement at Trinity United Church of Christ with the Youth Fellowship group. He also was a member of a choir called the Trinity Choral Ensemble which was under the direction of a talented young man named Jeffrey Radford. I read Mike’s letters in amazement that he was even doing something like that. When I came home for the summer after that freshman year, Mike and the members of the youth fellowship were doing a play called “The Return of Ham.” They went various places around the city to perform and I had fun hanging out with the group at those performances.

It was a year later that my religious development would undergo a dramatic shift in a positive direction. I came home from school for good and began to hang out with Mike, Jeffrey and some of the other guys from the choir. I began to go to the singing engagements the choir had in various settings around the city and I began attending church. In the early part of 1975, Jeffrey asked me if I would accompany the choir on some Earth Wind and Fire songs that they were going to sing at their annual spring concert in April. I played the clarinet and Jeff had heard me play. It was through Jeff’s invitation, coming to the rehearsals and being around people my age and younger that were singing about God, Christ and salvation that impacted my life. The pastor, a man in his early thirties, preached messages that were relevant and he interacted with the young people in the choir and had fun with them. My first encounter with this man, Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. happened as I was standing in the back of the sanctuary

with Mike Brown after he had gotten out of choir rehearsal. I was wearing my hat inside the church which I should have known was not proper. Rev. Wright did not say a word to me, but just took my hat off, handed it to me and kept walking. Finally after playing with the choir at their concert, I walked the aisle at church one Sunday and on the first Sunday in May 1975, I got the right hand of fellowship and became a member of Trinity United Church of Christ. I joined the choir and we traveled not only in the Chicago area but to other areas of the country as well. It was a very formative experience for me on one hand but on the other hand the part that was missing was developing a personal relationship with Christ.

All during my time in the choir I continued a habit that had begun in college and that was my use of marijuana and alcohol. I began smoking the drug as a freshman in college and would continue abusing my body with marijuana, alcohol and finally cocaine until January 26, 1991. That period of my life was a time of challenge and change, a period I will address momentarily. In the summer of 1976, after a whirlwind year and a half involvement with the choir, I abruptly took a leave of absence and did not come back to the choir or church as a faithful member for twelve years. I did stay connected however with various members of the church as we grew up, married, had children, some of us divorced and some of us even died.

During that period of time I was introduced to the most important human being in my life, my wife Carole. My friend Mike Brown not only gets credit for introducing me to church but he also introduced me to a young woman that attended Chicago State University with him, Carole Martin. Carole and Mike had become friends while she was dating another friend of his who also attended Trinity. That relationship did not work out and finally the two of us realized with Mike's help that perhaps we were suited for each other. We started dating in January of

1975 and in May of 1979 we were married and have been each other's best friend and confidants since.

It was actually a series of deaths that brought me back to church. In 1987 one of our former choir mates died, Mike and his wife Cheryl had a child that was born prematurely who died, and a man that had been a father figure to our choir died early the next year. That, coupled with a documentary that I had seen earlier in the year 1987 about Trinity on PBS, made me realize that Trinity was a missing part of my life. I told Carole that we needed to come back to church for more than just funerals. So we went back to church in the early part of 1988. Yet I was still using drugs and alcohol and that was the last piece of the puzzle in terms of getting my relationship with God right.

Jesus Christ my Savior

The evening of January 26, 1991 was when my life would be changed forever. That night I went to a cousin's apartment and we went out and purchased some cocaine. I gave him half of the amount and took the rest home. Carole and our niece Vera, for whom we were guardians at the time, were on a Girl Scout trip so no one was home but me. A funny thing happened to me however, the cocaine and the gin that I bought to go with it did nothing for me. It did not feel good, taste good or give me any of the results that it used to give me. I had tried to stay clean and sober several times before that but this time I was deeply convicted and it was Jesus that helped me through. On one occasion before, I was driving home and there was a presence that I cannot explain but I knew in my heart, in the depths of my spirit, that it was Jesus. That encounter enabled me to go home and confess to my wife the depths of my substance abuse problem. She was aware of it, but this was the first time that I shared with her how bad things had gotten. That divine presence is what I felt again that week after my

transformation experience. Daily I began to work on my prayer life by praying and talking with God no less than three times a day. I began taking bible study classes at our church.

Subsequently at the end of 1992 with poking and prodding from some of the men I knew in the church, I began training to become a deacon.

Answering the Call

I finally acknowledged the call on my life when I took the deacon walk because Dr. Wright had talked to me about being a minister in 1976. I told him that I did not know what I wanted to do with my life and he asked me if I had considered the ministry. I did not pray about what he asked me. I did talk to my mother and finally gave him a nonchalant negative response.

In the fall of 1995 I entered McCormick Theological Seminary as a special student and in June 2001 having made the transition from special student to Master of Divinity candidate I was proud to walk the aisle and receive my degree. I have been a full-time parish minister since 1997 and have benefited from the practical learning I have experienced on the job. I have learned that I have gifts for ministry beyond my comfort zone. While I primarily serve as a youth minister, I also provide ministry to families, married couples, the elderly and bereaved members. I have been stretched beyond what I thought I wanted to do in ministry and have actually enjoyed allowing God to push me beyond my self-imposed limitations.

Clinical Pastoral Education

Rush University's Department of Religion, Health and Human Values became a home away from home for me from March 17, 2008 until May 30, 2008 as I took my first unit of CPE. I was in a group that began with six people, four Unitarian Universalists, myself and one Catholic Religious, who left our group after the first three weeks because his religious order dismissed him. It was a great learning experience. My learning covenant was based on three

goals, one spiritual, one professional and one personal. First, my spiritual goal was to broaden myself spiritually. The hospital setting offered me the opportunity to learn and grow as I met persons of different denominational backgrounds and other faiths. It helped me to stretch myself beyond my comfort zone and also to strengthen my own theological grounding. I was able to share my faith in ways that was not diminishing to others whose spirituality was different. I learned to meet people where we were similar and to not be concerned about our differences except to not offend them.

Second, my professional goal involved intergenerational ministry. I have had a broad range of experiences in the ministry work that I have been involved in as a staff member at Trinity UCC. I have officiated an average of 8 -10 funerals per year since 1998, facilitated premarital classes, led workshops at men's conferences, married couples' conferences and provided pastoral care and counseling for couples, individuals and families. This goal was chosen to continue to build on that skill set and to help me to be seen as a holistic minister and not just a youth pastor.

Third, my personal goal had to do with my annoying tendency to procrastinate. I see this goal as an important part of self-care because of having sabotaged myself in completing important tasks by procrastinating. I was able to learn in some of the group work we did why I tend to procrastinate. One of our group work exercises is called Enneagrams which is another tool used to determine personality types. In this particular test, I was able to learn that it is a part of my personality type to put my own needs aside. That of course emphasizes the need to be very intentional about exercising good self-care habits.

Finally, perhaps the most significant learning was the practical application of ministry in a hospital setting where the relationships unlike parish ministry are transient. I worked with the

family of an end stage Alzheimer's patient for a couple of weeks on my unit. I developed a strong rapport with one of the patient's daughters as she was there visiting with her father on a daily basis. I learned that even in a short time frame God can use you to help someone. She was able to share stories with me about her childhood as her dad lay unconscious in his hospital bed. She told me what a great dad he had been. Just by listening to her I was able to help her through a very difficult time and that made a lasting impression on me.

Serving in the UCC

Obviously being a member of a UCC church for my entire adult life has been the denominational context that I know the most about. I was first exposed to the larger UCC church via a trip with the Trinity Choral Ensemble to sing at a couple of General Synod events in Minneapolis in 1975. My primary role model for being a pastor, preacher and teacher, Pastor Wright did a great job of educating us about national UCC issues and one of those issues was the *Wilmington Ten* which included Ben Chavis now known as Ben Chavis Muhammad. He talked about the case where nine African-American males and one white woman had been tried and convicted on charges of arson and conspiracy to fire upon firemen and police officers during riots in downtown Wilmington, N.C.¹ The issue was an important one for me as a young African-American male who had attended a predominantly white college after having grown up in a predominantly African-American community. I had experienced the uncomfortable feeling that I was being judged not by who I was but by what I looked like. The *Wilmington Ten* case made me realize that the struggle for civil rights was still very much alive.

¹ "North Carolina Collection – This Month in North Carolina History – The Wilmington Ten," www.lib.unc.edu pgs. 1 – 2 cited sources Wayne King, "The Case Against the Wilmington Ten." *New York Times Magazine*, 3 December Wayne Grimsley, *James B. Hunt: A North Carolina Progressive*. Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & C Larry Reni Thomas, *The True Story Behind the Wilmington Ten*. Hampton, VA : U.B. & U. S. Communications Systems, 1993

The history of the UCC with the Abolitionist/anti-slavery movement, the Underground Railroad and the Amistad Incident of 1839 has great interest for me as a former history major. I love that part of the history of this denomination because it shows what is possible when the church uses its collective witness to try and affect change that will impact the lives of God's people. I also recognize that because of the diversity within this denomination not every issue is going to be looked at with the same level of importance by all of us. I attended an Illinois Conference event some years ago along with other adults and some youth from my church and there was a workshop entitled "Racism and the Holy Spirit." Well to our chagrin we were the only persons that showed up and so our facilitators, a white male and a black male, led us in a discussion around the topic. It was at that time that I realized that the problem of dealing with race was not going to change if we can never come to the table together and try to work through our issues. We all tend to retreat to our own areas of comfort and safety. It is my hope that I can be a positive change agent within our denomination when it comes to matters of race. I am willing to help us work through learning to respect our differences and embrace our similarities.

UCC Statement of Faith

Each year as I watch the confirmation students at our church struggle to learn the UCC Statement of Faith, I reflect back on my own struggle to learn it as a deacon-in-training at our church years ago. This reflection has afforded me an opportunity to look at what is a beautiful statement about the theology of this denomination as we affirm our belief in our Creator and what that entails for us as believers.

I believe that God has indeed saved me from aimlessness and sin. I am not sinless, but I do sin less. I see Jesus as my guide and model for living for he was a man who came to serve and not be served. I accept the cost and joy of discipleship as a servant of God and God's people. I also

know that the power that I have been given by Christ is to be Christ's witness to the entire world. Nowhere in this statement is there anything that promises an easy journey yet in this era much popular preaching tends to take us in the direction of equating the blessings of God with material wealth, excellent health and no problems whatsoever. I embrace our Statement of Faith as one that I hope to mirror in my service to God and the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Sacraments

Annually I present the Sacraments of the Protestant Church to our confirmation students. I start with the definition of sacrament; a Christian Rite (ceremonial act or action) ordained by Christ – which symbolizes something sacred – or is a sign that points to a spiritual reality.² I briefly tell them the difference between the Catholic and Protestant churches when it comes to the sacraments. The UCC where churches are autonomous have more than one way to administer the sacraments. Some churches baptize by sprinkling, while others immerse baptismal candidates. Some churches welcome all to the sacrament of Holy Communion, while others only invite baptized believers. We are united and uniting and respectful of the traditions in each congregation.

Baptism

I believe that there are three truths being symbolized in baptism and also that baptism can be done by sprinkling or immersion. The three truths being symbolized in baptism are (1) Jesus' death, which is symbolized by kneeling or standing in the water (2) Jesus' burial, which is symbolized by the sprinkling of water or laying back into the water and (3) Jesus' resurrection, which is symbolized by standing up or rising back up out of the water. Those who have been baptized have separated themselves from other religious faiths by claiming Jesus Christ as their personal savior. That is how one becomes a member of Christ's church. That is what we all

² Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Tenth Edition, 1996 p.1029

have in common. We get baptized to symbolize the suffering of the head of the church on our behalf, which reminds us that we are accepting the cost and joy of discipleship. John E. Burkhart puts it this way in his book "Worship." "Baptizing, therefore is a *welcome through water*, it is expressed by the assembly whenever those whom the Lord is saving are welcomed into the assembly."³ Those being baptized are being brought into an assembly of people that is already in existence, it is our rite of passage into Christ's Church. The Gospel according to Matthew states that Christ commanded the disciples in Matt. 28:19 to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." I believe that the church of Jesus Christ is still charged with making disciples and not just members so that we as the Apostle Paul suggests can continue to be the body of Christ called church. Whether we are baptizing infants, children or adults it is the renewing of the Church of Christ that is important in the sacrament of baptism.

I think that it is important in churches where infants are baptized that there be a very strong Confirmation program which helps link the promises made on behalf of the child by their parents and guardians at baptism to the child's own faith walk. Like in Luke 2 when Jesus was found in the temple at the age of twelve, listening to the teachers, asking questions and showing his understanding, he actually affirmed his faith when his parents asked him, "Son why have you treated us this way? Your father and I have been searching for you." He responded, "Why were you searching for me? "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:46 – 49) Jesus had obviously grown up in a house where he was taught the importance of his relationship with God and was able to demonstrate that with those teachers in the temple court and I believe every child should have an opportunity to affirm/confirm their faith at some point in their journey as someone who has been baptized.

³ John Burkhart, "Worship," Pg. 132, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1982

Holy Communion

Some of my wife's family is Catholic and used to live in Decatur, IL. We spent two Christmas seasons visiting the family and attended mass with them at their church and I experienced exclusion from being able to participate in Holy Communion. I was wrestling with what it would be like to participate when I read in the worship bulletin how they did not allow non-members to receive communion. It struck me that something that we are to do in remembrance of Jesus was a dividing point in this place of worship. This is the same Jesus who always pushed the boundaries of who should be included in God's kingdom. In Luke 24:30-31 we see that it is in the breaking of the bread that the two followers of Christ are finally able to recognize the risen Jesus. I know many churches have rules about who can take communion but what would happen if we looked at communion as an opportunity for eyes to be opened to see Jesus and for all to recognize the risen Christ.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion for me is perhaps when I reflect the most on just how far short of the Glory of God I fall. It is a humbling moment in the service of worship when I think about how Jesus knew what lay ahead and was preparing the disciples to pass on to us this teaching that we practice to this day. It is also humbling to realize that Christ did this for you and did it for me. Again John E. Burkhardt helps me from his book on worship, "Eating and drinking together in recognition of Jesus is the basic act of acknowledgement by Christians of what God has done, is doing and will do through him (*Christ*)."⁴

The accounts of the institution of the Holy Communion found in Matthew, Mark and Luke do not seem to have Jesus making any requirements regarding who should participate, so perhaps it is the account written by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 11:23-34 which adds the instruction in verse 29, "For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink

⁴ Ibid, pg. 92

judgment against themselves” that has caused us to perhaps treat Holy Communion as something that only those who have met certain requirements can receive. All I am simply trying to say is that if someone desires communion and expresses a desire to be at the table and do this in remembrance of Christ then perhaps I as a servant of Christ do not have the right to deny that request.

The Bible

“Sola Scriptura” is a Latin phrase that I learned early during my time in seminary. It means simply “by scripture alone.” It is an important statement to those of us in the protestant church, for we need to look at the Bible itself to unravel some of the ways it has been used by taking scripture out of context. The Bible has been used to justify chattel slavery, keep women out of significant roles in the church and to promote anti-Semitism. The Bible has also inspired slave insurrections and the abolitionist movement regarding those held in chattel slavery.

Additionally it has been used to teach us about the significant role of women not only in the early Christian church but throughout the scriptures and to help us recognize that the Jesus we follow was Jewish.

Those three issues alone show the danger in what can happen if we blindly use scripture without understanding the context and content of what is written and why it is written. The Bible is not a science book or a history book, but rather a book of faith. It is a book that reveals who God is and how God has acted in God’s created world throughout the faith stories contained within the pages of the Book of Books we call the Bible. When used with that understanding it can be a how-to manual for a lifetime relationship with our God and with all of God’s children. I as one seeking to be ordained as a preacher, teacher and pastor in the United Church of Christ recognize

the importance of using the Bible as a way to liberate and empower God's people and not use it as a tool to oppress anyone who looks or thinks differently than I.

The Church

“United and Uniting,” those words echo in my head from my quarter in the UCC polity class taught by the Rev. Elizabeth “Betsy” Bueschel, the long term volunteer in-care student advisor for the Chicago Metropolitan Association and the primary professor for the class. That is how Betsy described the process that this denomination has followed since 1957 when the merger of the Christian Congregational Churches and the Evangelical Reformed churches took place and the entity called the United Church of Christ was born. Our denomination basically is a result of the desire for Christian unity amongst American Protestant denominations that was fostered during the early to mid twentieth century. Part of a quote from the “The Christian Century” in response to the formation of the UCC that Louis H. Gunnemann includes in his book, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ perhaps sheds some light on the significance of our merger in 1957. “The radical significance of the event in Cleveland (the birth of the UCC, June 25, 1957) was that in it American Protestantism turned a corner. A trend that had run in one direction for 300 years was reversed.”⁵

The Apostle Paul defined the church in one of his letters to the church in Corinth “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1Cor. 12:27 NRSV) He then goes on to describe the various roles in the church and how each of us play a different part in fulfilling the purposes of Christ's church based on the gifts that God has given each of us individually. He provides further understanding in what we call chapter 13 by saying that if we do not do what we do in the church in a spirit of love, all that we do is like a “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

⁵ *The Christian Century*, July 17, 1957, p. 863

(1 Cor. 13:1b) That is what perhaps was missing in the 300 years of struggle since the Protestant Reformation took place.

The church for the African-American community has always been a prominent part of our struggle for freedom; equality and the place where many of us were nurtured and encouraged to do our best. One of my preaching professors and mentors, Dr. Yvonne Delk, shared her experience of growing up in Macedonia Christian Church in Norfolk, Virginia, in a ten point paper entitled “The Church as a Safe Space.” Dr. Delk described her home church as a safe haven away from the sometimes hostile environment of a southern city where Jim Crow laws were the rule of the day. It was the African-American church that produced the prophetic voice of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and subsequently the Civil Rights movement. Often for those of us in the African American community, the church was one of the only organizations or businesses that we controlled and owned in our communities.

The church for me is the place where I have found family outside of my biological family and forged relationships with persons from diverse backgrounds, in my local church, in our cluster, in our association, our conference and our denomination nationally. My involvement in the body of Christ has reinforced for me something that Dr. Jeremiah Wright has always taught and that is different does not mean deficient and that, for me is the beauty of being involved beyond the walls of my local church. The ability to work with people of all kinds in fulfilling the work of the church is what I feel I bring to the table, where we may not always agree but we can disagree without being disagreeable.

Boundaries and Ethics

I have worked as a pastor to youth and children since 1997 in a mega-church setting where associate pastors in a multiple staff setting, develop similar relationships with congregants as a single pastor in a small church setting. There are numerous issues that come up that test one's ability to maintain a professional relationship especially if one is not making sure that they are engaged in self-care. Counseling relationships, mentoring young men and women, working with ministry partners all can have boundaries that get crossed intentionally or unintentionally.

The most recent version of boundary training offered by CMA has helped with that aspect of managing boundaries and ethics. This round of training has helped by making it clear that there is a lot of gray area when looking at boundaries. The key thing that was pointed out for me is that one should know when a boundary has been crossed and if it was intentional to just be aware of it and the subsequent results that can occur. I felt so strongly about this training that I received permission from *Sacred Trust* and created a boundary training workshop using their materials for our youth ministry workers as a part of the Trinity United Church of Christ Child Protection Policy and training.

We teach volunteers that the role of youth pastor/youth ministry worker causes young people to gravitate towards us with their questions, their problems and their trust. That relationship by its very nature sometimes places us in the position of being the recipient of information that is sensitive and needs to be handled with care. Counseling relationships also should be managed very carefully because members of a church are generally counting on us as clergy persons to provide spiritual guidance. That can sometimes confuse those being helped and they may mistake your caring nature as something more than that.

Care for the Care-giver

I have learned through the years of working in parish ministry the dangers of not practicing good self care habits by talking with and observing others who do practice good self care. One of the training workshops we have for our youth ministry volunteers is on Self-Care and Preventing Burnout. I am intentional about taking vacations with my wife and family. I also have learned how to say no when it is not in my best interests to schedule something outside of my normal responsibilities.

I take my role as a church leader seriously and recognize the damage that can be caused when a minister violates ethics and crosses a boundary that damages not only persons but the church of Jesus Christ. Too often we in the church are our own worst enemies in terms of how persons outside of our faith view Christianity. We too often talk the talk but are not able to walk the walk, hence the many instances of ministers found in compromising situations that shed a bad light on the church. We as our boundary training suggests have a “Sacred Trust” when it comes to our roles as preachers, teachers and leaders in the body of Christ.

Ordination Vows

On the day of my ordination service I will be called upon to answer “I am” to the vows in the UCC Book of Worship. “Before God and this congregation, am I persuaded that God has called me to be an ordained minister of the church of Jesus Christ, and am I ready with the help of God to enter this ministry and to serve faithfully in it?” That is a question that I ponder daily along with the other parts of the vows which talk about hearing the word of God in the scriptures of the Old and New testaments, accepting the word of God as the rule of Christian faith and practice, promising to be diligent in the private practice of my faith, and handling the public duties of my office. That pondering for me is a very important part of how I have learned to

serve in the Church of Jesus Christ. Daily I ask God for God's power, peace and presence to carry me through each day. I think there is no way to get through serving God's people without that daily reflection. I pray before each counseling session privately, ask God for the presence of the Holy Spirit in meetings and all aspects of our work in the church. I think that the ordination vows should be something that I incorporate into the private practice of my faith in order that I indeed can live out God's call on my life and fulfill what it means to accept the faith and order of the United Church of Christ, administer the sacraments and rites of the church, exercise pastoral care and leadership while reaching out to all who are in Christ to show Christian love to people of all faiths or no faith. "For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16) I ask to be ordained, not so that I can be involved in ministry work, because I already have been doing ministry work in the UCC where we believe in the priesthood of all believers. I say ordain me so that I can administer the sacraments in any setting, unite couples in marriage, preach the gospel, teach the gospel and serve the church of Jesus Christ and expand my God-given duties to serve God's people. I feel that God has indeed called me to ordained ministry and has provided me with the gifts needed to fulfill God's purposes for me in ordained ministry.

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