ORDINATION PAPER

Lisa Kopanski Harmon | January 2020

It’s a call. It’s a practice. It’s remembering who we are in soulful, joyful belonging. I am called as Minister of Healing and Transformation of beloved community.

Meeting Jesus for the First Time

I’ve carried a spiritual call in my heart since the early 70’s or at least that’s when I first became aware of it, when I attended St. Gregory the Great, a Catholic school in, Virginia Beach, Virginia. I was in the second grade.

I heard the voice and felt the vibration of the God in my heart that year at St. Gregory the Great.

My teacher was Sister Anne, a gracious, kind, young nun, whose smile I’ve never forgotten; it was upside-down, or so it seemed. The corners of her
mouth did not curl up when she smiled, but rather, turned down. She smiled with her whole face, and her whole heart came forward, wrapping my classmates and me in warmth and light.

That year, in addition to math, English, science and art, we took religious studies. I had piano lessons in the convent with Sister Estelle and played in the courtyard. I wore shorts under my plaid skirt, which I smuggled into my book bag, unbeknownst to my mother, so I could rough and tumble at recess. I had a crush on Paul Bieber, a young boy in my class with a bowl-cut. Lunch was always set up in the hall outside the chapel. We attended mass every Wednesday morning, and I didn’t mind wearing the little white round veil on top of my head. I kind of liked it, in fact. It felt holy.

The church was big and cold - the altar, beautiful. The stations of the cross were carved in stone, mounted on the walls, and ran parallel to the two rows of expansive, wooden pews. I was captivated by the stations of the cross and chose to illustrate them for one of my assignments in class. I remember my mom helped me draw Pontius Pilate, and we made a book held together with yarn. In studying with my mother and spending time on each station, I felt the doors of my heart open to feel great compassion. A first brush, that I remember, with suffering, I felt empathy. This would be the first time that I met Jesus, the man of Nazareth. That experience would shape who I am today.

Another experience that left an impression on me was the ‘washing of the feet’, as told in John 13: 1-7, and the loving humility and servanthood Jesus displayed toward his disciples. My 2nd grade mind understood the larger lesson here and I decided for my whole life long that I wanted to wash the feet of those who might suffer and whom others thought unworthy or unwelcome. I wanted to serve the world and her people, be a source of healing, and, at that age, wanted to be a nun.

I imagine that it is not uncommon for young girls (and young boys) who go to Catholic school to think of a life of service within the church, at least in the formative years. I was not unlike them, but the call never left my heart and mind; embedded, it just stayed. I thought that people like me did not get called like that.

Still, as I grew, I relied on my earliest understanding of the teachings of Christ to navigate through difficult times that would come.
When the country was experiencing the growing pangs of becoming a more just society through desegregation of our schools in the 70’s, I was able in my youth to resist the bigotry and hatred that surrounded me in the midst of racial tension. Could we be united as a people as God calls us to be?

I was bussed to a school far from my neighborhood to the southside of Norfolk, Virginia, and I would experience what it meant to be a minority, during the day at school. I also experienced the confusion and angst that played out in the behavior of us all as children, living out the consequences of separateness and racial inequality, and the attempt at systemic reform away from policies of segregation. It was an important, difficult exercise with riots and violence that were a part of our everyday life. It was a difficult, beautiful test with (some) gains that showed who we can be on the other side of struggle - liberated, integrated, united.

In my early teens my parents, having left the Catholic Church, would drop me off at church on Sunday mornings, and pick me up afterwards. I was the only member of my family of 6 that attended. Curious, I also attended other churches, with friends when we had sleepovers, attended an evangelical Wednesday night church group during high school for the community it offered, and I read the New Testament when I was a sophomore in high school, but lacked guidance and critical lens. I grew uncomfortable with those traditions whose myopic views and narrow interpretations of the Gospel marginalized women, people of color, the LGBTQI community, and invalidated indigenous traditions. I began to move away from church but remained spiritual and devoted to Creator God.

My un-ripened faith girded me through tumultuous teenage years and trauma. I was able to have a compassionate response to my father’s PTSD, the stronghold of his experience in a dysfunctional family and remnants of his experience in the Vietnam War. His struggle impacted my family greatly.

As I matured, I began thinking of a life in ministry but could not see a path forward in a world that did not seem to value or affirm this aspiration, and in a tradition that did not acknowledge or empower women in leadership. I moved away from the Catholic tradition.
I would eventually seek outlets for my call and my gifts like volunteering, immersing myself in international issues through my university studies and Model United Nations, where I would eventually be chosen as Executive Producer of 3 nationwide teleconferences geared toward youth/teens on issues before the United Nations (UN) like apartheid, nuclear disarmament and population issues.

I would travel from Norfolk, Virginia to the UN to meet with Ambassadors and diplomats, to work in the UN archives, and provide content, voice-overs and moderate the teleconferences, aired on public television. It was during this time that I knew that my life’s work would intersect my faith, my desire to be a healing presence in the world, advocate for justice, and that it would be found in diverse cultures and would find expression in forming and celebrating community.

Where have you been all my life?

In 2013, I attended Billings First Congregational Church, curious, as I watched this urban church exert itself in issues like the Non-Discrimination Ordinance, homelessness, Native American support and accompaniment, food and social justice. I watched and admired the dynamic leadership of a new Pastor, Reverend Mike Mulberry, who was reaching out, crossing lines, and standing firm against injustice.

I began studying about the United Church of Christ (UCC). I felt spiritually aligned with the practices and the expression of faith at Billings First Congregational Church (BFCC). And the welcome! The church welcomed me and the diverse ways I express my spirituality and the traditions that inform my faith. The UCC would accept me, would fight for my diverse
family and community, would welcome the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, advocating and taking action for a just world for all? Where have you been all my life?

I began attending church regularly, became a member, joined the Crossroads Committee and as a new member, began to work on revitalizing the church campus, including the green space, and working on social justice issues.

Concurrently, I entered a discernment period in 2016 where I took a 10 month 200-hour Yoga Certification course that invited study, reflection and embodied spiritual practice. And then again, enrolled in a 300-hour, deeper course of study on the philosophy and practice of movement, music, and meditation. I also received a certification from Yoga Behind Bars as a trauma-informed yoga instructor.

After much discernment in my personal and professional life, in 2017, I announced my resignation as Executive Director of the Downtown Billings Alliance to pursue ministry. Reverend Mulberry heard of my intention to pursue ministry through another faith leader. He approached me and began working with me on my path forward, which led me to becoming a Member-In-Discernment of the MT-NWY Conference of the UCC.

Since that time, I have completed the following classes and trainings:

- Polity, History and Theology of the UCC, Center for Progressive Renewal (CPR)
- Introduction to Christian Worship, Haldeman, Chicago Theological Seminary
- Creation Story Revisited, Rabbi Uri Barnea, Billings Education Center
- Bible 101, Bible 201, Re-reading the Gospel of Mark amidst Loss and Trauma; Apocalyptic Vision, Reverend Mulberry
- Boundary Training, Conference Annual Meeting, 2018
- Westar Institute, Jesus Seminar, 2018, 2019
- Our Whole Lives Training, Amy Johnson
- Reiki I & Reiki II Certification, Reiki Master Jean Guy

In addition, I have not only taken classes but have been able to lead two of our Apocalyptic Vision classes, collaborated on our Lenten Series 2019, Callings, with Rev. Amy Carter and Rev. Mike Mulberry. In January and
February this year, I will co-lead Claiming the Promise, with Rev. Dwight Welch and Rev. Mulberry. And finally, this Lenten Season 2020, I will co-facilitate a series on the Psalms with Revs. Carter and Mulberry.

*Traditions, traditions. Without our traditions our lives would be as shaky as... as a fiddler on the roof! – Tevye Topol*

The history of the United Church of Christ is rich, varied, expansive and complex! It could be no other way so as to produce a beautiful, evolving, striving denomination. The UCC was formed in 1957 with the union of two Protestant denominations: The Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches, each whose origin stories emanated from two earlier traditions.

These 4 strong traditions, each with its own brand of independence and guiding principles helped to shape the UCC:

1. **Congregational** – Congregationalists originated in England, derived from Protestants during the Reformation. They placed great importance on social witness and education, leading to the formation of Harvard, Howard and Fisk Universities. Some of the tenets of their doctrine were freedom, fellowship, autonomy, and covenant. They were progressive culturally, leading efforts in foreign mission, abolition and women’s rights.

2. **Christian**: The Christian Tradition, a product of early 19th century revivalism, was the American expression of Christianity. It was made up of multiple independent groups and modeled itself on the 1st century church. It objected to clergy and authority, maintained the bible was the only guide, and resisted creeds and confessions. It was criticized for its literal translation of the bible. This tradition believed it was the church of all Christians.

3. **Evangelical**: The Evangelical Tradition originated in 1817, combining the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. German immigrants came to the United States in the 1830’s and formed the German Evangelical Church Society of the West and the Evangelical Synod of North American. They dropped the name ‘German’ shortly thereafter. They were missionary, humanitarian, and evangelistic. Their works produced Deaconess healthcare facilities and educational institutions like Elmhurst and Eden Theological Seminary.
4. Reformed: The Reformed Church Tradition, a Protestant denomination originated in 1747 and was rooted in the Reformation. It was comprised of Lutherans, Anglican Baptists, and Quakers. They arrived in Pennsylvania in the 18th century, creating German-speaking Lutheran and Reformed Churches. They struggled to find footing with their organization. This did not support abolitionism, and proclaimed that homosexuality was a sin. They ordained the first woman in 1979. They believed creeds, catechism and liturgy were pathways to salvation and Christian unity.

While the origin story of the UCC begins with these four traditions in their strengths and weaknesses and because of the varied nature of the four traditions, we now have a UCC that emphasizes interfaith, is multi-racial, multi-cultural, embraces all genders, gender identities and sexual preferences.

These 4 traditions formed two affinity denominations: The Evangelical Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches. Seeing that their division was compromising their capability to proclaim the Gospel, in 1957 another merger took place with the creation of the United Church of Christ, a denomination that is curious and discerns, that questions and audits itself and how it perpetuates and interacts in a “just world for all”. The UCC embraces a theology of liberation, drawing us into the world with a message of healing, transformation, wholeness and hope. It speaks a theology of radical acceptance and welcome.

**Church**

In deeper study, I was intrigued by the Statistical Report and the Report on Congregational Vitality and Ministerial Excellence, presented during my CPR class and again at our MT-NWY Conference Annual Meeting when we met in Great Falls, MT.

It depicted the life and timeline of Billings First Congregational Church (BFCC) in many ways. The church experienced its peak of members in the late 50’s and 60’s. In the 70’s when the city began to sprawl with the building of its first mall on the fringes of what was then the most western part of the city, new neighborhoods emerged, and so did new churches to serve them. BFCC would be forever changed by this sub-urban development and did not have the mindset at the time to think in new ways to lead and be a part of the huge shift that was occurring locally and
nationally. As is often the case, leadership tends to dig its heels in and think that if it shuts the windows a bit tighter, the storm brewing outside will not be an issue. And indeed, it was an issue.

BFCC experienced huge swings and drops in membership and vibrancy, and reflected, almost to a “T”, the information in the Statistical Report in terms of race, age, gender, membership and leadership. There was a lack of diversity in all these areas, and this lack, coupled with no clear plan on how to be inclusive and innovative on all these levels, led to a dark period for the church. There was a time not so long ago that the church thought to shutter the windows and sell.

There has been a contingency of members that strongly believes that the church could increase in vitality and be viable, and they have been faithful in their pursuit of a new day for BFCC. It has been led by visionary elder members of the congregation and new, younger members who are of the millennial and gen-x generations. Add to that a courageous pastor Reverend Mike Mulberry, who is bold and visionary and has moved this church and community to higher ground.

We met initially in our pursuit of justice around issues of homelessness and Native American issues, issues that I had been working in with the City of Billings since 2005. I was the first chairperson of the Mayor’s Committee on Homelessness that was tasked to write a 10-year plan to end homelessness, that formed the Billings Area Resource Network (BARN) and launched Project Homeless Connect. As Executive Director of the Downtown Billings Alliance, I also led an initiative to bolster services and care to individuals experiencing life on the street who were addicted, and likely to have co-occurring disorders. The cohort was 96% Native American.

My overall program of work at the Alliance was varied with economic development, place-making, community building, public art, event facilitation and management, and outreach initiatives, such as Spare Change for Real Change, an education and awareness campaign around issues of homelessness and poverty. We had a vibrant calendar of events that rhymed with the seasons and with our values like community, celebration, grassroots organizing, and local economic vitality. Reverend Mulberry observed that the same type of work, rhythms and liturgical calendar were needed at Billings First Church.
As we worked more and more closely on these issues, I saw the church as an ally in many of these things and then deeper still I saw a new vision of what church might be in the midst of a rapidly changing society: A place to interpret the changing landscape of community and spiritual life, rich with spiritual practices and worship, a place of connection and belonging, a broad space for community life and conduct, a place of healing and celebration, a place of personal and social transformation, all wrapped in an ethos of caring for and protecting all of Creation. A church without doors or walls or borders that prioritizes radical hospitality and Shalom in a uniting and united denomination.

BFCC has responded to this alternative vision and call for the church to lead by entering the public realm in new and innovative ways, with diverse leadership, with increased focus on accompaniment, work and play that supports the Native American community, the LGBTQI+ community, and other communities needing allies, like refugees, immigrants, and the disadvantaged. The future repurposes and re-imagines the physical space, almost 40,000 square feet of space right in the middle of downtown into a liberating, gracious space.

I had the honor of being called in 2017 and since I began employment with BFCC some exciting things have happened to increase Shalom in our community and in the world. Click here to see our work in action:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1TzsNKTkxDFRYURLqKzYoKNjUKC2LybPh

How else would God speak to me, if not through my imagination?- Joan of Arc

God

As mentioned, my image and concept of God were very narrowly defined in my youth by the tradition in which I was raised and those traditions with which I was acquainted. Not necessarily because the grist and the wisdom of the tradition were narrow, but because those who kept it, translated it, and presented it, were.

Time and again, our triune God was presented in a patriarchal, hierarchical manner, not an egalitarian one, and presented in this way particularly when it came to treatment of women in the bible, in the church, and the overall treatment and dismissal of the feminine divine. It was traumatic for many,
like me, who ingested that for many years, preventing the relationship and prayer that I might have had with God - and the relationship and prayer I would have with myself and the wider world.

In The Church in Her House, a book by Marjorie Procter-Smith that I read during my class at Chicago Theological Seminary, Procter-Smith says prayer is simply conversation.

I deeply desired conversation and relationship with the God but it was complicated by a concept of God as human ruler, king, father, master, and it was punitive. It prevented the oneness that I desired.

I say oneness acknowledging that I am different from Creator, but that difference cannot be expressed in models of hierarchy and abuse of power. Procter-Smith poses in her book, “Can that difference instead be like the difference between humans and a hawk or a deer or a whale? God like an eagle, God like a mother bear, God like a tiny seed”.

Procter-Smith posits that in expressing that difference between humans and the Divine in this way, like human and hawk, “invites another model for prayer - that of encounter”. Encounters through sight, gesture, scent, sensation, and movement - that draw you deeper and deeper in relationship and oneness. I resonated with Procter-Smith’s assertion and how it invited imagination. I began to resonate more deeply with a triune God, not necessarily three persons, but three equal roles of God: Curator Divine and immanent God whose breath animates all of life; Jesus Christ; and, the Holy Spirit.
As I worked through the book, *The Church in Her House*, I thought back to my days on my banana seat bike as an a child, rejoicing in just *being* in nature – in the trees, in the woods across the street from our house, where I would ride my bike for hours; God was with me, found in the streams where I used to play, fish, catch snakes and frogs.

Several years ago, I went for a hike in Red Lodge with my god-daughter, Evi, and while we were gone for the day in Red Lodge, a leak sprung under our kitchen sink at home, leaking through the floor and into our basement. What I thought would be an easy repair, ended up being extensive. We had blowers in the house for days and no working kitchen from late June until early September.

As a result, my husband, Mike, and I made coffee and tea outside, used the outdoor grill for cooking, and washed dishes in tubs on the back porch. We ate, drank and socialized outside. In the morning when I had my tea, day after day that summer, I was surprised and delighted with daily encounters with the eco-system in my backyard...the beauty and mystery in the dance of the dragonflies, the daily struggle and toil of the squirrel, the first steps of the little bunnies from under our shed, the chorus of songbirds, melodic, symphonic.

How many mornings had I missed the non-verbal communication of our wondrous universe, of a wild and fierce Creator, whose breath/wisdom/Sophia animates all of life, including me? Every morning that summer I had opportunity after opportunity to commune with God and all of Creation available in my backyard. That summer, my conversation and experience of God deepened, so did my covenant and devotion to Her.
That awareness and deep relationship grew more profound. Last year at the Jesus Seminar (Westar Institute) at BFCC, Hal Taussig shared texts from the Nag Hammadi find including *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* which speaks in the voice of an embodied female deity, in all her pain and boldness, “I am she who exists in all fears and in trembling boldness” associating the embodiment of God in a being *relatable*, portrayed as you and me, in the spectrum of our own humanness.

*Nag Hammadi*

*The Thunder: Perfect Mind*

1:1-8

_I was sent out from power_

_I came to those pondering me_

_And I was found among those seeking me_

_Look at me, all you who contemplate me_

_Audience, hear me_

_Those expecting me, receive me_

_Don’t chase me from your sight_

_Don’t let your voice or your hearing hate me_

_Don’t ignore me any place, any time_

_Be careful. Do not ignore me._

_I am the first and the last_

_I am she who is honored and she who is mocked_

_I am the whore and the holy woman_

_I am the limbs of my mother._

_I am a sterile woman and she has many children_

_I am she whose wedding is extravagant, and I didn’t have a husband_

_I am the midwife and she who hasn’t given birth_

_I am the comfort of my labor pains._

I breathed a sigh of relief and, at the same time, a sigh of regret upon reading this. What if I had just known all along that I am she who is right, and I am she who is wrong - and it’s ok. I am wonderfully made (I *praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well, Psalm 139:14*) - I am wonderfully made and curiously odd, and it is celebrated. I am she who is kind and she who is nasty - and it’s beautiful. God as Momma Bear, and I can relate! I am soft and fluffy, but my claws are not.
A relatable God that claims me in my joys, in my laments, in my failures, in my successes – that reaches and teaches through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and compels and animates with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Calls me beloved and holds me through it all? Now that’s a concept and good news. I cannot imagine the suffering of a person or a people who think that the realm of God and the miracle and beauty and diversity of Creation does not include them.

In time where so many are left in the margins, in religion, in politics, in economics, we owe it to each other and to the mystery of a God that we can hardly comprehend, to ask the questions and approach a broader, more inclusive concept of the Holy One.

I owe that to you; we owe that to each other. And maybe when we say I am made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27, “God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God he created him”), it will mean one spirit, two spirit, transgender and everything in between and beyond, because if this isn’t what we mean then just what is the lens we are super-imposing and using to constrain the Source and Ground of All Being? What is the lens we are super-imposing and using to constrain the God of Justice, the Giver of Hope, Breath of Life?

In her book, Wild Mercy: Living the Fierce and Tender Wisdom of the Women Mystic, Mirabai Starr says, “We must resist our impulse to confine the Beloved by our personal ideas and our Western gaze”.

Those impulses and that Western gaze have betrayed beloved community long enough.

Jesus Christ

Cutting through those impulses and that Western gaze and fracturing the lenses that the world imposes on the realm of God is Jesus Christ, who came into the world with God’s subversive and liberating message of truth and salvation. Born in a manger, into poverty, to dark-skinned Palestinian Jews, in impossible circumstances, with a death warrant on his precious head, this child, the incarnation and the embodiment of God, came to live fully this human experience as the Grounded Mind of God, the Heart of God, the Hands and Hope of God, and for our denomination, the sole head of the United Church of Christ.
Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb 13:8), through stories of courage, of sacrifice, of calling, naming and binding community, draws us into the world to a ministry of hospitality, inclusivity, justice and love.

Through my ministry and works, I have endeavored to embody the example of Christ in my life, in the work that I have done and in the work that I do today in all settings whether at a city council meeting, at the Montana State Legislature, on the streets in downtown Billings, in a hospital setting, or at the font and pulpit. I continue advocate and work on behalf of those experiencing homelessness, with the addicted, with marginalized populations within the native community, and LGBTQI+ community, with the stranger, the immigrant and the refugee, and across the spectrum of community. I don’t always get it right.

I was reminded of this during General Synod in Milwaukee this past June which brought to mind the parable of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

A Good Samaritan?

On day 3 of General Synod, I decided to put my walking shoes on, head to the river and live-stream through my phone and ear buds, the debate at General Synod. The river was only a couple of blocks away from the hotel and as I made my way, I passed a man who was sitting on a raised planter like the ones we have in downtown Billings. As I was approaching the elderly gentleman, I thought, “I don’t have any cash. I don’t even have a bottle of water. I just can’t possibly stop”! And I walked on by, too embarrassed to lock eyes because I felt like I did not have anything that I could give. I also think my mind was closed in that moment, not knowing the way forward for this man in Milwaukee in terms of resources, not wanting to miss the synod session, and so I continued on and went and sat by the water and commenced listening to the good and difficult things that were being talked about on the national level.

As I was listening to the debate, I was distracted and could not help thinking about that precious man missing all of his top teeth whose belt was cinched so tight around his barely-there waist, and I was haunted and ashamed of my actions. Am I the priest or the Levite here? I prayed, “Beloved Mother please let him still be there when I walk back. I don’t want to be the person that walks by my neighbor”. And so I left hoping against
hope that he was still there on that planter. As I approached, I said, “Hi, how are you sir? He said, “I’m alright”. I asked him if I could help. He said, “Do you have money so I could get something to eat”? I let him know I didn’t have any cash to give but that I would be happy to go buy him something to eat. And he said, “I’d like a steak sandwich and let me tell you how I’d like it”. I went and bought a Philly cheesesteak sandwich with peppers and a bottle of water. I took it back to him and we chatted about his life and mine, and for that brief moment there was connection and community.

Sandwich and water notwithstanding, we always have something to offer: Our time, a shared story, a regard, a healing word and embrace.

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The embodiment of the life and ministry of Jesus has taken many shapes and forms in my life over the years as I taught high school French and German, created a cause-related, award-winning, national company, and served as witness on various community boards and commissions that made compassionate and just gains for the City of Billings and Yellowstone County. I have served and continue to serve on boards like the Native American Coalition, Community Innovations, Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter, the Mayor’s Committee on Homelessness, the YMCA, Billings Cultural Partners, the International Downtown Association among others.

Jesus was a brilliant organizer and was always gathering and forming community around him to teach, to uproot, to tend and to heal. Counter to the imperial narrative of his time, Jesus always pointed to the community forming around him as the Empire of God, a reminder of the saving grace found in the broad space that we make for community life and conduct.
**Holy Spirit**

In Job 33:4, Elihu says,

*The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*

In my years of community work, I knew that God’s spirit was working in me; I knew that God was in our midst in the beloved and broken community that I was called to serve.

How can I be a leaf of healing and restore and knit community? “On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations”, Rev 22:2. My prayers were often, “make me uneasy, fill me with your spirit divine, move me to that place, where healing and hope reside”.

That is where the Holy Spirit resides, in that liminal space where soul and spirit and body join, and we enter the realm of co-creative power with God. I never doubted the Holy Spirit would in-spirit/inspire me. “You know this Spirit, for it abides with you and will be in you”, John 14:16-17. I did however doubt my abilities. Time and again, God would answer, not always in my time, but in Hers. And it was at once arduous and glorious.

To touch what is always there, though our cerebral minds often prevent that knowingness and awareness, is to connect with a life force, or pranayama, as we call it in our yogic practice. The Holy Spirit is available to us all, “if we but knew the gift of God”, John 4:10.

To see the Holy Spirit, the divine counterpart, move in me, and among and through beloved community, please watch my TedxTalk on community and call:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_FpAaHwreo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_FpAaHwreo)

I recently wrote a children’s song that reflects my concept and relationship with the Holy Spirit and how it calls me into community, as a witness of God’s healing love and liberating message in Christ Jesus. It is called Firefly in My Soul:

**Firefly in my soul**

Give me wings to fly

Take me to that empty space
Where land and water dry

Firefly in my soul
Spark your wild divine
Lead me through the desert sands
To be your healing sign

Firefly in my soul
Take all that I desire
Mix clay and dew and nectar too
That all might feel your fire.

Refrain: There’s a light, there’s a light, there’s a light inside
There’s a light, there’s a light, there’s a light, don’t hide,
that firefly in your soul.

(Harmon, written at Common on the Ground/Border Issues Fair, 2020)

Meeting the Bible Again for the First Time

The bible is a collection of 66 documents or booklets with different authors writing stories at different times. It is a combination of literary genres - historical narratives, binding documents, political commentary, genealogy, poetry, song, biographies, letters, parables, poetry and much more. It is epic storytelling of the human experience from God’s perspective. It recounts the story of Creation, the beginning of humankind, the fall and the restoration of humankind through the birth, life, ministry and death of the incarnate-God, Jesus Christ. It is massive and can be daunting.

Having read it partially in my youth, I pushed away from it in my late teens, early 20's because I began to critique the language and perspective in which it was written. I found inconsistencies, taught as fact in my youth, that were hard to reconcile. Fr. Richard Rohr is quoted as saying “it is the best book in the world and the worst book in the world”, depending on who is reading it and using it.
Through developing the practice of hermeneutic, or interpretation, I now look at the bible in an entirely different light, asking the right questions, usually power questions, to mine the beauty, wisdom and the meaning behind the words. I look for what’s not there, what’s not said, and what that might mean in broader contexts. I geek out on word choice, syntax, conjugation, and all manners of composition. I find myself now in deep relationship with the bible because I no longer fear it.

What I have come to understand is that the bible is a discernment tool, an interpretive tool and a community book that communicates truth but not always fact. I call it my walking stick that accompanies me on my journey, strengthening me, reminding me that God is with me, with us on this human endeavor and desires our liberation and joy. It draws me into covenant and intimacy with Creator whose heart is grounded in steadfast love, righteousness and justice, as shown through the scriptures and confirmed by the life, ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ.

When I think about the bible, so many words come to mind. I created wordles, which is a tool that forms a ‘word cloud’ from those words.
As feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza reminds us, “a biblical word that does not liberate does not have authority”.

**General Synod & Inspirational Theologians**

I was so grateful to have been sponsored by the MT-NWY Conference to attend my first General Synod, held in Milwaukee, WI this past June.

The conference started off with a Member-In-Discernment (MID) Breakfast. We were welcomed by Rev. Dr. Renee Jackson of the United Church of Christ (UCC) National Office and by Nelson Murphy of the Brown Endowment who both led the morning for us, introducing a powerful line-up of speakers. Here are some brief take-aways from the speakers:

*UCC General Minister, Rev. John Dorhauer, welcomed us, sharing that the Holy Spirit is looking for partners.*

*Rev. Dr. Jim Moos – “may there never be a time that you are not in discernment”.*

*Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson – “we are called to be active, not just a prophetic voice”.*
Rev. Elizabeth Dilly, Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization Team (MESA), introduced the MESA Team who shared the ways that this team supports denominational polity for authorized ministry. The MESA team went over the Marks of Effective and Faithful Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ and described discernment as a life-long process.

Rev. Traci Blackmon inspired us all – “God has a plan”!

Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, the UCC Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice, shared her passions and personal mission of partnering with others to spread hope and heal the world. She shared the WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged) program of the UCC which encourages churches to use the resources of the Mental Health Network to be designated/certified as WISE churches, ones that welcome, engage and support those with mental health challenges. Billings First Congregational Church Vice Moderator Chelsey Duenow and I are pursuing this at BFCC.

Don Hart & Katie Closeski spoke broadly about the United Church Funds and then more specifically about its divestment in fossil fuel companies, and how United Church Funds practices environmental and social due diligence in its stewardship and work.

It was a great morning that first day, with a tremendous amount of content.

Each day forward at Synod began with early Western Conference meetings and worship service, in the plenary hall. I enjoyed watching our regional group work on issues together.

Worship service was moving and inspiring with diverse musical offerings and great sermons with gifted theologians such as Rev. Traci Blackmon, Rev. Amy Butler, Rev. Sharon Lee Mei-Shem, and Rev. Kaji Dousa.

The re-nomination of John Dorhauer was not without controversy or pain and I am glad to have witnessed the process, as well as the process for the many resolutions on the floor ranging from climate change, listening campaigns, forced migration, use of Styrofoam to abolishing private prisons – and many more.

Each day was also filled with visiting the tradeshow area and all the different ministries, supporting fair-trade goods and entrepreneurs, and learning about resources available to us as attendees. At the bookstore, I purchased materials for becoming a WISE Congregation and also purchased
Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund’s book, Blessed Be the Crazy, which I read last month in preparation for our WISE Congregation process.

I was thrilled to visit the Chicago Theological Seminary booth, and even scored a few tee-shirts. They were so welcoming to me, an online student.

*Showing up.* One afternoon, the plenary session was delayed so that all delegates could participate in a march and rally to protest U.S. immigration policies. To be a part of this demonstration of our faith and values was incredible. We joined other groups in downtown Milwaukee and were part of a unified force for immigration justice. Incredible to witness and be a witness, I was so pleased to take part.

Noel Anderson, Church World Service’s grassroots coordinator for immigrants’ rights and coordinator of the UCC National Collaborative on Immigration, started it off by leading the gathering in a chant; “UCC is loud and clear; immigrants are welcome here!” Anderson, who helped coordinate the march, noted that between 500 and 1,000 people participated in the rally, a large number coming from the UCC! How incredible! It felt good to add voice and physical movement to express our lament and grief over US immigration policies and the horrendous treatment of children and families at the border. I was inspired and encouraged at the prophetic witness of Rev. Traci Blackmon and Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, who spoke so bravely and eloquently on the issues and whose work I follow.

I enjoyed the educational sessions, like Thawing the Frozen Chosen, led by Rev. Kelsey Peterson Beebe. Kelsey is the Executive Pastor of Dancing Pastors Ministry and has a Four-Way covenant with Wayside United Church of Christ, the Pacific Northwest Conference of the UCC, and the Dancing Pastors Ministry Board of Directors. We visited after her session
and have kept in contact since General Synod. I have used at Billings First Congregational Church some of practices she shared during the session. When we recently connected by phone, she was excited to hear about the two yoga/wellness retreats at Camp Mimanagish that I have led; we plan to co-lead a retreat together in the future. I see her as an important contact and mentor for me in terms of embodying word and sacrament and in the passion we share for spiritual practice, movement and meditation.

In terms of a theologian and leader that inspires my work, I had the pleasure to meet and have a conversation with Rev. Cameron Trimble, the Founder and CEO of the Center for Progressive Renewal (CPR). I am currently reading her book, Piloting Church, and learned previously about her courageous and prophetic leadership when I attended the Still (Re)forming conference in Atlanta, GA, hosted by CPR. I was pretty star-struck when I met her; we visited about many things and found we had much in common, especially relative to health and wellness, criminal justice system reform, embodied spiritual practices and church revitalization. Cameron and I promised to keep in touch and we have done so via email, phone and zoom.

Cameron and I have, to date, recorded two podcasts re: health and wellness as it relates to clergy and lay people. This March, Convergence/Center for Progressive Renewal will host a virtual gathering of people of faith and moral conscience and I am honored to be featured among such a prophetic line-up of speakers. [https://convergencesummit.online/](https://convergencesummit.online/)

The educational offerings - the Speak Outs, the ‘Be the Church’ conversations, Artist-In-Residence, and special functions all made for an overall great experience as a first-time attendee, deepening my faith, my love and commitment to the UCC.

**Additional Inspirational Theologians**

I had the opportunity to attend the Still (Re)Forming Conference in Atlanta in 2017 and was introduced to the Rev. Jacqui Lewis, Senior Minister of Public Theology and Transformation at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, who led two sessions and spoke powerfully on racial equality, gun control, economic justice and equal rights for all sexual orientations and genders. She has a deep love for urban ministry, and that resonates with me. Since that time, I have followed her work. She is a powerful preacher and teacher, and a published author.
At that same conference, I was introduced to the work of two incredible millennial theologians, Casper Ter Kuile and Angie Thurston, who have co-authored several reports, How We Gather and Something More, dealing with the exploration of how millennials are finding and building communities of meaning and belonging and how grass roots groups and organizations are effectively unbundling and remixing the functions historically performed by traditional religious institutions. (howwegather.org).

I had the opportunity to sit at the same table with Mr. Ter Kuile and Ms. Thurston during the conference and was so excited to learn about the innovation taking place in communities where spirituality, justice and community intersect. They believe in the value of traditional and non-traditional authorized ministers working together to create communities of joyful belonging. I continue to follow their transformative work.

*God does not leave God’s people without nourishment.* - Rev. Scott Haldeman

Sacraments are sacred rites, and, in the Reformed Tradition, we celebrate two, baptism and communion. They are an important part of our history and tradition.

These sacred acts, authorized by the early church, include earthly elements like bread, wine, and water. They are meant to communicate the grace, steadfast love, and mercy of God, embodied in Jesus Christ, as related in the gospels. These holy encounters with God are the living God’s way of still speaking, reminding us:

- to prioritize and rehearse community
- to practice forgiveness and acceptance
- to love as Creator loves
- to draw close in solidarity with each other
- to be present for one another
- to be cleansed, restored and renewed
- to be nourished by Creation
As described in our Baptism Policy at Billings First Congregational Church, for Christians, baptism is a public sign of a reality already present. The earliest baptismal formula we have in the Christian Church is: “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor free, there can be neither male nor female – for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal.3:28, NRSV)

In one of the readings, Washed and Ready, in my class at Chicago Theological Seminary, written by our professor Scott Haldeman, he describes baptism as a gift and a call. I love that description.

That semester, I wrote a poem on the day of and in response to the massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019 using some of the ‘gift and call’ language.

The short poem hints at the two sacraments, baptism and communion.

    I can but so little do
    To soften the cry of mother, brother, a bride or groom
    In the darkest hour of night who
    Come face to face with hatred that consumes
    Go out, the gift induces us
    Weave hands and hearts among briar and thorn
    Quench voices parched for justice
    From the cup of community, along this path too worn.

Words chosen like “mother, brother, bride, groom” make reference to baptism in “creating communities”, and the idea of “kinship... and being claimed as members of a new household, the household of God” (pg. 4, Haldeman, Washed and Ready).

In both baptism and communion, we are given the companionship of both God and community as we journey.

*Gift and call.* A gift is an offering, given in thoughtfulness and love, and typically demands no payment or reciprocity. The gift is given and meant for all.

Call, in the context of baptism, suggests a several things. First is a call to discipleship - which can be expressed in our uniquely created design and works in the world, as Haldeman states “as Christ’s body upon earth,
continuing in the ministry that Jesus of Nazareth embodied.” Second is a call to covenant with God through Christ and a call to community. Lastly, in this context and taken a step further, we as faith leaders have the ability to help members of our spiritual community discern their spiritual call, help the church discern its call in dynamic partnership with the wider community, in acts of witness and discipleship, community forming and organizing.

Seeing baptism through the lens of ‘gift and call’ added so much more dimension and nuance to this rite for me, especially in the ways that it references the beauty and mystery of the gift and the call, the connection of communities of faith and God, and the strength and, at the same time, the fragility of holding community together. Baptism therefore is critical to my ministry which finds its setting in and with life-giving and life-affirming, beloved community. It is critical to the gospel call of solidarity.

In the poem, I chose ‘briar’ because the journey is not an easy one and we need each other in order to be liberated from the briars and thorns - briar also meaning here those who would ensnare and enslave us, such ‘empire’.

‘Cup of community’ is an obvious reference in the poem to the sacrament communion. In the sharing of the broken bread, we share with the boundless gift of love exemplified in the life of Jesus. In the cup, we share in the grace given to all in the death of Christ. The bread and the wine are a symbolic meal that calls us experience God through Jesus and to share equally among all, in solidarity and peace.

In baptism and in communion we are reminded that we are each other’s liberation. In each other at our best, we find love and acceptance, healing, radical hospitality, justice-seekers, celebration and respite. These sacraments are not to be understood as passive rites, but active, deliberate, intentional ones. They call us back time and again in collaboration with a merciful and just God, and to the hope we can find in the shared body of Christ, as the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians.

Community is foundational in these two sacraments. When I was in the secular world of weaving community, I frequently thought ‘community is a sacrament’. At least, it seemed to me to be so. I witnessed acts of rehearsal, washing, naming, belonging, celebrating, remembrance, reconciliation; they were sacred moments.
Some today may not be seeking traditional ways of expressing their spirituality or shared humanity like they once used to, but they do seek a sense of connection, belonging and a sense of the sacred. As such, they are experiencing the holy in many and diverse ways. No bread, no wine as we traditionally might define, but a body and communion for sure. God is still speaking.

I experience baptism every day in my own walk with Creator, a death and a resurrection, a dying off of the old, standing in the new with a risen Christ. How wonderful to look at communion in this same way, that when bread and drink are consumed, whether alone or in community, that I might experience the spark of God in my life, over and over again, reminding me of the presence and grace of a fierce and loving God and the life I have in Christ.

**Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God - Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel**

I was very excited to lead our Christmas Eve service this year, my first Christmas Eve service. After considerable time with the scriptures, music, as well as research and reflection, I decided that I would use the song the Little Drummer Boy as my inspiration for the service, the order of worship, the bulletin and my sermon.

Right away I knew that I would be drawing from my values and our values as a church community in that choice, and that I would draw on native wisdom to share the incredible birth story of how God comes to us in Jesus, a child born in a manger, absent of fancy robes, of emperors and of pageantry, involving ordinary people, in impossible circumstances. I would draw on the story of the Little Drummer Boy, a child who comes to play for the Christ child, and who is himself a poor child, who, in playing his drum, offers his gift and tradition to celebrate the birth of the King of Peace.

I wanted the service to be engaging and interactive for the congregation, one that would delight children and adults. I used liturgy resources found on the UCC website and shaped them for our use. I gathered, made, and purchased noisemakers for the congregation, with plenty of drums, set out in baskets at the entrance of the sanctuary; the congregation would use the noisemakers in the place of what would normally be spoken responses in the liturgy. It absolutely delighted the congregation and as a body, we found more opportunity to use them throughout the service. It was
incredible to see the congregation's joy in having agency in this, and it felt authentic and celebratory.

In addition to the Lighting of the Christ Candle, the Offertory, the Candle Lighting when the Sanctuary goes dim, the song the Little Drummer Boy was threaded through the service along with relevant scripture readings, some read that evening by our native brothers and sisters in Christ. One of our special musical offerings was the Cree version of the Little Drummer Boy, on guitar and sung by elder Delia Memnoon Whitford, via youtube video, which was played on our two large screens. It was beautiful and soulful, and there were tears.

Before the song was played, I spoke to the sacredness of the drum in the native community. In the Native American culture, the drum is used to bring balance and renewal to a person through participation in dancing, singing or listening to the heartbeat. It is not just a musical instrument. To native people, it holds great cultural and symbolic power, is the heartbeat of the Indian Nation, carries the heartbeat of Mother Earth and calls its people and nations together. It is sacred – made of wood and animal hide, it is honored.

Native Americans believe the drum often helps bring the physical and mental side of a person back in touch with her spiritual side. Each time the native community gathers and drums here in our church, healing takes place. Healing of the land upon which this church stands, healing of ancestors whose heartbeat is felt in the land, the trees, the water.

My sermon, I played My Best for Him, drew deeply into the legend of the Little Drummer Boy, using prophetic imagination, as witness and call to action at the birth of Redeemer, Healer, Savior and King, Jesus Christ. Near the end of the sermon, I teared up and the congregation played their noisemakers in solidarity to stand with me in that moment. It was an incredible manifestation of community, that presented itself many times during the service.

At the Candle Lighting ceremony in which the Sanctuary is dimmed, two of our native leaders, gathered light from the Christ candle and shared it with the congregation. We closed with the Benediction and our recessional hymn. The congregation left the service fed and filled, with some sharing that it was the best Christmas Eve service they’ve attended. Praise God!
I would also like to share my embodied spiritual practice, yoga and my worship ministry found there as well. I experience pulpit often when I teach yoga. A 500-hour certified, trauma-informed yoga instructor, I teach 2-3 classes a week. I teach at the Montana Women’s Prison, having started a program there, at Passages, a pre-release center, at Billings First Congregational Church (weekly class), and am a substitute at a private studio. I am pleased to say that our class at BFCC is growing leaps and bounds and has created such gracious space for community. Recently, one of my students said, “Every one of your classes is different and has a message, it’s kind of like church”! My heart!

There is much preparation to the arc of a yoga class just like to the arc of a worship service. I prepare a theme, an opening which sets the stage for the tenor of the practice. I prepare the body of the class and a closing. Each part must resonate with the other. In the opening, I introduce a spiritual or social concept and a pose that we might work toward, select intentional preparatory poses, introduce breath work, mudras, mantras and music that are complimentary to the practice and provide for a multisensory experience, just as we do in worship. The final pose of the class, savasana, or corpse pose, is a restorative pose that grounds and fortifies the individual and often produces a state of communion with self, Creation, and Creator. In the closing we rise as a shared community from savasana to a seated position, a reading and sending forth is offered, as well as the blessing/prayer of namaste.

**Pastoral Care and Counseling.**

Pastoral Care and Counseling are important functions of authorized ministers in the UCC. Attending to the emotional, spiritual, and social needs of our congregation is critical to the wholeness of the body of Christ and to a life of fullness in Christ. There are many scriptural passages that speak to the need for pastoral care for the body of Christ like Peter 5:2-3, Ephesians 4:11-12 and Acts 20:28. I resonate with these passages and also sense my call here. Much of pastoral care takes place in hospitals, in hospice centers, in homes, in prisons, in senior and assisted-living facilities, within our church walls and out in the public square. Other forms of pastoral care are weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and individual, pre-marital and marital counseling.
Administering to the needs of the community within the church as well as outside of the church is a critical part of my work and call. Prayer, relationship building, preparing and sharing meals, visits to hospitals and hospice centers are a part of my ministry on a weekly basis.

My first home visit was with Sue and Fred Betz (BFCC members) in advance of Sue’s major surgery and visited her post-operation twice. I was a non-anxious, comforting presence for the Betz’. Mrs. Betz died due to complications of her surgery and other illnesses; I remain a presence for Mr. Betz. A member of our congregation approached me after this sacred time with the Betz’ and they shared that Mr. Betz was so very grateful for my presence and care for his wife and for him during this time.

Recently, I had the honor of offering care to the RunsAbove family in the death of Mr. William RunsAbove, beloved father of one of our parishioners and his family. Over a two-week period, I spent many hours with Mr. Runsabove and his family. We spent many hours together, some praying, some reading the Psalms, mostly he liked to tell me stories. He asked me to lay hands on him, and I did while praying for him. I did Reiki as well, as I am certified in Reiki I and II which his family welcomed. As the days went by and he slipped into silence and could no longer speak, I continued to read to him, pray with him and his family and visit with the family, checking in on their health and wellness, bringing coffee when I could. Rev. Mulberry and I were there on his last day in this earthly plane, and it was a sacred time of song and story and prayer.

Pastoral Care and Counseling is leadership that cares for the congregation and the community along a life-long continuum.

This April I will attend a two-day hospice training with Riverstone Health, and become a hospice volunteer with the hospital system in Billings, MT, as a way of shadowing trainers, chaplains and bolstering and deepening my skills in this realm.

*Manual on Ministry, UCC Ministerial Code, Section 3*

➢ Demonstrate a sincere yearning for connection with the triune God, expressed in prayer, worship, Bible study, retreat, and other spiritual practices.

➢ Attend to my physical well-being by adopting a healthy life-style and diet, exercise, and rest, setting aside time for Sabbath and vacation.
➢ Actively participate in the covenantal life and work of all settings of the United Church of Christ.

Biblical and theological study, as well as ‘sadhana’, a Sanskrit term for daily spiritual practice, are ways of demonstrating my sincere yearning for connection and covenant with the triune God. Additionally, through routine spiritual practice such as meditation, yoga, worship, mantra, Reiki and prayer, there is a deepening of my faith and my connection with God. This ritual study and practice are critical to my ongoing formation as a pastor and leader.

Study begins each morning with contemplation, meditation and reading. I look for inspirational scriptures, readings, poems, or lectures.

Currently I am reading the works of: Sister Joan Chittister, Benedictine nun, writer, and leader of Celtic Spirituality; Christine Valters Paintner, poet, hermit, mystic, online Abbess, PhD in Christian Spirituality, 200-hour certified yoga instructor; Mirabai Starr, author, translator of the mystics, and a leading voice in the emerging interspiritual movement; Father Richard Rohr, Franciscan Friar, author and speaker; Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault – as well as others to inform my morning meditations.

I am currently working through Bourgeault’s book, Chanting the Psalms. I am learning about the art of chant in the Christian spiritual tradition. In doing so I am becoming better acquainted with the spectrum of emotion, beauty and pain that exists in the whole of the Psalms. I draw on these and other passages in my own prayer, in praise, as well as in pastoral care and visits.

Sometimes I read with an intention in mind. Other times I come into silence and stillness, open to how God might lead me on that day. I recently attended a 3-day Silent Meditation Retreat and it was an incredible experience of going deeper in prayer and meditation.

Gardening and contemplative walks in the South Rims and the Indian Pictograph Cave area are other practices that keep me in relationship to the land and to Creator. I am grateful for the mild winter this year. In the summer, my husband Mike and I cultivate 3 gardens each in our yard, have two fruit trees, and harvest regularly.

In the above-mentioned ways, I also attend to my physical well-being and added to that is the dimension of healthy eating and rest. My parents, both
from different countries, impacted the types of foods we ate and the way we ate them. Meals were prioritized, were home-cooked every day, and were shared en famille. My mother for a time had a Mediterranean catering company, and so ours was largely a Mediterranean diet. Food was nourishment and it was also healing. I live this daily. My husband and I both come from cooking backgrounds. Mike was the chef at Walkers Grill for years, and I owned a cookie company. Food and drink are a part of our culture and ritual. It is in the moments of cooking and sharing a meal with him and with our family that I find great joy and Sabbath.

Sabbath and rest can be elusive at times in the life of a pastor and in the life of the church. Sabbath sometimes comes in the form of daily blocks of time to meditate, to talk a walk, to sip tea. My husband and I are intentional about time away, together, mostly we travel to Mexico, where my father-in-law owns a palapa on the beach in Paamul.

I actively participate in the covenantal life and work in all settings of the UCC. Locally in our church conference, I have presented at our Clergy Gatherings, have led a session at our conference annual meeting on clergy self-care. I continue to lead retreats at our church camp.

I have participated as a featured speaker on a podcast with Rev. Tracey Howe Wispelway, Minister of Congregational and Community Engagement Justice and Local Church Ministries, and with Rev. Mike Mulberry, on Native American issues and how our church engages and accompanies the Native Community. You can listen to the podcast here: https://www.facebook.com/PodcastForaJustWorld/

As mentioned previously, I am a featured speaker for the upcoming Courageous Faith Summit with Cameron Trimble this March.

Additionally, I have contributed prayer and poetry to Worship Ways which have been published on the UCC website. Click here:
https://www.uccfiles.com/rtf/Prayer-for-Christchurch(Harmon).rtf
https://www.uccfiles.com/rtf/wwLivingPsalmforHolyWeek-Restless.rtf

It is my wish to continue to make meaningful contributions in all settings of the UCC.
Make a Statement.

I prefer this form of the UCC Statement of Faith and have also added one that more closely resembles my statement of Faith.

United Church of Christ Statement of Faith in the form of a doxology

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, 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.

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.

Amen.

Faith Statement, Lisa K. Harmon

My faith statement is a product of my discernment, study and class participation in my UCC History, Polity and Theology class at the Center for Progressive Renewal.
I believe in God as Creator, Savior, Redeemer, Comforter and Sanctifier.

I believe that each person experiences God in a uniquely personal way.

I believe in God as the source of divine love, who is the essence of life and relationship with all.

I believe that many faith traditions speak to the true nature of God and that such traditions speak to their own diverse and irreducible histories and traditions.

I believe that God chooses loving relationship with all life, and treats humanity with mercy, grace, truth, and righteousness.

I believe in the free will God bestowed upon humankind and believe that God created the diversity manifested in humankind and Creation.

I believe in the intimate relationship of God within all life, both as member to the world and as autonomous from the world.

I believe in dignity and sanctity of Mary as being Mother of the Son of God, and Temple of the Holy Spirit.

I believe in Jesus, the Son of God, made incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit, who lived as a man, shared fully in the experience of true humanity, suffered, died and was risen from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Jesus conquered sin and death and reconciled all of Creation to God.

I believe that in the resurrection, Jesus reveals God calling us to abundant life both now and forever.

I believe that God calls all life towards a beautiful, diverse, liberating future; one that is personified in the life of Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth.

I believe in the unconditional love and dedication to self-sacrifice exemplified in the life of Jesus and that we should also exemplify this love to all.

I believe in the in-dwelling breath of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual and non-physical presence of God.
I believe in the collected body of believers, gifted for mutual blessing and called to witness to God's presence and will; a body that welcomes, affirms and mutually empowers all life.

I believe and hope for a world that reflects the limitless imagination of God.

I believe in the traditions of Baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments instituted by Jesus the Christ.

As part of the community of Christ, I accept the responsibility to exemplify on earth God’s ideal future that regards not race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, class, ability, or tongue. As such, I am welcoming to all God’s creatures.

In God’s call to community, to be the body of Christ, I seek to:

· serve neighbors and strangers
· cultivate hope, healing, and belonging
· pursue justice and walk a path of discipleship
· rejoice in the gift of community
· care for the earth
· participate in God’s movement toward wholeness.

I believe that there is hope that all may abide with God eternally, through the work of Jesus Christ.

I believe these things not out of certainty but by faith, understanding that God continues to be revealed among us all. Amen.

***

I am called by God, called by community, deeper into community. This is who I am, a minister of the United Church of Christ.

Elisabeth (Lisa) Kopanski Harmon
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