

PAPER FOR ORDINATION IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST:

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Theme:

“A call for such a time as this”

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My Pilgrimage:

I am humbly thankful and give all praise to the most holy one who has appointed me to do this great service. 1 Timothy 1:12 says it best: "I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service". As we journey through this thing called life our purpose awaits us. It is up to us to accept the call that God has placed on our lives. If I had one word to sum up my life it would be favor. Favor connects to grace that is undeserved. Favor rest and rules in my life through all of my life's circumstances. God has been gracious to me. My life has been full of both perplexities and liberation. God has done, is doing, and will continue to do the unimaginable in my life.

I am a native of Chicago's south side; an only child from a single parent home. I was raised by my mother in a Christian environment and brought up in the Baptist church, which established my faith foundation. At the age of six I accepted Christ as my personal savior and from there I knew that there was something different about me. Growing up, it was always confirmed by church leaders and congregants that God was going to use me. I was often asked to do many tasks such as, storytelling at conventions, speeches at other churches, and community mission based activities that confirmed God's call on my life. At age seven I became a Junior Usher, at thirteen I was a Sunday School Secretary, and one of my greatest tasks was singing in the choir. My entire life is full of God's miraculous works.

My educational background involves a private school setting where I not only acquired a great education, but a great deal of discipline. Throughout school I was to be in class promptly at 7:45am, and classes ended at 2:45pm. School is where I learned how valuable time is. Meanwhile, time flew by and I graduated elementary school in the year 1999, and graduated high school in 2003. However, elementary school and high school were some of the toughest years of my life. I went through series of perplexities while in school. One of the perplexities that stood out amongst them all was learning differently from my classmates. Often times the teachers would become frustrated when I did not learn at the same pace as my peers, which

brought about anger in my spirit. On a brighter side, that anger would often shift when I would struggle through my assignments and finally come to understand them in the end. This is where I learned about the blessings that come in our struggles.

Things that stood out about me growing up on top of my difference in learning was my unique character. I stood out amongst everyone because I was always striving to be distinctive. One of the most noticeable characteristics that I acquired was befriending children who were from foster homes. My closest friends were from foster families. They would often gravitate to me and pour out their experiences of going from home to home and I was their listening ear. I still have that listening ear today, which is why I am in the counseling and advocacy field. One of the ways that I related to foster children was having a short attention span. The only difference between me and them was that my short attention span stemmed from the various things on my mind that caused me to constantly wonder how my life would be different had my father been around. I would also wonder how my life would be different had I grown up with my two siblings from my dad. On the other hand, my friends wondered how their life may have been different had either parent or other family member been around. This experience played a key role in the woman that I was becoming. In this experience, I became a person who desires to aid individuals in finding the missing pieces in their lives.

Other distinct characteristics while in school was the fact that throughout school I was never focused on my current situations. I could see my bright future, which is something that teachers struggled to see because of their focus on my difference in learning. I related to the children that went from home to home not only because we learned differently, but because we had a yearning for positive attention while in the classroom setting. Befriending individuals from foster families and becoming their listening ear, while dealing with my own issues in school is how I began to become empowered to journey with people in need of love that stemmed from positive embrace. Positive embrace and attention involves discovering the pressing perplexities within us. Therefore, my vision involves helping others focus on the now. It is my belief that people need encouragement and care so that they feel loved, which is the reason I went to college

to study psychology. Most importantly, undergraduate school is where I began to experience my sense of call. I served in campus ministries that involved Christian activities. My involvement in Christian ministries led me to be invited to mentor underclassmen transitioning to campus life. My service in the mentoring program landed me an internship with the Salvation Army's Summer Youth Camp Program. After completing my internship and finishing undergraduate school my supervisor in his evaluation of my performance confirmed that God has a special calling on my life. My supervisor even stated, that I would always have a job with the Salvation Army if I desired. Throughout school the confirmation of my call to Christian Ministry began to unfold. In reflecting on my supervisor and other people's evaluation of me, it all lined up with my sense of call. In my call to service others, encouragement, and affirmation of who God has called me to be, after I completed undergraduate school I pursued a master's degree in psychology where I felt God calling me beyond the practical. In graduate school I began to discern from the Lord that there was something greater in me beyond my own understanding. I began to desire to empower individuals to be who they are by living their life with purpose; never forgetting to let them know that God is their source.

In my love for Christ and God's people, after graduate school I enrolled at McCormick Theological Seminary in 2010 where my mind, body, and spirit began to open up. Seminary is where I officially began hearing God's voice and experiencing God on new levels. Christian ministry began to show up in my life and I began experiencing God in unfathomable ways. In Seminary God began opening up doors and more opportunities became available for me to help people from different stages in life. Coupled with counseling individuals with different psychological disorders, I received different opportunities to be present with families and children in various challenging situations.

Esther's influence on my call:

In reflecting on the image of favor in the story of Esther, I am reminded of a book that I read entitled, "A Story of Love and Favor" by Deborah Bateman . In this book the author breaks

down the chapters into lessons, and in these lessons there are scriptures and devotional readings relating to our everyday life. The author makes it clear to the readers that Esther was not only favored by God, but was portrayed as a heroine. With this, the reader can't help but understand the story. In the words of Deborah Bateman, "this book is for just a time as this, the revealing prophecy of today".

I find it interesting how Esther was adopted by her cousin Mordecai who prophesied to her saying, "maybe she was created for such a time as this to lead the Jews through a cycle of fasting and praying". I believe that God's favor was put upon Esther by being placed in position to save the Jews. I believe like Esther, God places each of us in situations where God can use us to further God's Kingdom. However, we have to demonstrate Esther characteristics in being obedient and willing. Esther quickly found her purpose in life. Like Esther, I feel God calling me to minister to God's people "for such a time as this". In my reference to such a time as this, I am referring to this 21st century time. This 21st century time is full of cycles. Cycles are best described as a series of events. These are trying times where darkness in our world seems to be more and more prevalent, where our children are facing more and more trials, and our society and systems are filled with more evidence of the isms, such as racism that's causing division instead of unity amongst our people. It is during these times that I feel God calling me to aid others in coping with life's difficulties. I feel that God is using me to share my experience, expertise, and most importantly my love and compassion for God's people not only in times like this; but forever more.

My life involves many replicas of being just as courageous as Esther. Esther and I have similar characteristics which are: courage, faith, favor, and obedience in following God. Often times when we are called to be ministers we ask ourselves are we worthy of such a call. We unknowingly go into situations that we do not know the outcome of, but we do it out of obedience to the will of God, and most importantly trust. My call involves aiding individuals in finding hope and empowering people to live up to who God has called them to be and makes reference to the word "whosoever" that is used in the Bible. Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever

shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved". In the world that we live in, society rejects and oppresses certain individuals based on different stereotypes and judgements. I am called to reject societal setbacks, and embrace them by applying the whosoever method at such a time as this. I am called by God to be a welcoming and inclusive minister of the Lord Jesus Christ and to be ordained in the United Church of Christ to preach and teach the gospel, administer sacraments and rites of the church, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership. God has called me to go out and tell the nation's that Jesus Christ is Lord.

My sense of call:

There are four components of my call to Christian Ministry that relate to going out into the world and telling others about our risen savior. Those components are: **Assimilation, Discipleship, Inreach, and Outreach**, which brings light to such a time as this. As a woman called to Christian Ministry I relate to the call of Esther who was a woman of great faith, wisdom, love, and obedience to the will of God. I relate to Esther because although Esther did not deem herself worthy of call, she listened and obeyed God. I like Esther, have great trust in God and I will continue to obey God's will with courage. God gives me the strength to endure and proceed in doing God's will.

My first component of my sense of call is **Assimilation**. Assimilation is defined by Webster as, "the act or process of absorbing information, and or, experiences. It is the need for quick assimilation of facts. It is the state of being absorbed into something, and the process of adapting or adjusting to the culture of a group or nation, or the state of being so adapted". Assimilation as it pertains to my sense of call to Christian Ministry involves assessing and observing people and the atmosphere, and active listening involving retaining information in order to appropriately be of service to someone. It is also the act of being culturally and socially sensitive. After retaining the information I must be sensitive to diverse cultures and social locations in order to adapt to others in going out into the world. Assimilation involves gathering God's people. One of my key compassion's in the act of gathering involves my inclusive,

welcoming, and most importantly authentic mannerism. Simply put, I treat others as I would want to be treated in an empathetic way. The call of Assimilation involves my understanding that we are all children of God no matter who we are, or where we are on this life's journey. In the story of Esther, she was called out not only by God, but by a close family member to do the work of God. Esther, an ordinary woman was called and equipped to do extraordinary things. I too am an ordinary woman who is called and equipped to do extraordinary things, such as, gathering God's people.

A prime example of my call to assimilate God's people, is my experiences in serving at one of our local churches. Upon serving at this church, one of my main assignments was Evangelism. Evangelism is mission and purpose based, and part of my assignment involved partnering with other communities where we would assemble together and have prayer for the neighborhoods, and then break into small groups and go into the communities, either on street corners or door to door. One of my most memorable moments was when I encountered a young man around the age of twenty one. He was on his way to a friends house, and my partner and I stopped him and asked him if he knew Christ. He replied, "yes, but I have no church home". He told us that "every church that he goes to is very unwelcoming and makes him feel uncomfortable and unwanted". I replied, let me tell you about Jesus who is love and welcomes everyone including you. Christ loves you and so do I; I then asked him if we can pray with and for him. Before we prayed he addressed his prayer concerns which were: re-establishing a relationship with God, reconnecting with his family, and finding stability. We held hands and had prayer, and as I prayed for him tears began to stream from his face like rivers, his hands went from cold to warm, and I reached out my arms and held him tightly. He thanked us and we gave him a church brochure. I am happy to say that he now has a church home. In this moment of assimilating this brother in our presence to introduce him to Christ I felt God move in my life like never before; this experience confirmed the component of my call to assimilation.

My next component of my sense of call is **Discipleship**. Discipleship simply put is, any follower of Christ. My call to God's people involving Discipleship connects with assimilating

God's people. In Discipleship transformation, renewal, and liberation of an individual takes place, whether the individual is new in Christ or in need of being reintroduced to Christ. Discipleship takes place both inside and outside the walls of the church. It is my belief that any visible act of giving reverence to God, rather in the sanctuary, in the communities, or on social media, creates space for an individual to be transformed. Discipleship is formulated in how I represent Christ in my everyday walk. An example of my day to day Discipleship practice that I engage in is, the sharing of my devotion via social media and upon my direct contact with people. It is my belief that representatives of Christ have to lead by example, and the example is in one's lifestyle. I believe that the example of Christ is made known through worship. My definition of worship is giving everyday reverence to God everywhere. Leading by example is through acts of kindness with day to day practice. Many who are not members of a church are in search for an outlet. In my day to day walk with Christ I provide a creative outlet through the sharing of scripture and provide encouraging words via social media post. I have been and continue to be encouraged to provide this outlet because of the confirmation of its effectiveness by others. I enjoy sharing who God is in my life with the world. On a regular basis I receive numerous inbox messages expressing appreciation and gratitude. The acts of appreciation and gratitude of others encourages me to continue to be the salt of the earth and a light to others in search of peace and hope beyond the four walls of the church. I am encouraged to continue being an example of Christ to the children of God everywhere I go.

My next component of my sense of call is, **Outreach**. Outreach is the reaching out and extension of services to others. My call to outreach is demonstrated in both my profession and ministry. My profession is counseling and advocacy. On a day to day basis I counsel and speak on other people's behalf, in order that they are provided with the resources and care needed, are fulfilled in life on practical levels, and are able to deal with different life challenges on spiritual levels. Outreach is demonstrated in my ministry because God's word lives within me and is displayed in my encounters with others. Often times, people are not looking for much, but are simply looking for some form of care and concern. My call to outreach is displayed in my concern for others. Christ is concerned for us, which is why He suffered, bled, and died on the

cross for our salvation. Christ love is everywhere. Esther had to be concerned for the people in order to accept her call to lead God's people. Leading God's people involves authentic concern. Going outside the walls of the church and into the world telling others about our risen savior is how I provide outreach to individuals in need of transformation.

My last component of my sense call is, **Inreach**. Inreach is providing services to others on an internal level. Inreach is done inside the walls of the church, and in any sacred place. Inreach involves preaching, teaching, serving one another on a pastoral care level, and engaging in the sacraments in the remembrance of Christ. At my local church I minister to pre-teens who are in need of a relatable outlet. Relatable meaning, an individual who has been in their shoes and has been in similar situations. I provide inreach to them in teaching them about Christ in weekly lessons and engaging them in stories about God who created us, Christ who saves us, and the Holy Spirit that guides us through life situations. I allow them to tell how the Bible stories relate to them. I utilize my active listening technique that helps me aid them and assist me in responding appropriately to their questions and concerns about biblical passages and life circumstances that they have. I use this same active listening techniques in engaging other congregants in conversations about Christ. Often times, we are simply called to be present with others. My inreach component of call involves the ministry of being fully present. In order to be present one must listen and understand, which lets the person know that they are cared for and gives them the knowledge that someone is there for them.

The Bible; my source of guidance:

The Bible relates to my journey and call for such a time as this; these trying times. It is my guidance through life's obstacles. The Bible is a tool that I use to aid me in doing the work that God has called me to do. The work that God is calling me to for such a time as this is utilized in both ministry and in my profession. The ministry that God has called me to blends with my profession. I utilize this tool the most when I provide service to individuals at my workplace, which speak to my outreach component of call. I am often faced with individuals that

are on the brink of giving up on life. They come into my workplace whether they have been traumatized, diagnosed, are dealing with life stressors, or are simply in need of resources. I am often put in position to provide them hope. Although religion is prohibited in the workplace, I create other avenues in providing individuals with tools of guidance by sharing stories with them that come from the Bible and from experience. I am careful with language and refrain from saying the word Bible; instead I use the term “book of inspiration”. Since I can not mention the name God, I use the term “higher being”. In sharing stories with others I describe this “higher being” as an image that watches over us; this higher being that is shade at our right hand. There is a being that is greater than everything protecting us and directing our paths. I borrow the words of “shade at our right hand” from the book of Psalm 121:5. The Bible provides me guidance not only in the workplace, but on my personal journey and gives me spiritual tools that increases my faith and gives hope in hopeless situations. The Bible lifts the burdens of God’s people as life can easily become too much to bear. The Bible as it relates to who I am and who I am called to be provides me wisdom in pouring the love of God into everyone that I encounter on a daily basis; especially individuals that are finding life difficult. The Bible is my personal aid and it equips me to stay in the race, minister and counsel others, transform and be transformed, and regulate the mind by keeping people encouraged to push forward through life.

Clinical Pastoral Education as it relates to my sense of call for such a time as this:

Clinical Pastoral Education connects to my sense of call in all four components pertaining to Christian Ministry for such a time like this. The components come to light in three distinct ways. This experience provided me: affirmation, focus, and assurance. What sticks out the most is affirmation, which shows how I care for others in ways that provide joy in times of sorrow. It appears that life presents us with more sorrow than joy.

I was privileged with the opportunity to work on the hospice floor at South Suburban Hospital. I remember this lady who would sit quietly by the window. I would come and knock on her door gently and wait by the door until she told me to come in. I greeted her by asking how

I could assist her. Most of the time she would beckon for me to come over by her, pick a scripture for me to read, and before reading the scripture I would hold her hand and pray with her, and after the devotion she would tell me that I was an exceptional young lady. Often times I would have to hold back tears in the moment. This experience affirmed my practice of the ministry of presence that God was instilling in me and gave me a strong sense of knowing how to be in the moment with someone who is transitioning to a new life in a sensitive manner. This experience gave me joy in knowing that my mission to provide care was effective and needed. I received direct affirmation of being called to journey with people through their life challenges in such times whether it is: failing health, low self worth, and or, torn family structure. This care is what I would want in facing my own challenging times. Walking alongside individuals wherever they are on their life journey is a gift that God has given me that speaks to my compassionate self. I believe one of the key missions of the life of ministry is walking alongside one another, especially in times of pain.

A book that provides me inspiration and tools for guidance for ministry in times like this is a book that I read entitled: “The Wounded Healer”, which is based on embracing our wounds and using them to become better individually and better on a ministerial level. This book has given me direction in ministering to individuals in both the contemporary and traditional society. The traditional way involves the let go and let God method in addressing wounds, while the contemporary method teaches us that we should embrace our wounds and use it as a source of healing. The wounds speak to us and helps us address the root of our inner struggles. Once we get to the root of our inner struggles what we deal with outwardly and how we address what’s causing us hurt on the surface will become easier to understand and manage. Our inner wounds cause a great deal of unexplainable pain, especially if they go unrecognized. Once we discover our own wounds as ministers it’s easier to recognize the wounds of others and help them get through them, (Nouwen, Henri). This book has given me many tools in aiding individuals through their inner struggles and will be an effective tool to reflect back on in my ministry.

Confirmation:

Confirmation as it relates to the components of my sense of call for such a time as this, involves spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is connected to confirmation, and is part of the teaching aspect of my work in Christian Ministry.

Growing up in the baptist church we did not have confirmation classes like we have now. However, I came to know Christ at an early age. I appreciate the United Church of Christ's high regard for confirmation. How I came to know Christ as my personal savior was through Sunday School classes. Growing up, every Sunday morning my mother would wake me up, and we headed to 9am Sunday school. This was exciting, because not only was I learning who I was in Christ, but I had the opportunity to learn about Christ with peers. Sunday School was just like weekly school for me. Christian education is highly valued because it contains lessons on being confirmed in Christ. Confirmation is an important tool in identifying with our creator. It establishes one's relationship with Christ and how we come to understand who we are in Christ. Confirmation is the affirmation of one's belief in Christ and is one's full acceptance into the body of Christ as well as the teaching aspect of coming to Christ. Confirmation provides education on the Sacraments that are symbols of Christ.

Confirmation is confirmed in our baptism, or in some congregations it is confirmed during dedication. Confirmation comes after a baby is baptized or dedicated. It is up to the parental guardians and church community to be the village for children and educate children regarding confirmation and the sacraments, which establishes our relationship with Christ and others. Depending on the culture of one's church, dedication is practiced. At the time of the child's dedication, they will not remember that day, which is why later on when the child grows up confirmation classes are important.

The Sacraments:

There are two Sacraments, which are Baptism and Communion. I grew up in the baptist church where we utilized these rituals and they remain in me and is key to where God has me in my UCC identity. The United Church of Christ makes known the sacraments and makes high regard to the body of Christ. I see the Sacraments as a way of uniting with others, experiencing God on a personal level, and being an essential part of a congregation and parishioners who are attending worship and are fellowshiping with one another. I believe the Sacraments are sacred practices during worship that displays intimacy and makes us all one in Christ. The Sacraments involve the Holy Spirit's use of water, bread, and wine to make known grace, forgiveness, cleansing, unity with the Holy Spirit, and the presence of God through Christ.

Baptism:

I remember my baptism like it was yesterday. I was a small, curious, and hyper six year old who asked many questions. Is that a bathtub? Will the water be cold? Why am I wearing a nightgown? Why is everyone here? I asked the typical questions of a small child experiencing something new. In a child's mindframe baptism is nothing more than a public bath time experience. However, at the age of six the most important thing that I did understand is that Christ loves me. In my time of questioning, I understood that I was making known publicly and decreeing Christ to be Lord and Savior over my life. My baptism is my first experience of being transformed and rebirthed into the newness of life. The newness of life involves having a full understanding of one's relationship with Christ.

Baptism is assembled by water that cleanses us, and the Holy Spirit that protects us. Baptism is the birthing of something creative, elaborate, and most importantly sacred. It represents the new covenant of God which is the gift of salvation through God's Son Jesus. Baptism represents Christ's call to baptize others, Matthew 28:16-20. It is the welcoming to become members of the body of Christ. We become members of one another in our Baptism. I believe that Baptism is communal and represents our oneness with each other. The forms of baptism are: full immersion, sprinkling, and infant baptism that's used to cleanse us. I will

respect the rights of parents and the various methods of baptism. However, my preference is immersion. I believe Baptism is best described as the formal welcoming of individuals to Christ. I believe that we only need to be baptized one time. Once we are baptized it will not be taken back no matter where we are on our life journey. Sure, at some points in life we have strayed away from God and many away from the church. Some were baptised at an early point in life and may feel the need to be reunited with the Holy Spirit. However, I believe that in the midst of our human imperfections we will always belong to God. I am a firm believer in one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism. I believe that when we confess with our mouth and repent of our wrongs we reconfirm our baptism.

Communion:

My first experience of taking communion is unforgettable. I had similar questions that I had during my baptism. The only difference during this experience was my sense of excitement knowing that I can finally have a snack in church. My only questions during my first communion experience was, why is the cup of juice so tiny? Do we only get one cracker? My sense of curiosity was always there. In my mind it was snack time; the small things matter to children. To a child like me, communion was snack time and for some parents it gave off a sense of relief, seeing as though, food has tendencies to keep children quiet in church. However, the most important thing was my understanding that communion was a time where the church community assembled together in commemoration of Christ. I understood that Christ died on the cross to save us.

I believe Communion is spiritual unity during the breaking of bread and wine during a worship assembly. The main ingredients of Communion are bread and wine. Bread and wine are replicas of the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine are also symbols that represent not only Christ's body and blood but also how we remember Christ's suffering for our sins. Communion is the call to remembrance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ amongst other believers. I would describe Communion as the establishment of relationships of Christians as

individuals within a church in the midst of God and other believers. Communion can also be described as a spiritual relationship with the divine and fellowship amongst congregants in commemoration of Christ. It is a gathering of the saints as one body to remember and celebrate the life of Christ. “Communion is an act of giving thanks to the Lord”, 1 Corinthians 11:24. This is where Jesus broke the bread, gave it to His disciples, and said take it and eat it. Communion is where we self examine how we are living our lives, 1 Corinthians 11:28. In Communion we are making a public statement of faith. We are proclaiming Christ's death until Christ's return, Corinthians 11:26. When we practice Communion we have full participation in the body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. Christ's life is transferred into our life in the welcoming of becoming members of one another.

What is the church to me:

The church is a body of believers who come together on one accord to worship God. It is my belief that the church is the representation of God's kingdom. As the church we are disciples of Christ in our teaching, preaching, and examples of how we treat one another and show acts of love. The word church derives from the Greek context that means *ekklesia*; “an assembly” or “called-out ones.” The church is not the building, rather the people. I am in agreement with the apostle Paul who describes the church as a body of believers or the body of Christ. I believe the true mission of the church is to meet people where they are on their life journey in a non judgemental way. The church is to do the exact opposite of what society does; it aids the homeless, provides hope to the hopeless, feeds the hungry, preaches and teaches the gospel of Christ, and are witnesses of the works of Christ. I believe the church is the place that provides space for everyone, such as: children, youth, young adults, and the older population. Whereas, the world rejects certain people with hatreds such as ageism and classism. The church is suppose to provide space for inclusivity and provide a welcoming atmosphere because Jesus never rejects anyone. He sat with people from all walks of life including welcoming the rejected. He also related to the people in undergoing His own suffering while on earth.

My understanding of the UCC Statement of Faith and how it influences me:

As I reflect on the UCC statement of faith and how it influences and relate to my call for such a time as this, I am in concurrence with the UCC's faith and believe in the Holy Trinity. I believe in God who is the creator, Jesus who is the resurrected Christ, and the Holy Spirit as the sole head of the church. I believe that everyone despite their differences are significant and worthy. We are all created in the likeness and image of God and belong to the faith. Everyone is on their own spiritual journey and are on different paths. As we continue to seek the face of God we create our authentic relationship with God. I believe that all who are baptized belong to Christ. Everyone who has faith are welcomed at the table of Christ to receive the body and blood of Christ. We are united and a uniting church and are called to serve one another and be good stewards over the earth's resources. I believe we are called to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for poor, and comfort the afflicted. I believe in peaceful outcomes and resolutions all over the world. God is still speaking as we continue to evolve in our faith.

How the UCC Covenant relates to me:

There are several reasons that I chose to be UCC. I chose this denomination because the United Church of Christ is a covenant body. I am inspired by the motto of the United Church of Christ that stems from the scripture in John 17:21, "that they all may be one". It is imperative as believers of Christ to know that we all come from God. In times like this, there are people who struggle to find God due to their experiences. The United Church of Christ's emphasis on unity and respect for one another is what draws me. A unifying body places emphasis on healing divisions amongst our brothers and sisters by loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. In this unifying body we all have the ability to walk in our individuality and have value in our differences.

Unity comes from God who is love and this covenant represents how God created us equal and in God's image. God created us unique with our own creative minds. I chose the UCC

because it gives regard to having our own personal relationship with God, therefore our faith and beliefs can not be judged, but rather welcomed, respected, and accepted. I believe everyone has their own testimonies of faith that can be expressed individually and differently. There is no either/or, but rather either/and; there is no me/I, but rather we/us. I appreciate the denominations openness to one's unique practice of faith. However, throughout history one's faith has been shared through confessions and statements of their faith. This points out the importance of teaching spiritual formation and practicing discipleship of Christ. Our covenantal relationship involves what we call partnership in Christ Locally, Nationally, and Internationally. As we unite together as one body, although we may differ, we respect one another and engage in acts of love and kindness. We give advice and assistance that is helpful to one another. God speaks to all of us.

My theological understanding as it relates to the UCC:

In my view on ministry pertaining to the United Church of Christ and my theology, I would label ministry as 'the creative undivided and unifying work'. In this undivided and unifying work we are one in Christ Jesus. In this creative work we embrace one another's unique being. Everyone sees God different on their personal journey with God. The UCC leaves room for one to practice how they worship God. I embrace the autonomy of the UCC, where no hierarchies or bodies can enforce any particular or set doctrine and or worship style in the different congregations. I appreciate the great regard in the UCC's constitution that obligates each local church to have freedom within their congregation. I appreciate the fact that the constitution states and is confirmed by the writer Donald Freeman who suggest that, "autonomy of the local church is inherent and modifiable only by its own action". This is what I admire about the UCC and what sets it apart from other denominations and further drives my desire to be ordained in the UCC. There is freedom in worship and different styles of worship are invited in local churches. Freedom in worship gives pastors and congregants the authority to add their own ideas within their church and community. The United Church of Christ stands firm on Unity. Unity has in it love. Christ is Love, and separation is of no existence. I believe the church

to be the people of God and without the people of God there is no church. I believe that a church without people is merely a building taking up space in the ground. Everyone must understand that God has great compassion and mercy for all who love Him.

Influences on my UCC Choice:

There are many influential people that have nurtured my decision to be a part of this united body and has made an impact in my walk and faith journey. To name a few of my influences: Phillis Wheatley who was the first published African-American Author. Yvonne Virginia Delk who was the First African American woman to be ordained in the United Church of Christ, and Antoinette Brown whose focus was on women's rights and freeing us from societal oppression. I am empowered by these influential women who have impacted the United Church of Christ and have influentially guided me in my decision to become UCC. These influential people has given me confirmation that as an African American woman in ministry I can do all things through Christ that gives me strength. I am confident that I can help others free themselves from the enslaved mentality that the world has beset upon us.

My UCC Identity as it relates to Mission, Ministry, UCC History, & Polity:

The United Church of Christ is a covenant and uniting body which connects with my faith in God and the knowledge that we are all one in Christ Jesus. We are a denomination that is unique and creative in worship, and since I am a stand out person these characteristics flow with who I am called to be in ministry. The United Church of Christ diversity meshed with it's inclusive and welcoming mechanism of everyone being welcomed at the table relates to my method of meeting individuals whoever, however, and wherever they are on their life's journey and applying an empathetic model of ministering to their direct needs. The motto that we all may be one is applied in journeying alongside an individual in need of care. How we identify with one another speaks to how we identify with Christ. My stance in being a church that is open to different characteristics and styles fits with my outlook on worship structure. Worship structure

should fit the aptitude of flowing with the presence of God. Often times we may have a particular order of service, but when the Holy Spirit speaks it may shift our original plan. The United Church of Christ's openness to difference brings light to my influence. It has been my experience when visiting different UCC local churches and conferences that they all contribute to the body of Christ in distinctive ways that shed light on my stand out model of being.

Throughout church history, we have been trained and told how we should and should not be that often makes impacts on who we become individually. The UCC gives room for an individual to grow into their own self, which allows doors to open and sets marks in the wider church in regards to how the church impacts and influences the world. I fully embrace the diverse four strands of the United Church of Christ, which speak to embracing not only one's differences, but one's background. Although I grew up Baptist, it does not take away my UCC identity that I have now. We are one body and serve God universal who is an unifying God. The UCC is made up of four strands that give regard to adhering to one's faith traditions and they connect with one another in terms of serving the same God. Evangelicals spread the gospel of Christ in the world, Christians identify with the body of Christ, the Reformed Tradition believe God is the head and has sole authority, scripture is the backing, and we as people are justified by our faith and priesthood of every believer, and in the Congregational church they give regard to all members of the church in an inclusive manner. These strands bring to life our, "that we all may be one" practice in serving God.

Why ordination in the UCC?:

One of the main reasons for my pursuit to be ordained in the United Church of Christ, is the fact that I share concurrence with the views of God calling God's people into sacred covenantal relationship. I share belief in the fact that the ministry's purpose should be giving service to the wider unity operating from the Holy Spirit. I am seeking to be ordained in the UCC, because of the diversity of the denomination, covenantal relationships, and high regard and integrity for one another. I appreciate the fact that the UCC has relationships with other

denominations and openness and respect for other religions which makes us stand out for the good. You will often find in other denominations an exclusion and close mindedness to religions, cultures, and practices outside of their own.

I love the UCC's full inclusion tactic which is how I believe Christ intended it. We are autonomous, and are under no set doctrines or divisions that would make us have to be under any set rules regarding the operations of our local churches, which makes room for creativity with the different models of ministry. I appreciate the fact that creativity is welcomed in the worship spaces. However, the rules that are created adhere to and are applied to the United Church of Christ polity. The motto of us being united and uniting stems from the UCC's slogan "Churches Uniting in Christ", where there is no separation amongst the body of believers.

There are some establishments of the UCC that further draw me to become an ordained minister in this denomination because those establishments are the true work of God. For instance, while taking polity there was a discussion about an organization called, "churches uniting in Christ" that I love that seeks to put together full communion amongst nine protestant denominations in our country. These establishments speak to our covenantal relationships in the wider church and around the world. As a candidate to be an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, I feel God's movement in connecting us as one body.

Milestones in my life in relation to my christian experience and my request for ordination:

To name a couple of milestones in my life that significantly impact my christian experience and my request for ordination is, growing up without a father and thinking that I was strange, as I witnessed my friends who had relationships with their father, and then, losing my father in my adulthood and never establishing closure. This speaks to my deep desire to minister to individuals in need of filling voids in their life. Another milestone in my life is, earning my degrees in higher education. I grew up struggling in school and surrounded by people who

doubted my success. This empowers me to encourage others to never give up on their dreams. This milestone speaks to how I minister to individuals who struggle with differences and guides me in ministering to those who struggle to see their capabilities.

My understanding of the UCC Ordination Vows and how they relate to me:

As I reflect on the UCC Ordination vows as they relate to me; I am in concurrence with the UCC's belief that God calls the entire church and each member to partake in and take on the ministry of Jesus Christ. I believe in the honor of being a witness of the gospel in both Church and society that includes every baptized Christian. God empowers the ministry of the church and its members by the Holy Spirit. The church nurtures faith, evokes gifts, and trains its members to service. God calls the Church's members to different forms of ministry in the name of the church. I will witness Christ, preach the gospel boldly in truth, and demonstrate integrity.

Pastoral Ethics:

I respect the polity of the UCC as a candidate for ordination. I appreciate the acts of confidentiality that I deem to be imperative in the building up of God's people. I will establish and maintain trust within the congregation in which I serve, in order that others may continue to deem my spiritual authority worthy of ministering. I understand the importance of demonstrating equal love toward every member of the church. Whereas, the parishioners are my main focus in helping individuals get through whatever situation they may be faced with. The fact that the members entrust me as their spiritual leader with their most sacred information makes me honor the covenantal vow of being ethical and confidential all the more. My passion is to meet the needs of God's people and the community that I serve. I will devote my time, commitment, and sacrifices to the church. However, I understand that in order to tend to the needs of others I must exhibit self care. I will continue to ensure that I am spiritually, mentally, physically, and emotionally whole. I am practicing boundaries and limitations in order that there may be an establishment of respect for what one can and cannot handle pertaining to a situation. I believe

that oftentimes ministers take on more than we can handle, and or, get overly involved in a members personal life. Ministers often end up in situations where their spiritual leadership is challenged. I will continue to remain authentic in my pastoral authority and relationships with congregants. I will continue to be honest with myself in order to minister effectively to others; I believe honesty to be the best policy. I will continue to utilize my partners in Christ in this covenantal relationship and shared responsibility to the church and community. Authenticity requires one to be true to self in order to be true to others. I will continue to uphold the sanctity of the church and utilize the ethical principles that I am knowledgeable of in serving the church. I will exercise service related activities for the building up of the church and God's kingdom.

Self Care:

I am practicing self care by engaging in daily devotions and meditations and sharing with others, stepping back when feeling overwhelmed, taking getaways along with other trips with family and friends, and or by myself in order to spend time with God and have recreation. I can hear God's voice better when away from chaos and noise. I am exercising and engaging in therapeutic activities, such as, utilizing breathing techniques, Zumba, Yoga, paint classes, listening to soothing music, and engaging in social calming activities in order to remain attentive to my mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health.

My Ministry:

I am currently a Member in Discernment at Covenant UCC. I am called to ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ to administer the sacraments, preach and teach the gospel, and provide pastoral care. I demonstrate fitness for ordained ministry in many capacities. At Covenant I serve as Pulpit Leader and Christian Education Teacher for Pre-Teens (12-14). I formerly served as organizer and liaison of the young adult ministry, president of the single's ministry, administrative assistant for the caregiver support ministry, choir member, and member of the Twenty Sum Ministry, which speaks to my ministerial leadership capabilities.

I currently serve as the CMA Cluster Five Secretary, I am on the CMA Nominating Committee, and I am on Pulpit Supply serving local congregations as needed. Pulpit Supply is where I am receiving full immersion of ministry in diverse ways and in many capacities in terms of serving different local congregations from culture dynamics, social, and geographical locations that differ from my own. Serving in different church settings makes me a well rounded minister of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Additionally, I served Pulpit Supply and had Associate Membership at God Can Ministries UCC in the Ford Heights, IL community for two years (5/2015-5/2017). At this local church I assisted with: worship planning, preaching, teaching, providing pastoral care to congregants, assisting with preparing the sacraments and learning how to administer the sacraments, and partaking in community engagement that speaks to specific practices of ordained ministry. This provided me hands on experience to minister both internally and externally to God's people.

As a candidate for ordination in the United Church of Christ, I will adhere to the church and denomination's policies and procedures in spiritual leadership and ministerial duties of practicing servitude, building covenantal relationships in Christ, and empowering God's people. My passion to serve God's people will be reflective everywhere I go. A great leader always leads by example. I will be an example of Christ in the face of the world. Christ fulfilled God's purpose by granting us salvation. The core example of my call to Christian Ministry that God has given me is the sharing of Christ's love through effective ministry that will bring about impactful bodies of Christ.

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