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“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you...”

I believe, people who are preparing for ministry are constantly and continuously charged to be reflective, to be intentional, to be authentic, to be deep. We dwell endlessly on our journey to ministry and our response to God’s call. And while this can often be profound, powerful, life-transforming stuff, we also spill a lot of ink in the process.

... “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Biography

I was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. I’m a city girl! I’m the first born of two children (two daughters; two different fathers). My parents conceived me at a young age. My mother was eighteen and my father was twenty at the time of my birth. My mother at the time was an unwed high school drop-out and my father was a pampered co-depending drug addict. According to my maternal grandparents, I was predestined to follow the path of unfortunate circumstances that paved the road down which my parents were headed. Surrounded by domestic violence on a daily basis as a child from

¹ Phil. 4: 8-9 NLT
Jn. 1:46 NLT

both my parents and grandparents, I'm often asked how I made it out of that environment successfully. The first seven years of my life my mother and I lived in the Cabrini Green housing projects (row houses) with my grandparents. At a very young age, between three and four, I witnessed my mother endure domestic violence from the hands of my biological father. I had no idea at the time that both my parents were addicted to cocaine.

I believe I was five years old when my mother started dating my stepfather. My mom and my stepfather (mom's boyfriend at the time) were still enjoying the freedom of being young and dating. I was an only child by my mother for nine-years of my life. I don't recall seeing my mother on a daily basis until I was about eight years old. I'm told that my maternal grandmother shielded me from quite a bit of the violence, only to bear witness to violence between her and my grandfather.

In 1980 God spared my life and presented my mother with a wake-up call. One particular summer weekend my maternal grandfather had been drinking heavily and he became extremely impatient with my granny because she was not moving fast enough from orders he had rendered her. Instantly, his anger shifted to rage (fueled by the alcohol) as he stormed from the kitchen table and headed upstairs. My granny sighed and announced that she hoped he had gone to bed. As my youngest Aunt (eight years my senior) and I sat on the floor playing monopoly, my grandfather's footsteps could be heard coming towards the top of the steps. As he advanced down the stairs, each step gaining speed and tension, without warning he swung his Army rifle from around his back and pointed the gun directly at me (thank God, my granny had hidden the bullets). I immediately stood up with the intention to run, but I was frozen. My Aunt released a

scream that could pierce your eardrums. My granny lunged from her recliner chair like a ninja and disarmed my grandfather so quickly that fear never had a chance to consume me. I also don't believe my grandfather had any idea of what was in store for him because of his actions. An ambulance was soon called; however, he was the one being wheeled out for medical treatment.

After my seemingly near-death experience my mother checked herself into a rehab center. She gave her life to the Lord and God changed our lives completely. My mother has remained clean and sober for the last thirty-seven years. As a child and even now as an adult, I've always drawn strength from my mother. As a child into my teenage years it was wonderful to see my mother every day after school. It was a joy to know that I was going to sit down and have dinner with my mom and talk about my day. It was a joy seeing her consistently, every day. We moved out of the projects and God blessed me with a stepfather that loved me as if I were his own. Because of God's many blessings, I had what I believe to be the best life growing up from that point on.

I attended Lake View High School on the North Side of Chicago. I played on the girls' varsity basketball team and ran track during high school. I was elected president of the Black Student Body; nominated as the only African-American girl out of fifteen (15) homecoming candidates; and held the position of treasurer of our Student Council during my senior year. My relationship with my biological father was very estranged. We never had a formal father/daughter relationship. My father was the type of father that broke every promise; missed all of my birthdays; and lied about everything, especially money, while he was addicted to drugs. When my mother married my stepfather, God blessed me with the father-figure that I needed. He was a wonderful

provider. He never raised his voice or displayed any violent behavior towards mother, myself or my sister.

On February 4, 1995, I was given a gift in the form of my daughter Kayla. I had no idea what I was going to do as a twenty-two-year-old single mother. I was fortunate to have a great support team. Although I was a young mother, I wanted to set a good example for my daughter, so I finally went back to college part-time in 2003. I graduated from North Park University in 2009. I am now the proud parent of a college student who is pursuing her goal as the founder of a non-profit organization for urban community youth. My husband (David) and I started dating in February 2000 as we were both completely against an exclusive relationship. Surprisingly, we had so much fun with one another on our first date that we've been together ever since. We were married in October 2004, which is the same year we self-published our first book entitled, "101 Ways to Glorify God Today".

Christian Pilgrimage

My Mom introduced me to Jesus Christ and taught me how to pray. From age seven throughout my adult life my mother and my spiritual mothers/mentors have been instrumental in molding me into who I am today. I believe a great contributor of their knee challenges today could possibly be from praying for me as a young adult on a daily basis. I'm so thankful and grateful to God that my Mom chose to say "Yes" to life when God called her. She has always been one of my biggest cheerleaders and my

greatest encourager. Even today when I need to be lifted, I'll call my Mom and God will use her to speak a word that pierces my soul. ²

“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep...”

When I was a child, we were once members of a "prayer band" which was held at a "minister's" house. An older woman who called herself Rev. Jones facilitated the worship service in her home every Friday evening for many years. As an adolescent, this was "church" to me. My mother and I attended her services for close to six-years. I sang my first solo at her house at six-years old. It was during those worship services that I learned the importance of prayer. I recall watching several older people coming to her home and it would be so crowded. A minister known as Rev. Williams and a woman we addressed as "Prophetess Teri" would ask certain individuals to stand and they would proceed to "prophesy" to them. The ministers would inquire about personal topics, information no one else should know about. Some of the individuals were my Aunts and even my grandmother once. After several years of only attending "church" on Fridays, my mother felt God had more to offer her in terms of spiritual growth.

In 1985 my family and I joined First Baptist Congregational Church, where the late Rev. Dr. Arthur D. Griffin, Sr. was Senior Pastor. We were baptized after attending our new members classes. I joined the young-adult choir and remained an active member of the young adult ministry until I turned eighteen-years old. I happened to visit Trinity United Church of Christ to surprise a friend in April 1991. However, I enjoyed the worship experience so much that I left First Baptist and joined Trinity in December 1991. I immediately joined the sanctuary choir and six months later I received my very first

² Matt. 7:15 NLT "Beware of false prophets..."

solo from one of God's greatest gifted musicians: the late Mrs. Barbara Smith. A TRUE Minister of Music!

In September 1997, I began to feel spiritually unemployed. Not as if I wasn't being fed spiritually by God's word each week, but as if I were not working at my full potential according to God's Will. I believed I had achieved the "mountain peak" in the choir and just had nothing else to offer. I recall praying and asking God, "Where is my place in this church? Where would you have me to serve Lord?" And the Lord spoke back to me and said, "My deacon." Tears flowed from my eyes because that was a much higher calling and duty of service that was expected of me. Immediately I wondered, am I worthy of such a task; and then I hoped that I could fulfill it. In October 1997, I embarked on a fifteen-month journey of praying, fasting, training, and studying under the leadership and tutelage of Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. and the Deacon Board of TUCC. It was Rev. Wright who taught me to be "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian."

I was ordained as a Deacon in December 1998. I knew deep down in my spirit that I would not be allowed to sit idle on the Deacon Board for very long. There was still a constant tug of going further into the ministry, yet I kept turning a deaf ear to God speaking. I didn't think I was ready to go further. I continuously tried to explain to God that I was not comfortable speaking publicly (cue chuckle). Shortly thereafter I was selected to facilitate orientations every week at my job for new incoming construction students. Soon after that I was asked to become a worship leader at church. Subsequently, I realized that God was preparing me for the preaching ministry; I simply was not ready to say "yes."

I wrestled daily with the notion of becoming a preacher because I could feel the Holy Spirit tugging at me on certain mornings. One July morning in 2000 (I was twenty-four years-old) God called me to ministry at 4:01a.m. My eyes opened like a child being awakened by a parent. Although I knew the steps I needed to perform next, I took no actions towards those duties. In 2009 God brought me to a point in my life where I simply became tired of running from what God had in store for me. I became tired of working in my own strength, without leaning on the strength of the Lord.

I couldn't help but wonder how many souls had been lost because of my selfish decisions in the past; or how many blessings had been missed because I chose to run away from God's call instead of running for Christ all those years?

In February 2011, I entered the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia. Seminary was one of the greatest experiences of my life! I had no idea how much I would mature both emotionally and spiritually. STVU's famous quote is "Trust the Process". When I lost my job, I trusted the process; when my biological father died, I trusted the process; when I felt like throwing in the towel, I TRUSTED THE PROCESS! I graduated Cum Laude in May 2013.

Ministry & Service

What does it mean to be called by God? I believe God calls us in our baptism to be God's own; we are marked and claimed in the waters of the living fountain. As we grow in years and in faith we come to a firmer understanding of what this means until we confess our desire to accept God's call upon our lives in an act of personal affirmation or confirmation. We live out God's call in our daily lives, in our dealings with

those around us: family, friends and fellow workers. I understand the call of God to be extended to all people. God's call takes many forms and requires different things from each of us. For some, God may ask for a life of celibacy and service in a separate community; for others, a life of church attendance on Sundays and little more. And for others, it is to a life of service within the church as individuals called by God and the community of faith to serve.

It is my opinion that the church today is not the church of yesterday, nor is it the church of tomorrow. The church needs leadership in ways it may previously have never needed. The church needs leaders who have a vision of working with other denominations as sisters and brothers in faith, leaders who look to other religions not as 'the heathen' requiring conversion, but as fellow spiritual human beings whose beliefs need to be respected. The church has recognized that not every person is called by God to serve in the same way; we need strong leaders in all of the many ways in which it is possible to serve our God. In the ordained service of pastors, we need gifted leaders who are ready to lead the church into tomorrow, while remaining firmly within the theology, history and teachings of the church.

Covenant United Church of Christ is where my journey as a minister began. After I graduated from seminary, I transferred my membership from Trinity UCC to Covenant UCC. I walked and studied under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Ozzie E. Smith Jr. I was offered the position of Minister of Justice & Witness and that position afforded me the opportunity to reach out into the South Suburban communities to remind the people that there is still a voice to be heard; the people's voice! During my

internship at Covenant I preached my first sermon. I preached the sixth word, “It is Finished” at a Good Friday worship service.

My experience and practice in ministry would not have been possible without Pastor Ozzie’s generous heart and tremendous leadership. In May 2015, I was working in a part-time capacity for a consulting firm in Chicago. I asked Pastor Ozzie if he was aware of any job opportunities as a means to increase my income. He suggested that I sign up for pulpit assignment at Galewood Community Church. I followed his suggestion and began preaching at Galewood in July 2015. Within two months’ time I was not only offered a full-time position with the Chicago Public School System as a Dean of Students for an elementary school, I was also extended a call to Pastor at Galewood. I accepted both positions and my life has been seemingly moving at a very rapid pace ever since. My first Sunday as Pastor of Galewood was on November 8, 2015. Aside from family and friends, there were only eight rostered members present in the congregation. For the past two-years I’ve been preaching sermons of healing, encouragement and empowerment to my congregation; and I grateful and humbled to share that we are growing and that they are doing better.

As a result, our weekly Bible study and Sunday school is thriving; church school for our youth has attendees (we had no youth my first year as pastor) and our Community Outreach Committee became our first new ministry since I started. We revamped our church’s bylaws almost immediately after I became pastor and we’ve elected new officers in addition to creating an Executive Council, which oversees church operations. They often express to leadership how much they feel a sense of support, encouragement and protection.

For the past two and half years we've had several church outings and community events. Those events include: bowling outings, movie on the lawn, "Easter Egg-stravaganza" for our youth in the community; outdoor worship service on our lawn; back to school jamboree and turkey basket giveaways for Thanksgiving. With the support of Covenant UCC, Galewood was able to give away sixty turkey baskets to needy families, including ten families from our local elementary school in 2017. Currently, we are undergoing a few church renovations as we attempt to update areas of the church, in addition to creating a food pantry for our community.

Upon entry of new members to Galewood UCC, I explain the polity of the United Church of Christ, which provides a unique blend of structure, organization, autonomy, and accountability enabling the denomination to respond to the prompting of a "Still-Speaking" God. Managing the tension between local autonomy and mutual covenant continues to stretch and challenge the nature of governance, as well as the promise of mutuality. Given the long history and traditions leading into the formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957, there have been many influential creeds, documents, and leaders. The current Constitution and Statement of Faith were created on the foundation of early believers who followed the Pilgrim promise of "more truth and light." These two "consensus documents" provide a general structure within which the designs of autonomy and covenant are manifested. We are reminded that unity comes from commitment, rather than agreement.

Sacraments

We are “One” at Baptism and at the Table. What a powerful statement to pronounce to the world! Baptism and Communion are sacraments; outward signs of the inward grace and love that God has bestowed upon us. They are physical ritual acts of some of the most simple and basic practices of human functions, bathing and eating. The seemingly simple acts of baptism and communion remind us that connecting to God need not come only from the preaching of the Gospel or the silence of contemplative prayer. Connection of God also comes through the connection of the material and spiritual within the context of a community, particularly a local church congregation. Baptism is a sign and seal that the person being baptized is a member of the Christian church and beloved of God.

I believe that infant baptism and adult baptism each provide us with a valuable insight into the nature of the Christian faith. Infant baptism reminds us that baptism is not defined by intellectual assent by the one being baptized, but through the action of God. It humbles us and reminds us of the reality that God has a special favor not to the mighty, but to the vulnerable. Adult baptism reminds us that Christians are not born, but made, and that new birth and resurrection are always possible, no matter our age or life circumstances. I believe in the real presence of Christ within Communion. As a pastor, Communion is a key part of my path to Christian discipleship, and I take it seriously. The Communion meal is a ritual reenactment, a call for us to remember the meals that Jesus ate not only with his closest disciples, but also with those he preached to.

We are called to remember these meals not only with our minds, but with our hearts and our bodies as well. In this act of memory, Christ becomes real and truly present to us. It is because I believe in the real presence of Christ that I support an

open table. I recognize that for much of Christian history and for most Christians worldwide, communion is a “closed” sacrament. For many, it is only available to Christians in their own denominations or traditions, and usually only to baptized and professing Christians. I also know that there are different opinions on what “open table” means within the United Church of Christ, and that these vary based on region and theology. I respect the right of any local church or body of Christians to decide who is able to receive Communion. Based on my personal experience, I believe that one of the ways that God is calling out to us now is through the communion table. It can be one of the most powerfully emotional experiences within the scope of Christianity, and to deny that to someone who is genuinely seeking it disturbs me.

The preamble of the United Church of Christ’s constitution states the UCC “recognizes” these two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion. It is stated that “This recognition is a deep way of seeing and experiencing God and God’s action in these rites. Recognition recalls Jesus Christ and his own baptism (Mark 1:9-11) his call to baptize others (Matthew 28:16-20), and the³invitation to become one with Christ and one another in baptism (Romans 6:1-4). Recognition remembers Jesus’ meals with his followers and the Last Supper (Luke 22:7-13), discovers his continuing presence in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:30-31a), and anticipates a great banquet for all God’s people (Luke 14:15-24). Recognition is not only an individual act, but also one we share with other Christians throughout the world.”

³³³³ "Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ." Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ. <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/preamble-to-the-constitution.html>

Statement of Faith

⁴Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). I understand that the United Church of Christ embraces a theological heritage that affirms the Bible as the authoritative witness to the Word of God, the creeds of the ecumenical councils, and the confessions of the Reformation. The UCC has roots in the "covenantal" tradition—meaning there is no centralized authority or hierarchy that can impose any doctrine or form of worship on its existing foundation according to the "Constitution of the United Church of Christ."

I believe that God is revealed in the Holy Trinity. I believe in One God with the ability to be who God chooses to be, both omniscient and omnipotent. I believe in one God, the Creator, and the Father, who is perfect beyond our understanding. I believe that God made the ultimate sacrifice of himself through His son Jesus Christ to redeem us because he loves us and wants to give us his gift of salvation through Christ. I believe that Jesus Christ is our risen Lord, that death could not suppress his love and sacrifice for us and through loving him we develop a more intimate relationship with the Father. I believe in the Holy Spirit who works through us and leads us, enabling us to move closer to God incarnate. The Holy Spirit works in us as a voice that reminds us who God and Jesus are in our lives. The Holy Spirit connects us to the Father by the people that are brought into our lives, the acts of Grace we experience every day and mysteries we experience that hone our faith and keep us connected to Christ our redeemer and God our Father. I believe in the Holy Bible as a living document that

⁴ United Church of Christ Statement of Faith
http://www.ucc.org/beliefs_statement-of-faith

touches and speaks to persons differently through the Holy Spirit and God's direction. I believe that science and evolution are part of our story. I believe in original sin; that we struggle with ourselves. I do not believe that babies are born carrying the burdens of sin. I believe that sin is a process that affects us as we are exposed to the earthly pleasures. We somehow begin to compete with God and others to know all truth; to know what God knows", instead of trusting in the mystery and revelation to come. Lastly, I believe that God will come to judge the living and the dead and it will be His pronouncement that decides who sits at His Table, not ours.

Structure

The primary function of church is not a social club. It is not a social justice organizing committee. It is not just a place to hear a fifteen to twenty-minute sermon and listen to instruments play nice music on a Sunday morning. The primary function of the church is to build faithful disciples who love God, love their neighbors, and live in kindness and mercy with all creation. I believe that many of the United Church of Christ's congregations, in their well-meaning and ultimately good desire to be as welcoming and open as possible, have undercut and downplayed the meaning of discipleship. What happened to the urgency of church? Although our salvation is through faith, not through works, it does not mean that Christianity is something that only happens in the head. If it does not provide discernable and real change within the hearts and the works of both individuals and communities, then we have shown our congregations nothing more than sham spirituality.

A life of discipleship is not one that should be taken lightly. One of the best effects of the decreasing level of Christian normalcy in the United States is that it is becoming less and less convenient to be Christian. I hope for the sake of American Protestant Christianity that we become counter-cultural again. I hope that we are no longer the establishment, the elite, and the trendsetters. When the church has cleansed itself of its privileged place, when the “cultural kenosis” happens fully, at a moment of despair, I believe that moment is when the church will be reborn.

One significant, inclusive aspect of the UCC is the belief that each person is both called and capable of ministry. Embracing the concept of a “Priesthood of all believers” all members of the United Church of Christ are called to minister and participate in ministry. Those who are called to formal and specific areas of ministry pursue additional study and “apprenticeship” to serve the local church or related partner ministries. Within the structure of the UCC, there are multiple opportunities to engage in covenant for ministry. The Basis of Union, a founding document of the United Church of Christ introduces the purpose of the Conference: “...for fellowship, counsel, and cooperation in all matters of common concern.” Involvement and alliance with the General Synod⁵ allows local churches to be part of the national church landscape, a broader, more diverse, scope of purpose. On a national level, UCC churches bring their collective spirit and voice to initiatives and campaigns that influence church policies, and even national issues.

⁵ “...for fellowship, counsel, and cooperation in all matters of common concern.” Constitution and Bylaws. Constitution and Bylaws. <http://www.ucc.org/aboutus/constitution-of-the-ucc.html>

Church in Today's World

It is my opinion, the term "Progressive Christian Movement" is resonating with post-modern believers who seek a viable, relevant alternative to the "Fundamental Christian" perspective. Interestingly enough, many of these same new views emerged from progressive theologians, seminary presidents, and clergy at the end of the 19th century. Henry Emerson Fosdick was one of many who became passionate about rethinking Christianity in light of scientific advancements and revealing Biblical scholarship. Fosdick and his contemporaries believed cultural and scientific advances could inform and enlighten the church and protect its future. Contemporary concerns about the viability and future of the church continue to fuel dialogue and debate about the need for Christianity. The term "Progressive Christianity" is readily accessible on the Internet, and is represented on sites ranging from Wikipedia to YouTube. Authors, theologians, pastors, and leaders of progressive organizations have contributed to the collective description. Most directly refer to the progressive nature of their beliefs and mission, however the website (and book by the same name) *Kissing Fish: Christianity for People Who Don't Like Christianity* appears as one of many attempting to provide a comprehensive definition to what appears to be a new, counter culture within Christianity.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.⁶

⁶ 1 Cor. 12:12 NLT

POLITY

Like most denominations, the UCC is in a covenantal relationship with God and with one another as separate congregations. Unlike most denominations, the UCC does not have a hierarchical authority of governance. Hence, each local congregation is in covenantal relationships with other local congregations, Associations, Conferences and the National Church. In the United Church of Christ, the UCC Constitution states, “The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole head Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior.”

However, as stewards, this authority resides in the local congregation. Each congregation creates and adopts its own constitution, elects its own leadership, and is self-governed. This gives the congregation freedom and responsibility within much larger covenant relationships. Assisting each local congregation to fellowship with other UCC congregations, an Association is established. An Association is pastored by an Associate Conference Minister, who assists regional congregations with resources such as search and call of pastors and leaders, and programs to strengthen congregational life.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”⁷

⁷ Col. 3:16 KJV

PRACTICES OF UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

For the past two-years, I've attempted to explain to my members that in the United Church of Christ all members are equals in the priesthood of believers, and though ordained ministers have special training, they are considered servants as well. Galewood congregants understand that members have the freedom to worship, live, and believe based on their understanding of God's will for their lives. Furthermore, with a rich diversity of congregations, resources are available that would well serve any Christian denomination such as the Book of Worship and The New Century Hymnal. Regardless of our diversity, each congregation practices two holy sacraments, communion and baptism.

During the time I have been in discernment regarding my sense of call I have spent time reflecting on my calling, my theology and my future aspirations. At times, I have spent this time of reflection in solitude; but at other times, I have done so in the company of others. Spending time with members of my discernment team, with family and friends, with individual members of my congregation, as well as with other pastors and church leaders has been an important part of this process. The time spent with others has challenged me to think more deeply regarding my faith and calling.

Yet, it is also in those times of conversation that I have heard the affirmation from others regarding God's working in my life and my calling to ordained ministry. The affirmation of others in the process of discernment is important. In a very real sense that affirmation tells you that you are not alone in sensing God's call on your life. Ordination is the next step in that affirmation. In ordination, the greater church affirms

the call and declares that it too senses that God is calling you to ministry and declares its intention to support you as you seek to follow that calling.

Within the church, pastors and leaders are viewed as individuals who “know what they are talking about.” All leaders within the church deal with that additional weight of responsibility. In the United Church of Christ with our various forms of authorized ministry, ordination carries with it additional weight due to its very nature of being a recognition of the greater church of that calling. The difference between a licensed pastor, a commissioned person, or an ordained person may be minimal in the way it is lived out in practice within the church; however, there is a different level of responsibility that goes with ordination. I am seeking ordination, not because I think I deserve it or feel I have earned it. Rather, I know that the title “ordained” carries additional weight with it, I’m humbled as I carry that weight as a senior pastor currently.

One of the aspects of the discernment process leading to ordination that I have become aware of is how in discerning the calling of one person, that same discernment causes others to look at their own lives in new ways. As they watch and observe the ways in which God is at work within one person’s life, they also become much more aware of how God may be working in their own lives. God may very well be planting the seeds of future ministry in their hearts. I know this because I have seen in my own life that it’s often been in the hearing of other people’s stories and sense of call that I have been able to see mine with great clarity.

Social Justice

I believe as pastors, ministers and lay leaders we should remain committed to social justice and working for God in the church, community and the world. There are many UCC churches making a difference in promoting racial justice, advocating with gender equality, and speaking out on social issues. We affirm the wholeness of life. We proclaim that God's love is unconditional in the promise of the gospel. Therefore, the Church has different types of caring ministers for spiritual healing, health and welfare issues. We also advocate for the LGBTQ community and for people with disabilities to have human dignity among others in their community. In 1985, the General Synod passed a resolution "Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Covenant as Open and Affirming". These actions allow the world to see that UCC is an inclusive church and not an exclusive church.

Members of Galewood church did not possess a strong social justice awareness as I had expected. My expectation was based solely on the teachings that stemmed from the leadership and activism at both Trinity UCC and Covenant UCC. As a result, I created a social justice page in our weekly bulletin, as we also incorporate litany's in various services and engage in respectful dialogue regarding current social justice issues.

Don't Forget About Me

This year I decided that 2018 was going to be the year for me to focus more on self-care. Recently, I realized that I've been on auto-pilot for the past two and half years without genuine restoration. I've preached every single Sunday, short of brief vacations with my family. This year I've decided to take one Sunday per month to rest; steal away from my everyday routines to meditate more, read my Bible more and listen to our still speaking God.

Be still and know that I am God...

As a "self-care" focused year, I was determined to be given "A Clean Bill of Health" from my physician during my annual physical. That has been my hope for this year. After undergoing outpatient surgery to have a benign lesion removed from my body that was spotted in a recent mammogram, I have become more appreciative of the "little things" in life. To encounter such a close proximity with cancer, I've made no other decision except to be still and acknowledge God for who God is. I've made this conscientious decision because I believe God is still speaking to me.

In spite of my challenges and life's dismays, I will continue to press my way to see what the end will be. Finally, as I continue the journey in my walk with Christ, I pray that God will continue to use me not just as His instrument of praise, but also as His beacon of light for generations to come.

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