

**PAPER IN CONSIDERATION OF ORDAINED MINISTRY
IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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As a father, I have encountered a number of moments that have disturbed my sense of being, prior to taking on this new role. One of the more interesting aspects of this truth is my unnerving ability to do and say things that remind me of my own parents and grandparents. This is to suggest that very often I find myself doing the things that I saw my parents do as a child, that I swore I would never do once I became a parent. One such thing I promised is to not be a hypocrite. While many parents will deny this, many of us are hypocrites, condemned by our own instructions to our children. We tell them to save their dessert for after dinner, right after we have taken the first nibble on the pie, cake or cookie. We tell them to go outside and be active, right before we grab our favorite beverage, settle into our favorite chair to watch a marathon of our favorite shows and/or series. We have come to normalize the command: do what I say, and not what I do.

Unfortunately, this has become the state of our faith. We have declared the need and desire of our faith to guide and guard us, yet the very statements that we make of faith turns its head as a mirror on our own lives, or lack thereof. A large reason for this abnormal reality, is the application of a “one size fits all” theology. This is not an attempt to antagonize the Ephesians 4:5 declaration of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” but rather that we have taken the application of this and all other texts in an attempt to create environments that are inherently exclusionary, even to the point of excluding ourselves. And by imposing faith that we fail to live by, we make it impossible for anyone, including the holder of the belief, to live by that belief/theology. As such, it is my belief that every believer should stand and measure themselves by a unified gospel (where members of the God-head are one and equal), as it reveals itself through their ideals of a statement of faith. For me, this statement of faith should be shaped by a number of considerations.

The first consideration is your social location. Though we do not often acknowledge this, the God we speak to is definitively shaped by the environmental encounter by which we engage God. This is to suggest that the “how” of meeting God determines the “who” of God we acknowledge. Scripture holds this truth coherently. An example of this is in Genesis 22, where Abraham is halted in preparing to sacrifice Isaac, his promised son, and God provides a replacement sacrifice. Abraham declares that location as Jehovah-Jireh (Jehovah/Yahweh will provide)¹ as a result of encountering a God that provided for him. For me this has manifested itself in the naming conventions that I have attributed to God. As a young man who grew up seeing his grandfather as his primary male influence, it was important at times for me to see God as father. In the moments of discord between my mother and myself, it was similarly important for me to see God as my mother. Put simply, the basis of my theological statement of faith is that God is everything to everyone willing to see God everywhere we need. Noel Jones says it best when he remarked, “God is everywhere, but he is nowhere unless you meet Him somewhere.” Any statement of faith that limits, in my opinion, goes against the very nature of the expansive God in whom we are declaring to plant our faith. To this end, I accept the statement of faith of the United Church of Christ (“UCC”), which presents a unifying identity of God.

The one aspect of the statement that I question, along with many other statements of faith including my own, is the tendency to lift Christ at the expense of the ideals of the creator God and the revelatory “Comforter” known vernacularly as the Holy Spirit. This is to suggest that we often are not as intentional about the other expressions of the God-head, which results in a statement of faith that removes the centrality of God, and the use of the Holy Spirit in our faith discussions. It surely is not lost upon me the importance of Jesus in our faith, as he is the central historical marker

¹ Genesis 22:14

for the faith and the “Word” by which we live. However, I wonder if we are unintentionally placing the burden of our faith on the New Testament when identifying a statement of faith and not the entirety of the Bible. To me, this is very obviously the case, as many statements of faith use the Old Testament as a way to rush to the cross and not allow the God described in those pages to persist on, at and beyond the cross. This is largely in part to the churches difficulty in creating a God narrative that fits the sensibilities of a wavering believer. Our failure at dealing with this God leads us to disregard completely or superficially handling aspects of God described in the pages of the Bible. I will say that although the UCC statement of faith is incredible in its inclusion of the God article before most of its declarative statements, I do find it lacking a bit in the identification of a role for the Holy Spirit in our faith. We often can rationalize the historic and gospel depiction of Jesus, though we struggle at times to identify what that means for us. We allow the Jesus of the Bible to be real in the text and in history, yet not real and active in our lives currently. We can also reconcile the identity of God as the Ultimate Reality, establishing a link across many faiths. But, in my opinion, what presses us beyond the life and work of Christ to a place of being guided to do the will of God (thereby reflecting the service and sacrifice of Christ) are the answers revealed to us through the Holy Spirit as a matter of faith, with an awareness of the strengths and limits of knowledge. The faith we are beholden to rests in the tension between the limits of our knowledge, the awareness of it, and God’s limitless nature (I write this in my book *Lost In Church Translation: Finding Christ In Christianity*). I discovered a quote by Karl Barth in Francis Chan’s book *The Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*. Barth states, “When we are at our wits’ end for an answer, then the Holy Spirit can give us an answer. But how can He give us an answer when we are still well supplied with all sorts of answers of our own?”. Further, John 16:7-11 states, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do

not go away, the Advocate [*Helper*] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”. In my estimation, this is Jesus pointing us in the direction of dependence not on his actions, but on a constant dependence and reliance on the Holy Spirit. This is not to suggest that Jesus is not the center of any effective statement of faith, but rather that the Holy Spirit is just as important and relevant (a unified gospel).

In many aspects, faith without the inclusion of the Holy Spirit is similar to baking bread without proofing it (allowing it to rest causing the gluten and yeast to expand the dough). When I was learning to bake, I would mix all of the ingredients that the recipe required. Because I was short on patience, I would immediately toss the dough into the oven. It turned out to be a disaster. It would be flat and dense, rendering it inedible to most, including me, the baker. Proofing allows the dough to expand (as the ingredients ferment) and causes the bread to become less dense and easily digestible. To not include the Holy Spirit as an important actor in our faith, would create a faith that is dense and unrecognizable to most. This faith does not contemplate contextual theological perspectives of others. If we integrate, more fully, the actions and place of the Holy Spirit in our faith, I believe it gives us a greater light into the ministry of Christ (and not simply a ministry about Christ).

This “proofing” cannot be limited to our identifying the primary Christian agents (God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit). It is also reflected in our understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. Growing up in the church, I often had a confused understanding of the sacraments. From my mother (a Baptist), I saw Baptism as the central act of the faith and that

through Baptism we are marked as believers, and as a result are “saved.” From my father (a Catholic), I saw Baptism as a part of the journey, albeit an important part, by which we must first come to understand God and the weight of our affirmation in Baptism with Confirmation being the culmination of our acceptance of Jesus as our (personal) Savior. I have come to find that my personal belief sits somewhere in the middle. I have grown to see Baptism as a personal act inside a corporate confession. Placed another way, it is our outward expression of a confession that should be preceded by an internal revelation from the Holy Spirit. Baptism does not welcome you into a local church, but the Church universal. Put another way, I see Baptism as an open confession of our decision to enter in the Body of Christ (the Church universal.) This act takes a multitude of people from all demographics and creates a bond by which we can come to reflect on a faith which requests that we love our neighbor as ourselves, and make the “other” a part of “us” as a truly catholic church. I do not believe that the act in itself is salvific, but rather is an acknowledgement of an entering/returning to a righteous stance with God. Further, it serves as a sign of entering into the covenantal bond that exist between the Church and the Christ.

Baptism is furthered and built upon by the sacrament of Holy Communion. This aspect of my faith has truly been a journey for me. Prior to my experience in seminary, my view of Communion was a reflective meal of the sacrifice of Christ, only for members of the Body of Christ. Without knowing it, I was effectively limiting the openness of the table based on cultural or contextual biases. I bought into these biases based on being a part of a specific community of worship. This practice contradicted the openness the community claimed. The essence of Communion is a reflection about and welcoming of the “whosoever” with Christ. In my context, it is like my great grandmother’s beef stew. Growing up, I was accustomed seeing a number of my family members, family friends and, in some instances, people I never met, congregating at the

home of my great grandmother, Annie Hester's, home. I never knew that she and my great grandfather (Albert) were known across the city for adopting and welcoming non-related families to come to their home as a place of refuge. In some instances, they adopted children that were without sufficient guardianship. One night she was preparing a huge pot of beef stew, as she regularly anticipated that a large number of people would come by the house for food at some point. For a bit more context, she was also the mother of 13 children herself, grandmother to countless grandchildren, and had many great grandchildren. On one particular night, when the beef stew was done, my grandmother sat in our dining room and moments later died. The entire family came to her house in a state of shock and mourning, as well as did members of the community and some of our "adopted family." Though we were bonded by the loss, everyone in the house that night was at extreme place in their journey. Some struggled financially, some emotionally; some struggled with identity issues, and other struggling with addictions of all kinds. Almost on cue, one of my great aunts went into the kitchen and began handing out bowls of the stew to everyone in the house. When someone asked her why she would hand it out to people who were not family, she remarked, "Because Momma made it for everyone who would walk through that door." That, to me is the table of Holy Communion. It is a meal reminding us of the intention of God through the sacrifice of Christ espoused in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who (whosoever) believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." The door of belief is not restrictive, but open to all who are willing to come to know the God of the Jesus who sacrificed, by revelation of the Holy Spirit. The meal should not be controlled by the perspective of who should be family, but should be open to Christ affirming the "whosoever" wherever they may find themselves in life's journey. I believe that this is only achieved by way of embracing and understanding the unifying spirit which advocates the case for the mission and

ministry of Christ. Simply put, the spirit allows us to be open at the table of Holy Communion so that any who partake would not only be considered a co-laborer (simply another worker), but a brother or sister, becoming family within the Body through the bonds of the unifying sacrifice of Jesus. When they become family, we love them differently.

Accepting what I perceive as the truth of the Sacraments, through the revelation given by the Holy Spirit, allows us then to move forward as the Church in accomplishing the mission and ministry to which we have been called. Historically, Christianity as a religion has established itself in an isolationist way. We are more interested in a particular belief, than in what unifies us. This has allowed churches to be on completely opposite sides of the central biblical truth. Placing a number on it, we currently have over 450,000 denominations across the world that lay claim to the name of Christianity. It is easy for to preclude some by how they choose to accomplish the mission of the Church as an extension of the ministry of Christ. How they serve, shows us who they are.

For me, the mission of the church is to act in accordance with the deeds and teachings of Christ, central to which are “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.²”. To me those three concepts encompass the whole of the mission of the Church. We are charged with the task of ensuring that justice prevails, and is the central focus of how we seek to engage the world. Justice, is not about equanimity, but rather is about the care and sacrifice for the “other.” The “other” is the disenfranchised, the lost, the left out or the least of us. It is ensuring that those apart from you are cared for as much as you. It is the act of lifting up the lowly and humbling the haughty. Justice allows us to live peaceably and in unity, to live peaceably. I believe justice is a requisite for peace. This is not to suggest that justice is accomplished through peace, but to experience justice is to experience peace. And this does not manifest itself in the form of charity,

² Micah 6:8

but rather in a greater investment of continual sacrifice to ensure that the life of the other is secure. Charles Dickens is quoted as saying, “Charity begins at home; justice begins next door.”. One who is self-seeking can never accomplish the central mission of the Church: justice. Furthermore, a church which lends itself to concern for itself can never lay claim to the gospel. The thematic truth of the gospel rests on Jesus’ acts for the other in face of personal danger.

Like justice, it is also necessary to include the love of kindness in the mission of the church. It is our love of kindness that pushes us to several acts. The first is the obvious act of service. Service can include acts of charity and ensuring the mental, physical and emotional stability of those who are less fortunate. It is caring for the proverbial orphan and widow. Contextually, the orphan and widow should be seen as those who are socially incapable of caring for themselves, relying on the response of the community for their well-being. Today, the orphan and the widow can be seen across racial, gender, economic and various other demographic lines. It should be the mission of the church to ensure that those disadvantaged by society have a means by which they can strive toward social equality. When the church loves kindness, it is pushed to ensure that in all that it does, it pushes toward the well-being of the other.

A question provoked by the first two mission points is – What makes loving kindness different than doing justice? The difference to me lies in my theological perspective of Jesus (my Christology). For me, the acts of Jesus can be split into the buckets of justice and loving kindness. A third, for revelatory purposes, is the work of Jesus to reveal the intentions of God, hidden in the words of both the Law and the Prophets. It was Jesus’ love of kindness that provoked him to heal the sick and the lame, and perform the miracle of the bread and fish. Similarly, it was Jesus doing justice that led him to the cross. His resistance of social systems and rejection of spiritual burdens

caused him to allow the bitter cup of the cross to become his accepted call, as it became the ultimate act for the other.

The third mission of the church is for believers to “walk humbly with your God.” I could and have written blogs and sermons about this, but the central point of this is our ability to be present as a witness to the mission and ministry of Christ. To walk humbly with God is to lift the image and character of God such that the self is of diminishing significance as the journey continues. It is our ability to walk with God as a reflection of God’s grace, love and mercy, in a way that says to believers and non-believers that God is ever present with them through life’s journey. It is here that we find our ability to witness and evangelize, but not for the sake of making members, but for creating disciples. A person that knows a God who will meet them when they need God (and how they need God), is more likely to render their trust and life to this God and in turn becoming “critically” present for someone else. This is true whether it be spiritually journeying with someone, emotionally comforting someone or economically providing for someone.

Much of what I believe hinges on one simple item. It is the singular item that has provoked many to belief and conversely repulsed some to the point of atheism. It is the item used as the central case for and against God: the Bible. Without creating a completely separate theological dissertation, my understanding and reading of the Bible can be summed up in one sentence. The Bible is the infallible word of God as understood by fallible human hands. Now that you are thoroughly confused, let me make sense of that statement. I like to approach the Bible in a very intentional, serious manner. I believe that a study of the Bible is an attempt to unearth the truth of God as it lies on those pages. But as with anything, we have to accept it as an interpretation of the truth that God was seeking to give to its writers. To better appreciate the perspective of how people

see truth, it is necessary to contextualize that truth for the writer, be aware of the contextual slant of the reader, and find the centrality of “truth” hidden between the two. The Bible holds truth for those willing to look for it. Further, the style of writing in the Bible is so varied that any attempt to be a literalist would be swiftly met with contradiction, lack of continuity and unclear vague statements.

The Bible is similar to how a chef uses a knife, in that the hands that uses it determines its effectiveness. I love watching the Food Network and specifically I love the challenge shows like Iron Chef, Chopped, etc. Periodically, they allow amateur cooks to be on these challenge shows. They often find themselves discussing the “knife skills” of a cook. To them, a person that is precise and intentional with every cut shows that they have trained with the knife and can create symmetry between each slice because they know how to deal with each stroke of the blade. Conversely, those not used to dealing with knives are clunky in their cuts, slow and often a danger to themselves and those around them. As with a good chef, in the hands of someone who knows how to handle the Bible with the care and authority which rests in its pages, each text word will be treated and rightly divided with the care that it was intended. In the hands of those not willing to deal with the text honorably you find people take text out of context, creating pretext (false truths), which can make it a danger to themselves and the believers who listen to them. This is not to suggest that you must preclude your own social locations in handling sacred texts, but rather that you must be honest about those biases in a manner that is thoughtful and intentional. Said another way, being “skillful” with the text does not assume that there is one right way, but rather that there are some obvious wrong ways to deal with the text. My grandmother taught me this.

To deal with the Bible contextually does not mean that it lacks relevant, practical application. The truth of the Bible is persistently relevant and necessary. Winston Churchill once

remarked that “The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is.” To me, the Bible can be easily attacked by those that are not seeking truth, but who are seeking confirmation of other truths. But for those seeking truth in times of great trial and controversy, in times of great angst and anguish, the Bible holds a truth of liberation, of peace and of joy that can ultimately give us the endurance to hold fast to faith in the face of a world that rejects it and you. It is in the pages of the Bible where I find a God who has spoken across eternity to reassure all who will believe that there is nothing God won’t do for you. At the core of the Bible is the desire God has to reconcile creation (ALL OF CREATION) to God’s self. As long as the world is in chaos, as long as we are in social, economic and political turmoil, as long as we go through personal distresses, joys and confusion, the Bible will always remain relevant.

Now I must be honest, everything that I have stated to this point has not always been the case for me! My journey in accepting these beliefs has been a long and winding road. Further, I did not always espouse to the theological perspective of the UCC. Growing up in a house where my parents were on opposite ends of the spectrum and eventually having a step-father who was completely removed from theological discourse altogether, left me wondering what it meant to be Christian. The deeper question was how I deal with or live in/out this truth? This is where I found the greatest connection to the UCC. As an amalgamation of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church, I found the UCC to be an attempt at not simply developing another denomination, but rather at forming a bonded relationship, undergirded by a desire to see unity through reconciliation. For me, this has been my faith journey. All that you have read to this point is my attempt at reconciling an internal desire to be in relationship with God, with my human frailty questioning the existence of God, and the Holy Spirit urging me to push toward the mending of the two. This is why I lean so much on the Holy Spirit, as there is no other reason

to help me comprehend how someone that grew up in the church, went through a season of rejecting the church, could now find myself as a defender of the church and my faith. Even now there are moments of tension and evolution that shape my understanding and of why it is important for me to believe in a “still speaking God.” This desire to see God moving actively in our reality allows me to see a God who was earlier as concerned with the oppressive Roman Empire, and is now equally concerned with the violence in Chicago, the brutality of the Ghana slave trade and all the other atrocities of our time.

Seeing unity through reconciliation takes appreciating its context as well. Here is where the polity of the UCC is its most important in my desire to be ordained as a pastor. The UCC is a forerunner in the concepts of autonomy and covenant. Too many churches and denominations are moving to a place where autonomy is fundamentally more important than covenant. Where denominations want to respect the local needs of the church they have not done as good a job helping churches understand what covenant requires.

This reflects a similar conflict within the church, where leadership desires for a means to connect its congregants, while members are concerned with their personal context (what they need and desire from God personally). I personally believe that congregations are a body of contextually similarly situated individuals bound by a singular desire toward the mission and ministry as expressed through a given leadership. No two congregants in any given church setting are the same. As a result, their perspective, and consequently, beliefs regarding God can be starkly different. What allows them to lay claim to the same church is a belief that the direction of the leadership is worth following, even if not always agreeable; or they have developed a level of kinship with the community not tied to theology or leadership. This can be very dangerous.

The challenge is to create a balance between autonomy and covenant. For the UCC, local congregations play an integral role in the context in which they sit and as a result have very specific theological perspectives given the congregation and leadership. But what binds the churches together is a shared desire to “proclaim the gospel in all the world, gather and support communities of faith in their celebration and mission, labor for the creation and increase of God’s realm of justice and love in the world, and to manifest more fully the unity of the church, all humankind, and the whole creation” as espoused in the UCC’s basic purposes of the church.

Beyond the polity of the UCC, my appreciation of its tenets has been shaped by a number of preachers, pastors, writers and theologians. The primary preacher/pastor that opened me toward this denomination is my current pastor, Rev. Dr. Ozzie E. Smith Jr. I did not always agree with what I understood to be the theology of the UCC. In truth, I had a tendency to lean toward a more conservative, exclusionary faith as held by those with whom I knew growing up. However, when given the opportunity to do a field study, I chose (and was chosen by) Covenant UCC, in 2014. I began attending Covenant, thinking that my beliefs would be reinforced about the denomination. I was quickly met by a pastor who I admire and has come to be the biggest influence in my views on how a pastor should love their people and be in covenant with the wider church. For many this may be a small consideration, but for me, one that grew up with a great-grandfather, grandfather, god-parents, several aunts and uncles that have or currently serve as pastors, this was incredibly important. Pastor Smith has not only opened my eyes to the relationship between the church and the denomination, but has also broadened my desire to be open to the next move of God (and not constantly reflecting on the last move of God).

The most influential writer on my spiritual journey has been James Baldwin. Even though he became an atheist, his reflection on religion and social ills have challenged as a lover of Christ

and the Church, to wrestle with some of the questions he posed resulting from his start as a preacher, to his eventual rejection of religion. At times I have found myself questioning God, whether it was during the loss of a family member, eulogizing my grandparents (who raised me), going through a period where I was living from house to house, having lost my job or dealing with medical issues. The writings of Baldwin served as a point of helping me to re-engage my faith. To this day, I often measure up my preaching, teaching and ministry actions by this Baldwin quote: “If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him.” The God that Baldwin desired to see was not evident in his context given an abusive preaching father coupled with a society that rejected his race and sexuality. My prayer is that I can show people a God who can make them feel bigger than their circumstance, liberated to be themselves and loving enough to accept those who are not similarly situated as themselves.

Preachers that have influenced me are vast, but much of the preaching that has affected my approach toward ministry and learning/acceptance of the UCC have been Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright and Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas. Dr. Wright made me believe in the fluidity of faith with his sermon, “The Good News for Homosexuals.” This message reflected a man who struggled with his theology to come to a new place in contrast with his original position. Also, his sermons uncovered a liberationist and an Afrocentric Christology that I had only read about from theologians and never heard from the pulpit of a congregation. To me, Dr. Wright may be the greatest prophetic orator I have ever heard. Not far behind him is Dr. Frank Thomas. As a student of his teaching on preaching, I have found myself enamored by Dr. Thomas’ ability to bring academic excellence to the pulpit. His preaching is what made me pursue seminary, as I felt that

my preaching up to that point was incapable of being academically sound and able to provoke thought to enhance one's faith and praise at the same time. His work is second to none in that area.

There have been so many theologians that have affected my call that it would take a separate 20-plus-page paper to explain. For here I will simply lift up two theologians. The first is Rev. Dr. James Cone. He literally is the first black theologian I read at any great length. Since then I have come to love some of his predecessors and contemporaries such as Howard Thurman, but largely my theology has been influenced by his writings in *Black Theology and Black Power* as well as *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*. Cone made my views on racial injustice contextually relevant to my theological development. The second theologian that has affected my spiritual journey tremendously is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Like Cone, Bonhoeffer's work pushed and forced the limits of my understanding regarding faith and what it means to be a Christian. While Bonhoeffer pushed me to wrestle with what it means to be Christian, Cone forced me to understand what it means to be an African American Christian. Bonhoeffer's work, as well as Cone, Thurman and many others, is on my constant reading list for their impact on my journey.

Much of what and who I am has been affected by the previous pastors, preachers, teachers and theologians. Much of it has culminated in what I understand to be my present call and ministry. When I sat down to write my book, *Lost In Church Translation: Finding Christ in Christianity*, I found myself seeking a way to make Christian theology a personal journey. Much of what we have come to know about our faith was told to us and was not a reflection of our personal attempts to question the text and context in which we have come to know God. Evident in the current generation's rejection of any sense of religion is an easily dismissible clinging to spirituality. They are not challenged to think about what life means. They likely have not had an opportunity to look at the bible or understand it for themselves. This is a result of our elders telling us what to believe

about God, as opposed to telling us where to look for God. Presently I serve the young adults at Covenant U.C.C. I see my call for them and for all as a guide. I want to help those caught between a rejection of the church and an acceptance of God. This is most evident in the generation labeled as “millennials,” but extends to all who have lost grasp of reason to “hope against hope.” While I adhere to the belief that all generations struggle with this at some level, I do recognize that this special cross section of religious/spiritual rejection and navigating social justice issues has not been this dense since the civil rights movement. My call is to preach and teach in such a manner as to draw out the question that believers hide, to begin the journey of finding their answer, in God! In practical terms this means coordinating Bible studies, ministry initiatives and programming for young adults and as the church and pastor directs me by the leading of God.

My ability to fulfill this call is contingent on my ability to honor the responsibilities that comes with it. To this end, it is easy for me to reflect on the ideals of the pastoral ethics and boundaries as set forth in the Manual on Ministry. Simply put, it is all about integrity. The gospel you preach and the way you live inside and outside of ministry should reflect an adherence to a gospel that is “light” and a responsible relationship that is “easy.” This is to suggest that we should be honest about the gospel. A life lived honestly can be made easy and manifest in a light and not burdensome relationship with God and with people. We come to the cross seeking a faith that will allow us to live “larger, freer and more loving.” As a leader in the faith, it is incumbent upon me and my peers to treat the people of God, with great care and consideration. We are never to be a burden and never to be hypocritical.

I opened this paper noting the challenges of not being a “do as I say and not as I do” father to my sons. I have noticed that Caleb (three years old) and Micah (one year old) have learned to watch my actions as they struggle to understand my words. As a result, I can tell them a million

times to do something, but what they do always mirrors what I do (even to the point that slight mannerisms I have, they have taken on). I pull at my beard when I am thinking, so when asked a question Caleb rubs his chin. I always stretch whenever I get up from sitting, so Micah always stretches back when he is standing near my bed. They can decipher some of my words, but it is my actions that matter to them the most. I would suggest the same for believers as a group and particularly for the leaders of the faith. We are not measured by our inspiring speeches or insightful quips. We are largely set against our actions and how it is we live out this truth before people. As a result, I do not take this opportunity of leadership or ordination lightly. I have grown to learn through trial and error that my actions matter. What I do to those around me is what is most concerning to people. My words are only valid if my actions and my character matches them. To that end, I have come to see myself and my personal journey as a marquee for Christ. The words may not always be well lit, but you will always know that Christ is performing on the inside.