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January 5, 2023



GYE NYAME

The African symbol for the supremacy of God

“Gye Nyame, meaning "except for God," symbolizes God's omnipotence through the knowledge that people should not fear anything except for God. Another interpretation of "except for God" is that no one has seen the beginning of all creations, nor will anyone live to see the end, except for God. Gye Nyame indicates the recognition of the supremacy of God over all beings and therefore is the one that is feared and revered by all. This is one of the many Adinkra symbols of West Africa, Ghana is used by the Akan people in various decorations, clothing, and artwork. Some say that the symbol represents a spiral galaxy or two hands with different gestures that refer to God being supreme to the simplistic ideals of male and female identifications that are used today. The use of this symbol by the Akan people suggests that the Akan had a highly advanced writing language that transmitted religious and cultural concepts, and also might have had a somewhat extensive knowledge of astronomy, which shows their intellect and indicates that the Akan were a more advanced civilization.”

Recently I traveled to Ghana and was introduced to and enlightened on religious and community practices. The previous year I had my DNA tested. The results indicated I share DNA with the Akan people. The partial search for identity increased my desire to visit this country of which I knew very little. I did not understand the attraction I had to this symbol which I adopted a few years prior.

However, that became clear as the days there progressed. God as the supreme being echoed the tenets of the United Church of Christ.

Autobiography

I am a native of South Florida. I was raised by my Aunt along with my brother who was murdered at age six years old when I was eight. She was an Evangelist in the Church of God in Christ and a community activist. In the Pentecostal tradition an evangelist is specific to the title female ministers are given after they have completed the training series and the Supervisor of the Women's Department refers them to the Bishop of the denomination to authorize the appointment. They are equivalent to the Elders, males. She was instrumental in my development in reading and practicing the word of God. This resulted in participating in several church activities with several denominations in the area. I delivered my first sermon at thirteen years of age under her guidance. SHE established a non-denominational bible class in her house when I was a teenager. She invited anyone who wanted to learn more about the word to show up on a Tuesday night. When there were community concerns, she was there for them and vice-versa. I observed men and women uniting to address injustices, care for each other, and demonstrate God's command to love one another. There are numerous actions I was a privilege to observe her involvement in life! At age eleven I listened to her have a heart-to-heart discussion with a man regarding his only son. His son demonstrated characteristics of a same-gender loving individual (my church supports referring to members of the LGBTQIA+ in this manner, it is more inclusive and honoring). He was heartbroken and disappointed. My mother sat him down at the dining room table following a breakfast she invited him to. She had him talk about how and why he felt as he did. Then she talked to him about love and the importance of loving his only son. She acknowledged there would be others who will say negative things, but they do not count. What mattered was his love for his son. His son needed him to support him and stand against anyone who had something negative to say. Then she

let him, and his son know she would be standing with them. She possessed that type of commitment and could handle almost anything that challenged her humanity. I have maintained that moment for many years in my spirit. There were several momentous occurrences experienced with my mother. Many of these lessons of life are supported by the United Church of Christ polity. She supported autonomy for congregations regardless of the denomination. She believed in the concept that congregations should choose where and how they would interact within communities. No denomination should dictate how you relate to and serve Christ. She demonstrated the “table” is open to everyone who wanted to come. She supported women in ministry, justice as significant to all mankind, and honored the humanness in God's creations.

After graduating with honors from high school I was accepted to Loyola University in Chicago. It was my first experience leaving Florida to live in another setting. There were no family members in this city. God connected me with those who demonstrated warm connections. I was adopted by a woman, and her family, wh my mother encountered during a conference the summer before I arrived. This relationship has lasted for over four decades. While at Loyola I experienced the usual response from many professors who did not feel African Americans were capable of leadership in nursing. However, I also experienced several who were extremely supportive and encouraging. Graduation occurred with a Bachelor of Science Degree in nursing.

I have worked as a hospital nurse at the University of Illinois and Michael Reese. Community health nursing, at the Chicago Board of Health, Visiting Nurse Association, and Chicago Public Schools has been the most fulfilling, it presents with different challenges. You encounter individuals and families in their homes with diagnoses that require additional research for appropriate treatment. It involves a more comprehensive form of care, that embraced the needs of the family and not just the individual as in hospital settings. I discovered that visiting the homes of patients offered opportunities to connect

with families and teach them healthcare from a preventative perspective or tertiary perspective. The Chicago Public Schools also involves working with families of students and the staff serving them.

Currently, I am employed full-time with the Chicago Public School system as a certified school nurse. God chose this job for me. I was hired as the first school nurse to work with a new designation of special education students. The category at that time was Emotionally Disturbed. I altered how I would refer to the students as Emotionally Challenged. This job has provided multiple learning experiences which initially challenged my comfort zone. To serve students and their families, and work with other staff in very special settings, I registered and attended available seminars that addressed meeting the needs of this population. I have continued to access educational offerings for over forty years to enrich my skills and improve my practices. I have often stated to co-workers for many years this is ministry.

During my tenure at Chicago Public Schools, I have filled roles as nurse manager for all high school nurses followed by managing half of the city school nurses. The spirit of God spoke into my spirit to begin attending homegoing services for any of the three hundred school nurses and their families as needed. There was such an appreciation as they saw me there. This is one of several ways to show, “regard to all people with equal love and concern and to minister impartially to the needs of all.” When I relinquished this position to another person she said: “I am NOT going to do what you have been doing by going to funerals.” I responded: “That is fine. God called me to do this.” That decision she indicated changed within weeks when she had to go for a very specific reason. She has been in attendance over the past eleven years. We meet at some of the same services. She has continued to remind me of her statement to me and how she could not have imagined how this form of ministering could impact those with whom we work. This call prompted openings to provide pastoral care in non-traditional settings to staff, students, and parents. Providing emotional and spiritual support continually has continued for over forty-plus years. There are opportunities to visit in their homes, visit juvenile detention centers,

asked to preach at some of their churches, attend and minister at weddings, and other celebrations of life, tragedies, and triumphs.

I relinquished the managerial position when I needed to focus on seminary at McCormick Theological Seminary. Before attending McCormick, I received master's degrees from Northeastern in family counseling, and from Chicago State in education. My family has been supportive and involved in all of my educational endeavors. I have two adult children who critiqued my assignments and offer suggestions on how my writing could be altered. They are exceptional. Although I was married for twenty-one years before divorcing, I appreciate that stage of my life and my current stage of being single.

Christian Journey

Ministry requires a willingness to serve God's people in the manner God determines. I have been interested in chaplaincy as a form of pastoral care. It addresses mental, physical, and spiritual needs to promote well-being and create paths toward wholeness. There is sharing of lessons learned and experiencing new ones. Therefore, as a chaplain, practicing pastoral care focuses on these concerns and desires. Historically my faith has developed through various actions and experiences God and others have provided. There are several examples throughout this document. The results have been and continue to be a faith that seeks understanding, and a continuous search to trust what we know about God as we learn more.

I accepted Christ as my savior in 1976 in South Florida at a revival service held in the church where I grew up while visiting my mother. Before membership in Trinity, I experienced membership in Baptist and Pentecostal denominations. In 1978 I joined a Pentecostal denomination located near the Cabrini-Green area. During the twenty years there I taught adult bible classes and volunteered one afternoon each week for ten years assisting the pastor. I developed a parish nurse program in

conjunction with a Northwestern Hospital program. Members participated in first aid classes, blood drives, and other health initiatives. The initial call to formalize ministry occurred in 1990. While in prayer and bible study the Holy Spirit said to attend the training sessions as an Evangelist. I discussed this with the pastor who encouraged me to follow through. However, I was hesitant because I did not feel I would be accepted. The level of rigidity was antithetical to my personality. I delayed for some time while God kept pushing me. In an interesting conversation with the Spirit, I stated I am not these people's idea of an Evangelist. The response was, "They did not call you I did. Are you going to act like Jonah?" I answered the call. I asked God to go before me at the interview and I was accepted into the program. After several months I successfully passed the oral and written examinations. It was a proud moment to receive my documents and letter to obtain my habits that are worn for communion and other ministerial duties. The ceremony was confirming God's call. My responsibilities included serving communion, assisting in funerals, and baptisms, teaching and preaching, and visiting sick and shut-in members of the congregation. These relationships have nourished my spirit which contributed to the nourishment of others. In 1996 continuing to serve and participate in my church became difficult as my recently divorced husband decided to join the congregation that I served for twenty years. This proved to not be conducive to my spirit and continuing as a member. Switching churches let alone denominations historically was frowned upon. Therefore, this required much prayer. I was leaving a church where I was very involved on the local, state, and national levels. After discussing the situation with my pastor, I decided it was time to seek another church home.

When I began to search for another church, I visited a few different denominations across the city. After some months of prayer, another church felt positive. En route to that church service with the intent to join, the Spirit said to me twice, "Do not join this church." I obeyed.

I became aware of Trinity United Church of Christ through a member of my clinical team who was a deacon there. Subtly she invited me to visit on a few occasions. I accepted her invitation to brunch for the annual Women's Conference. While it felt good to encounter women from other areas of my life, that was not the deciding factor for considering Trinity UCC. She assured me that her pastor Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, would engage me with answers to multiple questions regarding this denomination, this was beyond what I could have anticipated. She pressed me for weeks to write my questions to be submitted to him. I disregarded her declaration that he would respond because of the size of the church, and I was not a member with that he would feel obligated to communicate. When I finally wrote the questions on a scrap section of the paper, she took it from me to give to him. Rev. Wright responded to my scrap paper inquiry with a three-page single-spaced letter. The attention he gave in his response, and the shepherd-like behavior demonstrated, was affirming my humanity. However, the Holy Spirit had to confirm this consideration to join this church, and she did. Genesis 1:26 indicates God spoke and said, "Let us make mankind in our image". That image includes the feminine, Pneuma (Greek) and Ruach (Greek). Pneuma reminds us of things in our lives, provides comfort, teaches, guides, intercedes, sends workers, and calls. I would never impose my vision of the Holy Spirit on another person. However, I can support this image of God as Ruach. Therefore, I embrace the Holy Spirit as a nurturing member of the Trinity.

I informed my Pentecostal congregation it was time for me to leave. They were aware through conversations that this move was coming. There are similarities with the United Church of Christ, which became more obvious as I became more involved as a member that exists in these denominations. This includes the Baptist church wherein I was a member for four years. Each acknowledges the Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are some similar values observed, sacraments, communion and baptism, the importance of culture, and education. These denominations also exercise similarities in

autonomy, implementing church constitutions, and guidelines, and determining how leaders are chosen. Local church congregants are strongly involved in the decisions affecting the community. Currently, for over twenty-one years, the United Church of Christ has been the church I have continued to expand my call to a different type of ministry.

Seminary Education

Attending seminary allowed me to continue to follow the call of God. Before this, I received education in ministry through Moody Bible Institute classes, and from theologian professors at my other churches. Courses were also attended through SCUPE (Chicago's Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education). There were some of the most dynamic professors who contributed to my seminary education. Dr. Deborah Kapp, also my former advisor, introduced various facets of urban ministry in the city of Chicago. We explored historical and present concerns which are prevalent in society. These experiences solidified prior teachings and provided newer approaches for addressing some social injustices. We were introduced to various agencies and churches including The Urban League, and the Community Renewal Society. This course in urban ministry appealed to me because it connected with the concepts in the United Church of Christ on their positions for social change, justice, and witness. Dr. Delois Brown Daniels, Dr. James Perkinson, Dr. Stephen G. Ray, and Dr. Yvonne Delk were among many others who contributed to educating me on the importance of studying to prove oneself to God, rightly dividing the word of truth, and understanding the various interpretations of the biblical text. I must acknowledge Dr. David Daniels for encouraging me to enter McCormick Theological Seminary where I graduated with a master's degree in divinity. Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. is thanked for many conversations related to the importance of seminary and the letter of recommendation he wrote to McCormick supporting my entry as an MDIV candidate. He did this without informing me. But God

allowed a person in admissions to mention it thinking I knew. I requested and received a copy of the letter for a keepsake.

Pastor Wright facilitated the early Saturday morning Ministers-In-Training sessions which were very enlightening and appreciated. I began attending them in 2000 and continue currently. The years of attending and engaging many authors presenting at the sessions were phenomenal. Additionally, Rev. Wright reviewed diverse segments related to UCC's polity on covenants and autonomy. As an Afro-centric Church, we are expressing that autonomy as we live out being "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian."

These monthly sessions were instrumental in preparing me for attending seminary. Seminary offered me an opportunity to explore and apply different truths to benefit myself and others on the journey. The journey for a master's degree in Theology offered knowledge, truth, and disturbing realities. The desire to transmit knowledge garnered through instruction, and interaction, with individuals and groups from various ethnic and religious practices, has broadened my sphere of reference in understanding other traditions. This journey continues with the doctoral program for pastoral care at McCormick.

THE CHURCH: ITS MISSION AND MINISTRY

POLITY

The United Church of Christ operates from a covenantal, autonomous, non-authority, bottom-up relationship with congregations. It differs from other denominations in that members of congregations determine how they will function rather than being headed by a central figure, such as Bishop for example. The four denominations, Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed stressed, in addition to the attributes listed above, emphasize the importance of culture, sacraments,

and education. The governing body begins with the local churches and continues with the associations, conference ministers, and synod. The Constitution of the UCC indicates, "The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole head Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior." Therefore, this reinforces the significance of the local congregation's ability to determine how they can create their constitutions, select leadership, engage with the larger church, and determine how to implement the general constitution, by-laws, and resolutions. Congregations become connected through the love and appreciation shared. God chose this denomination for me and I chose to remain for twenty-two years because it lives up to the original values and intent and supports the values I share in ministry.

The United Church of Christ seeks to challenge multiple issues which affect our daily lives. We, the church, are called to implement the work of Jesus Christ who stood against powers that subjugated and in some instances eliminated, those members of communities at risk. The UCC confronts such entities through various methods. Civil protests, such as Black Lives Matter, and other strategies are utilized to identify and change discrepancies.

The social justice ministries and actions of the UCC in our communities reminded me of my activist mother in South Florida. Similar attributes are supported in the UCC, steadfast commitment to community, and humanity regardless of sex, denomination, race, or socioeconomic status, and challenging those in power. These qualities have contributed to the importance of my call to this denomination. While a different focus of ministry was prevalent in my previous denomination, becoming a member of the UCC has broadened my scope tremendously, particularly in my local church around the issues listed above.

There are actions of protest taken which speak to authorities of power to challenge the processes utilized for marginalized members of society who have been diminished even more or have no voice. The UCC continues to review additional actions necessary to respond with equity toward

injustices in the church and community. There is an increase in support for change, through resolutions and various initiatives within the UCC to increase their relevance to the current challenges experienced in churches and communities. One group within the denomination is MRSEJ.

Ministers for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice (MRSEJ) are an association of Christian ministers that actively pursues political resolution of Racial, Social, and Economic Justice issues. MRSEJ is the clergy component of the African-American historically underrepresented peoples of the United Church of Christ. They are a group that seeks to "address racial justice, within the structure of the church and the world...and to give voice and power to the many social issues where people are denied justice." Before membership in the UCC, I never participated in letter writing, attending informational seminars, or marching to protest injustice. That has changed. I have marched many times with my church, seminary, and community. I am a delegate representing school nurses with the Chicago Teachers Union and have and will continue to participate in civil actions necessary to protect lives.



The faith community of my church also engages in supporting missions of the local and national church through participation in providing for the needs of those who are experiencing wrongful incarceration, health initiatives that serve to promote (empowerment and advocacy) awareness of the physical, and mental illness, food deserts, and other health concerns. The pandemic has magnified the discrepancies and inequalities among certain groups. I have increased volunteered, distributed food, financially support various food giveaways, and fund other initiatives to support the needs of neighbors near and far away. While these areas of ministry are significant, another practice speaks to my spirit, the ordination of women to ministry.

The United Church of Christ affirms the importance of women as ministers equal to men. Women are honored in the denomination as God intended. Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers, Rev. Melbalena Evans, and Rev. Dr. Yvonne Delk, among others, are women I have known who represent the denomination consistently and provided me with lessons of life. Rev. Delk was the first African-American woman ordained in the United Church of Christ. She was the first African-American woman to head a national office, Church in Society. As a participant in one of her classes, she embodies the spirit and passion for ministry and, encourages those in her presence to strive for commitment to the call. Membership in the United Church of Christ revealed passages in the bible that offered new interpretations supporting women in ministry.

Statement of Faith

My central affirmations of faith include salvation by God's grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God as head of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit as the guide, Christ as the son of God, and the bible as the word of God, are core concepts of my beliefs. Faith is developed when we experience the workings of God in our lives. Knowledge of God comes through the study of the bible, relationship, and understanding of the grace God bestows upon those who seek him.

I believe the bible is the word of God and is his authority for life and faith (New International Version 2 Pet. 1:21, 2 Tim. 3:16). I believe scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit to provide direction for our lives to encourage our faith and bring us closer to God (2Pet. 1:20-21). This faith became important to me when I declared Christ as my savior over forty years ago. I felt the spirit of God calling me to trust and rely on him rather than my resources. Bible study was instilled in me by my mother and continues to be encouraged in my home church. Seminary studies related to the bible (Old and New Testament studies) challenged years of my belief systems and provided insights into who were the writers, to whom the messages addressed, why, and how to incorporate the knowledge for use in pastoral care. While I relate to several scriptural passages to guide my pastoral practices, there are tensions in the text. Among these are Paul's view on slaves obeying their masters, the subjugation of women, apocalyptic imagery, and the use of power. I practice using the bible to specifically address concerns presented by those I counsel where appropriate. A former pastor often would say "Eat the fish and spit out the bones." Scripture is a living document that presents various shades of interpretation based on the time and conditions of those presenting and those listening. There is a tremendous amount of wisdom in the bible to benefit our current lives.

I believe God is Father, creator, (for I am created in his image, Genesis 1:1), ruler of the universe, omnipresent, and he has existed throughout eternity. "He calls the worlds into being, creates man in his image..." He has a purpose for my life to serve his people and to worship him in spirit and truth while I am here. God has guided my vocation, called me to ministry in 1990, selected the United Church of Christ, and the seminary I attended. God has loved me through many tests and continues to guide my steps. God has demonstrated his care for me over the years. He has provided wisdom in many areas that could have devastated me and my family. When I was divorced, I needed twelve hundred dollars every month to replace the income. I had two children in college. I discovered months of unpaid bills and pink

notices of defaults in the two mortgages, both at twelve percent interest. This was a surprise. The only one to turn to was God. Step by step he directed me on how and what to do. Twenty-one years later I am still in my home. I can tell others how to trust God because of my experiences.

I believe Jesus Christ is the son of God that was foreordained to provide salvation for sinful persons to reconnect with God's original purpose for divine and human communion so that we might fellowship with him. Jesus is our Lord and savior who came in a human form born of a virgin, crucified, and died for our sins as a perfect sacrifice. Sin separates us from God. Sin differs for many of us. It represents, for me, going your way and leaving God out of the equation. You are not allowing Jesus to work out your salvation through you. I can share in my pastoral care practices how salvation has delivered me from the person I used to be. If you hurt me you could write in granite, she will come for you until she has made you feel what she felt. I had the proclivity for dissecting an issue, examining the components, and devising a method for executing the procedure. Salvation and trusting in Christ altered that behavior. My attempts to handle it would lead to sinful practices. He let me know that vengeance belongs to him. He has proven this on many occasions while he also taught me to pray for them. This was an adjustment for me. While it can be a challenge, Christ reminds me of patience through love that is to be incorporated into my call. There is a song in my culture that says, "Can't nobody do you like Jesus." I rely on Christ to guide me as I travel this journey directed by the HOLY.

I believe the Holy Spirit, Ruach, poured out power to the church at Pentecost, gave gifts for use in ministry, and empowers effective ministry. In the Pentecost tradition, there is a strong emphasis on listening to the Holy Spirit for guidance in our daily lives. Some of the gifts given to me by the spirit include the ability to teach, nurture, and care for nature, and humanity. John 14:26 reminds us that the Spirit inspires scripture, and dwells in believers. The spirit is the comforter and provides comfort for me in times of distress and turn, I can walk with those who are also experiencing distressful life encounters.

Most recently I attended the homegoing service of the father of two members. They did not know me personally. However, when the chaplain group to which I belong sent out the announcement, the Spirit said go. When I connected with them at the church, their response to someone during COVID to come alongside and be there for support, was significant to them. I have learned to hear the voice of the spirit within my spirit for ministry direction. The spirit has also on occasion blocked some actions I would have taken and altered decisions I thought were great opportunities.

I believe in the sacrament of baptism for the body of Christ, believers who have accepted him as Lord and savior, as a demonstration of the new life in Christ. It is a connection to all members of God's family, ancestors, current, and future (Matthew 28:19-20). I understand baptism is provided to infants and children in different denominations. My initial faith practice, Pentecostal, declared a person must know what justification and sanctification mean. Parents who accept responsibility to raise their children in the admonition of the Lord stand in that sacred space. During CPE training a couple wanted their newborn child to be baptized before leaving the hospital. Since they were Catholic, I indicated there was a priest available to perform this ceremony. The priest was pleasantly surprised the infant was healthy because this was not the normal situation. The hospital staff collected a variety of clothing for such occasions, and we were able to supply the parents with choices. The priest invited me to participate actively in this ritual and the parents were happy also. There was so much joy in that space as they spoke of the significance this had for them. It felt honorable to participate. The word states to "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6). Since baptism is considered a sign of a person entering God's covenant community and as a seal of the grace covenant, then it is significant for everyone to be a participant. Jesus said in Mark 10:14 that his disciples were hindering the young children from approaching him, not to hinder them, for they are significant to the kingdom of heaven. I believe that baptism for infants is a recognition to the

community, they belong to the family of God. I accept this as my responsibility and will honorably practice with joy. The United Church of Christ supports this practice and respects the autonomy of churches to facilitate their methods.

I believe in the communion of believers breaking bread as symbolic of Christ's body and drinking the wine representing his shed blood on the cross, as a sacrifice for our sins, reconciling us to God for a relationship, and fellowship (1 Cor. 11:23). God created us to be in unity with him. I believe in the unity of the body of Christ. When I participate in serving and taking communion, I feel the presence of the Lord in that instance. I am humbled by his sacrifice and love for all. All are equal for there is neither male nor female, incarcerated, free, or same-gender-loving (a term used for LGBTQIA+ members in my home church) that can separate us from the love of God. Everyone is welcome to the table.

Additionally, the reading of the word is living the word. Our experiences with the Holy produce personal testimonies or the construct of our own personal bible. A personal bible is developed through experiences that build upon each other thereby establishing a trusting relationship with God. Some of these experiences include surviving third-degree burns to my face. God spoke into my spirit while my face felt like thousands of angry fire ants attacking me. I heard God whisper "I will heal you." My experience of working in a burn unit at Loyola's hospital contributed to my understanding of what that would entail. When God healed me in record time and with new skin, it was a testimony to many people around me. There are no scars. This was not the first encounter with fire where God delivered me.

While working as a visiting nurse a client's husband accidentally started a fire in their apartment. It was on the day that I had a physical therapist and homemaker come on the visit for assessment. They were able to place the patient in a wheelchair and get her moving toward an exit. I attempted three times to rescue her husband who pulled away and went back into the apartment. When I looked up everything was pitch black. I could not see how to get out of the building. I cried out, "Help me, God."

There appeared an extremely tall figure in white who said, "leave him. Take a deep breath and crawl." I survived, he did not. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been instrumental in guiding my life through car accidents, diminished income as a result of divorce, death of loved ones, job placement, seminary, and joining the UCC. I have numerous testimonies to the power of the Holy guiding, protecting, and delivering me. God still speaks whether it is delivering from potential harm or reminding us of who is watching over us.

Ministry and/or call

My initial call to ministry was over thirty years ago in my previous denomination. Previous ministerial experience in other denominations included presiding over the jurisdictional training for the nurse's church group. Additionally, teaching bible classes, and conducting workshops, along with several program developments within the church and surrounding communities. As a co-founder of the counseling center there, in conjunction with Lutheran Child and Family Services, I provided counseling services to members and non-members. I served as a board member of the "For Christ Ministry" program.

After joining Trinity United Church of Christ in 1999, Rev. Wright offered me dual membership but indicated I could not hold an office at Trinity. Because I understood God calling me to Trinity, I did not want to have dual membership. I believe in giving one hundred percent to where I am to serve. It has been an honor to serve in several ministries. These include Worship and Arts, Counseling, Yoga, Green, Endeleo, Chaplains, and Ministers In Training. I have ministered as an officer, board member, and chaplain, in most of these ministries over time and continue currently. As a chaplain, I ministered to members and their families experiencing illness and provided spiritual care for homegoing services of relatives and friends. This continuing year of the pandemic has seen a significant increase in health challenges, deaths, and socioeconomic downturns. Members of the current ministry contact me usually

when they or someone they care for need pastoral care. I provide counseling and referrals to appropriate resources and church staff. Before the pandemic, I made visits to extended care facilities, hospitals, and home visits. The pandemic has presented different challenges.

Currently, I am a Minister In Discernment with the Chicago Metropolitan Association. In the past four years, I have been participating in activities related to the broader church. Each month attending cluster 6 meetings have inspired a desire to become more involved with this branch of the Chicago Metropolitan Association. Recently I became the treasurer for the cluster. Additionally, I have participated on a committee in the Chicago Metropolitan Association Council meetings since 2019. Interests in the denomination resulted in attending all of the conferences held in the spring and fall, annual Illinois Conference workshops, and boundary training beginning in 2017. Each week, with very few exceptions due to work commitments, I have become involved with two groups, Clergy Community of Practice held on Fridays, and Stronger Together As One Conference which meets on Wednesdays. Both have benefitted me in learning more regarding how the conference and association function. Their commitment to serving the membership in an inclusive, autonomous, supportive, and loving manner, has been encouraging. The emphasis on continued growth through education, social awareness, and the importance of scripture has drawn me to seek official representation as an ordained minister in the UCC. In 2020 I was encouraged to attend the IMN, Interim Ministry Network, training online. The training increased my understanding of different congregational practices. In 2020 I became a member of the Advocate Aurora Hospital system governance council representing the United Church of Christ. It is important for me to learn aspects of ministry that will benefit those whom I serve.

One of the requirements, for MIDs, of the Chicago Metropolitan Association is taking a clinical pastoral education class as referenced above. Initially, I did not understand the need for me to participate, particularly since I am a registered nurse and have years of experience in counseling

families. However, the process was great! The CPE goals were established by each participant. Goals were directed toward areas of your life to be examined and challenged for growth to occur. When our facilitator stated in one of our sessions: "This is about you." I thought, okay, I am open. One goal was to increase my ability to minister effectively to patients and families in crisis based on their needs. There were several opportunities to practice this in cases where the parent had to be removed from life support. This occurred with different patients. The emergency room was another area that increased my skills as a chaplain. Shifting mentally from registered nurse skill sets to chaplain skill sets required departmentalizing actions to be taken. When establishing contact between family members, per the patient's request, and resisting the inclination to answer questions regarding their family members' current health status, required focusing on the chaplain inside, not the registered nurse. Every encounter provided gems of novel experiences and opportunities from God to operate for the call to ministry.

There is an experience of which I would share involving a heart transplant patient. I made a few visits with a sixty-five-year-old African American female whose new heart was three weeks old. We talked about her life pre-surgery and the emotional and stressful changes she determined needed to happen post-surgery. I had the opportunity to visit with her approximately three times before dismissal from the unit. Following one of the visits after we prayed and shared scripture I felt a powerful emotional response inside. Upon leaving her bedside I continued to have this response and went to a space for privacy located on the floor. There I looked out the window as tears sprang forth and I began to praise God, for what the medical person in me knew could have been the outcome related to rejection for transplants, age, race, gender, enormous amounts of post-care that are usually required, and more. I entered what my soul was experiencing on the voice recorder of my telephone. I did not want to forget. "God, you are an awesome healer! Thank you for allowing me to see that you are no

respector of persons in this event. God, you touched the hearts, minds, and spirits of the physicians to select your daughter for this procedure. You God have erased organ rejection, the ability to pay for the aftercare medications, and given her a new attitude. You are using her to touch so many more lives that will bring glory to you. Thank you, God, for allowing me to be a part of this moment.” I choked on tears of joy (almost danced in that space about the goodness of God, hallelujah!). God is great, and greatly to be praised. I also had an opportunity to experience an internship in one of the south suburban churches.

The internship presented opportunities to experience the differences among congregational leadership within the same denomination. During the year at this church, I was privileged to provide pastoral care counseling to members, choreograph and dance with their dance ministry, attend monthly ministerial gatherings and events, participate in communion service, preach the baptismal service, and develop a congregational care program with two other members of that congregation. I initiated and facilitated six training sessions for twelve members who would continue the program. They were guided through research and development of the tools to be used for this ministry. The participants were eager to begin offering a ministering service to the congregation which was needed. Each experience directly related to the call from God in ways that I could not have anticipated.

My current call is the Transitional Pastor of Galewood UCC in Chicago. Before this call, I was focused on chaplaincy. However, God had a different plan. Since November 6, 2022, serving this congregation which has experienced several changes in its pastoral leadership has been an awesome journey thus far. We are working on healing, and program development, I currently understand it is pastoral care with an emphasis on I can share the word of God through various media. This can be accomplished through different forms of worship, bible study, arts, dance, counseling sessions, and care for the environment. I am involved in my church in several of these activities. I am called to provide service as God's servant through pastoral care which addresses mental, physical, and spiritual needs to

promote well-being, create paths toward wholeness, and share lessons learned in addition to experiencing new ones. The ability to provide care for congregations, and communities, development of programs that enhance the lives of those inside and outside of the church, and reach beyond the limits of physical structures to the heart and souls of people, has the potential to inspire unity in the body of Christ. I am called to serve the body as I grow in knowledge, and faith through bible study, and continuing my education. However, I am cognizant of the need to set boundaries that protect those I serve. I am to preach and teach the word as I honor what God has created. I remain open to the importance of discernment to my call and, with the assistance of others in ministry, continue to develop the nature of my call.

I understand and practice self-care. Christ demonstrated the necessity of pulling aside to refresh through prayer, meditation, and the word. I practice these also. People are some of the best creations in this world, you must love them, nurture them, and know when it is time to leave them. Additionally, self-care for me includes loving to cruise, fly, travel to interesting locations, dance, garden, visit museums, walk along the Atlantic Ocean, and listen to the waves crash the shoreline. Place me in nature and my spirit soars! I am excited about turning trash into treasure. I enjoy spending time with friends and family. I have completed multiple marathons and occasionally join community walking groups. These are some of the methods I utilize for self-care.

I am seeking ordination in the United Church of Christ as an official representative of Christ and his church in offering care and service to those I am called. When I consider the vows of the United Church of Christ these are the ethical standards and behaviors that require, willingly, me to remain committed to serving God and the community. I am accountable to both, to do no harm, but to love.

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