

PART I – MY THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE AND GRASP OF THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN FAITH

The earliest remembrances of my Christian faith development were activities in my family. There were songs we sang in our home around the piano, nightly bible devotions and prayers at suppertime with everyone around the table, and once more prayers and songs at bedtime. I also experienced the expansion of this Christian community of faith at weekly worship services, Sunday School, and elders sharing truths of God’s love. All of these reinforced the awakening of my relationship with God. I have turned to these treasures of God’s love throughout my life. They were sources of strength, as I consoled my parents when they buried all three of their daughters over the years. We held to the promises of our fellowship with this God of love and the hope of the Resurrection shared in our Christian belief of Christ’s redemptive power of love over sin and death. Our conversations during our grieving reclaimed the relational promise with our God of love; we cried, laughed, shared stories, rejoiced, embraced, and worked to heal the wounds of sorrow. We learned to speak of life and death not so much as either-or; instead, our faith shared communion in God’s love. I believe God was “we” with us.

I am drawn to the beginning of our statement of faith in the United Church of Christ (UCC), “We believe.” In this corporate expression, there is entirety and inclusivity. It proclaims that even while professing our faith belief, we do not prescribe how you must believe. We relate to each other through our similarities and differences. As the apostle Paul shares, “If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members but one body” (1 Cor. 12:19-20).

I believe our statement of faith, as the UCC and as individuals, recognizes the relationality between ourselves and God’s divinity as an eternal and foundational covenant of

love. In Jesus of Nazareth, who is fully God and fully human, God reinforced the importance of this relationship of God's love for all. My personal theology sees this relationality captured in the UCC Statement of Faith in the form of a doxology. This doxology is personal and immediate. God is referred to as "You," and we as "us," a dialogue of holy intimacy. This doxology frames my theology, recognizing the importance of the relationships between God, humanity, and all creation and the systemic changes that help our church's ministry thrive. My theology seeks to engage spiritual expressions of indigenous and native people to draw our Christian faith into deeper communion about relationality between God and all created things.

The opening statement, **"We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:"** describes the composition of God. Early Church Fathers, like Tertullian and Irenaeus, speak of God as one essence and the Threeness of the Trinity as the divine economy. The divine essence is not divided into three equal parts but a shared unity of God. The Trinity's interaction is referred to as perichoresis. I envision perichoresis as the eternal dance or procession of God. In this relationality, we witness the eternal connection between God and her creation. Each separate in our engagement with God, yet always and fully God. It acknowledges the Trinitarian tradition rooted in the early Christian faith in our naming God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Trinitarian naming, we baptize, but God is not limited to our human gender limitations. I believe God holds no human gender equivalency. I experience God as action and unchanged. Our Western Christian faith is rooted in cultures and customs of patriarchal maleness, while other cultures hold God as spirit, direction-focused, and even elemental. Even Jesus speaks about our being born of water and spirit, "Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don't be surprised that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' God's Spirit blows

wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:6-8)

Ecological theology examines the importance of God's gift of creation, our relationship with all created things, and our responsibility for its stewardship. Regenerative ethics focuses on our responsibility for sustaining creation without exploiting its resources and impoverishing other people. As one who embraces this theology and ethic, the following sentence in the doxology resonates powerfully with me. **"You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death."** The interconnectedness is set by declaring our identity and independence as a creation of God. God spoke into Creation, and we encounter God through all created things. Our Creation stories set the intention for a love relationship between God and all that is created. This mutually beneficial relationship is proclaimed in God's desire to make us in God's image. God creates companionship from the union with all creation, not only with other humans.

Yet, God grants us individuality as we experience our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual consciousness of God's presence all around us. As Leonardo Boff, the Latin American theologian shares, "Human beings were created for the universe—not vice versa—so as to attain a higher and more complex stage of universal evolution, namely, in order to be able to celebrate and glorify the Creator who wanted to have companions in love."¹ We experience God as eternal and our physical selves as mortal. In maintaining this relationship with God, we make our own choices. Choices that may be life-sustaining and renewing for all creation or harming and deadly to us, others, and future generations.

¹ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 112

In the UCC, we believe in the importance of a covenant. The next sentence in the doxology reinforces God's eternal vow with us. **"You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin."** I understand this as a bond of eternal faithful love seeking to restore our union with God. The oneness that is disrupted by sin and evil. I believe sin exploits reasoning by abandoning this relationship with God to promote our self-sufficiency. Evil is the act of intentional destruction of one's connection with God's love. Evil persists and flourishes as sin seeks to impede God's salvation. Through Jesus's ministry, words, and actions, he redefines love as the wronged father, wantonly lavishing love on both his sons, prodigal and obedient. It is the shepherd seeking one lost sheep instead of analyzing the risk. The words "your sins are forgiven" and "your faith has made you well" disrupt religious laws. Forgiveness and love's acceptance disrupt sin and sacrifice's repetitive and ineffective change attempts. Christ demonstrates love in his Resurrection, redefining death with life.

"You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles." According to my early faith formation, this statement would have focused on judgment and punishment. However, I now see the message of intervention and hope. I see the intervention as God's will that not one should perish, but all may have everlasting life. God's judgment focuses not on punishment but on calls for restoration. Yet even in the history of God's chosen people, they break the covenant with God and become absorbed in their well-being instead of their love for God, their neighbor, the stranger, and even their enemies. When our choices, by equating earthly power with righteousness, lead to faulty thinking and consequences, God intervenes through prophetic voices calling for repentance and confession.

In the sentence, **"In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and**

reconciling the world to yourself,” It is in the man, Jesus of Nazareth, that God reveals the fullness of salvation. Jesus, who was born fully experiencing our humanity, reveals our salvation through his life, death, and resurrection. Humanity sees this atonement through Jesus’s suffering, crucifixion, and death at the hands of the political and religious powers. Salvation’s ultimate power is in the perfect love and forgiveness Jesus declares for all eternity. Jesus’s perfect and unwavering love and forgiveness reveal our futility in comprehending God. Instead, Jesus restores wholeness between the Creator and creation. Jesus’s love brings about metanoia, the change in our hearts and lives. We see God’s love for us has restored our relationship by conquering sin and death. In sharing our common lot, Jesus ends the cyclic pattern of sin and sacrifice. By our faith in Jesus’s gift of salvation, love and forgiveness abound, and through our confession and repentance, full participation with God is restored.

In this statement of the doxology, **“You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races,”** I read the empowerment for ourselves and the Church to change. I recognize that throughout the church’s history, there have been changes, resulting in divisions, including the split of the East and West, the Protestant Reformation influenced by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, or the dispersion as the Puritans fled persecution, seeking religious freedom in the new continent. This same guiding power of the Holy Spirit drew together the four streams of our UCC formation in 1957, celebrating the unity in our differences of Christian faith expression while centered on unity around the statement of faith I engage now. I believe the UCC, though not the ultimate perfection of unity, reflects God’s hope for the relationality of all Christian faith expressions. We celebrate the strength of varied streams of theological and spiritual formation and expression. We recognize that the Holy Spirit’s endless intercession forms the primary

current of our faith formation, identification, and impact. Currents that develop uniquely in every local congregation, yet one in Christ. Currents that we hold in covenant with each other, churches, and denomination. Covenants that seek to welcome all into the oneness we share in Christ despite our differences. Oneness, affirming and building the church toward unity across boundaries and intersections of race, ethnicity, and culture. Unity, calling the church to action and mission to declare the Good News of Jesus's love and forgiveness for all.

The next sentence in our statement of faith states, **“You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.”** This calls us, as the church, to acknowledge the complete change in our lives through Jesus Christ's life, death, and Resurrection. We embody change in our actions and mindsets where the most powerful serves the least and most marginalized. Jesus Christ has redefined our relationship with God through this transformational change and made it whole. The Good News of Christ's redemptive act reveals a system-altering change. God intervenes to restore the covenant of love with all creation, where caring for the marginalized reveals Christ's fellowship with the one served and the one serving. It is an intervention shared at the font and table where our union with Christ may be made known, remembering the infinite promise of love's reign. We experience this transformation by celebrating the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, encountering Jesus Christ through love and grace.

We encounter water reframed in the sacrament of Baptism, a celebration of God's love and grace where God's Spirit has ever been present, flowing over the waters of Creation. Waters that brought forth life. Water from which Noah and his family were saved. Water that the

children of Israel passed through. Water in which John baptized Jesus. Water washing away the powers of sin and evil through our baptism with changed hearts and lives.

Further, we acknowledge our participation in the eternal dance of the Trinity as we baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The acknowledgment that we are not the ones who save ourselves. We are forever bound with God: in our birth as part of Creation. As we die and rise again in Christ, we are called to a life of radical change empowered by the Holy Spirit. By this profession during Baptism, we acknowledge that Baptism is the work of God alone. We come to the fount or water, and God binds us to the eternal promise in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life free from the powers of sin and death.

We celebrate as guests at Christ's table, this table of grace, an outward act of the invisible transformation of God loving us. A table that celebrates our relationship with Christ as we proclaim Christ's death, celebrate Christ's Resurrection, and expectantly await Christ's coming again. As the minister blesses the bread and the cup and all those gathered with the Holy Spirit, we recognize his suffering for our sake and the new covenant in his blood to celebrate the newness of life. A newness celebrating this relationship of forgiveness and love called to be salt and light to all the world, sharing the Good News of God's love.

I believe we are to invite all who seek Christ's presence to this inclusive table. There is no qualifier, no requirement to test the readiness of those participating. I believe that Christ invites all, for we see in the Gospels the parables of the prepared feasts and the promise of the heavenly feast where the invitation goes out to all, including those who are the poor, oppressed, marginalized, strangers, and sojourners on the byways. The invitation is to all, come whoever is hungry or thirsty, because you want to experience the fellowship of Christ's love present and

celebrated in this meal. A meal he shared with those who would betray him, deny him, and all who abandon him because God's love prevails. It is a feast celebrated that reminds us again that we are guests. We come because we desire that fellowship with Christ and one another. Our denomination and churches proclaim our unity in Christ. A unity, engaging issues of justice, advocacy, health, renewal, and wholeness as Christ's ongoing mission of love and forgiveness.

“You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end.” This is God's covenant of grace. Forgiveness abounds for all who believe as we share the love of Christ for all. This awareness of God's grace encourages change in our lives and the world by sharing the good news and working for justice and peace. Forgiveness dismissing the power of sin and death calls us to eternal life. Eternal life gives us hope for eternal communion with God, where we will know and experience a fellowship in our fullest participation with all creation beyond our ability to comprehend. The power of hope in forgiveness and grace drives our present work for the kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

The doxology concludes with, **“Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.”** It declares our worship of God, for there is no less. We acknowledge God's invincibility in all we proclaim in faith. Acknowledging our worship culminates in attributing praises worthy of God alone. Worship is expressed in the individuality of our hearts and congregations, yet unified in the Church, the body of Christ. For it is in the UCC where we proclaim, “that we might all be one,” that our praise is solely given for God alone, acknowledging the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer who inspire our worship with all creation. Whether by indigenous litanies, cathedral liturgies, or impromptu praise and prayers, God is the recipient of our and all creation's sacred and joyous thanksgiving; Amen!

Part II – MY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE POLITY AND HISTORY OF THE UCC

I became a member of the UCC in 2015, so its history and polity are still opportunities for discovery and learning. Yet, like the UCC, the richness of my Christian faith formation in the Evangelical Covenant Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Episcopalian Church have been the streams that have led me to identify with the UCC. My blending of traditions is not unlike the merging of the Evangelical and Reformed Churches and the Congregational and Christian Churches forming the UCC. The richness of discipleship, liturgies, education, leadership, worship, and mission have exposed me to many ways of celebrating my faith. Whether in highly liturgical services of incense and pageantry to guitar services on the lawn in a community park, I have known God's Spirit to be fully present. The UCC's diversity declares our love for God and our neighbor in each local congregation and affirms our faith relationships with God and each other.

Coming to the UCC, I relish the diversity of traditions expressed. These differences interwoven into unity are encouraged in the UCC. Whether a congregation seeks to designate itself through the various affirmations of Access to All, Open and Affirming, Intercultural and Multiethnic, Creation Justice, Just Peace, WISE (welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged for mental health), or others current or yet to come, or never choose to hold a designation, we as churches allow the grace for diversity while holding our unity in Christ. The words **covenant, unity, autonomy, congregational, systems, and change** illustrate my understanding of UCC polity.

Covenant – When I was young, the word covenant triggered images of a wrathful God. The breaking of covenants focused on sin and our eternal damnation. God's final forgiveness in

Christ's blood was always at risk. Fortunately, I now understand that God's covenantal promise of love to all God's children is eternal faithfulness and steadfastness. Yet our breaking of this covenant often results in failing and suffering consequences, not because God metes out judgment proportional to our sins but because our unfaithfulness brings about the opportunity for evil to be present.

Our use of covenant in the UCC is one of faithfulness to what is promised between us. These bonds between the pastor and the local church, the church and the association, or denomination and church, are rooted in God's promise of salvation in Jesus. Our covenants in the UCC help us understand boundaries and promises to faithful action. While they are written in our constitutions and contracts, it is the hope that these bind us as God's children to the eternal love and relationality God has promised to us.

Unity - God celebrates unity in our diversity and individuality in the body of Christ. The unity we profess thrives as individuals and congregations in our diversity guided by Christ as the sole source of our existence as the church. Our unity guides our vision and mission to share the good news of Jesus Christ in our diversity of expressions as the body of Christ. It also affords us opportunities to highlight and address challenges in our work towards creation and economic justice, reparations, systemic racism, anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments, dismantling white Christian privilege, and addressing the damages of colonization. Unity also recognizes the ecumenical union with other faith traditions as we work on peace, mercy, justice, and equity issues for all God's children and creation.

Autonomy recognizes that an individual or organization determines its function and purpose. For the congregation, autonomy allows them to explore and develop their role in vision and mission to the community, the denomination, the global church, and the world. Autonomy

does not mean isolation or unrelatedness. While the local church is autonomous in determining its functioning, it must recognize that its choices impact its members and the surrounding community. The UCC grants this autonomy in speaking to the churches, not for them. Speaking implies the importance of dialogue and communication, even with differences. As a minister to a congregation, I will recognize this autonomy while leading faithfully to the unity that Christ calls us to as the church. It is also helping the congregation understand how their autonomy is essential to the functioning of the whole system, this diverse and complex body of believers we call the UCC.

Systems speak to the interaction and contribution of all for the wholeness of the church. Recognizing the talents and gifts individuals bring to the local congregation is just as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. This gathering of believers, the local church, is like a human body. We all are not the same limb, organ, or body part, but we thrive, according to Paul, in our diversity of functions as we are joined together with Jesus Christ as the head of the body. Paul describes a body functioning fully with life and with awareness. It is not a dead body. Nor is it a body where one part dominates another. The church, as the body of Christ, functions as a system for the well-being of all its members.

We rely on these interactions for the mission and vision of the church. We also must confess there have been and are those times when the local and even global church has turned a healthy functioning system toward practices of systemic evils of racism, misogyny, colonization, and xenophobia. The church must recognize those marginalized members often considered least, for they deserve the greater honor—those because of their gender identification, sexual orientation, economic, racial, or ethnic identification. In our covenants, we, as the UCC, celebrate the diversity within our churches. As members of the local church, we must enable the

body of Christ, this system of integration and uniqueness, to move towards the unity in love we celebrate in Jesus Christ, the head of the church.

Congregational – From our early Christian history, we know that small gatherings and little churches spread the good news through the Holy Spirit. As smaller units, it quickly spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. At the same time, the Councils of the Bishops met to determine the theological framing of our Christian faith by establishing the creeds we use in worship today. The small groups continued to share, spread, and grow this message of Jesus Christ’s love for all. One of the UCC’s four main streams is the Congregational Christian branch, with the congregational coming from the reformed traditions founded by Calvin and Zwingli. Being congregational is our greatest gift to the local church, allowing the local church or congregation to make decisions for themselves as they discern God’s will. Though guided by decisions made at the denominational level, the congregation discerns its response through the Spirit. Responses shaping its vision and mission.

Change is inevitable in any system; the church is no exception, and understanding change is vital for its thriving and growth. This is critical for my work as a minister and pastor to a congregation. Jesus’s ministry includes the reframing language of change in the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5) “you have heard it said, but I say to you.” Or Jesus’s continuous message of metanoia found throughout the gospels. “Change your hearts and lives.” A call for the system to change, allowing new perceptions to occur. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This metanoia or systemic change often initiates from what systems theory refers to as change agents, often persons at the margins. The UCC’s history is replete with change agents, Lemuel Haynes, the first ordained African-American minister. Antoinette Brown, the first

ordained woman minister, and Rev. William R. Johnson, the first ordained openly gay minister in a mainline Protestant denomination, to name a few. Change agents are often on the margins and have encouraged a system to examine what keeps it from thriving. I see Jesus as a change agent. His life and ministry reframed the Law, forgiveness, the kingdom of heaven, and his Resurrection reframed death to life. Other change agents in the UCC advocate for designations and resolutions at the General Synod to engage ecclesial responses, for we all have a function to share in the body and ministry of Christ. These words have helped me to identify the unity and diversity of the UCC and how it has influenced its history and polity. They also speak to my theology centered on relationality and systems to discuss the Christian faith and the mission of the church.

Part III - MY PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF MY CALL

The person as a person of faith. My ancestry in Finnish culture is displayed in beautiful wall hangings. As a person of faith, I view my faith journey as a richly woven tapestry of spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual experiences. It is not a perfect weave. The denomination of my youth was conservative, evangelical, and judgmental, yet it whispered a call to ministry. It was rooted in a narrow understanding of salvation based on the four spiritual laws. It did not explain why we colonized those mission fields that I saw in the slide shows of visiting missionaries. I was also angered and disillusioned about a faith formation that had people arguing after the funeral whether or not my friend who died from suicide was “saved.” They did not argue about why we failed to welcome and accept him as he struggled with substance abuse and depression. I heard judgment instead of love. I buried my thoughts of ministry and pursued helping people through social work, crisis counseling, and other behavioral health roles.

Relinquishing my narrow conservative evangelical frame of exclusive salvation, I attended the ELCA and Episcopal churches. Their liturgies and focus on worship gave me a

profound reverence for the holiness in the Word, Sacrament, and music. Again, the relationality we all share with God became meaningfully present. Still, the call of God seemed far removed.

My first engagement with the First Congregational Church of Crystal Lake came on Christmas Eve, 2013. I was in the middle of a divorce, overwhelmed at work overseeing a significant layoff of employees, selling my home, and feeling isolated in my Christian faith. I entered the packed sanctuary praying for solace. After the prelude, the first words I heard were, “Welcome; no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” I cried uncontrollably as hope, peace, and love rushed into my empty being. A system that had closed itself off suddenly allowed itself to experience the love of Jesus again. This love reaffirmed God’s faithfulness in the personal welcome I received from many extended to inclusion in worship with music, word, and sacrament for justice, mercy, and kindness.

Five years later, my new wife asked if I had ever considered attending seminary because she sensed a desire in me. As we talked and prayed about it and met with our pastor, the church council, and others in the congregation, this decision was affirmed again and again. During seminary, I became even more convinced that my initial call of decades earlier was ready to be fulfilled. In seminary, I profoundly renewed my love of Jesus. I explored, dismantled, and reconstructed a faith rooted in a broader all-inclusive love of God, love for all creation, people, traditions, and expressions shared in Jesus Christ. Challenging my Western-Euro traditions, I uncovered biased roots creating barriers rather than bridges between faith expressions, calling me to confession, repentance, and willingness to address privilege and prejudice.

Yes, my faith formation tapestry has color deviations, worn edges, unraveled threads, and inconsistencies in its pattern as I experienced sibling deaths, unemployment, divorce, and doubt. Yet, this faith journey has led me to this time of discernment and responding to a call to ministry

initially begun earlier in life. My Christian faith is not just in the quiet times of prayer. It is the richness of worship with others stirring the Spirit within me. It is in the emotions of celebrating the birth of a baby and grieving over a loved one's death. It is faith shared with persons rejoicing in their healing or empathizing with persons expressing depression over physical limitations, mental illness, and substance use. It is a faith confronting those hidden factors of my privileged white Christian faith and my need for repentance and work for justice. All these threads of experience and discovery are in my woven wall hanging of Christian faith.

The person as one called to ordained ministry. I have affirmed my call to ordained ministry during my seminary education and discernment process with my home congregation and the Fox Valley Committee on Ministry. During this time of discernment, I have discovered that God sought to be in this covenantal union with all things from the first moments of Creation. Not just a relationship but a conversation between the Creator and the created, the Lover and the loved, the Forgiver and the forgiven. It is integrated into our faith's recorded oral traditions and stories. Whether in the conversations between Adam, Eve, and God or the conversations we have individually and corporately today, all are searching for God's fellowship. I believe our Christian faith grows from God's conversations and covenants with the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. God's desire for this relationship is the core message in the words and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, our Savior. It is a divinely interwoven oneness, unified yet diversified, of all believers, in the body of Christ.

My time at seminary and my ongoing reflection on the Marks of Ministry reaffirm that I have the gifts to minister to the congregation and individuals as the body of Christ. Gifts to teach, preach, lead worship, and preside over the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Gifts to minister to the local congregation, to be a pastoral presence for those in spiritual crisis,

leading the church for its autonomous life and mission to communities local and global. My gift of understanding systems affirms my calling of ministry to the dynamic entity we call the local church. It means working for equity, justice, and advocacy for those who often are shunned.

I see challenges for my ministry in helping others acknowledge rather than dismiss the perspective shared by another member of the body of Christ. Also, as an older white male, I will be challenged to address the privileges of social location that marginalized and oppressed others. Challenges lie in helping the church, the body of Christ, as a system, to recognize that systemic change is inherent in systems that thrive.

The person as one called to a particular ordained ministry. I believe that I am being called to ordained ministry as a pastor of a local congregation. I see my gifts of ministry attending to the wellness and thriving of the local and the global body of Christ. I believe God has called me to congregational leadership. My gifts include compassion, peacemaking, empathic listening, organization, and leadership.

As an ordained minister, I will lead the congregation by dedicating myself to worship, pastoral care, discipleship of others, and identifying and facilitating members' gifts to serve the congregation and the larger community around us. I will administer the sacraments to those who seek God's presence. I hold myself accountable for addressing injustice by calling to light those actions that oppress or marginalize others. I recognize that my leadership is by being a servant to any I encounter. I will honor these gifts God has given me and hold out Jesus Christ as an example of serving. I am drawn to the richness of the UCC traditions and will support the local congregation in its celebration and faith formation based on those traditions. I recognize the covenant I will share with the local congregation and my association. It affirms my commitment to wellness and healthy balance with my daily spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being.

This reinforces the need for my covenant with my family, morning devotions with my wife, and personal spiritual mentoring and study. I dedicate myself to my spiritual growth and care, taking time for my family and myself and strengthening my leadership skills through participation in denominational and ecumenical gatherings. In the next five to ten years, I see myself serving a local congregation as it seeks its vision and mission in a very different way than its history. I believe that the church of my youth is not the church of the future. We must become more aware of the potential to promote systemic change calling the church to respond to a world struggling environmentally, economically, and spiritually.

The person as called as an ordained minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Being called to ordained ministry in and on behalf of the UCC, I agree to participate in covenants for the life and work of the UCC. As an ordained minister, I commit to the healthy thriving of the UCC by maintaining my ministerial standing and honoring my call agreements and covenants. I also recognize the need for guidance from the Conference staff and my Committee on Ministry if there should arise divisiveness that would imperil the relationships in my ministry setting. I further acknowledge and share responsibility for the mission, vision, and purpose as a representative of the UCC to the communities I live in and serve. I will strive to promote equity for fellow clergy and employees in the church, honor our search and call processes, participate in my continued growth of the ministry, and encourage and advocate for the diversity of people and opinions throughout our congregations.

Furthermore, as a member of the ecumenical community, I will commit to addressing cultural awareness and justice issues. This covenant will also nurture mutual relationships focused on purposeful and encouraging dialogues for their ministry settings. As a formerly trained mandatory reporter, I commit to preventing and addressing acts of physical, mental, and

sexual abuse or neglect appropriately and legally. I will responsibly use resources, material, financial, personnel, and social media and appropriately report misuse concerns.

To be called to ordained ministry as a servant leader to the Church exemplified in Jesus's life, ministry, and redemptive act of love is profoundly humbling and genuine. I desire to share Jesus Christ through my life, growth, and witness to the local congregation through Word, sacraments, discipleship, and service to others. Hymns intercede through their text, harmony, and ministry of praise through participation have always been a source of my Christian faith. Two hymns stir my call to ministry, one from my childhood, "This is My Father's World," and the other, more recently, "Here In This Place" (Gather Us In). "This Is My Father's World" has planted deep in me my passion for the ecological theology of creation's revealment of God and our relationship with all. "Here In This Place" shares, "giving [me] the courage to enter the song" to serve, lead, and nourish congregations toward change for love, justice, and mercy.

I believe that ordination does not make me more holy; it sets me apart to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the covenant of love that God set eternally. In this proclamation of God's love, I believe that God will continue to speak and reveal more opportunities for the coming of the kingdom here on earth and in eternity. It is with joy that I will serve as an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, to grieve with those that mourn, to proclaim forgiveness to those who are burdened, and to celebrate with all the church the eternal and unfolding work of Christ's love for all of creation. Additionally, I welcome faith experiences to nurture growth from God's Holy Spirit to joyously serve, compassionately lead, gently comfort, and bravely seek and guard those who hurt and struggle. My spiritual journey has shown me through Scripture, life experience, education, and relationships with others that God's love is a transformative change for all and is woven deeply into the tapestry of my faith.