

THE MARKS OF FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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SECTION 1: SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION FOR MINISTRY

PART A: A SENSE OF BEING CALLED BY BOTH GOD AND COMMUNITY TO AUTHORIZED MINISTRY.

1. A lived faith showing love of God, trust in Jesus, and openness to the Holy Spirit.
 4. A sense of being called by God and the community to authorized ministry in the church.
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My call to ministry dates to my youth. My grandmother, who died when I was 10, was the first to recognize and affirm my pastoral gifts. She was and is the foundation of my faith in God's love, trust in Jesus, and openness to the Holy Spirit. It was my grandmother who first introduced me to my faith journey. Her devotion to her church, and her faith in God are still alive within me. She was a woman of little means but rich in love. It was out of her deep devotion to God and love of her community that she would gather with women in her church every Saturday morning to go out into the less fortunate areas of my home town of Tampa, Florida to witness to the poor through the offering of food, clothing, but most often just loving friendship. Her life is a testimony of the love of God. She was the first to name my call to ministry.

When I was three my mother married the man that would become my father and we moved from Tampa to Ruskin, Florida where we attended East Ruskin Pentecostal Church of God. It was there that I began to recognize my own sense of call at age 14.

I went through a difficult period of doubt at the age of 17, when I came out as an openly gay man. I was taught by the Pentecostal church that homosexuality was a sin and that being gay automatically disqualified me from ordained ministry. It took me several painful years to untangle myself from these beliefs. Yet even during this time of letting go of old beliefs, and coming to terms with new ones, my longing for ministry remained. It was as if God was giving me the time to come to my own understanding of just what my call was to be. I can see now that God has always had a hand on my life; protecting, affirming, and growing my call to ministry in the church.

The year 2008 was one of new beginnings in my life. This was the year that I came to fully embrace my call to ministry. On a Sunday morning in April of that year I had a strange encounter with God. In the United Church of Christ, we firmly believe that "God is still speaking." While I had always believed this, I had never quite encountered it in the way I did that Sunday morning at Saint Mark United Methodist Church. Meg, a young seminary intern from Candler School of Theology, was preaching this morning, and as I sat and listened to her sermon I had a mysterious experience. Every time she opened her mouth to speak, I knew exactly what she was going to say before she said it. It was like watching a grade-B movie in which you hear the sound long before you see the lips moving. It was a deeply unsettling experience. At the end of the sermon a small, still, and yet very clear voice said, "She is preaching your sermon." This notion disturbed me so greatly that I was on edge the rest of the afternoon.

As I was making lunch for my husband that day, he sensed something was bothering me. When he asked, what was the matter, I told him “you’re going to think I am going nuts if I tell you what’s going on.” At that point I started to cry as I told him about my experience during Meg’s sermon. When I told him that I heard a voice say, “She’s preaching your sermon,” my husband began to cry as well, and said, “You always knew you were called to be a minister. You just didn’t know when you would finally do what you have always been called to do.”

Several weeks later I had another moving experience that reaffirmed my call to ministry. I had signed up to be a lectionary reader at Saint Mark UMC. As I stood behind the pulpit and read the Gospel text that morning, I felt a deep sense of joy. After the service, Sara, another Candler student and intern at Saint Mark, came up to me and said, “You may think this is strange, but I have to tell you something.” Of course, I was eager to hear what she had to tell me. She said, “I have to ask you have you ever thought about going into the ministry? Because while you were up there behind the pulpit reading today’s scripture, all I kept thinking was, ‘Wow, he looks so right behind that pulpit, he needs to be a minister.’ I was not going to say anything to you but I just cannot get it out of my heart. It is as if God wanted me to tell you.” I began to cry as I told her, “Yes, I have known for many years that I am called into the ministry.” “Then why are you fighting it?” she asked me.

Just a month after that, on June 22, 2008, Reverend Phillip Thompson preached a sermon at Saint Mark on Moses and his call to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt. It was during this sermon that I realized I could not run any longer. I accepted my call from God to become a minister, and thus my journey into ministry began.

I began my journey toward ministry by attending Lay Speaker classes in the United Methodist Church, earning a certificate as a Lay Minister. This certificate allowed me to preach throughout the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. In August of 2009, I entered Atlanta Christian College (which was renamed Point University in 2011) and began working towards a Bachelors of Art in Biblical Studies with a dual major in Preaching Ministry. Shortly after I began studying at Point University, I left Saint Mark and the United Methodist church, as I never fully felt at home as a Methodist. I had concerns about the seeming lack of concern for social justice in the Methodist church.

As I began to seek a new church and denomination to call home, I came to realize that I was looking for a denomination that fully welcomed everyone to the table. I wanted to join a denomination that saw all people as beloved and formed in the Imago Dei. I longed for a church that spoke and acted boldly on behalf of those on the margins. My search did not take long. I soon began attending Decatur United Church of Christ, and in attending this church (and my first General Synod in Tampa in 2011) my love of the UCC blossomed and grew. It was here that I began to fully live into my call to ministry.

In 2012, I graduated Cum Laude from Point University, and matriculated into Emory University’s Candler School of Theology. Three years later I graduated from Candler School of Theology with a Master of Divinity.

God has called me into ministry to fully live into the extravagant welcome of Christ. I believe, live into, and am called to invite others to lean into the UCC statement, "No matter who you are, No matter where you are on lives journey, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE." This to me is the ministry that best reflects the ministry of Christ. Christ welcomed all; from Gentile to Jew, from tax-collector to prostitute, fishermen to tent makers, poor to the rich, healthy to sick. Christ welcomed all. God has placed the call on my life to minister to all of God's beloved no matter the age, race, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, social or economic status.

PART B. LIVING OUT FAITH IN CREATOR, CHRIST, AND HOLY SPIRIT AS REVEALED THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS.

2: Devotion to the word of God as revealed through scripture and Christian traditions.

The word of God comes to us in many forms and in many ways. I believe firmly that God speaks to us through both scripture and in that ever "still speaking" voice. It is how we interpret the word of God that drives and develops our traditions. As such, traditions are not set in stone but are rather ever changing. Our world and culture are ever evolving, and it is in our devotion to the study of the word of God that we learn to navigate those changes.

I believe that the word of God is divinely inspired. I also believe God's word is found not only in Scripture but in communion with each other and in nature. God speaks to everyone in different and beautiful ways. While we are all created in the one image of God, we all hear and interpret the message through the lenses of our unique experiences. As a child growing up in the Pentecostal faith, I was taught that it was wrong to question scripture. If it was written in the Bible the idea was: "so it is written, so it is now and forever more." Yet even as a child I could not buy into this concept and now as an adult I fully believe that it is in our questioning that causes one to dig deeper in study of scripture.

During a friend's Ecclesiastical Council, he used the word "curiosity" in reference of one way to look at scripture. I agree with this concept. Curiosity is a foundation that has given us many wonderful inventions. It is curiosity that drives people to thing and to dream of new ways to see things or new ways to better one's self. My questioning - or curiosity - is what brings out my joy and love of exegetical work. One of the joys in preparing a sermon is my curiosity to discover new ways to understand scripture. To dig in to the exegetical work opens me up to find that still speaking voice of God.

Have you ever seen a movie that touched you in such a way that you could not wait until you could see it again? Then in watching the movie for a second or third time, you find a new hidden gem in the dialogue and sit in amazement that you had not heard it before, but find even a deeper love of the movie because of it? This is how I find myself often when I study scripture. In reading commentaries of amazing theologians, I can find hidden gems and I find that is God speaking to me. It was during my time as a Biblical Studies and Preaching Ministry student at Point University that my love of exegetical work developed.

Yet it was not only in the studying of commentaries while preparing a sermon for preaching class but even more so in my translating the scripture from Greek to English in my Greek classes. I found this work fascinating. To find a word that its simple meaning could change the way the scripture is read or viewed is profound. To have to study the way in which the writer used the word in context in other writings would lead a way as to how it was meant to be read, was amazing. As we say in the UCC, "don't place a period where God has placed a comma," this was another way my love of translating grew. In the original Greek, there were no commas or periods. It was up to the translator to determine where the sentence was to pause or stop. It is this curiosity that leads me to a deeper study to determine if I agree or not with the original translation. This is how I can say that I fully believe that God is still speaking. Yet this is only one way that I feel God still speaks to me.

Music is another way in which I feel that I can hear God's voice. To be even more specific, it is often how I feel the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit. Please understand that I do not play any type of instrument, nor do I feel that I have a good singing voice. I often say, "I cannot carry a tune, and even if you were to give it to me in a bucket, I am sure that I would trip and spill it." Yet I love music and it speaks to me. While I am a true through and through lover of Southern Gospel and the old hymns, I find the message in Contemporary Gospel to be amazing. I love the way the writers are taking scripture and breaking them down to find a message in them and presenting them in a way to reach the younger generation. I am often amazed at the many ways in which scripture can be used, studied, and brought to life to find its way into our hearts. Thanks, be to God for the many ways we can hear God's voice.

Fiddler on the Roof tells the story of a poor Jewish man, Tevye the Dairyman. In the show Tevye tells the story about his life and Jewish beliefs. As the story goes, we learn that while Tevye does not always know the answers to the questions regarding his Jewish beliefs, he sums it up with one word; "tradition." Since the earliest founding of our Christian faith many councils have argued over the many different traditions that has shaped the church. Some denominations view on traditions that are to be observed, others see them as sacraments with higher meanings. For example: in the Catholic church both weddings and funerals are sacraments while in other denominations these are traditions.

One of my favorite traditions centers around our baptism. In early January, we are reminded of our baptism and to renew it as we at our own free will come to the baptism font to place our hand in the water. At my home church KUCC we are often asked to take a stone or pebble as a physical remembrance. I still have everyone of mine on my night stand next to my bed. Every morning and night I see them. When I am not in a rush to get out the door or to go to bed, I take a moment and try to remember when I got one and what year it that I got it. This is a tradition. While I could continue to discuss the many different traditions and their importance as signs or reminders of our Christian faith. I am going to turn my focus from tradition to our sacraments.

In the UCC, there are two: the Eucharist (Holy Communion/Lord's Supper) and Baptism. Both are outward signs of an inward faith yet in different, meaningful ways. Both hold sacred importance to the life of the Christian faith. Scripture points us to the importance of both in the Christian faith. Christ

shows the importance of both with his acceptance of baptism from John the Baptist and told us in his final hours to share in community with each other the last meal in remembrance of him. The welcoming and asking of the Holy Spirit to bless and use the elements (water, wine/juice, and bread) to show a visible sign of God's unending presents, grace, acceptance, and forgiveness through the acts of Christ in his death and resurrection.

Eucharist (Holy Communion/Lord's Supper): The meaning of the word, Eucharist, is "thanksgiving." It is a time when we, the body of Christ, no matter time or place, share as a community in the historical meal that Christ on the night he was betrayed shared with his community. This meal is often seen as a reminder of the sacrificial meal on the eve of Christ death as a reembrace of his sacrifice for our salvation. Yet is it also a vision of the banquet we will all share at Christ return. I fully believe that the table that is prepared is not our table rather it is God's table. A table of love and acceptance as it is and will be for us in our heavenly home. At God's table there are no strangers, there is only family. A family that is reconciled together by the death and resurrection of Christ.

There is one cup and one loaf as a symbol that we are all the one body of Christ and in the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the cup reminds us of how Christ's body given freely, broken, and bleed for our salvation. The beauty of this meal is that everyone is welcome. As God welcomes everyone, so do we. This is one way that we live out our statement of "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcomed here." I do believe that often an individual may come to the table with questions or maybe even doubts yet they can still meet and feel the presents of the risen Christ at the table. A table that is shared to help reconcile us one to another, each of us with God, and in taking the elements, with creation.

Baptism: "Baptism is like that. It saves you now—not because it removes dirt from your body but because it is the mark of a good conscience toward God. Your salvation comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," (1 Peter 3:21) The Apostle Peter gives an amazing analogy about the importance and the reason for baptism. In the verse before this, Peter explains to the reader of how Noah and his family are saved from the waters of the flood. "Baptism is like that," the outward sign of inward faith. Noah placed his faith in the promise God gave that through the ark he and his family would be saved. In a same manor, God's forgiven grace is made known to us in the waters of baptism and joins us together in the Body of Christ. What an amazing gift.

The Apostle Paul also assures us of this forgiving grace but he gives us something to look forward to. Paul reminds us that in the act of baptism we are joined heirs to the kingdom of God. The act of baptism reconciles us to God by sharing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We die to our old sinful self then resurrected a new creation in the waters of baptism. Baptism is a gift given to anyone who wishes to become a part of the Body of Christ from infants to adults as this marks their acceptance in to Christ church and the beginning of a journey of Christian Faith. As I mentioned before, this gift of acceptance and forgiveness is

truly amazing. I guess that is why I look forward to the tradition of remembering my baptism, and why every year when I add a new stone or pebble, I am reminded of just how much love Christ has for all of God's beloved children.

Traditions hold a valuable place in our Christian journey and life. Some hold stronger special meanings than others for all of us as individuals, yet they are wonderful ways to remind us of God's love for us. They continue to gently nudge us ever closer to the risen Christ and to point us to how Christ showed us to love each other and to love God. Thank God for traditions, and while Tevye may not know why he holds true to certain traditions, we in our journey toward the risen Christ can find our certainty in both our traditions and sacraments in the pages of scripture. Again, another wonderful gift.

PART C. COMMITMENT TO LIFELONG SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND CONTINUED DISCERNMENT OF MY CALL INDIVIDUALLY AND IN COMMUNITY.

3. Commitment to life-long spiritual growth and practice, individually and in community.
5. Openness to continuing discernment of one's call in community.

To fully understand my call in the community and my spiritual growth, it would first be helpful to know more about my professional background. While I earned my license as a master barber back in August of 1988, the journey into the beauty industry began two years earlier. I began Bradenton Beauty Academy in April of 1986 in the field of cosmetology. While at Bradenton Beauty Academy, I earned many top awards from hair styling competitions to earning advance certificates from national haircare lines. I was well on my way to being a leading hairstylist after graduation. With well over the state required 1,200 clock hours, and roughly 6 months in cosmetology school, I felt properly prepared to enter the beauty industry in the art of female hairstyling. I was, however, not prepared for the full range of individuals in need of my services. I was roughly two weeks away from graduation and only a month away from sitting for the Florida Cosmetology Board exams, when a male client came in asking me to give him a flattop. Up until this moment, I felt rock solid in my knowledge of all things cosmetology, but I was not prepared for barbering.

This event caused me to take a step back, and withdraw my application to sit for boards. I started my quest to find a barber school to properly train me. After a month of research, I made contact and set an appointment to meet with the director of education at Roffler Hair Design Academy in Tampa Florida. After our meeting, I was asked to come back the next day prepared to take a mock board so that they could assess my skills and knowledge. Once I had completed the exams, the director informed me that my results were as she believed they would be. I passed everything cosmetology related but failed everything barber related. She offered me the chance to attend Roffler for an additional 500 hours of schooling in all things barbering to which I instantly agreed. I moved from Bradenton Florida to Tampa Florida and began my training.

Over the years, my life in the beauty industry has blossomed. My achievements in this career are numerous. Yet they would not be if it was not for hard work and determination to be one of the best

in the field. My approach to my life-long spiritual growth and practice to both my community and myself has been approached with the same devotion. I can see now that my education and journey thus far have been God's plan. While my schooling in the field of beauty may not seem to be aligned with pastoral ministry, I feel as if this education can serve a bigger purpose.

I believe I can help those in financial difficulty by training them in cosmetology and barbering so that they can earn a living. I hope to expand this ministry by partnering with several friends who are just as eager to help train individuals in their respective fields of expertise. My hope is to integrate this ministry into the life of the local congregation. While I understand my call as one of service to a local congregation as a pastor, I feel this ministry may be one that I can bring into the local congregation, whether I serve as senior or associate pastor, or chaplain.

The idea for this ministry began to form in my heart while attending Kirkwood United Church of Christ in a few different ways. While I was one of the Ministry Interns at KUCC during the second year of my Contextual Education experience, I watched as Susannah Davis, my pastor and mentor, helped a young mother of two in our community. She saw the need of this young mother to support her two children and herself. Susannah working closely with one of the local restaurants/pubs in Kirkwood and helped this young mother obtain a job working and training with the chef. In this position the young mother gained the skills she needed to become the chef of this local restaurant/pub.

Another experience that lead me to the idea for this ministry occurred while working as an ACPE Chaplain Intern at Grady Memorial Hospital between my second and third year at Emory's Candler School of Theology. During my work as a Chaplain Intern, I began to witness the growing need of the individuals I was ministering to. During my encounters with them, I began to hear their life stories of living from job to job or paycheck to paycheck. For many there were no advancement opportunities due to their levels of education. This is where my dream ministry began to form. I was troubled as I began to seek ways in which I could help meet their needs. I began to realize that I had a license that allowed me to train others (just as the young mother trained under the chef at the restaurant in Kirkwood) to become a Master Barber. I realized I could be an instrument of positive change for individuals in more ways than to just bringing them the Good News of Christ. My hope is that in bringing this mission to life it will become a ministry for the UCC. I have a working plan that I would be more than happy to sit down and discuss of how I hope this ministry can come to life.

Prayer and study of scripture are a major component of my spiritual growth and practice. In my role as an ACPE Chaplain Resident at Emory's Saint Joseph's Hospital, I saw that not one person's prayer life is the exact same as another. Often it may seem as if it is, but it is not. I am no exception to this rule. Often my posture is not to kneel during prayer or fold my hands with a bowed head but rather I simply sit, stand, or even walk while simply talking to God as if I were talking to a friend. My daily prayer routine is done most often while driving my car to the gym or to my patients as a chaplain.

In my car, I often will play my favorite music, Southern Gospel, as this puts me in a spirit of prayer. This music is what I was raised with. My earliest memories of my family getting ready for church on

Sunday was that of my mom or dad loading up the turn table with records of the classic Southern Gospel groups like that of the Happy Goodman's, Gold City, The Cathedrals, Florida Boys, The Inspirations, and the King's Men. Nothing said it was time to worship in the Bowman house like the sound of this music. Still to this day no matter where I am all I should do is hear it and my heart is ready to simply praise and worship the Living God. Even while I am at the gym working out, I will play Southern Gospel as I begin to pray for my day. There is nothing like the rush of energy I get when one of my old-time favorites comes through my headset.

My morning gym time is not only my time for my physical self and health but for my spiritual self and health as well. In the time, I spend at the gym, I am alone with my thoughts as my mind is free from distractions of the world around me. It is during this time that I do my deepest meditations and can truly connect with the Divine. In my time of meditation, I often find myself becoming more aware of all the goodness that God has granted, which often leads me to think of the needs of others in the world. This helps to center and prepare me for the patients and families I work with in my Chaplain Residency. My prayers become that of healing for a broken world, a broken society, for my church family as well as my personal family. I pray that others may see the love of God in both my words and actions.

SECTION 2: UCC IDENTITY FOR MINISTRY

PART A. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF JESUS CHRIST AS A HEAD OF THE CHURCH AND A PASSION FOR THE ONENESS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

1. Acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as sole Head of the Church.
2. A passion for the oneness of the body of Christ as expressed through commitment to ecumenism, justice, and the full embrace of all persons in the radical hospitality of God.

"The United Church of Christ affirms its belief in God, the Eternal Spirit, and acknowledges as its sole head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior."

As a member of the United Church of Christ, and now in my journey toward ordained ministry, I have heard this statement repeatedly and I fully believe and accept it. However, it was not until my class on UCC History and Polity that I truly began to ponder the full meaning of it. Just how can I acknowledge my full belief in the notion that Jesus is the sole head of the Church? For me it is simple and based on scripture. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus tells a story and while we know that he gave us many parables and stories, this one not only tells me how I am to acknowledge him but also how I am to embrace every person in God's unending hospitality and love. In Matthew 25, Jesus calls us to go out to the hungry to bring them food, to clothe the ones who are naked, to bring and care for the ones who fall ill, and to bring love and care to those who are imprisoned. I strive be like Christ in showing and doing these things to the least of my brothers and sisters, and in this way, fully acknowledge him as not only the head of the church but more important, the head of my life and ministry.

Christ showed his love to everyone no matter of race, gender, economic status, or even religious beliefs and asked me to do the same. In my acceptance, love, and radical welcome to everyone no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey, I show how I fully believe and acknowledge Jesus Christ as the sole head of the Church. My life and actions are to be a mirror of that of Jesus' life and work.

The summer of 2014, between my second and third year at Candler School of Theology, I began my training as a Chaplain Intern at Grady Memorial Hospital. After graduating from Candler in May of 2015, I worked as a Chaplain resident at Emory University Saint Joseph's Hospital. In both of my roles as Chaplain intern and resident, I have fully welcomed people of different race, gender, economic status, religious beliefs, political status, and sexual orientation. It has been my honor to learn about other religious beliefs while in my role as a spiritual health provider. The people I served taught me about their beliefs and practices, from daily rituals to burial. My role as a spiritual health provider has opened many doors for me to offer the full accepting love of God to others and my life has been deeply enriched.

My chaplain opportunities have allowed me to understand the words of St. Paul. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul reminds us that we are all the body of Christ. Each of us brings something exciting and wonderful to this one body. I have witnessed this repeatedly in the vast diversity of individuals

that have crossed my daily path while in my work as a chaplain. Yet I would not even stop there. Over my life as a Master Barber, my life has been full opportunities to meet new and exciting individuals and to minister to them. The many parts of this magnificent body of Christ are just like the colors of the rainbow. Not one color is more amazing than another. They just are and that is the beauty of it. God does not see anyone as outshining another, and nor do I. I am to simply offer all the different body parts my love and acceptance just as God does.

PART B. ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH AND CONNECTION TO THE LARGER BODY OF THE UCC.

3. Active membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ.
6. Ongoing demonstration of commitment to the United Church of Christ.
7. Stewardship of resources, including financial support of the church in all of its settings.
8. Participation in the various settings of the United Church of Christ, including the conference/association and local church.

I am a member of Kirkwood United Church of Christ (KUCC) located in Atlanta Georgia. My husband Don and I joined on Easter Sunday 2012. Over my time at KUCC, I had the honor of embarking on my MID journey. I did my second-year Con-Ed Minister Internship at KUCC. I have participated in the life of KUCC by forming and leading the KUCC Men's Group, being sent as delegate to our annual conference meeting, teaching VBS arts and crafts to our upper youths (grades 4-5), offering my talents in floral arrangement for special services, making paraments, and designing, making, and presenting stoles to all my fellow MID's on their ordination. KUCC has been my church home and I am so honored to have their support and love as I journey toward ordained ministry.

As a member of KUCC, I am also a member of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ (SECUCC). As a member of the SECUCC, I now have the honor of serving on the Nominating Committee. While in this role I am honored to reach out across the SECUCC to engage with individuals in the hopes to fill the many different board and committee positions within the SECUCC. I also have the privilege to serve on the Commission on Ministry's (COM) Support and Nurture of Ministries (S&N) team. On this team my responsibilities are:

- Periodic Support Consultations for clergy;
- Continuing education;
- Boundary training;
- Clergy support;
- Support for congregations;
- Providing a process for Situational Support Consultations;
- Hearing initial concerns and determining whether a fitness review should be initiated, and providing a process for fitness reviews.

In my roles at KUCC and in the SECUCC, I have been given a chance to continue to show God's amazing hospitality. I have learned through these experiences that we are in the one Body of Christ to help broaden the circle of inclusion to all of God's beloved.

PART C. THE ABILITY TO ARTICULATE THE DIVERSE HISTORIES THAT COMPRISE THE UCC AND UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF COVENANT.

4. An understanding of the concept of covenant and how it informs the nature, purpose, and polity of the United Church of Christ.
 9. The ability to articulate diverse histories that comprise the United Church of Christ, to situate them in the broader evolution of faith traditions and to relate them to the theology, polity, and practices of the Member's local church, association, and conference.
 10. The ability to explain and work within the current polity of the UCC and its denominational structure, and to describe the covenantal relationships among the General Synod, national setting, conferences, associations, and local congregations of the UCC.
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From its inception, the Congregational Church set the standards for the political and social organization of the local communities (then called Townships). As a Congregationalist denomination, the UCC still holds these same principles. Every congregation is its own township, and the members of the church all have the right to vote on the polity and changes made within the local congregation. This also holds true to the larger UCC denomination as delegates from each local congregation meet with members from their conferences (such as the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ) to determine which delegates hold voting power for larger denominational issues. Like the earliest days these members must be in good standing within the local congregation to hold these positions.

The Cambridge Platform is another concept that I find that the UCC still holds to. Per the Cambridge Platform, "Christ was the head of the church; the congregation, independent of outside interference, had the right to choose its own officials. The office of the civil magistrate was subject to recognition by the church. Churches were to preserve communion with one another in mutual covenant with Christ."

The Christian movement brought to the UCC the spirit of the "Open Table" by which all are truly welcomed to participate in the Eucharist meal, such that even Jesus himself would not turn away anyone from the meal due to his or her status of baptism. Thanks be to God that we still hold true to this principle. For in this way, individuals can meet the risen Christ for the first time at the table. This movement also confirmed that Jesus is the head of the church and the Bible is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, which are both important factors in the Christian faith today. This is also the movement that would be the first to allow for the ordination of women into ministry; a practice that the UCC still holds true to. Higher education was also a standard set by the Christian movement that the UCC still requires of those seeking ordination.

Our Reformation roots remind us of the power of scripture and of the fact that Christ alone is the head of the church. We have full access to the scriptures to study, challenge, and use them as a guide to the Christian life. This movement also gave us a new way to view the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the UCC we view the Eucharist as an act of “remembrance” rather than “transubstantiation” (in which the blood and body of Christ are literally present in the elements).

The Evangelical movement gave us a sense of what it means to live a moral Christian life. This life is not a life of total abstinence but rather a life based around a moral compass. Hence, we no longer hold to the strict rules of no card playing, drinking, or dancing (like my Pentecostal roots), but rather strive for balance.

My UCC understanding of covenant began to take shape on the day I joined Kirkwood UCC. At KUCC we have two types of covenants by which one can belong. KUCC is composed of people who, by declaring a desire to be in either a congregational covenant, or a faith covenant, or both, commit to an ongoing covenant relationship with each other, KUCC, and God. A person in congregational covenant is committed to being a full part of the life of the congregation by investing time, talent, service, and financial resources, and by being in prayer with and for KUCC. A person in faith covenant believes in and chooses to follow Jesus the Christ, will celebrate and participate in the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, promises to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, three in one, and promises to be a witness of God’s love in the world in word and deed. All persons who are or shall be in covenant with KUCC are thereby in covenant with the United Church of Christ. These covenants can be traced back to our Congregationalist traditions and traditions that are still practiced today. Like the vows I made to pledge myself to my husband when I wed him, I pledged myself in covenant to KUCC when I joined the church through both the congregational and faith covenants. On that day, I not only joined KUCC, but also the UCC.

The structure of the United Church of Christ begins with the local church, followed by Associations, then Conferences, and finally the General Synod. The bond that holds this structure together is their commitment to each other to put Christ first as the head of the Church. In this commitment, they come together in covenantal relationship with one another. In this covenantal relationship, they begin to walk hand in hand together as the full Body of Christ. In making decisions they consult and collaborate. They listen, hear, consider advice, council, and honor request of each other in full respect and honor working and ministering to do God’s work in the church and in the world. In this covenantal relationship, everyone is welcome and invited to the table.

In the United Church of Christ, the Local Church is the basic unit of life and organization. I think it is safe to say that the Local Church is the backbone of the UCC. The Local Church is a body of believers who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and believe in the triune God. These believers are accepted into the Local Church in one of three ways; baptism and confirmation or profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, reaffirmation or reprofession of their faith in Jesus Christ, or a letter of transfer or certificate from other Christian churches. Everyone

is welcome in the UCC as the slogan, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here," indicates.

Associations are bodies that are organized around a geographic area. The Constitution and By-laws of the UCC determine what provision they provide to Local Churches. These provisions include its own method for securing financial support. A concern with the welfare of all Local Churches in its territory in assisting Local Churches in unusual difficult times. They offer assistance, guidance, and encouragement to New Local Churches. This, along with the Conference they receive Local Churches into the UCC, covenant with members of the UCC to discern God's call to ministry (MID's), ordain, commission, and licenses qualified candidate. They grant standing as a covenantal relationship with ordained, licensed, commissioned ministers, and persons with ordained ministerial partner standing. They certify, transfers, terminates ordained ministerial standing, ordained ministerial partner standing, commissioned partner standing and licenses. They install Ordained Ministers and persons with ordained ministerial partner standing. Offers covenants with licensed ministers, commissioned ministers, and the local churches to which they are called. They grant privilege of call and leaves of absence; reviews and disciplines Ordained, Commissioned, and Licensed Ministers and persons with ordained ministerial partner standing. They also verify that an Ordained Ministerial Partner has demonstrated knowledge of, and appreciation for, the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ. Last but not least they receive and act upon business that is referred to them by the their Local Churches, their Conference, the General Synod, and the other Covenanted Ministries. In other words, they do a lot for the Local Church. With all this work that they do, they also elect officers and either elect or appoint committees as necessary to carry out business in its work with the Conference and the General Synod. So, if the Local Church were the basic unit of the UCC, I would argue that the Association is the glue that keeps the unit together.

Like the Association, a Conference elects' officers, and elects or appoints committees as needed to carry out the work and business of the General Synod. But their work differs slightly from that of the Associations. Unlike the Association, the Conference provides names when they are requested to the General Synod Nominating Committee, chooses delegates and alternate delegates to the General Synod per the Constitution and Bylaws, receives from the Local Churches their contributions for Our Church's Wider Mission, and keeps record of it. They also consult with the General Minister and President, or his/her designee to reach an agreement on a dollar or percentage amount of the undesignated gifts for Our Church's Wider Mission to be retained for its own support. Each month the Conference retains the amount needed for its own support, and then forwards the balance on to the treasury office of the nation office. Like the Association, a Conference provides other duties to help further strengthen the Local Churches witness and that of the UCC. As such, they coordinate the work and witness of the Local Churches and Associations, render counsel to Local Churches and ministers in situations calling for help beyond their own resources. They also render an advisory service to Local Churches and ministers regarding pastoral placement, establish and maintain Conference offices, Conference centers, institutions, and other agencies needful to its growth and welfare, sponsor in-

service training for ministers, and conduct conferences, retreats, clinics, and workshops. With an attempt to live out our mission to be a uniting and united church, the Conference works to maintain interfaith and ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches and fellowships to advance mutual understanding and cooperation.

The General Synod consists of chosen delegates from conferences, thirty members of each board of directors of the four covenanted ministries, and ex officio delegates. The General Synod is the representative body of the UCC and provides coordination in the structure of independent entities. They meet every two years to carry out the work of the UCC. In this work the General Synod provides for financial support, calls and elects officers of the denomination, nominates and elects' members of boards of directors, establishes and maintains the UCC's national headquarters, receives and disburses funds contributed for the support of the UCC and its covenanted ministries, and determines ecumenical and interchurch relationships. The Executive Council acts for the General Synod interim, consists of members named by the Synod plus representatives of covenanted ministries and other UCC bodies and groups. Its work is to coordinate and evaluate the work of the UCC. It is responsible for policies related to the church's mission in its national setting, including health of the covenanted ministries in relationship with one another and their accountability to the General Synod, supports the church's spiritual and financial health, performs corporate functions of the Office of General Ministries, facilitates the General Synod's business, and is a focal point for planning and budgeting. General Synod gathers the whole diversity of the UCC together in celebration, worship, and to conduct the business of the UCC.

The General Synod helps to keep the UCC true to its foundation of being based on "Covenant" relationships that are all welcomed at the table. Several years ago, a resolution was brought to the floor to have General Synod meet every four years instead of two. After much debate, this resolution did not pass. It was argued that the General Synod needs to be meet every two years to stay abreast of the needs of an ever changing and challenging world, and to be on the forefront as an Ecumenical leader in theological issues along with social justice needs. This debate helped me recognize the importance of the General Synod in holding the UCC to its foundations.

PART D. A WILLINGNESS TO LIVE INTO THE COVENANT AND THE ABILITY TO LIVE OUT THE MISSION OF THE UCC IN THE WORLD.

5. A willingness to live in the covenants of mutual accountability that characterize authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ.
11. to share key elements of the UCC's statement of faith, constitution with its preamble, and bylaws regarding the governance, mission, and theologies of the UCC and their implications for the life of the church.
12. to articulate the UCC's commitment to being a united and uniting, multiracial and multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all and just peace church.

13. to envision how the UCC in its various settings may respond to religious, social, economic, and political trends, changing demographics, and other emerging factors.
 14. to use and promote the informational and educational resources available through UCC publications and websites.
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My understanding of the UCC's mission to fully become a "United and Uniting, multiracial and multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all and just peace church" began at the first General Synod I attended. I have had the honor and privilege to attend General Synod 28 and 29 where I witnessed the UCC honoring its mission "that they may all be one." At General Synod 28, a resolution was brought to the floor regarding the use of language during the offering of the Sacrament of Baptism. While I do not remember the resolution word for word, I do remember that if the language used during baptism included the wording of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" that the Catholic Church would recognize the baptism. This was also the same Synod that the UCC and the DOC would sign agreements of Full Communion Relationship. These were amazing accomplishments for the UCC as it lives into bringing everyone to the table.

At General Synod 29, I witness the UCC and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries come together in Full Communion Relationship as I watched the signing of the agreement between the two denominations. It was a joyous moment at Synod that year right up there with the striking down of Prop8 and the wedding of Dave Sigmund and Jay Greaves. At the 30th General Synod, I witnessed yet another way that we, the UCC, are leading the way in opening ourselves up to further becoming United and Uniting. The vote for resolution #8 to be in Full Communion Relationship Between the United Church of Christ and United Church of Canada was unanimous. With the joining of UCC (USA) and United Church of Canada, the UCC orb now gathers another part of the world within the UCC to signify Jesus' command, "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" so "that they may all be one." **(reference)**

SECTION 3: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL FORMATION FOR MINISTRY

1. A healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and personal experience.
2. A sense of theological identity and authority, while being responsive to the opinions and values of others, including those whom the Member will serve.
3. A healthy awareness of strengths, weaknesses and limits, and assumption of responsibility for one's body, mind and spirit.
4. Knowledge and observance of personal and professional boundaries in interpersonal, congregational, and community settings.
5. A commitment to continuing education, professional development, and life-long learning.
6. Demonstrated moral maturity, including integrity in personal and public life and responsibility to self, family, church, and community.
7. to affirm the identities of others, including others very unlike oneself.
8. to engage in self-reflection and to seek and use feedback from others appropriately.
9. to engage productively in public discourse, expecting to grow and be transformed through the exchange of viewpoints.
10. to take initiative in leadership, and to frame and test a vision in community.
11. to listen empathically, communicate appropriately, and keep appropriate confidences.
12. to function as part of a team, to give and receive supervision, and to mutually equip and motivate the community of faith.
13. to be resourceful and adaptable, and know where to locate additional resources and seek consultation when needed.
14. to accept and promote diversity, to inspire others to do so, and to minister in a multicultural and multiracial, open and affirming, just peace, accessible to all, united and uniting church.

Matthew, chapter 25 beginning at verse 34 reflects my call to ministry, and my sense of what it means to minister to diverse populations.

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.' Then they will ask him 'when did we do all of these things?' And he replied, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'"

Nowhere in this passage do I read that I am only to do this for people that look like me, think like me, believe like me, have the same sexual orientation as me, or are the same color as me. We are all God's children, we all have pain, we all suffer, we all laugh, we all cry, and we all breath the same air. Other scriptures tell us that, we are all one in the body of Christ, and even Christ said that he was going to prepare a place for us to join him. Thanks, be to God that Christ did not just offer this to the people

like him but rather to all of us. In my ministry and work as a chaplain, I am called to offer the same love and care as Christ would. I do not care about people's race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, religious background, economic class, or educational background. What I do care about is people's pains, fears, joys, laughter, and tears. I want to be the light of God/Christ in every encounter. I want to bring and show the unending, unselfish, ever accepting, and freely given love of God to all that I encounter. After all I know all too well the pain of being on the outside looking in. I know the pain of being told the lie that due to who I am and who I love that God does not love me. I do not want to be the one who brings that pain to another because in doing so I will fail in clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the ones in prison or the sick in the lonely hospital room. I would fail God in my calling.

In strength there is also weakness. To know yourself is to know your own strengths and to embrace your weaknesses. Knowing and using my strengths is a lot easier for me than to embrace my weaknesses. As someone who strives for perfection, being viewed as weak causes me to work harder or study more to overcome the feeling of being inadequate or less than. I come from a strong male Southern background where men are not to be seen as weak, they do not cry, and are often not very affectionate. Over the years, I have come to embrace my tears. Tears are not a sign of a weak individual. Tears are the sign of a person strong enough to show their vulnerability. Strength comes from within, from character, and acceptance of one's strengths and imperfections. It is not defined by gender. One sex is not weaker than another. I have been blessed to have strong women in my life. Blessed at a young age to embrace that gender does not determine roles, strength, or weaknesses.

One of my weaknesses that I have come to understand, embrace, and work to improve is that of affection. I remember when I was roughly 28 years old I received some shocking information about my personal character that I began to work on. I was friends with a lovely woman who was extremely affectionate. She would always greet me with a big hug and kiss on the cheek and would say good bye in the same manner. I never realized until the shocking observation was revealed about myself, my reaction to her affection and how it affected her. When she would go to hug me, I would slightly pull away with a suspicious look of uncertainty of her motives. My family did not hug, my childhood friends did not hug so why did she hug? While I did not understand the why she did, the last thing I ever wanted to do was to hurt her feelings. Which my reaction to her did just that. I worked on this reaction and I am now a big hugger.

Another weakness that I struggle with daily is self-care. For many years, this has been a constant struggle. Not so much understanding the need for self-care or the desire to take it, but more on not feeling guilty when taking it. Here is another ingrained Southern male habit from which I am working to move away. I am still fighting the stereotype that in my taking self-care means that I am weak, being lazy, or even self-centered. I have come to understand the importance of proper self-care and the many ways individuals approach self-care. What is self-care for one is not the same as for another.

While serving as a CPE Chaplain Resident, I came to a better understanding my way of self-care. I was blessed to serve along-side three amazing Chaplain Residents. Along with us there were other chaplains in our office. It was during a workshop on Myers-Briggs that I come to understand the different ways individuals practice self-care and just how it is for me. First, I am an ENFJ on the scale. But to be more specific, I am an extreme extrovert. Knowing this has helped me dramatically in knowing how to practice self-care for myself. While someone who is more of an introvert may practice self-care in the privacy of their own quiet space while reading a book, it would push me over the edge of insanity.

I have found several ways I enjoy self-care. I must be around people in some capacity. It does not even matter if I am directly interacting with others. Going to the gym, shopping of any sort (yes, even grocery shopping) energizes and refuels me. My favorite thing to do for self-care, while to some may sound strange, is to get a pedicure. Yes, there is something comforting, relaxing, and energizing about having my feet pampered. Unlike the Apostle Peter, I would have never denied Jesus from washing my feet. Yet to be honest, I like to give pedicures to others as well. The most recent most rewarding pedicure I gave was to my nephew during his final stay at Moffitt Cancer Center. It was a special time for me to give him his final pedicure as it gave him and I our time together to just talk, laugh, and joke.

One of my biggest strengths I have is that do things for my loved ones and friends just to see them smile. The act or give does not have to be big and grand. If I know I can bring a smile to their face and warm their heart, it brings me joy. I love to sit and listen while shopping or just hanging out to hear small things that in bring joy to someone brings me joy. I really love to surprise my loved ones (loved ones are not just my family, my friends are my loved ones as well) for a birthday, Christmas, or to be honest any holiday or a day that ends in y, is a good enough reason for me, bring them a gift or do a good deed just because it will brighten their day. It is my way of showing that I love and care.

Another way I do this is another way I do self-care, through sewing or doing crafts. At my home church, Kirkwood United Church of Christ, when one of our MID's reaches their goal of ordination I handcraft their own personal stole. I am given the honor to present this gift to them during their ordination service. While sewing and designing these stoles to me are a way of self-care it was only recently that I began to see how much they mean to the ones I have given them too. One of my fellow seminary friends, church member, and friend told me that one of the biggest joys for her at her ordination and the gift she was so hoping and looking so forward to receive was one of my handcrafted stoles. This brought tears to my eyes and brought me such joy. Only to have this repeated when I presented our associate pastor her stole. After the service and after several hugs and thanks, she came to me and told me how much she was hoping that she would receive a stole from me. She went on to tell me how she did not think that she would receive one as she was not an original MID sponsored by KUCC. Her joy in my gift to her was priceless and a moment that I will forever cherish.

Sewing for me has always been a therapeutic hobby that has now touched the hearts of several individuals. In all the years and even through fashion design school, I have only made myself two things: a vest I wore to General Synod in Long Beach and a duvet cover for my bed. All my sewing and design-

ing has been to bring joy to others. Once I begin to design and sew anything, my mind becomes focused on the design, my craftsmanship, and the individual I am making something for. I began to think about their personality and things about them that I know. This is how my creation comes to life in the style, design, and color of fabrics I choose. In doing this, my mind becomes so focused that whatever troubles I have had seems to melt away. So even in my own self-care, what brings me the most comfort and joy is to bring a smile to the face of others.

In my work, as a student ministerial intern, President of the Candler Coordinating Council (C#3), as a chaplain, and during my long-term career as a master barber, I have crossed paths with several individuals very different from myself. I have encountered people who are very verbal in their distrust in "religion" yet they fully believe in God and God's grace. I can walk alongside these people. I believe that scripture does not say that you must belong to any religious group or denomination, but rather simply encourages people to believe in God. God's love and grace go further than any denomination can even imagine. My faith is deeply rooted in my understanding that Christ came as the perfect lamb. In his willingness of death, his blood atones my sins. In his resurrection, eternal life was given to me. In his ascension, the gift of the Holy Spirit for my comfort and guide along this journey called life was freely given. In these three acts of Christ along with my baptism, I have been reconciled to God. Yet I do not feel as if Christ is the only path that one finds their reconciliation to God. Every individual no matter race, gender, or even what faith tradition are amazing creations of God. While our paths to find God may not all be the same that is ok. To me what is important is the how we all treat and interact with one another with love and respect.

To help me prepare myself for ministry, I have completed 4 units of Clinical Pastoral Education. During this time, I have received comments and critiques from both my peers and supervisor(s) in a positive yet growing manner. In both my chaplain internship and residence, my supervisor(s) and peers have offered thoughtful insights on things I did well along with how to rethink or re-approach aspects of those same encounters for my improvement and growth. I never left the group meetings feeling as if I was slammed. Rather I left feeling uplifted and encouraged to continue in my work with a renewed sense of understanding. The same sense of compassion has also been given to me by my pastor and the PPP council at KUCC during my time as a student minister.

I have been given the opportunity to grow in my skills to become pastor/chaplain. In my roles either as chaplain or student minister, I have gained the strength and understanding that no matter who we are, we are all God's beloved. I have become a better and more compassionate listener to those who do not think as I do or believe what I believe. Yet it is how I show love and respect that is what bridges the gaps between us. Christ accepted everyone, showed love and compassion to others unlike himself. As Christ is the leading example that I am to follow, then I am to do the same. One thing my time as a chaplain taught me is that if I approach the conversation from an individual who has a different faith background than myself, I can learn from them and gain a better application for their faith traditions and beliefs. That is truly an amazing gift.

SECTION 4: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR MINISTRY

4-A: GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

PART A. THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND AND MODEL THE CELEBRATION OF THE DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES.

1. The ability to understand and appreciate a variety of perspectives of life.
2. The ability to understand the profound differences that physical, psychological, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, class, cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic factors make in the ways that human beings experience the world.
3. The ability to comprehend the impact of historical change upon the thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals and societies.
4. The ability to perceive how a person's perspectives and interests shape communication, and to appreciate the virtues and limitations of those perspectives and interests.
5. The to grasp and evaluate the justifications that people give for their opinions.
6. The ability to apply basic concepts of psychology to the understanding of oneself, others, and human interactions.

In the United Church of Christ we believe that everyone is welcome as part of the body of Christ. It is the same for me in my work as a Chaplain Resident when I minister to a patient or their family. Pain and suffering do not discriminate; neither does the love of God, nor should I. I am called to be in community with everyone no matter where I should meet them. When Jesus said to "love your neighbor as yourself," he did not place a side note that read, "Only if they look like you, think like you, or believe like you."

My calling to ministry is to walk alongside my brothers and sisters right where they are, in the here and now. I firmly believe with the UCC that "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcomed." I am not to sit in a seat of judgment but rather I am to sit in a seat of acceptance and love. I am to see past color, race, gender, sexual orientation, social economic class, and religious beliefs to simply love and accept everyone as a beloved child of the still speaking God. My work as a chaplain gives me the chance to live into this ministry. Daily I was blessed to minister to individuals of different beliefs and faiths. My life over this time was richly blessed through the chances I had to sit and discuss the similarities and differences between my beliefs and others. My heart was opened to welcome this new and enriching conversations while helping me to become more welcoming of different views.

I also come to understand that often their faith journey was not much different than mine. Life is full of both teachable and learnable moments. Sometimes I am the teacher but I enjoy my time being in the place as the student. Like Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus, I often feel as God is speaking the language of love and acceptance when I sit and learn from someone different than myself. My goal in these moments is not to debate who is right or wrong but rather understand and accept. I feel that these learning moments will help my growth as a minister or chaplain.

While on this journey I have had a few challenges in dealing with individuals who are not as accepting of others as I am. In my chaplaincy residency while encountering welcoming individuals, I also met with individuals who would challenge me. I often found that to be difficult in the moment yet hoped that even in the difficulty they were still able to see the love of Christ in me. In my Christian Ethics class at Candler School of Theology I had to write one of my papers from another perspective than my own. This was a difficult exercise, yet rewarding experience that challenged me to take a deeper look at someone's beliefs that are the total opposite of mine. As a married gay man, my topic was to write on "traditional marriage" (in this case meaning a marriage between a man and a woman). **(insert paper as a link..?)** I received an "A" on my paper along with praises from my professor, Dr. Ellen Ott Marshall, and the paper gave me a deeper understanding of the view that is held by others. I now have a tool in my toolbox of knowledge that allows me to open myself up to fully understanding others and their beliefs, even when they are unlike my own.

Although this class was in my final semester at Candler, the process of understanding and accepting other people's views began while I was a student intern at Kirkwood United Church of Christ. While walking in the Gay Pride Parade, I noticed a group of protestors standing along the parade route in the blocked off area assigned to them. While they had all rights to be there and to speak their opinion, I noticed something else. A large group of individuals from the United Methodist Church's Reconciling Ministries were blocking them from full sight with very large colorful pansies. While the groups walking in the parade began to cheer them for their efforts to block them out of sight. I began to wonder, if we are not wanting them to point a judgmental finger at us, why are we doing it back to them? The following Sunday, even as nervous as I was, I preached on this topic. **(Insert Sermon here)**. (YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaFV0aGQIsY>). In both my ethics paper and in my sermon, I felt my journey to open myself up to others began. With my whole heart and being I feel this is how I am to show the love of God to all. I am to walk with others no matter who they are or what they believe. Scripture tells in Philippians 2: 12-13 us all to work out our own faith.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for God's good pleasure."

If I am to take these words to heart and to live them out in my ministry, I see that I am not to judge others in their journey of working out their own salvation. My role as a minister or for that matter another child of the still speaking God is to simply love everyone in full acceptance and respect. In the body of Christ as the Apostle Paul tells us, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female; we are all the body of Christ.

PART B. THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE USING DIFFERENT MEDIA AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS.

7. The ability to appreciate the importance of symbols and images in human culture(s).

9. The ability to analyze social, political, environmental, and economic dynamics, using the tools of the social and natural sciences.
 10. The ability to use respectfully and relationally a basic knowledge of specific human cultures.
 11. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively with appropriate media and technologies.
 13. The ability to adapt the practices of ministry to the unique social, cultural, environmental and ecclesiastical aspects of particular settings.
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Early on in my childhood, roughly when I was in the fifth grade, I remember getting into a debate with my pastor at East Ruskin Pentecostal Church of God. The debate happened after the death of my grandmother. I was sitting in a bible study when my pastor said that unless you were Pentecostal then you would not go to heaven. This disturbed me deeply as my grandmother was Baptist. I could not, and still cannot accept this theology. I am firmly rooted in the belief that the God who loves me and accepts me, also loves and accepts everyone else the same. I firmly believe that there are many ways to reach God.

While I firmly believe that I am to find God through the risen Christ, others do not share this belief. I fully understand and believe that God accepts them no matter what road they choose to take to find God. The God of my understanding is far bigger than I can even imagine. While working as a chaplain I often remarked that it does not matter if one finds their way to God through Christ or not. What matters is that they find God and find God's love for them. God's love and acceptance is welcome to everyone. I first witnessed and deepened this understand while attending Decatur United Church of Christ, during a multi faith worship service. This service hosted religious leaders and members of different faith communities, which included Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities. It was an amazing service of learning, acceptance, and love. This service was a rich symbol of what the United Church of Christ means when we say, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey. You are welcomed here."

Media and the arts are reflected differently depending on the setting. Over the years, I have had many wonderful opportunities to worship in different cultural environments. Often the worship styles of each location were rather different and individual to each setting. From my childhood, the lively praise and worship style of the Pentecostal church I grew up in was much different than when I would attend the quieter Baptist church of my grandmother. Both were centered around traditional hymns. As I grew up and moved away from the church due their theology toward same sex loving individuals, the music is what I missed the most. Longing for a church home and one that would accept me for who God created me to be, I attended the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). The music ministry was not something I was accustomed to. I was used to the praise and worship band with the piano, electric guitars, bass guitars, drums, tambourines, and pretty much any other instrument that could be used to make music. Yet the MCC gave me a new way of looking at the music ministry. Before I moved to Georgia in 2008, I began to visit Georgia twice a month.

Still seeking a church home, I began to attend Saint Mark United Methodist Church. Here I was introduced to a whole new worshipping world: the pipe organ. Now I must confess; I am still not 100% on board with this type of organ. I have found at times for it to be a wonderful praise and worship experience yet I still long for the worship of my home town church. As a student at Point University, my heart was strangely warmed as John Wesley would say. The praise and worship was amazing. Yet while I attended chapel at Point every Wednesday and could worship like I once had, I began to appreciate my quieter Sunday Morning worship services as well. When I entered Emory University Candler School of Theology something amazing happened. Under the leadership of Barbra Day Miller, my worshipping world was completely opened to many different styles of music. Serving on a worship planning team my first year at Candler, I could work with Barbra and my team to create meaningful worship experiences for the student body. Barbra has a wonderful eclectic mix of styles from around the world. She introduced me to African, Korean, Latin American, and Black Soulful music. Yet that is not the only new and exciting way to worship that I was introduced to while at Candler.

As a first-year student I was placed at the Episcopal Church, Holy Comforter. Here again my eyes were opened to a whole new world. The Holy Comforter is a mission congregation of the Episcopal church. The mission of this congregation is to minister to a great group of people who live in care homes for individuals who are mentally disabled. Most of these amazing people are ones who live daily with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. I must say, serving here as a student minister was one of the most amazing years of my life. One of the best parts of my day was right before Wednesday evening worship when, we the students, would lead a sing-a-long with the members as they would arrive via the buses that would pick them up from their homes. While often we would sing the same songs, it was amazing to see individuals who often did not talk, hear the melody and began to sing along. This would also happen during worship with the reciting of prayers and liturgy.

As I ended my year at Holy Comforter, I had a new and profound respect for how prayers, scripture, and liturgy welcome all to join in. Music is a great way to blend scripture and prayer to the worship experience of any congregation. Yet I have also found the use of technology to be just as profound. Point University was my first experience with the use of power point to be used during worship. While I became accustomed to its use at Point, it was not until I was in worship for the first couple of times at Holy Comforter that I appreciated their use. As someone who was new to the Episcopal Book of Prayer, I often found myself lost during worship. I have heard many praise the use of screens projecting the bulletins for the order of worship, I have also heard the lack of appreciation for their use. I do still believe that we as a culture have moved forward and this is just one way in which we have and it is a small but effective way to include everyone to participate in worship.

Another way that our culture has moved forward is the use of social media, the internet, and websites. In the day and age in which we now find ourselves, the use of the Internet begins as early as kindergarten, if not before. From paying our bills on line, buying our clothing, movie tickets, etc. we find ourselves more and more dependent on the internet. The internet has become the tool we turn to when we need to find a place to eat, shop, get directions, the answer to trivia questions, and even the

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local church. While locating a church is easy through a web search, it is the use of websites that helps to draw people to our congregations. Websites have become the easiest and most effective way to show individuals just who we are, our theological views, our ministries, and upcoming events. Yet not only does it help to bring new individuals to the church it also helps the members of the congregation to stay connected to the ministries of the church. This is also seen in the use of social media in the use of emailed newsletters and sites such as Facebook, The City, to name a few. Here is how the church reaches the younger generation yet it is still just as important to continue to use print for the more mature congregation member.

While we are moving rapidly toward a life that is almost completely on-line, we must not forget that we are not 100% there yet so we must blend together the use of both worlds to ensure that everyone finds themselves welcomed and informed. I understand this need more than most. It was not until I was in my 30's that I had my first email address or even used a computer for the first time. My skills of using the internet did not fully (if you would even say fully) develop until I began college and had to start using a computer to write papers and do internet research. I often still find myself not the most computer savvy. While this is the case for me and many others, I still see the use and benefits of merging both worlds together so that no one finds themselves on the outside looking in. I have seen this merger take shape at KUCC and one that I fully intend to bring to my ministry.

SECTION 4: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR MINISTRY

4-B: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS SPECIFIC TO AUTHORIZED MINISTRY

PART C. A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT.

1. A thorough knowledge of, and personal engagement with, the Bible.
2. Skill with methods of biblical interpretation, including the historic interpretive traditions of the church and contemporary methods, particularly those from historically underrepresented communities.
3. A deepening familiarity with the global history of the Christian churches through the ages and across cultures, including the newest Christian populations, and an understanding of the evolution of Christian communities in the United States.
4. A deepening familiarity with contemporary theological ways of thinking and with the rich and varied theological heritages, creeds, liturgies, and spiritual practices of the Christian churches.
7. The ability to analyze, evaluate, and integrate the biblical, historical, theological, and pastoral disciplines and practices in ways that contribute to fruitful and faithful Christian ministry.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

The last part of this message from the Apostle Paul gives me sound instruction on the importance of studying scripture. In other translations, the wording used is, "study to show yourself approved."

Throughout my life, I have attended private Christian school of one form or another. From the sixth grade to the eleventh grade I attended the private school at my local home church. Every morning we would assemble from 8:00 a.m. till 8:30 a.m. to hear the morning announcements and to recite the bible passage we were to have memorized. Every Wednesday from 10:30 a.m. till lunch time, all the student body attended chapel. Beginning in the ninth grade, I received my text books on the New Testament as one of my assigned electives while in the tenth grade I received my Old Testament text books. I guess you can say that bible study has been a vital part of my life since my youth. When I entered Point University to earn my Bachelor of Arts degree in Biblical Studies with a dual major in Preaching Ministry, bible study took on a whole new meaning. It was here that I began to learn the importance of exegesis. Our final assignment was to translate and parse Colossians 1:21-23, and to give a reasoned argument for either agreeing or disagreeing with the translator's translation. **INSERT GREEK IV FINAL PAPER.** This work helped to prepare me for my time at Candler and has served me well in ministry thus far.

Learning how to translate scripture has helped me turn ancient text into something relevant for the modern audience. I discovered the importance of studying the context to understand what certain words might have meant to the original audience, and how they might be interpreted in our current context. Over the centuries, the misuse of scripture has lead our culture down many dark paths of persecution and oppression. Throughout my time at Candler I have had the opportunity to dive into controversial topics, such as the biblical stance found in Judges regarding homosexuality. In this paper, I compared the story found in Judges 19 surrounding a Levite, his concubine, and father-in-law to the story of Lot. Both Old Testament texts have been and are still used as an argument against homosexuality through the misuse of the term "to know." I argued against this term as being sexual, and showed that the term had to do with Israel's lack of understanding around hospitality. **INSERT JUDGES FINAL PAPER.** Repeatedly during my time at Candler, the controversial topics did not cease to challenge me, yet with every challenge I found myself digging deeper and deeper into research and dealing with scripture to fully broaden my understanding. In my "Gender, Sexuality, and Theology" and "Women of the bible" classes I dove into the topic of women's role in the church. My final paper in G.S.T focused on how scripture has been used to oppress those on the margins, such as women, homosexuals, and black people. **INSERT G.S.T FINAL PAPER HERE.** The use of scripture is still used against women in certain denominations. Often the scriptures that are used are credited to the Apostle Paul. In my final paper for "Women of the Bible," I demonstrated that Paul, himself, used and authorized women to hold leadership roles in the church. **INSERT WOMEN'S PAPER HERE.** These are just 3 examples of my understanding of just how important proper study and research of scripture is. Yet I do see this task as a lifelong process. As history, has shown us, scripture is misused to oppress others, and I strongly feel it is our role to right the wrong.

Some of the lessons I have learned over my time at Point University and Candler School of Theology have been a great base to build a life of ministry. Yet I do feel that throughout my life I have in some way or another been in preparation to live a life of service. Over my career as a Master Barber, I have often said that I ministered to many from behind the chair. Many different individuals have crossed

my path from all walks of life. I feel that God led me down that path in a way to prepare me for not only a life of ministry but more so for a strong sense of pastoral care. I strongly feel that my role as a Master Barber and the love I have for individuals strengthened my role as a chaplain. In these roles, the biggest lesson I have learned is that of full acceptance; acceptance of different opinions, religious beliefs, cultural norms, financial status, careers journeys, relationships, and politics. This lesson was strengthened in my role as a chaplain. While it was often easy to prepare myself for individual encounters in my daily life as a barber, this was not the case in my role as a chaplain. As a chaplain, I often crossed paths with people of different faith traditions than my own. In these encounters, I did my hardest and best to treat everyone with love and acceptance while using the encounter to learn something new and important about their beliefs. I feel this has only strengthened my role, not only as a minister, but also in pastoral care. I strongly feel that to properly view scripture to best minister to individuals, I also need to fully understand their thoughts and interpretations as well. My journey to ministry calls me into a life of ministering to all of God's beloved. Simply doing my own study of scripture and its context is only half the job when you are trying to meet someone where they are on life's journey.

PART D. A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE FOUNDATIONS OR OTHER RELIGIONS/DENOMINATIONS AND THE ABILITY TO ENGAGE IN ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE.:

5. An understanding of other religions and their foundational documents.
10. The ability to engage in respectful ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.
11. The ability to celebrate the unique features of local faith communities while encouraging them to be receptive to perspectives from the broader church and world.
12. The ability to appreciate, practice, and pass on traditions of faith while interpreting them in light of the context of a diverse and changing world.

The pathway to God is found in many ways. I feel this has been the theme of my walk toward ministry and will be the path I will continue throughout my ministry. God is far beyond that of my imagination or even understanding. From my youth, my belief has been that my path to God is through Jesus's death and resurrection; a theology that I still stand firmly in. Yet throughout my studies, my work as both Chaplain intern and resident, and my daily life of meeting individuals with beliefs unlike my own, I feel strong in my faith and understanding that this is not the case for everyone. As a youth being raised in the Pentecostal tradition, one point of theology I have embraced is that God is a just and faithful God.

To openly accept this understanding and practice, I feel that my approach to all of God's children has to center around their understanding of how they reach God, whether it is like my own or not. Again, I go back to the knowledge and belief that one must work out their own faith with their own fear and trembling. I believe myself to be a believer and follower of Jesus Christ. My salvation was bought by the shed blood of the risen Christ, and my baptism was my outward sign of my acceptance into the church and Body of Christ. This is my theology but it is not everyone's and that is acceptable to God.

Over my time at Point University and Candler School of Theology, I have had the chance to study different views surrounding this journey of faith. Yet it was a class that I took back in Tampa Florida at Hillsborough Community College that opened my narrow Pentecostal eyes to begin this journey toward a broader and deeper understanding. I do not have any of the papers I wrote to share, however, I do have the memories. Over the course of the semester we journeyed down the path of many different faith traditions. The seeds of acceptance and appreciation for other's faith journeys was sown in this class. Since my childhood, I have had a longing to learn from others anything I could.

In my adult life as a Master Barber this love of knowledge again broadened my horizon. As the youngest individual at the school (I was only 17), I was tutored to act more mature than my actual age. This instruction came with the side note of, "if you want your clients to take you seriously then you must act mature, since more than likely you would be the age of their children." This was a hard lesson to learn yet I could use it.

Over my years, I found a way to gain knowledge from my clients. I would watch the news, read the newspaper, and listen to other conversations around the salon. For example, if I saw a case on the news and wanted to understand the law more, I would ask several of my clients who happened to be attorneys or even judges. Over time my ability to hold a conversation with other attorneys became more impressive. This skill of asking a simple yet thought provoking question has also helped me in my study of religions and beliefs different than my own. Learning how to have an open and respectful dialog with another is an art and skill, one that I would like to consider I have.

This skill is one of the ways that I was to gain a vast amount of knowledge in my class at Hillsborough Community College. One assignment I received was to take a trip to the newly opened Holocaust Museum. It was at this museum that I could engage in a wonderful dialog about the beliefs of my Jewish brothers and sisters for the first time. At the end of the semester, one thing I know that I learned was simple. We are all on a journey toward God. While the roads and paths may not look the same, the result is.

While I studied at Candler another wonderful way I learned to be open and accepting of others came while on a weekly worship planning team. On this team, we would meet to plan different styles of worship with music selected from various cultures and continents. This would also coordinate with one of my elective classes: Global Perspectives in Christian Worship. In my first reflection paper, I looked at the practices and views of 3 different documents on worship, the Eucharist, and Baptism. (Insert paper here) I noted in this paper that over all, all three documents were practically the same in nature. I have found this to be the case generally in my encounters with other religious beliefs. In my studies, I have found that a basic sense of commandments of right and wrong are the underlying theme to all walks of faith. We must all follow them to live a pleasing to God. While some faith traditions have 10 commandments, others have more, some may have less. At the end of the day, they all point us in the way to live in community with one another and with God.

This understanding is how I would approach my daily role as a chaplain. My role was to simply be the presence of God/the Divine to the one in need or as we would say, the care seeker. I was not there to debate who has the upper hand on the path to God, but rather to remind them that no matter the path, God's love was always there. I remember a time when I encountered a woman who was Muslim in faith yet welcomed me with open and accepting arms to be in community with her. She welcomed prayers from me as she explained to me that she believed Jesus to be a wonderful prophet of God and that his teachings were just as true as Mohamad's. Both men, were simply pointing her to God. While this encounter was one of acceptance and love, other encounters were not so. Yet I still had to maintain the same level of acceptance. Some were easier than others. Yet still, I reminded myself, I am not to be the judge but rather to be the source of compassion, grace, and show the love of God. I have found in my time as a Chaplain that that is the best approach to most situations. I pray to continue to use this skill in my ministry.

PART E. THE ABILITY TO ARTICULATE A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF AUTHORIZED MINISTRY AS I EXERCISE PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

6. The ability to articulate a theological understanding of authorized ministry, and to relate it to the practice of ministry.
8. The ability to understand the nature, use, and misuse of power and authority, and to exercise them appropriately and effectively in authorized ministry.
9. The ability to engage in community leadership that is collaborative and transformative.
18. The ability to read the contexts of a community's ministry and creatively lead that community through change or conflict.
19. The ability to lead and encourage ministries of evangelism, service, stewardship and social transformation.

It was my grandmother that was the first one to confirm that my life was to be devoted to ministry. I was only nine years old at a family Christmas gathering when she sat both my mother and me down and revealed this. I do not feel as if I chose a life of ministry, but rather that I was chosen by God to live a life of service and ministry. Even in middle school and high school when it was that time of year for class mates to vote on cute awards such as: Most Athletic, Most Popular, etc., I was always chosen Most Spiritual. My life from youth has been devoted to God and my local church. I guess that is why it was not that big of a shock for my mother or myself to hear the news from my grandmother. In the UCC we believe that "God is still speaking." I fully understand this. My first understanding of this came from my Pentecostal beliefs in "Tongues and Interpretation." This to a Pentecostal means that an individual receives a message from the Holy Spirit and often this message comes out from an individual who has the gift of "tongues" and then this message is revealed through an individual who has the gift of "interpretation." So again, it was no shock that at the age of 14 my pastor confirmed in church the message of my grandmother that I was to have a life of ministry. Yet as a young man, I was so fearful of what this life of ministry was to be. How was I to lead God's people? Yet here I am ready to be the minister and leader God has called me to be.

It was while I was at Point University that I began to discern just what is my call to ministry. It would be simple to say it is to lead God's people, to walk journeys with them in both good and bad times, to be the instrument of the Divine here on earth, and to show and to witness the love of God to all. But it is much greater of a role than this. While I do fully embrace, and accept this calling on my life of leading and ministering to God's beloved. I also fully embrace and accept that God has allowed me to journey down a few different paths in my life to finally lead me to this calling. In my youth, I was naive to believe that the role of the minister was to simply preach a sermon on Sunday morning, officiate weddings and funerals, baptize, and offer the Eucharist. While this is the role of the local pastor this calling goes so much deeper. During my internships at Point University and Candler School of Theology I could dig deeper into this life of ministry that I am called to. It was during these internships that I also began to accept my strengths in ministry and to uncover my weaknesses as well. Yet I fully feel that you have to have both strength and weakness to be an effective minister. In revealing my weaknesses, I will also reveal my strengths.

17. The ability to organize and implement programs, administer the operations of a complex organization, and initiate change when appropriate.
 20. The ability to understand and participate in the financial administration of the church and other religious organizations.
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As I began this journey into ministry I always thought that the pastor was to be the jack of all trades and in some way master them as well. When I look back on this thought of mine, I realize this is not the case. Seminary training touches on just a few of the daily administration needs of a local congregation. My seminary training did not come with an accounting degree, web design or social media specialty, or a handyman maintenance background. Yet these talents somehow fit under the hat of the local pastor. I discovered a new way of thinking about and understanding my role as a minister to a local congregation while I was in one of my biblical studies classes at Point University. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 tells of many different gifts that are given to individuals by God.

"To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."

This passage from Paul began to redefine my understanding of the role of the local pastor. As a pastor my gift is to lead and encourage others to find their gifts given to them by God. This is how I see my role as an administrator to a church that I am called to serve; to work alongside of the members of the congregation to use their gifts for the building of the church. While I am not good at accounting, I can work with a member of the congregation to maintain and budget the money. While I am handy with a set of tools, I can still call on others in the church to help maintain and repair the church. My

role is not to micromanage but rather to work with the members so that we all take ownership of the church to grow and prosper.

15. The ability to preach the good news, lead worship and participate in the sacraments in a manner faithful to the broader Christian heritage and appropriate to the characteristics of a specific culture and setting.
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Coming together to worship is not just a time to come and sing a few hymns, say a few prayers, and hear a sermon. It is so much more. It is a time of community, a time of sharing, a time of encouraging, and a time of healing. To plan a worship service to me is one of the more sacred jobs of a pastor and the ministry team. I believe we must learn to stop our own thoughts around what the service is to be themed, what songs are to be sung, and what message to bring and to be still to listen for the still speaking voice of God to guide. I do not know the needs of everyone who attends services but I fully believe that God does and if I move myself out of the way to allow the guidance and movement of the Spirit of God to move, powerful things can happen. I am simply the vessel for God to use to send out a meaningful message. This is something that I pray every time I sit down to write a sermon.

This is also the way I approach working with the music minister in song selection. Planning worship is not the sole responsibility of the minister; it is a communal responsibility. A simple guideline such as a bulletin is a great guide to keep all of us on track, but it is not the be all, end all way to lead worship. I fully believe in letting the movement of God guide us, and if we need a bit longer to allow the healing work to be performed then allow it. I have experienced a time when I was in a place of worship and the spirit of God was moving and then as if the alarm clock went off the pastor shut down the movement and closed out the service. I remember leaving that service still longing for a deeper touch from God. If we believe that God is still speaking, then why do we want to shut down God's voice or spirit during services?

Many individuals often feel closer to God through worship and not necessarily the sermon. As a minister/preacher I should take my own feelings out of the mix to allow the spirit of God to move and touch individuals in whatever way possible. In my understanding of this concept, I am so thankful that I have served on worship planning teams while at Candler and in my internships. I am not a musician of any sorts but I am so thankful that I am fully committed to working with music ministers in the hopes to invite the ever-present spirit of God among us. I have strong convictions of how important it is for us to find our own voices in how we worship the living God and open ourselves up to God's spirit. This can be seen and heard in a sermon I preached while at Point University. (Insert sermon, Praise Him)

Worship in the form of music holds special place in my heart. It allows us to open ourselves up and to ready ourselves to the movement of the spirit of God. This does not take the place of the importance of bring to good news of still speaking God. To open ourselves up to both can enrich our experience of being in the presents of the Divine. I hold a dual Bachelor of Arts degree from Point University in Biblical Studies and Preaching Ministry. To earn this dual degree, I was required to take 7 different

preaching classes to learn many different disciplines of sermon exegeses and sermon delivery. Sermon writing and preaching are a passion for me. One of the biggest joys in my role as a minister is to take the weekly text from the lectionary, exegete it as I dig deep in to the scholarly references to better understand the meaning and context in which our first century audience heard and understood. I love to then offer up a meaningful sermon for today's context to bring a message from God. I was privileged to study under two amazing professors: Dr. Billy Strother and Dr. Carson Reed.

Yet It was Dr. Tom Long that was the biggest reason that I wanted to attend Candler School of Theology. I was blessed that I could study under Dr. Long before his retirement from Candler. While Dr. Billy and Dr. Reed challenged me to hone my craft of exegeses, sermon writing, scripture reading, and preaching, it was Dr. Long that assigned me the most difficult sermon I was to preach. One of the lessons I learned while at Point was a minister needs to spend roughly 20 hours studying and preparing their sermon. This may be the case for some ministers if they can carve out the time but most ministers do not have this kind of time. I mention this concept to better explain the difficulty of the sermon I was to write for Dr. Long.

Since I my undergraduate degree is a BA in Biblical Studies with a dual major in Preaching Ministry I could skip Preaching 101 and take Dr. Long's advance preaching class: Sermon Development and Delivery that met on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. The sermon concept I was given was "crisis." The concept of preaching a crisis sermon is simple. A minister may look over the lectionary to see the text which they may use for the coming Sunday and begin to prepare, and then a crisis hits. For example, someone might walk into a school on a Friday afternoon and begin firing a gun killing several students. The sermon that a minister has been preparing is now not relevant and when Sunday morning arrives the congregation is in pain and looking for hope. A new sermon must be written and preached.

So, while others in the class could know the date on which they were to preach and had the ample time to prepare for their sermon. This was not the case for me, I wasn't as lucky as they were, or was I? During class on a Tuesday, Dr. Long said, "James you're up on Thursday; your topic: the tsunami in the Philippians." I had less than 48 hours to find a text and prepare a sermon; a sermon that was to be theologically sound, and not simply a bunch of fluffy hopeful statements. This was most difficult sermon I have written to date. Yet I was lucky to have had this assignment. My luck came in the way of now being prepared to face such events and the blessings that come when you bring a difficult yet meaningful word of hope to a grieving congregation. My regret about this sermon is that it was not recorded for me to invite you to view, yet I have attached the working draft of the sermon for you to review. **(Insert Sermon text)** God is still speaking to us every day. My calling to ministry is to invite congregants to be still, open their hearts to listen, and invite the spirit of God to move within them no matter if that is in the form of worship or in the preaching.

14. The ability to discern God's mission in the world and, in response, to lead ministries of compassion, nurture, justice, and proclamation that support fullness of life for all people.

One of the things that I learned from both my internship and my membership at Kirkwood United Church of Christ is how to do mission and outreach with care and compassion. When I joined KUCC and began my journey into ministry, KUCC was a small, yet growing congregation. Yet KUCC has never let its size hinder its mission of welcoming everyone. Mission and outreach is just one way of being the love and light of God in a community. As a member, I have such pride in how the presence and love of KUCC over flows into the local Kirkwood community. Yet as a person on a journey into ministry, I have been richly blessed to have amazing mentors to teach and guide me on the importance and the impact that doing an outreach ministry can have on the community. My prayer in going forward into parish ministry is to take the lessons I have learned at KUCC and bring them to the church I am called to serve.

Every year KUCC has partnered with a local elementary school in providing much needed school supplies and backpacks to local children. While it is easy to simply bring the backpacks and supplies to the school and drop them off, KUCC goes a step beyond. On the first day of school members of the congregation and clergy line the route to the school to welcome the students back and to hand out the supplies and backpacks. This may seem like a small gesture to some but to the families, students, and staff this means a great deal. This simple outreach brings the congregation and community together. This partnership has deepened over the years to now include offering full Thanksgiving meals and Christmas gifts in the form of an Angel Tree. Our presence at this local elementary school and our working with them through this outreach ministry has now led to the school offering KUCC the use of their facility to hold weekly worship while our new sanctuary is being built. Yet this partnership will not stop there. Once our new sanctuary is finished the school is allowing KUCC the use of their parking lot during weekly worship for congregation members to park in. This is only one of the successful outreach ministries of KUCC. This is an outreach mission that I feel will help any congregation grow, and one that I hope to invite any church I am privileged to serve to offer, if they do not already have something similar in place.

The last two Saturdays of the month, KUCC opens its doors to the local community in offering meals. This outreach ministry is called Soup Saturday. Yet it is not just the offering of one meal. During this time KUCC also opens the Clothing Closet. This ministry offers clothes that are donated by the congregation members to individuals in need. The outpouring of supplies given to KUCC has always overflowed. Items offered to individuals are not simply clothing but also personal items that a family or individual may need such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoo, etc. Still KUCC takes this mission one step further by also opening the Food Pantry. In this additional ministry, congregation members bring food supplies to be given to families or individuals. KUCC tries hard to not simply offer one hot meal on these faithful Saturdays but to bag up additional food that a family or individual can have during the rest of the week. The leader of this ministry is faithful in letting the congregation know the needs of the pantry to offer full meals such as a complete spaghetti dinner, just to give an example. This mission and outreach as also sparked other ministries and outreach programs. KUCC has now partnered with Mad Houser's. This organization builds small portable shelters for homeless communities. (include pictures of the build I was on). This mission helps the homeless to have a small space

to call their own, which gives them a safe place to store their belongings and a shelter from the environment. In building these shelters this organization also includes such things as a chain and lock to offer security and new sleeping bags to provide warmth. Not only does KUCC work with Mad Houser's but now also works with local refugees in the setting up of apartments with much needed supplies such as furniture and other household items. In these and more ways, I have seen just how we as a church are called to be God's love, acceptance, and light in the world. I hope to offer similar ways of contributing while serving in ministry.

My journey to ministry was not a simple one, to say the least. I do feel that in my journey to ministry, God placed me in the right spot to learn skills to help others in a few ways. At the age of seventeen, I began my training in the beauty industry. I entered Bradenton Beauty Academy. After successfully completing the required 1200 hours of training and was ready to take boards another twist happened. I made the choose to further my education and attend barber school. Once I completed 500 hours of barber training, I took my barber boards and obtained my barber license in 1988. As my journey, has begun to unfold toward ministry. I feel that God has begun to show me how I can use this training to better serve others. There is an age old saying that I feel applies to how I feel God is speaking to me to use my talents. "Give a person a fish and they can eat for a day. Teach a person to fish, they can eat for a life time." As a Master Barber, I can use my skills and knowledge to train others the craft of barbering through an apprenticeship program. My desire has been strengthened through the inspiration of my pastor Susannah Davis. She has been inspirational in helping a young woman, who attends KUCC and has 2 children she supports, find a job in a local restaurant. She began by working in the kitchen and training with the chef. She is now the cook for this restaurant. My desire to use my talents to begin an apprenticeship as a ministry of the church I am called to serve. As a ministry of the church I would like to begin and train others in the craft of barbering in the hopes to have a better financial life. Yet I would not like to stop there. In my life God, has richly blessed me with friends in many different trades. One trade is that of culinary arts. I would like to tap into these talents in training those who would like to learn this trade. This would take shape in the same way that KUCC offers Soup Saturday. Those training to become chefs would do the cooking for this ministry as well as weekly congregational meals. I feel that the church moving forward should look deeper into what it means to fully meet the needs of the congregation and the surrounding community that it is called to serve. In the age in which we currently live there are several individuals who have suffered hurt from the church and are reluctant to return. I strongly feel these types of ministries will be the welcoming back that some may need.

Sense of Vocation

I grew up in Ruskin Florida, a small town just south of Tampa. At the age of four, my family started attending East Ruskin Pentecostal Church of God, where only seven years later upon the start of a private school the name of the church was changed to, South Hillsborough Full Gospel Church and Christian school; it was in this church that I accepted Christ into my life and at the age of thirteen was baptized.

To better understand my acceptance of Christ, I need to take you back a few years. The year was 1978 and I was just nine years of age when I fell severely ill. My mother took me to my pediatrician yet nothing he gave me could break my fevers which lasted for over two weeks. Though I was sick with fevers we never missed a church service. It was a Sunday evening when a message came out during service, one that would change my life and that of my mothers. The message was, "Someone is holding something so dear to them that they will not even share him with God and they need to give him over, as God has great plans for him, and if they do not God will take him from them." Our assistant pastor Billy Denton came over and picked me up to take me down. When he went to pick me up, my mother drew back to hit him in protection of me.

With tears in his eyes he said to my mother, "Sister Bowman, if you do not give him over, God will take him and you know it." I was laid on the altar and it was now that my mother prayed, "God, He is yours. If you take him then take him, if you give him back to me he is yours and I will care for him and raise him for you. Have your way." After my mother prayed this prayer, my fever broke and for the first time in over two weeks, I walked out of church that night on my own. Once I gave my life over to Christ, I was baptized. This is when I can say that I began to fully feel my calling to the ministry.

From the sixth grade, I attended South Hillsborough Christian till a few months before my twelfth-grade year. I found myself, leaving the private Christian school to attend public school only to drop out. This was due to the destruction of my school transcripts. I left high school in March of 1986 at the age of 17. Leaving high school was heartbreaking yet I turned this heartbreak around into something positive. I start Bradenton Beauty Academy in April, after 1250 state required hours of training; I graduated with a certificate in cosmetology. I advanced my training with the enrollment at Roffler Hair Design Academy, after 500 required hours of training; I graduated with a certificate in barbering and in August of 1988, I received my state license as a master barber; a license I still currently hold. In 2004, I enrolled in Edutech Career Institute to peruse a certificate in massage therapy; I graduated with honors and received my national licenses as a massage and body worker in 2005, a license I hold today. I am proud to report that in 2002, I earned my GED from Jefferson High School in Tampa, Florida.

In September 2007, while on a trip with friends to Washington D.C., I met my husband, Donald Bowman Harris. Our marriage was held in Alberta, Canada on June 29, 2008, followed by our wedding held in Dahlonga, Georgia on August 30, 2008. Upon my marriage to Don, I became a step-father to a wonderful young lady, Miss. Elizabeth (Emma) Marie Harris.

2008 would be a year of new beginnings in my life. While it is the year I would marry, it is also the year that my run from ministry would come to an end. On June 22, 2008, at St Mark United Methodist Church, Reverend Phillip Thompson preached a sermon on Moses and his call to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt. It was during this sermon I knew I could not run any longer and I accepted my call from God to become a life of service and ministry. I started my journey toward ministry attending Lay Speaker classes through the United Methodist Church earning a certificate as a Lay Minister, a certificate which would allow me to preach throughout the North Georgia conference of Methodist

churches. In August of 2009, I entered Atlanta Christian College; where in July of 2011 would change its name to Point University. In May of 2012 I successfully graduated Cum Laud with my Bachelors of Art in Biblical Studies and Preaching Ministry. I began Emory University Candler School of Theology in August of 2012 and successfully graduated in May of 2015 with my Masters of Divinity. I am now seeking ordination with the United Church of Christ.

In March of 2010, I was blessed to finally become a full member of the United Church of Christ. Since then my journey to ministry has been a pretty exciting one. The summer of 2010, I have had the privilege of being an alternate delegate to the Southeast Conference Annual meeting as well as attend the 28th Annual Synod in Tampa, Florida. It was here at Synod my love of the UCC was strengthened. I am so blessed to have found a home with a denomination that believes in social justice, not only in words but in actions.

Since 2010, I have attended General Synod in Long Beach and in Cleveland. I have attended a MID retreat at the Mother Church House in Cleveland. In my local church, Kirkwood UCC, my roles have been many. From student minister intern, VBS crafts leader, and the KUCC Dudes Group (which I started as a student intern). My roles in the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ has grown as well. I currently serve on the Southeast UCC Nominating Committee, the Support and Nurturing Team of the Commission on Ministry for the SECUCC, and the Kirkwood UCC Delegate to SECUCC Annual Meeting.

Acceptance and loving our neighbor as Christ has called us to do are issues of the church that are tugging at my heart. It is time that we, the church, stop playing church and be the church. In this statement, I have found a renewed sense of call. Within the church (not just in the United Church of Christ) the issue of acceptance is now at the forefront of debate, such as in discussions around sexual orientation and a woman's roles in ministry. While these are not issues within the United Church of Christ, other denominations are in heated debates to the point of splitting. This is not the church Christ has called us to be. We all, men and women, young and old, heterosexual or homosexual, skin colors of all shades, make up the body of Christ. It was the Apostle Paul who stated in Galatians 3:28 (as taken from The Message), "In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous 'descendant,' heirs per the covenant promises."

In understanding this, and in beginning the process of total acceptance, the church can full start to live the commandment Christ called us to, "Love God what all your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself." We cannot be the true body of Christ with so much hatred and fighting. The focus needs to shift from who does what in the church, to simply doing what needs to be done to assure that everyone knows the love of God. The church should be a place where hunger is no more, poverty is no more, the death penalty is no more, and where brothers and sisters no matter what race, color, or sexual orientation stand hand in hand in love and harmony. This is the ministry I am called into.

Religious Education

Matthew 4:23 “Jesus went all over Galilee, teaching in the Jewish meeting places and preaching the good news about God’s kingdom. He also healed every kind of disease and sickness.” This is the first of many scriptures found in the New Testament that give us insight on how important education is to the church. Many often view the sermon during worship as education or the “good news.” While this is true, it is not enough. Sermons are often if not always more on the side of a lecture. There is not research or prior preparation done by the congregation other than to show up. Offering weekly educational opportunities is a big need for any congregation.

One way that I feel many individuals are let down in this area is the lack topics or subjects in which to explore. Not everyone has the same interest or learning desires. Many churches offer weekly “bible studies” yet not everyone desires to study the same topic. Here is how education is weak and needs to be strengthened. The role of the minister is to teach; yet it does not stop here, because to teach is also to train. In most if not all congregations there are those members who would excel in leading educational groups in many topics to bring a wide variety of interest. As a pastor this would be one of the roles I would gladly welcome.

Another hindrance that I have found is that of location and time. While the desire is to meet and learn. Often daily life becomes the barrier. In all the scripture that has referred to Jesus as a teacher, often he is not sitting in the local synagogue. He taught in many different locations and times. This is the model that seems to work best. As a minister, I feel I am to bring many options that can work for the congregation I am to serve and make it as easy and available for everyone as possible.

During my time as an intern at Decatur UCC I began a weekly education group. We met at a local tavern for dinner, beverage of choice, and discussion. Over the summer of my internship we used the book, “Parables from the Backside” by Ellsworth Kalas. In this time of discussion, the group took a deeper look at the parables that Jesus taught from a different point of view. For example, in looking at the story of the Prodigal Son the focus is often on the son who left, then returned while the son who stayed is often over looked. Parables from the backside challenges us to look at the story from the son’s eyes who stayed and examine his thoughts and feelings. Leading this group was my first experience of offering and sharing in education with others. I would go as far as to say, I began to understand the need, interest, and importance of education. I found a deeper sense of my call to ministry during this time. I could move from a place of fear of my call to ministry to a new strength. What I mean by this is, when I first began to understand or deeply feel my call to ministry I often feared that I would say or tell individuals the wrong information. Now my new understating of the importance of education, both my own study then offering and inviting others to study with me opens the door for us all to live fully into the understanding of working out our own salvation.

16. The ability to provide effective and appropriate pastoral care and Christian education, and to equip and motivate others to share in these ministries.

Matthew 25: 35-40,

“When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me.’ Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, ‘When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?’ The king will answer, whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.”

Over and over throughout my journey and accepting my call to ministry, this scripture has been my driving force. You may even say it is my theme or slogan statement. This passage speaks to me on several different ways of congregational care/pastoral care.

The passage starts off with a call to meet the physical needs of individuals. To meet them where they are in their time of physical need. Many in our world currently suffer from the lack of their physical needs being met. Over and over I hear the story of children in our local communities who, without the meals they receive at school, will go to be hungry. In a world where we are full of waste this situation is heart breaking. In the larger scheme of creation, we are called to be in community with one another. To be in community is to follow the words of Christ in how we are to love each other.

As congregational minister, I feel it is my calling to work in the community to help meet the needs of those around me. This is not simply the role of the minister rather it is the role of the entire congregation. In this parable, we see a few ways in which we are called to answer the call to help our brothers and sisters. I do not think that when Christ told this parable the message of this first line simply begins and ends with physical needs but it also taps into the spiritual needs as well. This world in which we live is broken, very broken and is starving for the loving word of God to feed hungry and thirsty souls. No matter who or what one may believe one thing is common, the universal need of love and acceptance. Studies have shown that love is a powerful gift that we should share. Kindness can soften even the most hardened hearts. This starts with every individual no matter what race, economic class, gender, or sexual identification.

Each of us has this call to ministry placed on our lives. This hunger and thirst does not have to be filled within the walls of a church. This need can and has to be met where we are at any given moment. While meeting, the physical needs is an effective way to begin the process of meeting the spiritual needs, we are called to go beyond simply handing out food and water, we are also called to meet the needs of the lonely.

In the summer of 2014, I embarked on a journey that would profoundly change my understanding of pastoral care. I began my work as a chaplain intern at Grady Memorial Hospital located in Atlanta Georgia. Brief piece of information about Grady: Grady is a Level 1 Trauma hospital. The level of care requires one to stay alert and ready to face many different emotional situations. My love of the work at Grady lead me to pursue a year-long residency with Emory Spiritual Health. Emory Saint Joseph’s

Hospital was the site I was assigned to. My work here was in the Cardiac Critical Care Unit (CCU). Both my summer internship and my year residency opened my eyes to the spiritual needs of individual in crisis. My work on my unit was often more with the loved ones of an individual rather than with the patient. Throughout my time in my residency, I had the honor of helping individuals lovingly say their good byes to their loved ones.

On occasion, I was also the one they turned to seeking help in making difficult decisions regarding their loved ones. While I must confess, I entered this work only by the suggestion of my Psychiatric Review Committee. I am so humbled that I did. My life and ministry has forever changed. My reluctance in entering this work came from a place of not knowing what this ministry entailed. I began working in the medical field as a certified medical assistant in the early to mid 90's. My work was on the HIV/AIDS unit at Memorial Hospital in Tampa Florida. I advanced my medical education in the 2003. I attended Concord Career Institute. I earned my degree and certification as a Certified Medical Assistant. My life and work since leaving high school has been in service of some sort to others. My love of people and my desire to help and serve is shown in all my career and training.

My understanding of this work was more in line with the medical side of healthcare and not the spiritual side. My thought was the while I was comfortable being in this environment this may confuse my understanding of the work/ministry I was to do. Never in my wildest understanding did I see the amazing blessing chaplaincy work would have in store for me. Yet God is still speaking to those of us that hear God's voice in small subtle ways or suggestions.

My work as a chaplain has opened the door to a profound way of being in ministry. While I would not go as far as to say that I am an expert in the many ways of pastoral care, I can say that I am far better prepared than when I graduated from seminary. Yet I do feel that pastoral care is a continuous learning process. I pray that I never get to a point where I feel I have learned it all or mastered it all, as I will sadly be mistaken. Just like snowflakes, individuals bring their own every unique and different life issues to the table. While some may look or even present themselves the same as another, the individuals that present them will never be the same. Chaplaincy has opened my eyes and understanding to the joy or blessing it is to walk the end of life journey with individuals and their loved ones.

Death is not as scary to me as it once was. While it is not scary, that does not mean that it is not heart breaking. No matter if a family is prepared to say their final good byes or death comes suddenly, the loss is still often devastating. Heartbreak, loss, painful emotions, sickness, and death do not know religion, gender, financial status, or sexual identity. It simply is. It is a factor of life.

As a chaplain, I have had the amazing journey of learning and understanding how to walk and love on others so unlike myself; others who do not believe the same way that I believe and learn how to find the blessing in our differences; to find a way to meet the divine, no matter what the divine is and to hold each other with dignity and respect, to fully live into my full understanding that while for me the way to God is through Christ, this is not the only way to God/the Divine. God's love and acceptance is

so vast and so big it is beyond my simple human imagination. This is where I find my love of the UCC's understanding: "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcomed here."

From the moment, we are born to the day of our death, we are all on life's amazing journey. We are all called by God to walk this journey together in community. Hold each other in the amazing Imago Dei that every one of us were created in. This to me in my full understanding that provides the basis for how I am to offer congregational care/pastoral care to everyone, everyone, everyone. Thanks be to God. Amen.