

Profile Section III: Statement on Ministry

Statement On Ministry

I love to be a part of worship. Singing and breaking bread and reflecting on scripture, these are the rhythms of the church that remind me I am part of something greater than myself. The clatter of coffee-cups, the strong press of a handshake, the shining eyes of someone holding back tears, these are like a great heartbeat that both sends people out into the world and draws them back into community again week after week. I even find myself treasuring those parts of worship that might be thought of as distractions. When a child's voice breaks into a practiced liturgy, I am reminded of the spontaneity and joy that come from the messy and chaotic places in life. Siren-sounds and the rumble of jet engines, these too seep through the stained glass and stone of our sanctuaries. The life of the city presses in upon our silences, speaking the word that the church does not exist outside of the world. As Christian communities, churches are called to serve as witnesses to God's all embracing love by serving those who are sick or grieving or who struggle to live with dignity. As a minister, I have devoted years of study, preparation and work to supporting communities such as these. This kind of ministry is one of the great joys in my life.

Our denomination worships the Living God and we seek faith that is no less vibrantly alive than is our God. For me, a vibrant church is one where a physicist and a theologian can burn away the hours in passionate discussion, bound together by curiosity and the passionate desire to understand the nature of the world. For me, a vibrant church is one where an artist and a banker support one another in the struggle to incorporate faith into their work with integrity. Church life becomes vibrantly alive when people with a diversity of world views and backgrounds come together with mutual respect and a commitment to community. Our denomination has worked tirelessly and with some significant risk to create such faith communities, where the goodness and worth of every human being is not merely affirmed but celebrated. We affirm the fundamental truth revealed in the first chapter of Genesis, that all persons are made in the image of God. And in our communities we have lived out this truth by welcoming the gift of diversity of gender expression and sexual identity. We also affirm Jesus' teaching that the Kingdom of God is like a banquet at which the poor and the mourning and the sick are afforded places of honor. And we live out this truth by serving the poor and grieving, walking alongside those who have lost loved ones and seeking to faithfully attend to the sick and the dying. The work of the church and the teaching of the church should never be separated. In all that we do we should strive to live out our shared faith.

In our teaching and proclamation, the church can wrestle with the fundamental questions of human experience: questions of life and death, of suffering and joy, of injustice and vindication. These are questions that cannot be answered with words or reason alone but which still demand a reply. And in the church there is wisdom that knows to reply to death with song and with silence, leaving empty explanations unspoken. The church also has the honesty to respond to injustice with work that matches our gospel. In the church there is also the humility to respond to suffering by accompanying those who suffer, visiting them in their home or hospital bed, staying with them even though their healing is beyond our power to achieve, even though in their pain we are faced with the fragility of our own happiness.

To be a minister in the United Church of Christ requires passionate commitment to all the daily and weekly and yearly work needed to support and expand a vision of human life centered on caring and community. A minister must be ready to lead but must also be ready to let go of the reins to allow the will of the congregation and the will of God to become clear. It is a challenging balance, but one that is full of the richness of shared life. A minister is called to be a care-giver, yet must also empower and encourage members to care for one another deeply because the gathered community can offer far deeper care than any one person ever could. A minister is called by both education and training to be a teacher in the community, yet a minister must always listen attentively for the Spirit of Truth to speak through and among the people of the church. For, the truth of our faith is a shared one, it is worked out in conversation rather than repeated monologue. A minister is called to help the congregation articulate its vision for the world and steward its resources so it can meet that calling, yet ultimately it is the people of the church who are responsible for the work of the church. A minister is only one person with one voice and can be easily ignored. But a united church inspired to follow in Christ's path can do

great things, unbelievable things. The voice of the United Church of Christ is a voice that the world is desperately hungry for: faith in God coupled with the integrity to work for change in the world, a message of the universal love of God for all people paired with the courage to stand against those whose actions create misery or injustice.

All of this work and witness and vision requires healthy, vibrant churches that see their ministries as growing. And such churches need to be supported by a vibrant worship life that inspires people to live their lives in deeply faithful ways. Such support is composed of small and elemental things: a simple touch, a word of memory for a lost loved one, eager anticipation of the gifts of a newly baptized child. Sometimes this support comes by being present and loving and understanding in times when life changes forever: the death of a child, the dissolution of a marriage, a grave diagnosis. All these things are worship of God as surely as the sharing of communion or the preaching of the gospel.

The rhythms of worship life reverberate through every part of the life of the church. It is my spirit's true home to be among the people of God in song and prayer and preaching, listening for God's voice amidst the sirens and the baby's cry, listening for what God would have us do together as church. I am more certain than ever, more passionate than ever, and more committed than ever to serve communities of faith and help this way of life flourish and grow.