

"Loved Back to Life: A Call to Ministry in Grace, Healing, and Hope"

Ordination Paper

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Introduction

Loved Back to Life

"We love because God first loved us." — 1 John 4:19

Before I ever understood theology, I experienced grace.

The convictions that follow have been formed over a lifetime through family, friendships, trauma, grief, recovery, gratitude, congregational life, hospital rooms, nonprofit leadership, faith and ministry formation, and countless moments when I discovered that God was present in ways I could only recognize in hindsight. My theology has emerged not from having all the right answers, but from learning to trust the God whose love has remained steadfast through every season of my life.

Looking back, I can now see a pattern that was invisible while I was living it. Again and again, God met me not at the end of certainty, but in places of longing, hurt, brokenness, and unexpected hope. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, I have often recognized God's presence only after the journey had unfolded. Those moments have taught me that theology is not simply something we study; it is something we live. It is formed as we encounter God in ordinary life and discover that grace has been quietly shaping us all along.

My spiritual journey has been marked by a movement from longing toward belonging. Church was not a consistent part of my childhood, yet I carried a deep desire for meaning, connection, and something beyond myself. Even as a young person, I found myself drawn to places where I sensed reverence and mystery.

As a teenager, that longing led me to embrace the Christian faith and to enter the Roman Catholic Church. For the first time, I found language for the sacred and a community in which my spiritual hunger was taken seriously. I loved the beauty of the liturgy, the rhythm of prayer, and the sense that God was present in ordinary life. My desire to know and follow Christ was genuine and deeply rooted.

At the same time, I struggled with the growing awareness that I was different. As I began to understand my identity as a gay young man, I also internalized messages that suggested God's love had limits and that I somehow existed beyond them. The tension between the faith that had become so important to me and the identity I could not deny gradually became

unbearable. Believing there was no place for my whole self within the Church I loved, I slowly drifted away from both the Church and the God I feared had rejected me.

In the years that followed, I searched for belonging in places that could never satisfy the deeper hunger of my soul. What began as an attempt to quiet shame and loneliness eventually became an addiction to crystal meth, leaving me increasingly disconnected from myself, from others, and from the life God intended for me.

It was in recovery that I encountered the God I had been searching for all along.

Through surrender, honesty, accountability, community, and service, I experienced a grace that did not wait for me to become worthy before embracing me. Recovery restored far more than my sobriety; it transformed my understanding of God. I discovered that transformation begins not with earning God's love but with awakening to the truth that we have been loved all along. When people ask me to describe my faith, I often return to one simple phrase:

I was loved back to life.

Those words have become more than a description of my recovery. They have become the lens through which I understand the Gospel itself. God's grace always precedes our response. Before we believe, before we serve, before we imagine ourselves worthy of love, God is already reaching toward us. That conviction has become the foundation of my understanding of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Scripture, the Church, and the vocation to which I have been called.

My return to church in 2017 became the rediscovery of a call that had been quietly unfolding throughout my life. At First Congregational Church of Watertown, I encountered a community that embodied the radical welcome of the Gospel and affirmed me as a beloved child of God. Through opportunities to serve, preach, teach, and care for others, I came to recognize that my call to ordained ministry was not simply an internal conviction, but a vocation discerned and affirmed within the covenantal life of the Church.

My professional life has become another place of theological formation. Decades of leadership in nonprofit organizations serving people living with HIV, individuals in recovery, those experiencing food insecurity, and communities facing systemic injustice have convinced me that ministry extends well beyond the walls of the sanctuary. Again and again, I have witnessed Christ's presence in clinics, food pantries, recovery meetings, board rooms, and hospital rooms. These experiences have taught me that pastoral care and public witness are not competing callings but complementary expressions of the same Gospel.

It is within the United Church of Christ that I have found the theological home where these convictions have taken root. The UCC's affirmation that "*God is still speaking*" reflects my own experience of a living God who continues to reveal truth through Scripture, community, reason, experience, and the Holy Spirit. Its commitment to covenant, justice, and extravagant welcome

resonates deeply with the Gospel I encounter in Jesus Christ and with the ministry to which I believe God has called me.

In these pages, I do not present a finished theology but a faithful account of the convictions that continue to shape my life and ministry. They are offered with gratitude, humility, and hope, trusting that God is never finished forming those who are willing to listen. If there is one truth woven through every page, it is this: **God's grace always comes first**. Everything that follows is simply my attempt to bear witness to the God who has, time and again, loved me back to life.

Theology of God - Knowing the God Who Loves First

If there is one conviction that anchors everything else, I believe, it is this: **God is love** (1 John 4:8). That conviction has become the foundation of both my faith and my ministry. There was a time when I believed God's love had limits and that I was beyond them. Through the experiences that shaped my life—especially recovery, faithful community, and pastoral ministry—I discovered a different truth. God's love had never depended upon my worthiness. It had always been there, patiently inviting me home. That discovery continues to shape how I understand every person I encounter. Before I know someone's story, I trust that they are already known and loved by God.

The Mystery of God

I believe that God exceeds human understanding. Scripture offers many images for God—Creator, Shepherd, Rock, Wisdom, Light, Mother, Father—but none is sufficient on its own. Every metaphor reveals something true while reminding us that God's fullness can never be contained by human language.

For that reason, I embrace expansive language for God. God's self-revelation to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM" reminds me that God cannot be reduced to my definitions or confined within my imagination. Rather than diminishing faith, mystery cultivates humility, wonder, and openness to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

The Triune God

Christians know God most fully through the mystery of the Trinity. I confess one God - Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit - not as three separate beings but as one God whose very nature is relationship and self-giving love.

As Creator, God delights in bringing life into being and sustaining all creation. In Jesus Christ, God enters fully into human life, revealing divine love through compassion, justice, humility, and self-giving service. Through the Holy Spirit, God remains actively present, guiding, comforting, challenging, and renewing both individuals and communities.

The **Trinity** reminds me that love is not something God chooses to do; it is who God is. Because we are created by a relational God, we are also created for relationship with God, with one another, and with the whole of creation.

My relationship with God

My relationship with God is sustained through prayer, meditation, Scripture, gratitude, silence, and worship. These practices do not earn God's presence; they awaken my awareness of the presence that has always surrounded me. They continually remind me that ministry begins not with accomplishment but with attentiveness.

This understanding of God is the foundation for everything else in this paper. Before I knew how to name God, God knew me. Before I answered God's call, God was already calling. Before I ever understood theology, I experienced grace.

That is the God I have come to trust. That is the God I seek to proclaim. And that is the God who continues to love us back to life.

Jesus Christ – Love Made Flesh

I follow a humble, brown-skinned, barefoot rabbi who had just two commandments - to love God as you love yourself and to love your neighbor. At the center of my Christian faith is Jesus Christ. If I want to know what God is like, I look to Jesus.

Everything I believe about God finds its clearest expression in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him, God's love is no longer an abstract theological idea, but a human life lived among us. Jesus reveals a God who moves toward people rather than away from them, who restores dignity instead of reinforcing shame, and who continually chooses mercy over condemnation. The **incarnation** is God's declaration that human life matters and that no place of human experience lies beyond God's presence.

Jesus' ministry consistently challenged the assumptions of his time. He welcomed those who had been excluded, crossed social and religious boundaries, healed those whose lives had been defined by suffering, and confronted systems that placed power above compassion. Again and again, he reminded people that God's love could not be contained by fear, legalism, or social expectations. His life revealed that the Realm of God is not simply a future promise but a present reality breaking into the world wherever people are restored to wholeness, relationships are reconciled, and hope is renewed.

The cross reveals both the depth of human brokenness and the depth of God's love. In Jesus' willingness to suffer rather than respond with violence, I see a God who enters fully into human pain without abandoning humanity to it. The **resurrection** is God's definitive declaration that death, fear, injustice, and despair never have the final word. Because Christ is risen, I trust that God is continually bringing new life out of places that appear beyond redemption.

Atonement: Christians have understood the meaning of Christ's death in many ways throughout history. I do not believe the cross reveals an angry God who required violence in order to forgive. Rather, I understand the atonement as God's work of reconciliation accomplished through the self-giving love of Christ. In Jesus, God enters fully into human suffering, exposes the destructive power of sin and death, and overcomes them not through domination but through sacrificial love. The cross and resurrection together proclaim that nothing—not sin, suffering, death, nor anything else—can separate us from the reconciling love of God.

Following Jesus is more than affirming certain beliefs; it is allowing my life to be shaped by his way of living. Discipleship calls me to love generously, forgive freely, seek justice, practice humility, and accompany others with compassion. Recovery taught me that transformation begins not with self-sufficiency but with surrender. Pastoral ministry has continued that lesson, reminding me that faithful discipleship is less about having all the answers than about becoming increasingly available to God's work in and through my life.

My call to ordained ministry grows directly from this understanding of Jesus. I seek to preach the Gospel he proclaimed, embody the compassion he demonstrated, welcome those he welcomed, and participate in God's continuing work of healing and reconciliation. I do not believe Christ calls the Church to preserve itself. Christ calls us to become living witnesses to God's love in the world. Everything I understand about ministry begins with following the One who first showed me what God's love looks like and continues to invite all people into the abundant life God intends.

The Holy Spirit - The God Who Still Speaks

Jesus promised that his followers would not be left alone. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's presence continues to guide, comfort, challenge, and renew. The Holy Spirit is the living presence of God, continually drawing creation toward healing, reconciliation, and hope.

Few convictions resonate more deeply with my faith than the United Church of Christ's affirmation that "**God is still speaking.**" I understand this not as permission to disregard Scripture or Christian tradition, but as confidence that the same Spirit who inspired the biblical witness continues to illuminate it, calling us to faithful discipleship in every generation. God continues to speak through Scripture, worship, prayer, community, and the ordinary experiences of everyday life.

Looking back, I recognize that the Holy Spirit has often been at work long before I understood what God was doing. My call to ministry did not arrive in a single dramatic moment. Rather, it unfolded gradually through recovery, congregational leadership, chaplaincy, theological education, nonprofit leadership, and the encouragement of people who recognized gifts I was only beginning to see in myself. What once appeared to be disconnected experiences now reveal a lifetime of quiet formation. I have come to trust that discernment is less about discovering God's hidden plan than about recognizing where God's Spirit is already at work and finding the courage to join in.

The Holy Spirit also reminds me that discernment, for me, has not been a solitary endeavor. Throughout my journey toward ordination, pastors, mentors, congregations, classmates, reflection committees, and my Committee on Ministry have each helped me listen more faithfully for God's call. Their wisdom has reinforced my conviction that the Spirit speaks through the covenant life of the Church as we pray, question, encourage, and discern together.

This understanding continues to shape my ministry. I do not seek to lead through certainty or control, but through prayerful listening, humility, and trust that God is already at work within every congregation and every community. My responsibility is not to manufacture God's presence, but to help others recognize it.

As I prepare for ordained ministry, my confidence rests not in having all the answers but in the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit. The God who has guided me through every season of life continues to lead the Church today, inviting us to listen with open hearts, to respond with courage, and to trust that God's work of grace is never finished.

Scripture – Listening for the Living Word

I understand the Bible to be inspired by God and written by people who faithfully interpreted God's presence within the realities of their own time and place. It is both sacred and deeply human, telling the story of God's relationship with creation, culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While the biblical authors wrote within particular historical and cultural contexts, the Holy Spirit continues to speak through their witness, inviting every generation into deeper faithfulness.

For that reason, I approach Scripture with both reverence and humility. I do not read the Bible as a collection of isolated verses or timeless propositions, but as the unfolding story of God's covenant love. Faithful interpretation requires attention to history, literary context, and the broader witness of Scripture, always asking how a particular passage reveals the character of God most fully expressed in Jesus Christ.

My understanding of Scripture has been shaped by the ongoing conversation among Scripture, tradition, reason, and lived experience. Scripture is the Church's primary witness to God's self-revelation. Tradition connects me to the wisdom of generations who have wrestled faithfully with these same texts. Reason invites thoughtful engagement with history, scholarship, and contemporary knowledge. Lived experience reminds me that God continues to work in the lives of individuals and communities today. Together, these voices deepen my understanding of God's continuing revelation while remaining grounded in the central witness of Scripture.

Faithful interpretation also requires humility. I believe we must ask not only what a text meant in its original context, but also how the Holy Spirit is inviting the Church to hear it today. That listening includes attending to voices that have too often been overlooked, silenced, or excluded. Listening to the experiences of women, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, persons with disabilities, the poor, and others whose perspectives have historically been marginalized does

not diminish Scripture's authority. Rather, it enables the Church to hear more fully the breadth of God's liberating and reconciling work. In this way, theology becomes not a tool for exclusion or domination, but an invitation into deeper truth, greater justice, and more faithful discipleship.

As a preacher, I believe my calling is not simply to explain biblical texts but to help congregations encounter the living Christ through them. Every sermon begins with careful study of the text and its context, but faithful preaching also asks how God's Word speaks into the lives of people today. Scripture becomes living when it draws us into deeper love of God and neighbor, challenges injustice, restores hope, and invites us to participate more fully in God's work of reconciliation.

Scripture has shaped my faith, challenged my assumptions, comforted me in suffering, and continually invited me into a deeper understanding of God. There are passages that have inspired me and others that have troubled me, particularly those that have been used to justify exclusion, oppression, or shame, including toward people like me. Rather than turning away from these difficult texts, I have learned to wrestle with them honestly, trusting that faithful discipleship welcomes questions as well as conviction. I continually return to Jesus as the lens through which I read the whole of Scripture, believing that his life, teachings, death, and resurrection reveal the fullest expression of God's character. If my interpretation leads me away from the love of God, the dignity of every person, or the hope of the Gospel, then I believe I am called back to the text with greater humility, deeper study, and a more attentive ear to the Holy Spirit. As I continue toward ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ, I seek to proclaim Scripture with intellectual honesty, theological humility, and pastoral compassion, creating space for people not simply to understand the Bible more fully, but to encounter the living Christ through its pages and discover the God who continues to speak words of grace, truth, and abundant life.

The Church – Becoming and Being the Body of Christ

More than a building or an institution, the Church is the living Body of Christ—a community called to worship God, nurture disciples, care for one another, and participate in God's ongoing work of reconciliation. It is within the life of the Church that faith is formed, grace is practiced and experienced, and people are continually invited into deeper relationship with God and one another.

My understanding of the Church is deeply shaped by my own journey. There was a time when I believed there was no place where my faith and my identity could fully belong together. Returning to church in 2017 became more than a homecoming; it was the rediscovery of a community where I was welcomed as God's beloved child. Through worship, fellowship, service, and opportunities to lead, preach, and care for others, I experienced the Church not simply as a place I attended, but as a community that helped shape the pastor I am becoming. That experience continues to influence how I understand the Church's calling. It is not enough for the Church to welcome people through its doors; it must become a community where every

person is genuinely seen, valued, affirmed and empowered to participate fully in the life of Christ.

It is within the United Church of Christ that I have found the theological home where these convictions have flourished. The UCC's covenantal understanding of the Church resonates deeply with my belief that ministry is never an individual endeavor but a shared vocation. **Covenant** calls us to mutual accountability, prayerful discernment, and collaborative leadership, trusting that the Holy Spirit speaks through the wisdom and experiences of the gathered community. This understanding has shaped both my leadership and my approach to ministry, reminding me that faithful leadership is less about authority than about equipping others to discover and use their gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ.

The Church exists not for its own preservation but for God's **mission** in the world. Worship should always lead to service, and discipleship must always lead outward in love. Throughout my ministry in congregations, healthcare, and nonprofit leadership, I have come to see that the Church's witness extends far beyond Sunday morning. Whenever communities feed the hungry, accompany those who grieve, advocate for justice, welcome the stranger, care for the sick, or stand alongside those who have been marginalized, the Body of Christ becomes visible in the world. These ministries are living expressions of the Gospel.

As I prepare for ordained ministry, I hope to help congregations become communities of deep faith, courageous compassion, and joyful service—places where people encounter God's grace, discover their gifts, and are equipped to participate in God's transforming work in the world. I believe the Church is at its best when it reflects the expansive love of Christ, nurtures authentic relationships, embraces thoughtful discipleship, and continually reminds people of the truth that has shaped my own life: before we ever found our way to God, God had already found us.

The Sacraments – Grace Made Visible

The sacraments are visible signs of God's invisible grace. In Baptism and Holy Communion, the Church proclaims not only what God has done, but who God is—a God whose love is freely given, whose grace always comes first, and whose invitation extends to all. These sacred acts do not create God's love; they bear witness to the love that has always been present, reminding us that we belong to God before we accomplish, understand, or deserve anything.

Baptism is God's promise before it is our response. Whether celebrated in infancy or later in life, it marks the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith and reminds us that our deepest identity is found not in our successes, failures, or the labels placed upon us, but in being beloved children of God. Every baptism is also a promise made by the Church—to nurture, encourage, and walk alongside one another as we grow in discipleship.

Holy Communion continually draws us back to the heart of the Gospel. At Christ's table, we remember a love that welcomes before it judges, nourishes before it demands, and reconciles before it divides. I cherish the United Church of Christ's practice of an open table because it reflects the extravagant hospitality of Jesus, who continually gathered people across every boundary of status, belief, and belonging. Communion reminds us that God's grace is never ours to possess or control; it is always ours to receive and to share.

The sacraments shape the way we live in the world. Baptism calls us to remember who we are, and Communion sends us out to embody Christ's love in our relationships, our communities, and our pursuit of justice and compassion. As an ordained minister, I understand my role not simply as presiding over these sacred moments, but as helping people recognize God's grace already at work in their lives and inviting them to live as people transformed by that grace. Whenever water is poured, bread is broken, and the cup is shared, the Church proclaims the same enduring truth that has shaped my own life: God's love always comes first.

Creation, Humanity, Grace, and Hope –

Creation and the Image of God: I believe creation is the first expression of God's generosity. The world exists because God delights in giving life, not because creation earned that gift. Every person is created in the image of God and therefore possesses inherent dignity and immeasurable worth. Our value is not determined by our achievements, failures, identity, or circumstances, but by the God who creates us in love and continually calls us into relationship. Though the image of God may be obscured by sin, suffering, injustice, addiction, poverty, illness, or brokenness, it is never erased.

This conviction shapes every aspect of my ministry. Whether serving the Church, walking beside patients as a chaplain, or leading a nonprofit organization, I begin with the belief that every person is already beloved by God. Ministry is not about deciding who deserves God's grace; it is about helping people recognize the grace that has already been freely given and the sacred worth they have always possessed.

The Fall: While I do not read the Genesis account of Adam and Eve as a scientific explanation of human origins, I do understand it as a profound theological truth about the human condition. The story of the Fall reminds us that from the beginning, humanity has struggled to trust God fully, choosing self-reliance, fear, and separation over relationship. The consequences are broken relationships with God, one another, ourselves, and creation. The Fall is not simply an event in the distant past, but a reality that continues wherever sin fractures the abundant life God desires for the world.

Sin: I understand sin less as the violation of a set of rules and more as the breaking of relationship—with God, with one another, with ourselves, and with creation. Sin distorts God's intention for abundant life and often becomes embedded not only in individual choices but also in the systems and structures that perpetuate injustice, exclusion, violence, poverty, racism,

and oppression. The Gospel calls the Church to confront both personal and systemic sin, always seeking restoration rather than condemnation.

Grace: Grace is God's ongoing work of reconciliation. It is the assurance that brokenness never has the final word and that no person is beyond the reach of God's redeeming love. Rather than asking who deserves God's grace, I believe the Church is called to bear witness to the grace already being offered through Christ. That conviction shapes both my pastoral ministry and my public witness, calling me to meet people with compassion, honesty, and hope while trusting the Holy Spirit to continue the work of transformation.

Justice: This understanding naturally leads to a commitment to justice. If every person bears the image of God, then every person deserves to be treated with dignity, compassion, and equity. Caring for those who are marginalized, advocating for those whose voices have been silenced, and working to address the conditions that diminish human flourishing are not secondary to the Gospel—they are faithful expressions of it. Justice is not simply about changing systems; it is about participating in God's work of restoring relationships and creating communities where all people can flourish.

Eschatology: Christian hope is rooted in God's promised future. I believe that through Christ's resurrection, God's new creation has already begun, even as its fullness still lies ahead. The Realm of God is both a present reality and a future promise—already breaking into our world wherever love overcomes fear, justice confronts oppression, reconciliation heals division, and hope triumphs over despair, yet not fully complete until God brings all creation to its intended fulfillment. This hope is not an invitation to escape the world but a calling to participate faithfully in God's ongoing work of renewal, trusting that God's ultimate purpose is the reconciliation of all creation.

Hope: Christian hope is rooted not in optimism but in God's faithfulness. It gives us the courage to love when reconciliation seems difficult, to pursue justice when change comes slowly, and to remain faithful even when the future is uncertain. Hope trusts that God continues to bring new life out of brokenness and reconciliation out of division. As I prepare for ordained ministry, I do so with confidence that God's work of redemption is ongoing and that the Church is continually invited to participate in that work. My own life has taught me that transformation is always possible because God's grace is always greater than our brokenness. It is this hope that continues to shape my ministry and compels me to proclaim a Gospel that restores dignity, nurtures belonging, and invites all people into the abundant life God intends.

Ministry, Leadership, and Pastoral Identity – How I live what I believe

Ordained ministry is not simply a profession or a position within the Church; it is a lifelong response to God's call. I understand ministry as the privilege of accompanying people as they seek God's presence through every season of life—celebrating moments of joy, walking with them through grief and uncertainty, nurturing faith, proclaiming the Gospel, and continually pointing toward the hope found in Jesus Christ. Ministry is ultimately about relationships,

trusting that God is already at work in people's lives and joining in that work with humility, compassion, and love.

My understanding of leadership has been shaped by Jesus' example of servant leadership. The most faithful leaders do not seek power or recognition; they create space for others to discover their gifts, deepen their faith, and participate in God's mission. I believe effective leadership is collaborative, rooted in prayer, attentive to the wisdom of the community, and willing to embrace both continuity and change. Healthy congregations are not built around the personality of the pastor but around the shared ministry of God's people, where every person is equipped and encouraged to contribute to the life of the Church.

Pastoral ministry also requires a ministry of presence. Some of the most meaningful moments I have experienced have come not through having the right words, but simply through being present with people in times of joy, suffering, celebration, uncertainty, and loss. Whether sitting quietly beside a hospital bed, accompanying a family through grief, praying with someone in crisis, or sharing in life's everyday moments, I have learned that God's love is often communicated most powerfully through compassionate presence. My hope is to be a pastor who listens deeply, honors each person's story, and creates spaces where people encounter grace, healing, and belonging.

I also understand proclamation as extending far beyond the pulpit. While preaching remains central to the Church's worship and witness, the Gospel is proclaimed whenever Christ's love is embodied in word and action. Proclamation takes place through thoughtful preaching and teaching, pastoral conversations, creative worship, public witness, community partnerships, advocacy for justice, digital ministry, and the daily choices that reflect the compassion of Christ. My calling is not simply to communicate information about God, but to create opportunities for people to encounter the living Christ in ways that are faithful, engaging, and relevant to their lives.

Throughout this journey, I have become increasingly aware that ministry is not about having all the answers. It is about remaining open to continual formation. Every congregation I serve, every person I meet, every sermon I prepare, and every conversation I have will continue to shape me as a disciple and as a pastor. I approach ordained ministry with gratitude for those who have walked alongside me, humility about all I still have to learn, and confidence that God's grace is sufficient for the work to which I have been called.

My deepest hope is to serve the Church with authenticity, compassion, integrity, and joy—to proclaim a Gospel that restores dignity, builds community, seeks justice, and reflects the boundless love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. If my ministry helps even one person discover that they are fully known, deeply loved, and never beyond the reach of God's grace, then I will have faithfully answered the call God has placed upon my life.

Conclusion – still being loved back to life and called to sharing that love

As I reflect on the journey that has shaped both my faith and my call to ministry, I have come to see theology not as the pursuit of certainty, but as the lifelong practice of recognizing God's presence and responding to God's grace. Every season of my life - times of longing and belonging, brokenness and healing, doubt and hope—has deepened my conviction before I ever sought God, God was already seeking me. Before I ever understood grace, I was already being held by it.

This paper reflects the convictions that have emerged from that journey. I believe in a God whose love creates, redeems, and sustains; in Jesus Christ, who reveals the fullness of that love; in the Holy Spirit, who continues to guide the Church; in Scripture as the living witness to God's story; in the Church as the Body of Christ; in the sacraments as visible signs of grace; and in the sacred worth of every person, created in the image of God and invited into abundant life.

Ordination is not the culmination of that journey but the beginning of a deeper commitment to live the Gospel with authenticity, humility, and courage. I do not enter ministry believing I have all the answers. I enter with a willingness to keep learning, listening, growing, and trusting the Holy Spirit to continue shaping both my life and my ministry. My hope is to proclaim a Gospel that restores dignity, nurtures belonging, seeks justice, and reminds people that they are truly and fully beloved by God.

I began this paper by saying that before I ever understood theology, I experienced grace. That remains the truest thing I know. Everything I believe, everything I hope to proclaim, and everything I aspire to be as a pastor is simply my response to the God who has always loved me.

I have been loved back to life.

It is both my calling and my deepest joy to spend the rest of my ministry helping others discover that they are, too.

With trust in God's grace and confidence in the Spirit's ongoing work, I offer myself for ordained ministry ready to continue listening, learning, and living into the Marks of Faithful Ministry with integrity, hope, and love.

My Statement of Faith

I believe in God,
the source of all life,
the breath within creation,
the love that holds me even when I cannot hold myself.

I trust in Jesus Christ,
God with us,
who walked among us in vulnerability and truth,
who proclaimed good news to the poor,
justice for the oppressed,
and belonging for those pushed to the margins.
In his life, I see love embodied;
in his death, I see the cost of truth in a broken world;
in his resurrection, I see that love is stronger than fear,
and life is stronger than death.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
God still moving among us,
guiding, unsettling, comforting, and calling,
drawing me again and again toward healing,
toward truth,
and toward all creation.

I believe the church is called into covenant,
not perfect, but becoming;
not uniform, but united in love.
I believe we are called to be a community
where all are welcomed,
where stories are told and honored,
where wounds are tended,
and where justice is pursued with courage and humility.

I believe **EVERY** person is created in the *imago Dei*,
bearing dignity, worth, and belovedness
that cannot be erased.

I believe sin is real, expressed as imbalance,
seen in broken relationships,
systems of injustice,
and the ways we turn from love.
But I trust that grace is more powerful-
freely given, meeting us in truth,

restoring what is broken,
and calling us into new life.

I believe in the Realm of God,
already breaking into our world
where love is practiced,
justice is lived,
and hope refuses to die,
and not yet complete,
still calling us forward
into deeper transformation.

I believe I am not alone,
that God is still speaking,
still creating,
still calling me into a life of meaning and service.

I believe I am called
to follow,
to love,
to serve,
and to live with courage and compassion
in the way of Christ.

Amen.