Ordination Paper for Schanan Harris

Section I: Statement of Faith

I believe that the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reveal the nature of God's saving love. God comes to dwell among us as a baby, born to a poor family under questionable circumstances, in a backwater part of the world, under the crushing rule of an oppressive empire. In the Incarnation, God becomes fully present in flesh and blood, not in the halls of power, but in the most vulnerable of circumstances. In his life and ministry, Jesus stands with those on the margins and invites all to turn toward God's work of justice, mercy, and love of neighbor. Jesus offers friendship, healing, and solace, and also shares words of challenge and truth-telling when they are needed. Through the parables, Jesus teaches of the Kingdom of God, in which society's expectations for the proper order of things are turned upside down, and a mercy beyond our imagination is revealed.

I believe that the love of God is so great, that God in Christ walks with us through all of the pain and injustice and suffering of human life, all the way to the cross and beyond. God is in solidarity with us in the muck and the mud of human suffering and does not abandon us as we endure the horrors of oppressive systems or the broken places of our own hearts and lives. In the resurrection, God's actions proclaim that love is stronger than evil, that hatred and fear and cruelty are not the final answer. While suffering is not in itself salvific, God's transforming love can create new life in the broken places. The love of God can open the tombs of our grief, struggle, and pain, creating space for new life and hope we had not yet begun to imagine. In the words of the first chapter of John's Gospel, "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." I believe that in the Trinity, God is in relationship with God-self. God is not static, but rather, through the interrelationship of the Creating God, the Redeeming Christ,

and the enlivening and sustaining Spirit, the divine presence learns, grows, grieves, yearns, and rejoices in mutual connection with creation.

God is revealed in the stories of Scripture, as the writers of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament wrestled to understand and interpret how God was present in their particular times and places. As we work to understand these writings in their own context and hear how these faithful and flawed individuals and communities perceived God at work in the world around them, we also can receive the gift of a divine Word that breathes life into the dry bones of our own human experience. With words that echo the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel at Peniel, Rev. Mary Hammond—a mentor from my college years-- would often speak of "wrestling with the text until it blesses (her)." Her perspective continues to inform my relationship with scripture, in the way that it holds together vigorous critical engagement with the text and hopeful anticipation that there is something of value that will be revealed about God or about how people have tried to describe the holy across time and space. God also continues to be revealed in our present context—in the art and music and literature and prayer and trees and oceans and animals and lived human experiences and struggles for justice of our world today. The divine presence permeates all aspects of our ordinary lives, and sometimes we have the attentiveness to perceive it.

In the waters of baptism, God welcomes us into community, into a covenantal relationship with ourselves, God, and with our congregation. In baptism, we are also connected with the great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us, in the context of a tradition that spans many times and places. God invites us into baptism at any age or stage of life. As God blessed Jesus at the time of his baptism with the words, "This is my beloved son, with him I am well pleased," so we are also blessed and cherished by God. Our divine welcome—which was and is

always present—is affirmed, lived out, and made manifest by the community of faith in the liturgy of baptism. It is an outward sign of God's abundant grace.

Baptism also recognizes the sacred connection between the person who is baptized and the community of faith. Members of the local church are invited into the gift and responsibility of welcoming, nurturing, supporting, and mentoring the newly baptized person. The church community should aspire to see the baptized person fully in their beloved uniqueness and help them listen for the ways that God is at work in their lives. It is an ongoing relationship of mutuality and care. In the words of the New Century Hymnal Order for Baptism, "In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, and renewal of the Spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always." (NCH p. 32)

At the communion table, Christ is the host and Christ welcomes all. At my church (First Congregational Church of Minnesota, UCC), our communion liturgy proclaims that one does not need to be a member of our congregation or of any church in order to share in this meal. In a world where many people are hungry and struggle with basic needs, the communion table offers an experience of holy abundance. In a world where many experience discrimination and exclusion, the communion table is a place where we experience our equality before God and receive extravagant welcome in community. Through the gifts of bread and cup and sacred story, we are invited into this very visceral encounter with God's love, and to connect with something that includes and is simultaneously larger than the particularities of our own experience. Communion gives us sustenance in our individual and communal struggles and also links us with the larger church and the great cloud of witnesses, reminding us that we are not alone.

In the sacrament of communion, we hear the stories of our connection to generations past and to all of creation, and we are reminded of God's promises. We tell the story of Jesus

celebrating the Passover meal with friends on the night before his death. As Jesus shared the bread and wine and proclaims that it is his body and blood given for us, we are invited to eat and drink in remembrance of him. And in doing so, we too proclaim with our own bodies the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In this intimate act of eating and drinking, the most ordinary of activities is infused with holiness. Perhaps the Spirit was always present in these ordinary facets of our lives, and in this sacrament we are given a new capacity to perceive it. Throughout the rhythm of life's joys and struggles across the span of our individual and communal lives, we join with the larger church to participate in this mystery of our faith. And over the course of Sundays and years of Sundays, we pray that the bread and cup might form and shape our bodies into the body of the prophetic, grieving, healing, loving, justice-seeking, and often surprising Christ.

God calls the whole church to participate in ministry, and all have the responsibility of living out the Gospel through service to others, working for justice, and embodying and sharing the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In ordination, some people are authorized by an Association of the United Church of Christ for ministry leadership on behalf of the larger church. In the words of the UCC Ministerial Code, "Affirming that I have been called by God to be a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ and granted ministerial standing by the United Church of Christ, I agree to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church with integrity, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership in covenant with others."

As a chaplain in a secular healthcare setting, I understand ordination in the UCC as rooting my spiritual care ministry in covenantal relationship between myself, my local church, my work setting, and the Minnesota Conference. It would be a great gift to be authorized to serve communion to my hospice patients and families who wish to receive this sacrament, and to be able to ground my work in the connectedness, accountability, collegiality, and challenge of these

larger covenantal relationships. The importance to me of deepening this sense of connection and covenant is at least partly related to my own story. I have for many years felt a strong sense of call to ministry, particularly to chaplaincy, which has been affirmed by my communities of faith. Yet, though I graduated from seminary in 2001 and have worked in spiritual care ministry for many years, I have just in the past few years been actively moving toward ordination. There are multiple reasons for this timing. It took some time after seminary for me to determine with clarity which denomination resonated most fully with who I am. I have now been a member of First Congregational Church of Minnesota, UCC since 2010 and feel very solid in my UCC identity. Additionally, in the years after I finished seminary, I experienced the onset of significant depression and anxiety. Learning to understand and work with both the limitations and gifts that came with these mental health challenges needed to be a primary focus in my young adult years. After many years of inner work, as well as benefiting from the wisdom of mental health professionals and connecting with other people who have lived experience with depression and anxiety, I am now on much firmer ground with my own mental well-being. I am now in a place in my life of having the energy and capacity to vocationally grow and connect in some new ways. One of the strongest growing edges in my life and in my work is to stay deeply rooted in relationship with community and with the larger church and for my work to flow from this sense of life-giving connectedness. Feeling guided in this path by the Holy Spirit, I have prayerfully discerned a call to ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Section II: Spiritual Autobiography

I grew up in the hills of southern Indiana in not the easiest of circumstances. I was an only child of parents who divorced when I was 4. My dad moved about four hours away to find

work, and my mom and I stayed put. My mom lived with untreated mental health issues and alcoholism and was often not able to be emotionally present or available. In the midst of all of this, I began to encounter the sacred in nature, books, and music. Though I might not have always used the word "God", the holy was present for me in the stacks of books that I devoured, in the woods and fields behind our house, and in my time spent happily plinking away on my neighbor's piano, teaching myself to play from her beginner piano books.

My dad grew up Roman Catholic and attended Catholic school in small town Illinois in the 1950s and 1960s. He ran fast and far away from this as soon as he had the opportunity. My mom grew up attending a United Methodist church in the same Illinois town, and had a less aversive experience. As a child, my mom and I attended Trinity United Methodist Church in Madison, Indiana. It was a well-established mainline Protestant congregation in a historic building downtown. I went to Sunday school and learned about the Beatitudes and memorized the Lord's Prayer. I was confirmed and baptized in this church at the age of 12. As an adolescent, I attended the Methodist Youth Fellowship group for a while; this was my first experience of something resembling community and the unconditional love of God.

My southern Indiana classmates mostly identified as Baptist or Southern Baptist, and the culture of my upbringing was also shaped by these influences. As a child and young teenager, I attended Southern Baptist and fundamentalist Baptist bible camp with friends. This was a complicated experience for me. I came forward to "accept Jesus" at a church camp altar call one evening, and later felt confused and shameful about my actions. I didn't have words for it, but sensed in some way that this did not resonate with how I actually experienced the sacred or with my not-yet verbal theology. Something about the personal Savior theology and the focus on going to heaven and escaping hell didn't fit for me. I didn't have much capacity for nuance or

paradox at that life stage, and I didn't know how to hold together the parts of Christianity that were life-giving for me with those that just didn't resonate. I left organized religion altogether for a few years and identified as atheist.

As a child and adolescent, I didn't have much awareness of other voices and perspectives beyond those which were right around me. I wasn't attuned to noticing whose voices weren't being heard, or who was at the margins of our community. I also myself grew up feeling at the edges of things, an awkward kid with no relatives in town besides my mom, and with bookish interests that were far from the center of mainstream. I was smart and eccentric and gawky, and often felt myself to be on the outside looking in.

My insular worldview began to shift, when, by the combination of grace and financial aid and many hours spent practicing my trombone in the garage, I was accepted to Oberlin Conservatory as a music education major. My years at Oberlin were a deeply transformative time for me. I was introduced to so many new ways of looking at the world and experiences different than my own. My music focus didn't stick and I ended up graduating with a major in Politics, through which I was exposed to hard truths about the injustice and pain woven into the very fabric of our society and our world. I began to be interested in movements for social justice.

Simultaneously, I began to feel that my atheism did not adequately explain the world as I experienced it. I began attending church services at a variety of local congregations, and ended up re-entering religious practice through Quakerism. The silent worship and lack of dogma enabled me to quiet my inner skepticism and to simply sit in God's presence and listen, while also feeling the healing love of community. Also during my college years, I discovered a small student group that met every Sunday evening for dinner and conversation about the intersection of faith and social justice issues. Ecumenical Christians of Oberlin (ECO) quickly became my

spiritual home, and before too long I was invited to become the group's discussion coordinator. I flourished in this role, started taking a few religion classes, and started to become interested in attending seminary. This did not make logical sense to me at the time, however, so I fought against these early hints of my sense of call, and moved to Minnesota for what would be a short-lived stint at law school.

After a year, it was clear that I hated everything about law school and that this was not my path. I discovered that there was a seminary in Minnesota that was a good fit for my theology and values, and I enrolled at United Theological Seminary for the fall semester of 1998, not sure why I was there but clear that this was where I needed to be. I loved seminary. I thrived in classes such as "Preaching" and "Gay and Lesbian Cultural and Theological Voices." But it was in my pastoral care and counseling classes that I really found my home, and in which my sense of call began to clarify for me. As soon as I understood that chaplaincy was a thing, I felt deeply drawn to prepare for this work, and my gifts were affirmed and encouraged. I took every pastoral care course that I could, and I was accepted into a CPE internship and residency after I graduated with my M.Div. in 2001.

My 5 units of CPE were a rich and challenging time. I had not yet had much experience with death and dying, and I was suddenly immersed in the reality of life's transitions. My initial CPE internship was with City of Lakes Transitional Care Center in south Minneapolis, where I served on a palliative care unit and a long-term care unit. I particularly loved the palliative care work, and I found the connections that I made with people at end of life to be deeply meaningful. For my CPE residency at the University of Minnesota Medical Center, I served two inpatient mental health units and a cardiology unit that specialized in heart and lung transplants. My sense of call to chaplaincy was affirmed, as was an interest in mental health.

During my CPE residency, I also experienced the onset of Major Depressive Disorder, which has been a part of my life since then. There have been many (painfully learned) life lessons that have come out of this for me… humility, interdependence with others, slowing down, realizing that I have limits, learning to ask for help, learning to say "no" as well as "yes." While my experience of significant depression has made my vocational path perhaps less linear and direct than I would have chosen, it has brought with it an abundance of learning that has made me a healthier person and spiritual caregiver.

After my CPE residency, I additionally completed most of a Master's degree program in Counseling and Psychological Services at St Mary's University of Minnesota. I gradually began to find part-time chaplaincy opportunities, which offered the chance to learn which settings were a good fit for me. In 2015, I started my current job as a Spiritual Counselor with North Memorial Hospice. This has been by far the best fit of any job I have had. To borrow some language from Frederick Buechner, I feel like this work is "where my deep gladness meets the world's deep need." It is an amazing privilege and honor to walk with our patients and those in their circles of care as they journey through the final chapter of their lives. As I have settled into this role, I have felt a sense of call to ordination in the United Church of Christ.

My first experiences with the United Church of Christ were through my degree program at United Theological Seminary, through regularly attending services at Spirit of the Lakes UCC, and through completing a parish internship at Falcon Heights UCC. After some exploration of different denominations in the years after seminary, I discerned that the theology and polity of the UCC were the best fit for who I am as a person. In 2010, I joined First Congregational Church of Minnesota, UCC, where I am presently a member. I was drawn to the vibrant and quirky community, the richness and creativity of worship, preaching, and music, and the

emphasis on social justice and continuing revelation coexisting with meaningful engagement with scripture and tradition. I have also been a member of the Community of St Martin since 1997, a small ecumenical worshipping community centered around peacemaking and social justice. These communities have over the years provided opportunities for spiritual growth, preaching, and leadership. In the context of these communities, I have been affirmed and supported in my sense of call to ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Section III. UCC History, Theology, Polity, and Practice

In the UCC history, theology, and polity class that I completed in 2022 (through the Penn Central Conference of the UCC and Lancaster Theological Seminary), Dr Carrie Call argued that there are five strands that constitute the modern UCC (Congregational, Christian, Afro-Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed), and not four as has been the conventional understanding. In the following section, I will discuss the contributions of each of these five strands and how they inform the covenantal relationships of our present denomination.

The Congregational tradition brings many contributions of theology and polity that are highly visible in the modern UCC. These contributions include congregational polity, a strong sense of moral conviction, a rejection of reliance on creeds and confessions as a test for membership, an emphasis on education, and an openness to theological diversity. The term "congregationalism" refers not to a particular belief system, but to a type of church government that emphasizes the scriptural authority and autonomy of individually gathered churches. The Puritans, early practitioners of Congregationalism, settled Massachusetts Bay Colony with a vision of reforming the Church of England. A deep sense of moral conviction permeated the Puritan movement as they sought to establish the "City upon a Hill," a model society fit for the

world to emulate. This zeal for transforming society had complex and sometimes problematic results, and the Congregationalists were complicit in the colonization and attempted erasure of other cultures and traditions. At the same time, the Congregationalists' communal sense of call to moral and ethical leadership in the world is a precursor to the social justice leadership of many settings of the modern UCC.

In the midst of this earnest sense of their own moral and ethical rectitude, the Puritans also maintained a sense of humility that God is still active and still speaking, and that we can only know so much about God. Relatedly, rather than relying on creeds and confessions as a unifying center, the Puritans believed in the capacity of individuals to engage with scripture without the filter of the creeds. Literacy and education therefore became highly important to empower local churches to interpret scripture for themselves. The theological diversity fostered by education, individual engagement with scripture, and local church autonomy was valued as a source of discerning religious truth.

The Christian Connection, though perhaps less visible than some of the other traditions that constitute the UCC, brings many gifts that are essential to the modern self-understanding of the denomination. Some of these contributions include pluralism of thought, the empowerment of people and congregations to follow their own conscience, an emphasis on practice rather than doctrine, a sense of personal piety, a strong focus on the importance of scripture, an empowering view of the role of the laity, and a focus on Christian unity. In his description of this tradition, church historian Richard Taylor quotes early Christian Connection leader Abner Jones: "Every Christian should be allowed to follow the dictates of their own conscience, and Christian character rather than credal statement or baptismal mode should be the test of church membership or fellowship. We know them by their fruits, not the doctrines that they hold."

(Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 32) The piety of this tradition was personal and heart-centered, and ethics were practical. Unity was to be found in practice and in how Christians lived their lives rather than in creeds or confessions. Accordingly, people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs were welcomed into fellowship. The Christian Connection was also in some cases able to create space for voices not often publicly heard in that time and place. Women and freed slaves preached at Christian revivals in the early 1800's, and some of the groups within the Christian Connection advocated for the end of slavery (Call, Lecture 2/11/22). The "big tent" approach of the modern UCC is indebted to the values and practices of the Christian Connection. The Christian Connection also emphasized the role of each Christian rather than relying on an elite clergy. Ordinary people of faith were empowered to express their own theology. This traditional thread emphasizes the importance of ordinary church members, offering a counterbalance to the strong value of a highly educated clergy within the modern UCC.

The Afro-Christian tradition was a grassroots movement which grew quickly in North Carolina and Virginia in the years following the Civil War. This tradition traces its roots to Providence Church, established by free Black persons in Chesapeake, Virginia in 1852, and also has origins in "the movement of black people from the slave balconies of white churches in North Carolina and Virginia to an abandoned cabin, stable, or 'bush arbor'." (Alston, p. 1) The basic tenets of the Christian Church were expressed through a distinctive style of liturgy, worship and preaching influenced by African chant and dance. (Alston, p. 9) Hope was a central theme in preaching. "The congregation never departed without being assured that despite the oppression, the suffering, and the pain experienced daily in life, joy will surely come in the morning." (Alston, p. 2). Churches in this tradition became a place where oppressed communities could have their own voice, sense of self, have opportunities to learn to read,

engage in community outreach and conversation around social issues. The church gave people a place to learn and develop. (Call, Lecture 2/11/22) Percel Alston suggests that the legacy of the Afro-Christian churches can be summarized in four statements: “They were fiercely independent; they maintained simple organizations; they upheld the centrality of Christ; and they preserved the African idiom.” (Alston, p. 8) The Afro-Christian Connection brings to the modern UCC a sense of hopeful resilience in the face of adversity, a Christocentric focus, and a tradition of experiencing and expressing faith with feeling and joy.

With roots in Germany, the Evangelical Synod officially began in 1840 with the meeting of a small group of clergy in Missouri. The Evangelical Synod integrated aspects of both Lutheran and Reformed religious experience in a third way that valued pietism and a “heart” experience of Jesus. They developed a practical theology addressing the question of “how do we live in the world?” (Call, lecture, 2/18) Ralph Quellhorst writes, “Evangelical heritage offered another alternative: the ability to benefit from both orthodoxy and rationalism, but not to be caught in the argument between which is true and which is false.” (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 25) This thread of the UCC offers a certain comfort with paradox and the ability to hold competing truths in dialectical tension in a spirit of charity and compassion. While the Evangelical Synod inherited creeds from both the Lutheran and Reformed tradition, its central identity was simply rooted in confession of faith in a crucified Christ. This confession was not individualistic or framed as a “personal decision,” but rather was a communal act of the whole body of Christ. (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 27)

A gift of the Evangelical Synod is the piety of Frommigkeit, a “warm-hearted faith that is spent in the world.” (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 26, 28) As part of this tradition, women formed orders of deaconesses, building hospitals and caring for people in need. Clergy were

called to embody the ministries of preaching, teaching, healing, and pastoral care. The Evangelical Church brings the capacity to integrate spiritual formation and practice with a Christ centered concern for the world. It is heart-centered, but not at the expense of social concern.

The Reformed tradition originated in Switzerland, and was brought to North America by German immigrants, who started to arrive in Pennsylvania in large numbers in the early 1700s. Seeking escape from poverty and religious conflicts in the German territory, these refugees had a wary view of the state, and wished to practice their faith in peace. The Reformed tradition was unity-minded, viewing religious divisions as negative and problematic. (Call, lecture 2/18/22) The Reformed Church was rooted in the Heidelberg Catechism, which integrated the basic tenets of Reformed theology but softened some of the harshness of Calvinism with the Lutheran concept of grace. (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 18). The Heidelberg Catechism emphasized justification by faith through grace and was also strongly rooted in scripture. The Bible and the Heidelberg Catechism were the primary sources for confirmation education and preparation for ministry in this tradition. (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 19) Reformed theology, particularly in the Mercersburg tradition, also emphasized the catholicity of the church, the significance of apostolic succession, as well as the importance of ongoing spiritual nurture through Word and Sacrament.

The Reformed Church practiced a presbyterial polity and a representative form of governance, with authority located at the level of the judicatory. In the Reformed Church, the ordained ministry "was understood to be a corporate office of the whole church." (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 21) An educated clergy was valued, and pastors were held to the standard of (in the words of John Calvin) "Word rightly preached, and sacraments rightly administered." (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, p. 22) The role of the pastor was viewed as equipping the laity

for their own ministry. Aspects of this understanding of ordained ministry are present in the modern UCC, particularly viewing ordination as being on behalf of and in service to the whole church (not just a singular local congregation), and in situating authorization for ministry in the association and conference rather than in the local church.

I find particular resonance in my theology and ecclesiology with the Evangelical and Congregational threads of the UCC. I am very comfortable with paradox and with a both/and approach to faith, and I am drawn to the "third way" of the Evangelical Synod. I deeply connect with the focus on a heart-centered piety that is immersed in the world. That said, I am a member of a UCC church with roots in the Congregational tradition and have great respect for my community's prophetic social witness and strong stance on the justice issues of our day, strengths that are very congruent with a Congregational approach to theology and polity. I also appreciate my church's openness to theological diversity and embrace of "differing but kindred minds," a commitment that is also rooted in a Congregational way of being.

I am also drawn to the idea of covenant, which is so central within the UCC. I understand covenant to be a sacred relationship in which we choose to intertwine our individual and communal lives with God, community, and the larger church in relationships of trust, accountability, and love—and through which God relates to us as God's people. This sense of interwovenness of our communal lives and institutions is a core aspect of the theology and ecclesiology of covenant within the UCC. The covenant that we share embodies some core values. Some of these values are as follows: Christ is at the center of the UCC. The local church is the primary unit of the denomination. Inclusivity and radical welcome—however this may be interpreted—are important. There is room for questioning and doubt. In the words of the Eden Theological Seminary motto: "in essentials, unity. In non-essentials, freedom. In all things,

charity." (Johnson and Hambrick-Stowe, 25) The UCC roots itself in the idea of "continuous testament." The Bible is important, and at the same time "God is Still Speaking" and continuing to reveal God's self in our lives and in our world. Leadership hierarchies within the denomination are flat and function driven. (Drummond, p. 3-4) Covenant in the UCC also speaks to the relationship both within and among congregations, evoking the vision of the UCC as being a united and uniting Church ("That they may all be one"—John 17:21). These values resonate with the congregational, Christian, evangelical, and reformed nature of the UCC—words that both describe the heritage and the present reality of the denomination.

Section IV: Power and Boundaries in Ministry

Boundaries are at their essence rules about relationships that protect us and allow us to be present with one another. By helping us to know what we can expect from others, particularly in the context of the roles in which we serve, boundaries create a sense of safety and offer a container in which connection is possible. In the church, this is particularly important, given the trauma to individuals and communities that can result when boundaries are violated and power is abused. Appropriate boundaries also help to protect clergy from burnout by safeguarding such essential aspects of a healthy life such as work/life balance, rest, privacy, and time with family and friends.

Ordained ministers are inherently in a position of power. As leaders of communities and people who are often publicly viewed as having the authority of the institutional church behind them, those in the clergy role wield a power that needs to be acknowledged and used thoughtfully and responsibly. Guidelines for doing so are articulated in the UCC ministerial code. These include practices such as acting to prevent and report known or suspected abuse or

neglect, not utilizing one's position for unwarranted financial gain, honoring confidentiality, utilizing social media responsibly, and regarding all persons with equal respect and concern. Additionally, it is important for clergy to get their primary needs for connection and support met elsewhere from the people whom they serve.

As I reflect on power and boundaries in my ministry setting of hospice chaplaincy, there are both similarities and differences from how this might look in parish ministry. Even in secular or interfaith healthcare settings, people sometimes perceive chaplains as representing the institutional church with all of its gifts and flaws. Sometimes this perception is a barrier to connection, particularly in a time when the population as a whole is less identified with organized religion and people are increasingly aware of harms perpetuated by Christianity. But more often, my role leads people to quickly trust me, and they grant me access to their stories, hopes and fears. The privilege of being allowed into the inner realm of my hospice patients' lives brings with it power. Additionally, as a hospice chaplain I have the power of access to medical records, patients' homes, and family systems. This power is a sacred trust, to be held with great respect and responsibility.

I work to observe practices that keep me sustainable in my role and help me to not burn out. These same practices help patients and families know what they can expect of me with clarity and consistency, something that is essential to trauma informed care. I respect people's choices about whether or not to accept spiritual care. I let patients and families know my work hours, and I do not answer my work phone or respond to messages during my off hours. I also offer direction in advance (and on my outgoing voicemail) about how patients can access other hospice supports during my time off. In my work, I do home visits and often get to know families well over the span of a few months. People often have questions about my life, and it

makes sense that they want to know a little bit about who they are talking with. Even as I work to build rapport, I am very intentional in my self-disclosure, and ultimately keep the focus on the patient and family that I am supporting.

Ultimately, boundaries help to create a sense of safety and clarity for both clergy and those with whom they are in ministry. Boundaries offer a principled way to help people to know what to expect from one another, and they invite clergy to minister in a way that is ethical, sustainable, empowering, and life-giving. They might be appropriately viewed as a gift, as a sort of living water that provides essential nourishment for the church and all of our ministry settings.

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