

Ordination Paper
“God Was Calling Me to This Day”

**Statement of My Faith Journey, Theological
Conviction and Call to Ordained Ministry**

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1.0. Acknowledgement

This ordination paper is a requirement to completing coursework in United Church of Christ (UCC) History, Theology and Polity (taught by Rev. Prof. T. Michael Rock) at United Theological Seminary (UTS) of the Twin Cities, and a fulfillment to the path of ordination in the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ.

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2.0 Introduction:

This ordination paper opens with the powerful story of my faith journey – a faith journey like none other, owing to the many peculiar moments it has witnessed. The eccentricities contained in my faith story are truly lived moments which I see as the workings of the Holy Spirit because I was never myself when they happened. When they occurred, the next thing that followed was, finding myself kindled and on fire for Jesus – a fire that has never extinguished. I have elaborated on this in various sub sections in order to provide a clearer picture and understanding to the readers.

I have also expounded on my call by God to ordain ministry – a call that has been a long time coming – a call that I heard through many voices far and near, but I did not pay close attention as much as I should have. But God being God, whose purpose for our lives must come to reality, has fulfilled this day. I, again, arranged by sub captions the stories and voices that are witness to my call to ordained ministry.

In this paper, I took time to reflect on the UCC Statement of Faith and what the theological highlights in that statement mean for me, personally. The paper also offers brief reflection on the United Church of Christ's eight marks of faithful and effective ministry for authorized ministers.

In this paper, I also reflected on key theological perspectives as well as Christology.

In my conclusion, I reaffirmed that God has called me to ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament and to be a voice of justice and peace.

3.0. Stories of My Faith Journey:

I opened my eyes in a home where my father held unto his Christian faith. He had been raised in the Baptist tradition. He had attended the Mid Liberian Baptist mission school in Suakoko Town and went to church every Sunday morning. He physically carried load on his head for white missionaries as they went on evangelizing trips and missions in the far away villages in the early twentieth century.

My father was not baptized, but had a very strong faith. He did not eat without praying. He prayed in the morning when he woke up from sleep and in the evening before bed time. Nevertheless, he held firm to his native tradition and culture. He kept his cultural values close to his chest. He would fight hard to marry the best values of those two forces (Christianity and native traditional norms).

My mother had attended fewer church services a year. She did not miss carrying my siblings and I to church during watch night service, every December 31st to the Malonkaã (Mercy) Baptist Church. At these watch night services, my mom would pray so hard for a blessed year, good health, a better yield for her rice farm, and pray for her family. She too, maintained her local tradition and cultural values at all times. Like my father, she was not baptized.

As a child, growing up, I found myself exposed to both a Christian way of life, but also with tremendous pressure to be upright with my local cultural and traditional values as my parents. As these two forces came to pressure me, the best way was to borrow from each norm the necessary values and merge them. While I lived my culture every single day, I wanted to discover Christianity more than what I knew at home – morning and evening prayers, prayer before meal and watch night service. At sharp midnights, during these watchnight services, my mom would say, “The old year has fallen!” She would ask whether we heard the sound. But not a night did I ever hear the sound of the old year as it fell.

I was very young. I do not know how it all happened, but I saw myself on fire for Jesus. I felt the Holy Spirit burning in my young soul like an endless dry season fire in the wildwood.

3.1. The Communion I ate Without Baptism, But Sets my Soul on Fire:

In 1984, I had a double promotion from 3rd to 4th grade, and at the end of the academy year, I landed in the 5th grade with a 96-average. I was attending the First United Methodist Church (1st UMC) Elementary School in Suakoko Town, the land of my father. All the teachers admired and loved me as a result of my academic intelligence.

One day, the principal, Peter D.M. Lake (now deceased), invited pupils to attend his church, 1st UMC. The day was Sunday, 2 December 1984. Excited by the invitation to attend church, during that early morning, I showered, got ready, and I was amongst the first people sitting in the church. To make sure that my principal saw me, I went and greeted him. “Oh, Jerry, I am glad you came to church!” Peter Lake said to me, so happily.

The pastor in charge was Rev. Dennis. He lived approximately 10 miles from Suakoko and commuted to church every Sunday and during special events. It was the first Sunday of the month – a communion Sunday. Rev. Dennis preached that day. Following his sermon, he consecrated the Holy Eucharist and invited the adults, first. The adults lined up and were served the bread and wine. I watched them with deep curiosity and admiration as they knelt down for the communion and as they made the sign of the cross in their chests; before walking back to their seats.

When the adults were finished, Rev. Dennis called the children to come forward. Without wasting time whatsoever, like the adults, I went to the altar, knelt down for the communion, made the sign of the cross in my chest and went back to my seat. I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I felt fulfilled in the things of God. It was a solemn and sacred moment for me. My faith had taken an accelerated turn.

Minutes later, Peter Lake walked to me with inexplicable eyes. But that did not bother me. I developed the feeling of accomplishment; that my teacher will be proud of my spiritual boldness. However, it turned out to be the opposite.

He was a tall gentleman. Hovering over me, he asked, “Jerry, did you take communion?” I knew he saw me, but thought he wanted confirmation. I responded, “yes.” His next question came, “But Jerry, are you baptized?” I asked him back, “What is baptism?” That alone was a sufficient clue that I was not baptized. Peter Lake explained, “When a pastor pours water on your heads or throw you in the river on your back is baptism.” I then knew that something was not right. My answer was, “no.” His response was shocking and devastating for me. “You are not baptized and you took communion? You will die!” That response was disturbing to my young soul. My thirsty and hungry soul in finding Jesus landed me in what I called, “Good spiritual trouble.”

The pastor was just about to pronounce final blessing to bring the worship service to a close. Congregants were already standing on their feet to receive the benediction. But upon hearing the statement, “You will die,” from Peter Lake, I ran to the altar – running through the aisle of the church and shouting, “Pastor, please pray for me! Please pray for me!!”

The church was quiet. People looked with wonder and interest. The pastor got concerned and asked the congregation to take their seats. He invited me closer and asked, “What happened?” In a shaky but loud, sharp and terrifying voice, I explained to him, “I am not baptized, but I just took communion from you. Someone just told me that I will die!”

The church exploded with an echoey “woooooo!” There were mixed reactions. Some people raised eyebrows, while others laughed and others shouted, “What kind of child is this?” Of course, there were those who said, “How in the world could someone tell a child such a thing?”

Rev. Dennis lowered down on his two knees, reaching to my level, as I stood below the steps of the altar. He asked, “Who told you that?” I was young, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, I didn’t point at or call the name, Peter Lake. I only said, “The person is over there.” It might have shockingly surprised members if they knew right away that it was Peter Lake of all integrity who has told a young child he will die because of his faith in Jesus.

With his two hands on my left and right arms, the pastor looked in my face and said to me, “Do not be afraid. Nothing will happen to you. In fact, by taking the communion, you will never die.” He stood up and placed his right hand on my head and prayed for me. After the prayer, Rev Dennis told me to go. When he said, “Go,” my soul further caught fire and I have never rested from walking with Jesus.

By the time church ended, the news had spread all over our town, “Jerry, has become the only child in this town to take Holy Communion without baptism.” Those who spread the news in that fashion, did not see it as a positively spiritual character trait. In the eyes of my culture, I was branded as a bad child; but especially a child of too much curiosity; which was not a good character for a child those days in the eyes of my clan’s culture, because a child should be quiet and humble. That is interpreted as a good child. It was a big deal.

All over our town, there were those who made a mockery out of me. I heard people mocking, “Pastor, pray for me!” Some of my agemates jarringly ran to a fellow, repeating what I had said to the pastor in church that day, “Pastor, please pray for me!” They laughed at me.

With little faith, but also saturated with fear for my life, extended family members and relatives came to our house that evening and the immediate next days. They proposed that my parents seek for me a holy bath rooted in the tradition of our clan. The holy bath was meant to be conducted by the country doctors or medicine men; otherwise,

the zoes in our clan. It was primarily meant to wash away the bad luck pronounced on me by Peter Lake. My parents downplayed the idea of the holy bath. However, like the heart of all mothers, my mom in particular was troubled. She asked many questions. She was confused and worried. Family members, relatives and neighbors kept coming up with suggestions. All of them wanted me alive. They rejected any death curse upon my life.

In place of that holy bath, which would have been done with fresh leaves and fresh water from the creek, intoned over and blessed by the medicine man before sunrise, my mother took the matter into her own hands.

The next early morning, my mother took me on the bush road (foot path) leading to our farm. What appeared like a ritual to me, required that we must be the first to walk that path early that December morning before anyone got on that road. This was done in order to satisfy a condition. We must walk on the bush path where all the leaves were fresh and still moist.

By letting me in front with the early morning dew falling on us, while the fresh leaves bearing moisture touching me and wetting my clothes with drops of water from my body, my mom believes that I would be cleansed from the bad luck of death pronounced against me by Peter Lake. There were no other rituals.

As Rev. Dennis had pronounced upon my life, I am still alive. Walking on the bush path with fresh leaves and early morning dew soaking me wet, was just another form of baptism for me, I had thought. Baptism being the Word of God used together with water and God's command,¹ I considered that ritual of my mom as a baptism (Matthew 28:19-20) since there was water. Before letting me in the front, my mother had earlier said to me, "God will protect you." Indeed, that was God's word (Romans 6:1-4). For me, the fact that my mom woke me up that morning, sent me ahead on the narrow bush-foot path and said, "Go, don't be afraid, God's protection is upon you," was God's commend. God has always told God's anointed ones, "Do not be afraid."² That was God's commend right there.

I realized the call of God upon my life for ordained ministry not because I read the Holy Bible in English and understand it in my native tongue. I also just did not feel that God has called me simply because I do go to church or because I have the ability to talk. I strongly feel the call of God upon my life for ordained ministry because of what the Holy Spirit has allowed me to see, hear and experience; and what God has and

¹ Advent Lutheran Church, "To Grow in the Lord and To Make Him Known," Baptism, (n. d.), http://www.adventlutheranch.org/?page_id=59#:~:text=Lutherans%20believe%20that%20the%20Bible,28%3A19%2D20., accessed on 8 December 2022

² Angie Ryg, Open Bible with Pastor Colin Smith, "God Tells Us NOT to Fear," (July 03, 2018, <https://openthe bible.org/article/god-tells-us-not-fear/#:~:text=God%20wants%20us%20to%20be,life%20of%20eternity%20with%20him>), accessed on 15 December 2022

continues to do in my life in a very special way for ordained ministry. When I look back at my life, and everything I have encountered and accomplished, I get to see my own life as both a testament and a witness of God's doing and God's amazing grace at work in me.

3.2. My Baptism and Confirmation:

My young soul was thirsty for something it just couldn't find. Two years have passed following my communion encounter at the First United Methodist Church in Suakoko town. For three months – December 1986 to February 1987, I attended the baptism and confirmation classes under Pastor J. David Lake.³ I memorized the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Lord's Prayer and read Luther's Small Catechism from cover to cover.

Prior to this time, Pastor Lake was pastoring St. Luke's Lutheran Parish in Phebe.⁴ He now saw the need to open a preaching point in Suakoko; which he started on his front porch in late 1986.

One evening, on our way from the farm, I heard handclaps accompanied by the sound of a handmade-goatskin djembe drum. I heard a Kpelle song that says, "Jesus, wash the road before we go." I stood for a while to catch the direction of the handclaps, drum and song. I carried a bundle of firewood on my head. My mom would burn the firewood to cook our dinner that night.

I quietly took a different route and made my way where the singing was, on the porch of Pastor Lake's house. I laid the firewood by the roadside and joined the small church gathering – at least eight people were there. Immediately, an older woman handed me the djembe drum. I played the goatskin djembe drum that evening. At the beat of the drum, moves and handclaps got hotter with uniformity. We felt the presence of the Holy Spirit on the porch. My mom endlessly waited at home for the firewood. As she waited for the firewood, I was already on fire for Jesus. I was busy with church service. She began cooking with a small leftover firewood we had at home.

When church ended, I heard members say, "We now have a better drum player." I would play the drum from December 1986 until I departed Suakoko for university education at the University of Liberia, in the Liberian capital, Monrovia in September 2000.

³ Peter D.M. Lake was the son of Pastor J. David Lake

⁴ Phebe is at least five miles away from Suakoko

From 1986-2003, I had already grown and matured in faith in the Lutheran Church in Liberia. My faith journey led me to play roles as youth choir director, Secretary General St. Luke's Parish Lutheran Youth Fellowship, Secretary General, Bong Districts (Lower and Upper) Lutheran Youth Fellowship, and Secretary General, National Lutheran Youth Fellowship of Liberia. My faith work took me to the Great Commission Movement, a campus ministry at the University of Liberia, the Liberian Council of Churches Youth Desk, National Students Christian Council of Liberia, amongst others. My faith work would take me to Geneva in 2001, Nigeria in 2002, Indonesia in 2003 and the United States in 2007. *God was calling me to this day.*

In March 1987, in the presence of more than one hundred and fifty congregants, I was baptized and confirmed by Pastor J. David Lake at the Bethany Lutheran Church in Suakoko – the first to receive baptism in our newly constructed, but unfinished church. If I couldn't die from participating in the Holy Eucharist when I was not baptized, I could and will never die participating in the Holy Communion after my baptism and confirmation. *God was calling me to this day.*

The following years, my parents and all my siblings would follow me to the Lutheran Church, where they all received baptism and confirmation. As a respected traditional leader, my father would subsequently play a leading role in the church by becoming a deacon. My mother led the traditional choir as director for many years. When I take a keen look at my faith journey, I came to realize that it is a journey that gave way to my call to ordained ministry. *God was calling me to this day.*

4.0. Statement of My Call to Ordained Ministry:

For long time coming, I have been on fire for Jesus. And I believed that God has been calling me to this day – the day of ordained ministry, particularly in the United Church of Christ. In every step of the way, I have prayed, listened to the Holy Spirit and asked God to let God's will be done in my life.

When I think back on my faith journey, my call to ordained ministry and my ongoing work in the UCC, I get to ask myself, "Why the United Church of Christ?" My own conviction tells me that particularly in the United Church of Christ because God was purposely preparing me for ordained ministry in the UCC in a very special way.

Furthermore, given the fact that my career objectives and theological convictions are well aligned in unity, freedom, justice, inclusion and equality, and it is only within the United Church of Christ I have found these convictions, God was preparing me for ordain ministry to be applicable here.

The theology of justice and love as well as the public witness I have found in the United Church of Christ, the church's stance and root in liberation and freedom from the time of the transatlantic slave trade, and its theology of extravagant welcome, is found nowhere else. My ministry fits here so well.

Also, however, being human, if I wasn't paying attention to God's call all this while, I now essentially realize that humankind may have their own plan, but God's agenda supersedes them all (Proverbs 19:21).

While I believe that God was preparing me for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ, sometimes, I feel that I was also not listening well when God was calling me. Below are just few of the indicators that for a long time, God was calling me to this day:

4.1. Prayer for the Soul of a Deceased Woman:

Later in 1991, a woman who lived in our neighborhood, died after a protracted illness. She and her husband attended the Malonkaã (Mercy) Baptist Church in our town. In this Church, there was a sinner's bench.

On the sinner's bench, authority in the church frequently put some of its members there for months and years; if they were ever caught in the act of sin including drunkenness, domestic violence, adultery, etc. Once on the sinner's bench, these members were denied the Holy Communion until they met everything anew with God.

Our neighbor mentioned above, was placed and remained on the sinner's bench until she died. The church abandoned the deceased and her family. The church suspected her of witchcraft. From the perspective of the church, she died a sinner, and the church had nothing to do with the deceased and her family.

During the night of her wake keeping in our neighborhood, members of the community were gathered. Her youngest son, only known as "Big Boy," organized the wake keeping program for his mom amid their abandonment. He wanted to give his mother a befitting burial despite their desertion by the Malonkaã (Mercy) Baptist Church, a Church in my thinking that did not live up to the true meaning of its name, Mercy.

Big Boy loved God so much. He attended the Firestone Rubber Plantation School in Harbel, Margibi County. Each time he visited his parents up country, he would sing gospel songs, at the top of his voice when he performed chores at home. His voice would be heard from a distance in the neighborhood.

During the wake night of his mom, fully aware of their rejection by the church, Big Boy walked to me in secret and confidence. He asked me, “Would you please say a prayer for my mom and give few words of encouragement to my family?” I asked myself, “Why me?” I am not a clergy. That night, with the leading of the Holy Spirit, I prayed for a moment and I heard a voice whispering to me, “Say yes.” With Big Boy almost prostrating to my feet, seeking my help, I told him, “Yes.” He was consoled and elated. *God was calling me to this day.*

I was so young. But God does not look at age, as was demonstrated in the anointing of David by Samuel (I Samuel 16:1-13). I took my yellow covered Good News Bible and walked in the middle of the big group of community people, both young and old, who were gathered including those from afar.

The all-day sunshine during the dry season had given more energy to the moonlight that shined so brightly during that December night. All eyes were on me and ears listening with shock. I was criticized. In the eyes of critics and the culture, this was not a good thing for a young boy. “Who is he to defy an entire church that has disowned the body of a witch,” many lamented.

Some people ran quickly with gossip, others went and reported me to my mother who was home nursing her young baby, my sister. My father was on a work trip, supervising the planting of coco and coffee somewhere in Bong County, Central Liberia.

Those who ran to report me had negatively told my mother, “If an entire church can reject this deceased witchcraft woman and her family, who is your little boy, Jerry to pray at her wake keeping?”

The dead body rested in a dark kitchen. Firewood burned nearby. The body was cared for by two medicine men (native morticians) of our town. They are responsible for caring and burring the dead.

That night, even though the moon shined so brightly, I used a dry cell two battery touch light handed to me by the deceased’s youngest son. I called the attention of the crowd to the scripture and read I Thessalonians 4:13-18; which promises that the dead in Christ shall rise. *God was calling me to this day.*

4.2. Predictions of My Call to Ordained Ministry:

It was one Sunday morning. My mother had cooked Liberian dry rice. She added fresh okra, dry (smoked) meat and dry (smoked) fish. We would eat it with fresh red palm oil. The year was 1991. My uncle, Elias Ricks Ngwayah was visiting our family. He and

my father sat at the table for breakfast. Imagine eating rice for breakfast? That's normal for Liberians. We eat rice at any time.

I loved my uncle so much. Whenever he was around, I would sit by to take a good view of him and to listen to him. That morning, I sat in the corner, nearby watching and listening.

In his conversation with my dad, my uncle said, "Kiinkay," calling my father's indigenous name. "We lived with missionaries, we read the Bible and went to school. We also accompanied missionaries during evangelism missions, but none of us ever became a minister of the Gospel."

My father responded, "Well, the fact that we continue to bring up our children in both local tradition and values, and Christian ideals, and still attend church and share our faith with others, we are ministers in some special ways." Uncle Ngwayah agreed, but stated, "I mean fulltime ministers of the gospel (church)."

Without further comment from my father, uncle Ngwayah pointed at me and said to him, "See, M'bartee," referring to me, "will become a minister of the Gospel." Looking straight at me, my uncle asked, "Isn't it, M'bartee?" I said to him, "Maybe, or maybe not, Uncle Ngwayah." My name M'bartee, means, "Rice farm" in the Kpelle language.

In a definitive intervention, he said to me, "You don't know right now, but when the time comes, you will know; and you will become a minister, for sure." *God was calling me to this day.*

In September 2001, I traveled to Geneva, Switzerland to participate in the Lutheran World Federation/Department for Mission and Development (LWF/DMD) sponsored activities for the global Lutheran youths. The program was called, "Lutheran World Federation – International Youth Programme: Transformation Through Participation (LWF-YIP: TTP). This was a global youth leadership program implemented in the context of economic globalization.

At the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, the 24 young people who had come from all five regions of the LWF (all over the world), met with the Secretary General of the LWF, a Zimbabwean Politician and Theologian, The Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko.

When we were gathered, Dr. Noko asked for a volunteer to pray before we started. The room was quiet. I volunteered to pray. Afterward, Dr. Noko asked me, "Which country are you from?" And I said to him, "I come from Liberia." He asked me, "Are you in seminary?" And I responded, "No sir." He said to me, "You think about being a

minster. You will touch lives if you become a minister.” From that day, till now, everyone who attended that event called me, Bishop.

When I returned to Liberia, my father was so proud of me, especially my involvement in the Church work and my first European experience. He informed all his fellow traditional leaders in our clan, “My son is back from Europe, from a church mission.”

One day, in October 2001, while visiting my parents up country, the Commissioner of our district, honorable James Saul (now deceased), heard that I was in town. He walked from his house all the way to our house to greet me. There were two other senior civic leaders visiting too. I shared with them my experience from Switzerland.

In the end, honorable Saul asked me, “Will you pursue becoming a minister of the gospel?” I said to him, “No sir, honorable Commissioner.”

He immediately questioned me, “Why?” In response, I said to him, “Because I want to be a diplomat working for the Foreign Ministry or the United Nations to promote international cooperation and peace amongst nations.”

Commissioner Saul laughed and said to me, “There is no better place to be a diplomat and a peace maker than the Church.” I insisted, however; “No sir, I want to work for international organizations.” Honorable Saul stood for a while crossing his two hands over his chest and said to me, “Who told you we don’t want for a Bishop to come from our town?” I sat, keenly listening to him. “It will be an honor for us in Suakoko Clan, if one of our sons (children) becomes a Bishop for the Lutheran Church in Liberia,” he indicated. Before he left, he told me, “I see you becoming a minister of the gospel someday.” *God was calling me to this day.*

In May 2007, I first came to the United States as an international camp counselor for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) through the Lutheran Church in Liberia. During one July weekend with a family that has been attending Peace United Church of Christ since 1977, the lady, Ruth Bakken, said to me, “Jerry, you could make a good minister.” I heard her, but didn’t understand her. I now understand that *God was calling me to this day.*

One interesting thing, I have observed throughout my professional journey is, despite my non-theological career, in all of my work, I have been associated with churches and some of my best achievements have come from those tasks that were collaborated with the church. Whether it was a job with the Lutheran Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Program in Liberia, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights of the Republic of Liberia, or with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, I have not

only performed exceedingly well in my fight for social justice, but I have succeeded so powerfully as a result of how God has used me to proclaim the theology of love, justice and freedom through projects I have engaged with through the church.

With deep reflection and prayer, I hear more clearly my call to ordained ministry at this period more than at any other time in my life. I feel called to ordained ministry at this crucial time in the history of the world, especially in America where there is increasing wave of hate propagated by white nationalists' movement. White nationalist⁵ movements are on the rise spreading hates and deceits. We see the wave of despicable racial injustice that continues to hurt Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC); and the quest for justice and freedom is most needed. I have come to say "yes" to my calling.

I have already responded to this call because God has been using me in the past three years in the United Church of Christ by bringing the message of justice and equality in which I also call on the world to walk in the light of God to end wars, poverty, diseases and hunger. I clearly hear my call to ordained ministry to advocate for peace and promote justice, and to give hope to those who are hurting in God's world.

My call to ordained ministry is not only authentic by the leading of the Holy Spirit at this point in time, it comes with tremendous responsibility and sacred authority. My call to ordained ministry has come at a time when a prophetic voice is needed to counter the hates and double down on God's love for all (John 3:16).

5.0. Reflection on United Church of Christ's Statement of Faith:

Overall, the United Church of Christ's Statement of Faith is sacred and divine. Through the eyes of faith, I see in it the pure hands of God; portraying the righteousness of God. It was crafted with hands and minds and hearts moved by the power of Holy Spirit. In the United Church of Christ's Statement of Faith, lies the blissful will of God manifested in God's people, as witness and testament declare amongst the believers of Christ; the calling of Jesus' followers and mission of the church that is at the heart of Christ.

When I first read the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ, my attention was immediately and judiciously drawn to the foundational character of limitlessness; the infinite language of inclusion; where it mentions "... binding in covenant faithful

⁵ SPLC, Southern Poverty Law Center, (n. d.), <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/white-nationalist>, accessed on 24 November 2022

people of all ages, tongues, and races,”⁶ that the church stands with now, then and the future.

For me, the United Church of Christ’s Statement of Faith reminds that predecessor of all human civilizations including ours, and those to come; languages spoken in every corner of the world where life has existed, the present and those in successions; every footprint of belief and faith ever charted and those to come, can find their heritages and traces in this statement.

At the same time, it further affirms that as long as God is the divine creator of all humankind and all things (Genesis 1:1-31), the image and glory of God reside in all ages, tongues, and races. And I personally see that image, glory and grace of God in every human person, in nature all around us daily. In my view, this statement of faith reminds us that God is not yet finished with what God started in creation ages upon ages ago (Genesis 1). As long as God remains God, God will continue to create and recreate. As long as God is still speaking, God is still creating.

The nature of infinitude in terms of ages, tongues, and races, laid out in the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ, even made its way to the preamble of the Church’s Constitution. “It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God.”⁷ Born before 1957 in four traditions: Congregational, Christian, Evangelical and Reformed and ultimately its merger in 1957 – now five streams (Afro-Christian),⁸ this is indeed an incredible dogmatic tradition that has and continues to evolve and reverberate in Christian history.

Certainly, every generation of believers has got to take upon themselves this faith in ways and forms they (God’s followers) are convicted and led by the Holy Spirit; thereby beseeching God in where they find God and how they perceive God. This statement of faith clearly lays down a tremendously powerful declaration of conviction, which I believed is a unique hallmark in Christendom. This Statement of Faith is instead not an examination of belief, but a declaration of living faith and the people who live it. With this Statement of Faith, the next generations will arrive, receive, live and own this faith in their world to come because God reigns forever (Psalm 9:7-12).

Also, attributing to it sacredness, the Statement of Faith is covenanted "to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil." I am convinced that this is one of

⁶ United Church of Christ. “Statement of Faith United Church of Christ – original version” (n. d.), <https://www.ucc.org/what-we-believe/worship/statement-of-faith/>, accessed on 24 November 2022

⁷ United Church of Christ. “Constitution and Bylaw,” https://www.newuccfiles.com/pdf/UCC_Constitution.pdf, (n. d.), accessed on 24 November 2022

⁸ Hans Holznagel. United Church of Christ, “Afro-Christian tradition’s status as distinct UCC ‘stream’ gets Historical Council support,” (October 10, 2022), <https://www.ucc.org/afro-christian-traditions-status-as-distinct-ucc-stream-gets-historical-council-support/>, accessed on 24 November 2022

the most powerful sacred expressions in the context of any justice and witness ministry of any Christian denomination.

With its theological roots in liberation efforts and missions, proclaiming the good news to everyone and fighting against the evils of this world truly mirrors my personal theology and the cause of liberating God's people. "The church is the conscience of the state,"⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., had alluded. Therefore, the church must always arm itself and never watch evils prevail in this age and ages to come without proclaiming aloud the prophetic justice-infused voice of God and showing a way to true repentance (Romans 6:18-22).

Proclaiming the gospel in all the world for redemption of humankind (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus has sent us out on a mission that once we have seen the light of salvation, we should share that good news and pass on that torch to others so that they too, can see and walk in the light all over in the world.

When Christ constituted the last supper, he instituted unity and equality by calling all to the same table, and prophetically praying that they (we) all maybe one (John 17:21-23). As a united and uniting church, opening wide its courtyard of love, is what I witness when we resist evil and embrace everyone in love. It has the power to refresh our table of oneness (Galatians 3:28).

6.0. Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers:

Through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, I believe that my enduring faith journey, steady walk with Jesus ever since I was twelve and ultimately, my response to God's call to this lifelong mission of ordained ministry, are indicative to a certain extent the birth of the marks of faithful and effective minister (servant) in me. I am influenced and sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, and as hallmark of this ministry, I shall truly demonstrate the marks of a faithful and effective minister in the United Church of Christ and the church universal.

As demonstrated in my faith journey as well as my long, but steady call to ordained ministry, here are some of the ways my ministry continues to be impacted in light of these marks:

6.1. Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practices: I am a strong believer of the Holy Spirit; and the reality is, I feel and hear the Holy Spirit working in me, in my day-to-day life. At periods when my human ability and capacity

⁹ Kathryn Jean Lopez. "Martin Luther King Jr. and Archbishop Jose Gomez have message for Joe Biden," (January 25, 2021), <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/01/the-church-must-be-the-conscience-of-the-state/>, accessed on 24 November 2022

failed, the Holy Spirit leads the way. Most powerfully, I see the Holy Spirit at work in my life at all times, at worship and empowering me to face the present and the future as a disciple of Christ. It was the Holy Spirit that held my hands to beat (play) the goatskin djembe drum in 1986 the way it was never beaten. It is the same Holy Spirit that is at work at all times and helping me in many miraculous ways.

6.2. *Nurturing UCC Identity:* From my life's experience, culture and career, I might have brought a piece of that hospitality, "*extravagant welcome*," that I see and experience in the United Church of Christ. Hospitality has been both our family and cultural value. Working with people from diverse cultures for many years, exhibiting cordiality and commitment of kindness and politeness; to me, is an easy fit. It is the spirit of faith, justice and unity. My little hospitality brought to the United Church of Christ has been evocatively amplified during the past three years, which is testament of how God was preparing me for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Coming to know the UCC history and identification that is rooted in a sacred and a liberated movement, manifested in public witness for all as propagated in its history and action as a "united and uniting church,"¹⁰ founded in 1957, is even more demonstrated in the Church's extravagant welcome. I have always wanted to embrace all people regardless who they are, and the United Church of Christ provides me that space to do so. It is a value that I strongly support and live daily in faith.

6.3. *Building Transformational Leadership Skills:* I have come to understand that listening to the Holy Spirit for growth and direction is essential to church leadership development, which embraces transformational possibilities and skills. With the unavoidable changing times, for example, in the case of covid that has changed the world since 2019, I believed that it is important for ministers to listen, to be open and discerning. When leading God's flocks, a minister must embrace change and must be flexible to what the future is unfolding for God's people. Such transformational leadership skills help the minister to know where people are at, and can meet and lead from there.

Learning and adopting to the reality of the times, must matter a whole lot for ministers. This is why I am open to new ideas. I love to get involved with the community. I love to consult and ask questions. I have an interest in trying/testing new possibilities and learning new things. I am a lover of knowledge. I love taking a journey along with all people.

¹⁰ United Church of Christ, History. "*The Early Church: 'Excerpted from 'A History of the United Church of Christ',*" by Margaret Rowland Post (n. d.), <https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/history/>, accessed on 30 November 2022

As a young man who grew up during a brutal fourteen years civil war, if I didn't go after knowledge, I would not have been here at this moment. Due to the love of knowledge, I always took the opportunity for school when the warring parties agreed to a ceasefire for a short time on humanitarian grounds. Between ceasefires, I was in school. I took the advantage and went to school whether it was in small peace time period. Even if it was only for six months before the breakout of another war, I took the opportunity.

Therefore, in the context of the church, learning, teaching and training, which all go together, is very essential, because it is by this, we can skillfully lead God's people uprightly (Psalm 78:72). I am convinced that our public witness of God's redemptive power is successful when we are trained, because we become more equipped (Ephesians 4:11-13) to serve.

6.4. Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions: Church history as a whole, may not all be glamorous, but it has come a long way. My exposure to Lutheranism¹¹ aroused my interest in the wider history of the church. With this interest, I learned much about the most "decisive spiritual force" in Christian history, Catholicism.¹² I have learned about how the reformation and Protestantism penetrated civilizations, with its historically pivotal moment when Martin Luther, on 31 October 1517 posted his ninety-five theses.¹³ The reformation was purely a revolution and continues today. In my view, reformation will never end either in worship traditions, theological convictions or interpretations. It will continue to occur.

In the last two years, my learning of church history has gotten better with the history of the United Church of Christ, which was the result of five earlier traditions: Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, Reform,¹⁴ and Afro-Christian Convention. My recent exposure to the history of the United Church of Christ – a history of the fight for freedom and liberty, demonstrates the continuing effort to learning and living the history and tradition of the church and the specific denomination. It ultimately helps me to exercise my ministry with veracity. It further allows me to bring to life the sacrament and God's word in the United Church of Christ.

No doubt, I certainly do relate with engaging sacred stories and traditions. It is a mark that is alive in my ministry, and is impacting my audiences in a very powerful way. I love storytelling; especially stories of my life, stories of my family and stories from the clan I was born and grew up in. I like to tell these stories and vividly bring them to life

¹¹ Hans J. Hillerbrand, "Lutheranism Christianity," (Last Updated: November 18, 2022), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lutheranism>, accessed on 30 November 2022

¹² Michael Frassetto, "Roman Catholic Church," (n. d.), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism>, accessed on 30 November 2022

¹³ National Geographic, "The Protestant Reformation," (n. d.), <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/protestant-reformation>, accessed on 30 November 2022

¹⁴ United Church of Christ, History. "The Early Church: 'Excerpted from 'A History of the United Church of Christ', by Margaret Rowland Post (n. d.), <https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/history/>, accessed on 30 November 2022

in theological ways. They are meaningful for faith formation and allows congregants to understand what God is doing in the lives of other people elsewhere in God's world, but in a different and meaningful ways.

Because of the values and influence these stories have created on many of those who hear them, I recently received a thank you card from a congregant. In parts, the card reads, "...my appreciation for all that you do at Peace Church in Rochester and the other church in Eyota.I love your sense of humor and listening to your personal stories of growing with your family that you include in your sermons! Sincerely your...." This is both a witness and testament of bringing my stories into theological contexts which has become active in the faith formation life of congregants.

As a result of enduring economic hardships in my country, in 2018, I launched a small charity foundation aimed at giving hope and restoring dignity to single mothers who struggle daily to feed their children. Sharing the love of God with these women, assuring them that God cares (Psalm 24:1) for them and that they should not be afraid (Isaiah 41:10-13), have changed the lives of these women and their families so powerfully. Providing material and spiritual support to war affected populations in South Sudan, caught up in the corridor of loss and grief, pain and suffering, and assuring them of God's unflinching love and protection and helping them take a look at the cross of Jesus – the cross of hope, is evident of sacred proclamation of God Word and witness.

6.6. *Caring for All Creation:* Creation and the whole beauty it beholds has, is and shall forever remain God's glorious generosity. Humanity can only appreciate God's generosity of creation by taking good care of that very creation; humanity being part of that creation. I must point out that when God placed humankind in charge of the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15), it was purely a responsibility God assigned to humankind for caring. And I believed that this is one primary reason why God created humankind in the first place, to care for God's creation and all that is in it.

As part of that responsibility in our world today, especially in a hurting world, ministers must exercise it at all times, a faithful and effective mark by caring for everything that is within God's creation; in Church and all societies, near and far; whether in our culture or others. Praying for peace in a world that is torn apart with vices of all kinds (the crisis in Ukraine, Haiti, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.), giving hope to the hopeless, are ways ministers can kindle this mark. Exercising this mark in one small form, I am currently on the United Church of Christ's Council for Climate Justice team, a national setting ministry.

6.6. *Participating in Theological Praxis:* The theology of the Trinity is a concept that is difficult for many to understand. When I first heard about the "Trinity," in my

baptism and confirmation classes thirty-five years ago, I was confused. I therefore don't blame anyone who struggles to understand it. It requires the power of the Holy Spirit to help people to comprehend and appreciate.

In a conversation with a friend three months ago, he mentioned his admiration for a football legend. However, he tried to adore the person and said he was his idol. I respected his fanaticism. Then, I drilled our conversation onto how his football legend plays extraordinarily well because God Almighty has given him the gift to do so. At that moment, God along with the Trinity was mentioned as he struggled to understand.

A conversation that began with a football, ended up theologically. He struggled with the theology of the Trinity that Christians professed. I pointed out to him that God works in three persons – God the Father/Mother/Creator, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He was still unsettled, but I provided him this example: The Trinity is like an individual performing three distinct duties without altering that person's identity. The Trinity is like a woman who mothers her children, works as a schoolteacher and goes to the grocery store as a customer or a buyer.

Here, the mom is performing three roles, being a mom, teacher and a customer cannot negate the fact that this woman is a mother. To him, that was the best explanation he has ever got about the Trinity. That is one way I continue to engage, reflect and maintain my ministerial identity in private and public spaces.

Another way is, without forcing my theological opinion whatsoever, I tried to intertwine and show that warm hospitality (extravagant welcome) that embodies the United Church of Christ.

6.7. *Working Together for Justice and Mercy:* I come from a less developed country in Africa, where there are many poor people, diseases and suffering. Civil wars and various unrests have ravaged and continue to destroy many nations. I have witnessed some of the world's worst insensitive and horrific atrocities committed against humanity in my country, Liberia, South Sudan and elsewhere. And we all may be aware about the barbaric transatlantic slave trade¹⁵ that remains the worst savagery ever committed in all civilizations that have come and gone.

As faithful and effective authorized ministers, especially in a church – the United Church of Christ that has lived its life advocating for justice and freedom, our attention and actions must never be taken from these vices that continue to tear down societies,

¹⁵ David Eltis and David Richardson, LDHI, African Passages, Lowcountry Adaptations, "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, (n. d.), https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/africanpassageslowcountryadapt/introductionatlanticworld/trans_atlantic_slave_trade, accessed on 30 November 2022

thus perpetuating human sufferings. Called by the Church of Jesus Christ, as faithful and effective authorized ministers, we must remember that Jesus Christ was always at the margins of society; seeking justice for the poor (Matthew 25:40), the hurting and feeding the hungry souls (Matthew 14:13-21). Today, there are many people who are hungry in many ways and forms. We must stand with them theologically, in advocacy and actions.

6.8. Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets: As boundary training is required by the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ for all ministers, I did my first boundary training in June 2020. The expression, “*Fiduciary duty*”¹⁶ was emphasized in one of the modules that was taught. That module cautioned clergies and equated clergies’ relationship with their congregations, members and community to that of fiduciary duties. It is when “a person or organization that acts on behalf of another person or persons, putting their clients’ interests ahead of their own, with a duty to preserve good faith and trust.”¹⁷ For the health of the church, individual congregants and the whole community, clergy must always be aware of this relationship with their people and maintain the necessary boundaries.

Minsters are called by God through the Church and by the church in order to serve. In doing so, ministers must serve with mercy, love, compassion and generosity to all God’s people, as Jesus did. We must grow in faith and maturity day-by-day leaning on Jesus. Because ministers did not choose themselves, rather chosen by God, (John 15:16), we must bear good fruits. God has called us to holy life (II Timothy 1:9) according to God’s own purpose. Therefore, the mark of faithful and effective authorized ministers must be exhibited at all times in good faith, always leaning on the Lord.

7.0. Theology:

Having grown up learning early Bible lessons in Lutheran tradition from the beginning of my faith journey, I have always leaned on, and accepted theology in Lutheranism – more so, soteriological¹⁸ or the doctrine of “Justification by Faith alone,”¹⁹ as proposed by Martin Luther. This theology that salvation is a matter between humankind and God, has been a nurturing and influencing force in my theological walk.

In light of this, my personal theological conviction is that the scriptures (The Bible), is the inspired and complete Word of God in its fullest, without any error whatsoever;

¹⁶ Julia Kagan, Investopedia, “Fiduciary Definition: Examples and Why They Are Important,” (September 15, 2022, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/fiduciary.asp>, accessed on 30 November 2022

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Emily Stetler, “Soteriology,” (n. d.), https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4614-6086-2_654#:~:text=Soteriology%20is%20the%20branch%20of,what%2C%20and%20by%20what%20means, accessed on 30 November 2022

¹⁹ Steven J. Cole. Bible.org, Lesson 31: Justification by Faith Alone (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-5) (copyright 1996), <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-31-justification-faith-alone-genesis-156-romans-41-5>, accessed on 25 November 2022

and that both the Old and New Testaments, dating back to their original manuscripts became alive through God's revelation. And God's Word is forever (Matthew 24:35).

Now, because God's Word is everlasting, the Word will continue to make its way to generations in ways and forms that only God works and understands fully. And God will send messengers to carry on from age to age. There have been many of them. One of such messengers was the German Theologian, Martin Luther, whom God used to further steer democracy and faith in God's Church.

While Martin Luther has had many claims against the Roman Catholic Church as corrupt and exploitative, which he compiled into ninety-five theses,²⁰ and posted on the Church door of Wittenberg, Germany, five hundred and five years ago,²¹ his leading argument was against the "Sale of Indulgences." It was a practice by the church whereby certain financial expense was made to remove a person's soul from anguish of suffering after passing from this life to the other. One reformation inscription has termed the selling of the indulgences as "a monetary payment of penalty which, supposedly, absolved one of past sins and/or released one from purgatory after death."²² Martin Luther's departure from the Catholic church gave birth to the Protestantism, and I view the Protestant reformation as liberal or theological democracy.

In so doing, this liberal theological (scriptural) democracy is vividly employed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ has paid, once and for all, for our sins. Once we come believing in God, through hearing of God's word (Roman 10:17); believing in the God Almighty, trusting in our heart God's true son, Jesus Christ's work of reconciling humanity with God, through his death and resurrection (Romans 10:9), which paved the way for salvation, and confessing with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, this deal becomes sealed forever. This is justification by faith, where "The guilty sinner is declared righteous by God on the basis of Christ's death at the instant [the believer] believes in Christ."²³ This is a deal that is done.

Just as salvation is owned by God and dispensed to humanity by God through the redemptive blood of Jesus Christ, I believe that forgiveness and mercy are owned by God, and not by any human being. Afterall, if humankind sinned against their neighbor, while that sin is committed against another human, that sin transgressed the will of God, because God, through Jesus Christ has released a new command, "Love your neighbor," (John 13:34-35). Consequently, owing to the fact that the righteous shall live by faith (Romans 1:17), as Luther was convinced, I find my heart in this theology.

²⁰ Uncommon Travel Germany, "Martin Luther 95 Theses," (n. d.), <https://www.uncommon-travel-germany.com/martin-luther-95-theses.html>, accessed on 29 November 2022

²¹ Reformation Lutheran Church, "The 1517 Society," (n. d.), <https://relcmedia.org/ministries/finance-ministry/the-1517-society/>, accessed on 30 November 2022

²² Reformation, <https://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/theogloss/reformation.html#:~:text=One%20particularly%20well%2Dknown%20Catholic,one%20from%20purgatory%20after%20death>, (n. d.), accessed on 25 November 2022

²³ Ibid

In the United Church of Christ, I see this theology of justification by faith alive. The outpouring of generosity, otherwise known as “extravagant welcome,”²⁴ that is demonstrated in the United Church of Christ is another way I would interpret this justification by faith from the standpoint that no person or a church has the power to deny anyone; no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey.

During Jesus’ ministry, he didn’t turn anyone away. In fact, Jesus was always at the margins of society. He was there for the downtrodden. Jesus was there for the poor and the sick. He told his followers about the many rooms in his father’s house (John 14:2) and announced that there is room for all (Luke 18:15-17).

8.0. Christology:

Even though, done on a subsistence basis, from the early 1970s before I was born, up to the 1990s until 2005, our family was heavily involved in rice farming. Certain species of bird in Liberia called, pepper birds often destroy our rice at an early stage. The flock of pepper birds come during early morning hours. If farmers are not present on their farms to mind the rice, the legion of pepper birds destroys it in little time.

One such morning, my older brother and I were journeying to the farm at 05:00 to chase the pepper birds before they arrive. It was a rainy season. We arrived at the river. The river was deep and full. The river was known to be notorious and aggressive. People have drown in it many times. The current of the water was violent. I was afraid to cross. In fact, I just couldn’t cross.

My older brother who had bravely tested the mercilessly perilous water by crossing it first, came back and squashed to the ground before me, and took me on his shoulders. He crossed the river with me. He told me these words: “I love you! You are my brother. You and I are not only walking together to the farm, I am here to protect you, to cross you over the river, and to look after you, because I have to give account to papa (referring to our dad), if anything happens to you.” We hastened to the farm. I was grateful to my brother.

If not necessarily in human form, I see Jesus as my brother in the spirit who crossed me over the dangerous waters of hell. Like my brother who was there to protect me and to cross me over the violently flooded river, Jesus has crossed humanity over from treacherous condemnation of death to everlasting life of joy. In the song of a local Liberian gospel singer, he says, “The hole of death the devil dug for me, Jesus made me

²⁴ The United Church of Christ, “*We are People of Extravagant Welcome*,” (n. d.), https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/general-synod/general-synod-resolutions-regarding-environmental-justice/vitality/vitality_boost-your-vitality/vitality_what-matters/vitality_what-matters_we-are-people-of-extravagant/, accessed on 29 November 2022

jump over it.” Jesus came so that we may have life (John 10:10). Jesus has crossed us from death to life and has made us to jump over the hole of hell.

Christology being that part of theological studies that is concerned with the nature and work of Jesus Christ, dealing with the question of Christ’s birth, earthly ministry, death, resurrection and the incarnation,²⁵ remains the central bone of the Christian religion. However, it also deals with the humanity and glorious divineness²⁶ of Jesus. It is primarily the doctrine of Christology that has shaped the Christian church for 2,000 long years. Rooted in Roman Catholicism, Protestantism (Calvinism, Lutheranism, Anabaptist), consequently orthodoxy, Christology is the foundation of the Christian movement. Christology and the church are inseparable – without Christ, there is no Christianity.

Jesus is the bridge that crossed humankind to God. I therefore see Jesus as our bridge over dangerous, undesirable waters and the gamechanger to salvation. When humankind got corrupted and fell from God’s glorious union through original sin²⁷ (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12-21) God, through Jesus Christ reconciled us back with God.

In Christology, I am fascinated with the presentation that Christ had taken both human and spirit forms. And I like to spend time discussing this, because of the importance it has on my Christian faith. If Christ (God) is spirit (John 4:24), it demonstrates that God is mighty. God is everywhere, all powers in heaven and here on earth belong to him. God, the son (Jesus), the second person of the trinity is both human and spirit. On the other hand, since Christ is human, it clearly tells us how God came down in human form to identify with humankind (Isaiah 9:6).

The argument of the humanness of Jesus, for me, provides that he is human because he was born of a human mother, Mary (Matthew 1:25). God came down from heaven in human form (Philippians 2:6-11) to lay squarely God’s kingdom and invites humankind to that kingdom. As human, Christ would experience some of the struggles that humanity fights through daily. Christ was tempted (Matthew 4:1), Christ traveled on foot like any human person does (Luke 17:11-19), he experienced hunger (Matthew 21:18), he was thirsty (John 19:28), he encountered pain and suffering (Matthew 16:21) and ultimately, he died (Matthew 27:50) for our redemption. Jesus was fully divine and fully human. Because he was human, he received the anointing. Christ was anointed first in Luke 7:36-50, second in John 12:1-8, third in Matthew 26:6-13 and in Mark 14:3-9.²⁸

²⁵ Hans Hillerbrand. “Christology doctrine of Christ,” (n. d.), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christology/Early-history>, accessed on 25 November 2022

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Richard Phillips. Original Sin, an essay, “Definition,” (n. d.), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/original-sin/>, accessed on 25 November 2022

²⁸ Troy Lacey, Answers in Genesis, “How Many Times Was Jesus Anointed?” (May 14, 2019), <https://answersingenesis.org/contradictions-in-the-bible/how-many-times-was-jesus-anointed/>, accessed on 9 December 2022

In terms of Christ being divine (God), in the creation story (Genesis 1:26), the first person of the trinity, God Almighty said, “Let us make man in Our Image.” God was referring to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who were with God from the beginning of time. To even confirm that, the New Testament tells how in the beginning was the Word (Jesus Christ) and that Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1-14). Therefore, Jesus, for me is our Lord, our savior, our teacher, our reconciler, our brother, our friend. Jesus is our protector and defender; and he has all powers to defeat principalities (Philippians 2:10-12).

Lastly and in connection to all what I have mentioned in terms of Christology, I like to point out that Christianity is and will always remain the most unique and distinguished religion amongst the world’s religions. The reason is, in other religions, humanity is the one that goes finding and inviting God to themselves. But unlike Christianity, where God comes with God’s endless love and open arms finding humanity with abundance of grace and mercy for all.

9.0. Conclusion:

In our local churches in Liberia, we sing a song that says, “When Jesus says yes, no man [no one] can say no.” I believe when I took that unique faith journey, Jesus said “yes” to my call to ordained ministry long ago. I believed that God was calling me to this day before my mother conceived me like God had declared to Jeremiah, “I knew you and chose you before you were born,” (Jeremiah 1:5). As I had alluded to in my statement of call to ministry, God was preparing me for this day.

God has called me to ordained ministry in both Word and Sacrament. I see my call to ordained ministry deeply rooted in justice and unity, freedom and equality. I hear the voice of God saying, “Go and be an advocate of justice and fairness, fight against oppression and discrimination, go and be the voice for the voiceless, go and be an advocate for peace and love; go and baptize and make disciples (Matthew 28:19) for God’s kingdom.