

MID Spotlight: JD Rose

After twenty years in full-time ministry, which started at St. Paul's UCC in Evansville, IN, and kept me in the IKC for my first eight years, I returned home to the UCC from the Disciples of Christ to Saron UCC in Linton, IN, after serving as a church planter in Houston, Texas. I serve as the Senior Pastor at Saron, the church of my youth, and have been so blessed to be back home there. In part because my Associate, Jeff Fulk, and I were known and in part because this church was ready to serve its community, but mostly because God is good we hit the ground running and the last 17 months have been busy and fruitful in many directions.

I'm a Member in Discernment (MID), but I haven't attended seminary and don't plan to. I visited nine different seminaries in my twenties with that in mind. I loved Pacific School of Religion! But going to seminary has always felt incongruent with my call to serve presently. I have learned a lot, love to read and attend training as much as possible, but taking three or four years away from ministry I was actively engaged in never seemed to be the thing God called me to do.

The defining moment for me in ministry came when I was serving First UCC Bluffton (no longer in the UCC.) I had a feeling in 2005 that denominational decisions were not going to sit well with this congregation and my instinct was to get out of dodge before things got tough. My mentor, Rev. George Varns, reminded me my call wasn't conditional on agreeing with everything my congregation thought (a lesson that is still timely for me) and that I'd be leaving when they most needed someone to love them. I stayed and saw them through the worst of it, even as they left the denomination. I'm so glad I did. By staying I was able to lovingly speak a gentle counterpoint to the fervor that sometimes showed up there. I was able to assert that loving them as brothers and sisters in Christ was more important than agreeing on every doctrinal point within Christianity. I was able to learn, in an emotional trial by fire, that the best way to win over hearts and minds to the idea that "love wins" was to be a loving presence in a time of great division.

My biggest challenge as an MID is that I have been in ministry twenty years, my Associate for twenty-three, and some of how the MID process is lined out is remedial, bordering on insulting for ministry veterans. But I see value in the process. As with many things in life and nearly everything in the scope of the Wider Church you will get out of it what you put into it. I try to remind myself of this (and get over myself, more bluntly) when I get frustrated and see this process as a deepening of my experience and capacity.

We want to build a missional church at Saron that sees Greene County, IN, as the place God has called all of us to serve. For many years Saron has had the motto "every member, a minister." We want to challenge every one of our members to identify their ministry and let the church be the place where we connect those, resource those, and refuel for those. We have had some early successes rebuilding our Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, and Mission teams to offer impactful ministry at a high level this past school year. Now we are building a Pastoral Care team, a Stewardship team, and a Hospitality team, all with the idea of finding a place for everyone to serve; or starting a conversation about what they are called to and helping them do it. Our community is responding and our church is growing.

My wife and I are expecting our first child and she, a native Texan, loves it here so I'd say the foreseeable future has us raising our kid(s) in Greene County and excited about the ministry at Saron. There is a lot for us to do at Saron in the next ten years to turn the corner and be ready for the necessary generational handoff in leadership that I see as my responsibility to facilitate, and incidentally I represent a bridge between. Personally, I'm working on building a podcast, I'm trying to get in shape to chase a kid around soon, and I'm super excited about being a Dad!

I want to offer my assistance to any IKC church who needs a helping hand/shot in the arm/truth teller to the sticks in the mud about websites and social media. If you don't have a good website you are twenty years behind. If you don't have an active Facebook page you are ten!! If you want to see visitors younger than me (40) you've got to get these things right, no matter your context. I'd love to help!