

MID Spotlight: Kyle Reaka

I belong to Saint Andrew UCC in Louisville, KY. I did my field education there last year, serving as the Student Pastor. During that placement, I helped to lead worship, lead the youth group, and sat in on committee meetings, among other things. I have been doing a summer CPE at Baptist East Hospital and working on weekends to make ends meet, so it has been tough to attend too frequently as of late. I am grateful for a loving and supportive congregation that understands my absence!

I am finished with all of my seminary coursework; I attended Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary for my MDiv. The best part of my seminary experience, aside from the wealth of knowledge and experience that I attained, was the wonderful community. I am very thankful for all of the staff, faculty and students at LPTS that work so hard to make their seminary community an accepting, loving and inclusive place.

One important thing that I have learned about myself is that, while I tend to lack confidence in myself and even my call at times, I have received nothing but affirmation and support from all those around me. My call is very clear to others, and I know it to be the case when I look in my heart. I have learned that the call is not a destination, but a continuous journey: a life-long walk with Christ. The biggest, most defining moment of my ministry thus far was when I was told on my last day as student pastor at St. Andrew that the UCC had chosen me as a Johnson Scholar, an honor granted to LGBTQ+ MIDs who have been deemed exceptional in their academic achievements, recommendations, and potential for ministry. That was truly a wonderful moment, indeed!

My biggest challenge in being a member in discernment has been the process of completing CPE. It has been a very transformative and worthwhile endeavor, but has also pushed me to grow in ways that I did not realize that I needed to before. I have learned a lot about myself, and it has definitely informed the process of self-reflection and discernment of the Spirit expected of a MID.

At this time, I am still really discerning where I am called to be. I know that I am called to ordained ministry with the United Church of Christ in some capacity, but I am not sure where yet. I enjoyed both parish ministry and chaplaincy, and my hope for next steps is to try to attain a position as a Chaplain Resident.

After I wrap up CPE in the next few weeks, I am planning to go stay with my family in St. Louis for about a year or so. I look forward to spending some time with my lovely 10-month old niece, Baylee Bea, my parents, sister, brother-in-law and grandparents. While there, I will look for some sort of ministry-related job. During this time, I will also be continuing to wrap up the ordination process here in Louisville, coming back to visit frequently.

My biggest hope in my ministry is to be an advocate for LGBTQ+ individuals who are struggling between the perceived tension between their identity and their faith. I have been there and experienced that internal battle. I love that the UCC places such an emphasis upon social justice and being welcoming to all of God's beloved children. It was this inclusivity that drew me in when I had to leave the United Methodist Church in order to answer the call to ordination.