

Hi I am Emily Phenice, I was born on August 5 in Lake Charles Louisiana, close to the border of Texas and near the Gulf of Mexico.

My parents are Glyn and Laura Phenice and have been living in Lake Charles for around 40 years now. Both of my parents work in the public education system, my dad as an adaptive physical education teacher working with students who have special needs and my Mom is in charge of the information management system that the Parish uses working closely with student data and teacher payroll. My brother is a year, a month, and a day older than me. He is currently in Chicago working as an engineer and sells for Movu Robotics.

I went to school in Lake Charles and received a bachelor's degree in elementary education from McNeese State University. After earning my degree, I was an elementary art teacher for a year before moving to Oxford, MS to further explore a call into ministry. I am now working on my Master of Divinity at Duke Divinity School and am on track to becoming an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church where I am hoping to get appointed as a camp director.

My faith story started the day I was baptized, but it did not become my own until later in my life. I grew up as an active member of the Church and got confirmed in the church in 6th grade. Every summer, throughout my childhood I would spend a week at Uskichitto Retreat Center. In middle school I became a counselor in training (CIT). That allowed me to stay an extra week and help the counselor with our itty-bitty campers.

I have always loved camp but getting to be a CIT at camp made me fall in love with camp even more. I was a CIT every summer until I graduated from High School and became a Counselor. As a camper I came to know and accept God as my savior and grow in a deeper and closer relationship with God. I was excited to pass that on to my campers as a counselor.

I worked as a counselor for two years before getting a call in 2020 to go and work at a summer camp in Tahoe California; it was not the same as Uskichitto. My summer in Tahoe was a big adjustment. It was nothing like what I had thought it was going to be.

While there I was talking with some of the other girls about what we wanted to do when we graduated from college. I mentioned that I was exploring a call into ministry. That did not go over well with them – most believed women could not be called to Ordained Ministry.

This created some divide between me and the others and made me feel isolated and alone. After that night I contemplated leaving the church and for the first part of the summer I did. I was hurt by the girls there and in turn felt hurt by God for putting me in that situation. One day while sitting on lake Tahoe listening to music, God put the idea that I was there to learn and grow in Him and in His word on my heart. A hard truth for me to understand is how the Church can, and dose hurt people without knowing it.

I grew up in a church surrounded by people who love me and cared for me. A congregation that supported me and my call into ministry and who encouraged me to live in to that call. This “church hurt” was new to me, but it helped me to better understand what others go through and to think about how different that could have been had I not grown up in such a loving and supporting church. It was in Tahoe that God reaffirmed my call into ministry and revealed a new side of ministry

to me that I need to know and experience for myself so that I can better understand those who I might serve.

After my return from Tahoe, I took a job as intern for the youth group at my church. When I graduated from college I became the assistant youth director. During this time, I discovered that teaching was not my call in life. I would spend my time looking forward to Sunday and working with the youth while dreading having to teach next day. While teaching, it felt like something was missing and I was not God's call.

During a spring break trip with the youth director and her daughter, I met the district superintendent for the area in Mississippi for the United Methodist Churches there. She told me about a program that Oxford University United Methodist ran where young adults one to two years out of college could go and work and explore what ministry in a church setting may look like.

While at Oxford University United Methodist Church I served as the 456 leader for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders, helped with missions, sat in on worship planning meeting and sermon writing meetings, and was even given the opportunity to preach a couple of times while there. Being in that space and seeing what made the church run as well as some conflicts that can occur within the church made me realize that I was exactly where I wanted to be. While in that space I met with the pastor and talked with him about applying for Duke and what that would mean for me moving forward.

A conversation that was supposed to stay between us soon became a conversation that I was having with the whole church and with the church board. The college pastor saw my call and knew that I was going to seminary and that I need to become a candidate as soon as possible so that I could go to school and lean fully into this call. He helped me apply for seminary and helped and is still helping me with all the questions that I have about ministry and the process that I am on. I am excited to see how God will continue to use me and how He will continue to impact my ministry for His good and His glory.

In the little free time that I have, I like to spend it with my friends, whether that means going to a sporting event at Duke or just hanging out watching a movie I enjoy spending quality time with the ones I love or reading a fun fiction book.

I would consider myself to be an introvert, while I love to hang out with people, I need that alone time to rest and recharge.

My plans are not so clear to me. God will work and use me how ever He sees fit and I am happy just going along with it. I have also found that any plans I make God likes to put His own spin on, it always works out for the better and sometimes change it up completely. I am hoping though to go into Camp Ministry once I graduate but am open to other opportunities that may arise.

My favorite Bible verse is *⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."* -Acts 2:43-47 NRSV.

When working at Uskichitto this was the verse that was given to us at the start of every summer with my camp director telling us that we will be embodying this verse that summer as we are going to be one community. As I have gone away from the camp the significance of the verse remains true, something special happens when we live it out and live into the verse.

I see it on Sundays when people come together and share that time and space with each other during worship, I see it when I get to share meals with others who believe the same as me, and when I share a meal with others who don't believe the same as me. This verse for me is about creating that warm and welcoming space so that others can enter in and explore it without fear of rejection, where people learn to listen and look past what makes them different and look to what/ who unites us.