

REV. DAMIEN J. LAKE

Candidate for Associate Conference Minister



A PERSON OF FAITH

My name is Rev. Damien J. Lake and I am the candidate elect for the ACM position with the MMSC. Although I realize that it takes time to truly know someone, I wanted to briefly introduce myself and share some of my story. I am looking forward a time when we get the opportunity to meet, break bread, share stories and worship together. I realize that this is indeed a strange and unusual time for many of us. We are being isolated from one another for health reasons and yet we are still connected through the Spirit of God. It is during this time that we need to keep doing the work that God has called us to do, staying connected by calling one another, worshiping online, and having virtual Bible Study. We must keep our focus on the next steps and stay open to the new ways of Being The Church.

Today is my first chance to share some of my personal story with you as members of the Missouri Mid-South Conference. I was born in a small rural farming community in the southwest corner of Michigan. I grew up with two older brothers and one younger sister. Together we spent most of our time playing games, working on cars with our father and learning to drive go-carts from our mother. I was born and raised in the United Church of Christ denomination. I attended First Park Congregational Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This is the place that gave me the foundation for my strong faith and love for the church. As a young child I sang in the choir and attended Sunday School every week. As a young man growing up in church I served as an acolyte on Sunday mornings, as well as on the church Diaconate. I was very active in both

the middle school and senior high youth groups at church before heading off to college. I continued my dedication to the church and my faith throughout my college years.

While attending a local community college, I fed my love for the arts and picked up a few new talents along the way, theater being one of them. After a few years I transferred to Kendall College of Art & Design where I pursued a Bachelors Degree in Interior Design. Soon after, I felt the call to pursue a Master of Divinity Degree which led me to Bangor Theological Seminary in Bangor, Maine. After some struggles with the politics of the seminary and the other students, I made the difficult decision to leave and return to Michigan to be closer to family and friends.

Once back in Michigan, I returned to working on and selling cars. One of my biggest passions in life are cars; classics, antiques and muscle cars of all kinds. I enjoy fixing them, polishing the paint and restoring them back to their glory. Another one of my passions is around interior design, which led me to a career in Kitchen and Bath Design and Sales. Along this part of my journey, I met my first wife and together we celebrated the birth of our son, Caleb. While my career was stable my marriage was not and eventually I accepted that reality that my marriage was over. After my divorce I returned to my home church for strength and support. They reminded me that I was loved by God and an important part of the church.

Eventually I found a new life partner in Susanne (Sue). We brought our two families together and soon after welcomed our new child into the family, which we say is the glue that connects us. Together, Sue and I have four children, hers, mine and ours. One thing you will find out about

us is that our family is the most important thing to us, getting together to talk about life and breaking bread together whenever we can. We are also a family that loves to travel. Our travels have taken us to many new places, almost all fifty states and other places like Israel, London, Paris, the Netherlands, Germany and Brussels.

After a few years together, I sensed the need to return to ministry. My career in sales, design and marketing came to an abrupt end, but with the love and support of my wife I decided to finish my Master of Divinity Degree. This time I decided to stay closer to home and so I attended Chicago Theological Seminary. While in school I was given the opportunity to pastor a small rural church in the southwest corner of Michigan for four years. During my time at that church I graduated and took on a second church located just thirty miles away from my current church, yoking the two congregations.

Over my career in ministry, I have served three churches as a settled pastor and two congregations as an Interim Minister. I have moved from Michigan to Ohio, and from New Jersey to Northern California. I have worked with churches as a coach, helping them through the search and call process, as well as working with new church starts. I have also helped churches to revitalize their ministry in the local community. In addition, I have taken courses from The Center for Progressive Renewal (CPR) and attended seminars on how to help churches to grow in our current time. I remain committed to helping churches to grow, to rethink church and to continue to focus on the Still Speaking Voice of God.

I am passionate and energetic, with a strong dedication to serving God and The Church. I have a deep faith that is always growing and expanding in new directions. I believe in the importance of answering

the call of God to stand up for social justice, to help those who are hurting and to Be The Church. I am passionate about equality for women, marching for Black Lives Matter and standing up against discrimination. I have been a guest speaker about recent immigration issues and traveled to Tecate, Mexico to build homes for families in need. My dedication to serving is strong and I look forward to walking along side of you in ministry together.

I am grateful to be the candidate elect for the position of ACM in the MMSC. I know that together we can reimagine what church looks like. The words of author and historian, Diana Butler Bass continue to echo in my ears, "We will be like Jacob in the years ahead, walking with a limp. A limp that reminds us of our past and yet gives us hope that we can get through many of life's struggles because of our faith in God." May we praise God this day and everyday for the great things we have been shown and be reminded that our story is not over, it is just going in a new direction.

Blessings and Peace,

Rev. Damien J. Lake