

Ministry Essays

Some essay questions reference The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ recognizes *The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers* in the formation of ministers, in the practice of active ministry, and throughout life. For the purposes of completing a denominational Profile, ministers are asked to spend some time with the *Marks*.

My sense of being called to ordained ministry by God and the Church (from the "Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice" section).

My call to ministry became clear as I ate a pimento cheese sandwich and sipped weak coffee in a church social hall. I was at a reception after the funeral of a member of the church I attended. I had left my job on Capitol Hill to go to the service. During the funeral and as I shared refreshments and conversation after, I had a growing awareness that, as much as I relished my job in politics, I felt more at home at church.

After the reception, I followed the minister to the church office. "The strangest thing happened during the service," I said to the minister. "I had the sensation that I'm supposed to be here at church more than at my job."

The minister laughed a warm chuckle and said, "Tim, that's a call to ministry. We've all seen it and have just been waiting for you to catch up."

My sense of being called to ordained ministry was felt keenly in that church social hall, and it had been unfolding for much of my life.

As a child and teenager, the stained glass Jesus in the sanctuary, the tadpoles that became frogs in Sunday School classes, the rumble of the pipe organ, the inviting stories of Ruth and Naomi and David and Jonathan, the kind welcome of ushers, church camps, thoughtful sermons, and the love of Jesus' message all filled me with warmth and wonder, and kindled what I would later learn was "religious imagination." As a college student, my elective courses tended to be in religion. As a young adult I found myself increasingly involved in the congregation where I had my "pimento cheese epiphany." The members of that church prayerfully discussed and affirmed my call and supported my seminary education.

My sense of call continues to be an ongoing conversation between God, the Church, and me.

At each of the congregations I have served, and at the faith-based non-profit where I currently work, conversations -- undergirded with prayer, meditation, and curiosity -- about purpose, meaning, gifts, and wisdom continue to clarify and expand my call as a minister.

My concept of covenant and how it informs UCC history, polity, and theology (from the "Nurturing UCC Identity" section).

"We are all in this together." That's how the 'theologians' at Disney expressed the concept of covenant in *High School Musical*.

Martin Luther King described covenant more earnestly, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

Both of those definitions echo, in some way, the story of Noah where the word 'covenant' first appears in the Bible. Humans are invited to live with creativity and care, while God promises to live with compassion and grace. In short, we all have a part to play.

In UCC history, covenant is seen as the voluntary, personal commitment of individuals to live in relationship with one another and with God. Those relational commitments are lived out in an organizational polity where churches are communities where people listen to and respond to one another with prayerful love. That same idea of respectful listening and engaging exists between churches, associations, conferences, and the General Synod.

Muerista theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz offered a fresh image of covenant when she replaced the historically authoritarian phrase "Kingdom of God" with the more relational phrase, "kin-dom of God."

Theologian Ann Pederson offered another image of covenant in her book, *God, Creation, and All that Jazz*, where she imagined God as the lead musician in a jazz combo with humans and all creation, where all the players had equal roles to play.

Covenant is not always easy. Life together requires patience, intention, and grace. In Ann Pederson's jazz combo metaphor, she says that mistakes are part of music-making; the players are invited to recover from their mistake and return "home."

God's "we're-all-in-this-together" covenant with the people of Israel in the Exodus is that they are to love God and love another as God moves to a flourishing home with them. Jesus reimagines that covenant by saying that God's home is in our hearts; our "network of mutuality" is the same, however -- to love God and love one another.

I am passionate about ...

I am passionate about...life.

We live in a world of abundance, mystery, complexity, diversity, complication, joy, sadness, and wonder.

Astrophysicists say our universe is 13.8 Billion years old. String theorists say there are at least 10 to the

500th power possible universes. Demographers say there are over 8.3 Billion people on our planet.

The psalmist says we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Jesus said that each of us is more precious than sparrows and more elegantly clothed than lilies in a field. The Epistle of 1 John says we are filled with holy love.

"I have come that you may have life," Jesus said. "And have it more abundantly." The universe sings symphonies of the grandness of our collective life. And much of the Bible sings lullabies about the uniqueness of each of our lives.

As a minister and as a human, I am passionate about life. I am passionate about the wonder, hope, and love that characterize abundant life.

I am also a realist. I have sat beside hospital beds with pain, stood at gravesides with grief, and marched in protests with anger. I have experienced personal loss, mind-numbing fear, and course-changing complications.

Despite the love songs of life that ring all around us and vibrate deep within us, anxiety, sadness, worry, and strife also live all around us and in us. Sociologists and psychologists tell us that those are normal parts of human existence. And those characteristics do not fully define us.

Faith invites us to live through and beyond the complications of our days into the abundant life that Jesus proclaimed.

The jaw-dropping number of possible universes, the rich variety of life-forms on our planet, the captivating diversity of humanity, and the depth of holy love in each of our souls all invite us to live with life-affirming hope.

Starry nights, a child's laugh, good coffee, whale songs that sound like the auroral chorus, "love that will not let me go" (as the old hymn says) -- these are signs of the life that stir my passion.

Reflect on your personal and professional formation for ministry in light of any Mark from another section.

When Moses encounters The Holy One in a burning bush, he asks, "What is your name?" Most translations of the Bible say that God replies, "I Am What I Am." Psychologist and humanist Erich Fromm, in *The Art of Loving*, says that The Divine's answer is better heard as, "I-Am- Becoming is my Name." That image of God as unfolding, then, invites humans to be in-process as well. This idea is echoed in the invitation in Romans 12 where Paul invites readers to be transformed by renewing their minds.

My personal and professional formation for ministry is very much an ongoing process of learning and growing.

The UCC Marks for Ministry include a section on "Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions," referring to study, preaching, and sacraments. While the section doesn't include the word "relevance," that is the invitation I see in that section. My study of our sacred stories and our history as people of faith must be relevant, and be expressed in relevant ways, in a world in need of renewal and transformation. What does the creation of the world in Genesis say about caring for the world now? What does the Exodus have to say about liberation? What does the story of healing a possessed person in the Gospels have to say to us about mental healing and inclusivity? What does the resurrection of Jesus say to us about hope?

To me, preaching is not a history lesson or a literature class (both of which I value); preaching is an ongoing conversation with the Bible and the listeners about how we may be transformed -- and are being transformed -- to live today and tomorrow. In that regard, this "Engaging Sacred Stories" mark of ministry intersects with another mark, "Working Together for Justice and Mercy." Our sacred stories and our histories invite us to lift up the radical hospitality of God in our time and to draw on the ministry of Jesus to seek liberation and justice.

As a minister, my prayerful study and my proclamation are always in-process as I seek to engage an I-Am-Becoming God's invitation to be an always-transforming person in an ever-renewing church's call to an ever-unfolding creation's journey to be a place of mercy and justice.

Educational Formation of Ministry

In the following section, I include a record of my College and Graduate Education, any Regional Education Training Programs, or other formative educational experiences I have completed, as well as Continuing Education.

College and Graduate Education

Wesley Theological Seminar
Washington DC, US
2015-2019
Doctor of Ministry, public theology

Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond
Richmond VA, US
1994-1997
Master of Divinity

Baylor University
Waco TX, US
1987-1991
Bachelor of Arts, history and English

Regional Theological Educational Programs and Formative Educational Experiences

None Provided

Professional Development

Continuing Education

Over the years I've been fortunate to have engaged in continuing education in various settings. For six years, I was in a Lilly Endowment-funded cohort with four other clergy people. Facilitated by Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (APTS), our cohort studied with artists to explore the relationship between art and preaching. During the time that I served as the pastor of a church in Austin I had the opportunity to take part in numerous learning opportunities at APTS. During the time that I have lived in the Washington DC, I have had the opportunity to take part in numerous learning opportunities at Wesley Theological Seminary and at the Washington National Cathedral's College of Preachers and their College of Faith and Culture.

Community and Wider Church Involvement

Board Member - Bethesda Cares
Member, Church & Ministry Cmte - Brazos Association UCC
Member, Executive Cmte - Brazos Association UCC
Member, Planning Committee, Annual Meeting - South Central Conference
Board Member, Pres., Treas. - Austin Area Interreligious Ministries
Board Member, Vice Pres., UCC Representative - Texas Impact
UCC Representative, Ecumenical & Interreligious Dialog Commission - Texas Council of Churches
Participant - CF Foundation Clergy Pilgrimage to Israel & Palestine
Member, Church & Ministry Comte - Potomac Association UCC
Delegate - Central Atlantic Conference/Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland Dialog
Participant - Hizmet Clergy Exchange, Turkey
Participant - CREDO Retreat, UCC Pension Boards
Member - UCC National Setting Racial Audit Task Force
Board Member, Pres. - Reach Beyond Mission
Board Member, Pres. - Ligare
Board Member, Vice Pres. - UCC Cornerstone Fund

Awards, Honors, and Publications

Select Publications:
"Riding a Tractor to Heaven: The Bible, Mysticism, and Being Gay" (working title). *Imago Dei: Queer Baptists Reflect on How They Know Themselves in Relation to the Church*, Paula Garrett, editor, Good Faith Media, Winter 2026 (expected publication).
"Lent 4: Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind." *Beyond Words: 52 Weeks of Gospel Reflections and Integration Practices from Spiritual Leaders Bridging Psychedelic Experience and Christian Faith*, Matt Zemon, editor, Psyched Publishing: 2025.
"Name Calling: Psalm 14," *The Lectionary to Life Series*, Congregational Center for Ethics, July 22, 2021.
"I Broke the Law with My Son (for Jesus)," *On Faith*, March 28, 2014.
"As with bales of hay, we, too, need a solid center to give us strength," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 5, 2005.
Full list of publications available upon request.