

Alex Sprague
Candidate for Ordination
FAITH JOURNEY

I was born and raised within the Presbyterian Church USA and really that is all I have ever known. My mom was raised with in the PCUSA, went to the church we all call home since she was three years old and then raised all three of us children in that same church. I was baptized, raised, confirmed, ordained as an Elder, and have been supported through seminary in the same church. I really do call them my church family because they have been there through the good times and the bad times! I have been discerning a call to the ministry since third grade. My mom tells the story that I came home one day after our Tuesday night elementary group and I told her that I want to be just like our youth pastor. What I do remember is waking up after a dream and remembering that dream. In the dream I remember the picture going completely black and all I could see and hear was a voice and that voice told me that I would be a great teacher and mentor to the people of God. As a third grader I was completely freaked out, but I have done a lot of discerning since then and I have grown into my calling. Dave Colby really was a role model for me and was my first introduction to what a pastor is.

Ever since third grade and receiving this call into ministry, I have tried my best to discern what this call means for my life and the life of the people close to me. Throughout my childhood I began to get involved with the life of my church to better understand what we as the church do. When I got into high school I was elected as an Elder for my church and through that got very involved with the “business” of the church. Along with my service as Elder, I began serving on the Christian Education committee which created educational opportunities for all ages.

The second significant person that needs to be mentioned in my faith journey is Chad Miller. Chad was the first pastor that confirmed my call and could see that I had a call into ministry. I worked closely with Chad throughout my time as an Elder and serving on the Christian Education committee. Chad and his brother died suddenly in a drowning accident that shook the entire church and especially the youth group. I was a sophomore in high school when this accident took place. This moment is a significant moment in my faith journey as this was the first time that I ever doubted God. 2009 was a rough year for my family as we lost my one-hundred-year-old great grandmother in March, lost my fifteen-year-old cousin to cancer in May, and then we lost Chad in June. How could God take away the good people in my life and how could God take away a fifteen-year-old? This really shook the youth group as we were planning a mission trip to Guatemala in July that Chad was to lead. We as a youth group pulled together and really were the body of Christ for one another as we grieved and tried to make sense of what happened. We decided to continue the mission trip as that is what Chad would have wanted for us. It was during this time as I saw the church, who was still very much grieving and trying to make sense of it all, come together as the body of Christ and care for one another. My faith in God was really illuminated and I felt the presence of God in my life more than I had ever before.

The discernment of my call continued throughout my college years. I found home very quickly in the chapel on my college’s campus. The chapel was like a second home for me. The college chaplain, Carol Gregg, was a huge help my first several years as I was dealing with home sickness, but also continued to explore my call. Carol became a huge mentor in my life and continues to be one today.

My faith journey continued during my Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) year when I served as a YAV in Chinook Montana. Along with gaining church experience, my call evolved during my YAV year. I had always envisioned myself as being a congregational pastor for my whole career, but as I got further and further into my YAV year, I began to long for the academic setting again. I realized how much I missed the academic culture and began thinking of ways I could reenter that space. As I did this it became very clear that college chaplaincy was pulling at me and at my call. I began looking into what that would look like and how that could work with my pastoral yearnings. While in college, the chapel was a special place for me and I want to pass that along and make it a special place for someone else. So, from that point on, college chaplaincy became a part of my call.

The last chapter of my faith journey to this point would be seminary. Seminary has challenged me, made me grow in my faith and in my call, and has confirmed that the path into ministry is truly where I belong. My call to college chaplaincy has broadened to include how I could teach, because I love the academic side so much.

During my first year of seminary, my world was turned upside down when I received the news that my father had died. I got the call during the weekend leading up to finals week of my first semester of seminary. My relationship with my father was an up and down roller coaster, especially in the last few years of his life. My dad had the disease of alcoholism and struggled with that through his last day on earth. I loved my dad deeply and his death has brought on many emotions ranging from grief to anger to freedom because I never have to have that phone call again. I gave my father's eulogy at his funeral and I closed with Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This quote from Scripture has been very important in my theological understandings. My dad was not a perfect person by any means. My dad made a lot of mistakes in his life for which he must be held accountable. But before we say anything else about my dad, I must start with that my dad was, is, and always will be a beloved child of God. That is my dad's identity- a beloved child of God. Not his alcoholism, not his mistakes or bad decision, but a beloved child of God. I hold dear the quote from Romans 8 because if I believe that first and foremost my dad is a beloved child of God, then nothing can separate the love that God has for my dad. I know that I will be reunited with my dad because I must believe that nothing, no mistake or bad decision will ever separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ.

While the call to college chaplaincy and teaching weighs on me, through my church field education placement last year I have come to realize that the congregation also feels at home to me. I love the day in, and day out work of a pastor, from Bible studies to meals and fellowship opportunities with the congregation, to planning worship and preaching. It is all a joy to me. Seminary has confirmed that I belong in this thing called ministry, but where God is calling me is still a mystery. Who knows, in the changing church I could serve as both a pastor and a college chaplain!