

Faith Journey Statement – Rev. Miriam Foltz – 4.9.18

Several years back, I heard someone comment that the hymn “Here I am Lord” marked a new generation in the PC(USA), written around the time of reunification and included in the “blue” Presbyterian Hymnal for the next generation of disciples. Indeed, I grew up knowing, loving, and belting out the lyrics to the hymn – “I will go Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” They captured my imagination and spirit as I grew up in the church.

I was born and baptized into the PC(USA), coming from a family of Presbyterians. I was particularly nurtured in faith by my ‘home’ church of First United Presbyterian in Belleville, IL. I was actively involved in their music programs. I learned to read music through their children’s handchime choir; I learned to lead worship through playing trumpet and piano with their youth band. Worship leadership was my entry point into discerning my call to ministry.

I also enjoyed reading stories from the Bible, devouring my children’s Bible in my own free time. My desire to learn more about Christ, Scripture, and the church was further heightened as I became active in the church’s high school youth group, participating in mission trips as well as weekly discussions. Yet, I found myself having many questions that were going unanswered, and my curiosity and desire to go to seminary (and learn more!) was nurtured through the Presbyterian campus ministry at William and Mary. Through Williamsburg Presbyterian in Virginia, I encountered fabulous pastors who led discussions on the ongoing legacy of the Civil Rights movement (in the context of the church’s ordination standards debate), the challenge of reading Scripture in the context of modern history (a whole Bible study on Joshua and genocide), and so much more (even a study on the early church and Gnosticism!).

I applied to seminary my senior year of college with the understanding, though, that I needed to learn more outside the classroom first – cue “I will go, Lord.” I felt called to encounter Christ outside of my personal context and to understand the depths of my call to discipleship. Through the PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer program, I headed off to Belfast, Northern Ireland, for a year of service, learning, and vocational discernment. I encountered Christ’s call to peace and reconciliation in the midst of deep divisions, prejudice, and violence; I encountered Christ’s complex call to seek the kingdom of God in the midst of poverty and segregation. I began seminary with my heart and eyes open to Scripture and was blessed by amazing story-telling professors who challenged me even further to discern how the Word continues to speak today.

For the past (almost) five years, I’ve been serving as the founding pastor of UKirk – St. Louis, the campus ministry at Washington University and St. Louis University. My faith has been further molded by this ministry context, as I’ve followed Christ alongside students in the midst of their own faith questions. Including: what does it mean to be a Christian, much less Presbyterian, in the 21st century? I pray that our community life together has been a lived-out answer, as we have held one another and our broader communities in our hearts, in worship, fellowship, and service together. I’m excited for where God is calling me next and to continue singing “I will go Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.”