

Shannon T. Hanson – Faith Journey: How I Understand Myself To Be Called To Ministry

Story is integral to understanding our identity. Joining our story with “God’s story” is the greatest calling of humankind. Presbyterians maintain, and I affirm, that the chief end of humankind is to glorify God. That doxological focus shapes my vision of ministry: that the story of my life be one that glorifies God. Having experienced the immeasurable gift of grace, I am afforded the opportunity along with all Christ-followers to share that love with others.

My faith story began with my baptism and eventual confirmation in my parents’ Missouri Synod Lutheran tradition, brought from small town Iowa to the suburban Indiana of my youth. In that setting, I came home to myself: my status as God’s precious child was confirmed and affirmed. But I also experienced the pain of schism watching our church family struggle and eventually split into two factions, one of which followed our minister out of community. I was troubled and confused by the absence of enacted grace I witnessed in the adults around me. As a result, I left my home church shortly after confirmation; my family followed.

Still eager to make sense of my path and purpose, I sought, and found, sanctuary in a Young Life high school youth group based at the nearby PCUSA church. Young Life’s message and medium offered me an alternate pathway into God’s loving embrace. Such was the profound influence of that lifeline on me that I wanted to share it with others. I became a Young Life group leader in college and, later, graduate school in Germany. Looking back, I count those relationships among the unexpected joys of my life, as I saw God powerfully at work changing lives.

As an adult, the person of Jesus continued (and continues) to challenge me. I have experienced abundant blessings in career, marriage, and two sons (now 21 and 25). Our family has been immeasurably strengthened by our fellowship with vibrant church families in Maryland and Delaware. Those dear friends encouraged me to explore the mystery of what I now understand as my call.

From 2004-2016, my journey included seminary education. That road deepened my confession of faith in myriad ways, and it has served as an ever more intimate invitation to participate in God’s work in and for the world. During the years since graduation, I have become increasingly involved in efforts at the Presbytery level, primarily through the NCP Trustees. I have also enjoyed the privilege of semi-regularly preaching at a number of NCP congregations, while I continued to reflect on my call. Through this next step into ordained ministry, I offer God more trust.

When asked what I “feel passionate about,” I answer that I have a life-long commitment to promoting justice. No need to take my word for it; I even have a badge that says so, as I have made the last 23 years of my career as a federal prosecutor. Yet what passes for justice in this world too often stands in stark contrast to the God of Justice we worship and serve. I have found my truest self, my most natural ability to join my small story to “the Story,” not in the adversarial world of high stakes litigation, but in environments promoting reconciliation. I seek to live out my faith by sharing with others the undeserved compassion, rest, and honor God’s Spirit has breathed on me.

Thus, I feel God’s call to pour my remaining life energies into fostering God’s active and meddling justice in whatever ways God places in my path, including community building through reconciliation of disparate peoples. I hope to share God’s word and, especially, God’s grace and justice, with a world deeply in want of meaning.