

Biographical Statement

Laura Viau

As a child, going to church was like going home. We gathered to play and sing and enjoy great food. People who loved me told stories of how Jesus loved people everywhere, including right there in Central Texas. Church was where we shared bread and juice and lit candles. It was also where I learned to articulate my faith, including the understanding that God had work for me to do.

Our Disciples of Christ congregation celebrated communion each week, and I will never forget the Sunday I was baptized and finally able to join in the feast with everyone. Later, as a junior deacon, I helped serve communion in the sanctuary and in the homes of shut-ins. I was given opportunities to use and develop my gifts - in worship, in planning local and regional youth events, in our church board meetings. I don't remember anyone being surprised to hear that, as a senior in high school, I was sensing a call to pastoral ministry.

But I told God to "Hold that thought." I saw college as a chance to explore the freedoms being away from home afforded. Even as I held it together academically and socially, I was a mess spiritually. My own #MeToo experiences left me trusting God loved me, but no longer needed my gifts in the church.

I graduated from Texas A&M University with degrees in English and Education and became a teacher, coach and mentor. I married Paul, and we started a family. Between job changes and our move to Orlando, God provided opportunities to heal and gain confidence in who I was as a woman, a parent, a wife, and a leader. And in God's timing, I found myself seeking grace and fellowship among the Presbyterians.

I became a Presbyterian in part because it was the closest neighborhood church and in part because I fell in love with our polity. I knew when I read through the first sections of the Book of Order that these were definitely my people. It was in congregational life that God reminded me that I'd always been loved and claimed. There was still work for me - singing in the choir and band, teaching various groups, and even serving on session. And it was at my third Presbytery meeting, during a prayer for a candidate for ordination that I heard God say to me, "That will be you one day."

God had indeed "held that thought." God and I had long chats, mostly about my being willing but needing the next step to be really obvious. Five years of juggling full time work, seminary classes, internships later, I graduated in 2012 as part of the first distance MDiv cohort at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. I took a year to breathe before diving into the beauty and challenge of ministry in the hospice setting for Clinical Pastoral Education.

I was ordained in 2015, and 3 transitional ministry calls later, God and I still have those long chats, mostly about my being willing but needing the next step to be really obvious. In every facet of life.

Church still feels like home, too; only now, it is where I get to wrestle with scriptures, put on my preaching shoes and do the work God made me to do. We gather to pray and sing and share covered dishes. We tell our stories of God's provision. We light the advent candles and put out the tenebrae candles. We text and stream; we march and advocate. We open the church doors whenever and wherever we embody and proclaim Jesus' deep, fierce love for all people.