

Bio/Faith Journey Statement - Rev. Hallie M. Hottle

I grew up in the cow and corn-filled plains of the Midwest, in Monmouth, IL, the oldest of three children, daughter of two loving parents. I was spoiled by the proximity of family, with a grandmother who lived across the street, and two grandparents who lived across town. We spent Sundays in worship at Faith United Presbyterian Church to please one grandmother. And we spent summers on the Mississippi River, to please the other. The ministries of that church, along with the experience of God's creation on that river, were the beginnings of a quiet call to ministry.

By the time I graduated high school, I was ready to rid myself of that small town, and made it as far as Iowa. I went to study art at Coe College, the first in my family to go to college. One year, a sorority, and some spiritual wonderings later, I changed my major to psychology, and began to take religion classes. My draw to art, counseling, and exegesis felt conflicted at the time, but now make up the heart of my ministry.

During the summer before my senior year of college, I returned home for an internship at my home church. I took the job simply because it paid, proving that God can use even the smallest of paychecks to move the most stubborn of people. My pastor took time off to begin his D.Min., and I was left with an office, a Book of Common Worship, a Presbyterian Planning Calendar introducing me to the lectionary, and instructions not to burn anything down. I preached, I counseled, I captured (hid from) a lot of bats, and in the end, God was pressing so deeply on my heart I found it hard to breathe.

I didn't want to go to seminary, at all. But, I realized my fear and trembling and running away was actually quite Biblical, and the encouraging words of my home pastor pushed me off that ledge, "You don't have to walk on water, you just have to know where the stones are." I sent applications to find that next stone.

I spent my next three years at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrestling with God and academia in some kind of love-hate relationship I have yet to understand. By God's grace, I worked during this time at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. I entered seminary thinking I would be some kind of college chaplain, but because of that church, I entered my last year of seminary madly in love with Church, and unconsciously settled on working for her with all my heart.

I applied and was received into the "For Such A Time As This" small church residency program, and was sent to Miami, FL, because God is hilarious. Long story much shorter: I stayed only a few months because of a very conservative congregation that was not receptive of my youth or my being a woman (or really anything else about me). I moved to Clearwater, FL to pursue a year-long CPE residency. While there, I sensed I was still being called to Church, and I received a call from Miami Shores Presbyterian.

Everything I've experienced since arriving at my first call has been challenging. Our Head of Staff retired almost immediately, the head of our school left quickly on bad terms in the midst of accreditation, the politics of our congregation have been divided, and our interim pastor was a bad fit for our needs. Despite these challenges, I've watched this congregation grow and flourish. It was this congregation who stood with me in ordination, who literally carried me while I was on crutches during Easter, and who witnessed my marriage. God has affirmed that I continue to be called to Church, even when she's a mess.

I go into this second call the same way I have since first answering this call seven years ago, just searching for that next stone. I know that if I'm too excited about it, if the fear and trembling hasn't set in, it's probably not right. I step onto this next stone, more weary now of what these waters of ministry hold, yet still fueled by the love for Christ's Church, God's pressing on my heart, and my humbling role with the thing called ministry.