

Faith Journey- Jessie Light

It is difficult to remember my first experiences with faith, tradition and the Presbyterian Church because I was born into this community. I was baptized by my dad at Community Presbyterian in Lake City, CO, attended preschool and watched my dad proclaim the Word at First Presbyterian in Lawrence, KS, and found a home in my childhood and adolescent years at Southminster Presbyterian in Prairie Village, KS. These congregations nurtured me and showed me the love of God before I could fully conceptualize it for myself, and I am grateful for their care.

My years in the youth group at Southminster breathed exuberance into my faith, empowering me to bring the whole of myself into the church, including my ever active and questioning mind. When I was 14, a trip to Agua Prieta, Mexico with my youth group lit a spark within me that has only continued to burn. Witnessing the suffering created by the erected border and beginning to understand the role of Christianity in both the complicity and the deconstruction of this border proved pivotal to my faith development. Similarly, serving as a YAAD to the 218th General Assembly in San Jose significantly impacted my understanding of faith in action. Any notion I had of a “perfect” church was replaced by an understanding of the church as the body of Christ, always striving to discern the will of God in the midst of complexities and differences of opinion. Realizing that my personal faith could impact change on a larger scale, I first recognized a call to theological education while serving as a delegate to General Assembly.

Throughout this time period, camping and working at Heartland Presbyterian Center provided a formational space for me to grow in an understanding of faith through meaningful friendships and time spent in God’s creation. In this way, Heartland provided necessary foundation for my continuing exploration of faith and meaning.

Finding a faith community in college was a top priority for me, and I was lucky to make Presbyterian Student Fellowship (now UKirk Nashville) my home away from home while studying at Vanderbilt. Rev. Jennifer Fouse Sheorn and Rev. Alan Bancroft, two of my mentors in this journey, consistently provided me with opportunities to discern a calling to seminary; in the midst of a larger environment that generally did not value faith or religiosity, I found solace in the campus ministry community. Paired with my newly recognized understandings of the world- particularly beginning to identify with post-modernism, post-colonialism, and feminism- I did a lot of work to process, challenge, and reconcile my faith in college. My concept of God was expanded and deepened during this time.

Following my undergraduate education, I had the great privilege of serving at Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village, KS for 18 months. During my time at Village, I worked with middle school and high school youth, oversaw and reenvisioned the social justice committee within the congregation, and had my first experiences with pastoral care. Transitioning into adulthood within such a supportive and affirming environment was a gift, as was the incredible mentorship I received from my fellow staff members and congregation. Within this time, I was also part of a Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Delegation to Israel and Palestine, which fundamentally transformed my worldview and understanding of mission and peacemaking in the global context.

All of these life experiences led me to pursuing theological education at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, where I have grown immensely- academically, spiritually and emotionally. I look forward to greeting whatever comes next with gratitude and excitement.