

Spiritual Autobiography

Josh Gilhart

1 I have often spoken of life, particularly my faith and discernment, as a river. For the early half of
2 my life I would say I generally walked alongside it, occasionally dipped a toe or even waded in a bit. I
3 grew up in a religious family though not one which valued church attendance. Religion was viewed as a
4 very personal matter, rather than communal. This time of life created in me much challenge as I felt my
5 life, my being, at odds with the God who I was taught about. This was a God who kept score, who sought
6 our mistakes, who hated me because of my sexuality. I never gave up faith in God, but I fell away from
7 any regular Christian practice throughout my high school years and through college. In 2016, I was forced
8 into the river. Faced with the news of the murder of my father, the life I had built around me crumbled
9 and, in that weakness, and suffering, more than ever, I felt God's presence, holding and comforting me
10 when the world felt so dark. My goals were selfish at first. I waded into the river, determined that I would
11 see my father again in the next life. We began searching for churches and we found our local PC(USA)
12 church. We began with the belief that we would be relegated to the back pews but soon found the river
13 sweeping us away. The pastor at the time, Caroline Kelly, welcomed us in fully and encouraged our
14 involvement. As I worked through letting God lead my life, I learned to give in to the flow of the river
15 rather than fight the current. As I did this, I found myself being led deeper and deeper into ministry.
16 Committees, Session, Pastor Nominating Committee, Christian Education Association courses, and now,
17 discerning a call into ministry.

18 I have considered many careers in my life, as I look back, I see bits and pieces of them coming
19 together in my call to ministry. Each time I sought a career path, something seemed out of place. I chased
20 these other career paths like streams branching off the river, each drying out in their time. What I found
21 during those excursions from the river was that no matter what else I had going on, what brought me joy
22 was my work in the church, whether on Session, or just serving as a volunteer. The work of the church
23 was not draining, rather it was life-giving, and I yearned to go deeper, to grow in my involvement and in
24 my faith. I learned of the Christian Educator Associate program and decided to enroll in it to get an idea
25 of whether I would want to pursue seminary. Around the same time, we were welcoming in a new pastor
26 at our church and over time and discussions she helped me discern a calling into ministry as a pastor. This
27 is an applied sense of call, in that I feel called to serve God and neighbor. I feel called to help people
28 grown in their faith and grow in connection to the living and loving God of creation. I believe I am being
29 called into pastoral ministry, though should the CPM not certify me, my calling would not change. I
30 would continue pursuing theological education and consider other ways I can serve God, perhaps in
31 Christian Education or in academia.

32 As I continue along this journey, I am ever looking to deepen my faith. Through class discussions
33 and conversations with my colleagues and professors, I have developed an appreciation for the difficult
34 work of slowing down. It is easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of life and try to carry everything on
35 our shoulders but when we do that, we often fall into the idolatry of thinking we have the ability to do
36 everything and that everything relies on us. By slowing down I am reminded that it is God who is at work
37 in and through the church, the community, and the world. I believe pastors are called to the spiritual task
38 of slowing down, to listen for God and to seek what God is doing and calling us to join in that work.
39 Currently, I find myself doing my best to allow the river's current to guide me wherever God wants to use
40 me and to do the work that is before me to achieve that end.