

May 12, 2023

Southwood Church Council,

As of the moment of writing this, I have completed all my seminary classes and am one week away from graduating with my Master of Divinity! I am feeling a mix of emotions as I end this transformational chapter in my life and discern where God is calling me to serve next. Cameron, Brooklyn (our dog), and I are on our way back to Nebraska where we will spend the summer enjoying time with family and friends as I await a call or job.

Though my brain is at full capacity (I've been saying "I have no more words left" for many weeks now), I am humbled by the blessing it was to receive a high-quality theological education, something I always dreamed of pursuing. After these two years, I am even more in awe of our Triune God who enters into the depth of our human experience and brings about new life.

I took my seminary classes alongside my contextual education in San Diego, which was a wild ride. I worked with four different pastors during my internship, and walked alongside the congregation through multiple transitions. However, the most affirming part of this contextual learning was my work with the unhoused community in the Pacific Beach neighborhood. I led multiple worship services for people who call the streets their home, and became the "Pastor" to that community. It was the greatest gift to be able to spiritually care for this population, get to know them and their stories, and offer them good news amidst challenging life situations. This was ministry I didn't go to San Diego to do, but it found me and altered my life path forever. As I reflect on my internship, I am continually reminded that God was faithful to me even among the chaos. This is a truth I'm holding onto tightly as I move forward in my call.

By the time you read this, I will have (hopefully) been approved by candidacy, graduated, and received paperwork for potential calls in Nebraska. However, I'm also looking for work outside of the synodical process and Nebraska – specifically in areas of campus, prison, or street ministry. I will also be applying for a Graduate Preaching Fellowship offered through Luther Seminary; this would allow me to research particular topics in preaching that I'm interested in. There are many opportunities heading my way, which is both exciting and terrifying. Please continue to keep me in your prayers as I discern where God is leading me next.

In the meantime, I am flying to France on June 2<sup>nd</sup> to spend a week in silence at the Taizé monastery. I'm sure you all know Taizé hymns from singing them at Southwood. This will be an opportunity for me to make space to reflect on these two years and rest in the love of God. I've been telling people that I'm excited to *receive* God instead of thinking and writing about God. I hope to come back refreshed and centered in my call, open to where the Spirit is leading me.

I share all of this because you, Southwood, have been an integral part of all of this. You have supported me with your prayers, generous financial support, and most of all, with an upbringing that blessed me with a significant Christian community that laid the foundation and shaped me for this call I've followed. None of this would have been possible without my home church who showed me how to serve others and modeled a living faith that shaped your lives. I am humbled and grateful for your continued love and support as you send me off to serve God's people

wherever I'm called. Thank you for your generosity during my pastoral formation over these past two years. It has allowed me the freedom and peace to follow God's call on my life without any barriers, and I am overwhelmingly grateful.

In the Peace of the Risen Christ,

Jenna Olson Popp