

Provide a brief autobiography that includes your early years, faith formation, and current life situation

I blink back tears as I take my picture that will fit on my Mayo Clinic badge. I have accepted a position here to serve as a staff chaplain. I can hardly believe I made it to this spot when just a few short months ago I was in the hospital myself fighting a complex cluster of medical issues that left me weak, nauseous and extremely sick.

When I think back to my very early years, when I was first born the possibility that I might be even working full time let alone in a medical setting would have been hard to imagine. I was born at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, abbreviated as CHOP. I have no memories of my time as CHOP but my body remembers, scars on my skin tell my story for me. My life in ministry no doubt was shaped by my own time as a patient. I was born with a complex heart, a small heart that needed surgical interventions from when I took my first breath. After four open heart surgeries, a stroke at the end of my fourth surgery and other complications, I was ready to see what else the world had in store for me. I was a little fighter.

A lot of my early life was hard for me. Like most kids, I felt like there was a giant spotlight on me magnifying all my differences for all to see. I struggled academically, I walked with a limp, I didn't have a lot of friends. And, I remember feeling very angry at God. I spent a lot of time in my head asking God why was I so different? Why did I have to be in my view "ugly and broken?" I was hard on myself, talking unkindly to myself and carrying a lot of anger and bitterness towards the so called "normal" kids around me.

At some point in time, around my junior year of high school I had a mental shift and started to slowly accept that others were struggling too. I started to develop my perspective in faith that God had had purpose in creating me the way he did. Instead of seeing myself as a mistake, I began to accept I was the way I was and maybe my story could inspire others. I turned my anger and pain into fuel for moving forward. I knew I needed to put my anger and bitterness down as this was a heavy burden to carry. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest and writer once said, "if you don't transform your pain you will transmit it." I needed to be able to transform pain and allow myself the possibilities to see how God could use me for good.

I grew up in a non-denominational Evangelical church and had always felt a strong connection to God even if I did not completely understand everything. I often felt if I had gone through four heart surgeries, survived a stroke, and gone through so much inner turmoil and discovery surely God saw me, and had a plan for my life even if I couldn't see it at the time. Fast forward to the present day I work as a staff chaplain at Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Every day I work with people who have experienced medical trauma or are going through some kind of life transition. I minister to people of all socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, religions, beliefs, and backgrounds. As God taught me to love and honor my own story, I endeavor to create space for others to share their stories and love and heal themselves in the process.

Describe your journey of discernment. How did you first experience your call to rostered ministry? What have you done to deepen this understanding? Who have you discussed this with? Through this intentional time of discernment, what have you learned about yourself, the church, and the world?

Three key time periods in my life have opened doors for discernment and clarity. The first seed of discernment gave root in my junior year of college. I had the opportunity to travel abroad to Dublin, Ireland to do volunteer work with intellectual disabilities and TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury). I traveled with my psychology professor and a group of fellow students to do work study in the Irish countryside. This trip opened doors for me in profound ways. It gave me a deep sense of calling to those that remain marginalized or forgotten in society. My heart and soul came alive as I companioned alongside these residents and their families; helping each person recognize their inherent humanity and worth and assisting in facilitating spiritual practices that provided comfort and support. In a way, I was doing the work of a chaplain without the formal title. I would take my residents to Sunday Mass or provide them with prayer booklets. I often sat with people there in their grief, in their joy, and in the mundane ordinary moments. I didn't know exactly how I would translate this feeling or this "career path" back home but I felt a stirring inside of me to pursue this as a life work.

A second clear period of discernment came when I returned to my home state of Oregon and began work in a Memory Care facility. My work as a caregiver was difficult and taxing both emotionally and physically. I formed close, trusted relationships with the people under my care, whom we called "residents." I also grew close to their family members. During this process I

also got to know the residents' chaplain, a man named Sam. Over the course of my time at the retirement home I was able to observe Sam as he cared for the residents and accompanied them on both their emotional and spiritual journeys. Unbeknownst to me he also had been observing my work and one day took me aside to encourage me to investigate chaplaincy. His observations of me made him feel it would be a good career path. This experience planted a seed for me to pursue chaplaincy full time by beginning my education at seminary.

The third period of discernment came during my time in seminary when professors and mentors guided me through my field of study. From them, I gained insights into both myself and faith. My internship at the Portland VA hospital, and my residency at Mayo Clinic gave me the opportunity to put into practice what I had learned. I feel honored to care for and support those who are vulnerable and ill, facing life-changing diagnoses or other challenges. I find that using the skills I learned in school and my internship and residency gives me purpose. Working as a hospital chaplain allows me to turn my story of medical trauma into a story for good. The more time and experience I have in this ministry, the more secure I feel in my decision to pursue this work. In addition, it encourages me that my supervisor, friends, and colleagues that I collaborate with have seen and affirmed the seeds planted earlier in my life.

Describe your Relationship with Jesus Christ

In my early adolescence I would beg to Jesus to please “make me normal.” I prayed daily and every night to just be “like everyone else.” Although I appeared normal on the outside with my heart condition, I experienced some learning disabilities and other difficulties associated with my medical history. These challenges made an already challenging time more complex. I at times envied other kids for just being able to live without the stress of medical trauma. I took these feelings out in my prayer life feeling very sure God had made a mistake in creating me.

I grew up in a more conservative Evangelical church and in church services and at home I would hear messages that Jesus loved and cared for me and had a plan for my life. Yet hearing these messages I still felt conflicted. I was self-conscious of my scars and that I walked with a limp, it was hard to believe what Jesus’s plan for me was. Despite my doubts, I enjoyed my *quiet time* or reflection time I had in the mornings. I read my Bible and was encouraged by stories of people struggling in their own lives but still experiencing Jesus’s mercy and grace.

In high school one experience fundamentally shaped my relationship with Jesus Christ and in turn my understanding of my identity. First, in my junior year I took an elective course where I volunteered in a class of students with intellectual disabilities. Some of the kids had Downs Syndrome or disabilities where they had to be in a wheelchair. This experience was eye-opening for me in that I could empathize with these students, and I felt like I could understand their perspectives and challenges in a more personal way. Yet I also could see the positive qualities of each student in this class; they were resilient and strong and like me used humor to cope with their disabilities. I began to see myself as strong and resilient too. My prayers to “be like everyone else” gradually faded. I was proud to be me, to have gone through the experiences

I had. I also felt a closer affinity to Jesus having experienced suffering as he had, albeit on a much smaller scale. I felt a shift inside of me where my prior pain and anger became replaced by gratitude for my life and how my unique story could impact others.

My relationship with Jesus Christ today is a rich relationship rooted in trust and wholeness. But like all relationships it has been tested and shaped by my life experiences. Much like other relationships in life, my relationship with Christ has had ups and downs but it has always been a constant presence in my life. Growing up, I was always told your connection to Jesus was like a personal relationship, and talking to Jesus was described as talking to your best friend. I finally had this resonate with me as an adult. One of my favorite things to do is go on walks to decompress and spend time talking to Jesus. It gives me peace and balance. Additionally, I have a quiet time each morning where I spend time in prayer and reflection. It helps set my mind and heart at ease to go into a potentially busy or difficult day at work.

As I've matured in my faith, I have leaned more into uncertainty and mystery. I grew up in a more controlled church environment where things were black and white and certainty was prized. I can still find peace and rest in Jesus in the grey middle of life where there are no certainties. Continuing to trust in Jesus and the certainty of his love allows me to live in those unknown spaces.

What plans do you have for rostered leadership, including theological education? How do you plan to develop yourself as a Missional leader? Consider all areas of the wholeness wheel. How can this candidacy process prepare you to be called by the church to rostered leadership?

Since moving to Wisconsin, I have been looking for a church that aligns with my values and beliefs. Finally finding my place at Immanuel Lutheran Church and being part of the ELCA has felt healing and therapeutic for me. I am drawn to the ELCA's value of God's abundant grace and love offered to all. I resonate with the held belief of the inherent dignity and worth of each person. My church has further enhanced my faith and my life's work of being a hospital chaplain. To me, the walls of the hospital are my church, and I represent a pastor to my flock of patients and families. In the future I want to further my theological education by taking more classes on Lutheran history and theology. As a representative of the ELCA it is important to me to have a deeper understanding of how to practically live out their key mission. I feel the mission statement of the ELCA, *God's work, our hands*, perfectly encapsulates my current work.

One way I want to develop myself as a Missional leader is to continue to deepen my leadership skills in my chaplain work outside a traditional church setting. It is a joy and privilege to come alongside patients and their families who are seeking God even amid their suffering. It is meaningful for me to be a leader in this space and walk with my patients as they discover new things about themselves and their faith. It is also my hope and goal to mirror God's love and mercy for my patients who identify as atheist or another faith tradition. In my work in the hospital, my colleagues and I host different services throughout the year marking important milestones in the Christian calendar. I find it can be especially meaningful to participate in these

services for staff as well. Ministering to nurses, doctors, and nurse practitioners is just as vital as providing care for patients. They are an integral part of my flock.

I strive to be an approachable and trusting person for anyone regardless of their belief system or what they are going through. My favorite aspect of my job is to humanize each of my patients and see them as Christ would. Being a non-judgmental, reflective, and safe person for my patients is an important part of my work.

Going through this candidacy process has helped me grow in my own faith and has given me the freedom and space to look critically at my work and find ways I can continue to improve my ministry. I feel both excitement and peace as I look to the future of my leadership in the ELCA. I know God has created this space for me and will continue to guide my steps.