

On my calling into the ministry...

I graduated in 1976 from Hanover College, a small Presbyterian college in Hanover, Indiana, with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Literature. Hanover is a school steeped in the liberal arts, with two and half years of required courses. This allowed me to encounter subjects I knew nothing about, including theology. In my secular upbringing I didn't know what theology was, and much to my surprise I discovered that all the issues we engaged in that class had been part of my life's journey; questions like, "What is human nature?" and "What is the aim and purpose of human existence?" and "What is God, and what are the forms God takes in existence?" and "What does it mean to have a connection to and experience of God?" I had already declared my major as literature, and continued to study Existentialism, American literature, and James Joyce in my final two years. But, I took as many additional theology courses as I could, and at the end of my college my life goal was set, I thought. I would pursue a theological education and, since I was raised secular and was "unchurched" using current terminology, would teach theology

In the years between undergraduate school and seminary I met my wife. She is my spiritual soulmate, as well as my friend and the love of my life. Together we embarked on a spiritual pilgrimage that took us to the first church I ever joined: The First Unitarian Church of Nashville, Tennessee. It is here, under the guidance of the ministers there – Bill Gardiner and Jerry Wright – that I began to encounter my call to ministry.

After a few years working in business and volunteering at church, I matriculated at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and Meadville Lombard Theological School in January of 1980. Pat and I moved up there together, and I graduated from UC in June of 1983 with a Masters of Arts in Divinity, and after completing my doctoral work in the fall of 1983, was awarded a Doctor of Ministry from Meadville Lombard in June of 1984, graduating with honors. My wife and I spent the time from August 1981-July 1982 in Seattle, Washington, where I was the Student Intern at University Unitarian Church, working with my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Peter Raible. While at the Divinity School I studied the works of Paul Tillich, Soren Kierkegaard, Mircea Eliade, Reinhold Neibuhr, James Luther Adams, and wrote my doctoral dissertation on pragmatism and the religious philosophy of William James. The professors who most shaped my theological and religious understandings were Martin Marty, Langdon Gilkey, and David Tracy at UC, and Ron Engel and Neil Shadle at Meadville. I received an excellent foundation in philosophy and theology, although it wasn't until my second church in Tulsa (1990-1999) that I sought a deeper education and knowledge of the Christian and Hebrew Scriptures, which my secular upbringing had not provided and which had not been a focus of my theological studies.

My calling into the ministry was not an "event" in my life, but a lifelong pursuit. I have sought to understand what I am called to serve, at various points in my life. And calling is not a "magical" thing, but a confluence of innate skills, proficiencies acquired, opportunities opening up, and individual will and the willingness to serve something larger than self.