

December 5, 2016

To My Fellow Members of First Congregational Church:

As Pastor Caela has explained, I am seeking the congregation's support of my request to serve as a licensed minister within our church in the role of "Pastoral Associate." I wish here to offer my explanation for why I feel so powerfully drawn to this role.

My desire to pursue licensed ministry is relatively recent, something that has increasingly drawn me over the last five years or so. Indeed, in the last few years, I have felt so drawn to this pursuit that it determined my decision to retire from Kansas State. Further, I can honestly say that this "call" is inextricably connected to my involvement in this church because it is here that I have learned a new way of practicing Christianity.

Though I grew up in a religious household and attended parochial school, I had, by mid-life, drifted away from the church of my childhood, no longer able to accept what I perceived as its indifference to questions of social justice. After years of drifting, I found this church. This church offered my three enormous gifts. The first was that it was, and is, such an open and welcoming community, one in which I could simply be myself.

Secondly, and owing to the wonderful preaching I have heard here, I realized that I was hearing all the familiar stories of my childhood, but hearing them again for the first time. I could finally hear the breathtaking possibilities of those ancient stories, the way that they still may inform our lives in the here and now. It was one of the most profound revelations of my life.

And thirdly, this church gave me the gift of asking me to preach an occasional sermon. Within the gentle context of this congregation's support, I have found a real and abiding passion for exploring the texts of the lectionary, of trying to pry meaning from them, of attempting to craft a message that explained how those texts spoke to me, and, I hoped, to others. That passion for discovering meaning from these ancient texts has become a major vocation for me over the last five years, one that inspires me each and every day. Most recently, I have learned the inspiration afforded by communal study of the Bible. The Disciples class has truly been an unexpected miracle to me; within this group, the sharing of the meanings that each of us have found separately as we read has created a synergy that is so remarkable that I find that I cannot find words to describe it – except to say that we have found constant meaning, and we have found each other.

All of these experiences have led me to believe that this position is something that I feel truly called to do. I want so much to participate as a worship leader, to give sermons, to become more deeply involved in adult education.

I do, however, want to make it clear that I see definite limits to this role. I am a member of this congregation; Pastor Caela is my pastor as she is to all other members of this congregation. I do not, in any way whatsoever, want to interfere with her pastoral role with anyone in this congregation, including myself. Accordingly, I will not engage in pastoral counseling. My only wish here is to take a much more active role in adult education, and to be qualified to take a leadership role in worship, alongside Pastor Caela, and particularly in her absence.

Finally, there is this: over the years, my involvement in this congregation has led me far from the understandings of my youth, and yet, I also feel profoundly that I have finally come home. Faith, it now seems to me, is not automatic adherence to a fixed set of doctrines, but rather, an ongoing, and often messy, practice of putting belief into action, an ongoing improvisation with our still speaking God. I believe that whatever gifts I may possess may best be put into action by pursuing the licensed ministry and serving within this church.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your willingness to consider my request.

Peace,

Sue Zschoche

IMPORTANT DATES

Dec. 18th immediately after worship:

Open Forum with church leaders and Sue to ask questions and get to know Sue

Jan. 8th:

Opportunity to hear Sue preach during worship

Jan. 22nd:

Regularly-scheduled Congregational Meeting where a vote will be taken on whether to call Sue as our Pastoral Associate