

## Statement of Call

Barbara Brown Taylor, once said, “I didn't want to be a priest. I wanted to do the work that priests do, and that required becoming a priest.” For obvious reasons, you can assume that, unlike Barbara Brown Taylor, I *do* want to be a pastor, or else I wouldn't be standing in front of you today. But I still resonate with this quote deeply. My call to become a Minister of the Word and Sacrament has been shaped around the work that ministers do, not what they are called. My calling has largely been revealed to me through my experience working with Youthworks, an interdenominational, short-term mission trip company. Where I often was presented with the opportunities to “do the work” that pastors do.

My journey with Youthworks began shortly before my eighth-grade year, as an attendee of a mission trip in small-town, Steubenville, Ohio. Here, I had the first opportunity to “do the work” that pastors do. I was able to show my love for Christ through acts of service and relationships with others. One rainy day on that trip, in a nearby nursing home, I watched with delight as an elderly woman chased my father around after he teased her for not dancing with him. Her eyes sparkled mischievously and I think I heard God giggling. Regardless of the fact that I had grown up in the church from birth, this way of loving others was brand new, and it rocked my world.

My first summer working for Youthworks I spent my summer serving in Savannah, GA. At the time, I was worried about not having a passion for my major, and spent the summer in turmoil over not knowing my “one true calling”. I liked kids, I liked people, I liked diversity, I liked leadership, I loved Jesus, and I loved serving, but that left me with too much to work with. An adult leader that came around the eighth week of my summer was patiently listening to me vent through this crisis when she interrupted me to ask, “You *have* prayed about this, right?”. My eyes grew wide, “Yeah of- of course! Definitely!” That night I prayed for my calling to be revealed to me for the first time, begging God for clarity. I thought that if God could just send me a sign, I'd be good to go. The next morning, as adult leaders were shoving their students back into the vans, an adult leader jogged up to me to exchange goodbyes. I hadn't spoken to him all week and was surprised to see him walking toward me. “Good luck with everything!” he said “I can't wait to see the amazing work you'll do as a pastor one day!”. I laughed. A pastor? I talk too much. I have too many big ideas. I'm too confused about what I believe. I attempted to dismiss it immediately, but I went home after that summer with the interaction still on my mind and began pulling book after book on theology, curious as to if it could hold my attention. It became yet another piece to work into the puzzle of my calling.

My second summer with Youthworks was spent in West Virginia. I had spent the end of my school year getting involved with the Westside Free Store, the first non-profit I would fall in love with. I would eventually become the store manager there, again having the opportunity to “do the work” a pastor does as I became intimately intertwined in friendship with the community of folks served at the Freestore- who were often in and out of houselessness, or food insecure. As I spent time serving food, coordinating volunteers, and starting new programs I began to find myself straddling the line between two communities. Straddling the line between the community of churches that came to volunteer at the store and had access to resources that they

desperately wanted to share, and the community of folks who came to the store and who needed resources and who often wanted to convey this to the rest of the world.

I also spent time that year volunteering at my first megachurch, the first church I would fall out of love with, helping out with youth ministry. I began feeling uncomfortable with the megachurch I had been going to, and the way we were told to talk about the gospel. I started recognizing the harm Churches can have on a community. I began to sense the white savior complex in myself and in other adults I was meeting. That summer, I met a female pastor who offered communion to another pastor that refused to take it from her because of her sex. She told me that I would always be too feminist for my church friends and too churchy for my feminist friends. She promised me there were women like me, and I would meet them, but they were all somewhere called seminary. I came home that summer hating church but loving Jesus. I turned to my pastor for help, and she offered up the idea of Princeton for the first time.

My third summer with Youthworks was spent in South Dakota. My year was full of coming out to my friends and family as gay, learning that the church treated me much differently when I let them know the truth about me, and I began existing in the margins for the very first time in my life. I began to understand my own identity as a young, white, able-bodied, queer, cis-gendered woman as something that further allowed me to straddle lines between two different sets of communities, and as a deeply important part of my calling to do the work that pastors do. I was ready for a third round of serving all summer, or so I thought when I boarded the plane to South Dakota. I would soon find out that I had over-exhausted myself tenfold. I had recently become the president of my sorority, the young adult commissioner of my local Synod, and had spent all year as the manager of the non-profit I fell in love with. I loved leadership, and my gifts of advising, collaborating, and problem-solving were revealed to me that year in new ways, but it drained me without me realizing it.

I only spent two weeks in South Dakota before I realized how burnt out I was and I flew back home. I spent the rest of my summer home, doing a different type of work that pastors do. I read I slept, I prayed, I spent time with God, I stopped running and started walking. I learned that God was there too. God was there even though I was not giving a speech, feeding my houseless friends, or leading 80 teenagers in worship. She was there in rest, and it turns out that I'm still worthy of my calling even when I rest.

I am still learning how the “work that pastors do” takes different shapes and forms, most of which I have yet to even discover. As I lean more and more into the identity I hold, I continue to straddle the line between different communities that allow me to do this work in new ways. So I will end this call story with a confident claim that over and over in my life, God has graciously revealed to me that I am called to do the work that pastors do, and therefore God has called me to pastoral ministry.