



The Long Walk

By Pastor Susi Kawolics

Maybe you know the church. It sits at the corner of Bainbridge and 306, its steeple a beacon to those who seek a welcoming place to worship. Not a huge church by any means. And yet it has taken me nearly 20 years to walk from the nursery on the south end of the building to the pulpit on the north end. And it has been quite a journey.

I first entered Bainbridge Community United Church of Christ when my now college senior was not yet two years old. I responded to an ad in our church bulletin for a nursery attendant, someone to watch the pre-school and younger children during worship every Sunday so the children would feel comfortable during that time. I interviewed for the position, and was offered the job that day. It was a nice opportunity for me. After I finished working there, I could still make it to worship at my church by noon. It got me out of the house, and allowed me to meet some great families. And, after about a year there, when the church called a new minister, I was fortunate to become friends with him and his family.

It was during that time that I was going through the process of converting from my Methodist up-bringing to Catholicism. I had the chance to share my reflections and thoughts about this journey with Reverend Ted, who said, facetiously, yet as it turned out, prophetically, that I was joining the wrong denomination, that I should become a member of the United Church of Christ (UCC).

Despite his recommendation, I stuck to my decision, and was confirmed in the Catholic Church. A few years later, after my second child was born, I found it difficult working and leaving my infant, so I decided I needed to quit my Sunday morning job. It was a sad leave-taking because the congregation was so wonderfully welcoming and supportive, but I still saw many of the members in the neighborhood and at ecumenical functions. Also, my daughters and I joined a playgroup started by the minister's wife, so I was able to keep in contact with many of the children I had come to love.

My life then took an ironic turn. Shortly after I converted to Catholicism, I sensed a call to ministry. I decided I would become a Certified Pastoral Minister in the Cleveland Diocese, and I went to Ursuline College to do my coursework, graduating with a Masters degree in Ministry.

Because of various life experiences, years later, after deep and painful reflection, I felt the pull to leave the Catholic Church and explore other faiths. I ended up being drawn to Federated UCC in Chagrin Falls, where no one knew me, and I could remain anonymous if I wanted. Soon, however, I became a member. I have taken courses through the UCC School of Lay Ministry and become a licensed minister. I am now in the process of seeking ordination in this denomination.

A few weeks ago, I was presented with an unexpected opportunity. I have been given the honor and privilege of practicing ministry at the Bainbridge Community UCC for the next few months! It feels right to have come back to this place where I've always felt welcome. The church's gift of hospitality which embraced me long ago is still very much alive. I look forward to walking the next leg of my faith journey with them.

The walk from nursery to pulpit has taken a long time. It seems it should have been a short trip, yet it has brought me up hills, through valleys and detours. But I am certain that God's abiding presence has accompanied me every step of my sometimes unpredictable and winding path, just as God goes with all of us, no matter where our journeys take us.

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