

Faith Journey Statement- Rev. Jessie MacMillan

My call to ministry began as a high school student heavily involved in school and church leadership. I had a deep connection with the local Methodist church- singing and touring with the youth choir, going on annual mission trips with Appalachian Service Project, participating weekly with youth group and Sunday school. It was not until college, under the influence of my campus chaplain, that I would identify God's nudge as a call and recognize the signs. My faith grew in college through participation in Bible studies and worship at a church across from my sorority house. But the biggest factor in my call was the mission trips during January term. Initially I went out of a curiosity for international travel, but seeing the impoverished conditions of life near Lima, Peru and in the jungle, as well as the people's struggle for justice, transformed my shallow intentions into deeper commitment. Each of the four trips taught me more about leadership, spirituality, justice and compassion.

My husband and I married one week after my graduation and began the process of applying for service as mission co-workers with the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Mennonites. As we interviewed with each of these entities, we realized that we needed further education for our skills to be useful in the communities we were sent to serve. We came under care of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve and then went to Princeton Theological Seminary, where a whole new world of theological thinking unfolded. Our first son was born halfway through seminary and our intentions shifted from mission to congregational work as pastors. Yet the call was still the same- to be an ambassador for Christ, partnering with God in the transformation of the world, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We were ordained on the same day in January 1995 at Bay Presbyterian Church.

During my first call in New Mexico, a position shared with my husband, we were blessed with a congregation well suited to help form us as pastors. My call expanded almost immediately from congregation based to presbytery leadership and theological education. This gave me an early, wider view of the church which has guided me throughout the past twenty- five years since ordination.

When we moved from Roswell, New Mexico to Fort Myers, Florida we had two young boys and a third on the way. A fourth son was born in Florida. God's call continued to grow in me, expanding now to parenthood, widespread pulpit supply and presbytery work, continued teaching, and involvement in significant pastoral and congregational crises.

In 2001 our family moved to Ohio, where both my husband and I had been raised and our parents still lived. The four boys were all under six and though I had my hands full, I kept doing what I could in ministry, lots of preaching, short stints as a temporary pastor, and a long term relationship with my family's church, where my husband is still pastor, as a Parish Associate. I found the greatest joy in preaching and teaching, but also continued to find myself at the center of crisis intervention and management in various churches, including my own. Toward the end of that period, my call to ministry seemed to be focused on mid-councils and I took some significant training to prepare myself for this ministry. I was honored to serve as Stated Clerk and Associate for Equipping Leaders for Western Reserve Presbytery from 2014 to 2018.

The move to Delaware in 2018 was a response to a call to larger presbytery leadership. These regional positions are few and far between, so living out the call meant experimenting with a commuter marriage for the first time as our youngest son was finishing high school. My position as Connectional Presbyter (Presbytery Executive and Stated Clerk) was fulfilling and a good use of all my gifts. I found myself thriving at work, but far from home and family.

As my husband and I weighed all the options for fulfilling both of our callings and sustaining a loving and life-giving marriage, I prayed about a position back in Cleveland. Fairmount Presbyterian Church needed an Interim Senior Pastor/Head of Staff and our mutual discernment led me to that position. I was blessed to help shepherd Fairmount through times of significant crises and grew to love the warm-hearted congregation. I'm proud of what we could do together, with God's help.

The pandemic has changed my view of time and focused my intentions. While I've been waiting for children to grow up and life to settle down, there is no end to the disruptions which make up the fabric of modern life. I already do an extraordinary amount of study and reading to fuel my pastoral vocation, so in January of 2021, I began coursework at Dubuque Theological Seminary for a Doctor of Ministry. The theme of our cohort is "Crisis and the Church" and the program will take at least three years of part-time study with other working pastors.

One of my learning goals is to review church history now that I have lived through a quarter century of ministry. If some of our most renowned theologians, poets, musicians and clergy produced such fine work during crises of their own time, what can we glean from them for our day? At a crisis point when many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer walked with him, Jesus asked the twelve if they too wanted to go away. And Peter answered- "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are God's holy one." As hard as these turbulent times are for all of us, sticking with Jesus is the only way through.

I joyfully join the enduring journey of God's mission through the Church of the Covenant. I pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire us toward peace and justice as we witness God's amazing grace at work among us!