

Exhibit A-1

Jessica Means
Faith Journey

I am fortunate to have known God my entire life – I cannot delineate a before and after or pick the moment my faith journey began. I grew up attending church and Sunday school, learning the stories of the Bible on a flannelgraph during children’s worship and then finding them in my children’s Bible to read them again and again.

As I entered middle and high school, my parents granted me freedom to choose how I wanted to participate in church life. Instead of withdrawing, the community I experienced in church continued to draw me in. I made friends who, like me, asked big, earnest questions. Adults at the church, both clergy and laypeople, treated my questions seriously and included me in their own faith journeys. For three years, I sat in the associate pastor’s office every Friday. She and I had far-ranging conversations on faith, politics, books, friendships, dating – in a word, life. In her office, the stories I learned as a child became the foundation for deep-seated faith in God, a faith that could ask questions, could adapt and change, but that was rooted in God’s love manifested in Scripture and community.

I attended Wheaton College, where I continued to learn to ask questions about the Bible and about faith. I learned that God is big enough for all those questions. I learned to integrate faith and vocation, even if my vocation was not (yet) in the church. The good people of that institution helped me take the love of God that I walked in with and form it into something with legs that could be enacted in the world as a response to God’s great love for me.

As I have journeyed through life as an adult, I have been grateful over and over for the foundation of faith cultivated in my youth. I have continued to push, to pick, to question. I have encountered real life, which is to say I have seen hard things in the world. I spent a year working for a health and human rights non-profit in West Africa, where I came face to face with darkness – abuse, mutilation, hunger, poverty – but also profound beauty and hope. I have watched friends and loved ones navigate sickness, death, unexpected circumstances. The lessons I learned as a child and at Wheaton hold true: God is, indeed, big enough for it all. The Good News remains such very good news.

Throughout my twenties, I experienced (and tried hard to ignore) a growing sense of call to theological education and to ministry. I was enfolded into the life of the local church and loved serving as a lay leader, teaching confirmation, leading small groups, serving on outreach committees, assisting in worship and guiding the church as a ruling elder. I did not recognize then the ways in which my congregation was forming my own sense of vocation by calling me lead in ministry in so many varied ways. I loved my job, I loved my church, and I couldn’t fathom leaving either, and yet God’s call was gentle and persistent. When I lost my job in 2019, one month after getting married, it became clear that it was time to say “Yes” to the call had I resisted for so long.

Though my time in seminary has been challenging, it has confirmed both my call and my deeply held belief that God is big enough for all that life may throw at us and all I may throw back at God, and that the Good News is indeed such very good news. I have fallen more deeply in love with Scripture. As a student chaplain in CPE, Jesus was present time and again as I met people in their hardest moments. In some of my own hardest moments, as a brand new mom during Covid struggling through Greek exegesis, I was nurtured and sustained by God our Mother and by God's beautiful community in the church. I am humbled by the possibility of shepherding a small portion of God's church, and I am awed at the opportunity to share the Love that has held me and will not let me go.