

SECTION D

ORDAINED

Rev. Dawn Balduf

Rev. Dawn E. Balduf

Ordination Story

My path to ordination was circuitous and lengthy. I had a successful business career and was not contemplating a major life change. I was involved with church in various leadership roles, including leading Bible studies and book groups for the women of our church. After a series of personal crises, I found myself in the wilderness, angry at God with the walls of my beliefs crumbling around me. Walking through the wilderness and reconnecting with Jesus found me on the other side with the sense of being unsettled, filled with anticipation for something not yet defined.

Guided by the Holy Spirit's prompting, I attended an open house at Winebrenner Theological Seminary in 2012 and applied at the event. I was accepted in a master's program in family ministry. In a spiritual formation class, I read "Confessions" by Augustine of Hippo. He outlined his life illustrating how he both extricated himself from a selfish, individualistic lifestyle immersed himself in the grace of God. I related to Augustine and the end of his worldly career as he transitioned to become a priest. He wrote, "I shook with fear, and at the same time, I grew ardent with hope and exultation of your mercy, O Father."

I continued my secular position as I attended seminary, telling myself "someday" I would discern to what I was being called. In the fall of 2015, God told me that someday was now, albeit without specifics on what came next. I gave notice to my employer, effective the next summer as we transitioned my role. In talking to a good friend who was director of spiritual care at Mercy Health, she suggested I try chaplaincy while I discerned my call. My response was that I didn't want to work with old people or sick people. I am sure God chuckled at that! I again felt the Holy Spirit's nudging and agreed to work as a chaplain on a contingent basis.

It wasn't long before I realized the direction of my call. My God-given gifts and the burdens of my heart came together in the work of chaplaincy. My seminary training in pastoral care was foundational as I integrated the learning into experiences with patients, families and staff who were often in crisis. Clinical pastoral education was an additional impactful experience; I expected CPE to teach me how to be a chaplain. Instead it taught me about me, forcing self-reflection as never before. I was also called as a part-time licensed assistant minister at St. John's UCC, Genoa, where I had been a member for 35 years. My role there solidified the calling to pastoral care as I journeyed with those in the hospital, in nursing homes, and at end of life.

In early summer of 2021, I completed the work for the alternate pathway for ordination and received the approval of the ecclesiastical council of the Northwest Ohio Association. My ordination service at St. John's UCC, Genoa, was celebrated on October 3, 2021. When Rev. Jon Komperda placed a Bible in my hands inscribed "Reverend Dawn E. Balduf," it was an emotional moment, marking the end of one journey and the beginning of a new one. I have indeed learned never to put a period where God intends a comma.