

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

Part I

Spiritual Formation for Ministry

My life began in an unexpected way, entering this world three months earlier than anticipated.

From the very start, my journey was unique, and I often reflect on the stories that surround my early days. The prevailing theme has always been one of love and divine intervention, as I've been told countless times that I was not only chosen by my parents but also by a higher power. In the narratives woven into the fabric of my existence, a church associate pastor played a significant role. Their prayers for my well-being, uttered during those fragile moments of my premature birth, have been described to me as a powerful connection between my existence and a higher purpose. This association led the pastor to claim me as his spiritual child, and this declaration has been a thread running through my life, shaping my sense of purpose and connection to the divine.

My upbringing was immersed in the rich traditions of both the United Methodist and Baptist faiths, influenced by the affiliations of my parents and their parents before them. The echoes of hymns sung in the youth choir, the lessons learned in Sunday school, and the moments of reflection during catechism have all contributed to the tapestry of my spiritual identity.

In the embrace of these faith communities, I found not only a sense of belonging but also a foundation for understanding my place in the world. The shared history and teachings have been guiding lights, illuminating my path and instilling in me a profound sense of purpose.

As I journey through life, the imprints of those early days, the prayers of a pastor, and the lessons learned in the pews continue to shape my beliefs and perspectives. I carry with me the legacy of love, faith, and the interconnectedness of a community that played a pivotal role in the unfolding

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

chapters of my life. The time since has been a journey marked by both triumphs and tragedies. Other defining moments were the tumultuous union of my parents that often led to multiple violent incidents of his abuse that included law enforcement, hospitals, courtrooms and ultimately the murder of my father. These events became a profound turning point, reshaping not only my world but also my faith. As I navigated the aftermath of this tragedy, the foundations of my faith were shaken, tested and transformed. The familiar roles I had assumed within the church — as secretary, financial secretary, youth director, choir member, and director — took on new meaning in the face of loss. The routine tasks first became hiding places but they turned into responsibilities that became anchors, grounding me in a sense of purpose and community during a time of profound grief.

In the midst of sorrow, trauma and grief, I sought solace and understanding with friends, family and unexpectedly, to me, within the pages of scripture. What began as a quest for answers evolved into a deep fascination with the preached word, the art of oration, and the profound insights gleaned from dedicated Bible study. The sermons became not just sources of guidance but lifelines that connected me to a higher purpose and provided a framework for navigating the complexities of life. Simultaneously, I found refuge and expression in the world of fine arts, particularly theater and music. In the creative process, I discovered a therapeutic outlet — a space where emotions could be channeled, explored, and released. Whether participating in theater ministry or immersing myself in the intricacies of music, I felt a profound connection to something greater than myself.

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

The arts, with their ability to convey the depths of human experience, became a means of both catharsis and celebration. They allowed me to explore the complexities of faith, grief, and joy in ways that words alone could not capture. Through directing and participating in choir performances, engaging in theater productions, and embracing various facets of the fine arts, I discovered a profound sense of healing and purpose.

As I reflect on this period of my life, the journey has been one of transformation and resilience. The tragedies have not defined me but have become integral chapters in a narrative that continues to unfold. Through the shifting tides of faith and the exploration of the arts, I've not only found strength in the face of adversity but also discovered new dimensions of spirituality and self-expression that continue to shape my evolving path.

During my youth, I had the privilege of being part of the choir where my aunt served as the pianist. In this musical haven, my passion for music and leadership skills were recognized early on. It became apparent to my aunt that I approached my role with a level of seriousness and commitment that set me apart.

As a member of the choir, I not only reveled in the joy of music but also took on a leadership role that went beyond simply singing. My dedication to the craft and my natural inclination for leadership became evident, drawing the attention of my aunt. She, being attuned to the nuances of the musical environment we shared, recognized the gift within me and the potential for greater responsibilities. What made these moments particularly impactful was the contrast in commitment among the other youth members. My seriousness about our musical endeavors, coupled with a desire for excellence, often stood in stark contrast to the more casual approach of

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

some of my peers. Around the age of 15, I had the opportunity to take on my first significant solo, and it was for a song called "Holy One" by the late Bishop Walter Hawkins. The lyrics of the song held a profound impact on me, particularly the heartfelt expression that resonated with, "Holy One, I never want to let you down."

These words became more than lyrics; they took root in my consciousness, prompting a deep reflection on my own attitudes and actions. Over time, I recognized that I had been somewhat lax in my commitment and approach, both in my musical pursuits and, more importantly, in my spiritual journey. The sentiments conveyed in the song served as a catalyst for a personal awakening. The realization that enough time had passed with a somewhat lax attitude compelled me to strive for better. The desire to be better wasn't just about musical excellence; it was a spiritual commitment to not let God down through poor choices and actions. The song "Holy One" became a transformative force, urging me to reevaluate my priorities and align my actions more closely with my faith. The solo, with its poignant lyrics and emotional resonance, became a turning point in my spiritual and personal growth. It marked the beginning of a journey toward a more intentional, purposeful life—a life where the words "I never want to let you down" were not just a song lyric but a heartfelt pledge to live in a way that honored my faith and the sacred values I held dear. This experience served as a stepping stone in my ongoing pursuit of a deeper connection with the divine and a commitment to living a life that reflects the principles and teachings that have shaped my journey thus far.

Prayer has been an integral and transformative aspect of my personal formation, contributing to the unshakable faith that has sustained me through various difficulties. The roots of this

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

connection to prayer can be traced back to the narrative of my early days, where I was the subject of fervent prayers as an infant.

I carry with me the narrative of being a recipient of heartfelt prayers during those fragile moments of infancy. The image of caring individuals, perhaps family members, friends, or even a church community, coming together to lift me up in prayer has become an indelible part of my story. This laid the foundation for a deep understanding of the strength and solace that prayer can provide. As I grew, prayer became more than a ritual; it evolved into a personal and profound means of communication with the divine. Those memories of being prayed for as an infant became a touchstone, a reminder of the community of support that surrounds us and the spiritual resilience that can be cultivated through prayer.

In the face of life's challenges, the practice of prayer became a steadfast companion, providing comfort, guidance, and a sense of connection to something greater than myself. Through difficulty and adversity, the unshakable faith forged in those early days of being prayed for has been a source of strength, grounding me in the belief that, even in the midst of hardships, there is a higher purpose and a sustaining power that transcends the trials of life.

My spiritual journey has been deeply intertwined with my affiliations with 2 particular faith communities, Rivers of Living Water Ministries, now Rivers of Living Water UCC NY, and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries. These communities have played a crucial role in my growth, both spiritually and personally. Through Rivers of Living Water Ministries, my theological education began with Ministers in Training classes. I was licensed and ordained, marking a significant milestone in my commitment to ministry and service. This recognition affirmed my

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

calling and provided a platform for me to further explore and express my gifts within the context of a supportive and affirming community. As the ministry transitioned into Rivers of Living Water UCC NY, my licensing and/or ordination continued to hold significance, anchoring me in a tradition that values inclusivity, justice, and extravagant welcome.

In addition to my affiliation with Rivers of Living Water, I was also ordained in The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, under the leadership of Bishop Yvette Flunder. This ordination represented a broader recognition of my ministry within the context of an affirming and inclusive movement that celebrates the diversity of God's creation. It affirmed my commitment to advocating for justice, equality, and the full inclusion of all individuals in the life of the church and society.

Together, these experiences of licensing and ordination within Rivers of Living Water UCC NY and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries have been integral parts of my spiritual journey. They have provided me with a solid foundation, a sense of belonging, and a framework for ministry that is grounded in love, compassion, and radical hospitality. As I continue on this journey, I am grateful for the communities that have supported and affirmed me, and I am committed to living out my calling in service to God and others.

Educational Experiences

Texas Southern University - Houston, TX 1984 - 1987, 1990-1992

Lancaster Theological Seminary - Lancaster, PA 2014 - 2017, Master of Divinity

New York Theological Seminary - New York, NY 2017 - 2020, Doctor of Ministry

My Understanding of My Call to Ministry

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

I grew up in a family deeply involved in religious service and ministry has been an integral part of my life. I would say I was called “*to*” ministry but also add that I believe I was created “*for*” ministry. My journey of faith has been one of active engagement and service, manifested through various roles and responsibilities within the realm of ministry. Over the years, I have had the privilege of creating and facilitating Bible studies, stepping into the role of a chaplain resident, and leading intercessory prayer calls. These experiences have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of spirituality and community.

My “*calling*” began with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a deep desire for authenticity within my spiritual exploration. This initial phase was marked by a passionate pursuit of understanding, delving into theological texts, biblical studies, and the rich tapestry of religious traditions. I yearned to know more, to unravel the complexities of faith, and to seek a genuine, authentic connection with the divine. As I navigated this intellectual and spiritual terrain, I began to sense a profound knowing that went beyond the acquisition of knowledge. It was a tugging at my spirit, an undeniable prompting that whispered of a greater purpose. This spiritual knowing was not something that could be easily explained or rationalized; it was a quiet yet persistent force guiding me toward a path of service and ministry. In the early stages, my expression of this calling found its outlet in music and the arts. I discovered a profound connection to the divine through creative expression, whether it be in the harmonies of a choir, the strokes of a paintbrush, or the theatrical storytelling of the arts. This phase allowed me to explore the sacred through the beauty and creativity inherent in these forms of expression.

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

Over time, however, my calling expanded and transformed. The initial focus on music and the arts gave way to a deeper engagement with preaching and administration. The spiritual tugging that had been present from the beginning began to shape itself into a more explicit call to share the transformative message of faith and to contribute to the organization and leadership of the community. Preaching became a central aspect of my ministry as I sought to communicate the truths and wisdom gleaned from my ongoing journey of spiritual exploration. Administration, on the other hand, became a practical expression of my commitment to serving the needs of the community, ensuring its growth, and fostering an environment conducive to spiritual development.

As a facilitator of Bible studies, I've had the opportunity to delve into the richness of scripture, guiding others on a collective journey of discovery and reflection. This role allowed me to not only share my insights but also to foster a space where individuals could explore their own relationship with faith. Serving as a chaplain resident provided a unique platform to offer spiritual support in various contexts. It was a humbling experience to walk alongside individuals during times of challenge and triumph, offering comfort, guidance, and a listening ear. This role deepened my appreciation for the diverse ways in which faith intersects with the human experience.

Leading intercessory prayer calls became a powerful means of connecting with others in a spiritual realm. The collective act of lifting up prayers for individuals and communities fostered a sense of unity and solidarity, transcending physical boundaries and bringing people together in a shared spiritual journey. Directing vacation Bible school and creating liturgy allowed me to

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

contribute to the spiritual growth of others in more structured settings. These experiences allowed for creativity and intentionality in crafting meaningful worship experiences and educational opportunities.

In extending my scope of my ministry, I've been actively involved in serving homeless communities. This hands-on engagement reinforced the belief that faith is not just a personal journey but a call to action, inspiring outreach and service to those in need. Additionally, I founded a ministry that worships on Saturdays, specifically designed to support individuals engaged in various forms of ministry. This initiative reflects my commitment to creating inclusive spaces that cater to the unique needs of those involved in spiritual leadership.

In the ecclesiastical realm, I have taken on various roles, including the assignment and execution of ecclesiastical duties. As a leader in youth and young adult ministry, I've been blessed to guide and mentor the next generation, fostering spiritual growth and leadership development.

These diverse experiences collectively form the tapestry of my ministry journey. They represent a commitment to active service, spiritual exploration, and the creation of inclusive spaces where individuals can encounter and deepen their connection to the divine.

As a Christian Educator, my work revolves around nurturing faith, fostering spiritual growth, and empowering individuals to deepen their understanding of God's love and teachings. Official Privilege of Call standing in the UCC would not only affirm my calling to this ministry but also provide a formal recognition of my dedication to serving the spiritual needs of others. It would strengthen my ability to lead, guide, and support individuals on their faith journeys, grounding my work in the rich theological tradition and values of the UCC. I am passionate about

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

facilitating opportunities for learning, growth, and exploration of faith that empower individuals to live out their beliefs with understanding and conviction. Similarly, as a Community Outreach Specialist, my understanding of my call is to engage with and serve the broader York community, embodying the principles of justice, compassion, and inclusivity that are central to the UCC's mission.

I understand that my call to ministry has been a dynamic, evolving process — a journey that started with a thirst for knowledge, authenticity, and a spiritual knowing. From the realms of music and the arts, it has expanded to encompass preaching and administration, reflecting a multifaceted response to the unfolding call to serve and contribute to the spiritual well-being of the community I am privileged to be a part of.

Personal Growth During My Journey in Ministry

Reflecting on my journey in ministry over the past decade, most of it spent being affiliated in some capacity with the UCC, I am aware of the transformative path I've traveled. This journey has been a mixture of challenge, change and illumination guiding me not only in deepening my own faith but also in understanding the richness of human experience. Through years of serving, teaching, and guiding, I've learned the invaluable lessons of patience, empathy, and the deep power of listening, which is not a prior strong-suit, not just with ears, but with my heart.

Each step of the way has been a lesson in resilience, teaching me to stand firm in my beliefs while remaining open to change and growth. The challenges I've faced, whether personal or

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

within my community, have honed my ability to adapt and find strength in my convictions, all while nurturing a spirit of compassion and humility.

Perhaps most importantly, this journey has illuminated the importance of connection to our own inner strength and wisdom, to the divine, and to each other. It's shown me that ministry is not just about leading or teaching, but about walking alongside others, sharing in their joys and sorrows, and finding together the light that guides us forward. This is the transformational leadership stressed during my doctoral journey. As I look to the future, I am filled with gratitude for the lessons learned and the journey yet to unfold. I am committed to continuing this path of service, growth, and love, embracing whatever comes with an open heart and a steadfast spirit.

Understanding of Ordained Ministry in the UCC

Having been part of the United Church of Christ (UCC) family for the last ten years, I've come to understand ordained ministry as the possibility of something really special. It's all about welcoming everyone, no matter their background or who they love. We believe that a church should be a place where everyone feels at home. As emphasized during my time in the PSEC conference of the UCC, becoming a minister isn't just about going to seminary; it's about being part of a community that supports you, challenges you, and grows with you. In the words of a PSEC colleague, "you've got to have skin in the game." At the time, I wasn't a fan of the statement because it was passively insinuating that I had no "skin in the game" in spite of my diligent contributions.

I love the fact that the UCC is a church that believes in asking tough questions and taking a stand for justice, whether that's in our local communities or on a global scale. When someone becomes

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

a minister in the UCC, they're not just getting the job of leading worship or performing sacraments. They're stepping into a role where they can really make a difference, advocating for change and caring for those in need. And even though ministers have a lot of freedom to shape their ministry, they're never going it alone. They're supported by a whole network of other ministers and church members who are all working together to spread love and justice. Being a minister here means you're always learning and growing. The UCC encourages its ministers to keep exploring, learning, and reflecting throughout their careers, so we can all keep up with the world's changes in order to be a relevant, witnessing presence in it.

Being a minister in the UCC should signify being part of a movement of open hearts, open minds, and open doors, working together to make a real difference in the world.

Building upon my personal journey and the profound growth I've experienced, it is my deepest hope that the United Church of Christ and all of its conferences embrace and truly live out this model of ordained ministry. This vision goes beyond the walls of individual churches to foster a collective spirit of service, empathy, and humility across our entire faith community. By embodying these values, we can inspire a more connected and compassionate ministry, one that actively demonstrates the love and grace at the heart of our faith. I yearn for us to not only preach these ideals but to manifest them in our actions, creating a living testament to the transformative power of our shared ministry. Together, we can set a powerful example of spiritual leadership that nurtures growth, embraces change, and encourages a deeper connection to the divine and each other.

Part II

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

Personal Theological Statement

As someone deeply rooted in the Christian faith, my theological perspective is shaped by a commitment to understanding and living out the teachings of Jesus Christ through a progressive, relevant lens. I believe that the heart of the Gospel is God's unconditional love for all of creation, and that this love compels us to pursue justice, peace, and inclusivity in every aspect of our lives. I affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every individual as a child of God, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or social status. This conviction drives my understanding of the Christian call to love our neighbors as ourselves, seeing and serving Christ in all persons, especially the marginalized and oppressed. In this, I am guided by Jesus' example and teachings, which consistently broke down societal barriers, challenged unjust systems, and extended compassion and inclusion to those on the fringes of society.

I am committed to a faith that is not static but is ever-evolving, recognizing that our understanding of the Divine and of sacred texts is limited and filtered through our cultural and historical contexts. Therefore, I approach Scripture with a critical and open mind, seeking the Spirit's guidance to discern its deeper truths for our time. I value the questions as much as the answers, believing that doubt and uncertainty can lead us to a deeper, more authentic faith.

Worship and sacraments are, for me, expressions of God's ongoing presence and grace in the world. Baptism is a symbol of new life, marking our inclusion in the community of faith and our commitment to living out the values of the Gospel. The Lord's Supper is a communal meal that reminds us of our interconnectedness and our shared call to remember and embody Jesus' life, death, and resurrection until he comes again.

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

In living out my faith, I am committed to social action and justice, understanding these as integral to the Gospel. This includes advocating for environmental stewardship, economic equality, human rights, and peace, as I believe that the Kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope that we are called to actively participate in bringing about.

My faith journey is one of continual learning, growth, and transformation, rooted in prayer, community, and service. I am part of a wider faith community that values diversity, seeks understanding, and strives to live out God's extravagant welcome to all. In all things, I aim to reflect the love, grace, and hope of Christ in

the world, trusting in God's guidance and the movement of the Holy Spirit in my life and in the lives of those around me.

Part III Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the journey towards recognition as a Privilege of Call candidate within the United Church of Christ (UCC) is both a deeply, persistent, personal and communal experience. It is a path that has called for introspect, growth, and renewed commitment to serving with love, empathy, and humility in spite of the struggles to do so. This journey challenged me to embody the teachings of our faith in every action and attitude, to nurture a ministry that is inclusive, compassionate, and reflective of the divine love that guides us. As I move forward, my intent is to embrace this calling with an open heart, committed to living out ministry in ways that not only speak to faith but also manifest its principles in our interactions and service to the community. In doing so, I honor not just the tradition and values of the UCC but also the sacred trust placed upon me as a leader within this spiritual family. May our paths be guided by the light

Rev. Dr. Dominique Denman
Privilege of Call Paper for UCC
April 2024

of understanding, compassion, and an ever-deepening connection to the divine and each other, as we strive to live out the true essence of our calling within the United Church of Christ.

A quote that captures the essence of what it means to provide an “extravagant welcome,” without judgment which makes space for genuine transformation and reflects the UCC and its approach to welcome all is from Henri Nouwen’s book (“Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life, Doubleday & Company, 1975”) states, ***“Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and be a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.”***

May it be so. Amen.