

Greetings, Bethlehem United Church of Christ!

Yes, it is appropriate to address you in that manner, because YOU are the church. I am excited to begin our journey together in July, as your intentional interim minister. I look forward to getting to know you and grow with you during our time together. The following will give you a head-start on getting to know me.

This is my second career, following hot on the heels of over 40 years as a veterinary professional (Licensed Veterinary Technician). I taught in the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) at MSU for 30 years, primarily in the Veterinary Technology Program. I also worked for 6 years in Emergency and Critical Care Medicine. I published Veterinary Medical Terminology, currently 3rd Edition, through Elsevier. In 2020, I was honored by CVM, as the recipient of the Distinguished Veterinary Technology Alumni Award. I am still an educator at heart.

You may be wondering how and why I made the leap from veterinary medicine to ministry. The short answer is hospice. Because of my volunteer work at Eaton Community Palliative Care (ECPC), spanning over 11 years, I felt a strong call to ministry. So, I retired from MSU to become the Assistant Director of ECPC, as well as pursue my seminary education at Chicago Theological Seminary. I was certain that I was called to hospice chaplaincy. Somehow God had other plans. So, after earning my Master of Divinity in 2016, I engaged in postgraduate studies with the Interim Ministry Network (IMN). God has been spot-on with this path for me and for those I serve. In retrospect, I've always played a role walking with others in transition – students transitioning into medical professionals; hospice patients transitioning from this life to the next; and now faith communities transitioning to who God calls them to be in their next chapters. I am delighted to have the opportunity to walk with you as you transition to your next chapter.

As a person and as a pastor, I wear my faith on my sleeve and carry a song in my heart. They say that every pastor has a single sermon that burns within their heart. Mine is the love of God, for all people and for all creatures great and small. (Yes, of course animals have a place in my theology!) Inclusivity is important. I cannot begin to tell you how delighted I am to be serving your Open and Affirming congregation. Your ONA status means that I can be fully authentic while I am with you.

You see, I fell in love with my best friend. She just happens to be a woman. We married in March, 2014 – one of the 300 same-sex couples who were blessed to marry that weekend. Praise God for the Supreme Court's decision the following year that made our marriage legal throughout the United States! Bea (pronounced bay-ah) was named after Beatrix, the Crown Princess (former Queen) in the Netherlands. She is truly my better half. Like me, Bea is a retired Veterinary Technician. Yes, we both graduated from and retired from MSU; however, we are Wolverines. We bleed maize and blue, not green. Go blue! We live in Williamston on 10 acres, with our Gordon Setter (Siofra), Cardigan Welsh Corgi (Branwyn) and little Quail (Dani). Branwyn is a certified Therapy Dog and provides regular therapy visits at an assisted living facility in Howell, as well as elsewhere. (We ministered to MSU students following the shooting in February.)

I am looking forward to meeting you in July! Until then, may you be held in the palm of God's loving hand.

Grace and Peace, Pastor Dawn