



Pennsylvania Southeast Conference ~ United Church of Christ

1441 Laura Lane, Suite 100

Pottstown, PA 19464

484-949-8774

psec.org

## STEPPING INTO THE PULPIT: Crafting and Leading Worship When a Pastor is Absent

Rev. Kevin J. McLemore

Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call

### The Current Situation with Ordained Pastoral Leaders

- Not enough pastors for our churches.
- “Over the last 36 years (1985 to 2021), Ordained Ministers only had a numerical net decrease of 474 (4.7%). However, the number of employed Ordained Ministers decreased by over one third (-40.3%), while Retired Ministers and Pastor Emeriti saw an increase of 88.1% over this same 36-year period.”\*
- Roughly, anywhere between 500-1000 clergy have an active profile circulating across 36 Conferences.
- Currently around 165 clergy profiles are being circulated in PSEC– but that doesn’t mean they have indicated interest in serving here.
- Smaller churches with less financial resources still needing pastors - and the retirees and mid-careers will likely not “save” us again.
- Truth is, there has always been a crisis with the clergy.\*

### The Past Is Present: Going Back to the Beginning

- In 18th and 19th centuries, most Protestant churches were served by pastors who served multiple congregations, often with only monthly and sometimes even quarterly visits by an ordained minister.
- As they do now, laypersons provided much of what we consider the work of the Pastor – a ministry of presence, support, and even accountability for each other.
- Perhaps God is “right-siding” the church, and empowering the laity as they remember that pastors come and go, but the members remain.
- The Church is returning to the past, with laypersons people taking on a greater role in the church – and that is not bad news.

### The Four Parts of Biblical Worship

- “They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.” Acts 2:42
  - Gathering - “life together”
  - Preaching – “teachings”
  - Holy Communion – “the common meal”
  - Prayer

## Let's Talk Serving Communion Without A Pastor Being Present

- In our German and larger UCC tradition, clergy are authorized to officiate at two sacraments:
  - Holy Communion
  - Baptism
- Lay Persons may distribute the communion elements that have been previously consecrated by an ordained minister.

## Laypersons can craft good worship services and preach the Good News – and will need to do so more in the future.

- Training does matter – but a heart for God's people, humility, and thoughtfulness matter even more.
- The truth is that it is already happening – and we hope to support you as you meet the needs of your congregation.

## Crafting A Worship Service Without a Pastor

- Fundamental Truth: It's About God
- Paying Attention to the Church Calendar – The Lectionary
  - UCC Calendar – sent to churches every year, but additional copies can be ordered from the UCC
  - Online Resources: <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>
- Your (UCC) Hymnal is Your Best Friend
  - Picking Hymns – Indexes in the back
  - Basic Services pages 1-61
- Liturgy – “the work of the people”
- Finding GOOD Liturgies, based on the Lectionary
  - Book of Common Worship –PC(USA)  
<https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/0664503187/book-of-common-worship.aspx>
  - The Worship Sourcebook – Calvin Institute  
<https://www.amazon.com/Worship-Sourcebook-Second-CD/dp/159255797X>
  - Books & Website by the Rev. Thom Shuman  
Three Books Found on Amazon.com:  
**Playing Hopscotch in Heaven: Lectionary Liturgies for Year A**  
**Where the Broken Gather: Lectionary Liturgies for RCL Year B**  
**Bearers of Grace and Justice: Lectionary Liturgies for Year C**  
<http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>
  - Chalice Worship – hard to find but worth it
- Web Based Resources – the future
  - UCC's Worship Ways  
[https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/worship\\_worship-ways\\_beloved-dust-to-dust-ash/](https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/worship_worship-ways_beloved-dust-to-dust-ash/)
  - Re-Worship  
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/>
  - Textweek  
<http://www.textweek.com/>
  - United Church of Canada  
<https://united-church.ca/worship-resources>

- Sacredise  
<https://sacredise.com/>
- Thom M. Shuman Lectionary Liturgies  
<http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>
- **IMPORTANT: Give Credit To Writers**

## Crafting And/Or Delivering A Sermon

- Focus on one Scriptural text
- Question: in light of this Scripture, how then shall we live?
- No need to address every verse in the Scripture text
- Context is important – but don't get too lost in it
- Telling a story – use an illustration, but make sure to connect it to text
- Give credit to the storyteller
- Pay attention to your current moment
- Conclude the sermon with a point

When you can't find someone to craft an original message...

- Website: [A Sermon for Every Sunday](https://asermonforeverysunday.com/)  
<https://asermonforeverysunday.com/>
  - Lectionary Based
  - Extensive Video and Manuscripts available, with permission to use the videos and manuscripts FOR FREE
  - ALWAYS attribute the sermon to its composer if you are going to deliver it
  - Do not alter the manuscript – find another one if you don't like certain portions of it
  - Consider donating to this good work

Tips for Delivery A Sermon

- Practice, practice, practice
- Underline key words or sentences to help you emphasize something and keep track of where you are
- Make eye contact as much as you can
- Speak clearly but warmly
- Be yourself
- Don't let the manuscript itself distract the congregation
- Make it always about God – and how to live in light of God's presence

## Summary

- The Future is Shared
  - Sharing Pastors – but also sharing the work of the pastor
  - The church will always be here, but it will be more lay-led
  - Stepping into the pulpit is part of that trend
  - God is speaking in the pulpit through the laity
  - Christ is faithful, always, in the new ways we will be His body.
  - Thanks be to God!