

New Minister Information

Rev. Jo Anne Dyson

Statement of Faith Expanded: Jo Anne Dyson

I believe in a God who is loving, merciful and best seen in Jesus Christ. God is the Redeeming Creator- creating a wonderful world and redeeming it in all its fallenness. Jesus was God in human form who is the Creative Redeemer. Jesus helps us to see what life could and should be when lived in awareness of God's sovereignty and love. His example of unconditional love and service as well as his teachings are meant to guide the life of individuals and the church. God lives in us through the Holy Spirit who is the Creative Redeeming Presence that works both in individuals and the world seeking to heal the wounds of poverty, homelessness, prejudice, hatred, and cruelty. We each have been given by the Spirit gifts, insights and abilities for this redeeming task.

The church is the community of faith where people can find a place to belong, a place of acceptance, a place to nurture their spiritual journeys, a place to serve, a place of support, a place to wrestle with deeper questions of the Bible and of faithful living, and of being a voice of conscience to the world. The church is often under attack these days for many things and many people have opted to not associate with religious institutions. We hear, "I'm spiritual, not religious." I think that is like saying "I like to play baseball...alone." The church can be a corrective voice for our American rugged individualism. Through worship, sacraments, prayer, Bible study, faith formation groups, service, the church enables its members to change their lives and the lives of the world.

While there are many sacred events in life (marriage, ordination, confirmation, holy unions, and services of healing), I believe there are 2 sacraments instituted by Jesus and practiced by the church: Baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism is the initiation into the community of faith. Whether by the commitment of parents or guardians for infants and small children or by the individual as an adult, it marks the identification with God's people through water and the word. Communion is the ongoing celebration at table of being nurtured as one of God's children. Through bread and cup, we are made aware of the spiritual presence of Christ in the act. It also reminds us of our union with all believers- living and dead, physically challenged and able bodied, healthy of mind and body and dealing with mental and physical disease, of all races/cultures/ethnicities/orientations. At this table, we are one.

Having made the Hebrew Bible a focus of study for many years of graduate study beyond the M.Div level, I find the Bible a fascinating series of writings by and for the People of God. It can be one way in which we encounter God. It can also be a dangerous book when it is not read with awareness of historical context. It can nurture the best and worst in us. It has turned around the lives of famous theologians like Augustine and Luther. It continues to inspire people to live God-filled lives. It has also been used to justify unwise ecological practices, subjugation of women and people of color, too many wars and an anti-science world view.

For the last 18 years, I have served both the church and academia. I have challenged both groups to look deeper at their values through film, fiction, service and thoughtful reflection. I agree with founder of Western philosophy, Socrates when he said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." I also agree with the 20th century philosopher Gandhi who challenged us to "Be the change you want to see." Reflective action and active reflection is where I live.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF JO ANNE DYSON

Life is an adventure, not a fairytale.

I recently read the above words in the devotional guide I use and they resonated with me. Fairytales are not without some dangers, villains, challenges, but they tend to end on the note *and they lived happily ever after*. The implication is that if you can survive a challenging moment, the end will be good and easy and maybe even boring. In my experience, life doesn't promise that. Neither does God. In the last four years, I have served as a hospice chaplain. I have been privileged to hear the stories of hundreds of patients. I have gotten a glimpse of the promises and pleasures and pain of aging. None of the ends were fairy tales, but some were better than others. What I saw was that those who died best had lived their lives with a sense of gratitude and intentionality. One woman said to me, "I am not eager to have my life end, but I am ready. I completed my bucket list 6 months ago. I have done everything I wanted to do." I aspire to say that when my time comes.

I am the oldest of 3 kids. My dad was in the Army when I was born during the middle of a hurricane in NJ. My family was always going to church on Sundays. While I had a great uncle who was a United Methodist minister, the UMC lost my dad when they brought a pledge card, not for money, but for a promise not to ever drink alcohol. My dad was really surprised. "I can't promise that," he told the visitors. "Oh you don't have to follow it, you just had to sign it," he was told. "I will not sign anything that I don't intend to do," he said. His integrity of being a person of his word influences me greatly.

My family joined a Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Tennessee and later a PCUS church. One of the women who had a short but impactful direction on my life was a missionary from what was then Tanzania. Her stories, her commitment, her creative Sunday School teaching made me want to go into ministry. Back in that time, women were not ordained as

clergy but I would still practice the liturgy of communion and create my own children's sermon/devotional. I was so proud when the associate pastor had me as a fourth grader do the children's sermon at the evening service.

My junior high years were my agnostic years. I still attended church but was a handful for my parents. Being cool, having a boyfriend, being involved in every club at my school was far more important to me. It was in High School when things changed. A guy I liked was really into this youth ranch where kids would gather to sing songs and pray every Saturday afternoon. I went hoping to catch his eye and get a date afterwards. God had other plans. I was blown away by kids talking to God like God was a friend and not a greatly removed Judge/King/Ruler. It was a turning point in my faith life. I became interested in scripture, prayer, learning more. The church I was associated with at that time was very into social justice issues particularly addressing racism. Adults read and discussed Martin Luther King's Letters from a Birmingham Jail. Our white youth group partnered with a black youth group and we created a float for the Martin Luther King parade. There were "dialogues" on movies like "Guess Who is Coming to Dinner" and interracial dating. My high school had riots over race issues and we talked about how to help create a better climate for all.

In college, I began to be interested in a more academic understanding of scripture. I majored in Bible and Religion with a minor in philosophy. Existentialism was the focus of my senior project. I felt called to go into full time ministry and attended seminary. My time at Union Theological Seminary whetted my appetite for more depth in understanding of the Hebrew Bible. I won a faculty fellowship and after 8 years in the parish as an associate, I went back to Union and did grad study in Wisdom Literature focusing on Proverbs 1-9 and 31. I did several chapters on the dissertation while I was trying to get pregnant. I became pregnant with my daughter. I found I could not do the job I wanted as a mom and the demands of disciplined academic writing so I withdrew from the Ph D program. I went back to working in a church part time and teaching part

time in philosophy. The flexibility enabled me to be the kind of parent and pastor and professor I wanted to be.

I find my spirituality today is focused on daily listing of my 5 gratitudes, reading devotional guide and journaling. I really have enjoyed book clubs in the past that took on books like The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, a Jew- Three Women Search for Understanding, The Shack, Three Cups of Tea, and The Secret Life of Bees. I also enjoy looking for themes of faith and philosophy in films. I have done sermon series on that in the past. I enjoy creating youth retreats on themes and did 6-7 for a previous church. My best was using the 4 elements of nature: earth, air, water, and fire. Earth was a Native based spirituality with understanding the importance of animals in teaching us the meaning and value creation. Air focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Fire picked up on a Youth Triennium theme of fires that warm and fires that destroy with clips from many movies at time (Hunger Games, Lord of Rings, Twilight series). Water had water based scriptural stories (Flood, crossing Red Sea, Jesus calming the stormy water, and baptism).

A few years ago, I did a service learning trip to South Africa. I worked with Muslims and a Christian preschool program. I learned about apartheid and Truth and Reconciliation commission under Bishop Tutu. That trip changed me in so many ways. I think African spirituality is more communally based and serves a corrective for our American individuality. One sadness of working three jobs has been I could not be more involved in the Zimbabwe exchanges that Denver Presbytery has going. I always wished I could take a month to do the exchange that was part of that partnership.

I did get to do a youth exchange with Japan as part of a Sister City Program in Broomfield. That was enlightening and deepened my appreciation of Japanese culture. I hope I will find in Ocala and in my new presbytery a chance for international exchanges and interfaith understanding.

Proposed Terms of Call
The Rev. Ms. Jo Anne Dyson

• Cash Salary	\$23,200.00
• Housing Allowance	\$34,800.00
Total Effective Salary	\$58,000.00
• Continuing Education	(\$1,600.00)*
• Automobile Allowance (@ IRS Rate)	(\$3,000.00)*
• Professional Expenses (phone and other)	(\$1,200.00)*
• Pension Major Medical	\$14,500.00
• Pension and Disability	\$6,960.00
• Dental insurance	\$1,168.44
• Social Security Allowance – 50%	\$4,437.00
Total Monetary Compensation	\$90,865.44

*These are maximum yearly amounts for reimbursable expenses.

- **Four weeks paid vacation per year**
- **Two weeks paid study leave per year**