

As the song goes, “we are building up a new world [and] we must be strong and courageous.” As a Christian centered on the words of Micah 6:8 and committed to service to humanity, I am compelled to facilitate and foster justice in love, show mercy, and honor G*d in all that I do. My Iliff education transformed me and encouraged the blossoming of the Sacred Music Theologian that’s always been within me, and empowered me to imagine, see, and engage with the world unlearning the paradigm of “power over [others]” and replacing it with “power with [others].”

First and foremost, I am a Singing Activist and Sacred Music Theologian who has a Master of Divinity, and I would not be here without the village that surrounded me throughout my theological journey. And thus, with an attitude of Eternal gratitude, I would like to thank the faculty of Iliff School of Theology for always seeing the best in me and voting me as the 2021 Master Student of the Year. Specifically, I wish to thank again, Dr. Eunjoo Kim and Dr. Cathie Kelsey for selecting me for the The Fellowship Seminarian Award.

To that end, across the last year, I have been able to embody the sacred music that is influenced by the spirituals and entangled with the values of ministry and the calling of service. This continues to show up through me in multiple ways. In addition to being a candidate for Deacon and Minister of Music and Worship at Park Hill UMC¹, I am also a Board member of the Denver Children’s Choir² and a member of the Spirituals Project at the University of Denver’s Lamont School of Music.³ I find it important to remain close to not only the Methodist family, but also be in connection interdenominationally⁴ and with other faith groups such as the Jewish and Islamic communities. As founder and director of the annual *Heart for the Holy-Days*⁵, the

¹ [Park Hill UMC](#)

² [Denver Children's Choir](#)

³ Performance Director – 2013-2016 - [Spirituals Project - DU](#)

⁴ Worship Leader for 2021 - [Lutheran Theological Conference 2021 - Involvement](#)

⁵ [A Heart for the Holy-Days - 5th Annual Concert & Report](#)

work continues to be that of bringing diverse people together united in the spirit of giving to those truly in need by living out a legacy of love for humanity.

However, in the midst of the COVID pandemic, like many, I was challenged as a worship leader. As worship services moved to online format, I felt there was an inability to “feel the presence” of the congregants in person, and this made me feel less effective in my ministry. I questioned my continuing ability to meet the spiritual needs of the worshipers. Feeling as though I was simply going through the motion of worship, Dr. Kelsey, Dean of the Chapel at Iliff School of Theology, affirmed for me that I am gifted in allowing the Spirit of God to guide me in worship. “You must believe,” she continued, “that our omnipotent and omniscient God can be accessed anywhere and that the Spirit can move and be felt in the ZOOM Room.” This defining moment was further affirmed—and continues to be affirmed—as I read the comments that parishioners express, via chat, as they attend virtual worship.

At this point, I don’t believe that church—as I’ve known it for the past 50 years—will ever be the same again. I am constantly updating my understanding of church, God, ministry, and my calling. My goal is to remain flexible and open. There is no one way to do church. The exciting thing is that we are freer to see God in our daily lives and the Spirit is not contained just to a building.

Ministry, “the call to serve” is not always convenient, but it continues to be necessary. One recurring circumstance that has highlighted a new set of needs for me is that of attending to bereaved families. In my limited experience, families have needed all three of my gifts for performing the memorials: eulogist, officiant, and musician, to be used within the same service. Holding all these roles in intention is doable, but a challenge. I am hopeful to be able to

strengthen my ability, through practice, to pay the kind of attention to each role so that each is done with its own integrity, focus, and completeness.

All in all, Iliff's impact on my formation as a thinker and minister continues to be felt. By way of the spirit of NAPAS and Dr. Vincent G. Harding, who was the champion of peace, it deposited within me a relentless drive to work with the music but also [to determine] how the music is going to move social justice forward. That is exciting. This brings back singing activism and a return to the sacredness of the music that we sing. It's not just music but also a ministry, and both have the power to heal the hurt and convict persons that we would say could never be convicted.

I might add that this also includes The Iliff School of Theology. As a communal body, the students that move through challenge and also convict Iliff to uphold and reexamine their own values. "The charge to the church is to rethink and reimagine what we should become and that is messengers of belonging through the joy of gathering," said theologian Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings. What this means to me, through the words of sacred music, is that we must be a people offering hope to "work for justice, where all hate and vengeance cease, [and] sing a new world into being, raising the harmonies of peace."