



*Spirituality. Community.  
Diversity. Justice. Peace.*

**GOOD NEWS TO SHARE FROM THE SEARCH COMMITTEE - PLEASE READ!**

September 19, 2023

Dear Members and Friends of Congregational UCC,

We are excited to report that the Search Committee is unanimously recommending an outstanding candidate to lead our church into the future. **We joyfully announce the Rev. Amelia Fulbright as our pastoral candidate!** In the scores of ministerial profiles (resumes) we read, the dozens of sermons we listened to, and the Statements of Faith we read, Amelia stood out from the very first time reading her profile and Statement of Faith. Following a very lengthy first interview, the synergy we felt reading her profile came to life. We deeply resonate with the way she translates her faith into living her life. Our committee felt an immediate connection with Amelia as she closely shares commonality with us in her theological perspectives, her passion for pastoral care, her commitment to social justice advocacy, and speaking truth to power in her prophetic preaching. Julie and Amelia were able to spend some time together during Amelia's visit to Greensboro recently, and Julie added her "wholehearted endorsement" of our recommendation.

Amelia was born in Zambia to Southern Baptist missionaries. From an early age, she was taught that God would be calling her to do something in a spiritual form. Her family moved from Zambia to North Carolina when she was a child to continue their work, and Amelia's parents still live in North Carolina. Fast forward to her college years at Wake Forest and, as she describes, she had to "deconstruct the faith of my childhood, and slowly reconstruct a form of Christian faith that made room for my intellect, my gay friends, and my emerging feminist perspective."

Amelia graduated from Wake Forest with a BA in World Religions and Spanish. She went on to attend and graduate in 2007 with an MDiv from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, with a focus on New Testament and pastoral care. Since 1902, Austin Seminary describes itself as forming "faith leaders and learners of any and no denominational affiliation."

Amelia was ordained by the First Baptist Church of Austin, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Denomination, and currently holds Privilege of Call in the South Central Conference by the SC Heart of Texas Association, United Church of Christ.

Amelia has been living in Austin, Texas, since graduation and currently lives there with her

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husband and two young children, Vivienne (age 8 ½) and George (age 4 ½). Her husband, Jonathan Zercher, works remotely for GoGuardian, an educational tech company and is able to work from any location in the country.

Amelia has worked as a chaplain in a men's correctional institution, a youth minister, a domestic violence counselor, and as Associate Pastor for Students at University Baptist Church in Austin. In 2013, she became the founding Minister and Executive Director of Labyrinth Progressive Student Ministry, the first open and affirming campus ministry at the University of Texas. Following seven years in leadership, Amelia turned the non-profit over to new leadership. She accepted a Designated Senior Pastor position at University Baptist Church and after almost two years, moved into a Transitional Pastor role for more than two years at Congregational Church of Austin, UCC, ending August 2023. Regarding her experience, one of Amelia's references shared, "Amelia has experience stepping into congregations after a long tenure from a settled pastor. She did it at UBC and CCA. Pastoral care is her superpower. She is proactive in offering care and support. She is able to hold space for all opinions and able to bring gentle, respectful confrontation when needed."

Amelia identifies as "unapologetically progressive (for better or worse)," an introvert, a consensus thinker, a deep listener, a lover of artistic expression and music. She loves good food, the beach, and kids, hers especially. She loves Bible Study with small groups and lots of interactive discussion. She loves creating a place where kids can flourish spiritually. Amelia values being known by her congregation and wants to live in her truths. She shared with us that she recently came out as bi-sexual and her reason for doing so is she wants to live authentically and into the person God created her to be. We found Amelia to be warm and genuine, thoughtful in her answers to our questions, humorous and relaxed, confident in her truth, and committed to a theology of inclusion, liberation, and care for creation. A colleague and reference shared about Amelia's social justice advocacy work, "She has been one of the leading pastors in the state in LGBTQIA+ and Reproductive Rights advocacy. She has testified at legislative hearings, written articles, and participated in speaking engagements."

We could go on and share with you another dozen reasons our committee is enthusiastically recommending Amelia as our pastoral candidate. Rather than read about her, we welcome you to participate in the candidating weekend described in previous eNews communications.

We will host an afternoon **Open House from 1pm to 4pm on Saturday, October 21st**, in the Fellowship Hall. This will be a time to meet Amelia and her family. **The next morning, October 22nd**, Amelia will preach and, following Worship, the members of the congregation will vote according to the process outlined in the Church By-Laws. We will be sharing more about Amelia in upcoming newsletters, as well as providing reminders around the candidating weekend plans.

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We truly could not have done the deep spiritual work required of this search and call process without the constant support and prayers so many of you consistently offered us. We are grateful and offer our thanks. As we prepare for our future, let us recall our rich history, embrace the energy of change, and look toward the opportunities we are presented to live into our faith.

With love and gratitude,

Robin Long (Chair)

Amber Alexander

Bill Guill

Clif Karnes

Lynn Wright-Kernodle



