

One of the greatest embarrassments of my life came as a 12-year-old soloist during one Christmas Eve service. I stood there blankly, forgetting the second stanza of “Silent Night.” It mortified me because, of all people, I should’ve known “Silent Night.” After all, I was the Church Kid; I served as an acolyte, regular soloist, and cantor for my small Lutheran congregation. My life was punctuated by bell choir rehearsal, sleep-away church camp, VBS, lock-ins, confirmation classes, and volunteering in a kitchen for the unhoused.

Maybe all that “churchy activity” made me feel I was called to ministry early on. Although that sense of call, simultaneously helped and hindered by several well-meaning pastors’ insistence that I was “going to become a pastor one day,” shifted as a teenager. I went from being the Church Kid to the Theatre Kid. I performed in community theatre productions, high school musicals, and local choirs. I attended a rigorous conservatory program at Southern Methodist University and came away with an appreciation for deep reading, dramaturgy, directing, and writing. I learned to handle great and complex texts with care.

While I devoted myself to the theatre, Christ never abandoned me. I attended whatever hip, reformed-evangelical church service I could find. I found a verdant Christian community at the local coffee shop where my then-girlfriend, now-wife, worked. At Crooked Tree Coffee Shop, you could chance upon lively discussions about justification, predestination, the authority of the Church, the latest papal encyclicals, Hans Urs Von Balthazar, or if improving your coffee palate was a sanctifying act. Through the evangelization of several thoughtful Catholics and Anglicans, I longed for a church more connected to tradition and determined to revisit my Lutheran roots.

In 2017, my wife and I moved to New York City to pursue our careers as theatre artists. I wanted to visit St. John the Evangelist, the Lutheran church once pastored by Richard John Neuhaus of “First Things.” It stirred my heart to see their commitment to the neighborhood. An active food pantry, fair

housing advocacy, and school supply drives for local kids—the difference this congregation of about 50 made was undeniable. I dedicated myself to serving there as a lay leader, a treasurer, and an occasional preacher. The community I found there was a rock for us during my Thyroid Cancer diagnosis and treatment and the loss of my father-in-law. At St. John, I found a mentor in the Rev. Dr. John Nunes. We'd stay late talking about the Theology of the Cross, Arthur Carl Piepkorn, how to overcome the challenges of leading such a diverse church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, and our favorite Bob Marley songs. Rev. Nunes led my diaconal training, counseled me as I led adult bible studies, and urged me to discern if I was called to full-time ministry.

At long last, I sense I am now being called to Word and Sacrament ministry. After divinity school, I plan to pastor a parish, fostering liturgical worship and teaching my parish to follow the example of Christ and the Saints. I'd also hope to extend my work beyond the parish context by engaging in modern philosophical conversation, strengthening local communities, bolstering multi-ethnic churches, introducing people to sacramental and reformation theology, and furthering ecumenical dialogue, especially between Catholics and Lutherans.

Yale Divinity School is uniquely well-suited to help me achieve my vocational goals. While its reputation for academic rigor is attractive to me, if admitted to YDS, I hope to also benefit from the unparalleled musical and liturgical training available through the Institute of Sacred Music. Since I am interested in promoting diversity in the Lutheran Church, the Institute's offerings in both traditional liturgical music and music of the Black Church are exciting to me. I also hope to avail myself of the spiritual formation opportunities that Berkeley Divinity School offers, like the Annand Program, daily chapel, and weekly vespers. My education will only be enhanced, challenged, and stretched in an ecumenical environment. Perhaps I could even find time to commit "Silent Night" to memory once and for all.