

## **Admit One**

Sometimes all it takes is an invitation.

I have been invited to try things I never knew existed only to realize it's exactly what I needed. Sometimes it's been fun things, like trying the restaurant Indian Dhaba in Edon, OH, just up the road. Now it's part of my Easter tradition to take my children there after our Easter worship service. Sometimes it's been an invitation to do something about a relationship. My mother, knowing that the relationship I had with some family members was unhealthy, invited me to simply let go of those relationships, without malice. Sometimes it's an invitation to check out a new church. My invitation story goes back to 2010.

In 2010 my ex-husband, my four children (all under 5-years-old), our two large dogs, and I moved to Fort Wayne, IN. Getting the house sorted and navigating a new city took up a lot of our time and made our new place feel like home. The next priority was finding two other kinds of homes: a preschool and a church. We landed at a two-for-one combo in February, enrolling our oldest in a preschool at a Methodist church where we started attending Sunday services. The church ended up not feeling like home, even though the preschool did.

The next year, the preschool changed some policies and we were again on the home search for both faith and family. A friend I had made through the Methodist preschool invited me to come along to check out the nursery school at Peace UCC in southwest Fort Wayne. We loved it. The emphasis on play and meeting children where they were won us over. My friend and I enrolled. And once we had a good vibe about the preschool, we decided to check out the church. They won us over, too.

Their pastor invited me to chat with her about what our expectations were for a meaningful church experience. Their children's church leaders invited us and our children to learn about the Sunday school curriculum and meet other families. Their church leadership encouraged me when I asked if they would let me give children's messages on Sundays. A lay member who was also on our Northeast Association's Committee on Ministry (who, among other things, identify and encourage people to explore a call to ministry) invited me to become a licensed minister. My seminary invited me to take advantage of scholarship money. Our conference minister invited me to check out a church in Angola, IN, who was looking for a new pastor. First Congregational invited me to be that pastor in 2020. Within 10 years of moving to Fort Wayne I experienced an incredible number of invitations that influenced and improved the course of my life. But none of that would have happened if a

number of people hadn't first invited me to get to know the places, people, and programs they already knew and loved.

It was like getting a ticket to my own life, an "admit one" to new communities of faith and family. I've made it a priority to offer the same invitation and welcome to our church community. And we, not just here in Angola, but in our Northeast Association and our Indiana-Kentucky Conference and our United Church of Christ denomination, have that same joy and responsibility to offer admission tickets of our own.

Someone you know is wondering where they will find their next church home, one that is anti-Christian nationalism, pro-LGBTQ+ lives and rights, pro-reproduction health and bodily autonomy, anti-Bible idolatry, and pro-forming a faith of one's own. You will never be responsible for saving souls; you are already responsible for inviting people to walk alongside one another as they figure out who Jesus is in their lives, to consider what justice means when it relates to the teachings of Jesus, and to experience a community of prayer that doesn't just hold a person in their thoughts but shows up when their hands and feet are needed most.

What are you waiting for? Admit one.

In joyful responsibility to Christ and community,

Pastor Nikki