

I was born and raised with my sister and brother in an upper middle class family in Saginaw, Michigan. My mother was German Lutheran and my father was Southern Baptist. My mother was the more religious one, so they compromised and attended a Presbyterian Church. In Sunday school I was taught the 23rd Psalm and John 3:16, said prayers at night, and sometimes sang myself to sleep with "Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart." By the time I was in junior high school my parents moved from the Presbyterian Church to a Congregational Church because of the retirement of their long-time minister. I was confirmed in the Congregational Church without much interest in religion, my heroes then were Henry David Thoreau and Albert Schweitzer.

After high school I went off to Albion College in Michigan where I was introduced to a larger view of life and politics, including speakers from the civil rights movement at our weekly chapel hour. After two years I transferred to University of Michigan to be with my high school girl friend. We participated in protests against the Vietnam War and tutored black grade school students. I graduated with a major in political science and about the same time my local draft board approved my request to be a conscientious objector to military service. My request did not include a belief in God, but I based it on the Golden Rule and other non-violent teachings of Jesus that I'd been raised in. I joined the Teacher Corps in order to fulfill my conscientious objector status--my internship was in an elementary school on the poor side of town in Zanesville, Ohio. Unfortunately it was not accepted as alternative service for conscientious objectors. So I left at the end of the school year and my girlfriend and I got married in the Congregational Church in Saginaw. I asked the minister not to include God in the wedding (but he did anyway).

Our marriage had a very rocky start, almost annulled, because my wife was still in another relationship unknown to me. We tried to make a go of it eventually and set off to the San Francisco Bay area in the summer of 1968. I found a job teaching in a free elementary school for underprivileged kids that met the criteria

for alternative service through a faith based agency. We soon chose our path for meaning and direction through the counter culture of California. My initial experiments with psychedelic drugs convinced me that I needed some way to live every day with more depth and awareness of life. I began a practice of Zen meditation through a teacher from the San Francisco Zen Center.

After a year and a half all of that way of life crumbled to ruins when my wife left me for another relationship. Desperate and broken-hearted, full of grief and loss, I hitchhiked up to Missoula where some close friends from California were living. As soon as I saw them it was obvious from their shining faces that they'd found the life we'd been searching for. They'd met up with childhood friends who were now a part of a little church called Community Covenant that was brimming with new life and drawing many young people from all over. My wounded heart was broken open to receive the amazing grace and abundant love of God like never before and I gave my whole self into that vibrant Christian family.

Within less than a year immersed in that new life, I felt a clear inner sense of call to be a pastor. I was thrilled with the thought that I was hearing from God. My pastor and others confirmed that direction for my life from what they'd seen in me. I returned to Saginaw to work in my dad's business for the summer to raise money for seminary. That time turned out to be a wonderful reconciliation for our relationship.

I was accepted at North Park Seminary, the Evangelical Covenant Church's seminary in Chicago. My wife came back to join me to see if we could reclaim our marriage, but as much as we both tried, it just wasn't working. Within a few months she returned to California and we agreed to divorce. Her leaving left me bereft again. After my experience of becoming a Christian I had hoped she would have a similar experience and we would finally be happily married. In the dark depths of my grief and loss, I found the presence of Christ below all of my pain holding me in love and grace and peace again. I rose up stronger in my faith that God would always be with me. The seminary community was very supportive. I loved my classes and the professors. Studying was so meaningful knowing that

this was preparation for my calling as a pastor. I was especially drawn to the life and theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and later Liberation Theology.

I returned in the summers to the Covenant Church in Missoula to share in the life and ministry there and then to do my internship year there as well. The church was growing in members (150 at the most) and in a community life through rich worship, discipleship, household groups and many ministries: a restaurant, a health food store, peace protests, homeless care, an elementary school, a counseling center, sponsoring immigrant families, mission trips, etc.

I led a group of singles entitled “the gift of being single” and by the end of the year most of us were married (including me, much to my surprise). Carol and I fell in love and with everyone’s blessing within three months were married and sent off for my last year of seminary. After graduation and ordination I became the associate pastor of the Covenant Church in Missoula. In the next two years Carol and I adopted two sons. We soon found that our youngest son was severely emotionally disturbed, a reality and relationship that challenged our family continually throughout his life.

I became deeply involved with the Covenant Church’s ministry with developmentally disabled adults on the model of the L’Arche homes. Carol and I and our young boys lived in the men’s group home along with Carol’s sister and husband. By the fifth year the responsibility of the group home, our growing and often troubled boys, and the demands of pastoral ministry in such an active church became too much for us to carry and we moved into our own home.

During those years the senior pastor made connections with other Covenant pastors for annual retreats and also formed bonds with other Christian communities through Jim Wallis of Sojourners. One of those relationships led us into the Palestinian Rights Campaign and I joined a mission trip to the Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Gaza during the first uprising. That first hand witness of the plight of the Palestinian people under the Israeli rule is something I will never forget.

The all-encompassing life of such a Christian community was both rich and challenging. As most of the singles got married and began families many of us church members were getting burned out. Our pastor, who was the founder of the renewal of the church in the late '60's left for ministry to Palestinians through the Middle East Council of Churches and I became the presiding pastor in a pastoral team of lay leaders. It wasn't long before conflicts over our identity and direction came to the surface. Some members saw us emphasizing the call for peace and justice in the world more than the call to evangelize the world. Others felt we were too conservative when it came to social issues. We recognized the equality of women in ministry, but many found changing the pronouns for the people of God and for God to be very upsetting and being open to LGBTQ folks was about to be our next issue.

It was an intense, agonizing year or so, for all of us. The vision of our community, relationships, and ministries began to break down. As the presiding pastor I sought to hold us together and often referred to the denomination's history of not dividing the church over such differences. The beginning of the Covenant denomination in America almost split over the practice of infant baptism of the Swedish Lutheran heritage or believer's baptism of the revival movement that gave birth to the Covenant. But, in an Annual Meeting the majority decision was that while this was a very important issue over baptism, it was more important not to divide the church, therefore both modes of baptism would be allowed and honored.

So as our church struggled internally with each other over modern issues, we did not attract new members and began to lose members from one side of the divide or the other until we were too small and exhausted to survive. At that time I felt like a failure as a pastor to church family and also as a father to my own family: our youngest with his intermittent explosive disorder and our oldest into rebellious behavior with drugs and alcohol.

The best I could do was to acknowledge that the church would not survive and that the time had come to give her a celebration of life service. So all the members we could find were invited to come back to mourn and remember and

give thanks for all the church meant to them. Community Covenant Church closed in 1993 on our centennial. I had served the church seventeen years and I was depleted.

The church gave me a generous parting gift of two month's pay for a summer of rest. I didn't know what was next, except that I wanted to stay in Missoula in some ministry, just not as a pastor. I believed that God would provide. And out of the blue by the end of the summer I was hired part-time as a hospice chaplain which was a perfect fit for me. I loved my work and the team I worked with and the freedom to care for my sons through their crises and troubles as well. With the closing of the church, Carol and I eventually found a church home and family at University Congregational Church.

Before long my hospice job became full-time. I found it to be a deeply enriching ministry experiencing God's presence and love and grace in all kinds of situations and people. It was such a much bigger world than the small church world I'd been living in. It was a privilege to be invited into that most vulnerable time of people's lives with a ministry of presence and compassion as a companion on their journey. It was sacred time listening to their life stories, officiating at memorials and funerals, and leading bereavement groups. Besides a full work week I was on-call every night and weekend as the only chaplain and with the on-going frightening dramas and traumas with our sons was just too much to carry. I had to admit it was time to resign as a hospice chaplain after sixteen years. My role had dominated my life to the point that my full name had become Tom King Hospice Chaplain.

I applied to the new Spiritual Direction Program at North Park Seminary having been receiving spiritual direction for a number of years. I felt I would enjoy doing that ministry myself. It was wonderful to be back at seminary grateful for my beginning, enjoying the luxury of study and retreat, and seeing the diversity in the student body. I received a certificate as a spiritual director in 2008.

I went on to provide spiritual direction for Covenant Pastors in Montana and for denominational pastoral retreats. University Congregational accepted me as a Minister of Formation to offer individual and group spiritual direction and help

lead twice a year contemplative retreats for a few years with Rev. Peter Shober. Peter and I also started a contemplative men's group and he invited me to share in various pastoral ministries such as worship, classes, and visitation. We also started a Spiritual Companions group of four ministers to share a contemplative/spiritual direction retreat three times a year which lasted about fifteen years. It was an immeasurable spiritual support for all of us.

When I left my hospice position eleven years ago, I began a three day a week chaplain position at Providence St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula. A year into that ministry our son died of suicide at the age of 32. He had attempted a couple of times before. It was devastating for us, but our families and friends surrounded us with love. The pastors Peter and Amy Carter and the members of University Congregational Church were phenomenal in their care for us, both through the ongoing struggles of his life and after his death. Our older son went into the alcohol rehab program in Billings right after his brother's memorial service and has led us through so many difficult times. He's been now sober three years.

My work as a hospital chaplain includes the Neuro-Behavior Inpatient Unit where both our sons received care. I lead a prayer group and a grief group that I named Loss and Found, drawing from my many and various losses that took me to the depth of my being where I found recovery and renewal. I also co-facilitate a men's cancer support group. Hospital work has been as rewarding as hospice work, only more variety, more patients, less time with them, but still a great team to work with and still accompanying people through life-changing times.

Also, the hospital has been where I often meet up with former members of the Covenant Church and my ministry with them continues. We find that the deep bond of Christian love was still there no matter now what side of the conflict we were on. It has been a blessing to have my work in similar ministries in the same town these many years. I have set dates to retire this last year or two, but then I've pushed the date several months further into the future. I do this because I still love my work and the people I work with. Maybe the end of this year, we'll see.

I still serve in various ways at UCC Missoula: helping with our monthly meal at the Poverello Center, serving as a Sunday liturgist, facilitating two men's weekly contemplative/sharing groups, and participating in the church's community care ministry and Montanans for Immigrant Justice.

I find these two favorite quotes ring clear and true for my spiritual journey. From Paula D'Arcy: "God comes to you disguised as your life." And from Richard Rohr: "Transformation happens through great suffering or great love or both." My spiritual journey has been that paschal mystery of death and resurrection, loss and found. I find God through my own story and stories from the poor and vulnerable who I am called to serve.

I've been called to a ministry of presence, listening, companioning, reconciling, caregiving, and honoring the Spirit of God with us and in us all. "No one has seen God, but if we love one another, God lives with us, and God's love makes us whole." (1st John 4:12) My ministry has never been solo; it's always been a life-giving partnership with others in church, in hospice, and in the hospital.

"I am with you" has been my sacred word for years in Centering Prayer. It is a prayer I speak to God and a word I hear from God. And more recently I use a quote attributed to St. Francis: "I am who I am in God's eyes, no more, no less." The highest calling, I believe, is to be myself, to be a child of God, and to be a sibling to all of God's children.

I feel deeply grateful and blessed to have had such good people in my life; all my beloved family (especially Carol, the love of my life) as well as so many dear friends and mentors, pastors and teachers and co-workers, patients and strangers and saints who have deepened my spiritual journey.

"How can I keep from singing!"

My Call to the United Church of Christ

In 2015 the Evangelical Covenant Church voted in their Annual Meeting, through delegates from all local churches, to revoke the good standing of any ordained Covenant minister who officiated at a same sex wedding. In the Annual Meeting this year the ECC voted to remove First Covenant Church in Minneapolis and their pastors from the denomination for their open welcome to LGBTQ persons to membership and all parts of church life including same sex marriage.

Last year I officiated at a same sex wedding for a nurse at Providence St Patrick Hospital. When she requested my services I understood I was crossing that line that the Covenant had established, but I decided to follow my heart and conscience and the grace of God. It was a simple and sacred time with only one witness, the mother of the nurse's spouse to be. I announced it to no one, until the news of this year's Annual Meeting of the ECC. I felt heartsick that the denomination that had been such a blessed gift in my life and had been known for living with differences, had done something never before in their history. I did not want to stay silent and hidden when others were removed for their actions. I reported the wedding to the ECC Pacific Northwest Conference Superintendent for my own integrity and for what I believe.

I met with the Superintendent and a leader in the Covenant Ministerium from Chicago to tell my story as they listened with respect and graciousness. The meeting ended with the question put to me: "As you reflect on this now, would you officiate for a same sex wedding in the future?" My answer was: "Yes, I probably would." They gave me a couple of weeks to consider my response, but by the next day I realized that the meeting was actually a gift of clarity. For while the Covenant has been my home church for many years of care and support, I have changed over the years as I moved into chaplaincy and the local UCC, and the Covenant made a definitive change this year to exclude those who identify as LGBTQ from full equality in the church.

My history as a Covenant pastor will always be with me, but the present reality is that I have been a part of UCC Missoula as an “Open and Affirming Church” for 25 years. In these years, not only have I been blessed in sharing life and ministry with those of LGBTQ identity, but I’ve been serving, in the name of God’s love, a wide range of people from all walks of life through hospice and the hospital. It’s clear to me that the church that is inclusive is the way of Christ and I believe that I belong in the United Church of Christ at this time in my spiritual journey and ministry.

ORDINATION PAPER

Thomas W. King

Jan. 4, 1978

2. What is your understanding of God? What is his relation to his creation?
What is the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity?

God is steadfast, present, vulnerable, loving, gentle, suffering, merciful, mighty, completely just, righteous, patient, compassionate, holy, mysterious, creative beyond all comprehension, wise, joyful, beautiful, Father/Son/Holy Spirit, Savior/Comforter/Judge, Lord of history/time/space/all creation and redemption, worthy of all praise, honor, glory, and power.

I imagine God enjoying all he has made and is making. I imagine God wounded by all sin, suffering, and death on the earth; torn by the corruption and destruction of people; pained by the death of whales and trees and rivers and air and soil and birds and bears. I see him acting in the Old and New Covenants for the restoration and renewal of the earth, the heavens, and all the inhabitants thereof.

The doctrine of the Trinity means:

- Perfect community -
- God has perfect communion within himself -
- Three persons in perfect loving union -
- God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit -
- Perfect fellowship -
- Each having clear identity of their own -
- Each doing nothing separate from one another -
- Perfect submission -
- Each in their own way revealing the others.

The doctrine of the Trinity means that such relationship of community is the essence of life.

3. What is the relationship of the Scriptures to your ministerial work?
How do you understand their authority? their inspiration?
How do you conceive the role of historical criticism with respect to the Scriptures?

The Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the bottom line, the eternal measure, the bedrock basis of life and ministry for me. In other words, they are the Word of God, "the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct." The Scriptures have divine authority, the authority of God's holy Word. They reveal his Lordship, his ways, his life and they reveal, discern, and judge the individual and corporate rebellion and God-playing of humanity and our need for salvation in every age. Written by human beings in certain times and places, but inspired by the eternal Spirit for that time and all time; read by human beings in certain times and places but illumined by the eternal Spirit for each particular time and place; this is my understanding the inspiration of the Scriptures. While it is helpful to know as much as possible about the historical setting for the words and acts of God in the life of his people, it is to be remembered that the purpose of scripture is to reveal our relationship with God. Ultimately all methods and interpretations are subject to the Word itself: "The word of God is alive and active, sharper than a two-edged sword."

4. How do you understand the new life in Christ? What is conversion?
What are the marks of growth and maturity for the Christian?

The new life in Christ is what God has done, reconciling us to himself through the life, death, resurrection of Jesus. It is the free gift of God's grace. Cut off from God through our own God-playing and thus dead in our own rebellion, God seeks us out in Jesus, his only Son, who took our sins upon himself in suffering and death - restoring our relationship with the Father, forgiving us, calling us into his family as sons and daughters, joint heirs. The new life in Christ is resurrection life, eternal life, God's own life and ministry offered to everyone.

Conversion is the acceptance of God's grace, his love, his forgiveness in Jesus Christ. It is repentance from our God-playing and participation in the spirit of this world. It is repentance to the Lordship of Jesus in every aspect of our lives. It is the reception and the release of his Spirit in our lives. It is identification with the life, death, resurrection of Jesus; following him as a disciple; and living in the life of his people, the church.

The marks of growth and maturity for the Christian: persevering faith and hope in the midst of death; a broken spirit and contrite heart; the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, self-control; and a willingness to be a servant in the Body of Christ and to the world.

5. Sketch the central features of your doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God
God the Son
Present in the beginning
All things made through him

Because of the Father's love, gave up his divine prerogatives, became incarnate
Conceived by the Holy Spirit
Born of the Virgin Mary

Fully God/Fully Human
Tempted as a human being, but knew no sin
Revelation of who God is/Revelation of who man was meant to be

Came to fulfill the law and the prophets
to make a new covenant
to save his people from their sins
to bind Satan
to heal
to free
to announce God's reign present and coming
to give his life for all people in all times
to forgive, redeem, unite all people in God

Was crucified by the religious and political power of his time, who represented
all humanity

Died and was buried

Was raised on the third day
 Was seen alive by his followers
 Ascended to the side of the Father
 Given the name above all names

Came to establish a new people, the church, his body
 to baptize in the Holy Spirit all those who believe

Continues to intercede on behalf of the world
 Will return one day as Lord of all to consummate his kingdom
 Will judge all individual, corporate, and spiritual beings.

6. Discuss the nature and the mission of the church.
 How do you assess the role of worship, fellowship, evangelism,
 education, and social action in the life of the church?

Nature of the church: God's family, sons and daughters, community
 Neither male nor female,
 Jew nor Greek,
 slave nor free,
 One in Christ
 A new people
 A pilgrim people
 A Spirit-filled people
 A blessed people
 The Body of Christ
 Submitted to Jesus as Lord
 Submitted to one another as brothers and sisters
 A foretaste of the kingdom of God.

Mission of the church: To be the church
 Pastoral and prophetic
 A light in the darkness
 Living under the Lordship of Jesus
 To give glory to God
 be his witnesses
 proclaim his Lordship
 follow him
 celebrate his life
 model his kingdom
 make disciples
 lay down our lives for one another and the world

Worship: Jesus is the light at the center.
 It is our first calling as his people to worship him,
 to give him our thanks and praise, because:
 He has lived, died, been raised from the dead,
 He has forgiven us,
 He has given us his Spirit,
 He is present in the midst of us,
 He reigns and he is Lord.
 Without worship we are not the church.
 Worship should fill all we say and do.
 We need to worship him.
 He is worthy of worship.

- Fellowship:** This is a gift from God; his Spirit making us one. Far deeper than social relationships, it is koinonia/community.. It is sharing our lives in common, serving one another, submitting ourselves to one another in the fear of Christ. It is collecting all parts of our lives (personal, social, economic, political) under the Spirit and the Word of God in the community of believers.
- Evangelism:** This is a ministry of God's Spirit, calling us as the church to share our experience of God's love for us and our love for one another with the world. Thus, it is to be both spontaneous and intentional. It is stirred by God's work in us and among us. It means hospitality to the stranger, no matter how different; it means love for the sinner, no matter how corrupt; it means care for the broken, no matter how shattered. It is a ministry of the whole body; a witness of the whole community which presents a living alternative in the midst of death.
- Education:** Again a ministry of God's Spirit, this too is much broader than we've realized before; it is the whole of the Christian life. All ages and all parts of our life need the standard of the Scriptures, as well as real life models. We need more than academic, isolated Bible studies; we need time to listen and follow the themes God is giving us for each stage of our pilgrimage as a community of believers. We need models, living epistles (both individual and corporate), as well as Bible studies, retreats, and topical seminars. We need to recall that relationship is central to Christian education.
- We, as children and adults, spent most of our waking hours in a non-Christian environment; we need to be equipped so as not to be conformed to the spirit of this world. Therefore, Christian education must go on at home, at school, on the job; not just "in church" but literally in the church - the community of believers. We need to provide extended family relationship, work situations, and schools submitted to the Lordship of Jesus and the values of his kingdom.
- Social Action:** The church is a corporate structure meant to be filled with God's Spirit living in the midst of the principalities and powers of the day (personal, social, political, economic) with prophetic discernment, prayer, and suffering love. We are to hold these fallen systems accountable, to expose them, to present a biblical alternative in the world. Widows, orphans, the poor, the oppressed, the elderly, the young and unborn, the handicapped, the powerless - these are God's concerns, and the church avoids them to her own judgment. We are to be a healing community, identified with broken people wherever they live.

7. What is your view of the Sacraments?

Baptism: I see this as an individual's identification with/participation in the life/death/resurrection of Jesus and therefore with the life and mission of his people, the church. While I lean towards believer's baptism and thus prefer the dedication of infants, I don't deny the grace of God at work in the Spirit of an infant in baptism when the parents are members of the believing community. In either case, adult or infant, baptism is a mystery of God's grace - an outward sign of an inward gift; an act of faithful obedience.

The Lord's Supper: I see this as individuals identifying and participating in the life/death/resurrection of Jesus and our life and mission together as his people, the church. The Lord's Supper is so central to the life of the believing community that it should be celebrated as often as the whole community gathers. It is a visible expression of God's grace offered to us in the present; it is a thanksgiving for his life given in atonement for our sins; it is an anticipation of his return to consummate his kingdom. So it is both a remembrance of the Last Supper and a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb. It means recognizing once again the costliness of grace and the life of God offered freely. It means discerning again that we are one body. It means once again being forgiven and forgiving; becoming whole and laying down our lives. It is a mystery - deep and true.

8. Share your thoughts concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit. How do you evaluate the so-called charismatic movements of our day?

Holy Spirit: Third Person of the Trinity
 Present from the beginning
 Involved in the creation
 Inspiration for the prophets, leaders, writers of scripture
 Jesus conceived by the Holy Spirit
 anointed/filled with the Holy Spirit
 led by the Holy Spirit
 revealed by the Holy Spirit
 Baptizer in the Holy Spirit
 Gift of God to the Church and to each believer
 Comforter/Advocate/Presence of God
 Convicts the world of sin
 Illuminates the Scriptures
 Leads us to Jesus

Having been involved in the so-called charismatic movement since my conversion in Missoula seven years ago, I have both positive and negative feelings as I evaluate what has happened and is happening under the general heading of charismatic renewal.

Positive: Every church is meant to be charismatic in the sense that the Spirit and the gifts are to be known and active for the building up of the Body of Christ. The church was meant to have God's own power for being his people, for living out his life. The charismatic movement has been a spontaneous renewal, a sovereign work of God that no one could have planned or predicted - touching every Protestant denomination as well as the Roman Catholic Church. For that I praise God. It has brought an experienced unity of the Spirit across denominational lines unlike all other attempts. It has meant a new immediacy and expectancy for the acts of God (such as prophecy and healing) in our time and among us. Too long the Spirit has been avoided and stifled by human programs, doctrinal disputes, and political control. Renewal of attention to the Spirit and his gifts has meant a renewal of worship and praise, spontaneous evangelism, fellowship and sense of community, and the life and ministry of the body. It means the institutionalized church can once again become the pilgrim church.

Negative: The charismatic movement in some times and places has gotten hung-up on displaying gifts and ministries, in God-bless-us clubs, in superficial witnessing, in other-worldly concerns of the times and signs of Jesus' return, in this-worldly concerns of a success syndrome and financial prosperity, in "spiritual" experiences and ministries of either seeing God or the devil around every corner. What is being avoided here is the nitty-gritty of life together and discipleship, involvement in the lives of the poor and broken, speaking to the realm of politics and economics, radically reorienting our lives to the kingdom of God/servanthood/the way of Jesus. The charismatic movement does not have a corner on such negative characteristics, of course.

9. What is your position with respect to the Christian hope and the consummation of the Kingdom?

While all the world - principalities and powers of death - deny with all their might such truth, the Christian hope is that God's way of love in Jesus Christ will one day be vindicated by God himself. Christians are thus called to live in that hope in the midst of death - not secretly hidden, but openly, with abandon, no matter how absurd such hope-lived-out may seem. We are called to live as reconciled, forgiven people - setting the oppressed free, healing the wounded, sacrificially but joyfully proclaiming the kingdom come and coming.

I believe that the kingdom inaugurated when Jesus came in the flesh will one day, only God knows when, be consummated when Jesus returns in glory. There will be salvation for all those who believe and have lived in the way of God; there will be judgment for all individuals and corporate beings who have denied his Lordship. New heavens and new earth will be created and God alone shall reign and be worshiped forevermore.

10. How do you feel about the ministry today? What are your aspirations as you enter the ordained ministry? Why have you chosen to serve within the "free church" tradition? What contribution do you believe the Covenant can make to the larger church?

We need the Spirit to restore biblical models of Christian community and ministry. The ministry needs to be free from the bondage of professionalism and given back to the people in the local church. The pastorate needs to be seen as but one of the gifts of ministry to the church - a ministry whose specialty is "equipping the saints for the work of the ministry." The pastorate needs to be seen again as a plural ministry whose members, both men and women, are not isolated professional ministers, but submitted brothers and sisters in the body. Real biblical authority needs to be returned to the pastorate - servant responsibility for leading the community.

My aspirations: to be a pastor to the people God has given me here for as long as he calls me; to be bold enough and ready to be used by the Spirit in the leadership of Community Covenant, Missoula, and in relationship to the Covenant and the larger church.

Why the "free church" tradition? It happened to be the one used by God to meet me. It is the one he has called me to serve in. I deeply believe that the simple confession that "Jesus is Lord and Savior, and the Bible is the Word of God ..." is good enough to call us to a most radical following of Jesus while allowing all the variety of ways of worship, fellowship, and ministry that God would want.

I thank God for the Covenant - for its openness and freedom, its avoidance of extremes and legalisms, its gentleness and ability to bend for people's sake, its sense of family.

11. What people, books, and/or experiences have been most influential in shaping your theological thought? At what points do you feel your theology is undergoing development, i.e. where are your "growing edges" and what directions do you see yourself moving?

The Gospels, Acts, Ephesians; Dan Simmons and the people and pilgrimage of Community Covenant, Missoula; Wesley Nelson, Fred Holmgren; the Holocaust, the Anabaptists; my divorce and remarriage; Jean Vanier, Mother Theresa, and Sojourner's Community in Washington, D.C. - these are the major influences on my theology. It is clear that, outside of the Bible, my theology has been influenced more by people and events than by books, which have mostly come along to confirm the Word and my experience rather than lead me. So my "growing edges" have to do experiences that I see ahead rather than ideas - experiences which will change more than my thinking - things like: moving to an inner-city church, working with the poor, caring for developmentally disabled people, becoming an adoptive and foster parent, and many more experiences in my life and the life of the church than I could anticipate.