

Introduction of Marshall Dunn as recipient of the Distinguished Alumnus Award

by Laura Jean Torgerson, Lee Hull Mose, and Yvonne Gilmore

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Laura Jean:

I have had the privilege of a “front row seat” to much of Marshall Dunn’s ministry.

Well, that’s not quite right. My mother Judy, my siblings, and I always sat in the *third* row at University Christian Church - and we almost always arrived about 15 minutes after the early service had begun. But I have certainly witnessed firsthand, from the third row in the sanctuary, while marching together outside the South African Embassy chanting “Apartheid no, Freedom yes!,” working side by side at church camp, sitting in a circle of care with other young ministers, and across many shared tables, I have seen the “beacon of goodness” that shines forth from Marshall.

It’s thanks to Marshall that I didn’t know until preaching class in seminary that you don’t have to start every sermon with a joke. AND it’s thanks to Marshall and the congregation of University Christian that I didn’t know until I left home in the late ‘90s how rare it was for a congregation to be one of these things, much less all of them: multi-racial; multi-generational; committed to serving neighbors in need; top givers to Week of Compassion; thriving.

Marshall’s wife Barbara is here with us today. (This is Marshall’s time, so if you want to know why she is amazing, see me after.) Several members of his church family and friends are here as well. His children, Kristen and Eric, are so proud of him and wish they could have been here today. The 8 minutes we have are not enough to even list his many accomplishments, but Kristen summed them up eloquently: “He truly has a passion for ministry in all of its aspects and at all levels. He’s a gifted speaker, organizational leader, and peace maker (with occasional as needed rabble rousing). He’s been dedicated to pastoral care and regularly made time for people who needed him - either in crisis or on an ongoing basis... he met people where they were when they needed him. He loved every member of his congregations, and they felt it.”

We felt it. I felt it.

Lee:

When I was in my first call, in the Capital Area region, Marshall, who was just recently retired from University, convened a small group of young pastors, most of us just out of divinity school and most in our first formal ministry roles. We got together once a month or

so, went on retreat together, I think – the details are hazy now, but what I remember is that that group was such a safe space.

Marshall could have played the role of veteran minister, the mentor who shared wisdom and told how it all should be done. And he did share lots of wisdom – but mostly he just created a space for us to be together, to form friendships with each other – that’s when Laura Jean and I become friends, even though we’d known each other in Chicago – to share joys and struggles of church life. I am sure I’m not the only one for whom that group was a lifesaver in our lives in those years.

I heard Marshall say once that ministry is one of the last great generalist professions; you have to know something about a lot of things; you have to know a little bit of Hebrew and a little bit of Greek and a little bit about church history and theology and also about organizational leadership and you have to know how to plunge a toilet and how to say a prayer at the bedside of a dying church member, and sometimes you have to do all those things in one day. That has always appealed to me about ministry.

And Marshall embodied that so well – not just in the 39 years he spent serving University Church, but also in that he served all the expressions of the church, in all kinds of ways. When what was needed was someone to run the young adult camp, Marshall was there. When DDH needed a board member, Marshall was there. After his retirement, when a congregation needed an interim associate minister for a few months, Marshall was there. When the OGMP needed someone to serve along Sharon Watkins in a transitional time, Marshall was there. Marshall knew the call to ministry wasn’t about any one way of being church, but about serving the church in so many ways.

Yvonne:

(A summary of Yvonne’s remarks.) Justice orders Marshall’s lived relations. It’s not a platitude for Marshall but the foundation and the fruit of his relations...as a beachgoer in Chicago, as a Pastor, as a Camp Director. Yvonne was one of his campers, and so was her daughter. Marshall is a practitioner and champion of theological education.

Lee:

One of the greatest gifts Marshall has given the church has been in the way he has continued his ministry after his retirement. And not just in all the ways he’s served the wider church, but also in the way he has modeled being a pastor emeritus at University Christian Church, which he’s done with the same pastoral graciousness that he exudes in all parts of his life.

If you've ever even had a conversation with Marshall, you know what I mean: he embodies pastoral presence; He wants the best for you, cares about you, and holds all that dear.

if you're in the same room with him, he's your pastor.

Laura Jean:

I want to close with two more things that make Marshall special. Marshall was my pastor for over 20 years, but he was my mother's pastor for 31 years and 3 months. Judy Torgerson was a keen observer. I knew that Marshall valued holding our congregation together through difference and conflict. But it was my mother who pointed out to me a really powerful practice that helped make this possible. Whenever there was a choice to be made, even a small one, he made a point of including people who had ended up in the minority or on the "losing" side. She noticed that if the Sunday School class he co-led voted on which book to study next, soon after the vote, he made a point to affirm a contribution of that person who had really wanted to read Judges instead of John. It was one of so many ways that Marshall has led with love.

And finally, there was a sermon that Marshall preached sometime in my youth that really stuck with me. I remember learning from him that Barnabas means "son of encouragement," and hearing how his father, John Dunn, also a Disciples pastor, had been a Barnabas for him. Marshall, you have been my Barnabas, a faithful encourager, and it is so far from just me -- you have been a Barnabas for generations of youth, for members of congregations in Chicago, Blue Island, Hyattsville, Mount Rainier, for Sharon Watkins as General Minister and president, for your colleagues in ministry, for Disciples Divinity House, and through those and even more ways, you are a beacon and a blessing to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and to the world that God loves.