

The Reverend Donna Frischknecht Jackson

Faith Journey/Bio

I grew up in a Northern New Jersey, middle-class family active in a Congregational church. Yet my first sense of God's call was on a family trip to Switzerland. While in the Alps, I came across a stone chapel. To a seven year old, its resemblance to a playhouse was intriguing. I entered and the deafening silence and simplistic beauty that greeted me kept me sitting quietly on a wooden bench. I remember sensing something powerful that then I could not name. I now know it was God. After that experience I hounded my father to build me a play chapel!

As a child and into my teen years, that sense of knowing God was my constant companion continued. I often found solace talking to God about my sadness over other children making fun of my disabled older brother.

In high school, I decided I no longer wanted to become a missionary as I was thinking about, but set my sights on a fashion journalism career. I enrolled in NYC's Fashion Institute of Technology. God, though, still had His hand on me. During my first semester, I was very anxious about the "what if's" in my future. One day when I arrived on campus the Gideon's were on the corner and I accepted a free pocket Bible. Later that day, I opened it up randomly and read Jesus' words "do not worry about tomorrow." That little Bible was in my backpack during my time at FIT.

Even during my secular career, I can see how God was molding me to serve the church. It was during my time at a fine jewelry trade magazine that I honed my writing and public speaking skills. It was also trips to the diamond mines of Africa and the gem factories of Bangkok that awakened my desire to write about the poverty I witnessed rather than the sparkling gems. I began going back to church and began feeling a divine dissatisfaction with my career. I felt as if God was nudging me to use my secular talents for more.

Then another twist in my faith journey occurred when my boyfriend was killed in a jeep accident in Africa. His death and the many God moments I experienced soon after led me to take the leap of faith. I left my career as editor in chief and began preparing the journey into seminary. I graduated Princeton Theological in 2007. I was ordained that November by South Presbyterian Church, Bergenfield, NJ (Palisades Presbytery).

Soon after, God led me to a rural upstate New York church. This didn't make sense to my colleagues, but I felt a strong pull. I spent the next five-and-a-half years building up a ministry not only in terms of numbers, but more importantly, in faith, as a Spirit of hope infected all who came. And in God's goodness, my long time prayer was answered.

Ten years after my boyfriend's death, God introduced me to my husband. We married in 2011 in a ceremony that was a community celebration of answered prayers. After settling into our 18th century dream home in Vermont, God once again "nudged" me.

In 2013, we left for Dutchess County, NY, where I served a multid denominational church comprised of United Methodists, Reformed Church in America and Quakers. There I gained a new appreciation for our PC-USA connectional system. It was in this call that I also discovered that my heart was in small-church and rural ministry.

God, though, wasn't done with me yet in fine-tuning this new understanding of my passion for rural ministry. I was led to serve West Nottingham Presbyterian Church in Coloma, MD. There I became active in New Castle Presbytery, serving on Council and being part of its team to re-envision presbytery. During this time, I was supported and encouraged to dream big in terms of this growing desire to return to my rural ministry roots back north. In November 2016, I

left Maryland to return home to Vermont. I am currently experimenting with a new worshipping community while consulting and writing.

And so my faith journey continues and I look forward to the people and places and opportunities to serve God that God has waiting for me on my path.