

Chilson Hills Executive Ministry Team, Deacons and Chilson Family,

My name is Angela Miller, I am a Deacon candidate. I have been an active member of Chilson Hills Church since 2003 and I am requesting the blessing to become a vetted Deacon.

My current reflective scripture passage is 2 Timothy 2:1-13. This passage is taken from the letters that Paul writes to Timothy while he is imprisoned. He speaks of grace and encourages Timothy to remain steadfast in accepting his calling, while growing God's church (people).

As a creative spirit, I have studied the human condition and human behavior deeply. In my professional career and much of my adult life, I have allowed this to become my identity. Whether in spoken word or by music, I know in the most intimate part of me that God has blessed me as a storyteller. If I had to describe myself I might use the following words; Nurturer, Feeler, Listener, Advocate, Artist, Vocalist, Protector, Intuitive, Joyful, Partner, Mentor, One that uses humor to break the tension sometimes...(that last one is more than one word, but it still stands.)

There is hardly a time when I have had a friend in need that I haven't referred to my spirituality and relationship with God as a comfort and starting point. So, it is no surprise to some that I would feel a calling to be a leader in Ministry. Sharing the stories of scripture is captivating and full of wonder. After all, my faith has always been a foundation in my life and talking in front of a crowd doesn't scare me.

I *could* say that the first time I felt the nudge for Ministry was the first time that I was asked to give the sermon in the summer of 2018. After I preached that day, I was asked how I felt. I was afraid to admit how exhilarating it was. But if I'm to be completely honest, the first time I felt this nudge was almost 10 years earlier in January of 2008 when Pastor David Swink invited me to attend the Calvin College Worship Symposium with the Chilson Hills worship design team. After a day chock full of workshops, I sat in a giant auditorium filled with a thousand other people listening to a band known as The Brilliance and I had a genuine religious experience. I felt like God was talking to me through that music. The lyrics that still ring in my ear, "You heard the cry of our hearts and You came down, freely you gave us Your love, showing us how...May Your love cause us to open up our hearts...may Your light cause us to shine so bright that we bring hope into the dark...make me an instrument of Your peace, where there is hatred let me sow love, where there is darkness let me shine light...". I sat entranced and overwhelmed as tears rolled down my face, I mean full on ugly cry with snot and all, while Scott Runyon sat next to me. I knew that not just this music, but this message was resonating with me on a level that I couldn't even comprehend at the time.

It shook me to my core.

At that time I had already been a member of Chilson for about 5 years and had served in a number of different ministry teams other than Worship Design, (Choir, Nursery volunteer etc.) but something during that weekend had awakened within me, something was burning to do more. Since then I have remained an active member of Chilson, always taking baby steps

toward this calling within me. Worship Design Team, leading the Chilson Hills Agape Theatre (CHAT) group for over a decade and taking part in special services is where I found my niche, it's where my most known talents were. Then, I followed a calling to apply for a staff position in the church as Director of Worship and Music. I thrived in learning the ins and outs of what a Sunday morning worship service required, my experience in the theatre soared into action and I was in my glory. I was challenged with new responsibilities and made this position my form of worship. Every week with synergy, Pastor DJ and I would collaborate and create each service with the support of the worship design team. On Sunday's, I was getting a hands-on education and experience in leading worship. This includes but is not limited to reading scripture, song leading, conducting the choir(s) and facilitating prayer sometimes all in the same service.

Into my third year of this title, I was instrumental in successfully on-boarding a new Music Director. Outside of Chilson, I was volunteering and mentoring teenagers, finding ways to serve in other capacities. All the while, I was working as a staff member and filling all kinds of needed positions, I knew that I was capable of more than what I was doing. I knew that I wanted to do more but struggled to see how my role could grow beyond what I was doing. Through much prayer and conversation with DJ, we decided that since a majority of my experience and service was already acting in the capacity of a Deacon, I could officially pursue being a Deacon at Chilson.

I want to say that the relationships and connections that I have with people are quite genuinely the most essential part of my life. With that said, I was given the opportunity to choose mentors to help guide me through this process and so I chose fellow Deacons; Dave Otlewski and Nancy Runyon, two people who have played an active part in my faith journey. I have spent countless hours talking, singing and discerning with these two beautiful humans and I am forever grateful. As a matter of fact, I need to include that I would not have found the courage to pursue this calling without the constant support and encouragement from DJ. Truthfully, my list of mentors at Chilson is endless. What I have marveled and learned from this congregation is limitless. This church family has been with me and my family through the absolute darkest and most challenging times in my life. They have fed me, literally and figuratively. They have also been there celebrating and lifting me in love in my most joyous moments. In turn, I have walked through life with them as well. I have celebrated with them, I have sat with them in grief. I have offered comfort. I have buried friends.

Outside of church, Ann Traye and I had the privilege of working together at the Clerk's office back in 2008. This was when she was in the midst of her battle with skin cancer. I told her that her scars made her look like she had won a bar fight and she would laugh and laugh. We had a playful friendship and mostly, I just loved to make Ann laugh. One day out of nowhere, she told me that I was pregnant...before I even knew! About 8 months later Vincent Thomas was born. Ann's funeral was bittersweet for me, I knew that I would miss my friend but knowing that her and Ron would be reunited in Heaven was comforting.

A poignant moment that I will forever cherish was sitting with Jason Miller as he meticulously and with compassion, planned an advent service focusing on the light of God. I knew that our

time with him was precious as he battled brain cancer. He was so particular as he chose the scripture passages and each song. It was evident that he had an understanding about life, a clarity, that I have found only among those that are closest with the Holy Spirit. Within a few months, I had the honor and extremely difficult task of singing at his funeral.

A building does not make a church, the precious people that you connect with make the church. Countless times throughout the years, I have been someone that people have come to in times of struggle. Whether for advice or just an ear to listen. It is not lost on me what a privilege that is. I hold their trust with the utmost care.

At the end of 2019, I was on a clear path toward the completion of my Deacon training, I felt like I was making progress and then Covid shut down the world and halted my training. Without a second thought, I leapt at the opportunity to offer what I could to keep our congregation in touch. Teaching myself how to record vocals for songs and scripture passages, making videos for comic relief, traveling all over the community to drive past and smile and wave at our church members and even attempting to give a sermon to a camera. Doing what I could to serve and spread God's light, hope and love in a time that we all felt uncertain. Proving once more to all of us that God is not bound by any four walls.

And so here I am. After having the opportunity to preach multiple times now at Chilson and outside of Chilson, I can say without a doubt that I am being called to a life of Ministry. I'm not even sure I can articulate what exactly that means right now today. Even now, I get overwhelmed with emotion thinking about it. How exactly do you begin to describe the works of the Holy Spirit? I only know that this is a tug, a nudge that I can not *evade* any longer. I spent years avoiding it because in my head I couldn't wrap my brain around how I could possibly fit the mold of a woman in ministry.

Historically speaking, church leadership has always been of the male persuasion. In my studies, I've read many books written by women in ministry to try and get some kind of clarity. One of the books that has resonated with me is, *Jesus Feminist, An invitation to revisit the Bible's view of women*, by Sarah Bessey. This book dives into great depths of the vast history of women in the church and our evolution to leadership. Other books that have been powerful tools for me are; *Fierce, Free and Full of Fire* by Jen Hatmaker; *Cassandra Speaks, When women are the storytellers, the human story changes*, by Elizabeth Lesser. Women are capable and qualified to do more than only lead music and read scripture! In fact, Jesus looked to women for so many of His teachings!

As time has passed, I have identified this familiar nudge as more of a magnetic pull. I know in my soul that my calling for ministry does not end with Deaconship. What lies beyond that is something that I will spend much time discerning with God.

All this to say, I am a work in progress. I struggle with forgiveness and judgment. I spiral into letting the opinions of others determine my worth and capabilities. I constantly ask God to work on my heart. I question my value and ability to make a difference in this world, almost daily. I am

not perfect and I don't fit into any kind of mold. My beliefs are surrounded in love and acceptance because that is what Jesus taught and lived by. Jesus doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called. I have a wealth of life experience and a will to keep learning. My heart beats with the people at Chilson Hills Church and it would be not only a privilege but an honor to walk with them and serve as a Deacon.