



## 2016 Ohio Conference Annual Gathering

### Inspiring Storytellers

#### Rev. Michelle Torigian

Michelle is the pastor of St. Paul United Church of Christ, Old Blue Rock Road in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is the author of a number of articles on the UCC's New Sacred blog and Huffington Post Religion page, including "Between Childless and Childfree," a reflection for Mother's Day.



Torigian regularly posts her musings on being single in the church (in the feature "Single in the Sanctuary"), current events, justice issues, pop culture and theology at [www.michelleorigian.com](http://www.michelleorigian.com), and she is among the contributors to the RevGalBlogPals book, *There's a Woman in the Pulpit* (SkyLight Paths) with her essay "Always a Pastor, Never the Bride." She is the facilitator of the Facebook group "Single in the Sanctuary: Unmarried Progressive Christians & Friends."

**Her story in brief:** I am over 40, never-married and very observant of how singles, divorced, separated and widowed persons relate to the progressive Christian Church. As one will see in the video, I've experienced the feeling of marginalization in churches because of not fitting "traditional" family structures. Because of my experiences, I have been focusing part of my own ministry on unmarried persons and the Church.

My hope is to give a voice to those who have felt like outsiders due to their marital status. In recent months, I have begun a feature on my blog and a Facebook group called Single in the Sanctuary. I hope to write a book of the same name in the near future.

It isn't easy being a single person in the world... or in the sanctuary. But I've found a way in which I've turned my extended tenure as a single person into something positive for those who feel a bit alone from time to time.



#### Rev. Dan Smith

Dan is the pastor of Immanuel UCC St. Bernard in Cincinnati, which he calls "one of the most amazing churches in Ohio." He was born in Connersville, Indiana, just a short distance from St. Bernard. He views being at Immanuel as a welcomed homecoming. He graduated from Indiana University with two undergraduate degrees. Dan still loves Indiana University sports and loves to go to games, especially basketball. As for his theological education,

Dan received his Master's of Divinity from the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware Ohio. Dr. Dan also completed his Doctorate degree from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. His dissertation was centered on Racial Reconciliation, it was entitled, "A Tale of Two Cities Divided, In Search of Radical Reconciliation."

Dan's family is the heart of his life. His wife Debbie is an Occupational Therapist. She enjoys home decorating, the arts and just being with friends and family. They have four children: Kyle, Logan, Micah and Rebekah. Dan's hobbies include, music, playing drums and riding his motorcycle.

**His story in brief:** Bookworm Diner is a program that feeds the body, soul & spirit of everyone that walks through the door. We start by having a meal together, which helps in having open communication and getting to know our community better. Then we have a time of song and celebration, which opens our hearts to one another. After this we join in reading in groups and sharing our thoughts. Another vital part is when people from the community come in as guest readers, which involves our younger friends in this loving and exciting program.



### Ms. Joni Christian

Joni has been an out transgender activist for over 40 years. She is a member of The Church in Silver Lake in Ravenna, Ohio. As a Minister of Extravagant Welcome, Partners in Ministry of the Eastern Ohio Association/UCC has given her the opportunity to become fully involved in the life of the church. She loves singing, community theater, public speaking, facilitating workshops, advertising and promotion. This includes spiritual awakening, recovery, social outreach and meaningful fellowship. She also enjoys working on music/video projects to promote the power of love.

**Her story in brief:** Joni will share her experience of finding inclusion in the United Church of Christ as a transgender person; then, turning that story into a passion for welcoming ALL to God's love. Through music—especially a song titled "God of Love" — she has arrived at a new and different place. "It has given me a connection that I pass on whenever I am given the opportunity. It has become a prayer, a mantra and a personal connection to the God of my understanding, in a way that keeps me focused. The message is as powerful today as when I first heard it. God is a God of Love and not a god of hate. It has become my life's work. God is Still singing through my heart!"