

Dear Members and Friends of Packanack Community Church,

I have been eagerly awaiting the opportunity to introduce myself to you.

My name is Julia Bertalan, though I go by Juli (pronounced You-lee). Where do I begin? Well, how about at the beginning. I was born and raised in Toledo, Ohio. Both of my parents are Hungarian, so my Hungarian roots are an important part of my identity. My father was a Hungarian Reformed minister, serving UCC congregations, which meant I grew up with a unique, blended church experience.

After completing my undergraduate degree at Temple University in Philadelphia, I went straight to seminary, receiving my M. Div. from Union Theological Seminary in NYC. I felt a sense of call to ministry from an early age, although my clear calling to parish ministry did not come until my time in seminary during my field placement at a church in New Brunswick, NJ. After seminary, I moved to Hungary for a year to connect with family and study the language. Upon returning to the states, I returned to the Toledo area to complete my ordination process within the UCC and have served St. Peter's UCC in Millbury, Ohio as pastor since the fall of 2013.

My husband, Dylan Wilson, currently works in the countertop industry as an installer. He also dabbles in painting, woodworking and mandolin playing in his free time. We have three children, Alma (6), Janos (pronounced YAH-nohsh) (4) and Ima (pronounced EE-mah) (2). I like to describe them as my beautiful, joyful, handfuls. Music, art, food, and adventures sum up our family interests pretty accurately.

As the Church, we find ourselves in an interesting and trying time. Churches everywhere are going through a major shift right now. Many churches are shrinking, the culture around going to church has changed, and so many of our once tried and true ways of living in community and sharing the love of Christ are not as relevant these days to our ever changing world. And that was all true before the Covid pandemic.

Being a pastor during a time like this can be a bit scary and worrisome at times, but more often than not, I am filled with excitement over the opportunity to partner with all of you to discern the ways that our church community, will best live out the love of Christ in this world in new and relevant ways.

I am excited about the possibility of serving as your pastor because your calling to put God's love in motion outside of the walls of the sanctuary is what is needed in such a time as this. I look forward to partnering with you in this work as we step out together in courage to discover where God is calling us.

It has been an honor to get to know the members of the Transition Team and to begin to get to know PCC through them. I am inspired by your desire to expand relationships with the greater community, to more fully live out your Open and Affirming affirmation, your commitment to offering extravagant welcome, your outreach team and your desire to grow in outreach and I look forward to the opportunity to lead you and journey with you in these ministries while also striving to find the balance between sacred, nourishing traditions and newness and needed change. I am looking forward to getting to know each of your stories, passions, and callings as I begin my ministry with you.

With joyful blessings,

Rev. Juli Bertalan