



October 16, 2023

Dear HRP Challenge to Change Grants Committee,

When I graduated from seminary in 2020, I had no idea what type of ministry field I wanted to go into. I thought I wanted to work for a non-profit or perhaps experiment with chaplaincy. I thought for sure that parish ministry wasn't for me because I was worried I would immediately be labeled as a "Youth Minister" because of my age and gender. However, I had very few experiences actually working in parish ministry, so I thought before I completely ruled it out, I had to at least give it a chance. My seminary connected me with Rev. Dr. Paul Seelman who was looking for someone to serve as a Pastoral Resident at his church in Pelham, New York. It sounded like a neat area and Paul promised me the chance to serve in a variety of ways at the church, so I packed my bags and spent two days driving from Alabama to New York.

It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Despite completing my residency during COVID, I had more experiences and opportunities in my 20 months at Huguenot than I did in my 40 months of seminary. I learned how to preach, I officiated my first memorial service, I taught several book studies, I led the youth program, I cared for congregants, I practiced self care, and Paul even trusted me to solo pastor for a summer while he took some much overdue vacation time. It turns out that parish ministry was my calling all along. Even more to my surprise, I realized that caring for youth was one of my greatest gifts, and now I proudly claim the title of "Youth Minister" as the Associate Pastor for Youth and Families at Larchmont Avenue Church.

While the congregation of Huguenot was very influential in my decision to enter parish ministry, it was ultimately Paul's leadership that most impacted my decision. Paul was, and continues to be, one of the greatest mentors I've ever had. I learned so much from him, from how to address conflict to navigating change. Additionally, his family treated me like family while I was far from home and new to the area. Anyone who has the opportunity to serve as a Pastoral Resident under Paul's mentorship at Huguenot Memorial Church will leave as a stronger pastor and a better person.

Sincerely,

Anna Grace Claunch
Associate Pastor for Youth & Family Ministries
Larchmont Avenue Church