

Dear Community Church of Sebastopol Youth and Families,

I am beyond thrilled to be working with you this coming year as your Youth Group Coordinator. I already feel blessed by all of your presence and have good feelings about the year to come! I know I have met a number of you already, but for those who do not yet know me, let me share a little bit about myself. I grew up in Wisconsin (and yes, I do LOVE cheese) but was living in Michigan before moving out to the West Coast. I enjoy hiking and being in the outdoors so much so that I have brought the outdoors into my small apartment with a small vegetable garden and 30 houseplants. I also have a cat (Mara) who I brought to the United States with me from Kenya and a husky/lab mix puppy-at-heart (Marci) adopted from Ohio. I am in my third and final year of seminary at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley with the goal of becoming a pastor in the UCC, or just working forever in youth ministry (or both)!

I have been involved with youth ministry ever since I was considered a youth myself. The funny thing is, I never thought that I would be here in this position. I was very shy (invisible, almost) all through middle school and high school. One day, my youth pastor approached me and said, "Hey, I signed you up to be part of a youth drama team because I think you would be good at it." I thought she was crazy. Why would I, a shy person, do anything drama related? Turns out this drama team that she wanted me to be a part of would help lead a middle school retreat of 150 middle schoolers... I was terrified! But my youth pastor dragged me, nervous and shaking, all the way to Pilgrim Center (Wisconsin's version of Camp Caz), and I LOVED it. I have been hooked on youth ministry ever since. Because of my youth pastor's initial push, my life's journey took me to Kenya, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and India working with grassroots service organizations. I served on the Wisconsin Conference Youth Ministry team and organized middle school and high school retreats. Now, I am pursuing a degree in ministry with the goals of becoming a pastor.

I am dedicated to empowering YOU(th) to strive toward your greatest selves so you may be leaders of change in your own lives and communities. I hope that throughout this coming year, you all will find (or at least begin exploring) your own way of living out your life's greatest passions in service and love to yourself, the wider community, and to our Creator.

... and we will get this wondrous journey started with lunch on Launch Sunday September 9<sup>th</sup>!

Peace and blessings, Emily