

Meet Pastor Laura Ymker



I was born in a hospital in a town of less than a 1,000 people in southeast South Dakota and raised on a hog farm four miles away from that small town. But my skills aren't limited to working hogs or weeding carrot patches (the latter a dreaded punishment when we were grounded as teenagers), I've lived in eight states and participated in as many Christian traditions. Perhaps the furthest I've been culturally from my roots in South Dakota is when I lived in a high-rise on Wall Street (yes, *that* Wall Street) and worked in a gym in Noho. I love diversity and believe that diverse opinions, beliefs, and experiences make us stronger not weaker as a community.

The most memorable experience I've had of Holy Communion was when I was visiting a Presbyterian Church (USA) church plant that was meeting in the LGBTQ center in Manhattan. As a queer person who'd only been in church spaces where I had to hide my queerness and try to change it, it was shocking to receive the bread and wine from two men who were openly married to each other. We celebrated that we were part of the one body of Christ, broken and scattered over the earth yet connected through the Spirit, not less than or greater than each other or anyone else. It was a place where we could be seen without being shamed or ashamed. Many times when I receive communion, it's just something I'm doing because it's part of worship. This time it was a few moments that changed my life because it said I also was fully included.

A dozen years ago, after hearing a sermon on the "new heaven and new earth" of Revelation 21, I came home and wrote in my journal that when I lived on this new earth (during the afterlife), I wanted to live in Montana. It was my idea of heaven. The last three and a half years in Red Lodge haven't changed my mind. Give me the mountains, not a beach, even if it's -10 in the sunshine and there is two feet of snow on the ground. I'll be inside, drinking cocoa.

Should you be as excited to work with me as I am with you, I would be delighted to spend many years with you, fostering inclusive community, working toward justice for all, discovering who God is and who we are, and renewing our spirits in worship together.

In Christ's love,

Laura