



St. John United Church Of Christ Names Lawyer, Turned Pastor As New Minister

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WOOD RIVER - John Pawloski has been named as the new Pastor of St. John United Church of Christ in Wood River. After practicing law for over 30 years, Pastor Pawloski has decided to devote the majority of his working days to the ministry.



Although he will continue to practice law, he will spend most of his time working for the church. Pawloski has also been tapped to helm St. John UCC in Brighton, and he will split his time between both congregations.

“My memory isn’t as good as it used to be,” Pastor John jokes, “so I thought it best to pick two churches with a name I would not easily forget, and what is easier to remember than your own name?”. Pawloski entered Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves Missouri in September of 2015. Eden offers first-year students an opportunity to go to seminary tuition free. He still was not sure that it was something he would be able to do alongside working full-time as a trial lawyer. However, with classes offered in the evenings, and with an understanding faculty, he was able to make it through the

grinding three-year process. Pawloski could tell right away that this was something he would really enjoy doing.

“In many ways, seminary was as hard as law school. I do not regret going into the law, but when you get to my age, fifty-seven, you start asking yourself, what do I want to do with the rest of my life?

"Although law will remain a part of it, it feels like it is time to do the thing that God has been calling me to do for most of my life. I am a bit hard-headed, but I finally listened." Perhaps a poker buddy of the pastor said it best: "I know what you are trying to do . . . you have been a lawyer for twenty-five years . . . you are trying to save your soul!" "I really could not argue 2 with him, so I said, guilty as charged!" Pawloski chuckled.

Pastor Pawloski feels a call to do something different than what has usually been tried: to offer a counter-narrative to the Evangelical message of fire and damnation and its alignment with Christian Nationalism; and to make church fun (again)!

“It is disheartening to see the number of people who have been driven away from the church because they are divorced, or LGBTQIA, disabled, or mixed-race, etc. These people have not been made to feel welcome in the American Christian Church for the most part, and we openly welcome everyone at St. John UCC. Whether you are gay, straight, White, Black, etc. we have a spot for you in our church. And not just as an oddity, but welcome in every way. Come give us a shot to prove it to you.”

Pawloski believes very strongly that if you are using the Bible as a weapon, and not as a shield, you are following Jesus wrong. “My job is to encourage and grow the faith of people, not to convince them that they are a whisker away from burning in hell for all eternity.

"Worship should be fun. Worship should be a joyful celebration of the Good News. If your church worship looks more like a funeral dirge than a Spirit-filled gathering of those seeking Good News, we welcome you to St. John's United Church of Christ (UCC)."

Pastor John Pawloski has made a solemn promise to his congregation: that worship will be fun. To ensure each service allows for revelry, time is set aside each Sunday for what is called Godly Play. We take fun seriously. So what does he mean by fun? Have you ever worn 3-D sunglasses during church to help understand the Trinity as a three-dimensional deity? Ever held sparklers during a worship service to experience the spark and fire of Pentecost? What about trying a pebble-snatch like that depicted in the 1972 TV show Kung Fu as a means of understanding that true discipleship is a skill that must be honed? Has your pastor ever given a Hamilton-style rap that outlines the future of

your church? St. John UCC believes that these and other topics should be explored in a lively, entertaining way.

"The Bible is explored in new, different, and progressive ways to imbue new life into sacred texts," he said. "The context of these readings is examined in a way that explores a meaning that is relevant to modern lives. "At St. John, we love to laugh. And sing. And sometimes cry. We are a small church family that enjoys each other's company and is thrilled to meet new visitors or welcome back old friends. We sing old, familiar hymns, but tackle contemporary issues ripped from today's headlines. Once a month, we have conversations in lieu of sermons. We make time to meditate and pray. We support our community and missions around the world."

All are welcome to worship at 9 a.m. each Sunday at the corner of Sixth and Penning Streets in Wood River, Illinois. Pastor John Pawloski, JD, M.Div.