

Rev. Rebecca Dunger Peak

I grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis, rooted in three generations of faith at Vinita Park United Methodist Church. My earliest memories of worship — standing on the pew beside my grandmother, her finger tracing the hymn's lyrics so I could sing along — stirred something in my soul that never left me. (A fun footnote: I posted my best softball batting average in 1981 — the year after breaking my neck. A required cervical collar, it turns out, is excellent for your stance.)

I'm a graduate of Pattonville High School and earned a B.A. in Communications-Media with a minor in Classical Studies from what is now Truman State University. After graduation in 1992, I worked as a design editor at the Suburban Newspapers of Greater St. Louis. But by Spring 1994, I could no longer outrun a call to ministry I'd felt since childhood. For years I'd buried it, convinced God couldn't possibly be calling a woman to pastor. Meeting Bishop Ann B. Sherer-Simpson changed that. She preached at my home church, we talked, and she became an early champion of my call.

My husband and colleague in ministry, Rev. Clayton Peak, and I began the ordination process together — becoming the first clergy couple to enter Perkins School of Theology at SMU simultaneously in 1995. We were jointly awarded the Hoyt Hickman Award for Liturgical Scholarship and Practice. My formation also

included a student appointment in rural Bryson, TX (population 579, vastly outnumbered by Black Angus cattle) and a residency in Clinical Pastoral Education at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital and Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

We returned to Missouri in 2000, and together we've served United Methodist congregations across Clark, Marion, Callaway, and Clay Counties. Each appointment has deepened my conviction that the church exists for its community, not itself.

At Park UMC in Hannibal, we went M.I.A. — *Mission in Action* — on fifth Sundays, fanning out across town to serve alongside ministry partners and local businesses. We adopted an at-risk elementary school and our neighbors at the Hannibal Fire Department. I also served on the boards of FACT (Families and Communities Together), ASAP (Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention), and HAYS (Hannibal Alliance for Youth Success), and helped found the NEMO Faith-Based Initiatives network.

In Fulton, I had the privilege of serving both St. James, a historically Black congregation, and Court Street, a historically Anglo congregation — a partnership that bore real fruit. A Lenten study on race and community listening led us to address the local food desert



At the 2026 BEYOND Conference.



Clayton and I making the resurrection real through shared Easter Sunday mission work at the Food Pantry @ Avondale UMC.

together, launching a shared food pantry at Court Street. Later, when a fitness center closed in a building the congregation owned, we converted a classroom into *Mission Fit* — open three mornings a week for community health programming alongside the County Health Department's Walk with Ease program. I also served on the board of CARDV (Coalition Against Rape and Domestic Violence) and the Kiwanis Club of Fulton.

Perhaps my favorite chapter: in 2019, my Presbyterian, Disciples of Christ, and Nazarene colleagues and I asked a simple question — what if we stopped competing in youth ministry and started collaborating? The answer became The Rock: A Community Youth Group, housed in Court Street's historic rock building. What began with 6 students grew to a high of 36 and an average of 26. Word spread fast enough that other denominations began asking about replicating the model.

I currently serve as Secretary of the Missouri Annual Conference and have been honored to serve on district committees and conference teams throughout my ministry.

Off the clock, I'm a retired competitive powerlifter who still trains — now working within the bounds of recovery from multiple surgeries in 2025. I discovered The Conqueror Challenges during rehabilitation and

highly recommend them. I find renewal in art, music, dabbling in photography, and the roar of a live crowd — I'm a lifelong St. Louis Blues fan and a newer devotee of the Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Mavericks hockey (above right). Clayton and I love live music from symphony halls to jazz concerts and bluegrass festivals (like the one to the left featuring our friend Joe Newberry on banjo), and we share a dream of one day crossing Canada by train.

A guiding scripture for me is Mordecai's challenge to Queen Esther: "For such a time as this." I believe the Spirit works through appointments, communities, and the particular gifts each of us

carries. I come to St. Clair and Fairview United Methodist Churches not as someone with all the answers, but as a collaborator — ready to learn as much as I teach, and eager to discover what God might do among us, together, for the sake of the Beloved Kingdom.

