

# Introducing Reverend Patty Willis



Dear Beloved Community of Granite Peak,

I am looking forward to meeting you at the end of this month and spending more time in the beautiful surroundings of Prescott. A couple of days ago, when I told a friend who lives in southern Arizona of the possibility of serving this congregation, she said, "They are known for their work in social justice." The energy that you have given to many causes over the years and continue to give, is one of the many reasons I am excited about the possibility of becoming your minister. After twenty-four years living on the western coast of Japan, my life partner, Mary Lou Prince, and I fell in love with the Sonoran Desert and built a home south of Tucson near the Santa Rita Mountains. The complications of life in the borderlands and the way that ministers were able to have a voice there drew me into ministry. I received a full scholarship from Earlham School of Religion, a Quaker seminary in Indiana. I happily returned home to complete two internships in Arizona, first in Surprise, with Rev. Terry Sims and Rev. Walt Wieder and then in Tucson under Rev. Diane Dowgiert's mentorship.

Along with my seminary studies, I wrote and performed "Man from Magdalena" a one-person play about the true story of a migrant who saved the life of an Anglo boy and gave up his dream to live in this country. Proceeds from performances have underwritten over \$150,000 of micro-loans to small business owners in Central America and Mexico. A Ministry of Writing fellowship at Earlham School of Religion supported me as I wrote "Dancing Bird's Apprentice" a work of creative non-fiction that interweaves my ancestor's pioneer diary with Native American narratives. In 2016, I transformed "Dancing Bird's Apprentice" into a one woman play "Midwife" to shed light on the harsh consequences of the pioneer narrative. This research and performance have led to conversations with elders from the Ute Nation and the Northwest Band of the Shoshone.

In 2012, an opportunity opened to serve a congregation in Salt Lake City. Since both Mary Lou and I were brought up in the LDS church and have ancestral roots in Utah, we packed our bags with trepidation! Aware for many years of the high rate of suicide among LGBTQIA youth in Utah, I reached across religious and political divides to uphold human rights, marriage equality, immigration, affordable housing, environmental justice, homelessness, and hate crime legislation. You can read some of the editorials that I wrote as well as sermons and creative work on my website at [www.revpattywillis.com](http://www.revpattywillis.com). A Muslim organization gave me a community service award for my work with immigration and a Salt Lake City magazine named me a "New Pioneer." The congregation I served was similar to Granite Peak in size and grew each year of my ministry. At the end of my tenure in Salt Lake, our young adult group had grown to around 30 people and there were between 80 to 100 children and youth in the religious education program. Mary Lou created an interfaith choir with the two UU choirs and Mormon singers to perform a cantata that she and I composed called "Songs of the Earth."

Performances were given in the Mormon Tabernacle and at the Parliament of World Religions. In August of last year, we left Salt Lake City because of the air pollution in both the winter and summer that compromised Mary Lou's health. I have spent the last year on the east coast working on a doctorate of ministry in public theology focusing on reconciliation.

I wonder what work we will do together in Prescott. I look forward to listening to your experiences and dreams and how we might work together. What will call to us from this land?

I look forward to meeting you in person!