

United Methodist minister takes on QAnon through podcast

by [Sam Hodges](#) in the [May 5, 2021](#) issue



Derek Kubilus serves as vicar of Uniontown United Methodist Church in Uniontown, Ohio (Photo by Brian Koch)

Derek Kubilus is no cookie-cutter United Methodist minister.

He has the dynamic voice of a talk radio host, brings his two Great Pyrenees to Bible study, and calls himself “vicar” rather than “pastor.”

Though he has historical and theological reasons for using that title, Kubilus acknowledges it’s also a way of standing out—a rhetorical bow tie.

“Honestly, I just like to be different,” he said.

Kubilus, leader of Uniontown United Methodist Church in Uniontown, Ohio, stepped out even further in late January when he launched a podcast called *Cross Over Q*.

It offers a Christian challenge to the QAnon conspiracy movement, which often uses overtly religious language to promote its claims that Donald Trump was recruited to run for president in order to save the world from a satanic cabal.

Kubilus's podcast came to the attention of CBS's *60 Minutes*, and Lesley Stahl interviewed him on the February 21 broadcast of the show. That exposure has made for a bigger audience for his podcast, more interview requests, and lots of fan mail. He's had hate mail, too. But he's making peace with that.

"It's all worked out. I'm thankful people are tuning into the podcast and the message is getting out there," he said.

Kubilus's message, in brief: QAnon is a lie but also a pernicious force that the church needs to call out, with compassion.

"We owe it to God to start this conversation," he said during his February 26 podcast.

Kubilus, 38, grew up attending Montrose Zion United Methodist Church in Akron, Ohio. He knew by age 13 that he would be a minister. He studied Bible and theology at Malone University and then went to Duke Divinity School.

Through the years, Kubilus noticed the strain that polarized politics was placing on families and congregations. He read news accounts of Pizzagate, a conspiracy theory alleging a child sex trafficking ring operated by Democrats. The hoax led to a 2016 shooting at a Washington, DC, pizza parlor by a man who thought he was at the ring's headquarters.

"I first heard about QAnon in 2018 and just kind of passed it off as a fad," Kubilus said. "But then people started talking about relationships . . . that were really strained by people who were believing in conspiracies.

"When the Capitol insurrection happened, and I saw Q flags and crosses and Confederate flags all being marched into the Capitol, I felt like I needed to do something," he said. "I'd already been doing a church podcast, with sermons and devotionals. I said, 'You know, I understand this technology, and I think I have something to say.'"

By late January, he had debuted *Cross Over Q*, which can be found on Spotify and other platforms. Kubilus's purpose is, in part, to raise awareness of the threat of QAnon and other conspiracy theories. He's committed to debunking them but also wants to offer Christian compassion.

"The victims of QAnon are not bad people," he said. "They're just folks who have fallen down a rabbit hole of misinformation."

Kubilus is sure the rabbit hole is crowded and cites an American Enterprise Institute survey suggesting more than a quarter of White American evangelicals believe the QAnon theory is at least mostly true. Fifteen percent of White mainline Protestants are in the same camp, the survey found. A Lifeway Research study found half of White US Protestant pastors say they hear congregation members repeating conspiracy theories.

"I guarantee you know someone who is infected with this stuff," Kubilus said on his first podcast.

Though it has been a stimulating stretch for him, Kubilus plans to do only a few more *Cross Over Q* episodes. He's working on a book, he said, but it has nothing to do with QAnon.

Still, his level of concern remains high.

"This way of thinking about the world has spread very far and very fast," he said. "I refer to it as a mind virus." —United Methodist News Service