

**THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY
REV. MARK RAMSEY, CHAIR
APRIL 29, 2014**

FIRST SECTION

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY, AN ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION, OR A TASK FORCE THAT REQUIRE ACTION BY PRESBYTERY:

I. RECOMMEND TO PRESBYTERY FOR EXAMINATION AND ORDINATION:

A. KATHERINE DEBRUHL BLANKENSHIP

From: Candidate, Presbytery of Western North Carolina

As: Mission Immersion Director for Asheville Youth Mission (Raleigh location)

Effective: April 29, 2014

(See COM Attachment 1 for Bio Credo, Sermon Transcript and CPM Report.)

II. RECOMMEND FOR COMMISSIONING BY THE PRESBYTERY AS LAY PASTORS:

A. JAMES KOONE

From: Elder, Union Mills Presbyterian Church

Commissioned Lay Pastor Graduate

As: Commissioned Lay Pastor, Union Mills Presbyterian Church

Effective: April 29, 2014

(The commissioning is to include permission to celebrate the Sacraments, moderate the Session and officiate at weddings.)

(See COM Attachment 2 for Bio Credo.)

B. PEGGY KOONE

From: Elder, Union Mills Presbyterian Church

Commissioned Lay Pastor Graduate

As: Commissioned Lay Pastor, Union Mills Presbyterian Church

Effective: April 29, 2014

(The commissioning is to include permission to celebrate the Sacraments, moderate the Session and officiate at weddings.)

(See COM Attachment 3 for Bio Credo.)

CA III. RECOMMEND TO PRESBYTERY THE TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP:

A. Carolyn V. Poteet

To: EPC, Presbytery of the Alleghenies

Effective: April 29, 2014

CA IV. RECOMMEND TO PRESBYTERY THE VALIDATION OF MINISTRY FOR:

A. Dennis Stamper, as Chaplain with Blue Ridge Healthcare, through April 29, 2015.

B. David Lytle, as Chaplain with Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center, through April 29, 2015.

C. Albert G. Peery, Jr, President, Mountain Retreat Association (Montreat Conference Center), through April 29, 2015.

D. Katherine Blankenship, as Mission Immersion Director, Asheville Youth Mission, Raleigh Youth Mission, through April 29, 2015.

SECOND SECTION

The Book of Order provides that the Committee on Ministry may be given authority by the Presbytery to find in order calls issued by churches, to approve and present calls for service of ministers, to approve the examination of ministers transferring from other Presbyteries, required by G-11.0402 and G11.0502g, to dissolve the pastoral relationship in cases where the congregation and pastor concur, to dismiss ministers to other Presbyteries, and to approve administrative commissions to ordain/install with the provision that such actions be reported at the next stated meeting of the Presbytery. (G-11.0502h) This permission was granted to our Committee on Ministry; therefore, the following actions are to be simply admitted to the record.

I. APPROVED THE EXAMINATION AND TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP TO THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA:

A. KEITH ANDREW GROGG

From: Coastal Carolina Presbytery
 As: Pastor, Montreat Presbyterian Church
 Effective: April 1, 2014
 (See COM Attachment 4 for Bio Credo.)

A. CLARA LYNN BLEDSOE

From: Sheppards & Lapsley Presbytery
 As: Member-at-Large
 Effective: March 25, 2014
 (See COM Attachment 5 for Bio Credo.)

B. JAMES M. COOK

From: Presbytery of Northeast Georgia
 As: Honorably Retired
 Effective: March 25, 2014
 (See COM Attachment 6 for Bio Credo.)

C. DENISE THORPE

From: New Hope Presbytery
 As: Member-at-Large
 Effective: March 25, 2014
 (See COM Attachment 7 for Bio Credo.)

II. APPROVED PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS AND TERMS OF CALL:

A. KEITH ANDREW GROGG

| | |
|-------------------|----------|
| Salary | \$40,000 |
| Housing Allowance | 18,300 |
| Social Security | 4,617 |
| Auto Allowance | 3,250 |
| Professional Dev. | 3,000 |
| Other Allowances | 2,050 |
| TOTAL | \$71,217 |

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Pension/Medical | Yes |
| Four Weeks Vacation | Yes |
| Two Weeks Study Leave | Yes |
| Moving Expenses | Yes |
| Sabbatical Intention | Yes |

B. KATHERINE DEBRUHL BLANKENSHIP

| | |
|-------------------|----------|
| Salary | \$35,000 |
| Deferred Comp. | 5,000 |
| Auto Allowance | 2,000 |
| Professional Dev. | 1,000 |
| Total | \$43,000 |

III. APPROVED TRANSITIONAL PASTOR RELATIONSHIPS:

- A. Jay Rabuck and Reems Creek-Beech Presbyterian Church
Extended: April 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014
- B. Donald Patchel and Green Street Presbyterian Church
Extended: February 24, 2014 - February 23, 2015

IV. APPROVED STATED PASTOR RELATIONSHIPS:

- A. Wyatt Aiken and Bridgewater Presbyterian Church
Extended: January 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014
- B. David Lytle and West Avenue Presbyterian Church
Extended: January 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014
- C. Theodore Grant and Brittain Presbyterian Church
Effective: March 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014

V. APPROVED COMMISSIONED LAY PASTOR RELATIONSHIP:

- A. Kenneth Humphreys and Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church
Extended: March 1, 2014 - February 28, 2015

VI. APPROVED AS MODERATORS:

- A. Long Creek Presbyterian Church and Billy Lowe
- B. Love's Chapel Presbyterian Church and Sam Warner/Daria Ragan
- C. Paint Gap Presbyterian Church and Bob Ayala
- D. Lowell Presbyterian Church and John Stanley

VII. APPROVED THE TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP:

- A. Michael Brazelle
To: The Presbytery of Blackhawk
As: Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Gibson City, IL
Effective: December 8, 2013
- B. Beth Yarborough
To: Trinity Presbytery
As: Member-at-Large
Effective: June 8, 2013
- C. Shannon Kershner
To: The Presbytery of Chicago
As: Pastor, Fourth Presbyterian Church
Effective: May 1, 2014

- D. R. Mike Johnston, IV
 To: Foothills Presbytery
 As: Chaplain, AnMed Health
 Effective: November 12, 2013

VIII. APPROVED THE DISSOLUTION OF PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP:

- A. Calvin Lewers and Love's Chapel Presbyterian Church
 Effective: March 31, 2014
 B. Deneise Deter Liss and Long Creek Presbyterian Church
 Effective: March 9, 2014
 C. Shannon Kershner and Black Mountain Presbyterian Church
 Effective: April 6, 2014
 D. Carolyn Poteet and Hendersonville First Presbyterian Church
 Effective: October 16, 2013

IX. APPROVED MOVING TO MEMBER-AT-LARGE

- A. Deneise Deter Liss

X. APPROVED THE REQUEST FOR HONORABLE RETIREMENT:

- A. Calvin Lewers
 Effective: March 4, 2014

XI. APPROVED PERMISSION TO LABOR OUTSIDE THE BOUNDS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA:

- A. Katherine Blankenship
 As: Mission Immersion Director for Raleigh Youth Mission

XII. APPROVED ORDINATION/INSTALLATION COMMISSIONS:

- A. Approve the Administrative Commission for the installation of Daniel J. Oedy as Pastor of the Southminster Presbyterian Church on Sunday, January 11, 2014 at 10:30 a.m.

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Responsibility on Commission</u> | <u>Min./Eld.</u> |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Barbara Ross | Moderator/Preside | Elder |
| Joan Martin | Propound the Constitutional Questions | |
| | Propound Questions to Congregation | Minister |
| | Charge the Congregation | |
| Bob Tuttle | Charge the Minister | Minister |
| <u>Guest</u> | | |
| Doug Pratt | Preach the Sermon | Minister |

- B. Approve the Administrative Commission for the installation of Steven M. Barnes as Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Newton, North Carolina on Sunday, March 2, 2014 at 4:00 p.m.

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Responsibility on Commission</u> | <u>Min./Eld.</u> |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Ann Aichinger | Moderator/Preside | Minister |

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Susan Denne | Propound the Constitutional Questions | Minister |
| Wallace Johnson | Charge the Congregation | Minister |
| Whit Malone | Charge the Minister | Minister |
| Richard Greathouse | Lead in Worship | Elder |
| Helen Hall | Lead in Worship | Elder |
| Lynn Sample | Lead in Worship | Elder |
| Bobbi White | Lead in Worship | Minister |

Guest

| | | |
|----------|-------------------|----------|
| Bill Poe | Preach the Sermon | Minister |
|----------|-------------------|----------|

- C. Approve the Administrative Commission for the installation of Rebecca Sue Jones as Associate Pastor, Shelby Presbyterian Church on Sunday, March 16, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Responsibility on Commission</u> | <u>Min/Eld.</u> |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Bobbi White | Moderator/Preside | Minister |
| Jim Henderson | Propound the Constitutional Questions | Elder |
| Luke Harkey | Preside at Communion | Minister |
| Robin Holland | Present Symbols of Ministry | Elder |
| Deborah Lesenger | Lead in Worship | Elder |
| Eddie Deas | Lead in Worship | Minister |
| Joyce Houser | Lead in Worship | Elder |
| Lauren Vanacore | Lead in Worship | Minister |

Guest

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Fred Anderson | Preach the Sermon/Charges | Minister |
|---------------|---------------------------|----------|

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Katherine Blankenship Info

1. Biography/Faith Journey:

In my life faith has been a source of great love, questioning, hope, and a continuous process of discernment. While growing up I attending both Presbyterian and Catholic worship services, and I credit my decision to be confirmed in the Presbyterian Church as the first moment I truly felt that God was calling me to a life of discipleship and ministry. I was heavily involved with the life of my church as a youth up until my junior year of college, when I transferred schools and decided to take some time away from the church to get distance and try to discern what role faith and religion could have in my adult life. In my last year of college I started to feel a pull to theological study and was encouraged to look at seminary by my mentors and professors. I applied and was accepted to Columbia Theological Seminary, where I will be graduating this May with a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts in Practical Theology with a concentration in Christian education.

In both the summer before I began seminary and the summer after my first year I had the opportunity to intern at Asheville Youth Mission, an organization that was founded by two of my mentors. During these summers I was able to reclaim faith language that I thought I had lost, and began to feel more at ease with the idea that God could be calling me to ministry. In my second summer working with AYM I was blessed to meet a group of youth and their pastor from a church in Atlanta. That fall I was invited by their youth pastor to come and worship with them and volunteer with their youth program. After a few months I was formally hired by the church and began regularly helping with worship leadership, serving on their Christian education committee, and their youth ministry. My work with Covenant proved to be an invaluable experience for me, as it allowed me to gain self-confidence in my skills for pastoral care, communal prayer, and the ins and outs of parish ministry. During my time working with Covenant I was able to identify why the sacraments of baptism and communion are integral parts of how I express and experience my faith, build relationships, have hands-on experience with conflict resolution, and find my “pastoral voice”.

My last four years at Columbia have also been filled with wonderful experiences, friendships, and a place of safe discernment and growth. I feel very fortunate to have been selected to study abroad for a semester in Cambridge, UK in my third year, serve on our student coordinating council.

My faith journey has forced me to ask and answer some difficult questions about God’s plan, especially in my experience of personal loss. Because of this I feel God has called me to a ministry that both ministers to and walk alongside those on the margins of society, youth, and young adults. It is my great joy that God has carried me thus far and will continue to walk alongside me in this journey.

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2. Statement of Faith:

I believe in God the Creator, who has been and continues to be present in Word and creation. I believe in the Holy Spirit, who continues to move over the formless voids still present in our life and calling us into a new creation in Christ. I believe in the Triune God who is Redeemer, Sustainer, Creator, and whose love calls us into a life of community with one another. I hold Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, both fully human and fully divine. I believe in the sacrifice of death on the cross and his forgiveness of my sins. I believe in the message of Christ's love and ministry as proclaimed and shared in scripture. I believe and trust in the continued movement and work of the Holy Spirit that "sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church".¹ I believe we reaffirm our shared commitment to God and to each other every time we welcome a new believer into the waters of baptism and invite each other to break bread and share the cup of salvation with our neighbor. I trust in the power and sustaining love of the Trinity to enable all to pray without ceasing, love one another without hesitation, bring peace where there is chaos, and the continued reminder of a grace and love that knows no bounds.

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John 4:5-26, 39-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is it that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

...

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So where the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

"The Jars We Leave Behind"

When starting to prepare for this sermon I found myself overjoyed to see one of the texts in the lectionary for this week is the story of the woman at the well. How appropriate, I thought, for me to have the opportunity to preach on a text of

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transformation, renewal, and call to a community that has walked with me in my discernment process. And how appropriate to be able to study and share a passage that we have all undoubtedly come into contact with, a text that is so well known and familiar, and yet always able to offer us something new. Reading over the familiar words, seeing the same names and dialogue each time and having each new reading affect you in a new and surprising way. Understanding the familiar predicament of coming to a text in search of something new Professor Anna Carter Florence offered this reflection on the passage: “Here is a passage for a preaching life and a lifetime of preaching. Here too is a text with its own bucket, ready for the filling. Let it down again and again, and each time it comes up with another sermon of living water, another deep drink from the well that will not go dry.”¹ I think we enjoy this text because it is so complex, there are so many directions one could go with it, so many insights into who Jesus is and how he engages with others. I think it is our own desire to have an encounter like this with Christ. How amazing would it be to see both his humanity and divinity all at the same time, the very human act of asking for a drink after a long journey, the very divine words of a hope and renewal that is nothing like anything we have heard before.

This hope of an encounter with a Christ that calls us to claim our truth, the ugly, the poignant, the hidden parts of ourselves that we have held so close for so long, hoping that without a voice it can stay hidden in the shadows of our hearts. Colleagues, friends, preachers, and congregants that I shared this passage with identified with the woman at the well, each person offering their own interpretation of why this passage stands out to them as an important example of Christ’s boundless love of humanity.

But let’s take another look at this text, because for all of our talk and understanding of the passage it is not Christ that came to woman while she was gathering her water at the well, but Christ was already there, waiting for her when she approached with her bucket.

When reading this passage I am reminded of when I was younger and my parents would spend weekends at our country house in Madison County. We had no running water or electricity, so to get our water for cooking and bathing we would have to haul it up from the well. Even as a child I knew you didn’t want to wait too late in the day for this task, as when mid-day came it would be hot, muggy, and the bugs would be out to eat you alive, even from the short distance from the well to the house. The best time to get the water was first thing in the morning, right when the air was still a bit cool from the night, or just before dusk, when the sun was starting to set and you could feel the first hint of the night air. So for this woman to venture out by herself, at the hottest time of the day, well, we can gather that this would not have been ideal. All the extra trouble she went to, to get to the well after everyone else would have already left, after walking from the village expecting to be by herself and what does she see? But some traveler, fresh off the road, just sitting at the well. Waiting.

¹ Feasting on the Word, 93

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Perhaps she's cautious, is he dangerous? She doesn't recognize him, but continues on. Maybe she's hopeful she can just get her water and get back home without too much of a delay, when what does this stranger do? He asks her for a drink. Well, it could be argued it was more of a demand. "Give me a drink." Great, now it's the middle of the day, it's hot, she's got her buckets to fill, she was supposed to be alone but he's here, and now he is demanding a drink?

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

Maybe he's just been traveling for so long that he's forgotten how things work. Maybe he didn't realize she was a Samaritan. You can picture her giving Jesus a sidewise glance, wondering who this man could be to ask something so outright, without any sense of how to interact with others. But does Jesus offer an explanation that actually answers her question? Of course not- instead, responding with a typical Jesus answer.

"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman is now especially puzzled. Should she know who this man is? And what exactly does he mean by "living water"? She looks at him again, this time taking in more of the picture. He doesn't even have a bucket. How does he expect her to get him a drink? How long has he been sitting here waiting for someone to help him? And if he's going to throw around the "don't you know who I am card", perhaps she should return in kind with a name drop of her own.

Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and flock drank from it?"

They continue this conversation back and forth, her amazement compounding while Jesus offers her a level of patience that even the disciples rarely see. He knows things, things about her life and her past, but he isn't calling the facts out of her in order to get her to ask for forgiveness or confess some sin. Instead, when she offers up the truth he almost delights in its reveal, acknowledging it, naming it, and moving on from it quickly and almost effortlessly.

Who could this man be? Who could be capable of transforming the act of gathering water into a moment of holy transformation and spectacular revelation? She knows in the moment that she cannot keep this interaction to herself, that this is a wonder and an experience that has to be shared, so without second thought she gets up and runs into the town to share her story. But in her haste she leaves something behind, her water jar.

The thing that brought her to the well, and she forgets it, now knowing that the water she came to seek doesn't even compare to the living water she has received. This passage undoubtedly speaks to us about call and the power of testimony, about where we encounter Christ in our lives and how we are transformed in our relationship with the Triune God. It also speaks to us about the reality of what is left behind when we follow these calls. And when we start to look we see this theme throughout the gospels. In Matthew 4 we find the story of Peter and Andrew, who are fishing in the Sea of Galilee when Jesus approaches. Christ beckons them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And what do they

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do? Peter and Andrew “immediately left their nets and followed him”.² And what of James and John in the following verses? Not only do they leave their nets, but also their boat and their own father.³

From these stories of call we can see the theme appearing of when Jesus calls, you drop everything and go. When reflecting on this concept of leaving things behind to follow Christ I was reminded of this quote, “But beware of this about callings: they may not lead us where we intended to go or even where we want to go. If we choose to follow, we may have to be willing to let go of the life we already planned and accept whatever is waiting for us. And if the calling is true, though we may not have gone where we intended, we will surely end up where we need to be.”⁴

We end up where we need to be. Certainly that’s true for the fisherman who left their nets behind. They traveled with Jesus and became fishers of men. How interesting for this passage to be in our lectionary for Lent, a season when we offer ourselves to God by leaving something behind for forty days. Imagine what would happen if we tried to carry it all with us, trying to walk in the world and share the good news, all the while bogged down with knick knacks and tools from before we heard the call. There is no way we could walk everywhere Christ calls us to walk with that much weight on our back, no way that we could continuously greet people with enthusiasm and joy for what God has done in our life if we are always tired from the journey. We have to learn to gauge what’s in our packs for ministry. We have to stop and rearrange every once in a while, always being ready to leave something by the path so that we can continue to follow the movement of the spirit.

So what does this passage offer us in this season of Lent? I would argue it’s a reminder that Christ is waiting at the well in our lives, waiting for us to come and meet him. We are reminded that the jars we carry today will not necessarily be the jars we carry tomorrow in ministry. We are reminded that Christ waits for those who walk in the heat of the day, the lonely, the shamed, the judged, and the persecuted. In verse 24 we are reminded that God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. Isn’t that what we’ve seen here? The woman does not shy away from the hidden truths in her life, from the cultural shame of her numerous spouses. She has offered the truth, and Jesus responds in spirit. There is no mention of sin or forgiveness in this passage, Christ never pardons her multiple marriages, but instead focuses on the fact that she said the truth. Perhaps part of the act of confession is naming the truths in our life, the need to give them voice and name them before God. Perhaps part of the way we worship in spirit is by offering our most true selves to God, the good, the ugly, the vindictive, the caring, the judging, the love, the hope and knowledge that God is enough to hold us and say, “What you have said is true! And I still want you to follow me.”

Most of all, this passage reminds us that Christ knows us and calls us because of and despite our faults. Christ knows what we leave behind to follow the call,

² Matthew 4:19-20

³ Matthew 4:21-22 and Luke 5:9-11

⁴ Steve Goodier

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knows the path of nets and jars we have left along the way. In someway along the journey we learn that we don't need all these jars and nets to hold our stories and convictions. As we journey through life we are reminded that Christ continues to call us to share our truth without hesitation, and with each word we are pulling the weight from inside the jar, feeling it being transformed into living water and becoming weightless on our hearts.

We leave behind our jars because we don't need the extra space to hold the love that God has offered us. Amen.

COM ATTACHMENT 1

Committee on Preparation for Ministry
Presbytery of Western North Carolina

Preaching Commission Report

Members in attendance: Bob Tuttle, David Nash, Edyth Pruitt, Laura Long, Esta Jarrett, Fred Brown, Sylvia Sellers.

On Wednesday, March 19, 2014 the Committee on Preparation for Ministry met in the Chapel at First Presbyterian Church, Morganton, NC to hear Candidate Katherine Blankenship preach in accord with the new Presbytery policy. Katherine presented an Order of Worship and our meeting opened with the singing of "I Danced in the Morning." The scripture text was taken from John 4:5-26, 39-42 and the sermon title was "The Jars We Leave Behind."

Katherine demonstrated competence in exegesis, the ability to draw relevant meaning from the Biblical text, and an aptitude in preaching. After discussion, the Commission unanimously passed a motion to approve Katherine's preaching and sermon and to commend her to the Presbytery for ordination.

Faithfully,

Rev. Bob Tuttle

COM ATTACHMENT 2

STATEMENT OF FAITH

James Koone

I believe in an omnipotent God who moved with great creative power to form the universe and all that is contained therein. His presence and power is expressed in three distinct yet similar persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

My understanding of God the Father helps me to realize that He views me as a father views his child. He has hopes for me, a plan for my life, and expectations of me. He takes pride in me when I follow His will. He doesn't stop loving me when I do not. He is always ready to help me and is always more eager to bless than to correct.

My knowledge of God the Son gives me a picture of the elder brother, the first born, who being fully human and fully God knows the Father's will and at the same time knows my human weaknesses. He partners with me in joy and sorrow, in triumph and tragedy. He makes intercession on my behalf and by His sacrificial death on the cross reconciles me to God the Father.

The reality of God the Holy Spirit allows me to be indwelt by the very essence of God, leading, teaching, and fellowshiping with me. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that I can know God through fellowship and through study of the inspired Holy Scriptures.

I believe Holy Scripture is God's instruction manual to me and through Spirit led study, faithful witness and preaching I can know more about the God I serve.

I believe in the church as the embodiment of God's family, loving and nurturing each individual member as a family should do and in turn being loved and supported by each individual member.

I have discovered in the confessional statements of our church, a means of expressing the beliefs that God's word has long since instilled in me.

I believe that in the observance of the sacraments we follow the instructions and example of Christ. In Baptism God enables us to die to sin, bury the old sinful nature, be cleansed by the righteous blood of Christ and resurrected to a new life in Him. In Communion we are reminded of the terrible cost of our redemption. We are bought with a price far above our ability to pay. His broken body and shed blood testify of God's love for us and calls us to brokenness over our sinful condition and commitment to the debt of love we owe to our blessed Savior.

COM ATTACHMENT 2

Faith Journey
James Koone
March 2014

As a child I went to church with my parents. At age seven, upon my confession of faith, I was baptized and joined the Baptist church we were attending. I attended this church for over 48 years and had the opportunity to serve in various capacities. I taught Sunday school and lead an outreach ministry. I served on several committees and as a deacon.

Over the course of my life I've had exposure to other denominations through friends and family and developed a viewpoint of-----one Church-----one Faith-----one God-----we are all on the same team through the blood of Jesus.

About three years ago I felt God was calling me to preach. I asked God to open the door and I would follow His leading. Soon after this, I was approached by members of Union Mills Presbyterian Church about serving in their church. I live in the community and have had previous involvement with the congregation. After prayer and feeling this was God's leading, my wife and I started attending this church.

In August 2011, my wife and I joined Union Mills Presbyterian Church and shortly after were elected elders. That fall we began attending the School For Laity/Commissioned Lay Pastor Training Program and completed the program in the spring of 2013. Since September 2013, I have lead worship and preached at Union Mills Presbyterian Church where I have alternated every other week with Rev. Don Scofield from Rutherfordton Presbyterian Church. Over the last three years I have served in other capacities for my church. I lead a weekly Bible study and am Chairman of the Outreach Committee. Since our congregation is small, I have tried to be available to serve wherever I am needed.

COM ATTACHMENT 3

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Peggy Koone

I believe in God the Father Almighty, who spoke the world into being, and breathed life into His creation. His love and desire for fellowship with His creation is demonstrated as He provides the way for redemption and restoration through Jesus Christ. As He reveals Himself to me through the Word of God, I know there is none like Him and I want to know Him more.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. I believe that Jesus was fully God and fully human and came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. Through Christ's sinless life and willing death, God accepted His sacrifice for the remission of sin. By my confession and belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I am reconciled to God. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Communion I am reminded of the sacrifices of Christ for me and the privileges I now have as a child of the one true God.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, whom the Father has sent to indwell all believers. I believe the Holy Spirit empowers us for service and to be witnesses of God's love and grace. As I prayerfully study the Word of God and allow the Holy Spirit to guide me, I am drawn closer to God and His son Jesus Christ.

I believe in the church universal of which Jesus Christ is the Head. I believe that study in the Word of God along with the confessions of faith are important for the growth and nurture of God's people.

COM ATTACHMENT 3

Faith Journey
Peggy Koone
March 2014

As a child I occasionally attended a Baptist church with my grandparents. I knew Jesus loved me but I knew I did not know Him as my personal Savior.

I was twenty-four years old when I attended church with a friend and knew God was speaking to me personally to receive His son Jesus Christ as my Savior. I made my public profession of faith that day. A few weeks later I was baptized at sunrise service on Easter Sunday and joined the church. The church was not in my community and I didn't know many of the members personally, so after a few months I stopped attending.

Later on a co-worker invited me to her church. After a few visits, I knew I had found a home. I rededicated my life to the Lord. I was involved in all aspects of church life: Sunday School, Bible study, prayer service and choir. I learned so much under the leadership of my pastor and his wife. When Jesus spoke in John 10:10 "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" that was what I desired...the abundant life God offers to all. I believe that is when the call to minister to others began. I wanted all people to know God personally through His son Jesus Christ and know that abundant life through the Holy Spirit.

A few years went by and I met the man who would become my husband. We were married and began to serve the Lord together. About three years ago, my husband felt God was calling him to preach. He asked God to open the door and he would follow His leading. Soon after this, he was approached by members of Union Mills Presbyterian Church about serving in their congregation. After prayer and feeling this was God's leading, my husband and I began to attend this church.

In August 2011, my husband and I joined Union Mills Presbyterian Church and shortly after were elected elders. That fall we began attending the School For Laity/Commissioned Lay Pastor Training Program and completed the program in the spring of 2013. Since September 2013, I have assisted my husband in leading worship at Union Mills Presbyterian Church where we alternated every other week with Rev. Don Scofield from Rutherfordton Presbyterian Church. Over the last three years I have assisted wherever I was needed in our church from teaching children's Sunday School and Vacation Bible School to participating with Community Outreach dinners and visitation. The call on my life is still to help others in any way that I can so that they might know the abundant life that Jesus spoke about.

COM ATTACHMENT 4

Statement of Faith – Reverend Keith Grogg

I believe in the Triune God—the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer;
the Godhead, the Christ, and the Spirit; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

God is love.

God is the Creator of all that exists, the source of our life and of all life.
Even if we could go to the ends of the universe, there would still be God.

I believe in Jesus, the Christ.

Jesus is the Son of God, fully human, fully divine.

He walked on the earth as a person in history—Emmanuel, “God with us”—
embodying in the flesh the presence of the transcendent Creator God.

He gave us the gifts of love, forgiveness, healing, and hope,
which he taught and demonstrated in his earthly life.

Following his example and his commands, we are called to be servants,
doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

On the cross, he bought for us salvation from our fallen state of separation from God,
and in his resurrection, he offers us the joy of eternal life.

It is our mission to share that resurrection joy with all creation,
feeding the hungry, caring for the world and its people,
working for peace and reconciliation, standing for justice with all who are oppressed.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the *ruah*, the wind/spirit/breath of God that is always free to do as God wills, everywhere,
the presence of God within us who enables us to have faith in God.

In the Church, the body of Christ,

the Holy Spirit gathers us around the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,
which witness for us the life and meaning of Jesus Christ,
calling us to remember God’s covenant with God’s people.

This we do in holy worship with the proclamation of the word,
the real nourishment of the sacraments of baptism and communion,
and faithful discipleship.

God made with us a covenant: “I will be your God, and you will be my people.”

We are called to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

I bow before the holy mystery of God,

and confess my total, absolute dependence on my Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer
to be able to speak any word at all about God.

Yet we who believe are called to speak the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world,
trusting in the Spirit to give us the words,
and embodying the Word in our faith and our works of love. ■

COM ATTACHMENT 4

Biographical Statement - Keith Grogg

"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose" (Romans 8:28). In Paul's context, these lines inspire and encourage women and men of faith who face great odds and difficult circumstances. In my comparatively privileged life, they have helped me escape from a life of quiet desperation to a place of spiritual fulfillment and challenge, wherein I am greatly blessed with the privilege of serving as a Minister of Word and Sacrament/Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

When elders-elect are being examined in my church, I often ask, "Which of the questions for ordination is your 'favorite,' and why?" I now respond to that question myself: "I will pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love." On any given day, in any given circumstance, one or the other of those may be in need of replenishment. All, I have found, are necessary, and we in the body of Christ share them with one another in joy, wonder, and awe.

To be a minister is to call on all my experience of the Holy Spirit throughout my life, all my learning of what it means to take up your cross and follow Christ wherever he leads, all my study in theology and Biblical interpretation, all my knowledge of what it means to live, work, and serve alongside people. I see my role as *pastor*: offering whatever I can, to give people the strength to embrace God's call on their own lives, to encourage kindness and generosity, to be a channel for the Spirit to inspire commitment to helping meet the world's needs, to invite people into a closer relationship with their Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer. I see my calling as being a pragmatic spiritual leader. Leading worship, providing pastoral care, finding creative ways to meet community needs and provide for Christian education (these all go hand in hand). In the Presbyterian Church, our connectionalism means that sisters and brothers together are resources for one another, providing various kinds of expertise and energy that work together to improve lives and build up the ministry of the church, just as Paul encouraged individual congregants to see themselves as members of one body.

My dreams for the ministry going forward are to play a role in building the congregation up—in spirit and in any other way that God sees fit—through an integrated congregational life of worship, mission outreach, congregational care, spiritual care for the community, and education. These are all areas in which the church I seek to serve has demonstrated commitment and tremendous capability. The role of a Minister of Word and Sacrament is to provide stable leadership, a unifying vision, reliable preaching, and able and, by God's grace, visionary administration. I find myself in conflict with no ordination standards as I understand them, and believe the present language of call in the Book of Order demands the highest standards of Christian discipleship and personal conduct.

I grew up in Second Presbyterian Church in Bloomington, Illinois and was formed by the traditional Protestant worship, with its dignified, Biblical, unostentatious approach to God; by the music and education programs from an early age through high school; by people in church who taught and demonstrated faithfulness, compassion, awareness, kindness and generosity.

I graduated from Indiana University and was accepted into the PC(USA) Mission Volunteer program. I was preparing for a year serving in the U.K. when I met Vivian Hare, who had returned from two years as a Mission Volunteer in Taiwan and stayed in Louisville, in the Global Missions Unit. We made a commitment to each other 48 hours before I boarded the plane. I remember the day I came back to the church in England, before Evening Prayer, after a long, wonderful day of home, hospital, and geriatric visiting and working in the community. My options were to go home and take an unfulfilling but well-paying job with State Farm, or apply to seminary. I knew I could never feel that I was doing what I was put here to do if I chose the former. I had walked away from a horrific car accident in 1986, which only a long series of unlikely coincidences could explain. I'd had a second shot at life, which I attributed entirely to God's grace—and I accept it joyfully and gratefully for the discipleship such gift demands.

I entered McCormick Seminary. Vivian was so instantly smitten with me that after only three and a half years, I convinced her to marry me. Our roots are in the mission of the Church—locally and globally. Our son, John, was born in 1994 about three weeks before I was ordained and began a shared ministry in Kannapolis, NC serving as pastor of Kirkwood Presbyterian Church (a family size church) and associate pastor of Bethpage Presbyterian Church, a program church where my primary roles were minister of education and youth pastor. Our daughter, Clara, was born in 1997. In 2000 I was called as pastor of Carolina Beach Presbyterian Church, which has been a beautiful relationship. I feel that I have done what the Spirit called me there to do, and I owe it to them, to God, and to the next church I serve to make way for their next pastor. How blessed I am, then, to have found such an amazing new church calling, where I feel so strongly called to serve with whatever gifts for ministry God has entrusted to me. ■

COM ATTACHMENT 5

STATEMENT OF FAITH - Clara Lynn Bledsoe

The words of the Apostles Creed, imprinted on my heart and brain, are the foundation of my Christian belief. I believe in God as Father, creator and sustainer of life. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only son. I believe that Jesus was fully human, incarnate and fully divine, born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus was tortured under the authorities of his day, suffered as we might suffer and died as we experience human death. I believe that he descended into Hell and although we may not fully understand what that means, we can know that for a time, he was separated from God and understands what it is like for us to feel isolated from God. He was resurrected on the third day. Scripture tells us that before Jesus ascended, he appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the disciples (including Thomas) and later to Paul. I believe these encounters to be significant validation of what Christians believe about the communion of saints. I believe Jesus ascended from earth and sits alongside God, to impart grace and forgiveness to those who believe in Him. *I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.*¹

I believe we are inspired and encouraged by the same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles. I believe we experience the Spirit through the Word proclaimed, the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion, prayer, encounters with Mystery, endeavors of social justice and daily acts of servanthood and life.²

I believe that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative witness to God. Both testaments are given to us as a guide to wisdom, life and service that is acceptable to God. God continues to speak to us through Scripture in the hearing and the reading of the Word.³

*I believe in one baptism, for the forgiveness of sins.*⁴ In baptism, one puts on the clothes of Christ and through the grace of Christ, may live life as Christ and die as Christ died. Death is the completion of our baptism. So as we raise our children in the faith, so may we care for our elders through the end of their days. The sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals instituted by God in order that God may fulfill the promise of the gospel.⁵ When we celebrate Holy Communion, we say the Words of Institution that Jesus said to his disciples, as we share the bread and cup with believers. This corporate act is the embodiment of God's love through which God's people share the Gospel in the world.

I moved from the United Methodist denomination to the PCUSA in order to join a faith community that does not function hierarchically. I value deeply the form of government in the PCUSA – the system of ruling elders, the characteristic of servant leadership, openness to Spirit, and communion around the Table, symbolizing equality among God's children. Specifically, I honor the unfolding of God's Word and Spirit through a reformed theology, as the Church seeks to serve in a world challenged by progress and human decisions.

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¹ Apostles Creed

² BOC, A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4

³ BOC, The Second Helvetic Confession, 5.001-5.002

⁴ BOC, The Nicene Creed, 1.2

⁵ BOC, The Heidelberg Catechism, 4.066

COM ATTACHMENT 5

Clara Lynn Bledsoe
Faith Journey and Bio

I was born in Atlanta, GA and baptized as an infant at the Oak Grove Methodist Church in Decatur. My cherished early memories are images of shadowing my grandmother as she cared for elders in the *Bledsoe Rest Home* in Carrollton, GA. When I was five years old, my family moved to Birmingham, AL which became my home until Summer, 2013, with a few exceptions of living out of state for graduate study. Throughout my school days I lived in a single community marked by civil rights turmoil and racism. Brother Rutledge, my pastor at the Woodlawn United Methodist Church, preached justice and equal rights and was such a beacon to the youth of the church that many of us through the years were called to ministry and social justice work. For this I am grateful.

I became a Presbyterian in college, influenced by my first tenure as a youth director at Shades Valley Presbyterian Church. I graduated from Birmingham Southern College where I was nominated for the Rockefeller Trial Year in Seminary Award. As a semi-finalist, I received a generous scholarship to attend Vanderbilt Divinity School in 1975 - 1976. For this I am also very thankful as it was an enlightening period of life that prepared me to open myself to God's call in subsequent years. After one year at Vanderbilt, I left to marry David Jackson. We were married for twelve years, during which time we lived in Montana and Oregon where I attended graduate schools and earned a Masters degree in Counseling. When we divorced, I was living in Birmingham, working as a high school counselor in a boarding school. I lived on campus with the students for eight years. I also served as a part time youth director (3 congregations), from 1974-1985. When we divorced, I was exploring my call with the CPM of my presbytery, and I realized that the difficult choice of divorce would lead to single parenthood and likely eliminate any possibility of resuming seminary study.

In 1991, Bill Ryan and I married and blended our families with my children (Ethan and Marilyn), his daughter (Emily), and in 1993, our son (Daniel). I left the counseling job in 1992, turning to non-profit community work and raising a family. After 12 years, the call to ministry was still strong, enriched by life experience. I graduated from Beeson Divinity School in 2002 and was ordained as a part time Associate Pastor for Older Adults at First Presbyterian Birmingham in 2003. Prior to ordination, another pastor asked me what would be my ideal call and I told him that I wanted to visit elder orphans in nursing homes. First Birmingham helped me realize that call. My job description called for me to reach out to un-churched older adults. Together with a group from the congregation, Rev. Dr. Mary Porter and I studied the book of Ruth and *sounded the call* for a nursing home ministry. Under the umbrella of First Church, we began the Ruth and Naomi Senior Outreach (RNSO) ministry in 2004. I left my church position in 2006 and RNSO became a 501c3 organization. Mary and I studied for and became Certified Music Practitioners and trained with the *Chalice of Repose*, thereby learning to blend contemplative music with centering prayer practices. In our work, we visited isolated elders and trained volunteers to come alongside us, using harp music for healing at the bedside, accompanied by my therapy dog. Our experience extended to hospice work in the community with New Beacon and VITAS Hospices. I am grateful for the legacy of my grandmother which prepared me to serve elders and for the support of First Birmingham that I was blessed to serve in such a unique and meaningful ministry of presence. I appreciate deeply the sacred experiences I have known in being with elders and their loved ones in the completion of their baptism. I know this is not the end of my journey. I am currently serving on the Board of Directors for Sage-ing International, an organization with a mission to promote conscious aging with spirit and wisdom among elders. Because of Sage-ing, Bill and I moved to Asheville in order to fulfill our own grand-parenting legacy and explore conscious aging and healthy lifestyles. Bill has had the good fortune of joining the Mental Health staff at the Asheville VAMC. I pray that my experience and training will be added to the outreach and ministries of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina and to the community to which we have relocated.

COM ATTACHMENT 6

James M. Cook
1029 Saddlebrook Dr.
Hendersonville, NC 28739

Statement of Faith

As I stated in my biographical sketch, I was born "a Child of the Covenant." I was fortunate to grow up conscious of God's love through the faith and care of my parents and family. While I remember clearly "affirming my faith" and thereby becoming a "communing" member, the transition was seamless. In some ways my call to the ministry was of a similar fashion, albeit with a genuine commitment to enter seminary in order to serve in the ministry.

In reference to the specific sections of the Book of Church Order, I still remember and accept that my ordination was a promise "to serve in subjection to my brethren in the Lord" and to study the peace and purity of the Church." I understand and respect the process of examination by the members of Presbytery.

With respect to my beliefs or creedal statements, I cherish the words of the twenty third Psalm, the opening verses of John's gospel and Christ's words of instruction to Peter by the Sea of Gallilee, "Feed my sheep." I am comfortable with the lifelong awareness that the Old and New Testaments give us an historical knowledge of God's grace and a living wholeness of that grace as shown in the life, death and continued presence of Christ. I treasure my reformed heritage because it underscores that I belong to God because of His choosing. The sacraments are beautiful symbols of God's gracious choice to love and forgive me long before I was ever fully aware of such grace. As Christ wished, the sacraments help me "remember". It is neither my actions nor the correctness of my beliefs that "save" me. Only God's grace and the Holy Spirit's continuing presence preserve my life and give me the hope that "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever".

What constrains me to seek God's will in care for others is a response of gratitude and a deep sense that if God is my father, Christ asks us to love "one another". It is always God's gracious love that informs me, calls me and sustains me. I fail everyday to meet the standards I see in Christ, in the Saints, and in the lives of so many of God's people that I have known. Only God's continuing grace and spirit enable me, as my earthly father put it so often, to come to "God's throne of grace" and gather in fellowship with all who seek to drink from the living waters of God's spirit.

COM ATTACHMENT 6

James M. Cook
1029 Saddlebrook Dr.
Hendersonville, NC 28739

Biographical Sketch

I was born a "Child of the Covenant." My grandfather, my father and my older brother were Presbyterian ministers. My grandfather and father both attended Hampton-Sydney College and Union Theological Seminary. My brother and I attended Presbyterian College and then Union Seminary.

In 1961 I was ordained and served the Edgemont Presbyterian Church in Rocky Mount, NC. In 1963 I accepted a call as Associate Minister at the First Presbyterian Church in Tyler, Texas. In 1968 I resigned this position in order to go back to school and enrolled in Emory University's doctoral program in Philosophy and Religion. Upon completion of my studies, I accepted a teaching position at Brenau College (Gainesville, GA) in the fields of philosophy, religion, and Bible. From 1973 until 1996 I taught full time at the college. In addition, for a great deal of that time, I was fortunate to serve as interim pastor of the Thyatira Presbyterian Church (Commerce, GA) while a member of my present Presbytery, Northeast Georgia.

After my retirement I taught adjunct at the University of Washington Tacoma campus and served as supply pastor in Blountstown, FL. Most recently, while residing in Dadeville, AL, I served as the interim pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Dadeville and later as supply pastor at the Woods Presbyterian Church (Dadeville, AL) until our move to Hendersonville in August 2013.

My wife and I now are settled in Hendersonville where we hope to live as long as our good health and God's grace allow. I am, in part, coming home since I spent much of my early life at Montreat and Camp Old Indian near Saluda. It is good to be back in the mountains.

COM ATTACHMENT 7

Denise Thorpe Statement of Faith

In life and in death we belong to God. Everything else is elaboration.

In life and in death we belong to God: font and foundation of being; mysterious presence marking, claiming, and redeeming; hope to which I entrust all whom I love; past, present, and future of this wondrous and broken world. In life and in death we belong to a God who promises to weave all of creation into God's Shalom--the pain, the joy, the sorrow, the hope, the striving, the beauty, the horror, the doubt, and the wonder. God ceaselessly groans and sighs and rejoices within us and through us, all toward that great Shalom. I depend on that promise.

This God to whom I belong is revealed to me in surprising, familiar, comforting, and jarring ways through the Holy Spirit. This mysterious God came near to me and to all creation through Jesus Christ. Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection are God's adamant proclamation that nothing in life or in death will separate me from the One who knew me before I was knit together in my mother's womb. The compelling grace of that gift requires me to seek and to follow. Often I lose my way, but I am confident that God never loses me. God will never, ever, ever let me go. Instead, this Good Shepherd ventures to dark and scary places to find me, pick me up, lay me on wise shoulders, and carry me home, only to then nudge me out to take new risks and find new paths, fully knowing I will inevitably be lost again...and again. I am humbled and grateful that the magnitude of my own sin and of the sins of the world in which I share is dwarfed by the enormity of God's forgiveness and love.

I was claimed by God in the waters of baptism. I have been flailing, drowning, floating, drinking in, and occasionally surfing that water ever since: cleansed and made new; comforted and cradled; sent out to choppy seas and required to trust that even there I am held in the arms of Love. In baptism my vocation dripped down my face and seeped into my body, later taking shape through holy stories and wondrous lives that speak, smell, touch, taste, sing, shout, whisper, and shine God's story of grace. My vocation continues to deepen as I journey toward new quandaries and celebrations, and inevitably into the raging waters of death. I trust God will be with me in those new waters as well, and I trust that in time I will gather with all the saints in heaven and on earth as we rejoice by a river that runs through the very center of God's heart.

I am fed at God's table, both in the church and in God's amazing world. When I was a young girl my pastor was a former hockey player, a "rock of Gibraltar" type. I have vivid memories of an ice skating excursion where I struggled with wobbly ankles and measured turns. Suddenly this pastor swept up behind and folded me into his arms. Just barely lifting me off the ice, he made great circles around the frozen pond. I was flying! The world twirled around me: scared and giddy, confused and thrilled, backward and forward, around the ice we flew. Living on the edge and wrapped in safety--all at the same time. That continues to be my hope for the church: the winds of the Spirit blowing who-knows-where; God's power lifting us to new heights; freedom to take wobbly steps and to explore new gifts; surprise in the midst of struggle; sudden bursts of life; the world twirling around us; help along the way; skating together; living on the edge; risking a fall. God's arms ever secure beneath us, propelling us toward a life of grace. I have no doubt God is fervently stirring this whirling work of creation and hope. My prayer for the church is that we drop our nets at a moment's notice, rush forward, and join God's terrifying pirouettes of wonder and grace.

COM ATTACHMENT 7

Denise Thorpe

The Christian faith formed both warp and woof in the fabric of community that welcomed me into this world and guided me on my way, wrapping me in strength, love, challenge, care, and faithfulness. I was baptized into the Swedish Covenant Church, now called the Evangelical Covenant Church and wonderfully diverse rather than purely Scandinavian. Two central questions in Covenant theology form and outline my faith: "How is your walk with Jesus?" and "Where is it written?". Seeking to follow Jesus, I look to the scripture and the living witness of the community to understand what it means to be a follower.

As a child I received lots of encouragement to become a lawyer as a means to channel my somewhat argumentative nature. That was my plan until my senior year in college at North Park University when out of the blue a visiting chaplain asked me, "have you ever considered a call to ministry?". My tart response: "I've always said I'd never *marry* a minister, I'm certainly not going to *be* one!" Soul searching conversations and a transformative trip to Haiti soon followed. I jettisoned my law applications and found myself enrolled the following fall at Yale Divinity School. In many ways my years at YDS were the richest, most fun, and invigorating years of my life. I worked in a local church and loved the experience of ministry. Those years were also painful and crippling years in my home church, a community being torn asunder because of egregious boundary violations by the minister. By the end of my time at YDS I was not sure I could survive the ministry--even if I loved it. I now realize that I was in full over-functioning mode at that time, driven by a fear of hurting other people in the ways I witnessed people I loved being hurt in my home church. So off to Duke law school I went. I hated law school and by the end of the first year I was sure my true call was to the ministry of word and sacrament. I did not relish the time I spent in a big law firm either. My years as a staff attorney at legal aid redeemed the law for me. What I now recognize with great gratitude is that I am a far better pastor for having been a lawyer. Through God's amazing providence my years in the law helped me develop the necessary boundaries and skills to return to the ministry of word and sacrament in a healthy way.

During my law years in Denver I served as an elder at Central Presbyterian Church and was taken under care by Denver presbytery in preparation for ordination in the PC(USA). A few months after marrying my husband John Weistart, a law professor at Duke in Durham, NC., I received a call to West Raleigh Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, NC where I served for eight years. In 2004, John and I started spending large chunks of time in Lithuania where I occasionally filled in as temporary pastor at the International Church of Vilnius. We fell in love with the children at two Lithuanian children's homes and became a sort of honorary aunt and uncle. Those relationships led us to consider adoption. Five years ago we adopted our daughters: Ryte, now age 15 and Aira, now age 13. During this time I was also working toward a ThD in practical theology at Duke. My dissertation is an ethnographic exploration of All Souls' Day practices in Lithuania. Our time in Lithuania changed my life and reshaped my faith in manifold ways. Above all, I am keenly aware that God is present and about the work of creating, redeeming, and sustaining throughout our world. That new awareness guides my present work and vocation: helping the church celebrate, honor, and acknowledge God's presence in spaces and places beyond the walls and boundaries of the church. I am presently serving as the leader for a Macedonian Ministry group meeting in Asheville-Black Mountain, preparing portions of my dissertation for publication, developing workshop proposals for churches and seminaries, and homeschooling our youngest daughter. I look forward to serving as a parish associate at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church.