

**THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA  
COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY  
THE REVEREND ROBERT J. TUTTLE, CHAIR  
OCTOBER 25, 2014**

The Committee on Preparation for Ministry recommends the following to the Presbytery of Western North Carolina:

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- I. THAT** Leah Elizabeth Epps, a member of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Hendersonville, and a student at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA, be enrolled as a Candidate following the required examination by Presbytery.
- II. THAT** Jason W. Myers, a member of Fairview Presbyterian Church in Lenoir, and a student at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ, be enrolled as a Candidate following the required examination by Presbytery.

Recently, your Committee on Preparation for Ministry conducted interviews with Inquirers who asked, with the support of their sponsoring congregations and Sessions, that they be enrolled as Candidates in the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. We recommend them to you today for your approval.

**Leah E. Epps** comes with the support of her congregation and the recommendation of the Session of Trinity Presbyterian Church. Her written call to ministry/faith statement is contained in this packet (see CPM Attachment 1).

**Jason W. Myers** comes with the support of his congregation and the recommendation of the Session of Fairview Presbyterian Church. His written call to ministry/faith statement is contained in this packet (see CPM Attachment 2).

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION:**

- Ann Elizabeth Franklin was enrolled as an Inquirer on August 20, 2014. Annie is a member of the Morganton First Presbyterian Church and is attending Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond.
- Rosy Alexandra Robson was enrolled as an Inquirer on August 20, 2014. Rosy is a member of the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church and is attending Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond.

The Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) is hoping that you will help to identify and encourage people whom you feel that God is calling into the ministry to be a teaching elder. Care for people who are feeling a call to the ministry of Teaching Elder is a shared responsibility of the Session and the Presbytery. The process is described below.

**The Process of Becoming a Candidate and Beginning to Receive a Call**

It is important that those who are to be ordained as teaching elders receive full preparation for their task under the direction of the presbytery. For this purpose, a presbytery shall enter into a covenant

relationship with those preparing to become teaching elders and with their sessions and congregations. This relationship shall be divided into the two phases of inquiry and candidacy." (*Book of Order G-20601*)

## Inquiry Phase:

In order to begin the inquiry phase, an applicant must be a member of the sponsoring congregation, shall have been active in the work and worship of that congregation for at least six months, and shall have received the endorsement of their session. This person is then examined by CPM, and if approved, is enrolled as an Inquirer.

"The purpose of the inquiry phase is to provide an opportunity for the church and those who believe themselves called to ordered ministry as teaching elders to explore that call together so that the presbytery can make an informed decision about the inquirer's suitability for ordered ministry." (*G-2.0603*) A person must be an Inquirer for at least one year.

## Candidacy Stage:

When an Inquirer believes, through their discernment, that they are called to the position of teaching elder, they can request that they become a Candidate. The Inquirer will meet with their Session and explain their sense of call. The Session can endorse them and recommend them to the CPM. The CPM, through its discernment, can decide to recommend them to the Presbytery. At the recommendation of the CPM, the Inquirer comes before the Presbytery to share part of their faith journey and their sense of call. The Presbytery can then ask them questions in respect to their sense of call, not questions of content of an ordination exam. They can ask about "their Christian faith, forms of Christian service, and motives for seeking the ministry." (Adopted from a previous *Book of Order*.)

## The Purpose of the Candidacy Phase:

"The purpose of the candidacy phase, then, is to provide for the full preparation of persons to serve the church as teaching elders." (*G-2.0604*)

## Preparation for a Call:

Before a person may take a call in our Presbytery, they must have completed the following:

- Pass the Bible Content Exam.
- Pass the four Senior Ordination Exams (Biblical Exegesis, Theological Competence, Worship and Sacraments, and Church Polity).
- Complete a two-day battery of assessments administered by a Career & Personal Counseling Center.
- Complete one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education training (CPE).
- Normally, complete at least one year at a PCUSA seminary.
- Meet annually with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.
- Have been an inquirer at least one year and have been a Candidate at least one year.

## Must be Approved by CPM to Receive a Call:

A Candidate may not begin to enter negotiations about a call as a teaching elder without the approval of the CPM, which has been delegated this task. When a Candidate has completed the above, the CPM will examine the Candidate and determine if he/she is ready to begin looking for a call, and if so, will "certify the person ready to receive a call." The Candidate will also have their Personal Information Form (PIF) reviewed and approved by CPM. If the person receives a call, the Candidate will be examined by the receiving presbytery.

# CPM ATTACHMENT 1

To the Members of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina,

My name is Leah Epps, a member of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Hendersonville, NC. I am honored to share with you my faith journey. I used to look on my journey as a wandering path, which eventually led to me discerning my call. However, the wandering path is not accurate; it is more of an image of a labyrinth path. It is a path God set out for me which has always had direction; God knew where I was going even if I did not.

I am a person of faith; this has been nurtured in me since childhood. I grew up in the Presbyterian Church. Christian education started with my home life, my parents, and my older brothers. It also took place at my hometown church in Lake City, SC. Growing up and learning in childhood Sunday school classes taught by ‘Miss’ Willie Ruth and ‘Miss’ Louise, and the joy of church music as I took part in children and youth choir directed by ‘Miss’ Betty. I also had the fellowship of community with my peers in youth group. Mom is still a member at this church and whenever I visit her, I attend. Lake City Presbyterian was my go-to church through most of my life –knowing I could always go home to friends and family. It has provided a wonderful basis for my life.

My faith began branching out as a youth attending summer camp here in the mountains of North Carolina –the love of God and nature all around me. We had services in a *green cathedral* with trees arching to a natural steeple, an alter made of rock and stone, candles set on a wooden cross, and all of camp gathered on a blanket of leaves. God’s presence was there! And to this day, when I want to hear God’s answers I go to the woods.

Learning of different denominations and faiths through high school and college expanded my beliefs. My high school years were spent at an Episcopal boarding school and the college I attended was Methodist.

Three years after college I married (1991). I got divorced in April 2011. During these years I did not have a church home. We tried attending Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Lutheran churches, but never found somewhere we were both comfortable together. For 10 years of the marriage we owned a small AM radio station and Sunday mornings were my responsibility. I may have not been attending a church, but I was hearing 4 or 5 different denominations’ messages every week. I continued my own walk of faith during this time, although it was private between me and God, and took place when and where I could find it: in prayer, while hiking, or even walking the dog.

In March 2010, when I realized the marriage was over, I began making a new life for myself – God had a new path for me. During this time, I knew I could draw from inner strength and faith in God.

May 2010, I began volunteering at The Free Clinics of Hendersonville with their Patient Assistance Program. This gave me a way of helping and caring for others as well as beginning my own healing process.

In June 2010, I joined Trinity Presbyterian Church in Hendersonville (N.C.). I found a new church family! God was leading me the on my purposeful path. I discovered a loving church family offering me many ways to grow in faith and to give a lending hand to others. Trinity opened my yearning to grow; the more I learned, the more I want to learn.

Fall 2011, I began taking School of the Laity courses through the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. It awakened in me a search for more knowledge and opened my eyes to where God has been leading me

# CPM ATTACHMENT 1

most of my life. These courses helped me realize that path God had in mind for me. I want to learn more, help, and care for others, and minister and teach to those who are in need.

I considered the possibility of seminary for several months, prayed on it and waited for an answer; I was reading a pastoral care book in early September 2012 when something struck me in the words. It felt as if God tapped me on the shoulder and whispered “YES” in my ear.

This first year at seminary has been amazing! Learning is a lifelong process and I am grateful for the learning opportunities I have had both in and out of the classroom. From the first day of taking summer Greek to the experiences at the Annual Recreation Workshop last May, the educational journey at seminary is guiding me into becoming a congregational leader, a practicing theologian, and a community witness.

I have enjoyed being in a community of fellowship with others also on their own journey of discernment. The friendships and connections I am making will be with me not only through my seminary years, but into the years that follow.

This summer, I interned in a small church in Tappahannock, Virginia. It confirmed to me my call of wanting to be a pastor in a small church. I found great joy in the relationships with the members of the congregation, the preaching experiences, and the opportunities to guide discussions.

As my discernment of call continues, I know I do not want to pass up any opportunities that God may offer. I love all the unique influences that have gotten me to this point in my life. Family and friends, the churches I have attended, the choices I have made or had made for me and the path that God led me on all bring me to this place now. There is joy in the journey and more unknown adventurous joys around the next corner; more opportunities to grow in grace.

Peace and Blessings to all,  
Leah E. Epps

# CPM ATTACHMENT 2

Statement of Call

Jason W. Myers

In order to understand my sense of calling, one needs to know from where I am coming to see where I believe God is sending me. Although I am only 32, full-time ministry is going to be a second career for me. Like many people who labor in ministry full-time, I never would have imagined receiving a call to full-time ministry. I grew up in a family that was primarily focused on survival, so there never was any encouragement to pursue education beyond High School. Many people in my family worked in the same company for their whole life. I don't know if it was the, "American Dream" being instilled in me or just a desire to be used by God, but I have always had an inward longing to do something important with my life. During a time of teenage rebellion, I lost sight of that dream and did not pursue higher education, and focused instead on a career in the restaurant industry. Although I had believed in God all my life and was baptized at the age of 7, I had never felt the need to belong to a Christian community. I also started a family with my wonderful wife, Martha. I had become a restaurant manager at the age of 19, so I was able to provide very well for my wife and children. Under my leadership, the profitability of the restaurant more than doubled. Despite my huge success as a restaurant manager there was something missing, however, I knew deep down that I was created to do something more with my life.

My wife had grown up in the Presbyterian Church. It was her ties to Fairview Presbyterian Church in Lenoir that led us there for pre-marital counseling and we have been active members ever since. It was there that God was presented to me in a new light and for the first time in my life I really wanted to be a part of the Church universal. Although I had grown weary of organized Christianity during my teenage years, I found myself wanting to be more and more involved with the small congregation of mostly elderly married couples and widows/widowers. In the winter of 2006 I felt the desire to start a youth program. This was a little ambitious on my part because the church only had two teens (One that was there bi-weekly and the other that came with a neighbor occasionally). A last-minute plea from my pastor, Rev. Edyth Pruitt, to go and chaperone teens at a summer camp in Petersburg, VA changed everything for me. Edyth had been directing the spiritual enrichment at the youth retreat for several years. Each year she would round up some teens to go. Two adults from Fairview would serve as chaperones. Since I set my own work schedule, it was easy for me take a week off with such a short notice, so I embarked on what would be a turning point in my life.

Serving as a chaperone for this mission trip gave me the confidence and confirmed God's desire for me to start the youth program. On that trip I felt God in a deeper and more meaningful way than ever before in my life. The fellowship that I experienced with God and with fellow Christians was overwhelming. It was true fellowship in the spirit of Acts 4:32. The setting, which was designed to transform the life of teens, had perhaps transformed me more than anyone that went with us that year. God used that mission trip to help me understand that we are all gifted for ministry, what we often lack is the courage to answer the call. Within a year of going on that mission trip, I had quit my job and enrolled in the local community college to begin the journey towards seminary. In 2007, I began a youth ministry at Fairview and I was nominated by the congregation to become a ruling elder. Since then, I have realized that youth ministry was not my primary calling, but I have served faithfully the congregation of Fairview Presbyterian Church. I have been blessed to serve as the Fellowship Chair, the Missions Chair, and the Outreach Chair. As Missions Chair and after reorganization as the Outreach Chair, I served as the Director of the church's Pay It Forward Food Pantry. I also serve as pulpit supply when needed. I find it very fulfilling to lead the people of God in worship and in service. God has used my family to bless the congregation and they have certainly enriched our faith as well.

At this point in my discernment I am open to the different possibilities for ministry. I know that God will make clear the path that I am to take. I love working in a small congregation and hope to be able to serve smaller, rural churches. To gain experience I would like to be part of a multi-staff church

## CPM ATTACHMENT 2

working in outreach ministries. My experience both as an individual and in my ministry experience has given me a deep desire to serve the “least of these.” Service is a very real part of the faith for me. I find that the people in the food pantry taught me just as much theology as the Professors at Montreat College, where I completed a bachelor's degree with a concentration in Biblical Studies in 2012. During seminary visits, my friends and I also visited churches. We were able to witness the vibrant outreach programs of East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, where we worshipped alongside homeless people who sought refuge from the cold in the church's homeless shelter. It was an awe-inspiring program which sought to restore dignity in their lives. During our visit to Princeton, we stopped in Philadelphia to visit the Church of the Advocate. This was the church where women were first ordained in the Episcopal Church. The building was in great need of repairs. The congregation had very few members to maintain the facilities. Despite their own struggles, the congregation reached out to the community (which was in even worse shape than the building) with a daily soup kitchen. It is easy to see the fruit of the Spirit at work in ministries such as these. They demonstrate to the world the message of the Gospel in a very visible way.

The most exciting aspect of ministry which I look forward to is helping to interpret the mystery of God's grace to the people of God. I see a huge need for people to grow deeper in their love for God and to their neighbor. This process begins with a deeper understanding of the Gospel, itself. It was with this goal that I entered into seminary. I look forward to learning from people from all over the nation and from all over the world to see how God has transformed their lives and communities through the life changing message of Jesus Christ. After gaining knowledge and experience, I plan to serve faithfully the PC(USA) no matter where God leads. My wife is hoping that means Guatemala, where she visited as part a PWNC delegation.

As my first year of Seminary comes to a close, I am grateful to God for the ability to come to Princeton. I am continually grateful that God has instilled in me the courage to listen to the call of Jesus and to follow him. Upon reflection of my first year, it has become clear to me that God has given me a special compassion for those on the periphery of society: the homeless, the imprisoned, and the working poor. It is also very clear to me that God has given me the desire to extend love and hospitality to those in bondage to addiction, failed relationships, and cycles of violence. I have witnessed first-hand that I will need to be able to deal with each of these issues in ministry no matter where I am called. I am more committed than ever before to follow the call of Jesus. The possibilities of what that ministry will look like, excites me more and more each day. For me the call to lead the church is not to be taken lightly. It is a call that I accept with fear and trembling, but one that also rest in the assurance of an overwhelming knowledge of God's grace, the faithfulness and model of Jesus Christ and the powerful guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is a call that has been confirmed in community with other believers. It is a call that with the blessing of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina I seek to continue to answer through ordered ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA) as a Teaching Elder.