

**THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA  
COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY  
THE REVEREND DANA VAUGHN, CHAIR  
JANUARY 27, 2018**

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

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**I. THAT** Allison Greene Simmons, a member of First Presbyterian Church in Gastonia and a graduate of Gardner Webb School of Divinity in Boiling Springs, North Carolina, be enrolled as a Candidate following the required examination by Presbytery.

Recently, your Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) conducted interviews with an Inquirer who asked, with the support of their sponsoring congregation and Session, that they be enrolled as a Candidate in the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. We recommend her to you today for your approval.

**Allison Greene Simmons** comes with the support of her congregation and the recommendation of the Session of Gastonia First Presbyterian Church. Her written call to ministry/faith statement is contained in this packet (See CPM Attachment 1).

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION:**

- Rosy Robson, a Candidate from the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church, was certified ready to receive a call on October 18, 2017.
- Annie Franklin, a Candidate from the First Presbyterian Church of Morganton, was certified ready to receive a call on October 18, 2017.
- Jackie Putnam, a Candidate from the Northminster Presbyterian Church in Hickory, was certified ready to receive a call on October 18, 2017.
- David Brandon Smith, a member of the Montreat Presbyterian Church and a Candidate from the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, has accepted a call as Designated Associate Pastor for Youth & their Families at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

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

“It is important that those who are to be ordained as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament receive full preparation for their task under the direction of the presbytery. For this purpose, a presbytery shall enter into covenant relationship with those preparing to become Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and with their sessions and congregations. This relationship shall be divided into the two phases of inquiry and candidacy.” (*Book of Order G-2.0601*)

**Inquiry Phase:**

“To be enrolled as an inquirer, the applicant shall 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 the session of the sponsoring congregation. The inquiry and candidacy phases shall continue for a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as a candidate.” (*Book of Order G-2.0602*) 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 Ministers of the Word and Sacrament 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 Minister of the Word and Sacrament, 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, then, is to provide for the full preparation of persons to serve the church as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament." (*G-2.0604*)

### **Preparation for a Call:**

Before a person may take a call in our Presbytery, they must complete 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.
- Take a course in Reformed Theology and Polity.
- Complete Seminary.

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

A Candidate may not begin to enter negotiations about a call as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament 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. When the person receives a call, the Candidate will be examined by the receiving presbytery.

If a Candidate who is under care of this Presbytery receives a call within our bounds, that candidate will preach before the Committee on Preparation for Ministry and their sermon will be included in the Presbytery report.

Members of the Western Presbytery of North Carolina,

Dr. Hobbie, "If you aren't changing, then you are doing something wrong. Because God is always calling you to change and drawing closer to God". These are words that have stuck with my since I was in college and they ring true to my faith journey and my statement of call. The mystery of God calls us into a relationship with God and that call requires change because who we are as a child of God is never finished; God is always working in us. In my life as God has been pulling me closer things about myself have changed for the better.

When I was a child my family, my mom and dad, attended First United Presbyterian Church of Dale City in Northern Virginia. It's about 25-30 miles south of Washington, DC. I remember attending church with my parents, sometimes begrudgingly but always together, on Sunday mornings. I attending children's choir, watched as my mother played handbells, Sunday school, and attended church functions together. I was active in Girl Scouts and I participated in the God and Me program with the leadership of my pastors. When I was in middle school I began attending youth choir, middle school youth group, homeless prevention and awareness walks, my first 30 hour famine, and confirmation class. I remember this being the first time I began to engage my faith from what I had learned to some level of practical application of living what I had learned. But from the beginning of 8th grade to the end of my 9th grade year, my faith and belief in who and what I believed about the triune God and sin was pressed to my personal faith.

On 9/11/2001, I was in 8th grade art class, when my world, my landscape and my faith changed. I remember thinking, once the shock of what had happened had worn off enough to begin to process, "where was this God I had always believed and known? Why didn't God stop what had happened? What did it mean to be beloved by God in the rubble?" Then almost a year to the day during my 9th grade year of high school, the "DC Sniper(s)" weeks long attacks on the Maryland, DC, and Virginia areas happened. I thought, "God we haven't even healed from a year ago and now this?" At this point, I was attending youth group, youth choir, sunday school, corporate worship, but my heart was missing. I was still trying to reconcile the God who was taught to me as a child to the God I was experiencing now. But in January of my 9th grade year, I went on a mission trip to Chetumal, Mexico. My friend and I had jokingly signed up to go on this mission trip, that had always been an adult trip, laughing because neither of us thought our parents would let us go; however, we were deeply wrong because we had to go. During that trip, God had a message for me. While playing keep away from the children in the village, I ran into a barbed wire fence. I started to hyperventilate and because I had never experienced this feeling before, I began to have a panic attack and had trouble breathing. While sitting in the hut, I saw the faces of the children looking through the wooden planks of the walls and our host began to pray over me. Immediately I could breath and had a calm spirit and it was that moment that I realized, God is not a God that sits above humanity but is in the valleys and messiness of our lives journeying with us and never abandoning us. It was then I realized God won't take the pain from us but promises we are not alone in any aspect of our lives and God is constantly pulling grace out of those situations.

After those years, I noticed I was not like the other students my age; my faith, spirit, ministry was all different than the peers of my age. Much like Esther, I was different than others but I had a value to offer to God's people that I hadn't come to terms with and am still wrestling with God on. During that time my mother, mentors, spiritual leaders, friends, classmates and the like would always tell me, "You'd make a good youth director" or "God is calling you to ministry" or "God is calling you to be a pastor". I promptly said no, of course God was not calling me to that ministry. I was confident that God was not calling me to ministry.

I felt God calling me to Presbyterian College where I participated in several campus ministries and I fought God's calling toward ministry. However, I knew God called me to major in Religion and Philosophy where I thought, "I won't use this degree ever in a church or ministry." After college and a

Allison "Bubba" Greene Simmons

# CPM ATTACHMENT 1

job at a bank, God called me to a Presbyterian church in Kings Mountain, NC to be their youth and children's ministry director; again I thought only for a time such as this but not forever. God led me to another opportunity to take a few classes at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, NC. Because I refused to accept the call of working in ministry, I decided not to seek ordination at first. Because I wasn't going to use an MDiv to do ministry and yet again God's mystery pulled me in and forced me to change my path to God's path. During my time at Gardner-Webb, I felt God's presence pulling me deeper and knew God was calling me toward ordination. I began the process as an inquirer. During that time I resigned from my job at the church in Kings Mountain and accepted a year long internship at First Presbyterian Gastonia. That year really gave me the space and safety for wrestling with what God was calling me toward. I was able to do a variety of ministries such as pastoral, teaching, preaching, leading worship, participating in various worship services, and various other ministries. As I was finishing my MDiv, I was required to take a unit of CPE to complete my Pastoral Care and Counseling courses. During that one CPE unit at CaroMont Medical Center in Gastonia, NC, I found the I-Thou moments with God I had so deeply craved during my life. I found God's presence with me in every encounter and for the first time in my life, I didn't fight the path to which God was calling me at that moment. I didn't know what road lay ahead, but I knew this chaplaincy was the steps God was calling me into for our relationship.

After that one CPE unit, I found my voice God had given me much like Esther found her's to save God's people. I realized then, I don't know how God is going to use me, my ordination, or my ministry but I know God is in this journey with me. Part of that journey that God was pulling me was to a Chaplain Residency which is a year long residency at a hospital. I am currently a Chaplain Resident at Spartanburg Regional Medical Center in Spartanburg, SC where my specialty unit is Behavioral Health. I am the resident chaplain for three behavioral health units: Voluntary, Involuntary, and Geriatrics. There I journey with patients for a small moment where they can begin or continue to see God in their lives. During times of crisis, I am a participant of what God is doing in that journey, during that time for them, and seeing how God is not abandoning them in their time of need.

I identified with Esther earlier who is a strong woman God called and I am a strong woman God is calling. I have felt different than my peers during my life, but in my journey of calling, I am seeing how God is right beside me reminding me I may not know the destination but I know my journey companion the triune God. Jesus who emulates the parts of humanity I try deeper to achieve, the Holy Spirit who never abandons me, and God who in my journey changes me. I find the place where I belong and in that belonging, I will obediently and prayerfully continue the journey beside God in faith to my call.

Grace and peace

Allison (Bubba) Simmons