

**THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA
COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY
THE REVEREND DANA VAUGHN, CHAIR
JANUARY 25, 2020**

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

RECOMMENDATION:

- I. THAT** Caitlin Johnson, a member of Asheville First Presbyterian Church and a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, be enrolled as a Candidate following the required examination by Presbytery.

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

Caitlin Johnson comes with the support of her congregation and the recommendation of the Session of Asheville First Presbyterian Church. Her written call to ministry/faith statement is contained in this packet (see CPM Attachment 1).

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-2.0601*)

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 to 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 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.
- 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 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. 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.

CPM ATTACHMENT 1

Caitlin Johnson
Statement of Call

Dear Members of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina,
I am pleased to share the story of my call to ministry with you. I don't have a moment as a young child when I knew that God was calling me to ministry, or when I saw a pastor and knew I would one day wear a robe and stole. But as I have reflected, I can see that God has been writing this story for a long, long time and that I am still very much in the midst of it. I grew up in a small town in New Jersey just a short train ride to New York City. My Baptist-raised mother and Methodist-raised father settled on a Presbyterian Church to raise my two brothers and me in. My home church called out my ability and encouraged my enthusiasm for ministry at an early age. I was part of a strong youth ministry and on leadership teams, but I never paid attention to that. I never considered that this might be part of a call to ordained ministry. I just knew that I felt at home within the church. I knew that on certain hymns I could and still can hear my grandfathers deep voice booming even if he wasn't there with me, I could and still can see my grandmother writing in the margins of her Bible and hear her praying. I knew that within the church there were people who deeply cared for me, that I could ask hard questions of, people who brought out the voice and gifts of a girl who often liked to stand off to the side and not attract too much attention.

I attended a Christian liberal arts college. During my freshman year I took an introduction to social work class and my world integrated for the first time in my life. My love for the world, for God's people, my belief in a just society, my longing for an active, vibrant, healthy church — all these passions seemed to merge together. I understood myself, in whatever sphere of life that I found myself, to be a coworker with God for the redemption and restoration of all creation.

During college I spent my summers as a pastoral care intern at my home church and I loved the work. I listened to people's stories, visited them in the hospital and at home, prayed with them in crisis, and paid attention to what God might be doing in their lives. That was the first time a few people began asking if I had considered seminary. That next year, I talked with a trusted advisor in the social work department who also asked if I had thought about seminary. She encouraged me to consider if God was leading me towards theological education and to the vocation of pastor. I prayed, I read a lot, and I talked to trusted friends and mentors. I applied to Princeton Theological Seminary and went off to do an internship in hospice social work. I spent a semester living in Chicago and working as a hospice social worker doing primarily in home care with a strong interdisciplinary team of doctors, nurses, chaplains, aromatherapists, social workers, and bereavement counselors. I loved the way we were able to care for the whole person and their family. I loved working with this kind of team. I graduated from college in 2004 and began at Princeton that summer.

In seminary, I was an intern at an urban church in Philadelphia and was mentored by a strong female head of staff. The church I served was racially, theologically, socio-economically, and geographically diverse. I learned so much about urban ministry that year and about what it looked like for a church to remain in place, committed both to the changing neighborhood

CPM ATTACHMENT 1

around them and also committed to the church being representative of the neighborhood outside their doors. Along the way, I met and married my husband, another student at the seminary. When I graduated in 2007 I took a job as a director of youth ministries in Summit, New Jersey while my husband completed a doctoral program. During that time I took and passed my ordination exams and completed clinical pastoral education in the summer. My husband was called to a church just as we learned that we were expecting twins. It was the right time for me to leave my job. I didn't know quite how to prepare to welcome two babies into our lives but I knew I wanted some time to do it well.

I also requested a leave of absence from the ordination process in my home Presbytery. I was told there was no process for a leave of absence. With misgivings, lots of tears, but also a deep conviction that it was the right decision I stepped out of the process in 2010. I have spent the last ten years nurturing, shaping, and directing our family life as we grew to be a family of six. Being mother to nine year olds Isla and Luke, six year old Claire, and two year old Felicity is my great privilege. Through it all, I have worked as a volunteer Sunday School director, I have started new programs, I have nurtured the faith of children in multiple congregations, I have taught classes, and led small groups. I have also lived with a lot of wondering about what would be next.

Four years ago, our family moved to Asheville and I became a member at First Presbyterian Church in Asheville. For the past few years I've wondered what it would look like to begin the process of ordination again. I am in this process today because I have received incredible support and encouragement from this Presbytery, from my family, and from the great cloud of witnesses we call the church. I am ready to be standing before you in a way I have not been before. I have reflected more recently on whether I wish I had completed ordination ten years ago. But, it wasn't right then. I have been able to fully embrace the vocation of parent to my four children. This last decade of my life has been given – my energy, intelligence, imagination, and love – to nurturing my family. That call has only better prepared me to say a bold “yes” to this next call. I don't pretend to know exactly what the future looks like, but I don't feel as though I am forging a new path in the wilderness. More and more as I look back on my journey and anticipate looking back to this season many years from now, I can see that God has laid this path before me. This path is a promise that encourages me to walk boldly forward in faithfulness and delight.