

Commission on Preparation for Ministry

Information Only—An Update On Our Inquirers/Candidates

We currently have 3 inquirers, 1 candidate, 1 candidate certified ready to receive a call, and 1 commissioned ruling elder under care.

Presbytery Action Item—Seeking A Move To Candidacy

The CPM brings before the floor of Presbytery John Kubar, who has expressed and demonstrated to us his desire to move from inquirer to candidate.

Presbytery Action Item—Motion for Examination for Ordination

The CPM moves to examine before the floor of Presbytery James Blankenkoper for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. His spiritual biography and statement of faith are attached.

Presbytery Action Item—Motion for Examination for Ordination

The CPM moves to examine before the floor of Presbytery Tamara Schmidt for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Her spiritual biography and statement of faith are attached.

Faith Statement

I believe in God the Creator, who made the world good. All people are created equally in God's image, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or social status. Therefore, we are all beloved children of God. God's love is infinite. This love reaches beyond our understanding and is poured out on us by God's grace through faith. But we rebel against God, ignoring the promises given to us in Scripture. We fall into sin, and turn against God, ignoring the divine love. But God acts with mercy in order to redeem us, and all of creation.

I believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God, fully divine, fully human. He is Immanuel, God with us, the Word made into flesh. I look to the life and works of Jesus Christ for an example of living a life in accordance with Scripture. Jesus came to love, heal, and redeem us. Christ came for the forgiveness of sin, so that all that who believe in Him, may not die, but live eternally. Jesus was crucified, suffering the fullness of human pain, giving his life for the sins of all. God raised Jesus from the dead, delivering us from death to eternal life, a sign of God's infinite love.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit is always with us, guiding and strengthening us in our daily lives. It was the work of the Spirit that breathed into and guided the hands that wrote the Scriptures. The Spirit breathed into the lives of those in Scripture and continues to breathe into our lives now through the Word proclaimed. It is through the Spirit that we are joined together into the body of Christ, the Church. The Spirit claims us in baptism, nourishes us with the bread of life and cup of salvation, and calls us to seek justice in the world by working with others to create a world where God's love is more than visible.

I believe the Church to be headed by Christ, with its mission to be God's presence in the world. As members of the Church, we are called to work for peace, justice, and mercy. Through this work, we are able to show God's love to those who may not have experienced it, reconciling the world through Jesus Christ. God calls all believers to the priesthood, with a place in the Church for everyone. As we work together to establish justice and righteousness, we show God's love to all people.

Spiritual Autobiography

I grew up a cradle Presbyterian at Maxwell Street Presbyterian Church in Lexington, KY. I was active in Sunday school, youth group, and college group, never calling another church home. This doesn't mean I haven't explored my faith. In college I explored the greater Church and attended Methodist, Catholic, non-denominational, and Church of Christ services, but felt the Presbyterian Church was my home.

Throughout my elementary and middle school career, I attended the Thursday evening community meal at MSPC and befriended many people experiencing homelessness. I am comforted to know I can still see a friend on the street in Lexington and strike up a conversation. Through this experience I learned to meet people where they are, an early life-lesson that I still hold close to my heart. My high school experience was the first time I experienced familial death. This experience led me to explore my faith and deepen my understanding in what being a Christian really meant. Seeing how MSPC functioned, and the lessons that I learned, I wondered whether the church would be a place to which I could devote myself.

As I graduated high school, my father had recently graduated from seminary and taken a call in rural West Virginia. I then attended the University of Kentucky. This was the time when I really started questioning and examining my faith. My friends from church went to other universities, but I continued to attend church and learn more about Jesus and myself. When I started college I considered becoming a social worker or a teacher. But throughout college, I was still unsure of God's call on my life. I decided my majors would be psychology and sociology after realizing that I truly enjoy helping others; and one way to help is to be able to understand why people and society do things a certain way.

Following my freshman year, I worked at Burnamwood as a camp counselor. There, I first got to see how children experience God. I learned about faith from people younger than me, something I hadn't considered earlier. I spent time in God's creation simply listening. A large take-away from this first year at camp was that I can learn from everyone, regardless of age or status. I enjoyed my summer so much that I worked there the remaining summers of college. I find Burnamwood as a place of solace. I vehemently feel God's presence when I'm worshipping there. After my senior year I had the pleasure of being the summer director. I oversaw the summer staff, and in return learned what it takes to run a camp. I was challenged everyday by resolving staff conflict, creating worship agendas, managing a camp schedule, and taking time to listen for God in the midst of chaos. This was a tremendous experience that I cannot and would not give up for the world.

In my senior year of college, I started debating whether graduate school was my next step. I felt that furthering my education was important, but also felt another calling. That calling was to serve. I looked into the Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program in the PC (USA). After much discernment, I accepted a position as a YAV at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood for a year of service with community outreach. My work consisted of cooking and serving food for community meals, working with youth ministry, coordinating and managing a winter refuge for people experiencing homelessness, case management, and leading a Bible study for the community. The work was challenging, but rewarding. I then applied for another YAV year, this

time in New Orleans, working at Lakeview Presbyterian Church and Mid-City Ministries. During that year I helped create a short-term mission program, developed worship leadership skills, tutored elementary and middle school children, organized that same tutoring program, worked with short-term mission groups, and helped with youth retreats and summer camps. Both of my YAV years shaped me spiritually. I engaged in conversation with people outside of my tradition regularly. I challenged my traditional understanding of God through new experiences, conversations, and engaging people.

It was during those YAV years that I discerned a call to ministry. I had toyed with the idea of seminary, but also with other graduate school opportunities. There was no specific moment that made me decide seminary was the next step. It was a gradual process that began to feel more and more right. As I applied and was accepted into seminary, I felt God's purpose on my life more fully than I had ever before.

As I entered into my seminary experience, I found it to be very important for my spiritual growth. I have never been around people who are able to articulate faith so clearly, which is enabling me to develop language for my own faith. Classes are eye-opening. The experiences are well worth it. Since being at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, I have gained a much greater understanding of what it means to be Presbyterian and how to articulate that. I had the opportunity to visit Israel/Palestine with the school, which has changed the way I read the Bible indefinitely. Working my way toward the end of my second year, I cannot wait to see what God has in store for me and where I'll be led in the remainder of this theological education.

James C. Blankenkoper Biographical Statement for Transylvania Presbytery

I was born (1977) into a supportive, middle-class (Euro-American) family in Bloomington, IN. My father (died 2014) was finishing up his advanced degrees (MSW/Ed. D.) while my mother was working as a physical therapist. We moved to Indianapolis, IN a year or two after my birth and there I was raised with my three siblings (1 sister [oldest] and two brothers [one older; one younger]) and remained there until my after my sophomore year of high school (16 years old), at which point my family (my younger brother in and I and our parents) moved to northwest Indiana (Hobart, Indiana).

I graduated Thomas Edison High School (Lake Station, IN) in 1995 and began my collegiate studies at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, IN (1995-1997). My initial attempt at collegiate studies did not go well (due to lack of effort and direction). I recognized this and I made the choice to join the U.S. Air Force at the age of twenty.

I served four years on active duty in Charleston South Carolina (1997-2001). I served as an Air Transportation Journeyman (loading/unloading cargo aircraft). I also volunteered in by off-duty time for the base honor guard (3 years) where I was afforded the opportunity to offer veterans military honors at their funerals among other high profile military ceremonies. After my four years on active duty, I chose to leave the military (honorable discharge) to pursue my Bachelor's degree and I moved back to Bloomington IN to complete my degree. Most of my undergraduate education was in the social science of psychology. I eventually graduated with a Bachelor's in General Studies. After graduation, I worked various 'dead-end' jobs; that is to say jobs that weren't fulfilling for me. However I believe God has used these various jobs to help me be able to relate to people from all walks of life and it has been a blessing in my current ministry.

In 2007, after talking with my parent's Presbyterian pastor, I applied for and was hired as 30 year old camp counselor at camp PYOCA in Brownstown Indiana. This experience truly began my trajectory toward seminary. I felt like I was experiencing what Church was really about (living in relationship with other staff and serving the campers each week). After working at another church camp (as full time "Building and Grounds manager") in Virginia with the National Capital Presbytery, I returned to Indiana to pursue a theological education.

My time in seminary exposed me to various approaches to theology. In fact, challenging theological norms was the norm in my education at LPTS. This, I think, is important because it has left me with an open mind to different theological approaches/perspectives and continuously challenges me to explore and decide (with God's help of course) what I believe in the context of the Church. This is a good and healthy thing because it helps me to avoid trying to have all the answers to life's most difficult questions even when I wish there were easy answers to give. My lived experiences tells me that any theological answer offered inevitably falls short and does not encompass all of who God is or why things happen the way they do. I have walked away from my seminary education with the firm belief that God loves each of us and God invites all to believe, in our own unique way, and to participate in God's redeeming love and to engage the world around us.

I was baptized and confirmed in the United Church of Christ tradition. I got away from regular church participation in my 20s but had sort of a 're-awakening' when I turned 30 and began my work at PCUSA church camps where I felt I was "doing church". I joined the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in February 2010 in Brownstown Indiana. My faith journey has had its ups and downs and I struggled much of my life to figure out what God was calling me to. Through trial and error (and the providence of God) I believe I found that calling in hospital chaplaincy.

I currently serve as staff Chaplain with University of Kentucky Healthcare in Lexington, KY. I work at Good Samaritan hospital where we often serve the homeless, the addicted, and are the site of UK healthcare's behavioral health unit. I lead a spirituality group Monday-Friday on the adolescent side of that unit. I also do pulpit supply for my home church in Brownstown Indiana (once a month) as well as for Community Presbyterian Church in Charlestown Indiana (once a month).

Statement of personal faith

...which incorporates an understanding of the Reformed tradition

Please include in your faith statement these elements:

What is your understanding of God?

What is your understanding of Jesus?

What is your understanding of the Holy Spirit?

What is your understanding of the Trinity?

What is your understanding of Scripture?

What is your understanding of the nature and role of the Church and of the Sacraments?

What is your understanding of Christian Discipleship?

I believe in the mystery of the triune God, creator of all things. One God in three persons traditionally understood as the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit; the very name we use each time a believer is baptized into covenant relationship with God and God's people and which unites us with believers of different Christian traditions. I believe the one true God to be in eternal relationship within the mysterious Godhead as well as with the whole of the created order. I believe in the relational aspect of God for all of creation, in that the Father sent the Son, in the person of Jesus the Christ, to reconcile and bring into relationship sinful people with a Holy God; who, by grace, redeemed and empowered believers to respond to God's love and live in ways that honor and glorify God.

I believe Jesus is the very son of God and God's chosen Christ, the messiah and deliverer of God's people. Jesus justifies all who believe, by offering them promised salvation through his life, death and resurrection. I believe that Jesus is the word made flesh and is the very bread of life for all who believe in Him, and as God's chosen messiah for God's people, Jesus is now, and forever will be, the head of the Church. The Church includes all who trust and believe in Jesus as the Christ, past, present and future, one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

I believe the Holy Spirit to be both the initiator and the agitator of faith; working in and through believers to bring about sanctification, working in our lives to conform us more and more into Christ's image. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to not only believe but to learn, to change, and to grow in our faith and empowers the Church to be a witness for Christ; living into Christ's command to make disciples of all nations and all peoples by telling them the good news of God's love for them in Christ and baptizing them into the faith.

I believe God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, chose to speak through people from different times and places to write down the very word of God that we know as the Bible. The Bible is our guidepost for our life of faith and is to be rightly preached to God's people. It pleased God to choose the use of biography, metaphor, poetry, history, prophesy, law, narrative and other forms of writing found in Holy Scripture, to convey God's love, to show how God has moved among God's people of the past, and to point us to Jesus our savior. I believe God speaks through the scriptures even today to change lives, to make wise the simple, and to draw us into closer relationship with the Holy One and with each other. I believe that God is not an idle God, but a pursuing God, drawing God's creation into relationship; first with God but also with each other as we ought to find in Christ's Church.

The nature and role of the Church is to be Christ's hands and feet to one another and to the world at large. The Church is identified by its proclamation of Christ through the preaching of God's word, the sacraments of grace, as well as through its governance and discipline. The Church is to model their ministry after the selfless example of Christ (the head of the Church). The Church's role is to be a body of believers who are working, as called to do so by the movement of the Holy Spirit through scripture and in our lives, for the reconciliation of the world and, with God's help, further establish God's kingdom on earth; offering hope to all. The Church should witness to Christ in such a way that those outside the Church, who see the Church's work, and respond by giving thanks and glory to God.

One of the means by which the Church offers a piece of God's kingdom and God's grace to the believer is through the celebration and the participation in the proper administration of the sacraments of grace: baptism and Holy Communion. The sacraments of the Church are visible signs of an inward grace by the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe the sacraments to be rooted in scripture and from the life of Jesus and are commands of Christ to do them in remembrance of him. The sacraments are signs to the world around us that we are Christ's body and they connect us to God and to one another. Our baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are cleansed of unrighteousness and we are claimed as God's own and it marks the beginning of our new life in Christ as well as our continued to call to live out our baptismal vows in the living out of our faith.

In Holy Communion the bread and the wine represent the presence of Christ's body and blood and is the outward sign of God's grace, giving to us to sustain us. The Lord's Supper is a remembrance and a time to reflect on how we are living out our faith (our baptism) and a time to be rejuvenated by the knowledge of God's love for us and God's provision of grace and strength through this sacrament.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He called people to be His disciples, to come and walk in newness of life, to learn from his actions and from his teachings. I believe Christian discipleship includes the spiritual practices of prayer, scripture reading, worship, participation in the sacraments, and the communion of the saints or fellow believers. However, Christian discipleship also includes turning our whole selves over to God, offering God our time, talent, and treasures; after all they are all gifts from God in the first place. Every Christian is called to discipleship and to tell others of the good news of God's love in Christ Jesus; demonstrated through acts of love and service following Christ's example. When we profess belief in Jesus as the Christ, we are no longer our own but we belong to God, and in Christ, all believers are one; claimed by God and given salvation in order to respond with lives of grateful service and selflessness so that God may use each of our lives for God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

-James Blankenbeker
November 2016

Spiritual Biography
Tammy Schmidt

Growing up as a Jehovah Witness, I was taught that God was vengeful and quick to pronounced judgment. Feeling unsettled in the middle of service, I turned to my older sister and quietly asked her, "Are Bible stories real or are they just stories?" She looked at me with horror in her eyes that I dared to ask such a question. She whispered derogatively, "Of course they're real!" I never asked again, ashamed and afraid I would get the same reaction. This led to an internal struggle over the next twenty years regarding the validity of the Bible and nature of God. I believed God existed, but I didn't understand the Triune God in the form of Jesus who came preaching forgiveness and grace.

My mother and father broke away from the Jehovah Witnesses when I was in elementary school. Overwhelming grief came in the wake of that decision. Our community of support, family friends, and the entire family on my mother's side came to an immediate halt. My father still had his support system as his family were not part of the Jehovah Witnesses. Sadly, my mother did not. Seeing how devastated my family was I learned that organized religion leads to disappointment and heartache. At that age how could I possibly distinguish the difference between spiritual trauma, grief, God, rigid doctrine, and faith? Ill-equipped to deal with such overwhelming feelings or circumstances I disconnected religion from faith. Religion represented rigid doctrine and judgment. Faith became a solo endeavor which insisted that I seek answers to life's hard questions on my own. This ensured that my questions would never again be judged or scorned, and that I would never feel the kind of shame I felt when I asked that question of my sister.

It wasn't very long ago that my family and I began attending Church. It was there that I learned about the body of Christ. Slowly, the Bible began to make sense to me. I realized that my need to become self-reliant without burdening others perpetuated a hands-off relationship with my Creator. God *wants* me to lay my burdens at God's feet. God *wants* me to ask for help. Most importantly, God wants me.

My faith journey accelerated in the summer of 2008. I had the privilege of being a back home leader for our youth group attending a conference in Montreat, NC. There, I felt God's call. "Tammy," God said, "I want you to become a pastor." A month later I heard it again in a dream. Two weeks after that, our interim pastor spoke to me privately about considering a call to ministry, a secret that I had not shared with anyone.

Throughout seminary I was sure that God was leading me into parish ministry, even though it didn't quite fit. My call was leading me to something different, but I had no understanding of what that something was. That all changed my last semester in seminary while I was doing cpe. Throughout that experience I learned that the word pastor has many meanings.

My understanding of my call became fully realized as a chaplain resident, and further still as a staff chaplain at a small regional hospital in Corbin, KY. I feel God has called me into the ministry of chaplaincy into this particular area. I believe God is calling me to use my gifts for ministry; to listen to patients and families who feel like their voices go unheard, and to continue the work which God has begun in me.

Tamara Schmidt –Statement of Faith

I believe in God, our Author and Parent, who with voice alone, spoke into being all that is seen and more that is not. From dust we were created attesting of the Creator's great love for us. God is our constant companion going so far as to covenant with us to guide and sustain humanity, even those times when we draw back from God.

God's love for us is so great that God took on flesh and became Christ incarnate. His ministry taught us that love calls us to take notice of those who suffer and to realize that our true humanity is found when we love one another. Christ's death on the cross taught us that not even death can separate us from the love of God. When Christ rose from the dead on the third day, humanity witnessed our own redemption that taught us that, though our search for wholeness has been realized, that we also do not suffer alone.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are challenged and empowered to follow our calling to be in relationship with God. The Triune God proclaims that a new heaven and new earth is near, and that we, the Church, participate in God's mission of redemption, reconciliation, transforming all creaturely things to be raised to new life. Christ is our authority, our reason and task to be in service to God. The Church is the Body of Christ connected through faith, which is a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Through the waters of Baptism, the Spirit claims us as beloved children of God. At the table, the Spirit feeds and sustains us, re-presenting Christ in our midst. Convicting us of the Scriptures, the Spirit pushes us to love our neighbor whether it be near or far, to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Urging each of us individually and all of us collectively, the Spirit calls us to be who God created us to be: free and beloved children of God. The Spirit binds us to one another and to God, in and through the body of Christ. Refusing to be captive to the Church, the Spirit flows where it will, inspiring faith in many ways and in many places. We are called to be the Church, followers of our Lord and Savior, in every place and in every time, remembering that God has promised to be with us always, to the end of the age.