

Committee on Preparation for Ministry

MOTION: That Dr. Matthew Robinson be moved from Inquirer to Candidate status in the ordination process.

MOTION: That the presbytery concur with Dr. Matthew Robinson's request that the Book of Order requirement of a 1-year term of candidate status be waived, according to the rationale provided in the appeal below.

TIMELINE: Matthew Robinson

2004: Graduated from Wheaton College (Illinois) with a double major in Philosophy and Ancient Languages

2006: Began the MDiv program at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

2009: Graduated from the University of Chicago Divinity School, with the MDiv.

During this time in Chicago Matthew became Presbyterian, and worshiped at two different Presbyterian churches in the Chicago area (2004 to 2012).

2009: Began PhD in Theology and Religious Studies at Northwestern University.

2014: While completing PhD dissertation, moved to Mechanicsburg; began teaching in the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at Messiah College.

Was received as a member of the Silver Spring Presbyterian Church on September 21, 2014; Sensing the call to ordained ministry, came under care of the Silver Spring Session.

2015: (December) Graduated from Northwestern University with the PhD.

2016: Was enrolled as an Inquirer by CPM (April 7, 2016) and subsequently was ordained as an Elder at SSPC. In the summer of 2016, was offered (and accepted) a position as Research Associate in Practical Theology in the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Bonn, Germany.

Uncertain about the implications of this move on the call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, Matthew and CPM agreed to keep the conversation open to see where God might be leading. Lacking facility with Internet video technology CPM did not include Matthew in the annual Retreat with Inquirers and Candidates.

2017: Reconnected and re-engaged with CPM - Matthew relayed that the first year in Bonn had been fulfilling, both academically and spiritually; He shared that experience as worship leader, occasional preacher, Christian Education leader and retreat leader at the University Church had reignited the sense of call and led to consideration of a “unified call” to both academy and church; Matthew began considering possibilities for a CPE experience.

2018-2019: As the sense of call to ordained ministry bridging church and academy began to clarify and intensify, Matthew took further steps in the ordination process, including passing the Bible Content Exam and all four Ordination Exams. He relayed a sense of satisfaction and meaning in teaching practical and systematic theology at Bonn University in the department of Protestant Theology, including courses on intercultural theology, pastoral care, and spirituality.

Matthew re-engaged with CPM and continued exploring the possibility of ordination to a validated ministry.

2020: (March) COVID hit and we all took a crash course in Zoom.

2021: (April) Matthew reconfirmed his sense of call to ordained ministry on the faculty at the University of Bonn, informed by both teaching and continued worship leadership roles at the University Church. At the recommendation of CPM, he engaged in pastoral care experiences, including providing accompaniment and care for students and attending seminars geared to pastoral care for students.

2021: (September) At CPM retreat Matthew discussed with CPM readiness to pursue the call to ordained ministry in current position at the University of Bonn. CPM discovered that Matthew had not been moved from Inquirer to Candidate status.

The Session of the Silver Spring Presbyterian Church endorsed Matthew for Candidacy on October 28, 2021. The Committee on Preparation met with Matthew on November 4, 2021 and voted to recommend him to the presbytery for Candidacy, based on the following appeal and rationale:

RE: Appeal for the waiver of the one year candidacy requirement To the Commission on Ministry of the Carlisle Presbytery:

I am writing to request a waiver of the requirement of G-2.0602 in the Book of Order that the period of inquiry and candidacy in preparation for ministry include “at least one year as a candidate.” I submit the request on the basis of G-2.0610 that “there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an individual seeking ordination.” Such reasons in my case include the following:

I am not seeking to circumvent the process or abbreviate the time needed for discernment and growth into the call to ministry. I began the period of inquiry on 7

April 2016. As such, I have been actively engaged in the ordination process now for five years and thus I fulfill the requirement of G-2.0602 that the whole process “continue for a period of no less than two years.”

I have fulfilled the purposes of inquiry and of candidacy according to G-2.0603 and G-2.0604.

Inquiry. I had completed most of the formal elements of preparation for ministry when I enrolled as an inquirer. I had already completed seminary and begun teaching theology and Bible at Messiah College. The discernment of my particular vocation as a minister of Word and Sacrament ministering theological education began through a half-year of discernment conversations with Rev. Dr. Bebb Stone, then interim Head of Staff at Silver Spring Presbyterian Church. Perhaps it was an atypical timeline, but it was first upon conclusion of this informal “inquiry phase” that the congregation and I in particular felt we were making “an informed decision about the inquirer’s suitability for ordered ministry.” (G-2.0603) I then formally enrolled as an inquirer.

Candidacy. Only four months after enrolling as an inquirer, I completely unexpectedly received an offer for a position in Practical Theology from the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Bonn. I immediately consulted with SSPC’s then recently installed Head of Staff, Rev. Don Wahlig, about the implications for the ordination process of accepting this offer. Rev. Wahlig and I prayerfully agreed it would be proper and wise to remain in the process. After the period of moving internationally and beginning the new position, I slowly began studying for and completing the ordination exams. I also began serving in the Schlosskirche (the university chapel) by leading and supporting in Sunday worship in a rotating schedule, in commitment to fulfillment of G-2.0606. As outlined in my letter from 21 September 2021 regarding training and experience in pastoral care, I have also consistently been involved in offering pastoral care and accompaniment in my role as a theological educator for five years. In these practical and formal ways, I would humbly suggest that I have fulfilled the purpose of candidacy as defined by G-2.0604 and pages 44-46 of the Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry.

It is only by virtue of a missing Form 5a rather than due to any lack of preparedness that I did not formally conclude the period of inquiry and begin the period of candidacy. Rev. Wahlig and I agree that the official transfer from inquiry to candidacy and completion of Form 5a simply “fell through the cracks” in the period of my transition from Mechanicsburg to Bonn and in the process of shifting CPM leadership from Paul Derrickson to Rev. Wahlig. I sincerely believe this was an accidental oversight that does not reflect negligence. I would note, for example, that I, then CPM

chair Paul Derrickson and Rev. Wahlig remained in email contact over the course of that 2016-2017 year, and I did still submit my Form 3 updates in 2017 for the CPM retreat. So this oversight in not filing Form 5a is not due to a cut in communications or a lack of “support, guidance, and evaluation of a candidate’s fitness and readiness” as foreseen by G-2.0604 and described on pages 44-46 of the Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry. To the contrary, the CPM and I have continued to fulfill our commitments to each of these things over the past five years.

The foregoing points outline my reasons for requesting, in good faith and consistent with the polity of the PC(USA), an accommodation to particular circumstances in the form of a waiver of the requirement to complete a year of official candidacy. This statement provides a “full account of the reasons for any such waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness” that can “be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred.” (G-2.0610)

Signed,

Matthew Ryan Robinson on this 24.10.2021

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Ryan Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'M'.