

Statement on Sense of Call

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I came to love the Lord early in my life and attended Sunday School all through my childhood and youth, even when my parents stopped going to church. God was faithful and I've always had a sense of the Holy Spirit's presence in my life, guiding me and leading me into prayer and Bible study. In 4th and 5th grade, the chapel where we were stationed had a junior church that the older children led. I loved helping lead this junior church! This is where I found my love of hymns, memorizing several before I was 10. Unfortunately, during my junior high years the church where I had started attending Sunday School did not teach the Word of God once I got to 7th grade and I stopped going. When I started high school, however (at a new duty station), I began attending church services as well as Sunday School. Because my dad was military, my early spiritual training was in military chapels, and my young adult years sort of hopped around among various denominations at college and while on break at home, so I became familiar with several Christian traditions. Eventually, I married and my husband and I joined the United Methodist Church, since that was his upbringing. When we retired, however, the UMC churches where we moved to in Gettysburg did not seem to "fit," and Lower Marsh Creek Presbyterian did. We love our church and are very active in this congregation; among other things, I am currently a Ruling Elder serving on Session. As I learn more about Presbyterian doctrine, I realize it is where my own thoughts about God's Being, intents, and purposes for the Church and the world have been leading me. Although I have always been very active in our churches, though, I never seriously considered ordained ministry—even after I was eligible to retire from my federal career—mostly because I am not a fan of the episcopal form of church governance in the UMC.

One of the (many) reasons we joined LMCP is because we did like the governance structure in the PC (USA), and soon after we began attending, the Lord sort of hit me over the head with a 2x4. In preparation for a "Steps of Paul" trip to Greece and Ephesus, our pastor led a book study on the N.T. Wright book "Paul: A Biography," which had only been out about 2 months. At the first lesson, he told us the book was pretty much seminary level and half-jokingly said that if anyone engaged with the book, they should come talk with him. I had already read through the book and was re-reading it for the class... follow that up with a young friend suggesting seminary so I could learn to read the scriptures in the original languages and a question from a fellow traveler on that trip to Greece about where I went to seminary, and I got the message. After seriously praying and considering the idea, I talked with my pastor, researched online MDiv programs, and applied both to Dubuque Theological Seminary and to be an Inquirer in the Carlisle Presbytery.

Since the time I committed to the idea, I feel like I am being refined for further ministry. Apparently it is common for seminarians to face difficulties above and beyond their studies, and I have certainly had my share — emotionally and physically, as well as spiritually, all in addition to the mental challenge that seminary is. Through these difficulties, I am learning that I just have to trust God — with my studies, with my health, with my family, and with my future. I have experienced doubts and had my confidence shaken; before I was always a confident person. I am battling depression and anxiety, triggered by my mother's cancer diagnosis. I have had a series of physical health issues, which also seem to also be linked to the stress in my life, but every time I go to the Lord and ask whether I can really do this, I am told to just trust.

Throughout this refining process, though, I have also gradually learned to see myself as a future pastor. The Sunday after I made the decision to go to seminary, I watched my pastor with new, different eyes...and wondered if I could get to the point where I could actually discern the Lord's leading for a congregation of God's people and work with them to follow it. After 1 1/2 years, I now see not only that I can, with God's grace and in the power of the Spirit, but that I will be miserable if I do not. I sense a bit of how Paul must have felt when he said in I Corinthians 9:16-17: "...an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission." (NRSV) Consequently, I feel I am now ready to enter the Candidate phase of preparation towards ordained ministry.