

Sense of Call
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Faith Heritage:

I grew up in First Baptist Church in Waynesboro, VA. I was baptized there at the age of ten. Church was always an important part of our lives, spiritually, socially, and musically. I actively participated in our youth group which took several mission trips. I remember these as deeply forming events in my life, as they solidified my friendships and increased my curiosity in what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Several of these trips involved creating “pop-up” Bible schools in various parks and I remember enjoying teaching, singing, and doing crafts with the children. The music program at First Baptist was quite strong and I ended up taking piano, organ, and voice lessons from the choir director at that time. My career in music thus really began in church.

Doug (my husband) and I have been members of several different churches since we’ve been married. While we lived in Tallahassee, Florida, Doug and I were active members of Lafayette Presbyterian Church, taking part in the young adult program there. When we moved to Decorah, Iowa, no Presbyterian churches were in the area, so we became Lutherans and attended First Lutheran Church. That is where our son, Shelby, was baptized.

We moved to Lebanon, PA in 2003 when my daughter was born and decided to try a Presbyterian church again. Our church, St. Andrews Presbyterian, is at the center of our weekly activities, and we truly feel our church is our second family. Our children grew up in the Sunday School and youth programs and my daughter was baptized there. I was the director of our handbells program for six years, leading two adult ensembles and one children’s ensemble (2015-2020). Currently, I am a Ruling Elder, serving on Session and co-chairing the Christian Education Committee.

I feel the most at home in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), mainly from its theological perspective, its involvement of women in teaching and preaching, and its roots in the Reformed tradition. I also appreciate the governance structure of the Presbyterian church in that it attempts to be a representative democracy. I like that the congregation is invited to vote and participate in certain key aspects of decision-making, while the Session (nominated and elected by the congregation) considers the detailed, critical work of the church. Perhaps my favorite thing about the Presbyterian Church is its strong adherence to the mantra “Reformed and always to be reformed according to the Word of God” (*Book of Order*, F-2.02).

Call to Ministry:

Though I am happy with aspects of my career as a music professor, there is a part of me that remains unfulfilled by the rigorous and personal demands of academia. I am blessed in all aspects of my life but have been feeling a “pull” for several years toward another career that is more focused on my place in the church, my deepening relationship with God, and my desire to serve others in a more active way.

In Spring of 2017, I was awarded a semester sabbatical to pursue research on vocal repertoire without accompaniment. I planned to do that research, but I also looked forward to the abundance of time to process and discern what else God might have planned for me. If God wanted me to change my life, now was a good time for God to show me a new path.

On April 6, 2017, the change came, but perhaps not exactly in the way I had hoped (as is usually the case, I suppose). I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I was actually quite glad my diagnosis, surgery, and radiation treatment came during this time because I could absorb how my life was slowly but surely changing. I prayed more than I ever have in my life because my mind was free to do so, and because I felt I *had to*.

As a way of helping me work through my feelings of being called, I started a blog, entitled “The B-Flat Christian” (www.bflatchristian.com). I gave it this name because that is what I feel I and many others are—everyday, common Christians. After reading some of my blog posts, my pastor, Reverend Robin Reilly, asked if I might be interested in preaching one Sunday. While preparing my sermon, I was struck head-on by a revelation so deep that I literally stopped breathing: *I can do this. I already do this. In my job now, I look at texts and determine not only the face value meaning, but the subtext as well. I connect ideas and source material and form talking points every day I teach in class...and I always refer to music to further that process.*

I began wondering if God might be calling me to ministry. I felt the best way to determine this was to try a few courses to see if I liked them. I had heard about the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary’s on-line program and began working on a Master of Arts in Christian Leadership degree in spring of 2018. After a few semesters, my professors encouraged me to consider changing to the Master’s of Divinity, and I felt God was pushing me in that direction, too. While it will take me a total of six years to finish, I feel strongly it is what God wants me to do. I still don’t know what God has in store for me once I finish but I’m not worried. I know the answer will be provided, whether that be in pastoral ministry, chaplaincy, or perhaps at a religiously-affiliated non-profit organization. My plan is to take early retirement and begin my second career once my degree is completed.

Until then, I continue to see God’s providence in my journey. I began this journey, thinking “I’ll try this out and see if this is what God wants me to do,” and not once have I felt the urge to discontinue. As difficult as it has been, I have found my M.Div. journey to be one of dogged determination. It has shown me just how much stress I can endure, but more than that, it’s shown me how I could never have done it on my own power. This is happening simply because of the sheer determination of God, not me.