

Committee on Preparation for Ministry Report to Presbytery November 19, 2022

For Information:

- On November 1, 2022 CPM met with Candidate Wesley Carl Smith (First, Port Huron; grad Pittsburgh Seminary May 2022) for Final Assessment. Mr. Smith was examined on his Statement of Faith, Biographical Statement, exegesis and sermon. CPM, in a unanimous vote, granted Final Assessment and permission to circulate a PIF.
- A sub-committee of CPM administered written examinations to CRE (trainee) MariJo Hockley and will report the results to CPM at the December meeting.
- CPM has scholarship funds available for Inquirers, Candidates and CRE trainees. Application is available on the Detroit Presbytery Website.

For Action:

- CPM presents Candidate Brendan Ashley (Pittsburgh Seminary, Final Assessment from Pittsburgh Presbytery) for examination for ordination. Mr. Ashley has received a call to serve as Designated Associate Pastor at Lake Shore Presbyterian Church.

Biography Brendan Ashley November 19, 2022

My name is Brendan Ashley and I currently live in Detroit, MI. I am happily married to Ashley Ashley, who is the Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. We have a cat named Augustine. If you are curious, yes, he is named after the theologian. I grew up in a military family and have lived all over the United States. I love sports of all forms and kinds, reading and writing, hanging with friends, cooking, exploring new places, and meeting new people.

I first heard the call to ministry at sixteen years old, when God spoke clearly through my grandmother who first articulated that I had gifts for ministry. In response to this encouragement, I attended Whitworth University in Spokane, WA, where I received a B.A. in Theology. While earning my B.A. I began to intern with a local church's youth group in order to explore my call to ministry. I also first learned about and felt drawn to missional theology while studying at Whitworth.

After graduating from Whitworth, I further pursued God's call to ministry by earning a Master of Divinity with a Church Planting Emphasis from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Over the course of my time in seminary, I was an intern at The Open Door and The Upper Room. I went on a number of lifechanging short-term mission trips with WMI. I was a Valentour award recipient, and explored the subject of the powers and principalities in Kenya, Guatemala, and Vietnam with my friend and ministry colleague Rev. Dr. Brian J. Lays. I also completed a Master of Divinity Thesis entitled, "*The missio Trinitatis in the Secular Age.*" Since graduating from seminary, I have served two churches in the Pittsburgh area as a student pastor. If the way be clear, I am excited and eager to serve a local congregation through my gifts of preaching, pastoral care, friendship and hospitality, and missional imagination and exploration.

I feel confident in my calling by God to be an ordained pastor in the PCUSA. I desire to help churches develop practices of worship, discipleship, and mission that allow space for churches to explore questions like "what is God up to in this world?" and "Who is my neighbor?"

This passion began through my experience with a local ministry called skate church. This church's willingness to connect with what my friends and I cared about allowed me to encounter the love and Grace of God in new ways. Now, as an adult, I want to continue this work and help congregations see that God works through our passions as a form of grace and a way to extend the gospel to those around us.

This calling intensified as I attended seminary and felt a particular call to church planting. I joined the Church Planting Initiative and interned with two missional communities. Through these experiences, I sensed my calling to ordained ministry, specifically as a missional pastor. I am excited to lead churches in radical hospitality and discernment of the Spirit's work in our world. I want to continue the work that God started with me at skate church.

Finally, after seminary as a student pastor I had an opportunity to explore my gifts for missional ministry. I took my experiences in skate church, my training from undergrad and seminary, and I applied it to my work with The Upper Room where I created a Missional Action Plan that incorporated mission into the worship and fellowship rhythms of the church. One specific example of this was a board game group that we used to help people see how the gospel connects the church with people in the neighborhood.

Brendan Ashley Statement of Faith November 19, 2022

I believe in the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one in three persons, whose will is unified in creating, redeeming, and sustaining the universe.

I believe in Abba Father: a loving and trustworthy parent. God created the structure of the universe so that every good thing could inhabit it. God gave humans the gift of life, so that we would follow and reflect God's relational and trustworthy character in our obedience. We rebelled and rejected God's promise, and our relationship with God and one another became cracked and blurry. Despite this, God is faithful still.

I believe in Jesus Christ: fully human and fully God. The Virgin Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and gave birth to Jesus. His life and ministry revealed that he is the Lord and the long-expected Messiah of God's people. Jesus taught, healed, and called people to faithful discipleship. He challenged human boundaries and called for justice and reconciliation. Yet, in the sinfulness of humanity, we rejected and crucified Jesus. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross reveals God's victory over sin and death, and calls us to pick up our cross in faithful discipleship. The Father raised Jesus from the dead, and now we may share in the resurrection life by participating in the mission of God in the Church's witness. Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, assuring us that eternal life is offered to all of humanity. Jesus's saving work restores our relationship with God by the forgiveness of sins, and assures us that we will share in the resurrection.

I believe in the Holy Spirit: the one who gives inward assurance that the gospel of Jesus is true. The Spirit also invigorates us in our daily life. The Spirit works in us to establish faith and participate in God's mission, which calls, gathers and sends us as the church. In our weekly worship gathering, the Spirit both nourishes us by Word and Sacrament, and sends us forth on the mission of God in the world. The Spirit works in the reading, study, and proclamation of the Word, the saving work of Christ, and invites people to participate in the mission of God through Christian teaching and discipline. The Spirit sends the church as a witness of God's love and justice. The Church becomes a tangible sign of God's kingdom when God is known, loved, and obeyed. The kingdom of God is both present and coming; we participate in it by the Spirit, but it is yet to come in fullness. The mission of God compels the Church to break down divisions, seek justice, protect the vulnerable and speak words of hope.

Holy Scripture, the Old and New Testaments, is the unique and authoritative Word of God which sustains our life and faith. The people of God were inspired by the Spirit and wrote scripture as an account of the Triune God's movement and work in human history. The Bible still speaks to us today, through women and men, as it is studied, proclaimed, and lived. As such, we dwell in the Word together. The Spirit teaches us how to cultivate Christian community and participate in God's mission to bring the good news to the world.

The Church is sent by the God of mission to point to God's reign. The Church learns about God's mission as it gathers to worship God in Word and Sacrament. In doing so, the community of faith encounters the living and reigning Christ who calls it to go and live the gospel way. We first learn about this way in baptism, which is administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by which God declares to the Church that everyone has a place in God's family. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we receive the body and blood of Christ through the visible and tangible signs of bread and cup. The Lord's Supper provides a regular opportunity for us to be nourished in faith by encountering God in and through our senses.

God's redemption of the world will be fully experienced and intelligible when Jesus returns, as is promised at his Ascension. We live in the anticipatory hope of his return, and yet Jesus teaches us in the Gospels that we will not know the day or the hour of his appearing, so we should be prepared at any moment. For now, the Church participates in God's mission in faith, hope, and love, as a beacon to a waiting world.