

Addendum to the Commission on Ministry Report

Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church, Austin TX

March 6-7, 2019

The Commission on Ministry moves that Mission Presbytery appoint an Administrative Commission (members to be named) to work with Community Presbyterian Church, Port Aransas with the following powers:

- enter a time of discernment with the session and congregation and recommend next steps to the Presbytery.
- meet and interview any person involved in Community PC, Port Aransas, past or present, on behalf of the Presbytery
- have voice in session meetings, including executive session.
- review the documents of the church including but not limited to session minutes, congregational meeting minutes, membership rolls, building and construction documents, contracts, correspondence and financial records.
- ordain and install ruling elders and deacons, receiving and dismissing members.
- consult with the PNC and make recommendations for moving forward to COM.
- audit financial records and if necessary, obtain an outside independent financial audit retained by the Presbytery Council.
- determine if there is a remnant and recommend how the two groups, the remnant and the schismatic group might move forward.
- declare schism as well as declare which of the two groups is the true Community Presbyterian Church - Port Aransas. (See Book of Order G-4.0207, See also, Advisory Opinion on Schism from 2013).
- work with legal representation. if necessary, retained by the Presbytery Council.
- assume original jurisdiction if necessary.

My life inside church

My name is Arquimedes Martinez Aguilar and I was born in Monterrey, N.L Mexico on August 4, 1948

In my life within the Church, I was baptized in the Presbyterian Church by my parents Cristina Aguilar Muñoz and Luis Martinez Contreras. In the first years of life I remember the activities of Vacation Bible School in the summers. At the age of 6 we moved to downtown Monterrey where with my mother and grandmother we were members of the Presbyterian Church El Buen Pastor where we attended on Sundays and participated in church activities. When I was 12 years old where I was invited to make my profession of Faith. We became members of that church however in my teens I did not want to attend Sunday services. I found this time to be a burden and discomfort because I saw other boys who were having fun and not attend Church and were not Christians. However, by the grace of God a high school teacher and some Christian classmates who were from other Evangelical churches gathered after classes to sing and to have studies about the bible. This group invited me to a camp where I had the experience of knowing Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. And as an adolescence I wanted to learn about the Bible and attend Bible studies by different brothers in Christ. Also, in the church El Buen Pastor I was invited for Sunday afternoons for youth Bible studies. There was where we learned to study the Bible, look for scripture. Memorize scripture and learned the books of the Old and New Testament. We learned to the gospel of Jesus Christ as a Personal Savior and I saw my life strengthened spiritually. I was appointed treasurer, secretary and president of the Youth Society learning from my Pastors of the Church and ruling elders. With my brethren in the faith of other Evangelical Churches I got a lot of teachings because I continued to meet with them along with my brothers. I am the oldest in the family. Being engaged in church activities I felt comforted spiritually since my father had not become a Christian. After a time, my father become a Christian and our family grew in the Faith. We participated in our church as a Sunday schoolteacher, teacher of catechism and committees of the National Border Presbytery and later at the New Presbytery Leon. In the summer of 1972, we attended and participated in the organization of the tour of torch for the Centenary of the Presbyterian Church in Mexico. This was in the states of the North east Mexico(Zacatecas,Coahuila Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon), this was a wonderful experience in my life because we worshipped with other churches of our Denomination. In December 1973 I was united in marriage to Ruth Esther Llanes my beloved wife. We continue to participate in the activities of the Church El Buen Pastor. We worked in the missions of this church in several of the colonies of Monterrey and its surroundings. I was appointed as a deacon and subsequently ordained as Ruling Elder in 1977 in this Church National Presbyterian El Buen Pastor.

From 1974 to 1980 three of our sons were born, Archimedes, Abiud and Abimael, who we baptized in our Church. In 1978 I was commissioned to the Monte de los Olivos Congregation in Los Cristales. We worked with the brothers to conduct prayer meetings, activities, special programs, and preaching. As a result of this work of faith was we built a Church in 1984. This work was hard as I was a volunteer there and was working as a primary and secondary school teacher as well as studying and working in the career of Dentist. From 1983 to 1985 we had two other sons Abdiel and Arli. We continued to participate in the preaching with the student and pastors in the Presbyterian Church "Mount of Olives". We were there until the year 2000 when my wife and two of our children moved to Presbyterian Pan American School where they attended high school, so I volunteered to work and visit the churches of Kingsville and Taft, until the latter closed,. From 2002 to 2004 I studied at TAMUK (Texas A & M University of Kingsville where I obtained a Master's degree in Bilingual Education. We attended the Gethsemane Church and began working with our brother Pastor Dr. Jesse Leos by preaching in his absences and illnesses; until the Lord called him home. In 2009 we started Bible studies and prayer meetings with our brothers and committed ourselves to preach on Sundays except when we had Communion with our Brother Rev., Sostenes Infante .

In 2014 we encouraged our brothers to celebrate the 100th year of Gethsemane Church here in Kingsville. We held a special service on December 6, 2014 and created 2 videos to remember historical events from this congregation along with a collection of pictures from these years.

In 2016 I started CIM studies offered by the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin TX. I completed the program in 2019 and continue to preach, hold prayer meetings, Bible studies and projects with this Church. In Nov 24, 2019, I was ordained as a Ruling Elder in this Church.

February 2020

Your brother in Christ Arquimedes Martinez

Statement of Faith

I believe in God the Father who reveals himself in nature day by day in everything around me, in the stellar universe that I contemplate with emotion, in the thousands of stars and planets that shine in the night sky.

I believe in God Creator of all that exists, who is my creator, who has given me life, with a purpose which I seek to discover every day by seeking his will.

I believe in Jesus Christ Son of God who came to be born as a man, teaching, performing miracles and revealing their divine nature by dying and by resurrecting to offer me salvation from my sins and give me a new life and that through his promise to be with me every day, gives me his peace that is incomparable.

I believe in the Bible as the word of God that is revealed in his words written by inspiration by men who surrendered to his will, writing for the Spirit of God, words that transcend the times and continue to transform lives into this time that we now have to live.

I believe in one God who manifested himself in three people the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who are one self in their essence and manifests himself to us through his constant revelation to offer us his salvation for anyone who believes and manifest his love that he gives us unconditionally and leads us to manifest that love to our fellowmen.

I believe in the Holy Spirit as God Himself Creator and in every power that comforts us, redeems us and intercedes for us in our requests. Holy Spirit that helps us develop spiritually, which impels us to serve our neighbor and that leads us to obtain spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faith, meekness and temperance; in a life of love and service.

I believe in the Church as a people of God that is made up by believers, by faith it is a universal and invisible grouping that works to develop spiritually and to reach out to others through faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, who testifies of faith before the world in our times and serves those in need and those who suffer from the diseases and problems in this world.

I believe in Jesus Christ as the son of God and Head of the Church, who gave his life to rescue us and free us from the bondage of sin.

I believe in His Second Coming that God has prepared at the end of time

I believe in the Resurrection of the flesh that he promised to all who are in Him by faith and Eternal Life when Jesus Christ comes.

I believe in the Unity of the Church in the Sacraments of Holy Communion and

Baptism that identify us and remind us that Jesus Christ gave his life for us, and that brotherly love is manifested in the congregations when we offer praise through worship and consecration to honor our God and be edified by the preaching of his word and have communion through prayer to know God's will, and to present our gratitude and requests.

I believe in the Church as the body of Jesus Christ in this world, of which He is head and leads us to manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit for the growth of his kingdom.

I believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as one God and only deserves the honor of glory and praise.

I believe in life that comes at the end of time in the resurrection and the manifestation of his glory.

February 2020

Blessings His brother in Christ

ARQUIMEDES MARTINEZ

Journey of Faith

Originally from Rock Hill, South Carolina, I am an exuberant young woman seeking to do God's will in the world. I am a daughter to Rev. Jim "Carrot" and Sue Williams, a sister to Nate and Rachel, and a partner to Addie. My formative years were spent actively involved with my home church, Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church in Rock Hill. I found a God and a home at Bethelwoods Camp and Conference Center and Montreat Conference Center. These remain places of spiritual sustenance.

When I was twelve years old, I felt the call to go to seminary and become a Minister of Word and Sacrament ordained in the PC(USA) in the process of developing my own adult faith. At that time, I did not feel called to traditional congregational ministry. While I was in college, I studied abroad in Nicaragua and Jerusalem, Israel/Palestine. These experiences revealed a passion for cross-cultural experience, interfaith dialogue, and how much I could learn from people different from me. I also continued my love for camp ministry, which opened the door to my desire to live in intentional community and engage in mission work.

Rather than go straight into seminary after college graduation, I served as a Young Adult Volunteer in the Philippines. While in the Philippines, I served as the guidance counselor for a school run by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. This was an incredibly formative time for my faith, as I felt the Spirit clarifying my call to a ministry of community organizing. So much of my faith and worldview were deconstructed as I lived on the other side of the world and watched my home country wrestle with its unresolved history of racism. I learned more deeply who I was at my core when I was so far away from my comfort zone. I still yearned for more tangible ways to intertwine my interest in community organizing with my call to ministry, so I served a second year as a YAV in Washington, DC.

Living in our nation's capital exposed me to more ways of embodying my faith in an urban setting through both direct and indirect service. Through my work with NEXT Church and New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, I built relationships across the denomination and developed my voice as a faith leader. God called me to be a pastor and community organizer and showed me people already living out that call.

My seminary journey was a time of great flourishing, wrestling, and growing. I have enjoyed creating community at Austin Seminary and in Texas. In my second year, I took on many leadership roles on campus and within the church. From this place of comfort, I came out of the closet to live as my full authentic bisexual self. 2018 was one of the hardest years of my life, as my mom received cancer treatment and I found myself bumping up against strong institutions in the church. In these challenging moments, I found God in contemplation, community, and prayer. 2019 also proved to be an exceptional year of discernment, family challenges, and realizing the true muscle of resilience God had helped me tone. God has been with me every step of the way, as I now live out this call as both pastor and community organizer in ordered ministry.

Statement of Faith

I believe in a creative God who loves and longs to be in relationship with all of creation.

I believe in a Triune God. They, the Holy One and Holy Three, engage in the dance of life, with all of creation in all of space for all of time.

I believe in the Incarnate One, Jesus of Nazareth, who was fully human and fully divine. He gathered a diverse group of misfits to be his friends. He taught them how to love, to ask questions, and to live in a world where they did not have much power. He gathered people around bread broken and wine poured, joining his practice with generations who have communed with each other and God at Table. His radical way of life that invited people of all backgrounds to come together in community threatened the status quo in Roman-occupied Palestine. For this reason, this Jewish teacher was executed by the state.

I believe in a resurrecting God who would not allow worldly power or death to have the last word. Through the resurrection, God calls and redeems us and calls us into right relationship with God and each other. I believe in a God who always creates new life out of death, even as we lament death, brokenness, and suffering.

I believe in an active God who is omnipresent through the Holy Spirit. She moves through the world transforming everyone and everything she touches. She holds us in our sorrow, causes us to lie down or rise up, and rejoices with us in our delight. She is the *ruah*, breath that gives us life, wind that moves over the chaos, and spirit that we encounter in the silence.

I believe in the sacredness of the Bible. This library of stories, poetry, parables, and prophecies, has guided generations of communities before us and still has wisdom to share with us today and for many tomorrows.

I believe in a parenting God who cares immeasurably for humanity. I believe in the freedom that comes when we acknowledge that all of us are beautifully and wonderfully made, and still we cannot help but sin. I believe in a God who calls us into relationship to transform the world together.

I believe in a heartbroken God, who despises sin and evil in the world. This God is big enough to hold all of that hurt and still loves every part of a broken creation pieced together to be whole.

I believe in a versatile church that responds to God's call for love, justice, and peace in the world by siding with the oppressed. Jesus modeled that for us, and the Spirit nudges us toward that mission. I believe the church is a community of the faithful who are called to love their neighbors as themselves and to love their enemies. We show this love by welcoming God's children to the Font where the community joins God in committing to love, nurture, and care for the whole body of Christ.

I believe in Christian hope that the reign of God is ever poking through to reveal itself to us. This hope drives all of my faith and trust. God is ever shifting the world as it is closer to the world as it should be, bringing heaven to earth.

Journey of Faith

While taking my exegetical exam, I took a break and watched the movie "The Post." It was then that I had a realization. Since starting my journey in ministry, I am often asked why I left journalism, especially considering my passion for telling a story. I did not have a good answer, or at least one that made sense. The exam text talked about justice, and ever present in my mind was Jesus talking about truth, in particular John 8:32 "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Growing up in the Texas Panhandle and being one of the few Presbyterians surrounded by thousands of Baptists, truth was something I was always looking for.

Joe Turner was my pastor as a teen and young adult. He gave me permission to find out where God and I came together. My questioning began after a Baptist pastor called me Satan from his pulpit. It was difficult finding the truth about other religions being from Pampa. Additionally, I started exploring other religions and meeting people of other faiths during college and early in my career. As I turned 30, I discovered I had returned to the place I had come from. Attendance and completion of seminary took several years since I had custody of my youngest daughter. Also, I think it was God's way of making sure I learned different skills to aid in my ministry. During this time, I discovered my skill sets were of value to the church and started working with Thornwell Home for Children to aid their fundraising and messaging.

I have been struggling to find the words to express what God has called me to do in these two different worlds, journalism and ministry. I never felt my calling changed, just the way in which I approach the mission. As a journalist I always felt I was called to help people in need, tell their stories and expose the wrongs in our society. Truth and justice seem like they are the easiest things in the world. Throughout the Bible we are called to strive for these two things because as humans we have itchy ears, we want the truth to be what we want the truth to be, and justice is not really justice unless it is retribution. As a journalist I strived to show the truth in all situations and bring justice to those who were oppressed. In my ministry, that is exactly where I am today, trying to live into liberation theology. The first time I read James Cone who said, "Kill the white man", though provocative, I understood where he was coming from as a child growing up in the 1960's. White privilege/oppression is still a dominating culture in our society even though many believe there are no race issues because we have black leaders. But, as a society we will struggle with racism until the church can help minorities approach the oppressors with a message from the Lord about truth, justice and reconciliation.

Ministering in disaster areas and on the border helps me understand how we must speak the truth through Christ to the historical, economic, and political factors that have brought us to this place in our society and around the globe. Power, disenfranchisement, and wealth must be interpreted through the lens of justice. Until truth and justice can be at the front of our conversations, there can never be a reconciliation with one another or with God. Genuine reconciliation is not the oppressors finding a way to make themselves feel good by acknowledging what they have done. It is about Christians engaging on both sides and changing the situation as we are called to do through Jesus Christ.

Statement of Faith

God offers us grace freely, yet we are not able to offer that same grace to others or receive it for ourselves as easily as it is offered to us. God is looking for the created to treat one another with the same grace we receive, but until we are willing to speak with the truth of Christ and offer heavenly justice, we can never reach a point of reconciliation that allows us to fully share God's grace one to another. We are sinners, and it is God who must forgive. God's forgiveness is a costly forgiveness, forged out of God's grief and pain at our failure to be the loving people God created us to be. We have to remember, standing at the center of Christianity is a tormented Christ, dying in forsakenness. "It points to our guilt and need for forgiveness, our estrangement from God and need for reconciliation."¹ As houses of worship and individuals we have to break our alliances with the powerful and enter into solidarity with the humiliated. For people to come to a place of authentic justice they must have authentic fellowship, and for this to happen there has to be a common point of reference. For Christians there is that common point, Jesus Christ, and it is through him the Christian community needs to rebuild relationships so we can live into the grace we have been given, into a reconciliation with God. Belhar states, "We believe that God has revealed God's self as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged, that God calls the church to follow God in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry."

I believe the atonement for my sin, the covenant with God created from the flowing waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit that leads me on a daily basis, and that the Triune God offers us a grace that can never be repaid. I believe in Jesus Christ, the salvation that comes from him, and the truth he has given to us and wishes us to extol and expose. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. I believe the Table where we all gather for a meal and in the Communion where there is a healing grace; a healing Table which we need to offer up and allow to become a balm for one another, the other, and the injured. From the beginning God has called the people into covenant, a relationship with men and women in community. The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, orders, and empowers the church community so that each member can receive the gifts of the Spirit to build up the body of Christ by equipping the people for the work of ministry. God calls us to different ministries. Seeking truth and justice was my calling as a journalist and remains my calling to this day. I will stand on the forsakenness, because I believe in the truth of Jesus Christ, the justice of the Holy Spirit, the ability of reconciliation in humanity, and the God-given grace for all of God's creations.

¹ Guthrie Jr., Shirley C.. Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition (p. 255). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

JOURNEY OF FAITH

I was born on my paternal grandparents' Adirondack farm and baptized at Bay Road Presbyterian Church in the Adirondack Mountains, a church (now part of the PC USA) that descended from the "wee free church of Scotland" in the Hebrides, transplanted to upstate New York and Quebec. My paternal grandfather, a ruling elder there for 30 years, was my earliest teacher of faith, clarifying for me an abiding commitment to prayer, love of Scripture and compassionate action. A special skill of his was in traditional drywall stonemasonry. I often watched as he fitted stones together, concave side to convex side, working reverently to build a structure better able to withstand weather changes than if it depended on mortar. My lesson in this is respect for natural processes and love of beauty resulting from careful observation and systematically applied skillfulness. My maternal grandfather was a lay circuit preacher connected to the Wesleyan tradition. He and my grandmother, a rural mountain herbalist-midwife, also exemplified for me the power of faithful service and love of neighbor. My paternal grandmother was a writer and K-8 school teacher in a one-room schoolhouse. By the age of two I was sitting with my grandparents as we read and talked about Scripture together. It was my maternal grandfather who gave me my first Bible as I entered kindergarten, inscribing for me on the frontispiece "Luke 12:32." I still love to think of myself as a part of the "little flock," prone to fears and worries, liable to treasure the wrong things, seeking the good in times of trial and loss, in need of frequent reminders that it is God who provides and prevails. I thank God for early teachers and for the many teachers and exemplars since then who have in their own way brought those words ever closer to my heart.

At Macalester College in St. Paul, which I attended after being awarded National Merit and National Presbyterian scholarships, I studied music and literature. I also met my husband James there and we were married in a United Methodist church after we had moved to Austin for my graduate program in music theory and composition at The University of Texas. My mentor and spiritual guide at Macalester was New Testament scholar Rev. Calvin Roetzel. A Methodist, he has continued to play a part in major life changes since then, such as my journey of discernment of calling from the United Methodist Church back to the Reformed tradition during my time at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Many of my earliest spiritual experiences involved playing and singing music. I became a violinist among a family of bluegrass musicians, often finding solace and inspiration in picking up my violin and calling to the Lord through the act of playing. At age 12 I began playing the unaccompanied sonatas and partitas of J.S. Bach as an important part of my devotional life and found encouragement in this from church and school musicians. Traditional bluegrass music itself, which I think of as "hillbilly jazz," shares with jazz the musical transformation of personal losses, fears and anxieties into relational and public beauty and celebration; and shares with the hillbilly or Appalachian culture the power of ballads and gospel singing to convey deep truths about human interactions and the need for God. My journey back to the Reformed tradition began with graduate study of the music of Congregationalist church organist and composer Charles Ives. Similarly during seminary I found myself studying and comparing the differences in church polity, theology and ministerial traditions between the Methodist and Reformed traditions, largely through reading the poetry of Charles Wesley and Edward Taylor. To this day I could not imagine myself as a Christian without the poetry and music by which artists throughout history have interpreted the call of God in their own lives.

Also during my seminary training I began to sense a call to chaplaincy. I had entered seminary immediately after leading a Methodist Sunday school class in a two-year study of the entire Bible, realizing from my experiences there that I wanted to be immersed in teaching, preaching and pastoral care all the rest of my days. It was in the second half of the three seminary years, while busy with the pastoral visitation aspect of my two semesters of field work (Teaching Church), that I discerned I was

being called to chaplaincy. I completed two Clinical Pastoral Education residencies and was hired as a staff chaplain at Seton, where I worked until my retirement in July 2018. Chaplaincy is extremely important in my faith journey because I learned to listen carefully, affirm graciously, challenge compassionately and accompany faithfully, the patients and staff with whom I worked. I learned to approach each conversation as though Christ were at my side, and indeed he was and is. Thanks be to God.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

I BELIEVE IN THE ONE GOD, who is our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. To grow in our understanding of the love of God in Christ Jesus, we join together in the church for a fellowship which is at the same time a restorative celebration of deep joy, a call to Godly action and a remembrance of our baptism. This is what it means to enjoy newness of life. Life cannot be made new until we have put off the old: all the things we once treasured and held dear for their own sakes but which were and continue to be in need of transformation insofar as they draw our attention away from where the Holy Spirit is calling us to go, who the Holy Spirit is calling us to be, what the Holy Spirit is calling us to do in the world. This putting off of the old is a onetime event in the sense of our baptism into the body of Christ but an ongoing event in the sense of our claiming our baptism, of living into the reality of the cross.

I TAKE TO HEART the words of Paul in Galatians 3, that in Christ all are one. There must be no impediment in our claiming as brothers and sisters those who differ from us in socioeconomic status, in level of education, in physical or mental wellness or ability, in sexuality or gender identification, in race or nation of origin, in religious affiliation and practice. I believe that this heartfelt stance toward the world which God created is ever in need of re-examining due to the fact that "creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" [Romans 8:19, *NRSV*]. Creation waits, because we are still working with God toward the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth. It is for this challenge that we begin and end each day with prayer and seek to be transparent and compassionate in our dealings with others. We have blind spots: that is our darkness. We follow the leading of the Holy Spirit: that is our light.

I STUDY the words and actions of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels, as imprinted in my mind and revealed to my heart by the Spirit, in order to put one foot in front of the other each day of my life and stay on the path God has set before me. One of my favorite hymns speaks of this necessity: "Bind my wandering heart to Thee/ Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it/ Prone to leave the God I love/ Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it" ["Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"]. When we sing and pray together our distress, our perplexity, our frustration, our regrets and repentance, when we rejoice *together* in the new life we have been given in Christ, we are stronger and better able to face the moments of decision that will follow throughout our separate and our joined lives. We need to know that even when we seem to be alone we are not really alone, we belong to God and to each other. The words and actions of Jesus are the perfect example of communication that heals disparities of theological interpretation, that offers a way out of the painful exclusions that haunted his earthly walk and still operate in ours. Jesus says "the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength...You shall love your neighbor as yourself" [Mark 12:29-31]. And at their root the Beatitudes are blessings: both a powerful affirmation and an urgent challenge to change the way we live together in this world so that all may fully enjoy community.

I LEARN BY GOING WHERE I HAVE TO GO [Theodore Roethke, "The Waking"]. I mention this poem because it is one metaphor for what I believe is that the world as we know it is a greenhouse created for us by God, and our place in it is for the purpose of our own growth within a larger system whose growth depends on each one of us and whose flourishing is longed for by God. That is to say, all of creation, not only the human beings but also the other creatures with whom we share space and air and water. Where we have to go is wherever the Spirit is leading us: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" [John 3:8]. Discernment is an everyday task that flows naturally out of our love for God and our neighbor. We desire to "lean in" and listen carefully to what we are being called to do. Eager for more light, we search for signs of the Spirit's work everywhere, envisioning the abundant possibilities inherent in this world.

Journey of Faith

I grew up in Cincinnati OH in a Christian family and at College Hill Presbyterian Church – a congregation that took their baptismal vows seriously from birth through to my ordination service in that church. The foundation was a wonderful gift, and one of the most impactful expressions of that gift was my youth group's weekly small group Bible study in which I participated alongside ten other guys from 7th to 12th grade. It was in this space that I first heard Jesus speaking through Scripture and the lives of others, and it sparked a growing desire to follow Christ. That desire was tested significantly halfway through high school when my parents divorced, and I felt both my family and faith foundation splintering. The presence and love of my small group proved the primary conduit through which Jesus ministered to me a significant grace in an otherwise disorienting season.

In college, I joined a campus ministry where I enjoyed the gift a mentor who helped me start and lead a Bible study in the Army ROTC program in which I was a cadet. I found it invigorating to see the depth of conversation about life and faith that I was able to facilitate in that setting, and eventually I began asking God, "Are you calling me to serve as an Army Chaplain?" As I started to lean into that possibility, I also sensed God calling me to marriage with a woman who – throughout college – had proven my best friend and a kindred spirit and encouragement in following Christ.

Upon graduation, I married my wife of now 15 years in Houston, TX, and we moved to Pasadena, CA where I attended Fuller Seminary. There, God opened my eyes to the vast diversity of God's Kingdom in terms of ethnicity, denomination, and theology. That experience continues to make me eager to partner with and grow alongside Christians of different backgrounds than my own. During that same time, God also awakened in me a sense of call not only to the chaplaincy but to serving in a congregational setting.

My first ordained call was as an Associate Pastor in Decatur, GA where I also served one weekend a month as an Army Chaplain in the reserves. As an Associate Pastor I found great joy in shepherding the congregation in new ministry endeavors that harnessed the gifts and interests of the congregants. I discovered Jesus's feeding of the 5000 in Mark 6 becoming a paradigm through which I understood how God was calling me to shepherd people; namely, with compassion and by encouraging all of us to offer our gifts freely and fully before Jesus who is more faithful than we could ever ask or imagine.

After five years in Decatur, God called me to pastor a congregation in Richmond, VA where I have found myself ministering and ministered to through preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. During this time, the social and political divisions in our nation have continued to heighten, and I have felt that ripple into and among the church. Amidst that, I've leaned heavily on nearby peers and mentors who minister Christ's friendship, anchoring, and wisdom to me as I seek to facilitate reconciliation and growth across difference within the congregation.

Two years into my call in Richmond, God opened a door for my wife and I to adopt a child whose parents are originally from Papua New Guinea. We have found great joy in God's call to parenting, and I find recently that our son is one of the most significant ways God teaches me about the nature of God's kingdom. Moreover, as we have become a multi-racial family, we have found ourselves called all-the-more-fully to confess and confront racism in its many forms even as we work toward racial reconciliation.

Today, I am humbled and thrilled to know God's calling to First Presbyterian Church Georgetown, TX, and I look forward to sharing life in Christ with this congregation as we discern and follow Jesus's lead. It truly is a profound privilege to serve as a pastor, and looking back upon my journey only increases my sense of gratitude as I see the grace-filled and surprising ways God has knit it together. Most fundamentally, I recognize the profound influence of loved ones and mentors along the way: my wife and son, my parents, my youth group Bible study leader Andries van der Bent, campus ministers Matty B and David Speakman, seminary professors Marianne Meye and John Thompson, fellow seminary graduates Darryl Evans and Ruffin Stepp, ministry mentors and colleagues Jim Duke, David Hartwell, Tim Lloyd, Jeff Myers, Megan Johnson, Joan Gray,

Bobby Hulme-Lippert – First, Georgetown

REPORT A.6

Micah White, Ben Sparks, Joel Morgan, and Alex Evans, and dozens of congregants who have ministered to me every bit as much as I could ever hope to do for them.

Statement of Faith

Revealed in Scriptures as the triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - I believe in the one, eternal God who created heaven and earth in sovereign love. As the pinnacle of creation, God created humans in the divine image for mutual love and grateful obedience to God. Though God declared creation good, I along with all humanity have rebelled against God and ignored God's ways.

I believe that God - being supreme love, justice, and mercy - has redeemed humanity from its destructive, self-serving habits through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. In his life and death, Jesus fully experienced our broken nature, proclaimed the Reign of God in word and deed, and bore the weight of sin and death upon the cross. Through his resurrection, Jesus broke bondage of sin and death for all of humanity.

Through God's gift of faith, I believe in Jesus' death and resurrection and have a new life, redeemed from the bondage of my self-absorbed attitudes and habits. I stand under a banner of grace and live by that grace in God's redemptive plan.

Scripture is God's written Word as recorded in the Old and New Testaments. When read by the power of the Spirit, God speaks through these words to nourish, guide, and transform me. Most fundamentally, these words bear witness to the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ, in whom I stand completely justified before God as Christ's righteousness lives in me and all whom God calls.

I believe the Scriptures reveal two sacraments instituted by Christ. In baptism, we are given God's covenant promise as our own, and I am grateful that the efficacy of my baptism rests not on my impoverished ability to follow God perfectly, but on God's perfect love which reaches out to me. As an outward cleansing signifying the inward cleansing, baptism incorporates all who pass through the waters into the body of Christ.

I experience this incorporation through the Lord's Supper. While the manner remains a mystery, Christ is present at the Supper, and I am spiritually nourished as I reflect upon Christ's death, experience unity with the great cloud of witnesses, and joyfully anticipate the messianic banquet when Christ returns. The rhythm of the regular meal serves as strength for my journey of faith.

Fueled by gratitude and hope, I believe that the Spirit-empowered church is called to manifest the Kingdom of God on earth. Specifically, I am called to manifest the peace of Christ and proclaim the hope of the Gospel to a hurting world. Moreover, Jesus' example on earth calls me to do this with humility and continual concern for the least. Insofar as I live out this call within and alongside the church, I bear witness to the Triune God whose essence is fundamentally one of self-giving community. Until Christ's return, I labor confidently knowing that Christ has already overcome sin and death and abides with us in this life and always. Amen.



May 13-16, 2020

Canyon Creek Presbyterian Church

The Commissioned Pastors Network of the Synod of the Sun presents the Empowering Commissioned Pastors Conference to be held May 13th-16th, 2020, at Canyon Creek Presbyterian Church, Richardson Texas.

This conference will be all about and for Commissioned Pastors in all the varied circumstances and ways that CPs serve the Church. If you are actively training to become a CP, but have not yet been commissioned, this conference is for you as well!

PC(USA) Co-Moderators Rev. Cindy Kohlmann and RE Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri will be there to help lead plenary sessions and the event will also feature excellent workshops that will support Commissioned Pastors and strengthen skills and ministries. This conference is focused on Empowering Commissioned Pastors as they serve an increasing portion of our PCUSA congregations.

Translation services in Spanish will be provided. Be sure to mark that request on the registration form / *Servicios de traducción estarán disponibles. Favor de indicar en el formulario de inscripción si lo necesita.*

One and Two-Day options are also available. See website for details. Limited scholarships are available on a first-request basis, offered only to Commissioned Pastors (CPs, CLPs, CREs, etc.)

Early registration for full event (by March 23, 2020) - \$125

Regular registration for full event (March 23-April 15) - \$150

Registration NOW OPEN:
synodsun.org/ecpc



HOW WE SERVE YOU

EMPOWERING COMMISSIONED PASTORS:

A conference to encourage, enable, empower

The Commissioned Pastors Network of the Synod of the Sun presents the Empowering Commissioned Pastors Conference to be held May 13th-16th, 2020, at Canyon Creek Presbyterian Church, Richardson. This conference will be all about and for Commissioned Pastors in all the varied circumstances and ways that CPs serve the Church. If you are actively training to become a CP, but have not yet been commissioned, this conference is for you as well!

More information at: synodsun.org/ecpc



GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS:

Over \$1 million awarded since 2012

The Synod's Grants and Scholarships Commission has funded scholarships and grants for many purposes since its inception in 2012. When partnerships between two or more entities are formed for grants, the Synod becomes a member of the partnership and can leverage Synod resources for success. To date, the Synod has awarded over 1 million dollars! Do you have a ministry, learning opportunities, program or mission that needs support? Together, we

can provide support to further God's work!
More information at: synodsun.org/grants

SYNOD NETWORKS:

Enabling relationships and mission opportunities

A Synod Network is formed around a specific and creative purpose, mission, or ministry project not possible within a single presbytery. In becoming a partner in ministry and mission, the Synod offers its resources of connection, consultation, and communication along with limited funding and administrative support. **More information at:** synodsun.org/networks:



SYNOD YOUTH WORKSHOP:

A singular experience for high school youth

Synod Youth Workshop is designed to provide youth and adults with an opportunity to receive and share the Gospel of Christ, create communities of faith, reach out to the world around the event, and honor our calling to be Christ-like.

Rising 9th graders through graduated seniors are invited to participate. The event is held from July 13-18 at the University of Tulsa

More information at: synodyouthworkshop.org

