

Delilah Jane Phillips

a. a statement of your understanding of Christian vocation in the Reformed tradition and how it relates to your sense of call;

I define vocation as the strong dedication and suitability required for one's career or occupation. I spent the first twenty-three years of my life fully invested in becoming a teacher and no one could have predicted any differently. That's why when I graduated with a teaching degree and license and something didn't feel "right", I knew there was more to my personal vocation and I instinctively leaned into my faith.

My outer call to serve in the church began before I recognized it as a call at all. My earliest memories of belonging were tucked under the arms of church grandmothers following the lines in the hymns as I followed along. Early on, I began to serve the church by taking up offering, picking up juice cups and assisting Sunday School teachers. That calling grew into teaching my own classes, leading outreach opportunities and youth group. I took ordination vows and served faithfully as a ruling elder for two consecutive terms while my children were infants in arms. Within the community of faith, the church who prayerfully served, invited me to do the same. As a family, my husband and I deeply invest in the community of our church and raise our children to know and love the Lord.

As Presbyterians we are all called in some way or another. God pours out the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon each Christian in Baptism, and all are called to use these gifts for the glory of God. (W-2.0301: Gifts for Service) Everyone's call is unique and yet stemming from the God who uses the body of Christ for God's will in the world. It is within this embrace of community that my inner calling was nurtured. Through prayer and meditation, study and life together, a calling deep and profound bubbled up inside my soul. The overflow of the love that had been so richly given to me from a sovereign God aches to spill over into my newfound vocation within the work of ministry to others. My inner calling pushes me to preach as well as speak, to shepherd as well as journey, to listen as well as hear.

While I believe people can have a vocation in the church in many ways, I believe the trajectory of my vocation will be through ordained ministry as a teaching elder. I have worked in a church on and off my whole career thus far. At this juncture I believe that the office of teaching elder is my own sense of call. Ordination will give me a place in the life and the work of the church as I walk the journey throughout the lives of families from birth and baptism, the long road of discipleship and on to when the promise of resurrection is realized. The outward ministry of the priesthood of all believers calls the church to know God in the world and as part of my own calling I will help the church find theirs.

Within our homes, inside the walls of the church and in the world, we are each called to faithfully do God's work. I've seen and felt deeply the gift of the church and I know I will recognize reflections of my outer calling and my inner calling as I serve the Church in a new way.

In First Corinthians 12, Paul writes about how the Spirit gives each of us gifts to be used for the common good. Throughout my life in the church, I have had the opportunity to use my gifts in various ways....Sunday School teacher, leading discussions with families of young children....leading advent workshops; and then later as a ruling elder and member of Session. In each of these activities, I have enjoyed my interactions in and with the community of faith that is Calvary Presbyterian Church of Big Lick, and have felt that God has been using me and my gifts for the good of the church. As I have gotten older, and as I have worked in the church as a Christian Educator full time in three separate PC(USA) congregations and two internships, I have had a sense that God is calling me into a deeper involvement with

Christ's church -- to use my gifts in a different way -- as a pastor. Since I started on this journey to Seminary and towards ministry as a teaching elder, God has opened doors, and allowed me to accomplish things I never imagined I would be able to do (like passing Hebrew!) I feel such confirmation that I am on the track that God intends for my life.

b. a statement of personal faith which incorporates an understanding of the reformed tradition;

I believe in a God who is the sustainer and the creator of all that is. This God, in desiring a special relationship with creation sent Jesus Christ to teach us about God and the Holy Spirit so that we can know God's presence among us, the triune God- three in one. God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of human minds. The radical manifestation of God is Jesus Christ as God incarnate and the Holy Spirit sent to dwell among us. I believe in God, creator, redeemer and sustainer of the universe. God who created the world, led the people through Israel, ordained and called David and orchestrated the world through to Jesus Christ's birth in Bethlehem. God's word made flesh came to live and dwell among us so that all humans might know God's love. The Holy Spirit, God's spirit among us, who danced over the waters at creation still moves and breathes in the world that God continues to dwell within today.

The story of God as revealed to us through the words of the Holy Bible tell the story of God's love for this world and all people. From it I can understand how God has given history its meaning and direction and called the church into service. Both the Old Testament and the New Testaments are prophetic and apostolic testimony meant to be read in community to discover the grace of God in countless ways. The stories within it are written by humans but through the inspiration of God and should be read, interpreted and proclaimed within community for the people of God.

God alone reconciles the world to God's self through the life, death and resurrection of God's son, Jesus Christ. In sin, humans claim mastery of their own lives, intent on rebellion and isolation. Through grace alone, all people are invited to share in the gift of God who was and is and is to come. Baptism is that free gift for each of us to receive, exemplifying the covenant of grace that God extends to us. Baptism is witnessed, celebrated and deepened within the community of faith. Along with Holy Eucharist, each sacrament is God's presence to us. The gift of forgiveness is freely extended in the sacraments preliminary to our need for grace, truly before we can even understand our need for it. Because of our sin we are separated from the intent of God and through the grace freely given we are forgiven of our sinful ways and engulfed in the fold of God's redemption.

The church and the believers through whom it is compiled are children of God called to do justice, seek kindness and walk humbly as the hands and feet of Jesus in the world (Micah 6:8). The church is the witness to testify to the Holy Spirit, God's continued presence in this world. The Spirit lives and breathes and makes its way among us, inspiring us to know God more fully.

The church is the manifestation of the work left to do in this world as it is called to act as the body of Christ. Praise, worship and learning are coupled with service, action and discipleship. The church is rooted in the contemporary world that is always being formed and reformed by the Holy Spirit. The church worships and renews itself through the Sacraments, Baptism and Holy Eucharist, which strengthen and sustain us in the work to be done. The hope that I am called to participate in as a Christian and as a pastor is a task filled with joy, wrought with promise that God is not done with us yet- God who began a good work in us will see us through until the time we are brought near to God in glory!

c. an analysis of at least one concept from the personal faith statement regarding what it suggests about God, humanity, and their interrelationships;

“Baptism is that free gift for each of us to receive, exemplifying the covenant of grace that God extends to us.”

The Confession of 1967 describes Baptism like this: Christian baptism marks the receiving of the same Spirit by all (Jesus’s) people. Baptism with water represents not only cleansing from sin but a dying with Christ and a joyful rising with him to new life. It commits all Christians to die each day to sin and to life for righteousness. In baptism the church celebrates the renewal of the covenant with which God has bound his people to himself. (9.51)

In Christian worship Jesus Christ is truly present and active among us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Wherever the Scriptures are read and proclaimed and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word, and proclaims the mystery of faith. **W-1.0106: Word and Sacrament**

For me in the Reformed tradition, Baptism is the free gift that is all around us, represented by the physical act of worship (baptism) as a response to the grace already freely given. In the same vein, infant baptism as a fully Biblical practice is a wonderful example of how God is acting in our lives before we are even aware of our need for grace.

John Calvin tells us that baptism engrafts us into the body of Christ which is the whole and seals us as a symbol that we belong within that community to God. Baptism cleanses our lives from sin so that we are free to live the life we have been created to live in Jesus. Baptized believers are called into the work of Christ because they’ve been sealed in the covenant and into the body of Christ of grace that is freely extended to them.

The Reformed tradition understands Baptism to be a sign of God’s covenant. The water of Baptism is linked with the waters of creation, the flood, and the exodus. Baptism thus connects us with God’s creative purpose, cleansing power, and redemptive promise from generation to generation W.3.0402

d. a statement of what it means to be Presbyterian, indicating how that awareness grows out of participation in the life of a particular church;

From the early church and as early as the day of Pentecost, the church, unlike other institutions, has a call directly from God. In the Confession of Belhar we profess that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ. (10.5) Doing the work of Christ in the church all points back to this reconciliation. For me, to be a Presbyterian means that I am part of an interconnected church throughout time and throughout all parts of the world who in community seek to do that work. The body is a communal giving and receiving body and in that context the person within the community extends out to concern and care for all people.

My entire concept of what it means to be church and what it means to be a Christian is fully informed by the PC(USA). It has embraced all of who I am and that is the best that Presbyterianism (USA) has to offer the larger world.

Presbyterians are guided by the great ends of the church, which are as follows.

- The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
- The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
- The maintenance of divine worship

- The preservation of the truth
- The promotion of social righteousness
- The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world (Book of Order F-1.0304)

I appreciate each of these ends as they help direct my own work in the church in large and small ways. The reformed tradition and Presbyterianism represents people who are actively listening to the Holy Spirit in the world, participating in ministering to “the least of these” and worship that is inclusive. As a participant in a PC(USA) church, each worship service and formation opportunity draws me closer into the community and the mission of the church.

One of the parts of the church that means more to me as I grow older is the governing system that makes decisions in the church. For me, I appreciate that aspect of the Presbyterian church because no one person is making decisions- decision making happens in community. When I myself became an elder, I felt the Holy Spirit in powerful ways as we made tough decisions about the life of the church and I was so humbled to have been part of a faithful session. I was able to understand in practical ways that no one person held power in the church. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have sat on that side of the session table. The leadership of the church never depends on one person, certainly not the minister, but the work of the leadership is spread out amongst many people. These are qualities of the church that makes me appreciate my Presbyterian roots but also makes me decide to invest in the PC(USA) moving forward.

e. a statement of self-understanding which reflects your personal and cultural background and includes a concern for maintaining spiritual, physical, and mental health;

I am a 37 year old wife and mother of two incredible children. I spend my days working full time in a church and my nights and weekends as a full time seminary student. The life I live has been afforded to me through privilege which I do not discount. I stand on the shoulders of countless women who have come before me in ministry paving a way for me to follow my calling in this way at this time. As a white woman, I am in a position of responsibility to care for the marginalized and oppressed.

I am enthusiastic and vibrant in my faith- it’s always been a part of who I am. Through mountain top experiences and deep valleys of despair, the grace and the goodness of God has been my guiding light. In my favorite children’s book, “Night and the Candlemaker” the candlemaker answers the night wind, “I shall see enough to take one step at a time and the light will go with me.” I have not chosen this path in life because it has been the easy or obvious choice, it has not. I have, however, wrestled with my beliefs, searched my heart and found time after time that knowing God is where I want to be.

I realize the great weight of the calling I’m answering and I understand there are certain things that I need to do for my own self to maintain the energy and the endurance needed for the journey ahead. Spiritually I know that in order for me to stay deeply connected to God’s voice in my life I need to personally stay in community with other believers, regularly participate in worship and sacraments and find time for prayer. Physically, I maintain regular check-ups, yearly testing and mental health care. I continually strive to care for myself and my body. It is always a challenge to keep up with these elements and remain a well-rounded human in a world that pulls me in so many different directions.

I have the most incredible support system to see me through. When I shared with my husband the news that the calling had become too loud to ignore, he considered it his calling to make it happen for me. My little family picked up their lives and their home and they know that they will again. I’m healthy and committed

because my husband is one hundred and fifty percent “in” and that allows me to never waver in my “yes”. I am surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses who come around us giving support in large and small ways including but not limited to my home church of Big Lick, my CPM liaison Michael and my colleagues at work and in school. The Church is alive and well and continues to care for me in my life.

f. a statement of your understanding of the task teaching elders perform, including an awareness of your specific gifts for ministry and of areas in which growth is needed.

Teaching elders have a unique task to lead and guide the people under their care.

John Calvin summed up the essential marks of a true church as where “the word of God is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered.” In addition to this foundation of preaching and leading worship, teaching elders guide the sessions of their churches as moderator and keep the church connected to the larger church by encouraging denomination wide participation. Teaching elders have the unique position to help a congregation discern a vision and direction for mission and ministry. Teaching elders can involve the session and the congregation in deep and intentional study of the Bible and through prayer. It is easy for Sessions to engage in “maintenance” of the church, rather than for them to be the leaders that the Book of Order envisions for the Session.

My unique gifts for the task of teaching elder include but are not limited to enthusiasm and energy. I am gifted in the area of formation with experience teaching the entire span of ages in the church and I bring that background of education in the church into every area I will encounter. I bring joy and enthusiasm to the work of the church, not by some untruthful persona but through a deep sense of hope found in the work of the church and the gift of my role in it. I believe in what we do here and I know that the church can bring people to know God. I am reformed “through and through” and I know that the organization of the church and the order it provides can serve as such a strong framework for the work that needs to be done. An appreciation for that order and an intention to do it well is a gift for ministry in a way. We all know that sometimes the church gets in it’s own way and I think by realizing and respecting that truth, I can consciously move forward to serve the church in our future. Teaching elders have the unique position to encourage the direction of their church and should do so through deep and intentional study of the Bible and through prayer. A cognizant attitude toward the “pulse” of the church and an ever deeper connection to God’s will is the basic tool kit for any teaching elder.

I love people. I enjoy connecting with people and getting to know them. I think that’s a great perspective to bring into this type of ministry. Some of my favorite days when I begin a job at a new church are the ones getting to know them. My most recent call to the church I currently serve happened to fall during a Pandemic. I spoke to families on the phones for months, taking notes about who they were and how they were dealing with Covid. I enjoyed those phone calls and still draw on the relationships we made in that strange time. I know from experience that parishioners who feel known are better able to participate in the body of Christ. One of my talents includes fostering connections within systems to help people find their place and opportunities for deeper meaning through community. From my earliest roots in the church and my deep appreciation of their love and care for me, I hope to provide those types of connections for others.

I bring with me ruling elder experience in a small but mighty church. I have worked as an educator in both a small, medium and large church and I’ve seen how they operate. I’ve witnessed both the educational and pastoral needs in each of these types of congregations and I’ve experienced the joys and hope in each. I did

not idly decide to stand up from the pew one day and seek this calling- rather, I came to love the church by working alongside the church.

I am growing in my skills to lead through preaching and moderating session- an experience that I know enough about as a ruling elder to know it's going to take a while to perfect. I'm looking forward to using the skills I'm working so hard to gain from my seminary classes.

One of my favorite quotes from our book of order that guides my life on this path is this, "God acts with grace; we respond with gratitude. God claims us as beloved children; we proclaim God's saving love. God redeems us from sin and death; we rejoice in the gift of new life. This rhythm of divine action and human response—found throughout Scripture, human history, and everyday events—shapes all of Christian faith, life, and worship". (W-1.0102)