



PRESBYTERY OF SHEPPARDS AND LAPSLEY

Serving Central Alabama

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September 16, 2013

SPECIAL MEETING OF PRESBYTERY

I, O. Neil McCarter, Moderator of the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley, with the concurrence of Teaching Elders Leeann Scarbrough and Susan Clayton and Ruling Elders Bill Stribling, South Highland, Birmingham and Susan Haskell, Independent, Birmingham; do hereby call a Special Meeting of the Presbytery to be held on October 4th, 2013 at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary of Edgewood Presbyterian Church, 850 Oxmoor Road, Birmingham, AL 35209 for the purpose of:

1. Examining Caroline Underwood for ordination as Teaching Elder on October 6, 2013 at 2:00 p.m. at Independent Presbyterian Church. Statements are attached. Her commission consists of: Teaching Elders Elizabeth Goodrich, Susan Clayton and Joseph Reid; Ruling Elders Carolyn Nowlin, Independent and Bill Stribling, South Highland. She has accepted a call to Calvary United Protestant Church, Park Forest, IL, as Temporary Supply Pastor, 20 hours a week as solo pastor and Sertoma Centre, Matteson, IL, Intake Coordinator for Mental Health Services. The Presbytery of Chicago has approved this call pending ordination by this presbytery.
2. Anything else pertaining to or arising from the above item of business.

Sincerely,

Rev. O. Neil McCarter

Rev. O. Neil McCarter
Moderator of Presbytery

EDGEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

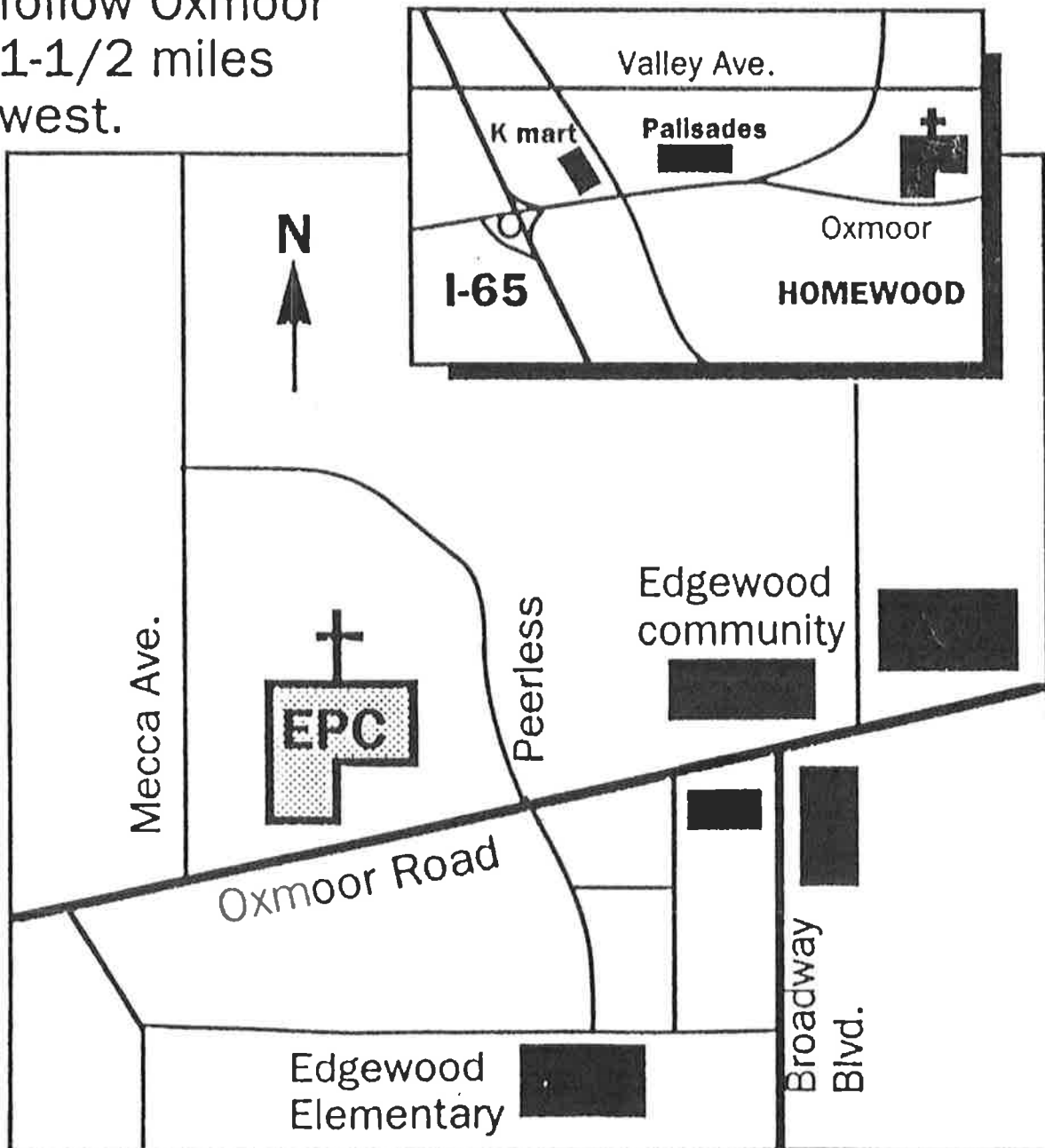
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How to find us

From I-65, take Oxmoor Road east past Palisades shopping center. From U.S. 31, follow Oxmoor 1-1/2 miles west.



Caroline Underwood, Faith Statement

God our creator breathed life into everything that is a part of our universe. God created human life in God's image and knows all our thoughts and words before we even say them (Psalm 139). God gives us hope and delivers us from evil and provides unconditional love no matter how much we fail.

As humans, we fall very short of perfection and are sinful beings. "Sin is", as Marjorie Thompson said, "our worldliness, our wounded pride and reactive anger, our compulsive desire to control and dominate, our greed for more than we need, our hardness of heart toward fellow human beings, our need to hide from the truth, our willingness to distort reality for our own purposes." Knowing that we struggle with sin every day, Jesus Christ, the son of God was sent by God to teach the gospel of love. I believe that Jesus was both human and God and that he preached the truth not only through his words, but also through his actions by healing the sick, feeding the poor, and befriending sinners. Jesus had followers, whom he called his disciples, who went with him everywhere he ministered, learning how to be his servants in both truth and love. Just as we too are called to be disciples of Jesus, we are also called to share God's love with all those whom we encounter. Jesus suffered a painful human death on the cross. This crucifixion was in no way just, but because of it all our sins were forgiven and through the power of God's grace we were given eternal life, so that we too may also one day dwell with God in Heaven.

The Holy Spirit is our sustainer, God's ongoing presence that we feel everyday we breathe life. This Spirit gives us the ability to have a relationship with God here on earth that is filled with prayer and trust. We are enriched each day by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we are taught to love and grow closer to God through meditation on scripture and worship with other fellow believers.

I believe in the two Holy sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism. Holy Communion is the symbolic act of eating the bread and wine to represent Jesus' broken body and blood, which were shed for all believers that we might have eternal life. I also believe in both infant and adult baptism as a personal profession of faith by either the individual or their families. Both sacraments are also signs of our connection to not only God but to God's people. These sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion allow people, especially those living through difficult times in their lives, the opportunity to connect with God, through remembering their own baptisms, and remembering the stories that were told over the years as they sat with friends and broke bread together. These rituals of baptism and Holy Communion help us recognize our need to connect with God and to connect with each other every day as a spiritual and holy act.

I feel God calls us "to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8) Even though we may stray, God empowers us through our faith and the power of the Holy Spirit to strive each day to serve others as Christ did. God is full of strength, mystery, hope, but most of all love. Christian hope is all-encompassing. Some times in our deepest sorrow, when we are "all cried out" what else is there left to do but hope. Hope somehow helps us makes sense of our broken lives. If we can just allow ourselves to see past tomorrow, and picture a life beyond this world. For the one thing that hope always does is bring us closer to God. As the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (NIV)

To have hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, is to have hope for all of humanity and all of God's creation, though evil and sin still exist in this world. Thinking beyond hope for our own personal salvation, we must also have hope for others and for our communities. With that hope, I believe that the Church is called to be the Resurrection. This Resurrection, just as that of Christ, is one that breaks down walls and barriers that separate us from one another. Whether those walls are race, class, or hate, when we become the Church, we become unified by the Holy Spirit, and only then can we begin live out the true message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Caroline Underwood, Faith Journey

I can't recall the exact moment when I became a believer. But there are certain moments that I can recall where my faith became deeper and more real. I grew up going to Church and especially remembered feeling the presence of God while at Church Camp and singing in the Children's choir. In 1981, as an infant, I was baptized by a woman minister, Rev. Louise Lawson, at Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee. As I have worked this past year as a hospital chaplain for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Labor and Delivery, my baptism has become an even more significant part of my faith journey. I have a picture at my home framed of my baptism, and find it particularly meaningful that it was performed by a woman minister.

My family lived in Memphis until I was twelve and then we moved to Birmingham. It took me a while before I became involved in youth group. In ninth grade, a friend of mine from Independent Presbyterian Church asked me to go on a mission trip with her to Eastern Kentucky (Appalachia). I decided to go, but remembered doubting this decision even up to the day before we left. The trip ended up being life transforming. This was one of the very first times my faith became real to me. We spent a week working and repairing a trailer home that was almost falling down. Crawling under the trailer just to stuff a little bit of insulation there in hopes that this family of five might keep warm, I began to understand what it truly meant to follow Christ. On this trip this was the first time I started to feel a tug or an inclination that God was going to use me in some way as a leader of a faith community. There were several young adults working there hosting mission teams, and I remember seeing them and saying to myself, "one day that is going to be me."

I eventually became very involved in my church youth group at IPC and in the presbytery, as I served on the Youth Council. I also grew in my leadership skills and my faith as I became a camp counselor in college at Gulfstream for three summers and serving in various churches throughout our presbytery leading day camps. Becoming a camp counselor, for me in many ways was like going home. I had loved going to Camp Pinecrest when I was a child growing up in Memphis and found much joy in being able to work with children at camp and share God's love to them in that way. Church camp will always hold a special place in my heart as it was one of the very first times I experienced God's unconditional love.

While at Rhodes College, I served as the student faith-based ministries coordinator and worked on many service projects that connected both faith and service. I also became more curious academically in religion as I decided to major in Religious Studies. My time volunteering in college helped me to understand that I could not separate both my desire to work with the poor and my desire follow Jesus and share my faith with others. Understanding my call more clearly, I decided then after college to go to Miami as a Young Adult Volunteer through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), where I worked with primarily Haitian American children and teenagers in a local church and a faith-based nonprofit. After one year of service I was hired by the places where I had been volunteering and stayed in Miami for two more years.

Shortly after leaving Miami, I decided to take further steps in answering my call to ordained ministry. I chose to pursue a Masters of Divinity degree at McCormick Theological Seminary as well as a Masters of Social Work Loyola University Chicago. Throughout the last few years in my formal education, and especially this last year while doing my Clinical Pastoral Education Residency at Rush University Medical Center, I have learned a lot about myself and the types of skills and passion that I bring to ministry. The first is that I have always seen my call to serve God and call to serve those on the margins of society as interconnected. When I first felt called to ministry (on that mission trip to Appalachia), I felt called because of a desire to serve. That desire to serve the disenfranchised of our society has been one thing that has always stayed present in my call. I found joy in serving

as a youth pastor at a mid-sized multi-cultural church in Miami. I found joy in starting an after school program at that same church and serving the needs of the people in that community. I found joy in working with children who lived in homeless shelters. I found joy in working with older adults in my CPE internship and in my time spent during my second social work field placement as a case manager to older adults. I have also found joy in working with adults with severe mental illnesses. And I have found joy in working with patients and families in crisis in the hospital, and counseling people through long term illnesses and end of life.

This year, however, there also came a time early on in my residency when I really felt like I just wanted to be in a position longer than a year or two, be looked at as more than just another student or intern, and have some permanency in the work that I am called to. At the same time, however, given that I have done so many different things and changed directions every few years, I know that a part of me gets a little restless if I am doing the same thing day in and day out.

This is where my desire to pastor a small church and work part-time as a social worker seemed to begin to evolve. What attracted me to being a pastor at a small church was that small churches are in many ways like families. As I have spent a lot of time reading about and discussing family systems over the past year, I found my desire to work with this theory could actually be applied in a small church setting. Also, I knew that being a solo-pastor at a small church, I would not only be able to get to experience working in all areas of the church (older adults, children, pastoral care, preaching, etc.), but also be able to help shape a community in a way that allowed them to revision themselves and how they want to be present in their community. As service and outreach have always been a strong component of my call, I saw that there could really be an opportunity here to help a small church grow through helping them develop a new outreach program that is meant to serve the needs of their community. At the same time, being at the church part-time also allows me the opportunity to continue to work in the field of social work, so that I can gain supervision hours towards becoming a licensed clinical social worker.

I was lucky to find a small church that wanted me to be their pastor, and a part time social work job just a few miles from that church. The church where I have been called is Calvary United Protestant in Park Forest, Illinois. Park Forest is an interesting and diverse community located in Chicago's Southwest suburbs. It is home to many people who once lived on the South and West Side of Chicago (Chicago's historically African American Communities) who have migrated out of the city. The church at one time was ecumenical and although they have been fully adopted into the Presbyterian Church (USA), they kept their name because still many of the people in the congregation at one time were a part of other denominations. As most churches in mainline denominations, they have lost members over the past few years and their former pastor (who retired in May after being there for a decade) slowly decreased the numbers of hours he was working to 20 hours a week before he left. They have a history over the past ten years of hosting many interns from McCormick Seminary, which has become a part of their identity. They have also been through discernment and visioning programs that have helped them be open to where God is leading them. It is a wonderful community, and I am honored to be their next pastor and look forward to see how God will help us grow together.