

Date: Feb. 5, 2021

Form 1B

Questions for Reflection

Name: Tamar Wasoian

Tamar

(family)

(first)

(middle/natal)

Reflect on the following questions and then write responses in the space provided (limited to about 275 words).

1. Describe yourself as a person.

I am a hard-working, compassionate, and resilient. I display a calm and assuring presence in my interactions with others and I am able to communicate well with people of all ages. Beneath my calm and assuring personality is a strong faith in God. I knew I was called to ministry since childhood and prayed for God to open avenues of service. As the first woman to assume a leadership role in my home church, my sense of call to ministry was consistently challenged. This taught me to trust God's calling and listen to the calm whisper of the Spirit above the voices of dissent. I had moments of doubt, wondering if others knew better than I did, but the certainty of my call prevailed.

My faith journey cultivated in me an openness to other people's struggles. Overcoming opposition helped me to connect to the experiences of others who face challenges as they respond to God's leading. I believe God continues to lead me and answer my prayers for continued direction on the path to ministry.

Another important thing to know about me is that I love teaching and learning- it is at the core of who I am. My parents, too, love learning. Because they were denied the opportunity of learning in their younger days, they have always been adamant supporters of my growth and education. I inherited my love of learning from them. This passion shapes my call to ministry because, I believe, every facet of ministry in the church is about education and formation.

2. Describe briefly your understanding of what it means to you to be an inquirer. Please include the most important events, experiences and persons that have prompted you to apply to become an inquirer.

One Sunday, in my recent ministry site, I was teaching about the leadership at the church and I introduced myself as the Religious Educator. One boy rephrased my statement and said, "No, you are the associate pastor." I explained my role again, but he repeated, "Yes, that is what I am saying. You are the associate pastor." This was an awakening moment. I have contemplated a call to ordained ministry since I first entered seminary in 1991. After all none of the Armenian churches ordain women. Insights from others, such as this young child's insistence on calling me a pastor, sparked a new awakening to the call I once thought impossible.

According to the Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry, the inquiry phase is the time for the applicant and the congregation "to explore and test that call together." The sad truth is that within the Armenian tradition I did not have a faith community that encouraged or helped me in my discernment. I am looking forward to the mentorship of the WPC and the Presbytery to help me find a network of caring and supporting relationships in the spiritual discernment of my call.

This will be a time for me to experience a faith home that is welcoming, nurturing and affirming. My long years of vocation in ministry without a supportive faith community require some healing. I look forward to a re-imagining of call and eagerly anticipate of what this new phase might bring. For the first time I will be enjoying the support and guidance of the denomination as we covenant together in this vocational discernment.

3. Write a brief statement of your personal faith describing what you believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and your relationship to them.

All life begins and takes form in God and life happens because of God. Humans are created in God's image, separated from and called to a renewed relationship through God's loving grace. Believers are bound to God through Jesus' sacrificial love. It is by God's grace and love that humanity is reconciled and transformed to become the living witness. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God took on human nature and lived among us. Through Jesus' humanity, God relates to our embodied human experience. God knows and understands because God became flesh in Jesus and lived a human life. The Holy Spirit is the gentle presence of God in us. It's the breath we take and the life we experience. She is the breath that connects us to the very first breath God breathed in us in our creation. This dynamic presence gives us the trajectory of hope and resilience as we navigate life and existence. The presence of the Holy Trinity, God in three persons, is known through the creative love and grace of the Father, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the acts of the Holy Spirit in life of the Church. This knowledge is experienced and renewed through partaking in the church's sacraments of Baptism and Communion, which are the signs of God's actions in the life of the believers. The source of knowing God begins with the Scripture. The Word became human through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as witnessed by the early church. We know God through the words of the Bible as we experience the Word through living by the Word. The Scripture grounds us as we grow in faith and hope.

4. What does it mean to you to be Presbyterian?

Growing up in Syria, I attended Armenian Reformed and Orthodox Traditions: the first sharpened my curiosity and questioning mind and the second taught me how to embrace awe and mystery of being in God's presence. I served the global church in Syria, Lebanon, Armenia and the United States in varying capacities and levels of engagement. Throughout my graduate studies in Chicago I made connections with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Beyond graduate school, I enjoyed teaching at McCormick Theological Seminary, and various other connections with congregations in the Chicago area and through my volunteer work in several Middle East related task forces for the PC(USA). All of my associations with the Presbyterians made me feel welcomed and affirmed. I feel deeply rooted in this denomination and my contribution is valued. My most recent ministry in the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) brought clarity to my previous experiences with the PC(USA) and with the Christian tradition as a whole. The experience is helping me grow and appreciate more deeply the faith traditions in which I find spiritual connection with. In discovering the diversity of the UU tradition and its multi-faceted approaches to faith, I find I am more centered in my Christian faith and can better articulate what I hold meaningful in my life. My ministry at the UU church became a catharsis, a new calling for ordained ministry, and brought me back to my renewed sense of 'home' within the PC(USA).

5. Describe your current spiritual practices and disciplines.

Reading the Word and meditating on its meaning is a lifelong practice that I began in my childhood. Growing in my biblical knowledge and my experience in prayer with the God I love is a persistent endeavor that I practice with an open heart and focused attention on the life and ministry of Jesus.

As I teach from the Bible, I pay attention to the written word and the meaning as they are transmitted to us through language. I navigate these meanings, along-side my real-life experiences through time and physical space.

Working with a diverse religious tradition at the present awakened a renewed interest in studying and understanding the fundamentals of my Christian faith.

6. Who/what is your ideal/role model for ministry? What do you expect in your ministry? What aspect of ministry do you find least interesting?

My role model is my first religion teacher. She was and still is ardent in her Christian life, bringing the Word to many people, especially women, deeply enriching their lives in Christ. I have remained connected with her across the miles and the years, as she continues to be a wonderful mentor to me. She is my inspiration and my role model, persevering in her faith in God regardless of what life throws at her, demonstrating true force of love and inspiration.

As an educator, I hold my teaching and service to the whole church as my Christian vocation. Ordination in a particular faith community will enable me more fully to fulfill God's loving call to be a teaching elder in the church.

Being a 'living sacrifice' is the hardest part of ministry. Church leaders are often put at the center of attention. They are expected to set the best example possible of what it means to be Christ's disciple and to model Christian virtue. I am learning to accept my limitations, though it is my heart's desire to live to a higher standard.

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7. What are you doing to maintain your physical and emotional health?

I focus on my breath through physical and spiritual practices. Physical exercise is my uncompromising priority in my daily routine. I walk, swim or practice yoga to maintain physical health and to elevate any day-to-day stresses. My emotional health is closely tied to my physical wellbeing. The more I move and focus on my breath, the better equipped I am to manage all areas of life with grace and freedom.

8. Comment on what have been/are some of your more meaningful interests and hobbies.

In addition to physical exercise, I enjoy a variety of arts and crafts. I love making jewelry, knitting, and crafting. I recently added creative writing to my list of hobbies. Writing usually doesn't come easy for me, but devoting one hour of uninterrupted writing is proving to be a very useful and enjoyable practice.

9. After completing and reviewing Form 1C of this application to be received as an inquirer, briefly discuss how you plan to finance your theological education.

I do not currently have any student debt and for that I am truly blessed. I can only thank God for all the grace and care I have experienced throughout my life-long theological education. I do understand that to complete the requirements for ordination, I may need to complete relevant classes that were not part of my previous seminary or doctoral course work. As I understand it, the need for course work will be determined by the Committee on Preparation of the Presbytery. I know, too, that the PC(USA) requires the completion of several ordination exams and in order to successfully complete the exams I may need some further course work. I am planning to cover the tuition from the professional expenses funds I receive from my employment. Should the costs of education exceed these funds, I hope to apply for financial support from the Presbytery.

Signature: Tamar Wasoian



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(date)