

## My ALP Experience

By Laura Boggess, Teays Valley Presbyterian

*This is the second in a series highlighting PWV's Authorized Lay Preacher/Commissioned Ruling Elder Program. In September, we begin a new set of Presby Prep courses, which are prerequisites for this program. [Click here](#) for more information about Presby Prep. Is God tugging at your heart to participate? Presby Prep is a great way to learn more.*

I didn't know what to do with the papers my pastor gave to me about the ALP/CRE program.

"It sounds like a good opportunity," she said. "Do you know anyone who might be interested?"

"I'll ask around," I replied.

I carried those papers around in my purse for weeks, not sure why. Every once in a while, I would dig them out of from under tubes of lip balm, loose change, and renegade breath mints. I would read the course descriptions over and over. It *did* sound like a good opportunity. Someone should do this, I thought. I shared about the program in my Bible study. I talked with my husband about it. I brought it up as I fellowshiped in the Narthex after church.

No one was interested.

Sometimes, I can be a slow learner. I grew up in a cult-like faith tradition where women were not allowed leadership roles. It was a sign of God's great love to be rescued from that. In the Presbyterian Church, I had taught the children, led a women's Bible study, chaired a committee and served on session, but...*lay preacher*? It wasn't on my radar. It took a while before I realized, *these papers are for me*. God was tapping on my heart, asking to show me a new thing. And frankly, I didn't want any part of it. My life was good — comfortable — just the way it was. Why would I want to complicate things?

But those papers weighed on me like a heavy stone. I couldn't get out from under them. It was more than a dreadful weight, however. I couldn't deny that this weight felt a little like an anchor. Like hope.

I talked with my pastor, and she encouraged me to sign up for the Presby Prep program — the prerequisite courses for the ALP/CRE program. "Just see what it's like," she said. "See where it takes you."

Where it took me was on one of the sweetest journeys in my God-life. God used the time I invested in Presby Prep, and later the ALP/CRE program, to pull me closer. Through reading and studying about faith, history, exegesis, the Church, and all the trappings of the life in Christ, my eyes for the Spirit-life were opened in new ways. I found a tribe of others whose desire, like mine, was for a deeper walk with Christ. I looked forward to my weekends with my classmates and the good things we would learn together. Still, throughout the program, I remained unsure of where it all would lead.

“It’s OK,” Susan Sharp Campbell kept assuring me. “If nothing else, you will be a more educated Christian. We believe that’s important.”

What a gift Susan gave me in those words. My heart was freed to continue moving forward not out of a sense of obligation or duty, but *because I felt God’s pleasure in the midst of all the workings of the program*. One important thing I learned is that out of my comfort zone is one place my faith is sure to grow.

Something beautiful happened as I let myself enter more fully into the new thing God was showing me. The more I learned, the more I experienced God’s faithfulness in that place of discomfort, the more I wanted to share with others. I have been filling pulpits in our region since 2012. I still work my day job. My children are both in college now. Life is still messy, uncomfortable, broken, and beautiful. But I have never regretted saying yes to God about going through the ALP/CRE program. Not once.

This is not the end of my God-story. I believe as long as I am willing, God will continue to show me new things. It is still difficult to step out of my comfort zone. I don’t think that will ever change. But my experience as an ALP has given more weight to the anchor of my faith. It has been a beautiful chapter in this story God is writing with my life.

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