



STATED ASSEMBLY DOCKET

10:00 Gathering Hymn

Welcome and Opening Prayer - - - - - **Moderator Nic Merchant**

- Welcome Guests and seating of Corresponding Members

Vibrant Presbytery - - - - - **GP/SC Daris Bultena**

- Report of the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk
 - Quorum and Adoption of the Docket - - - - - p. 4
 - Consent Motions - - - - - p. 3
 - Records Review 2025 - - - - - pp. 5, 10-14
 - Parity Report - - - - - p. 15
 - GAPJC Leach vs. Tropical Florida - - - - - pp. 16-17
- Dedication and Celebration of the Vibrancy Center

Vibrant Leaders

- Committee on Preparation for Ministry - - - **Rev. Dr. David Massey**
 - Mr. Luis Carranza | Inquirer: Statement of Motivation - - - p. 18
 - Ms. Lakeisha Aquino | Inquirer: Statement of Motivation - - - p. 19

Vibrant Together 2.0 Conversation

Vibrant Worship

11:25 New Business - - - - - **Moderator Nic Merchant**

11:30 Adjournment - - - - - **Moderator Nic Merchant**



THE BUSINESS OF THE PRESBYTERY

GROUND RULES FOR PRESBYTERY MEETINGS:

- The Consent Motion contains all administrative motions thought to be non-controversial. Any voting person may ask to have any item pulled for separate discussion and vote during New Business.
- The Report and Information sections are for information only and will not be presented on the floor.
- All new business must be in writing and presented to the Stated Clerk 24 hours prior to the convening of the Presbytery Assembly by emailing dbultena@vibrantpresbytery.org.
- Any person addressing the Presbytery must first be recognized by the moderator.
- A person wishing to speak to a motion cannot speak a second time until others who wish to speak have spoken the first time.
- Speakers during floor debate will be limited to three minutes.

**The Presbytery of Tropical Florida
engages, equips, and encourages
Vibrant Christ-centered communities
to build relationships, have spiritual depth, and be missional.
Through leadership development, disciple making,
vital worship, reconciliation, and clarity of identity,
we are Vibrant Together.**



CONSENT MOTIONS

Recommendations of the Stated Clerk:

1. THAT the Parity Report in the Appendix [p. 15] used to enroll commissioners to this Presbytery Assembly along with any subsequent Presbytery Assemblies prior to May 2027 be adopted in keeping with the Manual of Operations and the Constitution.
2. THAT the report of the GAPJC to withdraw the appeal of Leach vs. Presbytery of Tropical Florida be entered into the minutes of this meeting. [Appendix p. 16-17]

----- *End of Consent Motions* -----



MOTIONS

Recommendations of the Stated Clerk:

3. THAT the docket be approved as presented.
4. THAT the consent motions be approved as presented.

Recommendations of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry

5. THAT Mr. Luis Carranza be received as Inquirer Under Care for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. *[Statement of Motivation, Appendix, p. 18]*
6. THAT Ms. Lakeisha Aquino be received as Inquirer Under Care for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. *[Statement of Motivation, Appendix, p. 19]*

----- *End of Motions* -----



REPORTS

Report of the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk:

- That during 2026, the Session Records Review of 2025 minutes and materials is being conducted by the following method: Send the Stated Clerk a digital copy of your minutes along with the completed Session Minute Review Checklist [See Appendix, pp. 10-11] and the Session Minutes Review Form [See Appendix, pp. 12-14]. Once your minutes have been reviewed you will receive an acknowledgement sheet that can be inserted into your Session Minute book. The records review will be conducted by Presbytery representatives, so please remit your digitized records, and completed checklist and reviewer forms. Scanned PDF copies of all documents are preferred (not photographed pages).
- Those churches having completed their 2025 records review of 2024 minutes are: All Nations PC and The Sanctuary PC.

SESSIONS ARE REMINDED THAT SUBMITTING RECORDS FOR REVIEW IS A CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT. ALL SESSIONS MUST COMPLETE THE 2025 RECORDS REVIEW.

- Presbytery Assembly Dates for the remainder of 2026 are August 22 and November 14.
- Statistical Reporting is complete and YES, we did it again this year with 100% reporting for the 7th year in a row!! Way to go session clerks!
- The 2025-2026 Parity Report is now being implemented for clerks to follow in sending Commissioners according to the appropriate allotment.
- The GAPJC has granted an order to withdraw the appeal in the matter of Leach vs. Tropical Florida. That order is spread upon the minutes of this Presbytery Assembly.

Report of the Leadership Council acting as the Presbytery:

- APPROVED the Leadership Council minutes for January 28, March 18, 2026, as presented.
- APPROVED the Presbytery Assembly minutes for February 14, 2026, as presented.
- APPROVED the election of the Rev. Danny Morales (New Covenant, Miami) for Committee on Ministry-South Region, Class of 2028, Term 1.
- APPROVED the election of the Sue Long (Living Faith, Port St. Lucie) for the Goral Gables Fund Committee, Class of 2028, Term 1.
- RECEIVED the resignation letter from the Rev. Dr. Ben Sorensen, as a member of the Administrative Commission of First Miami.
- APPROVED that the Moderator's appointment of RE-Debi Davis (First, Fort Lauderdale), and RE-Nancy Fine (First, Delray Church) to the Administrative Commission for First Miami on an immediate measure and affirmed the commitment to seek additional members for the commission.
- APPROVED the election of the Rev. Dr. David Massey (Retired) for Committee on Nominations/Committee on Representation, Class of 2028, Term 1.



- APPROVED the election of the RE-Barbara Hassall (Sanctuary PC) for the Human Resources Committee, Class of 2026.
- APPROVED the sharing of information about potential use of Environmental Tax Services (ETS) grant writing.
- APPROVED that Nancy Fine and David Massey be authorized as signers in tandem on all UBS accounts, and that Daris Bultena continue in his authorized role as signer on all UBS accounts.

Report of the Committee on Ministry:

- APPROVED the February 5 and March 5 COM Minutes as presented.
- RECEIVED the updated March 5 and April 9 Regional Charts as information.
- RECEIVED the updated 2026 February Presbytery Assembly Attendance Report as information.
- APPROVED the following quadrangle approach for First Presbyterian Church of Boynton Beach:
 1. Move the congregation from thoughts of closing to hope in the future.
 2. Amendments to the Pastor's Covenant reducing the salary by 50% starting June 1, 2026. December 31, 2026, will be the final expiration.
 3. Study and Assessment of the future vibrancy and sustainability for the congregation and of the property.
 4. Loan from capital investment with Memo of Financial Obligation for operational cost.

Report of the Committee on Ministry Acting as the Presbytery:

- APPROVED the Terms of Covenant extension between First Presbyterian Church of West Palm Beach and the Rev. Sung Joo as Bridge Pastor, expiring August 31, 2026.
- APPROVED the Terms of Covenant extension between Ascension Peace Presbyterian Church and the Rev. Dr. Ken White as Temporary Supply Pastor, expiring December 31, 2026.
- APPROVED the Terms of Covenant extension between Community Presbyterian Church (Deerfield Beach) and the Rev. Dr. Albert Bush Jr. as Temporary Supply Pastor, expiring June 30, 2026.
- APPROVED the Terms of Covenant extension between Sunrise Presbyterian Church and the Rev. Yosneis Fleitas as Transitional Pastor, expiring March 31, 2027.
- APPROVED the revised Terms of Covenant extension between First Presbyterian Church of West Palm Beach, and the Rev. Sung Joo, as Bridge Pastor, expiring August 31, 2026.
- APPROVED the model of pastoral ministry for Ascension Peace Presbyterian Church be reduced from full-time to part-time.
- APPROVED that the Committee in Ministry find in order the fit between First Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale and the Rev. Tricia Young.
- APPROVED that the Terms of Call between First Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale, and the Rev. Tricia Young, as Associate Pastor.



- APPROVED the Terms of Covenant extension between Riviera Presbyterian Church and the Rev. Kim Robles as Bridge Pastor, expiring July 14, 2026.
- APPROVED the Moderators for churches without installed pastor ministers and those with special circumstances.

NORTH	First PC, Boynton Beach First PC, Lake Worth First PC, West Palm Beach Goodwill PC, Ft. Pierce Peace PC, Stuart	Amalie Ash (Transitional Pastor) Paul Bayerl (<i>Administrative Commission</i>) Tim Roberts-ART (Moderator) Ronald Evans (Stated Supply Pastor) Lonnie Darnell (Transitional Pastor)
CENTRAL	Ascension Peace PC, Lauderhill Community PC, Deerfield Beach Community Lauderdale-by-the-Sea Glades PC, Boca Raton Plantation PC, Plantation Sanctuary PC, Fort Lauderdale	Dwayne Black Jr. (Moderator) Geoff McLean (Moderator) Geoff McLean (Moderator) Geoff McLean (Moderator) Mike Mahan (Transitional Pastor) Dwayne Black Jr. (Stated Supply Pastor)
SOUTH	All Nations PC, N. Miami Beach El Cordero PC, Miami First Miami PC, Miami First Spanish, Miami Miami Shores PC, Miami Shores New Covenant PC, Miami Peace Covenant PC, Key West Pinecrest PC, Miami Riviera PC, Miami Sunrise PC, Miami Trinity PC, Key West	Denise McLeod (Temporary Supply) Daris Bultena (Moderator) Dee Grachek (<i>Administrative Commission</i>) Daris Bultena (Moderator) Valdir Franca (Moderator) Danny Morales (Temporary Supply) Victoria Isaacs/Robert Ward (Designated Co-Pastors) Kim Robles (Designated Pastor) Kim Robles (Moderator) Yosneis Fleitas (Transitional Pastor) Victoria Isaacs/Robert Ward (Moderators)

Report of the Committee on Nominations / Committee on Representative

- APPROVED the October 20, 2025, CON COR minutes as presented.
- APPROVED that Rev. Danny Morales (New Covenant, Miami) be nominated for Committee on Ministry-South Region, Class of 2028, Term 1.
- APPROVED that Rev. Dr. David Massey (Retired) be nominated for Committee on Nominations / Representation, Class of 2028, Term 1.
- APPROVED that Sue Long (Living Faith, Port St. Lucie) be nominated for the Coral Gables Fund Committee, Class of 2028, Term 1.
- APPROVED that RE-Barbara Hassall be nominated for the Human Resources Committee, Class of 2026, Term 1.

Report of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry:

- APPROVED the CPM meeting minutes for January 20, 2026, as presented.



- APPROVED to recommend to the Presbytery Assembly, that Mr. Luis Carranza be received as Inquirer Under Care for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. *[Appendix, p. 18]*
- APPROVED to recommend to the Presbytery Assembly, that Ms. Lakeisha Aquino be received as Inquirer Under Care for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. *[Appendix, p. 19]*

Report of the Human Resource Committee:

- APPROVED the hiring of an Executive Assistant on a contracted part-time basis.

----- *End of Reports* -----



INFORMATION

From the Planning Team for Today's Assembly:

We will be using Mutual Invitation during the breakout discussion portion of the meeting.

The Principles of Mutual Invitation:

- Speakers will limit their response to one (1) minute or less.
- The first person to share will be the person whose first name begins with "A" or is closest to "A" in the alphabet.
- After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whoever you invite does not need to be the person next to you.
- After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.
- If you have something to say but are not ready yet, say "pass for now," and then invite someone else to share. You will be invited again later.
- If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share.
- We will do this until everyone has been invited.
- All are invited to listen but not to respond to someone's sharing immediately (no cross talk is permitted).
- After everyone has shared, that is the appropriate time for clarifying questions or comments.
- Each group will need to observe self-regulation to achieve the principles of Mutual Invitation.

Each group should select a recorder to take notes, and someone who will report back to the Presbytery Assembly. Send your notes to Sandra@vibrantpresbytery.org.



PRESBYTERY OF TROPICAL FLORIDA
SESSION MINUTE REVIEW CHECK LIST

*** Clerk of Session put a stickie in the minute book noting this item for quick reference.

Church Name: _____ Year (of minutes to review): _____

NEEDS TO HAPPEN AT EACH MEETING

- Date, Time, Place, Moderator's name is clear at beginning of each set of minutes
- Attendees, Excused, and Absent Names are recorded.
- Others present are noted and duration of their stay.
- The presence of a quorum is noted.
- Meetings are opened with prayer.
- Meetings are closed with prayer.
- Motions are clearly defined, and the action recorded (passed, referred, tabled)

***** YEARLY ITEMS**

- Statement of composition of session and how it corresponds to composition of the congregation (G10.0301) at least annually
- Meetings of session are at least quarterly
- Record of training of elected officers by session
- Record of examination of elected officers by session
- Record of election of clerk of session and length of term
- Record of annual election of treasurer by the session
- Record of full financial review annually
- Record of approving the curriculum used in education programs
- Selection of members of the nominating committee by the congregation in an amount greater than the 2 elders from the session and a possible deacon
- Annual review of the adequacy of the pastor(s) compensation by the congregation



PRESBYTERY OF TROPICAL FLORIDA
SESSION MINUTE REVIEW CHECK LIST

*** Clerk of Session put a stickie in the minute book noting this item for quick reference.

***** AS NEEDED**

- Record of commissioner to presbytery reports
- Record of review of work of organizations in the church
- Record of setting the times of worship and the celebration of the Sacraments
- Record of calling congregational meetings with sufficient notice (G-1.0502)
- Minutes of the congregational meetings

ROLLS AND REGISTER

- Baptized members roll
- Active members roll
- Inactive members roll
- Affiliate members roll
- Roll of elders with dates of ordination, terms of service
- Roll of deacons with dates of ordinations, terms of service
- *** Can the rolls be easily reconciled with the minutes that record an action concerning a member.

_____ Approved _____ Approved with Exception _____ Not Approved

Reviewer's Name: _____ Date: _____



PRESBYTERY OF TROPICAL FLORIDA
SESSION MINUTE REVIEW FORM

Church Name: _____ Year (of minutes to review): _____

The spirit of this form is to try and capture what this presbytery feels is essential to include in a church's minutes in order to ensure transparency and good order.

Section I:

1. Each congregation is to maintain the membership rolls (active, affiliate, baptized), deaths, pastors, elders, deacons (if applicable). This register of the rolls of the church was updated on (date): _____.

2. The Annual Meeting of the Congregation was held on (date): _____.

At this meeting, the following transpired:

- a. Review Terms of Call for pastor - - - - YES or NO
- b. Elected members of the Nominating Committee - - YES or NO
- c. Elected new elders and deacons (if applicable) - - YES or NO

If the election of the Nominating Committee or new elders did not occur at the annual meeting, please indicate below when this occurred (date):

_____.

3. New officers were examined by the Session on (date): _____.

4. New officers were ordained/installed during worship on (date): _____.

5. The Session established the annual budget on (date): _____ (Please attach a copy of the budget in your minutes.)

6. The Session elected the treasurer on (date): _____ for a term of: _____.

7. The Session elected the Clerk of Session on (date): _____ for a term of: _____.

8. The church had a financial review (G-3.0113) with the findings reported to the session on (date): _____.

9. The Annual Statistical Report has been attached to the minutes at the end of the calendar year. YES or NO

Section II:

Please take an average month and check if the following information has been recorded in the session minutes. (month looked at: _____)



- | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|-----|----|----|
| 1. The meeting was opened and closed with prayer. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |
| 2. Date, hour and place of the meeting was recorded. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |
| 3. Name of the moderator is given. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |
| 4. A quorum was declared. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |
| 5. Names of those absent and excused were listed. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |
| 6. The minutes of the last meeting were approved. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |
| 7. All action items are recorded. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |
| 8. Clerk and the Minister has signed the minutes. | - | - | - | - | YES | or | NO |

Section III:

The following items should be contained in the minutes if applicable:

1. The Session has authorized baptisms on (date): _____.
2. The Session has authorized the observance of the Lord's Supper on (dates):
_____.
3. The Session received new members (dates):

 - a. By letter of transfer on (dates):
_____.
 - b. By reaffirmation of faith on (dates):
_____.
 - c. By adult baptism on (dates):
_____.
4. The minutes contain a detailed financial report within the year. YES or NO
5. The Session took a candidate under care on (date): _____.

Section IV:

Congregational Meetings may contain the following information. Please indicate if appropriate:

1. A new pastoral relationship was established on (date): _____.
2. A pastoral relationship was dissolved on (date): _____.
3. Any matters relating to property issues such as purchase, lease, sale, were discussed and voted on (dates):
_____.

Section V:

The annual meeting of the corporation was held on (date): _____.
(This meeting can be the same as the annual meeting of the congregation.)



Section VI:

The Presbytery of Tropical Florida mandated in 2014 that session minutes be signed by both the Clerk of Session (the person taking and presenting the minutes for session approval) and the Moderator (the person who moderated the meeting) after the subsequent session meeting has approved the previous session's minutes. During the annual inspection of the churches' minutes and record books, the Stated Clerk shall note the presence or absence of both signatures on approved session minutes.

Minutes – final minutes shall be kept on acid-free paper, bound in a permanent form, numbered so that material may not be inserted at a later time. Unused spaces shall be marked through with the phrase: "Intentionally left blank". Temporary minutes may be kept in a loose-leaf form, but the signed, final form shall be the permanent record.

1. Has Per Capita been paid? - - - - - YES or NO
If not, why not? _____.
2. Are there any loans from the Presbytery? - - - - YES or NO
Are they current? _____.
3. Has/have your Pastor(s) completed the Presbytery Boundaries Training? YES or NO
4. Has/have the Session/Trustees reviewed the adequacy of the church's insurance program? YES
or NO
5. Has any change in Terms of Call been filed with the COM? - - YES or NO
_____ Check if the church has re-done their by-laws
_____ Check if your church needs help with the re-writing of by-laws

Because each church determines the quorums for sessions and congregations, it would be advisable in the beginning of your minutes for a calendar year, to state: the quorum for a session meeting is _____ people/percentage of the session.

The quorum for a congregational meeting is _____ percentage of active members.

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE REVIEWER:

Items to be worked on for next year's review:

The minutes of _____.

Church were reviewed and approved as: - - **WITHOUT exception** **WITH exception**

Reviewer's Signature: _____ Date: _____

PTF Representative's Signature: _____ Date: _____



PRESBYTERY OF TROPICAL FLORIDA
Parity Report 2026-2027

Pursuant to the Presbytery By-Laws (5-5), representation by congregations at Presbytery meetings shall be determined in the following manner:

One ruling elder commissioner for each teaching elder in an installed or temporary pastoral position (no Parish Associates are included in this representation); **plus:**

- Churches with less than 100 members: 1 additional elder commissioner
- Churches with 101 to 300 members: 2 additional elder commissioners
- Churches with 301 to 500 members: 3 additional elder commissioners
- For each additional 500 members: 3 + 1 additional elder commissioner not to exceed 7.

The number of active members shall be determined by the last completed Annual Statistical report of the General Assembly. **Therefore, the congregations of the Presbytery of Tropical Florida may send the following number of ruling elder commissioners from the second meeting of 2025 through the first meeting of 2026:**

CHURCH	MEMBERS	MINISTERS	COMMISSIONERS
All Nations PC	33	1	2
Ascension Peace PC	87	1	2
Central PC	112	1	3
(The) Community Church	47	0	1
Community PC	76	1	2
El Cordero PC	27	0	1
First Miami PC	198	1	3*
First PC, Boynton Beach	57	1	2
First PC, Delray Beach	873	1	5
First PC, Ft. Lauderdale	714	1	5
First PC, Hollywood	67	1	2
First PC, Lake Worth	11	0	1*
First PC, Pompano Beach	352	1	4
First PC, Stuart	57	1	2
First PC, Tequesta	165	1	3
First PC, West Palm Bch	42	1	2
First Spanish PC	64	0	1
Gardens PC	67	1	2
Glades PC	33	1	2
Goodwill PC	16	1	2
Hobe Sound Community	70	1	2
Korean PC, Miami	291	1	3
Korean PC, Palm Beach	63	1	2
Lakeside PC	113	1	3
Living Faith Church	80	1	2
Miami Shores, PC	149	1	3
Myrtle Grove PC	54	1	2
New Covenant PC	53	1	2
New Life PC	71	1	2
Palms West PC	158	1	3
Peace PC	145	1	3
Peace Covenant PC	79	2	3
Pinecrest PC	24	1	2
Plantation PC	109	1	3
Riviera PC	65	1	2
(The) Sanctuary Church	70	1	2
Sunrise PC	49	1	2*
Sunset PC	60	1	2
Trinity PC	18	0	1

*Administrative
Commission

ELDER-BY-VIRTUE-OFFICE

As PTF Committee Chairs and Leadership Council Members, the following are continuing members of the Presbytery by Virtue of Office, serving the presbytery in a particular role.

Nancy Fine
2026 Moderator Elect

Debi Davis
Leadership Council Member

Barbara Hassall
Leadership Council Member

Heidi Kirk-Garcia
Committee on Ministry Chair

Deborah Sadriwalla
Leadership Council Chair

These elders should not be included in their church's Commissioner allotment.



**PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

Elder Marisa S. Leach,

Appellant

v.

Presbytery of Tropical Florida,

Appellee

Order Granting Petition to

Withdraw Appeal

Remedial Appeal

2025-01

This is an appeal before the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC or this Commission) from a decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the South Atlantic (SPJC), dated February 24, 2025. On April 7, 2025, Elder Marissa S. Leach (the Appellant) filed a Notice of Appeal with this Commission. On May 19, 2025, this Commission entered an order accepting the appeal. The appeal was then set for hearing in October, with the Appellant's Brief due August 10, 2025, consistent with D-6.0801.

On August 31, 2025, Appellant submitted to the GAPJC, by letter, a petition to withdraw her appeal. The Appellee Presbytery of Tropical Florida has informed this Commission that they do not oppose the petition.

Pursuant to the provisions of D-6.05, the petition has been circulated to the full Commission, and no member of this Commission has stated any objection to the petition.



Accordingly, it is ORDERED that the petition is granted; the appeal is withdrawn; and the case is dismissed.

Dated this 2 day of October, 2025.

Scott Clark, Moderator
General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission

Vincent A. Thomas, Clerk
General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission



STATEMENT OF MOTIVATION

LUIS ALBERTO CARRANZA

For the past twenty years, my professional life has been defined by the high-velocity world of tech startups. As a commercial leader, I have built my career on finding order within chaos, rallying teams to believe in a cause bigger than themselves, and turning a mess of pieces on the floor into a clear line of sight toward a goal. However, I have been a man of faith since before starting my career, and I have always felt a calling to help others and be a light rather than serve myself or grow in personal wealth. As much as I have attained success, I know it is not where my treasure should be. My motivation for seeking ordination in the PCUSA stems from a conviction that my ability to communicate a vision was not given to me for the sake of a software exit, but for the sake of a Gospel that reaches the marginalized, the skeptical, and the professionally exhausted people around the world, and specifically here in Miami.

Growing up in Honduras, I witnessed a huge need with marginalized people living within two feet of me, unlike here in the states where they are often not seen. This upbringing, coupled with my career in tech, has left me with a hunger for a truth-telling ministry. I am motivated by the realization that many people, from the hopeful to the hopeless, are hungry for the Word but do not know how to access it or know it is the Word they are looking for! I don't want the spotlight; I want to be a blessing to be a blessing, using the skills I have honed in the business world alongside the object of my faith to create a church environment that is welcoming and adaptable to a new world. I am drawn to the PCUSA specifically because it values a learned ministry that engages the mind and the heart without sacrificing objective, rational thinking.

Beginning this process is not a career change for me; it is a vocational alignment. Whether I was providing medical donations through forhonduras.com or leading a sales team through a pivot, my internal compass has always been the Spirit's counsel. I recognize that the church can move slowly, and I am ready to submit to the accountability and connectional nature of the Presbytery. I am motivated to test my call because I believe the PCUSA needs leaders who are comfortable with the messy pieces and who can speak a language that resonates with the marginalized, the faithful, and the skeptic alike. My goal is to be a vessel that can show them that meeting Jesus at the cross is the only outcome that truly matters.



STATEMENT OF MOTIVATION LAKEISHA McCOY AQUINO

My journey toward ordained ministry has been shaped by courage inherited from those who came before me. My grandmother, an ordained minister in our Pentecostal church in Pittsburgh's Larimer community, modeled faith that refused to panic. When I was a teenager diagnosed with myasthenia gravis—a disease that stripped me of speech, mobility, and hope—she gathered the elders, laid hands on me, and prayed. I woke from surgery in complete remission. The doctors called it a miracle. My church called it a blessed move of the Holy Spirit. My grandmother died before I entered seminary, but her courage is with me in every classroom, every sermon, every step of this journey.

For over a decade at The Riverside Church in New York, that courage took shape in lay leadership. I coordinated Open Bible Study, served on Church Council and budget committees, and was eventually invited to preach and lead worship. It was there that others named the call I had long carried silently. Their encouragement led me to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, where my MBA in Marketing & Communications, my BFA in Fine Arts and my work as a creator—from my early record label to my current YouTube series, Key Aquino's Divine Travel Joy—found theological language. A 2025 Valentour Fellowship sent me to Ghana, Ethiopia, and South Korea to study how local aesthetics function as conduits for religious enculturation. This research deepened my conviction that aesthetics are not ornamental to faith but constitutive of it. Art, I have learned, is not separate from ministry; it is incarnational.

My recent residency in hospitality ministry at First Presbyterian Church of Miami confirmed this daily. In learning names, preparing communion, and creating spaces of welcome, I discovered that God is in the details. A layoff from my corporate Marketing & Communications career, which once felt like rejection, now reveals itself as redirection—clearing space for the work I had been circling for years. In two to five years, I envision myself in a pastoral role, whether congregational or specialized, walking alongside others as they embody their faith. I also hope to contribute to the academy through continued research at the intersection of aesthetics, enculturation, and public theology. Ultimately, my aim is profoundly simple: to help others embody their faith. Whether through preaching, teaching, pastoral care, or scholarship, I want to create spaces where people can encounter God, discover their gifts, and step fully into the beloved community and shalom God dreams for us.

I enter the inquiry process with gratitude and openness, ready to submit myself to the care of the Presbytery. The courage planted in me in Pittsburgh, watered through decades of navigating seemingly disparate spaces, has finally ripened. The artist, the executive, the preacher, and the scholar have been one person all along.