



Courageous Past
BOLD FUTURE

A HISTORY OF CLERGYWOMEN

of Holston Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church

Special Word of Thanks

I am aware that nothing is ever accomplished by just one person. Consequently, I want you to know that while my name may appear on the bottom of this page as the one who gathered the information for this celebration booklet, I did not work alone. If by chance, in our rush to get this done, some names have been omitted, please let me know.

I am indebted to The Reverend Roy L. Howard, who graciously gave his permission for our use of what must have been an overwhelming amount of work in the publication *Women in Ministry in Holston Country*, April 2001. Specifically, we have used “Some Firsts for Clergywomen in Holston Country,” “Some Firsts for Clergywomen in Holston Country: Elaboration,” “A Few Other Pioneers,” and “Women in Ministry in Holston Country – Introduction.” Roy has been the one who has kept the history of our clergywomen from disappearing. I have not been blessed to know the history of so many of the women appearing in this 50th Year Celebration booklet. Because of Roy’s concern that historical records be kept and his diligent work in searching out the stories, he has blessed all of us. So, thank you, Roy, from all the persons who will have the opportunity to learn our history of the women who came before us in “Holston Country.”

The Reverend Lynn Hutton has also given me permission to use the account of the memories of The Reverend Mattye Kirby Bowman entitled “At Lunch...with Mattye Bowman.” This article was published in April 2003 in *The Call*, and Editor Annette Bender has allowed us to use it in our celebration book.

I also want to thank all the women who have contributed stories of their ministry and of their experiences in following the call of God in Holston churches. These stories are samples of the many stories we have been privileged to hear during our gatherings this last year-and-a-half. I hope you will read these stories in the way they have been offered, with hearts opened by God’s love.

This book would never have been published without the generous help of the staff at our Knoxville Conference office, namely Millie Meese, Sandy Ruebush, Sheila Knowles, Eric Glass, and Lori Sluder. Millie put this book together and took care of the printing, Sandy gave me lists after lists, and Sheila took my calls when I panicked and needed information looked up in old journals. The stories never would have been gathered if Eric Glass and Lori Sluder had not mailed all the brochures to our clergywomen inviting them to gather on three different occasions to share conversations.

Anne Travis has been generous in spending time to edit this work, and I appreciate her faithfulness to her call to connectional ministry throughout this annual conference.

I want to thank Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr., for his willingness to set aside time in his busy schedule to care for the clergywomen of Holston Annual Conference. We appreciate your gathering with us, hearing our stories, and finally encouraging us to faithfulness in our calling.

Judith Anna, Chairperson
Holston Annual Conference COSROW

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Clergywomen's photos on cover

clockwise from top right:

Sarah Simmons Gardner

Lee-Lee Tan Castor

Bishop Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor

Billie B. Mustard

Nancy Hobbs

Barbara Elaine Thomas

Angela Hardy

Viola Nethery Beadles-Apple

Brenda F. Carroll

Sandra J. Johnson

Bishop Minerva Carcano

Mattye Kirby Bowman

Sallie A. Crenshaw

Bishop Leontine Kelly

Celebrating Full Clergy Rights for Women

The road has been long, and many bumps, holes, curves, and slippery moments have occurred on this journey. But through it all, God has brought the women called by God to serve in ordained and licensed ministry in the Holston Annual Conference this far. It has not and is not easy for them, but many have remained faithful, productive, and still in love with Christ and His church. And because of their faithfulness and the support of their brothers in the ministry and congregations that were more concerned with gifts and graces than with gender, these women have been and continue to be a blessing to us.

It has been 50 years since the then-president of Asbury College made a motion that women be given full clergy rights within the Methodist Church. We are gathering at Lake Junaluska as an annual conference to celebrate Dr. Johnson's courage and the wisdom of the General Conference delegates to move us to where Paul pointed us when he said, *"For as many of you were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond or free, there can be no male or female; for ye all are one in Christ Jesus."*

There are still mountains to climb on this journey, but we do celebrate women serving as bishops, district superintendents, senior pastors, deacons, and local pastors. This year we celebrate the return to Holston of Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor, who was elected from the Holston Conference to the office of bishop.

So let us unite under this wonderful theme that calls to celebrate our *"Courageous Past and Bold Future."*

Grace and peace,



James E. Swanson, Sr.
*Resident Bishop
Holston Conference
The United Methodist Church*

Women in Ministry in Holston Country

“Holston Country” refers to the geographical area served by Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church – Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee. This entire document has to do only with The United Methodist Church (UMC) in Holston Country and its predecessors: The Evangelical Association (EA), The Church of the United Brethren in Christ (UB), The Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB), The Methodist Episcopal Church (ME), The Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MES), The Methodist Protestant Church (MP), and The Methodist Church.

In the early 1800s it was merely assumed that ordained clergy would be only male. Pronouns referring to clergy were always masculine, but there were no statements in the laws of any of these denominations that a female could not be clergy. (I at least have not seen such statements.)

In 1889 the United Brethren Discipline enacted legislation specifically permitting female clergy. (A quotation from the 1889 UB Discipline can be found in the article on Rev. Mary Westcoat.)

There were no Evangelical churches in Holston Country in the twentieth century and probably fewer than a half dozen before that.

In 1924 the Methodist Protestant Discipline changed its language from “No person shall be elected to orders or be licensed to administer the ordinances except he be a man of unexceptionable moral character, genuine piety, respectable attainments, and sound in the belief of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and faithful in the discharge of Gospel duties.” However, in Holston Country no females received a license.

Since language in the Discipline of The Methodist Episcopal Church did not specifically prohibit females from receiving a license to preach, they began giving women license to preach in the 1920s and appointed them as pastors in the early 1930s. Although it was not forbidden, women still were not admitted as full conference members. In 1936 the language concerning local preachers was revised to use the word “person.”

When the ME, MES, and MP churches merged in 1939, the MES insisted that women not become full conference members, and that was written into the Discipline of The Methodist Church. The restriction was removed in 1956.

When the EA and the UB merged in 1946, the EA insisted that women not be full conference members, so that was written into the EUB Discipline, with the exception that female clergy already licensed would not have their privileges taken from them. This rule continued until the merger with The Methodist Church in 1968.

In The United Methodist Church there have been no restrictions regarding the gender of clergy.

The information included herein is taken almost exclusively from conference journals and from *Holston Women: A Journey of Faith*, by Elizabeth T. Fowler, Tenpenny Publishing, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1984.

Some Firsts for Clergywomen in Holston Conference

Since the information included here refers only to Holston Country, persons in other areas and other conferences may have preceded the persons named here in some achievements.

More details on the persons on this page are included on pages immediately following this page. Their places and terms of service are included in the list of all clergy women in Holston Conference, on other pages.

- 1889 Mrs. Mary Westcoat was the first female pastor in the Holston territory in an antecedent denomination to The United Methodist Church (TN Conference UB).
- 1923 Mrs. Nancy Patterson Goss may have been the first woman in a Methodist conference in Holston Country to receive a local preacher's license (Holston ME).
- 1929 Mrs. R. P. Cummings was probably the first woman in the Holston Country to be ordained a deacon. (Holston ME)
- 1931 Mrs. Sallie A. Crenshaw was the first black Methodist woman pastor in the Holston territory (East TN Conference ME).
- 1932 Miss Paralee Prichard was probably the first white Methodist woman pastor in the Holston territory (Holston Conference ME).
- 1942 Mrs. Mattye Kirby Bowman was the first white woman pastor in The Methodist Church in the Holston Country (Holston Conference The Methodist Church).
- 1957 Miss Lena Houdeshell, having been admitted into Full Connection in the Ohio Southeast EUB Conference in 1950, transferred to the TN EUB Conference and served in Greeneville, becoming the first woman in the twentieth century to serve in the area as a member in Full Connection.
- 1958 Mrs. Nora Young and Mrs. Sallie Crenshaw in the same year were the first women in Holston Country to be admitted into Full Connection in a Methodist conference (East TN ME). Both were black.
- 1976 Brenda Carroll and Mary Virginia Taylor in the same year were the first women to be admitted into Full Connection in Holston Conference. Since Brenda had served a year as a student pastor while she was a probationer, she was the first female pastor to be admitted into Full Connection.
- 1982 Lenoir Hilten Culbertson was the first daughter of a clergyman to be a full conference member (Holston UMC).
- 1988 Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor was the first woman to be appointed co-pastor with her husband. In 1988 she and her husband, J. Russell "Rusty" Taylor were appointed co-pastors of Chattanooga Wesley Memorial (Holston UMC). In 2001 "Dindy" was the first woman from Holston to be nominated for bishop, but she received very few votes that year.
- 1991 Kathie Wilson-Parker and Carol Wilson were the first sisters to become full conference members; they were also the first sisters to become full conference members who were daughters of a member of the conference.
- 1992 Patricia Ann "Pat" Devoe was the first female District superintendent in Holston Country (Holston UMC).

Elaboration

MARY WESTCOAT

Mrs. Mary Westcoat was the first female pastor in the Holston territory in an antecedent denomination to The United Methodist Church (Tennessee Conference UB).

The Church of The United Brethren in Christ first granted clergy rights to women in 1889. The 1889 Discipline of the Church, Chapter VI, Section III, No. 13 stated,

“Not wishing to hinder any Christian, who may be moved by the Holy Spirit, to labor in the vineyard of the Lord for the salvation of souls, it is ordered that whenever any godly woman presents herself before the quarterly or annual conference as an applicant for authority to preach the gospel among us, she may be granted license, provided she complies with the usual conditions required of men who wish to enter the ministry of our church. When such person shall [have] passed the required examination before the regular committees, she may, after the usual probation, be ordained.”

The UB Church, and the EUB Church after it, had only one ordination for clergy, that of elder. Records seem to show only two female clergy in those two denominations in East Tennessee – Mary Westcoat and Lena Houdshell (see below).

It appears that as soon as legislation in her denomination permitted women pastors, she applied to preach and was appointed. Her husband, T. A. Westcoat, had already served at least one year as a lay pastor, at White Pine. In 1889 both he and she were appointed as the pastors of White Pine and were returned the next year. Every year from then until her death they were appointed together to the same charge. (No term such as “co-pastor” was used.) In 1895 they were appointed together to the Knoxville Mission. In 1896 they were appointed to the same charge, which had been named First United Brethren Church. She died within the year, and in 1897 he transferred to another conference..

NANCY PATTERSON GOSS

Mrs. Nancy Patterson Goss may have been the first woman in a Methodist conference in Holston Country to receive a local preacher’s license.

According to her memoir in the 1985 Holston UMC journal and *HOLSTON WOMEN: A Journey of Faith*, by Mrs. Elizabeth Fowler (1984), both Mrs. Goss and her husband, Moses F. Goss, received the call to the ministry at the same time, and they began preparing for the ministry while they lived in South Georgia. While their two children were in elementary school, they both enrolled at Tennessee Wesleyan College. Mrs. Fowler says Mrs. Goss received her license in the early 1920s. If that is accurate, it was probably 1923, for Mr. Goss’s first appointment, as a supply, was to the Etowah Circuit in that year. (We presume they were students at Tennessee Wesleyan at that time.) In that case, she was probably the first woman in either of the Methodist denominations to receive such a license.

ME journals did not list local preachers, as MES journals did. The 1941 Holston Methodist Journal, page 27, claims she was given her license in 1941. Both the ME and the MES (and the Methodist Church, after the unification in 1939) required a local preacher to make an annual report to the district conference, and a person could lose his (her) license if the annual report was not submitted. If Mrs. Goss had let her license lapse and had it renewed in 1941, or if that was the first time she received a license, then she was the first woman in The Methodist Church to receive a local preacher’s license.

Mrs. Goss apparently never served a pastoral appointment, but she periodically worked as an evangelist, preaching revivals in several places. After her husband’s death in 1954, she “continued her ministry in community centers and nursery schools, and in filling pulpits for ministers in the Maryville area.” (Fowler, p. 8) She died in 1985, at age ninety-five.

MRS. R. P. CUMMINGS

Mrs. R. P. Cummings was probably the first woman in the Holston Country to be ordained a deacon (Holston ME). During the Annual Conference of the Holston ME Conference in 1929, Mrs. R. P. Cummings was ordained a deacon as a local preacher by Bishop Charles Edward Locke. Eight men were ordained a deacon at the same time. Because the Holston ME journals did not list local preachers, we do not know when she received her local preacher's license nor for how many years she held it. We do not even know where she lived. As far as conference journals show, she never served as a pastor. As far as journal records show, she was not the wife of a lay delegate nor the widow of a clergyman.

SALLIE CRENSHAW

Mrs. Sallie A. Crenshaw was the first black Methodist woman pastor in the Holston Country (East Tennessee Conference ME). Sallie Crenshaw began her pastoral ministry in 1931 as the lay pastor of the East Chattanooga and Tyner churches. She also served pastorates in Bakewell (Hamilton, County TN), Elizabethton, TN, and Glade Spring and Wytheville, VA. She served as Church and Community Worker in the Bluefield District and as Conference Director of Youth Work for three years.

As soon as the General Conference of The Methodist Church decided, in 1956, that women could be full clergy members of an annual conference, Mrs. Crenshaw became a Probationer (then called "On Trial") in the East Tennessee Conference in which she had already served twenty-five years as a lay pastor, and in 1958 she became a member in Full Connection. Not only were she and Nora Young (see below) the first black women in Holston Country to become full conference members, at that point no women had become members of the all-white Holston Methodist Conference.

Many of the events in the amazing life of the Rev. Sallie Crenshaw, in her own words, have been chronicled in *Trail of Mission: Falling Leaves*, by Rev. Reid S. Wilson, published in 1985 by the Commission on Archives and History of Holston Conference. She is most well known for her work in the St. Elmo Mission in South Chattanooga, which she served for thirty-four years. She began with services held for 65 children and five adults in a beer joint. The Good Shepherd Fold was begun in a house with a dirt floor. During all these years she preached and ministered in every way to all sorts of people, both black and white, but especially among black children. In later years the Bethlehem Center in Chattanooga was named The Sallie Crenshaw Bethlehem Center.

PAROLEE PRICHARD

Miss Parolee or Paralee Prichard or Pritchard was probably the first white Methodist woman pastor in the Holston territory (Holston Conference ME).

We have not been able to determine where Miss Prichard lived before or after her four years as a pastor. We are not even certain of the pronunciation of her first name. Some women who spelled their name "Parlie" pronounced it to rhyme with "barley." The 1933 ME journal gives a list of accepted Supply pastors, including "Paralee" Pritchard and Sam Pritchard. No addresses or other information are given for any person in the list. Sam is listed as having served an appointment in Big Springs in 1925-26; McDonald in 1926-28; Burks-Fairview, 1928-29; he lived in Cleveland. In the 1920 census Sam Prichard, who lived in Bradley County, Tennessee, had a ten-year-old daughter the census record referred to as "Pearlie." I hope further research will clarify and enlarge on information concerning the Rev. Miss Prichard.

The year she was the pastor of the Burrville Circuit there were three Sunday Schools on the charge, and she lived in Burrville, which is in Morgan County, Tennessee. The year she was the pastor of the Jonesville Circuit there were six Sunday Schools on the circuit. She lived in Rose Hill, which is about twenty miles from Jonesville; there was also a Rose Hill Circuit. While she was the pastor of the Newport Circuit there were five Sunday Schools on the charge, and her address was Newport. She was ordained a deacon in 1935.

Journals of Holston ME Conference did not print a list of approved supply pastors before 1935. In lists from 1935-58, Miss Prichard is the only female. A scan of all ME appointments shows no female pastor before Miss Prichard.

MATTYE KIRBY BOWMAN

Mrs. Mattye Kirby Bowman was the first white woman pastor in The Methodist Church in the Holston Country (Holston Conference The Methodist Church).

Mattye Nation Kirby received her local preacher's license in 1942, probably the first woman in Holston Conference of The Methodist Church to receive a license. She began service as a pastor in 1933 and served thirty-eight years as a supply pastor. Her first appointment was Bright Hope, six years, and all the rest were in the Maryville District. She took one year of disability and retired in 1973. Her husband of fifty-five years, Griffin C. Kirby, died in 1981, and in 1983 she married the Rev. Harry Bowman, a retired UM pastor. Everyone who knew Mrs. Kirby (Mrs. Bowman) or heard her preach respected her. In 2006, she is the last living member of a group of pioneers.

LENA HOUESHELL

Miss Lena Houdeshell was the first woman to serve in full connection in the EUB Church in Holston Country.

In 1957 Miss Lena Houdeshell transferred to the Tennessee EUB Conference from the Southeast Ohio Conference. She had been licensed in 1935 and ordained in 1950 and served several appointments in Ohio. She served the Greeneville Circuit for one year and the Mosheim Circuit for a year, then served several years at the Cumberland Heights EUB Church in Nashville. In 1963 she became a minister in the Church of the Nazarene.

NORA E. YOUNG

Mrs. Nora Young and Mrs. Sallie Crenshaw in the same year were the first women in Holston Country to be admitted into Full Connection in a Methodist conference (East Tennessee ME). Both were black.

Nora Young, like Sallie Crenshaw (see above), served several years as a lay pastor in the East Tennessee Conference of The Methodist Church when women were not permitted to become full conference members. Her first appointment was in 1949, when she became the pastor of three churches in the West Virginia section of the conference. In 1956, when the General Conference of The Methodist Church decided to admit women as full conference members, she became a Probationer, and in 1958 both she and Mrs. Crenshaw became the first full conference members in Holston Country. All of Mrs. Young's pastoral appointments were in West Virginia. Her last pastorate ended in 1961, and she was discontinued as a conference member in 1964.

LENOIR HILTEN CULBERTSON

Lenoir Hilten Culbertson was the first daughter of a clergyman to be a full conference member.

Lenoir Hilten is the only daughter of Rev. Robert Hilten and Sarah Lenoir Hilten. (There are two brothers who are not clergy.) Rev. Robert Hilten served forty years as a pastor in Holston, and in retirement continues to serve as the Conference Historian.

Lenoir joined Holston Conference in 1977 and was admitted into Full Connection in 1982. She met and married the Rev. Barry Culbertson while they were students at Vanderbilt Divinity School, and she was already married to him when she joined the Conference. He had joined Holston in 1975. After each served one appointment in Holston, Barry took a position as chaplain at Vanderbilt Hospital. Lenoir transferred to the Tennessee Conference in 1985 and has served several appointments in that conference. In 2001 Barry continues as a member of Holston, serving at Vanderbilt.

BRENDA FOGLEMAN CARROLL

Brenda Fogleman Carroll was the first white woman pastor in Holston Country to become a full member of Holston Conference.

Both Brenda Carroll and her husband, Larry Carroll, attended Candler School of Theology and finished in 1975. One of those summers Brenda served a student appointment in the Tazewell District, and they got married in 1973. She served on the Conference Council 1975-77, then five other appointments. From 1991-98 she and Larry were appointed as co-pastors at Knoxville Trinity. Since 1998 she has served as the District Superintendent of the Abingdon District. She now serves as co-pastor with her husband Larry at First UMC, Maryville, TN.

MARY VIRGINIA TAYLOR

Mary Virginia “Dindy” Taylor became a full member of Holston Conference in the same year as Brenda Carroll. They shared the distinction of being the first females to be admitted into Full Connection.

Dindy was also the first woman to be appointed co-pastor with her husband.

After finishing school at Candler School of Theology in 1975, Dindy Taylor served one year under appointment. Both she and Brenda Carroll, along with their husbands, were admitted into Full Connection in Holston Conference in 1976. Together they were the first white females admitted into conference in Full Connection. Because Brenda served a year as a student pastor, she was the first white female pastor to be admitted into Full Connection.

Dindy and her husband, J. Russell “Rusty” Taylor, Jr., finished Candler School of Theology in 1975. Both were appointed to Tennessee Wesleyan College that year, she as chaplain, and he as director of admissions. Then both were appointed as associate pastors at Fountain City for two years. In 1988 they were appointed as co-pastors of Wesley Memorial UMC in Cleveland. In 1999 Dindy became Superintendent of the Cleveland District.

During the Called Session of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference in February 2001, she was nominated to be elected a bishop. She received very few votes at that time. She was elected Bishop in 2004 and was appointed to the South Carolina Conference.

PATRICIA ANN DEVOE

Patricia Ann “Pat” Devoe was the first female District superintendent in Holston Country.

Ms. Devoe attended Vanderbilt Divinity School from 1979-82. She served on the Conference Council 1984-87 and two other appointments (Associate at Church Street, 1987-89 and Hillsville First, 1989-1/1/92), before being appointed Superintendent of the Oak Ridge District from January 1, 1992-Conference of 1997. She then took a year of sabbatical leave, followed by a leave of absence. She withdrew from the Church in 2001.

KATHIE WILSON-PARKER and CAROL WILSON

Kathie Wilson-Parker and Carol Wilson were the first sisters to become full conference members, as well as the first sisters who were daughters of a conference member to become full conference members.

Kathie Wilson-Parker and Carol Wilson were the first and fourth daughters of the Rev Reid S. Wilson, who joined Holston Conference in 1948 and retired in 1989.

Kathie attended Iliff Seminary, and she joined the Rocky Mountain Conference in 1978, where she was ordained and became a member in Full Connection. She transferred to Holston, where she had grown up, in 1973. Carol served as an Educational Assistant before joining Holston Conference in 1991 and becoming a member in Full Connection in 1993.

Carol served as Educational Assistant at Athens Keith Memorial in 1987-89. Then she attended seminary and joined the conference in 1991 and was received into Full Connection in 1993.

Our Stories

My first experience of a clergywoman was when I was in high school. The guest preacher for the day was a woman, and I remember at the time thinking it seemed odd—not wrong, but different. As much as anything, I remember her wearing an alb and was fascinated by the rope cincture around her waist, (not that I knew it was an alb or cincture at that time).

I am a second-career clergywoman. I first discerned a call to ministry during the service of ordination at Lake Junaluska in June 1997. How I ended up at this service is another story all together. Afterward, I went to talk with my pastor, Randy Frye, who was very supportive. I dragged my feet for a couple of years, wrestling with the call I knew I had, and the absurdity of it all. I finally quit my job in April 1999 and began the process. I eventually contacted the DS in Kingsport, J. N. Howard, who assigned Rev. Judith Anna as my candidacy mentor.

The greatest opposition I have experienced in preparing for ministry was from my former church, many of whom could not understand how it was I felt led to go to seminary, leaving my husband and two children at home in Kingsport. My family and I had many discussions and much prayer and felt that this was the best way for us to answer this calling. My family of origin offered mixed support and criticism.

The greatest affirmation came from my father's cousins. My father's and their great-grandfather, Robert White, was a Methodist preacher, and his daughter, their grandmother, was so hopeful that one of her grandchildren would fulfill her "papa's" greatest wish for other family members to enter full-time ministry. When they found out that I was planning to enter the ministry, they could not have been more excited or supportive. While in seminary, I was able to research his life using his memoir, his Bible, family recollections, and surviving letters. One of the letters contained a startling insight, showing him to be a man a little bit ahead of his time:

I rather believe in woman preachers or any whose labours God owns. The clearest credentials that we can have that we are where God would have us be and doing the work appointed us is that souls are being converted to God – I wish some one that I love was a woman preacher that by her heaven might be peopled with precious souls ... I feel more than ever that I could die in this great and glorious work. I am very well better than usual – God strengthens me for my work.

– Rev. Robert White in letter to Sarah, his wife, 1871.

I felt a connection with him, and an affirmation he wrote over 100 years ago, as if it was just for me—yet also, for all women called to ministry.

My hope for the future is that women will be affirmed for the gifts and graces that we do have, not for the physical characteristics we do not have, and that in time, gender nor race will be a determining factor in the appointment process. I have encouraged at least one other woman to explore her calling to ministry.

Carole Martin

My first experience of a woman in ministry was my mother. One of our first missionaries to Japan after the war, my mother was a war bride and then a war widow who did not wish to spend the rest of her life being bitter toward the Japanese people. She felt called to go to Japan to serve and to heal. Her journey took her first to seminary in her hometown. One of the only women in the seminary at the time, she used to take great delight in fastening together her papers for the professors who did not think she should be there, with a bobby pin. Her calling then took her to Yale to learn Japanese and then to Hiroshima, where she served as a music and bible teacher at Hiroshima Jogakuin, a girls school, for 5 years. Over 300 girls of the school had been killed by our bomb that ended the war. The children could have hated her but instead welcomed her with open arms. They both had known great losses. Together they sang Handel's Messiah. Together they sang Japanese folk tunes. Together they healed. When my mother first arrived in that bombed-out city, the old spiritual "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen ... Nobody knows but Jesus" would go through her mind. But she would often say that the song doesn't end there. It ends with "Glory Hallelujah." When the time came for my mother to leave, the whole school saw her off at the train station. And as was their custom, these beautiful girls, dressed in their lovely uniforms, pulled out their crisp white handkerchiefs and began to wave them. They waved them as she walked up the train steps, as she sat down. They waved them until that train chugged out of the station ... these beautiful, beautiful girls. It was as though the wilderness had burst into life. From there her journey took her to Garrett, where again there were very few women. There she met my father, and eventually I was born ... a mission field all unto its own. But that's another story.

During my youth years, there were many moments of call and response ... at camps, at conferences ... and gradually a call to professional ministry emerged. During my college years and afterward when I worked as an educational associate in Florida, the calling toward camp and retreat ministry began to emerge. At that time I thought the best way to fulfill that calling would be to marry a camp director. My sister was in seminary at the time, and I remember telling her that I didn't think women could really be effective pastors in our culture. I went to seminary to pursue a degree in Christian Education at the encouragement of my friend and mentor – David Elliott. It was in the context of that faith community that a call to ordained ministry emerged. Perhaps it was discovering a deep love of preaching and sacraments during intern years. Mostly it was the men who encouraged me. It was the dean who called me into his office and said, "What are you going to do with your gifts?" Or the bible teacher who the week I was about to graduate with a Masters in Christian Education said, "You need to not walk in graduation, stay another year, and get your MDiv," or the homiletics professor who said, "You understand what preaching grace is. I hope you will preach often," or my spouse who said, "We will be great co-pastors," or Randy Pasqua who said when Joe-d left camp to be a pastor again, "I think you can move into the director role. You have all the gifts you need. I think you will thrive."

A key verse for me has been, "My grace is sufficient for your need ... for my power is made perfect when you are weak." What I have discovered is that the calling keeps on taking me to the edge of my sense of abilities ... and on the other side there has been great delight. Many times I have felt, "I could never do that." First the growing edge was preaching, then it was pastoral care, then it was administration, then it was fundraising for the camping ministry, and finally it has been self-care in the midst of the intense need to faithfully live out this calling we shared. I have enjoyed co-pastoring churches in England, Ohio, and Iowa. I delighted in being a camp director, and now I am thrilled to be a part of the ministry team at Munsey. It has been a wonderful journey. I am thankful for all those who have encouraged me along the way.

Christina Dawling Soka
Minister of Children's Discipleship

Life in the buckle of the “Bible Belt” in the 1960’s was much less liberated than it was elsewhere in the nation. Folk who were fairly widely read were open to dreams and plans that some of their neighbors and most of their churches tended to dismiss out of hand. As a teen, I answered an altar call at a district revival in a little Pentecostal church on a hill when the evangelist asked “Who among us is willing to answer God’s call to spread the Gospel?”

I remember the stir I caused that evening. The evangelist ignored my presence altogether and prayed for anointing to fall on the boys on either side of me. My brother, standing next to me, tried to take my hand during the prayer and was pulled away by one of the elders standing nearby. I felt the awful awkwardness that makes a virtual spotlight fall on the subject of ostracism. The suggestion was clear. God had called. I had answered, and God’s spokesmen had rejected my offer.

I stood there, shamed and frightened, knowing that the weight of awareness of my calling came from the same source as had the release from my conviction of sin. If it was not God who was calling me to preach, it was not God who had called me to peace and freedom. I might choose to listen to the men surrounding me, but to do so I would have to close my ears and my heart to the only source of hope to which I had ever clung.

My choice was clear and instant. I took a deep breath, raised my head and my hands, and asked God himself to anoint me because his servants would not. The outpouring from the congregation surprised and encouraged me. While the clergy focused their attention on the male responders, a wave of lay supporters flowed forward to surround me and pray for me. I half expected them to try to counsel me to abandon the dream, but instead I heard a jumbled chorus of prayers for special anointing and grace. The clergy might have their doubts, but the people among whom I worked and worshiped saw signs of the call on my life, and they would see that God heard my cry loud and clear.

As incredibly affirming as this incident was, it was the encounter that followed it that locked that evening in my heart and mind as a touch-stone for my calling. After the meeting, as the crowd dispersed, the District Superintendent approached me. Pulling me aside, in full sight of the milling crowd, but out of their hearing, he spoke words that my soul was starving for. “RuthAnne,” he whispered, “I see the hand of God on your life, and I expect great things from you.” That is all he said. That is all he had to say.

As I recall, I was sixteen. I had known that I was called to Christian ministry since the age of nine. My parents and neighbors had done nothing to discourage me, rightly assuming that if this was a childish role-play, it would evaporate the way their children’s aspirations to be astronauts and actresses had. If, indeed, this was the work of God, they had no intention of resisting it. I had rested in their acceptance for years, but that evening my commitment to vocational work moved into a wider arena.

That was a pivotal moment. I have revisited it often when my call and walk have been criticized. For several years, I worked in secular fields. I ministered as best I could as a social worker and chaplaincy designee. I rescued children from abusive parents, directly removing them from danger and speaking out against those who had harmed them in courts of law. I sat at the bedside of terminal cancer patients to whisper prayer and read scripture. I sang in choirs and acted with drama troops, but there was no release from the call that had captured me at nine and transformed me at sixteen.

The call would not let me breathe, but neither would it let me go. When I had lost the strength to hold on to the call, the call held on to me, and brought me to the United Methodist Church, where the gentle and affirming hands of my local congregation steered me back to the pulpit. Now, each time I approach that sacred stand to grasp it with trembling hands and lay before the people the message the Spirit has set astir within me, I am grateful for the path God has led me along, but more grateful still for the rich and fulfilling place to which that path has brought me at last.

Looking back, I am reminded of a saying my grandmother often used: “When God closes a door, he opens a window.” I may have come into the United Methodist ministry through the window, but God be praised, I am here!

The world has changed and is changing still. I intend to be a part of that change, don’t you? The next young person, despite gender, race, or ethnic extraction, who stands at the altar clamoring for the Church’s recognition of God’s call on her – or his – life will not stand nearly so alone. I will be there with her – or with him – to affirm God’s pleasure at the submission and courage the act of responding implies. We will be there with her – or with him – won’t we?

God will call whom God wills, and the genuine call will hold tight until it finds expression. I cannot originate that call in anyone. I will not, however, be an obstacle to its expression. I will hold the door wide open and welcome all who come. There are gatekeepers enough. Let them do what God has called them to do. I will do what I am called to do, and that is to say whosoever will may come.

RuthAnne Henley



My first experience of clergywoman was with my Jr./Sr. High guidance counselor. The Rev. JoBlan LaRue was licensed to preach in the Tennessee Conference in 1951, before ordination of women was approved by the Methodist Church. She served the Jamestown Circuit from 1956 to 1963, being ordained deacon (in 1959) and elder (in 1962) during this time. She would not receive another appointment in the Tennessee Conference until just before her retirement – the five-point Forbes Circuit in 1980. While living near her daughter in Indiana, however, she served a two-point charge there from 1966-1968.

I knew her in the 1970s after she returned to Tennessee and was regularly refused appointment by the conference. She served as the guidance counselor for our combined junior and senior high school and taught senior English. We all knew her as Mrs. LaRue. I don’t recall anyone at school ever using the title of Reverend. At the time, I had little concept of a calling and didn’t understand why she was hurt and angry about not receiving an appointment. It seemed to me like she was probably touching a lot more lives with her work in the school system than she would be preaching.

It did not occur to me then that I should ever struggle with such a calling. I don’t remember giving much thought as to the question of whether or not women should preach. It had nothing to do with me. It was plain, though, that any woman who took that route could expect little support from my church, and probably a good deal of trouble. Since my own call to pastoral ministry many years later, I carry a profound gratitude for those early women who had so little encouragement, met so much resistance, and yet remained steadfast in living a call their church would not accept.

Sylvia Jones

One's first impression of the Rev. Mattye Bowman is a woman of quiet strength and dignity. What is not apparent until one gets better acquainted – say, over a four-hour lunch – is the merriment and mischief in her sky blue eyes.

Ninety-five years ago, Mattye Kirby Bowman was born the third of twelve children to a Kentucky tenant farmer. Looking back now, she says, “The Lord has always had His hand on me.” She was baptized as a young girl, but “My true conversion – when I really became a Christian – happened when I was twenty-five, and I wanted to tell everybody about it.”

Two weeks later, she began a four-year stint teaching Sunday School at a Rescue Mission, but that desire to “tell everybody about it” gradually deepened into a call to evangelistic ministry. Her first revival lasted seventeen days, with sixty-nine converts.

She came to Knoxville in 1942, “at the Lord’s leading,” to continue her revival preaching. Her first revival in Tennessee garnered several converts and five invitations to conduct revivals. The Presiding Elder (called a District Superintendent today) heard her preach and asked her to take a little church whose pastor had resigned. “I never thought of being a pastor; the Methodists weren’t licensing women in those days.”

She agreed to take Bright Hope for nine months, a struggling congregation meeting in an abandoned school house and averaging twenty people in Sunday School. Bishop Paul Kern granted her the privilege to preach without a license, and for fourteen years she was the only woman preaching in Holston Conference.

When she left Bright Hope six years later, she had built a brick building that still stands (and whose cornerstone bears her name) and averaged over 100 in Sunday School. The congregation had paid all but \$5,000 of their indebtedness and had money saved for the furnishings. The Presiding Elder marveled at her success in raising money and teased her about “minting money in the church basement.”

Today she is the oldest member of Fairview Church in Maryville, where for six years she has volunteered in Glasses for the Masses, a mission program that distributes eyeglasses to the poor in countries from Paraguay to Russia. She is passionate about her partnership in this mission: “Be sure to put that in the article you’re writing,” she directed as she took another bite of her catfish.

When asked if she and her husband of 55 years had children, she replied, “The Lord had other plans for me. I may have been a barren woman, but I never pastored a barren church. I never had a year without professions of faith and never failed to pay our askings.”

As to the challenges she faced as a woman in ministry, she laughs, “I never went to a church who wanted me.” One group got up a petition when they learned a woman was coming to be their pastor, and one church pillar told her “There hasn’t been that much excitement in this town since the war broke out!” On the other hand, no church asked her to leave either, and one congregation even offered her \$500 to stay, in a day when “that was some money,” she said, twinkling.

In the 1950s, she was ordained a probationary deacon, and then, by three-fourths majority vote of the Conference, she was granted ordination as elder. She retired in 1973 because of her husband’s failing health, then took another church, and commuted 120 miles round trip for three years.

At age 75, while doing a skit entitled “Me and Pa,” she met Harry Bowman, a retired United Methodist minister who would become her second husband. She still does Minnie Pearl imitations and impromptu comedy routines, writes poetry, and quilts.

Rev. Bowman declared in her low-pitched, authoritative voice, “I’m glad I was a pioneer of the clergywomen’s part of the United Methodist Church. I’m happy I’ve spent my life in the Lord’s service. I’m real well satisfied with what I turned out to be.”

Mattye Bowman

by Lynn Hutton, reprinted from The Call, April 2003

Roots and Wings

Last June, our daughter was called upon to leave the only home she remembers. (She had been 18 months old when Thorn Grove Pike became her home, and she was leaving it at age 5 ½.) Her adjustment has taken time – although she’s pretty crazy about her new school and new friends, every once in a while she says something that gives me pause.

Not too long ago she said, “Mommy, can we call Becky?” (My successor at her “home church.”) “I want to tell her something.”

“Oh?” I said, a little confused because I did not think they knew one another, “What do you want to tell her?”

“I want to ask her when she’ll be done because I’ve decided I’m going to be a preacher, and I will be the pastor of Sand Branch.” (Let’s see, Kaitlin was six in December, so Becky probably has a good twenty to twenty-five years before she needs to book that moving truck and get those boxes ready.)

Of course, one might simply write this off as a young child dealing with the stress of change and leaving all her friends. Kaitlin, however, is an exceptional child (no, I’m not prejudiced, I am simply her parent) and has amazed and delighted us many times with her mastery of some pretty complex concepts.

When Kaitlin was three years old, she was riding to church with my husband and picked up his communion chalice from the seat beside her and said, “Daddy, the blood of Christ. We’re having ‘munion,’ aren’t we, Daddy?”

This January as I was preparing to baptize a baby in morning worship, Katie came to me and said, “Mama, if you are baptizing Joshua, it would be a good day for me to sing Jesus Loves Me because Jesus loves all of the babies.” And she did sing—strongly, clearly, and confidently.

Why do I tell the stories of this girl child and the ways she has been grown and nurtured in an accepting and loving church? She was baptized at Walland UMC at the ripe old age of eight weeks.

Kaitlin comes from a long line of pastors – both male and female. With the exception of Kaitlin, we were all born into another tradition where a male child feeling the call to ministry was accepted and celebrated, but the female child was not. First my own Mother, in 1984, and then I, in 1993, went through the hurdles necessary to become ordained ministers in a tradition that had no real place for us to serve the parish.

I ultimately found the blessings of ministry to and service in the United Methodist Church in 1996. After 20+ years of being ordained in a tradition that would let her do very little, my mother became a priest in the Episcopal Church in 2005 at the age of 61. (Kaitlin’s father, maternal grandfather, and great uncle, maternal and paternal great-grandfathers have all been ordained pastors as well. Father, Bill Beard, and Grandfather, Walt Isley, are now also pastors in Holston Conference.)

As this celebration of 50 years of clergy rights for women in United Methodism has approached, I have thought more and more of Kaitlin’s possible decision to follow in the family footsteps. On the one hand, she is already picking up quite a bit of “on the job training.” On the other, as the Church universal struggles with change and cultural transition and all the little struggles and strife of individual churches (some still not ready for clergywomen to have any rights) – is that what I/we want for her?

Of course, I would love for her to miss all the challenging people that I’ve met over the years. The time (in my former tradition) when a church proffered an invitation to speak and then rescinded it when their pastor discovered that “The Rev. K. S. Isley” did not stand for “Kenneth Stephen”!! The times since that a neighboring pastor of another tradition preached against the woman in the pulpit across the road or when they refused to let her church be in the Community Thanksgiving

Service ‘til they got a “real” (read: “male”) preacher again. Most all of us women have a “war story” or two, or four.

I think then about all the blessings I have received as a part of a Church that allows me to minister to them and with them. The joy of those who have affirmed my ministry by allowing me to be with them in the wonder of the birth of their babies or by requesting I be with them as we await the death of a loved one or simply given and received communion to and from me. As I grow older (wiser?) the list of remembered blessings and affirmations grows far longer and more significant than the affronts.

When I wonder if we should try to redirect Kaitlin’s energies, I remember with great affection the man at my first appointment who started out dead set against a woman, but who became one of my dearest friends and best supporters. I also remember my next appointment. My churches had nurtured an earlier female pastor through her first pastorate and the birth of her two children, and I think how they blessed me during my time there. One fellow in particular, I will always remember with love and thankfulness – he greeted me at the car each Sunday to scoop up my baby as I brought up the rear with my Bible and all my “stuff” for the second service. (He and his wife cared for Kaitlin then and even now let us know now we are still in their prayers and their hearts.)

Then there are those people she remembers well from my last appointment – her earliest sense of home. The Sunday school teacher, who is in heaven now, but it was she who made Katie feel so welcome and special when we arrived. Among others, the wonderful children’s leaders who for our going away party made her a collage of pictures from all the Christmas and Easter plays and Vacation Bible Schools with her friends – and the neighbors who remain like her other set of grandparents. Now she has all the folks who welcomed her to her new home this past summer and who have made a place for her in the circle of children they bless.

At the clergywomen’s luncheon where we celebrated the “Mother Roots” that brought us to this point, my table discussed our hope to some day be on a young person’s list as a root in their development and decision to minister. I shared some of Kaitlin’s precocious plans and dreams with them.

As her mom (and one of her pastors), I am so grateful for her roots in the Church and especially the UMC. Whatever her ultimate calling in life, I hope she will always be able to say that Mom was one of those who encouraged her to make her dreams reality.

It has been said that good parenting is giving our children not only roots, but also wings. Her family, her faith, and her already rich and varied experiences in the family of God have given her a wonderful foundation upon which to grow in grace.

Thanks be to God for my Kaitlin and all our young ones who are coming up in these times of great possibilities and great challenges. May all our daughters (and sons) live in a time when all dreams are truly attainable for each of them. Amen.

Kim Isley

When Carol Wilson was serving Pleasant View in Maryville, one of the families in her church spent a weekend camping in the mountains. When Sunday morning came, one of the children suggested that they have a church service. Everyone assumed their roles – choir, ushers, acolytes, etc. The father volunteered to be the preacher. “No,” one of the kids responded. “You can’t do that Daddy. The preacher has to be a woman.”

Carol Wilson

~ as told by Laura Rasor

I began my ministry in the area of Christian education as a diaconal minister. When I felt a call into the ministry as a teenager in the early 1980s, this was the area to which I assumed God was calling me because that was the area in which most women in ministry worked (I had not yet had the experience of hearing a woman preach or lead worship). Thus, I went to college and then on to receive my M.A. in Christian Education at Scarritt Graduate School, certain this would be my life's ministry.

During the time in which I served as a diaconal minister, however, I always felt restless, and as a result moved from position to position, always thinking a new setting would ease that feeling. It wasn't until on an Emmaus Walk that I met Betty Clark, a clergywoman in the South Carolina Annual Conference, that I began to sense that my restlessness had nothing to do with location but with vocation. Getting to know Betty opened my eyes and heart to the role of women as pastors. She became a mentor for me, as I began re-examining my own call to ministry and to what ministry God was calling me. I appreciated that she was comfortable with who she was as a woman, a wife, and a mother, and also comfortable with who she was as a pastor. Betty taught me so much, sharing with me the reality of the struggles being a woman in pastoral ministry brought with it, but she also sharing how she just had to be who God had called her to be and found joy in that, not letting those struggles embitter her.

It was six more years after meeting Betty before I finally surrendered and accepted that God was calling me into pastoral ministry. The moment I did that, however, I felt the most wonderful sense of peace come over me, and I felt a new sense of confidence in God's claim on my life. I was serving on staff at First Broad Street UMC at the time, but without any hesitation, I resigned my position, with the hopes of receiving an appointment that June (which I did as a TBS to the Knoxville District). I began the process of transitioning from a diaconal minister to the candidacy process for Elder's orders, went back to seminary to complete my educational requirements, and was ordained Elder in 2002.

I thank God for women like Betty who helped to blaze the trail and pave the road for those who would follow. And, I thank God for women like Betty who serve the Lord with joy, even in the midst of the struggles we often face. I pray that I can be as positive a role model for other women that Betty has been for me.

Ginger Howe Isom

I am enrolled as a full-time student at Interdenominational Theological Center – Gammon. I also still serve as pastor to the Hurst United Methodist Church. I drive to Chattanooga every weekend. Fulfilling the roles of wife, mother, daughter, sister, pastor, and student makes for an interesting and challenging journey. I am greatly appreciative of the support structure that undergirds me.

I consider myself truly blessed for the support and encouragement consistently shown me by my husband, Leon. My children, mother, brothers, and sisters-in-law are priceless.

I have another family that is making this journey with me – my church family. I think it is no coincidence that I am pastor of my home church at this time in my ministry. As a youth I remember that the Hurst church was often served by student pastors from ITC. In fact, as a church we were proud to be given the opportunity to “train them.” The laity of the church sort of handled what needed to be handled by the laity while the pastor was in seminary. Today the laity have stepped up to the task again. They are participating more fully in the ministry and mission of the church. They are being the church. Thanks be to God.

Sandra Johnson

I was about to leave for seminary at Candler School of Theology in 1990. It was going to be a hard transition for me because I was leaving my husband to continue serving as one of the pastors at First UMC, Maryville while I would be living in Atlanta. One of the secretaries gave me a story by Rev. M. Jacqueline Warren, Pastor of First Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Lincoln, Illinois. In fact, Jane had cut the story out of her calendar so she could share it with me. The story goes like this:

Being a woman minister sometimes has its humorous moments. I called on a member of the congregation to pray for a fellowship meal. She began her prayer and prayed just fine until she said, "O God, bless our minister and his wife." She began to stutter, "O God, bless our minister and her wife. O God, I mean, bless our preacher and his wife," she stumbled. She just could not seem to comprehend that she had a female minister with a husband. "O God, would you bless ... bless ...," she paused, "our man and her minister." I held my hand in front of my mouth to conceal my laughter as the tension mounted. "O God, would you please bless our minister and his wife?" "O God ... you know what I mean!" she shouted as she sat down.

I have carried this story in the front of my Bible for 16 years now, and it has proven to be a wonderful gift for me. I'm so grateful that in the midst of difficult times, I can read this and remember that ministry, too, has moments of laughter. It reminds me that women clergy are still in the minority and we, like many of the members of our churches and our conference, must learn how to recognize that ministry has changed. Isn't it great that God continues to surprise us with those called into service?

Judith Anna



True Stories

My mom was sitting out on the porch at Terrace rocking when a lady sat down beside her. The woman promptly began to complain that her church in Knoxville was "getting a woman pastor."

Mom told her that her church had been served by two women pastors in the past, and both were excellent pastors and preachers. Well, mom gave the woman more time to complain, giving her enough rope to hang herself. Then she played her trump card.

"Oh, and my daughter is a pastor in Chattanooga. She is the most capable person I know, and I think it is small-minded when people think women cannot be pastors. Everyone knows that women are much more compassionate than men. In fact, women are more like Jesus."

Needless to say, the conversation did not continue.

Go Mom!

A cute story that happened to me today:

It was reported to me that a little boy told his grandmother at lunch that Pastor Sherry sure does serve good communion.

Sherry Boles

My first experience with a clergywoman was in my first year of seminary (Asbury) in 1978. Dindy and Brenda, who had only been out of seminary 2 and 3 years each, were on the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry. They came with others to Asbury to visit with the students, and we had a great time. However, they tried to get me to transfer to Candler! (But I didn't.)

I was a church secretary and director of a pre-school when the Lord first called me one night as I was listening to my pastor preach at a guest church. It happened again 6 months later in my sister's church in Seattle. Finally, a year later (and I was a Social Worker for a chain of nursing homes) when my boss wanted to transfer me to another home being built, I was praying about it and the Lords said, "You know what you're supposed to do!" I said, "Oh no, Lord ... I thought you had forgotten about that!" That began a two-month struggle and surrender and I was amazed at how quickly I was accepted into seminary. My daughter was six when I started seminary, and we had a great experience there.

I'll give you two examples of opposition. The first one was when I was interviewing with a circuit PPR Committee, and one lady of the smaller church was rude and abrasive toward me. Everyone else was fine with my coming. This lady went home and told her family, "Over my dead body is that woman coming to our church."

When I got to annual conference, the pastor I would be replacing came up to me and said, "Boy, the Lord must really want you at [the] church." Then he told me they had just had that lady's funeral! When he got the call to go to the emergency room, this lady was already dead of a sudden heart attack by the time he got there. Her grown granddaughter told the pastor what she had said about me coming. This lady had never been sick a day in her life, and the family was so shocked that I could never get them to come back into the church!!

The second example happened at the same church. I had been there about two months when suddenly the pump at the well broke, and the church had no water. The well was next door and down a hill on a church family's property. They refused to allow the church to get someone in there to fix our pump "until that woman preacher left." I called the D.S. and he said that the church might have to dig their own well. The church was on a hill, actually a pile of rocks, and there was no money for a well. This went on for a few weeks, and the few families we had who had small kids and some of the older ones stopped coming because of no bathroom. Another call to the D.S. got the same response. Suddenly the Lord gave me an idea: Ask the 20 people who were coming to bring a gallon jug of water each Sunday for the toilets. We stacked them up on the front porch so everyone could see our water! By Wednesday of that week, the family gave in and let us fix the pump!

Three churches stand out as being just wonderful, and I had a good ministry with them because the people were willing to do ministry with me. We had a great time together, and it was contagious because many new people came in.

My hope for the future clergywomen (and active ones now) is that they will continue to hear the call, because you still have to hear it all the time. There have been times that I didn't think I could take any more abuse from churches, and a couple of times from the conference. When you can hear the call, then you're reminded why you are in it. I feel like Jeremiah in a way because his prophetic ministry just kept getting worse the longer he prophesied! This is my 24th year, and this has been by far the most difficult I have had, with the most opposition and outright disrespect. My hope for the future of Holston clergywomen is this: I pray that it will get easier to minister in this conference.

At my present church there are five out of our 23 active youth who have either felt a call to the ministry or feel the stirrings of it. Of those five, two are girls. I have heard of others in my former churches who were little girls when I was there and who are now talking about the ministry.

Meg Taylor Poister

My first experience with a female clergy was Rev. Lea Joyner who spoke at a chapel at Theological Seminary. She impressed me simply because she insisted on meeting the people handing out bulletins so she could shake our hand. However some male seminarians were not willing to even hear her. I can remember standing at the back of the chapel handing out the bulletins and watching as a couple of male seminarians looked at the bulletin and said (loudly) “A woman, we didn’t come to hear this.” Then they walked across the yard to the chapel at the college. I was rather shocked they didn’t at least give her a chance to be heard. She had shaken my hand, I was going to hear Lea Joyner!

I received a phone call in Plymouth, England, in March 1988 inviting me to interview for the position of associate pastor. However, after interviewing and accepting the position, the senior minister informed me that the church was not ready for a female pastor. He then added that I would be the director of Christian education and youth minister. I talked with my district superintendent, who told me that it was “too late” to accept another appointment. Therefore, I spent a year sitting in the pew at worship during the 11 a.m. service. I was not allowed to participate in the liturgy or any part of the service. I did, however, read the liturgy at the 8:30 a.m. service, which very few attended.

Because I am stubborn, I appealed to the Bishop. My main premise was that it isn’t truthful to offer someone an associate position and then make it a director of Christian education position. I also thought that listing my position as “associate pastor” in the journal was misleading.

He told me that I should not let it bother me because he had endured the “Mississippi burnings” and that was far worse than my situation. I still don’t see the connection unless he is saying that racial prejudice is worse than discrimination of women. Who knows?

I regret leaving the Holston Conference for the West Michigan Conference and realize I should have accepted another appointment here. I think that being away from my home for 14 years has been a very painful, yet learning experience. The anger now is long gone, but the regrets remain. I am blessed to have met my husband, completed a doctorate, and to have two beautiful children while I was in West Michigan. But I regret that I did not handle my disappointment and anger better in 1988. It has truly been hard to forgive myself for ever leaving my family and home. However, serving in the Holston Conference for the last 18 months has healed these old wounds. I have (in the words of a contemporary song) traded my sorrow for joy. Thanks be to God!

My vision for women in Holston is that more churches would have the experience of having a woman pastor, particularly churches which are medium size (150-300). It seems women are either in small churches or serving as co-pastors in large churches.

I also wish that when there is a pastoral change, the district superintendent would say to the PPR committee that they will appoint the most qualified candidate – male or female, white, brown, or black. Why should gender or color be an issue?

I also think that there needs to be a better support system/transition for women in their first appointment. Who can she talk with about conflicts? Who can she ask simple questions that she would not want to ask the D.S.? We are losing too many women in the first five years of ministry, and we need to give them support to get over the “humps.”

My greatest hope for Holston is that the number of women clergy will grow, and we will be less of a minority group. Wouldn’t it be nice if United Methodists in Holston could say, “We have lots of talented clergywomen in our conference!”

Janet Sweet Richardson

My first encounter with a clergywoman was as a sophomore at Emory & Henry College in 1983. Rev. Pat DeVoe, a former Holston Conference clergywoman, came and spoke at our religious life meeting during the fall. I remember being mesmerized by this woman who claimed that God had called her into pastoral ministry, despite the fact that my denomination condemned such callings as “sinful.” Pat was compassionate and articulate and full of spirit, and I was drawn to her almost immediately. I regret that she left the United Methodist Church just as I was entering my first appointment in the early 90’s.

I believe that I have been called to pastoral ministry since I was a teenager. During Youth Sunday at my home church (not United Methodist), I was asked to give a “talk” and felt such a conviction as I stood behind that center pulpit. During my senior year at Emory & Henry one of my closest friends, who happened to be a PK, prophesied that I was called into pastoral ministry, but I laughed it off and told her that, although I would always be active in the church, I was not called to preach. I was going to be an international accountant. I did not acknowledge my call to ministry until I had been out of college for 2 years working in Washington, DC. I was at a pro-choice march and was listening to the women and men share their stories at the pre-march rally. As I witnessed these people sharing why they worked so passionately for what they believed in, I realized that I wasn’t working for what I believe in and that I needed to admit what my heart had been telling me for a long time—that I was called into the ministry. I quit my job at the accounting firm the next month and worked for a year at a small social justice non-profit before moving to Atlanta to begin seminary at Candler School of Theology.

One of the most difficult experiences I have had as a woman called into ministry was at my first appointment. I had visited with an elderly woman for the better part of 3 years before she died. Although I was the associate pastor, I had been her pastor in every sense of the word. I was very hurt when the family refused to let me take any part in the funeral because I was a woman. They even discouraged me from attending. These people judged me without ever meeting me because of my gender and their belief that my calling was wrong.

I have received much support during my time as a clergywoman—from my family and friends to most of the people in the congregations where I have served. One of my most affirming moments also came during my first appointment when a 98 year-old woman asked me to baptize her, explaining that she had never felt comfortable sharing the fact that she had never been baptized with any other pastor in her life, but that, because I was a woman, she felt she could confide in me. We both cried as I sprinkled the water over her beautiful white hair.

My continued prayer is that there will come a day when women will be affirmed for the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them. I hope that there will come a day when all churches will welcome pastors who just happen to be women. My hope for the clergywomen of Holston conference is that we can continue to be a support for one another on this journey and provide better support for those women who are new to parish ministry.

I am blessed to be serving on the campus of a college, and I am currently mentoring and/or talking with three young women who feel called into some type of ministry. I know that one of these women comes from a church background similar to my own, and our conversations have helped her to affirm her own calling as a minister of God. I pray that my very presence on this campus will serve as a positive example of women in ministry and a challenge to those who continue to believe that the pulpit is no place for a women.

Beverly Robinette

I am a second career pastor. Or perhaps I should say third career, having owned my own business, raised four children and done a number of other things – anything to run away from my call which I experienced when I was in high school ... that I experienced in college ... that I kept experiencing as a young bride ... that continued to nag at me even as I tried to satisfy it by doing every imaginable job at various churches. Finally when my fourth child was less than a month old, I said, “OK, God, have it your way. Maybe, just maybe I can get rid of this restlessness within my soul.” When my children were able to function without Mom available for 24 and 7, I proceeded to start the process. I went through my pastor, Ray Robinson, who had been a previous pastor of mine at another town where we had lived, who promptly said, “What took you so long? I knew this a long time ago.” I received much support from him and my first encounter with the district committee. As the process continued, Rev. Robinson left and First Centenary received a new pastor. Unfortunately, he was not particularly helpful and in fact, at times a stumbling block, but I went through the process, getting encouragement from members of the church and discouragement from other sources. My children had mixed emotions from, “That’s cool,” and “Go for it, I’m proud of you.” To “I’m not surprised, you’re there all the time anyway,” to “Really Mother ... don’t you think that’s unfair to Dad?”

I finally entered seminary, where I encountered emotions I didn’t know I had. I entered seminary with what I thought were well thought out, grounded sets of beliefs and all of a sudden, I was confronted with having to visit them again and again and examine them. I had to answer for myself, “Why do I believe this?” Seminary was like passing a basket around and around, and some of the items I picked up and put in my basket, others I let pass by. Some things I added to the basket and others I threw away. It was a time of growth, of soul searching, of discovering who I was as a person, not as someone’s wife, someone’s mother, someone’s employee. Seminary was truly a love-hate affair, and I cried more tears in those years than I have in all of my lifetime before or since. During seminary my mother-in-law became ill and finally died. I had to deal with the emotions of guilt, of not being able to take care of everyone. My oldest daughter married during this time, and I had to deal with the mixed emotions of knowing what I had to do, and what I wanted to be doing. It was a difficult journey, but one of growth and one of dependence on the One who was in charge of my life and who called me.

You asked about opposition and support. I am now on my fourth appointment, and as I look at my appointments, the only one where I did not receive any opposition for being a woman pastor was my first and it was in England at Helston in Cornwall in Southwest England. There I found no differentiation whatsoever. I am truly glad for that experience.

I was suddenly moved from one location to another because of an appointment that came open in the district in mid-year when someone left the ministry. As I went to my introductory meeting, they thought my husband was to be their pastor, not a woman. Once the initial shock was over, most of the charge PPR committee was supportive. It was a two-point charge and in one church, the lay leader, choir director, accompanist, and church patriarch refused to speak to me. My second Sunday, just before I was to preach, 1/3 of the congregation plus the above-named leadership got up and walked out. My thoughts were, “Lord, are you sure you called me to be a pastor?” “They don’t seem to know it.” As I told one lady who said, “We’re really all for you, but you better have a thick skin ’cause they’re going after you.” I replied, “I’m not going anywhere. I not only have thick skin. I have raw hide for skin.”

On one specific occasion, just before I was to preach, the county’s deputy sheriff stood up and asked to say a few words. This gentle giant, a man of few words, suddenly was as eloquent as any professional orator. He affirmed me, my ministry, and said, “For a little lady, you sure can preach.”

That was the turning point. They gave me a surprise birthday party on two occasions and the quilting group made me a quilt. Today that quilt graces my bed, and I see the loving faces who stitched it every night before I go to sleep and I give thanks for them in my prayers. My five years in that church taught me so many things and brought me such pleasure. The people were loving, supportive, warm, and caring. They taught me to appreciate gospel music, and I helped them reclaim their Methodist heritage, of which they are very proud. This was a nightmare turned into a wonderful dream. Several of those who left returned. And on my final Sunday we all cried through the entire service.

I arrived at the introductory meeting for my current appointment and it seemed like a good match—both from my perspective and from theirs. Little did I know that the PPR committee was getting letters and complaints about a woman pastor.

After I arrived, I found out the PPR had addressed the issue and stood firmly for my appointment. I know some of the folks hurt over the loss of the 20 regulars that no longer attend because of my gender, but hopefully, one day they will return, like my country church folks did.

I received tremendous support from the Reverend Ramon White, Conference Registrar, who provided a good listening ear and direction. Perhaps it was because he understood what it was like to encounter bigotry, because he was one of the few African-American elders in this conference. Randy Martin and Robert Burlingham have shown me that they are real champions of clergywomen.

Through all of this, my district superintendent, the Reverend Mary Virginia “Dindy” Taylor, who is now Bishop Taylor of the South Carolina Conference, was my strength. She kept reminding me I was a pioneer. And for a while after Stella Roberts left to be on the cabinet, I was the only female elder in a five-county area. I hold Bishop Taylor in the highest regard, not only for her personal support, but because she brought quality women pastors into a rural district, and because of her actions has had a tremendous impact on the churches within this district. We are once again reclaiming our churches as United Methodist churches.

“Pioneer.” Yes, I suppose so and as I read back over these reflections, I realize that perhaps we were all called “for such a time as this.” Called by God to bring our gifts for ministry, to break down barriers, to reclaim the love of God rather than operate with outdated structures and fears and to be that listening ear for so many women who live in unbelievably abusive situations that the rural culture accepts as norm.

Thank you for asking for the stories. I really was hesitant to write, but now that I have, I realize I have grown. I have learned to overlook the petty biases and not take them personally. And when times get tedious, as I know they will, I can read over this again and say with assurance, “Yes, Lord, there isn’t anything you and I can’t overcome today as long as you are there with me.”

Linda Bird Wright

My deceased grandmother shared with me that as a child, I would like to play church and be the preacher. I grew up in the church and was in the church all my life. I knew that the Call had become more real to me through some difficult experiences in my personal life. It was through dreams and definitely through a critical experience of battling with cancer during the pregnancy of my first-born child. I realized that God had cured my body so that I might be able to serve Him, be a Pastor and Shepherd of His flock. He has created in the cosmos a universe of all ages, races, and experiences to tell the liberating story of Jesus Christ, the Lord of our life, [who] truly sets all of humanity free.

I would encourage women who are called to ministry to listen to their hearts, search their experiences and God’s will for their lives. God uses the most beautiful creatures.

Alberta Clark

... In the early days, as we dared to dream of what has become a reality today, we would often hope for women to become district superintendents, bishops, and pastors of churches of all sizes. It has happened.

We would often dream of the day when women would not follow in the footsteps of our male counterparts, but would offer different styles of leadership, less competitive ways to be colleagues, different styles of decision-making...

I give thanks that the role of women in the laity has also changed. I give thanks that there are too many women in the clergy ranks to actually know every one of us. I give thanks that there are many local pastors who are women.

The church is actually enriched by the presence of men and women working together in a way it could never have been without this great thing that happened in the second half of the 20th century.

My hope is simply that every woman called by God to be in ministry will be able to claim and to live that call...without feeling unclean ... which is often how we felt in the seventies. I can only imagine how it felt the first 14 years after the General Conference of 1956.

In Holston Conference, at a meeting of ministers of large churches in 2004, there were only two women. This is a territory explored by only a few. I hope the future will offer that opportunity to many. On some Boards, the presence of women, especially clergywomen, is very sparse. I hope it can be equalized.

I hope the clergywomen of Holston can someday have the experience of having a woman as their Bishop.

I hope that the clergywomen will never treat clergymen as second class or as less than valuable and capable.

I hope the clergywomen of Holston will not let race or credentials or size of church or age divide us.

I hope that in the next 50 years we will be extraordinary instruments of transformation, healing, justice, and Christ-likeness.

Brenda Carroll



Holston Conference Women in Ministry

in Chronological Order

Name	Conf. Relationship	1st Appt.	Name	Conf. Relationship	1st Appt.
Westcoat, Mary	FE	1889	Whitaker, Carolyn	FD	1981
Crenshaw, Sallie A.	FE	1931	Hutton, Lynn W.	FD	1982
Prichard, Paralee	SY	1935	Timmons, Hazel Virginia	ALP	1982
Brice, Frances	SY	1940	Wood-Johnston, Margaret	AM	1982
Donaldson, Mrs. D. W.	LP	1940	Braddy, Carolyn	PL	1983
Huff, Mrs. O. R.	SY	1940	Fowler, Elizabeth Thomas	ALP	1983
Pettigrew, Linda Hye	SY	1941	Puckett, Patti	ALP	1983
Bowman, Mattye Kirby	AM	1942	Arnold, Shirley Evelyn	PM	1984
Jones, Cora	SY	1946	Clendenen, Patricia A.	FE	1984
Cottingham, Mary E.	SY	1947	Crone, Mary Kathryn	FD	1984
Hust, Emma	SY	1947	Dennison, Glenda Shuler	PM	1984
Thompson, Julia Shropshire	SY	1951	Mincey, Cora Roseann T.	FL	1984
Grills, Helen Monroe	FD	1953	Nance, Catherine Clark	FE	1984
Houston, Effie	SY	1954	Webb, Deanna Y.	FE	1984
Thompson, Bertha	SY	1954	Johnson, Sue Lynn	FD	1985
Dunsmore, Carol	LP	1956	Strickland, Betty	ALP	1985
Mustard, Billie B.	AM	1956	White, Rita Ellen	FE	1985
Apple, Viola Nethery Beadles	FE	1957	Boyd, Betty Neal Owens	LP	1986
Houdeshell, Lena	FE	1957	Eberhart, Elaine	FE	1986
Gardner, Sarah S.	PM	1958	Goddard, Kimberly M.	FE	1986
Young, Nora	FE	1958	Jackson, Lauren Elizabeth	PM	1986
Thomas, Barbara Elaine	PM	1961	Jacobs, Bonnie Setliffe	FE	1986
Davis, Elverice	SY	1963	McMillan, Pamela S.	PM	1986
Dean, Fonda Mae	LP	1964	McNutt-Kaestner, Cindy	PM	1986
Green, Nancy	FE	1964	Rutherford, Carolyn	ALP	1986
Tatum, Jean	LP	1967	Yoemans, Martha B.	FE	1986
Ratledge, Mrs. Thomas	LP	1968	Everett, Margaret Joyce Tindell	FE	1987
Carroll, Brenda F.	FE	1972	Goddard, Gayle S.	PL	1987
Buck, Frances	LP	1974	Higgins, Margaret Jeannie	FD	1987
Guffey, Jennie	FE	1974	Cate, Janice A.	FE	1988
Roberts, Stella M.	FE	1974	Hendricks, Mary B.	PM	1988
Taylor, Mary Virginia	FE	1974	Kelly, Katherine T.	ALP	1988
Dickinson, Judith E.	PM	1975	Bryan, Priscilla R.	FE	1989
Cooper, Rhonda S.	FE	1977	Clark, Alberta	FE	1989
Culbertson, Lenoir Hilten	FE	1977	Hobbs, Nancy	FD	1989
Myers-Ross, Laura Jean	FE	1977	Humphrey, Nona	ALP	1989
Blair, B. Ann	FE	1978	Jamison-Ogg, Catherine	OM	1989
DeVoe, Patricia A.	FE	1978	Baxter, Cinda	PM	1990
Reiff, Betty C.	FE	1978	Coffey, Linda	FD	1990
Smith, Velma Gallaher	FE	1978	Flynn, Annette N.	FE	1990
Wilson-Parker, Kathie	FE	1978	Goddard, Caroline W.	FE	1990
Kerrey, Pamlee Ann	PM	1979	Meade, Peggy	FE	1990
Robertson, Janice N.	FE	1979	Moore, Velda Ruth	ALP	1990
Castor, Lee-Lee Tan	FE	1980	Quinn, Vickie B. Burks	PM	1990
Poister, Meg Taylor	FE	1980	Reed, Rebecca A.	FE	1990
Weir, Joan H.	ALP	1980	Snapp, Doris Davidson	PM	1990
DowlingSoka, Christina	FE	1981	Stone, Lisa A.	FE	1990
Earle, Troy Ann Kauffman	PM	1981	Vest, Jo McQueen	FE	1990
Freed, Rita Louise	PM	1981	Deese, A. Catherine	FE	1991
Hicks-Caskey, Wanda Sue	FD	1981	Phillips, Helen G.	FE	1991
Southerland, Patricia M.	FE	1981	Rhodes, Pamela Connors	AM	1991
Watson, Debra Starling	FE	1981	Rogers, Shirley	FE	1991

Name	Conf. Relationship	1st Appt.	Name	Conf. Relationship	1st Appt.
Sanders, Marilyn Mauck	FE	1991	Isom, A. Virginia Howe	FE	1997
Trent, Laura E.	FE	1991	Johnson, Gleasanna	SP	1997
Wilhite, Nancy J.	FE	1991	Marshall, Darlene J.	FL	1997
Wilson, Carol E.	FE	1991	Parson, Mary L	FE	1997
Anna, Judith	FE	1992	Smart, Natalie	FE	1997
Dodson-Walker, A. Sue	FL	1992	Taylor, Patsy K.	PL	1997
Eminhizer, Virginia M.	AM	1992	Belangia, Kelli D.	OD	1998
Gregory, Teresa J.	AM	1992	Blackwood, Lisa	FD	1998
Hogan, Patricia	FD	1992	Blair, Laura	FL	1998
Webb, Barbara Allene	ALP	1992	Buxton-Wade, Jan	FE	1998
Williams, Jennifer Ellen	PM	1992	Davis, Kristin Suzanne	PD	1998
Bedwell, Patricia Dover	FE	1993	Hankins, Phyllis	FE	1998
Boles, Sherrell E.	FE	1993	Layell, D. Jean	PL	1998
Fox, M Elizabeth	PL	1993	Littrell, Chloe	PL	1998
Gibson, Greta J. Hendricks	AM	1993	Taylor, Jane Elizabeth	FE	1998
Gilbertson, Agnes A.	PL	1993	Yonce, Judy	PL	1998
Rasor, Laura R.	FE	1993	Collins, Julie P.	FD	1999
Robinette, Beverly C.	FE	1993	Foote, Rebecca I.	FE	1999
Snapp, Doris Davidson	PM	1993	Fox, Catherine Anara	FE	1999
Stelson, Phyllis, D.	PL	1993	Furches, Betty M.	FL	1999
Thompson, Cynthia	FE	1993	Griffin, Caryl Peden	FE	1999
Warren, Annette	PL	1993	Horak, Amy Louise Loring	FD	1999
Bishop, Betty R.	FL	1994	Hybarger, Carolyn M.	PL	1999
Hurley-Browning, Lucretia	OE	1994	King, Gaye	FL	1999
Ferguson-Shirey, Carol J.	FE	1994	Leonard, Judith	FL	1999
Jones, Sylvia D.	PL	1994	Owens-Yates, Margaret	FE	1999
Marshall, A. Paige Zoller White	PM	1994	Wiley, Sharon E.	FE	1999
Matthews, Marsha Ann	FE	1994	Banes, Karolyn	SP	2000
Myrick, Mary Jane	PM	1994	Buchanan, Angela E.	PM	2000
Sneed, Susan A.	FE	1994	Holmes, Amy Suzanne Yeary	FE	2000
Albers, Karen Marie	FE	1995	Huffine, Constance F.	SY	2000
Briggs, Mary K. Pope	FE	1995	Lay, Barbara	PL	2000
Farmer, Cindy Hope	PM	1995	Maxwell, Rochelle D.	PL	2000
Hansen, Linda	FD	1995	Rhudy, Gloria Lancaster	FL	2000
Holloway, Brenda G.	FL	1995	Ayers, M. Jane	FE	2001
Pennington, Cynthia C.	FE	1995	Gannaway, Patricia	FD	2001
Stephens, Rebecca A.	PM	1995	Hale, Katherine	FE	2001
Wesley, Cindy K.	FE	1995	Jenkins, Alyson W.	SP	2001
Ahern, Doris J.	FD	1996	Kirkland, Bernice W.	FE	2001
Ball, Martha C.	OD	1996	Marshall, Betty S.	PL	2001
Clark, Barbara A.	FE	1996	Poole, Brenda A.	FL	2001
Cranford, Lauri Jo	FE	1996	Raper, Alta C.	FL	2001
Grimm, Maria W.	FE	1996	Robins, Ann P.	FE	2001
Isley, Kimberly S.	FE	1996	Stokes, Debra Jean McCard	PE	2001
Hester, Donna M.	FE	1996	Tompkins, Ginny	FL	2001
Hurst, Lynn S.	FD	1996	Waddle, Donna R.	PL	2001
Johnson, Sandra J.	PL	1996	Buckles, Michelle M.	FE	2002
Neese, Victoria	FL	1996	Collins, Deborah W.	FL	2002
Probst, Amy Rollins	FE	1996	Cook, Amy J.	PE	2002
Shaw, Helen	PE	1996	Fetzer, Rebekah	FD	2002
Wright, Linda Bird	FE	1996	Henley, RuthAnne G.	FL	2002
Anderson, Susan Lankford	FE	1997	Martin, Sarah A.	FE	2002
Bean, Christine W.	PL	1997	Myers, Mariel	FL	2002
Bishop, Patricia	FE	1997	Rozar, Linda W.	PL	2002
Fisher, Ellen F.	FD	1997	Shirley, Betty K.	PL	2002
Hardy, Angela Marie	FE	1997	Wright, Tammy C.	PE	2002

Name	Conf. Relationship	1st Appt.
Bell, Amanda Jill	PE	2003
Martin, Carole R.	PE	2003
Merker, Mathilda Sue	PE	2003
Miller, Dixie J.	PL	2003
Minnick, Mary	PL	2003
Richardson, Janet Sweet	FE	2003
Shearer, Laura Anderson	FE	2003
Smith, Melissa	FL	2003
Campbell, Paula Dell	SP	2004
Caruso, Cheryl M.	PE	2004
Denton, Jeanne	FL	2004
Doyle, Barbara A.	SP	2004
Hill, Nicole Marie	PE	2004
Humphrey, Susan L.	OE	2004
Salyers, Crystal Dawn	PE	2004
Shelton, Regina	FL	2004
Tolbert, Teresa G.	SP	2004
Wells, Sarah C.	PL	2004
Wyke, Laura Blair	PE	2004
Bowers, Sharon	SY	2005
Hobbs, Rhonda	FL	2005
Karnes, Melanie Sue	PD	2005
Manning, Janet K.	FL	2005
Roberts, Betty	PE	2005
Strickler, Jacqueline B.	FL	2005
Waddell, Judy	PL	2005
Willis, Lynn	FL	2005

Designations:

- FE Full Connection Elders
- PE Probationary Elders
- FD Full Connection Deacons
- PM Probationary Member
- SY Approved Supply Pastors
- SP Student Pastors
- AM Associate Members
- LP/FL Full Time Local Pastors
- PL Part Time Local Pastors
- OE Elders from Other Conferences
- OD From Other Denominations
- ALP Approved Local Pastor