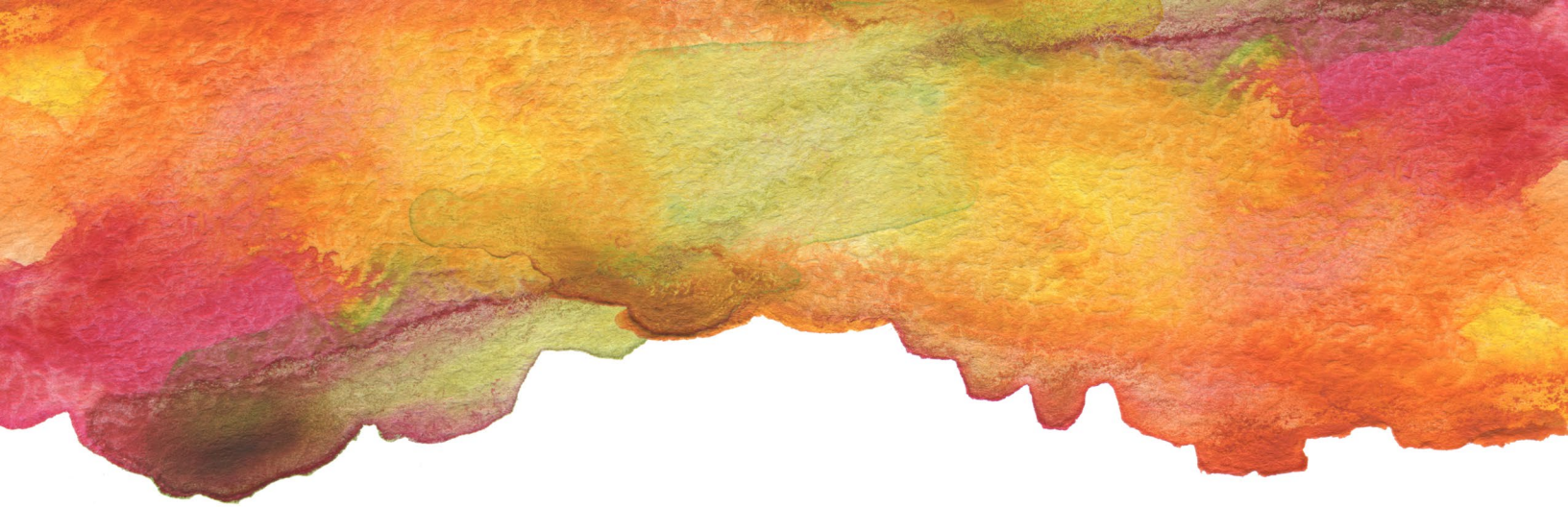


The EPISTLE

JULY
2016





IN THIS EDITION

Farewell to Rev. Sally Anne McKinsey Sisk Pg. 4

Central Member Reflects on the Residency Program Pg. 3

Celebrating Sally Ann Pg. 6

A Poem by John Huss Pg. 7

Reflections from Rev. Anna George Traynham Pg. 8

A Reflection from Rev. Molly McGinnis Pg. 9

The Future of the Residency Program at Central Pg. 10

Lilly Residency Program Alumni Updates Pg. 12

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This edition of the Epistle marks the end of the residency program at Central. As we give thanks for the life of the residency program, we celebrate that Anna and Molly are staying with us as Contract Associate Pastors. Anna will be with us through July 2017, and Molly until July 2018.

THE EPISTLE IS...

a publication of Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. This edition was designed by Zach Wells. Thank you to all who submitted or collected materials for this publication.

REFLECTING ON THE LILLY RESIDENCY PROGRAM

I have never known Central without its Residency Program.

When Jason, Ally, and I joined Central in 2007, Kate McGregor Mosley, Jill Morehouse Lum, and Jonathan Scanlon greeted us as the first class of Pastors in Residence. Kate and Jill in particular became friends who lasted beyond their time in residency. How awesome it was to have pastors with young kids our age – and even to enjoy my pregnancy with Tyler at the same time as two smart, fun, and confident women pastors. Over the years, like many of you, my family has immensely benefitted from the Pastors in Residence program.

Several years ago, as a new session member, I was asked to chair a Residency Task Force. This task force would assess and plan for what was largely presumed would be a continuation of the program. I spent many, many hours with varied Pastors in Residence, staff, members of the task force, Central members, and Gary. We researched, discussed, prayed, and discerned the continuation of the program. Ultimately, after careful consideration that included consultation with current and past residents, the Session unanimously voted to discontinue the program.

I have perhaps never been as nervous in front of the congregation as I was Sunday, February 7 when I made the announcement that we would not be calling another Pastor in Residence. I was grateful for the many positive and supportive comments I received afterward. It became apparent that the congregation at large was joining together in faith and trust that this decision had been made for solid reasons and after careful discernment.

What became very clear through the nearly three-year existence of the Residency Task Force was how grateful Central is and has been for its Pastors in Residence.

Each person who has served in this role has blessed us with their unique gifts – varied traits such as empathy, humor, art, sarcasm, joyful enthusiasm, wit, and innovative preaching.

Most recently, I have been extremely impressed with Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk, Anna George Traynham, and Molly McGinnis as they have navigated substantial change with polished confidence, professionalism, and initiative. These three people are tremendous assets to our congregation and role models for us and the Presbyterian Church at large.

This summer we say goodbye to the first of the last class of Pastors in Residence at Central: Sally Ann. My first interaction with Sally Ann was when I came on as a ruling elder in spring of 2013; Dave VanderMeer told me with absolute certainty that I would love her. True to form, Sally Ann has been amazing. She has been stellar behind the pulpit with sermons that cross generations and that we have all discussed and remembered for months to follow. She is a vocal advocate, a calm presence, a source of wisdom, and a delightful storyteller. My favorite memory of Sally Ann was when she led the X's and Y's retreat last summer. She skillfully, casually, and wisely led the group in soul-searching discussion with meaningful outcomes and beautiful candlelight lakeside devotion. Central has been blessed to have her as a leader among us over the past three years. She will go on to do great work throughout her career – and we will miss her. Godspeed, Sally Ann!



WRITTEN BY MELANIE BLISS



Farewell

TO

REV. SALLY ANN
MCKINSEY SISK

PASTOR IN RESIDENCE

2014-2016

From my third story office window each day I see the Capitol dome's reflection in the shiny glass windows of the Fulton County Courthouse, just behind the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception's steeple. We say it over and over again—Central's physical location between the State Capitol, City Hall, and the Fulton County Courthouse keeps us in prayer for the world, in word and action, engaged in the space between power and powerlessness. This is a hallmark of Central's reputation locally and nationally, and one of the many reasons I felt God calling me to serve as a Pastor in Residence.

In practice, a large portion of my time as a Pastor in Residence has been spent not in the middle of the city but all over this sprawling metropolis, down I-75 and I-85, from east to west along I-20, up to Buckhead and down to Decatur for many holy, memorable gatherings and visits in your homes and neighborhoods. Along all these Atlanta roads, my residency at Central has taught me invaluable lessons about parish ministry. In all my endeavors, from welcoming new members to planning the All-Church Retreat, to preaching, presiding, baptizing, listening, and fostering meaningful pastoral relationships, I have recognized that a congregation like Central, at the center of such need, has many needs as well. A mission, justice-focused congregation needs to be fed and cared for, too. I will carry my experiences in ministry with you wherever I go, giving thanks for Central's congregation and for these three years.

I've learned a lot over the past three years, but some of my most important learning has been done in the spaces between these practical experiences of ministry. As I have navigated Atlanta by car I have also traversed the labyrinth of my own thoughts about the practice of church in this changing, aching world and about my place in God's mission. As I have ventured out onto the roads leading into the world, I have asked questions like, "what does my ordination mean to a world in need?" and, "what good news does the world need to hear?" and even, "where do these needs intersect with my deepest joys?"

I have remembered my ordination vows to work for the reconciliation of the world, to proclaim the good news, to care for people, to try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ, and to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. The past three years have led me to understand in a fresh way what may seem obvious, but which is important for the wider church to remember in times of change—that the church and the world need people ordained to do these things inside and outside the Presbyterian ecosystem we love so dearly.

Though my vocational questions may never be neatly tied up with a bow, for the next season of my life, these realizations have brought me to answer a call to what has been deemed “bi-vocational ministry” in the PC(USA). Pastors engage in bi-vocational ministry when they spend part of their time and vocational energy in a secular field while continuing pastoral ministry in the church during the rest of the week. For me, this is a way to live into my ordination vows, to spend time in the world outside the church, and to tend two vocations that give me deep joy. So as Drew and I move to Richmond, VA for him to begin a Master of Fine Art in Graphic Design at Virginia Commonwealth University, I will begin as an artist at Shockoe Bottom Clay, a collective gallery and ceramics studio in downtown Richmond.



As I listen for the Spirit’s wisdom on the church side of this bi-vocational ministry, I will listen for the needs of those I come in contact with through the arts community. I will seek to bring healing to the same aching world I’ve prayed for from Central’s communion table, but this time through thrown cups, plates, mugs and pitchers, vessels made from God’s earth for creating daily ritual, relationship, and community.

I share this as a reflection on the Residency Program’s direct and indirect contributions to its Pastors in Residence, in the practical experience we gain and in the spaces between these experiences where we sense God’s Spirit moving in the church and the world. As I reflect on my vocational journey these three years, I also lift prayers for Central’s continuing vocational journey. vDuring a time of change and transition, Central is poised to continue asking questions like,

“what does our ordination as a baptized community mean to a world in need?”

and,

“what good news does the world need to hear?”

and especially,

“where do these needs intersect with our deepest joys?”

For unless we are being nourished in our ministry, we risk burn-out. This founding tenet of the Residency Program is also important for the Central community to remember. As I venture on to live out my ordination in new ways, I pray for Central and give thanks for each of your baptismal ordinations in the priesthood of all believers. **May we all remember that whatever we do, we are called to participate in God’s vision of justice and love, and that our baptism is sufficient for our calling. ■**



“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.” - Mother Teresa

Sally Ann is petite in size, some would say “short,” seemingly diminutive, introverted and shy. Oh how appearances are deceiving. She is strong, robust, creative, spirited, engaging, thoughtful and caring.

I first learned this a year into her residency at Central in the summer of 2014 when she assumed the responsibility for the vital ministry of visitors and new members. She tackled this ongoing challenge of new member ministry with eyes wide open and imagination. I came to look forward to our weekly Tuesday meetings as she brought a fresh outlook and excitement to engaging visitors and new members.

Our Central community has been blessed by Sally Ann’s natural gift of care and nurture. She has unfailingly been by our sides in times of grief, pain and joy. She prays deeply and with a beautiful passion and faith that you feel she has been your pastor all your life. She truly is OUR pastor.

Sally Ann was the first resident to become staff liaison to the Diaconate, a position previously held by Caroline Kelly, Steve Bacon and Jane Fahey. She had “big shoes” to fill. Not only did she not flinch but Sally Ann embraced the Diaconate with energy, thoughtfulness and a true sense of calling. I had the honor to work closely with her for a year when I was chairperson of the Deacons. She was a joy to work with as we shared our dreams for the Diaconate moving forward.

This petite child of God not only filled “big shoes” but changed the course of the Deacons with her grace, instilling in us a renewed sense of commitment and deeper understanding of how to care for our fellow Centralities. Thank you Sally Ann.

Mother Teresa’s words that our strength lies in small things is Sally Ann. She has given Central the faith and ability to challenge and learn from each other as we continually discern who we are as a loving community to each other and to the world. We will miss her but know her strength will benefit many others for years to come.

- DEBBIE MILLER

In Sally Ann’s sermon on July 3, she repeated the theme, “A little thing can be quite important.” Paraphrasing that idea, I contend that a little person can be quite important. Certainly we Centralites have learned that Sally Ann, though small in stature, has been immensely important in the lives of our church for the last three years. Everything that she has done has been outstanding.

She is a prophetic preacher, a comforting pastor, a gifted artist, an organized committee advisor, and a caring friend, in essence, the complete “package.”

The Down Yonder Parish is immensely grateful for her service and her friendship.

- MARTHA KIMES



“Heaven must be missing an Angel”

Thank you Sally Ann for allowing God to use you to His/Her Glory.

You are the BEST, and, I wish for you and Drew the very BEST that life has to offer!

- EM MCNAIR

SALLY ANN MCKINSEY SISK

Sometimes I just plain forgot when I called out "Sally Ann,"
When I needed a word of caring,
When you asked me how I was doing,
When you placed your hand with oil upon my forehead.

Sally Ann so young, and yes so pretty, looks so delicate,
As if the Buddha spoke his whole truth when he pointed to the insubstantial evanescence of all things
in our moonlit life.

But forgetful as I become in these later years,
I wrote out her name in full for three years in Central Session Minutes—
"Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk,"
No more, no less
And today I find it meet to meditate upon the "McKinsey" in her name.

I imagine it is no accident of fate, but more a matter of the Spirit's fluttering about that there are
elements of character in Sally Ann
That we as Presbyterians by profession of our faith
By right can find claim as "Scottish."

Scotland, so I have learned, was so rich in challenges, truth be told, so poor,
That it spawned generations of immigrants to all parts of the British Empire,
Immigrants with strength and grit,
Not likely to be all that willing to bow down to mere power masquerading as authority.
Sally Ann doesn't seem, to me at least, to be particularly stubborn,
But she does have her prophetic share in a revolutionary Scottish spirit,
A spirit that became insistent on having its own church not the Church of England,
A spirit whose contributions to the Enlightenment
Through David Hume,
Through the Scottish moralists,
Resonates to this day,

An enemy forever in its insistence on rationality to any form of fundamentalism as much as to the
superstitions the Scottish reformation fought.

Gentle Sally Ann,
Sometimes it must have seemed to her
In this difficult last year
That Central could be so hurtful to its pastors, its residents,
So threatening, so upsetting,
But with her wiry Scottish backbone,
She never ceased to serve us, even when we did not deserve it,
Lovingly,
As if the artist in her could draw us and her surroundings
As if the Holy Spirit held her hand
Bringing beauty out of brokenness.

I will not forget you,
Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk,
Your spirit touched me, even if one day in my senescence I do not recall your name.

A POEM BY JOHN HUSS

Sally Ann is a powerhouse packed in a petite package. She can hold her own and preach a powerful sermon. She's able to stand tall with confidence when necessary and connect with compassion in other situations. Her wisdom and artistic nature add a delightful sparkle to so much of what she does."

"It has been a joy to watch her grow and contribute her many talents to our Central Community. Working with the Stewardship Committee, she was able to address the theology of our efforts and at the same time keep us on target with deadlines. We always appreciated her perspectives and benefited from her involvement. Her talents and passions are amazing and she will be missed.

- BETSY SMALLEY

The Rev. Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk, through God's grace and guilders from the Lilly Endowment, was employed to be under the guidance and mentoring of our church for three years. However, upon arrival she immediately, and with increasingly authoritative and adept manipulations, in clear violation of our understanding, reversed the roles. She taught, nurtured, and cared for US with no regard for her age or level of experience. Thus began a long list of challenged expectations continuing throughout her tenure.

In her last week, Sally Ann delivered another great sermon, this one on Martha and Mary, giving clear (and needed) spiritual guidance to those of us struggling to remember what is most important for a life of service for our Creator God. Fine! So she hit a walk off home run and is now trying to leave us. Preaching, sincerity, dependability, pastoral skills, potential, grace are all rated A+, but we would prefer to say that other churches can't have her.

- BRIAN BISHOP



REV. ANNA GEORGE TRAYNHAM

PASTOR IN RESIDENCE

*No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to the rock I'm clinging.
Since Christ is lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?*

Those lines are among my favorites in our hymnal. The text is honest about the storms in the world: the places where struggle and tragedy threaten to swallow us in their swirling waters of chaos. It is no less honest about the faithfulness of God and the response of gratitude that fills our heart with song.

Over the past two years, I have been your pastor, and together we have been a branch of the church Jesus Christ. We worshiped, we worked, we laughed, we prayed, we cried, we shouted, and we sat in silence, waiting for the spirit of God to speak. Through it all, my friends, we answered the question in that beloved hymn. How can we keep from singing? By the grace of God, we cannot.

In Advent, we sang, Come, O Come Emmanuel, and the haunting tune bore the weight of our hope and our desperation. We grieved for the injustice in our world, and we longed together for the coming of Christ anew. On Palm Sunday we sang Hosanna! at the top of our lungs as we proclaimed the goodness of God in a broken world. The Intown North parish gathered around a holy coffee table at the Wilsons' home on Maundy Thursday, as we joined our voices in God's holy invitation, Come to the Table of Grace. On Easter, the choir's Hallelujah Chorus seemed to draw the heavens closer to the earth, and each refrain of Christ is risen indeed! lessened the distance between neighbor and neighbor.

Several times this year, we sat together in holy silence, and the spirit carried our song. On the Sundays following the Charleston shooting, the Orlando massacre, and the Paris and Baghdad bombings, our song was one of silence, and we sang it more loudly than ever before. Upon the deaths of beloved Central members, we grieved and praised together, as we witnessed to resurrection For All The Saints.

On the day of the Haitian church dedication, the children led us in a joyful and faithful Bondye se Bon! God is so good. On our US-Mexico border trip last month, our neighbors taught us songs of praise in Spanish, but my heart sang refrains of Jesus Entered Egypt. In Guatemala with the Central youth group, we sang the chorus All Are Welcome In This Place as we learned the meaning of Christian hospitality from our Guatemalan host families.

When I look back upon this year in ministry, one song rings the loudest in my memory. In the holy weeks before the deaths of Central members Catherine Covington and Howard Montgomery, I joined the Central choir in singing at their bedsides. Howard mouthed along with every word, needing no hymnal, for the verses of Holy Holy Holy were written deep within his soul. Catherine was beyond words at that point, but she tapped her little finger along with the music. In both rooms, we ended our visit with a choral benediction: The peace of the earth be with you, the peace of the oceans too... Deep peace, falling over you. We stood on holy ground, in a thin space between life and death. How could we keep from singing? We could not, and our song was one of peace.

On Sally Ann's last Sunday at Central, my heart will sing a teary chorus of God Be With You Till We Meet Again, and meet again we will. My heart is full of gratitude for my Central family and the amazing colleagues that the residency program brought into my life. For Anthony, for Sally Ann, for Molly, and for each of you, I will forever sing, blessed be the tie that binds.

How can we keep from singing, Central friends?

By the grace of God, we cannot, and I give thanks for the chance to join my voices with yours in another season of this life of faith. ■



REV. MOLLY MCGINNIS

PASTOR IN RESIDENCE



In seminary, I had the pleasure of serving on the admissions commission. I met and interviewed potential students. It was a real honor to get to know the intimate details of their lives and callings. At each prospective student weekend, our guests were divided into small groups and invited to a professor's home for dessert and deeper conversation. One by one, each person shared their call stories—how they came to be interested in ministry. One evening, a guest asked me to share my own. I was a senior at the time, so I thought that I had this story nailed. I told them all about how I had been a 22-year-old post-grad looking to find myself in the world; how my family had been struggling; how I wasn't feeling fulfilled in my life. Then the truth came out of my mouth plainer than I'd ever heard it:

“I like to say that I went to seminary because I wasn't doing anything else. But now I realize that there's nothing else I'd rather be doing.”

When I was in high school, people often asked, “So what do you want to be when you grow up” or something to that effect. I don't think I ever gave anyone the answer they wanted. As a 17 year-old, I didn't know what I wanted. As a 29 year-old, I still don't really know. I suspect that at 69, I still won't know.

I knew one thing when I was 17 that I know to this day: I never want my life to be stagnant. My first year of ordained ministry has been quite interesting, to say the least! I think my 17-year-old self would be very proud of where I am today.

Church is harder than it seems. I don't need to repeat here all of the challenges and changes that Central has faced this year. You all know very well how this community has struggled and thrived over its long history. Yes, church can be hard. We are only people, after all. People with different lives and commitments, interests and passions, backgrounds and futures. These things make it hard to be the church. However, they also make it beautiful, because we are the very reflection of God's own vast diversity and ever-lasting love.

This is what I see when I look at Central—a community of people who love each other and in so doing, show their love for God. I am grateful to be your pastor. ■

THE FUTURE OF PASTORAL EDUCATION AT CENTRAL

WRITTEN BY LEE CARROLL



Over much of the last half-century of Central's long history, the congregation has been engaged in one way or another in preparing men and women for professional ministry.

- Earlier, students from area seminaries were employed by the congregation to serve as part-time staff in specific areas like youth ministry, community ministry, or others. The focus of this arrangement was not on pastoral education with supervision, but nevertheless, students did provide a service to the church, and in the process, they gained important practical experiences and received a modest stipend to help with their expenses.
- In the 1970's, as seminaries began formally to incorporate theological field education into their curricula, Central began serving as a "teaching congregation" in which ministry students worked full-time for a summer or part-time throughout the school year, engaging in ministry with supervision provided by one or more of the pastors. Later, teams of lay people were enlisted to participate in the learning process, too. The internship was designed to provide meaningful exposure in all areas of the congregation's life and ministry—not just one designated area of responsibility—and to engage in theological reflection about their experiences.
- Most recently, beginning in 2006 and bolstered by a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment, the congregation began to offer full-time, three-year "pastoral residencies" to teams of three recent seminary graduates who essentially joined the pastoral staff, serving with the "permanent staff" in providing greatly enhanced pastoral services and leadership for the congregation. The residency was very intentional about providing pastoral supervision, peer learning, and ongoing theological reflection, and the three-year period provided a much deeper immersion into the life of the congregation and community.

As important as the Residency Program proved to be for Central and its resident pastors, the Session eventually found itself facing the question of how we might sustain such a program after support from the Lilly Endowment ended. In February 2016, the Session, following a long and difficult discernment process, finally concluded that Central simply is not able to continue the program without external funding; and the Lilly Endowment, by policy, could only offer a modest and steadily diminishing grant to help Central transition to a residency funded entirely by the congregation. Given the restrictions of our size and the demands of numerous competing mission-related programs, the Session finally determined that seeking a final bridge grant for the Pastoral Residency was simply postponing the inevitable. In the end, the Session reluctantly concluded that the program would be phased out when each of our current residents finishes her three-year term at Central.

What the Session also decided during this process was that while Central may not be able to sustain this relatively expensive approach to educating pastors, it is important to "reaffirm the historic commitment of the congregation to pastoral theological education." In other words, the Session avowed that one critical element in the vocation of Central Presbyterian Church is preparing pastors for leadership roles in congregations and communities.

But what will pastoral education at Central look like as we move into the future?

Seminaries seek to equip theological students to serve amidst constant changes in our culture. And Central's efforts in pastoral education face this same challenge. Among the many cultural trends that future pastors will encounter, the following are a few that seem particularly relevant to Central's own work in equipping men and women for pastoral service:

- **Secularization.** We will likely experience a continued decline in cultural values that are grounded in the Christian faith. Already, Sunday is "kids day" for sports, and stewardship is relegated to offering God occasional tips for special projects. Indeed, there is an extensive list of ways that secular society is changing our context for ministry. Future pastors will need to be able to educate congregations about how to remain faithful to God's mission in contexts where the church is no longer viewed as a relevant partner in their communities.
- **Post-Denominationalism.** We will likely see a continued decline in denominations including the Presbyterian Church USA, and accordingly, the benefits of being a "connectional church" will erode. Future pastors will need to serve without the guidance and theological vision of their denomination, and they will need entrepreneurial skills for creating networks for mission with new partners.
- **Social Isolation.** Increasingly we relate to one another through social media, distance learning, and minimal community life. Future pastors will need to be able to help congregations address unarticulated hungers for authentic, in-depth human interactions by cultivating Christian communities.
- **Polarization.** It is not just in the political sphere that people are increasingly polarized and uncivil in their efforts to establish public policies. Polarization also spills over into congregational life. Future pastors will need to be able to deal constructively with conflict and to seek visions of the common good, both in the congregation and the public sphere.
- **Economic Disparity.** With a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and with the parallel decline in a large middle class, the church occupies a unique and critical space for reconciling people from varied economic circumstances. Future pastors will need to be able to bridge economic chasms and to relate equally well to the rich and the poor.

Serving as a teaching congregation requires a growing awareness of how we are impacted by such trends. This is true not just for our work in educating pastors; it is also true for our efforts to educate ourselves for mission. If "the Church that Stayed" is to remain vibrant and faithful in our service for God in the heart of Atlanta, we will need a good working knowledge of the Scriptures and a capacity for thinking theologically about complex issues. And as we grow in theological competence as a congregation, we also grow in our capacity to educate those preparing for professional ministry.

No decisions have been made yet about the nature of our future work in pastoral education. We might return to the earlier model of serving as a teaching church for seminary interns; we might develop a scaled down post-graduate residency; or we might create an approach that is radically different from any of our earlier models. Deciding about this requires a careful analysis of the needs of the larger church and theological education, as well as the needs of our social context. This calls for creativity, wisdom, and new commitments of time and resources. That is the task before us.

Not only is the specific approach to pastoral education pending, but no target dates have been established for implementing our next efforts. It is, however, unlikely that any long-term commitments in this area can be made before a new pastor is in place at Central.

What we do already know, however, is that educating pastoral leaders for the larger church is an important part of what we do. It is a part of our identity, our ethos. We also know that as we prepare others for ministry, we ourselves are empowered and emboldened for missional service. For it is in teaching others to serve, that we more fully become God's servant people.

So what is our role between now and when the future is clarified? Do we do nothing in pastoral education? Actually, this can be a very important season of preparation, renewal, and anticipation for the entire congregation. During this season, we can strengthen our capacity as a biblical and theological people. We can intentionally recommit ourselves to the mission of God, for it is in serving others that we discover God anew. We can also join with one another in the weekly worship of God, for it is there that we are reminded of God's faithfulness in times of deep transition, and where we are reawakened to God's vision for social justice and peace. Finally, we can pray to God for the wisdom that will guide us in defining our future in pastoral theological education. ■

Lilly Pastoral Residency

ALUMNI

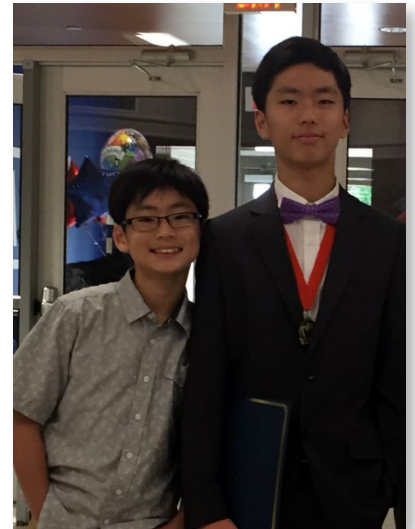


SHARON JUNN

This has been a full year for my boys and me. John is now 14 and graduated from middle school; Sam is 11 and graduated from elementary school. I am excited to inform you that I feel called to serve Christ in Asia.

Before I came to Central I applied to go to Asia, the organization thought I had perfect credentials, but needed something more, a better connection to churches. Later I acquired TESOL Certification (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) as a means to go to Asia. Last February a couple of field workers from Asia came to FPC in Jackson, Tennessee, sharing their work. While I was listening to their stories and the pictures, I heard a subtle yet clear voice in my heart: "That is where I am needed the most. That is the place God could use everything of me; for what I have been equipped, what I have gone through."

As you may find this news surprising, I was, too, very surprised to hear the call to Asia at this point of my life: "Now?" I have had many questions and doubts. I was concerned about my boys. However, the more I prayed and sought God's call out of obedience and faith, I have become clearer that it is a call from God. My primary job will be supporting missionaries through teaching their children. As I step out in obedience to this call, I covet your prayers and support. Please pray, pray, and pray for my boys and me and write or call me to learn more about these plans.



KATE MCGREGOR MOSLEY

I continue to serve as executive director of Georgia Interfaith Power & Light, encouraging congregations across Georgia to embrace sustainable practices and environmental stewardship as a witness to faith. The work has grown exponentially into Atlanta's Muslim community and I've grown in faith as new friendships have been forged with our Muslim brothers and sisters. My own faith has been enriched by the Islamic and Jewish expressions of faith shared with me on this journey, and I am evermore deeply committed to growing the interfaith dialogue that is so needed within the wider community.

In this time of growing intolerance and fear, I am grateful to be engaged actively in work that seeks to understand rather than condemn, that seeks to build relationships rather than construct walls that divide us. And, I continue to be most grateful for the ongoing support of Central Presbyterian Church in this ministry of Creation care. There is always more work to be done, especially as it pertains to changing public policy that serves and protects all of God's good creation. Thank you for continuing to say "yes" to this call to action and for being good stewards of the blessings of the Earth.

EMILY WILMARTH

Greetings from the North Carolina mountains! This has been a busy and rich year. I continue to settle into my role as Co-Pastor, enjoying the opportunity to collaborate and share the work of ministry with Curtis Fussell, my Co-Pastor.

I have been involved with an exciting campus ministry project at Western Carolina University in Cullowee, NC in Cullowee, about 45 minutes from Highlands. The Cullowee Presbyterian Church, which stands right in the heart of campus, closed its doors permanently a few years ago, though a small group of students remained active in a campus ministry group.

The Presbytery stepped in and gathered a group of board members to dream and plan for use of the vacated building. I have enjoyed serving on this board, especially as our dream turned into a reality. We turned the bottom floor of the church into a donation-based coffee shop to serve the campus. Hillside Grind has become a vibrant, welcoming space where students, faculty, and community members can enjoy a great cup of coffee, hold meetings, study, or relax. The upstairs of the church building remains an open sanctuary space, and we hired a campus minister last June. I love working with a hopeful, faithful, engaged board that is willing to take risks and dream big!

A huge highlight of the year was attending CREDO, an offering of the Board of Pensions, to nurture and sustain the vocation life of PCUSA pastors. About 30 pastors gathered for a full week at Lake Logan Retreat Center in Canton, NC last November. I like to think that a combination of a little planning and a lot of Holy Spirit made it possible for Erika, Catherine, and I to be three of the 30 for this wonderful week!

Kevin and I have had a big year, too. We're expecting to welcome a new family member in late October, and to add to the fun, we recently bought a fixer-upper in Highlands! Our prep work is cut out for us in the coming months!

Much love and peace to all the Central family.



ANTHONY DAMELIO

Anthony and Sharon currently reside in Jackson Heights, one of the most diverse neighborhoods in New York City with neighbors hailing from throughout Latin America and Southeast Asia. Sharon continues her work as Director of Development at WhyHunger, who's leading the movement to change our food system by supporting and connecting grassroots organizations with solutions in their own contexts. Anthony splits his time in two places: as Executive Director for Broadway Community, a non-profit in West Harlem that provides nutritious, delicious food and job training to homeless and low-income New Yorkers; and as the Program Director at Heat Seek NYC, a non-profit that empowers low-income tenants to get their heat restored in gentrifying neighborhoods throughout New York. He's also a Fellow at Beespace, a non-profit incubator that seeks to launch new organizations with innovative solutions to difficult problems. Eloise, their beloved French bulldog, will turn two this August and loves to forage for fruit on the city sidewalks and greet her adoring fans. Anthony and Sharon are delighted to be surrounded by friends from high school, college, and grad school, and they're eager to keep working hard, cooking a little less than they did, and exploring the Big Apple's endless food, drink, and culture. Let them know when you're passing through, and they'll show you a slice of the best that New York has to offer!



CATHERINE NEELLY BURTON

It's been quite a year. I'm still in Wichita, KS, at Grace Presbyterian Church. In November I was installed for the third time, this time as the pastor. The two previous installations were as associate pastor and designated pastor. None of it was what I imagined six years ago, but God worked through it all, and I am grateful to serve here.

Also in November our congregation completed an eight-month period of study and discernment, and our session voted in favor of same-sex weddings at our church. I was grateful for the good work the session did and for the outcome. It was a long process, and we lost and gained members through it. In a particularly difficult couple of weeks Gary was a good friend and mentor to me as I shared some of the challenges with him.

November was a big month all around because it was also when I met up with Erika and Emily in North Carolina for Credo. Credo is a retreat for pastors put on by the PCUSA Board of Pensions. It was a gift to share that week with them.

While November 2015 was a big month, February 2016 was even bigger. That's when our daughter Alice Crenshaw Burton was born, and she is fantastic. Life as a family of four (counting Dolly the dog) is fun, and John and I are filled with gratitude.

It's been a big year for you too. After much discernment you determined that the residency program will wind down in a few years, and then in June you said goodbye to Gary and Jennell. I continue to be grateful for my two years at Central, for the learning and growing, and for the relationships that formed in that season. It sounds cheesy, but it's true: the residency program will end, but the legacy of it will continue in the places where your former residents serve.

I continue to pray for you and am hopeful for you in this time of transition. I laughed when I saw that Steve Bacon is again serving God at Central. He's a gift to the church, and his latest role reprisal was a good chance for me to call to tell him to have fun. I hope you have fun too.



CAITLIN FOLEY PHILLIPS

I enjoyed seeing many of you at the goodbye party for Gary and Jennell Charles. It was wonderful to catch up on the exciting things going on at Central. I know this is a time of transition for the church, but I'm confident God has great plans for the future of CPC.

The Phillips household is also engaged in a time of transition. I will become a full-time installed Associate Pastor at Alpharetta Presbyterian on August 1st. My installation service is on Sunday July 31st and I'm thrilled that Brent Ivey will be serving on the commission! I'll serve with the membership, fellowship, and adult education ministries, so there's always lots of meaningful work to be done. Additionally, we are expecting our third child at the end of November so life will be full! I know it's a drive, but I'd love for some of you to come worship at Alpharetta Presbyterian one Sunday, it'd be wonderful to see you.

Grace and Peace

JONATHAN SCANLON

On Sunday, July 10, I was installed as the fourteenth pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Clarion, PA. It has been ten years since I was ordained to join you in Atlanta as a part of the Transition into Ministry residency program. My predecessor here in Clarion was a resident pastor in Indianapolis at the same time. I believe all I learned with you, and in the eight years since, has prepared me for this position, which I hope will last for many years to come.

Last May, I completed my D.Min. at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, as well as my M.S.S.W. degree through the University of Texas at Austin. I have included two of my graduation pictures with familiar faces you may recognize. While I will not formally practice social work in my work here as a pastor, much of what I gleaned from the experience has already been of benefit. I will continue to be a life-long learner, though my wife, Joanne, will not allow me to go “back to school” ever again. Maybe next summer I’ll find time to sneak away to Chautauqua for continuing education?

As the pastoral residency program winds down, I feel so fortunate for how much you invested in me when I was so young. Please know your investment is only beginning to bear fruit and will continue to have significant impact on many in the Church. I am especially grateful for all the time Gary Charles, Steve Bacon, Jill Morehouse Lum, and Kate McGregor Mosley spent with me, as together we discerned our gifts for ministry and how the residency would function. May God bless your upcoming pastoral search and bring forth a candidate who will fully embrace the ethos you instill as the church that stayed.

It is now time for me to part ways with my allegiance to the Braves. Appropriately, I am leaving them the same year they are leaving the city they call home. While I will never forget my days walking from Central to Turner Field, God has provided a new team for me to follow here in western Pennsylvania. On August 6, I will make my inaugural trip to PNC Park, riding in a charter bus with forty members of my congregation. Go Bucs!



JILL LUM

The Lums are delighted to be at Central! What more is there to say? We love practicing “residential stewardship” - a phrase Linda McCord coined. Brady is Clerk of Session. Please pray for him. (Thank you John Huss, for your encouragement.) I loved inviting Centralites to “Fearless Dialogues” for six weeks of Sunday School this winter. Invite us to sit with you at lunch and we’ll tell more!

JULY 2016

ERIKA REMBERT SMITH

Greetings from Orlando!

This past year has been one that has been filled with joy and sorrow.

On September 15, 2016, I celebrated five years in ministry at Washington Shores Presbyterian Church, Orlando, Florida. The wonderful members in this place that I love marked this joyous occasion with an Appreciation Luncheon attended by members of our community of faith, my family, friends and colleagues. In October, I facilitated our fourth All-Church Retreat where we spent time developing a blueprint of concrete actions that will help us as we continue to move beyond the walls of the church building to make a difference in the community in which we serve.

I was happy to have an opportunity to spend time with Catherine Neelly Burton and Emily Wilmarth this past November in Lake Logan, NC at the CREDO conference. It was a wonderful time of reflection and reconnection. The holistic CREDO plan I developed at the CREDO conference reminded me of the personal ministry plans Catherine, Emily and I developed while serving as Resident Pastors at Central. It was also great to reconnect with Sandra McDonald last month during the worship planning team meeting for the 2017 Montreat Music and Worship Conference. I count it a blessing to have the opportunity to serve as liturgist during worship at the conference next year.



My joy of the past year has been interspersed with the pain that we all are feeling in this nation. It is a pain resulting from pervasive evil and injustice. Too often I have found myself saying, "How long, O Lord?" as we have witnessed the deaths of black boys and men, police officers, and brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ community. The horrific shooting at PULSE Nightclub in Orlando happened approximately three and a half miles away from Washington Shores. One of our church members was a relative to one of the persons fatally shot. At WSPC we are looking at ways to have the important and necessary conversations around race and the inclusion of all of God's beloved children.

This past year, I also co-led two workshops on race and reconciliation for Central Florida Presbytery; one with former GA Moderator, Bruce Reyes Chow, the other with David Jones, who is now a new minister member of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. In the meantime, we continue to place our hope in God and to do our part in creating the beloved community of God.

Meke and I continue to enjoy our life together and will celebrate our 5th wedding anniversary later this month. I continue to give thanks for my time at Central. You remain in my thoughts and in my prayers.

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