

CAM THOMAS

BIOGRAPHY

It seems like we have a biblical precedent for people avoiding initial calls to ministry. Jeremiah told God that he was too young and did not know how to speak. My spiritual journey may be one where I spent some days and nights in a vocational wilderness, but parish ministry somehow had a way of coming back to the forefront. At The Barbecue Presbyterian Church in Sanford, NC, I was baptized in the winter of 1984. It was in this congregation where I first worshipped, attended Church School, and began learning the faith that we confess. During my time at Barbecue, I got to travel with some very faithful teaching elders and Christian educators along my spiritual journey. It is the guidance and influence of these witnesses that is really the starting point of my own journey.

During college, I worked as a camp counselor at Camp Monroe in Laurel Hill, NC. After college, I began teaching high school Social Studies and coaching football. As teacher and facilitator, I found that my teaching life and relationships with campers and students help me to grow as my own life and faith was enriched. As we talked about life, struggles, the human narrative and experience, and our call to be covenant people, I found myself gaining perspective as to how these concepts are consistent with biblical mandates being lived out in the parish. As I continued to teach high school, I sought ways to help more. I knew that I wanted to help people and I was searching for an avenue by which to do this. Having always been active in congregations, the faint call to parish ministry resounded once again and it was my task to see where this led. It led to a visitation weekend at Union Presbyterian Seminary. I went there, saw the campus, and met the people. I was impressed by the culture of gracious hospitality sustained by our faith. After this weekend was over, I went back home and had a lot to think about. The visitation was nice, but the question remained: “Is seminary and, even more crucial, parish ministry for me?”

About two weeks after I returned from Richmond, my now father – in – law was nearly killed in a car accident. Bill is the pastor at Lillington Presbyterian Church in Lillington, NC. What happened in the subsequent weeks was the church’s life together in action. The waiting room at UNC Chapel Hill hospital had a steady stream of friends caring for and praying with Bill’s family. A congregation had had their pastor plucked right away from them. Yet, they rallied, took on more roles of leadership, and continued to minister in their community. The small community of Lillington ebbed and flowed with the news from Chapel Hill with people from all of the congregations joining in ecumenical prayer. People that did not regularly attend worship sent their well – wishes and helped in other ways. This experience answered that question. Parish ministry is for me and I am for parish ministry. I am called to be part of something larger than myself. The parish as a part of the Church universal is the people of God in community as we worship, live, struggle, rejoice, and serve together in the ministry of Christ.

My wife Mary, who is my chief partner in life and ministry, and I went to seminary. With my colleagues, I learned about the tradition of and the outlook for our life together in faith. We pray that our next step takes us to First Presbyterian Church Myrtle Beach. I believe that I am blessed. When we hear God’s words to Abram, we remember that we are blessed to be a blessing. So it is with First Presbyterian Myrtle Beach and our partnership there. God has been faithful to us in the past, giving us much for which we are responsible and for which we are the stewards. Our call is to use these blessings to be a blessing to our world, to the Church, and to the local community. Mary and I are called be a blessing with the people in the community at Myrtle Beach as we partner in ministry and seek to be a witness to the Kingdom in this place.

Throughout seminary, I considered working for non – profits focusing on advocacy, community witness and service, the proliferation of peace, radical hospitality, and the perpetuation of dignity for all. Then I asked myself a question. If you are not doing this in the parish, then what are you doing?