

Faith Journey/Bio
Coastal Carolina Presbytery
Cynthia Williams
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I am a child of the tea colored waters and Spanish moss laden trees of the Northeast Cape Fear. I grew up in Sarecta, the birthplace of Duplin county, where I played hide and seek in the corn rows with my cousins and handed tobacco at my grandfather's barn. I was baptized and nurtured in the faith at Hallsville Presbyterian Church. Those were the 'good ole' days where Covenant Life Curriculum shaped the content of Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. Those were the days when snack time at VBS was a flat crate of Coke Colas and Sundrops and nabs served on the tailgate of someone's pick up and soft ball or roll the bat were recreation. The high light of Homecoming was getting some of Miss Irene's pecan pie. Two ministers were key; Kim Sydnor was the pastor who baptized me, and Jack Dail was the influence in my formative years.

So many saints have blessed my life. I attended St. Andrews Presbyterian College where I received a most excellent liberal arts education. Among the many excellent professors I had there were Dr. Ron Crossley and Dr. Doug Hix, members of this Presbytery. The lure toward church vocation was cast by my time as a counselor at Camp Kirkwood. There Bob Bankhead, aka Doc, taught me not only how to build a good camp fire and do a J stoke but how to tend the fires of the Holy Spirit that burn in our hearts. Our small group camping experience was meant to be a lived reality of what it means to be The Body of Christ. There I learned how to lead, how to teach, how to listen and pay attention and work in partnership with others. And I learned how to get in a canoe without tipping it over. Balance is a requisite skill in faith and life.

I attended the Presbyterian School of Christian Education after college. Those were the best two years of my life. PSCE was the perfect balance of challenge that nurtured mind and body and heart. What I received there has shaped the entire course of my ministry and adult life. All academics and theory were applied to life. Dr. Izzie turned my brain inside out with theology and ethics and Lamar Williamson led me into the deeper terrains of Exegetical Method. I took every class I could with both of them. But we also knew how to dance and play. The puppet I made in Glenn Bannerman's puppetry class, Elmo, (may he rest in peace) did many a children's sermon.

I was again blessed with giant saints my first year after graduation. I worked as an Intern in the General Assembly Youth Ministry Office with Bill Forbes in Atlanta. There again my horizons were stretched by all the experiences I was offered, whether participating in conferences, leading workshops, or attending ecumenical meetings and events. Incredible teachers like Bill and Mary Jean McFadden and Marvin Simmers and Henrietta Wilkinson and Robert Miller encouraged me and helped me grow.

From there I went to First Dallas to be Director of Youth Ministry. There another saint, Emily Quade would challenge me to realize that I had gifts for teaching adults. I became Director of

Christian Education for First Dunedin, FL. There I was once again blessed to work with one of the best preachers I have ever heard in Sherwood Smith. The largely retired membership in that church were people of eager minds who wanted to learn and were willing to experiment with intergenerational events.

By then there had long been a chorus of voices that said, “why didn’t you go to seminary; I thought you went to seminary; you mean you didn’t go to seminary; you should go to seminary.” So, I attended San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Most of my ordained ministry was spent as Associate Pastor for First Newton, NC. I can’t begin to describe the depth of relationship and experience that 20 years with one people gives. My most pivotal Continuing Education experience in those years was participating in the Shalem Institute’s training for Leading Spiritual Formation Groups. It confirmed what I had written in a paper in Seminary, that, if prayer is practicing the presence of God, then the purpose of ministry is to teach people to pray. The intensive training opened me to profound encounters with God and revealed the power of prayer to both transform me and create community.

I was blessed to serve three Interims in this Presbytery, Calypso, Warsaw and Beulaville. Most recently I served as Associate Pastor of South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church in Charlotte. Incredible people have forged the trail for me, walked before me and with me. In entering retirement, I hope to hear God’s voice to use my gifts in yet unimagined ways.