

Memories of First Presbyterian Church
Rev. Cynthia Cochran-Carney
Associate Pastor
1988-1993

When I was finishing my senior year of seminary in 1988 and pouring over monthly Opportunity Lists that arrived in my mailbox, I prayed God would lead me to a congregation where I could use my gifts, grow as a new pastor, and work with congregational leaders of a healthy, caring and vital congregation. I was blessed beyond measure when I was officially called to serve FPC as Associate Pastor. One of the early confirmations that this was indeed a movement of the Holy Spirit took place on the day I preached in a neutral pulpit for the APNC. Unbeknownst to the committee, the theme of my sermon that day at First Presbyterian Martinsville was having a mustard seed faith. The committee had scheduled to have lunch at Mustard's Restaurant. APNC Chair Ron Jensen was instrumental in guiding me through the call process and enabling me as a young pastor to have a rich and positive start in pastoral ministry. I thank God for him and the rest of the committee.

Once the call was official, this wonderful congregation welcomed this young pastor from California. One of the blessings of moving to Bloomington was reconnecting with friends and professors from Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, where I attended 1984-85 before transferring to San Francisco Theological Seminary. It was a great joy that my Old Testament professor and mentor, Dr. Johanna Bos, came up from Louisville to preach at my installation. I enjoyed working with Byron Bangert, sharing the responsibilities, joys and challenges of ministry.

One of my primary responsibilities at FPC was working with CE committee - Debbie Conkle and others. I loved meeting to review the curriculum, train teachers, and brainstorm ways to make the biblical stories come alive. One of the special blessings was having the presbytery library in our building with the wonderful Carol Tomasic as the librarian. I enjoyed long conversations with her about various topics related to spiritual formation and current events. It was also exciting to plan Adult Education at FPC. The congregation expected engaging and challenging classes and speakers on theology, current issues, and in-depth Bible study. Planning opportunities for adult spiritual formation in a university community that engaged people's hearts and minds was very rewarding.

Working with the youth group was one of my primary responsibilities and joys. I came up with creative games and discussion topics for our Sunday night gatherings. Retreats, mission trips and a particular lock-in for Halloween/All Saints stand out. I enjoyed teaching Confirmation along with elders and teachers. I also remember Byron Smith offering the use of his apartment for the youth group Sunday school class. The youth could walk over, enjoy snacks, watch a video on a biblical story on Byron's large TV, and have lively discussions. I am certainly proud of Rob McClellan and Hana Johnson Elliott for pursuing their calls to pastoral ministry. Karin Willison and her service dog Kennedy were very dear to me. She gave an excellent presentation on Canine Companions for Independence. When Kennedy died suddenly, Jeffrey and I offered a memorial service for the family. Throughout my ministry, I have enjoyed working with young people, listening to their questions, and guiding them on their spiritual journeys.

The Mission Committee was a central part of the life and work of FPC. Mary Lou Miller was an inspiration for me as the church led the way in issues related to peacemaking. I

remember helping to start and expand the Alternative Christmas Market, including the Heifer Market with live animals. Going to Indianapolis each year to the 10,000 Villages store to pick out items to be sold was a special annual experience. The partnership with Posoltega was beginning to take shape when I left.

The annual Rummage Sale was great fun and hard work. I remember how the Women's Association worked tirelessly every year to sort all the beautiful and odd items that were donated. One particular year Byron and I promised to wear something in worship from the sale if a certain amount of money was raised. I recall Byron wearing a tie that was about 3 feet long and I wore gold glitter high heel shoes.

FPC was good at helping people build relationships and friendships. Some of my favorite events were the Outings for Everyone, including trips to see productions at Brown County Playhouse. I still remember seeing "Steel Magnolias," with tears rolling down my face. Suppers of Eight was a highlight each year. Going out to the Larry Crowe Retreat Center for picnics and Christmas tree harvests were highlights each year. I was part of a church group of young adults who played volleyball in a church league at the Salvation Army for a few years.

There were some landmark events during my time at FPC. The PCUSA headquarters were built in Louisville. A group of us went down for the dedication in October 1988. Not long after I arrived, the plans to build Lyman Hall and expand the parking lot were approved. The staff and congregation lived with construction dust and mess for over a year, but it was certainly worth it when we moved into our lovely new offices. Using Lyman Hall for meals, classes, and community events added many dimensions to the church's ministry.

Serving as the associate pastor at FPC brought many blessings, but the most significant came in May 1990. Sue Artmeier played matchmaker along with her mother Louise Carroll. Louise thought that I should meet the pastor of her church in Greensburg so she gave him my phone number. And the rest is history. Jeffrey and I went on a blind date in May, started dating, fell in love, and got married in December. We knew God had brought us together. Kathryn Miller made my beautiful dress. We were married in Tustin, CA on December 29, 1990. After a wonderful honeymoon on the California coast, we re-affirmed our vows in a ceremony at FPC and then one more time at Spring Hill Presbyterian Church in Greensburg. For 3 years we juggled 3 churches, 2 houses, and 3 dogs before we accepted a call to be co-associate pastors at First Presbyterian Church in Wausau, Wisconsin. I am grateful for the ways FPC welcomed Jeffrey and supported us as a couple.

I am so grateful to God that my first call was to FPC. When I look back, those years gave me a firm foundation for a long and healthy ministry. Jeffrey and I went on to start two new churches (one in California and one in Pennsylvania). You nurtured me in deep ways, inviting me to see the breadth of pastoral ministry.

In Christ,

Cynthia Cochran-Carney