

**PERSPECTIVES ON MINISTRY
AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AS
ASSOCIATE PASTOR AND MINISTER OF CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION (1971-1974)**

CONNECTIONS

Prior to coming to Bloomington in November of 1971 as Associate Pastor and Minister of Christian Education, there were already several connections with the congregation that are worthy of note in any recollections on my ministry here.

Those connections begin in the *former Presbytery of Indianapolis* to which First Presbyterian Church of Bloomington belonged before the formation of “regional synods” and Ohio Valley Presbytery. Presbytery provided the context for meeting various leaders from First Presbyterian Church including Paul Miller, George Reed, and Dorothy Johnson as well as other presbytery leaders such as Bill Laws (pastor of First Church of Columbus, IN, and former General Assembly Moderator) and Bill Hudnut (pastor of Second Church and later a Member of Congress and Mayor of Indianapolis), both of whom later regularly supply preached for me in Martinsville. In my role at Tabernacle Presbyterian Church as Minister to Community, I met with inner city pastors in Indianapolis, which included Frank Ichishita, Robert LaFollette, and Herb Valentine, who went on to become presbytery executives respectively in Genessee Valley in the Northeast, Lake Huron and Baltimore. Herb subsequently became a General Assembly Moderator as well. This cadre of ministers forged a link between me and Paul who was a strong social justice advocate on the floor of presbytery in addition to several mutual assignments for the Synod of Indiana such as the Synod School at Hanover College.

While at Tabernacle Church, I developed a *Church Resource Center*, which is still operational as Johnnie and I learned in a recent visit to the Church. Part of that education thrust related to two national teacher education programs (The INSTROTEACH Program and the National Teacher Education Project) which provided impetus for the development of the *Portable Learning Center* which my wife Johnnie and I coordinated for 25 years (1970-1994) as a resource lending, consultation, leadership training, newsletter and publication project. The *legacy of the Portable Learning Center* continued in Ohio Valley Presbytery as a presbytery resource center, as a church library at First Presbyterian Church in Martinsville, with a large collection of youth ministry and Women’s Justice Issues resources at the Synod of Mid-America and the Synod of the Northeast, and with large donations of books to ecumenical seminaries in both Jamaica and Madagascar enabling their efforts toward theological library certification. Interestingly enough, there have also been a doctoral dissertation and a master’s thesis done on the work of the Portable Learning Center. When Johnnie and I moved to Synod of Mid-America, the Presbytery Resource Center component returned to First Presbyterian Church in Bloomington with Carol Tomasic as coordinator, who served for many years in that role.

Another connection to First Presbyterian Church goes back to *invitation-only*

Vocation Agency events sponsored at selected locations across the denomination to explore “Visions of Ministry from Diverse Perspectives.” Agency staff and consultants of the United Presbyterian Church (USA) came together with what in the early 1970s would have been understood to be “intentionally diverse groups of pastors.” The group of pastors was “diverse” insofar as it went for its day, in that racial-ethnic and gender diversity “had not yet come into its own.” But then, this was a time outside of governing body meetings when Senior Pastors rarely, if ever, went to meetings attended by staff ministers and small church pastors rarely, if ever, met in “open” groups with steeple pastors. Bill Laws, Paul Miller and I were at one such meeting---seating was on the floor as I recall, I suspect to keep us all off guard, if not humble and on parity. In the interview process for the Associate Pastor/Minister of Christian Education position at First Presbyterian Church, Paul recalled the gathering as pivotal, though we did not rehearse the nature of the dialogue of the event itself. Well beyond our particular small group experience, it is fascinating to speculate what the impact of the phenomenon of such a series of dialogues across the denomination may have ultimately been on the life of the church.

A final personal connection (more related to Johnnie than to me) is that when the Pastoral Nominating Committee members were introducing themselves, Dick Pigott picked up on our *southern roots*. And for good reason it turned out. What are the odds that there would be someone in Bloomington and serving on the committee from Johnnie’s small home town of Bethel Springs, TN. And yes, she (as did I) knew exactly where the Pigott House was just across from the elementary school and high school she attended and the nearby Bethel Springs Presbyterian Church.

MY MINISTRY IN BLOOMINGTON

Johnnie, Trey, Tim and I moved to Bloomington in November of 1971 to assume my call at First Presbyterian Church after serving as Assistant Pastor at Tabernacle Presbyterian Church for three years as Minister of Christian Education and Minister to the Community. As we were moving into our new home on Glenwood Avenue West, we were welcomed by this stranger who turned out to be the former pastor Joe Walker, whom we had not yet meet. He graciously invited us to his home nearby for lunch that he had prepared ahead of time---always prepared, always gracious (his wife, Audie, who we would meet later, was at work on campus).

My role as *Associate Pastor and Minister of Christian Education* was clearly outlined from the start to bring together the former roles of Director of Christian Education, a position held ably for many years by Dorothy Johnson and Assistant Pastor, a position held by George Reed, who had recently moved to Cincinnati. Several priorities were established by the Parish Life Education Committee, ably led by Merle Gray and later Bob Dodd, through which I related in terms of support of the Church Education Program and its overall aims and objectives.

Teacher Training Programs: Providing support for teachers at various levels in the Church education program of the congregation was given top priority which is where my experience with the Church Resource Center was felt to be a specific asset that could be

immediately “exploited” as Merle Gray suggested by building on my leadership related especially to the *INSTROTEACH Program* (an intensive teacher observation and interview program of 60 contact hours), which Associate Synod Executive Ralph Strong and I had collaborated on behalf of the Synod of Lincoln Trails. Merle immediately connected me with the Ecumenical Learning Center Task Force of Monroe County United Ministries (MCUM) co-chaired by Ced Cox, who was Associate Pastor at First Baptist Church, and Father Bob Borchertmeyer at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church. First Presbyterian Church in partnership with the task force conducted a series of two INSTROTEACH workshop events with Ralph Strong as Certified Director for the first and my serving as the Certified Director for the second. There were also *National Teacher Education Project* events for which I had served as local coordinator for Locke Bowman in Indianapolis and subsequently in Bloomington. Building off of my status as *Adjunct Consultant* for the General Assembly’s Board of Christian Education, *major teacher training events* soon followed involving such consultants as Don Griggs and Judy Gattis Smith to supplement *regular workshops* that either I or others within the church or from the presbytery led on a regular basis throughout each year. These workshops included a wide range of options and needs: lesson planning, arts & crafts, values clarification, music, group dynamics, bible study, or video self-assessment. To undergird our educational efforts the former superintendent position was replaced by a lay *Director of Church School* with that position initially assumed by Joann Dodd. Specialized training events were provided for her through the Presbytery and Synod to enhance her effectiveness in this new role.

Intergenerational and Special Programming: Given the nature of church membership at First Presbyterian Church defined often in terms of town-gown, but also because of the mobility of our membership and “our being at the mercy of the calendar,” education development and planning was at best complex. Paul Miller often alluded to the turnover in membership for which one must anticipate and develop strategies to meet those needs as they arise in the congregations and the larger society. [Alban Institute subsequently addressed the phenomenon in terms of life cycles in congregations and the need to allow for periods of grief and rebirth.] But the patterns of attendance made continuity for church education programming problematic for any Church School on multiple levels including student attendance and teacher availability. When we arrived our family was immediately introduced to one adaptive model of programming. This event was the annual *Christmas Advent Workshop* which featured music, crafts, church decorating, chili supper, and worship thanks to the leadership of folk like Joann Dodd, Joyce Grove, and Ruth Fleming. For me at least, this opened the floodgate of ideas for other optional approaches to program ideas. If an Advent Workshop works at the Thanksgiving weekend/pre-Advent break, what about other *Intergenerational Programs* at certain times of the year when general attendance was low and what about special *Lenten and Pentecost programming*. In turn, there were some experiments with *special six-week units* such as worship and the sacraments, missions related to specific areas of the world, and parables. On the other hand, *parenting groups* were also offered for parenting specific age groups such as a group on one occasion for “Parents and Their Junior-aged Children” and another for new or first-time parents. To facilitate such programming efforts and for continuity sake, *teacher teams* were recruited that taught for six weeks, served as aides for six weeks and were off for six. To undergird the Children Choir, a

weekday program was instituted that involved recreation or art time/a light dinner and choir rehearsal using a model based on the Logos Program out of Pittsburg though we did not use their bible study materials. Rather we used materials developed by Don Griggs and other educators at the time. Interestingly, the Logos program subsequently contracted with Don to take over the publication of a whole new concept for their Logos Program which was to become mainstream for many Church School programs.

Lay Education Programming: To compliment the two Bible Study options that had been available, various *lay education initiatives* were advanced including a Sunday morning *Forum* with special guest leadership that explored topics such as “Issues in Medical Ethics,” “Our Confessional Heritage,” “Hunger in America, and “The School Drop-Out.” *Special Studies Series* were also initiated in light of interests expressed including a Jewish/Christian dialogue culminating in a seder or Passover observance, a contemporary worship seminar, and a church banner project which focused around the Books of Confessions. A major special study series in 1973 averaged 120 participants over four monthly sessions. Five separate groups were led by Daris Bolig, Jerry Ruff, Alan Boyd and Betsy Muldrow, Paul Miller, and myself. A team of Joann Dodd Elizabeth Dodd, Barbara Burkhead, Ann Martin and Johnnie White led a program for children. We also conducted *Mini-retreats* which, for example, in 1973 were held in homes with 19-29 participants with potluck dinner followed with simulation games (twice), an old-fashioned hymn sing and a discussion of “parent effectiveness training.” The *Couples Club* was also re-energized with a full schedule of programs and a retreat at Camp Pyoca. The *Suppers of Eight* program was re-organized with an emphasis on assimilation of new members and the inclusion of “pairs” and not couples only. Johnnie developed a new rotation system for the program which was published more broadly through the Portable Learning Center with other congregations in turn utilizing this fellowship model. To meet the needs of younger working women and new mothers in the congregation, several women under Johnnie’s leadership organized the *Koinonia Circle* to meet at a time more convenient to their needs than the traditional Presbyterian Women groups. The legacy of that group continues today. Just as there was a Director of the Church School, we also recruited and trained a *Director of Lay Education* in the person of Carl Zager.

Larry Crowe Retreat Center: One of the special program efforts was tied to more fully utilizing the *Larry Crowe Retreat Center* in Brown County, which was largely underdeveloped. One of the ideas that emerged was to utilize the space for day-camping. A plan was devised to create three *home-in-the-woods areas* for small use and a worship center as the focal point. Another idea that would later be implemented was a shelter for picnics and outdoor activities such as Easter Sunrise Services and retreats. It was also determined that an improved *graveled parking area, lights, running water, outdoor toilets* and some *landscaping* suitable for sports activities might be useful. Bob Dodd learned that the Indiana Department of Correction was an inexpensive source of sturdy picnic tables suitable for the home-in-the-woods areas. Tarps were also found that were suspended from nearby trees to provide the needed shade for each area. A suitable double-outdoor toilet was also secured and the project was on. Chiggers, notwithstanding, the Vacation Church School for 1972 was able to begin operating as a *Day Camp* program. Bob Talbot, Dana Griffie and others provided the labor to get the work

done. MCUM after-school, summertime care and day-care programs utilized the facilities once they were in place for day camping.

Major Renovation Projects: After I had come in the fall of 1971, the session set about the process of implementing some major renovations to the church that included the closing of the second balcony above The Church Parlor for *Paul Miller's Pastor's Study* (later made into a mechanical room--- and for which there remains the continuing mystery of whatever happened to the stained glass window that was removed when his office was created). I still remember the debate at the time of whether to open or not to open the two "cherub windows," which of course were subsequently opened in the 1990s renovation. My role in the renovation was to get the "*Monroe County Preschool for Handicapped Children*" (nomenclatures today would prefer a name such as Preschool for Children with Special Needs) moved from upstairs in what is now Walker Hall to downstairs given the changes in childcare regulations. This required some modifications in the building (and the minds or attitudes of some leaders who did see why the changes were needed, it might be added). In the process, we moved the "church library" which were some shelves in the hallway outside the old offices into the fellowship hall. The *fellowship hall* (sometimes referred to as the basement under the sanctuary which, since the last renovation, is now divided into the youth room, music room, library and kitchenette areas) was refurbished with multiple shelves, new lighting, tile, wall paneling, and paint. While Paul's new study was in the newly enclosed balcony, the *Associate Pastor's Study* was now moved to that same level next to what had been the other balcony. My new study, like his, was a work center for counseling and study. The junior high fellowship, confirmation class, and Deacons would meet there. *The Portable Learning Center* and *Teacher Resource Center* were in the former balcony space that had been used for storage. With the failure of the merger with the First Baptist Church, the University Southern Baptist Church was now invited to "partner with us for a while" and Paul asked that I negotiate with their pastor Paul Liesmann for his use of my former office space. This arrangement would continue for an extended period until they eventually built their own building on Third Street.

Youth Ministry: Youth Ministry was a significant part of my work at First Presbyterian Church. It was unique in that it was in the context of the ongoing dialogue of union with First Baptist Church before and even after the votes for merger, because we continued to do youth ministry together after the merger talks ended. Ced Cox and I were not only partners in our joint ministry between the two churches we were also neighbors and continued to relate to each other for years through the Portable Learning Center through which I supplied him with resources for events and conferences he conducted in Indianapolis and Camp Junaluska. What would become the *Youth Club* alternated locations for 4-6 week units which involved music and the arts, worship, study and a light dinner. The Youth Club, which also included youth from the United Church of Christ congregation, ranged in what we called "our critical mass" of junior and senior highs of 40-75 depending on the time of the year. When they were challenged about why not *also* come to morning Church School and worship, the youth with some consistency called the Youth Club "our church time." The Youth Club model would become an important component in the National Youth Ministry Program on which committee I served for nine years during my tenure as Associate Executive for the Synod of Mid-America. For us

Presbyterians, *confirmation class* was also an integral part of youth ministry with the mentoring component with elders a key part of that program as well as the “urban immersion weekend” which I introduced taking the group to an urban center of their choice--- Cincinnati, Detroit, and Chicago, as I recall. Some of the elements of our confirmation program like “Getting to Know the Church” were published by the Portable Learning Center and the mentoring component were later integrated into the denomination’s confirmation curriculum series.

Social Concerns One of the realities of life at First Church was that what happened in the church was integrally related to what happened in society as Mickey Klein and Elizabeth Cleland readily reminded everyone on the Social Concerns Committee about the nature of outreach mission and ministry. This was also reflected in efforts on behalf of low income persons through the Downtown Churches Corporations and Housing Opportunities, Inc. and advocates like Bill Spangler and Charles Hoffer. When I came, the Presbyterian Preschool was a longstanding program as was the Monroe County Preschool for Handicapped Children,, which was a United Fund Agency in its sixteenth year (see annotation under “Major Renovation Projects”). While serving as staff to the committee, I also related to the Board of Monroe County United Ministries for which Holly Arpan was President at one point and with which First Presbyterian Church was involved at many levels. During 1972 on behalf of MCUM, I served as chair of the program committee for *Project Commitment* (a Project Equality partner program) engaging Jack Harlow, George Taliaferro, Jerry Ruff, Tom Berry, and Paul Miller in the planning and implementation of the effort. This town hall style, emceed by Paul and featuring Bill Russell during its fifth evening session ultimately involved a capacity crowd of over 450 people from across Bloomington (5% from First Presbyterian Church) at Fairview School. A Task Force on the School Dropout was one spin off of that effort as was a Work Release Center and the Big Brother-Big Sister Program of Monroe County, During my service at First Presbyterian Church, I also served as chair of the Ecumenical Learning Center of MCUM and chair of the Personnel Committee.

Missions: *International mission* took on new significance with the presence of Betsey Muldrow and her family, who had served in Ethiopia, when she became chair of the Mission Committee. The committee immediately focused on a special Nuer project in Ethiopia and the Sudan and we invited Russell Chandran, principal of the seminary at Bangalore, India, to be with us that fall. (Bangalore was a Vanderbilt Divinity School connection for me.) The legacy of Taulman and Mary Lou Miller and Jim and Rachel Pollack is also a part of the mission thrust of First Presbyterian Church as well. For example, the *Posoltega Project* in many respects has its roots in this period of the church’s life. While on a visit to Posoltega with my “Gift of New Eyes” group from the Synod of Mid-America in the 1990s I was asked if I knew of potential congregations that might partner with them into the future. I mentioned three churches: Village Church in Prairie Village, KS (Johnnie and I often attended there.); Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago (I had just seen Ted Miller in Managua, where he was leading a group from Fourth Church where he served as Associate Pastor; Ted was the son of Mary Lou and Taul Miller); and First Presbyterian Church in Bloomington (While my and Ted’s former links prompted the suggestion, I was also aware of Bloomington’s sister-city relationship because of yet

other advocacy connections). And the Posoltega Project was born! This project and my transition to MCUM puts a face on the tension of local church expenses versus mission giving, and local mission versus international mission that has been an issue that has plagued First Church for decades. The tension is also found in the report of the Trustees.

Governing Body Service: During my years at First Presbyterian Church, I represented the congregation in the larger denominational arena at several levels such as the *Indiana Council of Churches* in relation to which I served on the Board of Directors of the *Indiana State Pastors Conference* as a Past President. Working with American Baptist and United Church of Christ partner denominations from 1970-1976 on the design team of the *Ecumenical Laity Conference*, I served as moderator of the team for 1972-1974. I continued on the *Synod School Committee* of Synod on which I had served while in Indianapolis until 1975 and in various leadership roles such as special project director and worship leader until 1980. During my final year at First Presbyterian Church, I served as moderator of the presbytery Committee on Christian Education and Mission Unit chair, before taking a the break to become fulltime Executive Director at Monroe County United Ministries

Worship Leadership: One of the aspects of ministry at First Presbyterian Church and Paul Miller's leadership was that he was open to sharing the pulpit with his associate staff minister which is a relationship that many staff did not have in the 70s. Given provisions for special services, he basically had the associate preaching one-third of the time taking into account vacation and study leave time. He also included me in worship planning for special services such as historic celebrations and did not hesitate giving me the lead. On the other hand, he did not hesitate critically evaluating my work in that regard and welcomed critical comments in return. We did some interesting services of worship using the musical talents from School of Music ranging from Latin liturgical works to African music. I built off of those experiences for the National Staff meeting worship experiences in 1985 and other events in the Synod of Mid-America for various historic celebrations and in the Synod of the Northeast for yet other events there and in relation to the 100th anniversary of the evangelization of Puerto Rico and Cuba, when I was invited to events in Puerto Rico and Cuba as integral "mission presbyteries" of the former Synods of New York and New Jersey.

Pastoral Care: In reading Paul's account of his ministry, you might think that social justice was his major focus, but in reality my experience was that there was always a balance being sought between what some termed prophetic and pastoral ministry, between social justice/ethics and pastoral care/evangelism. That was reflected in the worship life of the congregation, but also in the allocation of one's personal energy and time. For example, there was a plan in place for a pastoral visit to every member's home every three years. While I did not work with the Parish Groups, there was an effort to establish such networks utilizing various strategies for sharing and communication in what was an ever changing membership. There was a follow-up on anyone visiting in worship for the second time (call or note) and a visit on the third, if they were amenable to it--- I know, I made them. There was a visit with any person and family interested in membership in addition to a membership class taught by Paul and a group of elders. A selected group of

senior adults was visited on a rotating basis by Paul or me every three months, whether they were in attendance in worship or not. Two trips to the hospital a week was the norm, one by each of us and extra visits as needed. We shared about our visits learning about our members and each other in the process.

TRANSITION FROM MCUM TO GOVERNING BODY SERVICE

My service at Monroe County United Ministries (MCUM) culminated in the receipt by the agency of the *1976 National Ecumenical Service Recognition Reward* from the Commission on Local and Regional Ecumenism of the National Council of Churches which cited such achievements as 1) the building of the *Day Care Center*, with the help of Community Development Revenue Sharing, designed by architect Bill Haynes and Associate Director David Edie to accommodate 60 children; 2) *Adult Care Program* as a federal Title III L I. F. E. pilot project; 3) *Summertime Care Program* as a licensed Department of Public Welfare Program for 45 children directed by Carl Zager; 4) *renovation of the original Christian Center building* thanks to the Board of Realtors and Tim Ellis in particular, and five work camps, under the supervision of Dale Southern, who was the former superintendent of maintenance at Crane, and Dale's connections with various contractors and suppliers; and 5) three *key purchases*, thanks to the local Lions Club and David Little in particular: a house to provide living quarters for Brethren Volunteers in Service and Presbyterian Volunteers in Mission, a house in Ellettsville for a clothing resale outlet and children's programming for the area churches there, and a mid-size school bus for use by MCUM's various child care and adult care programs.

After serving the congregation here in Bloomington as Associate Pastor and Minister of Christian Education and Monroe County United Ministries as Executive Director for two terms, I went on to serve as Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Martinsville, IN, until I was called in 1983 as *Associate Executive for Presbytery Services of the Synod of Mid-America* with offices in Overland Park, KS. In that role, I provided staff services to presbyteries in such areas as Face-to-Face, Synod School, leadership education, youth ministry, interim ministry training, peacemaking, racial ethnic ministries, and justice for women. The Portable Learning Center project continued to be an integral part of my ministry throughout this period since it undergirded the network of presbytery resource centers operative across the "union synod" of the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and Presbyterian Church U.S. In the advocacy arena, I led travel seminars to Central America, southern Africa, and southeast Asia and organized the "Inside Washington" legislative seminar program that involved five different Synods (22 states) at some point.

In the summer of 1994, I was called to serve as *Synod Executive of the Synod of the Northeast* serving twenty-two presbyteries in New York, New Jersey and New England. While in the Northeast, I guided the re-organization plan for the Synod which had been mandated at the beginning of my tenure. That re-organization involved the design and implementation of 1) a new structural design for mission, 2) staffing plan, 3) mission funding system, and 4) a Korean-language presbytery. There were also new initiatives in church redevelopment, international mission partnerships, and evangelism and church

growth as a result of these efforts. An increase in the Borrowing Authority Loan Fund with better lending rates, the development of new Partnership and Shared Ministry Grant programs and an expanded Student Loan Program also emerged. During my tenure in the Northeast, I participated on the Task Force on the Changing Family for the General Assembly Council's Committee on Social Witness Policy (1999-2001). In relation to mission initiatives, I co-led with the Synod Moderator a mission partnership delegation to South Africa and Madagascar and later attended the 2000 Quadrennial Synod Assembly of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar. Other such mission ventures included a famine relief delegation to North Korea, a Caribbean Basin Mission Consultation in Cuba, and a "Gift of New Eyes" travel seminar to Vietnam. During the General Assembly in Syracuse, NY, in 1997, I was honored with the Presbyterian Washington Office's 50th Anniversary Award for Leadership in "Speaking Truth to Power." During my Northeast days, I served as President of the New York Council of Churches for five years and organized the New York Governor's Bishop and Executive Round Table. In 2000 and 2002, I received Ecumenical Service Awards for my service as I had also done in Indiana.

RETIREMENT

After retiring in 2003, Johnnie and I moved to Jackson, TN, where I served as Stated Supply for First Presbyterian Church in Selmer, TN, in addition to teaching bible and ethics for our alma mater and working on tornado relief efforts and neighborhood association projects in Jackson. In 2006, we decided, however, to move to Bloomington, to be closer to Chicago where our two sons live. Our son Trey and his wife Laura own Anderson Valley Brewing Company in northern California and Tim is an Associate-Senior Interior Designer with HKS Architects in Chicago.

The Rev. Dr. Robert H. White, Jr.
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