

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” (I Cor. 12: 28; RSV).

As the Apostle Paul declares, God has endowed each of us with particular talents to serve His church to the best of their ability and understanding. In my case, I arrived on July 1, 2000, as the twenty-second settled pastor in the storied history of the First Congregational Church of East Windsor, CT.

My call into the service of God actually began many years ago. Since the age of eight or nine I knew in my heart I would go into the ministry. My earliest memories of church are filled with images of a crowded sanctuary. As we readied ourselves for worship, I can still remember quite vividly as the choir, led by our Senior Minister, Mr. Richards, and our Associate Minister, Mr. Davis, processed down the center aisle two abreast. It was quite a spectacle; the swell of music, the baritone voice of Mr. Richards as he passed, a world in which everything seemed so big. A world in which adults stood before and around me, tall and erect, a great human forest nourished by the light of God’s love.

Yet despite all the training, the many hours in church and confirmation class, I, like Jonah, decided to follow my own path and not necessarily the one God designed. Conflicted as to whether I should join the armed services and fight in the Vietnam War or go to college, I was persuaded by my parents to try the latter. After completing a two year program at Tunxis Community College, I graduated in 1975 with an Associate in Arts degree. By this time, as the Vietnam War was winding down, I determined to pursue a

career in academics.

The major problem, however, centered on funding. With my family unable to financially supplement my schooling it became necessary to work my way through school. Consequently, I began an employment history that would carry me throughout the entire course of my education. During this time I would work at many and varied occupations, which enabled me to experience many facets of life and interactions with people, and helped provide true life examples for many sermon illustrations.

Among this list I worked for thirteen and a half years in the grocery industry; for eight years as a security guard at two different hospitals; for two and a half years as a mental health worker in a locked mental health unit; for two years as part of a cleaning crew for a construction company; as an adjunct professor of history and political science at the community college level for nine and a half years; as a front desk clerk at the Super 8 Motel for a year; then, as I entered the last phase of seminary, as an In-Care Student for three years at the Berlin Congregational Church and a summer replacement for the Senior Pastor at the Newington Congregational Church while he was on sabbatical. For ten years I worked third shift at the hospital, went to school or sometimes even taught during the day, slept briefly, and began the whole cycle again. Had it not been sustained by God's grace, strength, and guidance I would have never made it through.

Academically my interests were wide-ranging and varied. Far from being a disadvantage these provided a natural complement to the practical lessons I learned throughout my employment history. Hence, after receiving my two year degree, I transferred to Central Connecticut State University, graduating in 1979 with Bachelor of Arts degree in history and political science. Intent on working toward a Ph.D in history

but desperately needing money for this endeavor, I made the decision to take a year off and replenish my dwindling monetary reserves. The year soon developed into two years, an extension made all the more necessary by the fact that I was married.

In 1981, I applied and was accepted as a Masters Degree student in history at the University of Connecticut. Continuing to work and take classes part-time, I graduated in 1985. Dissatisfied with the relative speculative nature of historical analysis, I turned to philosophy and was accepted into the Masters Degree program at Trinity College in Hartford. With a wife, a new home, and the birth of my son, Jonathan, I worked two and sometimes three jobs to help support my family and fund my education. Additionally, I studied very hard to expand my understanding of the intricacies of philosophical inquiry.

However, in my last semester of taking classes, I underwent something of a revelation. Walking down the hallway of the religious department I passed the office of the professor who taught a course on Jesus. Suddenly I realized that I had been studying religion all along in different guises. For example, my degree from the University of Connecticut focused on colonial theology. Likewise, my degree at Trinity College was concentrated on the dual fields of philosophy of religion and existentialism. As a result, before graduating I applied for and was accepted at Yale Divinity School.

Halfway through my program at Yale my world came crashing down. On November 17, 1995 my wife, Gail, was diagnosed with a brain tumor. The hope and clarity of the future was suddenly replaced with an ever present anxiety and uncertainty. With no primary site as yet found, test followed test in an endless stream as life and studies at times accelerated into a blur. Finally, in March, 1996, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. During the course of her illness she would undergo two brain surgeries, a

sigmoid resection, cryosurgery on her liver, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

Although we continued to hope and pray for a miracle, placing ourselves in God's hands, Gail returned to God on August 29, 1998.

A brave, compassionate, unselfish soul, Gail insisted that I continue with my schooling. Her reasoning was sound and farsighted; in case the disease claimed her, I would have a way to provide for myself and our son. Towards that goal, she continued to work as assistant to the tax collector in Colchester throughout the course of her illness. Before her passing I received my degree from Trinity College (1995) and was awarded a Masters Degree in Religion from Yale in 1997.

I have described this event because it was, and is, the turning point of my spiritual growth. Other than those who have been in a similar situation, mere words cannot adequately express or do justice to this traumatic upheaval. Gail and I had been together for twenty-five years and with our son, Jonathan, had planned a future toward which academics and the ministry had pointed. In the space of one afternoon, life was revealed as fragile, transitory, the future becoming a reflection of fear, dread, and anxiety.

In such a situation one's faith is not just tested, but assaulted. Likewise, in such a situation the common response of questioning is often replaced by anger, doubt, denial, and eventually acceptance. One's faith in any case is jarred and, dependant upon the foundations upon which it rests, sustains or topples. Fortunately for Gail, Jonathan, and I the support from family, friends, faculty members, and our church, provided a refuge which nurtured and sustained our faith in, and during, these times of trial. This ordeal prompted me, and us, to redefine life's priorities; to rededicate ourselves to Jesus as the Christ, to our church, our religion, our family, each other, and our marriage. Deprived of

the theological intent of academia, it provided an existential reality whereby I better understand, and am sensitive to, both our temporal condition and those who are ill.

Three years widowed, I met my present wife, Barbel, at a grieving class for children whose parents had died. Having lost her husband in January, 1998 she and her children, Nick and Julia, were still working through their grief. The meetings, held on the first and third Sunday of every month at the Old Lime Congregational Church, allowed a safe atmosphere for surviving children, parents, and spouses to better cope with the myriad of emotions associated with the death of a loved one.

We continued to bring the children to this support group for over a year during which time I received my Masters in Divinity (1999) and began an active search for a church. On June 25, 2000 the many years of labor, sacrifice, and personal trial and tragedy culminated with my ordination at the Berlin Congregational Church. Six days later I began my tenure at the First Congregational Church of East Windsor, CT.

A little over a year would pass before Barbel and I were married on July 21, 2001. She has proven to be a blessed helpmate who has supported my ministry and encouraged my desire and need to continue schooling. As I pursued my doctorate, she listened to numerous ideas, understood that there were many nights when I had to write and not sleep and many days when I had to be away attending to matters of the church, assisted me without complaint when the computer crashed at 3: 00 a.m., and any number of things great and small that helped bring the project to fruition. The efforts of many were rewarded when, on November 11, 2007, Hartford Seminary formally conferred upon me the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

My faith journey has not been one borne of some cosmic revelatory event or

experience, but has been a slow, at times imperceptible, march of spiritual awareness and growth. Endemic to such a process neither has this road been without its conflicts, doubts, and uncertainties. All such categories, I would argue, infer the testing of a belief which is present but in the process of maturing. Dependent upon the individual and the amount they open their heart to God and accept God's Son, circumstances and influences transform these questions positively or negatively, creating a faith that is continually strengthened in its challenge or an atheism, (or at best an agnosticism), that in various degrees denies the spiritual.

Such positions, I believe, give preeminence to the temporal at the expense of the spiritual, creating a temporal religiosity in which the elements of things seen are given preference over "the assurance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11: 1). Each journey is individual, evolving; each eventuality comes to some type of conclusion. For me, the study and spread of God's Word and the promise of Jesus Christ, particularly among those who need spiritual guidance, is the ultimate undertaking.