

## Faith Journey

Laurel Underwood Brundage

I grew up with the mixed bag of trials and blessings that come with being a “P.K.” – a preacher’s kid. My parents modeled for my brother, sister and me a life of love and service – Dad as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, Mom as a woman who set aside a promising future as a Registered Nurse to be his full partner in ministry. My life was also rich with stories from three generations of mission work in Korea: my great-grandfather, the first to take a Reformed understanding of the gospel there in 1885, and my great-grandmother, going on her own as a woman doctor in 1888; my grandfather, their only son, and his wife, both educators; three uncles and their wives who also served there. So it’s not surprising that I have always known that I am a child of God, loved by God; and I have always understood that any gifts and talents I have are God-given and intended for use to God’s glory.

I first thought about becoming a minister early in my teen years. However, somehow I knew that women ministers (back then) got to teach, but very rarely served as a church’s pastor. Even then I knew that was where my interest lay. But if that door was closed, I figured God had a different plan in mind for me, so I turned my imagination and energy toward other gifts.

I went to college; majored in music; spent my junior year exploring family and faith “roots” in Korea. I became a musician; got married to Steve; had three children. I continued to grow in my faith, especially as I went through the Bethel Bible Series teacher training course. I found ways to use my gifts in service to the Lord. I applied my schoolteacher training to Sunday school, VBS and youth groups. My musical gifts led to church staff positions, first directing youth choirs, later as a choir/organist music director. As the years passed, I rarely thought consciously about ministry, yet somehow developed an extensive list of reasons why I couldn’t and wouldn’t ever be a minister.

Although I loved music and the work I did as a musician, through those years I often struggled with a feeling of restlessness, a sense that I was meant to do something more, something different from what I was doing. Yet whenever I cried out to the Lord in pain and frustration at this feeling that wouldn’t go away, the answer I kept getting was “not yet.”

When Steve was laid off from his job, the closing of that door opened another for both of us. Since our lives and expectations were turned upside down anyway, nothing seemed unthinkable or impossible anymore, not even both of us going to seminary with three children (fourth, sixth and ninth-grade) in tow. “Not yet” suddenly changed to “Now!” as a strong and undeniable sense of call dissolved into mist all my arguments against going into ministry.

In seminary I came “home to a place I’d never been before.” Life and family challenges aside (and there were plenty of them!), there was so much to learn and grow and explore and experience! It was a joy and privilege to be at Princeton. I graduated first and was ordained to an interim position while Steve finished (after taking a year internship) and our oldest completed high school. Steve and I served as co-pastors for the next six years, first in western PA and then in northeastern Ohio. When our nest became empty, we decided it was time to find churches of our own.

Most of my last seven years were spent serving a small church in eastern PA. Because it was a young church (12 years old when I arrived), I went to a New Church Development conference. I decided to attend its multicultural pre-conference because I had treasured cultures different from my own since childhood and I was curious. There I found a vibrant vision for the church, a new passion for me, and a home for my heart. Over the years I have become increasingly involved with the “Office for Multicultural Congregational Support” and gladly work with them in service to the wider church.

Currently I stand at another threshold. Our daughters, Bonnie and Amy, are happily married. They and our son James have all made successful starts in the careers of their choice. Steve is settled into his call at First Presbyterian Church in Newark. Like all major life changes, the move here has closed some doors and opened others. I don’t know exactly what my future will bring. But I know I can share my understanding of multicultural, emergent and post-modern churches whether or not I find one to serve. I know I would enjoy experiencing again the unique challenges of interim ministry, where my energy, imagination, creativity, adaptability and insight serve me particularly well. I still struggle when the Lord says “not yet,” but I trust God, who has a well-established history of being good to me in many, many ways, and I have full confidence in the promise of Jeremiah 29:11:

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,  
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*