

Faith Journey – Tripp Brogdon

My faith journey began in 1981, when I was born in Sumter, South Carolina. I grew up in a loving, Christian (and very Presbyterian) home. My family not only stressed the need for a personal relationship with God, but also a community-centered relationship with God's church. I had wonderful examples of faith and service in action. My grandmother, who is now in her 90s, has selflessly taught both the Children's and Shorter Catechisms to the youth of First Presbyterian Church in Sumter for over sixty years and continues to do so even today. My great grandfather, grandfather, and father have all served as Clerks of Session and in other capacities. Just as importantly, I have seen my mother and sister work tirelessly behind the scenes in less desirable jobs around the church with very little recognition. Following the examples set by my family, I came to learn from an early age that faith in God was not limited to a belief, but included authentic service as a response to God's goodness.

I began to feel God's call to the ministry after high school, but I ignored it until I finished college. After college, I pushed it away, thinking I could just serve the church as many of my family members had before. I then became heavily involved in church life, eventually being ordained as a Deacon in 2009. I quickly became aware of the church in its entirety: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Church behind the scenes wasn't the same church I grew up attending - one only seen through the lens of a Sunday morning worship service. Those moments have had a deep impact on my understanding of what the church is and what it is not. Through my years as a Deacon, I served on numerous committees, as Chair of the Technology Committee, Co-Chair of the Ushering Committee, and Co-Chair of our Outreach Committee. I was also blessed to work with the youth of our church as a Youth Advisor, going on mission trips and leading Bible studies. A few years ago, my grandmother's Sunday School class asked if I would consider becoming one of their teachers. This was an unnerving proposition, having to stand in front of a group of people who have long been the pillars of First Presbyterian Church in Sumter. What started as an intimidating undertaking turned into a huge blessing. Through both lesson preparation and presentation, the desire to teach began to grow, and the members of that Sunday School class are still my biggest supporters today. Even after all of these experiences, God was still calling me to something new.

My seven years serving as a Funeral Director gave me the experience of helping families who have lost loved ones and are at some of their lowest points. I saw family members rejoice, cry, come closer together, and even fight. These opportunities gave me a much better understanding of what it means to live in a world of suffering and hurt and how to minister to those in the midst of that pain. That time afforded me a glimpse of not only how God was working in people's suffering, but it also built my own confidence in the gifts that God has given me. I held their hands, hugged them, cried with them, and prayed with them, and I have not been the same since. As fulfilling as this work was, God was still calling me to something new.

As I look back on my journey, it is evident that God has been there, guiding me and calling me forward through hard times, twists and turns, and many life experiences. My faith journey and my calling to becoming a teaching elder are interwoven. God has been faithful, even through my unfaithfulness. God has continued to call me, even when I was unwilling to answer the call. My motive for entering the ministry is simple; I am trying to faithfully respond to God's calling, grace, and steadfast faithfulness to me. As I have been trying to discern that calling, I feel as though I am being led, according to the gifts given to me by God, into local church ministry as a teaching elder: to love and serve a congregation, to

build trust-filled relationships with those under my care, and to help lead them into more faithful and love-filled lives with God and with others.