

# Showing Kindness **To The Community**

Rev. Emily Wilmarth, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Highlands, never seems to tire of serving her family or congregation or community.

**T**hough Rev. Emily Wilmarth is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Highlands, she's spread her message of love and service throughout town.

That's because Emily's a minister who can't help but be involved in her community. Part of that equation is derived from her happy, busy family life.

Married to Kevin Gates, the couple have two children – Clara (6) and Elliot (2).

"I served on the board of the Literacy and Learning Center for two terms," she says. "These days I'm participating in the Community

Childcare Coalition (a group of local leaders and advocates for early childhood education and day care). Kevin has

been a regular volunteer and leader with the Highlands Plateau Greenway, and I go out now and then on workdays to help. We love to hike when we can and cultivate the jungle that's our backyard."

All of that effort, all of that loving concern, has been noticed by the Highlanders she's encountered.

"I got to know Emily about six years ago, when she enrolled her daughter at Highlands Community Child Development Center," says Demitra Passmore. "First and foremost, Emily is a genuine person who's very family-oriented. I enjoy seeing her everyday as she drops off and picks up her son from the childcare center. In the last few years, she has become an extraordinary friend to me. Emily is always willing to

lend a listening ear and approach any situation with empathy and grace.

"For the last 18 months Emily and I have been a part of the Community Child Care Coalition of the Plateau. It's there where I learned about Emily's unwavering commitment to the community. She is interested in the children of the community and the needs of the families. Not only does she show interest, she actually gets involved with the community, and is one of the first to step in to help with anything that is needed. If there is one thing that stands out about her, it's that God's love is evident in Emily. We are so

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fortunate to have her as a member of our community, a pastor of one of our churches,

Her involvement in her community really isn't a surprise when you look at the continuum of her life.

"I was born and raised in Spring, Texas," she says. "A lifelong Presbyterian, I was attending a church in Houston all through my upbringing.

"I Went to Haverford College in Haverford, Pennsylvania, and graduated with a BA in Religion. After that, I was working for the Make-A-Wish Foundation in Atlanta, and then served as a Youth Director at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. From there I attended Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, and graduated with a Master of Divinity.

"Following seminary, I served at

Central Presbyterian in Atlanta, and the Presbyterian Church of Westfield, New Jersey."

Which brings us to her arrival in Highlands nine years ago. In addition to shepherding her First Presbyterian congregation, Emily has somehow found time and energy to serve her neighbors off the Plateau with the same degree of dedication.

"I've participated in some church-related activities in the region, including chairing the board of the Presbyterian Campus Ministry at WCU," she says.

So what's Emily's secret, which has embroidered her into the lives of her congregation and lives on the Plateau and even beyond?

Perhaps her friend Bonnie Potts has the answer.

"Emily is a friend that I both admire and respect," she says. "I admire her for being such a dedicated listener. She listens and she truly cares about anyone who seeks her advice – family, friends, parishioners, and anyone in the Highlands/Cashiers community. She acts selflessly, volunteering her time to numerous community organizations. She shows empathy; she shows love to those around her; and she has an incredible sense of humor. Time spent with her is refreshing and always goes by too quickly. But more than anything, Emily is kind. She shows kindness to people she knows and to all of those whom she doesn't."

*by Luke Osteen*