

**Presbyterian Church (USA)**  
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*Faith Journey -Martha Spear*

From the very earliest times of my life, I knew Jesus loved me. My mother sang of that love as she ironed the clothes and made the beds. My dad showed that love as he played with me on the den floor. They were devout examples of faith, that taught me from day one that Jesus Christ was to be central in my life. At the age of nine, they brought me to a revival meeting—they were Baptists after all, and it was during that great time of teaching and fervor that I made the decision to follow Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. That day changed my life, even at that tender age. It would shape my whole future. Being Baptists, my real first test of faith was to trust God enough to keep me safe through the waters of baptism—immersion, of course. You see, I had a tremendous fear of putting my head under water. But God was faithful, and I grew one step further in my faith journey.

Years past, and as a teenager I was given another real test as I entered the dating scene. It was clear to me that I had a choice—either to truly walk with Jesus in all that I did including my relationships with guys, or I could walk away from my faith and part ways with the Lord who had always led me. I made the deliberate choice to follow Jesus, a decision that would soon lead me to my husband, a great man of faith. For 43 years we have committed to walking with Jesus as a couple.

After completing my degree from Gordon College in elementary education, I assumed I would spend my future teaching. Instead God blessed us with two daughters, and a whole new challenge lay before me. But God was preparing me in those days, as I labored as a volunteer in my church, for a future that would call me to new levels of discipleship. I thought my calling was to become a Christian Education Specialist, and entered seminary with that goal in mind. It was during this time in my life, that God led our family to begin worshipping at Fort Square Presbyterian Church where I began an internship. One day, as I was wrestling with my true sense of call, I made a visit to an elderly shut-in. I expected nothing out of the ordinary. But God had arranged an encounter that would become my confirmation to pastoral ministry. The woman lay dying, and though her speech was gone, she continued to mouth the words “thank you” over and over to me. Then I heard a Word from the Lord. “This is what I want you to do— to stand with people at the most critical junctures of their lives, to minister to them, and love them on my behalf. “ The call to pastoral ministry became crystal clear to me at that moment. In October of 1987 I was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament at Fort Square Presbyterian Church, the church that had ushered me into ministry.

My first call was to the First United Presbyterian Church of Brockton, Ma., a congregation of 38 dear saints. Together we faced the sad reality that God was leading that congregation to closure, and to assist an Easton congregation into being. God was faithful as we celebrated the joys of what had been, and looked ahead to what God would begin anew in another place. It was a leap of faith, and we all grew in our trust of the Lord. At the time, I had also begun serving as Minister of Visitation at Christ Church U.C.C. in Brockton as well, where I continued to minister until I was called to the Litchfield Community Church Presbyterian in Litchfield, New Hampshire. I was forewarned that this was to be a difficult call. As predicted, I would face some of my most challenging days of my life as I pastored this congregation. There were painful trials, and deep learnings. God taught me to let go and lean on him. I learned much about forgiveness and reconciliation. At one point I desperately wanted to leave. God told me this was my Nineveh, and I was to stay. It took more faith than I had ever had before to face the next five years of ministry. But God was gracious. The congregation changed, and it became a beautiful place to serve the Lord. But then God said it was time to leave. It broke my heart, but for the church’s sake, I needed to move on, even though I had no new call. It was again time to trust.

Little did I know how God would answer. One month after telling my congregation I was resigning, our youngest daughter gave birth three months prematurely to a one pound four ounce baby girl. If ever I was needed as a mother and grandmother it was at that moment. God knew where I was to be spending my time. There were many years of testing and trusting, of letting go of the control and watching the miracles of God’s grace unfold. Today our granddaughter is doing well, a healthy, lively five year old who just started kindergarten!

After taking some time to move back to our home in Massachusetts, the Lord led me back to the church that had initiated me into ministry. I returned as a parish associate to develop a ministry to young mothers, including establishing a mothers of preschoolers (MOPS) group. I also served as a visitation pastor, assisting especially with caring for the shut-ins and

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elderly of the congregation. That part-time call allowed me time to enjoy my grandchildren as well as serve the Lord. Little did I anticipate that I would again be called to fulltime ministry as I stepped immediately into the role of short-term interim at a time of crisis within the church following the removal of the senior pastor for marital infidelity. There was no doubt that God had placed me there for that moment.

At the conclusion of that time, Art and I felt that this was the time God was leading us to move closer to our daughter and her family. We put our house on the market during a very precarious time in the housing crisis, but as always, God was faithful. In one day we had three offers to buy. It had only been on the open market for 24 hours! And so we began looking for a home. That, too, was God's provision as we felt immediately led to this home here in Peabody, and to South Church, trusting that in God's good timing, we would know the Lord's plan for my continued role in ministry. And so, as I begin this call to minister at South Church as Director of Children's Ministry, I come trusting that God has much exciting work for us to do together here in this place! Art and I feel sure God has placed us here and so we await with great anticipation what God will do, knowing that whatever is to be our future, it will be a gift of God's mercy and grace.

