

Biographical Faith Journey

I am the youngest of four children, born and raised in Dublin, Georgia, and in the Presbyterian Church. I am happily married to Joel Tolbert, a 2005 graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary, now serving as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Chestertown. We have three grown sons, Michael (22), Daniel (23), and Adam (26). Our life has been both rich and challenging, and we continue to be amazed at the way God leads and cares for us as we strive to do God's work in whatever corner of the world we are called.

As an adult prior to my time in seminary, I served God through the church as a lay leader, as well as an ordained elder and deacon. However, I eventually came to believe that God was calling me to a new phase of leadership--ordained ministry. Knowing that I respond best to gentle pushes of encouragement, God gave them to me over the years as I participated actively in the work of our two church homes. Early in our marriage, we were a part of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, a new church development in Montgomery, Alabama. At the age of 26, I was elected and ordained an elder on their first session. We went through the tedious process of "building" a church from the ground up—everything from writing a mission statement to planning and overseeing the construction of a sanctuary. From Montgomery, we moved to Greenville, South Carolina, quite weary from our heavy church responsibilities at Immanuel. Joel and I agreed to take our time finding a new church home, but a family crisis catapulted us into the loving arms of Fourth Presbyterian Church within a few months of our move. We joined shortly thereafter, and got involved immediately. I was ordained a deacon in 1998. Fourth Presbyterian in Greenville was our "support congregation" through our seminary days, and we will be forever grateful to them for that.

In 2002, Joel finally acknowledged God's quiet call to ministry and decided to abandon his corporate career and enter seminary. In January of 2003, I was finally able to answer the still-small voice of God that I had been hearing over the years. I am grateful to God for sustaining us throughout our Decatur days, both in seminary and in his (our) first call to Rehoboth Presbyterian Church. While there, I served as the Presbyterian campus minister at Emory University for five years, and also as Minister for Congregational Life at Oglethorpe Presbyterian Church for eighteen months. Upon leaving the Atlanta area, I served as a minister member-at-large in Northeast Georgia Presbytery while teaching at Winder-Barrow High School. I was excited to move to the Eastern Shore as Joel accepted the call to serve as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Chestertown.

While ministry may technically be considered to be a third calling for me, it has been woven throughout everything I have done vocationally since my graduation from college. I was first called to be a middle school teacher, then felt led to stay home for a time as we began our family. As a wife, I am called to work beside Joel as we continue to parent our young men, as he pastors the church he serves, and as we nurture our marriage, growing together in faith and love day to day. As a mother, I am called to love and nurture our sons, reminding them still that they belong, first and foremost, to God, and that God made them and loves them just as they are. As a seminary student, I was called to learn from and with my peers, giving my best in all things, and taking advantage of the wonderful opportunity I had to study for the ministry, among both students and professors blessed with amazing gifts and intelligence. After graduation from seminary, I served as the Presbyterian campus minister at Emory University in Atlanta. There I created a faith home for the students as they began to discern and live into God's call on their own lives during their college years. In 2015, I was led back to the classroom, this time as a high school teacher, and have been "practicing ministry under the guise of teaching math" since then. I begin my 11th year of fulltime teaching at North Caroline High School this fall.

My time in each of the above places has been vital in both my spiritual growth and my strong desire to live into my call to ministry regardless of how I spend my days. I continue to look to God to weave my gifts together into the fabric that is needed for God's work where I am. I look forward to putting my life experience, my gifts for ministry, and my theological education to good use, ministering among others here in New Castle Presbytery, as we work together to incorporate our faith in and our love of the Triune God into our daily lives.