

**Spiritual Journey:** The tombstone of my great-grandfather, who gave the land for the West Virginia churchyard in which he is buried, reads "He was a Presbyterian elder." My two grandfathers served as Presbyterian pastors; one ended up teaching Bible at Hampden-Sydney College. The grandfather whose name I bear retired the month I was born to two folks who eventually became ruling elders. My parents taught me to pray when knee-high (and on my knees) that God call me into God's best purpose for me: Prayer should come with warning labels. I believe that this prayer is the contribution I have made to God's present positioning of me. John Calvin said that it is only at the end of life that we appreciate God's providence expressed as predestination. Appreciation came a bit earlier for me; nevertheless, increasingly I am reluctant to buy green bananas. Seward Hiltner framed God's providence as God being pro-video (seeing ahead) and then providing, specifically a bubble of freedom around us that allows us to exercise our human freedom *con-fidei*: with confidence. With faith. I believe that God's providence surrounds and leads me, especially when the way forward is not as clear as I would like.

Concerned about how I was turning out at an early age, my parents commanded me to watch Billy Graham Crusades whenever they were televised. I have had more conversion experiences than new suits. I was called to ministry while sitting in a bathtub one rainy November evening. I had been working for the state of Illinois Department of Public Aid. Possessing both chemistry and history degrees, I had many vocational options. Only acknowledging a call to pastoral ministry relieved the stress, however. My calling made my parents wonder as to whether or not I had watched too much Billy Graham.

My initial experiences in ministry were in churches that fed and trained new pastors. One even decided I needed a spouse and so provided one, the daughter of the Clerk of Session and the president of the trustees. Subsequent pastorates, prior to my current one, involved serving churches with speckled histories or contemporary challenges. One was only 10 years old, yet had experienced three pastors provably engaged in sexual misconduct. A fourth may have been a pedophile. Another congregation had its pastor steal money and another pastor die under mysterious circumstances. The Charlottesville pastorate invited me to work on racial justice issues. Two non-profits resulted, yet the church broke my heart and spirit. God gave me respite back in Iowa, where I could enjoy again the love of the land and the life of the mind. My present congregation may be on the verge of committing to a ministry of racial justice in dialogue with African-American congregations. In this church I suffered broken bones due to a genetic predisposition toward thin bones as well as an acoustic neuroma that took my hearing in my right ear. God has granted me the comfort of two sons, a daughter-in-law, and a granddaughter on the way. Now God has tapped me on the shoulder and let me know that other flocks require my service.

To express briefly my grasp of the place that I hold right now, I believe that Jesus' embodied message, picked up by the apostle Paul, is that all of life is defined relationally and its meaning is the realm of God: right relationships of justice, mercy, and faith. It is a universal vision that Jesus articulated and for which churches are called to live and die in order to give expression. What we experience as time and space disappear at the quantum level and only reappear at the macro-level as we and the Spirit of God, led by the Risen Christ, create collaboratively the realm of God in every here and now. I don't need to crucify myself: I die billions of time, as does all of being, in every moment, only to be reconstituted by the Word of God. We "hear" and become here. This reality is affirmed by my mystic immersion in creation, in the communion of saints, and in the Triune God in whom we all live, move, and come to temporary being.