

Dear Congregation,

After careful consideration, I would like to announce my retirement. My last Sunday on staff at First Pres will be June 24. My time as the Director of Children and Family Ministries (almost 27 years!) has been richly blessed with rewarding connections with our children, families, congregation and staff. We are now caring for little children in our nursery whose parents were little ones when I started. I am retiring with countless treasured memories.

As a “cradle” Presbyterian my own very earliest memories of a church are of Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit. I remember a little bit about the church building but my lasting memories of Jefferson Avenue are of the people—the young people from the church who were my babysitters, the adult from the church who came to stay with my brother and me when our sister was born, other church members who remained friends of my parents all of their lives.

When I was almost 5 my family moved to a small town in northern Illinois. This is the church I remember in my growing years. I remember the minister, Rev. Shepherd—my best friend Betsy told me she thought he was really God! I remember getting up very early on Sunday mornings and finding my dad sitting in the big chair in the living room preparing the lesson for the high school Sunday school class he taught. I remember all-church potluck suppers with all of the kids running around, followed by a slide show presentation given by a visiting missionary in the church’s warm, dark social hall. I remember our choir director, Mr. Solberg, who would sign his name with a treble clef instead of an S and who would let us ride down the fire escape chute after choir if we had had a really good practice. I remember sitting in church with my parents and being proud when I could finally sing the Doxology along with everyone else and then using a pencil to fill in all the o’s in the bulletin during Rev. Shepherd’s sermon! I remember Mrs. Baumgartner, my mom’s best friend, helping me practice the 100<sup>th</sup> Psalm for recitation in Sunday school.

I remember walking into my new public school kindergarten class and being relieved that I already knew some of the children from my Sunday school class. I remember that confident feeling of greeting adults on the streets of our small community and knowing that I knew them and they knew me...from church.

As I compiled this collection of my early, church memories, it became clear that it was the people that filled my lasting memories. It was the people in my various childhood churches who gave me the secure, certain feeling of God’s love.

In this disjointed world of multiple activities and high expectations, it is hard for our children to find a safe resting place where they can grow in confidence and love, with the knowledge that the love of God is with them wherever they go. My hope and prayer for our children and our families is that they will find here at First Pres a church filled with people who deeply love and care for them, and who are the example of the love of God to them.

Wayne and I will remain members of First Pres, so I will continue to see you occasionally. But as I retire from my role with the Children and Family Ministries, and renew my role as a regular church member, I will miss the knee hugs from the toddlers in the pre-school wing and the eager, racing elementary school kids as they climb to their classes on the third floor. And, I will truly miss our many weekly interactions and my Sunday morning chances to greet all of you.

Peace and Grace to you all, dear friends,

Debbie MacVey