

## Tom Trautman Biographical Sketch

I have always felt God's call on my life throughout my 60+ years. He has led me step-by-step, and I have known a specific call in each location, job function, and lay ministry. As I look back, I am amazed at the breadth of experiences God has given me. I am clear that He has led me to this place and to this call to ministry as a United Methodist pastor.

I was first aware of God's call in my freshman year of high school. It was the first year that we could attend a retreat with the high school group. I remember the concluding worship service and time of commitment around the campfire. I was aware of God's presence and His call to serve Him. That call continued throughout high school years in participation and leadership in establishing a coffee house ministry.

During my high school years, our pastor was a professor of the New Testament. His preaching was an in-depth, exegetical explanation and application of the Word. I learned to love the study of the Scriptures. But perhaps the most formative was with my Sunday school class. My father was the teacher when the rock opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, came out. It was controversial, and many in the church thought it to be anti-Christian. Certainly there was debate and chatter among my high school peers. What did my Dad do? He bought a copy, brought it to class, and said, "Let's listen, search the Word, and decide for ourselves." That has been a lesson which has followed me all these years.

Next was Houghton College, a Wesleyan Methodist college in upstate New York. I earned a bachelor's degree in Bible and Psychology. The influence and impact on my life was profound. What was that influence? It was a thoroughly integrated study of a Christian worldview, the Scriptures, God's creation, and the overwhelming dedication of Christian men and women to my education affected me in a way that follows me each and every day. All of the activities that led to my spiritual formation at Houghton are too numerous to name. However, it was the experiences with my Bible professors, spiritual emphasis weeks, and chapel speakers that provided a grounding in Wesleyan thought and theology that started me on the path that brought me to you today.

I had whispers and hints since my freshman year of high school about God's call to ministry. I earned a double major in Bible and Psychology at Houghton College. While I knew God had called me, I was not clear whether it was a call from college into ministry, or to other tasks where I was to come alongside others to bring wholeness. As it turned out, the first call was to psychology in serving children and families through ministries in schools, therapy offices, and publishers. I started my life after college as a school psychologist. There were a number of steps that carried my wife and me from Upstate New York to my family home in Illinois where I completed my doctorate in psychology, to Arizona, and in 2000 to Oklahoma, and to Marlow in 2010. Through the years in psychology in education, I served as a school psychologist, clinical psychologist, school administrator, University professor, and director of curriculum for an electronic education publisher and school provider.

In each step, we could clearly see the hand of God working all things for good and His glory. One of those steps was to the First United Methodist Church in Marlow. It was a step I could not have planned, but it took us back to the roots that were sown at Houghton College. At FUMC Marlow I was active for about seven years teaching several Sunday school classes and singing in the choir.

I always had a sense that at some point in my life, I would serve on staff at a local church. I just did not know when or where. In recent years, I became restless in my, then, professional role. I sensed my time in that employment was coming to a close and my gifts and talents were not being put to use. I needed a change.

My wife and I took up motorcycling as a hobby. On one Sunday afternoon ride, I was passing through the Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge gazing at the rock formations marveling at their majesty and the creator who made them. I had been listening to a Phillips, Craig, Dean CD. As I rode through the mountains the words of the song echoed.

The voice of the Lord is calling His children,  
The voice of the Lord is shaking the Earth,  
The voice of Lord echoes like thunder,  
Hear, hear the voice of the Lord.

I knew, as I rode, with tears rolling down my cheeks, that it was the voice of the Lord calling me. He was and is calling me to ministry.

Then, as Lucy and I rode through rural towns in Stephens, Grady, Comanche, and Caddo Counties, I wondered “is this the voice of the Holy Spirit urging me to pray?” Five years later, I know it was no coincidence. It was and is the hand of God. I am now in my sixth year serving as licensed local pastor in Fletcher and Cyril. I am honored to be called to serve y'all here in Elgin as well.

Through all of life, God has been preparing me for the ministry and service yet to come. You might ask, with all this experience, what do you see as the spiritual gifts and talents that God has prepared in me? I believe my gifts are pastor, teacher, and counselor. Pastor in that I have a passion and ability to come alongside people and build them up in the grace of God and shepherd them toward a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and each other. Coming alongside is the description I think best describes that ability. It occurs in preaching, teaching, and everyday interaction with people in activities in and around church, pastoral visits at home, hospital, and local public places.

Next is teaching. I love to teach. I love to teach from the pulpit, in the classroom, and in personal interactions. I have a passion for learning that I believe is God given. But, it is a passion to study and learn so that I can pass that learning on to others. I love the preparation that preaching requires. I love the constant work it takes to continue to improve sermon delivery to effectively communicate God's word to people. A key element of teaching and preaching is relevance and effective methodology, and that is what drives my preaching and teaching. I

must say that not only do I believe this is a spiritual gift of mine, but the testimony of people at church and in classrooms have given me feedback to confirm this gift.

Last is counselor. I cannot separate counselor from these other two gifts. I think it merely highlights “coming along side.” It includes the ability to see a person’s or congregation’s need, speak to that need, and enable them to take steps to move in a more healthy, God-directed way of living. One aspect of this gift is the ability to be a peace maker. That is the way God has made me to work with people to bring calm where there was once strife, bring quiet where there was once chaos, and bring peace where there was confusion.

I am in my sixth year serving as a Licensed Local Pastor in two rural Oklahoma Methodist churches. As in years before, it’s a challenge recognizing that the congregations are warm and welcoming, and at the same time very much set in their ways. But, there are lights that seem to be turning on, and the people of the congregation are recognizing it themselves, Praise God.

In recent months, eight new people have started attending on a regular basis. All but one are women. All are from a demographic consistent with the people who are members. Mainly older women with grandchildren. But, what I am seeing are the beginnings of the fruit of discipleship. Some of these new people are stepping into leadership roles. And, what is different is than three or four years ago is that long time members are willing to let new people contribute new ideas. There are still some hands off areas, where change and input are unwelcome, but those seem to be easing. There is excitement about the possibilities of reaching out to groups of people who are not connected to any church or any other community. These are the lonely and disenfranchised. I’ll call them Beatitude People. I am both excited and apprehensive of starting a new ministry to the Beatitude People of Fletcher. What is different now than a year ago is a band of people, 6 to 8, that are coming alongside in support of this ministry. Only God knows how it will turn out.

I guess, even as I write, it opens up a whole new plane of depending on God and following his lead.

I continue to serve as the chaplain to the local volunteer fire department. These men are both a challenge and a source of fellowship. The men of the two churches I serve are faithful and devout, but there are few common interests. So, it is extremely difficult to get the men of the churches together. The men of the Fire Department, while a mission field for me, love working with each other and have invited me into their fellowship. I pray they receive as much blessing from me as I do from them (They assure me they do). As time and contact grows, the men are becoming more open about talking about faith and their own lives. I look forward to how God leads in this area.

You might like to know a little more about my family. Lucy is my wife of 42+ years. She is a retired educator with the University of Oklahoma. We have two adult sons. Our older son is a major, in the Air Force Reserves. Our younger son is a technology specialist in an educational software company. Both sons are here in central Oklahoma.

I will say, it is a difficult season as I write. It was some months ago, I felt led to begin a sermon series based on Colossians titled "The Anchor in the Storm." The series follows the letter to the Colossian church using the analogy of a coming storm, preparing for it, know who our rescuer is, how we are connected to Christ by faith, and so on. Little did I know my sister would be faced with stage four cancer. So, no sooner than the series begins on the storms of life, than we are living a storm of life. Thanks be to God that He is always with us in the midst of the storms and there is no storm that he has not faced.

In the midst of the storms and the challenges, I love the work that has been given to me. I love serving the churches. I love the challenge of people. I love being a part of enabling people to grow in faith and in relationship to each other, even in the midst of the storms both personal and congregational. I see my time coming to an end in the corporate world. I envision full-time appointed ministry as needed. I have grown to love the region of Oklahoma I serve.

My hobbies and interests? Plenty to keep me busy. Waterskiing and running are two that I come to regularly. There is no day of stress that does not feel better after the adrenalin tapping exercise of a rigorous waterski set and two or three mile run, or a workout in the gym. Hobbies on a less frequent basis are rock climbing, hiking, kayaking, woodworking, motorcycling, guitar, fishing, hunting, and all things outdoors. The rest? I look forward to sharing with you as time allows.

Grace and Peace,

Tom Trautman Ed.D.