

First Presbyterian Church
Servant of the Heart – August 2013
Theo Louise Woods



Interviewed 7/17/2013 by Roxanne Cheney

Theo was born and raised on a farm in Mayesville, SC, in Sumter County (where her brother and sister still live). In 1957, after receiving a Bachelor's degree from Limehouse College, Theo came to Beaufort (along with some college friends) to teach. She describes those as 'good years', in part because there were lots of bachelors at the Air Station. A popular spot to hang out was The Shack, a drive-in hamburger joint located approximately where Red Lobster/Olive Garden are now situated. At that time, Beaufort was so small that the telephone operator knew people by their voices and didn't even have to ask what number they wanted to be connected to.

A local Baptist boy, Gene Woods, captured Theo's heart; they married in the Presbyterian Church in Mayesville before establishing their home in the Mossy Oaks neighborhood. They became active at First Presbyterian about the time their only child, Mike, was born. Theo continued to teach at Port Royal and Shell Point Elementary Schools, almost exclusively 4th grade. She also earned a graduate degree in Library Science from USC and, for a short time, served as a teaching principal. Sadly, in 1988, Gene died of cancer. A few years later, after 35 years in the classroom, Theo retired from the Beaufort County School System.

Theo has witnessed a lot of changes in our church: she recalls that the offices of the pastor and secretary used to be in the space now designated as the choir room. More importantly, the congregation is now younger than she remembers it ever being, and we are far more involved in worship and outreach efforts with other churches and agencies in the local community.

In the 1980s Theo was ordained and installed as a Deacon. She has also taught Sunday school and Vacation Bible School; served on the Nominating Committee; and represented the Evening Circle on the Coordinating Team for Presbyterian Women. Currently Theo's time and talents are used in a number of ways, e.g., she is one of a few members who cover the office when the Office Administrator is out. In addition to her contributions to First Pres, Theo volunteers with the Child Abuse Prevention Association (CAPA) and the Beaufort Police Department's Volunteer Outreach in the Community Effort (VOICE).

When she isn't volunteering, Theo enjoys traveling, long lunches with friends, reading, and her grandchildren, Cooper and Davis. Earlier this summer she was a last-minute substitute on a trip to Greece to walk in the footsteps of Paul. Other adventures include a helicopter trip into the Grand Canyon; white water rafting; and an exhilarating ride in a hot air balloon – which she's ready to do again. Those are especially impressive considering Theo is afraid of heights! She explained that she's fine as long as she looks out, not down.

Asked who inspires her, Theo identified her maternal grandmother because "she did everything right". Her grandmother was a school teacher as well as a student of the Bible. When asked the most important thing learned (so far), Theo declared that she is "still working on accepting the fact that I can't be right all of the time; it's ongoing because I like to think that I'm always correct!" Even though she can't be right all the time, Theo always tries to do the right thing. Her motto, from St. Francis of Assisi, is: "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words." Theo, you've set a

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tremendous example for us all and we thank you for everything you have done (and continue to do) for our church family!

One final note: Theo is well aware that her given name is typically a man's name. She is accustomed to receiving mail addressed to "Mr." Woods; being referred to as "he"; etc. But "Theo Louise" is the name on her birth certificate and it isn't about to change now! 😊