

New Presbyterian Minister Eagerly Opens Church Doors

Rev. Brian Copeland has been waiting since October to address congregants from the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church of Marcellus. It finally happened March 21. Previously, coronavirus pandemic restrictions forced him to conduct Sunday services online via Facebook.

The church's re-opening committee follows New York State guidelines for cleanliness and safety to ensure the building is compliant for Sunday services and meetings, said Pastor Brian, as he likes to be called.

Although the church has opened its doors, services still are live streamed Sundays at 10 a.m. on Facebook and available later on YouTube.

The pandemic has more than delayed Pastor Brian's onsite ministry, it's also made him more patient. "It's a challenge for the individual," he said, "but it also forces us to do what's good for the greater community."

After quarantining for two weeks upon his arrival in Central New York, Pastor Brian ventured into the village, observing social distancing and wearing a mask to ensure his own and others' safety.

Southern born and bred, Pastor Brian said he felt "God's call for Marcellus to be my next church home." Prior to accepting the FPMC position, he served Ramah Presbyterian Church in Huntersville, NC, a rural community. He was looking for a small-town setting such as Eufaula, AL, where he served his first church after ordination. He also served as a supply pastor to other churches throughout the southeast.

Although Pastor Brian had always been active in the Presbyterian Church in which he was baptized, becoming a minister was a mid-life career change. After graduating with an associate's degree in engineering graphics, he did draft and design work for construction. The job was never a passion, but it helped support his family and gave him the resources to devote his energy and talents to the church.

In 1997, he took the first step to following his dream by earning a BA in philosophy and religion from Winthrop University in Rockville, SC.

After some life complications and further discernment, he continued his studies in 2010 at Columbia Seminary in Georgia.

After graduation and during an internship at a church off the coast of South Carolina, the new minister suffered a setback when he and his wife divorced.

It was one of the times he struggled with his faith, he admitted, but the location was a godsend.

"I was able to walk on the beach every morning and evening. It was a good time to reflect and talk with God."

Following an injury in late 2019, he's resumed his hobbies of flat water kayaking and nature photography. The accident resulted in a two-inch deficit of his adult height of 6'8".

"I'm taller than I appear on screen," he joked.

His above normal height, 6'6", and vision problems, since corrected, are due to Marfan Syndrome. The connective tissue disorder prevented him from playing most sports. After high school, he took up taekwondo, safer because it's performed on a padded floor. He has a second-degree black belt in the mixed martial art.

Although the South Carolina native has spent most of his life in the South, he adjusted to winter in upstate New York and is looking forward to spring. Pandemic restrictions have meant more time at home, giving him extra time to recharge his batteries. His daughter, Kasey, joined him shortly before the holidays. She's continuing her film studies remotely at Hollins University in Virginia. She hopes to become a screenwriter.

A self-described introvert, Pastor Brian nonetheless likes being out and about, running into people at the village post office, on the sidewalk or in the pharmacy.

"Marcellus is a very friendly place where people stop to say hello and ask how you are," he said, "You don't have to be Presbyterian to ask me to pray for you."

He's eager to help his new church home continue its mission. "I'm amazed at how much this church does. It's very passionate about its mission and outreach. Members have a strong desire to be part of the community and to serve people both inside and outside the building. We're beginning to gather again and do the work of the Lord."

He believes the church and he are a good match that dovetails with his favorite Bible quote from Micah 6:8:

"What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, seek righteousness and walk humbly with your God."