JUNE, 2019

THE BELLTOWER

1ST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF KANKAKEE

Karen Williams installed as our CRE, Interim Pastor & Moderator

A Prayer of Blessing for Karen was offered at the end of the worship service Sunday, June 2nd.

Note: I asked if Karen would be willing to share her life experiences and faith journey with us so everyone can get to know her better. She was gracious to accept. Her story below. Thanks to Bonnie Bergeron for her wonderful editing skills.

Karen Williams was born in Joliet and graduated from Joliet West High School. She began working at the age of 16 in restaurants as a server. At the age of 19 she was hired at Kerr Glass in Plainfield. She spent 15 and a half years there in various positions. While working at Kerr Glass, she married and had two sons. When her sons were 12 and 13, she left Kerr Glass to take care of her sons who needed more of her time. Later she began working at Red Lobster in Joliet and was part of the grand opening crew when the store first opened. She stayed at Red Lobster 5 years. While working there her oldest son turned 16 and she helped him obtain a job there. While still working at Red Lobster, Karen began a part-time job at Jewel in the deli. She was offered a full-time position and left Red Lobster. She started as a deli clerk, working her way up to the position of Deli Dept. Assistant Manager. Karen has always been a hard worker and credits her work ethic to her mother.

Her marriage ended while working at Red Lobster, but as Karen puts it "I got two great sons out of my marriage." Her oldest son, Stavros went to Joliet Jr. College and is employed as a residential and commercial electrician in Lombard. Her youngest son Ted went to Northwestern and is employed at DeVry University. Karen has one grandson, Daniel, who is 13. He plays hockey on a traveling team, and is very musical. He plays the double bass in an orchestra and bass guitar in a jazz band

In 1994 her mother retired from working and wanted to find a church to belong to and wanted Karen to go with her. Prior to this, Karen didn't attend church except for the baptism of her two sons in the Greek Orthodox faith. The first church they tried was Westminster Presbyterian in Joliet, IL. She recalls feeling right at home from the moment she stepped into the building. When they started going, the church had an interim pastor. They liked the church, but wanted to wait and see who the permanent pastor would be. After the permanent pastor was hired, she and her mother both liked him and they joined the church.

Staff

Karen Williams,
CRE, Interim Pastor & Moderator

Paul Johnson,
Director of Music, Office and Building Manager

Mark Wadley,
Maintenance

Karen Williams continued

After a back surgery in 1998, Karen was off work for a year. Three months into her physical therapy, she was able to get around in a limited fashion. During this time, she became more involved with the church. At first, she helped with the children's Sunday school program. During that time the PCUSA started an initiative called "RENEWAL." A big part of this initiative was the formation of small groups. Everyone was encouraged to join a small group that would meet weekly for fellowship and bible study. She was the co-leader of her small group which she really enjoyed. Soon she went from helping with the small children to teaching them about Jesus.

Karen was then asked to become part of a group that showed other churches the "RENEWAL" initiative. She enjoyed this immensely. She and others from Westminster would travel to other churches and teach them about the program. The church participated in another lay-led spiritual program called "CURCIO". She went on a long weekend with this group on a retreat where she began to delve deeper into the Bible. During that weekend, she accepted Jesus in her heart. This is where her real faith journey began. She became part of the leadership of this program which met twice a year.

Once she was healed and cleared to go back to work, she was there only a year before she needed a second back surgery. Due to the physical demands of her job she was never able to return to work. Once she completed enough physical therapy to get around, she became even more involved at Westminster. She was asked to become a deacon for 2 years. After that, she was asked to be an elder and served two three-year terms. She then became a Sunday school teacher for junior and senior high students and was the leader of the youth group for three years.

In 2010, while she was serving on session, the pastor asked elders if they wanted to preach when he was on study leave or vacation. She did that for several years. In the summer of 2013, while at the pulpit, she had an epiphany and decided she wanted to be a full-time pastor.

In 2014, Karen started the process of going through the CRE program, which is a course to train certified lay pastors. To become a CRE she had to pass eight on-line courses. She participated in a lectionary study with various pastors, including our former pastor, Jonathan Krogh. While taking her course-work she started doing pulpit supply for churches in the area. She was commissioned to serve communion once a month at Wilmington for 11 months. She also preached at Elwood, Pontiac, Coal City, New Lenox and several more. She enjoyed the experience and learned a lot about how to be a pastor through these experiences. Upon completion, she went to Dubuque, Iowa and participated in a graduation ceremony May 13, 2017 where she received her CRE certification.

During the years 2008-2014 she served on the Committee on Ministry. Our Presbytery has 4 areas, each area consists of congregations that are in the same geographical area. She was liaison for seven churches in different areas of ministry. Karen learned more about the Presbytery and enjoyed going to

Karen Williams continued

other congregations and meeting with their sessions and assisting in various capacities. In 2019 she became a commissioner on the synod for the Presbytery.

Karen being congratulated on her new position by Rev. Dr. John Rickard, General Presbyter of Blackhawk Presbytery, June 4th, 2019

Karen continued doing pulpit supply but in August of 2017 she needed another back surgery. She took a year off from pastoring and other duties in order to recover. In October 2018, she started preaching again at Westminster and in January 2019 she provided pulpit supply for our church and Elwood Community church. In April our Session phoned her and asked if she wanted to be our interim pastor starting June 1, 2018. She said "yes" right away.

Karen feels that her invitation to be our interim pastor is confirmation of what the Holy Spirit told her to do. Karen would like to extend her appreciation to session and the congregation for this opportunity. Karen very much wants to be a part of the congregation, to help us learn more about Jesus and his ministry and to help us as we seek a permanent pastor. Let's all make her feel welcome as she starts on this new journey! Congratulations Karen! Be sure to keep her in your prayers.

Blackhawk Presbytery Meeting Report

Our new Interim Pastor, Karen Williams, and our Office & Building Manager and Music Director, Paul Johnson, had the opportunity to attend a workshop and Presbytery meeting June 3 and 4 held at Stronghold Camp and Retreat Center, in Oregon, Illinois.

The workshop entitled, "1001" initiative, was very revealing and informative on many areas of ministry our church had not considered. There are many churches facing the same challenges we are now facing. Such as, a beautiful, historic building, but in an area that is no longer considered the first place you would want to go and worship.

It will take time to drill down into all of the aspects of how this initiative works. The goal would be to have something tangible to begin utilizing some of this initiative in the near future.

Another initiative that is being embraced by many Presbyterian Churches is entitled "Matthew 25", which encompasses the three focus areas of congregational vitality, structural racism, and systematic poverty, as well as the Trinity. Paul spoke with several pastors during the two-day period and shared our challenges. There were some who thought the "Matthew 25" Initiative would be a better fit for us, but the "1000" initiative has grant money available to start new ministries.

Whichever initiative is embraced or perhaps the combination of both, it is heartening to know that our denomination is providing resources for struggling churches like ourselves.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Thanks to Alexander Nunez from Juan 3:16 for weeding/cleaning up the prayer garden. Also for repairing the paver stones surrounding the plants at the corner of Indiana and Court. Someone had driven over it and wrecked it. Thanks Alex! Great job!