

Welcome Pastor Barbara Styers to Sunset Hills

written by San "Chip" Cook

In November of last year, the Rev. Barbara M. Styers answered the call to serve as pastor for First Moravian Church, located in our neighborhood and the only Moravian Church in Greensboro. Pastor Styers was installed as pastor in February, and along with her husband, Gray Styers, are now our new neighbors living in Sunset Hills.

Barbara and Gray moved from Raleigh where they lived for thirty years and raised two children. Gray is an attorney with Fox Rothschild. Their family includes adult children Richard, daughter-in-law Carolyn, and Remy. Richard and Carolyn live in Raleigh and Remy is a student at Vanderbilt Divinity School, in Nashville, Tennessee.

A native of Buffalo, New York, Rev. Styers holds a BS from Cornell University, an MBA from UNC Chapel Hill, and a Master of Divinity degree from Duke University. Rev. Styers is ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and additionally holds a Moravian Studies Certificate from Moravian Theological Seminary. The Moravian Church maintains close ecumenical relations with the Presbyterian Church (USA), as well as the Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Church. These close relations allow the sharing of clergy between denominations.

What follows is a transcription from a recent interview with Rev. Styers by Chip Cook, Sunset Hills neighbor and member of First Moravian Church:

Rev. Styers, can you share about your early background? Where did you grow up and can you describe your childhood?

First, please, call me Barbara. I grew up in Buffalo, only child in my family and lived in a neighborhood similar to Sunset Hills. So, I feel very at home living here. Growing up in Buffalo, my best friend lived next door and our birthdays were only a week apart. Folks thought we were sisters. I was struck down when she moved away in 8th grade, but we have kept contact over the years.

Related to that question, did you know as a young person that you wanted to become a pastor of a church, or did that happen later in life?

My mom was Presbyterian, but my father was Catholic, and that was how I was raised. I enjoyed being involved in church activities and intrigued by theology and interpretation of scripture. However, growing up Catholic, it did not occur to me I could become a pastor. Later when I married, my husband (who was raised Southern Baptist), and I were looking for a denomination we both felt comfortable in and found Raleigh Moravian Church. It felt like the right place to raise two kids. Later in my life, I realized the experiences from my youth were pointing to a call to ministry.



Barbara holding the first vegetable (a tomato) from the FMC Community Garden.



You became the pastor of First Moravian earlier this year, but you didn't completely move into Greensboro and the neighborhood until this summer, moving with your husband from your former home in Raleigh. What do you think of Greensboro and the neighborhood, and do you feel at home yet?

At the end of August, we sold our house, but we moved out in June. I feel at home living in this neighborhood, it was immediate. Yet, it was hard moving from Raleigh because we lived there for 22 years in the same house and overall lived in Raleigh for 30 years. Lots of stuff accumulated for three decades and we had to downsize. I really enjoy walking through Sunset Hills with the shady trees and beautiful front yard gardens. Additionally, on a quiet night when the windows are open, I can hear the distant train whistles, which also reminds me of growing up in Buffalo.

You are the first female leader of this church, and all the church staff, including the director of Christian education, director of music, treasurer, and administrative assistant, are women. What does that say to you as the pastor in a traditionally male dominated field, and what kind of impact does it have in working with this congregation and community?

It certainly speaks to changing times and people understanding things in different ways. Churches have evolved. Moravians love their traditions, but at the same time, this is not "your grandfather's church" with respect to expectations of roles. Moravians in particular do well at maintaining traditions that are worth preserving and yet still evolve and adapt. For me, I have been welcomed

here at the church...there has been no hostility or subtle messages of not being welcome. I feel like this has been a very smooth transition into this role as I grow and learn into this congregation.

What can I say about working with an all-female staff? Well, we all get along well. And we have a lot in common. Not all church staffs are all women but that does not mean they don't work together easily. We work together because we are able to work as a team, not just because of our gender.

One of your two children, Remy, is attending Vanderbilt to become a pastor. Did you inspire Remy, or was Remy already thinking about this as a career?

I would have to ask Remy for a more complete answer, but I will offer this. By the time I started divinity school, Remy was already active at Raleigh Moravian. At RMC, there was an associate pastor that inspired a number of youth at the time. Also, going to the Laurel Ridge Summer Camps (Moravian Retreat in Laurel Springs, NC) really had a positive impact on Remy.

Can we talk about your communication style, not only in delivering a homily or sermon, but in how you interact with people in the church and in the communities surrounding the church. You seem to be very approachable overall, and your sermons are often tied to events in our congregation, the local community or world. Can you describe your style?

Yes, I feel I try to be approachable. I also try to consider

things from various points of view and understand how someone might arrive at a particular conclusion or idea. At some point I have to decide what I think is the best interpretation or best way forward. I try to base my decisions or responses to people prayerfully in design. Still, I am always looking for new evidence to reconsider and learn from responses and feedback.

What are your goals for serving as pastor at First Moravian? What do you hope to help achieve for this church and for people who are part of this congregation, either as members or people who engage with the church in other ways?

First Moravian is one rambunctious family at times, but I want members to come together. I want people to love each other and be able to disagree with each other, which follows the Moravian Church's motto. Trying to model a community where we pull together on key areas and can disagree on less important areas is my goal. I want people to enjoy our time together and love each other as people.

As for the neighborhood and outreach, it would be nice to become a resource for the immediate community, like the community garden we are building. We also want to continue with traditional activities that draw participation from the neighborhood, like Candle Tea, Christmas Lovefeasts, and our summer ice cream socials. Over the summer, we also hosted a beginning band class to encourage learning an instrument.

Overall, we want people to know that we respect and value all of creation and that is tied into our service goals. Urban Ministries, the Night Shelter, and collecting coats/jackets for the winter, are some examples. Closer to the neighborhood, we recently collected school supplies for Lindley Elementary School.

We have a diverse audience of readers for this newsletter, as we have a diverse neighborhood with different perspectives on religion and spirituality. In a general sense, can you share what teachings from your spiritual beliefs guide you every day in how you live your life, and how you want to help other people, whether they are Christians, Jews, Muslim, believers or non-believers?

For me, it's Jesus' commandment to love one another and learning how to love others. What love looks like to people who share diverse views is fundamental. Learning to express love that is respectful of diversity.

Is anything happening at First Moravian that folks in Sunset Hills should be excited about this fall and winter?

Yes, we are back this December with Candle Tea. It will be more scaled up from the pandemic period and will return to some of the favorite experiences that people remember. Including chicken pies!

Christmas Lovefeast is coming back in full swing this Christmas Eve, with three services, including the return of the children's Lovefeast.

We are reaching out to college campuses in Greensboro, including UNCG and Guilford College. We were at Guilford College this week for a campus ministry event.

Lastly, keep an eye out for announcements on our new community garden. We now have our new beds installed and ready for fall crops. The Greensboro New School will be using one of the beds for teaching their students. Perhaps some beds could be available for folks in the neighborhood who want to work with our church.

Right now, I am hoping that we are laying the work for the roots to take shape. Our church is growing a lot of roots and hopefully showing growth above ground in the near future, and we welcome you as our neighbors to participate with us. ●

Information on First Moravian Church

Want to know when chicken pies are available or other events at First Moravian?

Sign up for the weekly newsletter by emailing office@greensboromoravian.org and requesting the newsletter. Or, access the newsletter from the website at <http://greensboromoravian.org/>

You can join FMC services on Sundays at 11:00am for worship in person or via Zoom (Meeting ID: 205-454-336) or Facebook Live (@fmcgreensboro).