

Brady Faggart

You might say that Brady Faggart became interested in the ministry because shortage of motor fuel forced him to walk to church. There's a lot more to it than that, of course, but those teenage walks and strong family faith ties are where it all began.

As a small child, Faggart's family, which at times seemed to comprise enough members to form a small congregation, filled up a lot of pews at Mt. Herman Lutheran south of Concord in what was then relatively rural Cabarrus County near Charlotte. His parents, grandparents and multiple cousins all faithfully gathered there every Sunday.

"It was what some folks called the Faggart church, Faggart recalled. "It was like a big family reunion every Sunday. All that had a great influence on me." But when gasoline rationing during World War II forced families to limit automobile use, Faggart's parents changed churches to save fuel. They switched to Calvary Lutheran, a city church within walking distance of the Faggart home. Those walks to church with the family became more important than he realized at the time.

Calvary is where Faggart in his early teens, without much forethought or long-range planning, first practiced his future sermons after becoming engrossed in Luther League and other church activities. "I did the youth sermons," he said. "I suppose that had as much influence on (what he was to become) as anything." That's where he began thinking about the ministry, although for years he never conceded that point to anyone but himself. It was not until his senior year at Lenoir Rhyne College that he made a public commitment to enter the ministry.

The career decision was based partly on his family's sense of Christian upbringing, partly on his allegiance to youth work and partly on the influence of professors. Whatever the reasons, the results have been rewarding to him and beneficial for more than four decades in the life of the Lutheran church in North Carolina, both from the pulpit and multiple administrative posts in this state and New York.

Faggart is both well known and highly respected for his years of devotion to the Lutheran faith among his peers across the country, especially in North Carolina, and for his continuing work with Christian endeavors since his retirement from full time parish work.

Three times he reached the final ballot to become Bishop of the Lutheran Church in North Carolina, never at his own request but because he was chosen as a candidate by fellow church leaders. He has also served as director of Lutheridge, the Lutheran Conference Center and summer camp at Arden near Asheville in addition to his work with the national Lutheran church.

"After seeking my first parish fresh out of seminary," Faggart explained, "I have never sought a job. The job requests always came to me, and a lot of them came. Putting it in theological terms, I guess that's the way God was calling me."

As for the closeness to becoming North Carolina bishop, Faggart said there would always be a tinge of regret for not having been chosen after being so close so many times, but then convincingly added: "In looking back, I'm glad it worked out the way it did." His staff ideas for the bishop's job, he stressed, might not have been successful because of administrative bureaucracy or what others might call church politics.

He can speak with authority on administrative hurdles in Lutheran church hierarchy. For four years, 1963-67, he served on the staff of the NC Lutheran Synod as Secretary of Christian Education. Then for six years, from 1969-75, in New York he served as assistant to Lutheran Church in America President Robert Marshall, who was earlier Faggart's Old Testament professor at Chicago Seminary. "That was a great experience," he said of his years on the national church scene because it afforded him the his ability to learn about broad spectrums of Lutheranism across the United States and Canada. But he also added he was uncertain of any real meaningful results in implementing worthwhile advancements in the overall church body. In church administration as in government things often move slowly, if at all.

Faggart left his New York job in 1975 to return to his native North Carolina at the urging of leaders of First Lutheran Church in Greensboro, a parish where he served for 18 years before retirement in 1993.

But as of the spring of 2010, he still hadn't figured out the definition of retirement.

When he announced his retirement from First Lutheran, he had two other jobs fall on his shoulders even before he left the pulpit. He had committed to serving Lutheran Family Services in Greensboro and was also asked to return for eight months as interim director at Lutheridge/Lutherock where The Lakeside Village of eight summer cottages is named in honor of him and his wife Lois. He was also asked to serve for a time as interim pastor at Prince of Peace, a racially mixed congregation in Greensboro. He managed to sandwich all those jobs into the immediate years after his parish retirement.

Then came other opportunities to expand his ministry in still newer adventures. His recent service has been in areas of social ministry in varying capacities, most notably with La Vela Hispanic Ministry. He has also continued to serve as supply pastor at Greensboro area churches and has been instrumental in arranging morning meals for homeless citizens of Greensboro through First Lutheran and been a leader in refugee settlement in Central North Carolina.

As a native of Cabarrus County who was born on April 17, 1930, Faggart tentatively decided early on to attend Lenoir Rhyne College in Hickory because of its Lutheran affiliation. What really sealed the deal, however, was when he learned his childhood sweetheart Lois McEachern, whom he had known since seventh grade, was also planning to attend Lenoir Rhyne. "The fact that she was going there certainly didn't deter me," he said with a chuckle. The future Mrs. Faggart is the daughter of the then-Cabarrus Clerk of Court, D. Ray McEachern, who was well known in Lutheran church work and local politics.

His allegiance to Lenoir Rhyne didn't end with his diploma. He for many years has been a strong fund raiser for the school, which has shown its appreciation by awarding him an honorary doctorate degree.

Faggart surprised—and disappointed—some of his Lutheran friends when he chose to enroll in the seminary in Chicago instead of Columbia, SC, where most assumed he would attend. One of those who encouraged him to attend the Chicago school was his Lenoir Rhyne professor Martin Luther Stirewalt, a man Faggart calls one of his more influential mentors.

His years in Chicago seminary were both pleasurable and educational, he recalled. One of his more influential professors there was Joseph Sittler Jr. who helped broaden his

experience level. "I learned there that the Lutheran church is much bigger than my perspective of North Carolina when I was exposed to a different environment and different people. In North Carolina, I had thought that all Lutherans were Germans."

Following seminary graduation, Faggart's first church was a mission congregation, Good Shepherd, in Hickory, the only career move he asked for. That was a good learning experience for a young pastor, he said, but it was also a crash course in the fact that Synod leaders are not always right. "In 18 months we had a parsonage and in two years had a church building," Faggart said, "but it was a time I learned not to always trust the Synod." Faggart and his young congregation wanted to build their sanctuary near a main traffic thoroughfare, but Synod leaders insisted on a more isolated location. That proved to be a fatal move; the church never caught on and has since merged with another Lutheran facility.

From that first parish, Faggart moved to St. Mark's Lutheran in China Grove, just south of Salisbury. From there, he joined the Synod staff where he served for four years before moving to the leadership post at Lutheridge before accepting the job with President Marshall and later returning to North Carolina where his service has continued unabated.

Faggart speaks fondly of his administrative jobs in the state and national Lutheran hierarchy, despite bureaucratic boulders, although he wonders now about future leadership, but his heart is still with local churches. "I had wonderful experiences in church leadership roles," he said, "but whenever a problem arises, (leaders) tend to reorganize for a few years, then another problem arises and they reorganize again. There is a lot of that going on now. And I really love preaching and I love working with young people where I seem to have a bond."

The greatest pleasure of his career, Faggart said, is hearing people respond positively to something he has accomplished in Christian service, or said in a sermon, often many years earlier. "It's a special feeling to have someone say to me that they went into the ministry because of me or they tell me they remember something I said in a long ago sermon. A few of those kinds of things make it worthwhile."

Faggart's current home pastor, Charlie Zimmerman, echoes the feeling of large numbers of people who have observed Faggart's service over time. "He has lived by example the servant nature of Christ, especially as he has become involved in refugee settlement in recent years" Zimmerman said. "He has been a spiritual director, a source of wisdom and discernment, a guide along the path of discipleship and life. He is known and respected for his wisdom, compassion and service."

Faggart, not surprisingly and justifiably, gives a high degree of his success to his wife Lois, whom he married 58 years ago. "She is the ideal pastor's wife," he said. "She gets involved as a calling, not as an assistant pastor."

The Faggarts have three adult children, daughters Lois Brouillette of California and Laura Zahran of Greensboro, son Luke of Greensboro and four grandchildren.