

Charge Conference Report 2008: Rev. Andrea F. Smith

March of 2009 will begin my sixth year of ministry here at Williamson's Chapel.

It has been a great experience to be a part of the past five years, the growth, and the transformation, not just numerically but spiritually as well.

This has been a year of transition for this church however, I believe the last 9 months have been a huge catalyst in the spiritual awakening that is happening here. People here are excited about their faith.

Over the past five years this church has been very passionate about missions and getting outside these walls and making a difference in our community and world, but this past year has been a spark for us to not only be missional but focus on our own spirituality as well. We have been intentional about growing deeper in our faith both individually and as the church. Living through this transition has been a tremendous growth experience, both for this church and for me personally. I appreciate the life lessons I have learned and cherish them as now I move into a new realm of ministry here.

I currently am in my second year as a local pastor here, being on leave of absence as a deacon as I transition my orders from deacon to elder. It is during this year that I have had the joy of experiencing many firsts . . . my first baptism, my first opportunity to consecrate the elements for communion, I had the privilege of planning and preaching Holy Thursday Service and the Sunrise Communion Service, and I was able to officiate at several funerals. This has been an amazing opportunity to be able to do these "firsts" while I have the assistance and guidance of a great senior pastor. And it is great to have a senior pastor that sees me as a colleague. That has been a great self-esteem builder and done so much to affirm my calling to seek ordination as an elder.

Over the past year I completed 15 hours of seminary through Asbury. As of now I am almost halfway through with my Master's of Divinity and barring no major life curveballs, I should with my degree and fulfill the requirements for ordination in a maximum of 4 years.

We began a new Saturday night service here after Labor Day. That has been an opportunity for me to work with the band and our praise team in a new capacity. Although I never thought I would want to play the keyboard for worship, that has very quickly become an outlet for me to personally bond with our worship leaders and it serves as a way for me to connect with God as we worship through song. The service is growing in both numbers and energy and I am excited to see what God is going to do with that ministry here.

The missions of Williamson's Chapel continue to flourish. This year for the first time we took our service beyond the borders of our nation taking 32 people to the country of Jamaica, working with the Caribbean Center for the Deaf and working w/ the children in

VBS in the Deaf Village and doing construction on their campus. It was a life changing event and we are set to go to Jamaica next summer as well, this time taking 45 people. That is a testimony to the heart of this church, 45 people who in this economy, are willing to sacrifice a week of their time and \$1300 of their money to travel to a different land to extend the body of Christ. Our local missions continue to thrive as well – Winnie Hooper, Soup Kitchen, Mooresville Christian Mission, HealthReach Clinic, and many more cite Williamson's Chapel as their largest contributor but even more importantly as the place they can call when they need things done.

We also have broadened our pastoral care ministry with the formation of a CARE team. This is a large congregation and we now have 17 different lay pastors commissioned. Over the past six months they have made over 330 visits and contacts with those in our church in need of pastoral care. They visit the hospitals, our shut-ins, those who are terminally ill, they are the constant face representing our God in the lives of these people. It has been a true blessing to Rob and myself to have this ministry begin and succeed.

When I move myself and my "to do list" out of the way, I am reminded in real and powerful ways how wonderful it is to be in ministry here. Today I had a counseling session with someone that finds herself in a relationship of a different faith tradition. The fact that she comes to a church with a woman pastor has become a point of contention. Her significant other has stressed to her that her church and her beliefs are wrong and she must change churches and faith traditions. In fact, he refuses to worship here ever, simply because of my presence. I told her that it has been my experience in this area that nothing is going to change his mind so she must decide where she is willing to compromise.

Her response, "There is no compromise, there is no reason women can't be in ministry thus it is time for the relationship to end."

That was one of those God moments for me, reaffirming that God is continuing to use my gifts and grace at this appointment. I love this church and these folks. They bless me and I do give thanks to God for calling me to serve here. I look forward to what the new year has to bring.