

BIOGRAPHY: REV. LEIGH B. GILLIS

Leigh Gillis grew up in Norfolk, VA and is a graduate of Virginia Tech. She is a second career pastor, having worked twelve years in Information Management and software installation before returning to graduate work. She has an M.A. in Communication from Norfolk State University and an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary in Richmond.

Leigh was baptized in the Presbyterian church in a small town where her parents were living, and grew up in the United Methodist church in Norfolk where her mom's family was active. Her Aunt Eva was a major influence on her faith journey.

The following is reprinted from *Church and Society* magazine, Jan/Feb 2006 which featured "Women Called to Lead."

"A Call Deferred" by Leigh B. Gillis

In 1971, when I was a high school junior, we each had scheduled appointments with the school's guidance counselor. As we considered what colleges to apply for, I asked her, "Where do you go to be a minister?" Her reply was, "Women can't do that, what else do you want to do?"

I ended up getting an English degree and working with business computers for twelve years until the hand of Providence stepped in.

In 1988, I was attending a small church in Norfolk, VA. One Sunday we had a supply pastor who was on staff at Union/PSCE in Richmond. Someone mentioned to him that I had, at one time, felt the call to ministry. He telephoned the next day and said he hoped I didn't mind, but he had taken the liberty of making an appointment for me – "just to talk" – with the admissions director at Union the next week.

My call to ministry was persistent and involved others helping to get me to the goal. I started work on the M.Div. in 1989 and was ordained by the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia on All Saints Day, November 1, 1992, more than 20 years after I had first expressed a call. By the time I went to seminary, about one-third of each entering class was female. It was a far cry from the days when "women can't do that" was the only response to a woman's call to ministry.

The fact that one of the predecessor denominations of the PC(USA), as well as the Methodist church, first ordained women to ministry in 1956, my birth year, is not lost on me.

In 1995 Leigh had the privilege of preaching at the 150th anniversary of the Beverly, WV church where her great-great grandfather was pastor following the Civil War.

Leigh and her husband, John, live in Elizabeth City, NC, where she has been pastor of Cann Memorial Presbyterian Church for eight years. John works part-time for the local Arts Council, managing the community theater facility. He has spent a number of years in non-profit work, and worked for the provincial government of Nova Scotia, Canada. They have grown children living in Virginia and Canada.

STATEMENT OF FAITH: Rev. Leigh B. Gillis

I believe in the one eternal God, our Father and Creator, who was and is and is to come, the God who is Love and who is the source of our knowledge and experience of love. Much of God's work in the world is a great mystery, and all human language fails to capture and describe our immeasurable God.

I believe our God is made known to us by revelation from the words of Scripture as contained in the Old and New Testaments, in the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in continuing revelation to God's people in every age.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, Son of God and Savior of the world, whose incarnation was the gift of God to all humanity, and whose death and resurrection for our salvation is the ultimate act of love and grace. Christ stands at the center of our faith as we bear his name, "Christian" and follow his mandate to "go [and] teach [and] baptize."

I believe in the Holy Spirit, our comfort and guide, whose presence illumines our way as we struggle to live lives obedient to God and to fulfill the calling to which we are called.

I believe that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs of the real presence and power of Christ, and that, in them, our God seals us into the church and marks us for Christian service.

I believe God gives each of us unique gifts for service in the Church, the "Body of Christ," and that each one is called to minister in his or her unique way, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry."

I believe that we are surrounded by "so great a cloud of witnesses," the pioneers of our faith, whose examples of faith encourage and sustain us as we "run with perseverance the race set before us."

I believe the Church is the body of Christ working in the world, and that it grieves God when there is fractiousness and discord in that Body. Because we all are reconciled with God through the cross and can live as forgiven sinners, we are encouraged to have the "mind of Christ," and be reconciled with one another.

I believe that our hope lies in Christ, who will come again in glory to redeem this flawed creation and stand in victory at the end of time. By faith, we live with that hope in this time and place, without any clear image of what is to come. That is the nature of faith that we "walk by faith and not by sight."