



Dr. Joe Kutter
Interim Executive Minister

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It must have been in the summer of 1972. I had served as an Assistant Pastor for 3 years, and it was time to candidate for my first solo pastorate. Fortunately, some of the region staff persons in New Jersey were willing to take a risk and recommend me to the First Baptist Church of Arlington in Kearny, New Jersey. (If I remember correctly, there had once been a town called Arlington which was absorbed by Kearny; but the church kept the name of Arlington, thus confusing everybody but the natives.) We had met with the search committee of about 25 persons in a neutral church and much to my surprise, they had invited me to be their candidate.

Now it is the first Sunday in the month, and I am the candidate. For the first time in my life, I was invited to lead worship from a divided chancel, a pulpit on one side and the lectern on the other which provided a clear view of the central communion table and the baptistry in the rear.

In my ignorance, I preached from the wrong side! Rookie that I was, I failed to ask; and nobody thought that I would not know. Fortunately, I did not know of my mistake until later so I spent no time wondering what they would think. I just read scripture and prayed and preached what felt like a thoroughly mediocre sermon. I learned later that most of the congregation thought that it was pretty good, but every preacher knows what it is to feel like the connection is not being made.

Then came time for communion. It was their habit to crowd each of the deacons around the table, shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow, knee to knee. We were jam packed with me, the preacher, in the middle wearing my nearly new pulpit robe. To pass the bread and cup required me to hold on to the tray with my elbows tucked tightly into my side and then twist from one side to the other as the tray was passed first to the left and then to the right.

We did well with the bread, and then it was time for the cup. In every church that I ever knew, the pastor was served last in the passing of bread and cup. In this church, the pastor was served first. I took the cup and sat it on the table. The trays were passed to the congregation and then returned to the pastor. To serve the deacons, I kept my elbows in tight and then twisted left for one set of deacons and then to the left for the others.

Did I mention the cup of very purple grape juice sitting on the table? And did I mention my pulpit robe with the very large sleeves? As I turned with my elbows pinned to my side from one side to the other, the low hanging sleeve of the robe dragged itself across the glass sitting on the linen covered table and, nightmare of nightmares, the contents of the cup spilled onto the linen table cloth and began to spread. Do you know how quickly a white linen table cloth can turn purple?

I have to tell you that I was certain that I was destined to spend another year or two as an Assistant Pastor but something happened that I could never have predicted. That group of folk saw something in me, in spite of my mistakes, and they invited me to be their pastor. A tiny minority voted against the call citing my inexperience; but the vote was overwhelming and Peggy and I soon moved to Kearny, New Jersey, where I served for nearly eight years as their pastor.

Here is what I must say about that very urban congregation that lives between New York City and Newark, New Jersey. For nearly eight years, they loved me into the ministry. Did I make my share of mistakes? I still blush to remember. But beginning with the Sunday I spilled the juice until I accepted a call to a church in Michigan, they loved us and forgave us and graced us into the ministry. I have served a lot of wonderful people in some very good churches, but I will forever be grateful for the grace of that first church that dared to love us into ministry.

*Every good pastor I know has been loved
into effective ministry by grace-giving people
in the churches they serve.*

I pray that grace for all of our pastors.

*I pray that our congregations will be
instruments of the God given grace that grows
healthy and strong ministers and ministry.*

APPLY TODAY

Central Region
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\$200

**IN CHRIST
FIND
YOURSELF
LEAD
CHANGE**

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. -1 Peter 4:10

LEADERSHIP//COMMUNITY//MISSION//CHRIST

WHO: Youth entering 10-12th grade

COST: \$200 total
*It is recommended that the individual and the church split this cost

QUESTIONS: Contact Julie Robinson, Region Staff Minister
254-652-2508 or julie.robinson@abccr.org

APPLY AT ABCCR.ORG BY July 31