

Jane Doty MacKenzie Biography/Faith Journey

Growing up, my family attended our local Presbyterian church every Sunday. My mother was a woman of deep faith. She saw the positive in everyone and her life was one of giving, and being available, to others. My faith is my mother's greatest gift to me. I wasn't sure my dad was a believer. I felt like he just "went along," yet he continued to attend after my mother's death. We said grace before meals but the topic of religion or spirituality was not often discussed in our home. Through this it was clear to me that how one lived life was the evidence of faith, not the words that came out of one's mouth.

For some reason, there were not many kids my age at my parents' church when I was in high school. So, I joined the youth group at the Congregational Church down the street from my church. This was the time during which I declared my own faith. We dealt with the normal angst of adolescence but attempted to apply our faith in our responses to life's circumstances. We loved and lost together, and grew together and apart over those years.

After graduating from college, I moved to the San Francisco Bay area, and attended First Presbyterian Church in Berkeley. This is where I met my husband. I tend to view the timeline of my faith development as pre-1991, interim, and post-1994. The interim years were the crucible of my faith formation. In 1991, I delivered a full-term, still-born son. Six weeks later, our house burned down in the Oakland Hills Firestorm. Within the following two years, I had two miscarriages, a close friend was killed in a US Air plane crash, and another close friend died of AIDS in the early years of the epidemic. All of this rocked my world and left me wondering where God was, and if I would ever find hope again. Up until that time, I had not developed any mechanisms to respond to this rapid succession of tragedy and loss. My husband almost walked out of our marriage and we started to see a marriage counselor which produced fits and starts of progress. It was hard to find the strength to work on our marriage while we were both deeply mourning the losses. I sat in church, week after week, numb and raw with grief. It seemed like there was always some part of the service that would cause me to weep from the depths of my soul; often it was a just a strain of music or a word spoken in a prayer. I sensed that each Sunday there was something happening through the Holy Spirit simply through my faithful act of "showing up." I found myself living into Romans 8:26: "For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." I could do nothing but surrender in the presence of the most Holy and allow the healing to take place.

Since then, my spiritual growth and development has been in seeking to be aware of the presence of the Holy in the midst of living each day. A visiting pastor at our church, Ben Johnson, saw in me a harried, almost burned-out professional trying to hold a marriage and a family together. He taught me to pause, give thanks for the blessings in my life, and sit in the silence until it silences me and I can hear God.

These and other experiences have led me to be a listening and compassionate companion to others. I did not ask to be initiated into the sisterhood of grieving mothers. Yet I find myself reaching out to comfort and pray with other women who have miscarried or lost young children or grandchildren. I held vigil at the bedside of my friend dying of AIDS. As a Stephen Minister, I have prayed with others, trusting that the Holy Spirit will bring healing. In group spiritual formation, I have seen the many ways in which God is revealed to us. As an elder serving communion, I have witnessed the grace of Christ in the faces of those who take the bread and wine, knowing that their own lives contain stories which have shaken the foundations of their faith – and yet they find a way to hold fast.

I believe that we are not equipped to see clearly the gifts God has given us. It is often through the reflective eyes of others. In 2013, I began to experience "nudges" from numerous people in my

church community – many who didn’t even know me – to formally pursue ministry. Was God trying to get my attention? So began a period of discernment through prayer and meditation, seeking guidance from friends, and receiving encouragement from my pastors. This led me to Princeton Theological Seminary, and ultimately to this present call at BurlPres. My foundation for ministry is knowing that I am intimately known and loved by God. This is what I seek to bring to awareness each day both for myself and for others.