

REV. SARA OWEN-GEMOETS

Associate Pastor 1979-1983

(Written For 25th Anniversary 1995)

Dear Ashford Members and Friends:

Congratulations on your 25th anniversary! Ashford has played such an important part in my life, which I have to confess I was amazed to know you are "only" 25 years old. My mother used to remind me that God never began and God never ends....God "always is". And I sort of thought it was the same with Ashford...you never began and you never end...you "always are"!

I was licensed to preach in 1976, and was still struggling with what that meant in my life. I felt a strong call to teach, and women in pulpits were sort of "weird" (or so I thought). In the fall of 1978, Jim Killen contacted me to see if I would be interested in a part-time position as associate minister at Ashford. I had been talking to some other senior pastors, and was unbelievably thrilled when Jim called back and officially offered me a position on the staff.

I began Jan. 2, 1979, and later that year, became full time. The love, the warmth, the concern, and the joy of the Lord that surrounded me is impossible to describe. Ruth Griffin was our secretary, and taught me so much. Our desks were side by side in the original building (the education building was not even a glimmer in anyone's eye). Many times, Ruth would see a need in the Congregation, and sort of "tip me" that a call or a visit was needed- And Jim was a wonderful teacher, too, always kind and patient. I have never known a pastor as well loved and admired as Jim. He has to be the finest man that ever walked! At least, he certainly put up with me while I learned and sort of got my "sea legs".

Jim used to begin his children's sermon by saying: How many of you out there are children? Several adults would always raise their hands, along with the children, and my hand was usually the first one to go up.

All of Methodism was experiencing changes with women in the pulpits. Language was being made inclusive, and the old hymnal used to welcome new members by saying: "Brethren of the household of faith...." I immediately took it upon myself to change that to "Brothers and Sisters of the household of faith..." The lay leader would sometimes read it, and I will never forget the time the lay leader, trying gallantly to be inclusive, said: "Brethren and cisterns..."



My life took a very sharp and unexpected turn in 1982, and I became a single parent. The church wrapped arms of love and support around me and helped me through the darkest and most difficult period of my life. After John's death in 1983, I lost my home, and Ashford was experiencing great financial problems. Many of you remember that the bottom fell out of the oil industry that year, and the Ashford community was hurt. With only one parsonage at Ashford and money problems pinching badly, the Bishop called to tell me that Covenant UMC was open. It had a parsonage and I was to be the new pastor.

It solved a problem for me and also for Ashford, and I went on to have 10 wonderful years there. But the love and appreciation and "rootedness" that I feel for Ashford UMC goes very, very deep.

You were instrumental in my early ministry, teaching me, loving me, shaping me. The seeds you planted have had fantastic results, not through any human successes, but through love and openness to the Holy Spirit. You have influenced others, I know, but God used each of you in a very special way in my life. My heart will always be with you.

God bless you on this 25th anniversary. It will be exciting and wonderful to see what God has in store for Ashford during the next 25 years.

Love,
Sister Sara