

**From:** "Ruth M. Brandon" <aremb@mac.com>

**Subject:** Still exploring

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Hi - more notes from Ohio move and new job. I'm still moving around to different churches every week - and taking pastors to lunch and doing varied kinds of consultations and work with committees. Next Sunday will be the first in a long time I don't preach in the morning - will have an ordination in the afternoon though.

Today was fun - I preached in the morning in a church about 70 miles from here that my father served in the late 1930s before I was born or imagined. My two older brothers were pre-schoolers there. (Bible Chapel in Hamersville - east of Cincinnati ca. 20 miles not far from Ohio river) So yesterday I went through a stuffed apple crate that had ancient folders of all kinds of paper from my dad's ministry and found several interesting things I could quote to them - it was their Homecoming Sunday. When he was there he was pastor to 6 churches in two counties - sometimes with an associate pastor helping. there were about 800 families in this "larger parish" so he had the responsibility of a pastor of a large church only the parishioners, worship services etc. were spread out throughout this rural area. This is the only congregation remaining of the six. And even for "homecoming" there were a total of 22 present - Bible study before church, church, and then a meal together. One lady brought a copy of her baptism certificate to show me - they did it in the river when she was 13 years old and she remembers how cold the water was! Sure enough my father's signature was right there! They have a "lay pastor" not an ordained minister. He works for the town of St. Bernard (which is a northern suburb of Cincinnati) full time and his wife does Christian Education at another church. We have a number of these small churches served by lay pastors and if they have endowment they may even have an ordained pastor. There is also a Lay school with a five year program of two classes per year.

Then in the afternoon, I went to Washington UCC, an inner city Cincinnati church that works at being a full service community center seven days a week, including worship on Sunday, and has major assistance from many other churches and workcamps etc. Serve mainly low income Appalachians and Afro-Americans with a few others - after-school programs - meals - a second hand store where everything is free and much more. They have rehabilitated some apartments across the street where they can house work campers. Today people from nine churches in the area were together for a "Unity Service" in the afternoon - a church cluster who actively help - yesterday and the day before many from these churches were there doing physical things like climbing up to high lights and replacing bulbs, polishing woodwork all over the place, taking unsliced bread and jam donated by companies and slicing the bread & repackaging bread and jam together to share with people who were served a hot meal to take home for later. Neighborhood people share the work and those serving meals sit down and eat and chat with those who come to eat. etc etc. I hardly know all they do - was my first visit. The afternoon the preacher was the head of justice and witness ministries from the national church (from Cleveland). My only role was "presence" and a prayer. Maybe 100 folks were there and youth from the local church had a prominent role and a children's choir from a small visiting church sang twice. Was a long service plus reception food (brought by another visiting church) and I didn't get home until 7 p.m. - had left at 8 a.m. Sara was outside on the covered patio out back and seemed happy enough when I arrived but not urgent!

A couple weeks ago I was in a large church which was both Presbyterian and UCC - they had a bulletin for everybody that was 11x17 paper folded and one of the pages had a column that was a tear-off sheet - with two segments easily detachable - a place for prayer concerns, or a ticket, or to sign up to do or attend this or that. Interesting idea.

Quite a few churches here have Saturday services - usually near 5 or 5:30 p.m. and many have two services on Sunday, one contemporary and one traditional or blended - even a rural church I am

helping search for a pastor where they say they get 30 at the contemporary and 50 at the traditional - the thirty would not be there without it and they are delighted at the new energy.

On the home front, I am getting closer to being "from Ohio." Sara has a vet and a kennel. Of course I am a home-owner. Have registered to vote. Have registered my car and received license plates. Have the Ohio book of traffic laws and will soon go take the written test to get an Ohio license. After that, I only have to think about things like dentist, doctor etc that I haven't needed so haven't sought.

But I eagerly sat right down to read the newsletter from the Westfield church when it just came. Sounds like all is well and that is good. I am confident a new era is needed there and the transition will go well. I am still a member there and have my clergy standing in Massachusetts yet awhile because my title here is "Acting" and I won't seek to move membership or standing until that is clarified more. There is no search committee here and they do NOT want me to do interim tasks with them - just help them continue what they were doing before I came based on the decisions at the end of the interim two years ago. So I am simply doing the job - but sooner or later we must figure out if this "Acting" has a term - or what! It is clear it will need my initiative and leadership for them to do anything about it.

Anyway - I think of each of you from time to time and pray your week goes well. Ruth B

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