

Pastor Gayle Bach-Watson's Many Lives

Psychology, Theology, Genealogy, Equine Massage, and Masterworks Chorale

Ed Zahniser

On Sunday, May 1, 2016, at 3 p.m., Christ Reformed United Church of Christ in Shepherdstown installed its new pastor, the Reverend Gayle Bach-Watson. The installation service also celebrated the church's long history and its continuing mission in Shepherdstown and the surrounding community. The church is located at 304 East German Street in Shepherdstown.

The Service of Installation included special music by organist and music director Mary Ann Morgan. The Reverend Kenneth D. Fuller, pastor of Christ Reformed United Church of Christ in Cavetown, Maryland, delivered the message for the service. Fuller served as a mentor and spiritual advisor to Bach-Watson during her years at the Wesley Theological Seminary at the American University in Washington, D.C. Ordained by the United Church of Christ in 2000, she has previously served several Maryland churches in Frederick and Carroll counties.

Bach-Watson, who introduces herself as "Pastor Gayle," was born in Dayton, Ohio, but raised in Maine, Massachusetts, and upstate New York. She moved to Maryland in 1977.

She was educated at the University of Maine at Orono and at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. She received a bachelor's degree in clinical psychology at George Mason in 1981. She attended Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., from 1995 to 1999, graduating magna cum laude. She hopes to continue pursuing her education toward a doctorate in organizational leadership.

"I have two daughters, Alexandra, a student, who lives with me, and Jessica, an IT specialist who lives in Williamsport, Maryland. I live in Knoxville, Maryland, where I am renovating a 116-year-old farm house." Pastor Gayle adds that—as many who undertake the task soon discover, and



Pastor Gayle Bach-Watson



Gayle Bach-Watson enjoys participating in medieval reenactments.



In Christ Reformed Church, Shepherdstown

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GAYLE BACH-WATSON

perhaps even with a healthy measure of understatement—"It's taking longer than I had expected, but it is a labor of love."

"Christ Reformed is a place with its doors and hearts wide open; and more than just welcoming, it is a place where you can experience the extravagant welcome of God," Pastor Gayle says. "A very large part of my ministry is greeting each person as a unique individual, cherished and treasured by God. We are all God's children—created in God's image."

Shepherdstown's Christ Reformed United Church of Christ was founded in 1747. Historically, the congregation was first served by ordained ministers of the German Reformed Church. In the early 1700s, thousands of German-speaking people had emigrated to North America. The church's stone tower was built as part of a structure shared in the very early years by more than one denomination. It was soon incorporated into the present building.

The church welcomes all to worship. Bible study is held Sunday mornings from 9 to 10 a.m., and worship begins at 11. Holy Communion is celebrated every Sunday and is open to all, regardless of membership. "The host at the Communion table is Jesus Christ himself," Pastor Gayle says. "He welcomes

all with open arms. If you are hurting, if you need a safe space, if you need healing, come. He is here waiting for you."

"I chose to pursue ordination in the United Church of Christ," Pastor Gayle explains, "because of its open-door invitation to all worshipers. I believe intensely and adamantly in the United Church of Christ's open and affirming stance that all persons, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, are loved by God and are welcome in God's church."

One of Pastor Gayle's favorite quotes is from *The Pensées* of French scientist, mathematician, and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), who pioneered game and probability theory and existentialism. "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim," Pascal wrote, "but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him," Pascal continues, "seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."

Pastor Gayle believes that every person is a child of God and that all people are inherently good.

All work and no play (except perhaps renovating that old house!) would make Pastor Gayle a dull girl, so she makes time for play, creative play.

"I am a medieval reenactor with the Society for Creative Anachronism," she explains. "On many Saturdays I can be found in medieval garb, serving water to the fighters, helping prepare feast in the kitchen, retaining for their royal majesties, or performing in a bardic, a musical, or poetic performance. I also fight in full armor and participate in competitive archery. My persona or character is a British noblewoman from 1215. The Society for Creative Anachronism covers the period from 600 CE to 1600 CE—so from the period of the Vikings to Queen Elizabeth I of England."

Pastor Gayle also devotes some time to her genealogy. "I have traced several of my ancestral lines to 1500 BCE. Having a long ancestral line does not make us any better as a person, but I find that the connections make history come alive in a very special way."

At this new-to-her but very old Shepherdstown church, Pastor Gayle will no doubt avail herself of the rich "genealogy in place" that is its graveyard. Gravestones there, some of them incised with German text, date back to before the American Revolution and include soldiers who fought in that war for independence.

Pastor Gayle also finds time to sing with the Shepherd University Masterworks Chorale, and she volunteers at a horse rescue organization as an equine massage therapist. She is also an avid and intense reader.

Ed Zahniser is poetry editor of the GOOD NEWS PAPER. His new book of poems, *At the End of the Self-help Rope*, is available at *Four Seasons Books in Shepherdstown*.