

Conference Minister's Corner

It's all one big gift: The varied and blessed life of Leadership Board Member Linda Mawhorter



This article is part of a series on new leaders in our conference. [Click here](#) to read about Ministerial Council Co-Chair Jenelle Roynon.

When I sat down with Linda Mawhorter (the W is silent) who is new to the Leadership Board of Mountain States Mennonite Conference to hear some of her life story, she said that one thing has brought it all together:



"The uniting thread throughout my life has been God's grace," Linda says. "I've always felt that whatever I was doing, wherever I was going, was because of the grace of God."

And Linda has done much, and gone many places in her life.

The Denver native has lived in 13 different locations since graduating medical school, now settling in Albuquerque. She has been a part of various Christian denominations through the years, including United Methodists, United Church of Christ, and a Community Bible Church before she became a member of Albuquerque Mennonite Church in 2017. Linda has also had two different but

related professional careers: for 20 years she practiced medicine as an internist and infectious disease doctor, and now she serves as a hospital chaplain.

"I went into medicine fairly blindly, in retrospect," she says. "Mainly it was because I like working with people and I like science. My father is a caregiving kind of person and inspired me—he became a Licensed Practical Nurse back when men 'couldn't be' nurses. I did very well in school, so I figured, what the heck, I'll just go for it."

Linda met her future husband Phil in Denver eight months before she finished her residency, and the two of them moved to Albuquerque for her to complete her fellowship in infectious diseases. They were married in 1990, and through the years, Phil has worked as a computer programmer, English professor, writer, and LPN. Linda practiced medicine in Albuquerque for 10 years and then moved to Alamosa, CO to practice there for 10 years.

But after two decades of a successful medical practice, Linda was increasingly frustrated by changes in medicine...and felt a nudge to go to seminary.

"The bad parts [of medicine]—the insurance and administrative hassles—were outweighing the good parts. I was tired. I started becoming more involved in church life; that gradually grew. I started feeling more like I had a faith family—it wasn't just a church, it was a spiritual family. I started studying the Bible more, became closer to my pastors and had more questions about my own spiritual faith. As that was growing, my enjoyment of medicine was sinking, so I decided that 20 years was long enough."

Linda and Phil moved to Maine for her to attend seminary. While obtaining a Masters of Divinity degree, Linda took a unit



Pictured: Phil, Teddy (lop-eared) and Max (black-and-white)

of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). That unit cemented her desire to be a chaplain. So Linda and Phil moved to Yuma, AZ where she enrolled in a one-year CPE program. But it was not all smooth sailing.

Because of unhealthy dynamics at the Yuma hospital, the internship did not go well.

“That time in Yuma was terrible. It was very traumatic for me. It planted doubts in my mind about whether I could even be a chaplain. The fact that I couldn’t complete the internship felt like a major failure on my part.”

So, not knowing what the future held, she and her husband decided to move back to Albuquerque in 2014. Though she was not ordained, she was accepted as a volunteer chaplain at University of New Mexico Hospital. Eventually, by the grace of God, she was offered a part-time position there.

“That’s what I’ve been doing the last couple years and I love it!” she says. “When you sit down with a patient and are allowed into their world even in a small way, it is just a blessing. The Holy Spirit is dwelling in that communion between people.”

It was while serving as a chaplain in Albuquerque that Linda says she “first met *real* Mennonites” in 2016, and she’ll never go back.

“Albuquerque Mennonite Church is a very welcoming church. The values it espouses, the people—their backgrounds, political views, their emphasis on social activism—all of that aligned with me. I knew I wanted something different, and AMC was that something. For me it’s been a perfect fit.”

Linda’s church family is a big part of her life, and her dogs, Teddy and Max, are also a big part of her life.

“My husband and I chose not to have kids, but our dogs are important members of my family.” She assures me that she’s not “weird about it” though:

“I don’t dress them up or paint their toenails. They are highly loved, *normal* dogs.”

And though Linda and Phil and Teddy and Max have put down roots and plan to never move again, Linda was willing to take on the new challenge of joining the Leadership Board of our conference, in part because she holds strong Anabaptist convictions:

“I think the Mennonite faith has a strong message for the world in its belief in following the steps of Jesus and in its peace message. It’s a very violent time we’re living in, and perhaps has always been—the history of humanity from time immemorial is violent. I have great respect for Mennonites—I think that Mennonites, Quakers, and other Anabaptists have tremendous potential to be a light to the world.”

Undergirding it all—her volunteer work, her professional work, her home life—is a profound sense of gratitude for God’s grace.

“The grace of God has allowed me to experience things that I have been so blessed to experience,” Linda says. “I see it more and more with each year: my place at AMC, my chaplaincy work, my marriage, my dogs—they’re all so important to me. I’ve been so blessed in life.

“I’m of the feeling that we as individuals don’t really deserve what we get, whether for good or bad. Some people say, ‘You did all that schooling, you deserve to be a chaplain.’ But I don’t deserve it by virtue of my training or anything—sure it’s been hard work, but I could have been thrust to the sidelines at any point by experiencing things others have experienced: a car accident, war, poor health, traumas . . . so I can’t claim to deserve anything. It’s God’s grace that has allowed all this.

“It’s all been a gift to me, and I’m extremely grateful.”