



Staff Spotlight: Sandy Rector

By Lesli Bales-Sherrod

Austin Rector was about 4 years old when his Christmas Eve “meltdown” over not wanting to go to church changed his mother’s life forever.

At the time Sandy Rector, now Metropolitan Memorial’s Minister of Congregational Ministries, attended church only on Easter and Christmas, as she had grown up doing. But while wrestling an unhappy Austin into his dress shoes - the same shoes he hadn’t worn since Easter - Sandy started questioning the tradition.

““Why are we doing this?”” Sandy recalls asking herself. ““We say we’re Christians, but I don’t even know what that means.””

Sandy and her husband, Clark, made a commitment to go to church as a family and explore their faith. They plugged in at Liberty Grove United Methodist in Burtonsville, Md., near their home in Laurel, but Sandy felt behind.

“I went to talk to the pastor about not knowing about the Bible,” she says. “I asked him if he had something like ‘Bible Basics for Dummies.’”

Sandy’s pastor encouraged her to join a Disciple Bible study, where she spent nine months learning history, context and chronology.

“It helped my head knowledge,” Sandy says, pointing to her temple. “My faith was up here.”

Sandy was filling some leadership roles at the church, including co-chairing the education committee, but it wasn’t until she participated in a women’s spiritual retreat weekend that she felt “it” for the first time - she knew what it meant to be loved by God.

“There was such peace and joy,” Sandy remembers. “It was a life-changing experience for me, powerful, ‘I get it.’”

Sandy felt her motivation shift from doing things in the church because her pastor asked her to, to wanting to share what she had found. As she felt increasingly called to serve in the church, Sandy became frustrated she didn’t have time to do more. She was working in marketing and public relations and raising three children: Austin, now 18, Hailey, 15 and Evan, 13. But she had reached a point of “inner turmoil.”

“Then one Sunday our pastor preached a sermon on being called into ministry as a vocation,” Sandy says. “He said everything I was thinking, feeling and experiencing. This was me.”

As the congregation prayed with heads bowed, Sandy’s pastor asked anyone who was feeling that call to raise his or her hand.

“Clark was nudging me, and I put my hand up,” Sandy remembers. “All our pastor said was, ‘I see that hand.’”

Afterwards, however, 15 people came up to Sandy and asked, “Was that you that raised your hand?”

“They had seen it before I had,” Sandy admits.

Later, her pastor confirmed that he had seen it, too. In fact, he told Sandy he had written the sermon specifically for her.

Still Sandy questioned, “Why me? Why now?” She didn’t feel like she knew enough yet. But the next morning, after learning a friend’s husband had died, she decided not to delay answering the call.

“We never know what life holds,” Sandy explains. “This was not about me and my life. This was about what God wanted to do with my life for others. If God was calling me, I was going to trust this call. And that was my moment of letting go of myself.”

Not that doubts didn’t arise. After being accepted to Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., Sandy overheard her pastor talking to another seminary student. She had “no idea” what they were talking about and felt discouraged by her lack of knowledge. Leaving the meeting, she prayed specifically for affirmation.

That’s when she ran into Bishop Felton E. May in the grocery store.

“I told him I had applied to Wesley, and he said, ‘I met with your pastor this morning. See, your call is already being affirmed,’” Sandy remembers.

Sandy was struck by how the bishop used the very word she had been praying. Finally, she decided to stop worrying. After all, “God doesn’t call the equipped; God equips the called,” she notes.

Sandy earned her Master of Divinity in 2005, graduating summa cum laude and as one of the top students in her class. Metropolitan is her first appointment. She started July 1, 2005, and preached her first sermon two days later, the first Sunday Metropolitan and Eldbrooke met as a merged congregation.

As an associate pastor for the past three years, Sandy has overseen service and advocacy, adult study, congregational care, internal nurture, and worship and the arts. As the staff hones its job descriptions, she will focus more on pastoral care, working on enhancing existing ministries and developing an older adult ministry, both of which Sandy is “really excited about.”

“I think there are a lot of opportunities ahead of us to move in new and exciting directions and reach communities inside and outside our doors,” she says.

Though working in the ministry has its ups and downs, Sandy is confident she’s living faithfully to what God has called her to do. The best part, she says, is “seeing in small ways how God has spoken through me to offer support and encouragement to people in our community of faith, being there through all of life’s journeys, the highs and the lows, helping them to deepen their faith and their spirituality.”

Sandy, now 44, realizes that her life experiences – from starting out as a Christian who attended church only twice a year to watching Austin “leave the nest” for boot camp with the Marines in July – only enhance her ability to minister to others.

“I think there are a lot of people like me,” she explains. “I was living a good, comfortable life, but I had this gnawing feeling in my heart. I knew there had to be something more, something was missing from my life. A lot of people are in that same place, perhaps filling the empty parts of their life with things.”

But Sandy knows the secret isn’t in the “stuff” they can acquire – it is “the fullness of life we reach when we enter into a relationship with God that fills the void.”