

Dear saints and angels of FCC,

It so exciting to begin our new relationship together. Rally Sunday, September 9, will be our first Sunday to worship and share communion together. I know the time we will spend together, as you search for your Called Pastor, will be fruitful, creative, spiritual, and fun!

I have written a bit about my background. I hope you enjoy this story. God bless us all.

At the age of 18 I had an agent in Hollywood and was on track to be another small, blonde actress. It was my dream, my hope, my only goal in life. Finding an agent took only one interview. I signed on the dotted line. Driving to studios for various auditions was a bit more difficult, because I am, and always will be, geographically challenged. In 1980 there was no GPS. But I made it to the interviews and found myself sitting in rooms full of girls who looked exactly like me. Humbling.

My father was an American Baptist Minister. Being a pastor's kid meant that when the doors of the church were open, we were there. I knew how the church functioned and which keys opened which doors. I can't say much went on with my personal faith. I knew how to smile and be polite and eat odd food when invited over to parishioner's homes for dinner. Manners were most important.

One day, my father called and said there was a group of Christian actors going to Israel to perform a Nativity Play and a Passion Play. They needed one more woman. As aforementioned, my faith was as solid as a vapor, so I naively asked him where Israel was. Mmm...

After saying, "Sure, why not?" Life moved quickly. Within one day I had a passport (unheard of), within two days I had two packed suitcases with everything I would need to live in a foreign country for six months (false, I was woefully unprepared), within three days my brother threw a surprise goodbye party (fun), and on day four, I was sitting on a 747 bound for Jordan, then to Israel.

My grandma asked my mom where I was going to be living. "I don't know." My mother said. My grandma asked my mom how I could be contacted or if I would contact someone upon my arrival. "I don't know." My mother said. My grandma asked who I would be working with. "I don't know." My mother said.

My mother had just put her 18-year-old daughter on a plane from Los Angeles to Israel for a six month stay. That was all she knew. When she looks back on that time, she says it was the Holy Spirit that kept her from asking questions, or there would have been no possible way in the world she would have put me on that plane. Thank God. I have an amazingly wonderful mother, I'm glad she was Holy Spirit-blinded that week.

I met nine American strangers when I finally got to Jerusalem. Our director, Francisco de Araujo, was a thin man with crazy white curly hair, which his fingers regularly ran through. He was artistic, visionary, and created two plays that changed many lives. Mine was one of them.

Over the course of six months, our small group became very close. We experienced things such as, being robbed, bomb explosions in the Old City of Jerusalem, an important education about differing cultures and religions living side by side. We ate waffles covered in ice cream, and falafels covered in yogurt sauce. We walked the streets with bibles opened and read the names of the places where we stood in the pages of the Gospels. We went where Jesus went and it was marvelous.

I had many roles in each of our plays. But in the Nativity Play, performed on the hills of Bethlehem, I played the role of an angel. The blonde hair was one stereotypical reason I received this part. All the other smaller angels had the blackest of hair and chocolaty brown eyes. They were local Arabs hired to perform with us, and they were beautiful. I danced with little angels on the hills of Bethlehem.

Six months in Israel, with more experiences than there is space to tell here, brought me to LIFE. Real life. When we all departed for our different homes, I flew back to Los Angeles and told my Hollywood agent bye-bye. I enrolled in College, then Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. I had lived the most fabulous story of Jesus Christ, from his birth in Bethlehem to his gruesome death and life-saving resurrection in Jerusalem. I wanted to tell that story with my life. It was my dream, my hope, my only goal. I wanted to make the story of Christ artistic, visionary, and creative. I understood why Christianity could be as boring as dirt, but also how it could light someone on fire with joy and excitement.

I have been a pastor for 24 years, serving RCA, UCC, and PCUSA churches.

I also write fictional books – The Pastor Maggie Series – about a small, blonde, twenty-six-year-old pastor entering her first church. I write about Pastor Maggie because I don't find many female clergy stories on bookshelves. I also don't always like how clergy are often portrayed in Hollywood, etc. Maggie is full of heart, clumsy, impetuous, lacking life experience, loves God and her new church. Loving the Lord Community Church is full of people who may or may not have similarities to hundreds of parishioners I have served over the years.

So, how have you danced with angels? How have they changed your life?

Dancing with angels in REAL LIFE is more enthralling to me than a lot of what Hollywood puts together. It is truly the collision of our stories with God's stories that make life more powerful than anything else. May the dance continue.

I'll meet you on the hillside.

The Reverend Dr. Barbara Edema

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