



Tempe church welcomes first female senior pastor

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When the Rev. Pamela Hines was a seminary student, a male classmate of another religion told his female peers that because his faith limited the role of women in the church, they would never be welcome in his pulpit.

Those words left the Detroit native anything but speechless.

"I told him, 'That's OK. I don't want to be in yours, want to be in God's,'" said Hines, the new senior pastor at First Congregational Church of Tempe.

Hines is the first female senior pastor in the church's 100-year history. She is the only African American on the board of the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Currently employed as a Chaplain with Evercare Hospice in Phoenix, Hines is accustomed to breaking stereotypes.

"I get a lot of, 'You're too pretty to be a pastor,'" Hines said, as she laughed. "What does that have to do with it? They expect me to look like a nun, I guess."

Hines does not shy away from a trailblazer role.

Prior to coming to Tempe, she was an associate pastor at the United Church of Sun City.

Upon her arrival, the senior pastor there asked, "How thick is your skin?" He explained that some members may have difficulty accepting her, either because she was female, African American or both.

"I told him, 'I've been both for almost 50 years. I think I can handle it,'" Hines said.

Hines said the congregation in Sun City gave her a warm welcome and received her well. When she left, she overheard church members talking about wishing for another female pastor.

Hines takes pride in delivering her sermons with an honest and personal touch that comes from what she described as a "been there, done that" viewpoint. She said women who have gone through personal

struggles and men who are outcasts particularly take her messages to heart.

"I've been divorced, been a single parent, I had to get on welfare," she said. "I'm able to connect with people by saying, 'Been there, done that.'"

Born and raised in Detroit, Hines' father was a lay pastor for Plymouth United Church of Christ, where she would eventually deliver her first sermon and take the role of assistant minister.

She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Detroit Mercy in 1993. She graduated from Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio with master of art's degree in biblical studies and a master of divinity in pastoral counseling. In 2001, she was ordained into the Christian Ministry by the United Church of Christ.

Hines was a probation agent for the Michigan Department of Corrections and, when she moved to Phoenix with her husband Addison three years ago, she took a job as a probation officer for the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

She and Addison, a retired real estate appraiser, have eight children and four grandchildren. Hines has three daughters from her previous marriage. Hines said she was in law enforcement when she started in the ministry, much to the dismay of her girls.

"They said they'd never get a boyfriend now. Apparently, boys were telling them, 'Your mom's a probation officer and a minister. She's got a badge, a .38 and a bible,'" Hines said.

Hines said she is excited about heading her own church and spreading her favorite message: forgiveness.

"So you screwed up, big deal, get over it. God will forgive you. Let it go," she said.

"It's harder to forgive ourselves, to look in the mirror and say, 'I love you.'"

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