

Her ordination was 'a very significant time'

by Virginia Rucker
 Daily Courier Associate Editor

FOREST CITY — When Janet Stephens Forrest was ordained at the First Baptist Church recently she was one of the few women who will become ministers in that denomination. She has another claim to uniqueness — she's married to a minister.

Her ordination August 14 is a step towards a goal she set for herself when she was 15, a goal from which she has never wavered nor had any regrets. It was also especially meaningful to her.

"I appreciate the boldness of the First Baptist Church in Forest City in ordaining a woman minister, for their support and affirmation. It was really a special time for me, at my home church, and to have a former pastor, the Rev. Dillard Mynatt, my husband, Scott, and a fellow woman in ministry, Peggy Stout, to take part in the service. And it was the church I was married in.

"It's been a significant time, coming back to the church that supported me, for this to be my church when I received the call to service, then to ordain me. It was very special."

She explains, "In the Southern Baptist church ordination takes place when a person perceives that they have received a call to the ministry and the church affirms them in that call."

The Southern Baptist Convention has between 100 and 200 hundred women ministers with that number growing she says. "The enrollment in the seminary has increased over 200 percent, women are no longer few and far between, many in the Master of Divinity program which until recently was considered almost exclusively for men. And women are beginning to organize themselves in 'Women in Ministry' and to support each other.

"I see all ministers working together for the same purpose. I'm glad to see more women interested in the ministry, I want us to work together (with the men), not as opposing forces."

She had "grown up in a Christian home with Christian parents and they were one of the prime forces that led me. We lived in Spindale until I was in the seventh grade when we moved to Forest City and the people of Spencer Baptist and the First Baptist here were so supportive. I went with young people from the First Baptist on mission trips and this was where I first perceived this call."



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It took her six months, she says, before she began to long for studies again and began by taking Hebrew on her lunch hour. In the Fall of 1981 she was accepted full-time in the Master of Divinity program.

Scott was still in the seminary and serving as associate minister of youth at a church in Louisville. After graduation in May he re-enrolled for his Masters of Religious Education. He will receive that degree and Janet her Masters of

have accepted me and supported me."

She has worked in the field she loves, pastoral care and counseling, as chaplain at Humana Hospital University, the teaching hospital for the University of Louisville Medical School.

"I was one of a number of chaplains. Women always outnumber the men in clinical and pastoral care, and we get credit, rather than pay. I worked in the intensive care unit and emergency room, it's a difficult job but a job in which you can feel how much you are needed. Humana is the major trauma hospital so we got all the victims for 100 miles around."

The fact that she was a woman serving as chaplain was questioned only once in her 18 months at the hospital. "In time of crisis people don't care whether you are a woman or a man. In my situation, victims usually were not up to talking. It was the families I worked with, talking, praying, reading Scriptures, listening how the accident happened, how much the victim means to them, and occasionally bringing ice water to upset persons.

"The most difficult situation is when death occurs. I've gotten close to patients and families and it is difficult emotionally to bear the bad news to the family. But it is very rewarding to know that I am needed and that I can help the family of the person who had died to feel the presence of God in this very difficult time."

If she had to select the one phase of her ministry she values most, Janet says, "it would be the contact with patients and their families, being there just to listen."

In September, she'll go to Central State Psychiatric Hospital for further training. Besides counseling, she'll preach every Sunday in the hospital — "an opportunity I'll enjoy. I have preached at Humana and got a chance to preach in my husband's church on Baptist Women's Day. It is a lot of hard work; I have sympathy for ministers who do three and four sermons a week."

She's done everything from communion to baptizing but "until now I tried to get ordained ministers, if they were available. I felt that I wanted more support of the church behind me before I did these. I have no hesitation now, since my ordination, to fully minister to people who look to me as their minister."

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She strongly felt she wanted Christian service but thought at first that this might take her to medical school. With that in mind she entered Wake Forest University as a biology major.

"But I had always been involved in the church and I became acquainted with the School of Pastoral Care and Counseling at school and took courses at Baptist Hospital (affiliated with Bowman Gray) and found there that I could combine my love for the hospital with my love for the ministry and my call to service — put it all together and have a little happy reunion."

During her freshman year she met Scott Forrest, from Lexington, and the two dated most of the time they were in college. He graduated a year ahead of Janet and they were married at Christmas, in the First Baptist Church here. "We moved into a tiny apartment at Wake Forest's married student housing. He was working but had been accepted at Southern Seminary in Louisville."



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Working and going to the seminary hasn't been easy, nor has the financing of two educations. "We've done all sorts of work: I've read to a blind lady, worked as a hostess in a fish camp, Scott worked in a photomat in a shopping mall and as a carpenter and painter."

Since both are equally as busy, they share in chores. "We don't have much free time and so many times we spend it together washing our car, doing the dishes and cooking. We try to help one another, if one of us stays up all night working on a paper the other will try to help by typing or proof-reading or whatever it comes down to. We've had a good, balanced partnership from the beginning."

Scott is currently pastor at Kent Baptist Church in Madison, Indiana, a post he's held a little more than a year. "It's a rural church and we drive up every week and spend the weekend there, so for a short while we became the pastor and his wife. At the

always volunteered to work in clinical and pastoral care, and we get credit, rather than pay. I worked in the intensive care unit and emergency room, it's a difficult job but a job in which you can feel how much you are needed. Humana is the major trauma hospital so we got all the victims for 100 miles around."

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After graduation "Scott and I hope to find a place big enough for both of us. I will enter Clinical Pastor Education internship, a full-time paid position similar to a medical intern. It's available only in certain hospitals and some industrial chaplaincy have CP E, Spindale Mills and Tanner here.

"At the same time Scott will hope to find a church position in the same area. We've been away from our homes four years — nine hours away — and a shorter distance would be what we want, four or five hours maximum. My mother and Scott's mother are widowed and we would like to be nearer them.

"I would never say 'no' to any ministerial opportunities but at this time all I can see is what I'm doing or moving in to a pastoral care and counseling center like that at Winston-Salem. I'll always be involved in the local church since Scott's ministry will be with that but we see our ministries as complementing each other, he in the church and I in my area outside. He's been my biggest supporter in