



An Interview with Rev. Grace Imathiu

In July 2018 we had a chance to interview Grace Imathiu as she began her new role as Senior Pastor of First Church. Here is a transcript of that interview.

Personal Background

What was it like growing up in Kenya?

Growing up in Kenya was comfortable, safe, lots of relatives, and always summer.

As the daughter of a Methodist Bishop and a local preacher, how influential were your parents in your own career path?

My parents were so passionate about their Calling as disciples of Jesus it made me nervous! I promised myself I would never ever work for God ---- unless the call was clear and God made it impossible for me to be happy contemplating doing anything else.

Tell us about your family.

My family, like many families, is complex and is made up of humans who live across the world in Kenya, Texas, England, Sweden, Norway and Greece. We are a family in transition. For instance, although David and Erik will be joining me Evanston, David has a job in Alabama which makes it a heck of a commute, and Erik will be graduating next year and heading off to college.

Do you cook? What is your favorite meal?

I love to cook although I really can't cook! David does most of the cooking in our family, and Erik is also a good cook. I love fried plantains from Whole Foods served with vanilla ice cream.

You previously served as Sr. Pastor at Green Bay UMC. Are you a Packers or Bears fan?

In my humble opinion, Michael Jordan will forever be the best basketball player of all time.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I hardly ever have any free time! I love bookstores! I especially love secondhand bookstores. Evanston will be a treat!

Are you familiar with Evanston? What have you explored so far?

I know nothing about Evanston. But since United Methodist clergy are appointed not just to the congregation but to the community, I have applied to join the Leadership Evanston Signature Program in the fall. I am also looking forward to visiting the Evanston History Center to learn more about the parsonage which was built in 1929.

How is your singing?

I am such an unabashedly terrible singer! Nevertheless, I do not shy away from “making a joyful noise unto the Lord”.

First Church**How did you feel when you learned of your appointment to First Church?**

When I learned of my appointment to First Church Evanston I was confused, and I was terrified. I was confused because I thought I was doing a grand job at my appointment in Naperville, and I was terrified because no one likes to follow a pastor who has served for as long as Dean did. I did not want to default into an interim pastor. After meeting with Dean quite a few times, I began to see the possibilities and a month before my arrival I had a “WOW!” moment. I am so excited and honored to be at First!

What are your top priorities as you begin to lead this congregation?

I have only three priorities for the year.

- 1 Listen to God’s movement at First Church.
- 2 Listen to God’s people at First Church.
- 3 Listen to God’s call on my ministry during this season at First Church.

What is your process for writing a sermon each week?

Pray. Read. Draw stick figures. Read some more. Talk about it. Pray some more. Drink tea. Repeat every day for three weeks. Write a manuscript.

Beyond the pulpit, what are your favorite and/or most fulfilling aspects of being a pastor?

In addition to preaching, I love Spirit-filled Baptisms; I am nourished serving at the Open Table; and I am both humbled and comforted by the ritual of death and resurrection.

As part of the Reconciling Ministries Network, what role can First Church continue to play in advancing inclusion across our denomination?

I am looking forward to listening to who God is calling First Church to be become as a member of the Reconciling Ministries Network.

Is there anything unique you have done in previous services or ministries that you are looking forward to bringing to First Church?

I try to stay away from being unique! I have never ever done anything unique anywhere!

Other

To many, religion seems to create more division than acceptance. How can the church better follow Christ’s example and welcome all people?

The church can follow Christ's example of emphasizing Conversation over and above Conversion.

A child approaches you and asks why you believe in God. What is your response?

I am so glad you asked so I can tell you that God has other names which make it easier to know why I believe in God. God's other name is SOURCE OF LOVE. I believe in LOVE! God's other name is HOPE. I believe in HOPE! God's other name is BEAUTY. I am always on the lookout for the beautiful that can be seen, heard, felt, thought and even tasted! God is splashed everywhere and super splashed most of all in our church!