

From Math to Ministry: Meet Elder Courtney Pybas

Written By Jacob A. SanSoucie

"I grew up in a non-Christian family... It was odd because although I wasn't trying to rebel against my family, becoming a Christian felt like a form of teenage rebellion because my parents were not happy with this decision. It caused a big uproar in the family."

When you first meet Courtney, you might see a thoughtful math teacher with a warm smile. What you might not immediately notice is the rich tapestry of faith, family, and service that has shaped her journey to becoming an elder at First & Calvary.

Rebelling Toward Faith

Unlike many who inherit their faith from family traditions, Courtney's path to Christ involved push back from her family. Growing up in Stillwater, Oklahoma with academic parents—her mother a theater professor who claimed atheism and her father more agnostically inclined—Courtney's interest in spiritual matters was discouraged.

"My mom pretty much told me I could have become anything but a Christian," Courtney recalls with a gentle candor.

At twelve years old, amid battles with her mother over faith, divine providence arrived in an unexpected form—a college student hired to clean their house. Overhearing one of these spiritual standoffs, this young woman invited Courtney to church when her mother was away. At that Baptist church, Courtney heard the gospel and responded immediately. *"I marched right down that aisle,"* she says, marking what would become a defining moment in her life.



Finding Home at First & Calvary

Courtney's journey to our church has been one of theological exploration and divine timing. She and her husband Kevin, whom she met at the same Baptist church in Stillwater, gradually found themselves drawn to Presbyterian theology. After years in various locations including Athens, Georgia while Kevin pursued his PhD, they settled in Springfield.

"We had neighbors that were members here and they invited us. We came the first Sunday and joined," she explains, though their time at First & Calvary hasn't been without interruptions.

After a period away and facing personal challenges including a severe autoimmune disease, Courtney returned to First & Calvary and found herself moved by Pastor Don's preaching. *"I just knew that was where I wanted to be,"* she shares. *"Coming back felt like a nice reunion."*

Called to Lead

When asked what led her to say yes to becoming an elder, Courtney's answer reveals both vulnerability and faith.

"When we came back here, I was just so excited and ready to serve. My heart was just kind of like, 'What do I do?'" Those questions emerged after what she describes as a "dry period" of illness and COVID isolation. *"When that call came, I felt like it was sort of an answer to prayer."*

The role hasn't been without challenges. As chair of the finance committee, Courtney found herself stretched beyond her comfort zone. *"I just was like, 'Oh no, I don't have those strengths.' I was scared,"* she admits. But under Pastor Don's guidance, she's embraced the opportunity for growth.

"It's been a good stretching...to trust God and have that leadership there."

Heart for Discipleship

When it comes to church life, Courtney's passion clearly lies in Bible study and discipleship. Whether leading women's Bible studies, helping organize Sunday school, or participating in The Table discussions after contemporary worship, she thrives in spaces where believers dig deeper together.

"I've always been involved in women's Bible study, whether just leading or organizing," she notes, emphasizing how these connections help her own spiritual growth.

The current sermon series on Encounters with Jesus has been particularly meaningful for her. *"I've loved what we've been studying,"* she shares, noting how a recent message about forgiveness had spoken to her even before she arrived at church. *"Even before I came to church, I felt like God was talking to me about understanding how much I've been forgiven."*

An Invitation to Belong

For newcomers wondering where they might fit at First & Calvary, Courtney offers wisdom born from experience.

"I would encourage new people to find their place, find a place where they can serve," she advises. "The more you get involved, the more you get out of it really, and the relationships you develop are the ones that are going to encourage you and give you ways to walk in your faith."

For Courtney, church family has always been her "North Star," not replacing Jesus, but providing the community where faith is lived out together.

Looking ahead, she's excited about the church's solid foundation for growth, the emphasis on the arts, and the emerging ministry to international students. *"Whatever God has for us,"* she says with openness, *"I just want to continue to bring people to Christ and bring people here to be a part of the family."*

Beyond the Elder's Role

When she's not tackling church finances or teaching high school math in Walnut Grove, Courtney finds joy in cooking, particularly Asian cuisine inspired by her daughter's time living in Hong Kong and Taiwan. She dreams of working through an entire cookbook someday when retirement arrives, with a special focus on bread-baking.

And if her cooking hobby seems unexpected, her love of murder mysteries might surprise you even more. *"It's like a puzzle to solve,"* she explains with a smile, a fitting passion for a math teacher who enjoys piecing things together.

If given the chance to have coffee with anyone from Scripture, she'd choose Mary Magdalene. *"Since I'm on this forgiveness journey right now, I'd like to talk to Mary Magdalene because I feel like she understood it. She was forgiven so deeply and just how that transformed her."*

In many ways, Courtney's own journey reflects that same transformative power, from a family resistant to Christianity to elder leadership, from economics to education, always following where God leads next. Her presence at First & Calvary reminds us that God's family is built through diverse journeys, all converging in faithful service to Christ and His church.