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40 YEARS IN ONE CALLING, ZERO REGRETS MINT HILL PASTOR: 'THIS IS WHAT I NEED TO BE DOING'

As a senior in college, [Chuck Williamson](#) knew he was headed for war.

"It was 1968 and the war was raging," he said. "As soon as word got out that you were no longer in college, unless you were someone who could pull some strings, you were going to Vietnam."

After receiving his draft letter and taking his physical, Williamson went to Richmond to test for Officer Candidate School. "If we're gonna be drafted, why not go as officers?" he reasoned.

While in Richmond, he stayed a night with his older brother - who at the time was in seminary. That one night changed the course of his life. His thoughts of combat boots shifted to thoughts of the cross, and he decided to pursue the ministry.

"A lot of people would say it was coincidence, or fear," he said. "But I think it was the Holy Spirit."

Forty years later, the pastor of Philadelphia Presbyterian Church in Mint Hill hasn't felt derailed from his calling.

"There have been a lot of hard times," he said, "but I still feel this is what I need to be doing."

Born in Portsmouth, Va., Williamson was raised in different places across the Southeast. His father was a Presbyterian pastor.

The lifelong Christian, who initially set out to follow in his dad's footsteps, began having doubts about his future as a student at Hampden-Sydney College.

"I never had that clear, burning bush, voice-from-heaven kind of experience calling me into ministry," he said.

That "struck blind" revelation emerged eventually, though, while in Richmond testing for OCS - to which he was not accepted.

After graduating from seminary, he was named associate pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Goldsboro and then pastor at a small church in Mississippi.

"I developed some of my closest relationships at that small church," he said. "They nurtured me on how to be a pastor. They helped me in a very loving and gentle way, how I could grow and improve. I realized, 'This is how I need to spend my life.' "

Williamson went on to lead a church near Mobile, Ala., and earn his doctor of ministry from Columbia Theological seminary in Decatur, Ga.

After moving to First Presbyterian of Monroe in 1986, and leading there for 15 years, he couldn't find work.

"I was over 50," he said.

Then, following a few stints as an interim pastor, Philadelphia Presbyterian gave him a chance. When asked about the best part of his role: "I love the fact that people allow me to be a part of their lives in those pivotal moments - birth, death, baptism, marriage, times of crisis," he said. "I use those times to remind them that God is loving, and he is good."

His biggest challenge:

"What I feel called to do is to share with people the good news of the Gospel," he said. "What the church often requires you to do is other stuff. Rather than getting bogged down in meetings or petty arguments and the tedious things that are required, I try to keep my mind focused on sharing the Gospel."

What people might be surprised to know:

His primary transportation is a Vespa scooter. Why? One, it's fun. Two, it saves money. And most important, it consumes less gas.

"A couple years ago, the president talked about reducing our dependence on foreign oil," he said. "I thought, 'What can I do?' At the time I debated this, my son-in-law had been deployed to Iraq. I believed then, and believe now, that there's a connection between our desire for oil (in America) and the fact that we're at war in Iraq."

"Now I know that's controversial and some people would disagree with that but if we were there for completely altruistic reasons, then why aren't we in Darfur and other places? They (Iraq) have something we want."

Williamson, 62, and his wife, Barbara, who will teach English at Porter Ridge High this fall, have four children: Liz, Chaz, Susannah and Katie Alice.

Away from the church he enjoys his roles as husband, father, grandfather and chef. Cooking is his most highly coveted recreational activity.

"I read recipe books and like to experiment with stuff," he said. "Like every cook, I have my successes and failures."

His specialty? Desserts. Particularly chocolate cheesecake.

Through all life's sweet moments and uncertainties, Williamson has clung to one of his most cherished Bible verses: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:4-5).

