

Meet our FUMC Family

Meet Joe and Ruth Way

Joe and Ruth Way have been members of FUMC GT since 1996.

Joe was born number five of seven children at home, near Georgetown, Mississippi. For his 10th birthday, one of his brothers was born. He said they never had birthday parties or received presents. He did say having his brother born on his birthday was the best present he received.

His dad was a dirt farmer. His parents always had a garden and raised just about anything. His mother did most of the canning. Being farmers sustained their family. They were so very poor.

During Joe's high school years, he joined FFA (Future Farmers of America). For a project, his dad gave him one acre to grow cotton. Joe said he worked his one acre but also was expected to help with the family farm, too. He said that after the crop was harvested, he wasn't sure if his dad was going to let him have the proceeds of that cotton or not. Joe waited and waited. One day his dad had him go with him to town. Joe thought, maybe, we are going to the bank. Sure enough, his dad drove to the bank and pulled a check out of his pocket and told the teller to open an account for Joe. Joe had earned \$150. That was a lot of money. Joe thinks that is when his dad really began to believe in him. "I had also grown more corn on an acre than my dad." From that point on, Joe had to purchase his own clothes and needs. Joe was valedictorian of his senior class. He laughed. There were nine boys and one girl in his graduating class. Ruth chimed in and said, "And every one of those nine boys liked that one girl."

Ruth was the youngest of ten. She was born in Brookhaven, Mississippi. Brookhaven is about 50 miles from Georgetown. Both Joe and Ruth's families were raised in the Methodist Church even though there were Baptist Churches every hill or holler in Mississippi. Ruth said she attended vacation bible school and youth events with her Baptist friends. She remembers her dad telling her, "They are just trying to convert you." Ruth's parents worked their whole lives to make sure all ten children received a college education. Ruth attended the University of Arizona for three years. She took a break due to a family move. She finished her degree in Elementary Education from Wesleyan College for Women in Macon, Georgia. She taught second and third grades. She said, "I loved teaching. They wouldn't have had to pay me to teach. In fact, they didn't pay me much."

Joe worked and paid his own way through college and graduate school. He graduated from Millsap College with a BA in Religion. Joe became a student pastor near Brookhaven, Mississippi. This is where Joe and Ruth met in 1954. Joe said of all the girls, only ONE stood out. Ruth's parents were not supportive of their attraction with each other until Ruth was older. Joe and Ruth



married in 1957. They had two children, a boy and a girl, twenty months apart.

Joe was assigned a church in Tennessee for three years while continuing his education at Vanderbilt, earning a Master of Divinity in 1960. During the 1960's the country was struggling with segregation. Joe and 27 other Methodist pastors and leaders signed a declaration of conscience. A few times, Joe and Ruth feared for their lives. Church officials refused to assign Joe to a church, so they had to leave Mississippi.

Joe decided to join the Air Force in 1964. He was assigned as a Chaplain in Alaska riding the radar circuit. He served 23 years in the Air Force with two overseas tours and several other stateside duty stations. He retired as Lt. Colonel. Ruth said it was much easier as a military wife than as a preacher's wife. She said, "I felt like I could be myself."

After the Air Force, Joe was a VA Chaplain in Biloxi, Mississippi. He was a certified counselor for alcoholism treatment in both Mississippi and Texas. He has written four books. Of the four books, *Getting Right with God*, is his favorite. He ended by saying, "We learned from Jesus how to love and value people. He gave what he had, and it cost him his life."

Joe also said, "Ruth did a super job as a preacher's wife. When they ask me to leave the church, they wanted to keep her." Ruth responded, "They just didn't want to give up my pies."

Joe was the Pathfinder Sunday School teacher for many years until Covid affected the class and the world. Ruth has served in many volunteer positions in and out of our church. She was the volunteer service leader that used to provide lunch for Rotary Club every week. She served on the Senior Adult Council and has volunteered for the Caring Place for over 25 years.

Joe and Ruth now live at The Oaks, Gracious Senior Living. They say it is an adjustment, but they have moved so many times during their marriage, they are adjusting. The hardest part is downsizing.

Interviewed by Judy Finnell