

**(The Very Revd) Charles Francis Edgar III,**

Dean and Rector, Church of the Apostles, Columbia

1520 Bull Street

Columbia, South Carolina 29201

1931 Henderson Street

Columbia, South Carolina 29201

chip@cotacola.org

### **Spiritual Autobiography**

The Proverbs of Solomon teach, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The assurance that can be gleaned from there—that godly parents, tending the hearts of their children graciously and lovingly, can trust God to bring them to himself—was enjoyed by my parents. I, together with my five siblings, was raised in the faith with grace and forgiveness both taught and modeled, and all six of us continue to live out the truth of the gospel we were taught. As I look back on my life, then, I cannot recall a time that I did not know Jesus, and that I—a sinner—needed him. As I have grown and matured, I have come to know both more of myself and my need for a Savior and Lord, and of Jesus and his gracious provision for my need.

My upbringing was one of serious, intentional, and intellectual discipleship. I attended a small Christian school from kindergarten through my senior year of high school that took seriously the Reformed emphasis that all of life—every discipline, every endeavor—was under the Lordship of Christ. In high school I studied theology, New Testament Greek, and biblical studies. (I even had to memorize the entire Westminster Shorter Catechism—question and answer—and recite them without prompting in order to graduate!) Our church youth group read CS Lewis and Francis Schaeffer and participated in the national Bible Quiz program. We were serious!

Raised in the south, in the days of integration and the Civil Rights movement, my parents were deeply involved in the founding of the Christian school I attended. In that context we were confronted with the ugly reality of racism. Looking back, I'm deeply grateful for two particular moments—one out of my view, and the other, very much part of my personal experience.

Westminster Christian Academy was founded in 1964, the year I was born. Like many Christian schools in the era of desegregation, it initially admitted only white students. But in 1973, when I was in the third grade, an African American family applied. I would later learn that the School Board, on which my father sat, struggled to respond. In the end, the board voted to open the doors to African Americans. When challenged with the negative effect the move might have on white enrollment, the board responded that their responsibility was only to do what was right, it was up to the Lord whether the school would suffer or prosper because of their obedience.

The second moment then, the one that impacted me directly, came a few years later. Our athletic teams competed exclusively with other small, southern, Christian private schools. I vividly remember travelling to away games, only to arrive and find gym doors locked to us because we had black players on our team.

I'm grateful both for the courage and faithfulness of that school board, and for the experience of rejection that I shared with black teammates, cultivating in me an awareness of the reality of racial prejudice at a young age.

By the time I graduated from high school, I knew a bit about myself and about the Christian faith. I continue to be profoundly grateful for the strong formation I received. I took my faith as seriously as an 18-year-old can, but there was a kind of knowledge that I was missing.

As a student at Wheaton College, I was known as someone who took his faith seriously. Unfortunately, that didn't keep me from getting into trouble. I was involved in pranks and much good-natured fun; but several times, we overstepped boundaries and broke rules, and did things that were just wrong. Once, aware that I had willingly done something that I knew was wrong, my understanding of God's grace was severely challenged: I knew God forgave our errors—sins of commission—but I couldn't imagine God forgiving blatant, willful disobedience. For several days I was ashamed of my action and doubted the reality of my faith—how could I have done wrong, knowing better? That Sunday morning, I woke troubled while it was still dark. I went off by myself to—I don't know that you can even call it prayer—sit before the Lord in my embarrassment and shame. As I did, I began to sense what I can only describe as permeating light and warmth. As I look back on that experience, the word I use is *embrace*. I felt loved. Forgiven. Welcomed into the heart of my Heavenly Father.

Since then, I have lived in the light of that profound experience of grace, and grace has become the hallmark of my preaching and teaching, and of the leadership I offer.

I graduated from Wheaton, having been captain of the swim team for three years, intending to go into coaching. (I had majored in Physical Education.) Instead, God literally pushed me into campus ministry, then to seminary. I intended to get my theological education and then go back to campus ministry where I felt I could make an impact for the Kingdom. It was at that time my new wife and I began worshipping in a strong Episcopal Church, and the Rector of that parish challenged me to pursue Holy Orders and ministry in the church. "You have gifts for ministry in the church," he told me, "God doesn't give gifts that he doesn't intend to see used."

After getting a degree in Anglican Studies, I went into parish ministry, and served churches in Tennessee, Florida, the Chicago suburbs, and, after the major crisis in the church in 2003, in Columbia, South Carolina, first with the AMiA, and eventually the ACNA.

We left St Mark's, Glen Ellyn (TEC) to come to Columbia to plant Church of the Apostles with a small group of people deeply committed to the vision of a vibrant, orthodox Anglican parish. Hard lessons that I had learned as Rector of St Mark's would come to shape the way I thought about and went about the work of church planting. During my years there, I had embraced much church growth strategy and the emphasis of Rector as Entrepreneurial Leader. In planting Church of the Apostles, I wanted to embrace my call as Pastor, Priest, teacher, and the business of the sacramental cure of souls. I believed that if I embraced that, while growth might come more slowly, it would surely come.

While the work has tested me, us, deeply many times, God's blessing on this endeavor has been amazing to behold.

Throughout this time our family steadily grew. Our boys, Chase and John Brogan, were born while we were in Tennessee and our daughter, Anne Tyler, was born in Glen Ellyn. But Beth and I became convinced that our family was not complete, and we were moved (she first, I took some convincing) to adopt two daughters.

That experience of adoption echoed to me St Paul's bold assertion in Ephesians 2 that, "you who once were far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ..." Becoming an adoptive father made me appreciate in new ways what it means to be an adopted child of God, as St Paul says in Romans 8, "an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ." Welcoming a child by adoption into our family helped me to experience deeply the love our Heavenly Father has for us and helped me to hear the Father's words to his Only-Begotten, "You are my beloved son, in you I am well pleased..." as belonging to me, too, through grace. Adopting children has changed the way I live and serve.

When we moved to Columbia—having served in three parishes to that point—I whole-heartedly embraced an idea I had been challenged with when I was discerning God's call to ordained ministry: back then, I went to talk to the pastor (Presbyterian) who had known me my whole life. He had baptized me, had been there for me and my family when my mother died, and mentored me when I was in high school and college, giving me some of my earliest opportunities for ministry in the church. I asked his counsel about ordination. He turned to John 12.20-26. Some Greeks come to see Jesus, we're told, and in that exchange Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit..." Pastor Paul, who planted a church as a young man, and retired from that same church 40 years later, said to me, "Pastoral ministry is about finding that plot of ground into which the seed of your life will fall and bear fruit."

I've tried to invest myself over the last 17 years at Church of the Apostles as if it were that plot of ground for me. But I've always said that the decision to move on is in God's hand. If he is now calling me to a new plot of ground, a new place of ministry, I'm open to his leading.

Please be assured that, whatever God's call, the Search Committee and the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina are in my prayers.

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