

# Church on the Green pastor has her 'ear to the ground'

By Daniel Jackovino  
Staff Writer

Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green installed its first woman designated pastor this past Sunday afternoon. Her name is Ruth Boling.

According to an October membership letter from the selection committee, Boling began to hear her calling to the ministry when she was a Yale English literature undergraduate.

Ordained an associate pastor in 1989, her first church was the Bedford Presbyterian Church in Bedford, N.H. Most recently, she was interim pastor of Olivet Presbyterian Church in Staten Island.

The letter states she "brings 23 years of ordained ministry, 24 years of marriage, 14 years of motherhood and a lifetime of rich and varied experiences in Presbyterian churches."

Her preaching, Boling said recently in new her Parish House office, can be a vehicle for imaginative and reflective storytelling. She is, in fact, the author of several children's books, and a nationally recognized preacher.

The material for stories she uses to illuminate her sermons, she said, are drawn from everywhere — children's stories, personal encounters, novels she has read, the Bible.

"I try to keep my ear to the ground," she said, "so what the people hear on Sunday is relevant."

She starts by forming her sermons using Scriptures. She wants her congregates to know that a Scriptural message is good news.

"A sermon is flawed if it's all judgement and criticism," she said. "and if there's a story I can incorporate, I do it."

Boling wasn't always a storyteller. But one day, traveling from New Hampshire as an associate pastor, she began her apprenticeship.

She was with a group of youths on a bus motoring to an activity in Indiana and the youngsters, she said, were getting rowdy. Another pastor asked if he should tell them a story. Boling didn't understand. But when her colleague told his story, the youngsters became engrossed.

"I was absolutely astounded," Boling admitted.

She asked her colleague to tell her everything he knew about telling a story effectively.

"Things happen in threes," she said was one thing he pointed out.

She also was instructed how to make transitions between parts of a story and how to memorize a story.

"You visualize it," she said. "You see the scenes even if you don't memorize the words. And I was also told about using refrains."

Asked to explain refrains, Boling did by using the story of the Three Wise Men.



Photo by Daniel Jackovino

As she met with parishioners following her Sunday installation, Pastor Ruth Boling, left, reacts to recognizing the name of Rev. Doris Glaspy.

This is the biblical story taken from the Gospel of Matthew about the Three Wise Men, or Magi. Following a star, they anticipated discovering the newborn Christ child as prophesied.

Stopping in Jerusalem, they were asked by King Herod to return to him with information about this infant so that he might also worship him. But in reality, Herod wanted the child dead.

The Wise Men proceeded to Bethlehem where they found the child. However, journeying back to inform Herod, while they slept, an angel visited them and warned them to return home by another route. They did.

"I envisioned this story as if the Three Wise Men were listening to crazy talk," Boling said. "I've had one part of the congregation saying, 'Don't do this, it's crazy talk.' And the other half of the congregation saying, 'Go ahead, follow that star.'"

Boling said politics infrequently enters her preaching. But when it does, she lets everyone know its her opinion.

"In the Presbyterian tradition, God alone is Lord of the conscience," she said. "What I preach is meant to be taken seriously. But it's up to the listener to make up their own mind."

The selection committee's letter ended by noting the position of designated pastor is for three years. After this time, the congregation and Boling will determine if it should be made permanent.