

Bill McConnell's Spiritual Journey

Lead Minister of First Christian Church of Harrison since 1991, Bill grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. He has been serving in the ministry since 1970 and was ordained in his home church in 1972. He has served congregations in Kentucky, Iowa, Illinois and Ohio. He has been involved in fire and rescue work for most of his adult life and has been very active with the Boy Scouts of America since 1970. Bill and his wife Nancy live in Okeana, Bill has four adult children (Mack, Meg, David and Robin) and Nancy has three (Klint, Josh and Jackie). They have ten grandchildren.



This is my story -- And I'm sticking to it.

My best friend told me upon first meeting me, "I think we could be friends, you're not very spiritual." He meant that I am not phony. The truth is I am not very spiritual. But I am a still a phony.

I was born September 20, 1946 in Louisville, Kentucky; the fourth in a family of six children. Five of us grew up together. My younger brother was adopted long after the rest of us were grown and out of the house. My father, William T. McConnell, Jr., was an attorney and Vice President of Lincoln Income Life Insurance Co. My mother, June Redding McConnell was a homemaker, seamstress and artist.

Dad was fresh from WWII. He promised God he would go to church and insisted on taking me and all my siblings with him. I lived a rather idyllic home life. I had good parents, we lived in the country and we lived well.

I graduated in 1964 from Eastern High School in Louisville, KY. While in school I participated in many sports: baseball, basketball, cross-country, and football and dating Nancy Rupp. My older brother and I were one year apart in school and shared sports, friends, social life and a room. He was the good boy and I wasn't.

We went to Sunday School and church and most everything else in between. It was not a bad experience. The pastor was a family friend and a very nice guy. The sermons were boring and not what I could call deeply spiritual. He used to put his hand on my head and say, "This one is going to be a preacher." I would respond by slapping his hand and giving him a good cussing.

Life was difficult between my father and me. I wasn't exactly rebellious, but I certainly wasn't compliant. I did just about whatever I pleased and then paid the consequences for my behavior. I was an A-B student and played several sports – football and baseball seriously. I had a very tumultuous and painful high school romance with one of the prettiest girls in school. Late in our senior year she was angry with me and ran off and married someone else.

When I went away to college, I went away to college. I left the church, not because I disliked it, but because it was irrelevant. God just didn't really factor into my life. Because of injuries, I didn't play sports. I replaced those with politics and drinking. I was deeply involved in both. My plan, my dream was to go to law school, become involved in politics and become a United States Senator from the state of Kentucky. All of that changed.

In 1965 my older brother and I spent the summer driving across the country. It was an amazing experience. During our trip my brother spoke to me about having a personal relationship with God. I became a born again Christian that summer. Not much changed in my life. It was a slow start. Just before my senior year I sensed a call to ministry. I struggled with that because I had other plans. I went on a six month drinking binge and was thrown out of school. I connived my way back in and graduated. I made peace with God and agreed to go to seminary. That Fall I married Pat Burris and started seminary. We were married about two years before we had our first child, Mack (William Thomas McConnell, IV). I worked at night and went to school full time in the day. Life was all a blur these years.

While at Asbury I experienced the revival of 1970 and that caused me to start stop viewing God as theoretical and to experience Him as real. I saw miracles. Even after graduating in 1971 I still didn't get ordained or work in the church. In the fall of 1972 my home church called me to be a Youth Minister. That changed my life. My time at Beargrass was amazing. We saw God do some great things in the lives of dozens of kids.

After leaving Beargrass, I took a small church in a tiny town in Iowa. The church flourished and we made some great friends. I went for more education and I and received a Doctor of Ministry degree from Kingsway Theological Seminary. I also worked at the Iowa Training School for Girls and the Iowa State Juvenile Home. My marriage got crappy but I didn't notice. Things finally got so bad that I quit the church before I was asked to resign.

We moved to a small church in an even tinier town in central Illinois. We both had a great time and made some good friends. The church won awards for church growth. But the marriage still wasn't coming together. While in Illinois I suffered some catastrophic health problems from undiagnosed lead poisoning and was a semi invalid for several months. In hopes of saving the marriage we decided to move back to Kentucky, closer to family to see if that would help.

The next four years were horrible. For the first time in my ministry, I was totally mismatched with the church I served. It did not work. I didn't like them and they didn't like me. It was a "country club" closed church that had suffered a huge split not long before I came which they didn't tell me about. My wife and I went to counseling and struggled for a couple of more years. She finally divorced me. I thought I understood why, I just couldn't fix it. I found out later that there was more to the problems than we understood at the time of the divorce. Even though I was relieved to be out of the marriage I was devastated.

While in that community I worked in the fire service and EMS, which was nothing new for me. I had become a certified firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician in 1980. I also served as the Oldham County Police Chaplain and worked in the Kentucky prison system. I drowned my sorrows in hard, dirty work. Two years of deep dark depression followed. I had had three basic goals in life – to be a good husband, to be a good father and to be a successful Pastor. And I had failed miserably at all three. I was suicidal most of the time. I left that church, went to another for a year as an associate and was fired from that church. I was unemployed and basically homeless for about six months and I was a complete basket case. I knew God was somewhere near but I could not find the energy to seek find Him.

I then moved to Falmouth, Kentucky, and had a nice pastorate. Most of the people were a blast to work with and the church enjoyed some nice growth and did some wonderful ministry. When the private ambulance service that served the area closed down, the county took it over. I ran the EMS system for the county and got my life back. After a few years I married Nancy. In one 24 hour period I went from living alone to living in a household of 8. It kinda freaked me out. We moved to the Harrison church in December of 1991. It has been a thrill to see it grow from a total membership of 265 to 670; average attendance has grown from just under 100 to just under 400; have gone from one Bible Study group to 25 groups; and gone from one traditional worship service to a traditional and a contemporary service. The church budget has grown from a budget of 85K to a budget of 500K. It is fun, challenging and exciting to go to work every day. I sit and watch God do some wondrous things in people lives and families, see people catch the vision and do meaningful ministry. I have been challenged as never before to grow in my relationship with God.

The only thing that hasn't changed is that I am still a phony. I expect to, any day, be arrested for impersonating a minister.