

## **Biography, The Reverend Michael J. Magee, MD**

I grew up in the Episcopalian tradition in Donelson, was introduced to Reformed theology in the Dutch Reformed Church in NYC in 1980, and have been a Presbyterian (PCUSA) since 1982. I have been an elder since 1986, and have served on three sessions. I was ordained and installed at Brentwood 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church on 11/12/06 as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

As a child, my seven-year-old playmate died of acute leukemia. The comment, “God called her to be an angel in heaven” was not satisfying. So my call to medical oncology was my *first call to Christ*. I graduated from UT Medical School in 1977, married my classmate and first love, Debbie Deason, and completed training in cancer treatment at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in NYC, and hematology at Vanderbilt. I have practiced oncology and hematology since 1983 at Baptist Hospital, and am a former president of the Nashville chapter of the American Cancer Society. But I have found that folks don’t care how much you know, until they know that you care. My vocation as a medical oncologist teaches me that suffering includes not just physical pain, but also anxiety, despair, and loneliness. I find that one can be physically broken but spiritually whole, and physically whole but spiritually broken. That healing can occur even when cure does not. Every day I am reminded that words, presence, and touch have more healing power than medication or surgery. So I pray with and help my patients find God’s healing presence in their suffering. I served on the board of Alive Hospice, and am currently the medical director for Trinity Hospice. I founded and co-led a family support group for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of America, and have honed my listening skills as a Stephen Minister trainer.

In 2000, after pondering Mt 25:35-40 (“For I was hungry”), loving my neighbor became my *second call to Christ*. I organized my home church’s first year in the Room in the Inn program in 2000. In response to Tennessee Medicaid dropping over 190,000 patients, I became a member of the “Bridges to Care” network, the Nashville Academy of Medicine’s attempt to provide an indigent care safety net for them. I also volunteer at Siloam Family Health Clinic every Monday night, which serves those without health insurance and without financial resources. I have represented our presbytery on two missionary teams to the Peten in Guatemala. We worshipped with and ate our meals with the Kekchi indigenous, helped them build manses for pastors, and organized eye glass clinics and vacation Bible schools. The Kekchi’s God-given cheerfulness and praise in the midst of their poverty is humbling. I truly saw Jesus in their faces. Despite the heat, the poverty, and the absence of first world conveniences, I pray that heaven will be like rural Guatemala.

But I eventually came back to the gnawing question of my childhood; “Why would an all powerful and all loving God allow a child to die of acute leukemia?” I discovered that medical science explains how, but not why. So I enrolled at Vanderbilt Divinity School in 2000 to learn the answers to the “why” questions. There, in Daniel Patte’s New Testament class, I heard my *third call to Christ*, the call to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

My maternal grandfather worked his peach orchard 6 days a week, but as United Methodist clergy, he preached on Sundays in rural Virginia. My father worked as a chemist for Dupont 5 days a week, and as management was on call 24/7, but preached on Sundays as Episcopalian clergy in Donelson, TN. I feel my personal family precedence

as well as early church precedence indicate God's call to a bivocational ministry is authentic and not "outside the box."

My 23 year experience chairing and being a member of physician hospital committees teaches me that congenial and transparent collaborative team building is more effective than autocratic decisions made in secret. Although a decisive leadership style is needed in the treatment of acute illness, church ministry is a mutual endeavor. Decision sharing is crucial in both the setting of a chronic illness like cancer, and in the setting of a church. I shift into a decision-sharing mode when I walk into a church, as when I walk out of an ICU and into a multidisciplinary tumor board where cancer treatment is planned.

Through my life experiences, God gives me compassion for those who hunger for spiritual and physical food, the ability to envision, create, and promote a ministry that does not currently exist, and the ability to organize, recruit volunteers, and implement the ministry until it takes a life of its own. God gifts me in the areas of time management, multitasking, and spiritual energy. And serving a church energizes me. After much study, prayer, and discussion, I hear God's call to serve as the minister of the Word and Sacrament for Brentwood First Presbyterian Church.