

# Meet your neighbor: Thurston returns to lead her home church

*Pivotal moment was hearing 'God loves broken people'*

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FREMONT - Trinity United Methodist Church's new pastor is no stranger to the building. Pastor Andrea Thurston grew up attending Trinity and began duties as its new pastor on May 2.

Yet her journey from the pew to the pulpit was long and winding, filled with a fear of public speaking and a resistance to God's call on her life.

But now that she's here, it feels like coming home.

Thurston began attending the church when her family moved to Fremont from Lindsay when she was about 2 years old. As she grew, her father was an occasional visitor, but her mother was heavily involved with the church. Thurston happily attended Trinity with her mom every Sunday, and she was baptized and confirmed there.

“For some reason, I was not baptized as a baby and had to be baptized when I was confirmed. So I was baptized and confirmed at the church on the same day,” she said. “It was a good church to grow up in.”

## **'Flitted and floated' in and out of church for about 20 years**

But like many young adults, Thurston stopped attending church after high school. When her five sons were young, she became an occasional visitor, but couldn't find her place there.

“For probably 20 years, I flitted and floated in and out of church, but I was more out than in,” she said. “My mom would pester me and I'd come back for a time and then leave.”

But her mother kept nagging, and then her father began attending regularly, and Thurston was struck by his change.

“I thought there had to be some substance there for my dad to come regularly,” she said.

Pastor “H” Kerns had been appointed to the church, and the friendship his wife, Megan Kerns, extended to Thurston became instrumental to her faith journey. Thurston once again became a regular attendee, but by this time, two decades and a few life regrets separated her from her former connection to the church. Those mistakes became a barrier preventing her from embracing her faith.



“My perception of church people was very skewed. They looked perfect, and my life wasn’t perfect,” she said.

## Finding her own 'faith walk' path

Then Megan told her this: “Your faith walk doesn’t have to look like everyone else’s.”

“I didn’t think I could have a relationship with Christ,” Thurston said. “That one statement gave me permission to go deeper into a relationship with Christ.”

Shortly afterward, Thurston attended a women’s conference where the speaker told the audience God loves broken people.

“To know that my faith journey doesn’t have to look like somebody else’s, and then to hear somebody stand on a stage in front of thousands of women and say that God loves broken people — that was a life changer,” Thurston said.

Thurston became actively engaged in the church and spent about two years as its children's education director when she felt a new call on her life while sitting in a Sunday morning church service.

"I had what I consider a vision. During prayer time, I closed my eyes and could see, as vividly as if my eyes were open, me standing up conducting the service," she said. "As terrifying as it was to see myself before an audience, it was also calming, and I didn't want to open my eyes."

## **Following a calling she didn't really want**

In the following months, she followed God in a calling she really didn't want and at points questioned if it was truly from God or her own imagination. She pushed through, prayed for guidance, and watched God open doors again and again.

Thurston became a Licensed Local Pastor in 2015 and served in churches in Tiffin and Perrysburg before her UMC district superintendent asked if she would consider an appointment to Trinity.

"He didn't even get to finish the sentence and I said, 'Yes!'" she said.

Today, Thurston is using her experiences of struggling faith and a fear of God's calling to lead in the church where her own faith was formed.

"It's really exciting. It's kind of weird because some things are so different and some things feel like I was just here yesterday. To be in this office, the pastor's office, is surreal," she said. "It feels like coming home."

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