

PEGGY EBY, INTERVIEW, 2004

Interview, July 24th in Tulsa Oklahoma. She had traveled to Tulsa from Houston to preach at Evangelistic Temple on the following Sunday.

July 25, 1945 – birthday

When did you become a member of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church?

I was about 9 years old when my parents became followers of Jesus. We had moved to Sapulpa, OK, and the pastor of the local Pentecostal Holiness Church visited our home. He came back regularly until my dad agreed to visit. On that first visit, Dad and Mom decided that we should be a church-going family, and that was the church we joined. I've been a part of IPHC since that day in 1954.

When did you become a Christian?

I cannot remember a time when I did not have a "heart for God." But just before my seventh birthday, my cousin attended a Vacation Bible School. While we were playing one afternoon, she told me, "I got saved today." I asked her to explain "getting saved" and her response was, "That's when you ask Jesus to live in your heart so you can go to heaven when you die." Of course, I wanted to "get saved" too. We climbed into the back seat of my parents' car (a 1949 black Chevrolet) and I knelt in the floor and asked Jesus to come into my heart. It was a profound experience that I have never forgotten and have held on to securely. I wasn't perfect, by any means, but there was never a time when I did not want to follow Jesus.

During the next few years I had only occasional visits to church with grandparents and friends, but no regular church attendance. Even though I had no real example of prayer in my life, I earnestly prayed and interceded for my parents to come to know the Lord.

Do you have a regular church that you pastor?

No, not at this time. We have pastored churches in the past, but presently we are working in cross-cultural missions. My husband and I have an organization called Mission Catalyst International, which is an interdenominational missions program aimed at training nationals to plant churches among the least-reached people groups in the world. Jim, my husband, does this work full time and I travel with him two or three times a year. I do conferences for women called *Women Who Lead*. It is exciting to see women around the world who are serious about taking the Gospel to every nation.

I also speak by invitation here in the United States in various women's groups, conferences, and local churches. At the present time I lead a couple of weekly Bible studies for local churches in the Houston area and I have a small group of ladies that I disciple on a weekly basis. We are walking through the whole process of what it really means to be a follower of Jesus. I also serve on the General Women's Ministries Board (IPHC) which gives me an opportunity to do a number of things related to Women's Ministries such as retreats and conferences.

How do you receive so many invitations to preach?

Because I have been in the International Pentecostal Holiness Church for many years and my husband has been a denominational leader, I've had many doors open to me. Also my work on the Women's Ministries board has kept me visible to women's groups across the nation.

When did you first feel the call to be a preacher?

I was fourteen. My desire was to be totally given to God for His will and purposes for my life. I was passionate for witnessing to people and for the work of the Lord – whatever that was. In that era in my personal life and church life, there seemed to be only three avenues for

people who were “on fire for God” – to be a pastor, an evangelist, or a missionary. So I had told God, in prayer, that I was willing to do anything He asked of me.

One day, during this period of struggle with this sense of call and not understanding what it was, I came in from school to find Mom out with my little sister. Since I had the time alone I knelt down in the living room and began to pray. I talked to God as earnestly as I knew how: “Lord, show me. What is this feeling of a call all about? I don’t understand this feeling, and I’m afraid. Also, I’m just a teenager – and a girl!” On the one hand preaching definitely appealed to me. I was not one of those people who reluctantly accepted the call. Because I wanted it so much, I thought I had to question it.

After my prayer, I stood up and put my school things away. When I walked through the house, I saw a small box with tiny cards which had scripture verses on one side and a thought for the day on the other. I randomly pulled one out and there was my answer: Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” I grabbed my Bible and read the next few verses: “Ah, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 1:6-7) With that command and promise I fell on my knees and said a resounding “Yes!” to God.

I began receiving invitations to speak in youth meetings in various churches. From that point on I preached almost every weekend. During the summers I preached in revivals and church camps. I preached in jails, open-air meetings – sharing God’s word with others was the delight of my life.

I started talking about my own life and how God always has a plan no matter what our “resume” might be. I ended by saying that I felt that I had wasted some of my life when I wasn’t a Christian.

With God, it is not a matter of wasted time because He never wastes anything, even our mistakes. Even the years that we call “wasted,” God will use them to weave into the fabric of who we are and the message we have to give. It may appear to you that you wasted those years, but God sees them from a totally different perspective. Perhaps they were wayward years, but God was weaving them into the total fabric of who you are and more than likely is using them to give you a passion for and an understanding of this generation who question everything and resist everything that is traditional – so it is certainly not a waste.

How many children do you have and how has being a mother affected your ministry?

I have three children, a daughter and two sons. When Jim and I married we immediately started to Bible College. During my second year I became pregnant with our first child and my college career came to a halt. We were pastoring a small church at the time and I preached regularly in the Sunday evening services. Two more children were born which brought about huge changes in my life and ministry.

Following that pastorate, my husband became director of Lifeliners International, the denominational youth ministry. This job required extensive traveling and because the children were small I did very little public ministry. My “ministry” revolved around three young children who needed my constant attention. This was a very important time in my life, but also a difficult time. I was accustomed to being “up front” in ministry, but now my husband was the “up front” person. He traveled all over the world and all I got was a suitcase full of dirty clothes. Let’s just say that this was character building time for me.

I had a remarkable experience with God one day when I was sort of moaning about my lot in life. I said, “Lord, why did you call me to preach? I’m doing nothing but changing dirty diapers and wiping runny noses.” I felt His response in my spirit: “If you do nothing else in life, give Me three disciples that are totally committed to me and your life will not be in vain.” At that point I laid down my driving desire to be an evangelist and saw the value of raising my children to know God and to serve Him.

Have you felt any challenges because you are a woman?

At the beginning of my ministry I felt no resistance from the leadership of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. However, I do remember one revival when a delegate from another denomination came over to visit with me in order to correct me on my theology because he thought I was not a legitimate minister (because I was a woman). I was unable to respond with sufficient theological understanding and saying that I “felt called” wasn’t enough for him.

Pentecostal churches were very open to my ministry. It appears that having a woman preach or teach does not present a problem, but when it comes to having a place of leadership, there is definitely a “stained-glass ceiling.” Personally, I am not an administrative leader, (I am quite happy with preaching) but many women who are called to preach are highly qualified as leaders.

The IPHC has licensed and ordained women for many, many years. However, relatively few women have become pastors or church planters. There have been a number of single women who were missionaries, but that number has significantly declined in recent years.

Tiny steps have been taken to open more doors for women, but much remains to be done. The church will miss some valuable leadership qualities if women are not welcomed into that arena. I believe every church board should have qualified women serving alongside the men.

If lasting change is to happen, church leadership must become intentional about including women. This denomination (IPHC) as well as others, has women who are wise, intelligent, spiritual, and who have strong leadership gifts. Many women (who are preachers) co-pastor with their husbands. They choose not to simply be the pastor's wife. They share teaching, preaching, and administrative responsibilities.

When the Bible talks about the creation of mankind in His own image, it says "male and female created he them." It takes men and women together to express the image of God to the church and to the world. I believe that church leadership will be lacking a powerful expression of God's character if women are excluded.

When did you become baptized in the Holy Spirit?

I was fourteen. It was during the time of understanding my "call" from God and my desire to know Him in a deeper way.

Have you experienced any challenges? Has the Pentecostal religion restricted you?

The local church I grew up in was very legalistic. There were lots of rules that applied primarily to women – no makeup, no jewelry, no short hair, no short sleeves, no slacks, etc. It took me many years to deal with all those restrictions.

More recently, a challenge I have faced with church leadership is a feeling of being patronized, but not valued as a woman.

I do not believe being Pentecostal has restricted me. Since the 1960's and the charismatic renewal, Pentecostalism is more mainstream. Pentecostals are the largest group of evangelicals around the world.

