



Reverend Julie Donohue Thompson - Faith Journey

My faith story begins in a family shaped by deep Christian roots and surprising turns. My father was one semester away from becoming a Catholic priest and missionary when he met my mother, a law student from Boston. They married, and I was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church before our family eventually settled in the Episcopal Church. I was raised in a lively, generous home in Connecticut, northern Virginia, and suburban Pittsburgh. My parents adopted three boys over the years, and our big

corner-lot home was a place of constant hospitality—welcoming neighbors, refugees, exchange students, and anyone who needed a place at the table. Church life was central: Sunday School, youth group, choir, and summer camp formed the rhythm of my childhood.

In middle school, a small confirmation class and a thoughtful priest nurtured my growing faith. Around the same time, I encountered evangelical expressions of Christianity through summer camp and youth retreats, where I first “asked Jesus into my heart.” Those experiences, along with playing guitar for worship and serving in youth leadership roles, broadened my understanding of the wider Body of Christ. Singing in a traveling youth choir introduced me to Full Gospel, Assemblies of God, and Christian Missionary Alliance congregations. I learned early that faithful Christians worship in many different ways.

At Miami University (Ohio), I remained active in the Episcopal Church while also participating in Campus Crusade for Christ. Summers as a camp counselor and involvement in Methodist and Presbyterian congregations gradually clarified a call to ministry. After graduation, I joined a campus ministry organization in the mid-Atlantic region, partnering with churches and colleges to disciple students. A partner congregation invited me to direct their youth ministry and funded my studies at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

During this season, I married Daniel Thompson, whom I had first met years earlier at summer camp. We lived in a racially diverse urban neighborhood in Pittsburgh as part of an intentional Christian community. A unique ecumenical youth ministry opportunity in suburban New York City led me to pause seminary briefly. I later completed my coursework at New York Theological Seminary, a richly diverse academic community, and ultimately received my degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Over the next decade, I served in congregations large and small—urban, suburban, and rural—in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Georgia, and New Jersey. As Associate Pastor in two downtown Presbyterian churches in the South, I experienced the depth of connectional Presbyterianism and developed a love for the wider church, strengthened in places like Montreat Conference Center. Along the way, we welcomed three children who grew up immersed in church life.

A brief season as a hospice chaplain deeply stretched me personally and theologically, teaching me to sit with grief, ambiguity, and holy mystery. Time working in the business world further broadened my perspective and sharpened my sense that my gifts are most fully alive in congregational ministry.

In 2016, while serving as a Transitional Pastor, I discovered a particular joy and calling in guiding congregations through seasons of change. I began teaching with the Transitional Ministry Education Consortium at Princeton Theological Seminary and later at Calvin Center and Mo Ranch, helping equip pastors for this specialized work.

After returning to an installed position in New Jersey, and following the end of my marriage in 2019, I discerned more clearly that Transitional Ministry best fits my gifts and temperament. I served as Transitional and later Designated Pastor through the pandemic, walking with a congregation through uncertainty and renewal. In 2025, I relocated to Chattanooga, Tennessee, to serve a highly conflicted congregation as Transitional Pastor.

Throughout every chapter, I see the Holy Spirit weaving together diverse traditions, communities, challenges, and joys. I remain deeply grateful for the privilege of serving Christ's Church and look forward to this opportunity to guide First Church in this next season of ministry with "energy, intelligence, imagination, and love."

Rev. Thompson has three adult children, Sam (29), a filmmaker and producer in Los Angeles, Claire (26), a social worker and therapist in coastal New Jersey, and Ellie (21), who works for a Georgia Congresswoman on Capitol Hill.