

Bio:

Elaine Blanchard is the pastor at First Christian Church in Union City, TN.

Elaine studied theater at Lambuth College in Jackson, TN and earned an associate degree in nursing from Union University in Jackson. She worked for twenty-five years in acute care settings; ten years of that time she worked with people recovering from addictions. She earned a BS from UT Martin in 1992, with a double major in English and philosophy. She earned her Master of Divinity, 2000, from Memphis Theological Seminary. She is adjunct faculty at Memphis Theological Seminary where she teaches "The Preacher as Storyteller." She is an ordained minister in the Disciples of Christ. Elaine is frequently invited to preach and speak for a variety of denominations and faith groups.

Elaine's first book, Help Me Remember, was published and recorded by Pilgrim Press in 2005. Her second book, Maggie Scott's Head Got Stuck, was published by Archway Publishing in 2015. Her short fiction has won Honorable Mention in the 2008 Memphis Magazine Fiction Contest, and her nonfiction was published by Christian Century magazine. Honey Comb, a children's book about overcoming jealousy and making friends, was published in 2018.

Elaine facilitated 9 ongoing classes, "Prison Stories," at Shelby County's jail for women. The classes met for four months and each class of twelve participants built trust and shared their life stories. Elaine wrote a script based on the stories shared in each class. That script is used by professional actors to create a performance for the entire community to attend. These story sharing events destroy stereotypes and build hopeful connections. A documentary film, "Inside Story," was made of Elaine's work in the jail and that film won a regional Emmy Award in 2015. She has coordinated and facilitated the same process with a group of transgender and gender-fluid people, women who have had abortions, HIV positive people, public library patrons, Seventh grade students and men who are ex-felons.

For her creative work in the prison system, Elaine was awarded The 2011 Jefferson Award for Public Service. She was selected as an Upstander by Facing History and Ourselves. She was selected by the Commercial Appeal as one of the 16 Memphians who made a difference in Memphis in 2011. And the Shelby County Division of Corrections selected Elaine as Volunteer of the Year for 2012. She was named "Woman of Vision" by Memphis Women of Achievement in 2014. She is the 2019 recipient of the Henry Logan Starks Award for Distinguished Service.

Elaine co-wrote the play, "For Goodness Sake," with David Prete. It is a one-woman performance. "For Goodness Sake" is a story about Elaine's childhood experiences of religion and racism. She also wrote a play, "Skin and Bones." It is a play about Elaine's struggle with body image and eating disorder. "Good People" is Elaine's third play, a story about racism and redemption.

Elaine lives in Memphis with her wife, Anna Neal, who is a pianist, an excellent cook, an artist and a librarian. Elaine's daughter, Jennifer, is married to Dalton Kilburn and they are the parents of Elaine's delightful grandson, Abram.