

## Where I Came From and How I Got Here: Gretchen Peters-LaChance



When people ask me “where are you from?”, I pause - the answer is not a simple one. I was born near Detroit, Michigan, spent a couple of years outside of Chicago, Illinois, had the bulk of my upbringing in Westfield, NJ then lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota for 15 years before returning to New Jersey almost 15 years ago. I am the daughter of a Lutheran Pastor but did not have the typical “PK” (Pastor’s Kid) experience. Although my siblings grew up with Dad in the pulpit every Sunday morning, by the time I was two years old, my father was working for the church-wide offices of the Lutheran Church in America - first in Chicago and then in Manhattan. My family prioritized and cherished our church life. While living in Westfield in the ‘70’s and ‘80s, we attended St.

John’s in Summit, NJ and some of our best family friends to this day are from our years there. One of my fondest family memories is all 6 of us singing hymns in 4-part harmony in the pews at St. John’s. I attended Wittenberg University in Springfield, OH - yes, a Lutheran school if it wasn’t obvious by the name (my parents’ alma mater as well)! After graduating, I moved to Minneapolis, MN - cold turkey. That is to say, my family had a few connections there, but going “home” wasn’t an option because my parents had moved while I was in college. So it was all very “Mary Tyler Moore” of me to move to a new city - no job, no friends, everything I owned fit in the back of my VW rabbit. A bold move indeed which worked out very, very well for me. In Minneapolis, I met my husband Bill, who coincidentally was also a transplant from the East Coast. By then, my father was the parish pastor at a large church in Madison, Wisconsin. We were married by him in his church - a “destination wedding” of sorts. It was in Minneapolis where we bought our first home and started our family with the birth of Spencer in 1998, and Owen following in 2000. We belonged to a very large Lutheran church there where our boys were baptised. I lovingly call Minneapolis “The Land of Lutherans” because it always felt like there was a Lutheran church on every other corner!. To this day, Minneapolis and our friends there hold a very special place in our hearts. In 2005, Bill’s job necessitated a move so it was back to the East Coast for us. Although it was difficult to leave Minnesota, moving to New Jersey meant that we would be closer to my parents, my sister Karen and her family (the Leister family) and to Bill’s extended family in Connecticut. We looked for a church home for a few years, floundering a bit, trying to find that “fit”. When Karen and John said that they had visited Gloria Dei, we gave it a try and never looked back. Much like St. Johns, Gloria Dei draws members from many surrounding communities, which somehow makes membership feel bigger than it is. We also love music in worship, which is very important to me. At first, the small size of the church felt intimidating - our previous Minneapolis church was very large, both in physical size and membership. However, there is a coziness to our church home - and that warmth is ultimately what made us decide to become members