



Rev. Ronald "Pete" McElrath
1965 – 1968

In a letter addressed to Mr. John Cowan, the Clerk of Session, **W.R. "Pete" McElrath** accepted the call extended to him on March 14, 1965. Mr. McElrath was ordained on May 2, 1965, and was Bethel's first full-time minister since the Reverend R.L. Rogers served from 1898 to 1905.

Prior to beginning his pastorate at Bethel, Reverend William Ronald McElrath married Bobbye Lee Hollingsworth of College Park, Georgia. The couple spoke their wedding vows during an afternoon ceremony at College Park Presbyterian Church on Saturday, April 22, 1965. The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gibson Hollingsworth of Jackson, Mississippi. Mr. McElrath is the son of Mrs. John McElrath of Kellyton, Alabama. The Rev. Beryl Rosenberger of Atlanta, Georgia, served as the best man. Following the wedding trip to Hilton Head, the couple began a pastorate at the Bethel Presbyterian Church.

The bride was a 1961 graduate of Province High School, Jackson, Mississippi, before graduating from Belhaven College with a double major in Christian education and history. McElrath graduated from Goodwater High School, King College, and Columbia Theological Seminary.

Bobbye had her first taste of possum, cooked on a wood stove, at the home of J.J. Marcengill. The McElrath's daughter, Rebecca, was born here in 1968 before they moved to Lyons, Georgia. Lyons is the county in which the famous "Vidalia Onions" are grown. Pete and Bobbye stayed there seven years, during which time both of their sons, John and Douglas, were born.

Their pastorate in Charleston, Mississippi, began in 1975. One reason for the move was to be closer to Bobbye's parents who lived at Jackson. Charleston was on a bluff over-looking the Mississippi Delta and about eighty miles from Memphis. Living there for sixteen years, it became the roots for raising their children. Among the members was U.S. Congressman Jamie Whitten who served in Washington over forty years.

In 1995 Pete and Bobbye returned to his home area of Goodwater, Alabama. Pete was born and raised only seven miles away. One reason for returning was to be responsible for two of his older sisters who were still living at the old home place. Both sisters have since been placed in a nursing home. Pete and Bobbye built a small retirement home on the property and this is where the couple currently lives. Their daughter, Becky is a CPA and fraud auditor for the state of Tennessee; John is a computer programmer in Jackson, Mississippi; and the youngest son, Doug, is a school teacher in the Memphis area. Pete retired from full-time ministry in 2000. He had heart by-pass surgery in 2003, but still continued to supply churches in the area.