

Not a Benchwarmer



When Loutisha James joined First English Lutheran Church (FELC), she told Pastor Byerly, “I’m not a benchwarmer.” As a child she was immersed in the church, with her parents setting strong examples of worship and commitment, her father being the Sunday School Superintendent in a segregated Methodist Episcopal church in Jacksonville. Her mother was a Lutheran, so when Loutisha moved to Norfolk, she joined a Missouri Synod Lutheran church. The conservative synod, the Liturgy, and special services were important to her. Later in Richmond, she joined a church where her uncle eventually became the pastor. However, when special services were eliminated and other problems developed, she decided to make a change, even though she emphasized, “I’m not a church jumper.”

Loutisha was familiar with FELC because she volunteered as part of a city-wide Lutheran program which fed VCU students at FELC. Mary Grace Taylor invited Loutisha to worship and she liked how the worship service was conducted. After Loutisha joined the church, she spent no time warming the bench. She shared her love and faith in many ways: joining the Choir, being on Church Council, taking the youth group to Youth Congress in Alabama, attending Synod meetings, and creating all of the Advent banners that hang behind the altar during Advent.

She became involved with the national church when all the ALC and LCA synods merged into one synod, the ELCA. She was the Council Representative for the Southeastern District and participated in the service that inaugurated the bishop in Chicago. She stated, “The things you do for and with the church are a part of Christianity. I can’t be a member and not be involved!” All this she did, while running her own business!

Loutisha’s participation in the church at local, synodical, and national levels has allowed her to meet and develop personal connections with a lot of people. There have been many changes at FELC since she joined in the 80’s. She has learned to accept the changes even when difficult without judgment and with forgiveness. Through all the change, her anchor is the worship service, the Liturgy, and the friendships she has made over the years.