

Meet Elizabeth Hodges

Pastor's wife, mother, grandmother and educator, Elizabeth Hodges brings much expertise and life experience to her new role as WNAC executive director. These interview questions provide a glimpse into the heart and mind of this leader.

Tell us a little about yourself.

On September 10, 1954 I was born into the home of Mary Belle and Ronald Creech. At the time, Dad was pastoring the First FWB Church in Newport News, Virginia. After pastoring the First FWB Church in Florence, SC for a few years, he accepted the Edgemont FWB Church (which later became Liberty FWB Church) in Durham, NC. Dad left this pastorate to assume responsibilities as the first Promotional Secretary for the North Carolina Association of FWB. It was in Durham that I grew up, attended school and left home for college.

I am the second of five siblings. Ruth serves as an Executive Assistant in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. My sister, Lois, is a resident of Murdoch Center, an institution for handicapped people in Butner, NC. Rebecca is a research scientist at Catawba Valley Medical Center in Hickory, NC. Paul pastors the White Oaks FWB Church in Macon, GA, and serves on the International Missions board.

Active in the ministry from a young age, I represented our church and state in the Bible Sword Drill competition as a sixth grader. I began teaching Sunday School (as a helper) around age 14. I also taught in the Wednesday night program for the children. As a high schooler, I was a member of three Bible Bowl teams which represented North Carolina at the national level. Two of those years we were the champions. Liberty Church had a strong youth group led by Bro. Ron Christ. Many from that era are in full-time Christian service today.

The fall of 1972 marked the beginning of my college career. I joined the Elizabeth Barrett Browning Society, the Sonnets, at FWBBC. I was an education major, graduating in the first class to receive the degree with a double major in Bible and Elementary Education. I met my husband, Eddie Hodges, there, as had my mother before me. After graduating in May of 1976, I returned home to teach first grade at Liberty Christian School.

Eddie and I married on May 29, 1977, my parents' twenty-fifth anniversary. Dad and his brother, Jake Creech, married us. So until their deaths in 2005, we always celebrated "the" anniversary together which have become very sweet memories for me.

Eddie was the associate pastor of the College Lakes FWB Church in Fayetteville, NC, when we married. We were there for a short time and then he accepted the pastorate of Piney Grove FWB Church in Bristol, GA. While we were at Piney

Grove, I taught in the public school system and finished work on my master's degree from Georgia Southern College, a master's degree with a major in Early Childhood Education. We ministered there for four years then moved to First FWB Church in Douglas, GA. Our first son, Samuel, was born during this ministry in the fall of 1983.

We then moved to the Rutledge Hill Community Church in Hillsboro, TN. While there, Eddie completed his master's degree at FWBCC. Our second son, Stephen, was born during the spring of 1985. I was able to stay at home with our boys while we were at Rutledge Hill. We served this church for four years and then Eddie accepted the call to the Hendersonville FWB Church where we currently serve. He completed his twenty-third year the first Sunday of June.

In the fall of 1987, Sarah was born during her dad's first year of ministry at Hendersonville. This church is home to all of our children. All three of the children were able to attend and graduate from College Heights Christian Academy for which we are so grateful. After being at home for seven years, I returned to the classroom when we began paying the second tuition.

During our ministry at Hendersonville, I have taught all levels of Sunday School, held the coordinator and study chairman positions in our local WAC, played one of the instruments, directed the choir, directed VBS, and served on the finance committee. After returning to education, I taught first grade for five years and then moved into administration. I served as the Academic Coordinator, Elementary Principal, and taught various levels of Bible. I completed my Education Specialist degree while serving in these capacities. CHCA closed its doors in 2006 and I returned to public education where I have ministered for the past four school years completing 29 years in education.

Samuel, our oldest son, and his wife, Melissa are stationed at Camp Lejeune in eastern North Carolina. He is a staff sergeant with the special operations unit. They have two children: Samuel (4 years) and Anna (2 years). Melissa is blessed to be a stay-home mom for which we are very grateful. Their family attends the First FWB Church in Jacksonville, NC.

Stephen is a patrol officer with the Sumner County Sheriff's Department and works the midnight shift. He is also a member of the Emergency Response Team for our county. He lives in Portland, TN and attends the Liberty FWB Church.

Sarah has just graduated from Hillsdale FWB College with a degree in missions. She has served the past year as the RLC director for women and has been an assistant to President Tim Eaton. She will complete these responsibilities at the end of the month. She is waiting for God to open the door to the next chapter in her life. She is extremely interested in the human trafficking of women and children.

You are not a newcomer to WNAC. Could you share a little about your background or experience?

As a child, I attended meetings with my mother who was very active in WNAC. Though a very quiet lady, Mother made a huge impact on the lives of the people in the various ministries where she and Dad served. She held various offices at the local level, but she faithfully attended and supported the ministry at the district, state, and national levels.

Mother had a letter-writing ministry to missionaries from my earliest recollections. She would purchase air-grams by the box and wrote to some missionaries every week. By the end of the year, she had encouraged them all. When asked what she wrote, she simply responded that she told them whatever was happening in our family and local ministry. She opened our home whenever missionaries were traveling through. Often multiple missionaries stayed with us so that they could interact with each other. Sometimes they went to school with me for "Show-N-Tell."

Mother was a diligent prayer warrior who taught us to pray consistently and specifically for the needs of the missionaries. She knew those needs because she corresponded with missionaries individually.

As a college student, I was involved in the WAC chapter at FWBBC. WNAC furnished copies of *Co-Laborer* and we conducted monthly meetings, gave of our funds, and had service projects. My senior year I served as president of this chapter.

After Eddie and I married, I served in various positions in the local WAC chapters. I have taken Sarah with me to meetings since she was an infant. On occasion the boys have attended as well. Once we arrived in Hendersonville, I was asked to complete the vice-president's term. For the past 19 years, I have served as either president/coordinator or vice-president/coordinator of the Cumberland District Women Active for Christ. Our district is very strong and actively involved in the state and national ministries.

What is your philosophy of women's ministry?

The biblical mandate in Titus 2:3-5 is for "the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." This mandate was "fleshed-out" in the lives of those women who invested in me. I strongly believe that faith is caught not taught. Yes, we teach precept upon precept, line upon line, but the roots of faith are deepened in the soil enriched from godly examples.

As the older women are instructed to teach or mentor the younger women, the younger women have much to share with the older women. It has been my experience that the ideas and thoughts of younger women are welcomed and encouraged when there is a mutual respect for each other. Some of the greatest life lessons I have learned have come at the hands of children or young women. So, I seek to be a good listener and learn what God is teaching them or revealing to them.

WNAC offers fertile ground for older women to mentor younger women, passing on the baton of faith given to us. However, we need the help of younger women as we seek to engage the culture where we have been placed to serve. Learning from each other, we can advance the opportunities afforded to women who are active for Christ. We have the opportunity to be faithful—to build faith into the lives of those young women and children who are coming behind us.

How has your role as educator prepared you for this position?

An educator must be flexible, innovative, and willing to take risks, all with a servant's heart. The ministry of WNAC requires all of these above named characteristics. Scheduling of the various state meetings, retreats, and speaking opportunities, as well coordinating events with the other national departments will require flexibility. When budgets are tight, we must be creative and innovative to meet the needs of our women. We must be willing to take risks and try new things to better meet the needs of the various women in our culture. Yet we must hold true to the premises upon which WNAC was birthed in 1935. I view the national office as a service mechanism by which the women of WNAC can better fulfill the roles God has designed specifically for each one.

The 11 years I spent as an elementary principal in a Christian school most closely resemble the roles I will fill as the director of WNAC. Managing a tight budget and living within the means...mentoring younger teachers and parents...daily setting a godly example before students...serving whomever is needy...all mirror roles I will fulfill as WNAC director.

As an educator, I also served on the regional accreditation commission for the southeast. This allowed me to work closely with various school boards.

I believe God gifted me with the needed abilities when I was formed in my mother's womb.

Do you consider your new role a calling? How did God lead you to this place?

I did not seek nomination nor had I ever considered this job during the years I served at the local, district and state level. However, after someone submitted my name, Eddie and I prayed and felt God would have me pursue the application process.

Most often, God speaks to me as He did Elijah—in a still, small voice. However, this experience has been more of a handwriting on the wall, as Belteshazzar experienced. Over and again, God has confirmed and assured both Eddie and me that He desires I serve WNAC “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:13).

I am very excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. I am thrilled to be able to have a small part in His work among the women of our FWB denomination. I also realize the awesomeness of this responsibility for “to whom much is given, much is required.” (Luke 12:48)

What is your greatest personal challenge?

The ability to balance all the various roles God has designed for me is the single biggest challenge I face. I find most women struggle with balance. We desire to do all things well, yet we only have a 24-hour day. The only way I have found to maintain balance is to spend quality time with the Lord at the beginning of each day. I seek His mind for what He desires of me for that day and purpose in my heart to serve Him faithfully. He helps me accomplish what needs to be done in an orderly fashion that brings glory to Him.

We know God endows every believer with spiritual gifts. What do you see as your gifts and how will these help you as lead WNAC?

Yes, God does endow every believer with the gifts needed to fulfill His plan. I view my gifts as teaching, administration, organization, hospitality and service. God has also enabled me to see the big picture (what needs to be done) and then break it apart in manageable pieces—thus accomplishing the goal. An effective leader/ administrator must have a servant’s heart. I will not ask others to do what I have not done or am not willing to do myself. To be able to multi-task and do a good job requires great organizational skills. These seem to be second nature to me. For those who knew my mom, Mrs. Mary Belle was the epitome of organization. I was able to see this in action on a daily basis.

For all of married life, I have enjoyed opening my home to others. In this new role, I am sure there will be many opportunities to share what God has blessed Eddie and I to enjoy.

Each of these gifts are necessary for the role of WNAC executive director. God knew that at this time in my life He would desire me to serve in this position. He will help me utilize these gifts in a manner that will honor Him as I seek to serve our FWB women.

For the past several years, one of WNAC’s key questions has been, “How can we engage younger women?” Would you share your ideas about this?

I would encourage a WNAC presence (student-led WAC chapter) at each of our five colleges. If we can be a part of the students' lives as they are preparing for ministry, regardless of what that looks like, they will be ready to participate at the local church level.

On the local level, mentoring should be part of the weekly ministry of the church. At the district, state, and national levels, allowing younger women to hold offices and serve on our committees and boards will ensure them a voice. For any woman of any age to honor the Lord effectively, we must be students of the Word. We cannot know how to serve Him if we do not know what He requires

Another goal of mine is to develop seminar/conference materials to encourage women of all ages. Given the time constraints of our lives, women often do not feel they can be gone from home for several days/ nights to attend a retreat. However, they can manage a one-day conference. WNAC could serve our women by preparing the content for such a day, (i.e. how to become a Proverbs 31 woman). Once the material is prepared, a local, district or state could choose to utilize the material with speakers from their own area. In a time period when everyone is concerned about finances, this would be a cost-effective conference.

These are just a few of the ideas that have come to me during this interview and nomination process. I am sure more will follow as I immerse myself in the work.

WNAC has been without an Executive Director for several months now. Will you start immediately? If so, what are the first items on your agenda?

My official start date is August 1, but I will go earlier to get things set up. The first item on the agenda is meeting our women and establishing relationships with them. I want to interact and share...to hear their heartbeats, prayer requests, needs and wants. I hope to attend state meetings and retreats as often as financially possible I will spend my first two days on the job attending the Arkansas state WAC meeting.

Another item of pressing business is securing 12 prayer partners in each of the 26 states where we have WAC chapters. Just as Jethro pointed out to Moses, I realize I cannot do this work alone. I need women who will function as Aarons and Hurs. Jesus poured His life into 12 men, and they spent their lives investing into others. What better model could I follow?

Do you have a favorite Scripture? A preferred Bible study method? Any favorite authors or speakers?

A Scripture becomes a favorite when it meets a specific need; I have many favorites. Here is the list that those who know me best hear most often.

Lamentations 3:22-23

Deuteronomy 33:27

Job 23:10
Isaiah 26:3
Isaiah 30:15
Isaiah 40:31
Jeremiah 33:3
Jeremiah 29:11-13
Hosea 10:12
Luke 12:48
2 Corinthians 12:9-10
Philippians 4:6-7
I Thessalonians 5:24
Philemon 7
Hebrews 4:16
I Peter 5:7

That list is probably much longer than you expected, but you asked.

For my personal study, I prefer inductive Bible studies. I love to dig the nuggets of truth out of God's Word. I enjoy reading behind Bible commentators but I would much rather glean what God is saying to me. I have just finished Beth Moore's study of Esther and it has been so rich.

Since I am an avid reader, it's hard to give just one favorite author. For Christian living materials, I enjoy reading Max Lucado and Chuck Swindoll. For pleasure reading, I enjoy Lori Wick, Beverly Lewis, Gilbert Morris, Judith Pella, etc. I have just finished the book *Almost Gone* by Ken Ham, which dealt with the topic of why young people leave our evangelical, Bible-believing, Bible-preaching churches. Though it is a compilation of statistics, this is a thought-provoking book by which I was challenged.

What is your strategy or your short-term goals (first year) as the director of WNAC?

As I immerse myself in the work, I am sure this strategy will be fine-tuned, but here is the framework for my first year in the office.

1. Challenge our women to develop a vibrant relationship with Jesus through prayer and study of the Word. Recommit ourselves to the ministry of intercessory prayer. Help our women engage the culture around them, recognizing that God has sent the mission fields to our back door.
2. Meet our women and develop relationships with them. Institute a plan built around the Jethro principle that will touch all of our women. Build a network of prayer warriors in every state where we have WAC chapters.
3. Establish our office as the service mechanism for the women of the FWB denomination.

4. Develop materials that will challenge and engage our women as we seek to together fulfill our God-designed roles.

What is your vision for WNAC?

Ideally, each FWB woman would be successfully fulfilling the roles God has designed specifically for her and patterning the woman of Proverbs 31, serving the Lord where He has placed her. Practically, following the Titus 2 model, I see us developing mentoring materials, providing teaching and training opportunities and enhancing older women's abilities to listen and learn from the younger, utilizing young women in leadership roles, all to enable WNAC as a strong arm of service.

If I can pass the baton of faith on to the next generation (my children, grandchildren and their peers) who will leave faithful footprints to follow after I am replaced, I will have been successful.

What a heritage we have been given in the past 75 years through the lives of faithful women. May we do our part in our time to keep that heritage strong, and one day hear the words of our Lord, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, ...enter into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:23).