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He answered the phone, then the call

By LINDSAY LATIMORE Staff Writer

The Rev. **Tom Masters** joins Rolling Bay Presbyterian as interim assoc. pastor.

Sometimes the phone rings.
Sometimes the call comes from someplace higher.

The Rev. **Tom Masters** experienced both simultaneously. As he sat in his office on Lake Washington's Eastside earlier this summer, **Masters** answered the telephone and heard the voice of the Rev. Rebecca Blackwell, inviting him to join the ministry at Rolling Bay Presbyterian Church as interim associate pastor.

Masters looked out the window and looked back at the phone, repeating his double-take a couple of times as he absorbed the information. Now he laughs as he wonders how in one short week, he's gone from lawyer to minister. "The only answer to that is God," **Masters** said. "He's a very mischievous person."

Masters graduated from the University of Washington in 1970 with a master's degree in business administration and a determination to make a solid, responsible living. A law degree from Gonzaga University followed in 1978, and he set up a family law practice in Bellevue.

While **Masters** grew up in a strongly church-oriented Baptist family in Boise, Idaho, church didn't play a large role in a good portion of his own adult life. With work and the business of raising children, he and his wife Kathleen, a registered nurse, "bounced around a bit" as young families do.

Then he joined a men's group at Bellevue First Presbyterian Church, where he met, observed and became inspired by a group of people actively engaged in their commitment to Christ and faith-based service.

"I realized that although I'd professed to be a Christian all my life, I didn't really know what that entailed," he said.

He explored further, meeting with the head of seminary at Fuller Theological Seminary, which is based in California but has campuses in the Seattle area.

The institution followed a modern curricular model that enabled **Masters** to attend part-time while maintaining his law practice. He graduated in 1999.

"I went to seminary with the full intention that the pastorate would be my final vocation,"

Masters said. "And somebody was listening."

But it took a bit of time. While **Masters** worked as an associate at Renton First Presbyterian, the law remained if not his life's work, then the work that filled the days of his life.



Brad Camp/Staff Photo

The Rev. Tom Masters in the sanctuary at Rolling Bay Presbyterian Church.

He did, however, find that attending seminary had shifted his approach to practicing law. In the legal system, **Masters** points out, “there’s no Judeo-Christian ethic system.” The law is the law, and for every question a lawyer answers, “there’s always an equal and opposite force telling you you’re wrong.”

This held particularly true in family law, where **Masters** regularly navigated the rough waters of personal separations, household dissolutions and strong judgments of both the personal and legal variety.

Seminary, **Masters** found, expanded his capacity for compassion and the acceptance of human foibles.

“If you’re doing family law correctly, you’re trying to put the children first,” he said.

“If you can do family law in a manner that doesn’t further antagonize people or pull them apart...the family in the long run is much better off. So in that sense, (attending seminary) helped.”

Now just getting settled at Rolling Bay Presbyterian, **Masters** says his new docket will include working on outreach efforts with the church deacons, assisting with adult education and the men’s group, officiating at services once per month and leading Sunday morning prayers.

He describes his role as that of a “generalist,” morphing and evolving as the congregation’s needs evolve and change.

Neither **Masters’** nor Blackwell’s tenure is intended to be permanent.

When previous pastors Dick Middleton and Dave Holyan departed in the fall of 2005 and 2006 respectively, Rolling Bay Presbyterian sought individuals to fill interim senior and associate pastor positions, as is **customary** in the Presbyterian church.

Masters describes an interim pastor’s role as to help a congregation make a transition from its old leadership to permanent new leadership, gaining an opportunity along the way to assess its strengths, evaluate priorities and decide how it wants to grow.

As **Masters** walks through his new church, he muses on the strengths of the congregation he’s observed so far - the large number of young families, the established leadership within the congregation, the vibrancy of the youth ministry.

He also thinks on the shift he and Kathleen have undertaken at this stage in their lives, which comes from a desire to “get a little bit smaller and a little bit simpler.”

They’re about to sell their Kirkland home of 30 years and move into a new house in Poulsbo. In the meantime, **Masters** makes the commute each morning to Rolling Bay to get to know his new church and his new calling.

“Just as the church is in transition, Kathleen and I are in transition in our stage of life. So we’re going to try something new, see if it fits and take it from there.

“Last time I checked,” he said, “we only get to try things once.”

Sunrise Sunday

Rolling Bay Presbyterian Church, 11042 Sunrise Drive, holds Sunday services at 10 a.m. this summer. Reach the church at 842-3098 or www.rbpres.org.