

**Administrative Team Spotlight – Phyllis Gutierrez**

First Baptist Ridgeway Member Phyllis Gutierrez is currently serving on her first term with the CMBA Administrative Team, which meets almost monthly to conduct business and share ministry updates from our Family of Churches across the Midlands. The group will hold its May 2023 meeting in Ridgeway.

Phyllis has been a member of her church twice in her lifetime – having grown up in First Baptist Ridgeway, then rejoined several years after she and her husband returned to the area in 2003. The couple lived elsewhere while her late husband served as a maritime terrorism expert with the United States Navy and was one of only two people in the world at that time who specialized in a specific type of terrorism.

“We lived in Washington DC when 9/11 happened. My husband was supposed to be at the Pentagon when the plane hit, but the meeting had been cancelled that morning,” she recalls. “We lived twenty minutes outside of Washington and could smell the smoke. Because of my husband’s work, our whole world changed that day.”

Phyllis says that when the couple decided to relocate to Ridgeway, they were able to purchase her grandparents’ former home that her mother’s great-great uncle built in 1900, situated on several acres of land. The irony doesn’t end there, because Phyllis’ father’s parents also bought the same house in the 1950’s, so “it’s been on both sides of the family!” Phyllis and her husband were thrilled to renovate the home they nicknamed “our Monticello,” which is made of granite and has a unique sunburst motif.

“When I dig in the yard, I still find big chunks of granite from when the house was built,” Phyllis says of her gardening hobby discoveries. In addition to this, she enjoys reading, needlework, and has learned the art of Japanese embroidery.

She describes Ridgeway as a typical small, Southern town with one stoplight. The town is seeing more change today than it has in Phyllis’ lifetime, with mostly retirees and some younger families moving into the area. The nearby growth is prompting First Baptist Ridgeway, established in 1886, to reevaluate how to best reach their new neighbors with the hope of the gospel.

“I love the people of our church. We have such a good spirit there,” Phyllis says. “We are going through the revitalization process and currently searching for a full-time pastor. It’s a blessing to see how a hurting church has come together.”

Phyllis describes an active Meals on Wheels ministry team and other church members who do outreach at the local elementary school. Because of these connections, church members also partner with the Fairfield County Council on Aging to help with collections and deliver gifts at Christmas time. Phyllis said the congregation is also seeing new people join them for worship.

“One lady and her husband connected with us because of an arts festival in Ridgeway where our church had an informational table,” Phyllis says.

Since joining the CMBA Administrative Team, Phyllis has been surprised to learn just how many other Midlands churches are struggling, like her own. “When your church is struggling, you think you’re the only one,” but Phyllis appreciates knowing there are local partners and resources available through the association and that there is a strong community that cares for one another. Serving on the team has also caused her to see that “there is a renewed sense of hope in CMBA. People are anxious to serve and want to be involved.”

Speaking again of her church, Phyllis asks the CMBA Family of Churches to continue to pray for them.

“For a little country church, we are touching lives. As we continue to grow and work through the revitalization process, we are praying for wisdom and discernment so that God’s will and not ours remains at the forefront,” she says. “Come to Ridgeway and see how the Lord is working within our church and this community! God is in control, and we have been blessed in so many areas.”