

Former Baptist Woman Pioneers Charismatic Healing Center in Georgia

Sandra Kennedy was one of the first women licensed to preach in the Southern Baptist Convention

It wasn't until Sandra Kennedy was asked to leave a Southern Baptist church where she served as a minister that she started to see that women could become pastors. That was 14 years ago. Today she leads The Healing Center in Augusta, Ga., where miracles are the norm.

Kennedy now realizes she has something in common with pioneering Christian women ministers such as Fuchsia Pickett, Charlotte Baker and Aimee Semple McPherson.

"I've been a pioneer in the [Augusta] area," said Kennedy, who is the pastor and founder of Whole Life Ministries, which has the city's largest nondenominational church membership, with 1,500 people.

A native of Midville, Ga., about 70 miles southeast of Augusta, Kennedy began breaking tradition during her days as a Southern Baptist. In 1972 she was one of the first women licensed to preach in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and she was ordained by the SBC in 1983.

Kennedy's teachings on healing and on her own charismatic experience led to her departure from the SBC, forcing her to pursue the ministry vision that God had given her during three visitations between 1973 and 1983.

The first occurred during spring break in 1973 while she was working toward her doctorate degree from Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I was driving along I-20 outside of Dallas. I did not know what had happened to me. The next thing I know, I had what I now know was a vision, and I was standing next to the Lord," she recalled. "I was standing in front of a building with plate-glass windows and across the building was [written] Whole Life Ministries."

Kennedy said her vision experience also featured her starting a bookstore. Other details of the vision included a counseling ministry. Her academic background was in psychology, and she had worked in mental health and mental retardation.

"He said it would be one where the Spirit of the Lord would set them free, and the Word of the Lord would keep them free," she said.

Kennedy said she experienced similar visitations in 1980, which was the same year she received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and in 1983 just after she had been kicked out of the SBC.

When she formed Whole Life Ministries, it began as a Bible study with eight people. The small fellowship became a church three years later, with about 30 charter members.

During Whole Life's early years, Kennedy said she experienced much hostility from within the church community. She once was

labeled a Jezebel, and she received outrageous hate mail. And being a single woman she was an easy target for additional slanderous attacks.

“No matter what it was, there was no way to win. I was in a no-win situation,” Kennedy said. “But God, in His mercy and in His grace, has been so faithful.”

Kennedy said she’s always had an interest in healing, dating back to her childhood, and over the years she has recognized that God has graced her in the area.

Although she has witnessed many miracles, Kennedy admits the most profound healing that she has ever experienced was the one for herself, having the peace within to do the work of the ministry.

“I asked God to show me according to the Bible that I could do the ministry that I had been called to do,” she said. “He told me never to defend myself, and He’s never allowed me to teach and defend what I know.”

Kennedy’s Whole Life Ministries began blazing new paths in 1997 when she started Healing Explosion sessions every six to eight weeks. The Healing Explosion sessions became the impetus for Whole Life Ministries’ latest outreach, The Healing Center, which is swiftly gaining notice in the Augusta area. The center opened in November 1999, and it was dedicated by Kenneth Hagin Sr. on Jan. 22.

The center’s soft-green walls, white trim and soft contemporary Christian music offers a soothing ambience for the participants who frequent the place. Since 1997, when

Whole Life Ministries began keeping records, the ministry has about 600 documented cases of healings. "The Word works," said Velda Schirhart, director of the center. "Teach them the Word and watch it work."

Those who participate and receive ministry at the center must have life-threatening illnesses. The largest percentage of them are cancer patients. All participants must be Christians.

Schirhart, who is a licensed registered nurse, said participants also are instructed to stay with their doctor and medication until their doctor says they no longer need it, and they must maintain their prescribed treatment.