

# President Carter - An Advocate for Equality of Women

We recently traveled across this country for the privilege of learning from Jimmy Carter.

The Nobel Prize winner and 39th president of the United States, now in his 90s, continues a disciplined practice, learned from his father's model and begun as an 18-year-old student at the United States Naval Academy.

President Carter is a Bible student and a Bible teacher. He now teaches the Bible each week at the tiny Maranatha Baptist Church of Plains, Georgia.

On Saturday, we met one of President Carter's fellow church members while shopping at an antique store; she graciously offered to save seats for us at the Bible study.

The next day, after waiting in the rain under umbrellas and passing through security, we were ushered into the church sanctuary and down to the front row, just before the orientation began.

When President Carter entered, he began by working the crowd, asking where we were from and who among us were clergy.

When Janice told him that we had been missionaries in Greece, he looked at us and said, "Would you lead us in the morning prayer?"

Not sure which of us he had asked, Janice looked at me and whispered, "You take it!"

As I stood to reach for the microphone, he looked at me and said, "No, I meant the lady!"

And Janice stood and articulately prayed, at the president's request. Afterward, I was informed that he will usually ask a woman clergyperson to pray.

I can relate to so much in President Carter's life. Visiting his boyhood home and farm, I saw the equivalent of my granddaddy's place. Seeing the school in which he began his education, I was transported back to my own.

To prepare for this trip, I reread "An Hour Before Daylight," Carter's memoir of a rural boyhood. In this moving, plainspoken and honest book, he traces the dominant influences of his early life.

Like a river running through it, the religious and moral strength and shortcomings of his Baptist upbringing lubricate every episode, for better or worse.

And so, I was not surprised that the still growing and learning President Carter is such a consistent advocate for women's equality, especially in the church.

In a later book, "A Call to Action," he said, "although economic disparity is a great and growing problem, I have become convinced that the most serious and unaddressed worldwide challenge is the deprivation and abuse of women and girls, largely caused by a false interpretation of carefully selected religious texts ... unfortunately following the example set during my lifetime by the United States."

By both word and deed and even at an advanced age, Jimmy Carter continues to advocate for the equality of women on both the small stage of a tiny Georgia Baptist church and the larger international stages, to which he continues to have entrance, as a respected world elder.

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