
Prayer Chair

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder, *Canon for Community and Education***



I recently had to reupholster a chair. But this wasn't just any chair. It was my prayer chair.

The chair used to live in my childhood home in Virginia. I took it with me to college where I started exploring my faith. I would sit in the chair, throw my legs over the side and read the Bible, or sit cross-legged to write in my prayer journal. I asked lots of questions of myself and of God.

I took the chair to Baltimore. There I would sit to start my day early with my Bible and cup of tea. It was in this chair that I would grapple with my parents' divorce and my dad's coming out, and it was in this chair that I would journal about the call I was discerning to full-time ministry.

The chair lived in storage while I lived in West Africa, but it was ready to catch me when I landed in Charlotte. It was in this chair that I prayed for the youth in my care as I discerned a call to Holy Orders. And the chair witnessed Jay get down on one knee to propose.

In New York, the chair traveled from our third-floor apartment to our first-floor apartment to our two-bedroom apartment to our "penthouse" apartment. It was my prayer partner through my first years of marriage, through seminary and ordination, and it held me as I held our first child.

Here in Atlanta, my chair lives next to the window in a spot I like to call "air traffic control." From my chair, I watch people come and go through the Andrews Drive entrance of the Cathedral parking lot. I notice when someone shows up an hour early to work. I watch neighbors walk their dogs, and I notice when a walking partner is suddenly missing from the daily routine. I watch parents push strollers, and I notice when the stroller transitions to a scooter, and then to a bike. I pray for the people I see, and I pray for the people I don't see.

After 25+ years, my chair showed considerable wear and tear. My dad, an interior designer, advised me that it would be better to replace it than to restore it. But I explained the significance of this sacred artifact, literally steeped in prayer. So Dad picked out a few fabric swatches for my inspection. When I drove up to Virginia in early February to care for my dad and make some end-of-life decisions, he called the fabric studio to order eight yards of the swatch I selected. It was the last fabric he would order.

A couple of weeks later, the fabric arrived here in Atlanta. Dad was back in the hospital, and I sent him a picture. A couple weeks after that, I took the prayer chair to an upholsterer a parishioner recommended to me.

By this time, Dad had died. I cried as I described what this chair and this fabric meant to me. I cried again when I picked the chair up, brought it home, and collapsed into its welcoming arms. And I prayed. I kept a remnant of the old upholstery—it felt too significant not to. We saved the less-worn fabric from the back of the chair to make a throw pillow. It matches the new fabric on the old chair perfectly.

Change is hard. Even when change is good, change is loss. And so, change is hard. I probably waited a bit too long to restore my precious prayer chair. I simply didn't want to say goodbye to the fabric that had become the tapestry of my life and prayer. But its restoration has been a gift. A tearful gift, but a gift all the same. I wonder what the next 25 years of prayer in this chair will bring.