In 1994, Rev. Sheila Holmes believed God was calling her home. “My husband died after a brief illness and I was having a hard time dealing with life without him. I could not understand why God would allow me to just exist,” she said.

However, she said, God spoke again, telling her, “You’re not going to die but change ministry. I am calling you to be a pastor.”

Holmes grappled with this new call but eventually submitted. She had no intention of staying in the Christian Reformed Church (in 1994, women were not permitted to serve as pastors). “But God has a sense of humor,” Holmes said, “and soon he confirmed that the CRC was where he was going to place me.”

Mentored by the late Rev. Stan Vander Klay, Holmes attended the Center of Urban Theological Studies in Philadelphia. In 1996 Holmes was examined by Classis Hackensack and subsequently served as interim pastor at Northside Community Chapel in Paterson, N.J., until 1998, when she accepted the call to be its pastor.

Even after becoming a pastor, Holmes felt that God wanted to use her in more ways. She served as an ethnic advisor to synod (the CRC’s annual leadership meeting) and was a board member for Christian Reformed Home Missions.

Her latest assignment is as a member of the denomination’s Board of Trustees, where she continues to blaze a trail. She is the first woman and first person of color to be the Board’s president, a position she will hold for the coming year.

And though most people think she is quiet, she said, “When God tells me to speak, he makes room for people to listen.”

—Callie Feyen