

Born August 1971, Stephen was placed up for adoption in Jackson, MS. and was adopted Oct. 1, 1971 by Pattie and Lawrence Sparks of Baldwyn, Mississippi. He was raised in rural Prentiss County, Mississippi on the same 37 acres where his parents still reside, across the road from his maternal grandparents, Pat and Inez Prather, who had lived all their lives as sharecroppers in rural Northeast Mississippi. His paternal grandparents were Jesse Paul Sparks and Audrey Ramey Sparks of New Site, Mississippi. Mr. JP Sparks had been an educator and principle of schools. Stephen's father, Jesse Lawrence Sparks, was a factory worker and machinist who is retired from Wolverine Tube in Booneville, Mississippi. His mother, Pattie Prather Sparks was a banker and just recently retired from Farmers and Merchants Bank in Baldwyn, Mississippi, where she had worked for 47 years, starting as a secretary and retired as Senior Vice President. Lawrence and Pattie Sparks instilled an ethos of hard work, determination, and perseverance into their young son. Stephen attended elementary, intermediate and high school in Baldwyn, Mississippi graduating valedictorian, star student and National Merit Scholar and scholarship recipient in 1989. That same year he began his studies at The University of Mississippi at Oxford, MS, graduating in 1993 as a Bachelors Degree in General Engineering. While there he was heavily involved in the Ole Miss Wesley Foundation where he first began struggling with a call to ministry. In the summer of 1993 he began Law School at the University of Mississippi graduating Juris Doctor in December 1995. While in law school he worked full time during the summers and part time during the year as the youth director at Water Valley United Methodist Church. He also worked as a law clerk at a local firm, and a research assistant for a law professor.

In January 1996, he began practicing law and volunteering at his home church as a youth director. In 1997, he began working part time at Wesley UMC, Tupelo, MS, as a youth director while practicing law. In 1998 he moved to a firm in Oxford, MS, and shortly thereafter began volunteering with St. Andrews UMC, Oxford. While there he answered a call to ministry that he had been struggling with since high school. He accepted a position with Getwell Road UMC as Youth Pastor for 2 1/2 years before leaving to attending Asbury Theological Seminary. While at Getwell Road he led and grew a vibrant youth ministry primarily through relational ministry and developing a large volunteer staff and small group leader network. He also helped lead a group of college and high school students to Russia on mission to conduct summer camp experience for everyone from children to youth to adults and focusing on leadership development. In August of 2001, he moved to Wilmore, KY to attend seminary. While there he served in student leadership and served as the Associate Pastor for 3 1/2 years at FUMC Richmond, KY. While at Richmond he served as the primary preacher for the Saturday Night Contemporary Service, Adult Ministries Coordinator, Area Coordinator for the Alpha Course, Purpose Driven Life Church Wide Campaign, later primary pastor for senior adults and visitations, interim Senior Pastor while senior pastor was on leave, and helped lead the church through a difficult transition. It was while in Richmond, Ky that he met his wife of 10 years, Holly Howard Sparks of Harlan, Kentucky. In 2005 he graduated Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary. He returned to Mississippi as Associate Pastor, FUMC Tupelo, overseeing mission and evangelism. Following Katrina, in 1996 he moved to Gateway UMC in Gulfport, MS. Gateway served as the headquarters for Disaster Relief in Harrison and Stone Counties for much of his 4 years in Gulfport, housing case managers as well as staff. Gateway also hosted several long term volunteers in campers attached to the church and housed large numbers of volunteers every week for the four years following Katrina. In 2010, he moved to Indianola FUMC, where he serves still. Since his return from Seminary, Stephen has served on several conference committees, including as chair of Petitions and Resolutions, vice-chair of New Church Development and member of that committee for 10 years, A2 Indicators task force, L3 Incubator, Pastors Leadership School, mediator for issues of clergy misconduct, council for the church in cases of clergy misconduct, parliamentarian/disciplinarian, UMCOR Mississippi Disaster Relief Committee, Greenwood District Missions Coordinator, & Disaster Coordinator, Greenwood District DCOM, Greenwood District Leadership Team, Chair of Building and Location Committee, Mississippi Missions Committee, Mississippi Committee on Race and Religion, Annual Conference Planning Team, Forming Faith Communities Committee and SLI team for the Greenwood District. He was elected as a delegate to SEJ Conference 2012 and a reserve to GC 2012, where he also reported for the Mississippi Circuit Rider and other radio outlets. In Indianola he is a member of the Rotary Club, the Congregations United task force, and several other local initiatives to improve the town and race relations and education in Sunflower County through the Indianola Promise Community, the Delta Health Alliance, Delta Missions and Mission Mississippi.

He is the father of three, Andrew, age 8, Anna Claire, age 6 and Amelia Rae, age 4. His wife Holly is a registered nurse and is employed at South Sunflower County Hospital as the Chief of Clinical Operation. She has a Bachelors of Social Work and a Bachelors of Science in Nursing, both from Eastern Kentucky University.