

Pastor Appreciation Month

October has been "Pastor Appreciation Month." I hope that you have all taken the opportunity to say, "Thank you for what you do." to your Pastor. I have been thinking about all the Pastors I have had during my 70 and a half years of being an active Methodist and then United Methodist. The first one was an older man who decided that since there was a youth in the church, I was 15, we needed a youth group. A few older people showed up including 2 married couples and the Pastor. We played a game based on the bible and when I did not know the answer, he kindly told me without embarrassing me. My next Pastor in that church was younger and I baby sat his children. He gave me great advice and I really liked him. He told me I needed to leave home and go away to school. I did and he was there for me to talk to and he helped me grow, not only in my faith but in life. He baptized our Son. He taught me many lessons specially to stand on my own two feet and not to expect from others what they were unwilling or unable to give. The Pastors changed and the next one was good but moved on and then came one who betrayed his vows. From him I learned that sometimes we expect Pastors to be above human temptations, most are but sometimes they are not. We moved and we left that church and went to a small church near our house. We had three pastors there. The first was a frequent Mission goer and being a former Optometrist went on Mission trips to Haiti to fit eyeglasses to those in need. I learned from him of the need to spread the love of Christ throughout the world. The next was young and enthusiastic. He and his wife became friends, and his sermons were inspiring and helpful in my faith walk. I sent him a note telling him this and he said he would put this note in his box and when he was having a bad day, he would reach into this box and pull out a note that had encouraged and appreciated him. Years later he wrote telling me that he had pulled out my note and how much he had needed that on a difficult day. Then came the next Pastor and he was young and made many mistakes. I needed church but felt empty and we left that church. I regretted the way I had done this and met him a few years later and we talked and I forgave him for what I had perceived as his difficult nature, I hope he forgave me for mine. Then we had a Pastor who once again I considered a friend. He was an encourager and put me places I did not think I was capable of handling, but he saw in me what I did not see in myself and he helped me grow. Then came one of my all-time favorites and he was great but then too soon he was moved, and he left. Then there were others, it is a truth in the United Methodist Church that Pastors come and go. Now we have a Pastor who has been here 10 years in July. In this church only 2 other Pastors have been here 10 years or longer since 1823. He is a terrific preacher, his faith is an active faith, a man of prayer, he is dependable, if he says it, you can believe it, a faithful husband and Father, a very hard worker, humble, and as a bonus he laughs at my jokes and we share a love of baseball.

Pastors come and go in our lives and we can love them, tolerate them, or dislike them, but we can learn life lessons from all of them. The ones I did not quite see eye to eye with taught me as many valuable lessons as those I loved. They all taught me that God is there in our darkest days, that there is nothing that can separate us from his love, that we are a forgiven people, that we need to love our neighbor whether they are next door, sitting in the pews or standing in the Pulpit, or in some remote foreign place, God calls us to love all his people. I thank God for all of them and the spiritual and life lessons they gave me.

Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Heavenly Father we thank you for the gift of those who serve you. Be with our Pastor, bless his ministry. Be with those who are ill, who suffer grief, who are isolated, who crave the love and closeness of family and friends during this pandemic. Be with those who are hungry, may they be fed. Be with our country Lord as we go through this election. Be with our staff and leaders Lord, guide them and bless them. Be with our families Lord, protect them. In Jesus name we pray, Amen. Grace Epperson

