
From the Pastor's Desk

Pastor Gerald (Jerry) Morris

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Thank You

As my twelve years at First United Methodist Church of Wausau are winding down, I'm getting a lot of thank yous. People are thanking me for the things that I've done well and very kindly overlooking the things I've done, um, less well. I appreciate both your affirmations and your restraint. The most meaningful affirmations, though, are not the ones about things that I do well. They are about ways that the church has grown in purpose and ministry during my time here. This is what I am called to do: Help individuals and churches grow to new stages in faith.

But one thing that is often overlooked is that in the pastor-church relationship, the church is not the only beneficiary. Do not ever forget that a part of your calling as a church is to raise up leaders, and part of that is to teach, guide, and refine those who serve you. And you have taught me much. So, in my last newsletter article at this church, let me thank you for some of the gifts I've received from you.

- ***You have moderated my natural tendency toward arrogance.*** I am a confident person, and that's not a bad thing. But push it just a little farther, and you get an arrogant jerk who always assumes that he's right and is dismissive of anyone who disagrees with him. And yes, that can be me. (One psych profile I took used the words "autocratic and dictatorial.") I think back to when I was absolutely certain that we needed to discontinue the 8 o'clock service, and I shudder at what would have been lost had I gotten my way. This service has become one of the strengths of our worship, and many of our new members the past years

have come through that service. Fortunately, John Ohnstad and Karen Petersen, as chairs of Worship Design, taught me to listen better.

- ***You have taught me to love people first, and teach them second.*** I do love to teach. I love that “light bulb moment” when people grasp a new concept. But in the church, that’s not where to start. In a church, you earn the right to teach. And the way you do that is by being present in people’s lives, sharing their hardships, praying with them, listening to their stories, laughing with their children. I learned this above all from our church’s two former parish nurses, Mary Ann Dykes and Rebecca Morris. I can never fully express my gratitude to Mary Ann, who has taught me more about Pastoral Care than anyone. And I’m taking the other former parish nurse with me, so I can keep learning.
- ***We are all support staff.*** When I first began on the church staff, we had a large, mostly part-time staff, and there was an artificial distinction between “Program Staff” and “Support Staff.” Well, we got over it. We realize now that we’re all ministers. More importantly, I’ve learned that all the staff, up to and including the pastor are support staff. Our job is not to do ministry but to help the church do ministry. I learned this by way of both of the new ministries we’ve started the past seven years. The Personal Needs Closet was an idea that rose out of the UMW. It was adopted by a team of people who were inspired by it, including Barb Hunger, Doris Carlson, Gail Cain, and Jamelle Milne. My job was to bring those people together and communicate their work to the rest of the church. This was even more true of the Downtown Memory Café, proposed by Charlie Schoenfeld and adopted by a full team of dedicated volunteers. My job here was to encourage, then get out of the way.

So thank you. You have molded me as a minister in ways that I needed to be shaped. As your new pastor comes, with different gifts and different rough edges, keep it up.