

Passing on the Faith

I was asked recently how I thought the faith was passed on through the five generations of our family who have been baptized in this church. My immediate response was, "I really haven't thought about it." As I reflected on the question later I found myself remembering my grandparents on both sides of our family and how their lives have influenced ours in many ways.

My paternal grandmother was somewhat vocal, a bit opinionated and maybe just a little judgemental. Both of my grandfathers were quiet and unassuming and men of few words. I never asked or even thought about their faith journey while there was still time to ask and they were not inclined or able to share it with me. I don't think that they ever suffered or were challenged for their faith, but I'm sure that throughout their lives they were sustained by it. There was certainly some of the "you must go to church because you must," but there was more often the silent example of this is who we are and this is what we do and here is where we belong. With few words but with their lives they supported the beginning of my journey of faith; and for this I am thankful.

I was fortunate to be born into those families and into this church community where faith was lived and encouraged. I remember my father's parents who literally spent much of their lives in this place. My grandmother often grumbled about the brass rail in the choir loft and her inability to ever get it polished properly. My grandfather took us with him to ring the bell, to collect the used bulletins, and sometimes to help him clean. I'm sure my cousins and I were exceptional help and if Mark were here he would certainly tell you he was better at it than I was. I also remember the sadness and acceptance when my grandfather had a stroke well before retirement age and could then express himself only through his eyes. I remember how his sons moved in and took over his job. I remember how the brothers included their children in this endeavor. Throughout these days I was surrounded by a caring family and congregation who expressed their faith through commitment and words. They articulated their faith when I could only absorb it; and for this I am thankful.

As a teenager I was nurtured here through some difficult days. When my mother was 12 years old her mother died. When she was 48 my father died after a short illness. My maternal grandfather, who was our rock during my dad's illness, died three months later. We were surrounded by kind words, practical support, visits, and prayers. Our lives changed, but the congregation remained faithful and through them I knew without a doubt that God would not abandon us; and for this I am thankful.

Today there are check lists, errands, conversations, tears, joy, delight - family, children, grandchildren, and friends; yours, mine and those we share. This life I have is a wonderful gift. Still I'd like to please everyone, have everyone be safe and happy and have this world be a loving, just place. Doubts, confusion, questions, and frustration creep in and I am discouraged by my inability to make it all better. I am certain, however, that God can use us wherever we are and I am sustained and encouraged by prayer, yours, mine, and ours; and for this I am thankful.

As I continue my journey of faith I travel sometimes through scripture and music, sometimes through sermons and prayer, sometimes through special events, and sometimes through grief. I find myself learning with and from adults and very often with and from the children. I see your caring and concern loop in and out through all of our ages and stages. I see children reaching out to each other and interacting with adults who may not be related but who are never the less an important presence in their lives. I see my grandchildren eagerly running to Sunday School, to choir, to Little Lambs, and to Children and Worship. I see Owen content and happy in the arms of Andy, Jane and Suzie. I know that here intergenerational is a commitment and a way of congregational life and not just an event label. I see that faith continues to be passed on; and for this I am thankful.

My journey of faith has been of the ordinary variety. There were no specific defining moments, no fireworks, and no great sacrifices. It has been gained surely through God's hand, in small consistent ways, over many years, and it has often slipped in quietly. But, here I am today possessing the certain knowledge that Christ is with us in every time and in every place and that nothing can separate us from the love of God; and for this I am very thankful.

Nancy Ver Hulst Gebben

Thanksgiving Day poem
Kara Green and Josie Kotowski

Silent are the whispers as I pray quietly before going to bed. (Josie)
Silent are our prayers as we feel God's presence through each generation. (Kara)
Silent are my grandparents as they listen to the word of God. (Josie)
Silent is the example of my parents' faith as they showed me the use of their gifts in the church. (Kara)

Loud are the Bible school songs my sister and I sing. (Josie)
Loud is the crackle of wrappers as our grandma passed candy down the row. (Kara)
Loud are the giggles of my friends and I in Sunday school. (Josie)
Loud are the voices of Will, Lucy, and Owen running circles with their friends in the gathering place. (Kara)

Forever is God's love for my family and me. (Josie)
Forever is my hope to grow spiritually with all members of our family. (Kara)
Forever are the memories, both new and old, my family has made and will continue to make within Third Reformed Church. (Josie)
Forever is our Thankfulness to God for our entire Third Church family. (Kara and Josie)