

The Blessings of a Life in Ministry

Jinny Larson reflects on the church communities that shaped her.



The picture captures the morning as the young family stands by their car ready to embark on a journey of four hundred miles from the city of Chicago to the town of Ashland, Wisconsin. In the blustery March day of 1962, they will head off with their infant son to begin not only their day's journey, but the longer journey of ministry in the Covenant Church.

I remember the excitement I felt as the wife of a newly graduated seminary student, mother of a nine-month-old baby, and the prospect of being a "pastor's wife." I had read books, received advice, loved Jesus as my personal Savior, and (luckily, as we seminary wives would joke) could sing alto and play the piano.

Now I look back fifty years later and see a life that has gone through deep waters, sorrow greater than I could imagine, words said that should not have been, opportunities that were not taken; but regrets cannot possibly compare to the wonderful life of ministry that I shared with my husband, Dusty, for thirty-four years until he passed into life eternal. And added to this are my children—Tim, Karl, Peter, and Chrissy.

Each church where we served has uniquely shaped my life through the love and care of the church and com-

munity. My favorite recipes remind me of friendships and fun over a meal or a cup of coffee. Dusty got a recipe for anise candy from a parishioner in that first church, and when the children were home this past December, Peter made a batch and brought back the familiar smell of Christmas for us.

Wherever we lived, I always felt that I was in the best place for whatever stage our family was in. Whether small town, suburban, or farm there are unique advantages to each. The farming area was probably the most dramatic move for me. I grew up in Chicago where houses were close together, streets had sidewalks, and we walked to stores, school, and church. Suddenly I was living in the country, five to ten miles from the nearest town, sending the kids to school on a bus, and worrying that I would never figure out how not to be lost.

When one of the farmers jokingly complained that I didn't honk my horn and wave as I drove by the field he was working in, I was amazed that I was expected to recognize someone on a tractor in a yet unknown field! But, yes, those roads and fields became as familiar as the cracks in the sidewalks of Chicago. And during those years, I learned how to can vegetables and fruits from the garden, make pickles, and how to knit.

Our lives were full of funny stories, exhilarating experiences, and impressionable memories. God has spoken to me not only through his word, but through the words and lives of many people. Sitting around a kitchen table has led to many conversations, much deeper and more thought-provoking than the weather or local gossip.

Times have changed dramatically in the church community during this half century, but the longing for gifts of love and friendship are felt by everyone. Don't expect the pastor to do all the "reaching out"—reach out to them and let them know they and their family are loved, appreciated, and prayed for.

My cup overflows with praise for each person, each church, and each community I have had the privilege of living in and with, because of God's constant presence. I have experienced God's love, joy, peace, hope, grace, mercy, comfort—the list is endless. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! ■

 For an expanded conversation on the blessings of a life in ministry, check out a video interview with the author at CovChurch.tv/companion-june-2012-feature

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