

## **Friendship**

Gretchen Dille

Growing up, Gretchen was always involved with church. She took part in handbell choir, the 1982 National Youth Gathering in San Antonio, and Christian Fellowship at college. God, faith, and church involvement were important parts of her life.

After college she joined a local church and was there 25 years. Things changed at that house of worship, and in January 2016, she decided to look for a new church home. Gretchen prayed for a church that was welcoming and would provide opportunities for her to serve God and the community. Her first stop was Hope Lutheran and she felt invited, comfortable, and welcomed. Very soon, she knew that Hope was her new church home and a place to make new friends.

At her previous church, if she missed Sunday worship, she did not feel as if she missed anything. Not at Hope! Now she looks forward to Sundays and if she misses church, friends from Hope ask if she is okay and tell her that they miss her. The people and the programs make it a place to be.

Being a part of a church family and having a desire to be at church was missing at her earlier church. That has all changed since she became a part of the Hope family. The first volunteer activity Gretchen got involved in was photocopying bulletins because it worked well with attending Bible Study and college studies. Now Gretchen looks forward to Sundays, Bible study, and being involved at Hope with programs like Grief Share, being responsible for recycling at Hope (with her mom), and interacting with the children by sharing books and stuffed animals, and volunteering with Hope at various church and community events.

The summer of 2016 brought an unfortunate diagnosis of prostate cancer to Jim, Gretchen's husband. She continued to attend hope and it was heartwarming when members reached out to them and wanted to know what they could do to help. Gretchen was thankful for Hope's prayer chain and being able to share what Jim was going through. It was comforting to know they were being lifted in prayer. Jim had a leg amputation and Pastor Lisa and George A., a member who was also an amputee, visited Jim shortly after his amputation. That brought Jim encouragement that he would be able to negotiate life without his leg. Jim also was paired with a Stephen Minister via Hope's Stephen Ministry program and that person visited Jim once a week for the duration of his illness.

Jim had not attended church in a while. A Hope member, Jerry Ivins, got to know Jim, he invited him to attend Hope and become a member of the Praise Band, by sharing his bass ukulele playing talents. Jim accepted the invitation and became a vital member of the Praise Band.

Gretchen was busy taking care of Jim but the desire to serve God and Hope was something that she wanted to do. Gretchen continued to photocopy bulletins and help Jim play in Praise Band because he had many mobility issues and needed help following the music. It was refreshing to be serving during her busy life. It provided a healthy sense of relief from her burdens. The pastor and God knew what she needed.

The Hope memory that Gretchen holds most dear was in December 2020, when her husband Jim was on life support. Pastor Christie led them through a renewal of their wedding vows that they had wanted to do earlier that year and COVID prevented. She remained at the hospital with Jim and Gretchen when he was taken off life support. Later, it touched Gretchen's heart that many Hope members attended Jim's Memorial service. Gretchen also shares that Jim was a body donor to the UC College of Medicine. After his body was returned

from being used for science there was a very special service for all the body donors that were returned that year. Several members of Hope attended that service with her.

Gretchen is most thankful for the FRIENDSHIPS that she has made at Hope. The people who care, pray, reach out, serve with, and celebrate life with her. Hope is thankful for Gretchen and the myriad of ways that she faithfully worships, serves and shares God's love with everyone.

Karen Schneider

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