

The Past 34 Days Seem Like A Lifetime And Yet Sometimes Like Only A Day

By the Rev. Jerry Swanson, Synod Commissioner, Presbytery of Dakota

On Feb. 11 we received a call from Linda Connors, an elder from the United Dakota Presbyterian Church, telling us that our son Dwight, 52, had passed away that morning. I am hoping that Donna (Dwight's widow) can tell you of his last night sometime. The message from Linda came as a shock and the first thing I felt was that this was not fair; I was supposed to go before my children.

The arrival of son, daughter, grandson, great granddaughter and the rest of our friends and relatives brought its own special joy and gave the week a silver lining.

We are as thankful for the outpouring of support from every direction, even as of today, more than a month later. I remember an Indian friend who spoke to me after the prayer service conducted by Commissioned Lay Minister Lavonne Looking Elk. She said, "Jerry, look around at the crowd; there are as many Indians as white people. That's because of Dwight." The Rev. Dr. George Goodrich, executive presbyter of Yellowstone Presbytery, conducted the funeral. Dwight and Donna had been conducting services in both United Dakota Presbyterian and First Presbyterian churches. It was a good combination. The long week ended with the funeral.

It is unique that in both Poplar and Wolf Point, Mont., there are two sessions, two presbyteries and two synods. But that was the first week of a difficult month.

The session of the United Dakota Church made a motion that the Committee of Ministry of the Dakota Presbytery commission Donna Swanson to serve the United Dakota Church in Wolf Point. I was asked to have the service that Sunday and moderate the session. Donna began her solo service at First Presbyterian Church that Sunday.

It became obvious that with four churches on the Fort Peck Reservation without pastors and that I was the only ordained Dakota Presbyterian Pastor in the area that it was as important for Barb and me to move back to Wolf Point and come out of our retirement home in Glasgow. That happened March 3.

This began a series of events that in some way reminded me of the Book of Job.

As the moving crew from United Dakota was finishing the last of the move in Glasgow, I took the old 1990 Buick station wagon and headed for Yellowstone Presbytery in Terry, Mont., to fulfill the responsibility as the Presbyterian Hunger Action Enabler.

The car was running fine and it was a surprise when south of Brockway, Mont., I noticed that the new transmission was not acting right. I thought, "Well this is a different unit that was installed 400 miles ago, so it will clear up." It didn't!

According to the sheriff of Prairie County I made it into the county by 194 feet when it happened. First, I stopped because the car was hot and steaming. I thought I would move away a short distance while it cooled. Looking back I saw flames coming out of the motor. I hurried back and asked a Fish & Game truck on the other side if they had a fire extinguisher. They had one so I used all of it to no avail. The Fish and Game truck had a good radio and called 911 and the fire department. I was afraid of the gas tank blowing. The sheriff from Circle, Mont., was the first to arrive followed shortly by the sheriffs from Prairie County. The fire crew was next and it emptied its tank of water on the car and, I think, kept the gas tank from blowing. I think the crowning blow was the \$294 charge to remove the car from the highway.

The sheriff of Terry took me to the church and I was able to be at the worship service that evening. The Rev. Freemont McCall drove me back to Wolf Point that night.

That night I felt a very sharp pain in my foot. As a diabetic, I went to see a doctor the next morning. It was an interior infection in the ankle. About this time I was thankful that I did not have a wife like Job to tell me, "Curse God and die."

Instead the chorus of a song came to me:

Some Through The Waters
Some Through The Flood
Some Through The Fire,
But All Through The Blood

Some Through Great Sorrows
But God Give A Song In The Night Session
And All The Day Long
I Know That My Redeemer Liveth
Amen.

My daughter Margo gave me a new name: the "Master of Disaster" and kindly sent me an EASY BUTTON.

We are looking forward to this new life ahead.