

Grace was MY Pastor

Last Sunday afternoon my pastor died. Rev. Grace E. Huck (NEVER forget the “E.”) was 102 years, 2 months, and 16 days old. It was such a relief and a blessing to be able to release her into God’s arms. On one of our last visits together, the last thing I said to her was, “Good-bye”. She responded by saying, “I hope this is the last time we say good-bye.”

Grace was so ready to move on, so ready for the next life in the arms of Jesus.

Pastor Grace was MY pastor. She was also the pastor of thousands across the face of the globe and across the span of time. I love all the people who have had the privilege of knowing that Grace was their pastor, but today I am very specifically thankful that she was MINE.

Think about this: Who pastors the pastor?

In many ways, ministry can be a powerfully lonely...and at times painful... profession. There are times when you cannot speak the words that you desperately want to speak. There are times when you wish deep in your soul that somebody would understand you without you having to try to explain all the details. There are times when a pastor needs to share in celebration....or grief....what is happening in a church but can’t share that in church circles. Pastors just need access to friends who understands the journey of a pastor.

One of those deep friends from me was Pastor Grace. She simply understood.

I was Grace’s pastor, and Grace was mine.

We first met forty-one years ago when I was seventeen. I was at home in Faulkton having lunch with my family on a bright, sunny day in July. Pastor Grace had just been appointed and moved to the next town over (Cresbard) and had driven the twenty miles to talk with my Dad. This small car pulls up in front of our house, and a small woman in her 60’s bounces up the sidewalk. My parents introduced all four of us McKirdy kids to Rev. Grace E. Huck, a human container of unending strength and energy. From then on we always referred to her as “Grace-baby.” (My mother warned us repeatedly to NEVER call her that to her face, that we must always be respectful of this tiny giant who now lived in our world. Mom needn’t have worried. For those of you who knew Pastor Grace, can you possibly imagine the look on her face and the response of her sharp tongue if anyone had had the audacity to call her “Grace-baby” to her face???)

I grew and went off to school. I graduated from college and signed contract to teach music in....Cresbard. Grace was no longer the pastor there, but from then on anytime that we met we always had something to talk about as we caught up on the events of that small town.

Eventually, I went to seminary. When I graduated and returned to South Dakota for ordination, Grace was right there with me and for me. We lived fifty miles apart, so got to bump into each other on occasion. We worked on a committee together. We shared summer events together. For some reason Grace and I just understood each other...resonated with each other.

Aaaaand....eventually I was appointed to Spearfish. In some United Methodist pastor circles, Grace was referred to as “Bishop Huck.” Needless to say, “Bishop Huck” approved of my appointment here! Almost every Wednesday afternoon for the past seven years, I was over to spend an hour of conversation and prayer with her. From Hickory House to Serenity Corner to Dorsett Home, I would simply come to wherever she was. Seven years ago she was in worship every week....fourth pew from the front on the right, middle aisle seat. Slowly, she began to miss church occasionally and finally altogether.

Today I smile as I write. Grace was my pastor. But much more deeply Grace was my mentor and friend.

I smile because I know that many of you can say the exact same thing. I am really looking forward to hearing your stories as the years now go by.

Grace’s funeral will be on Monday, September 24, at 2:00 pm here at the Spearfish United Methodist Church. Please mark your calendars! In music, in scripture, in sharing, in preaching, we are going to celebrate the life of this amazing person...this Amazing Grace!

Come celebrate with us!

Pastor Scott