

June 18, 2022

Dear Stettler United Church...

*How deep your designs are to me, O God! How great their number!
I try to count them but they are more than the sand.
I come to the end - I am still with you. (from Psalm 139)*

Well folks, it's been quite a page-turner. I can't quite believe I'm nearly finished this most interesting chapter of my life. There've been so many plot twists and moving scenes connected to being in ministry set here in central Alberta. Thank you for being co-authors, memorable recurring characters, bit-part players, editors, and the like.



I've been using this set of bookends as a focal point for my upcoming retirement. Dave Denholm made them for me when I returned to serve with Stettler United Church in the fall of 2013.

While I've never been good at retaining what I read, I think I read people well. So, it's the experiences we've shared that I cherish. My heart and head are filled with the truths and trials of all that's been part of my nearly thirty-two years of paid-accountable ministry.

"Fiction's got nothing on real people" is how I summarize what I liked best and least about having a people profession. I've been privy to some incredible life stories and circumstances. I've met people who've survived tragedies, taken huge risks, suffered great loss, been victimized and/or dealt with poor health all while holding to hope and showing amazing resilience. I've witnessed peaceful deaths, miraculous births, renewed health, answered prayers and healed relationships. I've been inspired by the wit and wisdom of young and old and mentored by many. Sadly, I've also seen people act with greed and selfishness and refuse to take responsibility for their actions and/or be too controlling to cooperate in the church as a community. My faith in humanity has often been tested and my faith in God has been called upon night and day. I've received messages in dreams and calls/visits that were serendipitous. Oft times the Spirit has been palpable and I'm grateful to have found the guidance necessary for direction and decision making.

Dave decorated these bookends with alpha and omega symbols. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet which represents the eternal living God, in the fullness of creation (Revelation 1:8). They *reveal* that God is before the beginning and after the end. God is and was and is to come. God does not retire! Thus, I'm trusting God to point me toward that which will continue to offer fullness-of-life in the next chapters of my life story.

One thing Bob and I already know about retirement is that we can be as busy as we chose to be. Firstly, we'll concentrate on completing and moving into our retirement house at Rochon Sands. We then look forward to meeting our neighbours; entertaining guests (many of you, for example) and taking a few trips. Our kids all live in Ontario now, and time spent with our three-year-old grandson is sure to be just what retirement needs! We'll also choose to volunteer with various

groups & programs and continue to be patrons of the arts. I can't wait to learn what "have a good weekend" means!

It's important for you to know that we will intentionally separate ourselves from direct involvement in Stettler United Church. (Except odd-job-Bob might still need to play with a sump pump, or something 😊). I will decline invitations to preside at worship services - including baptisms, weddings, or funerals - and will not be available for pastoral/hospital calls having to do with the ministry of Stettler United. My absence - especially once a new minister has been called - is to allow them to build their own relationships with the people of Stettler, Big Valley and Erskine United Churches.

After a year, and only at the invitation of the Board and/or current minister, will I consider sharing in pulpit supply or formal involvement (the exception being to help serve the needs of our own family members).

Bob and I will certainly want to visit with you when we happen to see you in the community, but we aren't willing to listen to any gossip about the next minister, staff, or lay leaders. Let's all try our best to take the high-road as we move through this transition time. (Of course, admittedly, I'll be wondering who's reset the furnace after a windstorm or the elevator after a power outage... or chased down the alley for a garbage or recycling bin. And I really want to know who reached up to hang the banner on the west wall or knew where to find the props necessary to stage a particular biblical story 😊).

Despite being told numerous times to grow thicker skin, it hasn't happened yet. So, I'll be the one that'll tear-up while talking/singing at what I'm calling the "Secret-Not-So-Secret Service" on June 26th (10:30 in-person & on-line; potluck lunch; cake and celebration). I'll also be the one handing out books from my library. Who knows? You might meet yourself on the page. Truth be told, we each have a role in God's story. Something we can already *read into* this ending is God's new beginning. May it be so.

Peace, Thanks, and Blessings,

Jan Richardson, serving with Stettler United Church
Sept/1990 - June/1996 and Nov/2013 - July/2022