



Focus on Faith



How often does God talk to us and how often do we listen? Patricia (Pat) Willeke knows that God has spoken to her a number of times and she also knows that when she listens to Him and puts her faith into His hands, things will be okay.

Pat is a life-long Lutheran and has served her church in many different ways. As a teenager, she sang in the church choir, taught Sunday School, and even helped to type the church bulletin. When she married her first husband and joined Westwood Lutheran Church on the west side of Dayton, she thought about looking at other churches, but God kept pulling her back to develop and apply her skills at Westwood which became a mostly black Lutheran church. Along with other young mothers, Pat started a moms circle and was soon invited to be a district chairperson of Lutheran women in the synod. Pat served on many committees, sang in the choir, was youth advisor, Sunday School Teacher, Coordinator of Vacation Bible School, and led retreats. It was through these experiences that Pat learned about how to confront and deal with racism that she saw all around her and that was affecting so many of her fellow congregants at Westwood. God clearly had plans for Pat and knew that she was the right person to have leading difficult discussions to confront racism.

Her professional career as a Mental Health Technician at Good Samaritan Hospital in Dayton started as part of the Children's Program for Emotional Growth. Pat got her bachelor's degree at age 40 and became an advocate for patients at the hospital until that position was eliminated. When she was 45 she earned her Masters degree in Counseling and became a Licensed Professional Counselor. She continued to ask for God to give her the correct words to be helpful to those she interacted with. Pat found herself divorced and a single mother of three children and in need of a way to support her family. Word of her good work at the hospital spread and when she applied for a new position at the Ohio Hospital Association (OHA) in Columbus, the interviewer told her, "I hear that you walk on water." Pat replied, "Well, I know where the rocks are!" She retired at age 62 from the OHA. While in Columbus she served on several synod committees and an ELCA committee. She also volunteered as an usher at the Ohio theatre for 20 years.

Pat continued to advocate for others, working as an academic advisor at Columbus State Community College, where she retired at age 69. But God was not done with Pat yet. She had been single for 35 years and her daughter encouraged her to meet others through a Thrivent dating website. This is how Pat met Gene Willeke. They met for their first date in Dayton where Gene brought Pat a loaf of homemade bread. Gene had a whole page of questions to ask Pat and apparently, she passed the test with flying colors. Gene decided within two weeks that they were getting married. Pat got him to slow down a little while they got to know each other, but clearly God had brought them together and there was no stopping the inevitable. After moving to Oxford, Pat became a hospital volunteer, served on the hospital auxiliary board and facilitated the caregiver support group for Seniors of Oxford (which she continues to facilitate). Today, Pat maintains a great relationship with Gene's extended family, including the family of Carol Willeke, Gene's first wife. She is a mother of three and grandmother of four; she has two stepsons and three step grandchildren.

When we look around us, we see the importance of talking to and learning from those who are different from us. To Pat, that diversity is all part of God's plan. And like Pat, we need to listen to God for He knows the best ways that each of us can contribute to do His work. We just need to be open to listening to God and hearing Him when He calls us. There have been many times when Pat has heard God say, "Get back in there, Pat!" And she has heard God and followed his lead.