



“Commitment Through the Years” – Rick Wiltse – November 6, 2016

I’m what you’d call an “Aldersgate lifer.” My mom’s family was here when this church began, I was born into this church, I was baptized here, later confirmed here under Rev. Bill Johnson, and after nearly 20 years of living out of the area, I’ve been back here for the last 7+ years. My parents were married here, as were my sister & her husband, along with other family members. There is no question that I am who I am because of who we all are.

I remember so many things that helped shape me as a young Aldersgater running around & hiding in the closets, from being an acolyte to singing in the Jr. Choir and later the Youth Choir & Chancel Choir, performing in musical productions here and attending Sunday School and VBS. I noticed how caring the congregation was when my grandfather Bill Ranck passed away suddenly when I was in Jr. High – this was the first time I had experienced the death of a close relative so it was especially hard for me. The same care was repeated in my adulthood with other family deaths – those of my grandmother Jean Ranck and my aunt and uncle Judy & Ron Baird for example. I know many of you have experienced the same thing with deaths in your families.

So many of you were there when I was growing up in the ‘70’s & ‘80’s and it’s so nice to be able to get to know you as an adult now! I’ve learned how important it is to try to lift each other up at every opportunity. I learned that from being immersed in this church family that truly cares for one another and lives that out each day.

Even in the years I was away from Grand Rapids I never really lost touch. In college I enjoyed receiving a care package each year. When I would come home people here were always glad to see me and wanted to hear how I was doing. When I lived in other parts of Michigan, I always kept up reading the newsletter because I wanted to know what was happening at Aldersgate and I was still here for worship on Easter Sunday every year but one.

There was never a time when I felt the love of Aldersgate more than just recently. As many of you know, in August I had a stroke which put me in intensive care for two weeks and then in inpatient rehab

for almost a month and a half. I temporarily lost the use of my left arm and leg but have been able to regain most of that function through acute therapy, which is still ongoing.

I was completely overwhelmed by the flood of cards, visits, gifts, and prayers that came my way, the majority of which came from this congregation. All of the cards went up on the wall in my hospital room at Mary Free Bed and it served as a constant reminder of all of the love from my church family that surrounded me. It gave me strength to get through the most difficult parts of recovery. How then could I fail?

Thank-you church family for being who you are and for making me who I am!