

Prayer for Pastor Nora's Blessing and Release

Luke 11:1-13 by Patty Friesen (July 24/22)

Today's gospel reading on the Lord's prayer is fitting as we release Pastor Nora from her responsibilities and calling at Osler Mennonite Church. When I say release, it sounds like working for OMC has been a prison sentence, which it may have felt like during the pandemic which occupied over half of her three years with us. Let's look at the Lord's prayer and then how it applies to our situation of pastoral blessing and release and praying for new help!

In Matthew's gospel, the Lord's Prayer is followed by an admonition to forgive others, in Luke's gospel the Lord's Prayer is followed by assurances that God answers prayer. If even a neighbour would help us in a time of trouble, will God be slow to answer an urgent request? We may pray confidently, not because we trust in our own persistence but because we know that in a time of need God is even more trustworthy than a neighbour.

The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, but Jesus does not give the disciples magic words to say. Instead, Jesus teaches them about the nature of the one to whom they pray. Disciples of Jesus can pray to God as to a heavenly parent. The first word of the model prayer is our Father or "Abba or Daddy or Mommy." It is in this intimate familial relationship that we converse with God. When the disciples ask for a lesson on prayer, therefore, Jesus responds with a lesson on the nature of God. The greatest stimuli to praying is the awareness of our need and absolute dependence on God and our knowledge and experience of the character of God. Only those who know their own need and the love of God will be able to truly pray.

Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone by James Martin, tells us that we all want to learn to pray. The book is a best seller because all kinds of people, religious or not, want to be in some kind of relationship with a Higher Being and find some kind of meaning in the universe. The first reason to pray is that God's Own Self wants to be in relationship with us and if any of us have any kind of openness, imperfect prayers-era that we are - God's calling us into relationship.

Secondly, we pray because we want to also be in relationship with God. Praying isn't about a wish list. It is acknowledging that I am not self-sufficient, that I am not the creator of myself and creation. We pray to be in union with God and to put everything into perspective. The third reason to pray is that we have to. Once we start praying, we feel like it's something we can't do without. Prayer is an outgrowth of our longing for the divine.

Fourthly, prayer then feels necessary and we feel off without it. In the face of all our problems, personal and global, how can we not ask for help from our Creator? We pray because we have needs. Fifthly, prayer helps us. That may sound selfish, but it is another common motivation, similar to reasons for doing physical exercise. If we never get off the couch, we'll end up out of shape and that will influence our overall physical condition. Not praying - not spending intentional time with God means our spiritual life will be out of shape and that will influence the rest of our life. We'll probably be less grateful and thus more irritable, less connected to the deepest part of ourself and thus more scattered, less aware of our reliance on God and thus more frightened. Prayer helps us. (Martin, Learning to Pray, p. 29/30)

One of Nora's best gifts to us during her ministry with us was showing us how to bring our need to God's love in faith and prayer. Her own personal prayer life was an obvious calming and grounding place for her. She loves prayer books and loves prayer language that speaks to and about God in powerful poetic and genuine heart-felt words. This was evidenced in the way she prayed on pastoral visits and prayed with youth and prayed in worship and prayed in staff meetings and prayed with patients at City Hospital during her Clinical Pastoral Education last year. Her sermons also were calmly meditative like prayer themselves.

We've been lucky these past three years to have Nora's prayerful leadership. And today we release her, hard as that may be and turn our hopes and prayers to her successful future in ministry - which is assured with the gifts she possesses. God will always find a place for her.

We pray confidently for our needs as well. Our congregation has always been committed to youth ministry - sometimes in the past, parents have led it or other young adults in church not much older than the youth themselves. We've had students from Canadian Mennonite University lead our youth like Sarah Buhler, Nathan Loewen and Val White and others - sometimes for a summer or sometimes longer. When I first got here 8 years ago, we had a visioning process that put youth as #1 priority which led to the hiring of Terri Lynn Friesen who was with us 3 1/2 years and then Nora Pederberg who has been with us 3 years. They came to us through Nutana Park Mennonite Church. After having been in the minor league, they all three worked their way up to the major league in Osler. And we've been very lucky to have them.

And now we have an interim youth coordinator Zach Dueck who also comes to us through Nutana Park Mennonite Church as he completes his term there of 5 hours/week. Zach also works at Mount Royal as 1/2-time youth and young adult minister and is currently filling in .25 for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Youth Minister. Our youth know Zach and think he's cool because he is a gamer. He also will pray with them and teach youth Sunday school one Sunday a month and we'll see where we go from there as we continue our search for a permanent position.

One of our MC SK pastors said she would have loved to apply for the position if she didn't already have a job. So, we have folks who think we are a cool church to work for - we just have to **pray** that our need for youth ministry leadership will meet with someone else's prayerful call for a job and giftedness and we both have to trust in God's matchmaking ability. We'll make this ministry work because we value our youth and children and desperately want them to know the same love we have for God and Jesus that will be an anchor and blessing for the rest of their lives.

As we pray for Nora and our church - I invite Nora forward and youth and parents and others who would like to surround she and Matt here in the front and then we will ask her to turn in her gun and her badge. I mean, just her pastor's badge because we didn't give her a gun - we gave her a cell phone and computer and office keys that she will also turn over to Zach this week. And we have a gift for her as well. Please come forward.