

Leadership Within ~ Pastor Denise Marikis

~Jan Talbott

Sometimes, one never fully realizes and appreciates the powerful effect that prayer can have. Our Pastor Denise is a walking testament to the power of prayer.

Denise's childhood was spent in the Mansfield area with her three siblings, (Saint) Dianne – the big sister everyone dreams of having, and two ornery brothers, Dirk and Darren. Denise's parents – Dick and Lil ran herd on the wild bunch.

Denise's Dad grew up around Orrville, Ohio the oldest son of a mechanic. During WWII he was in the Army Corp of Engineers busy building bridges and blowing them up. When he returned from overseas, he graduated from The Pittsburgh Art Institute. He became very successful in the advertising field. Her Mom was a PK...yep, a preacher's kid. Denise's grandparents were Rev. and Mrs. C. Wayne Balyeat who served EUB churches in Conneaut, Coshocton, Pigeon Run and his last appointment was being the first Chaplain at the Massillon State Hospital. It was at this appointment where her grandparents lived downhill from the hospital, in a big farmhouse, that Denise has many wonderful memories of being a very loved grandchild.

During the summers, Denise was allowed to stay with them for weeks at a time. She delighted being in their presence. The routines that they followed still stand out in her mind today. There was a comfort in them. In the mornings there was breakfast followed by a short devotional time. At night, Denise would be drawn like a moth to a porch light, as she watched entranced as her grandmother would go through her nightly ritual of combing her long hair into braids which she would proceed to wrap around her head. Her grandmother would then kneel beside the bed and invite Denise to join along beside her. Her Grandma did not hurry in her conversations with God. Denise would listen as her Grandma would name each and every one of her children (five) and then all of her grandchildren. To a child this conversation took a long time!

When Denise headed off for college she had a passion, just like her Dad, for art. She graduated in 1976 from Ohio State University with a BA in Art Education. During her next to last year of her five-year college degree, she took a Psychology class. It was in this class that I believe her Grandmother's prayers lead her to a curly-haired, young man with bibs and a copper cross. She was smitten by his warmth, his brains, his sense of humor. . . and his deep compassion. He was working at the school for the blind and she was impressed. It wasn't long after that first tuna pizza and BXW movie with subtitles, that they decided to marry. The first time she met his family it was like a Greek festival. By September Denise and Dennis were hitched and back at school. All the time Grandmother Helen kept praying Denise's name in her nightly conversations with God, and placing her and now her husband, Dennis, in His hands.



Denise with her Grandmother Helen

Skip ahead about six years and baby Andrew makes his appearance fol-



Andrew, Great-grandmother Helen holding Katie and Leah

lowed soon by baby sisters, Leah & Katie. The Marikis household was complete and things were calm – as much as it can be in a five-member family home! They all attended Main Street United Methodist Church in Mansfield. The associate pastor, Donna Van Trees, started ever so lightly nudging quiescent embers of Denise's untapped spiritual and faith development. That gentle nudging helped fan the flames and caused Denise to hunger for more to feed the fire within. Donna could see the flames starting to flicker so she added a little more igniter to the embers....she asked Denise and Dennis to lead the youth groupthen to lead Bible studies....you name it....whatever Donna proposed, Denise always responded in the affirmative. Pastor Donna offered Denise many opportunities to test God's call on her life. The biggest test was a five-minute sermon on UMW Sunday! Denise took a month to prepare for it. But all the while Grandmother Helen kept praying Denise's name in her nightly conversations with God and placing her and her husband, Dennis, and now her great-grandbabies, Andrew, Leah and Katie in His hands.

Leadership Within ~ Pastor Denise Marikis *continued from page 1*

In 1990, Denise was wrestling big time with God's call on her heart. Then her Grandmother Helen passed away and she felt an overwhelming sense of vulnerably.....who would be praying her name?

From her heavenly viewpoint Grandmother Helen could now witness the fruition of her life spent in prayer for her loved ones. Her precious Denise took the first step in answering God's call and tested the academic water of seminary, at Methesco, by dipping her toe in a class taught by Joanmarie Smith. Along with this and other God affirming moments, Denise finally accepted God's call of ministry on her life and went full throttle. She graduated at the top of her seminary class in 1995 with the Gindlesperger Bible Award.



Denise's graduation from seminary



Denise holding Andrew with her mother, Lil and her Grandmother Helen

Many of you have already experienced Rev. Denise's pastoral care visits. She brings love, compassion and prayer as she visits those in need of comfort "she is never in a hurry and she devotes her entire attention to the person she is visiting," said Rev. John Capper after one of his hospital stays, "Gay Street is very blessed to have her."

Even today Grandmother Helen's prayers are still impacting Pastor Denise's ministry. Do you notice when we fill out the Caring & Connected cards before worship, on the flip side Denise offers to pray for you "by name" in her daily prayer time, if you would like her to? Denise knows the power, the comfort and importance of knowing someone is praying for you by name!

Thank you Grandmother Helen for praying Pastor Denise to us!

