

Have you ever run in a relay race? My first competitive relay came when I was in eight grade at Immanuel Lutheran School in Danville, Illinois. That was the first time our school had a track team and I ran in the quarter mile relay. We spent more time practicing the handoff than anything else because the handoff is the key to a relay race. A poor handoff can cost your team the race. A good handoff can help you win the race.

The time has come for me to pass the ministry baton for Peace to Pastor Andy. This will be the third time a Pastor has passed the ministry baton to another Pastor at Peace. Pastor Tom Schoech ran the first leg of the race for Peace. Tom was the Associate Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor. St. Paul wanted to plant a new church to serve the west Ann Arbor, Scio Township, Dexter area, so a core group began meeting in the Birchwood West office plaza in October, 1993. Pastor Tom lead the worship services until Peace was chartered as a separate congregation in October, 1994.

That is when Tom passed the ministry baton to Pastor Don Mossman, a member of the faculty at Concordia College. Pastor Don carried the baton for a year while Peace was trying to call her first full time Pastor. It took a series of Calls before Peace decided to extend a Call to me in July, 1995. Joan, our three kids and I came to visit Peace in August that year and I accepted the Call. Don passed the Peace ministry baton to me in October, 1995. In reality Don didn't just pass the baton to me, he passed it to me and to my family because they have all played an important part in the ministry of Peace. I'm very thankful for their help and support.

God has been in control the whole time and blessed the people and the ministry of Peace. The church was trying to buy its first piece of property right after we moved here. Trying to get township approval was a real challenge. We ran into a "Not In My Back Yard" protest and the church was not given approval to build at that site.

So the search began for another piece of property. Ed Zill, who was a member of St. Paul and managed the property where the church was renting, found the land we are currently on. The owners wanted \$200,000 for the 12 acres that front Jackson Road. They wanted \$300,000 for the frontage and the rest of the land reaching to Parker Road on the West and I-94 on the North. We had to jump through some hoops to get a PUD, Planned Unit Development, approval to build on this property. The Michigan District Church Extension Fund purchased the property and sold us the 14 ½ acres that we now own at a prorated price of \$89,000. We got 2 ½ acres more for \$111,000 less than the asking price for the 12 acre frontage. God has been with Peace every step of the way, giving us all that we needed to do what He wants us to do.

When it came time to break ground for our first building, we had the building outlined in chalk and asked everyone to bring a shovel. They did. But hardly anyone could break the ground because it had been a very dry spring and the dry was very hard. But the message was clear. Everyone one knew that they were all important members of the Peace family.

Peace hired Bill Koch's brother to oversee the site preparation and closing the building to the weather. Then Bill took over with a team of volunteers to finish the inside of the church. No one was seriously hurt, although Ted Aufdemberge did fall off the scaffolding while helping to put up the fascia board on the West side of the building. Bob Boik scared us all when he turned as white as a sheet and had to come down from the scaffolding by the glass in the back of the church. I'm sure we drove Bill crazy at times. Ronnie Bruce cut almost all of the dry wall in the church and hung the frame work for the ceiling panels. After getting it all framed in and started, Bill taught me how to put down the hard wood flooring in the altar area.

The building cost was more than we expected. So Church Extension Fund gave us a contingency loan to complete the project that would be paid off when they sold the rest of the property. CEF did not make enough from the sale of the land to pay off the contingency loan. So they wrote off the difference. One more time God gave Peace what we needed.

We dedicated the church in October, 2000, with Pastor Mike Ruhl preaching. The church was packed for the dedication. People told me that we needed to build a bigger building. It took some time before we could begin that project. The ministry of Peace took off and our Peace family grew after we moved into this building.

Peace saw an opportunity to reach out to the youth and their families in the Dexter community after the Dexter Little League was formed. They needed ball fields to play on and we had land. So we entered into a partnership with them to build a field at Peace. But the funding didn't come right away. Mike Steffey was on the Dexter Little League board and the Vice President on our Board of Directors. When Mike and Deanna's son Tyler died tragically in an accident, the Steffey's and I talked about building a ballfield in Tyler's name.

The community got behind it and began raising funds. Ray Essell had just retired from Washtenaw County Parks department and could help oversee the project. Scio Township was building the boulevard and needed a place to do put the extra dirt. We had the perfect spot. Brandon Inge attended a fund raiser at the Dexter Pub. The Tigers were on the road in Oakland, CA when we dedicated the field in May, 2009. Brandon's wife Shani Inge helped Deanna uncover the rock and dedication plaque. Hall of Famer Al Kaline threw out the first pitch to Mike Steffey. Tyler's teammates played Dexter Little Leaguers in an opening exhibition game. Enough money was raised to cover all of the field expenses. One more time God provided.

Adding to the ministry Staff at Peace has always been a challenge. After she served her Family Life Internship at Peace, Abby Moss was called to be the Director of Family Life ministry at Peace. She helped strengthen the faith life of the families of Peace and started a Moms group to reach out into our community. Abby took a call to Florida and has been there ever since.

In 2014 the Fire Fighters in Washtenaw County wanted a rehad support program like the DART program in Livingston County. My son, Brent, was on the Fire Safety Board in Dexter Township. When no one else would take the lead, Brent and I talked to Roger Simpson at Huron Valley Ambulance. In less than five minutes, Roger agreed to give Peace a retired ambulance to be retrofitted as the first HART response vehicle.

It took about three month for the Washtenaw County Fire Chief's association, or WAAMA, to agree and enter into a partnership with us and give us \$2,000 to start the program. When the chiefs were debating what to do, one of the chiefs said "Just give the Lutherans the money" and HART was born. HART had a couple of runs under HVA in early 2015 and had our first official response in Milan in March. Again God gave us everything we needed to launch HART. When HART was given a newer ambulance, the original HART vehicle was given to our sister Lutheran Church in Berrien Springs and a new HART branch was formed.

As our ministry grew, the need also grew for a new youth room and more Sunday School space. That was when the Dexter Coop Preschool was told they would need to find a new home. So Peace entered into a partnership with them to use space in what became our gym, youth room and preschool / kindergarten classrooms. Not only did they move to Peace, they also gave us money to help build the addition and put the new playground on the property. Enough funds were raised to add onto our church facilities. We dedicated the new addition in October, 2016. One more time God has given us all that we need.

The gym addition has opened the door to enter into a partnership with recreational therapist at the University of Michigan Health System that has led to the creation of the Rollverines Wheel Chair Basketball team, walker soccer and the UMAISE summer camp at Peace. Mark Bacon can tell you how God provided the coaches and equipment needed.

When it became necessary to move confirmation classes to Sunday evenings because that was the only time we could get all of the youth together, we made the move. After one year it became clear that the students were getting to confirmation class, but many of them were not making it to worship services. So Matt Towers stepped up to play music for the 6:00 PM service that has opened the doors of Peace to more people. Because I was not able to work with our youth like I had in the past with Sunday evening confirmation classes, Nick and Maxine Santoro stepped back in to help. Then Alex Kauffman stepped up to help lead our youth and has done a great job. One more time God has provided the people and resources we need.

The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were being challenged for their faith. Some were tempted to give up. Others were tempted to return to Judaism without Jesus. Hebrews told them and tells us, **“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Hebrews 12:1-2)

There are three key points in these few words. First is the command to throw off everything that prevents us from running and the sin that trips us up. We all need to do that. I am not the perfect Pastor. You are not perfect church people. We all do things that get in the way and need God’s love and forgiveness. That is why we have the church, to hear about God’s love and forgiveness and with the Spirit’s help to remove the things that cause us to stumble and fall.

The second key is to run with perseverance. Keep running. It is too soon to quit. The Christian faith is a lifelong marathon. It is not a sprint. Even when we get tired or discouraged, we can’t give up. God is not finished with us yet. We run together to help and encourage one another.

The third key is to fix our eyes on Jesus. I could always tell when I was running in a cross country race that if the runner ahead of me looked back, he was getting tired. I knew that I would be able to pass him and stay in front of him. We don’t need to look back to see if someone or something is going to catch up with us. We look to Jesus. He is the author, the source of our faith. He will give us all of the help we need to run the race of faith.

How do we know that? Because that is what Jesus did! He saw the cross waiting for Him. But He knew that as painful as it would be, the cross was not the end. He knew the resurrection was coming. He knew the joy that the angels in heaven would experience every time a sinner repented and turned to Him in faith. So Jesus endured the cross for us.

Faith is a gift from God. Faith enables us to be the people of God and shows in the lives of God’s people. Faith fills our lives with love, joy, peace, patience and kindness. Faith helps us to serve and to forgive one another. Faith keeps us moving forward, drawing us closer to the goal of being with Christ forever.

Faith also pushes us upwards to be the best people we can be. We are not perfect and never will be in this life. But faith motivated by God’s Word and Spirit help us to try to become more like Christ. Faith breaks down the wall of sin that would keep us away from God and draws us closer to Christ and to His people. Faith gives us the strength that we need to keep running the race.

Now it has come time for me to pass the baton that I have been carrying for almost 25 years. Although it is hard to let go, the time has come to pass the baton to Pastor Andy. Since he has asked me to attend his installation service, I will pass this baton to him then.

Most of you know Mr. Rogers who said, “Often when you think you’re at the end of something, you’re at the beginning of something else.” That seems to be the case for me. My years of ministry at Peace are coming to an end. But God isn’t done with me yet. It looks like I will be moving into a different type of ministry. I have been asked to serve on a part time basis at St. Michael’s Lutheran Church in Richville, just north of Frankenmuth, to help them clarify their vision for ministry and prepare to call their next pastor. Joan and I will be keeping our house, so we may get the chance to see each other from time to time.

The ministry of Peace has just begun. It is time for Peace to start on the next leg in the relay of faith. God has provided so much for Peace up to this point. He is not done with you yet. He has given you a young, talented and committed Pastor to go with you on the next leg of your journey.

As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6) Amen.