

## Karen Renbarger's Spiritual Journey



*An Elder since the mid 80's, Karen and husband Dan moved to Harrison in 1974. They attended many churches and came to FCC because of many contacts and invitations from FCC members. Karen grew up in a Disciples church in Swayzee, IN and attended a Disciples church in Muncie, IN during college. Karen and Dan now live in Cleves, Ohio. They have two sons, Matt and Sean, who are both captains and F-16 pilots in the USAF. Karen, a registered nurse, is the Director of Nursing at Mercy Franciscan at West Park, a continuing care retirement community on the west side of Cincinnati. Her passion is caring for and about older adults and their families and the staff who care for them. Her interests include reading, walking and traveling to visit family wherever they are at the time. Karen has many ministry involvements having participated in seven mission trips, Walk to Emmaus, ALPHA, Adopt a Block, Matthew 25, Upward and Vacation Bible School.*

*Favorite Scripture: Matthew 7:12*

I began attending a Disciples church along with my parents, sister, and brother from the day I was born. No one missed church unless they were dead or contagious. I am not sure what would have happened if I had questioned the system. I did not try. Most of my friends were there also. Each Sunday my grandmother attended with us and spent the afternoon at our home doing whatever we asked her to, which was usually playing board games. She is also credited with my choice of nursing as a career.

I made my own choice of a church when I began attending college at Ball State University. There was a Disciples church within walking distance from my dorm, and I didn't have a car for three years so that was my choice. I wasn't particularly active during the college years but I was there most Sundays.

Following graduation, I married Dan Renbarger, whom I had known since high school. We both assumed church and God would be an intimate part of our relationship and 33 years later that is still true. Again, I had no other thought than to continue my journey.

We began attending First Christian in the mid 70's. We were mentored by many persons, but I particularly was influenced by Lois Schaich, who befriended me and our children. We raised our children in much the same way as I was raised and most Sundays found the four of us in church. In the mid '80s I questioned my spirituality for the first time in my journey. It was a difficult time but one of growth for me. Dan was a great influence in keeping me grounded and realistic about people and the church.

The early '90s brought a special person to my life whom I would describe as an unlikely minister. Bill McConnell introduced me to mission trips. I was sure I could not dig a ditch for a week without complaining but actually found it surprisingly easy in the atmosphere of love and service. Each mission trip has been exciting and life changing.

My spiritual journey may not sound exciting but it has touched every area of my life, constantly and enduringly. I have been a nurse for 33 years and simply could not do what I do without the underpinning of spirituality. There is no other explanation and understanding for some things that happen to people.

One more recent event caused me to deepen my relationship with the Lord. Early in 2003, our son, Matt, called to say he would be deployed to Iraq. Both our sons are Air Force pilots. I have experienced their oaths of office when they have pledged to give their lives for their country, if required of them. I knew that, but 2003 was my first experience with the reality of "harm's way" and my child. I felt frightened and helpless. One morning in March, just after war was declared, an elderly lady with a pencil and pad of paper stopped me in the lobby where I work. I knew Betty well and sat down next to her. She asked me my sons' names and how to spell them. She said she was praying for them every day and knew that God knew their names but she wanted to get it right also. My first reaction was, how kind of her. A few days later it dawned on me that this was God telling me He was in control and He did know my sons names and he would get it right. I didn't stop being frightened, but I did give up the sense of panic I had been carrying with me.

As I thought long and hard about my journey, again it hit me that I was so blessed with people in my life who loved me and shared special relationships with me – my parents, my grandmother, my husband, close friends, a minister, an elderly lady living in a nursing home, as well as many others. My journey is about my personal relationship with the Lord and relationships with other persons shaped that relationship. I have no doubt my journey will continue. I'm excited about where it might lead me and whom I will meet and perhaps influence on the way.