

*Written in 1995- Preparing for Deacon Ordination*

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FAITH JOURNEY WITH JESUS CHRIST

I believe I can say my faith journey began even before I was born in a small seaport town named Focce, located west of Smyrna, Turkey, which is now called Izmir. For this is the birthplace of my dad, Van Keriakos, and my mother, Irene. In the early 1900's a terrible war drove them from their homes. Dad came to America and Mom immigrated to Greece. Dad settled in Zanesville, Ohio, established himself in the confectionery business, and then went to Greece to marry and bring his childhood sweetheart to America.

Mom and Dad brought with them a rich Greek heritage and a strong Eastern Orthodox faith. As a youngster I remember a home filled with love. We spoke Greek, and Mom and Dad loved to read Bible stories to us when we were very young. Zanesville had only a handful of Greek families, so a priest would join us to lead in the observance of holidays. For baptisms, weddings and other special services, our families would form a caravan and drive to the Greek Church in Columbus, Ohio. However, I would attend Sunday school at a Lutheran Church down the street, summer Bible study at a Baptist Church across from it, and I would walk Mother Ludy, who rented our upstairs, to her Methodist Church services and attend with her. We studied Greek language and religion three times a week. Like so many Christians ahead of us, as you can see, we first learned about Lord Jesus from our parents.

Our family moved to Washington, D.C. in 1942, since my father's health was failing and doctors advised him to retire from business. We immediately joined St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church. I can remember Dad and Mom taking us to church early so that we could get a good seat, especially on holidays. We continued our Greek studies at St. Sophia in the evenings and were taught religion by a very wonderful saint, Father Aimilianos Laloussis. Like so many of us, we love to listen and learn more about God's word from our ministers and our teachers such as Father Laloussis, Dr. Russell Stoup and Craig Barnes. It is important to us.

After completing schooling and service life, the next chapter was starting a family and finding a church. I was drawn to the Protestant, English-speaking worship service and this may have developed from attending chapel services while in the Air Force and from a strong love for my country and its language. My sister and brother worship in the Greek Church and we join them for all special family celebrations. We joined the Georgetown Presbyterian Church, drawn there by Dr. Stoup, and there we brought our three daughters to learn about Jesus. I was ordained a deacon at Georgetown and for several years provided leadership to the Children's Ministry Program. We had wonderful, dedicated teachers, beautiful children, and classes from nursery through senior high. God's Word was being passed to the next generation.

I joined NPC in 1992. At the start I participated as a first grade Sunday school teacher, met a fellow first grade teacher, Kim, who is now my dear wife. We have a happy, love-filled home. We love our church, our ministries and our church family. I continue my faith journey and hope to increase my understanding of God's great love for us and its importance in our daily lives.

Van was blessed to serve as Deacon, Elder and Stephen's Minister during his years in the NPC family.