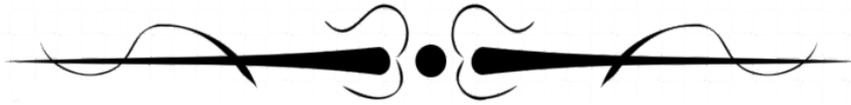


Gary Doherty



September 8, 1947 - October 24, 2020

Moose, Shelly, Matt, Dustin, family and friends, grace and peace to you from the one who lived for us, who died for us, and who now claims victory over every grave, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



Back in New Testament times, in the book of Acts in particular, there was a man named Barnabas. His name meant “son of encouragement,” and that’s what he was. Barnabas had a knack for sticking up for people. When a persecutor of Christians named Saul had a conversion experience on the road to Damascus, Saul changed his ways and even changed his name to Paul. Barnabas stood up for Paul when the authorities had their doubts about him. Barnabas also had a knack for helping those who were down on their luck. He sold a plot of land and put the money in a fund to help the poor. And perhaps most important of all, Barnabas had a knack for connecting people. He worked side-by-side with preachers like Peter and Paul to help spread the good news of Jesus. You could say that in all of these efforts and more, Barnabas had a helpful and far-reaching ministry of encouragement.

I think Gary Doherty was something like Barnabas. He was an encourager. When I sat down with the family to plan the funeral, I asked them some words that best described Gary. They came up with: positive, accepting, hardworking, charming, humorous, supportive – and others as well. They could have added “encouraging” too, because that’s what Gary was.

Of course, Barnabas and Gary didn’t necessarily start out to be encouragers. They became that way over time. It happened for Barnabas when he became an early follower of Jesus. As he learned about Jesus, he took more and more of his teachings to heart. *Turn the other cheek. You are the salt of the earth. Love your neighbor as yourself.* One teaching at a time, one action at a time, Barnabas set an example for others by following Jesus. And over time, he became an encourager.

Gary’s encouraging spirit began to develop as he was growing up. He was in the middle of 10 children. The family lived in a number of places: on a farm near Preston; in Grainger, MN; in Cresco, IA; and then on to Rochester. Gary’s dad worked various jobs, including one with the highway department. His mom waited tables at Woolworth Café, and also ran a rooming house close to where the Charter House is today. My hunch is that with all these children and the moves along the way, pitching in and helping became second nature for many in the family, including Gary.

Like Barnabas, Gary developed in faith. He grew up in a Catholic family. He went to St. John's Elementary School and Lourdes High School. After high school, Gary served in the U.S. Army. He continued to learn lessons from Jesus along the way: *Blessed are the peacemakers. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*

After the army, Gary was drawn to the world of Vo-Tech. Utilities and maintenance were his idea of a good time. Mayo provided just the opportunity. And from what I've been told, Gary spent a lot of time in the plumbing department which, in my estimation, probably got him halfway to sainthood.

Gary started a family along the way. He married Jean Geisinger. They had three children: Shelly, Matt, and Dustin. Gary was actively involved in each of their lives: Shelly in skating, Dustin in hockey, and Matt in soccer. He was a supportive dad. He made each of them feel like a favorite. Kids being kids, of course, Gary knew he had to do some disciplining, but it never came easily for him. Like Barnabas, he was always more comfortable on the encouragement side of things.

You maybe know this, but Gary's marriage to Jean didn't last. They began taking turns with the kids on weekends. Gary was good at getting the kids to church and Sunday School. Shelly remembers once asking her dad if he believed there was really a God. Without hesitation, Gary responded, "Yes, I do."

Along the way, Gary met a woman named Moose Johnson. In the small world department, Gary worked with her dad at Mayo. Moose's given name was Martha, but everybody called her Moose. I'm not sure about this, but the name alone might have won Gary over. Moose and Gary were married here at Zumbro in 1981. They set up housekeeping. Life was full: Moose was teaching, Gary was doing maintenance, and the kids were going to school.

They carved out time to do fun things together. They went to lake cabins up north, they followed the kids' sporting events, and they even traveled all the way to Disneyland and Hawaii.

Gary retired from Mayo in 2010. He continued working at the Ronald MacDonald House for a few years. Gary loved the kids who were there. He volunteered to be part of the annual motorcycle rally to raise funds for the house. That was Gary and his ministry of encouragement. He didn't seek attention. He was comfortable behind the scenes. He regularly displayed a steady hand and a quiet laugh, and he had fun as he did.

As the years went by, Gary and Moose were able to do some traveling: Hawaii, Florida, Arizona, California, Mexico, the Dominican Republic. Gary and Moose played golf together, joined a card club and played 500, and as we heard earlier, even went bowling together. Gary, who'd always had an interest in vintage cars, put extra time and attention into fixing up a '41 Chevy and a '55 Chevy. And when he got done, they looked fabulous!

Five years ago, Gary was diagnosed with cancer. It was a hard blow. There was the usual course of treatment, including radiation, but eventually the cancer spread to the liver. Challenging as it was, Gary didn't complain, and he didn't give up. Quietly, he kept moving forward and helping out where he could. He continued with his ministry of encouragement.

Eventually Gary lost weight and strength. He spent more time on the couch and in bed. Still, he hung on to his wry sense of humor. When Moose did some dusting in the bedroom, she'd often bump the picture of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and leave it askew. Gary would come behind and straighten the picture. A while later he would sigh and say, "I had to do it again, Moose. I had to straighten Jesus out again today."

With limited energy, Gary did his best to stay connected with the children and grandchildren. Ever the supportive, encouraging dad and grandpa, he regularly called on the phone. At the end of the day, he was often able to say, "Today was a good day. I got to talk to all three of my kids."

Gary died in October. The cancer finally caught up with him. I was able to visit Gary a few times toward the end. Even while lying in bed, he was asking about the church renovation project. He told me he'd been on the Property Team for a number of years. He'd been hoping we could make some improvements to the place.

I showed Gary pictures of the progress on my phone. He got excited. He wanted to come by and see it but, as it turns out, he didn't have the strength. On two of the pictures, a wall had come down and the library had been moved to a new location. A space was opened to look out the window. There was the red Cross of Reconciliation above the parking lot, a new residential building across the street, and beyond that, the city of Rochester. Without missing a beat, Gary exclaimed, "We are a downtown church!" Of all the things a dying man could say, that comment made my day. After all, we'd been a downtown church ever since our beginning in 1865. Now, in our latest project, the old was becoming new yet again.

In the midst of life changes, we need to be reminded that God will never forget us. The God who knit us together in our mother's womb is also the God who sent Jesus to us - to live, and to love, and to die for us. This God walks with us on the journey and gives us gifts to share with others.

As I see it, God loved and blessed the world through Gary Doherty, much like God loved and blessed the world through Barnabas in days of old. Each in his own way had a ministry of encouragement. We continue to need that encouragement. In fact, we might need it now more than ever.

Today, we reluctantly offer Gary back to God. As Jesus neared the end of his life, he promised to go on ahead and prepare a place for us. He promised a world with no more pain, or tears, or cancer, or death. He promised to make all things new. We trust that Gary is living in that promised new world even now. Amen.

Pastor Vern Christopherson
July 17, 2021