Every once in a while, a person crosses our paths and they may affect our lives in very specific ways. Then, when their life on earth ends and while one can rejoice over their ascension to the spirit world, we feel the loss profoundly.

Three days after I became a licensed local pastor I was to do my first funeral. I was petrified. I called an old timey pastor and asked him what I should do. He said, “Talk about Jesus and talk about the person.”

Through these past 13 years as a pastor, I’ve found that to be good advice. If I did not know the deceased personally, and even if I did, I tried to meet with the family and talk to friends who could give me insights into that person’s life and character. From that, I would search the scriptures to find where that life connected with the sacred text. If I could find an image or a word, then I could write the service. Sometimes this was easy, sometimes more difficult.

No such difficulty with Frank Potthoff. The word for Frank came quickly, integrity. Integrity of the best kind, with a great sense of humor. Last week, cancer took Frank at 73. A vast number of family, friends and acquaintances gathered to pay tribute. Pastor Bonnie McCord led us through the scriptures and his life. Granddaughters spoke of a fun-loving, musical grandpa, who was ‘there’ for them.

As his former pastor, I had memories of Frank, too. The always on time, always prepared board member who had more ideas in his head than a dog has fleas. My last visual memory of Frank was on a ladder as he and Denny Ferguson changed the entire lighting fixtures of the church to more ecological, energy saving ones. Palisade UMC went green.

I experienced Frank as a man who ‘walked his talk’. “A righteous man who walks in his integrity. “How blessed are his sons (daughter, grandchildren, great-grandchildren).” Proverbs 20:7. All of us who knew and worked with Frank experienced this as an understatement.

What I also admired about Frank was his sense of place. Anyone who lives in a small town knows its strengths but, if we’re honest, we know small town life can also be limiting and ingrown. I never experienced Frank (or Betty, his spouse) as being limited or colloquial.

Instead, I had found him wise to the world, open to diversity, and an ever-flowing fountain of ideas about how to make every aspect of Palisade life work better: church, community, work.

Yes, I have been affected by the death of Frank Potthoff, but more so by his life. He was a measure of integrity against which I can measure my own. Frankly (sorry for the pun), I think I come up a bit short. My prayer is that as Frank has embarked on this new adventure of the spirit that he helps God fulfill this, “He (God) is a shield to those who walk in integrity,” Prov. 2:7. May it be so!

Blessings,

Pastor Judy Dye.