



## What I Learned from Getting Sick on the Bus!

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Last Sunday Connor and I made the trek to the Silver Lake Church of God near Silver Lake, IN. We had the opportunity to be a part of a special surprise celebration. The church at Silver Creek celebrated Pastor Tom Craig's 20th anniversary of serving the congregation. It was a wonderful experience and it was especially impressive as they were able to keep the surprise (rumor has it that a fake bulletin and a lot of creativity helped in that effort).

There were several friends from across the CGGC present to celebrate with the church and Tom and Debbie on this special day. A lot of Tom and Debbie's extended family made the trip from across the Midwest to join the fun as well. The congregation at Silver Creek did a wonderful job of expressing their appreciation for the past 20 years and celebrating their pastor's service to Jesus and His church. I even got to reconnect with some old friends that I haven't seen for a long time.

### Author

The weekly eNews is provided by CGGC Executive Director Lance Finley



Debbie and Tom Craig



Don and Mary Ralston with Debbie and Tom (The Ralstons are from the Alice Church of God in Conrad, IA - Tom's first pastorate)

There was a special time of sharing during the middle of the service. Many shared funny stories of experiences with Tom or special memories of how he had impacted their lives. I shared two stories and a couple of things I've learned from Tom's life and ministry. Tom and I both call Charleston, IL home, we both graduated from Charleston High School and Eastern Illinois University and both majored in accounting – just a little info for the next CGGC trivia game.



Tom's Nephew Phil Craig (who grew up with me at the East Harrison Street Church - a dear old friend) Tom, Lance

One of my first memories of Tom was from my freshman year of high school. Tom was one of the leaders of the local Youth for Christ chapter and we had taken a ski trip to Wisconsin. Without going into a lot of the gory details, on the trip home I puked on the bus (which led me to be known only as "the kid who puked on the bus" for the remainder of my high school experience – that probably explains a lot of my social life throughout high school – nobody wants to go to prom with "the kid who puked on the bus"). Tom was the bus driver. I remember Tom coming back to clean up my mess on the floor. He didn't yell at me or chastise me (although he did inquire as to why I threw up "on" the trash bag in the aisle rather than "in" the trash bag... it all happened too quickly); instead, he kindly served me and took care of the mess that I had

made. It's a lesson that's stayed with me to this day: leadership is about serving in the midst of messes.

My second story was from my Camp Maranatha days. Tom was the counselor of my cabin during my final year as a camper. I know this will come as a surprise, but I could be a bit ornery in my younger days (I'm glad I've outgrown all of that now). For some reason unclear to me now, I and my fellow cabin-mates decided to move Tom's bed outside one evening and then disguised the awkwardly open space with four strategically placed chairs and a bed sheet to cover our crime. Again, for reasons that are unclear now some thirty years later, we also decide to sneak out of the cabin while our counselor Tom had stepped out for a moment. I'm certain we probably intended to do some type of all-night prayer meeting under the stars.

Tom caught us as we were sneaking away from the cabin and order us back to our beds. Tom stood in the doorway lecturing us about being the senior boys and needing to set a better example, and so on and so forth; the whole time somewhat distracted by the four chairs and sheet in the middle of the room where his bed had been. Tom had a patient love for us that resembled the patient love our heavenly Father has for us. We were certainly squirrely and mischievous and even out-right rebellious at times that week, but Tom kept patiently loving us and investing into our lives and I've never forgotten the influence he's had on my life and ministry. It was so good to see the Silver Creek church celebrate and show appreciation to their pastor. This doesn't happen everywhere. They went to great lengths to celebrate this special milestone and celebrate what they've accomplished together in seeking the kingdom of God. It was refreshing to see a church appreciate their pastor in such a thoughtful and meaningful way.

Pastors get a bad rap these days. We live in a society that no longer appreciates or respects their role or their work and contribution to the community. In Christian circles we're rediscovering the critical importance of Ephesians 4:11-13: **"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."** For far too long, the church has tried to function without the full gift expression of apostles, prophets, and evangelists alongside pastors (shepherds) and teachers. While it's vitally important that we rediscover the gifting and work of apostles, prophets and evangelists to fully engage in the kingdom of God, I fear that this is often talked about in ways that discredits or underappreciates the work of shepherds and teachers. We need all the gift-mix to allow the body of Christ to thrive. We need more apostles, prophets and evangelists, but we still need pastors and teachers too.



Tom and Debbie with their children and grandchildren



The extended Craig family

If you know Tom you know that he's a pretty "down-to-earth" guy. Humble, faithful and unassuming are some of the words that describe him best. He's not alone. I know a lot of other "down-to-earth men and women who have faithfully served where God has called them to serve for twenty, thirty and even forty years or more. I'm blessed to know a lot of folks like Tom who have spent their lives pointing people to Jesus while they've served in the midst of messes and patiently lived out the love of Jesus.

Is there anyone pointing at my life and saying "Lance pointed me to Jesus and made a difference in my life?" Is there anyone pointing at your life and saying "you pointed me to Jesus and made a difference in my life?" My friend Tom has pointed a lot of people to Jesus and made a difference in their lives, I'm one of those people. I want to be that type of person too.

May we all step up and live our lives with the goal of pointing people to Jesus.

Christ's Peace,

**Lance**