

THANK YOU, DR. MATT BROWN

A FAREWELL TRIBUTE TO REV. DR. MATTHEW S.
BROWN FOR HIS 21 YEARS AS PASTOR OF
SOUTH MECKLENBURG PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BY: KEN GARFIELD, FREELANCE WRITER &
FRIEND OF SMPC

We are grateful for the 21-plus years that Matt Brown gave us his heart and soul, wisdom and grace, tenderness and playfulness. That last one, were you here the Sunday morning he sang Pharrell Williams' "Happy" from the pulpit?

Matt invited us, as the song says, to "clap along if you know what happiness is to you." That was his way of encouraging the family of South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church to go deep in search of joy. "Happiness is fleeting and superficial," Matt says, "while joy is possible even in the difficult and cloudy passages of life."

Charter member and retired church administrator Freda Smith remembers how Matt whistled as he walked down the halls of the church. Sharing God's love with us as we journey through life, how could he not whistle while he worked?

"Matt celebrated with us and he mourned with us," Freda says. "When he asked 'How are you doing?' he waited for our answer. He was never in a rush. He was our pastor in the truest sense of the word, and we were his family. Still are."

Each member of our church family holds tight to a memory.

Church member Terry Gaines remembers the Sunday that Matt quoted the opening scene from the 2003 romcom "Love Actually" to remind us we are not alone. "General opinion makes out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that," says the film's narrator, Hugh Grant.

"Seems to me that love is everywhere."

Matt searched high and low for expressions of love and hope and devoted his life to the common good.

Church member Nancy Metzler served as our Director of Hospitality and Connection.

Sunday mornings in the bustling narthex, she'd watch folks share a word and a smile.

There Matt would be, seeking out those who

were standing alone, perhaps shy, struggling, waiting for someone to approach them and say, "Good morning, I am glad you are here."

Matt was that someone.

Nancy was chair of the Pastor Nominating Committee that brought Matt to us. The first time the committee met him, she says, they were 95 percent certain he was the one. When they met Donna, they were 100 percent certain.

Freda, who is grateful for the 17 years she worked with Matt, put it another way. With a hint of mischief, she wonders, "Matt can resign. But can Donna stay?"

The love that the church family has for Matt and Donna? The feeling is mutual.

"This church saw us through raising two teenagers (Noah, now 34, and Seth, 31) and burying four parents," says Donna, who found her ministry as a special education teacher. "We have been well loved."



SUCH MEMORIES

Donna Brown remembers the Sunday morning Matt referenced classic cars (he loves them) to illustrate a sermon point. That afternoon, church member Charlie Metzler showed up at the Brown residence in his 1966 yellow Corvette Stingray. And away the Browns went, a Sunday drive like no other. "That was a gift of love and grace and trust," Donna says (emphasis on trust!).

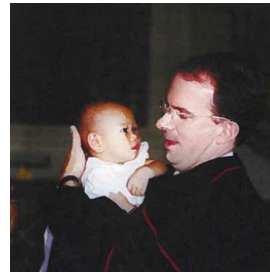


Well loved?

We love Matt for helping grow the church in membership and ministry, and for helping make SMPC – congregation and staff – a happy place.

We love Matt for his steadfast leadership that resulted in the building of the chapel and sanctuary, both free from debt.

We love Matt for how carefully he chose his words, whether speaking or writing, because you never knew what word might change a person's outlook on life.



We love Matt for his friendship. He says that to share in a long-term relationship – baptizing a child then watching him or her graduate from high school – was a blessing beyond measure. It was a blessing for us, too.

We love Matt for his gentle spirit and humor. A 10-year-old on his way to church with his grandmother once asked, "Do you think Matt could have been a standup comedian?"

Maybe we should have started a pool – "How many Mountain Dews can Matt drink in a week?" Yes, we even love Matt for his taste in soft drinks.

Most of all, we love Matt for the moments that add up to 21-plus years.

The baptisms. The weddings. The bedside visits. The church suppers. The lessons he taught that brought the Bible to life. The funerals, those he led and the ones he and Donna attended because they knew that's where they should be, with us, mourning a loss, celebrating a life well lived.

And then came Sunday morning.

JAZZ AND FRITOS?

In case you haven't learned this about our pastor: A Missouri native, he served churches in Charlotte, Hickory and Morganton before arriving at SMPC. He loves jazz, running, Fritos, Mountain Dew and all things chocolate and peppermint. He plans to rest, travel and spend time with family in retirement. And probably watch reruns of his beloved "Seinfeld."



Matt is up there preaching his heart out about life, death and everything in between.

We are in our seats, hanging on every word, commenting to one another on the way to lunch, "He was preaching to me. He knows what I'm going through."

This, from the Celtic tradition, is the thin place, where heaven comes close to earth.

"These are the moments that stick out," Matt says, "when you are preaching and a silence comes over and you realize, 'We are in the presence of something holy.'"

Indeed, we were.

"Matt was always watching over the construction process. I remember receiving a call one evening. Matt wanted to talk about the height of the half wall separating the chancel from the choir loft. He was concerned that the wall was too tall. By the next morning, we met with the contractor. Matt was right. The wall was shortened within a day or two to its current, more proper height. Matt and I both grew up in Missouri and are avid St. Louis Cardinals fans. My only regret is that we did not arrange for one of the children depicted in our beautiful stained glass windows to be wearing a Cardinals hat." ~ Guy Gosnell

Tricia and Guy Gosnell and their four children have been church members for more than 20 years. Guy chaired the Building Committee during a pair of construction projects, including our sanctuary.



Ken Garfield is a Charlotte freelance writer who has special reason to help us celebrate Matt's ministry and retirement. His son, Matt Garfield, is our former communications director.



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