

A Ministry of Example: Meet Elder Carl Gerhardt

When people think of home, most assign the term to a certain state, city, or house. For Carl Gerhardt, “home” was never about location. He preferred to live his life jumping from one adventure to another, meeting new people and experiencing new things in what he would call a “nomadic lifestyle.”

“We always enjoyed going to new places and building houses and that sort of thing and it ended up being our lifestyle,” Carl explained.

Carl’s job in the corporate agriculture industry helped solidify his wandering tendencies as he and his wife Judy moved from one state to another as positions changed and new ones opened. The pair found themselves in St. Louis and Kansas City within Missouri’s borders, the state in which Carl grew up, and later in Georgia and Connecticut. They covered three regions within a 20-year career and had no regrets regarding their mobile lifestyle, though their lives looked very different compared to a stationary one.

“You don’t put down deep roots in communities, but we’ve always had friends though not lifelong friends. We’ve [also] been a member of a lot of different denominations over the years,” Carl said.

During their years in the corporate world, the Gerhardts did not regularly attend church, though both Carl and Judy had strong Christian foundations due to their upbringing. Carl remembered the first time he knew he was a Christian was in the small town of Boonville, Missouri in a little country church.

“I grew up in that little country church. I was confirmed there and that is where I first pledged my life to Christ. I never had a lightning bolt come out of the sky and strike me like it has with some people, but all my life I’ve felt I was a Christian,” he said.

It was this foundation that served as the basis for Carl’s business and personal dealings, something he would recognize later when he transitioned from businessman to business owner and from the Midwest to the West.

West to Colorado Springs

After 20 years in the agriculture industry, Carl and Judy both needed a change.

“The farm equipment industry was on its ear, and the fun had gone out of it I got tired of laying people off,” he said. “We were in Kansas City trying to decide what to do next when [Judy] became our inspiration to start our own business.”

Because of Judy’s belief, the couple decided to buy a branch of a printing franchise and left Missouri for Colorado Springs, Colorado. Together they built a company. This company’s growth led to more employees and greater influence in the franchise world. Over the next 20 years, Carl led his company with a basis of honesty and integrity, a model which became the blueprint for successful and moral business methods. His business model was later utilized by the 300 franchise locations of the printing company across the United States and Canada.

“It was [Judy’s] faith in us that we could do our own business and do it successfully without the corporate paycheck that inspired us,” Carl said. “[Conducting business] always starts out with honesty and integrity. I became known for that from the corporate world and with the employees, making sure I always did the right thing even though it’s tough.”

A successful business wasn’t the only thing Carl and Judy found in Colorado Springs; they also observed some radical changes occur in the people around them that slowly built their faith in God from a foundation into a conviction. One of these people was their only daughter Brenda, who was baptized and confirmed into a church as a young adult.

“We started seeing Brenda voluntarily find the Lord and get confirmed when she was going to get married. It was an important influence [in our faith] because we didn’t ever push her to do that,” Carl said.

Brenda wasn’t the only influence on Carl and Judy’s faith journey; Brad, the manager of the day-to-day activities of their printing business and a young man whom the Gerhardts treated as a son, experienced a conversion that tugged at Carl’s heart.

“In the early part of [his career] he was kind of volatile. He could erupt pretty easily and wasn’t morally challenged,” Carl described. “But at one point after he got married and we had treated him almost like a son, he became a born-again Christian. [It was] just like that, like a lightning bolt got him. I like to think I was somewhat part of it because he observed the way I dealt with people and the way we lived, though at that point we weren’t active church goers. That inspired me that [quick conversion] can and does happen.”

As God was working on the hearts of those closest to him and using his moral example to foster growth, Carl’s own Christian roots were beginning to grow new branches. It was at this point that Carl and Judy’s plans changed once again, leading to a new location.

Finding Church in Michigan

“[Colorado Springs] was where we intended to retire. We built a beautiful log home on five acres. We had horses for most of our married life. But then as things evolved and the franchise was doing well, I got to be good friends with the CEO of the franchise, and he posed that I was too young to retire,” Carl explained.

Though late in their career, when Carl and Judy were presented with another adventure, they couldn’t say no. This time it was a position in the franchise’s headquarters as CEO of the entire company. Yet again, it was Judy who encouraged Carl to take the leap.

“She said, ‘why not? You know you want to do it.’ It happened almost that simply, as we saw it as an adventure,” Carl said.

They went off to Michigan, this time for 10 years. It was in this time span that the pair rediscovered the church and with it strong community. However, before they left Colorado Springs Carl and Judy had their first experience with the Presbyterian church, an encounter that influenced their return into the church community.

“Before we left Colorado Springs, we had joined a Presbyterian church three or so years before and got involved with them. Then we moved to Michigan, and we joined a Presbyterian church there, and I became an elder,” Carl said.

Not only did Carl and Judy become members but Carl took an active role in the leadership of the church, a role that helped the branches of his faith bear even more fruit as his business influence continued to be based on Christian morality.

After 10 years in Michigan experiencing growth in his career and in his faith, Carl finally retired at the age of 75. For Carl and Judy this meant another move, this time back west to be closer to Brenda and her family, including their two grandchildren. This time they did not go back to Colorado, but to Nevada.

Family Influences and First and Calvary

As Carl watched his grandson and granddaughter grow up, he watched their faith grow roots like his, primarily through their Christian education. Now, he continues to be inspired by their love for Christ as they both attend college and overcome the challenges that have been thrown their way following Christ’s example first and then their families’.

“Watching those two kids and thinking that we were a part of that, hopefully by example, has had a major influence on Judy and me both as we see what happened to them and how important it was,” he said.

Eventually those grandkids grew up, and Carl and Judy decided to return to Carl’s roots, finding themselves back in Missouri and in First and Calvary’s congregation. Though they are in yet another location, Carl’s goal of leading through example has not changed.

“I want to set an example so that people look at my life and say that I did the right thing and that I followed Christ,” he said.

As Carl acts as an elder of First and Calvary, he prays that God will use his influence to point people back to Christ and to His perfect example.