

A Time to Say “Yes”: Meet Michael Gerke

In the past five years, Michael Gerke has been able to say “yes” a lot more often than “no.”

“I don’t have the personality that I can sit still very easily. I always need to be doing something,” he explained. “My retirement has given me more opportunities to say ‘yes’ to things. It’s given me a lot of freedom.”

If the activity is skiing in the Rocky Mountains, fly fishing in Ozark lakes and rivers, sitting down to a new historical fiction novel, target shooting at a local range, or golfing on a well-kept green, Michael is happy to say “yes.” However, Michael’s “yes” extends far past exciting hobbies; he also uses it to walk out his faith by serving at First & Calvary.

“My walk with Christ has been gradual. I grew up in church learning about all the stories of the Bible. Most of what I do [now] to continue my walk of faith is at church,” he said.

Michael often volunteers to lead or help with various classes held at the church for new and long-time believers. This is in addition to his role as an elder, serving as the liaison with the buildings and grounds committee and as the treasurer of the foundation board.

Michael’s skill in building and grounds is rooted in his experience prior to his retirement when he held a corporate leadership position with IDF. IDF is a food ingredient manufacturing company owned by the philanthropic Darr family from the Springfield area. He worked for the Darrs for 32 years, and he frequently uses what he learned from that career to say “yes” to something else: trying to better understand people.

“I think a lot of your job is to listen if you are a leader. If you’re talking, you’re not listening,” he explained. “I’ve learned that people come in all forms. It’s more about how people think than trying to put them into categories. You can’t assume. Then, you have got to accept people.”

This philosophy has helped Michael go beyond understanding to learning how to have grace for the people around him.

“You might see somebody do something because they’re going through something [difficult], and you don’t have a clue what might be going on in their life. I try not to judge people because [of that],” he said.

Throughout his corporate career and now in retirement, there is one woman who Michael has said “yes” to every day for 41 years. He met his wife Shari when they were both in high school, and they got married after they both graduated from college. They have two children, Darren and Alyssa, and now five grandchildren. Michael enjoys saying “yes” to the five young ones often, especially when it means he is able to expose them to Jesus.

“You can’t make your children be Christians; all you can really do is put your child’s hand in the hand of God. Our kids and grandkids are being exposed to Jesus, so we are very blessed,” he said.

As Michael continues to enjoy his retirement, he hopes to use his time to love and serve Christ and the people around him. Starting a spiritual conversation is actually easy, whether sitting in a sanctuary, skiing down a mountain, or casting a line on a lake.