

From Dennis Niemi

When we don't actively practice our faith, it fades. When we consistently work at it, our faith grows and helps our lives become more fruitful.

I was raised on the Iron Range in northern Minnesota. My folks kept us very busy growing up- Methodist Youth Group, 4-H, Boy Scouts, as well as family camping trips on weekends when nothing else was scheduled. We were all confirmed and went to church and Sunday school up until we left home to further our education. We went to Bible camp each summer, and it was at Oak Hills Bible Camp at around age 14 that I gave my life to Christ. After high school, I went to Minneapolis Vocational School to get trained to be an electrician, served an apprenticeship, and then moved back to the Grand Rapids area. After I left home, my faith seemed to start fading, and I only attended church on Easter and Christmas for quite a few years.

I married my first wife in 1968. She divorced me in 1982 and married the Methodist minister of our church in Grand Rapids less than a year later.

I met my current wife, Donna, in 1984 and we were married in the Methodist church in Anandale in 1985. We occasionally went to church there, but we were just going through the motions for years. Donna's two children from her first marriage lived with us, and they were confirmed in that church. We began going to other churches in the area, but none seemed to be welcoming or friendly. After trying nearly all of them, we visited AEFC. The first Sunday we walked in, we were greeted by several people and felt at home right away. Pastor Jeff and Diane invited us over for coffee and cake the next week, and we knew we'd finally found our church.

We attended Discovery Class offered by Pastor Denny and Sue. This was the start of getting my faith back on track. About 10 years or so ago I'd started drinking a lot, and it was affecting my marriage. In 2013, Donna gave me the option of either the brandy or her. I quit drinking and went to AA. AA is a faith-based organization and it seemed to help me a lot. After about a year I felt strong enough and stopped going to the meetings. I have not used alcohol for four years now and feel very comfortable being a non-drinker. I'm active in the local Conservation Club as a gun safety instructor and also other aspects of that club. I'm on the Trustee Team at AEFC and am active there. We are taking the Alpha class and are really enjoying that.

I think my train is back on track now and I love it. I started a small handyman business this summer, and I am really enjoying serving the Lord by helping members of our church family take care of their homes and allowing the elderly to maybe stay in their homes longer. My marriage and my life have become more complete and fruitful since the Holy Spirit has led me back to a full and active worship and Christian lifestyle.