



The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the "landscape" we are passing through in this trail-laced, wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we're *learning* and doing.

An Autumn Story

JUDY NICHOLS

"I think I can live here." Thus began a remarkable time in the life of my 90-year-old mother. It was November. The trees were bare; the skies gray. My Father, her beloved husband of 56 years, had died four months previously. She had broken up housekeeping, left her friends and neighbors, and the city she'd lived in all her life, and moved in with us. We all worked hard at making the necessary adjustments.



As summer faded into fall, Mother began having some health problems—chest pains, shortness of breath, weakness. She felt certain that this was going to be the end for her and she welcomed it. For her, life without Daddy was a wearisome endeavor. She went to bed and wanted to die. At times, it almost seemed as if she wished God would hurry up and get it over with. After a couple of weeks, the strain on our family began to show. Always practical, as well as decisive, she decided she didn't want to be a burden and wanted to go to a

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ELDERTALK: Planting, Watering, and Harvesting for Christ

JERRY MATHIAS

As I began the fall cleanup of our garden, I was reminded of the springtime of planting. There was the preparing of the ground, planting of the seeds, watering, and the fun of keeping ahead of the weeds. (Ha! Ha!) I planted one zucchini, three tomato plants, one eggplant, two rows of beans, two sweet pepper plants, two Romaine lettuce plants, and a number of herbs for Linda. It was a small garden, but what I remembered most was the excitement of going out each day and watching for the seeds to come up and the plants begin to sprout and grow. We were able to enjoy and share with our neighbor the fruit that the Lord gave us.

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor, for we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building." (I Corinthians 3:6-9)

When a farmer plants a seed and waters it, he really does not make it grow; God's miracle of life does that. All the farmer can do is provide the right environment for growth and trust in the miracle. We do the same thing by planting the Word of God in people's hearts and minds. When someone follows Jesus, he or she becomes a new creation in Christ and is born again. The "new" person needs to be nurtured in the faith by adding to it specific Christian virtues thereby becoming effective and productive in their knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-9). Peter desired that new believers become strong in their faith to withstand the false teachers that had crept in and adversely affected the churches.

Paul wanted the young Christians to be able to detect and combat the spreading apostasy. And he told them to "grew in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18)

We are saved by God's grace, and we are to grow in the knowledge of Christ. Certainly part of that knowledge is learning about Christ from His Word, but we are also to grow in our own personal knowledge of Christ as we walk with Him daily, spend time in prayer, and submit to His lordship and authority in our lives through the choices and decisions we make. Paul told the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (2 Corinthians 3: 6-9)

Do you see any spiritual growth? Test yourself by asking: "Who is God?"

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An Autumn Story

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nursing home. My sister found an opening in an nursing home near her home. There, Mother was up, dressed and had her hair cut and permed. But she just couldn't stand her roommate. She didn't like the food. *"I went to the lounge," she told me, "and there was a circle of wheelchairs all facing the TV, and everyone was sound asleep. The people here are zombies."* She was appalled that she was the only one who showed up for a scheduled weekly worship service—not even the minister came!

In the weeks that followed, physical therapy improved Mother's condition, and as a result, her dissatisfaction with her living situation increased still more. We began looking for alternatives. It was after a visit to an assisted living facility where she observed the residents in the dining room, chatting and acting like normal people, that she made her remark, *"I think I can live here."* It was an understatement of vast proportion.

Her assigned table-mate in the dining room was a 89-year-old gentleman named Rex. A retired school teacher and principal, Rex was knowledgeable in many subjects and an avid talker. How they began to get to know each other remained a mystery. They both remarked that they weren't sure how it got started. They became fast friends and constant companions. Rex led a discussion of current events each week, and Mother participated regularly. Rex came up to Mother's room to escort her to the dining room. They attended church together. The rumor mill began to churn among the residents and staff about their "romance." When asked when she and Rex were going to get married, Mother replied that

Planting, Watering, and Harvesting

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"Have I put my faith in Christ?"

"Is it not the spiritual that is first in my life but the natural, and then the spiritual?"

You need to understand that you cannot grow in Christ until you choose to follow Christ. There must be spiritual life before there can be spiritual growth. The seed must be planted and constantly watered for it to grow like Christ, as each part works together, helping it to grow and build itself up in the spirit of love, every part doing its share, causing growth in the body, edify itself in love, carrying out the Great Commission.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. By this all people know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

- ♦ *Join groups at Grace Fellowship Church.*
- ♦ *Invite someone into your life and share your faith.*
- ♦ *Invite this person to hear God's word with you at Grace Fellowship Church.*
- ♦ *Grace Fellowship Church: "A people for God who will go into the world and make disciples."*
- ♦ *Our Theme this year: "Use your freedom to love God and others well."*
- ♦ *"Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God." (1 Peter 2:1)*

An Autumn Story (Concluded from column 1)

they were going to elope just as soon as Rex could find a ladder and maneuver it to her second-story window with his wheelchair.

Mother also found opportunities to minister the love of Christ. Her next-door neighbor to the left often struggled to open his apartment door and get in with his wheelchair. Whenever she happened upon him working at it, she would hold the door open for him. Though they could not communicate very well because both were hard of hearing, he always rewarded her with a big smile of gratitude. Her neighbor to the right sometimes couldn't find her way back to her apartment, so Mother would walk her there. I am sure she invited every one of the residents to attend the church services. She made it a point to thank the staff for their service to her. She sent birthday cards and get well cards and bought little gifts for special friends. The autumn of life, like the season of the year, can be a time of warmth and great contrast. It can be a time of beauty as the sun illumines the brilliantly colored but fragile autumn leaves.



Wakakusa English Program

REBEKAH STEFANIUK

So much is happening in Funehiki, Japan, as the church, the kindergarten, and the English school seek to regroup after losing their leader, visionary, and heart, Mr. Maki.

Mr. Maki once made the comparison that when the gospel really took root in Japan, the response would be like a volcano erupting. He encouraged us to build the foundation of the volcano, which is what we are seeking to do.

After so many years of saving and praying, the Funehiki Church is finally being built. The church's location is above Funehiki/Tamura City on a mountain, Mt. Katzone, and the elevated location is significant for the Japanese. The hope is that construction will be finished by March 2025 so that Tomoko Sensei (Mrs. Maki) will be able to see it.



Mt. Katzone at sunset with Funehiki in foreground



Church site after clearing of trees



Earthquake-proof foundation of the new Funehiki church



2024-25 English Teacher Team (in disguise!)

(Left to Right)

Back row: Stephen Oates, Nathanael Shifley, Linsey Richbow, Allison Clay, Hilary Stanovic, Jesse Cade, Rebekah Stefaniuk.

Front row: Anselm Wooden, Julie McAdory, Deanna Stout, Sara Mould, and Antonio Ramirez.

Sara Mould first heard of Wakakusa through Nancy Solon. Sara has been amazing at building bridges and connecting people wherever she is. Currently in her fourth



Sarah Mould with the teacher she works with, Chikako Sensei.

year of teaching English as part of the Wakakusa program, Sara relates: "Arriving in Japan in the middle of the COVID pandemic was difficult and made it hard to meet people. But it has been neat to see how God has been faithful and has opened up some awesome opportunities in the past couple of years."

Thanks, Margy Leonard!



You have sent GFCers hundreds of cards! You've served us for many years, and now you are retiring! God bless you for your faithfulness and artistry!

Dale, Your Crown Suits You!



As a resident of Kingston of Ashland, Dale Black was chosen as the "King of Kingston," which made him eligible to enter the Ashland County Fair Senior King Contest this year. Dale won and was crowned in a ceremony on Tuesday, September 17. Congratulations, King Dale! We know that you will wear that crown proudly and reign justly and wisely during the year ahead.

OCTOBER 2024

- 2, 9, 16, 23, & 30 Connect groups for all ages, 6:30–8:00 am.
- 3 Women to pray from 9–10 am. in the Lion Room.
- 4 3rd annual Ohio March for Life at the Columbus statehouse, 10 am.
- 5 Memorial service for Lynette Caldwell at 10:30 am at GFC. Games Reach, Free Will Baptist Church: 6:30–8:30 pm.
- 6 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on I Peter 1:13–21.
- 7 Dance practice 4:45 pm at Debbie Key's house.
- 13 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on I Peter 1: 22-25. 🍷🍔
- 20 Elder Jadaé Fox preaching on 1 Peter 2:1-3.
- 27 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on 1 Peter 2:4-10. 🍷🍔

Grace Fellowship Church

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|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Eric Byrom | Presiding Elder/ Pastor |
| Jadaé Fox | Elder |
| Matt Godsil | Elder |
| Jerry Mathias | Elder |
| Cameron Karger | Treasurer |
| Lori Judd | Missions |
| Andy Heining | Worship |
| Judy Nichols | Prayer Chain |
| Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox | Office |
| Andy Anschutz | Sound/Power Point |
| John and Donna Kurtz | TrailNotes |