

Staff Profile: Pastor Perry Fruhling, Senior Pastor

As staff members, we get to know you, the members of our St. Mark's family, through various interactions, but we are aware that you don't always know us as well as we think you do. So in an effort to help you get acquainted with us, we will do some periodic profiles of staff members. In this, the first, we begin with our senior pastor. Enjoy! —Donna Lunstrum, Connections editor

Tell us a little about your growing-up years.

I grew up in east-central Illinois in Champaign County (Go Illini!) in a German community called Flatville. The glaciers carved out some amazingly flat land that was a swamp until tilled by German farmers. Then it became some of the best farmland in the world. I heard Low German spoken around our home by grandparents and parents until I went off to college. My parents were very spiritual people. My mother directed the children's choir at church and my dad taught eighth grade Sunday school. We had daily devotions and Bible reading in the home.

How did growing up on a farm in Illinois--with four sisters--shape who you are today?

I certainly had to learn to get along with women! My sisters and I had a very normal childhood. I think I probably drove them crazy sometimes and occasionally, they did the same to me. But we shared a lot of love. My parents desired us to practice the basics of our Christian faith . . . love one another, forgive each other, and care for each other. We still have a great relationship today.

What's a favorite memory from your youth?

There are many, but I really enjoyed growing up on the farm and working with the animals and the soil. To watch the cycle of life is a pretty amazing thing . . . watching the birth of a calf or a litter of pigs, but also learning to live with death and dying. I still get "spring fever" when the tractors start going in the spring, and I just love the fall because of what I used to love about the harvest season.



When or how did you know you were meant to go into the ministry? What do you think you would have done if you had not become a pastor?

My parents tell me that when I

was three years old, I went up to a man who I thought looked like Jesus at a place called Biblical Gardens and told him, "God bless you." Maybe it was when I was gath-

ering eggs in the chicken house and used to preach sermons to the chickens that I had a desire to speak to a crowd! But I remember telling people I wanted to be a pastor as early as the 4th or 5th grade. There were some great Sunday school and Confirmation teachers who fanned the flames of that during my middle and high school years. When I was a sophomore in high school I was certain of my call to ministry. I'm not sure what I would have done had I not gone into ministry . . . perhaps farming!

How did you and Marlys meet?

We met in the college choir. My college roommate wanted to date her but I was pretty sure that Marlys wanted to date me instead. We wound up lining up against each other in a friendly game of football at a choir retreat and her football skills impressed me.

Tell us a little about your family.

Well, our family is the love of my life here on earth. I love my wife, Marlys, who keeps me grounded and out of trouble. All three of our kids are special in my eyes. Chantal is a junior at St. Ambrose University in Davenport. She has a boyfriend named Jerry and she is still determining her major. Ashley is a Piano and Viola major at Indiana University. She has had a tremendous faith experience her first year at college. Caleb is my bud...he is growing in his faith through The Edge, is musical, and we play tennis together and love the Cubs.

We know you have a very musical wife and three incredibly musically talented children. But you are musical as well. In what ways?

I play the radio. Well, actually I used to be a pretty decent singer and wound up in the school musical in high school (large school like LinnMar) playing the part of Rolf in "The Sound of Music." Trying to inspire and please my musical mother, I became a part of the Wartburg College Choir. I play a little guitar and can chord just a little on the piano.



Staff Profile, cont'd.

We know that, prior to coming to Cedar Rapids, you loved living in and being a pastor in Thompson and Independence, Iowa, and Fredericksburg, Texas. What are some of your favorite things about life here?

We think Cedar Rapids is just a great place to raise kids. The Linn Mar School system is one of the best in the state and the music programs there have been wonderful for our kids. This community has great values and it's sort of like living in a small town even though you have all of the assets of a city. I personally have liked having corn and bean fields on my drive from our home to St. Mark's each day! The greatest part of our stay here in Cedar Rapids has been the people of St. Mark's. It's home to us, both spiritually and emotionally. We have been so blessed through good times and hard times to have people with whom to share faith and life with.

What are your favorite things to do when you can get a day or a few hours off?

Our family loves to play games, especially cards (Euchre, Rook, 500). We love to hike when the weather is decent and have enjoyed Backbone State Park, Lake McBride Park, and Palisades-Kepler. We have enjoyed biking with our kids and then of course the numerous ballgames, musical concerts, and home productions put on by our kids.

Do you have hobbies or any collections or other interests? Our kids!

Where would you like to travel to that you've not been before?

Marlys and I have talked about going to Africa some day. We have good friends in Ethiopia and would love to see their ministry there and the life they live. I would probably like to at least see Hawaii one day, but as my dad used to say, when I get to heaven, God will show me much greater sights than those I've missed here on earth!

We know you love the Chicago Cubs. Why the Cubs, and have you attended any particularly memorable games? Do you follow other sports teams--or just the Cubs?

I grew up listening to Cubs games on the radio as a kid. My overall record for attending Cubs games is something like 39-11. If you think about it, that's way beyond their regular season record during lifetime. So I like to think I bring them a blessing when I attend! I also follow the San Antonio Spurs (we lived near there for six years) and the Chicago Bulls, as well as the Chicago Bears.



What's a little piece of trivia about you that very few people know?

I used to know the words to almost every country and western song when I was in middle school.

What are three of your favorite things about St. Mark's? (And you can't answer "the people.")

St. Mark's is a special place because of the spirit of optimism here. People are willing to try new ideas because they trust the leadership. Even though something may fail, they are willing to try something else because they believe God can bless that which is done in faith. I also think St. Mark's has amazing music ministries. From our choir to our organist to our contemporary musicians, we are so blessed and that's one of the reasons worship is so dynamic at St. Mark's. Each week there is music that will just knock your socks off. Finally, we have just an incredible staff. I can't tell you how much I appreciate each and every individual on our staff for their integrity, faith, hard work, and talent.

What is your favorite book (or chapter) of the Bible to read or study?

My Crossways classes will tell you that I say just about every book of the Bible is my favorite (because they are all filled with the message of God's grace!)...but I think if push comes to shove, I love the book of Galatians because of how Paul defends and explains why it's all about God's grace and not the law.

What are one or two of your favorite Bible verses?

2 Corinthians 4:7: "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." And my Confirmation verse is Luke 18:14, "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

What's one phrase or thought you'd like people to think of when they think of you?

Servant of Christ

How can the people of St. Mark's most be a blessing to you, your family, or your ministry?

They already are . . .



Pastor Perry receiving a blessing at the surprise 50th birthday party for him, April 17, 2012