

## Staff Profile: Pastor Steve Qualben

*This is the seventh in a series of staff profiles, presented so that our St. Mark's family can get better acquainted with our staff. This time we are spotlighting Pastor Steve Qualben, our Associate Pastor since August 2012. Past profiles can be found on our website.*

*--Donna Lunstrum, Connections editor*

### ***Tell us a little about your childhood.***

My birth certificate shows that I was born in Evanston, Illinois (suburb of Chicago), but I cannot claim any loyalty by birth to either the Cubs or the Bears, as we moved away when I was two. My older sister, Susan, was my first companion and friend. After my father earned his degree from Northwestern, he received a job as a professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and we moved into a world crazy for the Pirates (Roberto Clemente, Willie Stargell, et al) and the Steelers (brand new quarterback Terry Bradshaw). During those years my little brother, Mike, joined the family. We had a big backyard and there was a wonderful little farm, complete with cows, horses, and a hayfield, backing up to our yard that made for wonderful, sneaky summer days for young kids intent on exploring and creating imaginary, perilous adventures at the expense of Farmer Gladden (who we only ever saw from a distance). The next two moves would take us to our nation's capital in 1976 (great to be there for the Bicentennial) and then Dubuque for middle school and high school years.

### ***How did you and Annette meet?***

Annette and I met at Texas Lions Camp (Lions International) in Kerrville, Texas. I was working as a volunteer in the evenings over several summers and she was on staff as an interpreter for the deaf and working with nature crafts through most of that time. Though we had seen each other from a distance over the previous summers, it wasn't until the summer of 1997 that we both "saw the light"!

### ***Tell us about your family.***

Annette and I recently celebrated our 15th anniversary. We were married in San Antonio and had our first home together in Kerrville. I had purchased that house five years before, but she made it a home. We welcomed Rebekah a year later, Jacob 15 months after that, and then James in 2004. Our kids are a treasure and a delight to us!

### ***What do you enjoy doing together as a family?***

We have enjoyed going out to Palo Lake several times this summer. We all enjoy fishing and exploring in the water, looking for critters. Our absolute favorite spot is the beach. We were able to spend a week in Corpus Christi this summer and had several members of our extended family stay with us.

### ***What do you enjoy doing in your free time?***

When everyone is home, I enjoy spending as much time as possible with Annette and our children. If everyone else is at school or work, I enjoy fishing, kayaking, and doing home repair and improvement.

### ***What do you particularly enjoy about working at St. Mark's?***

I was asked that question a number of times on our trip to Texas in early August. My answers varied a bit, but some of the consistent themes were: amazing, committed members; outstanding staff, and a senior pastor who is great to work with; and lastly, a challenging environment that has enabled me to grow as a pastor, leader, and child of God. The past year has been a great, intense time of learning!

### ***When did you determine that you wanted to be a pastor—or feel God calling you to do this?***

I had no plans to become a pastor. I was a political science



and international relations major. My plans were to go to graduate school in the area of international development and work for an organization like Lutheran World Relief. God definitely had other plans as I found myself nearly pushed into seminary. Even when I was at seminary I had no plans to become a pastor. I was there to gain some experience in the church and learn the Bible (for my own personal faith and growth). I had planned to stay one year and ended up staying for four. I believe that God had His hand on me and led me year by year to see His plan that congregational ministry was where he was calling me!

### ***Certainly you've had some unexpected (maybe funny) things happen during worship services. Any you'd like to share with us?***

The very first wedding I performed as a pastor was just six weeks after I arrived at a little church in rural south Texas. The couple was very young and just wanted a simple wedding with family and friends. We planned the wedding for a Friday. The week before the wedding they changed it to Wednesday due to a work conflict for some family

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members. Four days before the wedding they called me to ask if they could do it on Tuesday. That Sunday they came to church and asked if we could do it on Monday. I had planned some time to do a rehearsal with them a few days before the wedding (originally on Wednesday), but it was clear that wasn't going to happen so I asked them to come a bit early on Monday so we could walk through the service. Twenty minutes after the service was supposed to start, the groom showed up. The bride wasn't happy and things were a bit tense.

After a quick five-minute pep talk to them both, we went out in front of the small gathering of very tense family members on both sides of the aisle. We started the service and got to the exchange of the rings. At that point, the groom grabbed the hand of his beloved and proceeded to try to cram the ring on the middle finger of her right hand. She began to protest, quietly at first, but then her volume increased. Finally, she looked at me with a level of frustration I don't think I'd ever seen in a woman's face before. I touched his hand and he stopped. He had that "deer in the headlights" kind of look in his eyes and he dropped the ring. As the ring rolled down the aisle a member of the family picked it up and brought it to the groom. He found the proper finger on her left hand and placed the ring on her finger, and she did her part and placed the ring on his finger. When the rings were where they were supposed to be, I had the next line and couldn't say a word. . . .

For about 30 seconds I just stood there while this poor couple just stood there staring at me. Finally, I just busted out laughing. It broke the tension and the family started laughing and then, the couple. The rest of the service was a joy and, though I have lost track of them, I know they did very well together in those early years as husband and wife.

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

I had the privilege of being a congressional intern with Iowa congressman Tom Tauke in the fall of 1984 when Ronald Reagan was running against Walter Mondale.

### ***What is one of your favorite Bible verses?***

One that has been on my mind lately has been Psalm 13:1— "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever." No, I'm not depressed nor prone to being morbid, but I value how real this cry is and have always appreciated that God, in His compassion and mercy, sees fit to hear such cries from us.

### ***What is your favorite book of the Bible to read or study? Do you have a favorite book of the Bible to teach?***

Pastor Perry has said that his favorite book of the Bible is often the one he is currently studying or teaching. I would have to concur with that! Whether teaching Crossways, walking through the book of Acts this summer, or doing my own personal devotions, it is always a privilege to hear whatever God has to say!

### ***Who is one of your favorite Bible characters and why?***

I like the amazing journey of faith of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and how God so graciously brought him and his entire household into faith, pouring the gift of the Holy Spirit into their lives with power! It's God at work!

### ***What is your favorite hymn and/or worship song? Why?***

"Untitled Hymn" by Chris Rice and "The Church's One Foundation" are a tie! Both hymns are so deep and wonderfully expressive of God's eternal plan for each of us as individuals ("Untitled Hymn") and Christ's dear and precious church ("The Church's One Foundation"). There is so much passion and truth in these songs that I find compelling!

### ***What's a phrase you'd like people to think of when they think of you?***

I know Jesus better because of him.

### ***What's something on your "bucket list"?***

I don't have a bucket list. I believe each day is a precious gift and I'm called to love and serve those God has placed in my life until such time as I'm called home to my true and lasting home with Him.

### ***Our series on The Story will be starting on Sept. 15. Tell us why you are particularly excited about this.***

One of the most exciting facets of working at St. Mark's is the congregation's willingness to dive into God's Word. As I have been helping prepare for our journey through *The Story*, I see an incredible opportunity for us to grow and deepen as disciples of our Lord Jesus. We will be walking through the entire sweep of the Bible from creation through revelation this year as a congregation, in small groups, as families, and as individuals. God made this promise through the prophet Isaiah: "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) God will work in our lives this year and we will be an even more effective tool in His hands as we walk together through His Word. †