



**PASTOR ROB MARTIN: A LEGACY OF JOY
ST. ANDREW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IOWA CITY**

Rob Martin's Legacy of Joy

When **Pastor Jordan Warntjes** gave his candidating sermon back in March, he talked about *how joyful, energetic, and excited about the future* St. Andrew feels. That's part of what drew him here. As I listened, something clicked—I realized he was naming **Rob Martin's** legacy.

When Rob and **Dō** arrived in Iowa City near the end of the first year of the pandemic, it had been more than three years since St. Andrew had an installed lead pastor and head of staff. The timing wasn't ideal, and the pandemic made for a rocky, complicated start to his ministry. It would have been easy to lean toward comfort or just try to get through it. Instead, Rob met that moment with energy, creativity, and a deep sense of possibility.

Rob was always thinking about the future—about what St. Andrew could become, not just during his time here, but long after. When I joined the staff in 2022—along with Abby Chen, Thomas Hartley, Nichole Hoffman, Tim Patrick, Sara Penn, and Austen Wilson—he encouraged us to find new ways to work together. He didn't want siloed ministries. He wanted collaboration.

He modeled that outlook in his leadership. Rob regularly brought staff and congregation members into conversations about new ideas, different approaches to worship, and emerging opportunities for ministry. He encouraged us to try things, to risk failure, and then to try again.

That kind of culture created space for ministries like the **Food Market, Flipping Tables, and At the Table**. It shaped a reimagining of **25Live**, opened the door to new expressions of worship, and kept us attentive to the ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of St. Andrew. →

Some of my favorite memories of Rob come from our regular Monday meetings. It didn't matter whether we had a full agenda or not, they almost always ran long. *Rob was genuinely interested in what I was working on.* He asked questions, offered advice, and encouraged me. I know I wasn't the only one who experienced that. Rob was never in a hurry to end a conversation. You always felt like he had time for you.

His presence was steady. Sometimes he was loud and full of energy; sometimes he was quiet and reflective. But he was always fully present in the moment.

Rob Martin's lasting impact on St. Andrew is a legacy of joy. He reminds us that it's okay to try new things, even when they don't go as planned ... and then to try again. He reminds us that it's okay to have fun: to wear rainbow Crocs, to call the benediction the "benihana," and to trust that God is faithful in both the good times and the hard ones.

And he reminds us that we don't do any of this alone: We lean on one another along the way.

– Matt Moore





Awe-Inspiring Worship & Feeling Seen

I have never had the privilege of meeting **Pastor Rob Martin** in person. However, I served in the shadow of his time at St. Andrew, experiencing firsthand the community's impassioned response to his bold proclamation. A few things strike me as especially noteworthy about the legacy he leaves behind.

Pastor Rob regularly invited people into awe-inspiring worship. He wrote hymns, prayers, and liturgies that reflected a wildly curious God – one who stirs in us both wonder and whimsy. Rob seemed to tap into a Divine frequency, making mysterious truths feel accessible.

Rob's love for humanity fueled his ministry. He loved people, full stop. No need for pretense or qualifiers. The ferocity of his love only burned brighter wherever he believed God's beloved were being pushed to the margins. He fiercely advocated for the "least of these," embodying the call of Matthew 25. His convictions were contagious, compelling those around him to join in being an incarnational presence.

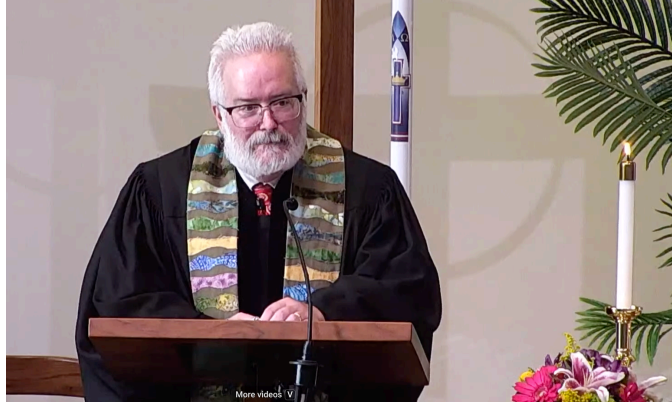
I believe Rob shared a deep and abiding love with (and for) the people of St. Andrew. Stories about Rob often include his beloved Dō and their shared love for life. A spark of joy brightens people's eyes when they recount, with fondness, how Rob and Dō made them feel *seen*. I believe this love flowed directly from the love Rob experienced in Jesus.

Pastor Rob Martin served with exceptional grace and creativity, fulfilling his ordination vows to lead with "energy, intelligence, imagination, and love."

Well done, good and faithful servant.

– *Pastor Carl Anderson*





An Inclusive Table

Rob Martin believes in an inclusive table. It is the cornerstone of his approach to ministry and the key insight into how he understands the divine.

And while Rob spent many hours each week crafting exact words and phrasing for his Promptings, he was at his most vulnerable when he'd set his manuscripts aside, look out at the congregation, and invite people to "Come to the table."

Those invitations loom large in the memory of the congregation. During the years Rob served as lead pastor, they became an expected part of the rhythm of worship at St. Andrew, month after month.

But when you go back and watch the videos – those minutes or two between the Doxology and the scripted Prayer of Thanksgiving – you realize just how precious few he offered to us. There are only 13 such invitations between Rob's first Sunday in February 2021 and his last Communion in July 2024.

And yet, within those 13 moments, a consistent message emerges – sometimes in nearly the same words, but usually reshaped for the day:

- "Everyone who comes to this table today is welcome, and everybody is loved—no matter what you've done, no matter what you think you've done, no matter whether people have told you you are not welcome."
- "In this very act, everyone who comes is given an equal share. That doesn't happen very often in the world we inhabit."
- "There's no checklist that we have to follow for you to partake in this meal... come where you are and as you are."

Across those invitations – brief and deeply personal – Rob made clear what he believed: that at Christ's table, grace is not measured or withheld, but given freely, equally, and without condition.

And in those few minutes, month after month, he invited people not just to remember that truth, but to live into it.

– *Jeff Charis-Carlson*





Kind, Selfless, Jolly, and a Friend to All

“Is Santa Claus real?”

That’s the conversation I assumed we would eventually have with our children (then 8 and 4) when the committee I served on nominated **Rob Martin**. You see, I discovered that our soon-to-be pastor was a bona fide St. Nicholas – spending the year growing out his white beard so that, come December, he would be ready.

However, what I came to learn – first as a member of the Pastor Nominating Committee, and then as a staff member under Rob’s ministry – was that Santa Claus wasn’t just a once-a-year thing. Before you ask ... no, Pastor Rob did not regularly show up to staff meetings dressed in a fur-trimmed red velvet coat, black sash, and round spectacles. But on a daily basis, he did (and does) embody everything that is innately Santa Claus ... even without the fancy gold buckle.

I have always known Rob to be **kind and selfless** – the sort of person who genuinely cares about others and takes the time to lend an empathetic ear to anyone who needs it. He encourages, inspires, and supports. While he doesn’t fly through the air in a sleigh guided by eight reindeer delivering gifts (*most likely – I should probably double-check that*), he would give the shirt off his back to a stranger in need.

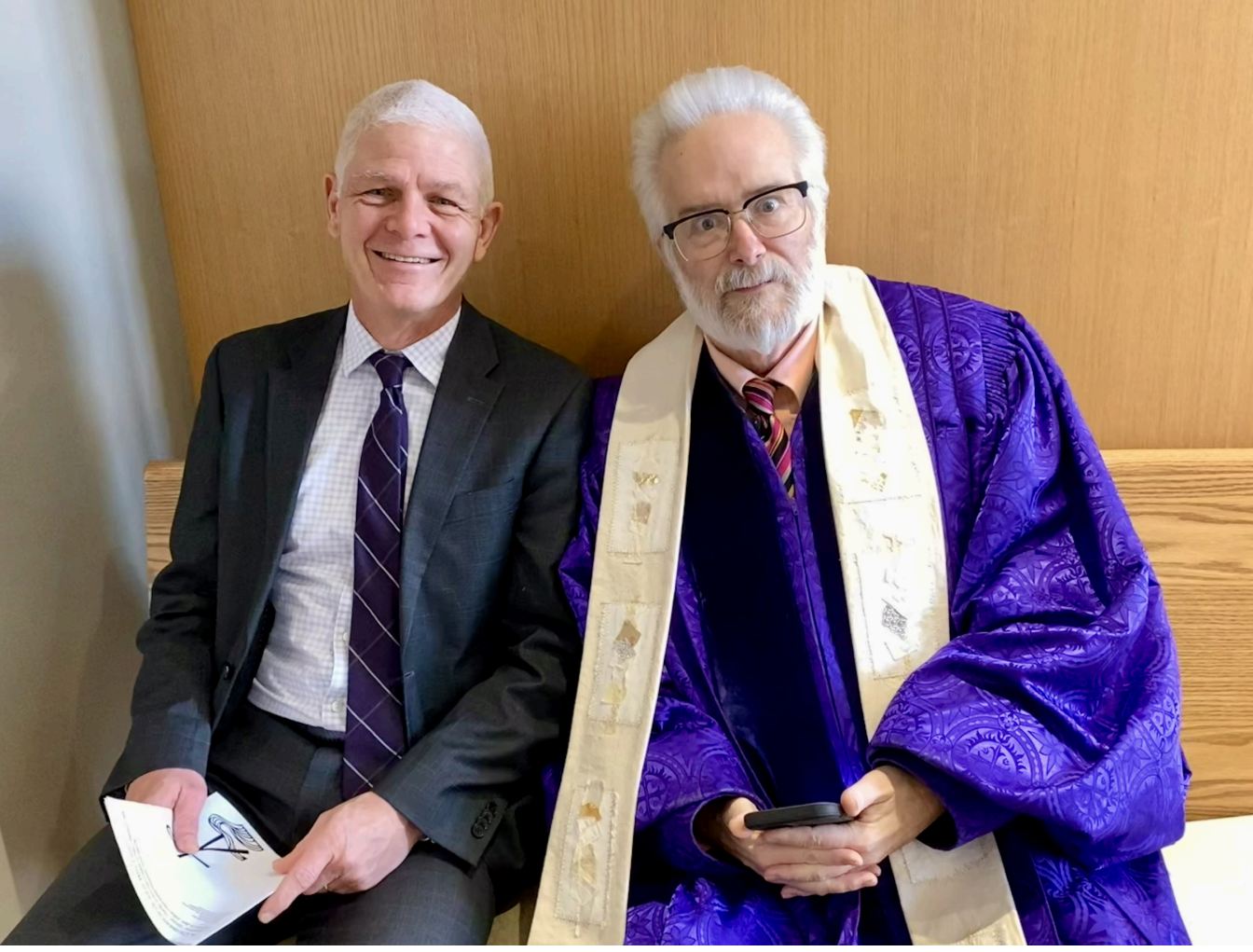
Jolly! His sense of humor is always a bright spot. Rob does not try to cover up the darkness and cruelty of the world with a joke. Instead, he acknowledges the darkness and shines a light of hope through his own particular brand of humor.

Rob is **a friend to all**. Working in Children’s and Family Ministry, I have seen just how deeply Rob advocates for those who society deems the least and the last. Whether it be small children, those experiencing homelessness, members of the LGBTQ+ community, or those of differing abilities, Rob is a champion for them all.

So, yes, because I know Rob Martin, I can tell my children with complete confidence: “Santa Claus is real.”

– Sara Penn





Heart of Compassion & The Wounded Healer

I remember well the first time I saw **Pastor Rob Martin**: walking toward the entrance of the church, a man with flowing white hair and beard, rocking a brightly colored Hawaiian shirt. He was like Moses headed out for a vacation in the islands. That is the way things were with Rob: always providing life materials (stories, images, and ideas) that sparked the imagination.

It may be clear that we were so different in many ways. But that is part of the grace and glory of the time that Rob and I served together as St. Andrew's pastors. Rob never let our differences divide us. Instead he used it to fuel our conversation and shared discernment regarding the life and future of the church. Rob believed in compassionate presence and listening, and he directed both toward building our "partnership in the gospel" (Philippians 1.5). Rob reinforced in me the power of curiosity, taking time to ask thoughtful questions and learn the stories and experiences that gave rise to who a person is and how they framed the world.

It struck me while working with Rob that his heart of compassion was the consequence of difficult life experience. He didn't hold himself aloof from heartache and loss; rather he made it a practice to give himself to others in the midst of pain. I know that this meant that Rob suffered as a result of the stands he took and the witness he made. Rob was unafraid to lead and serve others with vulnerability, being honest about his own losses and wounds. I hear echoes of Henri Nouwen's wounded healer. Such an example shines with the love of Christ.

I am grateful for Rob's friendship and encouragement. As a colleague he exemplified the gospel "one another's": encourage one another, honor one another, serve one another, love one another. He was always ready to celebrate and support the ministry of his co-workers.

And Rob loved the music, prayer, and worship of the church. If our native language in Christian faith is prayer and praise, Rob was fluent in it. His joy in worship was contagious and his presence in worship was vibrant and alive. Flowing hair, bright raiment, and a song in his heart: truly a minister quick to share the grace and love of Jesus with all.

– the Rev. Kyle Otterbein





Ever-Changing, Beautifully Non-Uniform, & Loving

Pastor Rob Martin walked with our family through two of the most significant moments of our lives. He officiated the marriage of our son, Nathan Schuchert, to Suzanne Moore in 2022, and he ministered to us – and led the memorial service – after the loss of Jason’s father, Gene, in 2024.

The wedding was a beautiful celebration of a couple who had grown up through the children’s and student ministries at St. Andrew. Rob’s presence helped settle the nervous energy in the room, allowing us to focus on the beauty of the ceremony and the joy of the celebration that followed. His message from a Trinity Sunday service a few months earlier even became the foundation for our reception toast, reminding us of the ever-changing, beautifully non-uniform, communal, and loving experience that God – and this congregation – has given our family over the decades.

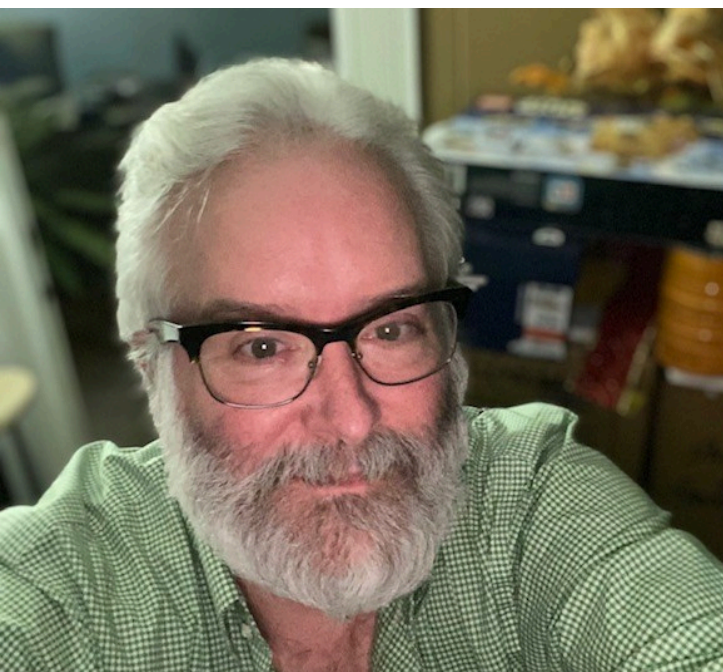
Rob’s leadership at Gene’s service was calming, reflective, and even joyful. His message revealed just how much time he had spent visiting Gene in his final months in a care center, and how deeply he had come to know the person Gene truly was. Rob invited us to grieve our loss, to celebrate a life well lived, and to receive the support of family and friends. We will always be grateful for his love, leadership, and friendship through both of these sacred moments.

We have also deeply cherished the many holiday dinners and celebrations we shared with Rob and Dō in our home, and we treasure the friendships that grew from those times – friendships we continue to enjoy to this day.

We thank God for Rob’s presence and leadership, not only at St. Andrew, but in every community and congregation he has served. We feel deeply blessed to be part of his and Dō’s lives – both during his ministry here and as they move into this next chapter in Iowa City.

– *Jason & Rebecca Schuchert*





Gritty and Hilarious and Honest

Pastor Rob Martin is one of the most passionate and unique pastors I have ever met. He is gritty and hilarious and honest.

He speaks truth to power.

His humor and sense of timing are second to none.

He has little time for structures and absolute urgency for Gospel.

His love for reading and learning new things is admirable.

His remarkable talent for story-telling is unparalleled.

Rob has taught me so much about boldness and courage, even in the face of intimidating systems.

I regret that Rob's health prevented a timely celebration of his retirement from ministry, but truly rejoice that it is happening now.

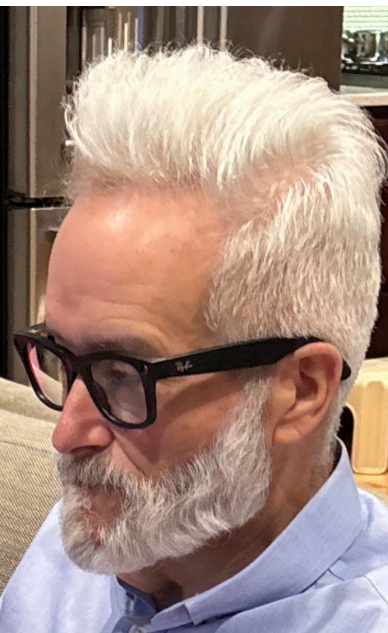
This is a well-deserved celebration!

While I am unable to be physically present for this occasion, I raise my glass to my friend Rob, with joy and gratitude.

Be well, and go with grace!

– *Pastor Sarah Goettsch*





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