



## ***The Power of a Praying Church – Steven Johnson’s Story of Faith***

By: Janis Heier

For nearly 60 years, Steven Johnson’s story has been woven into the life of Bethlehem, where he was baptized and raised by parents deeply rooted in the congregation. Steven didn’t just attend worship—he grew up in a community of faith that helped shape the person he is today.

When asked what he is most thankful for, Steven doesn’t hesitate. “The people who come to worship, for their beliefs and willingness to pray for people. Without their prayers, I probably wouldn’t be here today.”

As a senior in high school, on January 23, 1984, Steven’s life changed in an instant. A car Steven was in collided with a train. The collision left him with multiple injuries and in a coma. Doctors worked to save him. His family remained constantly at his side. And his church surrounded him in prayer. **“Those who prayed for me after my accident played an instrumental role in my recovery—from my coma to where I am today.”** Steven believes those prayers mattered.



“My faith gave me confidence that I could come back from the accident. I had faith in God to restore my abilities. I prayed to get better and heal. I didn’t like the state I was in.” Steven held tightly to the promise of Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Along with a strong will to heal, Steven credits another gift for carrying him through: his sense of humor. “It’s a gift from God,” he says. “It helped me survive through the hard times.”



Confirmation May 1981 with Pastors Stephen & Cyndi Ganzkow-Wold, Ron Prasek, and James Hanson

Some of Steven's fondest memories trace back to Confirmation—"Confo," as he and his friends called it. As ninth graders, they couldn't wait for Wednesday evenings. During the school day they would ask one another, "Are you going to Confo tonight?" Wednesday evenings were something they genuinely looked forward to. The pastors understood them. Faith formation was joyful, relational, and fun. To this day, Steven keeps a framed photo of his Confirmation class displayed in his apartment.

Over the years, Bethlehem has been more than a place of worship. It has been a place of belonging. Steven remembers youth ministries, a church basketball team in his younger years, Wednesday night suppers, and worship services that grounded his life.

Today, Steven primarily participates in Bethlehem's online worship from home, remaining connected even when he can't be present in person. "I always worship—in person or online. I have so much to be thankful for. My life was spared for a reason, and I am grateful."

His journey after the accident also opened unexpected doors. During his college summers from 1988–1992, Steven worked at Camp Courage, supporting people with disabilities in daily activities. "It meant a lot to me to give back to people with disabilities. I could give them first-hand experience. I've been there." Out of hardship grew a ministry of empathy. Out of recovery came a desire to serve others facing challenges similar to his own.

At the heart of Steven's story is also the steadfast love of his parents, Ron and Jean. After the accident, his mother remained at his side in the University of Minnesota Hospital. His father, then a professor at Northern State College, traveled every weekend to be with them. "Without them, I wouldn't be where I am today," Steven says.

When asked what means the most to him about Bethlehem, his answer reflects both gratitude and calling: "**Bethlehem is a great place to come and be accepted. 'All are welcome, friend and stranger at the banquet of our Savior.'**" (as Steven quotes the Dakota Road song.)

Steven's life is a testimony to prayer, perseverance, and the strength of Christian community. His story reminds us that when **we gather for worship, lift one another in prayer, and walk together through life's most challenging moments, we connect with God, one another, and our mission in the world**—discovering, through Christ who strengthens us, that even life's most difficult chapters can become part of God's greater story.



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