



# Passing on the Faith - Generation After Generation

By Bishop Greg Mohr  
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I never met my paternal grandfather. He died as a fairly young man, sometime in his early 50s. I wasn't born until years later. One of the things I love about church is that I have gleaned bits and pieces about my grandfather from quite a number of people over the years. You see, my grandfather was also a pastor. As I travel around this church and meet with people, I am touched by how many people will come up to me and say things like, "Your grandfather confirmed me" or "Your grandfather was my pastor." Some have described his voice and demeanour or spoken about his preaching. They speak with admiration and appreciation, and for that I am grateful.

I treasure these stories and memories. They help me learn something more about a man I never met. We have our own family stories about him, of course, but the stories from his former parishioners are very special indeed.

Earlier this year I participated in the 70th anniversary of Christ Lutheran, Kelowna. Like all church anniversaries, there was special music, a lovely meal following worship, speeches and reflections. What made this celebration in Kelowna particularly poignant for me was that my grandfather, Rev. Peter Mohr, was the guest preacher at their dedication service all those many years ago. So here I was, Peter Mohr's grandson, preaching at their 70th. They even had pictures of my grandfather from that day nearly 70 years ago. These, too, I treasure, particularly since my grandfather died the very next year.

Whenever I hear stories about my grandfather, there is an immediate connection with the past. Yet I also find that there is a compelling sense of pointing toward the future. The church continues on. Pastors continue on. The situations my grandfather faced are different from my context. Yet there also is an uplifting continuity in all of this: generation after generation, the word continues to be proclaimed, the people of God continue to minister, and churches love pot-luck dinners!

The church is facing difficult times right now. We grow increasingly concerned about numbers and finances. We wonder what the future might hold. Some question whether we will even exist in a few years' time.

Yet, at the same time, we know that this is God's church; it is not ours. We trust and believe that God will do something — and is doing something — among us. In the midst of the concern and anxiety is a deeply held conviction and a profound faith that God is still at work in us and in our communities, and that God will always have a church, even though the shape and activity of the church might be different from what we currently experience and imagine.

Generation after generation; passing on the faith. Over the years I have heard stories of how my grandfather was a circuit-rider in the 1940s. Living in Calgary, he would travel north on one weekend and lead worship for two or three congregations in that area. The next weekend, he would travel east and care for another two or three congregations. I recently learned that he also travelled south of Calgary and ministered to other congregations. In between his visits, the lay leadership attended to the ongoing ministry of their congregations.

What style and approach to ministry (both lay and ordained ministry) will we need to engage in the coming years? We are exploring that now, being open to where God is leading, wondering what God is up to in the world around us, and joining God in the neighbourhood. Who knows how God will shape and direct us the years to come? But "fear not, little flock." We have been down this path before. God is faithful.

And God is also a God of surprises....