

Charles Neiderhiser, Eulogy
August 29, 2020

Dear people gathered here,

It's been almost six months since Charles departed from us. On March 12 his ailing body and grieving spirit were relieved from the hardships he had endured especially over the last year of his life. His death occurred mere hours before the COVID quarantine rules went into effect at Meadowood, the community that he called home for the last 23 years of his life. One day later, and everything would have been so much more difficult. Loved ones would have been barred from seeing him in person. He went just in time to avoid the nightmare of this pandemic.

I knew Charles over the last 13 years of his long life. Soon after I started at St. Peter's, he invited me for a visit. And so I came. I vividly recall his sense of pride and ownership when he walked me all over the premises of his beloved retirement community. His demeanor was like that of a CEO showing an important visitor the newest developments of the company. "Look what they are doing here," he excitedly pointed out time and again. And everywhere we went people would say, "Hi Charles. How are you?" and he greeted them back by name. It almost seemed like he was Mr. Meadowood. He showed me the library and the common area; the recreation rooms and the equipment; the new parts of the building they had just added... up and down the stairs, up and down different wings of the complex. He could walk back then. I would not have been surprised if he'd finished his tour with the question: and now, do you want to move here with your family?

In that hour-long tour I came to realize some of Charles' main character traits. He was a thorough person; he paid attention to all kinds of details; he was patient; he was persistent. And that's true for everything he did, from his very successful professional work as a financial analyst to his involvement in various churches and on the boards of several committees in his retirement community.

Over the years I visited Charles and Lida several times. Each time Charles had stories to tell. He was a fabulous story teller once he got started. You didn't necessarily expect that from a person so quiet, so gentle, so precise, so serious; but appearances can be deceptive. There was a well of stories waiting to spill out of his innermost being to anyone willing to listen. I think it made him feel alive to tell and re-tell those various tales. Often he would lift his finger and stare at you for emphasis at the most important turns of the story.

You all knew Charles in your own way. And some of the people who knew him best are unfortunately no longer among us. He was born on May 15, 1925 and raised in the Jeanette area of Western Pennsylvania, among steel mills, mines and a nice selection of Lutheran Churches. As a young man, Charles loved baseball and the Boy Scouts. While he rooted for the "home team" Pittsburgh Pirates, his favorite player was Babe Ruth. The family home bordered on a ball park and woods that were good for hiking. Charles was never bored in the home either as he got to split the chores with three siblings, Roy, Virginia, and Paul.

He liked to remember the day when the Kebernick family who had just moved to Jeanette, walked into his church and when for the first time he set his eyes on one of their daughters, named Lida. Crushed when she paid attention to another young man, he remembered in his typical lamenting ways that "she never gave me the light of day." But on one of those Luther League Youth Conventions of yesteryear, with both of them attending, she set on the arm of his chair ever so briefly, and the young man in love took that as a sign, as an unexpected opening. "Lida, let's take a walk!" he said. I don't know what stories he told her on that walk, but I know this: it must have worked. After a year, they were engaged, and a few months later, on September 6, 1946, were married - and would be for 67 years. In one of his memories, Charles recalled working until 4pm on his wedding day, and then getting his haircut. Their marriage produced two sons, Edward and Frederick, and five grandchildren, Christy, Jonathan, Joshua, Jason, and Joel.

Charles had a wonderful gift of analyzing financial figures. He earned a business degree from Robert Morris School of Business in Pittsburgh in 1952 by attending night classes while working full-time. With this foundation and a great deal of effort Charles excelled at his job. He worked a number of years in Erie. In 1976, he accepted a promotion and moved to Western Springs, IL, just outside of Chicago. The accuracy of his annual forecasts and the quality of his supervision of finances regularly earned him significant bonuses, sometimes equaling half or more of his annual salary. After retirement in the late 1990's, Lida and Charles finally moved back east to be closer to their sons and grandchildren. We all know about the untimely deaths of both Fred and Ed, one as a result of a rare, slow moving but devastating disease, the other by a sudden, lethal heart attack; both experiences were crushing. There is nothing in life that can be compared to burying your own children, and Charles had to endure the experience not once but twice. It was extremely hard on him.

I would like to mention that Charles was a generous man and always supported the work of God in the church. I would also like to mention that he was well cared for throughout the last years of his life. His son Ed who lived close by, visited often and sometimes took him along to churches where he was preaching that Sunday. He was in touch with his son Fred and his wife Nancy even as Fred's disease progressed. And of course Valerie took good care of him in the last years of his life. Toward the end, exhausted and grieved, he was frequently in tears and on my last visit I wasn't sure he really understood me. It is never easy to see someone transition toward death, but Charles had had a long and meaningful life. It was also always a life of faith. And whether we live or whether we die, this faith connects us with a reality that transcends this world, this life, and propels us to an invisible kingdom that has no end. Gathered as we are in faith, we bless the sacred remains of Charles' mortal body and rejoice with him in the presence of God. May you rest in peace, faithful servant!

Amen.