

COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

This place where we worship side by side and celebrate our biggest joys and mourn our deepest heartaches with each other is exactly what I think Jesus had in mind when he taught us to love our neighbors.

by Robyn Banks, Director of Communications



“He’s going to be dead before Christmas.” That was the first thought that went through my head when Bill and I heard his Stage IV pancreatic cancer diagnosis on June 27, 2022. The surgeon who delivered the news was a little more optimistic... he said perhaps 18

months if the chemotherapy worked. However, the four people in my life who had received Stage IV pancreatic cancer diagnoses all died six months after diagnosis.

Later that day, I found myself in Ardelle and Scott Walters’s living room with Katherine Bush, the four of us trying to

process the news and think of concrete things I could do to begin living out this reality. It was in that moment that I started to understand how important my community and village were going to be. I wouldn’t fully comprehend this until later, but I knew I couldn’t—and didn’t have to—do this alone.

Don’t get me wrong; taking care of someone who is so very sick can be the absolute loneliest experience, even when surrounded by the best people. And yet, I don’t ever want to imagine what those six months (or the year and a half since) would have been like without our community. And that community is you. It was you who rejoiced with us when Bill and I celebrated our marriage at Calvary. It was you who promised to help us raise Emma in a life of Christ when she was baptized at Calvary. And it was you who fed us, checked on us, ran errands

for us, helped in all the ways with Emma, prayed for us, and celebrated Bill’s life with us in such a beautiful way. Grateful will never begin to describe how I feel when I think about those acts of love and care.

Those last days were terrible and sacred. They were filled with love, and they were achingly lonely. I pleaded with Bill to let go, and I hoped for some kind of miracle. Bill was so stubbornly optimistic throughout the entire six months we knew he was sick. He fought harder than I’ve ever seen anyone fight. We had fights about how hard he was fighting because I saw what it was doing to him. It was so hard to watch him suffer.

Even as his body deteriorated, we both held out hope. When the hospice nurse said she was trying to get him through Christmas, he looked at her incredulously and said, “This Christmas?!” It was only six days away. Two days later, another hospice nurse stopped by and said it would only be hours. It was all happening so fast. But, he wouldn’t give up. Even after I assured him that it was okay to let go; that Emma and I would be okay. Even after his mom and sister told him it was okay to go. For four more days I pleaded with him. I knew it was time. But, he still didn’t want to go. Finally on the evening of December 23, I thanked him for making it to Christmas. I’m not proud that I lied to him, but I had a feeling that since the nurse said that’s what she was trying to do, he was working toward the same goal. I picked up his phone and turned on one

of his playlists. And we just lay there and listened to music together. At 8:03 p.m., he slipped peacefully away, taking pieces of our hearts with him.

So, yes, Bill did die before Christmas. The six months between his diagnosis and death were both the longest and shortest six months of my life. I learned so much about cancer, chemo, drugs, reactions, parenting, grief, and love. I learned that grief is unique to the griever. And that as much as I wish I could write the guidebook for grief that I so desperately searched for after Bill died, there is a reason it doesn’t exist.

But what I can share is how important it is to show up for each other. Whether that looks like phone calls, texts, grocery deliveries, Door Dash orders, or hugs in the hallways...all of it means more than you can imagine. And your griever will need you long after the death, the funeral, and even the first year as they navigate life without their person. We all have to keep showing up for each other in whatever ways we are called to do.

I am so lucky to be part of this Calvary community. This place where we worship side by side and celebrate our biggest joys and mourn our deepest heartaches with each other is exactly what I think Jesus had in mind when he taught us to love our neighbors. He knew we would need each other in this world. And I am so grateful for you.

