



### **For All the Saints, Give Thanks.**

Charlie was as jovial and laid-back a person as you could imagine. He was kind and thoughtful, extremely intelligent and fun to be around. While he didn't have much of an official education, he had a quick mind capable of grasping the subtlety of a piece of writing or an argument being made. He also had a warm heart and a smile which never seemed to end. I got to know Charlie better when I entered 10<sup>th</sup> grade and began to attend the adult Sunday School class at our church in Nescopeck. Charlie was the teacher. He was the perfect man for the role. Unassuming yet so capable at leading discussion, Charlie made the class interesting for a 14-year-old sitting in the midst of adults, most of whom were 50 years old and above. What made Charlie such a good leader of the group was that he was so authentic. He never tried to be someone he wasn't, and if he didn't know the answer to a question, he openly claimed his lack of knowledge. He was a superb storyteller who could string a yarn with the best of them. But, for a young teenager, what caught my attention and kept me engaged was his ability to let me and everyone else know that he was delighted that you were a part of the gathering, an important part of the class investigation and conversation. As Charlie taught class or led discussion, he made every individual feel invaluable among the whole of the group, whether you joined in the discussion or simply sat back and listened. Then, when class was over, he would make sure to let me know how tickled he was that I was there. At this point, Charlie was well into his eighties, but engaged everyone with a timeless, eternal heart.

I hope you have had a "Charlie" in your life, someone who let you know how much it mattered that you were present in Sunday School, Church or at a social event. I was exceedingly lucky because I had many "Charlies" in my home congregation growing up. Mary led the Children's Sunday School and was warm and comforting, energetic and caring. Her husband Frank was our church council president over many of my years growing up. He was forthright and earnest, and lived his love for the congregation, his church, openly and without reservation. Both of them were important parts of my church experience growing up. Elizabeth was a retired schoolteacher, who, every Sunday when church ended and folks were leaving, shuffled over to me and, in her formal yet caring way, would share, "Young man, I am so very glad to see you here today." At that point, I was 9 or 10 and didn't see her any other time during the

week. I simply knew that each week she would shuffle over to me to make the point that it was important to her that I was present. Marguerite played the piano in the Children's Sunday School and sang in the choir and knew all the children by name, gracing us with her kindness, patience and attention. Eileen was our energetic 6<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday School teacher who let us know week after week that we were, are and always will be the church, no matter what our age or no matter where life might take us. She boldly shared with us how important it is that God is a part of our lives. Willie always was around the church. He had a good head on his shoulder and was talented in ways which kept the building in good repair. I can remember sitting in church council meetings as a teenager and listening to Willie and Frank debate (they disagreed on nearly everything) yet hearing in their words and voices how important the church, building and people, were to them. Donald and Harold were my pastors, who shared the love of God in word and in relationship. I still am blessed to count Harold as among the most important people I know. There are so many others I could name who helped me to develop an understanding of what "church" really means and of how much God's love is real in my life. John and Bonny and Bob and Cindy, and childhood friends and classmates who were part of the mix, all helped me, in some way, experience God's love and presence in my life.

I hope that you had such people in your life at some point, individuals who cared and shared enough to let you know that you mattered to them, and that you mattered to God. These "saints" helped pass the faith on to us, but they did so much more. They helped us to imagine and to feel, in some small way, what God's actual, immense love is like. They made God's presence real. No matter where I have been in my life, I have found these same "saints" active in the life of the congregation, constantly sharing God's love. We are inspired by them to be the church at this time and in this place. From their witness to Christ's love we have been shaped to witness ourselves. Now it is our time to reach out to those around us with this same love, sourced in God's infinite and amazing love, so that others will come to know what we know. God is love. God is life. God is our past, our present and our future. Please take the time this All-Saints Sunday and over Thanksgiving to remember the wonderful people who shared this love with you. Then, make the effort to pass it on.