

Celeste Birkey

A little bit of information about Celeste:

- Celeste began attending Meadowbrook Church in 1990 and became a member August 2000. With her marriage to Joe Birkey in 2005, she has dual membership with both Meadowbrook and her husband's church, East Bend Mennonite.
- She has participated on Meadowbrook mission trips twice to El Salvador and once to Czech Republic.
- Celeste grew up in the Air Force. Her father was a Master Sergeant in the Air Force. Celeste and her mother moved with her father as his assignments allowed and took them around the world. She has lived or traveled to about 20 countries during her lifetime. During a trip to Israel, she was baptized in the Jordan River.
- Favorite Hymn- "I don't have a favorite song or hymn, there are so many to choose from. I really enjoy the old hymns of the church. They give me encouragement in my walk with the Lord. The hymns also give me valuable theology lessons and advice from the saints of previous generations [hymn authors]." Celeste explains that hymnal lessons provide systematic theology in that it teaches her how to have intimacy with God, to know who God is, how she can relate to Him, what is required for salvation, what grace from God means, and how to walk in the spirit.
- Favorite Scripture- Psalm 125:1-2 "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever." This verse gives Celeste comfort in knowing God surrounds her with protection forever.

A Faith Journey.....

"I accepted Jesus as my Savior when I was 13 years old. I grew up in a mainline Protestant church but didn't meet Jesus until I attended my cousin's Baptist Church. My cousin invited my mother and I to her church where I heard a missionary speak. He worked in Haiti and talked about the self-less love of the Haitian believers he had encountered. The Holy Spirit convicted me at 13 years old. My mother then led me in the sinner's prayer. I accepted Jesus into my heart. Growing up in military chapels I experienced patriotic services. The Color Guard always presented the United States Flag which was displayed with the Christian Flag. After high school I went to a Mennonite college. I received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at a college Bible study off campus. I attended mostly charismatic type churches and fellowships as a young adult. The Charismatic Movement was a revival which swept through most mainline denominations. People received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues and other gifts of the Spirit. Although the charismatic churches were an outgrowth of the Jesus People Revival, most attenders were from mainline denominations. In 1990 my roommate observed that I was stagnating and not growing at the church I was attending. She suggested that I begin attending Meadowbrook where she was attending." Celeste has benefited from taking her roommate's advice to visit Meadowbrook. She has appreciated the teaching emphasis on God's attributes, who God is, and direct Bible teaching.

"The most moving Spiritual event I have experienced was when I heard a missionary give an eyewitness report of how God brought a dead person back to life. This missionary was speaking to an audience of 1000 people at a large evangelistic rally. Some hecklers brought in this corpse, threw it on the stage and said "Let's see how your God deals with this". The corpse was frozen solid and had been dead for a week. God then told this missionary and his team to pray for this corpse on the stage in front of the audience. The corpse and the stage began to shake. The corpse was raised back to life. The person told this missionary that he had been in hell. He wanted to accept Jesus as his Savior. He and everyone in the audience became Jesus followers that day." This resurrection happened within the last 50 years.

The missionary was working in a sensitive country. For security reasons the missionary's name and location have been withheld.

Celeste's faith journey includes a "God at work" story showing how He works in circumstances and brought Celeste and Joe together in marriage. Joe is a Rantoul native. Celeste was born at Rantoul (IL) Chanute A.F.B. when her father was stationed there. Her family moved away when she was a baby and later returned for Celeste's elementary school years. Celeste's father was reassigned and they left Rantoul again. The remainder of Celeste's school years were spent all over the world. After college Celeste moved back to Rantoul, the home she knew the most. Celeste was single for many years and she was a happy single individual with no plans or intentions to marry. A work colleague attended church with Joe and she arranged to introduce Celeste and Joe. As they spent time together they learned they were pictured in the same school yearbook, but had attended different Rantoul elementary schools. They discovered they had both attended his cousin's wedding 25 years previous. They were both in wedding reception pictures and because they didn't know each other at the time they don't remember each other from the wedding. Celeste was approached by a Rantoul realtor to buy the house she had lived in with her family as a child. She decided not to buy the house. As time went on, Celeste and Joe realized God had other plans for their lives. God knew they were both raised in families as the only child. Celeste believes in her heart that He brought them together to support one another in their physical and spiritual lives. The Lord has drawn them closer to Him and to each other throughout their marriage. Their gifts and talents have complimented one another and improved their quality of life. Celeste stands in awe that after traveling the world she came back home to marry a Rantoul native, someone she crossed paths with, but never really knew he existed. Oh, and the house... she moved into Joe's house and didn't need one of her own, after all. "I am thankful that Jesus brought us together. His ways are higher than our ways."

A servant of Meadowbrook.....

When Celeste first began attending Meadowbrook she recalls the sanctuary was in what is now the Student Center. She attended Sunday School in the classrooms above the kitchen area. The new additions were not built. Later, after the student classroom addition had been built and was being redecorated, Celeste and her husband, Joe, helped to tear out the old carpet. In 2007-08 during construction of the present sanctuary, members and attendees had an opportunity to view, pray, and autograph the floor before the carpet was laid. Celeste wrote her favorite Scripture passage (Ps 125:1-2) in magic marker on the bare floor as part of the sanctuary celebration festivities. Celeste enjoys the Parade of Flags event at the start of Missions Week each year in the sanctuary.

Through the years at Meadowbrook, Celeste has served in the nursery (in the 1990's), attended the Champions, and also has been a member of a home group at Curtis Orchard. She has participated in women's retreats and recalls two memorable retreats- one at a lodge of Eagle Creek Resort which has since closed. The second retreat memory was at a church camp near Decatur. The campground was hit by lightning and twenty-five women had limited power and water for the entire weekend.