

Greetings,

I'm Erik Ullestad, and from June 2003 to September 2015 I served as this congregation's Family Life & Youth Director. We first visited WHLC on our way from the Quad Cities, where Allison and I were living, to her hometown of Audubon on December 8, 2002. I had learned of a job opening in this congregation through my father, who was serving on the Augsburg Fortress board of directors with Pastor Richard Rehfeldt. Allison, pregnant with Anna at the time, and I slid in the back of the sanctuary to experience a "normal" Sunday service to see if this place was worth our consideration. During the sharing of the peace, a young man and his wife greeted us and asked, "Are you Erik?" These people were Dave and Kendra Basler, who were serving as interim youth ministers and chairing the hiring team. It seems that Pastor Rehfeldt had alerted them that we might be passing through at some point. We were no longer incognito. Six months later, we moved to Des Moines and have been pleased to call this city our home ever since.

Many things changed during my 12+ years on staff. Baptisms, confirmations, and graduations. Weddings and funerals. Facility renovation and expansion. I had the privilege of working with 5 called pastors and 3 interim pastors. Mission Trips to Jackson, MS and Mexico City gave way to ELCA Youth Gatherings and Pine Ridge trips. Five years of sporadic confirmation instruction morphed into 2.5 years of weekly instruction, which, for a while, was called Akaloo Wednesday, and eventually Wednesday Night at Church. Some programs were added. Others were removed. And even more has changed in the 4 years since we left this place. I thank God often that the Spirit continues to move through WHLC, propelling you to consider creative ways to use your resources of facility, money, and people. You're blessed with a tremendous staff, and I pray that you continue to love and support them the same way you loved and supported us.

This congregation will always be special to me and to our family. Our sons were baptized here. The likenesses of our children still hang on the wall outside the nursery. (And if you ever decide to decorate that space differently, we won't be offended.) Even the house we live in today has WHLC connections, as it was previously inhabited by the Basler and Boyken families. We will always be grateful for our time at Windsor Heights Lutheran. And though we have made meaningful connections and are enjoying life with our brothers and sisters at Capitol Hill Lutheran in the East Village, there is part of us which will always consider WHLC to be home.

And, to that point, I'll invite Allison to give you her update and fill you in on what's new with our family.

Greetings to you all! It feels great to be back with you on a Saturday evening. First of all, I second the sentiments Erik just stated. Because of WHLC, we have made life-long friendships, treasure many fond memories, and pray often for this community of faith. During our years of membership here, your support and guidance was so greatly appreciated as Erik and I grew our family and matured in our vocations.

As you can imagine, our family quite literally continues to grow. I now have the smallest feet in the whole family and have a feeling that I will soon be the shortest member of the family as well!!

Anna is now 16 and will begin her junior year at Valley High School in the fall. She just completed Driver's Education and will be getting her license in a few short weeks. She is very involved in Valley's Vocal Music Department where she is or has been a member of Concert Choir, Select Treble Choir, Acapella Choir, and both the JV and Varsity Show Choirs. We are excited to start visiting colleges with her this school year. She is interested in exploring career options in either nursing or teaching. Anna was confirmed in 2017 at Capitol Hill Lutheran and remains heavily involved in the youth program and nursery activities there. It's really hard to believe that we have only two more summers with her at home before she heads off to pursue her dreams.

Isaac is now 14 and will begin his freshman year at Valley Southwoods Freshman High School in the fall. He still plays basketball and hopes to make a top team this school year. Isaac ran cross country last year and very much enjoyed the comradery the sport provided. He still plays the trombone in the school band but after being in show choir last year has decided that his vocal talent is best suited for Southwoods Singers. Isaac works seasonally for the WDM Parks and Recreation Department as an adult sports scorekeeper. Isaac was confirmed this spring at Capitol Hill Lutheran where he is still a part of a group of several youth who are active in programs and activities. When he has some down time, he enjoys lifting weights at Valley and doing tricks on his skateboard in the driveway.

Evan is now 12 and will begin his 7th grade year at Indian Hills Junior High in the fall. Evan also continues to play basketball and will join the Indian Hills Junior High cross country team next month. He plays the trumpet in the school band and sings in the concert choir. Evan's smile is now full of braces, which he hopes to have removed in the next year. Evan will start his second of three years of confirmation at Capitol Hill Lutheran this fall. He spends his down time playing video games with his friends and can always be relied upon to jump in and lend a hand around the house or church when needed.

I continue my work with the City of West Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department. Just last month, after 12 years as a Recreation Coordinator of youth and family programs, I was promoted to the Arts, Culture, and Enrichment Supervisor position. I am tasked with managing the City's public arts program, marketing and promotions efforts and grant-writing, and will be responsible for the oversight of the future amphitheater that will soon be built on the West Des Moines City/School Campus. I still love dabbling in the hobbies of painting, woodworking, sewing, and any other interesting artistic venture that I come across. I teach piano to three neighborhood children and enjoy attending Anna, Isaac, and Evan's concerts and games. And in case you remember and are wondering, our dogs, Gus and Ruby, are doing well and keep us company on those days where we need extra hugs.

We thank you for inviting us back for this special occasion. We wish you all the best in the years to come, and may God be with you until we meet again.