

## **Laurie Little Presented with the Prestigious Denman Award**

The Harry Denman Award program honors a person within The United Methodist Church of Western North Carolina whose exceptional ministry of evangelism – expressed in Word (what), Sign (why), and Deed (how) – brings people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. What distinguishes a Harry Denman Award recipient is the commitment to consistently introduce others to the Good News of Jesus Christ in all ministry settings. Their ministry is exceptional for the number of new Christ Followers who credit encounters with this person as critical in helping to start or reignite their faith journey.

Our very own Laurie Little is the 2019 recipient of the prestigious Harry Denman Award for Laity. It was given at the Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church at beautiful Lake Junaluska. Laurie is one of the brightest lights on this planet. From her early days as a child involved in Abernathy United Methodist Church in Asheville to United Methodist churches in Ohio, Maryland -- and now for well over 30 years in Matthews, NC -- she has been sharing her faith every step of the way. She loves God and loves like God.

In 1985, Laurie and her husband, Tommy, moved to Matthews, and they quickly became involved in Matthews United Methodist Church. Laurie began volunteering in the Youth Ministry, and it soon became apparent to all that she should be leading that ministry. Thus, began 27 years of leading an amazing ministry serving students in southeast Mecklenburg County. It all began with a handful of teenagers gathered in a dilapidated Scout hut on the back corner of the old church property on John Street. When Laurie concluded her church ministry 27 years later, she was leading 5 full-time staff members, 75 volunteers with more than 300 youth gathering every Sunday night.

One of the things I'm personally astounded by is the sustainability of what she established in the Youth Ministry of our church. She, along with dozens of volunteers, built with such depth and infrastructure through the years that Matthews United Methodist has not missed a beat since her departure. Our Youth Ministry has continued to soar.

Laurie Little knows how to extend evangelistic hospitality better than anyone I know. She builds community that creates strong bonds. She brings people together. If you can imagine this, through the years Laurie and Tommy have hosted nearly 1500 meals in their home involving over 25,000 people. And that, friends, would be a conservative estimate. Laurie told me one time, **"We have always truly loved and felt called to invite folks to gather around the table to share life and to make them feel at home and loved like family. These times with folks have been a huge blessing in our lives."**

I'm thinking of the hundreds of young people who have made decisions to walk in the Way of Jesus due to her efforts. I'm thinking of the nearly 50 persons who have felt that nudge upon their heart to enter the vocational service of ministry because of her efforts, many of them as United Methodist clergy. I'm thinking of the numerous persons who have made decisions to live and work among the poor because of her efforts. I'm thinking of the dozens and dozens of adults she equipped to share gospel good news with teenagers and young adults. I'm thinking of the hundreds of young people and adults that traveled with her in mission service around the United States who were allowed to bring only a change of underwear and a toothbrush. I'm thinking of poor mountain communities, inner city young people and backwoods rural stations that were touched by the loving service of these young people and adults. I'm

thinking of the hundreds of persons who have traveled with Laurie to Haiti to serve among the poor and those with special needs.

But I'm also thinking about her next steps in ministry after her 27 years of service with Matthews United Methodist. These days she leads a ministry headquartered right here in Matthews called Rainbow Express Ministries (REM). REM is a community offering children and young adults -- with and without disabilities -- opportunities to share their gifts, to build friendships and to serve others, rooted in the abounding love of God. The purpose of Rainbow is to equip and nurture a church/community so that it reflects the involvement, gifts and value of young adults with and without disabilities, by providing opportunities for belonging and education. You can learn more about REM by clicking [here](#).

When people experience Laurie Little, they experience the love of God in Jesus Christ. When you are with her you are loved without caution, without regret or without boundary. She loves with the wild, passionate, relentless, stubborn, pursuing love of God in Jesus. When you are with Laurie you want to be more like Jesus because you know how deeply you are loved.

I have no doubt that southeast Mecklenburg County (Matthews) would look a lot different if it were not for her loving, visionary, caring, challenging, Jesus-touch upon so many.

Join me in celebrating Laurie Little and her receiving this prestigious award.

Keep Love Alive,

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