

DON & DEANNA NOLDER

Attended since 1992

Don Nolder

Birth Date:

January 2, 1944

Place of Birth:

Altoona, PA

Deanna Nolder

Birth Date:

December 24, 1944

Place of Birth:

Philadelphia, PA

Did You Know?

Lycoming College allowed Pastor Don to pay his tuition bill gradually throughout the year, with his \$100/month salary as a student pastor for a 5th church parish in Wellsboro, PA. During his senior year, the president of the college informed him that they were forgiving all but \$1000 of his remaining debt.

Favorite Hymns

Be Still My Soul

This Is My Song



Having known Pastor Don and Deanna for nearly all of my life, I have seen a consistent theme woven throughout their lives. The information I gleaned about their earlier history from this interview, only confirmed what I already knew. They have consistently loved people and embraced the 'other,' even when it brought them difficulty or earned them criticism. The result of this ministry of presence, as Pastor Don calls it, is a trail of lasting relationships that spreads far beyond the churches that they served in Montgomery, State College, York, and Chambersburg.

Deanna's words of wisdom are an encouragement to embrace people from different backgrounds. She says, "The more experiences you can have with other people and cultures, the richer your own life will be." But she goes on to warn, "Sometimes that involves hard things." And she would know. From her job as a girl's counselor in a detention home while Pastor Don was attending seminary, through her experience of providing infant foster care, and later the adoption of their children, Rob and Martha, Deanna knows that love can sometimes be messy. But she also believes that the difficult things we go through in our lives make us more approachable to others when they are struggling.

Pastor Don agrees. Of all the many ways that he has ministered to people throughout his lifetime, he feels that the most purposeful thing he ever did was the High School boys Bible study, which met at the parsonage once a week after school. Many of the relationships that were built here have stood the test of time, with some of the guys still periodically meeting with him to talk or have a meal. Pastor Don says that the boys always seemed very comfortable with him and would talk about anything. And he attributes that, at least in part, to the fact that he experienced great tragedy as a teenager. His mother passed away when

he was only 13. That Sunday morning, Pastor Don went to wake his mother for church, thinking she had overslept, but he found that she had died in her sleep.

Pastor Don says that things had always been difficult for his family. His dad's job with the railroad barely provided food for the nine of them. His mother was the glue that had held everything together. After her passing, Pastor Don remembers being on the receiving end of Christian mercy. He says the church became their family, rallying behind them to bring meals and care for their other needs.

Although Pastor Don was accepted into Lycoming College after high school graduation, he ended up needing to work at the Mallow Cup factory for a year in order to earn enough money for tuition. Fortunately, this put him into the same class as Deanna, who should have been a year behind him. They soon were spending a lot of time together in the college's traveling choir, which rehearsed four days per week throughout the school year and traveled to perform on spring break.

Pastor Don recalls it being a bit of culture shock when he first started dating Deanna, who came from a more well-to-do family and lived in the city. Her family had the expendable income available to eat out occasionally, a luxury Pastor Don had never known. Their first date, which may or may not have been surreptitiously arranged by Deanna (There is some debate between them as to whether or not she purposely arranged to have all of their friends leave early), was a walk into town for 25 cents worth of ice cream. Pastor Don said it's the most money he spent that entire semester.

Pastor Don and Deanna were married the week after their college graduation, and have been a team ever since. Although Deanna had herself earned a dual major in Sociology and Religion, she made the decision to forego paid employment for most of her life, choosing instead to keep the home running smoothly, while supporting Don's ministry behind-the-scenes. Having placed such a high value on teamwork herself, it is no wonder that some of Deanna's favorite church memories involve things like the Mission Fair, when different groups within the church all came together for a common goal.

Deanna recalls a specific moment of kindness in her life, when a young adult from their church in York offered to pay her way on a missions trip to Sierra Leone, explaining that he saw it as a long-term investment. Deanna would be exposed to different cultures and see the needs of the world more clearly, and he believed she would bring her experiences back to share with others. This and other missions trips, along with her educational background and volunteer experience made Deanna feel well-suited for her later position here at FUMC, as the Mission Coordinator.

Early on in Pastor Don's career, he had the opportunity to travel to India with an exchange program for young professionals sponsored by the Rotary Club. He also participated in a peace initiative known as the Sister City Program, which sent him for two extended stays in the Soviet Union. While in these foreign countries, Pastor Don would simply strike up conversations with people in restaurants, on trains, or in other public venues. Many of these people would end up inviting him home for a meal or to meet their families. On his return trip to the Soviet Union, Pastor Don made it a point to go back and visit with these same people, continuing the relationship. One of the young men later reciprocated, visiting the Nolders while he was on a trip to the U.S.

These international experiences naturally led to Pastor Don's position as president of Penn State's Hospitality Council, which welcomed international students into the school and matched them with 'friendship families' in the community. The Nolder family, of course, befriended several of these students, including one young man from China, who their son Rob latched onto.

Taking into account other mission trips to Brazil, Mexico, and Honduras, the Nolder's ministry reach extends throughout five continents, far beyond the four Pennsylvania towns in which they served churches.

When asked what they would tell younger versions of themselves, Pastor Don's answer was a simple, "Relax." Deanna said, "Try to see the difference between what is important and what seems to be urgent." Seeing the vast network of relationships that they have formed over the years, it seems to me that the Nolders have so often done just that—living for the greatest of all things—Love.