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The Goodrich Way: Serving with Open Hearts

By Laura I. Winn

Photography by Isabel Ollinger and courtesy of the Goodrich family

WHEN THE WORLD shut down in 2020, and churches transitioned to virtual services to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Dennis and Vicki Goodrich, a husband and wife in their 70s, took to the streets to share their faith and food with the large homeless population in Sacra-

mento. Even though the work of standing in the cold rain to dish up hot, homemade soup and freshly brewed coffee was physically demanding, especially for Vicki, who eventually needed a total hip replacement, it was a labor of love for three years. Their dedication to serve no

matter the conditions was also a way to live out loud what the couple who met at church in 1969 believe: "To love others as ourselves."

Opening their hearts and their home to others is what Dennis, 79, and Vicki, 77, have done throughout their 54-year

marriage. Their love story began when Dennis was a young man stationed at McClellan Air Force Base. He met his "sweetheart" Vicki at her church in Sacramento, but he had no plans to marry at the time. That all changed, he said, when a long period apart made him realize, "I want to be with my best friend."

"Oh, he was tired of taking care of himself," Vicki joked in reply.

The two married and lived in San Diego and Louisiana before returning to Sacramento and eventually settling in Fair Oaks in 1984. In addition to raising their three daughters, Shannon, Carly and Bethany, they have welcomed five grandchildren and about five more "unofficially adopted" grandkids into their ivy-covered home in the San Juan Vista neighborhood.

Currently, the couple's 17-year-old grandson lives with them, and adult children and young grandchildren – whether biological or not – have stayed throughout the years. Even friends going through hard times have found a soft spot to land in the Goodrich home.

"If someone needs a place, we'll take care of them," Dennis said.

"I had three months of an empty nest," Vicki said of the brief time after her daughters graduated from Del Campo High School. Then one returned for college, and eventually the next generation had filled up her home, including the room she had dedicated to her stuffed bear collection.

Recalling the memory of rising extra early to make coffee, start laundry, plan dinner, and then get three grandsons ready and dropped off at different schools on her way to work downtown at the California State Employees Association, Vicki said she doesn't know how she did it all. "But my grandkids kept me out of trouble," she added.

Dennis and Vicki have a special spot in their hearts for helping children. When their girls were students at Albert Schweitzer Elementary School, Dennis volunteered weekly as a reading resource tutor. After McClellan closed in 2000, forcing an early retirement from his civilian work, Dennis took a job

“Our lifestyle is changing. It’s not the same, but it’s still good.

as a bus driver with the San Juan School District.

Now both retired, the couple enjoys treating their friends and family to relaxing vacations at their “home away from home” timeshares in Lake Tahoe, Avila Beach and Kauai. In their younger years, the Goodrich family did without such “creature comforts,” opting for budget-friendly camping trips and scenic hikes through favorite spots in Yosemite, Donner Pass and Snowflower. As a member of Century Ride, Dennis cycled 100-mile adventures across different states with his work buddies. Vicki rode along on a memorable trip through the lush landscape of Oregon.

“We don’t have any boring time in our lives,” Dennis said. “I haven’t been bored since junior high!”

Staying busy, the couple frequently hosts family and friends for pool parties, game nights and

good food. Vicki loves to cook, drawing inspiration from her favorite YouTube chefs. When her mobility was especially limited after her hip replacement, Vicki said she could at least still move about the kitchen, experimenting with new twists on favorite meals to send home with her grandkids. During the holidays, she gathers with girlfriends to decorate cookies as part of an additional homeless outreach program.

Recently, the couple has taken on a new ministry. Every week, they visit an acute rehabilitation and skilled nursing center in the Arden area and video-stream a service from Saddleback, a Southern California church with a large online following. Seeing the joy their visits bring to the shut-in residents, they hope to volunteer at an additional facility. “One is good, but we’ve got plenty of time and energy for more,” Vicki said.



Dennis and Vicki with their daughters and many grandchildren

Despite their positive attitudes, in the last several years, Dennis and Vicki have slowed down a little and faced some sorrowful circumstances. They lost their eldest daughter, Shannon, to COVID, and they have not returned to in-person church, choosing instead to bring satellite services to those they serve.

“Our lifestyle is changing,” Dennis summarized. “It’s not the same, but it’s still good.”

Always seeking to build connections, the couple has welcomed other virtual churchgoers into their home for fellowship and community.

“We love all our neighbors and are here to help however we can,” Vicki said. ■

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