

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

"How's Charlie?" This has been Gary Malm's question many Wednesday nights since Charlie and Helen Murphy moved from Grand Forks to the Twin Cities in July 2017 to be closer to their grandchildren. My friend, Gary, is one of several special adults who attend worship on Wednesday night at ULC. If you have never met him, you really should make the effort. He is a delightful man who loves coming to church. Charlie, on the other hand, needs no introduction to the people of University Lutheran. He was our fearless leader both Wednesdays and Sundays as head usher for many wonderful years.

At ULC, Charlie was a pied piper for children. He was drawn to them, and they to him. Even though we all have missed Charlie's leadership on Sundays and Wednesdays since the Murphy's moved, it is in fact the children who have grieved him most. He paid special attention to them, making each of our children feel special because he talked with them, he included them, and he always remembered their names. This is not to say Charlie did not do the same for adults. I will admit, even for me, his pastor, Charlie just had a way, simply by being Charlie, of making people, making me, feel special.

Charlie made Gary Malm feel special too. Gary is one of many adults with disabilities who have attended worship at ULC on Wednesday evenings. Charlie had special ways of connecting with these folks as well. I would even say Charlie still has a sort of celebrity status with them. That is where Gary's question is born. On the rare occasions when Charlie was absent on a Wednesday night, Gary would always (and I can't emphasize always enough) ask, "Where's Charlie?" So, I would tell him where Charlie was, and more importantly, I would reassure him Charlie would be back the next Wednesday.

Well, after Charlie and Helen moved, and Gary grasped that Charlie was not coming back in the same capacity, his question morphed from "Where's Charlie?" to "How's Charlie?" To the casual observer, Gary's question might have seemed more like a liturgical response than real concern for Charlie, but they could not be more wrong. Gary loves Charlie because Charlie loved him for all those years. In fact, that is why we all love Charlie, because he loved us all those years. I often felt kind of sorry for Helen just because she so graciously had to share Charlie and his love with us and countless other people.

So, what about Gary's question, "How's Charlie?" Well, right now, he's not so great. Charlie is on a ventilator in an ICU in the Twin Cities. Last Friday, something went wrong, and he stopped breathing. It took CPR to bring him back, but we are still unsure of the outcome. I am writing on Monday, April 20, and tomorrow, Tuesday, may indeed tell if this medical emergency was too much for our dear friend. So many people are praying for Charlie right now that I have no doubt God is paying attention, but I also know God sees many things that we who are praying cannot see or understand.

Without knowing the outcome of all this for Charlie, Helen, their children, and grandchildren, I have a suggestion. I challenge you privileged enough to have received Charlie's care and love in the past, to pay it forward. I challenge you to call, send a card, a text, an email, to some other person, who might amidst the fears and isolation of this pandemic, need to know they are special to you. Charlie has made so many of us feel special, so let's together use the week ahead, no matter how things turn out for Charlie, to let other people know how very special they are to us, and that we love them.

Here are some suggestions: Call, send a card, a text, or an email to family and friends to let them know you love them. Call your neighbor next door or across the street to see if they are doing okay. Reach out to someone you have not spoken to for a while and perhaps rekindle a friendship. Take out your ULC directory and call or send a card to someone who sits near you at worship, or who you enjoy having coffee with at fellowship, or who you simply miss seeing. And, when people thank you for reaching out, tell them you were inspired by a good man and faithful Christian named Charlie Murphy.

I am also asking you to pray for Charlie, Helen, and their family. I am praying for Charlie's doctors to help him heal. I am praying for Charlie to wake up and rejoin Helen. I am praying for Charlie to be aware of

God's presence and love even while he's asleep. I am praying for Helen and the rest of their family to have the peace of God in their hearts right now, and also to be aware of the presence and love of God in their lives. Please join me in such prayers, and of course, you may have a few petitions of your own.

As always, you are in my prayers!  
Pastor Tom