Good morning!

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation for all of the efforts by so many people to create and maintain our connectedness through the livestream worship services at Nutana Park Mennonite Church. Stan and I are always so pleased that we can join you virtually each Sunday morning to participate in meaningful services from our kitchen table.

My contribution today is on the theme of individuals we have considered mentors.

Mentorship is all around us, and we are constantly learning from important people who step in and out of our lives. Many times, our mentors are likely unaware of the influence and impact they have had on us.

My Aunt Martha Nickel (Trish St. Onge’s mother) was one of those first important mentors during my teenage years and beyond. She always seemed to have had the time to sit at her table and actively listen to me. No problem or question seemed too trivial to take the time to talk about.

What I appreciated was her sensitivity to the needs of anyone who approached her and the way that she always treated others with dignity. She created a welcoming, non-judgemental space for the teenage version of me to explore issues including those of faith and justice.

As many of you know, Martha Nickel was the director of the Self-Help Craft store in Saskatoon, the precursor for Ten Thousand Villages. I have clear memories of walking into the corrugated metal building where she was the sole staff member and marveling at all of the wonderful items on display that came from so many areas around the world. Aunt Martha was always so excited to tell the MCC story whenever she could. She tirelessly packed up the crafts with Uncle Menno’s help. They set them up so many times during her trips to churches, mission conferences, and to schools to teach about various cultures and our responsibility to help others. She made me realize that having a real passion for your work is a *key to feeling like you are in the right place to be used by God.*

Uncle Menno also spread the story of our inter-connectedness globally by making presentations to so many students as he brought the ‘self-help’ crafts to various schools in Saskatchewan and shared his gift of story-telling to broaden understanding of diverse cultures in our world.

Aunt Martha demonstrated courage in so many ways. I admired her for that. She was willing to stand up for her faith and took risks to do that even at a time when women were not always encouraged to take on public speaking roles in the church.

When she traveled to India to attend a women’s conference, she had the privilege of meeting Mother Teresa face to face in one of the homes for the destitute and dying. This encounter with one of her mentors impacted her in a profound way and encouraged her on her own life’s journey.

I know that she would be so very proud of her amazing daughter, Trish, and the way that she continues to provide positive leadership and guidance for so many people in her own sphere of influence.

Other mentors for me have been people like Jake Ens, who would take the time to seek out and talk with young people in the foyer following a Sunday morning service in church. He cared about teenagers, and this translated to actions that validated their existence and importance for him. In his quiet and unassuming way, I have observed Jake supporting many others through playing his guitar to engage a group of teenagers in a choir he let during the 1970s and leading countless Sunday School worship times always with Barb at his side. Later, as a teacher, I learned from him in his professional capacity; as a Superintendent of Schools, Jake led workshops on positive staff development that engaged others and built relationships.

Thank you, Jake, for your involvement in the lives of others!

My number one mentor was undoubtably my dad. Service to others came naturally to him, and he felt it was important to volunteer his time by giving back to the community he cared about. This included serving Meals on Wheels, turkey dinners to kids in community schools, as well as being willing to take on Chairperson responsibilities for various boards.

One of the pieces of advice that I received from my Dad during my growing up years was to ‘change your corner of the world.’ This he did without seeking any recognition but with a humble heart and a generous spirit. I can remember returning home after a particularly unsettling but inspiring university class during my first year at the U of S. We had viewed a film about famine in Africa. I was all fired up about booking a plane ticket to help with the devastating effects of starvation. Dad patiently listened to my rant about how *we* need to *do something* about this situation and agreed with me. Then he suggested that I start with small acts right here in Saskatoon to help out every day. I can still remember exactly where I was standing in our basement when I experienced a defining moment and realized that *I* needed to take some personal responsibility and make the needs of others a focus in my own immediate part of the planet. I have often referred back to that moment in time and have used it as a motivation to propel me forward by just doing one thing to support someone I encounter in my day.

When I think about his granddaughter, Sara, volunteering to look after babies and toddlers in an orphanage in what is now our global village of Nairobi, I know that he would be so very proud of her choices to reach out to others. This was a dream that has come full circle that has always remained in her mother’s heart.

Dad’s optimism and enthusiasm for life was so evident in the way he chose to live. He always had a positive outlook and was quick to give compliments to others but dismissed any attention that focused on him. He had a very significant influence on my life and was a wonderful encourager! He gave me the treasured gift of love in action. My Dad had one line that he always included when he asked the blessing for the meal and that was, “Thank you, God, that we love each other.”

He decidedly embraced each joyful moment as it was presented to him and he modeled how to be grateful. There are so many lessons that I have learned from him!

In the introduction to first and second Timothy and Titus, Eugene Peterson, in The Message says that the best leadership in spiritual communities formed in the name of Jesus, the Messiah, is inconspicuous, not calling attention to itself but not sacrificing anything in the way of conviction and firmness either. In his letters to Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete, we see Paul encouraging and guiding the development of just such leadership. Paul says, “Stay at your post. Teach with your life: by word, by demeanor, by love, by faith, by integrity.”

In my current role as the co-ordinator for tutors who are retired teachers in Saskatoon Public Schools, there are many opportunities to connect with others on a personal and professional basis and walk with them through challenges that they encounter. Mindful mentoring has taken on a new meaning for me, and I hope that I am sharing encouragement, patient listening, and kindness through my responses and daily interactions. The support and practice with reading strategies that we offer to the students we work with and the safe place that we provide for them to make mistakes as well as to celebrate their success is a privilege and a gift!

Those we choose as mentors, whether we do this consciously or unconsciously, are ultimately people who take the risk to stand up for what they believe. Their faith speaks volumes in their actions!

They model strong values to others and we seek to be like them in our own unique way.

Our connections and relationships in life strengthen our own walk with God.