

Retired pastor filling interim spot at church

Written by Deb Egenberger

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Tom Wilson has never been one to stay in one place too long.

Twenty years in the Marine Corps will do that to a person, he says.

So will the ever-changing life of a pastor.

“I enjoy learning new things, gaining new understanding,” said Wilson, who took over as interim pastor at Gothenburg’s American Lutheran Church last fall. “You can get stuck in a rut so easily. I want to keep my faith fresh.”

Wilson came from a large family, growing up in the suburbs of Philadelphia. At 17, he enlisted in the Marines.

After 20 years of military service, Wilson entered college in 1992 and graduated from Temple University in 1995.

He earned his degree from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia in 1999 and began ministry in Clovis, NM in 1999.

Five years later, Wilson found himself leading Campus Ministries at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

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“When I was in the Marine Corps, I always worked with young adults,” he said. “Those people were all 20-something so it was a familiar age.”

Wilson embraced the challenge of college ministry and stayed until June 2012, when he retired from full-time service.

He agreed to fill in at the American Lutheran Church in Gothenburg on an open-ended interim basis because he knew it would be a good fit.

While at UNK, Wilson hosted evening worship services, noting that students were rarely inclined to get up early for church.

That allowed him to fill in during morning services for nearby congregations. One of those extra duties happened to be in Gothenburg.

For a couple of months before Matt Groenke was hired here, Wilson ministered at the church. That little bit of history, he said, made the decision easier.

“I’m not going to make any major changes,” he said. “We’re just tweaking a few things. When the new permanent pastor comes, there will be plenty of new things for people to deal with.”

Being single all of his life has allowed Wilson to accept challenges and pursue opportunities he may not have otherwise been able to do.

His military background also gives him a different perspective on faith, church and life, he said.

“I don’t consider myself a great theologian,” he said, “but I think I’m a pretty good pastor.”

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