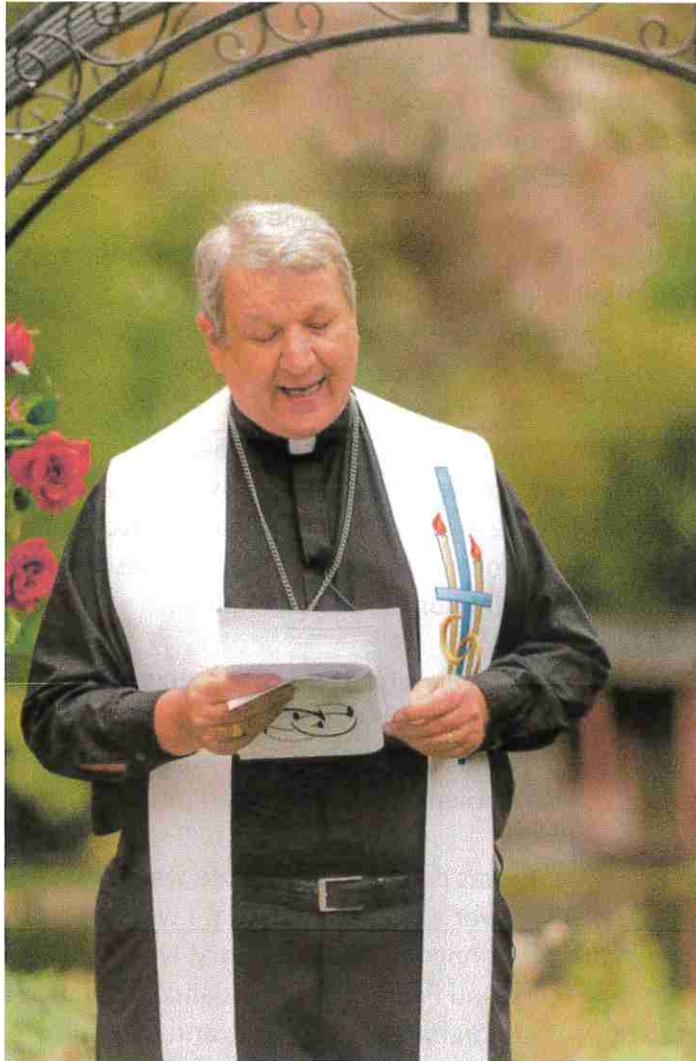


About Rick Ehrheart



Pastor Rick Ehrheart

My Faith Story

It has been a long and winding road in becoming the Utah Wine Pastor. Although I was baptized as an infant, I did not grow up in the faith. It's not as if my family was against God – we were not. It's just that we always seemed to be busy at something else. Both my parents worked full-time jobs and between that, school, and sports, we just never got around to church. I have no childhood memories of ever being in a church – not even for Christmas or Easter.

That all changed when at age 19, I met my wife to be, Bonnie. It was literally love at first sight for me. On the first day of American Literature class at Goldenwest College, I walked into the classroom and saw this beautiful girl surrounded by guys trying to chat her up. I figured I better get in there too. But, before I had even said one word to her, I heard myself saying, I have to marry this girl. At the time, this thought seemed to come out of nowhere. Now, I have a pretty good idea that it was God throwing me a lifeline.

It turned out that Bonnie was a life-long Christian. Her faith was very important to her. And over time, as we got to know each other, I figured if faith was that important to her, I had better show some interest. After all, I figured, "How bad could it be?" Long story short is that it wasn't bad at all – at first. I was confirmed as an adult in the Episcopal church. We were married in the church, had our son baptized in the church, and I began serving on their leadership team.

But it soon became obvious that I was too spiritually immature to take on leadership responsibilities. I stressed out, burned out, and got deeply resentful. I quit my position on the church council – actually, I just quit showing up. I went into a deep spiritual draught that lasted twelve years during which I never stepped inside a church. Of course, Bonnie remained faithful. I'm convinced that she prayed me into the Kingdom.

Finally, and as it turned out, ironically, the Spirit drew me back to faith shortly after we moved to Marin County, California. At that time, Marin was the "least churched" county in the United States. Even back in the eighties, it was politically incorrect to talk about faith there. But Bonnie was looking for a new church home and discovered Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in our neighborhood of San Rafael.

She had gone there a few times and finally suggested to me that she thought I might like it. So I went – another lifeline. There I met Pastor Fred Jagow – another lifeline – I immediately felt comfortable around him. Pastor Fred was and continues to be one of the sweetest, wisest souls I've ever known. We've remained more than good friends for almost 40 years.

Pastor Fred must have sensed that I was damaged goods. He was careful not to get me too involved in things too soon. For over a year, the job that I was spiritually equipped to do was to iron and hang decorative banners in the sanctuary. No pressure. But slowly thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit and Pastor Fred's guidance, my faith started to grow. Bonnie and I were at Resurrection for over 13 years, and by the time we left there in 2000, I had held every lay office in the congregation, including president of the church council.

Just before we moved to California in the eighties and while I was still deep in my spiritual draught, I had a God experience that started my return to faith. For over thirty years, I suffered from a truly debilitating, morbid fear of flying. I don't mean that I was just a "white knuckle" flyer. I mean that when I knew that I had to fly I was a wreck – unable to sleep two or three nights before the flight. On the plane, I was unable to think coherently. I heard every little noise and felt every little bump and was sure that each one was a prelude to a fiery crash.

Unfortunately, my career in the insurance industry demanded that I fly from time to time. And when I did, I was a mess. I remember one flight I had to take from southern California to Portland Oregon, to attend a class. I was such a basket case after that flight that I couldn't bear the thought of flying home after the week-long class. So without

telling my boss, and out of my own pocket, I bought a train ticket to get home. Seventeen hours on a train was better than one and half hours on a plane.

That all changed in 1987. While managing my company's smallest office in Salt Lake City (where I learned to love Utah), I got word that I would have to attend a meeting in Orlando, Florida. I knew I'd have to fly and I immediately started stressing out. To make matters worse, this was billed as a "family" meeting where spouses and kids were invited to tag along and have fun while the other spouse attended meetings. So now, Bonnie and a ten-year-old Matt were planning on going and it just added to my stress level.

We all drove to the airport that fateful day and before going all the way out to long-term parking I dropped Bonnie and Matt off at the curb at the terminal. I went to park the car and came dangerously close to just driving home – the thought of flying all the way to Florida was killing me. But finally, I parked the car and started walking toward the terminal. And although I hadn't been in a church for over 12 years, I started to pray.

I remember praying, "Please God, give me strength for this flight. Each step I take, make me stronger and stronger." The miracle was that with each step I took, the fear inside me became less and less. When I finally got to the terminal, I was completely at ease. And Bonnie noticed immediately. She asked if I was OK, and I surprised us both by saying I was fine... and I was.

If that had been the end of the story, that would have been enough. But the miracle continued. We had to change planes in Dallas which normally would have been traumatic for me, but I was perfectly fine. While in line waiting to change planes, I noticed the president of my division also in the same line. He was going to the same meeting.

We chatted briefly and he asked me to come up to see him in first class, once we were in the air, because he wanted to talk to me about something. If I had been my normal, incoherent, fear of flying self, that meeting would have been a disaster. But I must have said something right because in less than a month, I had an offer to manage my department's biggest office in San Francisco. This is how I came to end up in San Rafael and Resurrection Lutheran.

The rest, as they say, is history. I held management positions for the next 13 years in the Bay area which is where I learned to love wine. During those years, my faith grew and grew and finally I felt called out of the insurance business and into ministry. We returned to Utah in the year 2000. I enrolled in seminary in 2005 and graduated with a Master of Divinity in 2009. Mountain of Faith Lutheran church called and ordained me as their full-time pastor the day after I graduated, and I served that congregation for 14 years before retiring in 2023. We still attend there, and I love them dearly. These days, I stay busy by doing weekly Bible studies including one at Harris Community Village, a homeless shelter and low-income housing facility I helped get

started. After preaching every week for 14 years at Mountain of Faith, I also have settled into a rhythm of preparing weekly sermons. After retiring, I found I missed preaching on a regular basis. Bonnie suggested the idea of a podcast to share both my messages and my wine knowledge with a wider audience. And that's where we find ourselves today. Check out both at utahwinepastor.com or wherever you get your podcasts.

~ Cheers and Amen.