

Lebanon clergy couple is two-for-one deal

- JANE STOLTZ Mid-Valley Media



The Revs. Wes and Carol Sedlacek, both Episcopal priests, met through the church and are celebrating their 25th anniversary this month.

- Mark Ylen, Mid-Valley Media Wes Sedlacek serves as the chaplain for Samaritan Albany General Hospital and the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific, Northwest.

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Some churches in Oregon occasionally get a two-for-one deal.

That's what the Revs. Wes and Carol Sedlacek of Lebanon have told Episcopal congregations when they come to fill in for the regular priest on the occasional Sunday morning. ay

The Sedlaceks moved to Lebanon in 2002. Both are Episcopal priests, though neither one's ministry is the typical giving-a-sermon-every-Sunday-morning gig, and how they found each other and found their vocations is its own story.

Wes Sedlacek is a chaplain at Samaritan Albany General Hospital and the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific, Northwest, in Lebanon. Carol Sedlacek is the canon for Christian and leadership formation for the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon.

Wes, originally from Milwaukie, is a fifth-generation Oregonian whose great-great-grandfather, Doc Hartley, came to Oregon by stowing away on a wagon train. Hartley obtained a donation land claim near Gresham, where there's a school named for him. His wife, who was born Carol Westerberg, is a third-generation Astoria native.

Wes holds a bachelor of arts degree in theater and history from University of Portland. "I was going to teach high school if the acting thing didn't work out ... and it didn't," he said. "I was in two professional shows before having to get a real job." He added that his theater background has helped him with preaching.

Carol earned a bachelor of science in speech communications from Oregon State University. She had originally planned to become a pharmacist like her father, but something told her to prepare for a different type of work ... one where she might sometimes speak to groups of people.

After college, Wes worked at remodeling, bartending and pizza delivery; he also did volunteer youth ministry in Episcopal churches.

Carol spent a year of service in Washington, D.C., as part of a program of Washington National Cathedral. She was a full-time volunteer program director in a low-income senior housing project. During that year, Carol discerned her call to the priesthood. She received a master of divinity degree from Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria.

Meanwhile, back in Oregon, Wes interviewed for a paid youth ministry position. Two Episcopal churches, St. Gabriel's in Portland and St. Bartholomew's in Beaverton, were looking to share a full-time youth minister. Because Wes was committed to managing a pizza restaurant, he decided he didn't want to work for two churches. He inquired as to the possibility of just working at St. Gabriel's, and was hired to do that.

At this same time, Carol had an interview at St. Bartholomew's for a half-time clergy position but didn't feel motivated to return to Oregon for less than a full-time job.

But since Wes had turned down the youth-worker gig at St. Bartholomew's, the staff there had an idea: Why not create a full-time assistant clergy position, and have that person focus mainly on youth ministry? And why not offer the job to Carol Westerberg? Carol accepted and happily returned to Oregon.

A few months later, Wes Sedlacek met Carol Westerberg when they were both appointed to the design team for a youth conference to be held at St. Bartholomew's. Since they had the same day off, they started getting together to play golf, telling each other it wasn't going to be a relationship, that they were just hanging out as friends.

When Carol was ordained to the priesthood in November 1994, Wes attended the first Eucharist where she presided. Afterward, they went to Dairy Queen and talked for four hours straight. As time went on, they realized they were flirting with each other and that they wanted to date.

The following Easter, they dyed eggs together. Wes wrote "Will you marry me?" in wax pencil on an egg and left it in the purple dye. Carol found it and said, "Is this for real?" Wes replied, "I think so." They were married at St. Bartholomew's on April 20, 1996 — 25 years ago this month.

The Sedlaceks spent time in Austin, Texas, where Wes attended Seminary of the Southwest. They moved to Lebanon in 2002, where Carol became the priest at St. Martin's Episcopal Church. Wes became assistant rector at the Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan in Corvallis. Eventually they moved on to their present positions.

"Wes and I each have our own ministries, and occasionally we get to serve together (at Sunday worship)," Carol said. "Those times are a real treat. Right now neither of us have our own congregations, so we get to do supply services (filling in for an absent priest) together. We've enjoyed going to places like Gold Beach or Sutherlin or Coquille to take services in the small towns together.

“For the first 10 years of our marriage, we both worked in different churches, so we rarely had the opportunity to worship together,” she continued. “So we treasure those times even now that we get to do that more often.

“Wes and I bring different gifts to the ministry. I like structure and planning and details. Wes loves all the possibilities and seeking out questions, rather than having all the answers. He’s the idea person, and I’m the one who can help transform those ideas into reality. We work really well together. And yes, there are some times of ruffling feathers, but we work through that and really treasure the gifts that we each bring.”

The Sedlacek File

Names: Wes and Carol Sedlacek

Ages: Wes, 49; Carol, 54

Residence: Lebanon

Relationship: Married 25 years on April 20

Occupations: Wes, chaplain of Samaritan Albany General Hospital and the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific, Northwest; Carol, canon for Christian and leadership formation for the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon

Hobbies: Wes, board games, photography, volleyball, softball, bicycling, trivia, listening to music, watching movies;

Carol, volleyball, watching movies, singing in and serving on the board and the communications committee of the Lebanon Community Chorus

Family: Wes, mother Jan Sedlacek of Toledo; Carol, parents Bob and Aletha Westerberg of Astoria, two brothers, nieces and nephews, plus three great-nephews

Quotable: Wes: “I meet people where they are, and I’m told I’m a good listener.”

Carol: “Making music is really important in my life. Performing is fun, it’s OK, but making music is my main goal.”