



*Living Stones provides about 350 meals to needy folks each month in the South Hills, thanks to an army of volunteers, many of them from this church. Lynn Bell, a leader of the ministry, reflects on her experiences as a "living stone."*

It was clearly time for Living Stones to expand. It was 2014, nearly two years after we had served our first meal, and God was calling us to add a second location. He had prepared the way, and things fell into place quickly. We soon had everything we needed ... except a refrigerator.

We needed one without a freezer, and research predicted it would be expensive and difficult to find. But it was necessary, so we stepped out in faith and, with very little time or money, headed off to shop. The first store manager told us they rarely received refrigerators without freezers, but one had been delivered the night before, and he would sell it to us at cost.

Thrilled and grateful, we charged it, still unsure how we would pay for it, but believing this was God's ministry and He would provide. Not one of us anticipated the speed with which He would provide! In the mail that very day was a donation to nearly cover the cost.

Surprised? We were, too, five years ago when that happened, but we wouldn't be today. We've learned a lot about God's provision since 2011, when some friends with servant hearts jumped in to help Julie Livingston answer God's call to "feed the hungry."

Living Stones is His ministry and we are His hands and feet, striving prayerfully to be obedient to His leading. To quote a missionary in China, whose name we don't know, but whose words we believe, "Depend on it: God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply." How true those words have proven to be, and what a life-lesson they've taught us. If Living Stones were to have a slogan, that would be it!

Long before we knew of that quotation, we wanted to do God's work, and we wanted to do it His way. He had a plan, and we were genuinely excited to be a part of it. As we prayed and sought to discern His will, He began unfolding that plan, guiding our every step, closing doors when we were on the wrong path, and supplying our every need when we were in sync with Him.

When our food supply runs low, God never fails to make more than enough available. One Thanksgiving when we were in particular need, He delighted us with an unforgettable reminder of His faithfulness. It was 10 at night, and we had been waiting more than an hour in the kitchen of a popular Pittsburgh restaurant to collect food left over from their holiday buffet.

Pan after pan came back empty, and it looked as though we would be leaving

empty handed. How quickly our despair turned to joy when the general manager strolled in and opened first one door, then a second, then a third, revealing enough turkey and sides to fill our freezers to overflowing!

Our awesome God also has a habit of bringing just the right people into our lives, just when we need them. There have been "chance" encounters with people we didn't know: the pastor with a heart for the needy, who invited us to begin our ministry at her church; the volunteer who came into our lives just long enough to help us through the 501(c)(3) certification process; and the woman who attended the wrong meeting, learned of our ministry, and asked her church to invite us to serve there.

Those closely involved with Living Stones are blessed beyond measure by the privilege of serving God and those for whom He asks us to care. We are profoundly aware of His unfailing provision for every aspect of His ministry. He has never failed to provide. May we never fail to obey.

*The Living Stones core team today: Paul and Lynn Bell, Bruce and Loretta Douglas, Sondra Furedy, Julie Livingston, Sue Miller, Tyke Och, Leslie Shuttleworth, Chuck Wolfe.*

# JOHN & TOM Brothers in Christ

BY TOM O'BOYLE



While Living Stones is best known for the delicious meals it serves, it has been the conduit for providing other essential services to folks in need.

One such instance is the special bond between John Dempster, on the left above, and Tom Cowden. The two men were brought together by Julie Livingston, the founder of Living Stones and a member of Beverly Heights.

John lives next door to Julie in Mt. Lebanon on Glen Ridge Lane. He jokes often about moving to escape her constant persistence. "I've been trying to get away but she keeps taking down the for-sale signs and telling people my house is haunted," he quips.

Julie connected John to Tom last September, when Tom needed help.

As the former chief executive officer of Jefferson Hospital, running an organization of 2,100 employees, John has special skills navigating complicated health situations and advocating for patient needs. Tom desperately needed a Sherpa to guide him through the Byzantine complexities of modern medicine and his health care. He has chronic health problems, including language disabilities due to a recent stroke.

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## I would do *anything* for John.

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Among his many maladies, which include three heart attacks, blood clots and kidney problems since he turned 60 five years ago, Tom has bladder cancer. Even though the tumors were successfully removed last year and Tom says he feels "fantastic," it's an aggressive type of cancer. He may be in the final years of life.

The life circumstances which brought them together have changed each person for the better. Seeing them together, and the rapport they share, you might mistake them for actual brothers. But it's a brotherhood born out of mutual love that few people unacquainted with Jesus would understand.

They are, in many respects, the oddest of couples. Tom lives in Hazelwood. When John isn't providing transportation, he takes the bus. An Air Force veteran, Tom worked as a prison guard and with Alzheimer's patients before taking disability. He never drank, smoked or did drugs, he says; his health just collapsed. He has no family and has been homeless. UPMC pays his medical bills through its financial assistance program.

Tom met Julie when he began attending the Living Stones dinners. He started volunteering when his bus got him there early one day and he wanted to help. He's been helping out ever since.

As CEO of Jefferson Hospital, John made deals rather than dealing with patients. He came to regret that. He likes his new advocacy role better now. Although he survived a bout with cancer, it recently claimed his nephew. That changed his perspective about people who experience medical problems and cannot navigate the system. John says he admires Tom's incredible generosity despite his own deteriorating health.

"Tom gives unconditionally," John says. "When you think about what Living Stones has done, bringing people to the table of Christ, then you say, 'What can I do? How can I help?'"

Meeting John was a stroke of good fortune that leaves Tom teary eyed and at a loss for words. Recalling the first time they met, "I couldn't believe he came up there on a Sunday [to the church on Mt. Washington where Living Stones serves its meals] to see me," Tom says. "I would do anything for John. He's really helped me. If it wasn't for John and Julie, I don't know where I would be now."

## HOW GROW LIVING STONES

# Took Root

BY TOM O'BOYLE



On Sunday, June 30, Julie Livingston will be commissioned as this church's first full-time urban missionary and leader of our newly formed GROW Living Stones ministry.

What is GROW Living Stones and how did it take root?

You may have witnessed its inception back in January without even knowing it. On Jan. 6, at the "Meet the Pastor" adult-education class then, Pastor Nate Devlin described his vision for missions.

"When it comes to the area of mission, my mind goes local," Nate said. "God establishes churches for places and so we're God's outpost for His kingdom here."

Nate explained that according to Christ's command to proclaim the gospel and make disciples, in Acts chapter 1, Jerusalem was mentioned first, then Judea, then Samaria and lastly, to the ends of the earth.

"That list wasn't incidental," he said. "I think it was a prioritized list. Our first responsibility is to Jerusalem," the closest location.

"When I start thinking about the place where God has put us, I think about really one place: the corridor between Dormont and the Liberty Tunnels."

"This area is underserved in the same way that the North Side was underserved for all those years," he added, until organizations like Urban Impact and the Pittsburgh Project were established and began changing neighborhoods through a plethora of programming.

For this idea to take root at Beverly Heights, three P's were necessary: place, program and, lastly and most significantly, a person.

"I'm praying about a person," Nate said. "Join me in praying about that. And if the Lord brings all those things together, I call that confirmation and we'll move with that."

Nate's comments were the spark which launched Julie on the path

she begins formally July 1. Here is her recollection of that life-changing moment.

"When Nate said I have a place, I have a program but I'm missing a person, Bub [Julie's nickname for Lynn Bell, her confidant and dear friend] and I ... locked eyes and I said, 'I can go work for that person.' And [Lynn] said, 'You are that person.'" After prayerfully seeking God's will, Julie agreed.

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**"When it comes to  
the area of mission,  
my mind goes local."**

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Thus was born GROW Living Stones (the name Nate suggested in a later meeting with Julie).

Julie is leaving her job as a manager at Verizon to assume leadership of this new entity. In addition to covering her health care, Beverly Heights will support this startup by providing \$20,000 in 2019; \$40,000 in 2020; and \$20,000 in 2021. The funds are coming from the Missions budget and an anonymous donor.

Under the terms of Julie's call, unanimously approved by the Missions team and Session, she will spend her first three months assessing how best to move forward, consistent with the organization's biblical foundations and its charter and goals. Her analysis will then be reported to the Missions team and Session.

"Whatever we do," she says, "my goal is to make sure there's a need for what we build, that we encourage personal relationships with Christ, and that we further His kingdom on earth."





# Julie Livingston

## URBAN MISSIONARY

BY TOM O'BOYLE

In the annals of modern witnessing, there are likely very few people who accepted Christ themselves while giving their first testimony.

That is, however, what seems to have happened to Julie Livingston. Raised in a religious home but non-evangelical church in Akron, Ohio, Julie didn't grow up knowing that witnessing was what a believer did. That changed in her sophomore year at the University of Akron.

It was too dark to read her notes. As she walked uphill to the campfire, seemingly to the gallows and gripped with foreboding, "I remembered something in scripture where God will speak through me, so here I am, your vessel."

Then, when she began to speak, "His words were there," she recalls. "It was the weirdest experience because as I heard myself talk, I listened."

After graduating from Akron, Julie earned two graduate degrees from the University of Pittsburgh. Her master's engineering thesis was on the subject of "creep buckling," which is not a character from a pulp-fiction novel. It's what happens at high temperatures and constant load inside a boiler, knowledge she put to good use designing nuclear reactors at Westinghouse. Julie now works at a division of Verizon, running a team which provides high-tech services to customers in the transport industry.

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## It was the weirdest experience because as I heard myself talk, I listened.

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As the volunteer leader of a Christian youth group, she was charged with orchestrating the fall youth retreat. The culminating event was a nighttime bonfire and the newly called minister inquired what activity she had planned?

"I said, 'I don't know,'" she recalls. "And he said, 'Why don't you witness to them?' I remember thinking, 'I don't know who this guy is but he's clearly ...'" She paused, searching for the right word, then continued: "Witnessing? All I could visualize was a guy standing on a street corner with a big Bible shouting, 'Repent, repent.'"

She crammed and prepped madly as night drew nigh, but at the appointed moment

She not only convinced herself – a tearful professor came up and thanked her. Years later, when the man had passed, his daughters told Julie he'd accepted Christ, too, that night.

Nearly 40 years later, that moment crackles, in Julie's retelling of it, with as much intensity as the evening bonfire.

Recalling the guitar she played that night with a giggle, another of her passions surfaces: music. She loves to play the piano and organ, following in her mom's footsteps, and has played at such renown venues as Rockefeller Center and St. Patrick's Cathedral, both in New York City, as well as in Indonesia, the Netherlands, and at Beverly Heights, where she served as interim organist in 2015.

Building successful teams in the workplace is her strength, so it was only natural that she also began building teams for Christ. Fueled by her passion to care for the less fortunate, she helped create several ministries, including the Living Stones meal ministry, which gathers and repurposes leftover food. About 40 Living Stones volunteers from our church and others provide close to 350 individual meals to needy folks each month, serving Sundays at three locations in the South Hills.

Now, God is calling Julie to "grow Living Stones," and to turn her former avocation into full-time urban ministry. She's approaching that inquiry with the same engineering precision she's applied to past tasks.

GROW Living Stones is the title of this new ministry. It envisions what Julie calls "swim lanes" – each delivering a program or service that identifies and meets the specific needs of individuals and families in the corridor from Mt. Lebanon to the Liberty Tunnels.

As she learned at the campfire, all things are possible if you trust in Him. "He's a sovereign God. He's going to make His missions work, on His terms and on His conditions."