

Pastor's Buzz Cut Makes Good on Promise to Friend



Photo by Lori Niedenfuer Cool, Grand Rapids Press

Soon after pouring the foundation for Grace, Coopersville, member Scott Maxwell challenged the pastor to fill the worship center to the brim. And when it happens, Scott told the pastor, you have to shave your head except for the image of a cross.

Rev. Joel Hoyer laughed off the friendly bet. Another of Scott's jokes, he thought, and, for the next eight years he tended to his flock, which reached healthy numbers but never quite filled the 350-seat sanctuary. That changed in September, during a bittersweet service that mourned the death of a member of the church yet celebrated his admission into heaven.

Mourners filled not only the sanctuary but the entire narthex and spilled out into the hallways. Cars overflowed the lot on East Cleveland Street.

Scott Maxwell couldn't join in the celebration. It was his funeral that attracted the very numbers he'd playfully challenged Hoyer with back in 2000.

Scott, 43, died September 23 when the boom on the construction truck he was driving touched an overhead electrical wire. He exited the truck to discover the tires afire, and, when he went back into the vehicle for a fire extinguisher, he was electrocuted.

Julie Maxwell is coming to understand the gifts stemming from her husband's accidental passing, blessings on a Coopersville community that has had its faith shaken in recent months by too many tragic deaths.

At Grace, people who had strayed are attending again, drawn back by the message they heard at

Scott's funeral. Hoyer used the moment to remind those attending that "We all need to lay a solid foundation in life."

The reference was not lost on anyone, because Scott's business, TS Max Poured Walls, provided foundations such as the one supporting the church.

"Scott knew, too, that the church was more than just a building," Hoyer said. "He knew it was a spiritual hospital. It's why he said so many years ago, 'Let's fill the building, now that we've built it.' Scott got it."

Julie says she's grateful as a believer that her husband's death "got so many people into church at the same time to hear the pastor's message," a sermon she described as "incredible" for its call to spiritual action.

"For people out there who don't believe," she says, "it couldn't have been more perfect."

In the wake of Scott's death, Hoyer wasn't sure anyone would hold him to the haircut. But he made good on the bet during "Pastor Appreciation Month," sitting for a buzz cut that left on his scalp nothing but the shape of a cross.

When people ask him about the cross – he could be taking a walk, shopping, even playing basketball at the YMCA in downtown Grand Rapids – it gives him an opening.

"A chance to share the Gospel," he says, "as well as the story of a man who was the real deal."

Article excerpts from article by Tom Rademacher originally published in The Grand Rapids Press on Thursday, October 23, 2008. Reprinted with Permission.