

# The Guest Becomes the Guide

**P**astor Kurt Jacobson of Trinity Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, is no stranger to Pastors Retreat Network.

Like so many others, Kurt experienced life-changing days of refreshment and renewal during a personal retreat at Texas Stagecoach Inn in the Texas Hill Country. Those five days helped him begin a 13-week sabbatical from his full-time pastorship in the right frame of mind and heart.

But Kurt recently was given an opportunity to go even deeper with the retreat experience—by guest-hosting at Cedarly Pastors Retreat in Delafield, Wisconsin.

Although he welcomed the chance to return to a retreat center and was excited about serving, Kurt says he initially wondered if he was the right person for the job.

“Sometimes we have a hard time understanding our own gifts,” he says.

That can be true for guests as well. Busy pastors often find it difficult to step away from their “work” when they arrive at a retreat. Yet, time after time, those guests reconnect with their calling and return home with a renewed commitment to sharing God’s blessings with others.

## BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN

Kurt’s guest hosting at Cedarly came nearly three years after his week-

long retreat at Texas Stagecoach Inn. And although he would never trade his time as a retreat guest, the opportunity to host was truly special.

“The spiritual aspect of being host was richer for me,” he says. “I was able to engage more in the process of solitude and soul care.”

Kurt says his previous experience as an overworked, highly stressed pastor on retreat made him a more effective host. He remembers how it felt to fear the quiet—away and unplugged from daily life.



Kurt, leading worship at Trinity Lutheran Church



## FROM WISCONSIN TO AFRICA

Kurt Jacobson has a heart for people. All people. His congregation sees it every day of the year. Other pastors got a glimpse of that heart when Kurt recently guest-hosted at Cedarly Pastors Retreat. And hundreds of people in the landlocked country of Malawi in southeastern Africa also know firsthand Kurt’s deep sense of compassion and care.

Under Kurt’s leadership, Trinity Lutheran Church has developed a strong partnership with the Lutheran Church in Blantyre, Malawi’s largest city. Trinity has provided funding to support the many important works launched by the parish, including several orphan feeding centers that are bringing hope and a future to many children. With financial help from Trinity, the parish has also built four new churches in the area.

*“There has not been a day since leaving Cedarly where I didn’t spot God.”*



But he also remembers the powerful results. So, as host, he made a point of giving his guests permission to slow down and listen for God’s voice during their time away.

“There was a sweet spirit that hovered over the retreat,” he says, and “a profound sense of community.”

### THE TAKE-AWAY

The “job” of hosting a retreat tends to stick with a person for a while. In fact, Kurt says that his time at Cedarly profoundly changed the way he approaches life.

For starters, he’s reorganized how he begins each day.

“I sit down each morning for time with God,” he says.

He’s also developed a greater

dedication to spiritual reading. He now starts every morning with the Spiritual Disciplines Handbook. Kurt’s life has been affected in other, more internal ways as well.

“My time at Cedarly was a delightful blessing that truly gave me calmness,” he says. “I felt a peace from God, and I have kept that.” In fact, Kurt says he feels and is conscious of a peace that endures, nearly two months later.

And just as he took time to center his mind and heart on God during his retreat experiences, he now purposely searches for God in everyday life, through what he calls “God sightings.”

“Everyday, I ask myself, ‘Where did I see God today?’” he says.

This simple, but effective practice

keeps things in a healthy perspective. And it forces Kurt to slow down and appreciate all that God does each day. “There has not been a day since leaving Cedarly where I didn’t spot God,” Kurt says.

But spotting God isn’t enough. Kurt also strives to be an outward witness to others. “God did something of deep and enduring benefit in my heart and soul and mind,” Kurt says. So I ask myself, “How has God been sighted through me?”

Kurt took away many fond memories from Cedarly. But more important, he says, are the lessons he took away: “I now live with the conviction that God is always present, in, through and around me.” 🌿

### WHAT PASTORS RETREAT NETWORK MEANS TO ME

> “I was really honored to take part in hosting a retreat. Having the responsibility of pastoring to pastors was a truly humbling experience and very enriching. And the best part was seeing how the guests grew in their love for God. I’d tell anyone considering a retreat to take it. Take advantage of the opportunity. I can’t imagine anyone being disappointed.”

–Kurt Jacobson