

## Getting to Know....

### Mike and Sandra Dixon

Written by Vic Gideon

"This is our date day," says Sandra Dixon about her and her husband Mike spending Sundays at St. Philomena. "We date every Sunday."

"We really date seven days a week," adds Mike.

"I date two men on Sunday," Sandra continues. "Him and the Lord. It's always been that way with us."

The two met more than six decades ago, when Mike was seventeen and Sandra had just turned sixteen, Catholic Church playing a big part.

"I was in a buddy's car and she was walking down the street," Mike remembers, "I seen her face and I told him, 'I'm going to meet her' and I went to church that Sunday and, lo and behold..."

"There I was," Sandra finishes the story.

"There she was," says Mike.

The two met at St. Adelbert's but their journey is filled with twists and turns. Mike Dixon's family moved from North Carolina to Cleveland when he was nine and Sandra Epps came to Cleveland from Alabama to join her father when she was thirteen. They met as teenagers, dated, even got engaged before Sandra went to college. But then their paths went separate directions.

"Her father was not on my side," remembers Mike. "He thought I was a ruffian," Mike recounts. "I was a ruffian. Lived my life Monday through Saturday but Sunday, I went to church no matter what I did during the week. Always found peace walking through those doors."

Sandra attended St. Joseph's Collinwood School on St. Clair through eighth grade and graduated from Collinwood High School. She enrolled at Central State University to become a teacher, earning her undergraduate degree, eventually getting two master's degrees at Wright State University, and worked as a teacher, principal, and professor for 43 years – including principal for fifteen years at her former grade school before it closed in 2006. She retired in 2013 and keeps busy writing grants, volunteering with kids and seniors, and gardening with Sister Mary Manning.

"He wanted to be a priest," Sandra remembers about the

young man who led the church youth group.

Mike went to St. Adalbert grade school and St. Joseph's High School before graduating from Glenville, working as an RTA bus driver for more than thirty years before retiring in 2008.

"The one thing that keeps me centered is my faith," Mike says. "If I didn't have any faith, I'd be in jail today."

Sandra and Mike went their separate ways, each having a family with two children, each getting divorced before getting back together when Sandra, who had moved back to Alabama, returned to Cleveland for her aunt's funeral, eventually living in her aunt's Cleveland Heights home.

"I prayed for us to get back together," remembers Sandra. "Mike was always in my heart and in my mind and I asked God. 'Please, if you can find a way to get us back together, please do.' And he did."

The couple got married on Sandra's birthday in 1997 and have been at St. Philomena for 29 years. They're a blended family, Mike has girls now 47 and 51 (Monica and Dana) and Sandra has a boy and a girl the exact same ages (Robert and Tashena) with six grandkids between them, five girls and a boy, spread out from South Carolina to Columbus to Los Angeles. They even moved to California to help with a granddaughter before moving back to Cleveland Heights.

"The kids she have and I have, I love 'em all," says Mike. "You don't have to be blood to love somebody."

"It was like a fairy tale to me," Sandra says of her relationship. "It was just a joy for the Lord to bring him back in my life. I prayed for that."

"The thing that keeps you together is to be a friend first," Sandra adds.

But the real secret to their marriage:

"We have three TVs in the house," says Mike.

"We're one in Christ," corrects Sandra.

"I don't think I really would change a thing," Mike says about their long and winding road. "We learned a lot."

