

Hello! I'm Rev. Cindy Heidelberger Coates, and it is a true joy and privilege to serve alongside you at Rapid City First. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of a community that seeks to grow in faith, love, and service together.

I am a Commissioned Elder in the United Methodist Church and serve as the Executive Director and co-founder of GroundWorks Connect, a South Dakota nonprofit dedicated to connecting education and agriculture in ways that strengthen communities and cultivate hope. Through this work, I have seen firsthand how meaningful partnerships and shared purpose can transform lives. I believe ministry is not confined to a building or a Sunday morning—it happens wherever people encounter Christ's love in tangible, life-giving ways. Previously, I served Wesley United Methodist Church in Sioux Falls, where I witnessed the powerful ways God works through ordinary people who simply show up, love well, and trust faithfully. Those experiences continue to shape my understanding of what it means to be the Church: a community rooted in grace, committed to one another, and open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

My educational journey has been both broad and formative. I hold bachelor's degrees from South Dakota State University in Speech Communication, Theatre, English, and Education, and a Master of Divinity from Sioux Falls Seminary with emphases in Pastoral Care, Counseling, and Community Development. I also completed the Agricultural Leadership and Vision Certificate through SDSU and remain a certified 5–12 Language Arts, Speech, and Theatre educator. These experiences have equipped me to engage ministry with creativity, compassion, and a deep appreciation for lifelong learning.

My gifts include preaching, teaching, visionary leadership, trauma-informed ministry, empathy, and discernment. I am passionate about helping others recognize and embrace the gifts God has already placed within them. I believe leadership is not about having all the answers, but about creating space for others to discover their calling and step into it with confidence and faith.

At the heart of my ministry is the conviction that everyone longs to belong and be seen. The Church is called to be a place of grace, where relationships matter more than perfection and where all people can find their place in God's unfolding story. I strive to help create environments where authenticity is welcomed and where people feel safe to grow, question, and deepen their faith.

A guiding phrase for me is God's "and yet." Life brings loss and uncertainty, and yet God remains faithful. We make mistakes, and yet grace meets us. Hope may seem distant, and yet Resurrection surprises us. God's "and yet" reminds us that no story is ever finished and that God is always at work bringing new life.

My greatest joy is my family. My husband, Rev. R. Duane Coates, is also a United Methodist pastor, and we share both life and calling together. I am the proud mom of two sons, Xavier Larson (22) and Atticus Larson (19). Our home is also filled with personality thanks to Oliver Scout, our spirited pug, and Luna Tic, our queenly cat.

In my free time, I enjoy being near water, reading, writing, theatre, singing, and spending time in nature—places where I often hear God's quiet reminders of hope and renewal.

Above all, I hope people leave worship knowing they are deeply loved, created with purpose, and never beyond grace. I believe Christ continues to transform lives and communities, and I am grateful to share in that sacred work with you.