

Hello, I am Pastor Duane Coates. I am the product of a United Methodist preacher (Rev. Ed Coates) and an activist for what is now United Women in Faith (Ginny Coates). So, living in a parsonage and attending a West River church is nothing new to me, because that's how I grew up. I was baptized in what was then the Vivian (SD) United Methodist Church, but we moved to Timber Lake when I was 18 months old. We then moved to Winner when I was 9. So, I am a graduate of Winner High School. (No, I didn't play high school football, but was involved in speech, music, theatre, and church activities there.)

I also hold a Bachelor of Science degree in print journalism from South Dakota State University (SDSU) in Brookings and a Master of Divinity degree from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill. I worked 11 years in the newspaper industry before attending seminary.

My older brother, Gordon, is a member here. I also have a younger sister, Twyla Mah, who lives with her husband, Paul, in Mitchell. They have four daughters ages 16 to 28. They also have two living grandchildren, ages 4 and 2, who also live in Mitchell.

Pastor CC and I were married on July 6, 2024, at Asbury United Methodist Church in Sioux Falls, which is where we met. That made me the proud step-dad of Xavier, 22; and Atticus, 19. Xavier lives with us and works as a direct-support person for Black Hills Specialty Services in Sturgis. He also co-leads the Praise Team here at First. Atticus is a sophomore at SDSU studying history education and coaching. He spends summers with his dad in Lennox.

I was commissioned as a pastor in 2005 and appointed to school my last year of seminary, then as an associate pastor at Brookings First the next year. Following that four-year tenure, I was appointed to Wagner/Tyndall (2010-2014), followed by Sioux Falls Southern Hills (2014-16), then Hettinger (ND) (2016-22), and finally Valley City (ND) Epworth (2022-25) before coming back to the place where I was ordained in 2009.

Pastor CC and I are happy to be living and working together as we face the challenge of shepherding God's will for this church to thrive. These past six post-COVID years, I have found the local church to be a place that not only provides an antidote to the national epidemic of loneliness but also becomes a spiritual trauma center. So, with our vision team, we are eager to help the church achieve a mission, which we currently believe is to invite others into a Christian community of hope seeking to know, love, understand, and serve all our neighbors and our God.

I will let you be the judge of where lie my "gifts" for ministry. But I do enjoy teaching, preaching, and getting to know people. From 2023-25, I taught United Methodism and church administration to newly licensed local pastors. I tend to leave the churches I serve with a greater understanding of United Methodism and its local-church administration.

In United Methodism beyond the local level, I currently serve our annual conference on the Sessions Committee as well as the Committee on Records, Rules, and Procedures. I have experience in service on jurisdictional and denominational commissions on archives and history.

Since coming to First Church, Pastor CC and I have enjoyed exploring the Hills, attending concerts, movies, and one play. We also enjoy singing in the Dakota Choral Union, our Chancel Choir, and Praise Team. I am looking forward to more arts-oriented and outdoor activities. I am open to opportunities for community and service involvement, such as a local service club. I love spending free time with family as we play games, converse, and/or travel. I also enjoy reading, watching a limited amount of television, and jigsaw puzzling.

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.

