

KP Man Battling Leukemia is a Friend and Pastor to the Many

Written by [Scott Turner](#)



Key Peninsula resident Bill Ketts spends a happy moment recently at St. Joseph Medical Center. Ketts said his faith has him centered and focused as he goes through the steps of finding a proper bone-marrow donor to help get his leukemia into remission.
Photo by Scott Turner, KP News

If anyone can make lemonade out of sour lemons, it's Bill Ketts. The 56-year-old Vaughn resident — known to many as Pastor Bill — was diagnosed in April with acute myeloid leukemia, a type of blood cancer that “goes everywhere in your body,” he said.

Bill and his wife, Tracy, own Blue Willow Lavender Farm, where they grow more than 4,200 lavender plants.

The 15-acre farm is part of the popular Key Peninsula Farm Tour, and, until he had to step down because of his illness, Bill was president of the farm tour council.

The Kettses will celebrate their 36th wedding anniversary this month. They moved to the Key Peninsula from California in July 2008. “I was the pastor of a church and Tracy and I were both teaching at a Christian school, and our family was all there in California,” Bill recalled. But one of his best friends, Bill Walsh, had been trying for several years to coax the couple to move to Washington and do something with the land Walsh owned on the Peninsula. He even had a house that Bill and Tracy could live in. “His goal was for me to move up here and be a minister,” Ketts said. “After four years of prayer, we knew that we were supposed to pull up our stakes and move to Vaughn.”

The couple hit the ground running. “We just started pulling up grass to make a place for the lavender. Some might call it serendipitous, but we know it was directed by the Lord that we should do this. “The groove and focus of my life was that people would know Jesus Christ. And that's what's getting me through today. I had no visible means of support — only a friend who has three houses on this property and one of them is empty and he wanted me to live in it. There was no arrangement or anything,” he said.

Ketts calls the lavender farm his “holy ruse.” It's the context for his ministry and the house church he calls Grace Fellowship of Key Peninsula. “We're just followers of Jesus. We're part of the church wherever it meets,” he said from the bed at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Tacoma that has been his pulpit since April.

Ketts recently began his second round of chemotherapy after a bone-marrow biopsy in May came back positive. “That means that my bone marrow is still producing cancerous cells after the first round of chemo,” he wrote in a blog post to his friends. His doctors acknowledge that Ketts is very ill, but his spirit is not the least bit dampened and he continually reminds people of his many blessings. “When you have given your life to the Lord, there's nothing to be afraid of,” he said. “I believe in walking in faith.”

He's in line for a bone-marrow transplant, which is essential to putting his cancer into remission. He's already “living on other people's blood,” he said, because he's had so many blood transfusions.

And he encourages people to get screened as bone marrow donors or to give blood whenever possible because fresh blood is always needed. “You don't donate to me or any particular person,” he emphasized, “You donate it to the pool and everybody gets help.”

WANT TO HELP?

Community members wishing to support Bill and Tracy Ketts during this time of Bill's hospitalization can make donations at any Sound Credit Union branch to the Tracy Ketts account.

In many ways his work as a pastor has been a dress rehearsal for his current situation. “I have been on the other side of the bed for many years, holding people’s hands and guiding them, helping them go home to be with Jesus and walking them through the issues of their life and through the grieving,” he said.

He continues to preach the Gospel twice a week via the Internet from his room on the 10th floor of St. Joe’s that has “the best view in Tacoma.” “I can see Mount Rainier out of one window and the Cascades out of the other,” he said, beaming a smile. Every Thursday and Sunday, Tracy Ketts and friends set up a big-screen TV in Vaughn “and we all gather around and Bill meets with us on FaceTime and we have conversations with him,” Tracy Ketts said of her husband’s weekly services.

The Kettses have become well-liked members of the community, said Danna Webster, president of the Key Peninsula Community Council. “It began with them bringing their Blue Willow Lavender Farm to the community. It’s become a conversation point. They’ve made it so beautiful and now KP has our own lavender festival that’s competitive with Sequim,” Webster said. “And right from the start, they were very much out meeting people in the community. Bill is someone who becomes a positive person in your life and you’re glad he’s there and you’re glad he’s your neighbor because of the integrity he brings to the relationship. “He looks at this illness as a blessing and a good thing, and that’s an inspiration to us all,” Webster said.

The community has opened an account for the Kettses at Sound Credit Union, she added.

Neither Bill nor Tracy ever lose faith or question what’s going on. “I know that my eternal home is secure,” Bill said. “If ...

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