



DAN FERRIS SR. '69

Beginning with his unexpected enrollment as a freshman, Dan Ferris has ONU connections running deep and wide. His passion for serving God and serving others is expressed so well in the Ferris family theme song, “Let Your Love Flow Through Me.”

“My dad was a farmer, and I grew up attending a one-room Nazarene church and a one-room country schoolhouse in rural Northern Michigan,” he says. “Both had outhouses, by the way. Our school of 20 to 25 students included grades kindergarten through eight. I had heard about Olivet, but I didn’t know anyone who had graduated from there.”

When Dan was 15 years old, his dad passed away. “I was the youngest of five children,” he says. “To take the financial stress off my mom, I went to live with one of my sisters and her husband. College was my sister’s idea for me. She submitted the application to Olivet, and I was accepted as a freshman.”

He still remembers his arrival on campus with his sister and brother-in-law. “They helped me unload

my stuff and move into Chapman Hall,” he recalls. “Then we went to Burger King, and I had my first Whopper sandwich. They drove me back to campus and said good-bye. I knew it was sink or swim. Olivet helped me swim, and I’ll always be appreciative.”

Majoring in mathematics and minoring in psychology, Dan often thinks that he really majored in self-confidence as a ONU student. Very introverted, he avoided talking with people. He knew he needed to learn more about himself, and this happened in a life-changing way during a statistics course in psychology. Dan and his classmates took several psychological tests as part of their studies. When the professor shared their scores, Dan was amazed by his results. He discovered that he was just as intelligent as other people and smart enough to learn.

“From that day to this, I have loved learning anything and everything,” he says. “That class changed my life.”

Dan met his wife, Dianne, who is also a ONU graduate, during the summer after his freshman year. Following his sophomore year, they were married. He completed his degree in mathematics in 1969 and began teaching.

The Ferrises are parents of three adult children: Daniel and Derek, both ONU employees; and Dana, who is married to a ONU professor. “All three of our children and their spouses, all of our adult grandchildren, and the spouses of all our married grandchildren are ONU alumni,” Dan says. “I think our blood now has a purple tint!”

After a career teaching secondary math to mostly seventh graders in the Michigan public schools, Dan joined ONU’s Development team in 1994 to work in grant writing. When his supervisor left just a few months later, Dan was promoted to director of development. He worked closely with President John C. Bowling and a small team to establish and develop a traditional fundraising program for the University.

“Although I’ve done a lot of jobs with our team, my niche is developing complex major gifts,” Dan says. “Under the leadership of Dr. Bowling and now Dr. Brian Allen, our team uses many ways to build our strategies and develop relationships with alumni and friends.”

When Dan began meeting with high asset alumni, he was at first intimidated by their status. He began to feel at ease, however, as he discovered that they shared a passion for ONU. He remembers thanking a donor for a gift of several million dollars — and that donor’s reply to him: “You don’t need to thank me. God gave me the ability to make money. My mission is to give back to help build His Kingdom.”

In 2005, one of the donors encouraged Dan to become a Certified Financial Planner (CFP). “He and I were working on an investment project for ONU,” Dan recalls. “He said that one of us needed to get more expertise. He was 85 at the time. So with a grin on his face, he said it should probably be me. That certification helped me gain a much greater understanding of the legal aspects and tax advantages in planned giving, and thus become better at my job.”

In 2016, Dan began transitioning to a part-time consultant position with the Development team. He continues to use his knowledge to nurture donor relationships, help younger team members carry on the work, and strategize about what needs to be done and how best to do it.

“What our Development team does makes all the difference in the world for our students,” Dan says.

“It is critical for us to cast the vision to alumni and friends to make them feel a ‘part of the mission of Olivet.’ We want potential donors to know that regardless of the size of their gifts, they can make a real difference in the lives of young adults. And as these well-prepared students graduate, they will make a powerful impact as they serve God through their various professions.”

Dan Ferris Sr.

Internal Consultant for Major Gift Strategies

815-939-5228

djferris@olivet.edu