

## “There are Two ‘L’s’ in ALAN.”

It has been said that a person has three names! The name they inherit; the name their parents gave them, and the name they make for themselves....All three are precious in their own way.

A number of weeks ago I was busy, very busy with events in one of the church congregations I serve on an occasional “need” basis. It happened that during the week I was there, four *Celebration of Life* services were required. As any minister will tell you, life becomes somewhat like a pressure cooker in situations like this because end of life events are probably the most important in a minister’s list of duties. Why you may ask? Surely there are other events that should come before an end of life service!

Well I did use the word “probably,” and let me tell you why. When new life enters the world in the form of a helpless child, we celebrate that little Johnnie has got a sister or little Lisa has a new brother...or indeed that ‘at long last’ a much hoped for addition to the family has finally made their appearance. Parents and well intended friends no longer need to drop their clumsy hints about ‘tick-tock’ time is running out; or at the Christmas party, comments like ‘wouldn’t it be nice to have something to celebrate with you two in the Fall’ ... etc..... You get the picture by now. Of course we celebrate other ‘Hallmark’ events which make up our life’s journey however, when a well-lived and precious journey travelled by a person comes to an end, we should reflect on the meaning of their life and how it might have touched/influenced our own. (Thanks Pete)

The words spoken to me by a funeral director: **“Pastor Ian, there are two ‘L’s’ in ‘ALAN,’** came during the final preparation of one of these *Celebration of Life* services and reminded me of the importance of getting a person’s name correct. The person I am recalling had been given the Christian name ‘Allan’ by his parents over eighty years ago and must, in that time, have scribed it on thousands of documents. I got it wrong because I did not check my information. I would have been doing *Allan* a great disservice by allowing an error like that to slip through because our names are our second and most precious gift after receiving the gift of life itself. Yes Ian, it was a lesson well learned and I will always remember to check if there are two ‘L’s’ in Alan.

Speaking about gifts, how many of you own and use a GPS...acronym for Global Positioning Device? You see them stuck on car windshields like mine, and on more expensive models they are even built in to where the radio used to be. They are clever little machines that can do lots of things. I won’t bore you with a list...however, they are NOT infallible. Like any computer device, when you put

garbage information in there is a very good chance that you will receive garbage information in return. This is not a good scenario folks and such was the case as we departed Florida to travel home this year. As we set out from Tampa, our final destination on that first day was to be Florence in S. Carolina. There are some good fast roads leaving Tampa which head northeastwards in the direction we wanted. I couldn’t understand why we were travelling north westwards on each and every busy little side road this darned Garmin GPS device could conjure up for us. Texas here we come!

There comes a moment in time when you just know that your homing instinct is better than that of a machine! After a frustrating two hours of going nowhere fast, I wet my finger, stuck it out of the window, pointed the car north eastwards on the first road heading in the direction my windswept finger indicated.... while the GPS wailed out to us at every moment:

**“Turn left at next intersection!  
Make a 180 degree turn where it is safe to do so.  
In 250 meters please make a left turn.”**

Fortunately unlike the party bore, the GPS has an OFF switch.

Silence..... Precious silence..... while I got on with the job of driving and Irene resorted to providing directions from our map....not always a safe thing to do as she sometimes has trouble differentiating her left from her right. Over a lunchtime break I poured over my GPS machine to see why it was apparently telling ‘porky pies!’ Here I must reluctantly admit to the benefit of reading the instruction manual when you purchase a new toy. Three little words: **“avoiding major highways”** suddenly gained a whole new meaning for me as I realized that their function was inadvertently activated. Who could have done something so silly I pondered? It was tough to place the blame on Irene because she never touches the thing, so it was back yet again to eating humble pie. Blessings all.

**- Pastor Ian.**

p.s. Memo to self. “Contact GPS manufacturer and advise them that their “avoidance technology” is an unnecessary gimmick because most of us use their machine to quickly get from A to B and not to **avoid** the fastest route.”