

Generosity Stories

Personal reflections on the power of giving



FIRST LUTHERAN
Church of Kearney



CREATING
Space
For Faith
TO GROW

Generosity Stories

These are personal reflections on the power of giving from the First Lutheran congregation. For the Lord Jesus said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" – Acts 20:35. However, sometimes simply being a witness to generosity can have a powerful impact. We are all witnesses to God's glory among us. May these reflections serve as a reminder of the glory of God at work within our lives.



We moved to Kearney in 2006 after living in the same community for 30 years. Help was needed for two young grandchildren, and we were eager to volunteer. First Lutheran Church has been a blessing in so many ways. During our early years here, we both had some health issues. Our church family was by our side to help us through some tough issues with illness after treatments. Losing our only son in 2014 was difficult to bear. With our faith and wonderful pastors and church family, we were able to lean on them to see through the darkest days of our lives. We love our pastors and church family dearly.

- Myron & Diane Riddle



We have experienced generosity in a variety of ways throughout our lives. We were blessed to grow up witnessing the generosity of our families giving both financially and through their time and talents in our churches, as well as in our communities. As a child, having our parents serve in multiple facets in the church made the church a part of the fabric of our lives.

Serving and seeing others gain enjoyment or hearing of how something has made their day better is a great gift in return for the time spent or finances given. We believe that discovering and using the talents that God has given you to honor Him is a way to give thanks to God for those talents. We also work to remember that we are stewards of the finances God has given us. When putting this in the forefront of our thoughts, it has helped us remember that the goal is to serve and grow God's kingdom.

We feel we have grown in the understanding that generosity is truly both monetary and time spent in serving the church as it takes both to keep a church alive. We have experienced generosity all throughout our lives. The Lord has blessed us in so many ways. We are grateful to give Him the glory and honor He deserves!

-Derek & Sarah Schweitzer



Generosity can come in many forms, ourselves, money, time or peaches. Peaches you say? Yes peaches.

We planted a small peach tree in our back yard some years ago. The first year we had two peaches. We watched and waited for them to ripen. Then just before they were ready, the squirrels ate them. Well, I guess God decided to bless us for not killing the squirrels because over the next few years we had quite a few peaches and were able to share them with friends, neighbors and the squirrels. Our little tree would put on so many peaches that we would have to go and thin them out.

A couple of years ago we had thinned and thinned when the peaches were small. As the peaches got bigger and started to ripen, we still had so many peaches that the branches had to be propped up. One morning as I let the dogs out, I noticed something didn't look right with our peach tree. During the night one of the big limbs had broken from the weight of the peaches. The peaches weren't quite ripe but really close. We went to work picking peaches off the ground and off the broken branch.

We gave peaches away like crazy and still had lots left. I hated the idea of them going to waste. That is when the idea came to me to see if the food pantry could take some. I drove down and asked if they would be able to use the peaches and was told they could. I brought in a few plastic grocery sacks and they thanked me saying they didn't get much fresh fruit. I asked if they could take more and they said yes, so I took them out to my pickup to see the ice cooler I had full of peaches plus a few other buckets full. They were shocked and delighted. As we carried the cooler and other buckets in I was able to see some people already picking through the peaches the team had set out. I was so happy to know the peaches wouldn't go to waste and was making someone else's day by them being able to receive fresh fruit.

-Laura Love

We offer ourselves, our time and our possessions. Usually when we think of generosity we think of money. Don't get me wrong that is very important, but what about ourselves, our time and our possessions?

Take a look at all the volunteers that work around the church, Sunday school teachers, the people who make food for the Feeding the Flock ministry, the groups that prepare food and serve it after a funeral and the list goes on and on.

One that may be over looked is the snow removal crew. These people go out on cold, snowy mornings to make sure the sidewalks are clear of snow. The church does have a couple of snow blowers, but many of this crew bring their own snowblowers and shovels. The crew has been known to bring their own trucks with blades and four wheelers with blades to help remove snow. Not only are they out there when it first snows but they often have to go back and reopen sidewalks that have drifted back shut. They go and make sure the sidewalks aren't icy and if they are they apply ice melt to the affected areas.

So the next time you think, how can I help out at the church, think of this. If you are culinarily challenged go help serve a meal and clean up, or be on the set-up crew. You say you can't teach but what if you help with a class? Or maybe grab a shovel or your snowblower and help the snow removal crew.

-John Love



Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. I think I like it so much because it is focused on relationships and food! One Thanksgiving in particular is still a favorite memory of mine.

In November of 2015 I was on the board of Gettysburg's equivalent of the S.A.F.E. Center. It was called Survivors, Inc. We felt moved as a board to provide an extra special meal on that day as our shelter had been full, and it had been a tough season with funding sources. I spread the word to my friends and colleagues in the Gettysburg area. That Thanksgiving Day our house was full of energy and food. People dropped off multiple turkeys, ham, and vegetarian lasagna. So many sides that our dining room table was filled to overflowing, containers stacked on top of one another. Then bags of clothes, toys, food for the pantry, and even a child's bicycle arrived on our porch. Pastor Rick and I packed both of our cars and headed over to the shelter. I did not get to see the recipients of this abundant meal because of privacy protections. But I knew that on this particular day, women and children tasted the love of our community. One of my friends told me, "If it wasn't for you, Michelle, we wouldn't have known that we have an opportunity to help our own neighbors. Thank you."

Mother Theresa once said, "If you can't feed 100 people, then just feed one." God provided an amazing group of friends and colleagues to step up to the call. We provided abundantly for our community that day. Thanks be to God!

-Pastor Michelle Carlson



Generosity can mean so many different things to so many different people. Some consider a generous deed to be when money is given to those in need, others when they volunteer their time or abilities. To many, a generous act can be as simple as a few kind words. I learned from a young age; generosity can come in all forms.

My mother, Eunice, is a very wise woman, and she shared many rules, guidelines and pearls of wisdom to help me grow up to be a “good person.” As a little girl, my mother encouraged me to be caring, saying, “You never know what people are going through; the least we can all do is give kindness.” To encourage gratefulness, she would share, “Other people would LOVE the blessings you have.” To create empathy in myself she would ask, “How do your actions make those around you feel?” All these questions and ideas created the base of generosity in my life.

As I embarked into adulthood, I wanted to live by her wisdom. Through hers and God’s teachings, I try to do the best at giving where I can. When I became a parent, I wanted to give my children the same foundation my parents had given me. And that foundation started at church. As a member of First Lutheran Church, I wanted my girls to experience youth programing and learn about God’s love for us. When they started our Wednesday night FROG program, I was asked to teach. In all honestly, I was reluctant when I agreed, and only planned to help that one year. Six years later, I have helped as the coordinator and am still helping as a teacher.

I have continued to give my time to the church and the youth of this church because I have received so much more back than I could have ever imagined. Seeing the children of the congregation having fun, learning God’s word, and having a safe place to play is truly so amazing. That is the thing about generosity -- there so many ways people can be generous, but when you give with good intent, we all receive God’s love back. When you are truly generous with your time, words or donations, you get as much as you give.

-Eve Shipp



Generosity, for me, started in college when I donated blood on a regular basis. It just seemed like the right thing to do. I didn't realize at the time who and why someone would benefit from me giving blood. But, after finding out how many lives can be saved by donating blood, I was hooked!

After college, I accepted an invitation to be involved in United Way. I spent several hours of my time campaigning for monetary donations from local businesses. It was rewarding for me to know the benefit to those in need was partially due to my involvement. Many business owners were very generous because they knew the United Way was serving those in need. I remained active with United Way for many years and served on their Board.

I'm also involved with the Goodfellows organization, once again campaigning to raise funds for those less fortunate at Christmas. Our three children and I have for many years delivered gifts to families on Christmas morning. What a great feeling when you knock on the door and hear children's footsteps running to greet us because they know we are bringing gifts to celebrate Christmas and the birth of our Savior.

I feel blessed to have had a positive impact on many people's lives by giving of my time. It warms my heart to know that God has planted the seed to keep me involved in these efforts to help and serve His children in need.

Giving to the church is very important to me. Being involved through committee work, teaching Sunday School, serving communion, ushering, etc. has been very rewarding. God wants us to make the best use of our earthly resources. By giving generously to the church of our time and money, we are following God's will, and we also feel ownership and a greater sense of belonging.

Get involved and stay involved!

Blessings, Mark Schipporeit



I've been blessed to have so many generous people influence my life. Friends and family have supported and inspired me in very positive ways with their generosity. However, it was someone outside my closest circle who impacted me with the most profound act of kindness.

A colleague of mine who worked in the same building as I did, but not in my office, happened to strike up a conversation with me one day in the hallway. It was near the end of the year so our talk turned to plans and preparation for the holidays. She mentioned that she had an extensive collection of Spode Christmas dishes that she would be using throughout the season. I told her that I too, loved my china and even though it wasn't a Christmas pattern, I would be using it for our family dinners as well. I must have made a comment about needing one particular serving piece to round out my set because about a week later, that piece showed up on my desk one morning!

I was stunned to say the least! I could not imagine why she would take it upon herself to search out and then purchase a somewhat costly item for someone who was just a casual acquaintance. I immediately went to her office to thank her for the unexpected surprise and tell her how moved I was by her thoughtful gesture. She said it made her happy to do something unexpected for someone and simply encouraged me to do the same.

What a wonderful example she became of how we can enrich our own existence by being generous to others. Her single act of giving left an indelible impression on me and made me want to extend that generosity at every opportunity.

Certainly, the church provides many options for each of us to express our gratitude by giving generously of our time, talent and treasures. Not only to help others around the world to know Christ but also to bring joy and meaning to our own lives.

-Kimra Schipporeit



I believe the seed to give generously is planted at a young age. I am unsure exactly when that was, but the generosity was instilled in me by the Holy Spirit during my Sunday School, VBS, and confirmation classes as a girl. When I was a young married woman with two young girls, I remember going to Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Broken Bow. My weekly donation to that church was much smaller than what I donate now, and I wondered how the church could keep its doors open if all the members gave the amount I did. I prayed for a time when I could give more to the church and get that warm satisfied feeling one gets from tithing. My prayers were answered.

But generosity is more than financial giving. I am involved in various volunteer projects and get the same warm feeling when I donate my time and talents to the sick, needy, and poor. Often when volunteering, I sometimes witness those less fortunate than myself and wonder why God chose me to have a healthy, happy, and prosperous life. I choose to think it is partly because of my generous spirit.

Bible verse: "To whom much is given, much will be required" (**Luke 12:48**).

Judy Henning



Those of you that have seen our journey at First Lutheran have watched our family grow. When we first joined in 1997, Ryan was not yet one year old. Since then, he and his sister Megan grew in faith as they grew in stature. We have tried to guide and lead them along the way and in so doing touched the lives of others and had others touch their lives and ours. From teaching Sunday School and Confirmation classes, to leading Sunday lessons for FLY, to volunteering for numerous FLY fundraisers and mission trips, we have given of our time and talents and treasures and seen others do the same.

We respond to the grace we have been given in our work through the years on Care and Growth, Imaging and Technology, and the Preschool Board. Our work continued in the community as leaders for Girls Scouts and Boy Scouts. We grab opportunities to volunteer and lead at work. The Spirit has gifted us with the talents to teach and lead and we respond in turn by acting as Jesus did – as servant leaders. When there is a need in our community, whether that be in the church, at work, or in the community, we try to respond. As humans, we are certainly not perfect in our efforts and each week we beg for the grace and forgiveness that God gives when we fail, but we continue to try.

So, what does living generously mean for us? It means that to the best of our abilities that we do for the sake of others when we see need. It means that we take the gifts of time, talent, and treasure we have been given to touch the lives of others. It means that we make giving a spiritual practice by giving from our first fruits and in a way that ensures we do so regularly.

--Scott and Stacy Darveau



I have experienced generosity in so many different ways that it is hard for me to narrow it down, but as I reflect on the past year I have experienced generosity in a variety of ways. My employer showed me generosity by hiring additional staff so that I could go part-time to be more available for my family. I was especially grateful for this change in my schedule as it allowed me to help my mom more when she was diagnosed with cancer. Not only did this change in my schedule allow me to be more present for my family but the extra help staff at work has helped with my workload and has allowed me to be more meaningful and intentional in my job. I can definitely say that because of the generosity that was given to me, I have been able to demonstrate generosity in more ways.

-Lindsey Weaver



While I have had the honor to work with the youth of First Lutheran, I have witnessed the generosity of the congregation. I have witnessed congregation members pay for youth to attend mission trips and summer camp who could not pay on their own. I also witnessed the generosity of the congregation when they support the high school youth in their fundraising events each year. Thanks to the generosity of First Lutheran congregation members many youths have had the opportunity to attend mission trips, youth gatherings, and summer camps who would not have been able to if it was not for the generosity of the congregation members.

- Keith Powell



As I've pondered writing this, I really took time on the first question asked, "When did you learn generosity?" To be honest, I don't know. I think it was modeled for me at a young age. The truth is generosity is a practice. It is something that you cultivate over time. I also think generosity offers opportunities to learn about ourselves, the people around us and the world.

I think people's first assumption is that generosity is about money or monetary donations. It is an effective one, but there are many ways to practice generosity in our lives. We can be generous with our time, our possessions, our empathy and our talents.

I remember growing up in a small town of Hartington, Nebraska and my parents volunteering in our church and community. Whether for the local county fair stand or foster care, it was modeled for my brother and me at an early age. I felt a calling to give back to my own community and offer gifts of time and talents. Sometimes it's money, but connecting with people is where I shine.

The last question of "How has your giving to the church grown and changed throughout your life?" is really where it hits home that First Lutheran has been a home for me. Since 2005, our family has felt a sense of belongingness and connectedness to the church. Both Dave and I have grown in our faith and modeled that for our own children. Because of the blessings I've felt from our church, the leadership and members, I feel compelled and called to give back.

We pray for a forward-thinking and progressive process with the Capital Campaign. We trust this is what is needed for growth and prosperity for future generations.

Best,

Dave and Renae Zimmer



Sometimes a quarter is enough.

I realized it several years ago when I was in Barnes & Noble at Conestoga Mall in Grand Island. I was standing in line, waiting to purchase my books, behind a young girl who quietly put at least 5 carefully selected books suitable for a pre-teen on the counter. After the salesperson rang up the purchase, the young book lover carefully took out a tin container that once held cough drops and proudly dumped out a pile of change. I was instantly caught up in the drama of watching the salesclerk count out the amount of the sale. When finished, she quietly spoke to the child: "Do you have another quarter?" The young girl lowered her head and said, "No. I'll put one back." She began the difficult process of trying to choose which book to give up.

Now, I am a life-long lover of books, and could not stand by and watch this go any further. I fished a quarter out of my change purse and said, "Anyone who loves to read as much as I do and who has saved her money just for this special day is not going to go home without all her books." She, of course, was stunned by my offer.

The salesclerk bagged all five books, the girl thanked me, the people standing behind me were smiling, and the clerk said, "Thank you so much. We are not allowed to do that for customers." I left the store, my heart singing. I have carried the glow of that tiny gesture for many years. Obviously, because I still remember it decades later.

-Janet Welch



Some people are born givers and some learn how to give. I was raised in a family who was taught to be kind to others. I am the oldest of two girls (17 months apart in age). I am one who roots for the underdog, has empathy for others, and gives what I can to help others. There are different levels of giving in my eyes: donating money or goods; volunteering time, talents, and skills; spending time with people; lending a helping hand; providing money to a good cause. More than half my life I have been a single mom raising two sons. For many years, I had been blessed to share my life with our dog Daisy whom we adopted from the Kearney Animal Shelter.

When my boys were young, money was tight, and I would give my time volunteering at their school and at church as I lived paycheck to paycheck. I would volunteer my time at First Lutheran by teaching both Sunday School and Wednesday night programming (GIFT now FROG). There have been multiple times in my life where either the church or members of our church have provided me support by offering a meal or kind words when I was sick or when my second son was born. Through our church, I have been connected with the Jubilee Center and their weekly meals, which has rolled over into my full time job where we sponsor at least a meal a year. I may not have much monetarily compared to others in Kearney; however, I feel truly blessed with family and friends, I feel good inside when I share what I have with those around me.

I am not always good at accepting things from others (either compliments or gifts); however, it causes a warm feeling inside of my heart that I mean enough to someone for them to say or do something nice for me. When I bring a small token of appreciation to the church, such as a Diet Coke for the pastors on Sundays, I hope it will help them know I care and they are appreciated.

-Jen Puls



There have been many times in my life when my selfish self has been surprised and overwhelmed by the generosity of others. One of the most consistent examples of generosity I have experienced was modeled by one of my first employers, Marvin Vieselmeyer, the owner of Superior-Deshler Co, Davenport, NE. Superior-Deshler Co. was the fertilizer and ag chemical business where I worked for two summers while in college.

The first example of generosity came only a few weeks into my employment when Marvin called me into his office, told me he appreciated my work, and gave me a raise that I certainly was not expecting nor needed to keep me happy with my employment. But he did it because he had a generous heart and he enjoyed providing encouragement, instilling confidence, and enabling his employees.

I also saw his generosity when I went to him and reported a mistake I made when mixing a batch of chemical for a customer. He effectively communicated how much damage that mistake could have caused to a farmer's crop but was also gracious in his approach and helped me fix the problem.

If Marvin happened to be eating at the same restaurant that I was during lunchbreak he always managed to pick up my tab. I remember protesting and telling him he did not need to do that but he always insisted. The thing that is really neat about acts of generosity is that the example tends to be carried forward. Throughout my career as a crop consultant, I have had many summer interns. I made sure I honored Marvin's legacy by buying lunch or afternoon pops for my interns – and many of them, like me, protested and told me I did not need to do so. Their protests gave me a chance to tell them about Marvin's generosity and explain how much that example meant to me. I know many of my former employees have continued to carry on Marvin's legacy of consistent generosity as they have moved into management roles themselves. Eventually the simple act of generosity and the pleasure it provides becomes entrenched and extends to all areas of one's life.

-Mark Kottmeyer



I have experienced the generosity of First Lutheran's members, whom I consider my church family. They have supported me through prayers, cards, calls, and visits during my recent and past health issues.

-Lil Larson



About 60 years ago, Dad asked if I wanted to ride along with him to take the first load of corn to the elevator for sale. My ten-year-old self sure did.

After the corn was weighed and unloaded at the elevator, Dad returned to the truck with a check in hand and a big smile on his face. He hopped in the truck and headed downtown. I figured he was headed to the grocery store to refill our pantry. But he wasn't. Instead, he drove to the church where I watched him sign the whole check over as a donation. When I asked why, Dad said every year, he ALWAYS gave the first full load of the harvest to God in thanks for the harvest to come.

**In Memory of Rex Weber
In Gratitude
KrisAnn Sullivan**



Generosity for sure has been learned from the generations before me – my parents, my grandparents, and teachers in all capacities. Throughout life, extreme generosity has been given to me by friends through grace and forgiveness and support in my lows and in my highs.

I have experienced generosity through an incredible employer who truly puts employees first. Being generous to others is something I give great joy in doing! Generous with my time through serving on committees through church and through our community and doing all I can for my family.

Since the moment I was told I could help in the church nursery (10 years old), I have been in some type of position working with the youth of the church. The generosity I have witnessed from teaching the youth and how they work with one another has been one of my greatest joys. God has been beyond generous to me in my blessings. I enjoy passing those blessings on through providing to those in need through multiple avenues. Volunteering my time to organizations, adopting families in need, helping deliver Goodfellows presents, delivering meals to those in need at Christmas and through Meals on Wheels, providing food to the Jubilee Center, participating in the gift of giving in the annual Give Where You Live Campaign, providing worship service for the elderly at Brookestone Gardens and so many other avenues.

I was told, by one of the most generous people I know, one will never go poor by giving. I have found this statement to be profoundly true.

-Rachel Leach



I learned about generosity at a very young age. Growing up, my family would do the best with what we had. I remember my mom putting iron-on patches on my jeans, and many of my clothes came from garage sales or hand-me-downs. Even though we weren't well to do, my parents made the effort to give financially to the church and other organizations they were passionate about. Additionally, we gave of our time, volunteering to various organizations. Giving in my family wasn't an afterthought, "Oh, we'll see what we have left, and then decide...", it was a conscious effort to give of our first fruits in confidence to the best of our ability.

As I matured and had a family of my own, my husband and I have worked hard to be able to continue the tradition and increase our giving in order to make a bigger impact. Although we aren't able to give as much as we would like, we continue to give as we are able, to help the greater good. Giving of our gifts, time, and talents not only helps others, but provides us with feelings of encouragement.

I have also experienced being the recipient of generosity numerous times in my life. There have been countless times that I have received help, a thoughtful gift, or a monetary contribution from others at times when it was needed. These gifts are never taken lightly, but always treasured, and greatly appreciated, knowing the thoughtful intention of those giving so generously.

When we focus our giving efforts outward - beyond ourselves - we become filled with joy, feeling better for helping others. As Christians, we strive to live our lives like Jesus. Matthew 20:28 alludes that God created us to serve, "just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." I pray that we not only continue the tradition of giving within our family, but that we grow our efforts to produce greater impact in the years to come.

-Tyler, Annette, Hope & Zach Schwartz



Recently, my son Hayes and I were talking about the geese that were returning to our area after winter. I asked if he noticed all the birds. He answered, “Yes,” and noted that he saw them flying in a “V.” Hayes is five, so his world right now is consumed with letters – we look to pick them out of our surroundings nearly everywhere we go. I asked Hayes if he knew why birds fly in a “V” shape, to which he responded “No, why?” I explained that the first bird, the leader, flies out in front, taking on the wind. The leader does this to make it easier for the other birds to fly. Then, each bird falling behind the leader in that “V” shape carves a path through the air that helps the follower, and so on. Hayes thought the geese were pretty smart to fly in a “V.”

Our conversation made me reflect on generosity. I was fortunate to grow up with a good family, in a good community that spoke of and modeled generosity. I had always felt I was also a generous person. However, as I grew older, I began to see generosity in a much different, and more meaningful light. Beyond the superficial volunteerism I had offered when I had time, I began to see the servitude, the sacrifice, and the beauty that often come with true generosity.

Immediately, what I have experienced as a parent comes to mind. I still remember that first realization of, “This beautiful little girl is *mine*” when my daughter, Lily, was born. In an overwhelming, awe-struck moment, it hit me that God had entrusted me with this amazing gift. I have never been entirely sure that I deserved this level of generosity, but I received it just the same. To honor that gift, as a parent I have tried to emulate generosity as well. I think most parents would say they’re willing to do *whatever it takes* to keep their family safe and healthy. Without a second thought, we sacrifice and bare heavy burdens to ease the burdens our children may bare.

I also clearly remember a moment with my husband, Adam, as we planned our marriage. He and I visited with Pastor Meg in a session leading up to our wedding here at First Lutheran. She turned to me and asked, “What do you love about Adam?” My first thought – first answer – was, “He’s generous.” With him, I witnessed how *real* generosity looked. Adam gave of himself when it was inconvenient, when he was tired, when it stole time from other things, when no one else would, when he knew he was being taken advantage of, when most would say, “I need to focus on me for a while.” *He was generous even when it was difficult.*

Just as the leading bird in a “V” formation, taking on resistance to pave an easier path for others, generosity often comes with these undercurrents of servitude and sacrifice. It’s not always the “right time,” or easy, or social-media-worthy. Often, it takes work, is time

consuming, and falls on our busiest days. The beauty in true generosity, though, is in its impactful end results, for those who receive *and for those who give*. “A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.” (Proverbs 11:24). I can’t help but see

amazing examples across our church – both noticeable and behind the scenes. So many folks are willing to lean into the wind and use the talents and position God has given them to serve. Our family feels so blessed to be a part of it.

-Stefani Wegner

Stories of Generosity from Kids and Youth Group:

Generosity in First Lutheran to me is like giving thanks. A simple prayer, a simple smile could change somebody’s whole day. Generosity to me means we should always do something that will make somebody turn their frown upside down, which then makes you feel proud that you did something that will affect their day. It will make it a great day.

I think if everyone in the world did one nice thing every day the world would be the best place to be. Generosity can be something that will affect somebody’s entire life. As a matter of fact, this church is really good with being generous because we don’t just look at our own lives and our own problems. We look at others’ life problems and things they need help with because not only does life revolve around us, but others. People need to have their best lives, and if someone doesn’t have a good life, we can simply help change that by asking how they are doing.

Generosity is something really nice that you could just say and change their life or day. Just simply maybe giving them a hug and asking them about their lives will help. Giving thanks to everyone so their lives can be the best it can possibly be. This means a lot to people in need because it can help them through their lives.

-Brooklyn Eilers, middle schooler

The youth group, around Christmas time, put some money together to buy Christmas gifts. They went to Target and bought some of the needs and wants from a list for two families. Two families the youth group didn’t even know received care and gift baskets to help them through the Christmas season.

-Miranda Wright, middle schooler

The choir sings every Sunday. They are generous with their time because they sing and practice twice a week. My dad sings in the choir and devotes his time to do it. I want to be able to sing in the choir or do praise band when I get older.

-Cosette Wagner, middle schooler

I would say generosity is really good on Thursdays when the church does meals for families in need because there are times some of us take for granted things we have when some people don't have anything. When I went on the ski trip with the youth group there was a project we did that helped a shelter that gives to people in that community. There was an older man who was getting clothes and he said, "I'm living in a van with my family." He had four people in his family. I just think it is nice what we are doing.

-Preston Eilers, middle schooler

The thing about generosity at our church is how much we spend time and money for people we love, and this place is unbelievable. My church, First Lutheran, has so many reasons why we are generous – when we feed people with the Jubilee dinners and help the people that are homeless, or that need help, or someone who doesn't have somebody to eat with. I think that is being generous.

-Maggie Sabah, middle schooler

Last summer, I had a lemonade stand outside our house and I raised \$50 for the Kearney Area Animal Shelter. Most of the people who stopped to buy lemonade were from our church!

-Jens Himmelman, grade schooler

Because First Lutheran is so generous in giving to our youth fundraisers, I get to go on mission trips and retreats that are fun and also a big part of my faith. I love being a part of this church.

-Grace Weber, high schooler



Every week at Campus Lutheran Dinner Church, we end with dessert (although, admittedly, sometimes we start with it...) that is delivered by a congregation member of First or Family of Christ. Whether it's cupcakes, brownies, or cookies; homemade or purchased; we enjoy a taste of the sweetness of God's love that extends beyond our group and into the community. This small, consistent, and generous gift is a tangible sign of God's abundant love that is oh-so-sweet!

-Sophia, Siarah, Brooklyn, Christopher, Reed, Kiernan, and Makayla @ Campus Lutheran



When our dog was hit by a car in front of our house last fall, she took off running and we couldn't find her. Suddenly at least a dozen people from FLC and Campus Lutheran were helping us look all around town to find her. When the Eilers family found Zoe on the field behind First Baptist, Jen Puls drove right onto the field, laid blankets in her backseat, and took us to the vet. It was a Wednesday night so it was a busy night at FLC, and Keith Powell took care of running FLY at the last minute. People really showed up for us in the midst of crisis - our family is so grateful for the generous spirit of our congregation.

-Pastor Elisabeth Pynn Himmelman



Growing up in our hometown churches, it was easy for us to learn generosity as our parents modeled giving gifts of service to the church in many ways. As our own family began to grow, we knew it was our turn to give our time and talents to the church. Through our various volunteering opportunities at First Lutheran, we have been blessed to work with wonderful families and members, and we feel that these opportunities have given us much more than we could have imagined.

-Luke and Michelle Dutcher

When I started confirmation, I began giving back to the church through service opportunities. I have sent cards to members in the church, volunteered at VBS, and helped serve during Feeding the Flock. These opportunities have helped me to grow as a child of God, and I'm thankful to continue growing in my faith.

-Paisley Dutcher

Generosity was given to Fred by his grandparents through their examples. They taught him early in life that if you were fortunate, you should share with others. Our parents were examples of that value also. During the depression and World War II, Fred's parents showed that giving to others was important. Hoboes passing through as they "rode the rails" left a "hobo code" on our porch foundation that let other hoboes know our home was one where they could be fed. Betty's parents did the same to help "gypsies" as they stopped at the farm to get food and aid. Fred's parents invited soldiers from Kearney Army Airbase to come to our home for Sunday dinner and for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We didn't have a lot of money, but our "victory garden" provided home-grown food for us to share. Betty's mother was one who gave via church auctions of handwork that both men and women produced at Fredricksburg Lutheran church near Minden. Our parents showed generosity by giving effort and money to see their churches grow to serve others.

Betty and I have agreed to support efforts in Kearney to help others in need. As educators and UNK alumni we contribute to the UNK Foundation scholarships. Two community organizations, "Give Where You Live" and the United Way, have been efforts we support. Working on Kearney Area for Habitat for Humanity (KAHFH) since it began, helping to build 90-plus houses for neighbors in need, serving on KAHFH committees and the board of directors has been worthwhile. Giving time freely is a way we all can give. Working on Jimmy Carter Work Projects in East St. Louis, Missouri, Pikeville, Kentucky, and Americus, Georgia have given Fred examples of others who value giving.

Betty has given generously of her time and talents through her participation and leadership role in the Women of the ELCA and Gloria Circle here at First Lutheran. She is actively supportive and involved in the Nebraska Synodical Women's Organization (NSWO) through Saved to Serve. This group provides women opportunities to put their faith into action by:

- building relationships with people of diverse ages, cultures and situations,
- initiating partnerships with social services agencies of the Nebraska Synod and in our communities,
- and participating in Bible study and formal worship.

Participants learn ways to put faith into action as stated in Hebrews 10:24: "Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another, and to show love." Betty has participated in 11 Saved to Serve events and is registered for another in May at Carol Joy Holling Camp near Ashland. Participants will bring items for the camp and for summer campers. While there the women will prepare the facilities for the camping season.

Betty and Fred plan to be at Carol Joy Holling over the Memorial Day weekend. They will be hosting their children, grandchildren and significant others to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary.

Our church is growing and we need to support our many ways of being generous in our building and in our larger community. We will continue to do that as long as we are able.

- Fred and Betty Kempf



Barbara Andrews, my late mother, was a writer and a collector of postcards and stamps. In addition to writing books, she was a columnist for an antiques newspaper. The greatest gift she bestowed on my siblings and me was her legacy of generosity. For decades she solicited postcards from churches around the country to sell in a mail-order auction, with all the proceeds going to ELCA World Hunger. “Stand up for those in need” was her belief. Thanks, Mom.

-Pam Hanson



In the summer of 2018, I went on an off-pavement motorcycle trip across Idaho with my old friend Howard. On that trip I saw a beautiful part of the country and discovered both my limits as a rider and the level of generosity a stranger can have for a traveler far from home.

About 30 miles from McCall, ID, I went down in deep gravel. When I got up, my right ankle and hip hurt, and I couldn't put any real weight on my right leg. Fortunately, I could still ride the motorcycle, so Howard and I made our way to the McCall emergency room. The wonderful staff

there soon informed me I was basically ok other than needing crutches to walk for the next week.

McCall is a lovely place to be, and I'm sure I would love going on vacation there, but it was almost impossible to find a ride back to the motel. (You really can't carry crutches on motorcycle, though I'm sure it's been done.)

No taxis, no Uber, no Lyft.

The nice lady with long, grey hair who took my insurance information offered to give me a ride once she got off work at 9 p.m., but that was still a long way off. But she said she would see what she could do.

Before long a man came out wearing a hospital custodian's uniform. He had a shaved head with giant spider tattooed on his skull. He approached us and asked, "Did you need a ride? I'm on my dinner break."

Yes, as a matter of fact, I did need a ride. And this man, whom I had never met before in my life, gave up his dinner break to ferry me to the hotel. I offered him \$20 for his efforts, but he said, "No, I'm just helping." This was a man who made his living cleaning floors at a small hospital. Who I suspect could have used the money. But it was more important for this man with a scary tattoo across the top of his head to generously help a stranger in need.

-Ralph E. Hanson

When one thinks of a person who is generous, they often think of someone who is giving with their money. My husband and I like to give in another way - that of our time and talents. I was involved with the Special Olympics for a very long time. During that time, I spent many hours at practices and competitions. When I saw an athlete improve in a skill or learn a new skill such as swimming or roller skating, and their face lights up because they accomplished something they thought they would never be able to do, I knew the time I spent with the athletes was well worth it. The competitions were the best as you were encouraging the athletes to give their best. But if they didn't, you had to let them know that was ok because they gave it their best and that's all I asked of the athletes. Because of my involvement with the Special Olympics, I have athletes and coaches from across the State who are lifelong friends.

My husband, Don, is very giving with his gardening talents. He takes orders for tomato, pepper, cabbage and eggplant. He starts tomato and pepper plants in his greenhouses to fill these orders. Once they are big enough, he will transplant them to a bigger cup so the plant can grow. Once he gives the plants to the person who ordered it is a nice full grown plant. He does this with close to 2,000 plants. No money is accepted for the plants, but if people want to give money it is donated to Horizon Middle School. We have a large garden and what we don't use we give to people who want fresh produce.

Don and I have found that if we are blessed and wish to share our blessings through our time and talents.

-Deb and Don Schauer



When we were first asked to write our Generosity Story, our first thought was "Really? We are not the big financial givers of the church. Why would they be asking us to share our generosity story?" As we reflected more on what it means to be generous, we realized that giving money is only one way to be generous to a cause or organization. Time and talents are also ways to be generous.

Growing up, both of us came from families that were not wealthy. Our parents were not the financial backers of the church. Instead, we witnessed our parents from a young age being actively involved in our home churches. As we got a little older, we also took part an active part

in our home churches. Dave ushered and helped out with VBS. I played the piano and organ for church, sang in the choir, and helped my mom with weekly and monthly bulletins.

After we joined First Lutheran Church, we found ourselves in a very similar situation to our parents. Money was not plentiful being newly married with new jobs and college debt, so our financial giving was minimal at best. However, we believed that when there was a need in the church and you had the ability to help fill that need or serve the church, you should do that. At the beginning, I joined the bell choir and was asked to help with the kids' bell choir. Then I began helping coordinate VBS.

As our children got older, we found ourselves doing even more for the church. We have both been in the bell choir (in fact all of our family has played in the bell choir at one point in time), I help fill in for the choir director and accompanist when the need arrives. Our entire family has helped (and still does help) out with VBS. I now sing in the choir and have even helped take students to Confirmation Camp. I have served on the call committee and am currently on the Mutual Ministry Team for the co-pastors. Dave has served on Stewardship, Confirmation, and Budgeting committees and is currently on the Care and Growth Committee. He is also in charge of cooking for Wednesday night meals and helps out with ushering when needed.

So our Generosity Story is one of time and talents. We hope that we have shown our children the importance of sharing what you have – whether that is money, time and/or talents. (I believe we have as our children have played and sang in choirs, played instruments or sang for special music or with groups for service, ushered, assisted with communion, helped in the booth with projection and cameras, and helped with VBS just to name a few.) Sure, money keeps the lights on in the church, but if there is no one to step up and lead, teacher or assist with the programs within a church, there is no need for the lights to be on! So we challenge you to think about how you can be generous to First Lutheran.

Dave and Angela Wright
Maleah, Marissa, Karson and Miranda



Both Stacy and I were constantly shown examples of generosity by our respective parents growing up. As a farming family, Stacy parents were always helping a neighbor or friend move cattle, or helping in the many ways a farmer needs. Their generosity didn't always come from having an abundance, but it always came with genuine faith and understanding that relying on each other from time to time was an important part of farming. My parents were also instrumental in raising my sister and I with examples of volunteering their time and various talents.

Generosity is thing unique in a way that is not always easily recognized, but without it our lives would be incredibly difficult. Growing up our youth group in church was very active in volunteering at homeless shelters, helping with yard clean-ups, visiting senior care homes. Both our families housed exchange students in high school. Stacy, through the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, has developed a great relationship with an individual with whom 20 years later she is still in contact with. Her generosity along with the help from the program as made an incredible impact on the young man's life. During our time in Alaska, as our family grew, our trips to Nebraska became more challenging. Our families were always able and willing to have a vehicle with car seats installed waiting for us at the airport! Our church family in Alaska had many fellowship groups that were very encouraging of which to be part. From providing shelter for the homeless in the winter months, taking part in a new moms group, and a group of church families getting together for a meal and fellowship, there were many ways in which generosity was being given and received.

Our giving has fluctuated with our flexibility time wise as well as financially. Early in our marriage, having children had an impact on our giving early on. As time has moved on, our giving has been a bit more stable and predictable. There are always new ways that we can learn to give. It doesn't have to come from money alone. The gifts that I have been able to provide through music and other lay opportunities helps others to feel comfortable in their church life are a rewarding part of ours.

Being generous comes from a sense of self awareness of our ability to give in ways that are not always immediately known or require stepping out of a comfort zone. The smallest gifts and acts of kindness can have the biggest impacts. Our lives are constantly being impacted by generosity from friends, family, and sometimes strangers.

--Jonathan Reece



Those who are called to serve Christ as pastors display inspirational generosity.

I have witnessed this time and time again from pastors in my life. From a very young age attending Christ Lutheran Church in Lincoln, I remember the warm smiles, hearty handshakes and enthusiastic hugs that Pastor Charles Reimnitz would handout as congregants left the church after every service. He was such a positive and endearing servant of God who had an infectious way of spreading joy to others.

Since moving to Kearney and attending First Lutheran, I have become more involved over the years and worked very closely with many pastors. I'm in awe of the way in which each pastor gives of him or herself for the people of this congregation and community. Countless hours, early mornings, long nights, holidays, and weekends, pastors are on the job. There are higher paying career choices, certainly, but I doubt there are many career choices that are more rewarding. Rewarding for the pastors and rewarding for the people they serve.

Pastors give, and give, and give. They give of their time and they give of their hearts. I've witnessed pastors behind closed doors, out of sight of others, completely break down feeling the weight of anxiety, strife, and unrest of those who confide in them for pastoral care.

I've witnessed pastors drop everything they're doing to respond to a call from the hospital, or a community member in need of assistance, or lost soul in need of direction. They care about the people deeply – flaws and all. They accept others the way Christ accepts us all.

The pastors I've had the good fortune of interacting with have shown a selflessness that I didn't know existed. A deep caring that I aspire to achieve. A willingness to serve that shines a light illuminating Christ in our lives.

This is a generosity that may not pay for material things, but it paves the way for a more meaningful connection with the Spirit. I'm grateful for the work of pastors in our church and throughout this world.

-Kyle Means

NOTES:

Generosity Stories

Personal reflections on the power of giving



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