

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen*

Ephesians 3:20-21

IMAGINE

*...All that can be done through Christ.*

**Faith  
Stories**



# FAITH STORIES

## Message from the Spiritual Life

**“Oh Lord, you have the power to help us be faithfully bold in our service and giving. Help me to have more trust and less fear!”**

It is our fervent hope and prayer that you will find inspiration in this prayer and in these stories from the faith journeys of your friends and neighbors. There are so many common threads in the journeys of God’s children, and we are often buoyed up by the fact that our trials and celebrations have parallels in the lives of brothers and sisters in Christ. And we all benefit, at one time or another, from new insights into faith provided by other Christians.

This book may be used as a daily devotional over the next few weeks, or you may choose to just sit down and read it! We trust that God will lead you to nuggets of wisdom and pockets of strength as you read.

*May He bless you richly and lead you to deep wells of peace and joy!*

## Your Spiritual Life Team

## *Team Members*

Verna Strand  
Carol Will  
Helen Bunkowske  
Bonner Armstrong  
Carol Kimble  
Sharlene Kolb  
Karen Armstrong

# FAITH STORIES

## SEND ME

*Janet Olson*

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, Here am I; send me." *Isaiah 6:8* NIV

"Send me" was the motto of an Army unit to which I belonged for several years. Our soldiers were assigned difficult missions requiring special skills. They trained constantly to be ready whenever their orders came. As Christians, we are often called by God to perform tasks, small and large, requiring the use of special skills with which he has blessed us. He has given us these skills, or gifts, so that we may be his ears and eyes, hands and feet, and occasionally, his voice. He may ask us to perform a simple, but important task such as preparing a meal for a shut-in; giving tired caregivers some rare time to themselves; mowing the grass for someone unable to do so; babysitting for a single parent, or just listening to someone who needs a sympathetic ear.

Often God calls on us for more challenging "missions", requiring extraordinary faith and courage. Examples of these kinds of tasks include responding to a young nephew's critical need for a kidney by offering one of your own; or speaking out for what you believe to be God's will, instead of being swayed by popular social and political trends that run counter to his teaching, such as those who spoke out against Hitler's Nazism or Stalin's purges. Or merely being a practicing Christian today in many countries where Christians are routinely persecuted and even killed. Most of us are not called to be martyrs for our faith, but no one knows when God will call on us or what mission he will have for us. To be useful to God, we must be prepared through prayer and knowledge of his Word so that when he asks, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?", we will be able to hear his voice, discern his will, and respond, "Send me, O Lord."

### Prayer:

Almighty God, please give us the strength, skill, and courage that we need to perform your work here on earth, in tasks both large and small, to further your will and to glorify your holy name. Train us through your teachings in the Bible to discern your will for us and to respond only to your voice, so that when you call out "Whom shall I send?", we will have the faith to answer with confidence, "Send me!"

# FAITH STORIES

## STAY AT THE WHEEL

The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.  
*Zephaniah 3:17*

Like so many of the areas around Helena, my property did not escape the ravages of the pine bark beetle. In May, the tree removal service arrived to cut down and haul away the dead trees, leaving only stumps. It was two months later, while walking the dog, that I noticed it. In the crevice between two stumps, a new tree was growing, two feet of green, vibrant growth. God renews His creation, and He also renews us through the power of the Holy Spirit. The analogy of a potter working clay on a pottery wheel is often used to describe God's relationship with us. If God is the potter, then our job is to stay on the wheel. As long as we stay on the wheel, then the master potter can continue to work new life in us. How do we stay on the wheel? Regular worship, prayer and Bible study are all good ways to keep close to God, giving Him the chance to renew us and form us into the persons He desires us to be.

*Pat Lumma*

### Prayer:

Heavenly Father,  
help us to stay  
close to you, giving  
your grace  
and power the  
opportunity to  
transform us so  
that our lives will  
bring glory to you.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## AMAZING GRACE

*Luci Pearson*

John's Gospel, the hymns "Amazing Grace", "How Great Thou Art", "What a Friend We Have in Jesus".

I consider myself a spiritual rather than a religious person. My faith is simple, a belief in God, accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, trusting Him for the salvation of my soul, experiencing a spiritual rebirth through the Holy Spirit and a renewal of God's love in my heart for all mankind. But this was not always so with me. Though I always believed there was a God, I didn't believe in or put any trust in Him because of my early religious experiences, viewing Him as a harsh, vengeful, and judgmental and uncaring person out to get me if I stepped out of line and not the caring, loving, kind and generous God I know today. Life's circumstances, alcoholism and other serious problems turned me back toward God. I came to realize that no human power could relieve me of the problems I faced, but God could and would if I sought Him. This was the turning point of my faith, trust and belief in God - the "amazing grace that saved a wretch like me". It has never failed me since I first came to believe, giving me the faith and trust in God I so desperately need.

### **Prayer:**

God the Father,  
Son and Holy Spirit;  
the Holy Trinity;  
One. I put my faith  
and trust in You  
always. Let me  
know and do your  
will each day, then  
help and guide,  
direct and show me  
the way. In Jesus'  
name I pray.  
Amen.

# FAITH STORIES

## THE SPRING IN MY LIFE

**Amy Heldt**

Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future for you, and your hope will not be cut off. *Proverbs 24: 14*

Spring is touted as the time for new beginnings. Everything is fresh and beginning to grow, and people are filled with hope for the future. However, fall has always been my favorite season for just those reasons. The start of the school year brings fresh school supplies with names written clearly across the front and syllabi to detail exactly how students will grow in the coming year. Fall is the best time for hope because poor grades and other disappointments have yet to smudge the perfect year. My excitement for fall begins the last Wednesday in July, when the first back-to-school ads are sent out. Those feelings are shared by Meg Ryan in the movie *You've Got Mail*, who told Tom Hanks' character, "If I knew your name and address, I would send you a bouquet of freshly sharpened pencils." The smell itself of pencil shavings reminds me of fall and leaves me feeling giddy. Proverbs 24: 14 says that "...wisdom is sweet to your soul." Whenever I conquer a difficult math problem or essay, I feel that sweetness, that feeling that anything is possible. Fall promises wisdom and a fresh start, making it the spring in my life.

### Prayer:

Dear God, author of life and of new beginnings, please continue to lead us to joy in simple things!

# FAITH STORIES

## I NEED FREQUENT REMINDERS

*Craig Erickson*

Having eaten breakfast and gotten ready for work, I was once again gripped by a paralyzing fear and asking myself. "How did I get myself in this situation?" Two weeks earlier, I had started working as a grant writer and administrator for an engineering firm here in Helena and even though I had over ten years experience, that morning I felt overwhelmed and inadequate, but once again, God responded by gently guiding me to the first five verses of Isaiah 43. That morning, it felt very much that God was speaking directly to me rather than to the people of ancient Israel when I read the following: But now, this is what the LORD says—

he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.

<sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD, your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I give Egypt for your ransom,  
Cush <sup>[a]</sup> and Seba in your stead.

<sup>4</sup> Since you are precious and honored in my sight,  
and because I love you,  
I will give men in exchange for you,  
and people in exchange for your life.

<sup>5</sup> Do not be afraid, for I am with you...

### **Prayer:**

Creator God, your promises sustain us through life's trials, and we have only ourselves to give in return. We're so grateful that you seek nothing more from us than ourselves! Amen

As I read these verses my fear melted away and I was once again reminded (God knows that I need frequent reminders) that He is always with me and I need not be afraid. And while I would rather not pass through life's turbulent waters or walk through its many fires, I take comfort in His word and I am given the courage to do what must be done that day. That is my hope and my strength and for this reason, I regularly worship God, tithe, and try to do what I am directed to do by God's word. It is a small price to pay in comparison to what was given for up for me on the cross by my Lord Jesus Christ.

# FAITH STORIES

## HE TOUCHED ME

*Elaine Heen*

### **Prayer:**

It's interesting that I am asked to tell my story in the same month it occurred 29 years ago, the 31st of July, 1981. I have a physical each July and this time a small lump showed its head. Within a few days it had grown. The night before surgery as I was getting ready for bed, my heart was crying out, oh, so loud, as you see my life had been really strained for the past fifteen years. I finally threw up my hands and cried out, "Lord, YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER, I CAN'T HANDLE IT ANY MORE".

A short time later I laid down in my bed lying on my back. It was only a few moments later that it seemed like a finger touched the back of my head, slowly moving down my spine to the bottom of each heel. I was quiet, at peace and slowly fell asleep. The next morning, Friday, I walked to the hospital for surgery. I woke up refreshed like taking a nap. On Sunday the doctor walked in and said, "We need to talk". I told him, "No, I want to go home". Home I went with tubes and all. On Monday morning the doctor called and said, "WE GOT IT ALL". I told him, "I KNEW YOU WOULD". A few days later in the doctor's office I told him the story. You see when the pathologist report came back the small lump had exploded (that was why it was so large), but it had exploded into another sack all around it. Nothing had traveled into my system. NOW just where did that other sack come from???

A few days later the door bell rang and here stood Karen Seyler, a young 30-plus-year-old mother of two little boys who was living out her short life dying of brain cancer. She asked me how I was and I replied, "Fine". Well she came right up to my face and said, "YOU ARE TALKING TO ME NOW." "WOW"! So we sat down and I told her the story. "OK", she said and left.

# FAITH STORIES

## HE TOUCHED ME

*Elaine Heen (cont)*

A couple of Sundays later I met her at church by the back pews and she asked how I was doing. I thought awhile and told myself I better not lie to her....so I told her I had been sitting in my rocker wondering where the cancer would travel in my body. Her big brown eyes looked at me and here is what she said, "DIDN'T YOU GIVE IT TO GOD"? I said, "YES". And her reply was, "THEN WHY DO YOU WANT IT BACK IN YOUR HANDS"? I can still hear her and see those big brown eyes in front of me. They will be with me always. I truly believe they were the penetrating eyes of my Lord. Karen died a short time later. Who knows how many people she touched.

It took some time, but little by little I completely put all my trust in Him. It wasn't easy leaving my concerns and worries in His hands. Since then I don't do anything without talking to Him and asking for His guidance. Prayer taught by my mother and the wind of the SPIRIT move me. Looking back it's been an interesting life!

YES, HE TOUCHED ME, OH, HOW HE TOUCHED ME.

### **Prayer:**

Dear loving God,  
you promise to be  
with us and in us  
always. Help us to  
trust that promise  
and rely on your  
presence—always.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## TWO WOMEN

*Pastor Kendra Wilde*

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. *Romans 8:28*

Before I went to seminary I did fundraising and public relations work for a nursing home in Seattle and it was my job to hunt for compelling stories from nursing home life for the newsletter. While I met several remarkable residents and staff, there is one particular story that *still* makes me wonder about how God is at work in the world.

The basic story is this: two women whose ancestors were connected ended up being roommates in the nursing home's TCU (temporary care unit). The two roommates were the direct descendants of Meriwether Lewis and a chief of the Chinook people—who had met many generations ago during Lewis and Clark's journey. What are the chances that these two particular women would be at the same nursing home at the same time and be made roommates AND that they would discover this ancient connection between them?

The women's families met and exchanged gifts. My interview didn't venture into deep waters—broken promises or forgotten treaties—but I do think healing happened because of their friendship.

I certainly left feeling more hopeful about the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation between people and awed by the circumstances that came together to make this encounter possible: was God's hand in this?

There is a popular quote that says: "Coincidence is God's way of staying anonymous." I am enough of a rationalist that I think some coincidences are just that. Yet, other times, especially when a coincidence yields love or joy or peace or justice, I think we get a glimpse of God's work in the world.

Likewise, I don't think anyone who is part of our faith community is here by coincidence. I am quite certain that we have been brought together for very particular reasons—some of those reasons we already glimpse and others we can only imagine.

### **Prayer:**

Tinkering God,  
Open our eyes and  
our hearts to see  
You at work in the  
world. May we be  
willing participants  
in Your work when  
You bring people  
together for Your  
purposes. Amen.

# FAITH STORIES

## SOLID FAITH

*Don Schenck*

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. *Hebrews 11: 1-3.*

### **Prayer:**

Lord! Prepare us for what is to come! Amen

In a sense I was born Lutheran – to parents of Lutheran faith. During those early years I received all of the Lutheran training from Sunday School to Confirmation. I became a member of the Luther League and an expert dishwasher, washing dishes for over 600 individuals that attended our annual lutefisk dinner.

During those early training years and the many years following I wrestled with the word "faith." And I'm quite certain that many of you did the same. I kept telling myself I had faith – faith in Jesus Christ and the Second Coming of Christ. But did I?

Then on a day in the 1970's I was driving on the streets of Helena with two companions and we began discussing religion. Then at that very moment I realized that with about 70% of biblical prophecy already completed why should I question the balance of it? Ever since that day I have had solid faith in God and the Second Coming of Christ.

I look forward to the completion of Daniel's prophecies and those predicted in the Book of Revelation.

# FAITH STORIES

## NEEDS AND WANTS

*Karie Shelton*

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

*Matthew 6: 31-33*

My four grandsons are adamant about saying grace before meals. Often it is in the Catholic tradition of my daughter-in-law, with the sign of the cross beginning and end. Sometimes it is the grace they learned at Lutheran bible school, with hand motions. Sometimes they sing the joyful "Johnny Appleseed" grace they learned from their Auntie Laura. Occasionally we do all three.

It is the Johnny Appleseed song that runs through my mind today. "The Lord is good to me, and so I thank the Lord for giving me the things I need, the sun and the rain and the apple seed. The Lord is good to me!"

The Lord does abundantly provide the things I need.

As a First Grade teacher I taught my students the difference between *needs* and *wants*. It is a difficult lesson for all of us. I'm sure I'm not alone in the tendency to confuse the two. For example, I may think I *need* a new pair of shoes, but one glance into my closet brings the realization that I only *want* new shoes.

I would like to challenge you to a stewardship exercise. Prayerfully give thanks for all you have. For a few days, make a "blessings" list, and add to it daily. Think about your *needs*: clean air and water, food, shelter, and clothing.

# FAITH STORIES

## NEEDS AND WANTS

Anonymous

How many of your blessings far exceed those *needs*? Then consider and acknowledge those whose basic *needs* are not being met.

Christ has charged us with caring for those in *need*. Imagine what could happen if we made the choice to grow in service by putting aside some of our *wants* in order to meet the *needs* of others. I realize this is no small order; it may involve some surrender of control.

I spent a lot of years struggling to fit God into my aims, my schedule, my finances. The "Forty Days of Purpose" campaign ORLC undertook a few years ago was a turning point for me in my relationship with God and consequently in my philosophy of living and giving. By simply putting God first, and asking Him to use what time, talents, and resources He has given me for His purpose, my life has been enriched and I have gained a sense of peace and freedom. God's grace makes that an option for each of us.

### Prayer:

Father, You richly bless us. We ask that You would guide us to trust You as we open our hearts and wisely use the resources You have given us. Help us to remember that "All we have is Thine alone, A trust, oh Lord, from Thee." Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

*Julius Christianson*

On the Sunday before I entered the Army in World War II, the Pastor at my church in Wolf Point (First Lutheran) gave me a Lutheran published pocket sized daily prayer devotional for military persons. It came with me to CBI (China-Burma-India) where I spent two years. I read it almost daily and it was a great comfort to feel God's watch over me and to also know the folks in my church were praying for us. After returning to the states and settling in, it always lay on my home desk. Our grandson, after high school, volunteered for four years of service. He was first sent to South Korea and I offered him my special booklet; he said he wanted it and thanked me. It went to Korea for one year, and then to Iraq for 18 months. He called me from Iraq and said it was always the first thing he packed when moving.

I think it was a great gift for service people and have thought Lutheran Churches should continue this for those entering military service.

### Prayer:

Please, Father God, continue to be with those who serve our country in distant and hostile places. Lead them to strong and enduring faith.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## THE INFLUENCE OF OTHERS

**Karen Armstrong**

Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. *Psalms 148: 8b*

Thinking about my “faith story” invariably leads me to the fact that it isn’t MY story at all – it’s the influence of others living out THEIR faith that causes my faith to grow! I think of friends who quietly visit the ill and the homebound bearing gifts of food, conversation and laughter; folks who provide meals for new mothers and their families; those who schedule time to shop/lunch with friends who don’t see well enough to drive; those who clean and supply the church kitchen; those who greet and visit newcomers to congregations; a person who meets weekly with a small group of “socializers” and presents a short word of scripture and care and waits patiently for the seeds to grow.

As a child, I recognized in my maternal grandfather and paternal grandmother a joy and delight in life that I wanted to have for myself. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to realize that the source of that joy was an unshakable faith in the Lord. And I see the same joy in others all around me. The flip side, of course, is the lack of that joy in other lives – usually the lives of those who’ve not yet gotten to know Him.

### **Prayer:**

Dear loving God, I am so thankful to you for all those saints who’ve taught me that faith is the single greatest asset any of us can know. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## A MARVELOUS JOURNEY

*Ann Bailey*

"Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work."

*2 Corinthians 9:7-8*

My being called to be a national church leader in stewardship is proof positive that God does indeed have a sense of humor. I received the call at a much earlier age than I acted upon it because I was certain it was a wrong number. But God's Spirit wasn't about to give up and eventually even a slow learner such as I became aware of a life of servanthood that was mine to follow. It was up to me whether I would respond.

But it wasn't easy. Why me? Why now? I had a comfortable and predictable life that was safe and secure. As I viewed what challenges would face me in this call; the work-load, the travel and the disruption to my way of life. I also felt under-prepared and lacking in so many ways. This sense of call was tough to fathom and many people close to me never did understand. At times I thought it was all in my imagination and yet doors opened and I found myself moving through them even as I struggled with my own uncertainties.

Unexplainably I found myself becoming the head of the internal fund-raising for the national Lutheran church which meant being the head of a department, writing the entire curriculum and teaching stewardship across the nation. This caused me great stress because although I had grown into walking the talk, I did so reluctantly. Where was the joy? Where was the cheer? From an early age I was taught to be frugal and even to hoard things since "you never know when the other shoe will drop."

# FAITH STORIES

## A MARVELOUS JOURNEY

*Ann Bailey (cont)*

Now I was giving more financial support to charities on an annual basis than my entire yearly salary in my 20's. As a trained financial planner and CPA such actions seemed extreme.

As my internal stress grew I began to focus on verse 8..."and God will provide you with every blessing in abundance." Not what I might want mind you, but what I need. Gradually I began to trust in those words and as my heart changed, I was released from being a prisoner to my possessions and security needs. This was replaced by the beautiful peace and understanding of a Christ-centered life free in the certainty of the Gospel. By then I had established Kairos and so I choose as Kairos' mission "teaching the joy of giving and growing in Christ."

Kairos has been in ministry for over 20 years and I have been privileged to work with thousands of faith filled believers who humble me daily with their generosity.

### **Prayer:**

Thank you, God, for being persistent and forgiving me this marvelous journey to travel. As I walk with the good folks of Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, may the abundance of your blessings become apparent and may the Holy Spirit's presence generate cheerful generosity enabling ORLC to become all that you know it can be.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## THE CHURCH WAS ALWAYS THERE

*Helen Bunkowske*

"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." *Matthew 28:20*

I was born into a wonderful Christian family in Wendell, MN. My parents had me baptized when I was 5 weeks old. Then I started Sunday school at 4 years old in a small church held in a home. I continued on with my Sunday School and then confirmation on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a larger church. We went thru Luther's Small Catechism and Bible history. I attended Bible study during my high school. Years and it was there that I had a wonderful teacher who really helped me relate to the Bible and prayer.

After high school I went into Nurse's training under the Cadet Nurse Corps in Fargo, ND. While there I met my husband to be, dear Al, and we were married in Chicago while I finished my nurses training and he went to school there. We were both of the same faith and found our church home close to where we lived and also attended Bible study. God was so good to us and we soon moved to Minneapolis to have our first child, and soon three more children. My husband and I were very active in a growing church and our children also in Sunday school, choir and vacation bible school. I loved teaching classes then also.

Several years later we moved to Rapid City and again found a wonderful church home and the children were very active in youth activities. One of our sons developed cancer so I spent a month at Mayo clinic caring for him. Without the many prayers and vigils of the congregation, friends and relatives it would have been very hard.

Our next move was to Helena where my husband worked for the FAA. We were so fortunate to meet the AAL insurance agent who led us to Our Redeemers Lutheran. This was in 1972 and our church sanctuary was just where the overflow is now. As our congregation grew we needed to expand, so the new sanctuary was built, with much prayer and fortitude by the congregation. We were gradually able to add pews and carpeting. Each phase required much dedication by all and God lead us on. Now that we own the new land and hope to expand to a new church, we pray and ask the Lord to direct us to do his will.

### Prayer:

May our hearts be filled with the Spirit and joy to follow his leading. He has said "Lo I am with you always." God bless Our Redeemers.

# FAITH STORIES

## LETTING GO

*Sharlene Kolb*

"Sometimes grace is a ribbon of mountain air that gets in through the cracks."

Anne Lamott, *Grace Eventually*, © 2007, Penguin Books, London, England (pg. 20)

I have always believed in God, but thankfully my beliefs have changed over time and continue to change as I encounter God in my life. I grew up going to church every Sunday, but like many families, we didn't talk about our faith. Confirmation taught me the beliefs of our denomination, but I do not remember hearing much about God's love, forgiveness and grace. As a child I saw God as a form of Santa Claus sitting on a cloud and recording all my sins.

As an adult I thought I could earn God's love through perfection. But to be perfect I had to be very much in control. I did the things I knew I could do well and seldom sought new experiences for fear I would fail or look foolish. Yet no matter how in control I felt, I seldom met my own expectations, let alone what I believed God expected of me. To feel I had some semblance of control over my life I shrunk God and tucked him away in a corner of my heart. I still felt his presence, but I found it easier to live with myself when he wasn't looming over me.

In 1988 my husband and I hiked to Granite Park Chalet in Glacier National Park with a group of friends. As we left Logan Pass and hiked the High-Line Trail that crosses the mid-section of the Garden Wall, I suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of God's presence. There in the beauty and vastness of those mountains God cracked open my heart and gave me a glimpse of a different God...a God of goodness beyond my comprehension. Gradually I found myself letting go of my fear of God, and began to see him in a new light...not as the judgmental God of my childhood, but as a loving

18 God who cares deeply for his people.

**Prayer:**

# FAITH STORIES

## LETTING GO

*Sharlene Kolb (cont)*

Five years later the bottom dropped out of my world when our daughter gave birth to a still-born son. What hopes and dreams we had piled on this baby. But when I held him in my arms, cold and silent, those hopes and dreams died; my perfect world shattered. I could not breathe life into his tiny body. I could not protect my daughter from heartbreak. I could not pretend that this tragedy would go away like a bad dream. I had to face his death. I had to watch my daughter grieve. There was nothing I could do to right this wrong. But because I now believed in a loving God, I was able to accept the gifts he offered to my family and me. Our friends became God's hands reaching out to us with hugs and phone calls, cards and food, and shoulders on which to cry. A wonderful nurse who herself had experienced stillbirth became God's counselor in helping us deal with the issues of death and grief and the emotional trauma it leaves behind.

Although I still find it hard to give up my need for control and perfection, I find that when I am mindful of God and all that he has done for me, it is easier to let go. How freeing it is to turn my worries over to God, how freeing it is to know that he is in control, how freeing it is to know God isn't sitting on a cloud counting my sins. Instead he forgives me and loves me just as I am.

### **Prayer:**

God our heavenly Father, hallowed be thy name, be with me this hour. Come Holy Spirit; inspire my heart with praise for the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me remember him and his teachings at morning and evening, in work and rest, when I am alone and when I am with others. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## FAITH IS A GIFT

*Karen Duncan*

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. *Luke 12:32*

I often confess and beg forgiveness for fear of earthly things. I have had many moments (OK, maybe longer than moments) of fear in my life but as I remember them my gut is most wrenched by the fear that I have on others' behalf. I have had fear for myself when facing divorce, employment uncertainty and even cancer diagnosis. These were intense, short-lived fears from which I moved on to action. I trusted God - trusted that God has given me the gifts necessary to cope with whatever comes my way.

For others I have feared the outcomes of illness, both mental and physical, ramifications of their behavior, threats to them from others and their environments. These are more difficult fears for me to overcome. I have great difficulty giving over their good fortune to God. I feel guilty and fearful for what I cannot control in others' lives. Especially when in the throes of worry and fear over a parent, sibling, dear friend, child or grandchild I am sleepless! My mind rolls with the awful possibilities. I wish for the faith of Moses when he said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you have only to keep still." (Exodus 14:13-14)

Faith is a gift, an inoculation, and a comfort, but sometimes elusive due to my own foolish desire for power and control over things. Amidst my agony I argue with myself and become more fearful and agitated. I ruminate that if only I say or do exactly the right thing, all will turn out OK.

Alas, faith is also a habit and to move away from my power quest to recognizing my lack of power over others and recognizing anew God's all powerful presence I cry, pray, and recite with deep breathing "Be still and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10). One might expect I would learn my lesson once, and for all - not so. I still struggle and yet the gift is mine!

### Prayer:

Holy Creator,  
Redeemer and  
Counselor, For-  
give my fear and  
illusion of per-  
sonal power!  
Breathe through  
me your healing  
words and  
actions that your  
power will make  
right the wrongs  
I cannot correct.  
All glory to you  
in Christ's name,  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## DOES FAITH MOVE MOUNTAINS

*Gary & Joy Novota*

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. *Psalm 143 10:11*

In September of 2005, our lives took a turn that was so unexpected that we are still shaking our heads! After Gary's first medical physical in many years, we were informed by Dr. Riegler, a gastroenterologist, that Gary would need a very specific surgery. Dr. Riegler had seen Gary's "alien" (as we dubbed it) only 3 x's in 15 years of practice. At the end of August, we traveled to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, & we returned home at the end of October. What a wild ride of events....

Our dear friends, Lyle & June Pratt, hooked us up with suggestions for Lutheran churches in Rochester, & we visited one on our first Sunday in town. We connected with the pastors at the church, & they were our life-line during our 6 weeks at Mayo. Lots of prayers were said on our side, & we know the prayers & well-wishes of our family & friends from Helena & our home-families were going strong, back & forth between Mayo, & all the connections in-between....& of course, God was in control. If it hadn't been for a strong faith to keep us going, we're not sure if we could have withstood all the obstacles & the challenges of having left home, thinking we'd be gone for a maximum of a week or so...but the end result was being away from our home for 6 weeks. Sometimes the memories are almost surreal - did they really happen? Did we really go through this unusual process that certainly happens to others, but not to us? Somehow the strength was given to us to handle each day & the rocky road we would travel, & especially to bless us with a world-renowned surgeon with ultimate knowledge & skill.

Yes, even when we didn't know how we'd ever be able to complete the trial handed to us, we came out smiling when Gary was released from the hospital.

# FAITH STORIES

## DOES FAITH MOVE MOUNTAINS

*Gary & Joy Novota (cont)*

God had granted successful healing for Gary to recover (from a pancreas sparing duodenectomy .... for those who are curious!). The journey was arduous & very costly, & we didn't know how the financial aspect would hit us. Once again, our faithful friends came through, & a fundraiser gave us the much-needed help to pay the bills that had mounted up. Was faith at the center? Not always - sometimes it was hard to go on, & it was very difficult to be optimistic. However, what other choice was there? Ultimately we knew God was in control, & He directed & guided the healing process, & He allowed Gary to get back on his feet.

Two years later, almost to the very day, Gary was back in the hospital, this time at the local St. Peter's Hospital. Gary developed septic salmonella poisoning, & he almost didn't make it. I yelled at God, I pleaded with God, I cried to God, & I begged God to make Gary well again. At some point, I let it go, & I gave it over to God to take care of my husband as I had watched him slipping away from me that first night. Did I have complete faith? No, I was scared to death....however, at some point, my faith had to keep me going to take care of Gary, & then God said, "I'm in charge", & once again, Gary was finally diagnosed, treated & left the ICU & hospital 6 days later.

Faith can come in little ways, or it can come with a major impact. Between the knowledge of God's care & knowing that He's at the helm, why is it so difficult to just give everything over to him 24 hours a day? It's a life-long learning experience for some of us, but we do know that without faith, our lives would probably be constantly filled with turmoil & uncertainty so isn't it easier just to have faith & believe? It's so great that God is so patient with us!

We're not sure about faith moving mountains. However, faith sure does bring the mountains to a level we can climb!

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, your presence heals an sustains and strengthens us when we falter. Thank you for being there through every trial.  
Amen.

# FAITH STORIES

## THANK HEAVEN

*Dee Dee Fischer*

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?... *I Corinthians 15:55-57*

My father was diagnosed with colon cancer 3 years before it took his life. He fought the disease with everything available to him in the Seattle/Tacoma medical community. The disease won the battle to kill my father's body. But, it never succeeded in conquering his spirit – his love – his passion for life and the people around him.

I was blessed to spend the last 2 weeks with my dad as he faced the certainty that his time on earth was coming to a very quick end. He had been advised by the Dr.'s that he only had a couple of weeks to live. What would you do with that information?

I remember driving through the beautiful tree lined streets with my dad, watching as an eagle flew overhead . He said, "It's so weird Dee Dee. I look around me and see all this beauty and think – I won't be here in a couple of weeks."

My dad was a sweet man and he loved to laugh. I will forever remember him lying in the hospital bed in his home, eyes closed, smiling at a goofy joke or comment made by one of 4 his goofy kids. My dad loved Jesus. He was confident in his trust in God's promises. But, like each one of us, he was walking into the *unknown*. - We believe we're going to heaven.... Right?

My father stopped breathing about 12:30 in the afternoon on April 22, 2008. As my sister, brother and I stood around his bed, marveling at the reality and finality of his death, our attention was distracted by the music playing on the radio.

# FAITH STORIES

## THANK HEAVEN

*Dee Dee Fischer*

The song was "Cheek to Cheek" written by Irving Berlin and sung by Fred Astaire:

"Heaven..... I'm in Heaven...  
And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak..."

I believe that my father knew that each one of us is going to face that moment of transition – death. And that each of us will be facing that same unknown, with the same uncertainty he had. I believe he sent us a message so that when it's our turn, perhaps we will be able to face our time with more confidence and peace.

### **Prayer:**

Thanks Dad!  
And thanks be  
to God!

# FAITH STORIES

## FAITH STORY

*Clayton Schenck*

My faith story is that I have learned to be able to express my faith. My faith story is that I am learning to know God and when to turn my concerns over to him. It is a never-ending journey, and in my spiritual life I am an "infant", but I am on my way, with a lot of help from Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church and God's creation we call "Glacier".

I was blessed to be born and raised in a Christian family, and am a lifelong Lutheran. My parents ensured I was given the gift of learning about God and the privilege to be nurtured through Sunday School and church attendance. Yet for all of us, there is a time when it begins to really sink in what it is all about, and that we begin to understand the meaning of grace, stewardship, forgiveness, and so much more. For me, that time came after God led me to Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church. I struggled at first, but about 15 years ago, both ORLC and myself, through ORLC, began a spiritual journey that has changed my life forever.

God has so blessed the ministry at ORLC with dynamic, spirit led pastors who have the gift of leadership and of preaching and teaching God's Word. They have inspired me to work to grasp the whole meaning of what I had been taught over the years. I am learning to know God in a way I could never IMAGINE was possible. And God has used so many of you as the vessel to inspire me and to mentor me. We are all sinners, and we all falter along the way. I have done more than my share of faltering.

The ministry at ORLC has been a true blessing, and has a rich history, yet it has faltered too, because God entrusts this ministry to sinners that falter. God knows we must sometimes be challenged in order to understand what we are called to do, and God leaves a few potholes in the road to successful ministry.

## Prayer:

# FAITH STORIES

## MY FAITH STORY

*Clayton Schenck*

We are in a period of transition at ORLC, and there is anxiety and uncertainty as we seek to call a new lead pastor. We have other challenges, including a daunting call by God to grow our ministry and reach out to serve through a new facility. So when I was asked to be Council President last Fall, I grumbled and complained. But I felt called to do so. As the year has progressed and as challenges and trials have faced us, I have grumbled and complained that I didn't want to do this. In fact, when a long scheduled trip to Glacier came up this week, I grumbled and complained about going because of all that I was called to do here. But God knew I needed to go to Glacier. As I walked a trail on top of the world in the midst of God's greatest creation, it brought clarity to my life, and an awareness of the blessings I have been granted. It reminded me that I am BLESSED to be called to serve ORLC, because through it God has given me so much. I was once again reminded that, through all the uncertainty, I must simply turn it over to God, and then to be His faithful steward in discerning and carrying out his ministry.

God will not fail ORLC. He has invested so much in it, by sending us pastors and leaders over these years who have taught us that this is HIS ministry, and that we are to be faithful stewards of that ministry. They taught me to stand up for this ministry through feast and famine. God is challenging us to have faith in this time of transition, to honor the preaching and teaching of the pastors he has faithfully sent us in the past and present, and to be active stewards of our time, ourselves, and our possessions in proactively working to redirect as needed to achieve his commission.

### **Prayer:**

God, you have so blessed my life with the gift of learning about you, and of growing in my faith. You have sent me inspirational pastors and mentors to guide my way. You have given me the gift of Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, and you have given me the privilege to seek clarity and direction in a special place in your creation, Glacier. I pray for your guidance to lead me in the right direction and to

# FAITH STORIES

## MY FAITH STORY

I have been reminded of that on a mountaintop in Glacier, and will have to be reminded again and again. But God has so enriched me in my faith journey in these past fifteen years, and I know that he will continue to nourish me. I can't even begin to IMAGINE how I could ever repay the blessings I have received from this opportunity to learn to know God, and from embarking on a spiritual journey that will never end. God has given me ORLC, and I must never let it down when I am called to do my part.

When you hear me grumble and complain about the challenge of participating in and contributing to the work of this ministry, remind me to turn over my concerns and frustrations to God, and to get back to work! If I don't come around, send me to Glacier. We all have a place where God is closest to us and can reach us when we're lost, and His creation called Glacier is mine.

*Clayton Schenck*

### **Prayer:(cont)**

get me back on track when I falter. I pray thanks for the challenges you offer me, and I pray you will always inspire me to meet those challenges as I reach out to serve in the best way I know. I can only IMAGINE what you will call me to do through your ministry at Our Redeemer's, and I pray that I will never let you down. Amen.

# FAITH STORIES

## HE LEADETH ME

*Janet Miller*

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. *Psalms 92:*

When I was young I believed that surely God would speak to me, perhaps helping me make a plan for my life, or at some later stage, just turning me in the right direction. In the meantime I prayed, and studied Scripture, and tried to listen for guidance, but mostly bumbled ahead, knowing God was with me. There is no doubt that I wasn't a music major. There are several other church members much more qualified. I'm an oboist, not a bell ringer. But the echo of God's voice in my head didn't go away. God closed doors to some of my wrong choices, and opened doors wide to head me in the right direction. It took His direct intervention to keep my son alive. But no voice from the heavens ever called my name!

You can imagine my amazement when on the Easter Sunday before last, during the silence immediately following the processional, inside my head, a voice very clearly said, "Start and direct a bell choir." At long last God had spoken to me! He said it several times. But His words certainly weren't what I wanted to hear. It didn't fit into my plans for a relaxed retirement! Beside that, the last time I directed a choir was about thirty years ago! I had lots of other arguments. I'm too old.

I wasn't a music major. There are several other church members much more qualified. I'm an oboist, not a bell ringer. But the echo of God's voice in my head didn't go away. I finally talked to Dr. Stuberg, our minister of music. He just grinned and said that if God told me to start a bell choir, I'd better do it. He didn't even ask if I knew what I was doing.

So last fall, Our Redeemers had a new bell choir. If I was to be the director, it would happen only if God was leading me and all my choir members every step and note of the way. Actually, the Holy Spirit is in charge. I pray, wave my arms, and the bell ringers, some experienced, some just as new to ringing as I am, produce resounding miraculous praise to the Lord. The thanks from the congregation, and the choir's fellowship and support for each other and for me is a blessing that will keep me going as long as my arms can move!

Now I just hope that God is busy calling many new ringers to join our ranks! Obviously, experience is not required!

The lesson from this experience that I want to share with you is this. If you hear a call, or feel the slightest nudge to serve in any way at Our Redeemer's, don't be afraid.

# FAITH STORIES

## THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

*Jim Haubein*

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."  
*Psalms 23:1*

I recently passed my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday and as always I reflected on the many ways God has been guiding and taking care of me. He speaks to me through my conscience and has given me what I needed to live my life according to His wishes.

I could write a book on the many ways He helped me through my life, but I will share with you three major times He has blessed me.

First, He blessed me with the most wonderful parents. We did not have much in the way of material things but it was more than made up by the love they had for me. They instilled in me the morals and values that are so important to me.

Second, I was born in Southern Missouri. God saw I needed someone to help me through life so He created this wonderful girl to become my wife. She was born almost nine months to the day after I was born. Also she was born in Montana some 1500 miles away. God made sure we met.

Third, God blessed us with children. Raising children is such a blessing watching them grow and sharing all their joys and sorrows and then seeing them grown and leading such productive lives.

God has truly blessed me.

### Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the many Blessings that You have given me. Continue to guide me throughout my remaining life and when death calls me please accept me into Your wonderful kingdom. I pray this in Jesus' name.

# FAITH STORIES

## HERE I AM LORD

**Rob Stuberg**

*Here I Am, Lord*

(Refrain)

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.

It was 1999, and Carolee and I were still in the process of discerning whether we should uproot our lives and move our family from a comfortable life in Nebraska to Helena and Our Redeemer's. It was a difficult discernment process, as we had a wonderful home and church in Nebraska, and we were also taking a huge financial risk. After our third trip to Helena, as we were traveling up to Great Falls in the pre-dawn hours to catch an early morning flight back to Nebraska, a song that I rarely thought of came into my head. The song was *Here I Am Lord*, and it seemed to come from nowhere. Carolee and the boys were sleeping as I drove through Wolf Creek Canyon at sunrise, with this song in my head and tears welling up and rolling down my cheeks. The words, "I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart" were especially poignant as I thought of all the people of Our Redeemer's who had been so kind and gracious to us. I knew at that moment that we were moving to Helena, and that the people of Our Redeemers would forever be held in my heart. It was one of those moments in life—moments that I find to be quite rare—when it seems we are highly tuned to the calling of God's Spirit, and God seems to speak clearly to us through a song or scripture, nature or another person. I'm thankful that we could feel the clear understanding of God's purpose during that time in our lives, and I long to always feel as close to God as I did on that sunrise drive through Wolf Creek Canyon.

### **Prayer:**

We give you thanks, O God, for calling us to be your hands and feet in this world, for giving us vocation and a church home, and for your Spirit that inspires and guides us. Give us courage to follow your calling, and keep us always tuned in to the winds of your Spirit.

# FAITH STORIES

## FEAR NOT

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? *Psalm 27:1*

God was always in my life through my childhood. Because of His guidance, I was able to do many things I might not have tried without Him. However, as I grew older I became confused and started questioning my faith. College didn't help. I wandered in a fog of fear and self doubt wondering who I was and where I was going in my life.

During this time, Jim and I married and started our family. My mother sent me a book entitled "The Power of Positive Thinking" by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. The quote that shouted out to me was "I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me." In the same time period a new Lutheran mission church was starting and we were invited to attend. The pastor started challenging me to do things I never thought I could. His favorite comment was "Oh Joan, you can do that!"

God was certainly knocking at my door and I began to again feel the warmth and love He gives to us. The above quote became my mantra and was always popping into my head at the time I would start something new. I felt a freedom without the fear and self doubt I carried on my back like a shawl.

Fear keeps us from all the pleasures of life and what we are able to do with God's help. It keeps us bound, afraid and lonely. Fear not and open your hearts to the glories of God. He will give you such love and joy. You will never know if you don't try.

*Joan Haubein*

### Prayer:

Dear Lord, giver of life and love, open our hearts and minds to the awesome life you have given to us. Show us what we can do if we only step forward and not be afraid. That we know you are there to hold and catch us when we start to fall. You set us back on our feet and gently push us forward so we can do your will. Alleluia!

# FAITH STORIES

## OH TAKE MY HAND DEAR FATHER

**Walter Bauer**

*Purple Heart Veteran*

I was born January 30, 1923. Franklin D. Roosevelt was born January 30, 1882. I was born in an adobe house in the German settlement north of Bethune, Colorado.

I was confirmed April 2, 1939. My confirmation song was "Oh Take My Hand Dear Father."

I served in the US Army and on April 12, 1945 I was in the Ruhr Valley engaged in furious fighting against Hitler's SS troops. Every 30 days we were losing an average of 42 men a day.

President Roosevelt died. The next day, Friday 13, 1945

I was wounded. My only prayer was, "Oh Take My Hand Dear Father." Ever since then my evening prayer has been, "Oh Take My Hand Dear Father" lead me through this night. My morning prayer has been, "Oh Take My Hand Dear Father" and lead me through this day.

Oh Take My Hand Dear Father" until at my life's ending I dwell with thee.

### **Prayer:**

Oh Take My Hand Dear Father" lead me through this night. My morning prayer has been, "Oh Take My Hand Dear Father" and lead me through this day.

# FAITH STORIES

## LITTLE THINGS

*Carol Will*

Pastor Kendra asked a small group the following question, "Where have you recently seen God?"

I could not respond because, at that moment, I felt overwhelmed with life while considering my responsibilities that place high demand on my time, energy, and emotions: Church council member, small group leader, wife, mother, employee, friend, etc... I thought, "Yes, where is God?"

Where is God when the church is facing budget issues? Where is God when people turn down invitations to participate in small groups? Where is God when people are not willing to get involved? Where is God when it is difficult to spend quality time with your family? Where is God when your children leave home? Where is God when an employment practice is questionable? Where is God when new friendships need to be nurtured?

Like many times before, I turned to scripture for strength and guidance. This particular time I was guided to the following scripture:

Matthew 17:20-21 - "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

### **Prayer:**

May God grant us the strength to take care of the small things that help us in our walk with Christ.

The expected things do not always effect me. The big things do not always define or impact my life; even though I continue to want to solve the big picture. The small things enable me to see God and focus my life. I see God in a small thing such as the trust and intimacy nurtured in our developing small group; in a small thing such as an evening hike to the top of Mount Helena to marvel at the setting sun, days before my daughter leaves home for college; in a small thing such as a reconnecting with a college friend; and in a small thing such as a morning prayer while walking with my dog. If I focus on the small things, they act as a foundation and provide me the strength to move forward into effective service of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Mother Theresa said, "Small things done with great love will change the world."

# FAITH STORIES

## TRUST & BELIEF IN GOD

*Mike Caplis*

John's Gospel, the hymns "Amazing Grace", "How Great Thou Art", "What a Friend We Have in Jesus".

I consider myself a spiritual rather than a religious person. My faith is simple, a belief in God, accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, trusting Him for the salvation of my soul, experiencing a spiritual rebirth through the Holy Spirit and a renewal of God's love in my heart for all mankind. But this was not always so with me. Though I always believed there was a God, I didn't believe in or put any trust in Him because of my early religious experiences, viewing Him as a harsh, vengeful, and judgmental and uncaring person out to get me if I stepped out of line and not the caring, loving, kind and generous God I know today. Life's circumstances, alcoholism and other serious problems turned me back toward God. I came to realize that no human power could relieve me of the problems I faced, but God could and would if I sought Him. This was the turning point of my faith, trust and belief in God - the "amazing grace that saved a wretch like me". It has never failed me since I first came to believe, giving me the faith and trust in God I so desperately need.

### **Prayer:**

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the Holy Trinity; One. I put my faith and trust in You always. Let me know and do your will each day, then help and guide, direct and show me way. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

# FAITH STORIES

## HE LEADETH ME

*Judith Carlson*

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.

*Proverbs 3: 5-6*

My faith story begins when I was about twelve years old and a new mission church was starting up in Helena. A very dedicated young Pastor Rev. I C. Cliff Gronneberg had moved to town and was canvassing my neighborhood for young people to take to Sunday school. Ruth and Pastor Gronneberg would stop by my house every Sunday and pick me up for Sunday school and take me to the small church building for Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church. Pastor Gronneberg baptized me and also performed our wedding ceremony when God brought Wayne into my life at a later date. When God brought Wayne into my life it was through him that God continued to enrich my faith and grow me as a child of God. God says " Be patient and know that I am God." Forty-five years have passed and we are still together walking the narrow path and enriching our lives daily with God's love and grace.

### **Prayer:**

God our heavenly Father, hallowed be thy name, be with me this hour.

Come Holy Spirit; inspire my heart with praise for the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me remember him and his teachings at morning and evening, in work and rest, when I am alone and when I am with others. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## FAITH JOURNEY—THE BEGINNING

*Jerry Hoover*

Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things, let this be known to all the world, Shout aloud and sing for joy.....*Isaiah 12: 5-6a*

Its 6:00 a.m. on Easter morning, and Judy and I are vacationing in Rome. We are up early and preparing to go the Vatican to listen to the Pope's Easter service. Other than several Christmas programs, I have not been to a church service for nearly 50 years. The radio station broadcasts that over 30,000 people have already assembled in the Vatican square. We quickly decide that this is not the Easter venue for us.

However, Judy is determined to attend Easter service somewhere and she sends out a friend to survey the neighborhood for a church. Returning, he announces that he has found a 16<sup>th</sup> century Polish Catholic Church a few blocks away. It is a small, charcoal-grey quarry stone structure with black wrought iron gates, huge wooden doors and priceless stained glass windows depicting the Stations of the Cross along its walls. Inside it is dark, and seating consists of 20 rows of 10-foot wooden benches and candles provide the only interior light. Suddenly, I am no longer an inhabitant of the

20th century but several hundred years earlier, and I am feeling wonderfully peaceful...like I really belong here. All the women are wearing scarves over their heads, mostly white, and many have white aprons tied around their blue or black dresses. The men are wearing mostly dark suits or pants with white shirts. It is respectfully quiet. Suddenly, the choir begins to sing and their harmonious voices sing out sweet, melodic hymns. Their voices reverberate off the stone walls and overwhelm the sanctuary. I feel like I am in heaven. The service is entirely in Polish; however, as I listen to the melodies, messages and responses I am feeling filled with the Holy Spirit and tingling with exhilaration and I am fighting the urge to jump up and shout with joy. However, being a visitor and respectful of this wonderful worship experience, I do not, but realize that on this beautiful Easter day, far from home, the love of Jesus has begun my journey of faith..

These captivating moments inside this simple structure filled with faithful servants continue to inspire me to use the gifts God has given me to help broaden his kingdom on earth.

### Prayer:

Lord, you come to us wherever we are and greet us as long-lost children. For this we praise your hold name. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## HOPE IN THE LORD

*Shirley M. Bristol*

Through the years and at this time, the following Holy Scriptures, devotion and meditation continue to be a blessing to my life:

The words of the Jesus in Holy Scripture bless me with comfort, hope and peace, especially: The Beatitudes *Matthew 5:1-13*

"Blessed are those who need Jesus, for they will be graced by the vivid light of His presence. Blessed are those who want Jesus for they will find themselves with Him." (from a devotional booklet)

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.: Isaiah 40:31

HOPE (With Open Hands by Henri Nowen)  
Hope means to keep living amid desperation and to keep humming in the darkness. Hope is knowing that there is love, it is trust in tomorrow; it is falling asleep and waking again when the sun rises. In the midst of a gale at sea, it is to discover land. In the eyes of another, it is seeing that you are understood. As long as there is hope, there will also be prayer, and God will be holding you in His Hands.

### **Prayer:**

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your loving presence in our lives. May we be open to your Spirit, know Your will and be able to do it always, as we live and keep the Christian Faith. In your Holy Name, Amen.

# FAITH STORIES

## SACRIFICES

*Colleen Grass*

*"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:20-21*

I never thought we were poor when I was growing up in Havre, but I knew that money was tight. I don't remember being taught about giving, but I do remember that at least twice a month my mom would put an envelope in the offering plate, and every Sunday she put a quarter in four little hands so that each of us could give an offering.

I carried those habits over into our marriage without ever really thinking about them. But then in my early thirties I was elected to the council of our little church in Box Elder and it wasn't long before I realized that I was still giving like a child. That was the first time I really thought about giving, and it changed our giving from "whatever's left over" to a deliberate, respectful offering -- respectful of the families who had sacrificed over 75 years to build and maintain that little church and to make sure that the gospel was taught there -- and also respectful to God.

The funny thing was that our change in giving also changed me. Jesus said, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." As I gave more of our treasure to God, I began to value our church and my relationship with Christ more.

I still have much to learn in my relationship with Jesus, but today my offering comes first, right alongside my house payment and my retirement savings -- the three payments that are automatically deducted from my checking account so I can't forget. It just makes it a lot easier to put my money *where my heart is*.

### Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for the sacrifices of those who built Our Redeemer's, a holy place where the gospel is preached and taught. Help me to treasure you and your kingdom above all else. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## GOD IS ALWAYS WITH ME

*Janet Erickson*

"We Are Marching in the Light of God"  
Hymn # 866

I recently heard some disturbing news about a family member and happened to look out my window and saw a beautiful rainbow. I knew everything would turn out all right. The rainbow is God's ancient sign of promise to us that He will always be with us with His love and grace. For the past ten years, I have had several diagnoses for different skin cancers and God has always been with me with early diagnosis, during surgical procedures, and the healing afterwards. I praise God each and every day, thanking Him for His healing touch both physically and spiritually. When I hike Mt. Helena each morning, I boisterously sing out loud hymn # 866, "We Are Marching in the Light of God" but I make up my own verses depending on the day. Some of the verses I sing include:

We are singing (praising, confessing, serving, praying, healing, joyful, thanking, loving, forgiving, and hiking) in the light of God. It is very simplistic, but I know that God is always with me and He is hiking right beside me.

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, I thank you for the gift of this new day. Let each of my new activities and my encounters with others reflect the love I have for you. Help me be open to your guidance as I move gently through my day. Remind me of your constant presence and your love for me, so I will know that I do not walk alone. In Jesus name I pray,  
Amen.

# FAITH STORIES

## FAITH KEEPS ME STRONG

*Jude Illikainen*

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness does not overcome it.

*John 1:5*

I was raised in a traditional, loving family. My childhood was religion-based, but our God was a condemning one. If we sinned we would certainly be on the road to damnation. In my mind I felt that if I sinned I would go to HELL. So, in my early teens I did many of the things I was told I shouldn't do because if I were to go to Hell, it would be for many things and not just one.

I got married when I was 17 and was a mother before I was 18. I tried to raise my first four children in the church that I was raised in, although I questioned my faith and the principles of that church. One of my sons became friends with a pastor's family who lived across the street from us. After my fifth child was born, the pastor came to see me in the maternity ward. Sitting on the bed next to mine, he told me of a loving, forgiving God and relieved my mind of the condemning God I had been raised with. What a revelation that was! We joined the church of this wonderful pastor and the baby was baptized there. Our sixth child also was baptized into that same faith.

Years later, when my children's father passed away, his memorial service was held in that same church. When my sixth child died as a result of an auto accident in his senior year of high school, my faith kept me strong as the remaining five of my children and I gathered at his funeral and graveside.

It is this faith that I hang on to with both hands. And with the will of God and His grace I will continue to praise Him for being the loving, forgiving God that I met that day in the maternity ward when the Pastor came to visit and pray with me.

### **Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, be with those that still live in the darkness of the true faith that has sustained so many in times of difficulty and trial. Help them to find the loving, forgiving God that will be with us always!

# FAITH STORIES

## MISSION

*Bonner Armstrong*

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. *Acts 1:8*

When I was in high school I thought about doing mission work and how dangerous it would be and that I could never do that kind of work. Now imagine this farm boy 32 years later going on his third of five 2-week missions to Guatemala to help build churches. As a member of Our Redeemers' Lutheran Church, the acquaintance with Elaine Heen who lead Missionary Ventures trips to Guatemala along with Terry and Carole Maier who had gone on trips before were the inspiration that lead me to reach out and serve others on these construction teams. Through the support of our church family we raised funds to buy materials to work with when we were in Guatemala (steel, wire, concrete etc.). Now imagine if you will the love that people showed us for helping and working with them to build a place of worship for their families. So what I want to share with you is an evening of worship with the local members from Chichicastenango in March of 2003.

The team was very tired from the heat and the physical work but was invited to worship with the local parishioners. The local women had cut pine boughs and scattered them on the dirt floor and put flowers on the stage, the walls were covered with plastic tarp and there were benches made of planks stretched out on cement blocks for additional seating along with wooden benches. Arlen, our Missionary Ventures leader, interpreted the sermon and service for us.

# FAITH STORIES

## FAITH JOURNEY—THE BEGINNING

*Bonner Armstrong*

We ended up sitting intermingled with locals wherever there was space. As my lovely wife wrote in her dairy, “We were thanked profusely from the pulpit and Pastor Pasqual preached on the new commandment – “Love One Another” - embarrassing us all by citing our willingness to love others through actions rather than words.”

They called our team women forward and gave them woven souvenirs in their village colors, than the men were called forward and given cloth hats that they had made for each of us. (Note: most of these folks did not own shoes and did not have enough blankets to stay warm on cold nights and yet they gave out of their meager earnings to give us a gift of love.) Then Arlen said he was going to “push us all out of our comfort zones.” And he asked us to spread out and through the church and for men to find a hermano and women to find a hermana and pray with and for that person. It was hard at first but soon the place was filled with prayers being offered in Quiche, Spanish, and English and I knew, by and through the Holy Spirit. This was without a doubt a heart mover for me as I stood holding hands with an hermano and not even knowing his story or NAME, and praying to God to provide for his family, and keep him safe and bless him and everything good that I could think of. And he was as bashful as I was but was doing the same in his language for me at the same time. I need to share with you, tears were in my eyes, joy and love in my heart, and the hair was tingling on the back of my neck and I felt energized and blessed in a way that I can not describe to you. Those were Holy Spirit moments for me.

### **Prayer:**

Oh God our Father who art n Heaven, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of short mission trips and I thank you for the reward of experiencing joy and love and others. I say this in Jesus name.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

*E. Wayne Carlson*

“Be still and know that I am God”

My faith story starts with dedicated parents of the Lutheran faith who brought me to church as an infant for baptism with the Holy Spirit and followed through with the Lutheran teaching of Sunday school, confirmation and the study of Luther's Catechism by devoted pastors and Sunday school teachers. It is this foundation and our family devotions and the Christian environment of which I was raised that has kept me strong in my faith and has helped me with God's grace to pass this on to my children and grandchildren.

Just about two months ago I received a card from our oldest daughter Danae, and this is what it said. I quote “I wanted to take this opportunity to say a very warm heartfelt and deeply appreciated “Thank You” for being the wonderful parents who raised me. You sacrificed and gave yourselves selflessly to provide such a “Godly” based foundation and I am forever grateful! I am able to know that God is, was and forever shall be! Therefore I am rooted on His Word because of you. Both of you committed to a marriage and home based on biblical truth and I am reaping the benefits to pass on to Karmyn and Ashley. I wanted you to know my heart and appreciation. ”

There have been trials in our lives but with prayer and God's grace we have overcome these situations and have steadily grown in faith through church, adult teaching, fellowship, daily prayer and regular Sunday worship.

### **Prayer:**

Thank you Lord Jesus, for the gift of your life in me. May my words and deeds always show forth your presence and power for good. Turn me away from anything that would bring dishonor to your holy name. Give me joy in your love, rather than fear of failure, as I seek to represent you in this world. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## RUMBLE STRIPS

*Ruth Straley*

*Hebrews 11: 1-3*

The verses in Hebrews 11: 1-3 have served as a road map on my faith journey. There have been times in my life when I found myself veering off course, hitting those rumble strips, zig-zagging down the road, the road map long crumbled up and tossed.

But it was the strong presence of my Mother who modeled her faith through her every word and action that would get me back on the road. Never giving up, keeping me focused on the journey and ultimate destination. In her quiet way, encouraging me to be steadfast, meet new challenges and to trust in the Lord.

Faith is a gift from the Lord and a sign of our relationship to the Lord. It is that promise that keeps me staying the course and off the rumble strips.

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of faith and for faithful parents who guide us on our earthly journey.

# FAITH STORIES

## PEACE

*Carol Ann Kimble*

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you."  
*John 14:27a*

In 1991, I was engaged to a man from Iowa. He was going to fly to Helena for Thanksgiving and I came to work just prior to his date of arrival and received a phone call from one of his family friends telling me that Carl had been in a car accident and was in the Intensive Care Unit in Des Moines. Fortunately, I had co-workers who felt I needed to catch a plane to Des Moines to be with him. As I sat on the plane after take off, I could hardly control my emotions and silently said a prayer to Jesus, my God and Heavenly Father praying for help. I could feel total PEACE go throughout my whole body and that helped me get through many months of his hospitalization and death. A few years later, my son Wes died and my body was in total denial and as friends drove me to Bozeman, I once again prayed for peace. Total PEACE was there again and arrangements were made for his funeral and spreading of his ashes.

In 2002, my Dad's health reached the point where he could no longer be cared for at home. We took a tour of Peace Hospice in Great Falls and I held the door open as Mom and Dad entered the building. I then entered and as I did, there was a strong breeze that came from the top of the entry door and took my breath away. I asked Mom and Dad if they felt the breeze and they did not. I knew it was from our Lord, God and Heavenly Father. Dad became one of their patients and died in that facility. The last time I saw him and was leaving the room, I heard a voice say "Do not turn around" and I knew that was going to be the last time I saw Dad alive. He died two days later.

Friends and family could not believe in these instances that I could be so calm and I just explained that I prayed to Jesus, my God and Heavenly Father for help. Because I have experienced these instances, I can never doubt the Higher Power and know if I truly need anything, it will be provided by our Lord, God and Heavenly Father.

### Prayer:

My Lord, my God and my Heavenly Father, thank you for touching my life. I pray others have and will feel what I have been able to. In times of stress, you provide the help that is needed.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## GRANDMA RUBY

*June Pratt*

My life has been inspired by the example set by my Grandma Ruby. She and my grandfather lived simple lives in the hills of west central Wisconsin. Even though they had lost a young child and a 20-year old son, her faith never wavered.

Mealtime prayers and evening devotions were an important part of every day. Neighbors, visiting family members, friends, and an occasional traveling salesman were included in these activities.

Families in their little village came to her for advice on child rearing and family relationships. Her calm and loving demeanor soothed and comforted the sad and lonely. She found room in their house for a relative, friend or neighbor who needed a temporary home, and would give away her last loaf of bread or jar of fruit to a family in need. All of my life I have admired her example of unconditional faith, compassion, hospitality, and generosity. I know I haven't come even close to reaching her level of abounding kindness and faithfulness, but I hope that from her heavenly home she cheers me on and encourages me to keep on trying in my own humble way.

### **Prayer:**

"Loving God, open my heart and mind to heed your call to be a humble worker in your earthly kingdom. Amen."

# FAITH STORIES

## BE A CHEERFUL GIVER

".....Each man should give whatever he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

*2 Corinthians 9:6-8*

I am reminded by my husband when he talks about his family and the small county church where he was raised, that the church was and still is an integral part of everyday family life. Life was simpler in earlier days, not so many directions to be pulled by society, community and life. We were about helping each other whenever your neighbor needed assistance. We reached out to serve without any thought of why. But like it or not, life has changed and so many other things pull at us from what is really truly important... To serve the Lord without question!

I was brought up the third daughter in a preacher's family who worshiped every Sunday and was taught that it was better to give than to receive. I believe volunteering and being a part of the solution is what God needs of me. Yes, it's time consuming, stressful at times and overwhelming at others, but in the long run I know it is who I am and what I do well. Sometimes my cup runneth over and I have to rest, but I always come back and return with a cheerful heart. And I always know that God is saying "Well done, good and faithful servant". It doesn't get better than that!

**Charlene Mayala**

### Prayer:

Lord, we ask your continued guidance as we journey life's pathway. Keep us knowing what is right and good and just. Make our hearts open to your goodness and grace and make our offerings out of love and cheerfulness.

# FAITH STORIES

## HOW GREAT THOU ART

*Todd Will*

."Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble"

*1 Peter 3:8*

Hymn: How Great Thou Art

My grandfather was always a very strong influence in my faith. His understanding and explanations of the Bible and its message were always so insightful. It was his example of faith, however that made an even bigger impression on me.

One such example was one Christmas when we were all together. My grandfather was in his 80's, in failing health, and lived in a nursing home. After supper, before we took him back to the home, he asked my mom to play "the song". My mom agreed, and played "How Great Thou Art" on the organ. As my mom finished, tears streamed down my grandfather's smiling face. His only comment was, "great song". For my grandfather to show that much emotion and to be so genuine, his faith was as evident to me as the tears of joy on his face.

### **Prayer:**

Father, we are grateful that you show us the faith that lives in others in order to strengthen our trust in you. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## GIVING IS GOOD DISCIPLESHIP

" I know what it is to have little, and what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."  
*Philippians 4:12-13*

Are you strong? I know. It's a relative questions, isn't it? Strong in relation to what? When I was thirty-one I acquired about a hundred pounds of cheap weights, a bar and a wobbly bench. Having been an athlete in high school, I thought I was pretty strong. One evening after work I put some weights on the bar and lay down to do some bench presses. One. Two. Three. Fourrrrr. Umph. Five wobble, wobble. Shake, shake. Sixxxxxx. Oh my gosh. I was mortified. I couldn't even do a set of ten lifts with seventy pounds. The second set I only managed three.

Sometimes when I work out I think about that first evening many years ago and the progress I have made through the years. I once was weak, but now am...well, not necessarily strong, but at least I'm a lot stronger.

I used to ask my confirmation students to practice giving. I used to encourage them to practice letting go and giving away gifts of money. I explained to them that practice was the only way to make their giving muscles stronger...and the stronger they got, the easier it would be.

Want to know why I used to talk to my confirmation students about giving? It was because giving is such an inextricable part of good discipleship. In my opinion, generosity is a spiritual strength. Lack of generosity is a big spiritual problem.

**Lon Bechtel**

### **Prayer:**

Gracious, generous  
God, lead us all to  
greater heights of  
giving - after all,  
Jesus gave his life.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## UNFATHOMABLE LOVE

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." *Romans 8:38-39*

Unmarried, pregnant and a high school drop out at the age of 16, everything in me cried out with shame and pain. And then, the Pastor's daughter called me with an invitation to a baby shower in my honor. Beautiful decorations, glorious food and a room filled with the women that I most admired in our congregation, they offered me God's message of grace and love. The next Sunday I walked through the doors of the church with butterflies in my stomach and knees trembling afraid of the righteous people within only to discover that my church family was waiting for me with a warm smile and open arms.

Divorced! God intends for marriage to last forever. I had failed Him. I had failed my children and my family and friends and the grief, shame and failure washed over me in wave after wave. Once again, God reached out to me with His love using a member of this congregation. It was in the form of a card that I still carry in my Bible over 20 years later. It is yellow and dog-eared but it reminds me each time that I look at it of the way that I want to respond to others who are hurting and feeling ashamed or alone.

Repeatedly in my life, this awesome God of second chances has extended His arms to embrace me in my pain and has allowed this broken vessel to be used for His purpose. Not because I deserve it, but because He is a God of indescribable grace, and unfathomable love!

**Kathy Olson**

### Prayer:

Loving God, I am humbled by Your willingness to forgive us over and over again. It is unfathomable that you allow us to be a part of your story in spite of our brokenness. God, thank you for the people that you use along the way to remind us of how much you love us and to reassure us that you never give up on us.  
Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## GIVE ME STRENGTH

*Annette Wakefield*

Hebrews 11.1

Hymn: Day By Day

Today I would be whiny, grumbling, depressed and full of self-pity, just a plain, miserable woman if it were not for my faith. In 2005 I became handicapped from diabetic neuropathy, which came on suddenly and unexpectedly, affecting but of my legs and feet. I was frightened. I was unable to walk without a walker and just when things looked up and I was taking several steps without it, I was careless and fell and broke my arm! This set me back considerably and I needed home health care, unable to go anywhere except church, doctor, hairdresser, a simple car ride. I went only where I was comfortable going. My fear of falling again was overwhelming. At night I slept in my recliner (did this for weeks and weeks) and lay there in the dark, wondering why this all happened. Actually I did have solid faith that God would completely heal me and I would be back 100% in a few months. Well, my arm healed, my feet and legs became stronger and I was eventually fitted with APO's, (plastic braces for my legs and under my feet). I was unable to drive my car for a year. I asked God, when I realized I would not ever be quite 100%, to give me the strength to be mobile enough to be on my own to continue my hobbies, church service, choir, social and family gatherings without a wheelchair. That prayer was answered. Without faith, I could not have made it through this rough time in my life. God is great and always there for us, to take our hand and lead us. Something good comes out of something bad. I have learned the challenges of the disabled and handicapped, the kindness of family, friends and strangers, the absolute love of God. So, have faith and call upon our Savior and Lord.

### **Prayer:**

Precious Lord, in times of struggle, fear and uncertainty, grant us strength to draw on our faith to see us through, that we may never lose hope. Let us be comforted knowing you are always there for use, you are in charge of our lives and that your love surrounds us. I pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen

# FAITH STORIES

## PRAY, WORK & SACRIFICE

*Verna Strand*

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

*Lamentations 3:22, 23*

In Benson County, North Dakota, where we lived when I was a child, everybody was Lutheran. Most were Swedish farmers, sharing a common world view with absolutes for living. My brothers, sisters and I were baptized in Klara Lutheran Church, a small country church built by Swedish immigrants over one hundred years ago. The first thing they did was to set aside land for a church and a school for their families and the ones to come after them. They prayed, worked and sacrificed to make it happen.

That is what we are called to do; pray, work and sacrifice. With faith in God's help, we too can do it. I am very thankful for God's gift of faith nurtured by faithful people from the early beginning to this day. It has shaped my life and given me a foundation for living and a purpose for living.

I believe that God is working on our behalf according to His purpose and for highest good. His heart is moved with compassion, His purpose is guided by love and His ways are paved by grace. Great is His faithfulness.

### **Prayer:**

Faithful and loving God, help us by your Holy Spirit to be bold and faithful in loving and serving you and others in the name of the Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord of all. Amen.



# IMAGINE

*Oh Lord, you have the power to help us  
to be faithfully bold in serving and giving.  
Grant me more trust and less fear.  
AMEN*



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