

Generosity Brings Joy Storybook! Stories by Easter people

Generosity takes many forms from sharing our time and talents to giving money to causes we believe in. For some, this value is ingrained early by their parents. Others learned from friends or teachers. This generosity of spirit is what drew many Easter members to this church and what makes it special. May these stories inspire us *to grow in faith and carry on the work of Jesus Christ.*



A STORY SHARED

I remember traveling with my dad. One evening, we were walking back to our hotel after dinner, chatting and laughing about the events of the day. We turned the corner and were greeted with “Spare some change.” My levity was immediately replaced with pity. That feeling of wishing you were invisible. The beggar told us a story about how he needed bus fare to get home in another city. My dad asked, “How much?” The beggar quoted an amount, at which point my dad then reached into his wallet and offered the exact amount. The beggar thanked us and eagerly walked away.



Chad Kilgore

The next night we walked the same path to our hotel, chatting and laughing just as the night before. We turned the corner and again were greeted with “Spare some change.” My levity immediately turned to disbelief. My dad pointed to a nearby bench and told me to wait there. When I was out of earshot, I watched my dad and a beggar sit on the curb and talk. They talked for what seemed like forever to an impatient child. But as they talked, I watched. I watched my dad listen to a man, not a beggar. Even though I couldn’t hear a word, I knew that he was telling my dad his story. His real story. And when he was done speaking, my dad reached into his wallet and gave him seemingly the same amount, if not more, from the night before. They parted ways with a hearty handshake. The man calmly walked away.

I asked, “Why did you give him money again?” My dad smiled and replied, “I like a good story, but it needs a happier ending.”

The man was not there the third night. I like to believe he found that ending.

There are times in our stories when we need a happier ending. When we need to be reminded that we are loved. Truly loved. Endlessly loved.

Easter has been that place for me much of my life. I was handed a Bible and guided through the Word of God. I was a Confirmation student and drove

my mentor nuts with inane questions, like whether Adam and Eve had belly buttons. I was a Youth Leader and a Summer Intern, not realizing the impact that I made until years later. I drove from Chicago just to be married in the backyard and to baptize my children in a place where I know that I am loved. I was a Confirmation mentor and was driven nuts with inane questions, like whether Adam and Eve had belly buttons – but moments later was in absolute awe of genuine curiosity of these kids. And now I watch my children run to JAM with unending excitement – seeing that look of excitement handing my child a Bible. Watching the story of the Church continue.

And it is the story that we all tell.

While the details of your Easter stories may be different, they are also the same. It is about knowing that you are recklessly loved and allowing that love to explode from you because you can't not. This love is why my family supports Easter with our time and treasures. Because there are times when we all need a happier ending. For its members. For the local community. For the Church.

OFFERING ENVELOPE #74

I was raised in Ortonville in western Minnesota. Even though it was small, so many Lutherans called it home that there were three Lutheran **churches**: First English, Trinity, and Zion. Zion was popular with the Lutheran farm families in the area, and since both of my parents were raised on farms, Zion was our church home.

I have no idea I still have “Zion Lutheran Sunday School – Offering Envelope #74” in my possession. It has my name written on it along with the date – July 17, 1966 – and the amount, 10 cents. And yes, the Mercury dime from 1944 is still inside. Maybe God intended for me to keep it until I was asked to write a story about generosity, or maybe there's some other good reason that it didn't end up in the offering plate that Sunday. For years, it has been on the top of my dresser in a small drawer where I keep other things that I rarely look at. I really do not know why I still have it, but here's what I do know.

My parents were very faithful Christians who made sure that Sunday was



Royce McEwen

always a day of worship for them and their four boys. The “McEwen pew” was third from the front on the right side of the sanctuary, right behind the Lindquist family. My dad, Orville, could not “carry a tune in a bushel basket,” but that didn’t prevent him from lip-synching all the hymns every Sunday. Maybe it was because his wife, Andrena, was the church organist. Her musical genes were passed to the boys, who sang in church choir, served as acolytes, and attended Sunday School and Luther League, growing their faith on a weekly basis. I have fond memories of my dad sitting at his small desk on Sunday mornings writing out their weekly check to Zion and putting it in the offering envelope,

soon to be placed in the offering plate. My parents were instrumental in getting me off on the right foot on my walk with Jesus and my stewardship journey.

Pat and I have been Easter members for eight years. Of the many attributes that we love about Easter, our favorite is the focus on community – whether that community is local, in other parts of our country, or on some other continent. The many communities within Easter (such as Man Up and Soul Sisters) not only help us develop strong relationships with other Christians, but also provide us many opportunities to serve. This network of communities, both internal and external, is what makes Easter the perfect place for us to help carry on the work of Jesus Christ.

The Easter community is blessed with many great members, wonderful leaders and lots of passion and ingenuity. As Easter members, we all have unique “tools” that we can use to carry out God’s plan at Easter, as well as the communities we serve. I think of these tools in a big tool box with three drawers: one labeled “TIME,” another labeled “TALENTS,” and the third labeled “TREASURES.” God gives us the responsibility to learn how to use these tools to carry out His ministry. When it comes to the Treasures drawer, instead of thinking that there is money and other financial assets inside, we think of these as the tools, and as Christians, ask how we are going to most effectively use them. That makes our decision-making about financial stewardship much easier and more focused.

FROM GRATITUDE TO GENEROSITY

I was taught about generosity in a bunch of ways and by a bunch of people. My parents obviously were the first, teaching me to give to my church – and to give to others. One example of helping homeless people was during a vacation to Oregon when we had extra food and random clothes. We gave them to a person we met while driving to the airport. Why waste the food when it is possible to give it to someone who could use it? My parents also taught me the generosity of time and giving it away for others through volunteer projects. For example, we volunteer for an organization called Free Bikes for Kids, and just by spending a few hours cleaning and gathering bikes, kids in need can get a free mode of transportation. My sister is another person who taught me generosity by sharing her toys and clothes with me. From her I learned that even small amounts of generosity can have a big impact. As I grew older, I joined the youth group at Easter, and then I became a Tim Teamer. I learned generosity from my peers around me in the form of compassion and friendship. The simple generosity of being nice and welcoming can make people feel safe and cared about. This generosity is an important one because of how easy it is and how much change it can bring to the people around you.



Marissa Montesinos

The most important act of generosity that I have witnessed has been the mission trips that Easter participates in. Kids and adult chaperones give up their time for a week to go somewhere completely new and help out. They don't know what they will have to do when they get there or who they will meet, but they are still eager to get out and help. This is the most important act of generosity to me because it shows how much people want to help out and learn. I feel like only the people who are really trying to make an impact and grow deeper in their faith are the ones who are willing to go on these trips. If it weren't for YouthWorks and their generosity for planning the trips, people would never be able to go on them.

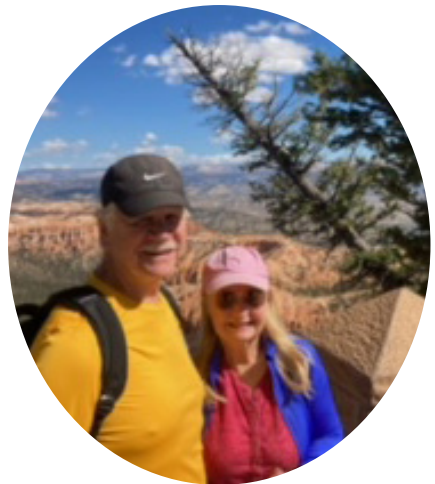
These ministries of Easter Lutheran Church are important to me because they have helped me expand my mind, my beliefs, my faith, my relationships, and my experiences. I have been given the opportunity through Easter to go on mission trips, and to be able to see God in communities around the U.S., as well as give back to those communities. In addition, the youth group that meets most Wednesdays called YOWIE has helped me grow in my leadership and connect with people who share a faith with me. I am able to learn so much from kids close to my age, as well as from our amazing leader Hans. Another thing that Easter has done for me and my family is create life groups. To this day my family is in touch with our life group and we go on trips together and hang out all the time. I am so grateful for Easter Lutheran Church and know that I wouldn't have as deep a faith or as strong relationships with people and God if I never came to the church.

EASTER FOUND JOHN

Easter found John. He is one of the rare congregants, who was invited to church by the Pastor. Shari found Easter. Recently arriving in Eagan as a single mom, she was looking for a church community. We found our future spouses in the Easter parking lot, thanks to a single parking spot and a bit of chivalry. As our friendship developed, so did meaningful relationships with other Easter members. Then, as now, Easter's mission of "To grow in faith and carry on the work of Jesus Christ" was in full force.

Easter Lutheran's generosity of spirit is reflected in their acceptance and welcome

of our mentally handicapped son, Brent. Mentors and pastors modified confirmation to include Brent. The worship committee willingly accepted



John and Shari Couch

Brent as an usher and occasional communion distributor. That generous acceptance reminds us to be intentional and accepting of others, who may differ from us.

Over three decades as members of the Easter community, Easter community members have generously welcomed, encouraged, and included us through their kind actions and words. The pastors' sermons, hospital visits and personal prayers have inspired our faith growth. That faith journey has also been enhanced through participation in other Easter member opportunities including Sunday School, adult and children dramas, youth group activities, educational workshops (both in person and online), golf league, life groups, Bible Studies, and Table Talk. The Easter community's generosity of spirit has enabled us to continue our faith journey at Easter.

Jesus came to save us all. As such we have been gratified to be able to participate financially in the capital fund programs to enhance Easter's facilities. We have repeatedly observed how the Easter community has generously served the larger Eagan community and welcomed more families to Easter through Easter Preschool, Vacation Bible School, Loaves and Fishes meals, Special Olympics practices, Holiday gift shop, homeless shelter, Homework Help, Tree House, and Community Concerts Together, we hope that through the generosity of spirit, the Easter community will continue to intentionally reach out and welcome people of various ethnicities to join the Easter Lutheran Church community. Through our kind words and actions, Easter Lutheran Church will continue to grow and reflect Eagan's diverse population and embody the mission: "To Grow in Faith and Carry on the Work of Jesus Christ."

COFFEE TIME

We joined Easter Lutheran Church in early 1978. We had been watching the construction of the facility and were curious about the congregation. We had both grown up in the Lutheran Church and attended a church college, but had not joined a church. With the birth of our son, we wanted him to be baptized. We knew we wanted an ELCA congregation as it was more theologically consistent with my beliefs. We were looking for a church home where our children would be nurtured, instructed, and inspired to live a life of



Barbara Johnson

worth and service. Someone once told me that Brandon was the first baby baptized in the church building, but I have never confirmed that.

From the beginning, I felt comfortable at Easter. We were part of a community that included lots of small children, so I never received that dirty look when my child made some noise during worship. I felt like Easter was my church home when I was participating in converting the worship space into Sunday School space and when I was added to the cleaning rotation. In those early years, a few couples

were assigned to clean and vacuum the church each Saturday. Although the congregation didn't have a lot of money, it had a lot of caring and sharing.

There are lots of thing about the Easter ministry that I appreciate. In no particular order:

- a. Services to support the larger Eagan community, such as community meals, homework help, etc. I believe that these programs reflect our mission to carry on the work of Jesus Christ.
- b. Music programs
- c. Excellent pastoral care and support services
- d. Support for international sister congregations

When I was a girl, my family never talked about money, but my Dad told me about his mother helping strangers. In the depression, people would come to the back door of their house, and his mother would always feed them. When Dad asked why she was doing this, she told him that they were hungry and she had food to share with them. To me, generosity is about observing a need and taking action to address that need.

I have a dear friend who I worked with in London. Each Saturday, when running her errands, she would stop at a particular news agent's shop to buy coffee and breakfast for an elderly homeless man who frequented a bench next to the shop. She would sit with him while they ate, and they would talk.

It was an incredible affirmation of our shared humanity.

I choose to support Easter with my financial gifts as I support the mission and ministry. My financial support is a response to the gifts that I have been given.

My greatest hope for Easter and the next generation that calls it home, is that they reflect God's love both to the congregation and to the world, and they do this with joy and thanksgiving.

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

I grew up in Winona, MN and I can't remember a time not going to church and going to Sunday School when I was a kid. My parents modeled that for my brother and me. We moved to Florida for a few years and my parents were involved at that church as well, in particular helping to lead the youth group for awhile with my younger brother and me. When we moved back to Minnesota when I was in high school, we looked around for a church and ended up at Easter and it has always felt like the right fit for my parents, my brother and me. When I met my wife, Cathie, one of our first "dates" was inviting her to come to church with me introducing her to the Easter family. We have brought our kids up with Easter as an important part of their lives.



Ryan Ford

I've always appreciated the variety of connecting points through which you can be involved at Easter. There are so many ways that the mission of Easter, "To grow in faith and carry on the work of Jesus Christ," has meant a growth in opportunities to reach out and serve within the Eagan community and outside the Eagan community. I've also always enjoyed the variety of the pastors that Easter has had over the years that I've been a member.

Early in life, I learned generosity from my parents as they donated their time and money to the church. When I met Cathie, I learned generosity

from her and her family and early in our marriage, we began Simply Giving so it wasn't a matter of having to choose to put our offering in an envelope or in the offering tray, it was just automatically part of our family finances. Our commitment to generosity has been a part of our lives as a family "from generation to generation." My family chooses support Easter with financial gifts because we believe in the work that Easter does and in the organizations and causes that Easter supports.

In our time at Easter, Cathie and I have been Confirmation Mentors. Cathie has been involved in Easter leadership, choir, and was on one of the Call Committees. We were part of a Life Group for a time. I've been on the Confirmation Committee, have gone as an adult leader on 3 high school mission trips, and have been an adult leader for Youth Group for a couple of years now. My hope for Easter and the next generation is that especially youth and young adults feel that Easter can become a lifelong church home and church family like it has been for me, my parents, my brother, Cathie, and our kids.

GENEROSITY FOUNDS A CHURCH

Thirty-three years ago, Mark and I were recently married and looking for a church to join. After visiting several churches, we decided to join Easter Lutheran Church. We found that members at Easter generously shared their faith. We understood that it is through this sharing that our own faith can grow. One example of this is a poem that Gary Burdick slipped into my pocket one Sunday.

Love of God

In my heart I feel
 The love of God abound,
May I never, ever lose
 This great love I've found.
No other love I know
 Can be so full and sweet
May I always keep my faith
 Until God in Heaven I meet. (**Gary Burdick**, September 1995)

I also appreciate the variety of adult learning opportunities that Easter provides. I was working long hours and taking care of my great aunts and



Laurie Martinson

my grandma. Tuesday morning, 6:30 a.m. Bible study, was so important for me at that time. I attended that Bible study as often as I could. Reading God's word aloud with others and sharing our faith stories sustained me. It is so important to me now to be able to lead Women on Wednesday's Bible study and continue this deeper dive into God's word on a weekly basis.

I am drawn to the outreach ministries at Easter and how those ministries grow and change as we grow in our faith and as we understand how to carry on Jesus' work in a changing world. Easter people have always

placed an emphasis on our outreach ministries, and I am eager to see how these ministries will grow and change in the coming years.

My parents taught me about generosity – and how it can help a church to grow. We were taught to use our small allowance, starting in first grade. I remember carefully placing my coin in the collection plate and feeling like I was a part of something bigger than me. Recently, my mom shared her recollection of how a practice of generosity can make a big difference. Our family, with 16 other families, established the first Lutheran church in Chanhasen. We had hired our first pastor and we were so excited. My dad was treasurer and he and my mom were talking about how funds were not sufficient to pay the first month's salary for the pastor. My dad assured my mom that it would be OK. He had this assurance because he knew that our family and other families had a practice of generosity. This practice was not only financial generosity but included the work, time, smarts, music, teaching, food and any other needs of our new church. Yes! Our pastor was paid and our church grew! I remember how much fun we had, how excited we were and how we built relationships that have endured to this day.

Newly retired, Mark and I are planning to increase our financial gifts to Easter to support the upcoming One Easter+One Mission Capital Campaign. We are working with our financial advisor to consider setting up a donor-advised fund where we could contribute IRA and other taxable funds to an account where donations could be made to Easter without tax penalties, increasing our giving power!

THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

My introduction to tithing came from St. Peter Catholic Church in Quincy, Ill., at Sunday mass. The ushers held out poles with a basket attached to the end and families dropped in their envelopes. Kids usually argued over whose turn it was to drop in the envelope. Others dropped in neatly folded cash so people around them could not see the numbers on the bill. It all felt very rote. I knew the money went to “the church” but did not understand much beyond that. Catholic grade school religion class used words like “obligation” and “duty” to describe tithing. Ten percent, before taxes, was the formula to ensure you gave the right amount. It was later in life that I learned about generosity.



Ryan Kistner

As a parent, I give my three children each some money at Christmas time for their gift shopping. Not a lot, but enough so that after mom and their sisters are taken care of, there will still be enough left over to get me a pair of socks. The point is, they do not keep any for themselves (they put any excess change in the socks). And everything they give originally came from me. They would have no gifts to give without my money. They are children. I do not expect them to make a connection between me giving them money and how God has also given his children everything they have. But I, on the other hand, do see the connection. And when I realized the precious gifts in life I have were never mine to begin with, they were given to me by God, it is then that I truly understood what generosity means.

Generosity was one of the most common topics Jesus Christ taught his disciples and listeners. Easter Lutheran Church, even St. Peter Catholic Church, exists because others before us followed Jesus’ teaching. This capital campaign is an opportunity to be the type of person Jesus described in Luke 12:33-34. One of my favorite Christian writers used to say that “Christianity is always one generation away from extinction.” Dramatic, but true. Our children and our community need beacons of hope like Easter Lutheran to keep Christianity alive. God gave us resources, not to keep for ourselves, but to give generously to others.

BELONGING

I was first drawn to Easter Lutheran Church because it was the closest Lutheran church to our new home, and several neighbors belonged. I wanted a church that our children, then ages six and four, would be eager to attend. A church where they would see other children from their school and where they could form lifetime friendships. I was prepared to attend services at other area churches to find what I was looking for. But we attended worship once, just once, and I knew we had found our home. Easter people were simply glad to welcome us. I felt like I belonged. I have since served on several committees and in leadership with the council, now called the Vision Board. I sing in the choir and help in other ways as I can. I do these things because they bring me purpose and joy.



Angie Swetland

One of the ministries I serve is the Dementia Care Support Group. A concern raised by many caregivers, is the person with Dementia asking, begging, to go home. I advise providing a sense of belonging with a hug, a favorite food, a look at an old family photo album. Home is a feeling, not a place. We all yearn for a sense of belonging. I belong to, and with, Easter people beginning on that first Sunday morning. My children, and now my grandchildren, have loved and learned from the sacrament of Baptism, Easter Preschool, Sunday School, Confirmation, Vacation Bible School, Camp Wapogasset, Mission Trips, and the list goes on.

Easter continues to reach out to the youth of our community. Our church also continues to find new ways to reach out to older adults, to the poor, to the lonely. Recently, I saw a story about a Twin Cities mega-church which is hoping to build a new, very large sanctuary in a suburban neighborhood. Those living in the surrounding area are concerned about parking. In response, the church officials said that Sunday morning was the only time that there would be a significant number of people in the church. I am grateful to belong to a church where we grow in faith and meet the needs of our community every day, not just on Sunday. Worship is central to what we do, and community outreach is too.

I learned about generosity from my grandmothers. Grandma G would shower us with gifts at Christmas. It was often a pencil, a notebook and crayons, each wrapped separately, so we would have a lot of packages to open. Grandma S would send a pair of hand knit mittens, each with a dollar bill stuffed inside. Not big, expensive things, but given from the heart. After graduating from Luther College, I was blessed to find work in elder care, always in faith-based non-profit organizations. I learned firsthand how important philanthropy was to our work, and to the people we served. I watched the joy on the faces of donors, too, and realized that giving feeds the soul of the giver. I learned about all the ways to be generous, with time, talent and treasure – each according to their ability. We now have the opportunity to participate in a transition to one campus, allowing us to use all of our resources wisely, and offering us a chance to grow in new ways. We are truly blessed to be a blessing.

FOR FAMILY

Long ago we struggled with finding a spiritual and church home. Our early lives involved vastly different faith traditions and neither of those theologies felt like a place capable of satisfying a nagging family need for Christian practice. A friend's recommendation brought us to a Lutheran congregation. It felt good and from there we began a journey.

Relocating to the Twin Cities, and to Eagan, meant finding a new church home. Easter was close by and seemed to have the qualities our growing family needed.

Admittedly, an awful Easter Sunday morning worship experience brought a question or two to our choice, but we pressed on and stuck to the Sunrise service in later years.

That Easter Sunday experience showed one thing though: Easter was a growing congregation and needed resources to serve everyone seeking what it had to offer. It needed our generosity.



Randy Dufault

We were not a family of great means at the beginning of our Easter tenure. Yet it felt good to contribute what we could to this place we called our church home. As our means grew over the years, our giving could too. Each year we saw the results of those gifts in our family, in global mission support, in community involvement, and in programming meeting the needs of young and old alike.

With very few exceptions, there are never enough resources for any endeavor to do all it wants to do or needs to do. Easter is no different. This congregation has given much to Eagan and the world, yet it can give more. There are programs delivering tangible results. There is a vision for the future. Both parts make it easy for us to continue our generosity.

At a future time, we will leave the Easter congregation. Whether that happens when God calls us home or because of other life changes, we hope that the generosity of Easter people means that other families find a church home here. And that our generosity flows beyond our borders to encourage our brothers and sisters in Guatemala and Tanzania. Until then, it feels good to be a part of a congregation doing things no individual can do on their own.

A STORY SHARED

As a 42-year member of ELC, I have seen many changes over the years. I am especially excited about the One Easter+One Mission, and looking forward to the new opportunities and possibilities to serve one another – and the wider community.

My parents taught me the importance of being generous. We didn't have much money, but they set an impactful example by giving their time to help others: ushering at services and singing in the church choir,



Lynn Deml

assisting with the annual grounds clean-up and cooking at our big church camp, delivering Meals on Wheels, visiting hospice patients, helping with school fundraisers and more.

Our church was Mount Olivet, the large Lutheran church in Minneapolis. It had several programming staff members so it could coordinate and offer many volunteer opportunities. As a teen, I visited weekly a young woman with Down syndrome, read books and mail to a blind woman, was a candy-striper at Fairview Hospital, and worked in the church camp laundry.

The joy I experienced in helping others strengthened my faith – and I also learned a lot in the process of helping, especially in developing better listening skills and increasing my compassion for others.

As kids, we were expected to give a portion of our weekly chore allowance to the church in kid-size offering envelopes, a portion went into the bank and the remaining we could spend if/as we chose.

Our parents discussed donating to many worthy causes. And regular giving to church was at the top of the list. They often reminded us that services with beautiful messages and music “don’t magically happen for free.”

I joined Easter in 1981, when our young family had just moved to Eagan. Easter was only one block away from our new home – and it ticked all our boxes for what we were looking for in a neighborhood church: a friendly, welcoming atmosphere, a breadth of good programs, dedicated, inspired pastoral leadership and a focus on Christ’s outreach mission in our new community.

We also wanted to see opportunities for all ages to enhance their Christian education and to volunteer at church and in the community. One of the most impactful things I have volunteered for at Easter was serving as mentor for two teen confirmation groups. We all learned and grew in our faith together.

The most important act of generosity I have personally witnessed is that of a friend who donated a kidney to a complete stranger who needed one. Even though that is one of the most incredibly selfless and generous things to do for another human, it can’t compare to what Christ did for us on the cross. That is the ultimate gift of generosity!

JUST LIKE MOM

Throughout my life, one person taught me generosity above all others: my mother. She models it every day. She has always been a very active member of her Lutheran church, and she has given so much of her time and skill to helping others. She's led, taught, and participated in all kinds of groups, and her volunteer experience is inspiring. She helps children with their reading skills at local elementary schools and is also helping one of her current pastors re-learn how to read after he suffered a stroke. She collects and donates winter gear and clothing for those who need it. She has put in countless hours organizing, stocking shelves, and handing out the food at the food pantry associated with her church. She works at Thanksgiving dinner serving guests every year.



Coryn Petersen (left)

Mom serves others when asked, but perhaps most inspiring to me is her ability to take action when she sees a need. For example, she found out that one of the elderly members of her church had lost her husband and needed help putting on her stockings every morning, so my mom organized a group of women to take turns going to her house and helping her with that task. There are lots of people who participate in scheduled volunteering activities, but there aren't as many (like my mom) who proactively plan and execute them, and I think that's very admirable and something I aspire to do, too.

The most important act of generosity that I witnessed was my mom taking in a member of her community and inviting her to share her house when she did not have a safe place of her own. Mom's an example to me and to her community of what it means to give her time and skills to others, and I very much look up to her in this capacity. I have no doubt that the stories of helping others from the Bible and Jesus' own actions have positively impacted my mom and, at least partly, explain why she does what she does.

The ministry of Easter Lutheran is important to me because I, too, want to help others like my mom does and like Jesus did. Easter is inclusive, diverse and offers numerous opportunities to help others. This is what draws me to the ministry and makes me proud to be a member.

GROWING FOR GIVING

I have been going to Easter all my life, but I first started to understand what that really meant during the process of confirmation. It felt like a coming of age in faith and community. The big questions were on the table, and our church leaders were our intellectual, spiritual peers. We were encouraged to enter a millennia-long conversation and find our place in an age-old story. At Easter, there was enough room for curiosity and openness to keep me coming back.



Sam Fouts

As a former Easter employee and a former employee of Reaching Up Homework Help, I have seen how Easter opens itself to the community. In a suburban landscape characterized by separation, privacy, and cars, I cannot overstate the importance of Easter's ministry through physical gathering space. A telling metric is that most of Easter's space is used most of the time by kids who are not members of the church. I am talking about the young people of Reaching Up Homework Help, Treehouse, and Easter Preschool. To be sure, Easter's ministry to its own young people is vital, and its welcome to many beyond the faith community is truly remarkable. These are young neighbors who come to Easter as part of their daily routine. Easter is telling kids that they matter: their safety matters; their growth matters; their rest matters; their play matters; their gathering matters. These kids love Easter because it is a bright, distinct thread in the fabric of their community.

I learned generosity from my parents. As a kid, my sister and I got a weekly allowance, which was tied to our age. So, at 13, I got \$13 a week. Of that, we were expected to save 10% and give 10% to the church. I see my parents' genius now because that started a habit of giving. Some years ago, a friend's generosity sermon prompted me to ask myself, what is 10% of my income now, and how much would I really miss it? So, I opened a separate bank account and deposited 10% of every paycheck. Funds grew quickly, now that I was making more than \$13 per week! I found that I did not miss the money, and I was thrilled at the idea that this could be a resource gathered for giving

away. So, I started giving it away to my church, my neighbors, and our vision of community. Far from being a burden, tithing infused my personal finances with a sense of joy and purpose: I am not growing my resources for the sake of consumption or hoarding; I am growing for giving.

I give to my church, because those of us who are able, must move resources toward the things that build the communities that matter to us. There is so much working against human connection these days. We are increasingly “networked” and yet disconnected, so much so that it feels like swimming upstream to find, claim, and make space for our own positive communities. We (all of us) are beaten back and beaten down by cultural messages of selfish individualism, consumerism, nihilism, and productivity. These “interlocking systems of oppression,” as Casper ter Kuile puts it, “depend on us feeling alone and afraid. But spiritual practices cultivate courage so that we will risk more for each other, so that we will risk more for love.” Our joyful, hopeful, and courageous generosity is a protest against this false gospel of scarcity (“you will never have enough, so cling to what you have”). And it is a spiritual practice by which we risk something for our community, for our neighbors, and for love.

But hold on. Isn't it kind of buying into a consumerist story to believe that our greatest power is in our money? Yes, actually. And that's why giving to my church also requires my presence. My church doesn't just want my money—it wants me. To give fully and to fully benefit, I need to show up. God in Jesus taught that our power is our love and our love is our drawing near to one another. Incarnation. Giving to my church, then, is not abstract—it is a willingness to become further entangled in a community that welcomes me and others I care about. As a queer person, I do not take such communities for granted. To celebrate and build up the places that welcome my body and my being, I give out of my abundance.

My greatest hope for Easter and its young people is that they find the supportive community that I have found there. As I've said, such a thing cannot be taken for granted, nor is it small. For many, it is life-changing and even life-saving. Our young people deserve spaces where they matter, where they are taken seriously, where they are cared for and care for others. As such, it is my hope that Easter will embrace the leadership of its young people so that they may have a stake and a role in fashioning the community that they need.

FINDING HOME

Sandy and I have been lifelong church members. When we married it was natural for us to find a church home. At the time we moved to Eagan, Easter Lutheran Church was not here. Our options were few and we set our own roots in a neighboring church. Over time, things changed and we began to search for a new church home. It was a difficult time, but we found "Home!" Easter was and is a welcoming community, filled with warmth, joy and grace. Through small group studies, we found fellowship that we enjoy to this day. A place not only to grow, but to reach out to others in our community via Meals on Wheels, Open Door, Loaves and Fishes, the after school programs, Tree House...the list goes on. An example of Easter's flexibility in worship was during covid when we were able to worship "on line" and to allow others to participate... and that led to another avenue of ministry to others.



Dorie & Sandy Erickson

Over the past 28 years, other opportunities to serve in our church community arose. My special desire was to learn more about prayer. I became a part of the prayer chain which became the prayer team which blended into Stephens Ministry and then expanded to the many facets of today's Easter Care Ministry. My prayer curiosities opened up horizons and relationships that are a blessing to this day!

In our Easter "Home," there is so much we love and appreciate! We find joy in the welcoming narthex. We find inspiration and assurance in the staff who work and pray together. We are both comforted and challenged by the sermons we hear. We love the church services and music that speak to our souls. We respond with our generosity of spirit, participation and finances.

Early in our marriage we were part of a stewardship campaign. As Co-Chairs, we were encouraged to be an example of generous giving. With lots of prayer we decided to tithe. From each paycheck, 10 % was transferred to a separate checking account. It was challenging but it worked! It gave us freedom to give God the “first fruits” and still live on the 90%. That formula has been a great truth and example to our family and gave us the opportunity to “Grow in faith and carry on the work of Jesus Christ.”

SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG

We joined Easter in 1996 after having recently moved to Eagan. We were looking for a church where we could share our musical talents and which had worship settings that supported contemporary music and handbells. With three young children, we were also looking for the sense of community that we had in the church where we grew up. We knew that would be more difficult being that we weren't living in a rural community anymore, and Easter was a congregation in the suburbs. So over the years, we sought out ways to become involved and encouraged our children to do the same.



Brenda Lyseng

We have seen how the ministry of Easter has changed over the decades and appreciate that it is willing to reinvent itself, try new things, and expand our reach. Our family has worshiped in traditional settings, outdoors, with a band, in a middle school with intergenerational learning, with a group of families, by candlelight, at camp, in our living room. Streaming has allowed our extended family to join us from afar. All of those settings are important to us. My husband plays drums with the Messengers most Sundays while I've been a part of Jubilate Bell Choir since we joined. For us, that invitation to be an active part of worship has been at the core of Easter feeling like home.

We are excited that the dream for one site is coming true. Our family was enthusiastic when the congregation was invited to write a message on the concrete floor of the Great Room at the Lake before the carpet was laid and the building opened. From Herbert Brokering's hymn "Earth and All Stars," we chose these lyrics: "Trumpet and pipes, loud clashing cymbals, sing to the Lord a new Song! Harp, lute, and lyre, loud humming cellos, sing to the Lord a new song!" Our spot is under the drum set of course. I would love to have Jubilate and the Messengers playing an anthem together (up to you Ben and Kent!).

With the many ministries of our church and our partners, we can't be involved in everything. But everyone has a place, a group, a program, that they can be a part of. We also recognize that each of us needs extra support at times in our lives. Giving space and recognition to the outreach programs of the church and our partners is also important to us. Gaining a deeper understanding of the community we live in and how both our actions and inactions affect our neighbors will perhaps lead us to new worship styles, programming, and outreach. With one site, what new opportunities will arise?

A PLACE TO BE FED

In 1991 our family moved from Superior, WI, to the Twin Cities. We settled in Eagan since it was close to the airport and we heard that it was in a quality school district. We did some church "shopping" and when we worshipped at Easter, we were encouraged by the kind welcome and inspired by the insightful preaching. There was also special music and an uplifting baptism. We left feeling spiritually fed. Because we had three children in elementary and middle school, we were looking for a church where we all could become involved and grow in faith and service. As we learned more about all the programming for children, youth, and adults, as well as the mission to serve locally and globally, we knew we had found our new church home.



Jim & Liane Mattson

We are so grateful for the dedicated and engaging pastors and lay leaders Easter has had over the more than 30 years we have been members. We consistently have that feeling of being welcome and part of a family that is spiritually fed. In so many ways, Easter feeds the individual, feeds the neighbor, and feeds the hungry world. Easter members serve in many ways, and the friendships created when serving together strengthen us all in our relationships and in our faith and inspire generosity.

We both grew up in rural areas, and our parents encouraged generosity as they always reminded us of the importance of giving of ourselves both in time and resources – assisting with Sunday School and setting aside a portion of our allowance and babysitting money for church offering. Bible camp experiences and college outreach teams were also a very formative part of our lives. One of our favorite songs from that time was “Pass It On.” The gratitude we have for the opportunities we’ve had over the years to grow in faith are what inspire us to ‘pass it on’ by being generous with our time and our money. There have been times when our budget has been stretched – especially when helping our kids with college costs – but we have remained committed to prioritize what we believe is most important. We follow the saying “Give until it feels good!”

We are especially committed to extending our financial support for Easter in this step to once again become One Easter with One Mission at one site. This was the intention when the site at Easter by the Lake was built, and we are excited to help it come to fruition – for the blessing of being able to see each other and cross paths in one place, and for the efficiency of having all ministry happening at one site. It is time to facilitate Easter’s mission of feeding each other, feeding the local community, and feeding the world.

RELATIONSHIPS

The title of Mary J. Blige’s song “Searching” is the theme for my generosity story. My husband, Greg, and I found Easter Lutheran Church in 2002 as we searched for a faith community that provided comfort, preaching/teaching for our spiritual growth, and programming/outreach that spoke to our need for a faith community and the larger community. The welcoming and warmth we received was a gift that drew us in and challenged us to make a commitment to this faith community. Our “search and find” efforts yielded joy, respite from life’s stressors and soul-searching that strengthened our commitment to Easter Church.



Kris Palfe

During the years prior to Greg’s death in 2014, active participation as volunteers provided opportunities for us to serve and support our church mission statement ... “To grow in faith and carry on the work of Jesus Christ.” The more we said “Yes” to volunteer opportunities and giving, the more we connected with members and staff in this large community of believers. We especially valued the meeting and greeting after past experiences feeling like strangers or being invisible. I’m reading David Brook’s book, “How To Know A Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Seen.” It’s a read that confirms the value I place on my investment with the Easter Care Team and my monthly Women Warriors support group for widows. My past work as a social worker helped me recognize the importance of relationships that connect and support us along our spiritual journeys.

My hope for Easter is that we continue to move forward with the challenges and issues we face, sacred and secular, and trust that God’s work and our hands, hearts and resources will continue to inspire and energize us to continue with this journey of faith. We all face these risk/benefit thoughts, but know that “God is working his purpose out,” a line from a hymn I recall from my youth. I feel blessed to be a part of this faith community and ongoing efforts to grow in faith. My soul is more full of hope as I stay on this journey, always walking toward that Light.

FAITHFULNESS

When we moved to Eagan last year, we were anxious to find a new church home after serving in our church in Duluth for 33 years. We wanted a church that had traditional worship style, where there was opportunity for spiritual growth through Bible study, that had good music, and where there was energy in preaching. We found that at Easter Lutheran Church, where we were welcomed with open arms and where we feel at home. So the question is, what do we have to contribute to this vibrant community?

Both my husband and I grew up in homes where regular church attendance was assumed. I remember Dad laying out five coins on the table on Sunday

for us sisters to give to Sunday School. Then he would fill the envelope that he and Mom placed in the offering plate. They were faithful in giving.



Dave & Doris Walter

In our early marriage, we were not able to give a lot to the church, but the idea of faithfulness in giving remained strong. In raising five children, our offering was more than likely what was left over rather than from the “first fruits.” But over the years, we were able to grow our giving each year until we were able to give a tithe – and even above. Our employment over the years did not provide much of a retirement benefit, but by being frugal we were able to save. Now through investing

wisely we are able to gift some of the RMD dollars (Required Minimum Distribution) directly to the church.

I believe everything we have and all we are is a gift from God and that we are called to be wise stewards of these gifts. In our years, in good times and not so good times, we have never had to do without. I believe that faithfulness has led to our ability to be generous.

WE'VE FOUND OUR CHURCH HOME!!

Our faith journey led us to Easter Church some 35 years ago when Deb and I were looking for a church home in which to be married. We both had different faith backgrounds so we were open to any church, denomination and location. One call to Pastor Jim and the decision was easy. Our discussion with Pastor Jim made it clear that the mission of Easter Church was the centerpiece of everything that would and could happen in our lives.



Tony Wand

From day one, we felt welcome and comfortable. It didn't take long to meet others at Easter who shared our faith and values. Most of our family's milestones and celebrations happened through Easter Church. Deb and I were married by Pastor Jim. Mikaela and MacKenzie were baptized and confirmed by Pastor Jim and Pastor Tom. We were part of mission trips, faith groups, church leadership teams and Bible studies. All of which re-affirmed and strengthened our faith.

It has been so fulfilling to see the growth not only in the membership and footprint of Easter Church, but more importantly the opportunities for ministry that have developed over the years. There is something for everyone. Personal and family spiritual growth. Community outreach. Youth and adult ministries. Support groups. Mission trips. And so many ways to support Easter and its people with the gifts we have been given.

Having served on Easter's council and finance committees for many years, we know first-hand that Easter leaders are good stewards of the treasures given by Easter's members. Not only financial gifts but also gifts of time and talent. It is easy to support such a strong mission and leadership.

It is our greatest hope that Easter Church remains focused on the ministries that will continue to help everyone grow in faith and carry on the work of Jesus Christ. Let's make room so that everyone who wishes to join Easter in their journey of faith can be warmly welcomed and made comfortable, just like we were 35 years ago.

GETTING INVOLVED

When my husband John and I moved to Eagan in 1992, we began looking for a new church home. We wanted to be part of a vibrant, welcoming, large Lutheran church. Strong clergy, beautiful music, and interesting activities were also important to us. When we visited Easter, we immediately felt comfortable. We needed to look no further.

I found the best way to meet people was to get involved. I made many wonderful friends through the various adult groups and volunteer activities. The women's group (Chick Talk), that I've been part of for many years, is delightful. We've become close friends who support each other and who enjoy spending time together.

Over the years, I have attended both traditional and contemporary worship services. I appreciate the option of either type of worship setting, with contemporary being the usual choice. Worship services are upbeat with a friendly tone. The sermons are both relevant and interesting. The music ministry is very strong in both settings.

Internally, there is a variety of programming for people of all ages. Externally, Easter has been generous with its resources through such programs as Tree



Louise Ulrich

House, Homework Help, Loaves and Fishes, Holiday gift shop and others. These are important ways that Easter gives back to the community.

It's hard to recall exactly when I learned about generosity. I observed it in my family before I really understood it: Grandma sending home fresh cinnamon rolls, extended family coming to help with the harvest, friends showing up for others in need. My family always contributed resources and time to the church, but I didn't truly understand first fruits giving and generosity until later as an adult. We have opportunities all around us to help others, many right in our own neighborhoods. I certainly have room to grow, but I do believe it's my responsibility to give of my time and resources. It's also rewarding to see what we can accomplish together.

Easter is my church home. I believe in its mission and enjoy being part of it. I financially support Easter because I want these ministries to grow and to be available for the next generation, both within the church and in the surrounding community.

IS SOMEONE WATCHING?

Like much of teaching, the most important way I learned about generosity was from watching my parents. I don't recall them ever talking about it, lecturing or sharing their source of motivation - being generous was just how they lived their lives. The sharing of their time, talents and treasure were woven into everything.

Many of my earliest memories revolve around my family's relationship with our church. I recall every Sunday being proud to drop my miniature-sized envelope into the offering plate at Sunday School, seeing my



Deb Stoll

parents go to church meetings, encouraging others to participate in pledge campaigns, chaperone youth events, etc. Outside of church life, within their family and social circles, my parents were the ones who always “showed up.” Weddings, funerals, hospital and nursing home visits, gatherings with extended family and/or friends - they were there.

It wasn't until later in life I learned that at times they had financially supported a few of our relatives; the most touching was my dad sending a monthly check to his sister, whose husband had left her as a single parent of five young children. The most significant act of generosity I have witnessed was the act of an organ donation. Someone very dear to me was in need of a double-lung transplant. The extended period of ups and downs while waiting for the right donor was challenging for her and for all who cared about her. When the time finally arrived for her to get new lungs, my thoughts centered on someone who decided to give “the gift of life” and a family who, while grieving their loss, supported that decision. Simply amazing!

Easter's ministry is life-giving to many people. One of the main things that attracted me to Easter, and continues to inspire me, is the church's focus on outreach. Loaves and Fishes, Tree House, Homework Help, being connected to parishes in Guatemala and Tanzania - and on and on. People of Easter are generous with their time, talents and treasures!

FINDING MY PLACE

I first came to visit Easter Lutheran Church when my family was looking for a church where our daughter could go to confirmation with her friends at school. We were attending another church at the time, but no school friends were in her Sunday school classes. Easter was recommended to us, so we thought we'd give it a try. We visited a service and felt welcomed by others and in the pews were little pink forms we could fill out as visitors. It had a box at the bottom “request a pastor to visit us” and so we checked the box.

Soon after that Sunday, the pastor called us to set up a time to come to our home and visit us. Once he came, I felt very comfortable, and he shared the

vision of Easter Lutheran Church and we discussed what we were looking for in a new church for our family. As we visited, he told us that no one had ever checked the box before – so he wanted to be sure to come and “see who would check the box”. We all had a huge laugh about it together!! I felt immediately comfortable with this pastor and wanted to join this church.

I began attending the Saturday morning Men’s breakfast group. This group was welcoming and a lot of fun. I’m a chef so I soon started helping the men prepare the food for the meetings. This gave me a great sense of belonging and a group I could feel at home with.

Before Easter had the Easter by the Lake setting, Easter provided Loaves and Fishes meals quarterly at a Bloomington MN location. I started leading this cooking and serving group with another Easter member. We did this for 14 years, ending up with a core group of committed members coming each time to work together and serve others. We usually served over 200 people each time. We worked hard and had a great time together. I always knew we were helping and serving others and this was what it was all about for me.

Throughout the years at Easter, I have seen my church work to serve others within Easter, within our community, and around the world. I appreciate how my financial giving to Easter is used to support the work and vision of Easter church. My greatest hope for Easter Lutheran Church is for us to grow together as a congregation and continue helping others in our community, within the church as well as our support for foreign churches like those in Guatemala and Tanzania.



Dan Reiners

CATCHING THE SPIRIT

I'm sure my mom probably had a role in teaching me about generosity, but mostly I remember learning about it by being on the receiving end.

When I was in elementary school, I remember that my best friend, Amy, never hesitated to share with me. If she brought two Swiss cake rolls in her lunch, she'd offer me one of them. If we were playing at her home and she wanted a pudding cup for a snack, she offered one to me, too. If she was the lucky recipient of some surprise bit of candy, she'd ask if I'd like some and promptly offer me a chunk (or a few pieces depending on what it was). I was very

aware that I did not harbor the same generosity in my heart toward her. I had a scarcity mindset, and if I had the good fortune of receiving a treat, I'd gobble it down as quickly as I could or hide it to enjoy by myself later. Before long, my conscience would kick in and I'd ask myself if it was fair that I had this double standard – expecting generosity from Amy while excusing myself from it. I think I started sharing with Amy out of a sense of obligation, but as I continued to see her joy in sharing with me, I became more and more inspired. Eventually I found I agreed with her – a treat tasted better if it was shared.

In middle school, I participated in 4-H, and one summer my dog (participating in dog obedience) qualified for State. There was no way my mom would be able to bring me, and my neighbor and friend (whose family regularly gave me rides to 4-H meetings) had bowed out of the dog obedience programs part way into the year. I knew some other folks who were going, but I accepted the fact it just wasn't in the cards for me. But then, unexpectedly, I was invited to join another girl from our 4-H club who was a few years younger than me. Her mother and grandmother were bringing her and said they had room to bring my dog and me along. If that wasn't kind enough, they covered our hotel fee and all of my meals. On the way home from the competition we even took a side trip to Wisconsin Dells. I'd been to the Dells a number of times before in my life, but only to visit one low-



Kristie Ristey-Mandel

cost attraction at a time. My brother and I at one time collected brochures of different things to see and do in Wisconsin Dells and I had daydreamed about many a fun vacation in my younger years. But this time I was treated to a full day of fun. Two of the things I remember were taking a land and water tour on the Wisconsin Ducks and making it to the Wonder Spot, an attraction at the top of my dream vacation list. But what struck me the most was the extreme generosity of this family. They didn't really know me at all, and yet they treated me like a member of their own family. That's an example I've been inspired by from that time on. I endeavor to exhibit the same degree of generosity toward others.

I'm very aware that a lot of people in our country do not have a very high opinion of Christians. Many see us as judgmental, selfish, rigid, narrow-minded, etc. I'm thrilled to be a part of the Easter Lutheran Community as we follow Jesus and carry on His work. Easter lovingly serves our local community and others around the world. In being obedient to Christ and reflecting His love to the world around us, we are definitely pushing back against the stereotype many folks have against Christians. We're serving as ambassadors to our Lord and signposts of His Kingdom.

POPSICLES

When we were young, how often did our parents show us and tell us we needed to share? There was the time when the ice cream truck came down the block, and my dad bought the neighbor kids their popsicles. The time my mom had us bake cookies for the staff at the hospital where she worked as a nurse. Or one of the hardest, having to give the last piece of pie to my sister at the dinner table.

Our family belonged to a small church where the pastor was always finding ways our small groups could give. One summer, our pastor organized the high school kids



Dave Montgomery

to help the local farmers with their wheat harvest or bale hay. It was hot and sweaty work. The days were long. Once the harvest was complete, we all met at our church and thanked God for something that none of us thought we could do on our own. But together, we felt we made a difference. We grew closer and helped each other through the process. (P.S. We also got to swim in the pastor's pool).

Our family has been blessed with people who have cared and given their hearts to help us or loved ones when life's challenges arose. Generosity and gratitude were instilled in me so I in turn try to help and give when called. These characteristics are an essential part of my life. Getting to help our families, friends, neighbors, and community in real and sincere ways is a joy! We need to give in ways that matter and show we truly care. We give to those when we are able and pray for those when we cannot.

We are embarking on an exciting time at Easter Lutheran Church with the "One Easter – One Mission" journey. Many of us remember previous campaigns we hoped would bring both locations into one. There were many reasons where the timing just didn't work. But now, we have the opportunity to make this really happen. Just as I learned from my parents, childhood pastor, and all those who have helped throughout the years, this is a time to give. This endeavor brings our congregation together to show our faith in God, the church pastors, staff, and volunteers and to demonstrate our generosity. "One Easter – One Mission".

THE TIME IS NOW

Patti and I joined Easter because it resembled churches we had belonged to in the past. Easter is spiritually vibrant, welcoming and non-judgmental. Patti has been involved in Soul Sisters and I have been involved in Manup. Through these groups we've made new friends and pitched in on fixing up a house, a fall clean-up of a member's yard, and working at Fare for All. Patti has provided snacks for the Messengers on Sunday. I have participated at Open Door doing a snack pack. We both have participated in Feed My Starving Children. We have given bags of food to the food shelves. It is so satisfying to join with other volunteers lending a hand through these programs. We have given generously with our time.



Patti & Bruce Morgart

When we first joined Easter, Pastor Jim told us that it was his dream to have one location, One Easter. Today there is work being done to see this dream come true. Will it be an easy task? Far from it. Over the years, Patti and I have participated in two church building projects. Both were great additions that allowed them to have a contemporary service and to have more room for families looking for a new church home. We envision this for One Easter.

The parable in Matthew 25:14-30 has stuck with me my entire life and shaped my financial stewardship. Jesus describes three servants who are given gold by their

master. They are told to invest it during his absence. Two servants double the amount, but one simply saves it. The story closes saying “To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have abundance.” Those who are faithful and responsible in using what they’ve been given will be rewarded, while those who are negligent or fearful will face consequences.

My family did not have a lot of money when I was growing up, but I watched my dad give his time and talents to others when they were in need. My grandmother was very financially stressed but she reached deep into her savings and gave to her church *whatever amount* of money she could muster at the end of the year. **In 1 John 3:17: If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?** Generosity was ingrained in me by witnessing acts of generosity from my family members.

As we sought a church home, we were alert for a sense of active generosity. This was one of the tenets (generosity) we found at Easter. Patti and I have had a good life, good jobs we enjoyed, decent pay, and have been able to put extra away into our 401k plans. Thus, we have been able to increase our generosity to the church. One of the methods of giving we use is the Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from our retirement funds. A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian, payable to a qualified charity, in this case Easter.

SIGNPOSTS

From an early age I can remember my mom giving each of us a nickel or a dime to put in the offering plate at church. It is something I do to this day, but it is no longer with a nickel or a dime.

The Church was very important in my growing up years with the members helping Mom raise seven kids by herself after my father's tragic death. I believe that instilled in me the goal of helping others whenever possible.

I often question if God has a plan for me but the signposts of my life sure seem to point that way. I met a Lutheran Girl and fell in love with her. Sue and I share many of the same beliefs which we find nurtured within the Easter worshipping community.

One of the signposts God gave me was a summer intern at our Roseville Lutheran church simply mentioning that Easter and Roseville Lutheran had a lot in common. When we moved to Eagan we visited and joined. It has been our church home for 30 plus years.

Giving has always been a topic of healthy discussion in our lives. We have been very blessed and how we share those blessings is always a question. It is easy to give from abundance and much harder to give from basic needs and maybe go without something. We all will have that same discussion as we move forward with One Site.

Since reaching 70, I have been able to give money with before tax dollars and remind all seniors of this savings in income tax.

In my retirement I have found more time to be involved in church and those signposts keep coming at me. Manup, snack bags for hungry kids, financial board and a Mission Trip to Tanzania with many signposts telling me God has a plan for me. Where that plan will take me is unknown but with faith I will travel it.



Al Peterson

IT JUST FELT RIGHT

In 1995, we arrived in Eagan from the east coast as a result of a job change for Arlyn. Since both of us had been active in a church since our youth we were anxious to find a new church home. This process led us to a couple of the Lutheran churches in the area to learn more about them and to take in their worship experience. We kept coming back to Easter as it just “felt right” in meeting our needs and desires for a church home.



Arlyn & Kathie Poppen

Why? People were friendly. Easter was a vigorous congregation growing steadily and offering a wide range of opportunities in their music programs, learning and fellowship. At the time, Easter did not have a large older adult membership compliment.

Where did we learn “generosity”? Both of us came from homes where the church was an integral part of life, including our time and regular giving to both operating programs and, as they arose, capital appeals. Both of us were active in youth programs until we entered college. Kathie attended Gustavus Adolphus College where she experienced generosity, service and commitment. Arlyn attended college in South Dakota and continued to be involved with the church in his home faith community.

One personal experience with generosity for Arlyn happened when he was in high school. His home congregation conducted annual stewardship campaigns and every few years they reinforced stewardship with “every member visits” (EMV) where teams of two or three regular members would be sent out to call on every member of the church to present the church’s programs and coming year’s budget. Members were then invited to sign a pledge card quantifying their plan for monetary support of the church. For one year’s EMV program it was decided that members of the congregation’s youth program should be part of the teams going out to visit the members of the congregation. The team he was assigned to was given, among others,

a family that was active in the church but had only limited financial means. The husband was a city employee (sanitation worker) and was not well paid. When presented with the pledge card and asked what he felt they could contribute to the church, the husband, without a pause, named an amount for their intended weekly gift. Upon hearing the amount, the wife exclaimed "... but Mel, that takes up your entire raise at work..." Yet the husband stood firm in his commitment. As a teenager, this was both an embarrassing and inspirational learning experience, and certainly altered Arlyn's perspective of generosity... a lesson he remembers to this day, some 50 years later.

Easter Lutheran church offers many opportunities to "Grow in Faith and Carry On the Work of Jesus Christ". We have grown through classes we have taken, our Life Group experiences, and donating time to the Red Cross blood drives and Homework Help. Participating in these programs has "felt right," just like our introductory visits to Easter did!

OUR FAMILY CHURCH

Church has always been a part of my life, and I thank my parents for providing me a basis to grow my faith formation. I thought all churches were alike, but in my adult years when I was searching for a church for my young family, I quickly found this was not the case. Then we found Easter Lutheran Church, and now this is our family church. My two daughters grew up at Easter attending church school, confirmation, mission trips, marriages and baptisms of my grandkids. What a blessing it is after nearly 35 years of entering the doors at Easter Church to be able to attend church with your children and grandchildren, and be part of their faith journey.



Sandy Bull

The ministry at Easter provides so many different opportunities to grow your faith and give back to the community. There is something for everyone to

develop a relationship with God and feel the power of his grace and love. I found myself being called to give more to the church than just attending services on Sunday morning and giving an offering. I started by volunteering to be a church school teacher, then signing up to be a chaperone on a mission trip. I learned so much from the young teens, and saw God at work in their lives – something I never expected to witness! Next thing you know I was in leadership positions on the Vision Board and chairing the Call Committee for a new lead pastor. God does work in mysterious ways!

I support this church because of the outreach it provides to the community. The congregation is not inwardly focused but looks to go out into the world, both locally and globally, to spread the word of Jesus Christ. We live out our mission statement! Yet while we look outward, our internal programs are awesome. Our pastors are inspiring, demonstrating the grace of God. Our music programs provide meaningful content to our services. Our staff is talented and extremely dedicated to our mission. For me, Easter Lutheran Church has it all.

My hope for this congregation is the opportunity for future generations to feel the love of God, know his saving grace and to be part of a community that cares for others. I am excited about the One Easter+One Mission Capital Campaign, because together God is calling us to do great things!

INVOLVED

Family and relationships are John's priority, and he lives his life according to that purpose.

John's story begins with his high school sweetheart. After high school, John and his wife, Tammie, went their separate ways. Their breakup was amicable, but for probably 10 years, they didn't talk with one another. In 1998, John's mom passed away. Circuitously, John soon learned Tammie's mom had also died, and John decided to attend Tammie's mom's funeral. At the



John Peterson

funeral, Tammie told him, "If you ever want to talk, call." So John did. "We talked for 2 hours on the phone," John remembered. "We got together, and the rest is history!"

John and Tammie married in 2002. At that time, Tammie and her two children were members of Easter, and her children were very much a part of the children's programs. Tammie also has two older sisters who are Easter members. John attended a different church and was very good friends with one of the pastors there. He and Tammie were married at Easter, and John's good pastor friend officiated. Soon after, they had Elena, making them a family of five. For a while, they went back and forth between the two churches. There came a time, however, when both decided they needed one home church.

"Making church feel like home is all about getting involved," he said. "It's what keeps me coming back. It's a place to develop and grow my faith through programs and opportunities the church offers." They came to decide that Easter would be their home. John's participation extends beyond weekly Sunday worship. His greatest joy comes from volunteering at TreeHouse, an organization for teens to end hopelessness. "Easter has the right set of circumstances that remind me of the importance of my faith," he said. "I wouldn't know who to go to if it wasn't church. It's all about relationships, and it makes going to church at Easter a lot more fun!" John and Tammie have gotten to know lots of new people and have made lasting friendships through their involvement.

John likes that Easter has global ministries in Tanzania and Guatemala, but what he really appreciates about Easter are the many local ministries that Easter partners with. "Taking care of the people in our own community is vital," he said. John retired a year ago and is looking forward to making a difference in the lives of those around him daily. Easter has so many opportunities for giving back.

GROWING IN FAITH AND GIVING

We found ourselves at Easter in 2001 when we moved to Eagan from northern Minnesota where Jerry had served in parish ministry for 25 years and was pursuing a career change into hospital chaplaincy. Sue found a job in Dakota County, so we bought our new home in Eagan. For the first time in our marriage, we had the opportunity to “church shop” and were excited about that new journey of discernment. Since we lived very close to Easter Lutheran



Sue & Jerry Friest

and actually had a couple of connections in the church, we started there. We never made it any further on our church shopping trip. We liked the church, the staff, the choir, the focus on reaching out to our neighbors in Eagan and around the world, and the people we were meeting. Six months later, we became members of Easter and the choir. Over the twenty plus years that we have been members, it has been a joy to become more involved and to see the ministries of Easter expand as we “Grow in faith and carry on the work of Jesus Christ.”

We were both raised in the church. In Jerry’s family giving was taught through both seeing his parents give and the opportunity and expectation that he would also give from what he had. In Sue’s family, money and offerings were not really talked about. Although we came from different experiences, we made the decision early in our marriage to tithe our income. We decided that we wanted our lifestyle to be impacted by our giving rather than our giving being limited by our lifestyle. This was not always easy as we struggled to pay the bills of our young family, but as we continued this practice, we discovered that there was always enough. We have not regretted this choice even though it has meant making hard decisions about what we have and what we can do.

As our income grew, it was satisfying to see our giving grow as well. At the time we retired in 2015, our income was cut significantly. We were on the

Simply Giving (an automatic giving) plan, so we decided to try to keep our giving level the same until the end of the year, knowing that if it became a hardship, we could always change it. We discovered, somewhat to our surprise that we could do more than tithe without hardship. Then we challenged ourselves to continue to grow our giving even though our income remained fairly static. For the past 8 years we have increased our giving by a weekly dollar amount. Each year we discovered that a few more dollars a week really wasn't hard to do.

Easter Lutheran has been such a gift to us on our faith journey. Opportunities to learn and serve keep us grounded in our faith. Our mission trip to Guatemala in 2019 was life changing. The energy and positivity of the relationships we have developed at Easter have enriched our lives. We are so excited about where the Spirit is leading our church as we serve with our neighbors and envision Easter as a one-site ministry.

As we have contemplated how we could financially support the building of an addition to the property by the lake, as part of the One Church/One Mission campaign, we knew we wanted to do more than our income would allow us to do. After consultation with our financial advisor, we were able to come up with a plan that will transfer some of our retirement savings directly to Easter Lutheran over 4 years starting in 2023 (so this money will not be taxable.) This enables us to give more generously than we imagined we could. Thanks be to God who generously gives us all we need so that we to can know the joy of living generously.

HOME!

In the summer of 2019 my family and I took our first international trip. We traveled to Armenia, my husband and children's ancestral land. We stood inside medieval monasteries, laying our hands on the stone walls in prayer like thousands of people had before us for hundreds of years. Some were as old as the 9th century. We ate apricots directly from the orchard trees, picked at sunset by the farmer and placed into our hands. We climbed enormous stairs to stand inside the Temple of Garni, a massive Pagan Temple built in 77 AD. We saw waterfalls spring from the sides of mountains, and men herd goats on horseback through the countryside the way it's been done for centuries. Everyday was amazing. We met the kindest people who live a simple, beautiful life.

After twelve days away from home, and over thirty hours of travel, no matter what might have been offered to me next, I wouldn't trade anything for the sight of my little split-level home nestled at the end of our cul-de-sac. Home. It's where we retreat to, it's where we find rest. It's where we feel safe and protected.

Easter has been our church home for nineteen years or so. So much has happened in our lives over the past nineteen years. We have raised two wonderful children. We have had so many blessings in our life. Like many, we have had our share of struggles as well, a critically ill child, the loss of a parent, chronic illness, the unexpected death of a friend. Life, with its apricot orchards, and spontaneous waterfalls can sometimes be quite painful.

In the Fall of 2019, one of my dearest friends unexpectedly suffered a heart attack during a medical procedure, she was in her forties. She passed away days after the procedure leaving behind her husband and two teenagers.

On a Sunday morning, after losing her, and many long days spent at the hospital with her family, my husband and I got up and went to the Lake service. I was hurting, and so I retreated Home. We stood with just two rows between us and the Messengers. I let every note wash over me while tears streamed down my face. I'm certain there were quiet sounds of anguish as well. I gave both little regard. When the Messengers finished, Wendy from the Messengers came and she put her arms around me. We knew one another from years of morning chats and Bible studies. She had already



Mindy Hilo

blessed me through her voice and time with the Messengers, and now she offered me more. Another woman from the Messengers, whose name I don't know, (that matters little, I know her smile and her voice) also put her arms around me. She told me that she didn't know why I was hurting, but she was sorry that I was.

The music that morning soothed my weary broken heart in all the ways I needed. Easter is the beautiful place it is because of the collective whole of generous people who pour wonderful things into it.

Just as turning a corner to see my home, my place of rest, there for me brings me incredible peace, I know the same is true for my church home. I know that Easter, and its people, are there for me, always. It's where I retreat to, it's where I find rest. It's where I feel safe and protected.

Let's continue to give to one another, generously. And perhaps in ways that you never knew you were giving at all.

Psalm 91: 1,4

1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

4 He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart

