

DOROTHY ZELENKO, 1946—2021

A LEGACY OF FAITHFUL SERVICE TO THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN PUBLICITY BUREAU AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

It was the First Sunday After Easter in 1979 or 1980 that I first met Dorothy. I was greeting her following the 11 am Service at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in White Plains, NY as she was leaving the Church. It had always been my practice in ministry to write a note of appreciation to those who visited the Church and if they returned the following week, offered to visit them in their home. Dorothy did return and accepted my offer to make the visit. It was certainly a unique pastoral visit when Dorothy said she was very disappointed in my Sunday after Easter sermon since I did not mention a word about the Good Shepherd and His sheep on a Sunday she called "sheep and shepherd Sunday." I accepted what she said, and what followed was her introducing me to the world of sheep and shepherds in what was like a study room encircled with shelves with at least a hundred of what I would call knick-knacks of sheep and shepherds and often both together.

When we returned to the living room, I asked about her collection, and she told me that when she was a little girl someone at the Missouri-Synod Church her family belonged to had given her a small figurine with Jesus holding a lamb in His arms and this figurine had always been a great comfort and support as she came to think of herself as the sheep in His arms.

Later, after Dorothy became a member of St. Matthew's and a Sunday School teacher, she invited one of the younger-aged classes with their parents and the pastor to see her Christmas tree in front of a window in her living room. Extending inches below the ceiling topped with an angel to the bottom, the tree was filled with sheep and shepherd ornaments. Of course, she told the children about Jesus who was their shepherd and loved them.

Later, working with two other women of the congregation, Marie Bahnmuller and Joan Murphy, they started what came to be known as the St. Matthew's Shepherding Program with the congregation divided into sheepfolds with a member of the congregation asked to be the shepherd of each fold for the purpose of staying in contact with them and letting the pastor know of any special needs or concerns with members in their fold.

Dorothy also led tours for members to a place in Connecticut she called the sheep farm. On these tours she gave lectures on the history and importance of the image of the sheep and shepherd in the Bible.

Dorothy taught the 7th-8th grade Sunday school class, served on the church council, investment and finance committees and trained one of our best administrative assistants, Arlene Gundlach, who, when learning of the death

of Dorothy, wrote to me, "So very sorry to learn of Dorothy's death. What a wonderful person she was. She taught me all I know about a computer which was all new to me when I started working at the church. I will hold her close in my memory forever."

In 1982 Dorothy was asked by the congregation to serve as a delegate to the Metropolitan New York Synod Assembly. Her conservative Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod background led her numerous times to the microphones to speak on the issue of the ordination of women, ordination of homosexual pastors, and the blessing of same-sex marriages. She was so articulate in her words that one of the editors of *The Lutheran* asked her to write an article for the publication. More significantly, following that same Assembly I ran into Glenn Stone in Grand Central Station who asked me about the lady from St. Matthew's who was at the microphone several times at the Assembly and asked if I thought she might be willing to serve on the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau Board of Directors. I gave him Dorothy's phone number and she accepted his invitation and almost immediately became the treasurer. Not too long after I was also invited by Glenn to become a member of the board.

There followed difficult times for the ALPB financially in 1989 with the Bureau having only \$4,000 in the bank, just enough money to refund subscribers if we had to go out of business. It was then that Dorothy volunteered to take a leave of absence from the General Reinsurance Company where she worked as an actuary and volunteered to work full-time in the Bureau office, to in the words of ALPB historian Richard Johnson, "straighten things out administratively and financially."

Dorothy's organizational skills (professionally she would later become an Actuarial Expert Witness in legal proceedings) as ALPB Treasurer were incredible. Her attention to detail and grasp of our entire endeavor, ever under the Lordship of Jesus, were beyond admirable. Dorothy's grasp of all matters concerning fiscal stewardship and their ties to mission were always complete, explainable, and fully documented. If ever engaged on any spending or income matter before the Board, she always was right. Ever polite and soft-spoken, any interlocutor would eventually surrender to her knowing that, though Dorothy would never do it, she was quite intellectually and experientially capable of reducing any challenger to a squealing mass of protoplasm. Most generous with her own funds in the Lord's work, Dorothy was scrupulously protective of ALPB assets. She was always suspicious of wishful thinking and feel-good proposals. During one such deliberation of the ALPB Board, the Secretary, Captain Ray Brown, taking minutes asked her if "cheapskate" was hyphenated. Dorothy laughed agreeably but stuck to her guns.

Dorothy was a model of speaking the truth in love. Her gentle voice and demeanor would never alter. The only hint she might be tiring in explaining the obvious was that the hue of her complexion might take on a red blush.

Later in 1991 at a meeting of the ALPB Board at St. Matthew's there was a gathering of young theologians from across the country. During the meeting Bishop Michael McDaniel asked to use my office to make phone calls and noticed a copy of the Roman Catholic four-volume *The Liturgy of the Hours* on my desk and shared with me that he used the same book for his daily devotions. We both at some point expressed how our Lutheran Church needed such a book and he suggested that I should take on the project. That evening at the ALPB meeting I shared with the board my conversation with McDaniel and they immediately asked me to bring a proposal to the next meeting. Dorothy began investigating publishers and the cost of such a project and at the next meeting I brought forth my proposal and Dorothy announced that the first volume would cost \$20,000 and offered to lend the Board the money. Within two months after the publication of Volume I of what was to be called *For All the Saints: A Prayer Book For and By the Church*, Dorothy's investment without interest was returned to her, and the ALPB continued to be the significant organization it had been since 1917.

Little is known of the role St. Matthew's played over all the years with the Board meeting there and at least two conferences where pastors and lay people from all over the United States with Dorothy organizing members of the congregation to host them in their homes. In the work of creating the Prayer Book, she recruited at least twenty church members to enter the enormous text of the book into the database at the church or computers in their homes. Being so admired in the church, members readily volunteered to proofread, unload trucks and pass large boxes of books through a window in the church library and frequently labeled the boxes and took them to the Post Office.

In March of 2018 Dorothy turned her position as Treasurer over to Donna Roche, whom she had trained years earlier to be the Board's Business Manager and continued as a very active member of the Board despite the development of Scoliosis and then Parkinson's disease.

The ALPB honored her on two occasions over the years. In 1997 at a banquet at the White Plains Hotel with Bishop H. George Anderson as the speaker, and in May 2018 in a restaurant in Bronxville when Board President John Hannah presented her with a beautifully framed image of the 15th century Ghent Altarpiece, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. How appropriate for the woman the young people of the church called "the sheep lady." Dorothy cherished it and had it hung in her living room.

In October 2010, long after my retirement Dorothy left the membership of St. Matthew's Church and joined the Village Lutheran Church in Bronxville, a church she was very familiar with, having worshipped there as a student at Concordia College and where in 2000 she was awarded the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters. My wife Joyce and I, along with her dear Mother, Marion and sister Barbara attended.

When I sent the sad news of Dorothy's death to members of St. Matthew's and the ALPB Board, I immediately received numerous e-mail messages. I will quote only three of them. From Dr. Robert Benne: "It is probably a blessing that the good Lord took her away from the suffering she no doubt endured for so long, but we are only finite human beings. You are right that she was crucial in the life of the ALPB and in the great work - with you - on *For All the Saints* and financial bookkeeping and advice. And I will never forget all the wonderful times we had at the dinners before the ALPB meetings. What sweet memories, and she was always there with cheerful words. (She may have secretly winced at the expense of the dinners! Ha.)" May she rest in peace until that Great Day when the Lord raises her up and says: "Well done, my faithful servant!"

From the executive director of the ALPB, Paul Sauer: "The Board owes much to Dorothy. She was a powerful witness to the tremendous impact that a committed and gifted layperson can have on the church. We were all blessed by her presence in our earthly journey."

From ALPB Board secretary Captain Ray Brown: "After the Lord made her, I think He threw the mold away."

My reaction on learning of Dorothy's death was that she is now in the arms of the Good Shepherd and is one of the lambs of His flock being held in His arms as she imagined in that small figurine of the Good Shepherd given to her as a child.

Frederick Schumacher has been a member of the ALPB Board of Directors since 1985 and Executive Director from 1993 to 2014.

Below: Possible Photos and words she wrote for some Hymns which appeared in LF over the years connected with ALPB events.



LIFT HIGH THE VICT'RY BANNER
7. A. 7. A. D.

Dorothy Zelenko, 1988 D. DeWitt Wasson, 1988

1. Lift high the vic-t'ry ban-ner! The Lamb of God, His Son,
2. By wa-ter and His Spir-it He grace and felix im-pars
3. This life not right-ous-ness is But growth in right-ous-ness.

His en-tered Ev-il's strong-hold And o-ver Death has won.
His cross where sin and Love met is signed up-on our hearts.
We are not what we shall be But heav-en-ward we press.

His bod-y that was weak, His ho-ly blood out-poured,
And we are claimed for-ev-er! Now new life by His power
The Lamb has gone be-fore us; His Prom-ise sure we hold;

Give life and peace and heav-en To all who call Him Lord,
In joy and deeds of good-ness Can blow-some like a flow'r,
Our home with Him is end-less And bright-er far than gold.

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