

The Power of a “THANK YOU!”

NGLS Bishop Emeritus Dale R. Skogman

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing... abundance for every good work.” 2 Cor. 9:8

The abundance in this case amounted to \$1,150,000.00!!

I served as the pastor of First Lutheran Church in Gladstone, MI from 1971-76. During that time, Norman Lamberg, who grew up in Gladstone and whose family were members of First Lutheran would send occasional gifts to the congregation. My secretary, June Hawkinson, would be very excited when the checks would arrive in the mail. Norman had moved out east and became a most valuable employee of the Ball Seed Company as a horticulturalist and top salesman. In the process he amassed a lot of money.

I learned from Norman’s sister who is a member of First Lutheran that he was battling cancer and I reached out to him reminding him of his past generosity to First Lutheran and thanking him once again for his benevolence which was deeply appreciated. I also sought to affirm and support him in his illness.

Much to my amazement Lisa Zulke, our church secretary, called me one day and said “I have a \$50,000.00 check here designated for “Skogman Projects!” I was amazed, humbled and most grateful for Norman’s thoughtfulness and generosity. The money was divided between First Lutheran, Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp, The Northern Great Lakes Synod and Finlandia University. I humbly thanked Norman for his generous gift and shared with him the invaluable ministry that his benevolence would support.

More amazement!!! Lisa Zulke called saying “I have another check in the amount of \$100,000.00 earmarked for “Skogman Projects.” Now my previous amazement turned to utter astonishment! Again, the money was divided between our synod’s ministries and I provided a careful accounting and most grateful thanks to Norman for his astonishing and wonderful gifts.

The story doesn’t end there!!! Recently Norman succumbed to the cancer and he managed to amaze me once again, this time beyond belief. In his will he designated \$1,000,000.00 for “Skogman Projects” under the auspices of First Lutheran Church!

Yes, I lost a little sleep pondering how to be a good steward of Norman’s profound generosity! One thing was certain! In my experience as a pastor and bishop I knew that the very worst thing I could do was to give the entire amount to First Lutheran as it would stifle our sense of responsibility and stewardship for the support of our ministry!!

After much prayerful consideration and conversation with trusted friends and church leaders the previous and current money has been divided as follows:

\$122,500.00 has been directed to Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp to pay off their mortgage and to ease their persistent “cash flow” between camping seasons.

\$212,500.00 has been directed to the Northern Great Lakes Synod to establish the “Norman Lamberg Fund for Pastor’s Debt Retirement.” Many of our pastors begin ministry with staggering and almost insurmountable debts from their college and seminary training. It is our hope that this support will both attract and retain pastors in our rural context.

\$592,500.00 has been directed to Finlandia University which struggles mightily with the costs of providing a viable academic institution in a rural context, as it is distanced from its Finnish roots by the passing of generations and faces competition from public schools with cheaper tuition. I served on the Finlandia board for fourteen years and as chair for nine. I was also responsible for persuading President Philip Johnson to accept the presidency despite his hesitancy and I am most grateful to him for doing so!

\$222,500.00 has been directed to First Lutheran. Some of these funds are supporting our Intern and the Church Council is to provide guidance as to the best utilization of this gift for our life and ministry together.

One last word: Never under estimate the power of saying THANK YOU for kindness and generosity past, present or future! It has been at the heart of my ministry as a Christian, pastor and bishop and remember: “God is able to provide you with every blessing... abundance for every good work!”