

WITNESS THROUGH SERVICE

by Caroline Sheaffer



Ida with some of her unused Depression ration cards.

After I read that the scriptural theme for this edition is on Mary and Martha, it took me about three seconds to decide whom my story would be based upon. Ida Sponsler is one of St. Stephen's Marys. Her unwavering faith guides her every move making her a nonjudgmental listener. When someone has a challenge or problem to share with her, Ida asks if the person has prayed about it. She knows that will help. "I try not to be overly assertive with family members who disagree with me," she says, "but instead be available to listen."

Ida credits reading daily both her Bible and the small devotional booklet provided by our Educational Ministry program as keeping her grounded in her faith.

It is my privilege to give Ida communion monthly as part of our church Eucharistic Ministry team. She made me promise if she gets to the point of returning to worship that I will still come to visit her. That is a given!

Anyone who knows her, or even simply talks to her on the phone, is aware that Ida's soft-spoken, carefully-chosen words are always centered around her faith. She considers everyone in her life a blessing to her.

Ida is appreciative of phone calls, cards, and visits. The cards sit around her sunny living room along with her ever-blooming plants.

Besides working to earn a paycheck when she was younger, Ida always served as a caregiver to family members who required her compassionate, consistent care. She performed whatever tasks were necessary in order for the family member to remain in his or her home where he or she was most comfortable for as long as possible. Ida never complained about spending twenty-two years caring for her mother.

She appreciated the support of her pastor whom she would call often when she was frustrated or the pharmacist to explain a prescription she didn't understand or a doctor when she had a question.

As a child growing up on a farm, Ida did lots of cooking and baking to help her mother feed the farm hands. Every Sunday after church, they baked several pies, cakes, and batches of cookies to last throughout the week.

Ida was the Sunday School teacher for the three-year-olds' class at St. Stephen for many years. Her kind and gentle personality is the epitome of a first formal teacher every child should experience. Her students loved Miss Ida and eagerly looked forward to spending each Sunday morning with her. She delights in those former students who remain in touch with her after all these years. One former member, now an adult, still calls Ida regularly from her home in Wyoming.

Until recently, Ida sent greeting cards to church members for significant events in their lives such as their birthdays and anniversaries. Due to her arthritis, she has had to limit her card ministry this past year but continues to do so as much as possible.

She lovingly shares the cards she has received since my last visit, allowing me to read them. She now makes calls to check on others whom she knows are having medical issues or experiencing rough times in their lives.

Ida's phenomenal memory makes her a wonderful storyteller. It's fun for me to listen to her personal stories as well as sto-



PHOTOS FOR THIS ARTICLE PROVIDED BY: the author

ries about an early St. Stephen. And I believe sharing those stories is life-giving for Ida.

Ida makes handmade Christmas ornaments every year to give to special people she cares for. She apologizes that this year's is a simple design due to her fingers being stiff. I find the simplicity elegant and beautiful.

When I visit, Ida grabs me in a huge bear hug. She enjoys chatting with visitors immensely. Anyone who knows her, as I do, finds Ida to be a blessing in our life. She continues to live a life of service, adapting as she must, but continuing to serve in whatever capacity she can. †



PHOTO CREDIT Nick Gould Photography

..... *Truck Stop continued from page 13*

themselves, they are not technically homeless and cannot get housing assistance.”

As its ministry continues, St. Stephen is considering adding a second truck stop and resources such as haircuts, financial education, job training and job application assistance.

Although many factors play a role in homelessness, Houser said it's the simplest assistance that has the greatest impact. “What we have learned in this ministry is that the most valuable commodity we are offering is community,” she said. “Our participants have no place where they fit, where they are welcome, where they are cared for without judgment. No, we cannot solve all their problems. We work together to find the resources they need, but at the end of the day, we are present and listening.” †

This article was written by Lori Haugen and originally published in the July 2019 issue of Living Lutheran. Photos by Nick Gould Photography.

HELP STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Thursday, September 26 at 7:00PM

ST STEPHEN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

30 West Main St, New Kingstown, PA 17072

Did you know that human trafficking is a growing problem in south central PA?

The intersection of the PA Turnpike from the east and west with the north/south Rt 81 corridor facilitates easy transfer of human “cargo.” Social Ministry is sponsoring an educational program by PAATH 15 (PA Alliance Against Trafficking in Humans: Route 15 Project) designed to raise awareness of human trafficking, services available, and teach safe bystander intervention techniques. Please take time to learn what you can do to help.

PAATH 15 is a 12 county project focusing on enhancing services, interagency collaboration, training, and awareness of trafficking along Route 15 in PA. PAATH 15 Human Trafficking Response Team provides direct services to victims including crisis intervention and response, emergency shelter, case management, advocacy, legal & medical accompaniments, information and referrals, and other services. PAATH 15 Team Members include the YWCA Greater Harrisburg, Transitions of PA, Survivors Inc., YWCA York, YWCA Northcentral, PIRC, and Friends of Farmworkers. Find more at [Facebook.com/pg/PAAgainstTraffickinginHumans](https://www.facebook.com/pg/PAAgainstTraffickinginHumans).

