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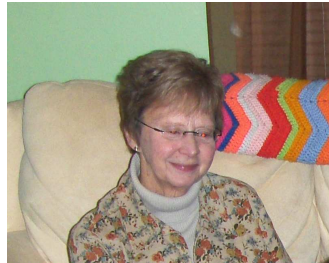
# Newsletter

A ministry associated with Classis Lake Superior of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

Spring 2010

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## One Ally's Testimony

I'm Sylvia Graham. I joined Cross Lutheran Church about three years ago primarily because of their many outreach ministries. I felt I would be able to serve my Lord and Savior as a member of this congregation. Shortly thereafter, our pastor learned of Starfish Ministries. When I was approached to get involved, my first response was, "It sounds like something I would like to become involved in."

I grew up in a Christian family and was taught the power of prayer early in my life by my parents. With my parents as models, I too provided for the Christian upbringing of my three children (two sons and one daughter). They were always in attendance at church and Sunday school, Vacation Bible School and other church events as well as attending a Lutheran High School. During those years, I taught Sunday school and Vacation Bible School as well as attending Bible studies and ladies groups at my church.

Now, I can only thank my Lord and Savior for bringing this program to our church and me. Since November 2008, I and two others have been allies to Laura, a woman with two

children, one just turned three and the other is now eighteen. I have been able to walk along side Laura, encourage her in working toward her goals, and see her grow spiritually. She has begun to take pride in her role as a mother and friend as well as a wife. Since her husband has been having difficulty with the law, she has had to make some tough relationship decisions and has learned to trust in God through prayer.

Laura has now completed her four year degree, has made strides to become a better parent, has joined a church and greatly increased her prayer life. This took much hard work and many prayers by both her and us as her allies. Although she was determined to accomplish her goals, it was more difficult when she did not have those who believed in her skills and abilities nor who could celebrate each accomplishment she made.

One big hurdle for Laura was to trust again. Developing this trust took time and risk on her part. Once she was able to trust us, she was able to expand her circle of friends which in turn has allowed her support system to increase. She gives thanks to her Lord and Savior for bringing Starfish Ministries to her when she most needed it.

[continued on page 4]

## Inside this issue:

- Deacons' Page:** 2  
*"The Church is Always Asking for Money!"*
- Volunteer's Page:** 3  
*Giving is Easier Than Receiving*
- Treasurer's Report** 3
- Book Review:** 4  
*The Hole in Our Gospel by Richard Stearns*

# Deacon's Page

## "The Church is always asking for money!"

*Deacons:*

*I found this article in a publication called Editor's Clip Sheets, published by Logos Productions, Inc., Inver Grove Heights, MN. It may give you an answer the next time someone complains about the church asking for money.*

*Bonnie Smith*



Sometimes you hear people say, "The church is always asking for money." That statement is untrue.

It is the world which is always asking for money... When did you last go to the supermarket and the checkout operator failed to ask you for money? Your mortgage company asks for money with unfailing regularity. If you are like most people, each month brings a new collection of bills. Are any of them from the church?...

There is no free lunch—except at the church. You can attend worship every week—there is no admission charge. If you are sick, one of the clergy will visit you in the hospital. Where else can you get free counseling when you need it? Where will your children be married? [People receive a bulletin or] newsletter each week. None receives a subscription notice "asking for money" as with other publications.

...The church building will always be there when you need it—clean, with kitchen and nursery provided. You make full use of it and never pay one cent. No one will even know whether you contribute or not.

You...pay taxes to provide your children "free" public education, but your church operates a Sunday school... with absolutely no cost or obligation. The church requires no membership fee, no annual dues. It never sends its members a bill. Is there any other organization in the world

that functions that way? ...You see, the truth is the church "asks for money" LESS than anything else you can think of.

...Yet of all the things your money could be used for, very few are

more important than what the church provides.

The church is here to share the love of Jesus Christ himself. Our money goes to serve him. We will continue to provide ministry in Jesus' name to everyone, whether they can afford to contribute or not. Isn't that something you would like to be a part of?

[Published in The Epistle of St. Paul's, St. Paul's Church, Kansas City, Missouri]

### Treasurer's Report

For July 1 thru March 31 (9 months)

Income	Budget	Actual	Difference
Churches	\$ 9,210	\$ 7,324	\$ -1,886
Classis Ministry Shares	12,469	19,099	6,630
Grants	7,500	0	-7,500
Individuals/Businesses	16,236	17,165	930
Miscellaneous	0	7	7
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$45,525</b>	<b>\$43,576</b>	<b>\$-1,949</b>
<u>Expenses</u>	<u>45,525</u>	<u>47,353</u>	<u>1,828</u>
Difference	0	\$-3,777	

#### Your financial support is appreciated.

There are multiple ways you can give:

For a credit card, log onto our website, [www.StarfishMN.org](http://www.StarfishMN.org), and click on the "Donate Now" button.

For a check, mail it to Treasurer, Starfish Ministries, 3540 75th Street East, Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076.

For matching funds or campaigns, identify us as the Eastern Minnesota Deacons Association doing business as Starfish Ministries, MN Tax Exempt No. ES 36110.

## Volunteer's Page

### Giving is Easier Than Receiving

By Dr. James R. Kok

#### Take the gift— Honor the giver!

Many years ago when I was the solo pastor of a church... My habit was to deflect all praise and compliments...

Then one Sunday morning, when I once again rebuffed a “gift-giver”, she turned sharply and looked me straight in the face. *“Why can’t you just say, ‘Thank you?’”* she scolded.

I was stunned. Immediately I knew she was right, I was wrong. Weekly, I had taken her kind gift and trampled on it. Weekly I secretly longed for encouraging words but showed no gratitude, acknowledged no neediness—just shoved away every gift offered... My behavior disguised my hunger and denied her and others the pleasure of gift-giving.

From that Sunday on, I humbly responded, *“Thank you, I really appreciate that,”* whenever anyone offered positive words...

Several decades later I’m still more comfortable giving than receiving...

Perhaps there is some residual unworthiness contaminating my spirit but here’s the explanation I arrived at... In giving, the giver is in control. When receiving, control is relinquished to the giver. Most of us like control. Some need it more than others. A few are addicted to it. Receivers are out of control in a given situation.

My control needs contribute heavily to the unsettled feelings I get when being appreciated, honored or just plain offered a gift. I confess that I don’t like the feeling.

I believe this control issue can be a spiritual problem. To truly enjoy “amazing grace” requires abandoning control, giving up the “at home” feeling of being in charge, allowing honest neediness to creep into my soul.

Earnest empty-handedness is being “poor in spirit.” There lies a prime qualification for being nourished by the Holy Spirit and receiving spiritual help.

**We who major in giving care must be especially sensitive to this challenge**—by giving a lot we may lose our capacity to graciously receive because we become so used to being in the driver’s seat of giving. The secure position of giving becomes a comfort zone not easily given up.

A physically challenged woman ... told me that decades of living with an irreversible condition has been an on-going lesson in how to be on the receiving end of care. *“It isn’t easy,”* she said, *“being helped, needing assistance, not being independent.”* Always being on the receiving end, she was implying, kills something vital to balanced living. She needed help but constant need sapped her soul.

Caregivers need to hear this cry. We need to stay on-track delivering



what is needed but carry high sensitivity to the ordeal of those on the receiving end much of the time. We can find ways of giving that preserve the spirit and dignity of the recipient.

The best way to fine tune our “giving reflexes” may be to search our own souls to assess how we feel when allowing gifts to come our way. Regular openness to the uncomfortableness of letting another serve us or care for us—even asking for it, may groom us spiritually in positive ways.

Certainly, inflexible entrenchment in the role of giving is dangerous. Giving all the time is not good. The meekness of empty-handed receiving is essential for the followers of Jesus, and everybody else as well.

Maybe Jesus’ example when anointed with costly perfume can help us. He meekly accepted what his disciples rebuked as wasteful. His spirit was lifted and she experienced the joy of giving. The most gracious gift-giver of all was also a humble receiver.

[From Care Capsule, may 202, published by the Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA]



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### One Ally's... [continued from page 1]

Yes, I thank my Lord and Savior for placing this ministry and this family in my life. I encourage you to consider becoming part of this ministry -- many blessings can be yours!

**Sylvia Graham** is a retired social worker who served the elderly, especially those living with memory loss. She now works as a respite companion and home helper which she enjoys very much. She has three grandchildren and one great grandson, Tyler. A new joy and challenge will be hers this fall as one of her grandsons comes to live with her to continue his education at a local music school.

## Book Review: *The Hole in Our Gospel* by Richard Stearns

Below is an excerpt from this challenging book (pages 118-126):

*...children of the poor in America live in communities that often expose them to very destructive forces; crime, gangs, violence, rape, drugs, domestic abuse, economic deprivation, and prostitution are just a few. A child living in a slum, who has never met his father and whose mother is a crack addict, does not start with the same choices I had. And while poverty in America is not usually characterized by bad water, famine, and epidemics, it replaces those destructive elements with others that are equally powerful: discrimination, intimidation, alienation, and exploitation. The result is the same as it is in Sudan—hopelessness. Poverty in America is just as damaging to the human spirit. At its root is has the same causes: a defacing of the human spirit and, effectively, the lack of real choices.*

*For most of the poorest people in the world, their hard work doesn't matter. They are trapped within social, cultural, political, and economic systems that do not reward their labor. The result of this entrenched futility is*

*devastating to the human spirit. A person, no matter how gifted or determined, cannot escape the trap in which he finds himself. He has lost the one thing that every person needs to thrive: hope—hope that he will somehow overcome his circumstances, that tomorrow can be better than today, and that his children might someday have a better life than his. Such people discover that they are in an economic and social prison from which there is no escape—unless something happens to change their circumstances and to restore the link between their efforts and their reward...*

*While providing things like [food, medicines, clothing, etc.] ... in urgent situations is sometimes necessary, it neither addresses the underlying stubbornness of poverty nor is it sustainable; it just creates a dependency. **Frankly, giving things to the poor does much more to make the giver feel good than it does to fundamentally address and improve the condition of those in need.** [Emphasis mine.]*

I heartily recommend this book to you.

Richard Stearns is the President of World Vision U.S.