

ROSA & KAYE

Sisterhood OF SERVICE

By Christine Scheele Weerts

Dr. Rosa J. Young, often referred to as the Mother of Black Lutheranism, was confirmed at Christ Lutheran Church in Rosebud, Alabama, on Palm Sunday 1916, in response to hearing the “pure Gospel” from Rev. Nils Bakke. Dr. Young worked with Lutheran mission pastors and helped found 35 Lutheran churches and 30 schools to serve “her people” living in isolated communities in some of the poorest areas of Alabama. Her love for Christ and the Good News of the Gospel has touched — in some way — most of the leading African American pastors and teachers in the LCMS since the 1930s, when the first pastors graduated from Immanuel Seminary, and teachers from the Alabama Lutheran Academy.

Decades after Rosa’s confirmation, an infant girl named Kaye Dumas was given new life in Christ through Holy Baptism at the same Christ Lutheran Church in Rosebud. That was just the beginning of the intrinsically woven pattern between Kaye and Rosa Young.



Kaye spent her early years in Alabama, and even after moving to Michigan as a child with her family, she spent every summer and holiday she could with her grandmother in Alabama. "I returned to Rosebud each year on school breaks and summer vacations. Whenever school was out in Michigan, I was down in Alabama," Kaye says. She often returned to Christ Lutheran Church and School, helping her cousin, who was teaching in the one-room school house, by working with younger children in reading and writing.

Kaye grew up knowing Rosa Young as "Aunt Rosa," because they were distantly related by marriage (her grandfather's brother married Rosa's youngest sister). "But I did not realize the depth of her accomplishments until I was almost grown," Kaye said.

"When I traveled around doing witnessing workshops for Lutheran Hour Ministries, most often people would ask, 'When did you become a Lutheran?' There are still many people in our Synod who think that only Germans are born as Lutherans," Kaye says. "Thanks be to God for Rosa J. Young that I was born a third generation Lutheran."

Kaye's favorite Bible verse reflects her Aunt Rosa's early influence, as well as her family's dedication to serving others in Christ-centered ministry: *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms* (1 Peter 4:10).

Her Rosebud and Aunt Rosa connections culminated three years ago in the filming of the movie, *The First Rosa*. Produced by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), this dramatized biography told of Dr. Young's life and ministry. Kaye played a key role in bringing the film into reality, as well as working in production. (See page 6.)

Her First Mite Box

Just as Rosa Young loved the "ladies aid societies" who greatly supported her church and school planting in Alabama, Kaye also follows an impressive lineage of faithful LWML women. Kaye grew up following her own mother, Susanna Ramsey Dumas, to church as a child, where both her mother and aunt were active in the LWML.

"I had no idea what it was, but I was a part of it because I went to meetings with my mom," Kaye says. "I asked my mom for a Mite Box of my own. Then I asked her for some money to put in it, and she told me that I had to put my own money in my Mite Box. It was an early lesson on cheerful giving. The part I liked about the LWML was hearing about the help it was providing for people all over the world with the money from the Mite Box."

Kaye's aunt, Dr. Iri Skinner, was the first African American woman to serve with the International LWML Executive Committee as Vice President of

Mission Inspiration, elected at the 1993 convention in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Despite being involved with LWML for many years at the local level, Kaye said she was not completely familiar with the structure and strength of the national organization until she started working on a national committee.

Kaye has served in the LWML for the past 10 years, as a member of the Mission Advocacy and Grants Committee, the Gospel Outreach Committee, and the HOPE Committee. She has served as the LWML Michigan District Leader Development Coordinator and, in 2015, was elected LWML Vice President of Special Focus Ministries, a position she still holds.

Special Focus Ministries committees are updating programs that reach out to younger women (Young Woman Representatives) and women from different cultural backgrounds (Heart to Heart Sisters) to encourage them to engage in the mission of LWML. Kaye wants the mission of LWML to reach from the national level to the woman in the pew through the LWML website, devotions, and news releases.

Servanthood

Christ Lutheran Church in Rosebud, Alabama, the mother church of Lutheran ministry to African Americans in rural Alabama, was founded by Rosa Young in 1916.

Kaye still visits Christ Lutheran Church at Rosebud. An annual worship service is held there in September to remember Dr. Rosa Young's ministry. Kaye enjoys the time to reconnect with her extended family as well as to be surrounded by her faith family: those students from Rosa's schools across the Black Belt who attend the celebration.

Rosa Young often referred to one of her favorite Bible verses from Mark 10:45: *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*. Encouraging her family and students to serve the church, Rosa urged them to "do something worthy for mankind. Give light to those who are in darkness; sustain the weak and faltering; befriend and aid the poor and needy. There is nothing more reputable to a race or nation than Christian service."

That light still shines brightly in Alabama and around the world in those who follow Christ's call to servanthood, including a woman born again in the waters of Holy Baptism in the church Aunt Rosa built.

"I am grateful every day for the ministry of Aunt Rosa," Kaye says. "While we were filming the movie about her life, I was deeply moved when the narrator said that Rosa was a theologian the Lord used to grow the Lutheran Church in Alabama. She grew the church, he said, in ways so spectacular that it set records in modern American mission history." Q

Christine Sheele Weerts, who wrote Heroes of Faith: Rosa Young, is managing two state grants to digitize the history of Rosa Young's extensive church and school work in rural Alabama. She is a member of Bethlehem Lutheran, Prattville.