

REINVENTING

Servant Gertrude

By Carolyn Blum, Associate Editor

Can *people* be recycled? Yes, if one considers that God may find more than one purpose for them throughout their lives!

A living example of how God finds areas of service for His people at various times and places is Gertrude Schmidtke-Koehlinger. Born in 1913, she has been active in women's groups wherever her pastor-husband was called, including Oklahoma, Indiana, and Wisconsin. President of her local group and a vice president of the Oklahoma LCMS District women's organization before the advent of the LWML, she was a delegate to the 1942 meeting where the LWML was "born."

Assembled at St. Stephens Lutheran Church in Chicago, Gertrude remembers that "the meetings were very serious and smooth-running. We saw the advantages of the then-newly-formed Lutheran Laymen's League, and we wanted a similar organization for the women of the LCMS, to be united with our sisters throughout the country. I've not been in recent contact with any of the other women who attended, so I may be the last surviving member of that group."

Gertrude has reinvented herself at each stage of her service: being elected the first District President of the Oklahoma LWML, starting LWML societies when they moved to a new church, and attending conventions (including Portland in 1953).

Responding to God's call to serve in other ways, Gertrude started the first-ever LCMS Sunday School class for developmentally disabled youth. "I remember teaching Sunday School as a teenager in my home congregation, and found the need to reach all youth, regardless of their abilities or disabilities," she shared. In 1987, she received the Christian Service Award from Bethesda Lutheran Homes for her dedication and devotion in this field.

Mother of one, grandmother of four, and great-grandmother of ten, she says she's "ready to go

home to meet the Lord at any time" but would like to live to see her first great-great-grandchild. One of her grandsons, Rev. John Schmidtke, is a pastor at Bethlehem in St. Louis, one of the oldest congregations in that city.

Living independently is very important to Gertrude. "I receive home-delivered meals only to satisfy my family," she quipped. "I needed to spend time in a rehab facility last year while recovering from pneumonia, and I couldn't wait to get back to my apartment."

A member of Immanuel in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where her husband served as pastor in the 1950s, Gertrude spends winters in Florida and attends Beautiful Savior in Sarasota. She enjoys participating in the activities of their LWML society, especially gathering supplies for the area's migrant workers.

What keeps her going strong at age 96? "I've been abundantly blessed during my life and spend time each day thanking God. I talk to Him frequently in prayer and read six devotions each day," she shared. "I also eat one cookie after every meal!"



Blessed with good eyesight, Gertrude enjoys knitting.



Gertrude (under the arrow) at the 1942 LWML organizational meeting in Chicago. If you can identify anyone on this photo, or know someone who attended this meeting as a delegate, please let us know at readersrespond@lwml.org.