



# A LEGACY OF *Mission Hearts*

BY CHRISTINE SCHEELE WEERTS

When Betty Anderson was a teenager, she wanted to walk home from church with her friends and not stay after worship for “boring” Ladies’ Aid meetings.

“I’m not even a member of Ladies’ Aid,” she told her mother.

“Every young Lutheran woman is a member,” her mother replied. “By the time you are 15, you are a member of Ladies’ Aid.” Betty, 15, stayed for the meetings.

Today, at age 70, Betty has been a member of Ladies’ Aid — now the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League — ever since. Her sister and granddaughter are also active at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Camden, Alabama, and, as Betty’s mother raised her, Betty is raising up her goddaughters, sisters Naykaria, 16, and Zaykaria, 12, with an LWML heart for mission. “Every time I pay the girls for a chore, they know to put some change in their Mite Boxes. They know that missions are important,” she said.

“It is because of the missionary heart of Rosa Young that I got to go to school and became a Lutheran,” Betty said. “I want Naykaria and Zaykaria to know how important it is to tell others about Jesus — not only in what they say, but also what they do. They have hearts of compassion to help others. I’m grateful for that.”

Betty’s mission heart extends far beyond filling Mite Boxes. She is often helping others in her community, buying school clothes, collecting items after a house fire, taking teens to the park to play basketball, or helping an elderly neighbor with groceries. She gardens and cans her tomatoes, cucumbers, figs, and muscadines for neighbors, and picks pears and pecans to give away.

“I really learned it from my mother, because she was always helping people in the community,” she said. “It didn’t matter if they were black or white, Lutheran or Baptist; she followed Christ’s command to ‘love your neighbor.’ She didn’t talk about it either. It was between her and that person; she didn’t go around advertising it.”



Betty has had to cut back on some of her outreach — and her time with her goddaughters — since the COVID-19 pandemic began. She is at risk because of her age, and because she has sickle cell anemia, a life-long blood disease which causes acute pain and anemia.

“I was always sick as a child, but we didn’t know what it was,” she said. When she was pregnant with her first child, a blood test identified the disease. As a child, her paternal grandmother gave her herbal tonics to drink, and doctors later credited it with saving her life. For years, she has followed a strict regimen of eating healthy and getting rest.

Before the pandemic, Naykaria and Zaykaria helped Betty at the Black History museum she opened — the only one of its kind — in Wilcox County, Alabama. “I want them to learn our history — their history — as African Americans living in the Deep South. Times were very hard, but I am proud of what we have accomplished through God’s grace and mercy,” Betty said.

She can trace her family roots to slavery. Her great-great grandparents, Isaac and Vina Pettway, arrived in Wilcox County in 1846 to work their owner’s cotton plantation. Born in North Carolina, they walked the 700 miles with other Pettway slaves to the plantation in Gee’s Bend, Alabama.

Betty lives about nine miles from Gee’s Bend, where the home of her grandmother Minder Coleman, Stamper Pettway’s granddaughter, still stands. It was there that Minder wove fabric for the FDR White House, ran a farm cooperative, and founded

a quilt cooperative — Freedom Quilting Bee — that made Gee’s Bend quilts world famous. “She was a community leader. My grandfather was, too. He was a WWI veteran and owned his own farm.” Their daughter Minnie Sue Coleman’s vibrant “Pig in a Pen” quilt was one of 10 Gee’s Bend quilts selected to appear on a U.S. postage stamp in 2006. Today it hangs in the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts [pictured left].

Her grandmother’s sewing machine and a recording from the Library of Congress of her singing a Gospel song are featured in Betty’s museum, alongside the family’s other quilts. In the front of the museum is the original Shoe Shop her father, Joe Anderson, ran — one of the only black-owned businesses in the county at that time.

Betty’s parents moved from their farm into the town of Camden in the 1940s so their children could attend Holy Cross Lutheran School. Her father’s first town job was sweeping up at the local barber shop where he watched the shoe repairman work in the back room. Soon he was an apprentice, then he ran the shop, and then started his own shoe shop.



“She [Betty’s mother] was always helping people in the community. It didn’t matter if they were black or white, Lutheran or Baptist; she followed Christ’s command to ‘love your neighbor.’ She didn’t talk about it either. It was between her and that person; she didn’t go around advertising it.”

“I believe we need to tell these stories — when we were slaves, when we were second class citizens, and when we were striving for our rights — because our children need to know how we got here. We need to show that through those tough and terrible times, we came through with faith by the power of Christ.”



She also features the work of Dr. Rosa Young\*, the African American woman born in 1890, just ten miles down the road in the community of Rosebud. Dr. Young had a passion for Christian education for “her people” and worked with the Lutheran Church to open more than 35 churches and schools serving rural African American families in Alabama beginning in 1916.

“Dr. Young opened up schools and the Good News to us, and I love to share her story,” Betty said. Holy Cross Lutheran Church was founded in Camden in 1924 through her mission efforts. “We walked three miles to Holy Cross every Sunday when I was two years old,” Betty said, a memory her brother, who was seven at the time, shared. “He said he would pick me up and carry me the last mile.” That brother, Rev. Dr. McNair Ramsey, has served in the LCMS for decades as teacher, pastor, administrator, and as an officer with the LCMS Southern District.

“Rosa’s story is especially important for Naykaria and Zaykaria to learn, because of her deep love of Jesus and her passion in sharing the Good News,” Betty said. She also delights in sharing gems from her collection, including the first edition of Rosa’s book, *Light in the Dark Belt*, a second grade reader from St. Andrews in Sedan, Alabama, the second Lutheran School for blacks in Wilcox County, and letters Rosa exchanged with “Ladies Aid” members around the country who supported the mission.

“Rosa showed how we can walk together in ministry and not be crippled by the past, because our past can be painful and dispiriting,” she said. “I believe we need to tell these stories — when we were slaves, when we were second class citizens, and when we were striving for our rights — because our children need to know how we got here. We need to show that

through those tough and terrible times, we came through with faith by the power of Christ.

“I bring Nakaria and Zakaria [pictured left] to the museum with me to help with chores to earn Mite Box change. They are also learning their history and the struggle of our people. At the same time, they are learning that we are one people in Christ.”

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).* Betty said she “put this Bible verse on the wall in my museum because I want to remember it every day and remind others, as well.” **Q**

Christine Weerts, author of *Heroes of Faith: Rosa Young*, is an LWML member at Bethlehem Lutheran in Prattville, Alabama. She wrote the February 2021 *Portals of Prayer* devotions and is a contributor to *The Federalist*. She received a 2020 Award of Commendation from the Concordia Historical Institute for her *LWQ* Winter 2019 article on Denise McNair, “Segregated Scars and the Legacy of Miss Denise McNair.”

\*For more on Dr. Young check the Winter 2017 *Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly* in the *LWQ* archives at [lwml.org](http://lwml.org).