



**FLING WIDE THE DOOR**  
Embracing All In Christ

*Our Stories  
of Generosity*

# Pat Goodyear

My journey to Emmanuel had taken years; I found my home! I remember my first Sunday at Emmanuel; Pastor Steve was the preacher and the sermon was like none I had ever heard! I don't remember the words but I do recall leaving, filled with excitement, knowing that this was the place for me; a place where I could fully belong.



I found a church that isn't hesitant to plunge into mission and ministry; a church who's pastors preach the law and gospel each Sunday; a church that is committed to educating its members; a church that knows the value of Stephen Ministry; a church that won't sit idly by, watching pulpits go unfilled; a church that supports youth ministry; a church that actively engages in community programs, especially those for addiction; a church that builds Habitat Homes; a church that generously contributes to global ministries. So, what was I looking for? A church home that helps me worship fully in service and ministry...I'm home.

I learned the joy of generosity from my parents. I remember watching my Dad fill the offering envelopes before any bills were paid. I saw my Mother hand food out the door to indigent and homeless beggars. Even though my parents weren't wealthy, they were rich in compassion and mercy; there was always enough to go around. There was never a question about generosity...what we had we shared, and I still believe in that.

I support Emmanuel in all areas because I believe my gifts are needed and are responsibly used. I fully support the many programs and ministries, so, if I am committed to faithful membership, how could I not support it financially as well as in engagement?

My primary hope for Emmanuel is that we continue to faithfully preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, and then, we dare to live lives that always reflect what we confess. All else flows from that.



*"And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love."*

As a young woman, perhaps once when I was home from college for a visit, I found myself in my dad's home office looking for a book. I noticed on his desk a check written to his congregation – also an Immanuel – for his weekly contribution. It was for an amount far in excess of anything I had imagined my parents would be contributing to the church. I already knew that my parents, especially my dad, were extremely generous with their time and talents in the congregation. Dad served as Immanuel's president, taught Sunday School, and chaired the Building for the Future campaign. But I had no idea that his generosity extended into the financial realm. He was truly putting his money where his values were.

And why did he do this? My parents were grateful to God for the blessings he had bestowed on them over the years. I'm sure it didn't feel like a blessing when their 11-year-old daughter died suddenly of a heart attack. But, with the support of family and friends at church and in the community, they used this tragedy to rekindle their faith and as it grew, they became examples of how faith informs generosity.

My mother and father-in-law would spend the winters with us here in Naples once we made the move from Minnesota to Florida in 2009. We regularly worshipped at another Lutheran congregation nearer our home. But one year my father-in-law suggested we visit Emmanuel for the Christmas Eve service. He had heard about this preacher at Emmanuel from some snowbird friends who worshipped there in the winter. It was AMAZING! The Gospel from Luke 2 suddenly came alive as Pastor Steve recited it with great exultation. Emmanuel became our church that night!

I had been looking for ways to become involved and began to hear about the vision for the future, especially the development of a multi-lingual congregation. I had been active in my congregation up north and was missing that sense of mission in my life in Florida. Pastor Jose welcomed me into the Steering Team for what was to become ECC as this fledgling congregation took flight. Bi-lingual worship, after school tutoring, and Bible study in homes blossomed. God was active in this venture to welcome persons from different countries and walks of life who spoke different languages. New worshippers were grateful for the opportunity and contributed to the worship and fellowship activities. I was grateful for the opportunity to be a tutor with enthusiastic learners and to help grow the ministry. My gratitude quickly turned into generosity of time, talents, and treasure.

My upbringing and my church involvement proved to be powerful examples in my attitude toward generosity and giving. God gave His son, His Only Begotten Son, to die for us, to save us from our sin. To paraphrase that great hymn "How Can I Keep From Singing?", how can I not be grateful and respond with generosity?

*Janet Anderson*



# Puchalla Family Story

Our journey to Emmanuel started before we even had children, probably sometime around 2004. As a newly married couple in June of 2004, we were looking at worship options throughout the community and participated in an Alive service. We did not commit to a single church in that early period of our lives together, but always kept the experience in the back of our minds. Our girls were born in 2005 and 2008. We came back to Emmanuel to participate in the Alive service in 2011. The children's ministry was very important to us at the time. The way our girls were able to get involved and the comfort level we felt with the members in the service convinced us this would be our church.

We became members shortly after finding our way back to Emmanuel.

Our girls became active in youth ministry as soon as they were of age. I was blessed to be able to join the Alive band and participate as an assisting minister in services. In 2015, I joined church council and served 6 years, the final 2 as president. This was my first time experiencing work on a church council and it was very rewarding. It provided an insight into all that goes into building a strong church community. The sense of community we feel within the ministry of Emmanuel is very important to us. The desire of this congregation to go out and serve people where they are is truly inspiring, and is the main reason why we choose to support Emmanuel financially.

We are blessed to have found this church community and the loving congregation, and hope that we can play a small part in continuing the growth and evolution. We see the opportunities in Eastern Collier County through Emmanuel Community Park as a great vision for the future. We also see the work of Emmanuel Academies, raising up future leaders of the church around the world, as vital. We want to continue to inspire more families and children to check out Emmanuel and all that we are doing not only in the community, but around the world.



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Veronica and I were searching for a church home in Naples over the course of a decade as we prepared for retirement. We attended every ELCA church in Collier County and kept coming back to Emmanuel Lutheran Church because of its vibrancy, outreach, vision, and pastoral leadership.

As God would have it, our retirement came during the worst months of the 2020 COVID pandemic. Just prior to retirement, while we were counting down the final months at Valparaiso University, we started joining online worship at Emmanuel because it was the only Lutheran church we knew that had found a way to offer communion remotely. Soon after we retired and relocated full-time to Naples, Emmanuel announced the commencement of drive-in worship at Emmanuel Community Park, which just happened to be a convenient drive from our home.

We attended services at the Park every Sunday, listening to Pastor Will's vision for the Park Church over the car radio, watching that vision materialize through the launch of the Meals of Hope food distribution initiative, seeing a diverse group of people gather together each week for work and worship, and beeping a hearty "Amen" to all of it. Both of us felt called to be a part of this worshipping community and to help realize its vision. We knew that this is where God wanted us to be, that this was the place where we were called to give our time, talent, and treasure.

We support Emmanuel because it is dynamic, innovative, and forward-thinking. We support Emmanuel because of its visionary pastors. We support Emmanuel Park Church because its primary mission is to serve the hungry and those most in need; because its weekly worship offers respite and community after a week of doing God's work in the Estates. To us, too many churches appear self-absorbed, with Sunday worship as the culmination of all the congregation's effort. Emmanuel Park Church has flipped this model—its focus and effort are principally external. Sunday worship is a chance to chill out in the Park after a week's labor, and to soak in the wonders of God's grace. So, we give from a place of gratitude for the "new thing" that God is doing here.

Our greatest hope is that Emmanuel Park Church grows and diversifies, that it becomes financially self-sustaining, that it continues to innovate, that it expands its service to those in Golden Gate Estates and the many surrounding communities that will be built in the coming decade, and that it brings more and more children and adults into a rich, meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ and one another through serving those in need.

*Mark and Veronica  
Heckler*



## Dennis & Carla Reustle



When we started our search for a community of faith, we were anxious to find a church that had programs for the youth, provided contemporary music and showed community involvement and outreach. Our first visit to Emmanuel was in December during the Christmas nativity play in 2011.

Seeing all the children warmed our hearts and told us we were in the right place. As the weeks went by, we so enjoyed the contemporary music and relaxed atmosphere the Alive service provided. In addition to the tremendous worship experience, we appreciate that the church sees a need in the community and they go about finding ways to provide assistance. They have always trusted that the Lord will provide the resources and expertise necessary to accomplish God's will. This church isn't here to cater to the members. We educate and motivate our members to be God's hands and feet in our community.

Our parents taught us to give back to the world the blessings we have been given. We have also tried to surround ourselves with like-minded friends who feel the same. We have been deeply involved in the church and we see just how committed the people who work at Emmanuel are. This reassures us that our financial support will be used properly in order to grow the kingdom. We hope that the work at Emmanuel is able to break through the challenges that face all churches and finds better ways to connect to the community and grow. What we have here is very special, and it's exciting to be part of the vision of the future.



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I found that as a young man having travelled and lived in a number of different cities around the US, I was seeking a home to put down roots. I visited and attended a number churches no matter where I lived. As a student at Boston College, I was afforded the opportunity to explore numerous religious systems in a double credit course called Perspectives wherein philosophy and various religious avenues, including the bible, were explored and dissected, and framed as sources of beliefs. Though raised in a Lutheran Church in Fairfield, CT, when I studied the basis for each belief system, I found Martin Luther spoke to me clearly, loudly, and authentically in a way that connected to my essence. I like to refer to my journey to being a Lutheran as a chosen direction.

When I met Kathleen here in Naples in 1991, there was no question I was going to put roots down here. In December of 1991, we attended our first Christmas eve service – not at Emmanuel. It was a clear disappointment on many levels. So the search continued, and sometime in the new year of 1992, we attended Emmanuel.

There were some simple invitations to help out around the church with some landscaping projects, and I answered the call. I met Jerry Kimble, Ned Renfroe, Steve Stohler, and a couple other guys who didn't mind giving up a few hours on a Saturday to pretty the place up a bit. After having attended church services and getting to know Michael Collins, and a few members, Kathleen and I were married at Emmanuel, she and our children were all baptized there, and we remained engaged - meeting more members and becoming more involved – teaching Sunday School, joining the Council, opening the pre-school, etc.

I appreciate the very unique opportunity to serve others, and spread the Gospel. The Lutheran church as a whole is going through a leaderless upheaval, and would do well to consider a wholesale reformation, moving away from the strictures associated with a larger organization that is unable and unwilling to adapt. Emmanuel, however, could lead the way employing fortitude to embrace true bold change as it has demonstrated through Emmanuel Communities and Emmanuel Academies.

Generosity was taught to me by my parents whose daily practice of gifting is an example of give and thou shalt receive. Also, my Jesuit education – Service above self – was a terrific influence. We are put on this earth to help others, so the natural outreach afforded by various projects that reach the needs of others is a clarion call for the spiritual health of our community. Direct financial support of those projects or missions that speak to me is very rewarding and gratifying.

My greatest hope for Emmanuel is that will become the spiritual base for a new generation of seekers, and one of the most important venues for a fresh new delivery of the gospel with a very broad appeal, employing every communication tool available. It seems to me that the current call committee has a much larger job at hand than many may believe.

This is a crossroads for Emmanuel Lutheran Church, and identifying a goal rich mission that can be matched to a new fresh start is an elevated challenge that ought not look like the process of choosing your parents' minister. This is the most important selection Emmanuel has ever made. My greatest hope is that we make a maverick decision in how Emmanuel will deliver Christ to the masses in the 21st century.



*Peter and Kathleen  
Wasmer*

# Julie and Jerry Kerr

Since we were married, we have joined several different Lutheran Churches...and Synods. When we moved to Naples in 2000, we were attracted to Emmanuel initially for its location and ELCA association. But over the years we learned to appreciate not only the spiritual enrichment it has provided but also for the ministry opportunities that the congregation envisioned.



Our first Church as a married couple was in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We still remember a home visit from our new minister who confronted us with a bold encouragement: When you plan your family budget always consider your support to the Church first. We have followed that principle for the last 56 years.

It has been a blessing to gladly and freely share our gifts to support the vision of Ministry that the staff and congregation has inspired. Multi-cultural ministries, planting a new worshiping community and providing an affordable opportunity for new clergy through Emmanuel Academies.

How can one not answer this calling?

We still budget our Church giving first but the possibilities and hope we see for the future with Emmanuel has inspired a new level of generosity!



*How can one not answer this calling?*



# Lea & David Smith

My husband, David, and I were looking for a Church that was all inclusive. We believe that God made all people, and all people should be welcomed in Church. We left our previous Church that was very biased.

We met with Pastor Steve and Pastor Lee sharing our concerns. We were assured that ELC was very inclusive. We have found this to be true. We both have had health issues. It was so comforting to know that clergy and members were there to help us both spiritually and personally.

What makes Emmanuel so special? - The inclusivity, immensely inspirational ministry and educational offerings. The love and warmth of the membership. The vision of Pastor Steve creating the Emmanuel Park and Emmanuel Academies and the tenacity to make it happen.

Our Church demonstrates the Christian mandate, "Share God's word. Be a disciple". Our Church reaches out with the traditional service, Contemporary/Alive Service, and multicultural/Bilingual service. Again, our Church is all inclusive.

We choose to support Emmanuel financially so that all this Church does now can continue, and the future plans are viable. Our greatest hope is that this Church will always stay grounded continuing to care for all people. That it will continue the Bible-based service and education and training of new clergy for the Lutheran Church.

