Quintessential Ladies Interviews

1) **When did you begin to attend First Lutheran Church? What caused you to choose this church?**

Caroline Schwartz started attending First Lutheran Church in September of 1964 when she and her husband Wayne first moved to Watford City "because it was the town's Lutheran church."

Donna Rauser chose FLC because within 3 days of her young family's arrival to Watford City in 1970, FLC deacons Eric Arndson and Paul Wagner came to visit them. By the following Sunday, their membership was transferred from Keene to Watford City. Donna reflects, "We always went to church wherever we lived or moved."

Jean Wold became a part of the church due to her 1957 marriage to Omar. She was baptized, confirmed, and married at Keene First Lutheran, but when she moved to Watford after her marriage, she then became a member at First Lutheran, where she's now held membership for around 70 years. Jean shares, "Both Mother & Dad were so active in church that it was just automatic that we were, too."

Cleo Kirkland came to FLC due to the closing of her rural congregation—Faith Lutheran—in 2008. She remembers, "At Faith Lutheran, because we were a very small congregation, we learned to do everything. We did Bible studies with the WELCA Gather magazine, we cleaned the church, we served dinners and brunches (I especially remember Easter caramel rolls for the 6:00 am sunrise service), and we never complained about going to church. Never."

Delores Quale moved away from the Watford City area at age 5 to eastern North Dakota's small town of Michigan during the Dirty Thirties. She was confirmed in 1947 while there, and her parents moved back to McKenzie County in 1952, a year after she'd graduated high school and then completed a one-year business school program in Grand Forks. Upon the family's return to Watford, they began attending First Lutheran.

Donna Lou Sanford remembers that her first experience with First Lutheran came about due to her 1951 Confirmation journey being hosted here (her home church—Clear Creek—had no pastor while she was in 9th grade). There were around 20 confirmands total, and she shudders to look back on how terrifying the public questioning felt while on stage in front of the whole church for the culminating "final exam." She also talks about how the confirmands looked out for one another and stage-whispered the answers to each other whenever someone got stuck. And as a

few other Quintessential Ladies have also mentioned, Donna Lou points out that the 10 Commandments—and their explanations—had to be fully memorized in order to successfully pass Confirmation.

Swany Schmidt began attending First Lutheran in 1988, the year after she married Don. The couple got married at FLC (where her husband Don was a member long before he met her) because he announced in no uncertain terms that he was NOT getting married in the nursing home where Swany's church services were held!

Although **Elaine Fedorenko** was born in Keene and attended Clear Creek Lutheran, she moved to Watford City when she first started high school. That's when she became involved in First Lutheran and then—at the invitation of Mrs. Odin Stenehjem—started playing organ for the church in 1948 while they were meeting in the town's movie theatre because the church had burned down. Elaine still remembers the long, scary walk down the aisle in the dark to play for services on the movie theater's organ down at the front. It was the Clear Creek pastor's wife who initially taught her to play on their mice-ridden pump organ, and Elaine remembers that her Dad then built a tin mice barrier all around the organ to keep the mice away…and it worked! While the church's building was being rebuilt, Esther Lundin invited Elaine to help pick out the Hammond organ that would be installed into the newly-rebuilt church.

2) **What are some of the biggest changes you've seen at First Lutheran during your time here?**

Caroline reflects, "Confirmation is different now. It was much more demanding many years ago, and much more Scripture memorization was required back then."

Jean says, "We've gotten friendlier! We used to go to church, sit silently in the same pew, and didn't talk until we got outside after church. In fact, we used to get quietly ushered out of our pews at the close of service. Now we have greeters! Ushers smile, talk with you, and greet you. Sharing the peace and greeting one another is a good way to start out the service."

Delores laughs, "The building has gotten a lot larger!"

Donna Lou shares, "I remember when there was always a head usher and 4 other ushers—all dressed in suits—taking offering at FLC." And Donna Lou and Elaine both remember the day when Donna Lou's mother Lettie Dodge broke the longstanding Clear Creek Lutheran Church tradition of men being seated on one side while women and children were seated on the other side. Lettie calmly walked in one day with her

children and sat down with her husband on the all-male side. It didn't take that long before other women followed suit, and the tradition was changed permanently.

Swany reflects, "Lots of kids growing up, people moving away, and people passing away."

Elaine: "A beautiful, all-new, much better kitchen! And the hymnbooks have also changed over the years—often a source of controversy and the cause for lots of conversation. And the Confirmation process has definitely changed: we used to memorize the entire Small Catechism plus additional Scriptures."

3) What are some memorable life events that occurred here at FLC?

Caroline: The Centennial and Dedication Celebration in 2014; singing in choir (first Wayne, and then Caroline joined him several years later); teaching & eventually superintending Sunday school; and road trips.

Donna: The dedication of the brand-new Centennial Hall in 2014.

Jean: Kids' Christmas programs. And also, "I remember one time when Omar was helping with Communion, and a child staunchly informed him, 'I WANNA A DRINK, TOO!'" She especially remembers one wintry cold morning when she decided to stay home from church due to the ongoing storm. As she listened to the radio broadcast of the service, she heard the following announcement at the beginning: "Thank you, Jean Wold, for being our Scripture reader today." Oops! So Omar started the car for her while she hastily got dressed, drove to the church, walked through the church basement and up the stairs to arrive behind the lectern, read the Scriptures, went back down through the church basement, and then drove home.

Delores: Both of her weddings and the funerals of both of her spouses were held at First Lutheran. The funerals of other loved ones and family members (both her parents and also her son Gary) have been held here, both grandkids were baptized and confirmed here, and one of them got married at First Lutheran as well.

Donna Lou: The weddings of her daughters and the baptisms of her sons took place at FLC. With a twinkle in her eye, she also divulges, "I was ALWAYS in the kitchen… and I was a great dishwasher!" **Swany**: Her 1987 wedding to Don took place here, and so did their son Keith's confirmation. **Elaine**: The burning down of the original church building in 1948 is an indelible memory, and so was the first Mystery Dinner—put on by Eric and Carol Arntson—that ever took place at First Lutheran.

4) **What gifts have come to you through First Lutheran?**

Caroline shares that for her personally, choir experiences, seasonal cantatas, and Christmas concerts have all been true gifts over the years.

Donna agrees: music, singing in the choir for 35+ years, special music, and Christmas cantatas have all been high points in the 56+ years she's been at FLC.

Jean thinks that some highlights have been "learning I could do things I didn't know I could do—like lead Bible studies. And hearing my husband Omar sing at the 11:00 am Sunday service."

Delores: "Many different pastors have been a gift here over the years. The music has been, also, and I especially love the vocal music because I sang lots of vocal trios throughout my school years."

Swany exclaims, "Friendships! My boys both gave me away at my wedding, and they asked me, 'Do you know all these people, Mom?' I also love sharing my quilting gifts through the ministry of the FLC quilting ladies, and I've enjoyed serving at First Lutheran over the years on church council and the altar guild as well."

Elaine muses, "The caring people here at First. They always looked after me while I was in high school, and after my husband Gene's death, they did the same thing: people called, brought food, and reached out."

5) **When is one of the times you have sensed God's presence at work in your life?**

Caroline: "I sense His presence in everyday life moments. Before we sing, or when I forget my place in the music & start praying, 'Thy will be done.'"

Donna: "In the absolute worst crises, through illness, surgeries, in hard times, that's when God feels most present. He works through your friends, and He is always there…in every breath." Donna shared that one example of God working through her friends came through Caroline: "Caroline visited for 13 out of the 15 days that I was in the hospital, plus she washed all my laundry."

Jean: "I guess it's every day, and more so the older I get. In my prayers, for example, I notice I'm more detailed now. Not only am I asking, but I'm also thanking. But I do wonder…when I fall asleep at night before my prayers are done, what does God think sometimes? Because I often don't make it to the 'Amen!'"

Cleo: "Whenever someone dies, His presence seems especially near."

Delores: "Perhaps in times of questioning."

Donna Lou: "Ever since I received a serious cancer diagnosis, I have especially sensed God's presence with me."

Swany: "Lots of times. When Don and I first met each other, we felt it was a divine thing. Don was definitely God's biggest surprise in my life! Our first date was at the Elks for Las Vegas night, then he took me out for breakfast on Saturday morning, and then we went to the Chamber of Commerce event that same Saturday night. (I remember Don getting so flustered when we met Scott & Jane because he couldn't say my name right yet!) Don was so good for me during my daughter's illness. I'd be gone for many weeks, and I'd come back to a home all decorated by Don and ready for Christmas. Our years together—through his retirement, buying our first home together in Arizona, through the deaths of loved ones and the births of grandchildren—were such a gift."

Elaine: "During the time of my mother's death when I was only 14 and now needed to help raise my two younger brothers. I sense God's presence all the time, and His presence got me through the double funeral of my husband and my daughter. I've sensed His presence during the deaths of my siblings as well."

6) **If there is one bit of life advice you could share with us—your fellow siblings in Christ—what would it be?**

Caroline reminds us, "When I took my Confirmation vow in 1949, it was sacred to me. I took it seriously, and I knew that I needed to take my worries and cares—and all these things---to the Lord."
Donna strongly recommends, "Keep your faith. Read that Bible every day—it is your strength. And of course I love to be with people, little children. I just love them!"

Jean urges, "Remember to pray for yourself, too, not just for others. Don't forget to ask God to care for yourself, and for your needs, especially as you get older. Let God know all your concerns and what's happening in your life."

Cleo chuckles, "Turn the heat on!"

Donna Lou expresses gratitude: "I'm so thankful we have church online. We watch every Sunday after David makes the most delicious breakfast. He makes such wonderful eggs, waffles, and bacon. (We've been married for 61 years.)"

Swany affirms, "Your faith in God is the backbone of everything. It gets you through so much: happy times, sad times. I lean on Him pretty heavily."

Elaine encourages, "Keep Christ in your hip pocket at all times."

7) **What's your favorite dessert when we have potlucks at church?**

Caroline: Brownies! **Donna**: Sour cream raisin bars and 3-stripe pistachio dessert!

Jean: Everything would always be so good! (As an aside, I always knew the deviled eggs would be good because Omar made them.)

Cleo: My favorite desserts are Jello salads—and one of my very favorites is the Lime Jello Marshmallow Cottage Cheese Surprise!

Delores: I pretty much like all desserts. I've got a sweet tooth!

Donna Lou: Pumpkin pie! My daughter Vicki brings me the most delicious homemade ones.

Swany: 3-stripe pistachio dessert! (We always had that at springtime for a fundraiser.)

Elaine: I usually washed dishes and made and poured coffee instead of bringing something!