

In Memory of  
**Luther Alexander Gotwald, Jr.**

February 9, 1927 – October 12, 2018

Son, Brother, Husband, Father, Grandfather, Great Grandfather  
Pastor and Friend



Norma and Luther

## A Life Well-lived

*A short biography by Judy*

Luther Alexander Gotwald, Jr. was born February 9, 1927, in Chirala, India. His parents, Luther, Sr. and Ethel, were missionaries there for more than 20 years. All of their seven children were born in India. Lutie was the middle child.

The family returned to the United States for a scheduled furlough when Dad was nine years old. When it came time to return to India, his parents decided to leave the oldest four children in America, fearing the coming war would interrupt their education. Dad was the youngest to move in with his maternal grandparents in Gettysburg, Pa. The plan was to reunite in three years at the latest, but he would not see his parents and youngest siblings again until he was 16.

Dad enjoyed his Gettysburg years and proudly recited: I went to elementary school in Gettysburg and high school in Gettysburg. I attended Gettysburg College and Gettysburg Seminary and I did post-graduate work in Gettysburg.

He also met Norma Burkholder in Gettysburg. They would marry and become partners in ministry in an era when women were not afforded many opportunities to serve. They were very much a team. Luther earned the paycheck and credit, but Norma gave him a non-clergy view on many issues and helped with any number of projects—from teaching Vacation Bible School and Sunday School to women’s programs, and choir work. Luther commented shortly before his death, “I was lucky to have her.”

His first call was to a two-point charge in Point Township, Northumberland County—right where the western branch of the Susquehanna joins the main branch. Perhaps that was a portent that this eastern Pennsylvanian would someday move west. The area was very rural. Many members were farmers. Grace was a more traditional Lutheran Church.



Trinity was a family church loosely tied to Lutherans (and has since left the Lutheran Church). Dad helped Grace grow. He commented, the family church didn’t need his help in that regard. “It was packed every week.” Dad learned the importance and value of small churches in Point Township.

Tim, Judy, and Dan were born in nearby Sunbury, during the Point Township years.



Luther (front right) with his family shortly before his return to America. His siblings are Emily, Ethel (on lap), Fred and Mary. On the floor are Bill and Susan.

In 1957, the family moved to Emigsville, a small town just North of York, Pa. to serve St. Mark's Church, where Sarah was born.

St. Mark's had shared a pastor with a neighboring church but wanted to try to go it alone. St. Mark's was a small church with very little property, but its Sunday School and Vacation Church School became very popular and the church grew. Dad led the church in making plans to relocate and build a larger building in a more accessible location. A developer was willing to donate the land, and plans were drawn up. However, the synod wouldn't support the plan because the site, though visible from the main road, was not actually on the main road. Dad knew that relocation was necessary to continue growth and this discouraged him. St. Mark's is once again sharing a pastor with a neighboring church. The lot on the hill in sight of the main highway where he envisioned a new Christian witness? It is now in the middle of two neighborhoods that have grown together. Dad was right!

In 1965, he was asked by the synod president to consider a call to St. David's. He was advised that this small town congregation was divided over a similar relocation plan. Dad accepted the challenge. He spent the first year or two in Conemaugh Township concentrating on visiting every family. His intent was not to rally support for one view or another but to simply get to know members by



**Our family in York: Judy, Tim, Dan, and Sally (Sarah)  
They didn't have much furnniture and  
Dad made the lamps and end tables.**

sitting with them and listening. The congregation soon moved to the new site and Pastor Gotwald was able to promote many initiatives with the added classroom and fellowship space. In addition to standard Sunday School and Summer Bible School, he experimented with Weekday Church School, release time (from public school) and Saturday morning offerings. The fellowship hall made the Community Passion Play possible. He was always eager to try new ideas and was willing to cross denominational lines. He would often quip when someone told him they were Baptist or Mennonite, for example, “Baptists and Mennonites make good Lutherans.”

Pastor Gotwald served St. David's for 23 years. When he was 61, he accepted a call to serve as Assistant to the Bishop of the new Allegheny Synod. During his four years with the synod, he took a sabbatical and spent the time studying the constitutions of the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He could see problems with the interdependent structure that called for three constitutions – one for the national or church-wide entity, one for the regional body and individual constitutions for each congregation (which might differ). He saw that the power was centered in the regional body or synod. He paid particular attention to the Articles of Incorporation which dictate what is allowed in the way of constitutional bylaws. But there is little oversight of the interdependence and no effective checks and balances of power. He saw the potential for abuse but he did not seem worried. Perhaps he assumed all leaders were as mission-driven as he.

Luther Gotwald did not shrink from conflict. Conflict, well-handled, can bring about change. It was something to work through. One of his proudest accomplishments was advocating for the preservation of both Philadelphia Seminary and Gettysburg Seminary, arguing that multiple institutions leads to more diverse practice. He made the same argument when the publishing houses of the merging churches were merging. The more publishers, the more opportunity for different voices to be heard. He failed to influence the publishing houses, but he succeeded (temporarily) to protect the separate seminaries.

You won't read much about the last ten years of his life in his obituary. After his wife, Norma, died, Pastor Gotwald spent a lot of time in Philadelphia where he joined a neighborhood church. Although he knew little about living in a city and often expressed his dislike of urban life, he soon adapted to city ways. He loved hopping on buses and trains and going into the city. Despite his advanced age, he always stood up to yield his seat to another senior.

He loved the theater, both professional and the local theater club. He surprised me one day by presenting me with a ad he saw in the newspaper. It was for a Cabaret. "I want to go to this." We went and had a delightful afternoon listening to various vocalists. He did not drink the free glass of wine that came with the entrance fee.

Perhaps his missionary childhood made the diversity of the city an easy adjustment. A friend invited him to attend a dinner with guest speaker the Civil Rights advocate, Al Sharpton. Dad was so impressed with his speech that he made a contribution and joined the mailing list. He was also invited to hear Michelle Obama speak at a neighborhood rally. Dad was not impressed because she was late. After waiting an hour, chatting with the rest of the crowd, he walked out and never heard the First Lady speak. I stayed for the speeches. Dad had made so many friends that when I went to find him, numerous people approached me. "Your Dad is over there."

Dad became an active member of Redeemer Lutheran Church, which he served passionately, this time from the pew. His influence had preceded his involvement as I had played a leadership role for years and I knew Dad's style.

Dad was a servant leader, using his talents to equip the saints for better service. He fit perfectly into this small church with no pastor but plenty of leaders.

Dad spent the last three or four years in a retirement home, where he enjoyed visits from family and friends and retelling his favorite life stories.



One of Dad's last visits to St. David's with The Rev. Nelson Ilgenfritz, a distant cousin

# Memories and Tributes

Memories from members of St. Mark's, Emigsville, Pa.,  
where Pastor Gotwald served from 1957-1965

*(compiled by Peggy Diehl)*

Tall. Thinnish. Distinguished looking. An air of savvy with a touch of humor that went a long way to helping a child see him as a person plus a pastor.

I remember he liked to laugh and he liked to debate. He struck me as intelligent and so very kind. I think he had eyes that smiled even more so than his mouth. I remember he liked to sing and he liked to sing boldly! I remember him being a proud member of the choir!

One of the things I liked about Pastor Gotwald was that he had his own kids and he knew how to talk to the kids at church. I remember he liked to tease us kids — although maybe that was just to my sister and me because we were twins. I'm not sure he ever figured out which was which and he thought that was a joke on him. I liked his sermons which may be unusual since I was a kid but somehow he reached kids (or was it that I knew my mother was watching from the choir loft and I had to pay attention?). I liked that my parents greatly respected him as a person and as a pastor.

Pastor Gotwald was someone my dad liked enough in later years long after he had left St. Mark's that he was willing to drive across Pennsylvania to visit. He had to be rather awesome! I had hoped at some point in my adult life I'd get to see him again in Philadelphia but never got to visit when he was there with his daughter, my friend Judy.

I heard about his support to Judy during some difficult times and that increased my respect for him even more.

I remember how much the folks at St. Mark's were saddened to learn Pastor Gotwald was accepting another call. I feel sure he helped shape some lives back there in Emigsville. He's probably already at work shaping angels where he headed after all those days in Pennsylvania!

**Peggy Diehl Mann, Houston, Texas**

Norma Schroll Diehl, York, PA. recalls that she was nervous about taking over the adult choir. Pastor Gotwald encouraged her to take it over when his wife, also named Norma, had to step off as choir director. He kept saying 'you can do it' and she didn't want to disappoint him, so try it she did. She remained the adult choir director for years. Her other recollection of Pastor Gotwald was that he was so kind. Always a kind man.

Gloria Bobb, York, PA. was recruited to be the St. Mark's children's choir director. She recalls that Pastor Gotwald was very helpful to her, helping her get started in that role. He made it easy on her to work into the role. He was always so kind to her.

**Memories from members of St. David's, Davidsville, Pa.,  
where Pastor Gotwald served from 1965-1988**

Pastor Gotwald served our church when our children were young and growing. He guided and taught us through many life experiences—Sunday School, Sunday Services, Baptism, Catechism, weddings and difficult times, enriching all of our lives in many ways. Pastor was a kind, caring, wonderful person—setting us a fine example of “a life well lived.”

**Sincerely, Buck and Pat Sleek**

Pastor Gotwald will always be a part of who I am – daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother and nurse. His loving kindness and caring nature I am sure is the Lord's example of how to live out our faith in this world. I was blessed to have him as a guide throughout my life from childhood to adult. I thank God for him!

**Lois Tessari**

St. David's has been my Church home my entire life. Pastor Gotwald played a large part in my life as a young man and on into early adulthood. From Sunday service, Saturday confirmation classes with Pastor, to Sunday school with Mrs. Norma Gotwald a foundation for life was established for me. During a Sunday sermon, I can still picture him at the pulpit to this day. I believe the phrase a gentlemen and a scholar can be over used. In the case of Pastor Gotwald he was a Saint sent to live among us, a man of the cloth in the truest form, a gentlemen and scholar. My emotional ties to both St.David's and Camp Sequanota are thanks to Pastor Gotwald and the entire Gotwald family.

**Buck Sleek II (Bucky)**

Pastor Gotwald was a part of the first 23 years of my life. And yes, I have some memories to share.

My first memories would be that of being an acolyte. Pastor was always very thorough in explaining the procedures and also always very patient dealing with a bunch of young children. I remember when St. David's was burning the mortgage and Pastor asked me to be the acolyte to “light the mortgage.” As a young person I was taught to never play with matches – especially inside a house. So, let's just say I was a little nervous about setting fire to a piece of paper inside a Church full of people. But Pastor Gotwald always had a way to calm your nerves and the ability to make a person believe in themselves.

The next memory was confirmation classes and lots of meaningful conversations about God, faith and life. Pastor was a great teacher and again, as I look back his patience in dealing with young people was extraordinary. His faith shown through as he answered questions of why, what and how on very deep issues. At the end of confirmation, the class took a trip to Williamsburg, Virginia. We saw Pastor Gotwald not just as our Pastor but as a regular human being. He was the same fair, patient, calm, positive man that we had always known and loved.

The last thing Pastor Gotwald did as my pastor was to officiate the marriage of Rick and I. We were a little nervous at the time but we must have heard what he said because 33 years later we are still happily married!

A few other memories include the Rock N Roll sermon and the sermon when he wished everyone a Merry Christmas on Easter morning!! I loved his hearty laugh, his sense of humor and the fact that sometimes he laughed at his own jokes!! I also remember him being there to comfort my family when my grandparents died.

But the most important memories I have of Pastor are not of any specific events but things that are much more important.

His ability to make you feel good about yourself.

His ability to make the best of any situation.

His ability to calm and reassure.

His hearty laugh and sense of humor.

His character, patience and faith.

His humble, gentle and caring soul.

He made you want to be a better person.

He was what the world needs more of today.

My deepest sympathy to his wonderful family.

Rest in peace Pastor Gotwald!

Love you,

**Diane Miller**

Pastor Gotwald was our pastor for many years at St David's. He confirmed all three of our children and performed the marriage ceremony of one of them. Over those years we had the privilege to share some meals with them in our home. We enjoyed the company of the whole Gotwald family. We shared many laughs and good times together, but Pastor was also always there to provide comfort and guidance. He was a good pastor and friend. His life of service to others will never be forgotten.

**Love, Esther Mishler**

### **From a director of the Passion Play (early 1970s)**

On behalf of the entire cast of the Community Passion Play that Larry Diehl and I directed and participated in, we offer our thoughts and prayers to the Gotwald family on the loss of a wonderful pastor and mentor. Pastor Gotwald's creative idea for this play and his mentoring me provided the community ministerium to get national recognition, as well as gave me a path to get my PhD and position at a Christian college that I just retired from. He touched countless lives while at St David's Lutheran Church and in his service to the Lutheran Church and numerous denominations. What a wonderful person.

**John Sadlon**

October 23, 2018

To the Gotwald Family,

I can't remember how I learned your Dad liked Italian Pizzelles. However, after he retired as assistant to the Bishop of the Allegheny Synod in 1992, I visited several days before Christmas with Pizzelles for him. This continued each year until he moved from Davidsville to make his home with Dan and his family.

Also from the time he served as Pastor at St. David's, we exchanged Christmas cards each year. Unfortunately he was unable to send any the past several years.

During my 2002 visit, he gave me one of his Books of Worship with Hymns and tunes which was published in 2002. I cherish the note he wrote to me on the front page of the book.

Judy, thank you for bringing your Dad to worship with us at St. David's when you were in town.

Thanks also for giving me this opportunity to remember your Dad and my friend.

In Sympathy and Friendship,

P.S. I won't go into the  
"Geape Piz" Story

Jean Lutz

Pastor Luther Gotwald was one of the most generous and peaceful men I've ever known. He cared deeply about all the people in his congregation. I remember most his patience and persistence in believing in us even when we failed. I specifically remember his generosity and patience when, as teenagers, we misbehaved. He never lost faith that we would turn out OK in the end. I never heard him speak an unkind word about anyone and his smile could defuse even tense conversations. He truly lived the example of Jesus. Bless you and thank you, Pastor Gotwald for your guidance and unfailing love for all of us.

Elizabeth Good

Seemed to us to always be a kind, caring and gentle soul. And of great service to God's ministry, in the Lutheran tradition. Peace, Luther. Peace.

Bill and Dar Weible

I have been a member since birth and my wife joined the church when we married. We would like to share a very nice memory with you.

I left Davidsville in 1965 for a new job in Pgh. A very tough move for the family.

In 1971 our daughter decided to get married and she wanted to have the wedding at St David's. We came "home" to make the arrangements. We all remember how pleased your dad was that we came to him . He was very, very accommodating. The groom was from the Mt Calvary church in Richland. He ask if his pastor could have part in the service. Absolutely, replied your dad.

The wedding came off on June 5, 1971, as a huge success, well except for the caterpillars. They were all over the walk, the church doors and some even got in the doors. Some managed to get on the bride's gown as she came in. So, much thanks to your dad, the marriage was a success. We have two super grand kids and four extra special greats.

**Gene and Jo Spangler**

### **From his nieces and nephews:**

I remember Uncle Lutie's by his laughter, his love of life and his family and his faith in a gracious Lord. He must be overjoyed in heaven! Know my thoughts and prayers are with each of you as you grieve the loss of your father and yes, share his new address in Heaven!

**Jeanne Lose Dallman**

My earliest memory of your dad was one time when we were in the apartment on LaSalle Street. We must have blown a fuse. When checking the fuse box (I even have a memory of where the fuse box was located), your dad started singing a jingle, "I think I blew a fuse." It was such a light hearted moment and always makes me think of how your dad sang his way through life, bringing smiles to those fortunate enough to know him. He is certainly missed.

**Mary Grace Fry**

I also remember this vividly (after all these years!). I can still hear Lutie (and then other family members) singing this, and just hearing this in my mind is bringing a big smile to my face at this very moment. Dear Lutie had a such a kind, gentle and light-hearted manner (with deep thoughtfulness and substance underneath, of course); he was a wonderful uncle and (no doubt) father and pastor, too. He is, indeed, certainly missed.

**Chris Fry**

We conferred together and shared our memories of your father. David said it best, "Uncle Lutie was quintessentially a Gotwald." He definitely was named well after Grandpa because they both loved family history, family reunions with curry dinners, writing, and especially their calls to minister to their parishes and

the church. David remembered “Nine in India”, and I love “Lutie Babu” which I read with Mother regularly, Sarah. Uncle Lutie would visit Grandma when she was living with my family in Lancaster, but Jeanne and I were out of the house by then.

I remember most when Uncle Lutie and Danny would come up to Ogontz, (*family summer homestead in Cooperstown, NY*) and Danny continued his dad’s practice of swimming across Lake Otsego. We think it became a tradition when David and, more recently, Jack continued and swam the lake. His love of curry is a fond memory because of the time that my George was in St. John’s kitchen cooking curry with Uncles Fred and Lutie and all of their sisters on the occasion of Grandma’s funeral. I remembered an excellent sermon delivered by Uncle Lutie and wondered if it was for Grandma, but David corrected my memory and nailed it with his memories of what Uncle Lutie said for dear Aunt Mary at her funeral. “He talked about the 3 days in May - the first being when Mary’s (and his) grandfather rode over to Uncle Frank’s grandfather to pay a visit (from a journal LAG kept). The second day in May was the day Frank and Mary were married, and he made bold to “give Mary away” (bold because only the Lord gives us to each other). And the third day in May was the day Mary died, and the Lord received back again the one he had given to Frank and the rest of the family in marriage and life. It was stunning.”

**Susan Lose Leelike and David Lose**

*Note: Dad missed Granny’s funeral. He had just landed in North Dakota for a visit with Sarah and new granddaughter Katie. So you probably are remembering Aunt Mary’s funeral. He spoke at Old Trappe Church, clinging those colonial stairs to the pulpit.*

Uncle Lutie always had a twinkle in his eye!

He visited us in Selinsgrove on occasion and would stay in my room. After one such visit, he left a thank you note with a limerick:

“There once was a girl named Corinne  
Who gave up her room to a foreign...  
His name: Uncle Lutie  
He loves tutti-fruitle  
He thanks you again and again  
(and again, and again, and again!)”

He was apologetic about the dubious rhyme scheme, but I thought it was sweet and have never forgotten it.

On our last visit with Lutie this summer, we pulled into the parking lot and mom said, “He’s probably going to call me Etta.” I’d never heard that nickname before; mom was surprised that it came back to her at that moment. Sure enough, we walked into the room, Lutie looked at mom and said, “There’s Etta!” He dearly loved his little sister. They had a wonderful visit and I’m grateful I was there for it.

**In Christ’s Peace, Corinne Foor Kern**

## From his Philadelphia visits:

**REV. LUTHER GOTWALD, an exceptional human being.**

Pastor Gotwald was a very special visitor when he spent time in Philadelphia. Of course, he was here to visit his daughter Judy and grandson Natty. He could have sat back and watched the world go by but that wasn't who he was. During challenging times at the Redeemer Church, he was an advisor to the leadership. He was a learned theologian, who also knew Lutheran Church law well. His role as advisor is well remembered.

On one of his visits, he came to see First Lady Michelle Obama at Dorothy Emmanuel Recreation Center. It was a chilly day, there was a long line waiting for all of the security to be put in place. He did not seem to be bothered by the long wait. He walked around, connected with many of those who were waiting, had conversations with the very diverse multitude of humanity. When offered a seat, he offered it to an elderly woman. His smile was infectious. To say he was charming was an understatement. He asked numerous individuals why they took time to come to this event. The common occurrence was people engaged in conversations with him, and felt that their time was well spent. A few thought he was one of Michele Obama's advance team.

For many months following that special event, Pastor Gotwald was remembered as the charming man, with white hair, who was so engaging in conversation, very attentive and had the ability to make you feel as if you were having a dialog with someone who made you feel very special.

That day the politicians were in attendance, PA Governor (Wolf), U S Senator (Casey), President of City Council, Council Members and the First Lady of the United States. Yet by the end of the event, folks knew the man with the white hair, remembered his smile and his gift of attentiveness. He was included in many photos and Facebook posts and is still fondly remembered as the man who made time go by with thoughtful conversation and a warm smile.

Pastor Luther Gotwald was is a man of exceptional gifts, we are better for having that connection with him.

**Dr. Lorraine Poole-Naranjo**

## Tributes from colleagues:

An excerpt from a message to the family:

Your dad was one of those “mature” pastors in the Central Penn Synod in the late 1970s when we were ordained. I started to work with him and got to know him in 1979 when I joined the Sequanota Board. Over the years we could trust that in meetings he would be the one who would keep us focused on our Lutheran identity and God’s gift of grace.

I recall a few years ago when Ardelle was leading worship at the Johnstown Home we met your dad in the lobby. I asked if he was going to worship. He responded “There is a worship service?” I invited him to join me and he gladly did. Once we sat down in the worship area and leaned over and asked: “What new things are happening in the Lutheran Church?” Even as his mind was failing he had concern for the church he loved.

As I look back on my early years in ministry, colleagues like your dad, Howard McCarney, Sam Schmittthener, Charlie Lady, Ray Shaheen, Gerry Miller, Lee Hebel, George Doran and others were not just colleagues but in many ways mentors and friends. We have been blessed in many ways by your dad and all of these friends.

There are not many colleagues in ministry whose children and grandchildren I have been blessed to know and even work with. Sequanota provided me with these opportunities. Sequanota’s ministry does touch lives in so many beautiful ways.

**George Mason**  
**Former Sequanota Director**

In 1983 the people of Conemaugh Township were experiencing challenging times following the most recent flood in Johnstown and a severe downturn in the economy. Inspired by the clothing and food ministries begun by the people of St. Anne Roman Catholic Church and Bethel United Methodist Church, the people of fourteen churches in Conemaugh Township came together and organized St. Francis Sharing and Caring; a ministry of and for the people of Conemaugh Township. States the Constitution and By-Laws of the organization; St. Francis Sharing and Caring is “... a church-based community organization dedicated to assisting those members of Conemaugh Township who find themselves in need.”

One of the original leaders of the movement to establish this St. Francis ministry and one of the drafters of the Constitution was The Rev. Luther A. Gotwald. Pastor Gotwald had a passion for serving our Lord and it was reflected time and again in his ministry. The ministry of St. Francis being one of those passions.

What began as a small food pantry located in an old bank building in Hollsopple and a clothing shop in a section of the lower floor of a barn has today (2018) become a vigorous and compassionate ministry that touches lives

throughout the township. Pastor Gotwald served faithfully on the board of St. Francis Sharing and Caring in its early years. He stepped back from the board when he was called to serve as Assistant to the Bishop of the Allegheny Synod, ELCA, only to return to the board in retirement. It was during his second term on the council that he helped the board to vision new possibilities that included the purchase of land upon which a single building housing both the Bread of Life Food Pantry and Thrift Shoppe would be constructed.

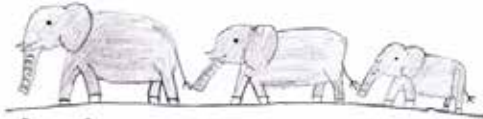
Today Pastor Gotwald's vision has come to fruition. St. Francis Sharing and Caring ministry is now located in a new building on a tract of land near the Route 219 interchange. Currently 120 families receive food each month. Each year upwards of 75 families are assisted with rent, mortgage, and utility expenses (approximately \$18,000 a year is provided for this emergency ministry). The Thrift Shoppe takes donated used clothing, shoes, toys, and other household items and re-sells them for \$1.00, \$2.00 or so. The money received from these sales is used to purchase the food needed for the food pantry and is used to fund the Emergency Fund. Over 100 volunteers today work to ensure that this ministry continues 35 years later.

The Board of St. Francis Sharing and Caring in 2018 wishes to express thanks to God for this servant of the Gospel, The Rev. Luther A. Gotwald. His legacy of touching lives with God's love continues through this not-for-profit ministry he believed should reflect the prayer of St. Francis ... "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace ...". For over 35 years, then, Pastor Gotwald's many gifts have been a blessing to this ministry and to the greater Conemaugh Township community. Thanks be to God!

**The Rev. Gregory R. Pile**  
**Bishop Emeritus**  
**Allegheny Synod**  
**for**  
**The Board of St. Francis Sharing and Caring**

## Memories from his great grandchildren

# ♥ Grandpa Lu Memories ♥



Grandpa Lu loved elephants.



Grandpa Lu told us stories, watched our plays, read our letters, and we always read National Geographic together.



Grandpa Lu got us gift cards to different places like Toys'R'Us. He was always happy and played with us.

Lydia Willson

Lydia Willson, age 12



Tobias Willson, age 10



Miriam Willson, age 7



Mathias Willson, age 4



Luther's son, Tim, with wife, Mary, surrounded by his son John's family on the left (wife Leslie, children, Rachel, Peter, and Eli) and his daughter Elizabeth Willson's family on the right (husband, Mark, and children Tobias, Lydia, Miriam and Mathias)



Javier Bonilla with mom, Katie

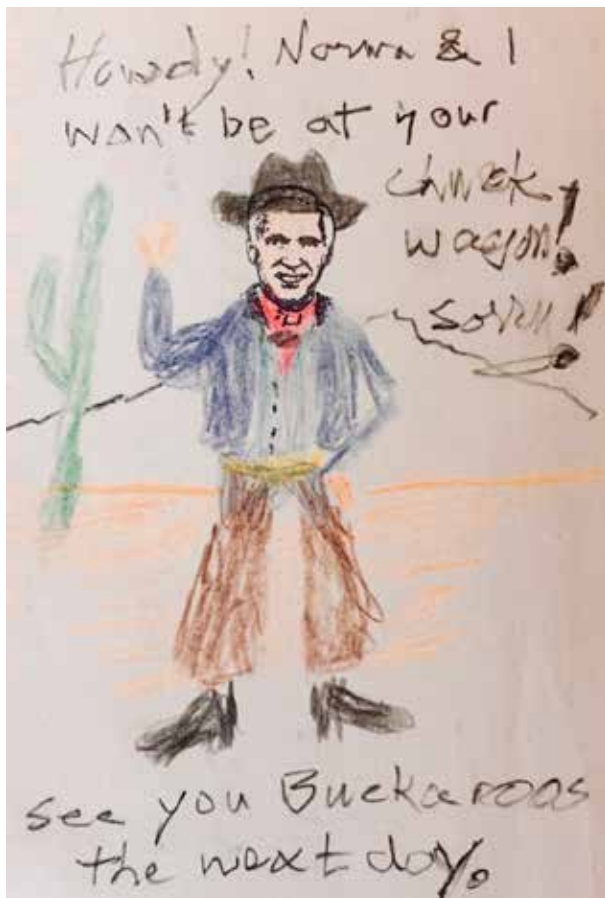
## Memories from his grandchildren

### Grandpa Luther

As a child I only remember Grandpa Luther getting out his box of small items from India a handful of times. I recall my cautious but insatiable curiosity for the delicate and exotic figures. I knew they were not only meaningful to him as a remembrance of his childhood, but also very fragile so I approached them with hesitancy and asked too few questions. Apparently in 1993, fourteen-year-old me, in a thank-you note for sweatshirts, was brave enough to ask for one of these pieces. In 2009 my family received a box with Grandpa Lu's handwriting. Letters describing the contents were enclosed. In addition to his typed explanation was the letter I had written over 15 years before. Although my request had left my mind, it hadn't left his. He remembered. And he thoughtfully and lovingly and generously responded. That's Luther. He continually engaged others in what mattered to them. As his memory failed, his repeated question, "What's new in Chambersburg?" emphasized his desire to relate to each of us in a personal way. Through these simple gestures, he demonstrated the love of Christ – valuing each individual and celebrating the wonder of God's unique creations. During our last visit, he shared a bag of Fritos with his 4-year-old great-grandson, (my son), Mathias. Although words were few, he smiled every time they reached their hands in the bag together for that salty, crunchy snack. And so a piece of his legacy in our memory: relating and sharing, hugging and loving, engaging and blessing all for the heart of God's people and His glory.

Elizabeth M. (Gotwald) Willson, granddaughter





We all have the blessing of Grandpa Luther's many writings, but this RSVP to our rehearsal dinner seemed like a perfect representation of who he was to me:

It is a personalized response that showed that we were special to him. Most people would also probably wonder why someone had access to their own likeness in stamp form. But that just seemed like a normal thing for Pa Lu (as my daughter would later name him). Of course he was a pastor, but he wore many other hats over the years (writer, handyman, etc.). And the stamp makes sense from someone who also had heated sidewalks and a super-fast garage door.

Pa Lu's legacy of loving those around him with a personal touch and inspiring us to be our unique selves will live on in our memories. And "Nine in India" is always available to fill in the rest.

John Gotwald

Pap has always been a true light to my life. Not only was he my goofy grandfather who would remind me constantly what sophomore means and bring up his many memories in India, but he was also the one guy who truly became one of my best friends. He was the guy who I'd run to sit by in church as a little girl and the person I'd want to ride with when it was done to go to our normal brunch spot at eat n park. He was the guy who brought me closer with my faith and the one who even baptized me. When he moved in with us for a while, he was the person I'd spend most of my days with watching "the little shop on the corner" and running in from school to tell him how my day was. Even on the worst days he'd remind me how capable I am and how I'm his "little Cheyennie." He will always have a place in my heart not only as my pap, but as one of my very first best friends.

Cheyenne Gotwald



Nomie and Pap with youngest granddaughter, Julie Kucherer (now 19)



Pop came to my college graduation at Yankee Stadium in New York (pictured). I cherish that supporting me on that day and throughout my college career superseded his tolerance of hurried New Yorkers, college dining halls, and sleeping in my dorm room the night before graduation. I'll miss his ingenuity, courage to fight for good, and his unending need to repeat the refrain "Shop Around!," in booming baritone, to every single Motown song he endured on my behalf one long car trip from Cooperstown to New York City.

Natty Leach



The grandchildren: Alice, Natty, John, Julie, Liz and Cheyenne (not shown, Katie)

## Memories from his children



Among the many memories of Luther, I would like to include his wide ranging interest in a variety of fields and endeavors outside of or parallel to the ministry. Some of these include hobbies – short wave and “ham” radio, astronomy (the leather bound telescope). Others were quirky, short-term obsessions or interests that were sometimes revived – painting tools and yard equipment with Rustoleum, a fascination with epoxy glue, drilling holes in household objects with his 1/4 inch electric drill, growing African violets, repairing(?) mechanical clocks, getting an old Mercedes 190D on the road. Some were incorporated into his ministry – filmstrip production (who could forget the fan favorite “The Church Council Views Its Duties”), 4 x 6 letterpress printing, IRORI (Instantaneous Retrieval of Recorded Information) data card system. He loved to write, but admitted that he wasn’t very good at it because English was not his native language: *Testimony and Trial* (biography of LAG I), *Nine in India*, *Westward Ho Victorian Clergyman*, *Resume Speed*, a collection of hymn lyrics. All of these things, and others contribute to making the Luther that we loved.

An incident that I recall was one day while he was visiting us in Chambersburg – he and I went over to Gettysburg to see the Seminary Ridge museum that had just opened in Schmucker Hall where he had resided while a seminary student. The attached picture is of Luther standing in what was in 1948 his dorm room – now part of the exhibit. That was a great day of memories for him, topped off with a “Texas with everything” at Ernie’s downtown.

Tim Gotwald



**Luther A. Gotwald**

As I became part of the Gotwald family later through marriage to Tim, I experienced Luther's welcoming and caring ways. I watched as he valued everyone equally. Many of the sympathy cards that we received from people in our community who had met him on visits to Chambersburg mentioned how "likable" Luther was. I think that this likability trait was noted because he truly cared for others. He shared the love of Jesus with everyone he met.

He loved the children. The picture attached is of Luther and Liz, granddaughter #1. During a visit to his home he spent bonding timewith her in the hammock. Granddaughter Katie later spent time with Lu in the hammock, describing it as "paradise." Now he is in the true paradise. He will continue to teach and comfort us as we carry his love, kindness, generosity, interesting mind, unique humor, humble nature and gentle spirit in our hearts.

**Mary Julia Oyer Gotwald**

## Luther Gotwald, Warrior

My memories of Dad are a bit different. I had my share of warm and cozy, fun-loving experiences, but they were overshadowed by circumstances out of my control. It is important that all the easy-going, fun-loving traits that are so easy to bring to mind are only one side of this passionate Christian leader.

Dad believed in the corporate voice of the Church—Christians coming together regularly and speaking to God with one voice—in other words, worship. He wrote this service with this in mind. But he also knew that the corporate entity was only as strong as the conscience and resolve of the individual. Christians must live their beliefs and be willing to take a stand. He was a warrior in that regard.

All too often, I knew warrior Dad. A force to reckon with!

I remember standing in the Jolly Roger parking lot and telling my parents I intended to marry Andy Leach, who was significantly older than I. Mom, who had every right to be concerned, was close to dumbstruck. I won't share what she said. Dad grinned from ear to ear. He later shared, "I've married many couples close in age who have less in common than you and Andy." When Mom was hesitating to come to a wedding of which she disapproved, Dad reassured me, "She'll be there." And she was.

For the last ten years, Dad was an unrelenting warrior for our church in Philadelphia, which he joined after Mom died. This is part of his ministry that didn't make any of the obits, but it was remarkable, and so I will elaborate just a little in order to flesh out just who Luther Gotwald was. I know he wouldn't mind.

Make no mistake. Dad wasn't just supporting his daughter as the local critics said dismissively. Dad saw something wrong in the Church he loved and tried to correct it.

In retirement, Mom and Dad were members of St. Thomas. St. Thomas had voted to leave the ELCA. Dad didn't want to leave the Church of his heritage. He joined Redeemer.

Dad was a frequent visitor to Philadelphia and was respected in our eclectic congregation with a growing membership of East African students and families. The missionary kid was back home!

Our small neighborhood church, like many urban congregations, had been targeted for closure from the beginning of the ELCA. A key factor in the church closure movement is that small urban congregations often sit on prime property.

There were three attempts by our synod to take our property and endowment funds. The man who would become my husband handled the first attempt in 1987. In 1997, the synod privately encouraged the church council to resign. A mass resignation would give them the right to take control. But three members refused to go along with the plan. Dad hopped Amtrak to Philadelphia and helped our congregation reorganize with the same nurturing so many others have mentioned. When things seemed hopeless, he pointed to the light. The synod backed off but offered us no help. There are no pastors for you, the bishop told us. We actually managed pretty well without a pastor, growing fivefold during the next ten years.

The hope was that ten years of little leadership would wear us down.

The end of that ten years coincided with the Great Recession of 2008. Money was scarce for everyone. A new bishop tried again, assuming our numbers had dwindled along with our resolve. Redeemer, Bishop Burkat thought, was ripe for picking! Her mind could not be swayed by facts and dialog was non-existent. She attempted to secretly change the locks, but we caught her representatives in the act. When we resisted, the Southeastern Pa Synod simply declared our congregation closed, refused us representation at Synod Assembly, and sued the entire congregation, naming me personally in the law suit.

Dad doggedly sought to correct this abuse of power. For the final ten years of his life, if I was in the room, that's what he wanted to talk about. He was willing to put everything on the line, helping with the enormous bills and sharing the crosshairs. He attended many of the court hearings. He wrote numerous letters and postcards trying to prick the conscience of clergy. He used his knowledge of church law and familiarity with the constitutions to point out the wrongs. He approached churchwide leaders. He met with complacency. He was soundly mocked and ridiculed in clergy circles, where the attitude was "go back where you came from." Frustrated with his resistance to bullying, the entire Synod Council petitioned Bishop Pile to censure him. Thank you, Bishop Pile, for not complying.

The courts ruled in a split decision that, if the law were applied, our congregation's arguments had merit but secular courts cannot enforce church law. The suit was never heard. The synod knew by this time that they could do anything unchallenged by its own clergy, so they lost no time in locking us out of our property. They continued to sue me for four more years. Our church had borrowed money for renovations and I had signed the papers. The synod wanted the property but not the responsibility for the loan. They accused me of fraud in signing the papers, but the charges did not stand up in court. A frustrated judge said, "Where's the fraud? I don't see any fraud. She was doing what she thought was right and two judges agreed with her."

Dad continued to worship with us and traveled with us to visit other congregations, including one founded by the grandfather who raised him. (St. Mark's, Conshohocken). I am thankful for his support. He was one of very few who understood the personal toll. It means so much more than "thoughts and prayers." I would have been very alone without him. But I wish it had never been like this. Sometimes, I just wanted non-warrior, fun-loving Dad everyone else could enjoy.

I wonder if I had not been personally named in the suit if I would have fled when the going got tough, as did all the clergy and most of our members. I know Dad wouldn't have!

I was always worried that the day might come when he would not recognize us. In one of my last visits, I woke him up, surprising him. I was momentarily alarmed when he looked at me, smiled, and asked "What is your name?" But he quickly got his bearings and before I could respond he said, "Oh, you're my Judy."

Yes, I am. I always will be. I am thankful for that.

Judy Gotwald



Hang gliding was on Dad's bucket list. This was close!  
Sarah Gotwald Kucherer



Luther with his four children: Tim, Sarah, Dan, and Judy



Dad with his surviving sisters: Susan and Ethel

# Luther's Triumph

Eulogy by Sarah Gotwald Kucherer

Do preachers recycle sermons? This PK knows they do! So I see no harm in recycling one of dad's. Pastor Gotwald saved the sermon he wrote for the funeral of Jim Spory in 1981. Here it is, revised to honor the life of Luther Alexander Gotwald, Jr.

Scripture tells us "A servant is not greater than his master, nor is the one sent greater than the one who sent him. A scholar is not greater than his teacher, but when fully taught will be like his teacher." Jesus taught by his example in the Upper Room with a towel and a basin as he washed his disciples' feet. Jesus knew it is better to show than to tell. And Luther followed this example.

## **There was a certain baby boy, born in a stable far from his hometown. This boy grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.**

There was a certain baby boy, born in India. This boy learned by wondering, experimenting, and exploring. He passed this curious spirit on. How many kids have a propane torch in their bedrooms for chemistry experiments and smokescreens? I did. Thanks, Dad, for the wonder.

## **There was a certain man of Nazareth who had the creative skills of a carpenter and a knack for telling a good story.**

There was a certain man of Gettysburg who served his family and community with friendliness, quick wit, boundless creativity, non-stop ideas, and countless work projects...roofing, plumbing, wiring, so much epoxying, so much drilling. This man passed on his goodly heritage and shared his faith with artwork and prolific writings like "Nine in India" and "Bible Notes and "Resume Speed." His artwork decorates our homes, mine with a painting of his favorite place of relaxation and refreshment, the family cottage, Ogontz on Lake Otsego.

## **There was a certain man of Galilee who made it his life's calling to tell his Father's will, to show his Father's will, to be his Father's will.**

There was a certain man of Gettysburg, who learned to preach God's word and share his faith in changing times. This man maintained tradition and broke it, often ahead of his time, and sometimes against resistance. He led contemporary instrumental services, introduced interactive sermons, and organized ecumenical community passion plays. He inspired with simplicity, raising a Christmas candle to the words "Son of God, Love's Pure Light."

## **There was a certain man of Jerusalem who raged against distortions of His Father's will as he overturned the tables in the Temple.**

There was a certain man of Gettysburg who never backed off of a righteous fight. This man fought to keep his beloved Lutheran church on a humble path of justice and kindness. He marched to protest destruction of the environment, and he provided welcome to victims of prejudice. The list goes on. This man did not shrink from sharing his bold vision.

**There was a certain man of Galilee who was a teacher and a healer. When people touched him, they were blessed, filled with hope, filled with peace, filled with wonder, filled with food.**

There was a certain man of Point Township, St. Mark's, and St. David's who was a pastor. He taught the faith to countless confirmands (patiently ignoring the flying paper airplanes). He brought people to Christ even in his eighties. He diligently cared for his parishioners through joys and sorrows. He worked to bring respect, comfort, and necessities to everyone... poor, sick, hungry, lonely, mentally ill, flood victims. He fostered wonder in God's creation as he contributed to the outdoor ministry of Camp Sequanota. He practiced forgiveness and understanding. As a child, I ran away from our Main Street home once. Got as far as Mr. Fuller's house, a block away. Dad ran after me and lured me back with a Hershey Bar.

**There was a certain man of Galilee who supervised 12 very different men fairly and patiently, and worked with women to spread the Gospel effectively.**

There was a certain man of Davidsville who came to lead a church successfully to a new building and a new chapter of ministry amid much controversy. He included women, men, and children as fellow church leaders. He recognized that we all bring special talents as fellow servants in the Kingdom of God. After parish ministry, this man continued to lead as the assistant to the bishop of the Allegheny Synod.

**There was a certain man of Nazareth who loved children and gathered them around him.**

There was a man, my father, who had unfailing love for my mother, Norma, and their children (Timothy, Judith, Daniel, and Sarah) and their darling grandchildren (Elizabeth, John, Katherine, Nathaniel, Alice, Cheyenne, and Julie) and their great grandchildren (Lydia, Tobias, Miriam, Mathias, Rachel, Peter, Eli, and through the internet, little Javier). He and my mother were partners in life and family and ministry. He offered endless support to his children. He was our biggest fan, and urged us, repeatedly, to "think loftier thoughts." Experiments, concerts, projects, adventures, games—he was up for it all. But beware, we warned his grandchildren, Pappy cheated at games! His theology, shared with his family, is simple: Little children, love one another.

**There was a certain man of Galilee who spoke, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Then he proved those words on Easter Day.**

There was a certain man from India, Gettysburg, Northumberland, Emigsville, and Davidsville who shared the Good News until the very end of his life on earth. His last words, spoken to a caregiver, were "How may I help you?"

Our comfort in our loss? The man of Galilee and the man we love, Luther Gotwald, are now fully one. Now Lutie is like his Master, his teacher, in every way, through all eternity. He has fought the fight, run the race, kept the faith, and reached his Triumph Day to gain the crown of righteousness.

Well done, good and faithful servant.  
Resume Speed with our Savior through eternity.  
Amen.

To You is  
born a Rejoice!  
Savior!



I remember hearing the Christmas Story  
told to me while sitting on the sands  
of the Mission Compound, Chirala,  
South India. The settings may  
change but not the Glad Tidings!

Lullie-Breba!

Salaam!