

Remembering Irene Stangland

Irene Stangland, Director of Program Services and Administration for *Lutheran Vespers* from 1985-1998, died Wednesday December 3, 2008, from complications of Alzheimer's Disease. She was 84.

Irene was a familiar voice on the phone to many of our listeners. It was not uncommon to hear her pray with callers, reassuring them that God would walk with them through any difficulty. She wrote personal notes on many thank-you letters, praying for each person as she did so. Irene's time spent at *Lutheran Vespers* was never work: it was always ministry. She bequeathed to us high standards for love, hard work and faithfulness and we're grateful.



Dr. Richard A. Jensen and Irene Stangland

I join with Irene Stangland's family and many friends in mourning the passing of a remarkable woman with an indomitable spirit. May she rest in peace.

Irene was my assistant during most of my tenure at Lutheran Vespers. She could do anything: edit my letters, edit my sermons, edit our newsletter, keep the books, give good and wise counsel to people who would call our office, write poetry for the newsletter, manage the office, represent me when necessary and so forth. I could trust her with every aspect of our organization. She was a brilliant and gifted woman who coached me, encouraged me, uplifted me, served me tirelessly. My life was better because Irene was at my side. May God bless her memory.

- Dr. Richard A. Jensen

I worked in radio for many years before ordination, and it was a rare blessing to be involved with *Grace Matters* where I was able to use my God-given talents in both theology and production. While serving as a parish pastor, *Lutheran Vespers* was a part of my weekly devotion. I would never have dreamed that I could be a part of a ministry that touched people beyond my reach as a pastor. With the technology for listeners to be able to download the *Grace Matters* podcast allowed us to connect with a new generation of seekers and sojourners.

As a child of God, I know that am always blessed, but the blessings were always evident as I served with Peter and all my colleagues on the *Grace Matters* staff.

I will miss everything about it.

Barbara Berry-Bailey
Associate Producer for *Grace Matters*



Anna from Texas calls and asks for a program transcript. We end our conversation by talking about our tomatoes and tactics for keeping rabbits or other animals from devouring them. Eunice from Minneapolis has no living relatives and no church home, but she connected with *Lutheran Vespers* and we would talk about our lives and discuss the program she heard the previous week. We became weekly phone friends. As a joke, Ernie from Seattle would send us a quarter because he knew we needed to process that separately from checks received from donors. Lucile, from Iowa, and I would write back and forth and talk on the phone about our children and grandchildren and end our conversation about our common love for the sung version of the benediction that closes each *Grace Matters* program.

For 21 years I have been so deeply blessed to respond to your notes, to answer your phone calls and take care of your requests as well as listen to your joys, sorrows and life stories. I have laughed and cried with many of you on the phone. Thank you for welcoming me into your lives. Above all, I thank God for letting me be the one to serve you in whatever way I could over the years.

Until we meet again,
Dixie L. Miller
Office Manager for *Grace Matters*

In the past few weeks I've been asked one question several times: if you could have your dream job, what would it be? This is a common response when people learn that you're looking for work. It took me a while to understand why it was so difficult to answer: working with *Grace Matters* is my dream job.

I have been blessed for the past fifteen years to work with Walt Wangerin and Peter Marty, two gifted and generous servants of God. I have edited first-class storytelling and provocative interviews. I have been surrounded by colleagues who have become close personal friends. In the past few years I've had the joy of meeting many of you in person and have marveled at the way this radio ministry has touched your lives. For all of this I am profoundly grateful to God.

I have a quote from one of our *Grace Matters* guests on my computer that says "God is not a character in our lives. God is the plot." Ending this ministry is a plot twist I hadn't expected. Still, I trust that the plot will continue and God will lead each of us into new paths of service. Thank you for sharing part of this journey with me.

God's grace to you,
Susan Greeley
Producer/Director for *Grace Matters*



Fond Farewell

by Peter W. Marty



I spoke with a *Grace Matters* listener on the phone two days ago. She is a 48-year old woman in Portland, Oregon, who tracked me down to share two things. First, she wanted me to know that she is not a churchgoer. "I'm one of your secular listeners. I tried church for 20 years and never really got much out of it. But

that doesn't mean I haven't yearned to have faith. I'll never forget that program where you interviewed the Harvard chaplain who talked about longing for the longing of God, or desiring the desire to know God. I have that longing and desire now. It's fantastic."

Second, she talked about the value of *Grace Matters* for her personal life. "The big issue in my life, since going through a number of job changes and some huge family challenges, is a lack of meaning. I'm really after meaning. Listening to your show has been a life-changing experience. I don't know exactly how to put it into words. But people who have found religion to be a turn-off need to discover you."

Tears were in my eyes as I listened. Tears were in her eyes when I told her that *Grace Matters* was over. This special conversation with a woman whom I have never met or heard of before is what this radio and web

broadcast ministry has been all about – sharing the grace of God in truly genuine ways. Week in and week out, we have shared grace through fascinating guests, the probing of scripture, samplings of diverse cultures, and through it all ... a God who does not quit on us.

Now it is time to bid a fond farewell after nearly five years with this ministry. The *Grace Matters* ministry is being eliminated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). It was not my decision. This radio ministry has served under the guidance and support of the ELCA, along with your loyalty and many financial gifts. Executive directors in the church chose a direction different from one I would have selected. Needless to say, I am disappointed.

Despite the grief of what the closure of this ministry means, I take with me the extraordinary memories of our partnership. A sacred trust develops between host and listeners of a program like *Grace Matters*. You know this. Your prayers have been part of the "juice" of this ministry. Your financial gifts have made such an enormous difference. Your calls, letters, and enthusiasm are the stuff of friendship for life. For all of this, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Please remember in your prayers my *Grace Matters'* colleagues whose employment with the ministry has concluded, or soon does. Barbara Berry-Bailey, Dixie Miller, and Susan Greeley have been awesome servants. For them, and for you, I say: Grace does matter! I will continue to serve as senior pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa. There I will try to live the grace that you have heard so much about these years, and shared so freely in return.

PETER

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Our thanks to all whose gifts have helped sustain the *Grace Matters* ministry over these many years. Your support helped make a difference in the lives of thousands of people. We are grateful beyond measure.

