

A WOMAN WHO INSPIRES

by Emma Crossen



clockwise from the left: Katharina von Bora Luther, Edith Schultz, and Marie Tesch (right)

Ask women why they support Katie's Fund, and one answer comes up again and again: They love Katie. Or, Katharina von Bora Luther, to be more precise.

"We never knew anything about her before," said Marie Tesch, a longtime Katie's Fund donor from Waseca, Minn.

That all changed 16 years ago when Women of the ELCA created an endowment and named it after Martin Luther's wife and partner. Since then, Katie's Fund has grown to nearly \$763,000. Along the way, thousands of women, like Marie, have grown to admire the woman it honors.

Marie was born into a Lutheran family and has been active in women's ministries for more than 40 years at St. John Lutheran Church in Waseca. "We knew Martin Luther was married," she said of her congregation. Before Katie's Fund, however, they did not know that Katie was a theologian in her own right and a savvy business woman who managed a busy household that served her large family, the local community, and the broader Reformation movement.

Like Katie, Marie knows a thing or two about managing a small business at the heart of a community. She and her husband, Russell, owned and ran Tesch Service Center, the local filling station, for 38 years.

"We had no idea that she brewed her own beer," Marie added, noting one of many interesting facts about Katie. Since Katie's Fund was established in 1987, anecdotes like this have emerged among Women of the ELCA to give a fuller picture of Katharina von Bora and the integral roles she played in church history. *A Bold Life of Faith: Katharina von Bora Luther* is one Women of the ELCA resource that shares these stories. In it, Linda Post Bushkofsky writes:

"Katie and Martin received the former Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg known as the Black Cloister

as a wedding gift, and soon Katie was managing all the household affairs. She was a frugal and shrewd entrepreneur: She raised and bred cattle. She ran a brewery. She took in students and professors as boarders. She had several gardens, which fed both her family (in time she and Luther had six children) and the boarders. She managed the stables. Using nursing skills learned while in the cloister, Katie cared for many of the local ill. She often participated in Luther's famous table talks. She even assisted a call committee in securing a new pastor, at Luther's request."

A woman to admire

As executive director of Women of the ELCA, Linda wrote *A Bold Life of Faith* after accompanying 82 women on a trip to Germany to mark the organization's 20th anniversary in 2007. The travelers walked in Katie's footsteps in Wittenberg and explored many sites of the Reformation. "We had planned for about 20 women to go," Linda said, "and the registrations just kept coming in."

For donor Edith Schultz of Webster, Wis., Germany is an important part of her connection to Katie's Fund. Edith was born to German parents in Poland in 1922. During World War II, she became a prisoner of war under the Russians before making it safely to American territory a few months later. There, she met a Lutheran soldier from Wisconsin. They married in 1948 and moved to his home state.

"I feel a special connection to anything German," she said about her affection for Katie Luther. Like Marie, Edith also knew little about Katie before Women of the ELCA established Katie's Fund. Even growing up a few hundred miles from Wittenberg, she said, "we knew who Martin Luther was, but nothing about his wife."

Edith is giving to Katie's Fund through her estate. She included Women of the ELCA as a beneficiary of her life insurance policy. Now in her 90s, Edith said she has some extra money to share at the end of her life because she has lived frugally. In 1999, she wrote *Riches to Rags to Riches*, a memoir about her first 75 years of life. She was quick to clarify that the latter "riches" are spiritual and not monetary. Edith shares with Katie an appreciation for God's abundance. Last year, at age 90, she swam in three events at the Wisconsin Senior Olympics and came home with gold medals.

Both Edith and Marie share a more dramatic connection to Katie Luther. They played her on stage. Since 1998, "Katie Luther: A Skit" has been performed in congregations throughout the ELCA and at Women of the ELCA conventions and gatherings.

When she was president of the Southern Ohio Synodical Women's Organization, Martha Leach, who died in October, wrote the original script. The play features a narrator asking Katie Luther about her life with Martin, and Katie asking the narrator about how Katie's Fund is growing. For Marie, playing Katie was a special opportunity to appreciate Katie's faithfulness and the struggles she endured. An updated version of the skit is available at womenoftheelca.org.

"Beyond my lifetime"

Earlier this year, Women of the ELCA announced a goal of raising the Katie's Fund endowment to \$1 million by July 24, 2014. That date marks the start of Women of the ELCA's ninth triennial gathering in Charlotte, N.C. Women from all over the country will gather there for three days of engaging speakers, enriching workshops, and inspiring worship.

The 2014 gathering theme is "of many generations," based on the Scripture in Isaiah 58:12: "Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the

foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."

Katie's Fund illustrates the link between current and future generations. Dollars given to the endowment are invested in perpetuity. Each year, the interest on the investment goes toward ministries and projects in three key areas: leadership development, global sharing, and living theology. Meanwhile, the endowment principle continues to grow for generations to come.

Supporting an endowment is important to Marie. She gives to Katie's Fund, she said, "to sustain programs beyond my lifetime." Marie served two terms on the churchwide board of Women of the ELCA, including six years on the finance committee. That experience underscored the importance of the endowment. With the interest earned each year, Women of the ELCA can support innovative initiatives that raise up leaders, nurture connections among women, and shape bold theology for the church.

In 2011 and 2012, Katie's Fund dollars supported ministries like the Young Women's Leadership Experience at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, outreach to thousands of youth and adults at the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, and a multi-generational gathering of writers, pastors, and lay leaders to shape program resources published by Women of the ELCA.

Modern-day Katies

In all of these projects, the connection to Katie Luther is key. In a letter to donors, Linda wrote, "By giving to Katie's Fund, you help Women of the ELCA raise up modern-day Katies throughout the church."

Last December, 17 women traveled to Liberia to celebrate the 25th anniversary year of Women of the ELCA and the longstanding partnership between Lutheran women in Liberia and the United States.

You can download the free resource, *A Bold Life of Faith: Katharina von Bora Luther*, at www.womenoftheelca.org or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2736 to request a copy.

Katie's Fund helped to ease travel expenses for the two youngest travelers, who are active leaders in Women of the ELCA. Katie's Fund made it possible for them to go on this journey, build relationships with their Liberian sisters, and return home to lead more boldly in their congregations and in Women of the ELCA.

One of the earliest Katie's Fund projects also focused on global sharing and leadership development. In 2003, Women of the ELCA partnered with Lutheran World Relief on a campaign called, "Pour Justice to the Brim: A 90-Ton Challenge," to double the amount of fairly traded coffee purchased through the Lutheran Coffee Project. The campaign was a great success. In just one year, thousands of women educated and mobilized their congregations around fair trade and exceeded the 90-ton goal.

In 2004, LWR organized a 90-Ton Coffee Tour to Tanzania, bringing women together to celebrate the campaign's success and see first-hand how it was changing lives among coffee growers. Thanks to Katie's Fund, a woman named Kathryn Lohre was able to go on this trip and deepen her understanding of economic justice and global partnerships. The experience also shaped Kathryn as an emerging leader in the ELCA and the larger church. She now serves the ELCA as director of ecumenical and inter-religious relations. Last year, she began a two-year term as president of the National Council of Churches USA. She is the first Lutheran and the youngest woman to hold this position.

In 2010, Katie's Fund provided crucial support for "I Believe You," a documentary about domestic violence and faith. The film received Emmy nominations and aired on ABC and NBC stations. "Words Matter" is another project supported by Katie's

Fund. Since it began in 2010, it has provided tools to help Christians think about how language affects their relationships with God and with each other, how the words we use can reinforce injustice or bring about healing. In projects like "Words Matter" and "I Believe You," Katie's Fund carries out its commitment to living theology—to the power of ideas, images, and language to change lives.

Live boldly

Katie's life illustrates the importance of sharing theology, building connections, and supporting leaders from all walks of life. She and Martin showed that bold lives of faith were not limited to monasteries and convents; they lived out their vocations in domestic and worldly affairs, fully engaged with the larger community.

Women of the ELCA is driven by this same understanding that women of faith are called to live boldly in their own time and place. Katie also understood the need to support each other in this vocation. She cared for the ill and fed the hungry. She made her home a place where guests could engage with challenging ideas, meet new friends, and be nourished in body and spirit to go forth and change the world.

It is easy to understand why Katie Luther is so beloved. For women like Marie and Edith, her story resonates with theirs, and with the lives of women

in every congregation. It is a story of following God's call into community to boldly bring about healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world. It is the story of Katie's Fund. 🌸

Emma Crossen is director for stewardship and development for Women of the ELCA.

Have you included the Katie's Fund endowment in your estate plan? Let us know so we can count your gift toward the \$1 million goal. Want to learn about giving to the Katie's Fund endowment through a charitable gift annuity, life insurance policy, or retirement account?

Contact Emma Crossen, director for stewardship and development, at 1-800-638-3522 ext. 2736 or emma.crossen@elca.org.

There's a little bit of Katie in all of us.

Katharina von Bora Luther was a practical and bold woman of faith. She was also the dedicated partner of her husband, Martin. The example she set as a wife and mother, farmer, entrepreneur, leader, and caregiver continues to inspire us today.

Through **Katie's Fund**, Women of the ELCA honors her life by developing leaders, bridging cultures, and nurturing faith.



Won't you help continue Katie's legacy? Support Katie's Fund!



Your gift will help Katie's Fund endowment grow to \$1 million. Together, we will raise up bold women of faith for generations to come. Give online or send to:



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Make checks payable to Women of the ELCA.