

Katie's Fund and the power of words

by Emily Hansen

How often do you think about the importance of words and language in the context of your faith? And how has language made an impact on your religious beliefs?

Perhaps early in your life you encountered theological language that was deeply comforting and kept you coming back to worship. Or maybe you had the opposite experience, of language that was hurtful and made you question your place in the church.

As a young person, the language used not only by my pastors but also by my parents had a significant impact on my beliefs about church and how I interpreted Scripture. Growing up, both my father and mother intentionally used gender inclusive language when we prayed as a family. That language was important to them and thus became important to me and to my sister. On my personal faith journey, that focus on language *did* make me feel more included and helped me understand my place and my calling in the mission and work of this church.



Luther's words: Katie's inspiration

It was the powerful words written by a monk she didn't even know that persuaded a young nun named Katharina von Bora to reject her life in the convent and escape to Wittenberg to begin a new life. That monk was Martin Luther.

Katie found his words inspiring and freeing; they changed the course of her spiritual and personal life. Katie, of course, ended up marrying Luther, and as his life-long companion was an integral part of his ministry. The power of language continued in their marriage as they hosted long theological discussions in their home. Those discussions were eventually published as *Table Talks*. Having learned to read and write while a nun, Katie Luther understood Latin and so could be an active participant in those discussions.

Katie Luther, the intellectual and spiritual woman—but also Katie Luther the mother, wife, administrator and entrepreneur—inspires us. To honor her, we created Katie's Fund.

Katie's Fund began in 1997 as an endowment fund with gifts given in thanks for the first 10 years of Women of the ELCA ministries. To date, interest earned on the fund has provided leadership opportunities for young women at triennial gatherings and global networking on behalf of the organization. It has also supported our participation in ELCA Youth Gatherings and human trafficking advocacy training.

Money from Katie's Fund is available for ministries in three key areas: leadership development, global sharing and living theology.

Leadership development provides opportunities for current and future leaders to participate in our organization and further the mission of Women of the ELCA.

Global sharing helps us to build global partnerships that increase multicultural awareness and promote service projects.

Living theology is a ministry focus that supports nurturing our faith through Bible studies, worship experiences and educational theological forums.

The Words Matter project

In 2010, Katie's Fund supported the living theology ministry area. The words of Martin Luther changed the course of Katie's faith journey, so it is fitting that Katie's Fund dollars supported a new language consultation project of the National Council of Churches USA (NCC).

A group of men and women from various denominations, including the ELCA, has begun convening to address important issues related to language in our faith communities. ELCA pastor the Rev. Ann Tiemeyer, program director for NCC's women's ministries, plays a key role in this new language consultation program, aptly titled "Words Matter."

"When working on a project around language, sometimes you just have to start by saying what it is not," Tiemeyer said when asked to define the project.

She said it is not a set of rules or requirements, a book you need to read or someone else's opinion you

Katie continued on page 6

must adopt. It is not only for women, feminists or academics.

“The Words Matter project is a conversation,” Tie-meyer said. “Those who agree that words matter believe that the words we use shape our realities. We believe that real, personal and social justice is tied together with the language we use.”

She said members of the group believe that words can even reinforce the very systems of injustice it wants to dismantle.

The impact of language

In recent years, there seems to have been a decline in the use of gender-inclusive language throughout many denominations, according to the Rev. Lowey Powell, chair of the specially formed language consultation working group of Words Matter.

Additionally, some language in our churches reinforces harmful stereotypes about people with disabilities and people of color. These words can “create or disrupt community and wholeness,” Powell noted.

The Words Matter project seeks to address these issues with two primary questions: How does our language for God, one another and our world move us toward God’s justice? And what other imagery is there to help us connect with God?

When convening initially, each person in the consultation workgroup was asked to share an experience in which they noticed the power or importance of language and the impact of that language on their life, their faith community or their relationship with God. This experience may have helped them embrace the Divine more fully or it may have been destructive, harmful or painful.

How would *you* answer that question?

Women of the ELCA is excited to be a part of this project and grateful that we had Katie’s Fund dollars to help support it. As women committed to our faith and to our organization, it is important for us to play a role and have a voice in these important new initiatives.

Emily Hansen is director for stewardship and development, Women of the ELCA.

Katie’s Fund Appeal

Would you like to help support projects like Words Matter and other great ministries through Katie’s Fund? The month of May brings our annual Katie’s Fund appeal. Through Katie’s Fund, we will continue to honor Katharina von Bora’s life by supporting global connections, leadership development and living theology for years to come.

Perhaps for Mother’s Day this year you’d like to make a contribution to the fund in honor of your mother, grandmother or aunt, or a friend who was like a mother to you.

You have two options when giving to Katie’s Fund. You can make a difference by giving either to the annual portion of the fund, which directs your gift to the most immediate needs, or to the endowment, which makes use of the interest earned on your gift. Gifts of any size are welcome. Individuals and congregational units are encouraged to give to Katie’s Fund.

Won’t you help continue Katie’s legacy? Send your gifts to Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago, IL 60694-1256. Questions? Call 800-638-3522, ext. 2736, or e-mail Emily.Hansen@elca.org.

“Did I hear you say something about Katie’s Fund? Are you all collecting money for me again? I’ve been wondering how the fund is going. ...”

Using the information in this article is a great way to share how important Katie’s Fund is to our ministries, but did you know that we have a skit featuring Katharina von Bora that you can use too?

Visit www.womenoftheelca.org and go to the section “Stewardship and Giving.” There you’ll find a free, downloadable skit designed as a dialogue between a narrator and Katie. They talk about the fund, the Women of the ELCA ministries that it supports and a little bit about life in Wittenberg and life with Martin.

It’s a short, easy and entertaining way to remind your unit of the inspiration behind this fund and the many ministries that rely on it.

“Oh, I am so impressed with how you are helping to develop Christian women leaders. And I’m a little envious too. Women in the city of Wittenberg. ...”