

I met Leslie the very first day I was a pastor at Emanuel Lutheran Church in Patchogue. The Senior Pastor was away, and the congregation was not sure exactly when I was arriving. They contacted Pastor Robert Mylod of the Lutheran Church of Our Savior to handle a funeral that took place that week.

I had arrived. My secretary, June, told me that there was a funeral for the mother of one of our members at Robertaccio Funeral Home in Patchogue. Though it was basically around the block from the Church, she gave me directions to get there. I arrived and sat in the pew.

The funeral was for Leslie's mother. On that day, Leslie and I became very good friends. It would last from 1986 through this past Sunday.

While I was at Emanuel, I witnessed a mighty miracle pulled off by Leslie and another member of our congregation, Sarah Walters. Due to the Administration of the United States at that time, all of the mental hospitals in the area were closed or greatly impacted. Many of the combat wounded and soul seared Veterans wound up in the various rooming homes in the village and, unfortunately, many wound up permanently on the streets of the village. There was a huge homeless population, and no one seemed to be doing anything about it. They were homeless and hungry.

One of the Churches in our neighborhood, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, had a soup kitchen every Monday. Leslie and Sarah were determined to get one going at Emanuel as well.

The village didn't like the idea. So Leslie and Sarah dragged me along to a village board meeting where they pleaded the case to approve our project, and chided the board in a way that made them say "thank you."

In 1987, Leslie and Sarah presented the idea to the Congregation. One would think this would be an easy sell to Christians looking to fulfill this command of loving our neighbor and feeding the poor. Wrong.

It was a pretty heated meeting. “What if the Youth Group needs the gym that day.” “Who will supervise the building?” “What about protecting our children.” Blah, blah, blah. Sad to say, most congregational meetings today also have excuses and suspicions. But Leslie and Sarah didn’t give up. By the time the vote was taken they had nearly unanimous support. Thus began a ministry that changed the face of Patchogue.

Trinity Inn was founded. Until it was taken over by another church within the past two years, the people of Emanuel served tens of thousands of meals to those on the streets.

Not only that, but when the other churches in Patchogue saw what was happening at Emanuel, they followed suit. For many years there was a soup kitchen open each and every day in the village, providing for those who only needed a warm meal and a little human care and concern.

That’s Leslie.

With her background, she also served and counseled abused women at Brighter Tomorrows, a women’s shelter in Shirley.

Another story was that I was the Youth Pastor at Emanuel. We were about to go Christmas Caroling and I hadn’t heard from Tara and Heather. So I called Leslie. She told me that they were not going because a tragedy had just transpired next door to their house taking the life of one of their neighbors. She explained that Richard went over to try to save the man, but that was not to be. I could hear her voice quivering.

Leslie was all about serving others.

She did it in another way, too.

Leslie was what some refer to as a “prayer warrior.” Someone who took Paul’s admonition to “pray without ceasing” literally. When I would see

Leslie at her house, after anointing her, praying for her, and giving her Holy Communion, she continued to hold my hands and each and every time I saw her, she prayed over me. In some ways she had become a confidant for me—that's hard to find in ministry. I am grateful for that.

All this because she knew Jesus—more importantly, Jesus knew her. Baptized into His body in 1948, she served Him every day of her life. His forgiveness, life, and salvation was something she lived for.

I believe this gave her a strong will to go on.

When cancer ravaged her body, she told me that the doctors gave her weeks to live. That was about 15 years ago. But she just kept on praising Him, loving Richard, Heather, and Tara, wishing that they all could be close again.

I saw Leslie at Peconic Bay about 3 weeks ago. I could not rouse her. And so I prayed the “commendation of the dying” over her, knowing it would not be long before Jesus called her home to Himself.

Lo and behold, she woke up a bit later that afternoon, and Richard called to tell me that she was sorry she missed me. The last time I saw her was a week ago Friday after she had been transferred to Westhampton Care Center. Even though she did not want to be there, she still prayed over me after receiving Holy Communion. The last words I heard from Leslie were a prayer over me.

This Sunday is the Last Sunday in the Church year, “Christ the King.” One of the alternate readings is from Matthew 25, the Great Judgment passage. When Jesus speaks to the Sheep- those redeemed by His blood- He says, “Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World- When I was hungry you gave me something to eat, when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink, when I was naked you clothed me. When I was sick and in prison you visited me.... Then the righteous will say, “Lord, WHEN did we see you in these states?” He replied “in as much as you

have done this to the least of these brothers of mine, you have done it unto me.”

My guess is that as Leslie stands before the throne, she, too will ask “when” did she do these things as God’s baptized child. That’s what following Jesus does to a person.

May she rest in the everlasting peace of Jesus our Lord and rise in His glory.

Amen.