

St. Armands Key Lutheran Church Foundation

A Bit of History!

- The church began discussions to create a church foundation in 1977.
- The By-Laws for the Foundation were adopted by the Board of Trustees on April 15, 1978.
- The Articles of Incorporation for the Foundation were filed with the Florida Secretary of State on April 18, 1978. The initial officers designated to serve “until the first election of officers” were: Col. E.W. Ogram, Chair; Dugald J. Cameron, Vice-Chair; Hartley Torrison, Secretary; and Victor Seiter, Treasurer. Trustees included Dan W. Brabeck, Gilbert S. Bull, Mrs. Carl Geppert, Melvin O. Johnson, and Pastor Jul N. Quello.
- The Internal Revenue Service certified the Foundation as a legal 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization on October 3, 1978.

One of the earliest challenges for the foundation was how to raise the necessary funds to become an effective grant-making organization. Colonel Ogram, serving as the chair, had made an offer in 1980 that he would contribute one dollar for every four dollars raised for the foundation. As part of the drive to raise such funds, some members of the congregation were simply redirecting their regular gifts to the church to the foundation! Lawrence D. Hollman, of the law firm Kaler, Worsley, Daniel and Hollman (Washington, D.C.) wrote on April 25th, 1980 that such an action became “a matter of gamesmanship which would serve to bastardize the very purposes for which the Foundation was established.”

But this same legal consultation also sheds significant light on the ability of the foundation to support the work of the church. First, he indicated that the initial intentions of those establishing the foundation “was that the Foundation would serve: (a) as a repository for long-term endowment funds the income from which would be used to advance Church projects and programs and for other related charitable purposes.”

He continued, “Second, more broadly, the Foundation was designed as a means of securing new gifts largely for the benefit of the Church that were otherwise not being made except when a special fund drive....was undertaken.”

The role and relationship between the church/congregation and the foundation was originally one of collective responsibility. In the July 14, 1978 Application for Recognition of Exemption they wrote, “The organization expects that all of its members will engage in efforts to raise funds on behalf of its purposes, but it expects that particular members will be designated from time to time as having primary responsibility for efforts to increase the organization’s funds.

The foundation grew during its initial years. This growth can be seen through the many of the tax returns filed by the foundation over the years. In 1987, the foundation had revenues of \$15,159.43 resulting in a total endowment of \$175,427.80. This resulted in total grants of

\$12,500 for the year. By 2000, the annual revenue was \$18,771.75 resulting in the total endowment of \$343,052.76.

As part of the energetic effort to gain congregational participation in the foundation, in December of 2005 the Board of Trustees created “The Birthday Blessings Program.” Beginning in 2006, every member of the congregation was asked to give in honor of their own birthday, or other family members’ birthdays. The goal was to engage 100% of the congregation’s members in the work of the foundation. Members were encouraged to give a gift “for the years we have lived.” Their research suggested that between 32 and 44 congregants had a birthday in each of the 12 months of the year!

This aggressive fundraising continued over the next decade. In October of 2010, the Foundation held a dinner at Café L’Europe to raise money for both the Church Foundation, the Florida-Bahamas Synod, the ELCA Fund for Leaders, and global mission. Each attendee was asked to make pledges for financial support over the next three years; 2010, 2011 and 2012.

As part of their strategic planning for the foundation, the trustees began serious conversations regarding the need to two distinct funds within the foundation. The goal was to find ways to better support the needs of the local church/congregation while maintaining a commitment to serving the community through the Community Support Fund. A new fund called “The Church Support Fund” was created. The first year-end balance for the Church Support Fund was \$89,895 in 2010. The first grant made through the Church Support Fund was a gift to the church in the amount of \$6,700 in 2013. This led to a series of years where the Church Support Fund provided a direct gift to the church in the range of \$20,000 to \$25,000. The intention was to allow the Church Council to determine how best to use such funds. In reality, because of financial pressures on the church’s General Operating Funds, these annual gifts have come to be considered as part of the church’s general revenue.

The success of this congregational outreach is reflected in the 2013 annual report. A major effort was made – either by the family or the foundation leadership – for memorials in memory of Patricia Beckman. A total of 42 memorials were given to the foundation, with an average donation of \$67.00. The result, \$2,815 in memorials showcases the potential for the foundation to be a place where members of the congregation are remembered and celebrated with gifts that last.

At the same time, many of the congregation’s members also made gifts to the foundation. A total of 43 families gave a gift to the foundation during 2013. One gift was for \$10,000. The average gift from the other 42 families was just over \$100. At the end of the year total assets for the foundation reached \$1,255,687. Grants averaged \$5,000 or less. They ranged from Habitat for Humanity to All Faiths Food Bank at the local level; and from the Synod’s Latina Mission to the ELCA’s Malaria Campaign on a broader focus.

In 2017, the Foundation approved the “Foundation Fundamentals” to guide the focus and work of the foundation. Steve Blackledge and Roger Arnholt led the effort in creating this document. In presenting it to the board for approval in October they described the three main purposes of this document:

- “To describe why the Foundation exists, what it does for the church, the community and the world, and the principles by which it operates.
- To foster, solidify and give momentum to the many connections between the Foundation, SAKLC, the Lutheran organizations and other organizations.
- To highlight the sometimes-contrasting objectives and ‘balance points’ of governing and managing an organization such as the Foundation, and the choices the Trustees have made in managing that balance.”

By 2017, the foundation’s assets reached \$1,439,242.

2020, was noted throughout the world for COVID. That was reflected in only \$190 in donations to the SAKLC Endowment Fund (Church Fund) for the entire year. The General Endowment fund received \$10, 486. The trustees felt encouraged to also respond to the impact of the epidemic on local organizations. At the end of the year, the final grant was a gift to the local food bank – using the total amount of remaining funds designated for distribution during the year. In 2021, contributions to the fund increased significantly from the previous year. A total of \$5,535 was received.

As the congregation has faced increased financial needs for the maintenance of a property growing older by the day, the Church Council has looked at ways to both understand the need, and identify potential ways to meet such needs. The Council commissioned a study on long-term capital needs and the amount of capital reserves projected to cover such needs over the decade ahead. This was before the Hurricane storms of 2024 created huge capital expenditure demands – which were not planned or fully funded. The net result was the Council used reserves to enable the restoration to move forward while fundraising – and insurance coverage – were determined.

Knowing that any major long-term capital fundraising by the Church/Council would create tension with the traditional work of the Foundation, a joint task force was created to build better relations and cooperation between the Foundation and the Congregation/Council. This work occurred over the 2023 and 2024 years. The respective chairs of each organization were asked to attend the meetings of the other. (The Council Chair has always been an ex-officio voting member of the Foundation.) More important, the conversations have led to real desire to significantly increase the growth, size and service of the Church Support Fund. Second, there is a recognition – as evidence by Council and Congregation action – that the Church/Council will need to create its own long-term capital fund beyond the traditional work of the Foundation.

At the conclusion of 2024, the Church Support Fund balance was \$562,674; and the Community Investment Fund was \$1,851,698.