



## St. Mark's Bold Woman for 2023—Mary Eskelund

Bold Women's Day—observed in February—celebrates Lutheran women who have acted or are acting boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. Some women are bold in their unceasing prayers, in their service to those in need, in their advocacy, or through their hospitality. Whether we live out our bold story of faith in the workplace, family home, or community, our faith compels us to make a difference in the lives of others. It's all about living out our baptismal call, about being a disciple of Christ.

This year, St. Mark's Women of the ELCA has designated **Mary Eskelund** as our Bold Woman for 2023.

In 2022, Mary's husband Gerald passed away into God's embrace. Mary and Gerald were married for 66 glorious years. Their children are Elaine Saunders, Richard Eskelund, and Sally Stratton. They also have four grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Mary had a college degree with focus on Education and Library. Mary's career included being a teacher for over 27 years both in New Jersey (2 years) and in Fairfax County (25 years). She taught numerous grades to include the gifted/talented program and ESL. Mary said her favorite grade to teach was 6th grade. She said she liked this top of the elementary grade as these kids often thought they knew it all but she really liked the challenge. She said, it was "every year, every day different"—this says it all. Mary likes a challenge both in her job and in her daily life. And St. Mark's has been lucky to have her in our community.

The Eskelunds moved to Northern Virginia from New Jersey in 1978. Mary remembers that Gerald was offered numerous jobs in Boston and in Washington, DC—they chose Washington, DC. Mary said the primary reason was that the previous winter in NJ had been a bad one and she wanted to move further south for milder winters. Mary recalls they moved into their Springfield, VA home around July 4th and they joined the church within weeks at St. Mark's—Gerald had done some church shopping before the family moved down.

Mary remembers that when they first joined St. Mark's, it reminded her of her church growing up in Illinois. The music was fine and there wasn't much variety. She said each Pastor brings their own touch to the services.

Mary made her mark at St. Mark's by becoming our *first woman usher* ... Mary said that there was an announcement in the church bulletin that there was a need for ushers. She had previously ushered at their church in New Jersey and she signed up to indicate she'd like to usher at St. Mark's. She said months passed by and she heard nothing, thinking that they no longer needed ushers. Finally, she got a call from the usher coordinator who

said, “You can be an usher.” Mary didn’t realize that it was a “big” deal until she went to the usher orientation—and she was the *only* woman. At the meeting, when they told her that they “never had a woman usher before,” she realized that’s why it took so long to hear back from them.

Mary also shared that the first time she ushered she wore her best suit, a red suit. Pastor asked, “Did your suit have to be red?” Another time, the Pastor asked, “Do you have to wear such bright colors?” Suffice it to say, Mary may have been a trendsetter for the ushers at St. Mark’s.

## **Other Ministries**

Mary also joined one of our women’s circles when she joined church. She remembers going to Iva Parrot’s home for her first meeting. Later, as she began teaching in Virginia, she switched to Deborah Circle since it was the only circle that met during the evening. Deborah Circle is happy to have her and love when she’s the hostess!

Mary has supported St. Mark’s in many capacities in the past and to this day. Her service to us touches many parts of St. Marks: Altar Guild, Remembrance Committee, Usher, Church Council (two terms), Deborah Circle, military package collections, Personnel Committee, Clown ministry, Prayer Shawl ministry, and Quilts and More to name just a few. She has also helped around the St. Mark’s kitchen as well as with VBS and teens in various activities—a special memory with the youth was a “teaching” photography session on the mechanics of how to take photos, and the next day shooting pictures, going back to the computer lab, and selecting one or two pictures from each person to display. But her most interesting and favorite task was taking photos of everything at the church to document the items, such as the crystal and the silver—and she even went on the roof one time! (Feel free to ask her about this in more detail ...)

## **Music in Her Life**

Mary’s favorite hymn is “Faith of Our Fathers.” This choice was made as a youngster, when the organist at her home church challenged her to play this song on her clarinet first with an open hymnal and then to play without the music. And she did!

She loves music but can’t sing at all. She shared a story that Bob Webb said that she was one of the best recruiters for the choir. But even though Mary can’t hold a tune on her own, her family is *full* of musical talent. Anyone who attended Gerald’s service knows that all the family, including their grandchildren, are multi-talented. The children all have excellent singing voices.

*Today we honor **Mary Eskelund** as St. Mark’s Woman of the ELCA*

***Bold Woman of 2023!***