

## Grow the Mission Team!



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(This article written by Kristin Kaldahl of Spencer, IA.)

It has already been one year since Pastor Mark Gerken officially joined the Iowa District West mission team. On October 12, 2008 Gerken became the Executive Assistant for Missions, but he has been a part of a faith mission team for much longer than that.

Gerken describes himself as a product of the LCMS educational system, having attended Lutheran schools from kindergarten through seminary. Both Pastor Gerken and his wife, Ruth, whose fathers were pastors, grew up in homes that focused on faith.

Mark and Ruth first met when they attended our Synod's boarding high school in Concordia, Missouri. They both graduated from the high school and junior college at Concordia then went on to graduate from different colleges. Mark graduated from Concordia, Ann Arbor and Ruth from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. Wedding bells rang out in 1980, just prior to the beginning of Mark's vicarage year.

In 1982 Pastor Gerken completed his studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and received a call to Faith Lutheran Church in Humboldt, Nebraska. He served there until moving to Adel, Iowa in 1987 and serving another Faith Lutheran Church.

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57-58)

This favorite Bible verse of Pastor Gerken's (and many others) helped form his own personal mission statement:

"Celebrating the victory to grow the team!"

Not only were these two congregations a part of his mission team, but also the Gerkens' growing family. Son, David, and daughter, Sarah, now both married, along with their brother, Jonathan, were taught first-hand about missions, stewardship and first fruits giving.

"First of all, we wanted our financial stewardship following our death to be a continuation of what we've practiced while we were living on earth—first-fruits giving to the Lord," explains Gerken. "This also provided an opportunity, through a Christian preamble, to share one last time with our children that which was most important—the faith God has given us in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Mark and Ruth are grateful that gift planning counselor Jim Schroeder provided his assistance and expertise with their Christian Estate Planning. Jim even accompanied them on their visit to see the lawyer.

Pastor Gerken recalls when he first was introduced to Jim Schroeder. "I believe Faith, Adel was one of the first congregations Jim visited when he started working for Iowa District West back in about 1989. We established a friendship and then invited Jim to help us update our Christian estate plan this past year since it had been over 20 years (and our children were now grown)," says Gerken.

With Jim's help, the Gerkens established an estate plan which gave them the opportunity to provide a gift to their children and to various

ministries. After their deaths, a tenth of their estate will be given as a tithe offering to the Lord and another portion divided among their children. The remainder of their estate will go into their "Give it Twice" trust. Mark and Ruth's children will receive an annual gift from the trust for twenty years and then the trust principal will be directed to other ministries chosen by the Gerkens.

Gerken knows his children will be touched by their decision. "What we shared in the preamble—both about our faith and Christian stewardship—was not anything they haven't heard before. Yet we would imagine that hearing it again in our own words following our deaths, will have a powerful impact."

Gerken adds, "A side blessing was an opportunity to witness to our lawyer who commented about the Christian preamble, 'I've never seen anything like that before.'"

The Gerkens encourage others to contact Jim Schroeder. "Jim has a gift with people – putting them at ease and allowing his faith to shine through," says Pastor Gerken. "He was extremely helpful, patient, and thorough in explaining how it all worked'."

Go ahead. Put him on your mission team and start growing today.

If you would like more information on developing your Christian Gift Plan contact Jim Schroeder at 1-877-913-2221 toll free or email [Jim.Schroeder@idwlcms.org](mailto:Jim.Schroeder@idwlcms.org). Visit the Foundation's web site at [www.lfndgp.org](http://www.lfndgp.org).



*Pastor Mark and Ruth Gerken*