

Messiah Village Receives Historic Gift

ON DECEMBER 30, 2009, MESSIAH Village joyfully received the largest single gift in our history — \$860,000 from the Norman T. Asper trust. Norman, a retired PA railroad worker and his wife Elizabeth moved to a small studio apartment at Messiah Village in 1989. Norman died in 2000 and Elizabeth, a resident in the Special Care Neighborhood, died in 2004. They were frugal, humble, prayerful, and compassionate people who are remembered fondly by family and friends. During a special meeting of the Messiah Village Board of Directors in January, the board gratefully accepted this extraordinary gift and recommended part of the gift be used to complete the capital portion of the current *Connections* Campaign.

The remainder of the gift will be used to meet future needs. Because of the Asper gift, the *Connections* Campaign has now reached over \$3 million toward a total goal of \$3.5 million (for more information on the campaign go to www.MessiahVillage.org). President Dr. Emerson L. Leshar said, “We are humbled by this historic gift. One family’s charitable choice will positively impact the lives of hundreds of residents for years to come. We are pleased that Norman chose to remember us so generously in his estate plans.” A portion of the Asper’s trust has also been gifted to Paxton Ministries, a ministry in Harrisburg, PA. For more on the Asper family and their connections to Brethren in Christ ministries, please see the following profile.

Norman T. Asper: A Profile in Generosity

HOW CAN ONE PERSON make a difference in the lives of countless others? Meet Norman Asper — a man who remained true to his Brethren in Christ (BIC) heritage and cherished his connections to church ministries. Interestingly, Norman and his family had ties to Messiah Village since its earliest days in Harrisburg; first at Bailey Street where they attended church; later at Messiah Home on Paxton Street in Harrisburg; and most recently at Messiah Village’s Mechanicsburg location where they also lived, worked, and attended church at various times.

Norman and his first wife, Susan Yingst, a registered nurse, lived on a dairy farm near Linglestown with their daughter Norma. Norman’s brother Ellis worked the farm while Norman worked night shift as a baggage handler on the PA railroad. Susan passed away in 1969 as a resident at Messiah Home, and Norman later married F. Elizabeth Hess, a registered nurse who worked at Messiah Home in Harrisburg and later in

the nursing neighborhoods at Messiah Village. Through-out his life, Norman’s family attended various BIC churches, including the congregations at Bailey Street and Paxton Street in Harrisburg. He also attended the Harrisburg BIC Church and Messiah Village congregation.

He is remembered as a Sunday School teacher and deacon who faithfully visited brothers and sisters in their homes. His daughter still recalls how Norman would drive his truck around Harrisburg to pick up children who needed a ride to church. Elizabeth was a prayer warrior who spent countless hours on her knees interceding for others, especially the missionaries with whom she corresponded.

In 1989, Norman and Elizabeth moved to Messiah Village, at its current Mt. Allen Drive location, so Norman could slow down and “fold his wings.” Known for their frugal lifestyle and careful habits, the Aspers chose a small studio apartment, drove used cars, and would often shop at the Village’s used clothing

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sale so they had more money to send to missionaries. When Norman was ready to leave the farm he bought with Susan, he put the farm into a trust established through the Brethren in Christ Foundation, who maintained it for twenty years. The trust then provided income for Norman and Elizabeth for many years and now the remainder is being distributed to two beloved charities — Messiah Village and Paxton Ministries. Norman believed his planning would double the impact of his gift. First, he had access to a wonderful income from the trust; and second, though now deceased, he has been able to greatly benefit two charitable institutions through the 2009 disbursement of the original trust deposit.

Norma, who was named after her father, remembers him as a very humble and compassionate man—who truly exemplified the simple, Anabaptist lifestyle. Norma is married to a pastor (*Wesley Brethren in Christ*) in her daddy’s denomination. She and her husband Richard are therefore most pleased that two important *Brethren in Christ* ministries will benefit from her father’s stewardship and thoughtfulness. Norman’s extended family includes three grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren. One of the grandchildren lives with his wife and children in Norman’s original house. The Asper story is truly one of connections — connections to God, to family, and to the neighbors we serve.

If you would like to discuss charitable trusts, estate planning, or learn more about how you can make a significant difference through philanthropy, call Sharon Engle at 591-7212.



The architect’s rendering of the proposed new entrance to the Chapel.

