



RUTH YOUNGDAHL NELSON An Everyday Disciple!

As we learn new ways to pray and to recognize God's presence in our lives as an opportunity for prayer, a witness from recent church history is our mentor. The Christian message of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson, a faithful and courageous Lutheran woman born in 1904, spans Lutheran generations. She cared deeply for her children and grandchildren and the church's children and grandchildren. She talked to God about the ones she loved--her family, the Lutheran family, the human family.

Ruth's devotion to God and love for others was learned at an early age at home, where Ruth said, "And God was always there." Her father, a hard-working grocer, was a deacon who saw that the family always was in church on Sundays. He also led the family in prayer sessions and hymn singing at home. She often recalled that through her formative years she and her nine brothers and sisters were all taught to "be responsible to God" and that "life is stewardship".

Ruth Youngdahl Nelson was the picture of the grandmother everyone could love. And yet behind those bright eyes and broad smile was a Christian woman whose life changed the world. Nationally known as a speaker, author, peace activist and Christian leader, Nelson put her faith into practice through her writings and her life. In 1973 she was named Mother of the Year. To honor the occasion, the American Bible Society presented her with the symbolic 40 millionth copy of "Good News for Modern Man", the New Testament in Today's English Version". "It's my favorite book," she said.

She credits her mother for teaching Ruth and her siblings that the Lord wants Christians to be concerned with all people and that there were no preferential people in God's world. Remembering her childhood home, Ruth said, "As far back as I can remember this matter of hating war and wanting peace was central; it was mostly a concern for people --the hungry, the dispossessed, those who suffer injustice. I was brought up in it--my home was the kind of home, an immigrant home, where there was such a tender heart for the downtrodden and a desire for peace."

Her life is marked with countless examples of compassion and action for the sake of social justice on behalf of those whose voices were not heard. She held Bible classes at the women's prison and later took released inmates into her home when they had no other place to stay. In Washington, the Nelsons welcomed people of all races and nationalities into their church despite some objections. She started and sustained many projects for the poor and the senior citizens of the community. A story of Ruth's relentless quest for justice is told about the time when she had just returned home from a vacation. The very first thing she did was sit down and write a letter to President Nixon protesting the federal fund cuts for child care centers and summer youth programs.

At 79, in a wheelchair still weak from cancer surgery she had three days earlier, Ruth

Youngdahl Nelson, was one of the 1, 500 persons who turned out to demonstrate at the corporate headquarters where parts for nuclear weapons were made.

Ruth's vocation was a shared partnership as she ministered with her husband, the Rev. Clarence T. Nelson, at parishes in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, Chicago, Washington D.C. and Geneva, Switzerland, often giving dialogue sermons with him. In 1960, Religious Heritage of America, Inc. named Ruth Youngdahl Nelson, "Church Woman of the Year."

Unassuming in her impact, she said of herself, "I am no theologian. I can only speak and write about what Christ can do in my everyday life." This understatement belies the life she lived as mother of seven children (three of them foster children), as minister, as author, as speaker, and finally as activist. Upon publication of her last book, **A Grandma's Letters to God**, she commented, "It's a messy situation my generation handed down to them. We're constantly hearing about economic disaster and, more awfully and realistically, the threat of nuclear annihilation. Some of them are very discouraged. What can I say to them? How can I be helpful?" Even as she wrote the questions she lived the answers. (from ELCA archives)