

# 2019 Distinguished Life Awards

*We make friends... before it was one of our five habits, these ladies knew that lives are changed in community. Since they met at St. Luke's, they have served on mission trips together, attended Bible studies and Sunday School classes and spent countless vacations and holidays together. As Susan Silvus said, "We are the kind of friends that can call each other after midnight." And aren't those the best friends of all?*

## MARLYS BARRY



In 1976 Marlys Barry found herself with nothing to do on a Saturday night and decided she needed more friends. So, Sunday morning she visited the “big church on Westheimer” where she discovered the Bruncher’s group. She met life-long friends and knew she had found a new church home. She left the retail clothing business after 30 years and began to volunteer at St. Luke’s. Before she knew what had happened, Marlys was working on staff at the church. She served in several areas before Dean Robinson asked her to work with Senior Adults. When he retired, she assumed his position and continued leading Senior Adult Ministries at St. Luke’s for over 23 years!

During her time working with Sr. Adults, Marlys planned day trips and monthly programs that attracted seniors from all over the city. In addition, she served as an officer in the local chapter of the Christian Educators Fellowship and as a member of the National CEF Board. In 2011, she received the Dick Murray Award for Excellence in Christian Education. Marlys has been active in outreach and mission trips, the St. Cecilia Choir and numerous Bible studies. She is pleased that the Celebration of Couples Married 50+ years, which she began, has become a church tradition. But perhaps Marlys’ biggest achievement was creating St. Luke’s Caregiver Conferences that have offered hundreds of family caregivers a wealth of helpful information and a way to connect with one another.

## LINDA BURCH



A friend introduced Linda Burch to the Bruncher’s Sunday School Class and she liked it so well she moved to Houston and joined St. Luke’s! What is so amazing about her move is that she continued to teach in Baytown for 37 years. Jumping in with both feet, Linda served as President of Bruncher’s class and later served as President of the Good Will Class.

Mission and outreach is Linda’s calling at St. Luke’s. She traveled twice to Alaska and twice to Belize. She felt a strong bond to both her fellow missionaries and to the locals with whom she served; and many are still her friends. Linda was a Stephen Minister, offering one-on-one Christian friendship to persons experiencing a difficult time. She also served on the Outreach Commission and mentored two children through KIDS HOPE USA. There is no doubt these opportunities prepared her for her true passion... serving others at the Hospitality Apartments. Patients and their families stay at the apartments while receiving care at the Texas Medical Center. As a volunteer, Linda assists with family needs and serves as a good listener and caring friend to both patient and caregiver. It is a highlight of her week and a blessing to those who meet her.

## PAT DECKERT



Pat Deckert joined St. Luke's in 1988 but visited for a long while before she joined. It was the personal invitation of friends, Barbara and Joe Eason, to get involved that sealed the deal. Small groups have always made this very large church more like family for Pat. The more connections she has made, the more friends she has made and enjoys to this day. Starting off with the Winners Circle and Crossroads classes, she finally landed at the intergenerational Good Will Class. She originated and still writes the weekly class news, *The e-Pistle* which has a distribution list of over 400 people. She found more "family" when she taught the Disciple class, led Divorce Recovery, UMW Night Circle and the Alpha Course. She has served on the Evangelism and Outreach Commissions and went on several mission trips to Belize and Russia. She is a faithful historian and chairs the Docents. She has also given herself away in service to children, serving as a Kids Hope mentor, PM Pals helper, and Kids Meals coordinator. "I love doing what I think helps others and what God and Jesus want me to do," Pat says. "It's all about others. I love that hymn we sing here at St. Lukes:

*Lord, help me live from day to day, In such a self-forgetful way  
That even when I kneel to pray, my prayer shall be for others.  
Yes, others, Lord, yes, others. Let this my motto be.  
Help me to live for others that I may live like Thee."*

## SUSAN SILVUS



Susan came to St. Luke's in 1986 so that her teenage sons could be part of the program led by Youth Director, Tom Pace. Several years later she left her position at Christian Community Service Center to join the St. Luke's staff. For over 25 years she served as Director of Outreach. She went on 50 mission trips including 17 to Russia, and others to Kenya, Belize, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Fiji, The Bahamas and West Indies. "The most impactful part of the trips was meeting the people," said Susan. "We went in not as volunteers, but as partners in mission and became friends. Being with people in other countries showed me how much we are all alike. People everywhere just want a better life for their children."

Locally, Susan led recovery efforts from tropical storm Allison, and hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In fact, when Katrina refugees headed to Houston, it was Susan who got the late-night call from the Red Cross to set up cots in the Astrodome... lots of cots. In addition to coordinating our church's outreach ministries, she worked with the Texas Annual Conference to present workshops and training to other churches. She served as Chair of Partners in Mission, Chair of Global Ministries and as the Secretary of Missions for the Texas Annual Conference. In retirement, Susan is thrilled to see her dreams for the Gethsemane community become reality.

## NANCY STEPHENSON



Nancy Stephenson said she didn't think she was old enough to receive the Distinguished Life award. After all, she has only been a St. Luke's member for 42 years! She recalls first being a part of the Bruncher's class where she felt as though she had "instant friends," and quickly moved into church activities and service. Mission trips have been a big part of her heart. She went to Alaska in 1986 and has made numerous trips to Belize. In fact, she became so close to the friends she made there that she has returned for visits even when there was no mission trip planned. Nancy has served as Chair of the Council on Ministries and as Church Treasurer. In addition to being a high school math teacher, she served as a Bethel Bible Study teacher and led a Disciple Bible Study. In 1993 she was "Rev. Stephenson" for the morning as she preached the sermon for Laity Sunday... That, she says, was not her calling. About eight years ago she became a Sunday morning greeter and is excited to see all the young new families coming to St. Luke's. And who could be better to welcome our visitors than someone who calls St. Luke's her family?

## *Distinguished Life Awards continued*

### **FRAN AND JACK STEELE**



When Fran and Jack Steele moved into the neighborhood in 1980, they looked for a church and found St. Luke's. They loved the total vitality of the church—especially the excellent music and preaching. Their daughter Ann was born in 1982 and was baptized by Jack's father who was the District Superintendent at the time. She went through the Sunday School and was a member of the very beginning of the Pure Sound Youth Choir. Fran and Jack were part of the Harmony Sunday School Class and later taught the class. They took the first Disciple Bible Study and then taught it the second year.

Fran taught the "Grand Sweep," a read the Bible in 1-year program, for five years, and also led Disciple Fast Track and Covenant Bible studies. She was a Communion server and recalls one very full Christmas Eve when they ran out of wafers and had to run out to the grocery store to buy bread to cut up between services. As if that was not enough, Fran led the Altar Guild for years and saw that as a great privilege.

Jack served in leadership along with his teaching. He was part of the Council on Ministry, chaired the Administrative Board, (later to become The Board of Stewards, and now Church Council) and was a Trustee and part of the Gethsemane merger. He believes that no one person has to fulfill responsibilities and serve by themselves, for St. Luke's serves in teams. "Step up if God is calling. There is always a need for your interest, talent, and time at St. Luke's."

### **LELA DAVIS**



If you spend any time with Lela Davis, you will learn very quickly that she loves people. She is humble and likes to kid and joke, but there is so much more. Lela and her husband Stan moved from Nebraska to southwest Houston in 1968 and settled into Gethsemane UMC the following year. They were part of the Challengers Sunday School class, and Lela continues to be part of the class after Stan's passing in 1997. That's 50 years!

Lela has the gift of hospitality and uses it at church. She cooked for the Silver Circle and the Youth for years and now helps cook for the Wednesday night suppers. She housed interns for years, and one intern in particular, David Horton, lived with her. She recalls with a grin and a twinkle in her eye, "He was a good kid, and made his bed. He's a good preacher- no a great one. He's the best."

On Tuesdays, you can find Lela at the Wood Shop. She adds wheels and sands the toys that go to children in need. As she reflects on how much the church has changed over the last fifty years, she delights in loving it more and more. "It is friendly and feels like home, and I enjoy meeting people from different countries." Her joy stems from the love of God and a belief that one must make the best of everything. "We need to give and take. When things may go a different way, watch out because great can things happen."

*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.*

Philippians 1:3-5