

Finding Guidance in a Crisis

By Sarah Watts

A terminal illness spurs a couple to dig into their finances, where they find an unexpected source of help.



Thrivent member Lynn Kahl and her Thrivent Financial professional, Mike Stehlik, at St. John's Lutheran School in La Grange, Illinois, where she was a teacher and principal.

On a trip to Europe in 2010, Lynn Kahl noticed something unusual about her husband of 10 years: Fred was having trouble walking. Fred, then 56 years old, blamed his lack of balance on the cobble European streets. But after the couple returned to their hometown of Brookfield, Illinois, his coordination became worse.

It took about a year before Fred's doctors determined he was suffering from a rare disorder called multiple system atrophy. As his condition deteriorated, Lynn retired in 2016 from her career as a principal at St. John's Lutheran School in La Grange, Illinois, where she met Fred and worked for 42 years. She began taking care of Fred full time—and the couple started making plans for an uncertain future.

Looking Ahead

The Kahls wanted to organize their finances. They had financial accounts with various organizations, including Thrivent.

"I told Fred that we needed to get things in order because we had accounts all over," Lynn says. "We both drove out to the Thrivent office and met with Mike [Stehlik] to start consolidating everything."

Working with Thrivent Financial professionals Stehlik and his joint field work partner, Paul Hoyem, the Kahls made a plan to consolidate their accounts in one easy-to-access place. Stehlik and Hoyem also helped Lynn envision her financial future.

"We did a lot of legwork discussing with Lynn what her retirement might look like and

LIFE INSURANCE LINGO

CASH VALUE Some life insurance contracts may accumulate value during your lifetime. Called cash value, it grows tax-deferred, and you can use it as a fund from which you can borrow. If you cancel a cash value insurance contract, you'll receive any cash value you've built up less any outstanding loans.

RIDER A rider is a feature that can be added for additional cost to an insurance contract, to provide an additional benefit. For example, a waiver of premium rider can help cover payments if you're no longer able to work. A guaranteed purchase option rider allows you to buy additional insurance in the future without providing evidence of insurability.

positioning assets for her retirement needs," Stehlik says.

It was during one of these meetings that Stehlik discovered a way to save Lynn and Fred money.

"When we looked at each of their universal life insurance contracts, we saw Fred had a premium rider on there," Stehlik says. "It stated that if the contract owner is deemed to be disabled, then the insurance company would pay the premiums for the contract holder going forward. So we were able to help Lynn get started on the paperwork and take that responsibility off her."

In April 2017, during the process of consolidating the Kahls' finances, Fred died of a stroke.

"It hit me really hard," Lynn says. "We were married for 17 years. I still miss him every single day."

But the comfort that remains, she says, is feeling in control of her finances.

"There was a whole lot of change, really fast," Lynn says of the time following Fred's death. "But I knew I'd be financially OK based on what Mike and Paul put together for me. I knew what we had insurance-wise. I knew what we had in our various funds. That was a very nice sense of reassurance."

Ongoing Support

The financial guidance didn't stop after Fred died.

"After Fred died, I didn't really pay attention to my money," Lynn says. She felt that her finances were organized, so she didn't have to constantly worry. But Stehlik continued to check up on her occasionally.

He also helped her invest funds from a previous investment into her universal life insurance contract. The contract's cash value can help pay for potential long-term care expenses, should they occur.¹ "If I need to go into a nursing home, the contract could help pay for it. I never would have come up with that myself," Lynn says.

Lynn credits Stehlik and the rest of her Thrivent team with the relief she feels and the freedom not to worry. But Stehlik says all the credit belongs with Lynn.

"Lynn was the head coach, and I was the offensive coordinator," Stehlik says. "I gave her the plays, but she had to call it." ■

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—Thrivent member Lynn Kahl reflecting on her husband's death

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