

## A life of inspiration

**Thrivent's oldest client, 115-year-old Iris Westman, dies**

By Donna Hein

Iris Westman lived a life of purpose, meaning and gratitude. Her zest for life showed in how she cared for family, thrived in her career, prepared for her retirement and gave back to her church and community.

At 115 years old, Westman was Thrivent's oldest client when she died on Jan. 3 in Northwood, North Dakota. She became a client 93 years ago when she purchased an endowment contract at age 22. Westman also holds the record as longest-lived person documented in North Dakota.

The supercentenarian always said her long life was God's business, says Jane Lukens, Westman's great-niece who still lives near the family farm that Westman grew up on in Aneta, North Dakota.

"Iris never wanted credit for her long life; she said the Lord had decided how long she'd live," Lukens says.

### Career, family and faith

Westman was one of six children. She grew up with her three brothers; two sisters died as children. After graduating from high school, Westman earned a bachelor's degree in education in 1928 from



Photo by Joshua Komer/Grand Forks Herald

the University of North Dakota. Westman was teaching English when she earned a degree in library science in 1946. She was a librarian until her retirement in 1972.

"At the time, farm families often pooled their resources for one daughter or son to go to college and be educated," Lukens says. "Education was emphasized in her family."

Westman chose career over marriage, but she had close ties with her four generations of nieces and nephews, spending holidays with family at the farm where she grew up

and visiting others where they lived across the country.

She shared her love of education and books with both her family and her students. "She always gave us books as gifts," Lukens says. And in recent years, some of her former students reached out to Westman with cards and letters, affirming the impact she made in their lives.

"Her purpose and meaning came from her career, her family and faith," Lukens says. "She joined and participated in church activities wherever she lived. She always joined the choir."

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Westman didn't tell others what to do, but her family knew the expectations she held for them—whether it was education, family, faith or finances. She lived what she believed.

"Iris was generous, but she handled her savings and investments carefully and thoughtfully," Lukens says. "She was deliberate in her financial decisions."

### Living simply

Growing up, Lukens remembers always getting a birthday card with a \$5 bill in it from her great-aunt. "My children received savings bonds and later cash gifts from her with the assumption—she never said it—that you might need this some day so you better save it," Lukens says.

Westman, like her father, loved to travel. She went on many trips with friends, including at least two European trips. "Once she took a driving trip to Florida, then took a plane from Miami to Havana, Cuba, for dinner. All in one evening," Lukens recalls. "She was thrifty, but she wasn't miserly. She enjoyed her life."

Westman lived on her own until 2012, when she fell and broke her hip. With no underlying health issues, she had a successful hip

replacement at age 106. Even though she fully recovered she stayed at the residential health center after, making it her home, Lukens says. She used a walker for balance, calling it her friend.

Thrivent financial professional John Halstenson remembers Westman as being pleasant and easy to work with. She had a good understanding of her financial products, even after Lukens started helping Westman with her finances.

"She planned well for her retirement," Halstenson says. "She lived conservatively and always set extra money aside. She lived 115 years and didn't run out of money."

When Westman died in January, Halstenson sent in the notice of her death to Thrivent, knowing the organization is going to deliver on the promise made to her—and her family—when she took out her first contract in 1927.

"What comes through the most in Iris's life," says Lukens, "is that living a simple, purposeful, thoughtful life is so valuable. And it can yield wonderful results."

The client's experience may not be the same as other clients and does not indicate future performance or success.

### Generosity in action



### Supplies for re-entry Sugar Land, Texas

Debra and Bruce Lacy, with help from their friend Melissa Erickson (pictured), wanted to provide supplies to those being released from prison. After receiving a wish list from Prison and Re-Entry Ministries, the Lacys led a Thrivent Action Team to shop for and assemble 60 bags of materials. They included items like grooming kits, winter gloves and hats, hand sanitizer and face masks. The team called local store managers and asked for volume discounts, which stretched their funds.

With COVID-19 restrictions in place, the team held four smaller events to assemble items. Participants also heard educational talks about prison ministries at each event. They finished with a prayer, and the bags were then transported to those in need.

Melissa was an inspiration through her generous heart and energy. Her enthusiasm and love of service shined brightly. "We had a great time serving," she says. "And, with a bit of creativity, everyone should serve and help somehow."