

## A Story that Should Be Shared

### *From the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary – Above the Fog Email*

No wonder she was silent. What could **Pastor Barb Westhoff** possibly say?

There she stood, next to **Pastor Chris Flohr (MDiv 1992)**, in front the banquet crowd at the Montana Synod Assembly. Both had just received the synod's "Spirit of Hope Award," which is granted annually for outstanding courage, faith and inspiration. She is the pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Westby. He's at St. Paul in Missoula.



**Pr. Christ Flohr**

If you are looking for inspiration, you found it.

Pastor Westhoff has polycystic kidney disease. It runs in the family and it is serious. Her kidneys were failing and hope was running thin. She was in the fourth stage of the disease. The fifth stage is dialysis. There is no sixth stage. She needed a kidney, and all the usual donor prospects, her siblings, were afflicted just as she was. The waiting list for kidneys is very, very long. Day by day, her condition worsened. What could she possibly do, except pray for a miracle?

She got one. His name is Christian Flohr. He lived up to his name.

In 1980, he had listed himself as an organ donor on his driver's license. Throughout the course of years, he pondered more and more about the possibility of being a living donor. Research demonstrates that organs from living donors prove more effective in helping the recipient live a longer and more normal life.

He noticed that the synod newsletter sought prayers each month for Pastor Westhoff, so he inquired about her. When he learned that she was failing from kidney disease, he sent her an email. "What's your blood type?" he asked. Not the everyday kind of question you'd ask of someone you hardly knew, but then, Pastor Flohr is no everyday kind of person.

Once he learned that their types were compatible, he offered to undergo the more rigorous testing to determine if he was a match. He was.

So he offered to give her one of his kidneys.

In doing so, he offered her a whole new life. A new kidney, from a living donor, would mean no more feeling lousy all day. A new kidney meant the grim prospect of dialysis would be erased. A new kidney meant she could plan for a long and fruitful ministry and a long and loving marriage.

And so the day came that they both entered the Denver hospital, he to give her life back to her and she to receive it. A month later, they stood together on the assembly stage.

No wonder she was speechless. What do you say to a person who gives you a gift so precious and wonderful and valuable? Are there words?

If there are, Pastor Barb Westhoff continues to look for them. She didn't have them at the assembly banquet, and nobody thought to blame her. She just looked at him through teary eyes. He looked at his shoes, ever the humble servant.

It's hard to tell who emerged the most blessed by the experience. But then it always is in such cases.

One thing is sure. The spirit of hope is alive and well in Montana.