



Elaine A. Hagenmueller

August 8, 1929 - May 24, 2026

Elaine was born on August 8, 1929, in Henning, Minnesota, to Albert and Margaret (Albrecht) Brutlag. She grew up on the family farm with four brothers — Lloyd, Marlin, Harold (deceased), and Charles — and one sister, Caryl. Life on the farm shaped Elaine in lasting ways. She learned the value of hard work, family, faith, and simple daily blessings.

Elaine spent five summers attending Concordia Teachers Colleges in Seward, Nebraska and River Forest, Illinois before beginning her teaching career as a “supply” teacher serving several Minnesota Lutheran schools.

While at Concordia River Forest in the summer, Elaine met Ernie Hagenmueller, and the two were married on June 21, 1953. Together they moved to Des Peres, Missouri, where Ernie was already teaching at St. Paul’s Lutheran School. They were true partners in life, family, and ministry. They believed that if something mattered, you gave it your time, energy, and full attention. Elaine later joined the faculty at St. Paul’s serving as a kindergarten teacher for 33 years.

Elaine never stopped learning. After teaching for many years, she returned to school to complete her four-year teaching degree. This meant taking classes while working full time and even completing a summer residency at Concordia River Forest. After finishing her coursework and student teaching

requirements, she “walked” at graduation alongside her younger daughter.

Elaine especially treasured the opportunity to develop a flannelgraph biography of Martin Luther for primary-age children, which was later published by Concordia Publishing House. She enjoyed serving on committees and presenting at Lutheran teachers’ conferences, always looking for ways to encourage Christian Education and support fellow teachers.

Living far from extended family, Elaine and Ernie, along with their two daughters, Sharon and Janet, became especially close-knit. They took a deep interest in their daughters’ lives, always encouraging, supporting, and cheering them on in everything they did.

Watching their parents work side by side left a lasting impression on Sharon and Janet, both of whom later became teachers themselves. Elaine and Ernie modeled lives marked by servant hearts, commitment, and genuine care for others. They believed deeply in doing their very best and willingly sacrificed time and energy in order to faithfully serve the children and families entrusted to them.

Life at St. Paul’s brought friends into Elaine’s life who felt more like family. Her stories of traveling with the “Journey with Ernie” group became legendary. She cherished phone calls, letters, and staying connected with people she loved.

Elaine and Ernie retired in 1994 and moved to Marengo, Illinois, where she volunteered her time and talents at Zion Lutheran School. In 1998, she became coordinator for performances of the Christmas pageant The Boar’s Head Festival, a role she faithfully carried out for many years. She especially loved sewing Old English costumes alongside the women of Zion Lutheran Church and helping bring the celebration to life for others.

After Ernie passed away in 2020, Elaine moved to Cary, Illinois, where she enjoyed living with her daughter Sharon and family. She loved taking walks outdoors and spent countless hours working on whatever jigsaw puzzle lay before her.

After becoming a member of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Cary, Elaine continued looking for meaningful ways to stay involved in church life. Even in her early 90s, she came up with the idea and led a group that wrote cards to visitors and former members, always encouraging people to reconnect and become part of the church family.

When asked what word best described her life, Elaine answered, "Busy." She was a doer, staying active and always ready to learn new things.

Elaine is survived by her two daughters, Sharon Dunker (Mike) and Janet Beyer (Phil); her grandchildren, Matt Dunker (Sarah), Lisa Jongebloed (Dan), Nate Beyer (Stephanie), Joanna Rogers (Tim), Ilesha Dunker, Maurice Dunker, and Marco Santano (Tori); and her great-grandchildren, Kara and Kailey Dunker, Jackson and Emerson Jongebloed, Cayson Dunker, Jacob and Luke Beyer, and Arya and Wyatt Rogers.

Elaine loved Eastertime. Not only did it mean warmer weather and treasured outdoor walks, but it also reminded her of what Easter brings to all believers: the assurance of things not yet seen and the hope of things yet to come.