



HEROES FOR LIFE™
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

WORSHIPPERS COME TOGETHER TO SAVE A LIFE

Family grateful for access to an AED in the church

It was a typical busy Saturday for Betsy Bertke, a third-grade teacher and mother of three in Coldwater, Ohio. Betsy spent the morning catching up on lesson plans and the afternoon doing activities with her children. That evening, the Bertkes planned to attend Mass at Holy Trinity Church and then a fundraising event at the local bowling alley with friends and family.

But the evening wouldn't exactly turn out as Betsy had planned. Returning to her pew after communion, Betsy suddenly felt weak and tired. "It felt like my blood sugar dropped, and I thought I just needed to eat dinner," Betsy says. "But the next thing I knew, I was waking up in the emergency room."

Betsy had fallen over in the pew. Her husband and brother-in-law carried her to the aisle, where a team of rescuers kicked into high gear. As luck would have it, there were four nurses attending Mass that evening.

"People just seemed to jump right in," says Carla Ahrens, a registered nurse who played a key role in the emergency response. "I don't remember a lot of discussion, but it wasn't needed. Everything just went as [well] as it possibly could. One woman jumped in and played the team leader role."

When the nurses didn't find a pulse, two of them took turns doing CPR. Meanwhile, a church usher ran to the back of the church to retrieve an automated external defibrillator (AED), which Carla and another nurse operated.

"The whole thing was a little intense, to say the least," Carla says. "I'm used to working in a hospital setting, [using] different equipment and resources on someone I don't know very well. I've known Betsy for a long time. I graduated three years before her, and her dad was one of my favorite teachers in high school."

Prayers answered

After the nurses administered two shocks using the ZOLL® AED Plus®, Betsy's heart began beating again. The paramedics arrived soon after and

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"CPR was great, but the defibrillator was what she needed."

*– Carla Ahrens
Registered nurse on scene*

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transported Betsy to the hospital. During the transport, they needed to administer a third shock when Betsy's heart went into v-fib. About 45 minutes later, Betsy woke up in the ER, surrounded by her family.

"We typically don't have everyone together, but it just so happened everyone was home for the fundraising event," Betsy says. "It was not the kind of night I was expecting to have, but I was happy to have everyone there for me."

Betsy later learned that she has low ejection fraction and experiences premature ventricular contractions. At the time of her sudden cardiac arrest, Betsy was also dehydrated and low on electrolytes and potassium, which was likely a contributing factor. "It was a perfect storm," she says.

When her condition stabilized, Betsy was transferred to Riverside Methodist Hospital in Columbus, where she received an implantable cardioverter defibrillator. A month later, Betsy was back in the classroom.

"I'm so grateful that the church had an AED. Even if the nurses hadn't been there, anyone could've used it.



Betsy and her family enjoying a vacation in Michigan.

The new AEDs talk to you and tell you exactly what to do. My sister was yelling at the nurses doing CPR because it kept telling them to press harder," Betsy says with a laugh.

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"I'm so grateful that the church had an AED. Even if the nurses hadn't been there, anyone could've used it."

*– Betsy Bertke
Sudden cardiac arrest victim*

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Carla agrees that the ZOLL AED was easy to operate. "You open it up and turn it on, and it tells you exactly what to do. That's pretty great for people who don't have a medical background and might be afraid they'll harm someone they're trying to save."

The fact that the church had an AED was news to both Betsy and Carla. "I'm so glad that they had that defibrillator," Carla says. "I truly believe that's what saved Betsy's life. CPR was great, but the defibrillator was what she needed. That AED was amazing for her and I can't express enough that it truly made her outcome."