

## **GRATITUDE: THE ORIGIN OF SERVICE**

As a struggling comedian, Danny Thomas was discouraged and felt as if his career was headed nowhere. While attending mass, Thomas turned his attention to Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes. He whispered a prayer for guidance, vowing to give back if ever he was blessed with the ability to earn a living as an entertainer.

### **A Hospital Founded on Gratitude**

Over the course of time Thomas enjoyed increasing opportunities as a performer: first as a comedian, then as a character on radio broadcasts, and finally as an on-screen actor. He not only was able to make a living doing what he loved, he experienced success far beyond his highest hopes, winning a Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actor in 1954. Grateful for his good fortune, Danny Thomas honored the pledge he had made as a young comedian. By the mid-1950's he had donated a \$250,000 to finance a research program for a children's hospital. The medical facility that Thomas envisioned, Saint Jude Children's Research Hospital, opened in 1962.

### **A Hospital Funded through Thankfulness**

Danny Thomas' vision for St. Jude was to provide health care to children suffering from catastrophic illnesses—regardless of their family's ability to pay for the medical costs. Founding the hospital was one thing, but financing the hospital's operation would be another challenge altogether. To raise the money, Danny, of Lebanese heritage, enlisted the support of fellow Americans of Middle Eastern descent. He felt that these Americans should fund the hospital to thank the United States for the gift of freedom the country had given them. His appeal attracted over 100 supporters, who together created the American Lebanese Syrian Association Charities (ALSAC) for the express purpose of fundraising for St. Jude. Members of ALSAC worked tirelessly to collect the money to construct the hospital building and to finance its annual budget.

The gratitude epitomized by the founders of ALSAC remains central to St. Jude's fundraising strategy. Since 2004 St. Jude has conducted a national outreach campaign, *Thanks and Giving* ([www.tg.stjude.org/index.shtml](http://www.tg.stjude.org/index.shtml)) launched by Danny's daughter, Marlo. The campaign invites donors to, "Give thanks for the healthy kids in your life, and give to those who are not."

### **Summary**

St. Jude holds the distinction of being America's most trusted non-profit organization, and the hospital frequently is rated as the top pediatric care provider in United States. On average, Saint Jude serves 5,700 patients per year. When the hospital first opened, the overall survival rate for children with childhood cancers

was under 20%. Today, thanks to the innovative research and pioneering protocols of St. Jude, survival rates are 80%.

The impetus behind the tremendous service that St. Jude provides to society can be summed up in a single word: *gratitude*. First and foremost, the hospital is a byproduct of the thankfulness of its founder, Danny Thomas. St. Jude also bears the legacy of appreciative Americans of Middle Eastern ancestry who secured funding for the facility's construction and for the hospital's yearly operating budget. Finally, Saint Jude continues to expand its influence due to a host of donors who, as an expression of gratitude, generously contribute to its annual fundraising campaign.



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