

St John's Evangelical Church



Foundation of
Faith 1880

125 Years

St John's United Church of Christ



Nurturing the
Faith 2005

St. John's United Church of Christ 125th Anniversary Celebration Book

1880



2005

For all the saints who showed your love in how they lived and where they moved, for mindful women, caring men, accept our gratitude again.

For all the saints who love your name, whose faith increased the Savior's fame, who sang your songs and shared your word, accept our gratitude, good Lord.

For all the saints who named your will and saw your kingdom coming still through selfless protest, prayer and praise, accept the gratitude we raise.

Bless all whose will or name or love reflects the grace of heaven above. Though unacclaimed by earthly powers, your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

Preface

“Every generation is but the stepping stone for the next one,” declared Herman Buff, President of the 1930 St. John’s Board of Directors, in his Golden Jubilee Message. *His message rings true today as we celebrate the 125th Anniversary of St. John’s United Church of Christ.* He remembered the small group of Christians of German descent who founded St. John’s Evangelical Church in June 1880. He stressed the importance of pausing in the days of rejoicing to reflect on past accomplishments and future plans.

Rev. F.R. Schreiber wrote that several German families met for divine worship in Koch’s Hall on Bridge Street. A young pastor from Sturgis preached to them in their mother tongue. His name was Rev. Fredrick Mueller.



Rev. Fredrick Mueller

About twenty families accepted the constitution of the new church on June 20th, 1880 and Rev. Mueller became the first pastor of St. John’s.

A Sunday school was organized and not much later a Women’s Society, “the Frauenverein” was formed. St. John’s became a church which would cultivate the best church traditions of the Evangelical State Churches in Germany, from which almost all the immigrants had come.

It is claimed that the preservation of treasures, which included the language of Martin Luther and the wonderful German Chorals, “contributed greatly to the spiritual and cultural life of our church and country.”

And so the stones began to be laid from 1880 to 50 years later in the 1930 Jubilee Celebration, and on to the 100 Year Celebration in 1980, to the present. The stepping stones have been many, the pathway long, reaching from the first twenty families who laid the foundation of faith to 125 years of loyal sojourners who were called as Christians to live their faith.



St. John's Evangelical Church 1880

Rev. Nelson Andres, in his centennial message, affirmed that “*Our church has been served by dedicated and able pastors and by good and faithful laypersons, who have given us a heritage that is vast and profound.*” He continued, “*We thank God for those relatives and friends who have given us such a rich legacy of enthusiasm and support, of cooperation and service, of faith and conviction.*”

In these pages you will find their stories—stories of hardship, hope, and profound faith, of praise and rejoicing, and stories of those responding to human need, with compassion and action.



As we complete one and quarter centuries in Christ’s service, our church family celebrates with heartfelt appreciation the gifts of the faithful. We dedicate ourselves to continue to uphold their legacy of love and compassion, and prayerfully ask God’s guidance as we seek to learn more about Him through worship and study, keeping ever mindful of the presence of His spirit in our lives and in our church. We go now to continue to lay the stones of our faith journey, perhaps in a new way as the United Church of Christ. We ask God to wrap His loving arms around us as we travel on our way as His faithful people.

In The Beginning



As we reflect on past history, we discover that eight German families left Immanuel Lutheran Church due to their disagreement regarding that church's stand on Fraternal organizations. They began to gather at Kochs Hall on Bridge Street NW for church services. The group grew to 20 families.

Reverend Frederick Mueller, the brother of Mr. R. Rebentisch, one of the members, preached to them, in German. After only four meetings, they asked him to lead them and a temporary organization was formed on June 20, 1880. A constitution was submitted to the people. They accepted the call to become members of what would be called St. John's Evangelical Church. A Sunday school and Women's Society, the "Fraunverein," were soon organized .

One year later the congregation built a Gothic style church on Mt.Vernon Avenue NW which seated 400 members. The dedication was on December 11, 1881. The lot and building cost \$11,000 with a \$6,000 mortgage. The large debt would prove to be a great burden.

Reverend Adolf Schmidt (1886-1889)- During his service a parsonage was built next to the church. It was completed and dedicated in 1890. However, due to the lack of funds it was only a shell with a few of the basic comforts. Later, it would be updated.

Parsonage Built in 1890

Financial Woes in 1892

Reverend David Greiner (1889-1895)- In 1892 there were 42 members of St John's. It was difficult to find the money to pay a minister; even the interest on the mortgage suffered. Rev. Greiner would take speaking engagements and would help financially when the treasury was low. He worked with the youth from the Grigendbund in 1892. He was the director of the choir and served the congregation cheerfully in spite of an illness which caused his death on April 25, 1895.



Reverend Paul Keinath (1895-1897) – He kept the church going during his two difficult years of service, but little is recorded about his pastorate.

Rev. Keinath

Praise Given to Reverend and Mrs. Schreiber for Faithful Service



Rev. Schreiber and Mrs Schreiber with Family

In Reverend Schreiber's forty years of service, major changes occurred at St. John's. In the early 1900's, renovations began on the parsonage. Additions to the home were: indoor plumbing, electricity, a new furnace the completion of four second floor rooms and a porch. In 1904, a new church basement was added for a cost of \$1900. In 1905, the lot next door was purchased for \$1,200. That same year, in response to a letter written by members of the Women's Society, one of whom was Mrs. John (Elizabeth) Roh, Andrew Carnegie donated \$1,000 toward the purchase of a new Estey Organ (\$2,250) for the church. At this time an organ loft and railing for the choir loft were built.

Rohs Active in the Early Church and The Tradition Continues

Now and then someone asks me if I was married at St. John's. I was not married *at* St. John's, but I've been married *to* St. John's for almost 60 years. Bob and I were married in Decatur, Illinois in the Methodist church where I grew up. As soon as I moved to Grand Rapids I joined St. John's. At the time Rev. Franke was the minister, and my father-in-law, John Roh, was the President of the consistory (as it was then called). Those were troublesome times for all concerned. Thus began my association with St. John's.

Andrew Carnegie Well Known Philanthropist Sends Donation



Mt. Vernon Church Interior With Estey Organ

Bob's family (both his mother and father's side) were in on the beginnings of St. John's. I remember my mother-in-law telling me about her women's group contacting Andrew Carnegie, the great philanthropist, to help them get an organ for the Mt. Vernon church building. Every generation of the Rohs since has been very active in helping the church to stay alive - even the in-laws - sometimes during very delicate situations.

My experience at St. John's started as a young bride away from home for the first time and unknown to anyone. I was moving into a very well established church community. Everyone took me in as one of their own, and I've had that same friendly, family feeling for all these years. There have been times of great joy and times of great sorrow in our family, and through it all this church family has been an incredible source of comfort and support. There's always someone interested in how things are going for you, to say something uplifting when you're low, or at the very least to give you a big hug. One of the many blessings that came to me through my marriage is my relationship with this church family.

My prayer would be that St. John's U.C.C. is still a source of love, comfort, and spiritual growth 125 years from now. My memories are of the people who have crossed my path here for the past 60 years.

Phyllis Roh

Kay Walcott Tells of Her Father's Role in Heating Plant Installation

My mother and father, Elisabeth Braun Swart and Siebold Swart, were charter members of St. John's. He was a master plumber and installed the steam heating plant in the original St. John's built in 1880 on Mt. Vernon Ave. The cost of the installation was \$1,075.

In the early 1900's, my parents sold the plumbing shop on Stocking Ave. and bought an eighty acre farm in Marne. We did come to St. John's at Christmas time. When I was in the eighth grade, I started confirmation. I took the Greyhound bus into Grand Rapids once a week for the Catechism Class. When we were confirmed we had to recite from the catechism book in front of the congregation. Reverend Schreiber was the pastor.

I married Herman Walcott in 1941. We moved to Detroit and lived there until 1946 when my husband's mother died and we inherited a home in Wyoming Township, now the city of Wyoming. My husband took a job with Grand Rapids Transit driving bus. That meant working on Sundays.



S.A. & Elisabeth Swart

Dorothy Bound's Request Leads To Teaching Position

When my daughter, Eileen, was three-years-old we would take the city bus to St. John's on Sunday mornings. My daughter could not understand how the pastor got into the pulpit as it came out of the wall. Reverend Buchmueller showed her the stairs that he took to get into the pulpit.

Dorothy Bounds asked me to teach Sunday school. By that time we had a second daughter, Janet. The Bounds picked us up every Sunday so that I could teach the second grade. In 1956 St. John's moved to the new building on Bridge St. where I taught the fifth and sixth grades, assisted by my husband until his stroke in 1971. Herman died April 19, 1980, on his 71st birthday. It was also the 100th year celebration of St. John's. Many of our friends attended the celebration and then came to the funeral home.

Eileen and Janet were both baptized, confirmed and married at St. John's. **Katherine M. Walcott**

Many Years of Struggle End With Joy

In 1913, after many years of struggle, it was with much joy that the mortgage on the church was paid.

In 1921, further changes included the installation of comfortable pews and six large art glass windows in memory of friends and relatives. Not long after, in 1926, a new parsonage at 209 Glenhaven NW was purchased for \$15,430.

To celebrate the 50th Anniversary of St. John's, a beamed ceiling and electric lights were added to the church and in that year, 1930, the membership had grown to 360. Until 1915, all services were done in German, including Sunday school. In the 30's, English and German Worship Services were held. In 1934 the Evangelical and Reformed churches united to form St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church.

During Rev. Schreiber's long term of service, he and his wife, Mathilde were loved and respected for their loyalty and dedication to their church.



Rev. Franke

Reverend Adolf Fritz (1938) - served as interim during this year. The following year Reverend Franke became pastor.

Reverend Theodore Franke (1939-1947) - He was a great comfort to his German congregation during the World War II years. He was devoted to the 100-plus St. John's men who served in the armed forces.

Franke Influences Life and Faith of Long -Time St. John's Member

As a lifelong member of St. John's I'd like to share a memory of one pastor who had the greatest influence on me in my Faith Journey. His name was Theodore Franke and the time was the 1940's. I was in his Confirmation Class, which at that time was called Catechism.

Every Saturday morning for two years we were required to memorize parts of the Catechism book. Rev. Franke taught us how to relate this to our daily lives and decision making. To this day, this is still my guide in trying to live my life according to God's will.

Thank you, Rev. Franke. I wish you could have known how great an influence you have had on my life and faith.

Ann (Hailfinger) LaBrenz

Prayer Book Sustains Family

My husband is the late Eugene (Gene) Heugel, born 6-17-1922 in Oetisheim Germany. He immigrated to Grand Rapids in 1928 with his mother and aunt. His father came a year earlier to find a job and home for them.

His parents were Wilhelm (William) and Emma Heugel who were members of St. John's Church until they moved to Milwaukee, WI in 1949. Gene, also a member of the church, was confirmed in the church too.

Gene and I were married in St. John's on December 25, 1943 by Rev. Theodore Franke at the church on Mt. Vernon. I was baptized on Easter Sunday 1944. Our first child, Rodney Eugene, was baptized at St. John's in 1948 or 1949.



Eugene & Greta Heugel

Emma died November 25, 1980 and Bill on May 17, 1982. Gene passed away May 18, 1989. I remember a service on Christmas Eve 1944 where you had a candle on a cross for every person who was serving their country at war. It was very impressive.

I also want to share the following with all of you about a prayer book presented to my husband:

***The Power of Prayer...and the Little Prayer Book
Which Sustains My Family in Time of War***

It is only a small prayer book which fits in a shirt pocket but if it could talk, it would have the most interesting stories to tell.

This book was given to my husband, the late Eugene (Gene) Heugel during World War II by his church, St. John's United Church of Christ in Grand Rapids. He carried it with him for over two years including 20 months tour of duty in the European Theater of Occupation, where he participated in five major campaigns and was wounded three times.

I found this book several years ago and showed it to my son, Thorn, who asked if he could have it so I gave it to him. Thorn's son, Christopher Heugel and daughter, Rebecca Jones, are both in the U. S. Army.

Chris carried this book during his service in Kosovo in 1998, Afghanistan in 2002-2003 and in Iraq in 2003-2004. When my granddaughter, Becky, was assigned to Fort Bliss, Texas, in March for 2-weeks training prior to going to Kuwait; and later Iraq, she visited her brother, Chris, now stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, whom she hadn't seen in two years.

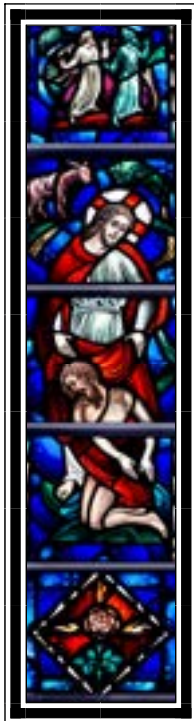
Yes! You guessed it! Becky is now carrying that same prayer book in her left shirt pocket. That prayer book has become a very important item in the military history of my family and prayers have kept them safe. She is now back in Belgium where she is a Communications Specialist at NATO.

Greta C. Heugel

Stechow Heads Stained Glass Window Selection



The Annunciation



The Good Samaritan

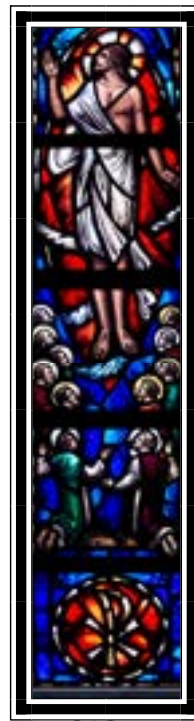
The first service in our Bridge Street church was held on February 5, 1956, with windows consisting of pastel colored squares.

In the late 50's or early 60's my father was a member of the consistory. At one Consistory Meeting, the Pastor, Rev. Herb Barten, asked my dad to chair a committee to find and select stained glass windows for the chancel and aisles. When my dad told my mother and me of the chairmanship we were in a state of high glee, for my dad was color blind-except for red- and had no interest in art.

He chose as his committee, Harold Comfort, Howard Zaremba, Virginia Anderson, and either Louise Kellenberger or Emma Ritcheski and



Easter Sunday



The Ascension

they set about to find a stained glass window company and to select the windows which grace our sanctuary today.

Windows Given To Show Appreciation

They chose Connick, a company from Boston. After a long search and many meetings were held and designs were poured over, their selections were made. In 1961, three Chancel and 6 Aisle windows were dedicated. By 1963, the balance of the windows were dedicated and in 1966 the 6 Narthex windows and windows over the nave were installed.

My dad and his committee were always pleased to say that they NEVER had to ask for donations. All of the windows were donated by individuals in memory of loved ones or in appreciation for service to the church.

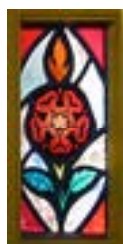


Maynard Stechow,
chairman of the window
selection committee.

Each time I enter the Sanctuary, I smile and privately say, "Well done, chairman, who couldn't see colors," and his faithful committee.

Carol Stechow

Stained Glass Windows in Doors Often Forgotten Despite Their Beauty



The door on the left has a rose. This is used to signify a number of things, including love, paradise, beauty, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, but especially the hope for the Messiah.



In the center doors, the left door has a cross on an orb representing Christ as the hope and salvation of this world.



In the center doors, the right door has a cross with a crown. Christ says, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life".



The door on the right has an anchor, a symbol of the hope we have as the result of our faith in Christ

A Treasured Gift Given for 100 Year Anniversary

I was a member of St. John's for 78 years and I have lots of memories of "old" St. John's.

My mother, Eda Mohr, was a member of St. John's all of her life. She lived to be 85 years-old. She was the secretary of the church for many years. She made the bulletins for Sunday on an old mimeograph machine that worked by hand. She had to type a stencil and put it on the machine and then ink the machine. I used to be at the other end with papers to put in between so they wouldn't smear. On Saturday morning I would hop on my bike and take the bulletins to church.



My husband, Ron, (he was also called Doug), was the one who went to the old church on Mt. Vernon when it was being taken down and, in a blizzard, took the two round windows out and took them to my mothers for safe keeping. When my mother died, we put them in the attic at our house.

When St. John's had the 100th anniversary, we gave them back to the church. They were installed in the barrier free entry addition. Ron had also removed the sign and cornerstone from the old building and they, too, are in this new addition. **Caroline (Mohr) DuBois**

Mt. Vernon Stained Glass Windows Find a Home in Barrier-Free Addition Through the Generosity of DuBois Family

Architectural Addition Compatible with Existing Church Brings Beauty and Accessibility



Ground breaking begins with Carl Drost (Property Chairman) turning dirt and Carl Sommers, Art Doering, and Lynn Bowers looking on.

Doering family's foresight enhances beauty of the church and accessibility. Construction is started on October 18, 1981. One year later in October of 1982 the project reaches completion with an exterior covered portico and an interior ramp and elevator.



Committee poses with architect Bob Czerew, Lynn Bowers, Carl Drost, Bill Walters and Art Doering, Maynard Stechow and Randy Hamstra. The committee is pleased with the design and ready to begin construction.



Construction of Barrier Free addition brings easy access for everyone, compatibility of design to the existing building is pleasing and the elevator makes lower level Fellowship Hall accessible.

Buchmeuller Serves Six Years



Reverend Theodore Buchmeuller (1947 – 1953) – There were no major changes in the parsonage or church during his years of service. He was respected as a counselor.

Rev. Buchmeuller

Mt Vernon Church Demolished-Brach Donates Land for New Church

Reverend Bert Helm (1953-1957) During his service the church on Mt. Vernon would be replaced by a new church at a cost of \$256,000. Land donated by the Brach family is the present location of St. John's United Church of Christ.

Ceremony HeldCorner Stone Laid in May 1955



Rev Bert Helm



Reverend Donald Gabler (1955 – 1957) Joined St. John's in 1955 as an Associate Pastor and stayed on until 1958 when he took a position at Bethel Evangelical & Reformed in Pontiac, MI.

In 1957, the Evangelical and Reformed Churches merged with Congregational Churches to form the United Church of Christ, and St. John's became St. John's United Church of Christ. Final payment on the debt of the church was made that same year.

Brach Niece Praises God - Shares Memories – Sheds Light on Gabler Pastorate

God has most certainly been by my side all the days of my life. Praise God!! Alleluia!!! Thank you, *Lord*, for walking with me.

Going back in time-We all know how important those “Memory Moments” are.

Well, my mother and dad, Ed and Dorothy Wiest, and both of their parents before them were members of St. John's. (The Wolfer and Wiest families). So, I was born into St. John's church. It has been such a big part of my life, with memories of many good friends from Sunday school, Junior Choir, Confirmation, Youth Fellowship and Senior Choir.

I was in the last Confirmation Class that Rev. Franke had, a large class of 21. Rev. Franke was such a wonderful teacher. Back then, the church was our recreation! Many of my friends from St. John's have kept in touch over the years. It was our other family and it meant so much to us. Today, things are so different. There are so many other activities outside of the church that take up family time.

My Aunt Bertha and Uncle Ray Brach bought the property for the current church and also the church camp on the Thornapple River. Before the church was built on the property at Bridge and Covell, there was a house there where our group met on Sunday evening. I'm sure that Larry Kammert and others remember that. We had a record player and did a little dancing. It was a good time of fellowship.



Rev. Gabler at the organ.

While we were still at the old church on Mt. Vernon, Roger Bauer, a St. John's member and college classmate of Don Gabler's at Elmhurst College in Illinois told him about an opening for an Associate Pastor. After graduation from Elmhurst where Don had been a philosophy major, he went to Eden Seminary. He was the third generation of his family to attend Eden.

Music Brings Connection Between Gabler and Wiest

After graduating from seminary, Don was allowed to choose a church, unlike when his father graduated from Eden and had no choice of placement and was sent to Rome, New York (Don always loved telling people he was born in Rome!), and in 1955 Don chose St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI.

He was hired as Associate Pastor and as such wore many hats. He was Choir Director, Christian Education Leader, preached one Sunday each month and did weddings and funerals. The Senior Minister, Reverend Bert Helm, allowed Don a great deal of freedom, which he always appreciated. He lived with the Otto Sommer family which included their youngest son, Fred. Don and Fred were like brothers and the Sommers became Don's family away from home. I am sure Carl and Marian Sommer can tell you many stories. Don spent time helping Carl fix his roof – also a good place to write sermons, so I was told. And as Choir Director, Don worked closely with members of the choir, one of whom was Mary Lou Wiest, who became Mrs. Donald Gabler on May 18th, 1957.



Mary Lou & Don Gabler

Don was with St. John's from 1955 through the move to the new church in 1956 until 1958 when another Elmhurst college friend, Roger Johnson, came to visit and offered Don a position at Bethel Evangelical & Reformed Church in Pontiac, MI. Don said yes and we were there 37 years. Bethel was a loving family for us. We raised four children there, Paul, Luanne, Mark and Daniel. Don retired in 1995 and we came back to Grand Rapids and to St. John's. Sadly, Don passed away August 22, 1997. I do thank God for the 40 years we had together.

Mary Lou (Wiest) Gabler

Barten Family Arrives in '58 Embraced by St. John's Church Family

Reverend Herbert Barten (1958 – 1968) – During Reverend Barten's time at St.



New Addition in 1961

John's a new educational wing was added, three rooms on the main floor and six rooms on the lower level, at a cost of \$72,000. The dedication was held in April, 1961. The ethnicity of the congregation became more diversified.



Rev. Barten greets Mrs. Youngberg and Mrs. Doering

Pastor Inspires Service In Christian Education

A person who made a great impression on me was the Rev. Herbert H. Barten .

First of all, he asked me to coach the St. John's Boys Basketball Team, which I accepted and felt proud to be asked.

Then, Rev. Barten said, "How would you like to help in the Christian Education School?" Again, I said yes. And so I started helping teach the Kindergarten Class at St. John's.

I remember Rev. Barten always praised anyone who tried to help. He always had something nice to say about you, to make you feel wanted. He believed everyone, young or old deserved the same courtesy.



I remember one time like it was yesterday. He always had the Confirmation Class sit in the first pew in the Sanctuary and take notes while he led the Sunday Service. This one particular Sunday, while he was preaching, lo and behold, there in the front row with the confirmands were two boys who were talking to each other and not listening to him. After a short while, Rev. Barten stepped down and led the two boys up to the Chancel and set them down so everyone could see them. Needless to say the boys were confirmed with a different outlook on life.

Rev. Barten started the “Couples Club” in 1963 which evolved into the *Young at Heart* Group here at the church. He just had a way of getting people active in church.

I will say that Rev. Barten was a savior for me. He was a kind person in many ways, a strict person in ways also, and, forgiving of you when things were not going according to his plans. What a leader of human beings! *Rev. Barten will always be missed by me and remembered as a great pastor at St. John’s Church.*

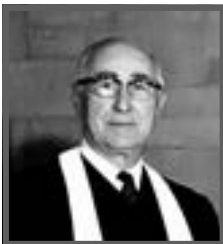
Bill Foster

Associate Pastors Play Important Role In Lives Of Children

Reverend Donald McPeek (1964-1966) - In 1964 Reverend McPeek came to St. John’s as an Associate Minister. He remained for 2 years, followed by Reverend Michael Playdon who served as associate for 1 year (1967-1968). Rev. M. Playdon is Pastor of a church in England and Rev. D. McPeek is retired and living in Wisconsin.



Rev. M Playdon & Rev D McPeek



Rev. Baumgartner

Reverend Walter Baumgartner (1968-1969) - Having served as an Associate Minister with Reverend Barten, he became the interim after Reverend Barten’s departure and resumed his position as Associate Minister in 1969. He and his wife, Ruth, were active in the life of the Church.

Jerry and Barbara Brought a Young Family and Fresh Creative Ideas to St. John’s



Rev. Jerry O’Connor

Reverend Gerald O’Connor (1969—1972) It was Reverend O’Connor that introduced the “Hanging of the Greens”, which has become a St. John’s tradition. He was innovative and presented many new ideas, one of which was preaching from the center aisle in the sanctuary. Reverend O’Connor and his wife, Barbara, preferred their own home, so the decision was made to sell the parsonage on Glenhaven.

Letter of Congratulations to St. John’s Family of Faith

How does one "congratulate" a church on its 125th anniversary? The church building isn't 125 years old, and it isn't even in the original location, but the building isn't the church - the hundreds of souls who have been and continue to be a part of St. John's family of faith are those who deserve congratulation and praise for all they have achieved in God's name.

Barbara, I, and our 3-year-old son, David, arrived in the summer of 1969. Our daughter, Kathryn, was welcomed into our family and the church family that November. It was a time of great joy and change for us and for the church family. We remember the many people who welcomed us and helped us fill the pages of a three year chapter in our lives. Together, we made many changes in the life and activities of the church, none of which would have been possible without the help of Mary Esch and Stella Bower in the church office, Willa Bauer at the organ, Walter Baumgartner as my ministry partner and the many who supported me along the way.



What are the events that stand out in our minds? Hanging of the Greens, O'Connor style, - so many people involved in an afternoon of activity, sharing in the joy of the Advent season, preparing for Christmas and all without a rehearsal. Willa Bauer wasn't at all sure we could do it, but we did it. As one who seeks to be creative and challenging, the Sunday we created a service around the musical, "Jesus Christ, Superstar" brought a record attendance of young and old. Then there was the Sunday I chose to accept the challenge to leave the pulpit and preach from the aisle - it was a Wow! experience. Some were confused and a bit dismayed, tradition had been challenged, but I'll never forget Art Doering's comment at the end of the service, he indicated his approval and offered that he might learn to play the guitar and walk with me in the aisle.

Events involving the congregation, individuals and families flood my/our minds: Mother and Daughter Banquets cooked by the pastor and men of the church - Bill Walter was my right-hand man in the kitchen. Relocation of the offices, painting fellowship hall with those bold colors of olive green and bittersweet; rearranging the chancel furnishings, events at St. John's Camp - the list is endless.



Many happy moments were shared with our St. John's family: baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals, each event marking time in the lives of the family members.

As you celebrate 125 years, we remember our joy at being included in the 100th anniversary and give God praise for the impact St. John's United Church of Christ has made on our lives - it was a short time for all of us, but we had fun along the way.

To God be the glory and may the future be filled with the challenging reality, that "God is still speaking," through the

ministry of St. John's United Church of Christ.

Jerry & Barbara O'Connor

Dr. Banning Gentle Manner Endears Him To The Congregation

Reverend Andrew Banning (1972—1973) - Dr. Banning was retired from a church in, Bangor, Maine, and served as interim pastor for one year. His wisdom along with a quiet manner and willingness to help wherever needed was appreciated by St. John's members.



Rev. A Banning meets former associate minister Rev. Baumgartner

Unanimous Vote Brings Andres Family To Grand Rapids From Pennsylvania



Rev. Nelson Andres

Reverend Nelson Andres (1973-1984) - Reverend Andres and his wife, Grace moved into a new parsonage which was purchased for them on Markwood Lane NW. Reverend Andres helped to spearhead the 100th Anniversary of St. John's in 1980. The barrier free addition was completed in 1982. He and Grace contributed greatly to the work of the church. When he retired, they remained members of St. John's. In 1986, he was honored by receiving the title of Pastor Emeritus.

A Letter From The Heart: Tells Story of a Family Serving Their Church

It was in the Spring of 1972 when my late husband, the Rev. Nelson H. Andres was presiding as the minister of Grace United Church of Christ in Hanover, PA... We were visited by Arlon Ley and James Stephens of St. John's United Church of Christ, Grand Rapids, Michigan, to evaluate my husband's preaching ability and to interview him as a candidate for the then vacant pulpit at St. John's.

That week we were hosting a group of visiting high school band members, so we invited Arlon and Jim to join us for dinner. All went well until Stacia, our youngest daughter tripped while serving the dessert and apple strudel covered our guests, however they all cleaned up well and the pulpit committee invited my husband to present a trial sermon at St. John's. He accepted a unanimous vote to fill the vacancy, so we made plans to relocate to Grand Rapids. My husband, myself and, Stacia (then 14), our 17-year-old Doberman and 17-year-old pet White Dove, made the trip from Hanover to Grand Rapids in one LONG day. Michelle, our oldest daughter, was studying international law in Bologna, Italy, and did not see her new home in Grand Rapids until the following year.

I have many fond memories of St. John's church and the wonderful people and friends we made here. I had the joy of helping select a new parsonage and it will always be in memories as an all time favorite home. I loved our visits to St. John's camp in Ada and all the delightful events that we enjoyed there. Another



*Receiving Pastor Emeritus award
from Dietrich Roth in 1986*

highlight was the wedding of our two daughters, as their father conducted the service and I gave them away-such proud moments.



The Rev. Andres family

I remember well the many weddings, baptisms and confirmations that were so delightful and sadly the many funerals. I remember the parsonage open houses and hunting for the biggest Christmas Tree for the church at Tanis' farm. Then there was the Couples Club activities (were we ever that young?) and the thrill and excitement of watching the new addition to the church being built. I especially appreciate the elevator now at this time in my life. But, one of my most lasting impressions was watching my husband baptize nine of our 10 grandchildren. After serving as pastor to St. John's for twelve years, it came time to retire. In his retirement, Reverend Andres was honored as Pastor Emeritus for an additional fourteen years. It was sad to move from the parsonage that had been our happy home for many years.

But it was also a thrill to buy our very own home for the first time in our married life and after 21 years, I still enjoy it.

After 51 years of marriage, my husband passed away on February 10th, 1999 in Sarasota, FL and is buried in Rosedale Cemetery, Grand Rapids, MI. The funeral service was held at his beloved St. John's church that he held so important. He will live forever in my heart. May God bless you all!

Grace Andres

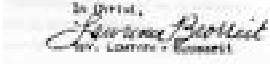
A Man Of Compassion Enters Our House

Reverend Larry Brosseit (1984 – 1985)

Dear Friends:

Our desire at St. John's is to become a people who belong to Jesus Christ, and also a community that cares about people in His name. We are a congregation open to the fresh winds of the Spirit, allowing God to shape us into an instrument of His grace for the healing and wholeness of all who would join us in the pilgrimage of faith.

We are one in the spirit and one in the Lord, finding in Jesus Christ the Hope of the world.



As interim he held interesting bible studies and was appreciated for his counseling abilities. He was an eloquent speaker as well. A request was made for him to remain as Senior Pastor but denomination rules did not allow for that possibility. He became senior pastor at Comstock Park United Church of Christ.



Rev. Brosseit



Rev. Roger Brooks

Reverend Roger Brooks (1986-1989) – Worked with the youth and promoted many programs in the church including setting new goals.

His wife Emily was an active participant and became director of the Sunday School program. They moved to Milwaukee where he became senior minister.

Emily and I have been enjoying our life in Milwaukee since leaving St. John's Church in 1989. For nine years I found interim ministry in southeast Wisconsin to be a satisfying calling. Since retiring in 2002, I have been pursuing my social advocacy passion. We are active at Plymouth UCC, are in fine health and enjoy camping/traveling, and our children and grandchildren.

Rev. Roger Brooks

Rev Donald E Washburn was our interim minister starting in **1989** for two months.

Ott Tried New Techniques To Make Confirmation Relevant

Reverend Michael Ott (1989 – 2001) During his service, Reverend Ott brought about many changes. He and his wife, Mary Louise, and their sons, lived in the parsonage upon arrival but would soon purchase their own home. The Markwood Lane property was sold.

Reverend Ott initiated new ways of teaching Confirmation and was instrumental in having more participation in worship by lay members. During his tenure, Mary Louise became Choir Director.

In 1993, donations were made for a set of Hand Bells and the Bell Choir was formed under the direction of Brian Bartusch, organist.



The Children gather with Rev. Ott in the Chancel

The Lauck Pipe Organ Gift to the Congregation

The Lauck Pipe Organ was purchased for \$130,000 and installed in 1992 after the renovation of the Chancel with additional paneling, moveable altar, new choir chairs, and carpeting for the Chancel and Sanctuary.

Committees were changed to Ministry Groups, one of which helped plan Worship with the guidance of the New Faith Development Director, Terrie Loomis and Reverend Ott.

In 1999, Reverend Ott received his PhD. In the Spring of 2001, he took a position with Grand Valley University.



Members gather for adult bible study with Rev. Ott.



Rev. Bendroth

Reverend Norman Bendroth (2001-2004) – As an interim he brought peace and healing to the church and helped renew the spirit of the people. He and his wife, Peggy, participated in the Lenten Luncheon Series. They, with their children, Nathan and Anna, moved to Cambridge MA. He serves as Senior interim at the Congregational Church of Topsfield (UCC). Peggy is Executive Director/Librarian of the American Congregational Association.

Remembering High Lights At St. John's

I think of you often with great fondness. I remember the many fun lunches after church with the silver-haired set. Pete Post would always round us up and announce the restaurant. I remember the many conversations (always over coffee!) about matters of faith, love, impending surgery, the future of the church, past hurts, future hopes, and joyful celebrations. I remember handing out food in the parking lot with young and old alike to our less fortunate neighbors. I remember crawling on my hands and knees into the mouth of the whale that swallowed Jonah during our VBS. I remember great conversations with Kim and her mom as we folded bulletins or set up the Easter Prayer Vigil.

I remember what a kick in the gut it was when we got the news about 9/11 and how we put our faith to use as we tried to make sense of it. I remember Thursday morning Bible studies, babies being baptized and Ron and Kris Martell renewing wedding vows on their fifth wedding anniversary. I remember jawboning with Frank Jenks about pop culture and the Christian faith, I remember with appreciation the creative worship services we had (especially the Living Last Supper) and how you all graciously responded to my preaching.

Perhaps the events most indelibly imprinted in my mind took place during my last two months when the paramedics were called on two different occasions during the Sunday service. It was truly wonderful to see how the people of St. John's pulled together as a family of faith and fortunately everything was alright

Times that were most memorable at St. John's were when we could be open, human and vulnerable with each other; when we could laugh at our foibles and yet keep high goals and ideals; when even in the midst of our differences we knew that Jesus was the glue that held us together.

I thank my God every time I remember you. Have a wonderful celebration!

With all good wishes in Christ.

Norman B. Bendroth

Reverend Lyons Called To Serve



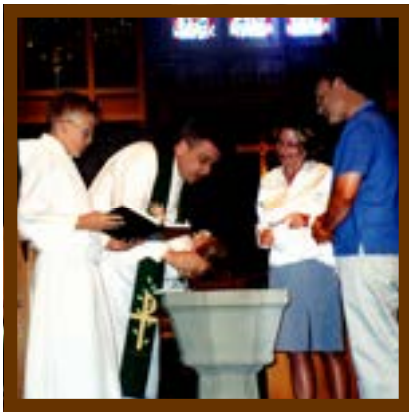
Rev. Bill Lyons

Reverend William Lyons (2004 -) Serving a little over a year now, Reverend Lyons brings his creativity to St. John's in new forms of delivering a sermon and presenting dramatic productions, as well as including varying ages of the congregation in the Worship Services.

He reinstated a strong acolyte program involving children and youth and initiated a program where they not only light the altar candles, but also help with the offering and communion.

He encourages participation in innumerable Mission Projects and is available to give support and comfort to people facing crisis in their lives. He and his partner, Ron Cammel, share their talents in the work of the church.

A Strong Faith Brings Members Together And Closer To God



Loving. Open-minded. Welcoming. Dedicated. Those words describe the founders of St. John's Evangelical Church. In 1880 those first 8 families risked a great deal in order to practice their faith from a more open and embracing posture. Their loving, open-minded, welcoming and dedicated approach to the life of Christian discipleship received God's blessing as they built a faith community that shared the best traits of their German cultural heritage with strangers and loved ones in the old country and the residents of Grand Rapids.

Through these past 125 years the women and men who have been this church have cradled infants in their arms at baptism, nurtured confirmands as they made the faith their own, consecrated marriage covenants made by couples in love, fed the hungry in both body and spirit, comforted the sick and the diseased, and commended the saints who from their labors rest. In the midst of these milestones, the men and women who have been St. John's have laughed and cried, agreed and disagreed, gained and lost, and come to love one another deeply from their hearts, just as they love their Lord Jesus Christ.

As an Evangelical congregation and then as an Evangelical and Reformed congregation, and now as a United Church of Christ congregation, the women and men who have been St. John's strive to widen their vision outside these four walls. As each preceding generation has welcomed the stranger and the immigrant, God has led this generation to say in our time "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!" The same loving, open-minded, welcoming and dedicated spirit that founded St. John's still lives in the men and women who are St. John's today.

Please accept my love and prayers for God's continued blessing as we celebrate this anniversary together. "Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus... make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

Reverend Bill Lyons



Reverend Lyons A Man Of Many Talents



Rev. Lyons hold the interest of all ages in his children's sermons and sermon dramatizations as well as in His Bible classes Relating to Life issues.



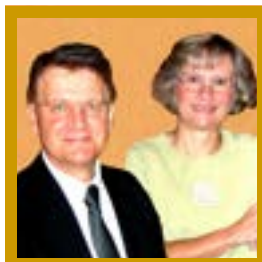
Left: Yes that is Rev. Lyons clowning around during a Sermon.
Right: Ben Tiedt and Todd Krapp having a serious talk in the 40 Days of Purpose study group



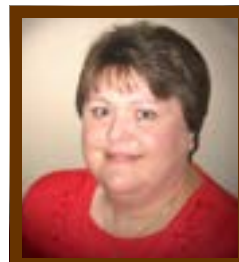
The Staff of St. John's Is Important To St. John's Church Family



Christian Education
Bill & Liz Bode
Children's Faith
Development Leaders



Music Department
Rose Manby Choir
Director
Bob Fredrick Organist



Administrative
Assistant
Kim Peck



Church Caretaker
Denny Stellard
Building Custodian

Board of Directors—Consistory—Council Titles Held By Governing Bodies of St. John's

COUNCIL STATEMENT

The Council is comprised of four executive officers and at least five lay members elected at large by the congregation to represent each Ministry Team organized to carry out the work of the church (Worship, Education, Administration, Mission and Community Action, and Fellowship and Caregiving). As the chief governing body of the congregation, the Council acts to ensure that all activities of the church reflect the mission and purpose of the congregation.

Among the ensuing recommendations of the Council was to create a new vision of the function and form of our Constitution and Bylaws to promote the ministry and mission of St. John's. Concurrence about the legal functions of our governing structure is easily achieved; however, few saw these core functions as particularly meaningful to the fulfillment of God's mission in the various settings of the church. As a result, in 2003, the congregation adopted a more flexible mission-based Constitution and Bylaws that empower Ministry Teams to focus on the ministry and mission of the church, unimpeded by the rigid structure of the traditional corporate model.



Teams Plan Programming For Education, Worship, Mission & Community Action, Fellowship and Caregiving



The present Worship Team includes L to R Reverend Bill Lyons, Bob Fredrick: Organist, Jerry Krauss: Head Usher, Rose Manby: Choir Director, John Scherphorn: Worship Team Chair and Bill Newsom.



Jerry Krauss as head usher has warmly welcomed visitors and friends for 35 years to St. John's. Here he is with those who faithfully serve under his direction. L to R Cliff Rowe, John Kritschgau Jerry Krauss, Bill Foster, Jack Belke, Bill Wild, Judy Krauss. Sue Garza, Carol Stechow.

Gillette Happy She Found Her Church Home

After moving from Big Rapids in November of 2003, I wondered where I would find my church family here in Grand Rapids. My twin sister Dottie visited me in December 2003 and helped me to get settled. One Sunday we decided to visit a new church together. I had planned on visiting several churches and wondered if it was possible to find a church that was as warm and welcoming as the United Church of Christ congregation in Big Rapids.

Our first visit was at St. John's and immediately Dottie and I were surrounded by smiling faces. We soon were invited to have lunch with a group of friendly members of the congregation. I stopped my "church shopping," and continued to attend St. John's Church. Soon I realized that the congregation was at the threshold of change. The congregation needed a new pastor. How the congregation would deal with the direction that this would take them was especially important to me. Would the church continue its commitment to reaching out to others in Christian love? Would the congregation be willing to look at their programs and make changes where changes were necessary?

When the congregation chose a pastor, Reverend Bill Lyons, who had visions for this church, who made efforts to reach out to others in the community, who preached diversity and inclusiveness, I was hooked! I wanted to be a part of this vision. I knew that I had found a church where I could develop meaningful relationships and continue to grow in my relationship with God. I had found my new church home!

Marilyn Gillette

A Positive Church Willing to Listen and Keep an Open Mind

I came to St. John's in the late 50's Reverend Barten was the minister at the time. He married Don and I and baptized two of our daughter, Kelly and Kim. I always enjoyed his sermons. To me his thinking was ahead of the time, which I always admired him for.

Reverend Andres was the minister when we left the church. He was another minister I liked a lot, again for his positive thinking and very open mind. He baptized our daughter, Keary, and son, Ted.

My return to St. John's has been such a great experience. I *truly* enjoy Pastor Bill, his sermons and *vision*. He said in his sermon on June 26th, St. John's is a church that will listen and keep an open mind. I feel very strongly that this is a very positive church!

Thank you all for a very warm welcome. It's great to be back! Much love.

Lois DeWald

"Shine With the Joy and The Love of The Lord" Major Mission Project Recommended for 125th Celebration of Faith

The mission team under the leadership of Bob Roth recommended supporting a Habitat for Humanity Northwest neighborhood build to begin in November of 2005. A gift of \$12,500 representing 125 years of the life of St John's would be given toward the start up of this home. This recommendation was supported by the Council.

Members will be called to 'let their Light shine for the kingdom' as carpenters, painters, clean up crews, food providers and encouragers, work alongside the family whose home is being built. The gift received may prove to be far greater than the gift given for St. John's people.



UCOM Important Mission to St. John's For Many Years

UNITED IN LOVE

Our outreach history with UCOM goes back many years in many different capacities— from serving on boards and tutoring at Homework House, to food drives, blanket drives and volunteering on a weekly basis. We also support them financially, both through the church mission budget and individual donations. UCOM provides more and more services to more and more people, and they really welcome our contributions in any form. United Church Outreach Ministry is our local United Church of Christ Mission.

An off shoot of our work with UCOM has been the Mobile Food pantry truck on our church parking lot. With a lot of moral support and instructions from the dedicated people at UCOM, we started up the truck three years ago. We started slowly and now serve an ever expanding number of hungry families.

It takes many people to make a program like this work. Some of the workers from St. John's that have put many hours into making it a success are Bill & Irma Wild, Bill & Virginia Miller, Bill & MaryAnn Foster, Clyde & Ann LaBrenz, Cliff & Dolores Rowe, Gerry & Judy Krauss, Pete Post, Lorraine Loef, Kim Peck, Beverly Wisner, Carol Stechow, and Jean Kritschgau.

In the summer when school was out we got a lot of help from the Jenks family, the Drost family, Frost family, Scherphorn family, and the John Roh family.

A ripple effect of our food truck is an association we have started with Mt. Mercy—a government subsidized housing development right down the hill—run by the Grand Rapids Housing Commission. Recently they started a food pantry in their building. It is run by the residents for the residents. They use ACCESS rules just as UCOM does. In our quest to be a “neighborhood church it was decided to help them out, both financially and with periodic item donations. They will also be getting some of the leftovers from the monthly food truck if we have items they can use. This is a project in addition to the work at UCOM.



Left: People waiting for their number to be called to go through the food line. Above: Ready to serve food that has been delivered by the Mobile Food Truck are Austin Blanco, Deb Scherphorn, Sandie Scherphorn, Marcie Roth and Michael Roth who are volunteers from St. John's.

A partnership with GVSU's Protestant Campus Ministry proves beneficial to all as they provide help for food truck distribution.

Mission: St. John's Lifeline To Members Community And The World

There has been a sewing group at St. John's for probably sixty years or more. At one time there were 15 to 18 women at church sewing on a regular basis – all for charities. As the years went on and lifestyles changed, there were less and less women available to sew. A few years back they started making pajamas, mostly flannel material. They were given to In The Image – an organization that gives their items free of charge to low income families. These days we are down to six very productive women, two of them are not members of St. John's. We make flannel pajamas from September to December and seersucker from January to May.



Phyllis Roh Gives The Gift of Leadership to the Sewing Circle. The Sew and Sews

Two years ago we started giving our pajamas to the children at Sibley School. Those children have attended our Women's Fellowship meeting in December to perform for us and enjoy lunch with our group. They are a total joy and so very appreciative. We have been able to donate to them 25 to 35 pairs of pajamas twice a year. We get absolutely precious thank you letters back from these kids.



Carol Stechow at work changing pillow cases into pocket storage for Sibley childrens school supplies

Our group has some very special, faithful financial supporters, which have so far enabled us to be self supporting. This project has turned into a very personal and fulfilling mission program of St. John's.



Pat Harris exudes happiness while making pajamas for the children at Sibley School.

Concentration by Florence Moler brings good quality workmanship to the finished product ..Ready to Wear Pajamas



Pat Drost works diligently cutting the fabric for the pajamas. 36 pairs were delivered to Sibley school teacher Mary Englesma in the spring. 31 thank you letters were received from children addressed to the Sewing Circle of St. John's.

Priscilla Schap focused on the task of warming the hearts of the children. They in turn warm ours. Phyllis Roh exclaims "They make your heart sing."



Sibley School Children Give Gift to St. John's A Christmas Performance and Letters of Appreciation



Children light up the lives of the St. John's women with happy smiles, beautiful voices and their letters of appreciation



St. John's Sewing Circle and Womens Fellowship were impressed with excellent manners of the Sibley School boys and girls.



St. John's Has Intentionally Become a Neighborhood Church

St. Johns Working With Kids

Yes, is a program that provides inner city youth an opportunity to find summer work. St. John's has employed some young people from this group for lawn care service.



Come And Open Your Heart Dégagé

St John's has been called to help others in many ways. The song *We Are Called* says 'we will walk with each other as sisters and brothers united in love.' 'We are called to love tenderly, to serve one another and to walk humbly with God.'

Four times a year people from St John's numbering 20 or more gather to serve and provide dinners for those who come to Dégagé for a meal. What a blessing to share the love in our hearts with those who are homeless and hungry or going through a difficult time in their lives.

Prayer Chain Links God To People In Need of Comfort



Kim Peck,
Amanda Peck, and Bev Wisner

When the church that I had been a member of since 1949 closed, I started visiting area UCC churches. It was when I walked into St. John's and was greeted by Jerry Krauss that I began to feel that I had found a new church home.

This was also the time in my life when I had retired and was planning to do more volunteer work. This led me to Vivian Hoffman and Women's Fellowship. Vivian was in charge of both the Caregivers and the Prayer Chain. She asked me to be part of the Prayer Chain.

We struck up quite a friendship. When she finally made the decision to move closer to her daughter, she asked if I would oversee the Prayer Chain. I said yes and have been working with this group ever since. Thank you Ann LaBrenz, Betty Roth, Dolores Rowe, Priscilla Schap, Margaret Bradford, Doris Bauer, Judy Krauss, Bob Roth, Mary Ann Foster and Karl Betz for your past or present participation in this ministry done the old fashioned way, via the telephone.

Vivian was also responsible for my becoming involved with Women's Fellowship, a group of women who when called upon, can get it together at a moments notice. You'll never see a better example of "serving" or friendship and outreach than in this group.

Bev Wisner

Vivian Hoffman Leaves Legacy of Caring to Kim Peck and Lay Callers

After I was led to St. John's in 2001, I became acquainted with Vivian Hoffman. She kept track of those members who were unable to attend church the way they once could or who were in need of some special attention. She assigned the lay callers to each one of these individuals.

When Vivian's macular degeneration progressed and she moved to Gladstone, Michigan to be closer to her daughter, someone was needed to continue the Caregiving Ministry. The Rev. Linda Looney and I were very interested. Linda was led in another direction, so I promised Vivian that I would carry on the work she had so lovingly done for many years. It seemed natural to me to be involved in this sort of ministry, having lived with four generations in one home since I could remember. Being around and caring for "older folk" was something I have always been a part of.

The face of the senior or persons unable to attend church is constantly changing. It is said today that 70 is the old 50, and this segment of the population is remaining much more active and vital than any generation before. (Most of our lay callers themselves are seniors!) We need to make sure our programming and ministries reflect this as well, along with traditions that have worked well in the past. I am happy to work with the people of St. John's to evolve this ministry and grow along with all of you.



Vivian Hoffman

As we celebrate 125 years of our faith journey, may we always be willing to try new things and have the vision to see where God is leading us. *Imagine* what the Caregiving Ministry will be after the next 25, 50, 100, 125 years!

Kim Peck

Kirschners Serve Seven Years In Nigeria

One of the historic responsibilities and joys of church congregations is to participate in world missions. For missionaries, being sent by a local church to represent that body in doing God's business on foreign soil is humbling and thrilling. For 7 years between 1995 and 2004 St. John's United Church of Christ "served as senders" for the ministry of Dr. Carolyn Verschoor Kirschner and Dr. Greg Kirschner in Jos Nigeria. Along with their children Christine, Katie, Stephanie and Jonathan, Carolyn and Greg worked alongside SIM International and the Evangelical Church of West Africa to care for women with devastating childbirth related injuries, and taught young Nigerian physicians in training. For the Kirschner family, the sacrificial financial support of St. John's, coupled with the ongoing prayer support and general interest of the congregation, was very encouraging. The Kirschners have enjoyed sharing with St. John's their "front row" view of what God is doing around the world. May God continue to bless St. John's congregation as it seeks to look outside itself to meet spiritual and physical needs around the world.



Greg Kirschner

TLC Given to Residents at Pilgrim Manor

Pilgrim Manor Retirement Home plays a vital role in this community and was founded by members of the United Church of Christ. It is considered a local mission of our denomination. St. John's has offered financial support over the years budgeted by Council as well as donations given by families and individuals.

Many St. John's members have lived there as independent residents, in Assisted Living and in the Health Care Center.

Throughout the years the Caregiving teams, as well as the choirs and Couples Club, now Young At Heart, have given many hours to visits and caroling. Many have volunteered there. Doris Bauer has been serving Pilgrim Manor for many years.

The gifts given to the Pilgrim Manor Foundation are used to help those residents in need of financial support.

St. John's care and concern for others has been shown over the years to our Pilgrim Manor friends.



Picturesque garden gives joy to residents.

OCWM

St. John's United Church of Christ is one of the highest per capita giving churches to Our Churches Wider Mission in Michigan

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Matthew 25: 40

SPIRITUAL GIFT OF MUSIC BRINGS EVERLASTING PEACE AND JOY

Throughout the history of the Church, from St. John's Evangelisch, to Evangelical and Reformed to St. John's United Church of Christ the choirs have been an integral part of worship.

In the Mt. Vernon church, children sang in the Junior Choir at age 6, moving next to the Treble Choir and then to the Senior Choir.

In the 60's there was a Cherub Choir of 3,4, and 5 year olds and a Junior Choir. Major Musicals including *David and Goliath* and *100% Chance of Rain* were performed by the Junior Choir under the direction of Willa Bauer.

The Senior Choir had become the Chancel Choir and the talents of its members have been and continue to be an inspiration and spiritual gift to the congregation through the beautiful music they perform.

Warren Wandrey inspired hard work by the Chancel Choir, producing magnificent cantatas. Many hours of practice went into the performance of the cantatas as well as *The Messiah* which he also directed.

Mary Louise Ott's energy and enthusiasm brought a new focus on more contemporary music. She emphasized the importance of warm-up exercises to prepare the choir for singing and she encouraged them to express their joy.

Cammi Adams ethnic music, relating stories about the origin of the songs, and learning the language of a song, introduced the choir to new ways of giving praise to the Lord.



Music that evokes an emotional response has been resonating for 125 years throughout St. John's Church. May it bring everlasting peace and joy to those who hear it for the next 125 years.

Choir Boy Meets OrganistLeads To Years of Marriage

When Willa and I started to think of what St. John's has meant to us, we began to reminisce, and memories gushed forward out of the mist of time.

Beginning with Rev. Robert Schreiber, who I never really knew because I was too young, and didn't think I liked because he pounded on the pulpit at the church on Mount Vernon. He got the attention of the congregation and I guess scared me. That was before "children's sermons" were invented.

I remember long time kindergarten teacher, Miss Ella Groggel, and Miss Elsa Frey's 6th grade class where we had to learn the 23rd Psalm from memory. In between was Mrs. Carrie Lindeman, a beloved person and teacher who, among many other loving things, sewed orange colored net bags each year that were filled with an orange, chocolates, hard candies and nuts. The bags were given out to everyone at the Sunday School Christmas Pageant. We played, we practiced and rehearsed, and really looked forward to that event for weeks.



Then came choirmaster and organist Miss Doris James, who was tough! We worked and achieved because of her dedication.

After graduating from Union High School in 1948 and Elmhurst College in 1952, it was time to come home and back to St. John's. Since church choirs are always in need of tenors, I was personally visited at home by choir director and organist, Jane Door who asked me to join the Senior Choir. I did of course, but this special visit and extra effort by Jane was something I have never forgotten.

Life experiences are sometimes sad and at other times very happy. 1954 was one of those years that produced both.

In February of 1954, Choir Director Jane Door, was in need of medical surgery. When Jane unexpectedly passed away on a Tuesday, Jeff Door, Jane's grieving husband was called upon to find a quick replacement for Thursday's choir rehearsal and Sunday service. Thinking about that now, I can't imagine burdening him with that request.

Still making music together however, enter Willa Joan Bos, a second year music and organ major at Calvin College. Oh, how I remember that first Sunday in the old church on Mt. Vernon Avenue! It was scary to say the least, having never played a church service before, and particularly not one in an Evangelical & Reformed Church. Everyone was friendly and very accepting. Rehearsals and the Service soon became familiar even if the Organ Prelude to the service had to end the moment the Custodian rang the church bell during the years when Rev. Bert Helm was Pastor. He was punctual!

Choir rehearsals were fun with interim choir director Jeff Door and members were almost always ready to walk over to the Red Lion on Bridge Street for a hot dog or coffee after rehearsal.

At rehearsals and along the way to the Red Lion, I met this "cool" tenor. It took a couple of months before our first date at Civic Theater which was performed in the St. Cecilia Auditorium. It was followed up with a snack at Hattens "Chicken in the Rough" Restaurant. We were married in June of 1956, and the rest is history.

When first son Randy came along I was not playing at church. However, when second son Brian got to be 6 or 7, I was asked to play again and continued for the next 9 years until third son Ken was born. I tried to permanently retire then, but was only allowed 1 year off before being asked to return.

Playing for the Senior Choir, which by then had been renamed The Chancel Choir, directing and playing for Junior and Cherub Choirs, working with everyone and preparing for services and special events with Musicals like, "David & Goliath"; "Moses and the Freedom Fanatics"; and "100% Chance of Rain" was a busy time. But, it was great fun and provides many happy memories.

The many friends who became a part of our lives over the years are still very close and dear to us, and we sincerely wish we could be with you as you celebrate 125 years of service to God. **Roger & Willa Bauer**

Remembers Excellent Choirs Great Musicians and Vocalists at St. John's

Where do I begin? My grandfather, William Groggel, Sr., helped to build St. John's Evangelical Church on Mt. Vernon. where my memories are centered, although my brother-in-law, Nick DeVries, was on the building committee for the present church, and the cinder blocks were made and supplied by Nick's family business.

I was the youngest of seven siblings, and all of us were baptized by Rev. F. R. Schreiber, who also confirmed all (but me). Rev. Schreiber retired just before I was confirmed.

One of my vivid memories was the huge stage, built over the altar for the Christmas pageant each year. The year most vivid for all of us who were there, building the stage and rehearsing for the pageant, was the December 7th announcement of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. What a display of shared faith and hope permeated the sanctuary that afternoon.

Who will ever forget those potluck dinners? Oh, what excellent cooks, along with scurrying around of Mrs. Ruoss. There was also the large coffee urn. My dad, Bill Groggel, had to make the coffee with his special combination of coffee, eggs and salt. No matter what activity we attended at the church, one of the women's groups, the Frauenverein, the Women's Guild, or the Dorcas Circle, efficiently and lovingly served the food.

There were the fun-filled youth fellowship meetings, always led with youth-led devotions that have come to be more meaningful through the years. They gave significance to the group, a significance we did appreciate at the time. My first Sunday School Class was taught by my Aunt Ella Groggel. She taught the "little ones", and I had to stay there forever. Of course that was because they had let me attend before I was really old enough.

Those familiar with the church on Mt. Vernon, can you remember not being able to use the balcony? Or, if it was used at all, it had to be very limited usage because the weight up there jammed the doors to the sanctuary?

As I think of St. John's, I can't help but recall the beautiful stained glass windows of the "old" church. A Bible Story was found in each of the six windows. My favorite was the window right next to the pulpit. Christ knocking at the door with no outside latch. It was the source of many good sermons, reminding us we must be the one to invite Christ into our lives. My second favorite was of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Then there were the choirs. All the excellent choirs through the years were very special to me. I will always remember Doris James and the black choir robes with white collars, the black shoes, and for the men white shirts and black ties. We memorized the first verse of the processional hymn and all verses of the recessional hymn. The quality of the music went along with her demands. We were blessed with such great musicians and such great vocalists at St. John's.

From grandpa's building of the first church, until my sister-in-law's death this past December, our family has been a part of, and served St. John's Church and the wider church. How vital St. John's was to our family's lives. Important, too, in my memories of St. John's, was the sharing of moments of spiritual significance, baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. It was there that we shared in my parents', Bill and Melita Groggel's 50th Wedding Anniversary Celebration.

As I recall these memories, I'm sure that I am joined with many of you, in saying, "Thank you, St. John's" for your nurturing of our faith, and for the foundations of faith you have given us for a lifetime. **Barbara Groggel Kasper**

Congratulations On Spreading The Love and Teachings Of Jesus Christ For Over 125 Years!

I was hired as Choir Director in September 1972, just as you called Rev. Nelson Andres as your Pastor. Andy and I had a wonderful working relationship and became close personal friends. His wife, Grace, is still one of our closest friends. My association with St. John's, the choir and members of the church brings back many fond memories including the 100th Anniversary of the church in 1980. I will always remember the choir's hard work, especially on special music including the Messiah and Cantatas.



Members of the choir and the church are still close friends and always will be. Memories keep coming back. It was a wonderful 20 years for us and St. John's. May God Bless you as you continue to spread the word of Christ.

Warren Wandrey



Uplifting Spirit Evident In Her Performance at the Organ

Chris VanHof came to St. John's as organist when the Chancel Choir was under the direction of Warren Wandrey. Her joyful spirit helped to bring out the best in the choir.

**Handbells Arrive
The Talented Brian
Bartusch First
Director**



**Other Creative
Handbell Choir
Directors Keep
The Bells Ringing**

As the congregation at St. John's United Church of Christ continues to grow together in their faith, their desire to express their love for God through music continues to grow as well. With the help of donations, the church purchased a set of handbells in 1992. The set contained three octaves allowing for eleven ringers. As the group progressed, chimes were added in 1998. The founding director was the talented Brian Bartusch. In the following years the Hand Bell choir was also directed by Stephanie Wiltse, Luann Barnes, Cammi Adams and Rose Manby.

New Organ's Sound Brought to Life by Bartusch

Brian Bartusch (1989—2000) He received a Bachelors Degree in Organ Performance from Aquinas College. Brian arrived at St. John's when Michael Ott become senior minister and Warren Wandrey was choirmaster. He was in *Embellish*, a bell ringers group which performed throughout the Michigan area. When the bells were purchased, he gathered a group together who were eager to learn how to ring. They became St. John's first Bell Choir.

Bob Fredrick Brings His Musical Talent to St. John's

Bob Fredrick (2000 - present) For 19 years prior to coming to St. John's, Bob was organist at Hope Lutheran Church. He grew up in a Lutheran church in Muskegon and beginning at age 15, he was organist at several churches there. He was also organist and choir director for 6 years at a Grand Rapids Episcopal Church. Bob has had some formal organ and piano training, but is mainly self-taught.

Presently, Bob is payroll supervisor and cashier at the American Seating Company, a position held by a former member of St. John's, Ferd Wendt.

Bob especially enjoys St. John's three manual pipe organ which has inspired him and afforded him the opportunity to learn new music.

Playing accordion for the Grand Rapids Morris Dancers and Sword Team is just one example of new musical experiences he has discovered since being at St. John's.

Rose Manby Arrives: The Chancel Choir Sings Her Praises

Rose Manby (2004 - present) Rose has been St. John's choir director for 1 year. She received her Bachelors Degree in Music Education and Minors in Piano and Liturgy from Aquinas College. Her main interest as a Soprano is Voice. Her passion is church music. She enjoys inspirational music whether she is singing, directing the choir or just listening to it.

She and her husband, Josh, met in a church choir where she was directing and he was a member. Their love of music has been a strong bond between them. Both sang in the Grand Rapids Symphony Chorus.

Rose brings knowledge and inspiration to the Chancel and Bell Choirs as their director, which is evidenced by their performances.



**Bob Fredrick: Organist and
Rose Manby: Choir Director**

BEAUTIFUL IS THE MUSIC OF THE CHOIR



Chancel Choir Members

Bass
 Ron Cammel
 Bill Newsom
 Carl Sommer
 Dick Heindrichs

Alto
 Marian Sommer
 Marilyn Gillette
 Kim Peck
 Deb Scherphorn
 Doris Bauer



Soprano
 Donelle Hamacher
 Sandie Scherphorn
 Julie Blanco
 Andrea Wressel
 Jean Kritschgau

Tenor
 Jeff Wressell
 Judy Krauss
 Josh Manby
 Craig Hammerlind

In 2005 Manby Makes Music Come Alive With The Ringing Of The Bells

Bell Choir
 Members:

Kay Hofacker
 Karin Drost
 Sue Bradford
 Megan Smith
 Judy Krauss



Susan Newsom
 Bob Fredrick
 Josh Manby
 Dave Bradford
 Doug Drost
 Ron Cammel

The Gift Given Brings More In Return

A variety of Christian Education methods and curriculum have been tried from the earliest church to the present. From Sunday School, to Church School, to Worship Centers, whatever the chosen name, the consensus of opinion of the members of St. John's has been and forever will be that our children are a special blessing.

Their Christian Education and their feeling of belonging to a church family is of the utmost importance. Getting to know Jesus through his stories, learning to trust and to be kind and loving, teaching Christian values in word and by example is the gift the teachers give to their children. Dedicated, loyal, prayerful, passionate, gentle, enthusiastic, filled with the Spirit, are all descriptive of the teachers of our children from 1880 to the present.

Teaching Brings Heartwarming Results

St. John's has been my church and "family" for over 70 years. My first memories are of the German Services that we faithfully attended every Sunday. My mother belonged to the *Frauenverein* and they met every month. I went to every meeting with all of the German ladies. They only spoke German, no English, and of course in those days we didn't have babysitters.

The Sunday School teachers who very special and helped me begin my faith journey were Mrs. Groggel, Mrs. Lindeman and Miss Frey.

I remember developing a very special bond with many friends in Youth Fellowship, Junior Choir and Confirmation Classes. The Briegels, Wiests, Herrmans, Leys, Doerings, Sommers, Hessels, Comforts, Groggels, Wendts and many others, as well as pastors, had a lasting influence on my Christian beliefs and feelings.

I can still remember those wonderful Men's Fellowship Dinners, as if it were yesterday, prepared by the good cooks of St. John's.

It has been wonderful through the years working on various committees, serving on Council and teaching our Church School Children and seeing them grow in their faith. Now, many of them are leaders of our church and Patti and I are so proud of what good people they have become.

Worshipping with all of you every Sunday morning, feeling your love, has been a blessing from God. Through the years, God has blessed all of us. The past years have left lasting memories. Now the future looms before us challenging us to minister and to serve all of God's people.

Karl Betz



Sunday School Class of 1980

Karl & Patti Betz, Teachers

Middle Row (l to r): Rick Tanis, John Scherphorn, Ken Bauer, Mike Kritschgau, Kevin Sommer, Scott Barger

Front Row (l to r): Heidi Betz, Kim DeWald, Lori Loef, Jodi Danley

Once when some mothers were bringing their children to Jesus to bless them, the disciples shooed them away, telling them not to bother him. But when Jesus saw what was happening he was very much displeased with his disciples and said to them, "Let the children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as they. Don't send them away! I tell you as seriously as I know how that anyone who refuses to come to God as a little child will never be allowed into his Kingdom." Then he took the children into his arms and placed his hands on their heads and he blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

Earliest Experiences Leave Lasting Impression...Lead to Faithful Service

When I think of St. John's, I think of family; not just my own immediate family, but a wonderful extended church family that has supported, taught, and loved me over the years.

My childhood memories are a variety of sights and smells. My earliest memory is sitting in the back row as a young child bugging my dad to give me candy out of his suit coat pocket. I also remember taking part in Christmas pageants, especially one about a German girl that Patti Betz wrote, and I got to play the German girl! Along the German theme, I remember my parents were in charge of planning the annual Oktoberfest one year, and I can still smell the sauerkraut cooking in a roaster in our basement at home. My Sunday School years were topped by my fifth and sixth grade class which was taught by Karl and Patti Betz. Karl would dress as a different character from the Bible each week, and it was such a mystery and so much fun to anticipate who he was going to be next. I learned so much from them in this class because they brought the stories to life, much like our Worship Centers do today. Their work and dedication has inspired me to be so committed to our children's program today.

One of my favorite periods of time in our church was when I was in college. I was in the Chancel Choir at the time, directed by Warren Wandrey. I loved singing and the songs ministered to me during that scary and uncertain time. I felt very supported by the people in the choir, especially the alto section which was always happy to mother me (which was interesting because my own mother was in the choir at the time!). I also was in charge of a junior high youth group then along with my good friend Chris Roth. Both the choir and the junior high youth group challenged my faith and forced me to get involved in furthering others' church experience.

As an adult I've been involved in so many aspects of the church, the most memorable to me being my help in starting and maintaining our Worship Centers. Our children are such an important part of our church and I have been honored and spiritually deepened by



Deb Foster (r) assists Wendy Jenks in Worship Center III

serving them. I have also been challenged by getting involved in activities that benefit people outside of our church, such as the food truck. My mother Phyllis Roh and so many others in our church have been wonderful examples to me about how to serve others.

So many highlights of my life have occurred in that church; I was baptized and confirmed there, I was married there, and both of my children were baptized there. Both my immediate family and church family have been there at these times of celebration in my life, as well as the times of sadness, such as the death of my father. This love and support from

St. John's has given me the strength and faith, to now as an adult, go out and do what I hope is God's work in this world. I pray that St. John's will minister to others in the next 125 years as it has to me.

Wendy Jenks



Family Using Talents and Treasures for God's Will

Our memories of St. John's aren't as long as the other great memories we have read about, but I still think our voices need to be heard. I remember driving by St. John's before we were members and thinking what a great use of land for a church that is intersected by three roads. I wondered what the inside looked like after seeing the beautiful circular windows shimmer in the sunlight.

One day our neighbor invited us to Vacation Bible School in the summer of 2003. My first memory was seeing Bill Bode dressed up as Jonah. The kids loved it and Kim did a good job teaching along with the other teachers.

We asked friends about other churches, but never really found one that seemed to have the warmth and friendliness that St. John's had. So we started to come regularly.

I remember Ron Martell and Jerry Krauss being the first to welcome us and acknowledge us in a friendly manner. We became members and our sons were baptized.

I believe now we feel as if St. John's is our family. I like the way Pastor Bill speaks to our sons. Anthony will only shake Pastor Bill's hand. Someday hopefully he will shake the hands of others, but for now, that is all he is able to do.

Now I know what the inside of St. John's looks like. It looks like a family that loves one another for their great cookies, or beautiful sewing abilities, or willingness to help with a food truck, or their incredible voice. A family using its time, talents, and treasures for God's will. Thanks for allowing us to be a part of your family.

Sue Garza



Bill & Liz Bode
Directors of Children's Ministries



**The church year is composed of six seasons:
Advent, Christmas,
Epiphany, Lent, Easter
and Pentecost**

Liz Bode (center) uses Worship Center Wooden Figures to tell the story to teachers, from left, Christian & Theresa Bileth, Wendy Jenks, Kris Martell, Karin Drost, Sue Garza, Deb Foster and Laura Hamacher.

September is the time for getting ready to be with God...teachers help the children learn to enter sacred time and place

Sue Garza and Kris Martell help the Children of Camp St. John's during response time.



Kritschgau Youth Group ‘Best Ever’ Espoused Strong Christian Beliefs

I am a life long member of St. John’s. I was baptized in my parents’ home by Rev. Franke. My first recollections of St. John’s are of the church on Mt. Vernon and my Sunday School teacher, Virginia Miller trying to get her class to memorize prayers and bible verses.

I remember the German Language Service and the great meals served to us by the ladies of the Frauenverein and Women’s Fellowship. The sermons of Rev. Helm impressed me as a young teenager. I wonder if his stories about being a Navy Chaplain inspired me to join the Navy.

I recall Clyde LaBrenz having to sit with us, a group of noisy teenagers, in the balcony of the old church, so we would not disturb the service....it must be his eternal job as he still sits in a pew near me to this very day.

My greatest memory is that of our youth group. I still believe that it was the best group ever. It was strong in its’ Christian beliefs. With a new church camp and great leaders, we could not wait to be together.

I believe the true meaning of St. John’s is that we truly care for the mission of our church, but more important than that, is that we care for and love each other.

John Kritschgau

Today’s Youth Leaders Emphasize Spiritual Life, Service, Fun and Fellowship

Tarah and I had talked about looking for a church since we started dating, but it wasn’t until I bought a house and we had been dating for just over a year that we actually started looking. We talked about getting married. We wanted to strengthen and align our religious beliefs and become involved in a church that we could get married in and attend after marriage.

While Tarah had grown up in the United Church of Christ, I had grown up Lutheran. When we started looking for a church, we attended three Lutheran churches. At these churches, we were most



troubled that we were not recognized as visitors by the congregations (and, in some cases, the pastors). We were able to walk into church, attend worship, and walk out without anyone even talking to us, let alone welcoming us to their church, inviting us to their fellowship time, or asking if we were thinking of becoming members.

St. John’s was on the route between Tarah’s parent’s and my house, so we passed it daily. We knew it was a UCC church, and decided to attend morning worship. As soon as we walked in the door that Sunday morning, we felt welcome at St. John’s. From the greeters, to the ushers, to the people around us worshipping in the service everyone seemed to notice that we were new and they were very friendly. We were worshipping with a close knit yet accepting family. We finally found a church that we felt comfortable in.

We continued to visit St. John’s and, when invited, we started attending a new member’s class. The class was particularly beneficial to me, since I was not familiar with the United Church of Christ and

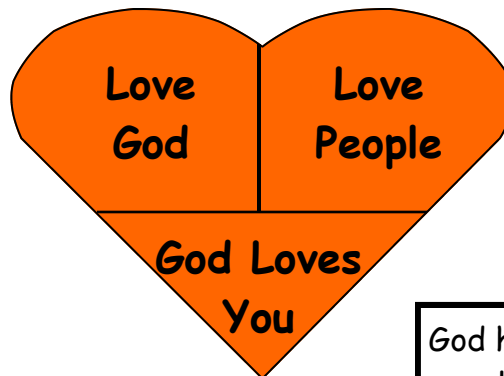
how it compared to my Lutheran upbringing. We were excited to be joining St. John's as it got a new pastor and planned to grow. We became members in the spring of 2004 and hoped to find ways to become involved in the church.

Although Tarah and I do have busy schedules, we're happy to be active in the mission of the church. The first time we heard that St. John's was looking for Youth Group leaders, we thought it might be fun to volunteer. We felt we were young enough to relate to the youth and had recently experienced being in Youth Groups ourselves. Becoming Youth leaders has proven to be a great experience. Not only are we developing a strong Youth Group for the church, but Tarah and I are growing closer by planning and leading it together.

We have also had an awesome experience in Bible Study. We are growing stronger in our faith and getting closer to the members of St. John's. We look forward to Bible Study nights since we can come together with other brothers and sisters in Christ and study the Bible. We also have the opportunity to share personal experiences which is an important part of being in a church.

We feel very blessed to be members of such a faithful and growing church family. St. John's has been an amazing experience for our relationship and our spiritual life. We look forward to seeing what God has in store for us in the future of St. John's.

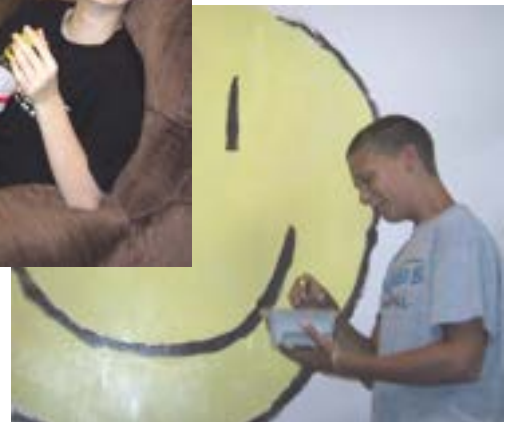
-Ben & Tarah Tiedt



Certain times are special in God's Eternal Plan



God helps the young people put the pieces of the puzzle together through their experiences in Worship Centers and Youth fellowship.



God's People Make a Difference in the World

Rekindling the Flame on Pentecost With the Dedication of Confirmands



Confirmands, Parents and Mentors Affirm their Commitment to Faith Study



**Pictures
Featured on
Confirmation
Sunday, May 15,
2005, were
displayed
beginning with
the earliest
classes in the
1800's to the
most recent in
2003.**



Confirmands and Mentors Bond at Overnight Retreat

The opportunity to come together at an Overnight Retreat, to develop closer relationships between confirmands and mentors followed the Dedication Service.



L. Bill Foster,
Nicholas Frost,
Ron Cammel &
Colin Jenks.

R. Karl Betz,
Z. J. Scherphorn,
David
Kiracoffe,
Patti Betz and
Kayla Roth.



Bonding occurred through role playing, games, music, and exploring prayer and worship around a campfire.

An early morning
Trip to
Celebration
Cinema was the
beginning of the
Saturday Team
building session



Pictured L to R. Back Row:
Austin Blanco, Karl Betz
Z.J. Scherphorn, Alana
Moore, Sue Bradford,
Nicholas Frost, and John
Scherphorn.

Seated: Bill Newsom,
Jacob Drost, Mark
Bradford, Bill Foster,
Front Row: L to R Kayla
Roth, Ron Cammel, David
Bradford, David Kiracoffe
and Colin Jenks

God's call to us is not only to believe in God but to love God. It is an invitation. His unconditional love invites our love in return.



L. Sue Bradford,
Nicholas Frost,
Jacob Drost,
Z.J. Scherphorn
and
Mark Bradford.

R. Kayla Roth and
Alana Moore.



In responding to God's love we see God's own desires for justice, and compassion and we become sensitive to those desires in our own lives.

Affirmation of Baptism...Making the Faith Their Own

Confirmation is a tradition with roots going back to the Evangelical Church in the 1880's. It was an important and meaningful part of the lives of young people who were being instructed in Catechism Classes by the Pastor for a two year period, later, a one year period. The Pastor, Parents and Young People took this Biblical instruction very seriously, as they did in the Evangelical and Reformed Churches as well.

When the children were brought to the baptismal font as babies, the vows were taken for them by their parents. At confirmation, they were speaking for themselves, dedicating their lives to Christ. This is true today at St. John's United Church of Christ. The young people have made the choice to come to Christ when they take their vows on Confirmation Sunday.

Confirmation Special...Required Special Attire

We attended catechism every Monday and Thursday for one hour after school for two years. The Sunday before we were confirmed, which was Palm Sunday, we answered questions before the Council and our parents. We were apprised of certain questions, but were asked others, too. It kept us on our toes.

On Palm Sunday we were confirmed. Easter was our first experience taking communion. Rev. Schreiber was a wonderful teacher and mentor, strict but understanding. I remember well the Christmas pageants put on by the Sunday School. It was Mrs. Schreiber's total enthusiasm that brought everything together. I will never forget them. I hold many, many warm memories in my heart.

Doris Bauer



Confirmation Class of 1936



Confirmation Class of 1938

Youth Took Confirmation Seriously

My memories of St. John's Church are very deep and very dear. My parents, Heinrich Gottlieb Hessel and Wilhelmina (Huber) Hessel immigrated to the United States in 1902 and were married in St. John's church on Thanksgiving, November 27, 1902.

After their marriage, Henry & Wilhelmina joined the church and the congregation became their means of support, strength, security and friendship. Rev. & Mrs. Schreiber were their council and best friends, in addition to spiritual teachers.

After instruction and teaching by Rev. Schreiber in catechism classes, I was prepared for confirmation in 1938. Catechism was very difficult but Rev. Schreiber was very patient and eventually the class was prepared. Mary Ruoss Doering and Marion Riebe were also confirmed at that time. I do not remember the other class members.

In addition to their five children, my parents were further blessed with the arrival of their niece and nephew from Germany, Emelie (Betz) Kritschgau and Karl Betz Sr. They were the children of my mother's sister in Germany. They came to Grand Rapids and also became members of St. John's. I was a young girl at the time and Emelie and Karl became a big part of our life, leaving many happy memories.

Ruth Hessel Fleet

Confirmation Sunday Celebration

St. John's Legacy of Confirmation has remained constant from the early 1900's to the present.



Confirmation Class of 1971



Confirmation Class of 1974



Confirmation Class of 1976



Confirmation Class of 1978

28 and 30 Years Later the Faith Journey Continues with Sons and Daughters.

Bob Roth and Doug Drost in the Class of '76 and Wendy (Roh) Jenks in the Class of '78 will witness Confirmands, Kayla Roth, Jacob Drost and Colin Jenks be confirmed in 2006.



Confirmation Class of 2000



Confirmation Class of 2003

Fellowship Groups...An Integral Part of the Church

Lasting friendships have been made through the many men's, women's and youth fellowship groups which were designed as social and service organizations.

The *Frauenverein*...The First Women's Society

Because St. John's was founded by German immigrants, it was only natural that the earliest society was the

Frauenverein, a Women's Society. From its' beginning until the final gathering, the scriptures read, the hymns sung, the poetry and readings were done in the German language. There were many faithful women who loved and served this unique organization.



The Mrs'. Wiest, Hauman, Lindeman and Landauer



The Mrs.' Kritschgau, Haillfinger, Lindeman and Krauss

Reflections of the Past...Fashion Show 1977



Mary Doering
Max Doering
Alan Doering
Arthur Doering
Marie Doering
Elsa Frey
Josephine Drost
June Hobbs
Judy Post
Donelle Sommer
Caroline Sadenwater

Elsa Martini
Judy Miller
Beatrice Post
Crystal Walcott
Phyllis Walter
Ann LaBrenz
Marguerite Waltz
Caroline VanSullichem
Dorothy Wiest
Marian Sommer

Marie Wirth
Marcia Rykse
Irma Wild
Pauline Barten
Nancy Drost
Julie Esch
Cheryl Steketee
Theresa Steketee

FASHION NOTES _ Hemlines and Skirt Interest

1900-01 Floor length, no shoes showing-train, except for "Rainy Day Dress". Belled or Morning Glory Sjirts with a neat tailored look.

1902-04 Floor Length, extra fullness in entire costume, 5-9 gore skirts, flounces and ruffles good.

1905-07 Toe tip showing, fewer trains except for evening, extra back fullness waning.

1911-10 Ankle length very new and daring. Trains still good for evenings.

1916-17 7 or 8 inches from floor. Very full with tiers and tunics.

1920-22 Ten inches from the floor or just at top of the high laced shoes. In 1922 the waist line below the natural line & stayed down until the early thirties.

1926 Hemline now went to the knees!

Reflections of the Past Fashion Commentator...Ardean Mathews

Rev. Buchmueller was Pastor of St. John's when Chuck and I joined the church. Our sons were about 3 and 6 years old, and had to be baptized.....so did I! It was a moving experience for me, a fond memory that has stayed with me for these "50-some" years.

During all those years, the people, especially the ladies, of St. John's have often been my support both spiritually and socially.

How many of you were in that first group of Young Marrieds who met with Delight Helms at the old church on Mt Vernon for Bible study? That group became the "Mother's Club", which evolved into the "Couple's Club", which exists today as "The Young at Heart".

The years have been sprayed with Bible study groups, Mother-Daughter banquets, cleaning "Bees", committee meetings and dinners....dozens, dozens and dozens of dinners! Stacks of dirty dishes, setting up tables and chairs, and mountains of strawberries to be cleaned for the Strawberry Festival, held every year in June.

I remember, not only the ladies of St. John's that I worked with, (whose help I sorely needed and appreciated) but those whose special devotion I admired so much. I am not going to mention names. I don't want to leave any of you ladies off a long list that goes back many years. I still see you in the choir, in the sewing group, serving bereaved families, planning and leading special programs. teaching, greeting, ushering and just being there with your hugs and smiles.

Ahhh.....your smiles. May the walls of St. John's keep on reflecting them for at least 125 more years, and may God always be with the ladies of St. John's, who are still with us, and those who have passed on.

Ardean Mathews

Mother Daughter Banquets and Family Nights A Favorite...Then and Now



**Octoberfest
Family Nights
Complete With
Oom-Pah Band
and Dancing**



Social Aspect a Draw But Service Important to Bowers

We moved to Comstock Park on Halloween of 1959. The first week Rev. Herbert Barten showed up while Stella was making Halloween cookies. He sat at the kitchen table and told her about the St. John's family and invited us to church. Because St. John's was the only church in Grand Rapids with an Evangelical and Reformed background which Stella grew up in, we began attending on Sunday mornings. We transferred our membership in 1960. We were soon involved in many of the activities of the church.

There were 600 plus members and two services on Sunday. The children had a full hour of Sunday School during the early service. At that time much of the work of the church was done by volunteers. We only had one annual congregational meeting which was held during the week in the evening following a church potluck supper.



In May of 1968, 20 Young People took a trip by boat from Ludington to Manitowoc. They visited the Children's Home in Niellsville, Wisconsin, the Indian Mission at Black River Falls, and Lakeland College. Rev. Barten asked us to be chaperons as Kay was in the group.

Worship followed by coffee hour while the Sunday School was in session started during Rev. Gerald O'Connor's tenure. We visited and got to know each other during that time.

In the mid 1970's, we had a huge snowfall. Stella was checking the building before work and found one window broken and one was very bowed in the south wing hallway. She called members of the Property committee, then, proceeded to call several of our regular volunteers to bring shovels and snow blowers to remove the snow from the flat roofs over the classrooms. The first time I weeded sprayed the church yard was with a three gallon sprayer and the first application of fertilizer was done with a push spreader. As time went on, I used bigger equipment. After I retired, I used a riding mower from Hofacker Equipment and mowed the church camp for years.



The first year Couples Club had a strawberry Social. Stella's parents brought the strawberries from Baroda and



it was such a success, we had one every year for some time. Then the Couples Club switched to chicken barbecues. They were good fund raisers for the group. Now this same group as Young at Heart are still doing a fund raiser - the paper drive.

In 1993, the Bostwick Lake Bell Choir performed at our church After the service, Carl Drost said, "That is something I would contribute to for St. John's". Within 15 minutes during Coffee Hour, we had enough money pledged for a set of bells. Within one week they were ordered.

During Stella's seventeen years as Financial Secretary, she got to know our members and friends of St. John's. It was so interesting to learn how many were related to each other. In 1994 while Stella was church treasurer, we started the St. John's Endowment Fund with the initial investment. Hopefully as it grows, it will help in the service of God's glory at St. John's. The members of St. John's family are such loving people and many are still our best friends.

Lynn and Stella Bowers

Lifelong Member...Enthusiastic and Eager to Serve

I am a life long member of St. John's and have wonderful memories, from the spiritually uplifting services to the many wonderful people who are my St. John's family. I was baptized and confirmed around 1951 with Pastor Buchmueller. I began singing in the choir shortly after Rev. Andres came to St. John's and continued until the last two years.

I have always been eager to serve my church whenever possible. I always had a wonderful feeling after working on the many Lay Life dinners and Young at Heart events. My life has changed so now, that I can only help support the church.

My memories have always been wonderful. I sure do miss everyone at St. John's and someday will be back. Just on a temporary leave of absence. But, everyone is in my heart. **Carole Shrontz Norton**



Young Mothers A Wonderful Support Group

In 1955 our family received a very warm welcome from the congregation of St. John's. Rev. Helms was the interim pastor and his wife was instrumental in beginning Young Mothers. Many of you with adult children who are around 50 years old will remember what a wonderful support group that was. Sometime later, another group emerged. It was named Couples Club.

My fondest memory is of the wonderful church school with about 80 boys and girls, ages 3 through 18 participating. Today many of them are St. John's leaders.

May God bless each of you as you celebrate St. John's 125th Anniversary.

Phyllis Walter

Happy Times With Friends...Square Dances and Halloween Parties at the Church Camp



Trudy & Tony Verolme

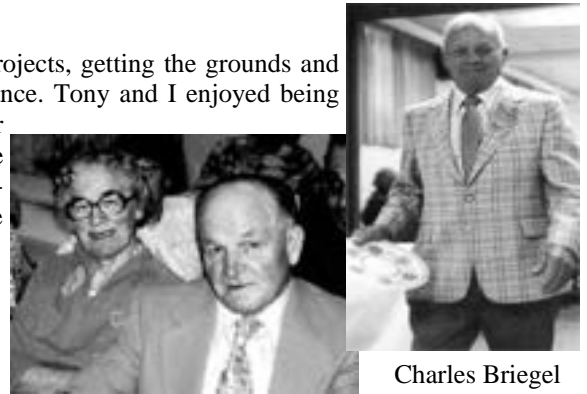
I came to St. John's with my husband, Tony, in 1964. Reverend Barten was the pastor and there were two services. Everyone made me feel welcome. They were so friendly and nice.

It was suggested that we start an Adult Fellowship Group. Tony and I, the Leys, the Comforts, Karl and Marie Betz and Carl Sommer's parents, the Groggels and a few others began meeting. Eventually, potluck dinners became a tradition.

St. John's Church Camp was one of our service projects, getting the grounds and building ready for a Halloween party or square dance. Tony and I enjoyed being co-presidents of the Adult Fellowship group. For the square dance we hired a caller and decorated the lodge. We ended the evenings with one of our delicious potluck dinners, enjoying the fire we had made in the stone fireplace.

Those happy times with St. John's friends will always remain in my memory.

Trudy Verolme



Marie & Karl Betz



Charles Briegel



Gilbert & Crystal Walcott



Martina & Walter LaBrenz



Kay Walcott



Ed & Dorothy Wiest

Coffee Hour Fellowship...Long Standing Tradition



The Sunday Lunch Bunch

An active youth group pulled me into St. John's in 1940, and I have remained involved in the church ever since. The youth group would have outings such as trips to the beach and eating meals together and it would meet regularly. I eventually attended a Sunday service and got hooked on the Rev. Franke's sermons because they were understandable.

I also got hooked on a girl in youth group, Bea Beyer, whom I later married. Bea and I had eight children, all of whom were confirmed at St. Johns. We lived for 35 years in the church's former parsonage at 209 Glenhaven NW. I was reluctant to buy the home but was talked into it after a fellow consistency team member worked out a price.

Years ago, Bea and I began going out to eat with seniors from church after Sunday service. I kept up the tradition even after Bea passed away in 1996. I later married Eleanor Collier, giving me the privilege of marrying in both the old and new church buildings. Eleanor died in 2002. I keep the Sunday dinner group going still today. It has been an important part of church members getting to know each other.

Over the years, I also served as treasurer, shoveled snow at the new church many years, tended the nursery for 14 years and served on the property and consistory committees a couple of times. *St. John's has been a very important part of my life for many, many years.*

Pete Post

Hanging of the Greens

Reverend Jerry O'Connor presented the idea of "Hanging of the Greens" to the newly formed Lay Life and Work Committee and they were excited to begin to prepare for the Coming of the Christ in a new way. It was a day for all to gather at the church on Sunday afternoon at 3:00 pm. Everyone was welcome. Children and adults joined in making crafts for Christmas, the ladies began preparing the evening meal in the kitchen and the men would scurry about putting up greens and sconces and a 15 foot tree in the sanctuary with a multitude of lights.

Outside work was being done to set up the large wooden creché, a manger scene that would greet people who passed St. John's for many years during the Advent Season.

The children had rehearsed the Christmas Story on Sunday morning and were eager to don their costumes for the pageant that would begin immediately following the 5:30 pm dinner. It was a busy day for the whole family and everyone enjoyed the beginning of the Christmas Season.

"Hanging of the Greens" has been a tradition at St. John's and is still held each year the 1st Sunday in Advent. Crafts and decorating the church are followed by a pot luck supper.



Simple Gifts Brought Simple Pleasure

I remember, as a young child at St. John's, our Christmas programs. The Sunday School took part being angels, shepherds, Joseph, and Mary. After the program, we all were given a small box of hard candy with one piece of chocolate in it. We also received one orange. We all looked forward to this wonderful treat. Do some of you remember?

Irma Mergenthaler Wild



Touched By An Angel

I remember a Hanging of the Greens celebration we hosted for Liz's House. We had several mom's with their children, but one little boy stands out in my mind. My husband Dave played Santa and handed out gifts and candy canes. One little guy named DeNiel approached Dave after he came back from changing out of the Santa suit. He had made an ornament at the craft table and he handed it to Dave. All he said was, "I made this for you". All the other kids took their handmade ornaments home except DeNiel. I know how special that was to David - I'll always remember the look on his face. DeNiel's gift is on our Christmas tree every year.



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Sue Bradford



Many Athletic Teams Sponsored By St. John's

From the 50's to the 90's sports were popular with St. John's youth. Basketball and Softball teams for boys were sponsored by St. John's, as well as co-ed and girls softball teams.

The Call of Larry Kammert, "Hit 'Em Where They Ain't"

Back in the days of the Barten and Andres pastorates, St. John's sponsored athletic teams in the church league, basketball and softball for boys and softball for girls.

I was treasurer of the consistory at that time and the athletic program chair person. I arranged for practice fields and courts. I also offered helpful hints. If you were on the softball teams you might remember me calling out, "Hit the ball where they ain't."

Bill Miller, with expertise gained from playing with the Michigan Bell teams, coached boy's softball and actually managed to teach the boys how to hit and where to place the singles and bunts. With help from school pals, Wayne Ross, Jim Ragsdale and Larry VanderMolen, St. John's played well enough to garner some trophies which can be seen in our church library.

These softball games were fast pitch. Bill Miller, Jr., Ken Betz, Fred Sommer, Bobby Wright, Bill Heindrichs, Tom Waltz, Wayne Walcott, Denny & John Roh, Tom Boehm, John Kritschgau, Craig Saurman, along with the Hand boys, Jack, Ray & Larry, all took part in the team's success.

The girl's softball team was coached by John Kritschgau and starred such luminaries as Chris & Stephanie Roth, Wendy Roh, Nancy Drost, Sue Bromley Roh, Carol White, Kim & Kristi Betz, Mary Smith and others whose names I can't recall. These girls fielded a good competitive team, though John sometimes complained of post-game headaches!

In later years, there was a co-ed church league with couples like the Frank & Wendy Jenks, Greg & Rajene Betz, John and Deb Scherphorn, and the Dan Scotts. *I really enjoyed those years.*



Championship Team of 1951

Larry Kammert

In the '80's...

the St. John's Spiritual Hackers was formed.

It was open to young men and women golfers. The league played at Scott Lake Country Club. Some of the early members were: The Rausers, The Mathews, members of the Sommers Family, Lynn Bowers, Warren Wandrey, Carrol Minard, Jim Shrontz, Ted Borden, Andy "Holy Toldeo!" Andres, Don Hondorp, and Roger Brooks later joined. A good time was had by all.



Softball Popular With Boehm Boys

Dick Boehm sought healing and joined St. John's after his church disbanded. He had been a member of the Session and was affected by its' failure. Lucretia became a member of St. John's when her childhood church was torn down due the construction of US131. She shared her gifts utilizing her beautiful penmanship to write to shut-ins, the sick and visitors. Both walked to church until they no longer could. Of their eight children, Tom, Larry, Gilbert and Denny were involved at St. John's. *Tom and Denny were on the Softball Team.*

Dick and Lucretia moved to Pilgrim Manor in 1984 but kept their membership at St. John's until their deaths, Lucretia at 81 years of age and Dick at 100. *They loved the people of St. John's.*

Richard Jr and Betty Boehm

Now.....and Then



Dick Heindrichs began his musical career in St. John's when he joined the Junior Choir at the church on Mt. Vernon. His path later led to Oklahoma and Korea where he served for 3 years in the army. Upon his return he joined the Senior Choir at the old church and has been singing in the Choir ever since. He began with choir director Don Gabler and Francis Rose to the present Chancel Choir Director, Rose Manby. He states, "I have enjoyed the friendship of so many people through my years in the Choir and I feel I am making a contribution to St. John's."



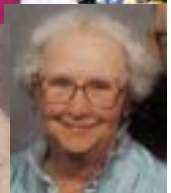
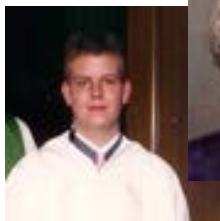
New vests have been sewn by Kay Hofacker for the Bell Choir's appearance on Celebration Saturday, September 17, 2005. Jean Kritschgau and Kay show off their new vests. Both are ringers in the Bell Choir.

Behind the scenes in every aspect of church care, Cliff and Dolores Rowe can be seen. As a landscape architect, Cliff has been evermindful of the care of the church grounds and has played an important role in preventive maintenance of the church building. Dolores, in her quiet way, tends to the details of the church kitchens' organization and participates in serving wherever she can.

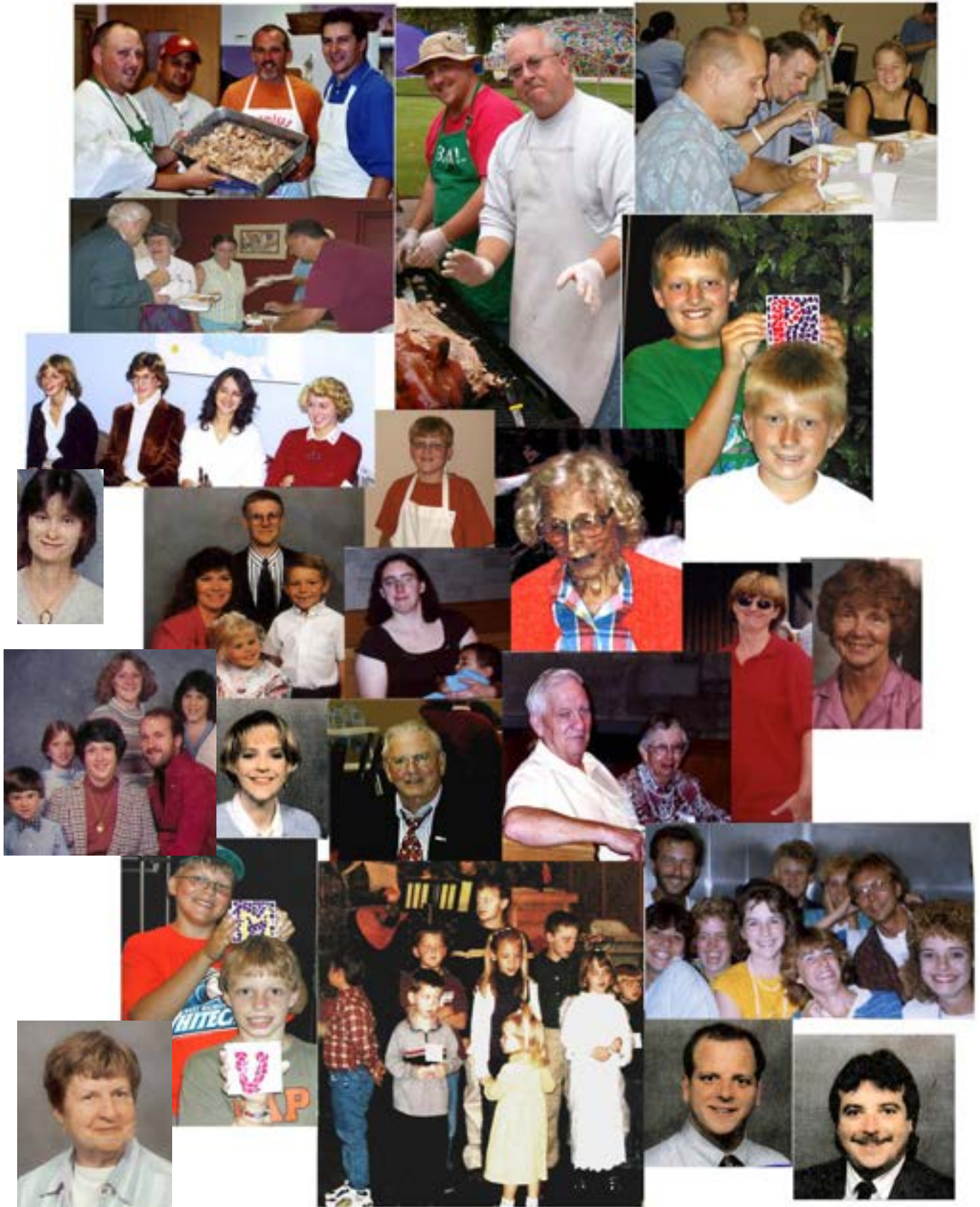


Doris Bauer and Lorraine Loef are St. John's Ushers. Both have served their church and community for many years.

Brian Bartusch was the organist when the new organ was purchased. Ken Betz and his committee made the choice and the congregation reaped the benefit of the beautiful music which Brian produced.



Now And Then



Faithful Followers

Charlotte TerBeek

Many beautiful banners have been created for St. John's with inspirational messages. This Shalom Banner was designed and sewn by Charlotte TerBeek who was a well known seamstress in the Grand Rapids area and was in the Sewing Circle many years.



Arlon and Harriet Ley

Arlon was Consistory President and General Chairman of the Building Fund Drive for the new church. Harriet was an officer in the Mary-Martha Circle at the time.



Bill Mathew

Bill Mathew held the position of Finance Chairman in 1954 at the beginning of the Fund Drive for the Bridge Street Church.



Clarence and Ruth Groggel

At the time of the Sacrificial Giving Dedication for the new church build. Clarence was superintendent of Church School. Ruth was an officer in the Women's Bible Class.



Harold Comfort

Harold was the Vice-President of Consistory when the soil was turned to begin building St. John's new church.



Elsie Wendt

Elsie was an active member in Women's Guild and Dorcas Circle. She was known for her cooking abilities.



To encourage members to give to the building of the new church on Bridge and Lake Michigan Drive. This was written: The paramount question is not: "How much does my church need?" It is: "How much do I need to give

Wedding Sunday, June 26, 2005

A Chronicle of Marriages from the Early Church to the Present



Raymond & Bertha Brach 1907

The founders of the early church were immigrants who had saved their money for passage to America. Once they arrived they were confronted with learning a new language and culture and finding work.

If a couple planned to marry, they chose the parsonage in which to take their vows and the pastor would perform the ceremony. Usually, the bride and groom had one attendant each, either a relative or friend.

The parsonage was located next to the church on Mt. Vernon. One of the earliest photographs of a marriage that took place here is that of Mr. And Mrs. Raymond Brach in 1907.

Raymond and Bertha Wiest Brach donated the property on the Thornapple River which became St. John's Church Camp. Mrs. Brach was Mary Lou Wiest Gabler's aunt. Mary Lou's father, Edward, and Bertha were two of fifteen children baptized at St. John's church. Mr. Brach owned G.R. Plating and was well known in the community.

Parsonages:

Popular Choice for Marriages in 20's

In 1926, a new parsonage was acquired at 209 Glenhaven NW. The parents of Ann LaBrenz were married there in 1928 by Reverend Schreiber.

Clyde LaBrenz' parents were married in the Mt. Vernon parsonage in 1922.

Others who arrived in the 1920's and 1930's would experience loss during the Great Depression. Many did not have jobs or money to pay for the kinds of weddings of the present day. *But those were the times!*

Ann Labrenz



Parsonage at 209 Glenhaven NW

Progress Changes Church Location

Eventually the church on Mt. Vernon would succumb to the new development of a major highway. The Brach family donated land at the corners of Bridge Street and Covell NW on which to build a church. In 1954, ground was broken and the church was expected to be completed in 1955.

Glenhaven Parsonage Chosen During War Years

My memories go back to the old church on Mt. Vernon Avenue. Reverend Schreiber was the minister there for forty years. He and his family lived in the parsonage next door to the church. The front rooms on the first floor were used for church purposes. Choir robes were kept there and that is where the choir had to put them on. There was a short sidewalk from the house kitchen to the church kitchen. No matter what the weather, the robed choir had to go on that path to the church. Two aunts, Elsie and Dorothy, and a cousin, Bill Roh were choir members who took that walk each Sunday.

Catechism was held for two years beginning at age 12. You had to memorize the Ten Commandments, the 23rd Psalm, and many Bible verses.

On Confirmation Sunday, you were expected to answer questions. Not knowing what they would be meant you had to memorize everything. We also had to memorize and sing two verses of a song. Our class sang "Oh Master, Let Me Walk with Thee". I still remember the words.

When the Schreibers moved to the new parsonage on Glenhaven, the old parsonage was used for church activities.

Reverend Franke succeeded Reverend Schreiber after he retired. He had a very vibrant personality, was a very good speaker and had a wonderful singing voice. The Junior and Senior Youth Groups were active at this time. I have memories of the fun we had, often climbing into the back of an old truck and going on picnics to an area park for the whole day.

We performed in two plays, one we put on at the YWCA, the other on the stage of the gymnasium in Sibley School. Reverend Franke was our director. It involved many young people and we always had a full house for our performances.

On September 12th, 1941, Bill and I were married by Reverend Franke at the parsonage at 209 Glenhaven. Sixty-four years later we are together celebrating the 125th Anniversary of St. John's United Church of Christ.

Virginia (Roh) Miller

Almost First

In the fall of 1954 they had told each other of their love. He was going over seas and she had another year of college before she would graduate. He gave her a ring before he left. It was a long way to Greenland, and there was no coming home for a year. As the days went by they decided that they wanted to be married when he came back to the states. She went to see the minister, Reverend Helm, and told him of their plans to be married. He informed her that the new church being built on the corner of Bridge and Lake Michigan Drive, would not be finished on time due to a strike of the stone masons. If there had not been a strike, they would have been the first couple married at St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church on November 5, 1955. The couples name???? Jim and Marlene Stephens!

And that is the rest of the story.

Jim Stephens



Bill and Virginia Miller, on their Wedding Day Sept 12, 1941



Jim & Marlene Stephens, Nov 5, 1955

German Heritage Brings Feeling of Welcome

I want to spend a moment on the church in Germany I grew up in, because it helps to explain why I ended up at St. John's. In Germany, you are either *Evangelisch*, which means Protestant, or *Roemisch Katholisch*, which is Roman Catholic. Wherever you reside, you will find a Protestant or Roman Catholic Church and both act as parish churches similar to the Roman Catholic Church in this country. In other words you consider yourself a member of the Protestant or Roman Catholic Church serving in the parish you reside in. As a newcomer, you generally attend worship at the parish church of your faith, so, there is no big decision of which church to attend.



Betty and Dietrich Roth

The first nine months (after leaving Germany) I spent with my brother and sister-in-law in Toronto. They were members of the United Church of Canada and I attended worship with them. Thus, I was not confronted with looking for a church home but it gave me the first glimpse of the many different denominations the Protestant Church was composed of. This is not surprising considering the many different nationalities of immigrants which brought their Protestant faith to their new country.

When I came to Grand Rapids, I visited many Protestant Churches but I did not feel quite at home in any of them. One day, a lady at work told me about St. John's UCC which had a strong German background and the only UCC church stemming from the E & R branch. It was not long before I felt at home. I liked the Order of Worship, the Evangelical Preaching of the Word, the familiar tunes, the friendliness of the people which was not overbearing and the fact that it is a church based on the willingness to unite with other denominations. That is how I ended up at St. John's.

Shortly after I became a member at St. John's I met Betty. We were married at Betty's church on May 19, 1961. We agreed to look at both churches with an open mind to make one of them our church home. Betty was not a stranger to St. John's since her grandparents, the Straubs, were members there. She decided to join St. John's and we have been attending together since that time.

Dietrich Roth

Joining St. John's UCC Through Marriage

When John and I started dating, I had attended church off and on, but never found a church home. When John asked me to join him one Sunday I was glad to, but nervous. I'm not comfortable in new situations, but everyone was very friendly. As I continued to visit, people wanted to find out about me and they asked, "How was I able to bring about this change in Johnny?" That would always lead to other conversations which helped me learn about the church. Before I knew it I was a part of the family! John and I even joked that if we stopped dating I would be the one to continue to be a part of the church. We could joke because we knew we were destined to be married.



Deb & John Scherphorn

As we started to plan our wedding, I knew I wanted to be a member of the church. I understood I was a part of the family I just wanted to make a public covenant. Many people welcomed and guided me. Some don't even know the influence they have had on me. Some don't attend anymore and some I still see every week. Certain women were great examples to me. They too had come to St John's through marriage They are always some of the first people to approach visitors, because they were once that visitor.

In my earlier visits it was always Sandie, John's mom, who guided me. This of course led right to the Kritschgau's since Sandie and Jean are best friends. I had attended school with Michael Kritschgau, so I felt comfortable with them. Jean, John and Karin involved me in many aspects of the church, including the softball league. I had never played before and the stress that my inexperience caused John Kritschgau as our coach probably contributed to his heart problems. I would like to honor Jean and John on their 40th wedding anniversary, and all the others, who have welcomed me so warmly.

Deb Scherphorn

St John's Couple's Combined Years of Marriage Total 405



**Bill and Irma Wild married
49 years - September 22, 1956**

**Judy and Jerry Krauss married
47 years - March 1, 1958**



**Chuck and Ardean Mathews
Married 60 years - April 25, 1945**

**Bill and Virginia
Miller Honored
on Wedding Sunday
June 26, 2005**

**Married at St Johns
Parsonage
64 years ago
September 12, 1941.**



**Clyde and Ann LaBrenz
Married 47 years
September 18, 1948**

**Carl & Marian Sommers
Married 62 years
September 25, 1943**



Don & Flo Rauser married 66 years October 21, 1939





Art & Mary Ruoss Doering wedding



Clyde & Ann Hailfinger LaBrenz Wedding



Celebrate Marriages
on
Wedding Sunday
*
Left: Jean & John
Kritschgau
40th Wedding
Anniversary
June 26, 2005
*
Frank & Wendy
Jenks married on
August 9, 1986



Gary and Karen LaBrenz Frost Wedding



**The Wedding
of
Ben & Tarah
June 25, 2005
was the
most recent
held at
St. John's
prior to
The
Wedding
Sunday
Celebration**

Ben & Tarah McCarthy Tiedt Wedding

Four Generation Families

St. John's United Church of Christ is composed of many people with diverse backgrounds, some of whom have been members over sixty years, many less than that, and others who have recently joined the church. All belong to the Body of Christ.

St. John's has the good fortune to have two Four Generation Families:
The Carl Sommer Family and the Sue Bouman Family.

The Sommer Family goes back to one of the Charter members of St. John's Evangelisch Kirche.



Seated Carl & Marian Sommer with great-grandchildren Kyleigh Hamacher, Lily Wressell & Kaitlin Hamacher Top Row:
Grandchildren Shawn & Andrea Wressell and daughter Donnelle Hamacher



Seated: Sue Bouman, Jean Kritschgau daughter on the left
Granddaughter Karen Drost on the right, Son Jerry Bouman
in the back with Grandchildren Jacob & Chris Drost

Family Traces Their Roots to the Early Church

I came to this country from Germany as a 2 1/2 year-old child, with my mother and brother, Hans. My father was already here, living with an uncle, Charlie Dressler, who sponsored him and found him a job. This uncle was a Charter Member of the church, and one of the stained glass windows in the old church was in memory of him.

In the years that followed, I was on many councils, was President, and served on Pastoral Committees. Also, I was active on many sport teams sponsored by St. John's, softball, basketball, bowling and golf. You might say that St. John's was a large part of my life, and now I am very proud to have four generations active and attending here.

I have seen many changes, and have good memories of church friends over the years. **Carl Sommer**

Arrives From Netherlands in 1953

The Bouman family arrived in Grand Rapids in 1953 from Kroningen, The Netherlands. They sold the family business, Bouman's Drivers Training, and brought 13 year old Jean, her 9 year old sister Rita and 3 year old brother Jerry to the United States so they could "have a better future."

They had no car and spoke very little English. Jean entered South Middle School at a vulnerable time in her life. Within a year she was speaking English fluently. Rita and Jerry attended Hall Elementary school.

Her father found a job as a mechanic. Later he would teach almost all of the Dutch immigrants in a Driver Education business which eventually led him to designing a drivers training program at Mary Free Bed Hospital. He was instrumental in adapting vans for people with various kinds of disabilities. He passed on the legacy to his son. Jerry is presently the director of this program.

Sue Bouman has been an active member of St. John's, involved in Women's Fellowship, and a faithful visitor to those unable to attend church.

Jean married John Kritschgau forty years ago and became a member of St. John's. Their children are Karin, Michael and David. Karin married Doug Drost and both are very active in the life of the church. Their children are Jacob and Christopher. Jerry is married to Susan and they have three children, Nicole, Josh and Amanda.

Mrs. Lindeman...One of God's Angels

Carrie Lindeman was my Sunday School teacher during my high school years. The class was downstairs in the fellowship hall in the old church on Mt. Vernon. On Sunday morning we would all sit together with Mrs. Lindeman.



She was a great lady, soft spoken, a very caring and loving person. Her eyes just twinkled when she smiled. She always had her Bible with her. She would read us a story from the Bible, then, we would talk about it. She had a special way of telling a story. It made you feel like you were there. Carrie Lindeman had a great gift when it came to telling stories from the Bible.

I will always remember her in her navy dress with white flowers and pretty white lacy collar with a big brooch in the middle. Her grey hair was pulled back in a big bun.

She always wore her little round Sunday hat on top. I thought she was one of God's angels.



Mary Ann Foster

Beautiful Friendships and Love Remembered

Physically, I was a part of St. John's from 1931, when I was born, until 1952 when I married Curtis Verschoor in the sanctuary of the old St. John's. Spiritually, I have been a part of St. John's all my life through memories and the fellowship of my family, John and Jean Kritschgau and Karl and Patti Betz and their extended families. I realize that almost all of my childhood experiences took place in the old church on Mt. Vernon.



My Mother, Emilie Kritschgau, told me I was baptized at home. Aunts and uncles and friends sat around in a circle in the living room in an apartment on Sixth St. A pink round bowl, that I still have, was used to hold the baptismal water and St. John's pastor, Rev. Schreiber officiated. Ten years later my brother, John, was baptized at home and the same bowl was used.

St. John's had members from many parts of the city of Grand Rapids and its surroundings. It seemed to be more of a regional church, as members came by walking, car or bus from all parts of the area. All of them had a German background: I believe that Tante Hessel and Onkel Hessel were part of organizing the Church. Ruth Hessel Fleet is their daughter and the most direct descendant, but the Betzes, Kritschgaus, and Scherphorns are also part of that family.



It was a requirement that St. John's minister was able to speak and preach in German. As a young girl I attended the 8 am service with my Mom. In those early years the first service was full and the minister led the whole service in German. I know that, in addition to Rev. Schreiber, Rev. Franke also conducted services in German.

Sunday School on Mt. Vernon...Mrs. Lindeman, a Favorite Teacher

Early German Church was followed by Sunday School. You entered the Church School and went down into a large room where chairs had been placed into a large circle. I think it was little people through sixth grade that met there. We sang wonderful songs in that circle and had a short service. Then we broke up into smaller groups by age, and we shared the lesson. We received wonderful Sunday School papers to take home that were in beautiful color, with a story and memory verses.

As we grew older, we moved into the sanctuary for Church School. We sat in the pews but divided into age groups with a few pews between each class. I remember Mrs. Lindeman the best, as a church schoolteacher and friend. I don't think that she had any children, but she certainly influenced many children. I remember her white hair, braided and laid around her head like a crown. She gave a lot of herself in the lesson and expected a lot from us and we seldom let her down. Every Sunday after Church I got a ride home to Alpine Ave. from Mrs. Lindeman and her husband.

Catechism Preparation Followed by Palm Sunday Confirmation

Preparation for Confirmation or Catechism lasted two years on Saturday from 9am to Noon. It consisted of two groups of children-those who were going to be confirmed that Church year and those who were starting their two-year trek. Rev. Franke instructed us. A lot of work was involved, especially memorizing the Books of the Bible, Creeds, Bible verses and lots of discussions about our Faith. At the end of two years we had an opportunity to show what we had learned in front of our parents, church officials and others. We were confirmed on Palm Sunday in white dresses for girls and suits and ties for boys. My class had seven people, Karl Waller, Ron LaBrenz, Roger Bauer, Mary Braun, Hilda Eberle, myself and I can't remember the seventh person. Confirmation was a big event. Now we were members of the Church.

One of the benefits of Confirmation was becoming a part of the Youth Group. We met in homes and Rev. Franke was usually there. Girls' Choir was special, too. We were in high school then and many of us worked after school. We met for supper at a restaurant on Bridge St., close to the Church. It included Martha and Ruth Hermann and Anna Hailfinger. It was wonderful to be with these Christian girls and then to go on to choir.

Apfelkuchen Baked for Frauenverein Meant Treats for the Family Too

My Mom, My Tanté, Marie Betz, and other German wives made up the Frauenverein. They were the best cooks and bakers. Their meeting date meant they would bake Apfelkuchen and other yeast breads and there would almost always be leftovers for their families. Very few women drove a car. Tanté Marie was the only woman driver, I knew. She always transported a lot of people to meetings, Others took the bus.

I usually sat in the balcony with friends during the service. We took notes on the sermon for Catechism and had a good view of the organ and choir. The pulpit was to the left and was entered from behind. I remember the beautiful stained glass windows- Jesus knocking on the door, Jesus kneeling by a rock with hands folded in prayer and Jesus with a staff and his sheep. I remember also the yearly booklet which listed each member's name and what they had given for that year. I don't know if this helped with contributions, but it is interesting that it was published.

Special Time Between Mother and Daughter...Walking Home In the Snow on Christmas Eve

Christmas was a special time at St. John's. The Sunday School always had a special service with everyone participating. I remember receiving a bag each year with an orange in it and various candies. There was always a large tree in the sanctuary. Christmas Eve was a beautiful service. My Dad drove us, my Mom and me, to Church, but he usually could not pick us up as I had a little brother, who was already asleep. My Mom and I would walk home. It was so special to leave St. John's in all its Christmas beauty and walk home, often in snow, on that blessed night.

St John's continues to be a part of my heart and mind. It supported our daughter and son-in-law, Carolyn and Greg Kirschner, in their seven years in Nigeria. It continues to be a church home for my brother and sister-in-law, my cousins, nieces and nephews, old friends, etc.

I feel so blessed to have had a St. John's in my life with all those beautiful friendships and love. Although my grandparents and much of my family were in Germany, I never lacked for fellowship in those growing up years. **Marie K. Verschoor**

Love and Support of St. John's... A Gift Given to Mother and Passed Onto Daughters

When I thought about all of my experiences at St. John's, I realized that choosing one thing to write about was impossible. This church is so much a part of who I am. From my baptism in 1972, to my wedding in 1996, to seeing St. John's through my children's eyes today.

I could write about being in the cherub and junior choirs and how they helped to form my love of music. Because of my musical foundation at St. John's I decided to play the trumpet and continued to sing in a group through college. I really enjoyed learning German songs and traditional children's songs and performing them for the congregation.

I could write about all of the wonderful teachers I had and how they supported me through the years with family issues. They were always willing to listen and always there to not only teach me but guide me in my daily life.

I could express all of my wonderful memories of all of the family dinners, days at the church camp or my many outings and fun years of confirmation classes with friends in the 80's. Watching my children look at my mother's Christmas tree every year and how it is loaded with ornaments made at church during Hanging of the Greens also makes me smile.

I know that as my children grow with St. John's that they will enjoy many of the same things that I did and still do. Seeing how at home they feel at church while they run around, learn lessons in class and form friendships gives me great joy.

Feeling undecided as to which of my many St. John's memories to write about I will simply say that I can't express how much these walls and more importantly this church family mean to me.

I believe that St. John's is so special because of its members. We are all very different in our own ways but we all want the same things. We want acceptance for who we are, support as we change through the years and the knowledge that as we worship together we are one family. **In Christ's love, Theresa L. Bileth**



There is no past we can bring back by looking for it. There is only an eternal now that builds and creates out of the past something new and better. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



A Prayer of Remembrance

By George R. Graham

Eternal God, our Alpha and Omega, the one who was before anything and will endure beyond all things, we close our eyes and memories flood our minds.

We remember family and friends, experiences and events that have shaped us.

We see faces of dear ones no longer with us. And we feel buoyed up by those countless witnesses who have gone before us, linking one generation to the next and stretching back to the foundations of our faith.

We give thanks for all who have gone before us and who have helped guide us on our way.

When we feel discouraged, remind us of their example. Remind us of your love and faithfulness.

Dare us to imagine some bright new future of joy.

Lead us to where all are gathered in and where all memories reside with you. Amen.



St. John's United Church of Christ 125th Anniversary

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Patti Betz and Ann LaBrenz: Co-Chairpersons

Worship

Reverend William M. Lyons Pastor

Reverend Gerald O'Connor Guest Minister

The Chancel Choir and The Bell Choir

Rose Manby

Bob Fredrick

Brian Bartusch

Music Director

Organist

Guest Organist

Bill and Liz Bode

Ron Cammel

Children's Program

Grand Rapids Press Release

Homecoming Events

Denny Stellard

We are Called

*Come! Live in the light!
Shine with joy and the
love of the Lord! We are
called to be light for the
kingdom, to live in the
freedom of the city of God!*

*We are called to
act with justice,
we are called
to love tenderly,
we are called
to serve one another,
to walk humbly with
God!*