

Remembrances from the Last Mass on Main October 13, 2015, 7 p.m.

MIKE CONRAD:

When you begin to think about good times at Immaculate Conception Church and parish many things come to mind. You think of your marriage, children's births, baptisms, first communions, confirmations, graduations, daughter's weddings and then your grandchildren come along and the cycle starts all over.

Memories of sad times include funerals of family members and tragedies that affected our family and other families of the parish.

Milestones also occur during the times when you start serving on the different activities that make your parish become an important part of your parish life.

I remember Holy Name meetings, school board meetings, lay finance board meetings, building programs including bricking the church, new rectory, remodeling the school and building a gymnasium and cafeteria along with the revitalization of the Labor Day picnic. All making our parish a better place to learn and profess your faith.

Retreats at the King's House were also an important activity of the parish and the plaques on the wall in the rear of the church attest to that fact.

One can hardly forget all the parish priests parishioners have known over the years including Fr. Schroeder, Msgr. Holtgrave, Fr. Dollar, Fr. Wirth, Fr. Jansen, Fr. Haselhorst, Fr. Iffert, Fr. Gira and of course Fr. Chris and Fr. Carl. Others coming to mind serving short periods here I remember are Fr. Meskenas, Fr. Lapardo and probably some I have forgotten.

Long gone, but still remembered, were the Adorers of the Blood of Christ sisters who served this parish faithfully until the time when a lay staff became necessary for the parish to continue its role in Catholic education in Columbia.

For over 150 years Immaculate Conception Church and its parishioners have been an important part of Columbia providing excellent education opportunities along with business leaders and elected officials.

As we bid farewell to this grand old church we all have reservations with the ending of an era started by early pioneers and German immigrants coming to Columbia.

Progress is important part of every parish and it is important that we don't allow the history of this church fade away. Future generations need to know how this church and its parishioners were an important part of Columbia for over years and hopefully many more years to come.

In closing I would like to paraphrase former president John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your church can do for you, but what can you do for your church."

MAGGIE KISH BURNS, BETTY SCHMIDT KISH, JESSICA BURNS:

Maggie

Good evening. My name is Maggie Kish Burns. Father Carl asked if I would be willing to share some of my memories of this Church. I brought my mother (Betty Schmidt Kish) and my daughter (Jessica Burns). We represent three generations of experiences - 169 combined years of memories in this Church. We have received a total of 15 sacraments here, my mother the recipient of six of the seven sacraments. This Church building & our Church community has been a large part of our lives.

Betty

When I was a young girl we spent a lot of time in Church. There was daily school Mass, weekend Mass, and special prayer services, too. My family lived next door to this Church & the old rectory. One time when I was in the backyard singing a favorite song, a big booming voice joined in across the fence – it was our neighbor Father Schroeder. He liked to sing too. When he had guests over, we often heard them singing.

When we weren't IN church, we were reminded we had church obligations. Mr. Leo Fromme made sure the Church bells rang at 6 AM, Noon, and 6 PM. This reminded everyone it was time to pray the Angelus. He also tended all furnaces, mowed grass, dug graves by hand, drove the high school students by bus to Catholic High School in East St. Louis and home each day, and shoveled snow.

The Church looked a little different when I was young. There was a pulpit over there [points to the front right] where the priest went up several steps to read the gospel and say the homily. Father Schroeder could see everyone from there. I remember one day during the New Year's Day Mass he stopped and asked loudly, "Would someone wake up that man in the back seat."

There was also an additional aisle over on that back half (point to the back left). It divided those rows into smaller, half-pews. When I was a little girl our pew was about half way back, in that section. Yes, OUR PEW. Back then Father would pick

a day and announce he would be auctioning off the pews. The closest pews went to the highest bidders. That was your seat for one year.

The priest stood facing the Altar on the back wall. Some time later a new wooden Altar was added, forward of the old one, so the priest could face the people. My brother was a carpenter who helped create that wooden Altar.

This was a poor farming community, your dress might have been made from a feed sack. Stockings were mandatory – including the rubber band that held them up on your thigh. No bare legs. Young girls covered their heads with a cloth – ladies too if they didn't have a hat. Sometimes I forgot my cloth and would have to use a tissue to cover my head.

Besides Mass there were other prayer services throughout the year like 40 Hours and 7 Day Novenas. People would stop by the Church during the day to pray, then there would be service in the evening with Benediction. Everyone was expected to attend.

Occasionally missionaries would come for the 7 Day Novenas. One time my husband happened to be growing a beard and one of the nuns thought he was so rough-looking he must be one of the missionaries and would be asking for money.

At the end of these events there was always a special service. Men wore their suits, young girls their white dresses. Four men held up a white canopy for Father to walk under. He led a procession around the Church while carrying the monstrance. It was quite a big deal

Rogation Days was another prayer time that was intended to bless the crops. We said extra prayers and, if the weather was nice, the school kids would walk up to the cemetery for afternoon prayer.

First Fridays were days we could gain special indulgences or blessings. In order to get these blessings you had to make sure you had nothing to eat or drink from the time you woke up until Mass which started at 8am. There was a water fountain up by the old library in the school that stole many of my special indulgences on those First Fridays.

Taking communion in those days was different. We lined up and knelt at the communion rail. We folded our hands and rested them on the top of the rail. The Altar Boys (yes – only boys could be servers back then) would then flip the Communion Rail cloth over on top of our folded hands. This made sure the host didn't touch us if it fell. The priest put the host on our tongue.

There were country schools so children wouldn't have to travel so far from their home, but during the year of their confirmation they had to attend the Catholic school to prepare for the sacrament. One of these children happened to bring some homemade wine to school. Of course they were caught. Father made all the children line up to watch him get paddled. The Bishop also came to ask the confirmandi questions, just like today. He scared us half to death back then too.

Men AND women were allowed to sing in the choir back then. Some time later it was decided that women shouldn't sing in the choir. The men's choir formed. The men also decided they wanted to be Altar Server's. I was volunteered to sew the man-sized Cassock's and surpluses for them. This exclusive men's choir was later asked to sing at special events. Women were added back into these special events and the group became the Strassenfest Singers and Dancers.

Church back then was woven into the fabric of daily life. This beautiful building was the home for that community feeling that formed the very center of our faith. It will always mean a great deal to me.

One last note, my husband almost married the wrong woman at our wedding. Father Schroeder said to my husband-to-be, "Do you take Betty Weilbacher ...". He caught himself and corrected the name. That was a close one.

Maggie

I may have been another son to my dad, but when it came to going to Church, I was a girl. He took his sons up in the choir (boys-only) and sent the girls down below with mom – 3rd row - Mary's side. That may explain why this "daddy's girl" tends to sing a little loud – I wanted to make sure he could hear me.

In my generation we no longer **bought** our pews, but we claimed them just the same. We always left 15 minutes early to make sure we got **our** seat. Occasionally random folks would make the mistake of sitting in **our pew**. Well, we smiled and squeezed on in anyway to make sure they knew it was **our spot** for the next time they came.

And, since we always had the same spot, I had nearly the same view of the statues and stained glass windows. When I was bored I prayed, imagined, and talked to the statues – they took on a personality and became my friends. I carried them with me in my thoughts. Church was so important - we played it at home. We would process to our crucifix, kneel, sing hymns, receive pretend communion. At home I *was able* to be in the choir.

The Church was divided into Mary's side and Joseph's side. I'm not sure what made Sunday folks stake their claim on any given side. But at weddings, the bride's family sat on Mary's side and the groom's family on Joseph's side. Since our family was so large, having 11 children, our side was always pretty full. There was conscious effort to strategically place *mutual* friends of the couple on the less full side to lessen some of the marked difference.

Altar Servers were still all boys. The dress code relaxed considerably. Girls wore pants to church and didn't have to cover their heads anymore.

As school kids we had daily Mass – girls **could** sing in the school choir.

Receiving communion changed during my generation. The rail was removed, we started receiving the host in our hand, and we were now able to take the wine. There was a short time when we were allowed to dip our host in the wine.

I remember having to remove all mention of God as a male figure from the songs and responses.

One time at a Christmas Eve gathering at my mother's house, my brother Mike was stressing because he couldn't attend the Midnight Mass. He worried the men's choir would miss his strong voice. He recruited me to fill in. I was hesitant. For as much as I loved Midnight Mass and loved to sing, I wasn't sure I was ready to cross the barrier into the men's choir. I felt some tension when I entered the loft

and eyes turned toward me, but Dorothy Metter on the organ and Joyce Rose had already made a path for me.

I loved the choir loft and dragged my family there whenever I could for Mike's guitar Mass. Part of the draw was singing with my brother. He stood front left playing guitar, and I stood top row on the right. With the acoustics of the church I could hear his voice as if it was right next to me. I imagined catching all the different voices between us and weaving them together to make our joyful noise. When we blended just right, I would get goose-bumps, even though warm air rises and we were usually sweltering up there. I sang many a wedding and funeral solo from the front corner of that loft. We didn't have microphones back then. You had to project and the church's wonderful acoustics helped spread the music.

The world's culture changed quite a bit during my generation. Children grew up and found jobs outside the farming community. We were exposed to many other events and activities that competed for our attention. I met my spouse through a co-worker. He lived in another town and was of another faith. Routines had to change to accommodate our new lives. While not always able to attend this church's activities, this building always grounded me. It reminded me of the importance of my faith, and always welcomed me home. It spoke of simpler times submersed in routines and traditions – a time I always had hoped I would regain. This church will forever hold a special place in my heart.

Jessie

My life is difficult to separate from this space. I was baptized here – I've seen the home video (I cried.). My kindergarten graduation took place here – I was a donkey. I had my first reconciliation here –feeling so proud when I was able to light my first reconciliation candle. My first communion happened here – with my entire row of family standing up beside me. I cantored, by myself, at this ambo in 4th grade – nervous and off-key I'm sure, but loved that my mom and grandma took the time to come to a school mass just for me (in a big family, that is a big deal). I was an altar server here – where I learned the ins and outs of how to keep mass flowing smoothly. I said good-bye to my grandpa Al in this space – and when the line of people reached the door, I wondered if I would ever make an impact on

so many lives. I had my confirmation here – choosing the name Aldegondes, one of the cancer saints, in memory of all the family members I had lost to the disease. My eighth grade graduation happened in this church – where I said so long to grade school and hello to high school. I received my blessing when I started driving – and if you know anything about my luck with vehicles, who knows where I would be if I hadn't received that. It was also here I received my blessing when I went off to college, the first time I would live away from home and away from my church. It was also here that I asked to be prayed over when I graduated from college – scared and unsure of what I was supposed to do with my life now. And it was here, just a month after college graduation where my life & the future I had planned, changed forever – this church became a space that would no longer be used for sacraments.

All the memories I had – singing in the choir loft with my family, serving, baptisms, confirmations, graduations, reconciliations, weddings, anointings, and funerals – would stay just that – memories. Growing up, I had always believed that I would also be married here, like my parents and grandparents – that I would also baptize my babies here, just like me and the generations before – and I believed that my funeral mass would be prayed here, just like so many family members before me. However, it looks like life has other plans for me. So no, I won't get to have those memories here, but when I look back at all the memories I did have here, my heart is full. This space has always been a very important part of me, and will continue to be. So no, I won't say goodbye, because this space will always be a beautiful, living, important part of me. Thank you Immaculate Conception Church on Main Street, for making me who I am.

THANK YOU

