

Let's Remember Together!



Let's Remember Together



Let's Remember Together! was a project started to remember Christmas. The people of Christ Church were invited to share their favorite Christmas stories that included their church or church families (past or present).

Our goal was to remember that church isn't just something you do during the holidays, but it is an experience that can make this time more holy, more special, more memorable, and enhance the holidays in every way!

Merry Christmas 2012

A special thank you to all of the people of Christ Church who had a part in this project. *These are their stories...*



I have so many memories of Christmases past that are dear to my heart!

One that has always been in the forefront is the year we went to church on Christmas Eve. Christ Methodist Church, as it was called then, had been going through the addition of the new sanctuary and education wing. As a young child I don't remember, or was unaware of all the hubbub that goes along with such a huge undertaking, but my memory of that special Christmas Eve service has been one that I have shared through the years with friends and family. The sanctuary was not complete.

Try to picture it, there were no pews, no fancy floors, no carpet lining the center aisle, no choir loft, no pretty altar table and lecterns like we see now. The room was roped off to where the pews would be, giving the space in front for an altar area. Candles, not gorgeous chandeliers lit the room. We sang carols and listened to scripture about the Christmas story. As the Bible verses were spoken retelling the story of that first Christmas night, live animals and people in period clothing came down the roped off center aisle. Mary, riding on a donkey in my church! The vision is faint, but I remember seeing the live nativity in the place where I would worship the newborn King for many years to come.

Paula Kreib

My grandfather came from Germany, and he grew up not too far from where Hans Gruber wrote "Silent Night."

He had a rich baritone voice, and he loved to sing "Silent Night" in German. One Christmas Eve in church he sang a solo of "Silent Night" in German. I had tears in my eyes, and I still get tears in my eyes when I hear that song "Stille Nacht."

Caroline Hess



More than a dozen years ago members of the MYM (Mature Years Ministry) Group were setting up for their annual Christmas Party.

Ruth Swenson was one of the decorators, and as I passed her that day I couldn't help but notice and comment on the sweatshirt she was wearing with the word "JOY" across the front. The next day, Ruth showed up at my door with a bag containing the sweatshirt. She offered it to me as a gift saying, "Our joy-girl needs to have this." She literally gave me the shirt off her back. What a treasure! What a JOY!

Sally Pollard

My earliest memories of Christmas are attending midnight mass at St. Roch's Roman Catholic Church in my home town of Flat Rock, Michigan.

The family would put on our church clothes, pile into the wagon at 10:45 p.m., and head off to church. I remember the smell of wax and incense that assaulted our senses as we walked into the church. I remember the way the church looked at night by candle light. I remember the hushed silence and muffled greetings of the congregation. I cannot say that these memories touched me spiritually but they were emotionally and aesthetically significant.

Spiritually this all changed for me in 1973. In March of 1973, I surrendered my life to Jesus. The first Christmas after that (December 1973) I had a second awakening. We were singing Christmas carols, and the words began to scream off the page at me. For the first time in my life I realized that the songs we sang at Christmas were deeply and profoundly connected to the story of the birth of my savior, Jesus Christ.



“O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.” “Child for us sinners poor and in the manger, we would embrace thee with love and awe. Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?” “Hark! the herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the new-born King;’ peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”

As the songs were sung I found my spirit renewed and the profound connection between the words of the carols and the music of my heart were one and the same.

Pastor B.J

My first Christmas Mass was on Christmas day.

I was three and full of questions. Why does he wear that pointed hat? Why is he wearing a pink belt? Why is the manger so large? I went on and on.

When Bishop Burke stopped Mass and came down to bless me, I was sure I was about to die. I froze. He asked my name, and when I replied, 3,000 people behind me laughed.

I hadn't looked behind me! I was at the new Cathedral, and marble echoes sound throughout the church.

Diane Lovejoy

An especially memorable Christmas for us was at Christ Church in 1967.

That year, the Christmas Family Fellowship program went “live” when it was decided to put on “A Journey to Bethlehem,” a pageant with a “live” family, sheep, and a donkey in Crafts Hall. A search was made to find the youngest baby in the congregation. As it turned out, Scott Fisher, born October 5, was the youngest. So, he played the part of baby Jesus, and we were Mary and Joseph. It was special to be able to play the roles of the Holy Family with our new-born son in the midst of live animals and shepherds, almost like the stable of old (as shown in the picture).

Ed and Cindy Fisher





It was Christmas Eve day.

Even though it was a Monday our neighborhood Catholic Church was having three services: a 9 a.m., noon, and an 8 p.m. As members of the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization), we were required to attend the 9 a.m. with our own tithing envelopes.

Well, a gang of us went to Danny's Pool Room, one of our "hangouts." We had been there about ten minutes when who to our wondering eyes should appear but "Father Zuppa" our youth leader! He asked why we weren't at the 9 a.m. Mass. We told him we were planning on attending the noon service. He asked us if our parents gave us envelopes. When we answered "yes," he told us to collect the envelopes and put them on the counter.

He asked, "Who is the best pool player?" I was not that good but they pointed me out. Father asked me if I played "Nine Ball." I said, "Yes." He asked me to rack the balls, and I did. Father then "ran the table," sunk the nine ball, took all the tithing envelopes, told us he would see us at the noon Mass, and left.

Needless to say, we all went to church. We arrived and stood in the back of the sanctuary. The Mass hadn't started yet, and people were still filing in. At the podium was Father Zuppa on the microphone telling the "pool players" to take seats and stay a while.

Ron Corsaro



I remember Christmas Eve at Christ Church.

You had to arrive early to find a parking place within a quarter mile! Inside the church was a choir of 50 plus singers, a large orchestra, and MANY worshippers. Chairs were set up in the parlor, and people stood in the back. The music drew hundreds! The musicians produced a glorious “Messiah” to the delights of all. Year after year people came to worship in this spectacular fashion.

Barbara Carier

My sister and I sang with the children’s choir in the Congressional Church in Rutherford, New Jersey.

We rehearsed all year (or so it seemed to be) to sing at Christmastime, and again on Children’s Day in June. How angelic we were in our long, red skirts and short, white robes with red bows at the neckline! It was exciting to participate in the Christmas music and to contribute to the worship service.

Ann Burdette

My son, Alex, was born in December, and came home from the hospital on Christmas Eve.

With the doctor’s approval, Alex’s first service was on Christmas Eve. He slept mostly, until communion time.

We usually formed two lines down the center aisle. It soon became one long line on the left side of the church.

Everyone stopped to smile at my “urchin” who was not expected to be born. We all laughed and rejoiced at his life. Praise God!

Diane Lovejoy



Christ Church invited people from Seneca St. UMC for an evening to share a pot-luck dinner and play some games hoping to get to know each other better.

We had just finished the coat drive and were sending some coats back with Seneca St.

One woman, Priscilla, had her eye on a beautiful, red coat. So we encouraged her to try it on. When she saw herself in the mirror wearing that beautiful, red coat, she burst into a huge smile and stood a little taller that night!

Peggy Bermudez

The combined choirs of St. Paul's Lutheran in Eggertsville and Williamsville were performing an Advent concert at St. Paul's Williamsville.

The day was dark and overcast (a typical December day in Buffalo). The choir was well rehearsed and ready to give what we hoped to be a good concert. We started to sing a piece that begins with the words, "And then, then shall your light break forth as the light of morning." At that very second as if on cue, bright sunlight came streaming through the stained glass windows.

It happened so suddenly that there was an audible gasp from the congregation. It was a true "mountain top" experience, and I felt God's presence in a way I had not before, and is till well remembered by all who were there.

Dave Wolf



The first year I was elevated to single mother, I helped out at the Advent fellowship.

The kids sat with friends, and I sat alone. Kevin Johnston came over and invited me to eat with them. Wendy told me that Kevin had told her, “No one should be alone at Christmas.”

Kevin was right, and I came to know a great family. Merry Christmas!

Diane Lovejoy

Not all the best Christmas memories are from long ago.

Some are from the recent past, and new memories are created every year. Four years ago our daughter, Olivia, was 10 months old, and I ended up watching the Christmas pageant from up in the cry room. This actually provided an excellent vantage point from which to watch all the action. My only memory of the actual pageant is that of the twins who were a shepherd and a sheep.

The shepherd was really getting into his role, perhaps too much, and his sister, the sheep, smiled even though she seemed a little annoyed by her brother’s prodding. I recall pointing out the sheep to Olivia and asking her if she might want to be a sheep one day.

Three years later she had that opportunity. My wife, Laura, and I were also asked to help with the youngest kids. So there we were, not just watching the pageant but also participating. This yielded many wonderful memories, including the image of a whole herd of sheep crawling wildly underneath the piano as they waited their turn.

My favorite memory of the pageant is when Olivia got a case of stage fright before the last song and wouldn’t leave our pew. However, Laura and I weren’t above



bribing her with candy, and this did the trick. She immediately ran up with the other kids, took her position as was rehearsed, and sang along.

This year, we are helping again, and we also have a new 6 month old daughter, Annette. While Laura helps with the pageant, I might find myself up in the cry room again holding Annette up to the glass and asking her if she might also, in a few years, have a role in the Christmas pageant.

Merry Christmas!

Christopher Smith

It was a tradition each Christmas Eve to go to Christ Church for the Christmas Eve service.

This service was usually at 11 p.m., and when we exited at midnight, the luminarias were lit, and snow would be falling—a perfect Christmas. How *was* it that it *always* snowed as we came out of those doors? Even the mild winters would have us come in seeing green and come out seeing white! Some years things were not so perfect, but even during those instances, God was always with us.

When we were very young, Mom would attend that service by herself to sing in the choir. Our service was the pageant. Sometimes Dad stayed home with us, but more often we had a sitter. When we were old enough, we were thrilled to be able to come alone. There were so many special moments that we had been missing all this time.

While Dorothy Brown was reading one of the Bible passages, I was always mesmerized and touched emotionally while listening to her voice and her interpretation.

One of my favorite times of the service was the candle-lighting and singing of

“Silent Night.” During junior high and high school, we really came only wanting to see our friends from Youth Group—share a hug and gifts. Later in high school we were invited to sing the “Messiah” with the choir! What a treat! Barb Mitchell stood next to me, and we still laugh about the “ha-ha-has” to this day.

One year, it snowed so much while we were in church that cars were stuck in the snow. My Dad, (who never wore an overcoat) spent an hour pushing cars out in his suit coat, dress pants, and dress shoes (probably wingtips!). So nice to help others, plus he thought he was the strongest and best at navigating cars in the snow. He twisted his knee in the process, which swelled and prevented much movement. He was always glad he helped regardless of the outcome. When we returned home, I had to help Mom prepare for the next morning (if you get my drift). I finally found out the special hiding spots! David, my younger brother, was still young, and I loved being part of the surprise.

After high school and throughout college, our new tradition after the Christmas Eve service was to join the Koeppels at their house. They were part of our church family and neighborhood family. Ed sang in the choir, Bunny was the best cook, and many of the family were musicians. We shared eggnog, toasted to a special year, sang, and laughed. We would walk home well after 2 a.m. The next morning came and went quickly, but the memories of friends and family last until this day.

I never feel like it is Christmas without attending the Christmas Eve service; so many family members have been in those same pews, and I still “see” them on that evening. It is the last and best place to be before the big day!

Lynn Ramsey

Through all of my childhood, moving was the norm.

Just to go from kindergarten through high school, I attended nine different schools, and, over all, I've lived in eight states across ten major moves.

But, one thing stayed the same, since my earliest memories: Christmas Eve at church. Church was the stable part of an otherwise nomadic life.

Each and every year, no matter where I or my family was, or what was going right or wrong, I felt a deep anticipation of Christmas Eve in a dimly lit sanctuary, as each person lit and held up a single candle while singing, "Silent Night, Holy Night, All is calm, All is bright."

Some churches barely held 100 people, some were perhaps two dozen, while others held hundreds. But what I anticipated was that deeply personal moment when we were reminded, "All is calm, All is bright."

To this day, I have a box of candles that only served one brief purpose. They are my keepsakes from many Christmas Eve services. Initially, they were the treasures I gathered and saved as a boy. I didn't know what I would do with them; I just liked knowing I had them. Now, when I think of them, they are the treasures I save as a son, man, husband, father, and grandfather.

With all of the busyness that can come from Christmas, and all of the final preparations that can keep us up late, I am deeply moved by the anchor that God has always been and will be—a bright, single candle in my life that calls me to be still and know, "All is calm. All is bright."

Roger Johnson

A standout memory for me was years ago at Christ Church when Ed and Cindy Fisher portrayed Joseph and Mary in the Nativity Pageant.

They made the story seem so real.

Ann Burdette

As a child, my parents encouraged my sisters and me to use our God-given, musical talents to enhance the worship service for others.

I sang in the children's choir; then later played instruments with the church organist at special services. I remember rehearsing before Mass began, and Mrs. Diaz handing out special sheet music on colored paper and selecting soloists to be featured each week. I loved to sing.

Now, as an adult, I find I feel closest to God listening, singing, and playing Christian songs. I've performed with contemporary, classical, and liturgical ensembles. If you turned on the radio in my car, you'd hear Chris Rice playing traditional hymns in a contemporary style; I find music to be so soothing and centering.

The Christmas service has held a special place in my heart—the church packed to the gills, decorations, and candles creating a beautiful, sacred atmosphere, the voices raised in praise singing songs from childhood, and the special ensembles of bell choirs and instrumental musicians.

A Christmas without going to service just wouldn't be the same, and my husband and I try to be involved in a service every year, sharing our musical talents together. Remember, when you sing, you pray twice, so pipe up!

Valerie Suffoletto

Church pageants have had a long standing history at our church.

I remember the days only adults were part of the pageant. Sometimes there were live animals. I loved the year Cindy and Ed Fisher were Mary and Joseph, and Scott was baby Jesus. Mostly, I remember how special that day felt.

Long before I was involved with the pageant at Christ Church as an adult, I had my first glimpse into how a church pageant and Christmas celebration can make a difference. We were a young family living in Rochester, searching for a church with the right fit for us. We both wanted a pastor like Rev. Dick Harrington. So, we called Rev. Dick and explained our dilemma. He sent us to check out Asbury First.

Although bigger than any church either of us had attended, we liked it immediately! Meaghan, now 24, was 3 or 4 and Taylor, now 20, was an infant. They attended Sunday school and childcare. Our second or third Sunday in church talk began about the pageant that was to take place on Christmas Eve. Thinking Meaghan was too young, we did not pursue this, but we were swept up in the hubbub as they encouraged us and assured us “every child can participate.”

We invited Mom and Dad and were so excited for this night. Proudly, little angel Meaghan walked down the aisle Christmas Eve with the other angels and sheep. Most of the children had no speaking lines or singing parts, but her being on that altar sure made our day! Thus began our quest to share with our children, the true meaning of Christmas. During their childhood, I felt it was important to remind our family each year not to forget that we were celebrating Jesus’ birthday.

It was a blessing to be welcomed into a church community that Christmas. God must have seen my glow that night as he led me to the other side of that equation, welcoming one and all into Christ Church’s pageant each year. Many of those years my “angels” Meaghan and Taylor were involved.

More recently, I have been touched by new “angels” in our church community,

not to mention the shepherds, wise men, Magi, Marys, Josephs, and baby Jesus-
es! I get so much more than I give during this season! I hope the moms, dads,
and grandparents in our congregation get that same tingling feeling when their
children share the love of Jesus during our pageant.

Lynn Ramsey

D.C. the Christmas Cat.

It was a cold, rainy Christmas Eve. The choir was gathering in the back of the
church waiting for the 11 p.m. service to begin. Outside a small, black cat was hid-
ing in the bushes. The church must have looked warm and inviting to him, be-
cause the next time the door opened he ran in and straight up the center aisle. An
usher ran after him, caught him, and brought him back to where the choir was.
An Acolyte held him.

He was very wet and scared, and he left
muddy paw prints on the front of the
Acolyte's robe. The usher asked what
we should do with him.



I was living next door to the church at the time, and asked him to put the cat into
the garage attached to the house; I would take care of him. After the service I
checked on him; he was huddled in a corner still cold and wet. I dried him off,
brought him into the house, and gave him some milk and food. D.C. (Dave's cat)
was with me for the next seventeen years and was a great companion and friend.

Dave Wolf

While we attended Central Park Church, they decided to have the children put on a Christmas pageant.

Now Alex did not speak, but was so active they had to attach the toy shelves to the walls because he would climb them.

The pageant began and a line of costumed children walked out. Jasen was a shepherd. The last child was Alex. He was an angel. My entire family said, “An Angel!” and all snickered. The teacher calmly “Shhhhhhhed” us.

Diane Lovejoy

I have many Christmas remembrances, but one I would like to share occurred 22 years ago.

Our family—Marilyn, Bill, daughters: Sarah (6-years-old), Jacqueline (3 years old), and Kathleen (2-years-old)—were lighting the Advent wreath. As soon as the candles were lit, Kathleen turned to the congregation and in a loud voice began to sing “Happy Birthday.” Rev. French followed this with, “it takes a child to remind us that Christmas is about celebrating a birthday.”

As a follow up, Kathleen is now a fourth year Medical student, and will be married in this church in June.

Marilyn Morris

What a special Christmas 1979 was!

Our family, Chuck, Elizabeth, Martha, and I, had just joined Christ Church and really knew very few people. At the pageant just before Christmas, we sat next to Anne Glaubitz and daughters Jeanne and Marlena (Phil was in the pageant).

In talking with Anne, we found out that the Glaubitz girls were the same ages as our daughters, and that we shared many common interests. We realized that we had made a good choice in choosing Christ Church as “our” church.

Joanne Gilbert

Our first Christmas at Christ Church the family went to the 9:30 p.m. service.

Jasen and Alex sat with me in the first row. Services ended at midnight. I had two boys asleep on my legs. I woke them, and told them it was Christmas because it was after midnight.

They popped up, ran into the great hall, and found Rev. Drew Heizenrater. The three jumped up and down that it was Christmas, and they could get toys now!

Diane Lovejoy

I remember teaching the Christmas story to my first and second grade church school class.

We talked about how young Mary might have been at the time, maybe as young as 15. When one of the children exclaimed, “FIFTEEN! She didn’t even have her driver’s license yet!”

Peggy Bermudez

Growing up at Christ Church I could always count on the smells and sounds of Christmas Eve service.

The sound of the brass band and the goose bumps I would get when we all sang “Silent Night” for the last song. As I grew older I would sometimes have a tear or two also. But the one memory that really stands out, is sitting in the pews, smelling the wax, and playing with the wax from the lit candles. My brother would cover the palm of his hand in wax, then roll it into balls to share with my sister and myself.

I look forward to my own kids having memories of Christmas at Christ Church now that we are back in town.

Susan Rowlands Schauer

A tradition at Christ Church since long before I arrived here is to have luminarias lining the church walkway on Christmas Eve.

Various groups or individuals have set out and lit these luminarias over the years, but in recent years it has become a tradition for my son, Christopher, and me to share. Sometimes my husband, Jim, joins in as well.

Now that Christopher is grown and on his own, I enjoy this tradition of lighting the luminarias more and more as he continues to make time to do this. Or maybe he just thinks I’m old!!

Sally Pollard

Christmas Eve. Cold, windy, dark—

Then we reached the front of the church sidewalk where the glowing, warm, flickering lights of the luminarias greeted us, inviting us to come in. It was breathtaking! A perfect welcome! Christmas filled our hearts.

Bill and Ruth Swenson

Two memories come to mind:

1. The live manger scene on the lawn.
2. The church full on Christmas Eve, and the choir singing parts of the “Messiah.”

Phyllis Nicholson and Family

The first time I traveled outside the US was for Christmas.

I was seventeen years old in my junior year of high school, and I was traveling with my aunt and uncle to Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, Mexico. My aunt and uncle had planned this trip to visit their only daughter, her husband, and their three children for Christmas. It was a great honor to be included in this fun trip.

My cousin, Renee, and her husband, Nic, had been in Mexico, at the time, for fifteen plus years. Most would consider them missionaries; they considered themselves pastors. Being so far away from home for such a long time made time with family even more special, and the holidays greatly enhanced with excitement and joy. My aunt lived for Christmas. If there was a decoration to be had, a movie to be watched, a carol to be sung, or a present to be bought she was making sure it happened!

I hope you can imagine the excitement, but chaos, of such a trip. Think of an aver-

age size, Mexican house with five members in the original family, then the three “Americans” visiting, on top of that, the three to five Mexicans who lived with my cousins at random times. Throw in a dog, a tarantula, and about six unwelcome lizards and the chaos was complete. The normal hustle of the holidays is not lost on the Mexican town of Puerto Escondido. Along with the added bonus of out-of-town family making the Christmas time more intense, we had the back and forth from store to store, the grocery list for the “American” food, and the present “assembly line” going full speed.

Christmas in the year 2006 happened to be on a Sunday, and I was in a pastor’s house, this meant church. But who has time to slow down to go to church on Christmas morning?

Come Sunday morning, all of the family, including the adopted Mexican family, along with a few other local missionaries, and some other native friends were all gathered around the Christmas tree in the living room and experienced Christmas as more than just presents, food, and games. We celebrated on Christmas morning in the charged atmosphere that comes with the joy of Christmas morning.

We worshiped with one well-known, Christmas carol. *“O come let us adore him, o come let us adore him, o come let us adore him. Christ the Lord.”* To this day that carol sends shivers through my body. It reminds me of a holy moment in a small, Mexican house surrounded by other worshippers.

What a wonderful reminder that Christmas is about so much more than everything else we make it about. When Christmas becomes overwhelming and not filled with worship, I stop and remind myself of that Sunday, Christmas morning in Mexico.

Rachel Vaughan



Christ United Methodist Church

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