

# Reflections on Gratitude

By Bill Luerrsens

Delivered at The Transept – August 28, 2022

I am grateful. My life is very good, and I am grateful for so much. As I look back over my life one theme, something high on my gratitude list, is “church.”

The first 18 years of my life I attended a liberal Presbyterian church with my mom in Evansville, Indiana. We both attended every Sunday and were fully involved with the congregation. The inspiration of Sunday morning, and the supportive members of the congregation, helped shape my life. Even when I went off to college at Purdue University, I sought out the inspiration and renewal of Sunday morning services at a liberal Presbyterian church.

When I came to Cincinnati in 1966 to take a job with Procter and Gamble, I began a search for a new church home. I thought it would be easy. It wasn't. I couldn't find a place that fit for me among the Presbyterian and Methodist churches I tried.

Then in 1967 I decided to try Unitarianism. I came to St. John's to give it a try. Wow! I instantly could feel that I had found a new church home. The Sunday services were so inspiring and thought provoking. The people were so welcoming and interesting. I attended regularly and then joined in 1968 – and I am still grateful to be a member 54 years later.

Looking back, I have the perspective that St. John's and I have been taking care of each other for 54 years.

I arrived here as a very immature 23-year-old. St. John's has helped “grow me up.” Through my volunteering here I learned people skills and organizational skills that I carried into my work career and beyond. Through the Sunday services here I have developed as a person. I have had some major personal changes and challenges in those 54 years, and the supportive community here has helped see me through them.

St. John's has also had changes and challenges in those years. There have been seven settled ministers in that time. The cultural and political challenges beyond our walls have been huge. The actual individual members in our congregation have

changed many times over. Our financial health has had its ups and downs. There have been building repair challenges that needed to be addressed.

I have tried through my efforts to take care of the church. Consistent throughout my time here has been financial my support. It has also meant holding most of the volunteer positions in the institutional side the church, some more than once. It has had me singing in the choir. It has engaged me in all manner of repair work on our building.

I'd like to think that St. John's and I have done pretty well in taking care of each other so far. We are both healthy. I am grateful.

Now St. John's and I are entering a new phase of our time together. A master plan has been developed to repair and improve our wonderful church building. And I have agreed to help lead the major capital campaign needed to pay for that work.

This has led me to two new perspectives I wanted to share:

1. I have come to see our church at 320 Resor Ave. as a gift that was given to me and those who came after I did. I did nothing to build that wonderful church building and pay for it. It was the dreams, planning, and importantly the financial sacrifice of those in the congregation who came before me that built it. In retrospect, many of the older people sitting around me on a Sunday morning in those early days were part of providing that legacy, that gift. For that I am grateful.
2. Many, if not most, of the St. John's congregation that raised the money for our building in Clifton were sitting where you are right now! Yes, there would be no St. John's at 320 Resor Ave. if it hadn't been for that last St. John's congregation at 12<sup>th</sup> and Elm. **Sit with that thought for a moment.**

So, I have come to realize how much my life has been affected by a group of German immigrants from over 150 years ago. They dreamed of building a church for their congregation. They were building for the future. They chose this location in Over-the-Rhine, for that is where so many new German immigrants were settling. Their dreams, plans, and financial sacrifices led to the building of this magnificent church. So, this feels to me like "hallowed ground." As I came

through those front doors and walked up the stairs, I was holding onto the original wooden railings that they once held. I feel a kinship with them as my religious forebearers. Just like I had been, they were seeking religious inspiration and a community of like-minded people on a Sunday morning.

I am grateful for them.