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Joy in Christ
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Jubilee 100 Biography Project

Biography of Neil and Cecile Gannon

Submitted by Good Shepherd Parish, Edmonton



It is with humble hearts and thanks to our generous God for His many blessings to our family that I write this biography of our life in the Edmonton Archdiocese at Good Shepherd Parish.

With Neil's Doctorate in place and a promising new job, our family moved to Edmonton in 1982. This was like returning home where we had first begun our married life. We have presently lived here and been active parishioners at Good Shepherd for 30 years. When we first arrived, we debated whether or not to join this new parish as we heard rumours they were fundraising for a new church. There was a huge wall displaying the "buy- a-brick" campaign going on. We felt we had already built enough churches, additions, helped build a swimming pool and community halls along our travels, but something about this new parish with Rev. John Hamilton, an energetic, enthusiastic, young parish priest at the helm, attracted us. It was like déjà vu. There were many young families and Sunday Mass was celebrated in a school gymnasium converted into a chapel. Also, Rev. Landrigan who was now retired and helping out, remembered Neil who had been his "head altar boy" for many years in Vermilion. Sr. Maureen Ryan was also no stranger. Neil had met her years before at meetings when he was principal at the Ft. Saskatchewan Our Lady of the Angels School and she was principal at Sherwood Park Catholic School. And so it was, we would be helping to build another church!



Over the years we saw many changes happening in Good Shepherd Parish. Neil was a Charter Member Knight of the Fort Saskatchewan Council in 1972. Within a few years he became Grand Knight of his council and they were involved with many family functions like the big hit children's "Birthday Party for Jesus." There was a fun family picnic and barbecue in the spring. They raised money through bingos for the new church and one year Neil presented a cheque to Rev. Hamilton for \$100,000 to the building fund. He became Chairman of Parish Council, sat on the Finance Committee for many years, was Chairman of the Budget Committee for the Archdiocese of Edmonton, Chairman of the Ecumenical Committee for the Archdiocese and member of the Seminary Admissions Committee until it was dissolved. The Knights also assist as volunteers at the Blood Donor Clinics. For many years the Knights also ran the monthly pancake breakfasts which are now a big success and an opportunity to meet new families or visit with friends. He became the first president of the Senior Club. He also chaired the Misericordia Hospital Bio-Ethics Committee for a few years.

A few years later Neil was asked to become a District Deputy for the Knights of Columbus. That started a whole string of Knights positions including State Communications Director for four years, State Warden, State Advocate, State Secretary, and finally State Deputy of Alberta. I must add that as Neil's wife I became very familiar with the work of the Knights, travelled many miles with him and enjoyed hosting several functions. We found the work of the Knights to be so inspiring and invigorating. I too, heartily believe in their principles of Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism. I was touched to see these dedicated men reach out to the Slave Lake disaster, to see them fight for the issues they believed in like the March for Life, to see them deliver wheelchairs to handicapped in underdeveloped countries and handing out Coats for Kids in the inner city schools of Edmonton. How proud and committed they were to raise \$1,000,000 for the new St. Joseph Seminary. We met so many wonderful, dedicated, charitable people.

My work at Good Shepherd Parish took me in different directions. Of course, I joined the CWL and before I knew it I became President. Sr. Maureen was often my mentor as both our past presidents had moved away. How I enjoyed working with dedicated women for all kinds of local causes. We eagerly prepared for the Pope's visit in 1984 making street banners to welcome him. I signed up as a volunteer. Our whole family rose early and went out to meet Pope John II on that cold windy day. I got to wear my VIP volunteer jacket and froze!

I have also served on the Arts and Environment Committee for nearly 20 years. It was a great way to show our creativity, have fun, be welcoming, all the while making our church celebrations come to life. At first to save money we even made bees-wax candles. This was a complicated task of melting a mixture of bees wax and paraffin and praying it would come out of the mold safely. Sr. Maureen used to ask our CWL ladies to wash and iron the altar boy surplices, and a small group of us got together to spring-clean the rectory.

Of course one of our highlights was finally moving into the new church. The wonderful occasion was celebrated by a special Mass. Then we began to see a need to establish a CWL Funeral Luncheon Committee to serve lunches after the Funeral Mass for bereaved families in our parish. Parish Council approved our plans and this ministry has been successfully in place since 1988. Shortly after the move we celebrated Sr. Maureen's 50th Anniversary of Religious Life. It was a sunny, fall afternoon and Fr. Hamilton's message during Mass was a great tribute to her. We had autumn sweet-pea floral arrangements on every table, served a lovely tea and a member of CWL made a huge cake in her honor. Our CWL prepared a little skit and we presented Sister with a bouquet of roses.

The new parish hall was filled to capacity and several presentations were made, a tribute to Sister. We worked hard but I believe this was a moment of crowning glory.

I was still president when somehow we accepted to host a Win House Tea. Ignorance is bliss! I soon realized this fundraiser for abused women was a very formal event. A CWL lady came from Diocesan to give me a head's up on the protocol. Our young council rose to the occasion. Our ladies came forward with help galore and enough tablecloths and sparkling Silver Tea sets. There were formal dignitaries as "Tea Pourers" such as politician Pam Barrett among others attending, and of course, our very own Rev. Hamilton. I was welcoming and thanking the guests as they arrived when one lady said to me, "Oh don't thank me for coming. A few years ago I was one of the ladies that Win House helped. They put me back on my feet so today it's my pleasure to support this fundraiser and help someone else." Her honesty moved me to tears.

When our Good Shepherd CWL Council celebrated its 25th Anniversary we created a souvenir book that included our highlights, milestones from the past, some personal stories of special events, photos and ending it with favorite recipes. Somehow, our typist became ill and I continued to slowly gather stories and work at compiling them. Before I knew it I was also the sole printer and editor. I found the work rewarding and the stories and recipes kept coming in. By the end of April it was all ready for printing and we began selling them at our May Brunch. When our President asked me what would we like to do with the money I suggested that we follow our League Prayer and share by adopting a little girl from Africa through the Chalice program.

Together Neil and I also are still readers and have both been Eucharistic Ministers at Good Shepherd parish. I have been a member of CWL for 48 years. We have led and hosted a Listening Centre, "Circle of Friends" for 11 lively, fun-filled years, sharing and discussing various Bible readings and applying them to daily life. Our children also participated in church life while they lived at home. Corine helped to teach the children's Sunday school program while she attended university. Celine became an altar server, the Youth Rep on Parish Council, recipient of the CWL Scholarship, and a reader at Mass. Both Tim and Celine escorted youth groups to meet the Pope for World Youth Days in Toronto and Germany. Looking back, it's hard to believe how those precious years slipped by so quickly. Today, they are all successful university graduates and happily married. How blessed we are to have 10 healthy, energetic grandchildren, all under 11 years of age.

Over the years we have worked with and appreciated all our parish priests. They shared their special gifts and leadership qualities. Today we are blessed with a new priest, Rev. John Reddy. He is young and enthusiastic.

Our memories of working for 30 years in Good Shepherd Parish are precious, our priests served us well, and we are grateful for the many lasting friendships. Hopefully God will grant us all many more happy years!