



The Catholic
Archdiocese
of Edmonton

Joy in Christ
100 Jubilee
1912-2012

Jubilee 100 Biography Project
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Sherwood Park

Biography of Sister Connie Piska

Submitted by Sister Connie Piska at the suggestion of Archbishop J.N. MacNeil

In the fall of 1974, seven people phoned Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish requesting to inquire into the Catholic faith. There was only one recently hired parish pastoral associate, Sister Connie Piska, who realizing she could not possibly instruct them individually, decided to take them as a group at the Sisters' residence, where there was a lovely big room with a fireplace and hospitality was readily available. She mentioned to Father Gerry Wiesner, who was coming to Sherwood Park for weekend ministry, what she was doing. He showed great interest because he was teaching the new document on the restored Catechumenate at Newman Theological College, but welcomed a chance to have a hands-on experience.

Thus a team of two was begun. The study guide for the restored Catechumenate was used as a basic guide for that first year. It was used more extensively the following years.

Each year catechists, sponsors and godparents were initiated and formed to be part of the Catechumenate team. We gradually grew into an understanding and use of this new model of Catechumenal catechesis, following more and more of the study guide.

Sister Doreen Victoor and Patricia Morris were also beginning a Catechumenate in Millwoods and we would meet together from time to time. Eventually Fr. Gerry Wiesner and Sister Connie Piska arranged to meet with Archbishop J.N. MacNeil to let him know what was happening regarding the RCIA in the Archdiocese. He suggested that we organize an Archdiocesan RCIA Committee, which we did in early 1975.

Biography of Dan and Ann Bingham



Fifty years ago in St Augustine's Parish in Ottawa we said our yes to each other. Since then we became parents to four children who have now increased our family with six grandchildren. This of course comes with both blessings and challenges; we believe the grace of the sacrament of marriage nurtured us to this day. We have always taken an active part in the life of the parishes to which we belonged.

Then we arrived here at OLPH 34 years ago, post Vatican II, with its many opportunities to become aware of our gifts freely given by our God, we began to listen and see that our church had many areas for a couple to become involved. Ann became active in the Franciscan Fraternity and was surprised learn that some of her natural talents were needed in building up of Church. What a grace! Throughout our lives as a couple we have experienced many challenges and rewards. Through our sacramental life we have become more aware of the way of being a good steward; of responding to our baptismal call. We have also come face to face with our brokenness and with the help of the Holy Spirit our ability to heal and forgive.

We have over the years enjoyed the participation in many adult development programs. We have been privileged to be Eucharistic ministers, readers, visitors to the sick, sharers of our faith in the RCIA, and now are so grateful for service in the jail ministry. Learning to be more generous with the goods, the time, and the talents, that God has given us to; and to share our faith, our joys, and even our pain is an ongoing learning experience. In this journey we are beginning to develop grateful hearts. We have become more aware of the generosity and mercy of the Giver of our talents, and are more ready to share these gifts with others. Our desire to learn and to grow in this faith drew us into Scripture study, where we meet with others weekly in search of a better understanding of the Bible. In this program we meet fellow parishioners on the same journey with the same questions and the best of support.

In conclusion our stewardship prayer in this parish tells us that the Holy Spirit is our guide and teacher. We have the power to respond. This comes to us through our Baptism and Confirmation and is always strengthened by the Eucharist and Reconciliation. We come to Mass together as a couple to be nurtured, and to pray for our growing family. Here we receive the graces we need to reach out to those in need. We are sent out on a mission to serve and love as Jesus taught us.

This is our journey. May it never end.

Biography of Dave Carkner

Written by Barb Owens



Dave came to Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish as catering chef in 1987 and retired in December 2011.

Dave and his wife Jan have raised five children and have 12 grandchildren. It is heartwarming to see these grandparents bring up the gifts at Mass with some of the little ones. Volunteers for the catering service have been blessed to get to know Jan better as she often came in to help with the catering activities.

Prior to his coming to this parish, Dave had worked in all aspects of the food industry, but by 1987 the long hours of the hotel business had taken a toll on his family and on him. He found that this position in our parish was the perfect fit for himself and his family.

Dave learned to be flexible, to 'go with the flow' and to be accepting of people of all ages and talents since he had to work with a different crew every time. His patient and helpful manner was very much appreciated by the many who worked with him. No matter what the crisis, Dave remained calm and composed and always came up with a solution. People who came to volunteer found a warm and cheerful atmosphere in the kitchen and hall, and this was due mostly to Dave's supportive leadership style and warm personality.

The catering service brought together 600 to 1,800 different parishioners every year as volunteers under Dave's professional guidance. So many of these people, belonging to such a large parish, would otherwise never have met each other, but with the opportunity to work on a catering crew, they got to know each other quite well. This experience was the greatest community building activity in the parish for 24 years.

Thanks to Chef Dave's commitment to his work of stewardship, the catering service also provided an important source of income for the parish. As a service of outreach, our parish is well known in the greater community and we are well respected for the generous and committed volunteers here in OLPH. In his own words, writing in the parish's 50th year Jubilee Book, Dave says, "Thank you OLPH for the opportunity to give my talents to a very special church community for all these years. And thank you – all of you – the volunteers for making my job so much easier."

Dave adds these words of wisdom: "I have learned that people power and teamwork can accomplish just about anything."

Biography of Florence Blaise



My husband Ed and family became members of OLPH Parish in July 1970. Ed and I met at and graduated from Notre Dame College, Wilcox, Saskatchewan, in 1958. Our Catholic faith has been important to us all our lives. We carry the spirit of Notre Dame, 'luctor et emergo' (struggle and emerge), with us in all of our married and family life. The Catholic Church and Catholic schools have been most supportive to us in our marriage, parenting and grandparenting.

My first church ministry began in Regina at the age of 12, when I participated in the music ministry, playing the organ and piano. This ministry of music has continued throughout my life and is a love that has been life-giving to me and to others. From 1984 to 1998, I was called to be a pastoral assistant here at OLPH. During this time I had the honour of working with many dedicated volunteers. I say thank you to all of you for your hard work, support and encouragement.

My ministry involved me in the following areas: pastoral care (home visitation, hospital visitation, bringing communion to senior facilities, the homebound); baptism preparation, funeral preparation; annulment interviews; Ecumenical day retreat for the homebound and their caregivers; support groups for widowed, separated and divorced; birthright volunteer, telecare volunteer; Spiritual director in the Ignatian exercises; Angel Connection, a ritual for the loss of a child from miscarriage stillbirth or abortion. Both Ed and I are Secular Franciscans and have received spiritual nourishment and direction from the Friars at Mount St. Francis Retreat House in Cochrane, Alberta.

My previous careers were social work and teaching. During my ministry I have benefited much from my studies as a student at Newman Theological College. Now, as I enjoy my retirement, my new loves are golfing and curling, book club and of course grandparenting. I continue to play the piano for the monthly Mass at the Strathcona Care Centre. I loved parish ministry. I loved engaging with the children, parents and the wounded. It was a privilege to serve and to be in relationship with so many beautiful people.

I am grateful to have worked with my pastors. They were encouraging and very supportive of women in ministry. To the parish teams who became lifelong friends, I am forever grateful. Thank you to all those

volunteers and a special thank you to my greatest friend and supporter, my husband Ed. A huge accolade of appreciation to my family of two sons and two daughters, the loves of my life.

My calling in ministry has been to be a compassionate listener and to enable my brothers and sisters in Christ to live out their Christian faith with grace, peace and respect within the family of God.

It is my belief that each person wants to know that they belong and that you care about them. Helping others is what ministry is all about. The honour of serving one another is what sheer joy is all about. Thank you for the honour of participating in parish ministry. Thank you to the members of OLPH for your warm hospitality. "See how they love and serve one another."

Biography of Henri and Elizabeth Helmers

Written by Barb Owens



Henri and Elizabeth (Beppy) Helmers left Holland in 1951 and 1952 for the West Indies and arrived in Montreal in 1954, then to Burlington and in 1983 on to Sherwood Park, where they still reside. The Helmers raised eight children and have 16 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Upon arrival they immediately joined into parish life as they had everywhere they lived. Henri and Beppy express gratitude for the way they were welcomed by such a faith-filled community, the priests and staff of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish.

Having a big smile and welcoming demeanor, Henri participated in the Welcoming Committee which welcomed the parishioners as they came into the church on Sundays. Sometimes he was motivated to say "Smile! We are celebrating." He was also a most appropriate and enthusiastic member of the parish teams who visited the homes of newcomers to the parish.

Always interested in his faith formation, Henri worked diligently as facilitator for a Bible study group which dates back to when Fr. Spicer initiated sessions for scripture study, and together he and Beppy attended a second Bible study group. The Cursillo Movement became an important part of Henri's spirituality and he participated faithfully for many years. Henri served as an acolyte (now adult server), took communion to the homebound and served Mass for the priests at Silver Birch Lodge once a month. Taking seriously the mission of sending forth from Mass, Henri delivered Meals on Wheels through all sorts of weather to persons in need over a period of many years.

Willing and energetic, the Helmers worked weekly at church cleaning and frequently assisted with the parish's catering service. Henri also participated in counting of the collection monies every Monday.

As well as the many activities Beppy engaged in together with her husband, she loved to care for the babies and toddlers in the Mother's Morning Out program, faithfully continuing for 25 years. She was a member of the Catholic Women's League and helped in many ways, especially in providing baking for fundraising events for their many worthy charities.

Now retired from some of the activities, the Helmers still serve as best they can. They attend Mass each Sunday, join in some of the social events sponsored by the seniors group ENCORE, and take great delight in the annual Ecumenical Mission.

Perfect examples of totally engaged stewardship Catholics, Beppy and Henri are an inspiration to all those who know them and have worked with them over the years.

Biography of Jean Boisvert

Written by Barb Owens



Jean came to Sherwood Park in July, 1959, as a schoolboy with his parents and family. He graduated from Salisbury High School and married Micki. They raised one daughter and two sons and now have five grandchildren. Though he spends a lot of time with his siblings and family members who live in the area, an important focus for him and Micki, Jean expresses regret that none of his children live in Sherwood Park. He is busy with work and very much enjoys the many pursuits that contribute to the community, especially people-related activities. His priorities have always been family first, then work (in order to provide for the family) and then School Board activity or other community related activities.

Jean has been active in the church since he was a young boy and helped set up chairs when Mass was held in Campbelltown School. He was the first altar server in the parish as a teenager. His duties as usher began about 1962 with Linus Meyer and Claude Brassard as mentors. A very friendly, welcoming and helpful person, Jean is perfect as an usher and has continued that ministry to this day. Other liturgical ministries he participates in are Eucharistic Ministry and Commentator, assisting with the Commentator's scheduling for the 8:30 a.m. Mass. He is quick to add that he participates in ministries because he enjoys doing the work that needs to be done.

Besides ministries, Jean was always willing to give a hand where needed. He worked many hours in the parish's catering service as a major, ongoing fundraising venture, humbly and willingly taking on the scrubbing of pots and pans. Two houses of the L'Arche community reside in Sherwood Park and Jean was able to jump in with assistance wherever needed, especially in distributing food that was available for

delivery to the houses. His extended family was and still is involved, as a highlight of their Christmas season, in providing for the Boyle Street Christmas Dinner under the leadership of Lorne Hooper. There was plenty of opportunity to work hard physically during the establishment of two church properties. He participated in work bees at the church in the early and more recent years whenever something had to be done such as planting trees, laying the parking lot and an endless number of projects.

Jean was the youth representative on Parish Council where he had input on behalf of the youth he was so interested in. In the 2000s he was part of the Building Faith Committee which planned and attempted to raise funds for a major expansion of the church to accommodate the growing community. Although the full project was never accomplished, a great deal of important work was done in the gathering space and a beautiful new immersion font for baptisms was built. Jean was part of the Welcoming Committee to ensure that new parishioners were welcomed and introduced to parish life.

Over the years Jean has belonged to different groups that contributed to the advancement of life in this community. A Men's Club was formed in 1958, a unique group in which men of all faiths took part of the club, but the largest membership and focus was Catholic. This group, to which Jean and his father Roland belonged, supported activities of both the church and wider community, working with minor sports and sponsoring the Park Scouts. Minor sports, supporting and coaching, was an area of interest for Jean and he pursued this even as the Men's Club folded and the Knights of Columbus formed in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish. Belonging to the Knights provided the opportunity for Jean to participate in fundraising for charities and church projects. The Knights have contributed to the church locally and in the broader Catholic community with hands-on work and financial support. For example, they put up monies and labour for the new rooftop nativity scene, paid for new equipment for the church kitchen and have contributed substantially to Newman College, Robin Hood School, World Youth Day and many other major charities. The Knights set up Blood Donor Clinics and Jean was on hand to help out. Jean also belonged to the Friars, a group of individuals that raises funds for the Archdiocese of Edmonton and the Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy for further education of priests.

Catholic Education was a main priority in Jean's life, following in his father's footsteps and extending even further. Their families were great support for this even though it took many hours of time at meetings. Father Kenneth Kearns was a driving force in establishing a Catholic school district in Sherwood Park. Roland was one of three founding trustees. Jean began his time on the School Board in 1983 and remains a trustee today. He was also active in the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association as director and president, and was involved at the national level with the Canadian Catholic School Trustees Association. He had to use the majority of his vacation time from AGT/Telus to do this work. In terms of church related accomplishment, the Board, working with the parish, established chapels in two schools, Archbishop Jordan and Madonna.

A man of strong faith and great commitment, Jean Boisvert has contributed his time, his skills, and his financial aid in a willing and generous manner since the founding of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish.

Biography of Joan Gilbert

Written by Barb Owens



Joan and Bill Gilbert moved from St. Anthony's parish to Strathcona County in 1956 when the town site was known as Campbelltown. At that time there was no church here, so the Gilberts attended St. Michael's parish in Edmonton, driving over rough country roads. When in 1960 Father Kenneth Kearns was assigned to the new parish named Our Lady of Perpetual Help, it was a busy time for Joan and Bill, who helped provide for the new church. As the parish grew in size there was more work, planning and fundraising to be done to build the current church, which opened in 1983. The Gilberts became close friends of Fr. Kearns and offered him a great deal of personal support. Over the years Joan has continued to show dedication and loyalty to the priests of our parish and it has been much appreciated.

Joan and Bill opened their hearts to four adopted children, and there are now eight grandchildren. They found that acreage living was perfect for the family and, although a widow now, Joan still resides in the same house. Most of her time before retirement was spent as a school bus driver and mail carrier. Golfing is now a way of life for Joan, but her heart is with serving her Lord. Even in such a large parish, everyone knows Joan Gilbert. She is found helping out at the church almost daily. She is the 'go to person' for what has to be done and how it should be done. Valuable as a historian, the history of the parish and parishioners is at her fingertips. Dependable and personable, she is known to go beyond the call of duty.

Joan has always been one to be involved in the parish in a personal way. For example, as well as church cleaning, she cooked and did laundry for Fr. Don Stein. She generously takes the priests to football games and offers to drive them whenever a ride is needed.

Joan was a member of the Care Group and ministered in lay-led services at Cloverbar Lodge for 16 years. She still sets up and serves Mass for the priest who says Mass at the Care Centre each month. Her interest in caring for those in need has carried over to her work with Companions on the Journey, a retreat for the homebound. She faithfully joined in this work of mercy as a committee member from the very beginning and is the mistress of ceremonies for the popular event.

The Secular Franciscans are very active in OLPH. Joan finds that the spirituality of prayer, simplicity, and being your "brother's and sister's keeper" appeals to her, and she has been a Franciscan for many years. There is an opportunity within the group for charity and social justice. They visit the L'Arche community where they put on a dinner and sing carols in December.

The Franciscans take their turn in preparing hot meals for the Youth Group in OLPH. The lay Franciscans also prepare and deliver food hampers at Christmas and Easter, taking on special families and using this as a chance to minister with the warmth of personal contact.

Supporting liturgy and the sacraments is a priority for Joan. Singing in the choir was an important contribution over a long period of time. Presently she is a Proclaimer at Sunday Masses and is always available if we are short of a reader for any liturgical celebration. Sherwood Park is a very active ecumenical community and Joan has made valuable contributions over the years on the Ecumenical Missions Committee. First reconciliation children are given a cross on a chain; these are ordered and assembled by Joan.

Joan's duties as sacristan may have begun with the humble task of washing purificators, but has expanded to taking on the position of Coordinator of Sacristans and she represents this ministry on the Liturgy Council. She trains, supervises and works personally with a small group of ladies every Saturday morning and often during the week for special occasions and during each change of liturgical season. As sacristan, she cleans and cares for priests' albs, washes ciboria and chalices, checks pyx to be sure they are purified, fills wine decanters and host containers, prepares the thurible for liturgy, services the wax and oil candles, cleans water fonts and fills them with holy water, ensures there are full bottles of blessed water, and prepares the credence table with sanitizers, bowls and towels. In addition, the sacristans set the Sunday readings and replenish supplies in the cupboard for the Day Chapel. For the special liturgical seasons she changes the altar cloths to the appropriate colour and changes the *Lectionary* cover according to the *Ordo*. At Christmas and Easter it is a challenge to create a church setting downstairs and supply items used for Mass, holy water, ceremonial cross and collection baskets. On Holy Thursday the Day Chapel is prepared as an Altar of Adoration, and the Reconciliation Room is prepared as an Altar of Repose. Joan is the designated Sacristan given signing authority to purchase necessary items to resupply the Sacristy so it is Joan who makes supply regular trips and special trips, to Universal Church Supply for needs of the sacristy but also for the many other needs of the parish such as bulletin covers, baptism candles, or cards. As well, she is the designated sacristan responsible for making up Mass kits for the Care Group to serve Masses at six nursing homes and for Mass at Archbishop Jordan High School. All of this pays tribute to the fact that Joan is committed and responsible, and that she is very knowledgeable about liturgy.

A very strong, and much appreciated aspect of Joan Gilbert's presence in the parish is her spirit of hospitality. Every Monday morning she serves coffee and snacks to the Church Cleaning crew, all the while providing a cheerful conversation and showing appreciation for this important service to our parish. She is a gracious hostess for parish priests when they are here for our parish reconciliation celebrations. At other times she hosts various other meetings of priests, again providing lunch and hospitality. Because she has such a welcoming disposition, they feel right at home with her. Big-hearted and generous, Joan is always there to offer assistance. It is a blessing to have such a dedicated and considerate person in our parish family.

Biography of Pauline Burkinshaw



Jon and I, along with our five children moved to Sherwood Park in 1982 and quickly became involved in OLPH Parish.

I had developed a keen interest in theology and so I enrolled at Newman College. During this time I was hired as a Pastoral Associate and served in the parish from 1984 until 2000. My areas of responsibility were Marriage Preparation, RCIA and Adult Education and I was able to gather gifted, generous and dedicated parishioners to form teams for these ministries. We met regularly with a focus on prayer, planning and faith education and most importantly, fun. Frankly, without these people nothing much would have been achieved. It was a life-giving experience for me. I also worked with some wonderful priests, parish team members as well as many fine people on Parish Council.

I was attached to the Youth Group when Jon was leading it and in the same way with the Welcoming Committee led by Denis Beaudry. I also enjoyed accompanying the priests on school visits. Such variety made for interesting times.

We faced plenty of challenges over the years and yet I remember the times of growth in faith, of humour, of friendship and of feeling a deep sense of gratitude for the many people who crossed my path.

It was a privilege to have been given the opportunity to minister in Jesus' name for all those years and I cherish those memories. I guess for me it was never a job, it was more like a vocation.

Biography of Sharon and Harold Wanke



When Harold and I first started dating, we noticed that our discussions often strayed from the usual topics, to far more interesting debates about religion. It would remain a favourite topic for us! Harold and I were both raised in devout Christian homes – his Evangelical and mine Roman Catholic. Our parents had raised us in their faith but we had not yet claimed it as our own. We attended services at both churches while dating and in our early years of Marriage. On Sunday mornings we often went to his church so we could have lunch with his family afterwards but I always attended a Catholic one for Holy Week services. For me these churches were only interchangeable to a certain point! It wasn't until after we were married and our first child was born that we decided it was time to get serious about our religious beliefs. It was important to us that our children were raised with one common faith. Before we could even consider which Faith that might be, I had to ask myself how I really felt about Jesus. My answer was "Hope".

Since Harold's church didn't offer 'Evangelical training' for me we decided to enroll in the RCIA program in our home parish of OLPH in Sherwood Park. That was the beginning of an interesting and challenging year for us. I was shocked by how little I really knew about the church I had grown up in and I did a poor job of answering Harold's many questions as we drove home from RCIA each evening. At the end of the year, Harold still had too many reservations to become Catholic himself but he did feel that our daughter should be baptized as one.

Our conversion process went on for many more years after that. In 1996 I joined the 'Parents Share-n-Care' group at OLPH. It would have an enormous impact on our spiritual life. It was here that I made friends with people my age who were living their Catholic faith in a way I had never experienced before. Each week we researched and presented different aspects of the faith. We prayed, watched movies, brought in speakers, attended daily Mass and talked and talked about what we were learning. Then I would go home and repeat it all to Harold. We began to pray more, read scripture and be fully open to life in our marriage. The group had frequent parties which allowed the men to join our growing friendships. Having friends who supported us in the faith meant everything to us. Our hearts were now wide open.

It was through this group that we were invited to spend a weekend at the 'Catholic Family Life' conference at Lac. Ste. Anne.

Questions we had struggled with for years were clearly answered by the knowledgeable speakers, based on Scripture and Church history. We developed a passion for Jesus and the teachings of His Church. We began listening to tapes, attending conferences and reading all the Catholic literature we could get our hands on. And we prayed. In the Jubilee year of 2000, after a second run of RCIA, Harold became Catholic.

In the same year, a group of women from 'Care-n-Share' decided to create a similar faith and fellowship group for their children. We called it 'Young Disciples' and in the 12 years since its formation, hundreds of children have passed through the program.

Other ministries flowed out of these communities. I joined the 'Parents in Prayer' group which prays in one of our Sherwood Park Catholic schools each month. We taught Sacramental Preparation classes as our four children went through their Sacraments. Harold still remains very involved in teaching Confirmation and is an active 'pancake flipper' for the Knights of Columbus. We assist with Youth Group, and the World Youth Day Pilgrims – many of whom were previous Young Disciples, including our two eldest.

It has been said that *"True humility is honesty. Recognize that the gifts you have been given are from God and use them for His glory as He intended them to be used."* Over time Harold and I have realized that our love for the Church, for her teachings and for her people, is a gift. We try to share it by doing our part to teach, and build our church community. We have experienced the benefits of what others have done for us and we hope that our contributions will do the same for the church of tomorrow.