

“Divinity Saints”

Luke 6:20-31

The longer I serve our Divinity brothers and sisters, the more difficult it becomes to preside at funerals. Today we remember and give thanks for men and women we served beside, we loved, and with whom we shared the hope of eternal life.

Richard and Pat Roff were guided along right pathways all over the United States in their pop-up camper and then the R.V. They belonged to a camping club and enjoyed cooking in the R.V. while Pat enjoyed gardening and mowing the lawn at home.

We thank our Stephen Minister, Doug Doza, for faithfully visiting with Richard for over 3 years and bringing him Holy Communion. The Roff’s always sat along the middle aisle near the back. Whether I was visiting with them in their home or in worship at Divinity, we would pray the Lord’s Prayer together, I would bless the bread and wine, and they would receive Christ’s presence in Holy Communion to strengthen them for the journey ahead.

What most revived **Rhea Spanagel’s** soul was her family – including 6 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren. Granddaughter, Amy, told me that in some ways she was the “mean grandma” because “she always enforced the rules and told you what was on her mind.” Rhea’s love for her family was unconditional as she intentionally tried to keep them connected. They would receive a phone call with the greeting “Florida calling”. George and Rhea would be on separate phones wanting to know what their grandkids were doing. They were “the connectors”.

Joan Drehs loved to worship in our chapel on Saturday nights with her son Scott and Melinda. Joan always had a big smile on her face as she greeted me and other worshipers.

It was at one of those German Central dances that Siegfried met a petite and beautiful woman seven years his younger. Preferring to call her Fi Fi, they began to frequent the drug store at E. 93rd and Union to enjoy ice cream floats together. Siegfried and **Phoebe Tober** were joined together in the covenant of marriage on May 23, 1953, in Immanuel Lutheran Church on Scranton Rd.

During my last visit with Phoebe at her caregiver Virginia's comfortable home in Brunswick, we sat together at the kitchen table. After visiting, we prayed the Lord' Prayer together. I repeated Jesus' words in blessing the bread and wine, and Jesus came to her again in Holy Communion. Her Stephen Minister, Judy Jacobson, had also brought her Holy Communion many times in these last years. It meant a lot to Phoebe.

Marie Dornbrook – Gene was in the 8th Air Corp out of England during the war and was shot down over Germany and was a POW for five long years. It was a time in my life that was scary and moments of scary times and I'm sure it led the way to a life in need of prayer and faith.

Becoming a member of Divinity was a huge leap of faith for both of us since we were both brought up in different faiths. Growing through W.W. II was like living through life by fire, we never knew what would happen next. We were both overjoyed when Gene came home from the war.

I believe my faith in God grew with the many accomplishments I have had at Divinity – Bible class teacher with Jean Lessing on Pearl Road, cleaning crayon marks off desks for Sunday School, meetings, dinners, Bible groups, helping to build a church –

all were tests and leaps of faith to hang in there. As our family faith was built, so was our church, our community and our many friendships were built also.

When **Sue Clay** was at St. Paul's in Defiance, Pastor Terry Reuther was the vicar there for a year while he was in seminary. When Sue and family moved to Waterville and she took her first teaching job at Evergreen High School in Metamora, Pastor Terry was the pastor at Zion Lutheran where she began raising her daughters. When Sue moved to Parma in search of ice-skating rinks for her daughters, she call Pastor Terry and asked for directions to Divinity. As Sue told me this story, she smiled and said, "I really liked Parma".

I appreciated Sue's notetaking ability as secretary of our planning council and more recently, our worship board. I will miss our annual trips to Akron for the synod assembly with Sue and Erick Schumacher always driving who has also gone ahead of us. Sue also coordinated our Divinity volunteers who tutored Parma Park students across the street who were behind on their reading skills.

When Victoria Vegh was applying for a Divinity scholarship, she interviewed her father, **Dan Vegh**: Question four: Why did you choose to be Lutheran above other forms of Christianity?

Answer: "Because I was raised Presbyterian and your mother was born Catholic and it seems the most Catholic like religion is Lutheran. It is very, very similar. My Mother was born Lutheran before she married my father, and basically it was a church Irene was familiar with. We went to the church and all the people were nice. I have a picture of your mother and I when we joined the church. We joined a year before we were married. We used to go to Sunday service, and I would read scripture. We went for many years on Saturdays.

It wasn't until I started doing the sound that we started going on Sundays. It just seemed like a very nice, warm, open church. I think Covid really hit the church hard with less and less people coming. Once you stop going to church it is easy to fall out of the routine of things?

Younger daughter Alexis wrote, "I had many great memories with my father. We would go bike riding in the metro parks and on the canal, we would go to Adventure Princess camps often over the weekends, and we would go to Steak-N-Shake every Sunday we were together after church. When I heard that he had passed I was shocked and deeply saddened."

In 1989, **Greg Nespeca** came home to his house on Barrington where he became a blessing for his parents. For the last 15 years of Al and Pauline's lives, he did everything for them – cleaning, cooking, washing clothes, mowing the lawn, etc. Greg was his parent's keeper.

In his spare time, he would read science fiction, history, keep up on current events, take care of the yard, take good care of his '03 blue Mustang, and cheer for the Browns and the Guardians. He learned to tolerate his cousin Linda and other Pennsylvania cousins who supported the Steelers.

Mona Wendell served folks as a nurse her entire career. She served Divinity folks as a parish nurse. In these later years she really appreciated visits and Holy Communion from her Stephen Minister, Linda Doza.

Having survived the war and the death of many men, a young, teenage **Fred Waerther** went to work for Volkswagen in Wolfsburg, learning to be a tool and die maker. It was a time of rebuilding because of a mad-man's atrocities just like there will be another time of rebuilding because of a mad-man's atrocities in Ukraine. We are resilient and we recover.

I don't know how still the Atlantic waters were when Fred immigrated to Cleveland. But he did find what were then, green pastures in Parma Heights and a good job at Chevy. A Lutheran pastor initially sponsored him just as Divinity is presently sponsoring two Afghan families whose men had worked with our military.

Fred sent for his wife, who came through Ellis Island, and they bought what must have been an almost new house on Woodview Blvd., just around the corner in 1961.

For many years, **Jeanne Mapes'** routine was getting up early to drop off her boys at school or at Grandpa and Grandma's house to walk to Parma Park. She would drive to the Brook Park rapid to take the train to Tower City, and then walk to the law office. She would get home at 6:15 to immediately begin cooking dinner for her sons.

Her sons told me, "Mom worked hard for a long time to keep a roof over our head, the utilities paid, and food in our stomachs. We didn't realize the sacrifice she made when we were kids. She was always there for us".

Lois Deighton's soul was restored and strengthened as her family continued to grow over the years, eventually being blessed with 15 grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren, and 5 great-great-grandchildren so far.

Christmas family gatherings started out in Sharlene Simko's basement and then had to be moved to a hall as the family grew. Lois told me the best present she ever received was when her family told her they loved her.

"Mom can do it" when her children volunteered her for activities here at Divinity or at school. **Donna DeVault** enjoyed caring for everybody, but she especially enjoyed serving her family; cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, picking them up from baseball and football

practices, attending their activities, and inviting their friends into her home or on camping trips. When her children were outside playing and they heard the cow bell clanging, they knew it was time to come in for a big meal. Donna was happiest when she was taking care of her family.

When Donna became a school crossing guard just outside my office window, she loved the children.

“Children are so special”, she said. “I think you can always find something good in every child”.

When I stood with **Kristin** at **Wayne Clark’s** bedside, I read the 23rd Psalm, we committed him to the Lord, and prayed our Lord’s Prayer together. Then we listened to the Beach Boys which was a first for me. When we returned to the ICU waiting room with the doctor to help prepare them for his transition from this very temporary life to eternal life, I counted 24 people in the waiting room. 24 grieving people. 24 people who knew Wayne as family and loyal friend who would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it. It is a time to mourn.

Carolyn Kolp met her good friend Alice Linn while tutoring at Parma Park grade school. Carolyn and Alice attended my Wednesday morning Bible studies and the “Dinner and a Movie” at the Strongsville Senior Center. Carolyn was best known at Saturday night worship in our chapel singing praises to God, listening to God’s Words, and receiving Christ’s forgiveness and presence in the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

Kathy Buza’s soul was revived as a wife, mom, and grandmother. Louis with thanksgiving told me that she did everything – cooking, cleaning, cutting the grass, tending the

flowers and washing dishes and clothes. She didn't need to go work out, she worked out and stayed in shape by doing the work of being a wife, mom, and grandmother.

Louis told me, "I'm the luckiest guy that ever lived. She was the most giving and unselfish person I've ever known. She mad life easy for all of us".

Bonnie Schoch was a compassionate and free-spirited woman. She was a member of the Red Hat Club Society, became a million-dollar real estate broker and then owner of The Hearing Place in Lakewood. It was when she owned the Hearing Place, she met her beloved life partner, Andrew Straka. He came in for a hearing test. Who would have ever imagined this meeting to turn out to be the romance of a Life Time.

Our mom was humble, kind and devoted to Christ. **Pat Antos** was always willing to help a person in need. She lived life to the fullest with the simplest pleasures, a deep conversation with family and friends, attending church, being a good listener, giving words of wisdom, and her infectious laughter.

Evelyn Skinner was born on December 5, 1922, and died on August 24, 2022, just 4 months short of her 100th birthday. She and her husband Bob were members of Divinity from 1985 to 2007 when she and Bob retired to North Carolina. She and Bob were very active at Divinity, providing items for the annual raffle and Silent Auction. She volunteered to assist with Homebound/Care Giver Luncheon – to drive and pick up people for the luncheon; bake and help in the kitchen as needed for events; carry communion to homebound members; help with mailings in the office and prepare and serve food at funeral luncheons. Her servant's hands and heart were always appreciated.

Bonnie Schroedel Bader enjoyed the Thespians club at Forge, singing in our adult choir and bowling. She got Debbie a job downtown so they could ride to work together. Always taking care of her little sister, when Debbie turned 18, she took her to the Skyline Bar on Prospect Road for her first legal drink where she met Mike, the young man who would become Debbie's husband. Bonnie decided she'd better take care of Barbie as well, by taking her to the Oktoberfest at the Berea fairgrounds where she introduced her to a young man named Dave, who would become Barbie's husband.

On September 15th, Bonnie was admitted to the hospital where her body quickly broke down over the past month. As she walked through the valley of the shadow of death, her family was beside her, and Jesus came to take her through the gate of death to her eternal home.

May the peace of God . . .

#423 – Shall We Gather at the River