

*Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable,
always excelling in the work of the Lord,
because you know that in the Lord
your labor is not in vain.*

—I Corinthians 15-58

St. Peter's United Church of Church, 1905-2004

The First Decade: 1905-1914

The city to which the **Reverend Henry S. Gekeler** had been sent by the national office of the German Reformed Church was bustling. In the opening years of the 20th century, Indianapolis was flush with a prosperity that had been brought to town by new industry.

The capital of Indiana had become a metropolis. The far reaches of the town stretched out over some 25 square miles, and there were more than 170,000 inhabitants. Sixteen railroad lines crisscrossed the city, and seven newspapers—two of which were printed in German for the area's largest immigrant population—were published each day.

Indianapolis was thriving. It was centrally located, labor was cheap, railroads were efficient and the population was increasing each day. There were elegant hotels, fine restaurants, and stylish ladies and gentlemen could be seen riding in fancy carriages and horse-drawn buggies around Monument Circle at the city's center.

(One of the first memorials in the United States to pay tribute to the common soldier and sailor, this limestone monument had been dedicated in May of 1902. The famous composer and bandmaster John Philip Sousa had even written a special march to mark the occasion.)

Because the downtown area of Indianapolis was relatively compact, it was possible to travel virtually anywhere throughout the town by bicycle, hansom cab or on the streetcar. Automobiles were relatively few.

Many prominent families lived near the city's center in Woodruff Place, with its fountains, or in the developing neighborhoods to the north of Monument Circle. Others with more intellectual interests built their homes to the east in Irvington. The site of Butler University until 1928, Irvington was then a village of wooded, winding streets, a half-hour's ride on the interurban trolley to the downtown and its businesses.

For most of the residents of Indianapolis, though, life was more about making a living each day than it was about partaking of the cultural happenings downtown. After all, the average wage across the country in 1900 was 22 cents an hour, and an average worker in the United States—if he were a man—might make \$200 to \$400 a year.

Nonetheless, it was precisely to such people that Rev. Gekeler wanted to appeal.

His commission, as articulated by the Home Mission Board of the German Reformed Church in the United States (its roots can be traced to the Swiss-German Reformers of the 16th century), was to organize an English-speaking church—rather than one using German for the worship services—on the north side of Indianapolis.

The minister had been instructed to call upon families of the Reformed faith in that section of town with the hope of sparking in them the desire to form a new church. He accepted the challenging task of determining “if such a thing was advisable and possible” early in 1905.

Encountering his share of frustrations during the spring months that followed, Rev. Gekeler was finally able to enlist 18 people in the venture. The little church family gathered for the first time on June 11, 1905, for worship in Indianapolis Public School #29, a primary school at the corner of College Avenue and 21st Street.

On that Sunday, a charter was drawn up, and our congregation was formally organized. Significantly, over half of its members were female. Flying in the face of the notion of the day that men were inherently better suited for leadership, these women exerted a strong hand in shaping our church. Our first treasurer was a woman who held the position for three years.

After several Sundays of worshipping amid school desks and slate boards, the congregants concluded that services held in the homes of various members would be more meaningful. Within weeks of gathering in each other’s houses, though, it became clear that a central place of worship was needed to accommodate our quickly growing church.

A committee was appointed to find such a location. After brief negotiations, a modest, red brick building was purchased from the nearby United Brethren Church at 21st Street and Central Avenue. (The Home Mission Board of the denomination greatly helped to finance the purchase as well as the salary of Rev. Gekeler.)

By the end of July in 1905, our congregation—which had taken as its name the **Central Avenue Reformed Church**—was rejoicing in its new home where “all services were conducted in English.” With the new building, an organist was needed, and the sister of the pastor was appointed. Her salary was one dollar per week.

In addition to playing for the weekly service, she also provided music for the Sunday school and the mid-week prayer service. Given the cost of advertising in any of the local newspapers, publicity about the activities of our fledgling church was usually by word-of-mouth.

That same year, the minister’s wife—who was already teaching the Women’s Sunday School Class—organized and served as the first president of the Women’s Missionary Aid Society. It was this group, as a matter of fact, that later would step forward and erase the debt that our church had undertaken.

Even though Central Avenue had adopted a weekly offering envelope system in 1906 to encourage our members to give more consistently, these women satisfied the \$1800 obligation with money earned from the sale of aprons and rugs, and by their hosting church suppers and lawn parties. They also set up a booth at the Indiana State Fair on behalf of the church.

During the 13 years in which Rev. Gekeler was posted at Central Avenue, he took care of our church in ways large and small. His was a familiar face in both pulpit and classroom; the minister acted as the first superintendent of the Sunday school as well as served as the teacher of its Men and Boys’ Class.

He was also reported to have fired the furnace and sometimes to have played the organ when his sister was absent—all the while conducting the worship program and preaching the Sunday sermon. Rev. Gekeler was indeed remembered as a man of many talents.

The Second Decade: 1915-1924

The tranquil pace of life in Indianapolis was scarcely disturbed by the outbreak of hostilities in Europe during 1914. But with President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war in April of 1917, living in the capital city was idyllic no longer.

German Americans residing in Indianapolis "quickly came under suspicion, [and] churches bearing German inscriptions scratched them from the stone," noted the *Indianapolis Star*. "The Indiana State Teacher's Association went so far as to ban the language from being taught in public schools. A rash of misplaced patriotism swept the city."

Our nearly 12-year-old church, with its strong German heritage and tradition, watched from the sidelines with sorrow and deep concern.

Nine months later, as the savagery of World War I was coming to an end, Rev. Gekeler accepted a call to Wooster Avenue Reformed Church in Akron, Ohio. (Later he would become editor of *The Christian World*, a weekly denominational journal that was being published in Cleveland.)

The departure of the minister and his family was especially bittersweet for one of the congregation's teenagers, Evelynne Bernloehr Mess Daily. As a 12-year-old youngster, this future artist of note had been confirmed at Central Avenue Reformed Church after walking to the confirmation classes that had been held in the Gekelers' home.

In May of 1918, the **Reverend Robert Thena** became the second pastor of our church. A graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, this young man was with us only eight months before resigning in January of 1919 to serve another congregation.

One short year after we had welcomed Rev. Thena, our membership prepared for an interim pastor who was being sent from Central Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. The **Reverend G. H. Gebhardt** was a graduate of Heidelberg College of Tiffin, Ohio, and, at the time of his call, was completing his ministerial studies.

With seemingly unlimited energy, the new pastor took over Central Avenue Church. (The following year in 1920, the women in our congregation would be able to take their rightful places alongside our men, winning the right to vote with the ratification of the 19th Amendment.)

Under Rev. Gebhardt's vigorous direction, the church of nearly 200 parishioners underwent substantial renovations. Our auditorium was rebuilt, the basement was redecorated, additional pews were installed in the sanctuary, and the red brick exterior of the building was beautified with a stucco facade.

In April of 1920, special services were held to celebrate the re-opening of the freshly decorated church. The total cost of the remodeling came to about \$4,000—and our congregation paid for the entire amount through a subscription of the membership.

In June of 1921, Rev. Gebhardt was ordained as the full-time pastor of Central Avenue Reformed Church. But before our parishioners could embark on any other major projects, we were asked by the denomination's Home Mission Board to support a goal that had been embraced by the greater Church.

According to a survey that the national Reformed Church Council had sponsored some four years earlier, "it was thought desirable to establish a Reformed Church north of Thirty-eighth Street" in Indianapolis.

What this proposal meant for Central Avenue did not become clear until January of 1922, however. It was at this point, after a search had been made for suitable locations and a number of places had been considered, that two lots were purchased.

The best spot was thought to be at East 44th Street and Carrollton Avenue; it was near the family homes found in the emerging neighborhoods to the north of town. After purchasing the

properties on the northeast corner, the Home Mission Board assured our congregation that “it was heartily in sympathy with the new project and ready to support it by further grants.”

Shortly after the lots were bought, a wooden chapel was moved from the Grafton Avenue Reformed Church in Dayton, Ohio, to Indianapolis. The narrow little building—dubbed “the sheep shed” by some among us—was expanded in order to accommodate the Sunday school study that had been instituted by Rev. Gebhardt in the spring of 1922.

During that summer, this energetic minister conducted Vacation Bible School there, and, in the fall, he opened the enlarged chapel for regular evening services. In September, Rev. Gebhardt preached his first sermon in the temporary space on the subject, “As One Who Serves.”

During this period, he did double duty, serving as the pastor for groups that were meeting at the chapel as well as for the main congregation on Central Avenue. On the last Sunday in October of 1922, as they observed Communion in the sanctuary, our members said goodbye to the church edifice that had sheltered them for nearly two decades.

A week later, the chapel on Carrollton Avenue was officially dedicated; and soon thereafter, the Central Avenue congregation joined with those folks who had been involved at the chapel. We took as our new name the **Carrollton Avenue Reformed Church**.

Our property on Central Avenue was advertised for sale. It was purchased by the Central Hebrew membership that worshipped there until establishing a synagogue farther north in the city. (In 2005, that group is known as the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation on North Meridian Street. Currently housed in the Central Avenue building is the Greater Faith Apostolic Church.)

With funds in hand from the sale of the building, our congregation turned its collective face to the future. Membership was increasing rapidly, and it soon became necessary to think about providing more room for worship. Along with Rev. Gebhardt, one of the lay leaders traveled to Philadelphia to plead the church’s case before the Home Mission Board.

These men challenged the Board to assist them in erecting a building that would be “a demonstration of not only a fine denominational home missionary work, but of a project of community Church work in the city of Indianapolis.”

The Third Decade: 1925-1934

History reveals that the two churchmen were persuasive because they succeeded in obtaining the needed financial aid. On Sunday, July 19, 1925, ground was broken for a new building . . . and that morning our congregation celebrated its 20th anniversary. It was a momentous occasion for the parishioners of Carrollton Avenue Reformed Church.

According to our congregational records, plans called for “a modern Church, in Gothic style, to cost approximately \$85,000.” In reality, when the construction was completed a year later, the total cost—including furniture, the temporary chapel and a parsonage that would be purchased in 1927—amounted to more than \$116,000.

The new home of Carrollton Avenue was dedicated in a flurry of special programming and services during the week of June 13 to June 20, 1926. Our congregation was justifiably proud of the building’s inspiring architecture that was graced by vivid stained-glass windows soaring above the church’s main entrance.

In addition to a sanctuary that would seat up to 550 people, there was a balcony over one end with room for 100 more. On the ground floor were four classrooms, “a large recreational room with a 30-foot stage and convenient dressing rooms, gymnasium, reception rooms, fully equipped kitchen and pantry, washrooms, lavatories and showers.”

In its reporting of the dedication festivities, the *Indianapolis News* further noted: “This part of the building is designed to serve as a recreational and social center for the community, and has been planned carefully and completely equipped to provide all essential features.”

Our church family was indeed grateful to be in a place of its own once more. (After the chapel had been moved from the two lots to make way for the project, services had been held in the Calvin Prather Masonic Hall at 42nd Street and College Avenue. According to one of our senior members, she has fond memories of this place because she and the other children loved chasing each other up and down its stairs.)

Within months of settling into their space, members of our congregation set about expanding the church’s outreach . . . and by 1929, Carrollton Avenue was known as a “community church.” As the needs around it grew, so, too, did the responses of our church.

From the original Women’s Missionary Aid Society of 1905 came the Women’s Service Circle, the Altar Guild, the Missionary Society and the Women’s Council. A Men’s Club met, in addition to the weekly Sunday school and a youth program that was held every Sunday night. Our church even hosted a highly regarded Boy Scout troop of 83 that turned out 17 Eagle Scouts.

In July of 1929, Rev. Gebhardt resigned from our church to accept a call to the Trinity Reformed Church in Wadsworth, Ohio. Two months later, the **Reverend Elmer George Homrighausen**, pastor of the First Reformed Church in Freeport, Illinois, accepted a call from Carrollton Avenue to step into our pulpit.

The man, who earned graduate degrees from Butler University as well as the University of Dubuque, would be in the unenviable position of having begun his pastorate in Indianapolis one month before the stock market crash on Black Thursday.

In the face of the debacle on Wall Street and what would lead to the deprivations of the Great Depression, the people at Carrollton Avenue worked diligently—and generously—to maintain our church’s activities as well as its assistance within the community. (By 1933, more than one in four adults in the Indianapolis area had lost their jobs.)

As it had the prior year, our church offered a prayer calendar during 1933 at the cost of 20 cents; the proceeds were then donated to charity. It contained an illustrated page and a prayer that were appropriate for each month. (During the several years in which these calendars were offered, member Evelynne Mess Daily designed and illustrated most of their covers.)

During those difficult times, Carrollton Avenue stayed the course of its community outreach, using well those facilities that had been designed for that very purpose. In 1933, our church mirrored the success of its Boy Scout troop by starting a Camp Fire Girls group that quickly attracted 32 participants.

That same year, the annual salary for Rev. Homrighausen was \$2,250, and an additional \$540 was given to him for his housing allowance. The organist, who was also functioning as our choir director, was paid \$520, and the janitor received \$510. The total budget for our church was \$9,294 . . . and more than 17 percent was set aside for benevolences that year.

Soon after returning from Belfast, Ireland, in 1933—where he had been sent as a delegate to an international church conference—Rev. Homrighausen learned of plans to merge our denomination with another. One year later, the Reformed Church in the United States joined with the Evangelical Synod of North America to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

(Ironically, this union was formalized only weeks before the notorious bank robber John Dillinger, who grew up on 21st Street in Indianapolis not far from the newly minted **Carrollton Avenue Evangelical and Reformed Church**, was gunned down in Chicago, Illinois.)

The Fourth Decade: 1935-1944

As its fourth decade opened, during the depth of the Great Depression, our church resolutely celebrated its 30th anniversary on June 9, 1935. It hosted a modest banquet that organizers declared was “a homecoming event.”

In the midst of bread lines and relief projects across the country, in the middle of record joblessness that cut the number of factory workers to half of what it had been at the start of the decade, the Carrollton Avenue congregants were determined to rejoice with the members of our church family.

By the time Rev. Homrighausen submitted his resignation in the early fall of 1937, the Depression had begun to ease under the New Deal policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The pastor, who had seen our church through harsh economic times, left to take a position as Professor of Christian Education on the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary.

Later this prolific writer with an expansive view of the world would serve as Dean of the Seminary from 1955 to 1965. Rev. Homrighausen would also become active with the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches as well as with missionary and evangelistic programs worldwide.

Wanting to maintain its emphasis upon outreach, Carrollton Avenue Church called to its pulpit another man who was grounded in the spirit of mission. With service in the foreign field as an instructor in North Japan College in Sendai, Japan, as well as pastorates in two Pennsylvania towns, the **Reverend Ralph L. Holland** began his ministry with us during February of 1938.

A graduate of Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, he took over a church that, while recovering from the lingering effects of the Depression, boasted of a vital and growing congregation.

The Sunday school that Rev. Holland inherited was thriving. According to the 1938 annual report of this group, the “organization is composed of nineteen classes with a total enrollment of 205. We have a staff of 24 teachers.” Citing that the regular offering had increased by nearly four percent over that of 1937 to give “us a total of \$454.80 for the year, the special collection brought our (Sunday school) income to a total of \$538.68.

“Our expenses for this same period consisted of: \$260.14, literature and general expense; \$101.84, social and recreational, dramatics; \$68.40, educational activities, Girl Scouts, etc.; \$44.67, new equipment (100 new songbooks) etc.; \$70.00 for benevolence.”

Under Rev. Holland’s hand, our church blossomed, sending numbers of delegates to a religious conference that was held at Hanover College each summer. In 1940, to mark our 35th anniversary, the congregation asked for pledges to help defray our church’s debt as well as fund memorial windows with which to beautify the sanctuary.

Our membership also elected a woman to its Consistory—the administrative group charged with overseeing all aspects of church life—for the first time. Named a Deacon, she took her place on the governing body of Carrollton Avenue Church during November of 1941.

Within weeks, though, bombs would rock Pearl Harbor . . . and it would matter very little that a certain Mrs. Dessie Mulford had been chosen to help make decisions on behalf of her church in Indianapolis, Indiana. World War II had started, and before it was over nearly four years later, as many as 10,000 Hoosiers would lose their lives.

During that tragic time, the names of 54 young men—and one cadet nurse—from families in our congregation were proudly displayed on the Roll of Honor at Carrollton Avenue. One of those was Lieutenant Newell Van Sickle, who was killed during active duty just months before the war's conclusion.

The Fifth Decade: 1945-1954

By the time revelers crowded Monument Circle to celebrate the end of World War II in the summer of 1945, the **Reverend Richard Rettig** had been serving as pastor of Carrollton Avenue for some two and one-half years. He had stepped into our pulpit after Rev. Holland, in September of 1942, had given up his pastorate to accept an appointment as Executive Secretary of the Indiana Council of Churches.

Rev. Rettig was a graduate of the college at Mission House in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, as well as Lancaster Theological Seminary. Before coming to Indianapolis to lead our church, he had served congregations in Omaha, Nebraska, and New Glarus, Wisconsin.

Not only did Carrollton Avenue rejoice in getting all but one of its soldiers safely home from the war, but the church marked its 40th anniversary that summer as well.

“As we look forward to the commemoration of our fortieth year of progress,” a member then wrote, “we must bear in mind that Carrollton Avenue Church has a mission to perform in this community and in the postwar program of the Church and of the nation: that there is a pledge of faith we must keep with those who have risked their lives in our common cause.”

Along with celebrating four decades, we re-committed to programs that had so enriched our church life. In 1945, the Sunday school consisted of the Builder's and Friendship classes as well as the Men's and Women's classes. The Men's Brotherhood met weekly; the Women's Guild met monthly; the Youth Fellowship met weekly; and each elected its own officers.

The church also continued to support a scouting program that was flourishing. Dedicated members from our congregation kept volunteering to lead Boy Scout Troop #60, a collection of boys who were drawn from Carrollton Avenue families as well as from the surrounding neighborhoods.

With these activities came an understandable increase in our church budget. In 1945, a grand total of \$11,750 was projected for expenditures; \$3,042.50 was allocated to the pastor's salary, his automobile expense and his pension payment. A new system of pledging was also put into place. Under this plan, the amount that people pledged was considered permanent until they gave notice otherwise.

Not surprisingly, given its tradition of thriftiness, our church committed anew in 1945 to lessening its debt: “Our goal in this campaign is to increase our Building Fund contributions by \$85 each week, and thus retire our entire church debt in five years.”

The post-war years were full of “firsts” for Carrollton Avenue. In 1946, it opened a Recreation Center every Monday evening; and in 1947, a carillon, an amplification system and a system for the hearing-impaired were added.

Capping that year was a performance of *Uncle Fud's Ole-Time Jamboree* in the recreation hall at the church. It starred members from the congregation. This “original Gay-Nineties Revue”—one of many plays and performances being mounted on the stage there—was billed as “an evening of fun you won't want to miss.” The *Indianapolis Star* later wrote that “patients at Sunnyside Sanatorium will enjoy movie films bought with [the] proceeds.”

In June of 1949, Rev. Rettig resigned to move to St. Peter's Evangelical and Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During his nearly seven-year stay, he had served his church well. During that time, Rev. Rettig had also received the Indianapolis Church Federation's Interracial Award and served as president of the city's Ministerial Association.

By September of that year, Carrollton Avenue had extended a call to the **Reverend Earl W. Krueger**. Formerly pastor of the First Evangelical and Reformed Church of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, he brought considerable expertise to our church in working with young people. Rev. Krueger would be recognized, in fact, for strengthening and expanding our youth programs.

The foresight of the national Reformed Church Council in "establish[ing] a Reformed Church north of Thirty-eighth Street" was never more apparent than at the opening of the 1950s. Because Carrollton Avenue Church had been located to the north of the city proper, the church found itself directly in the path of a population shifting to the suburbs.

According to the *Indianapolis Star*, "[t]he movement, led mostly by World War II veterans, aimed to create their idyllic version of the American Dream. They didn't want to live in the cramped confines of the city; they wanted space, space to have separate homes, separate cars—all separated by white picket fences. They wanted the freedom to have it all, shiny and brand new."

By 1953, our church had been blessed with such growth—the total membership was 324 at year's end—that we had no choice but to enlarge its facilities. A "Church Expansion Drive" was launched. A "Loan Share Plan for Church Expansion was put forth, and, at the start, 9 people pledged to loan the church \$4,900 of the church's goal of \$30,000 for church expansion."

Our plans were ambitious. Existing classrooms would be improved; the parsonage would be converted to additional classrooms, an office and a parlor for small group meetings; and the parsonage grounds would be paved and landscaped to provide off-street parking as required by the city's zoning regulations. In April of that year, a new home for the pastor was purchased.

The Sixth Decade: 1955-1964

As many in our city were struggling with issues of segregation, a Crispus Attucks High School student was quietly making a statement of his own. Leading the basketball team of the first designated all-black school in town was the future NBA-great, Oscar Robertson. "The Big O," as this young man would later become known, took his school to the championship game in 1955, and it became the first Indianapolis team ever to win the state title.

Less newsworthy, but more important to spiritual life of our church, was the observation of its 50th birthday during June of that same year. Two of our former ministers, Rev. Rettig and Rev. Gebhardt, returned to join in the festivities that took place over the course of eight days.

No doubt the talented singers who were involved in the musical ministry of Carrollton Avenue were prominently featured throughout the weeklong celebration. According to our 1955 Annual Report, "[t]he Senior Choir is doing a masterful job . . . in enriching our worship services" and "the Junior Choir (with an enrollment of 30) is moving along at a fast pace."

The music director also "has organized a third group of about ten girls called the Guido d'Arrezzo Choir. They rehearse on Saturday afternoons, and it is from this group of girls we hope to build material for our Senior Choir." At one point, "at least for three years there was even a church orchestra, complete with three coronets, two violins, an alto horn and a flute," recalled one of our elder members.

Nearly one year after our Golden Anniversary gala, Rev. Krueger resigned to take a position with the Christ Evangelical and Reformed Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Our pulpit was vacant only four months, though, before the **Reverend Frank J. Erdey** assumed the pastorate in September of 1956.

Born in Hungary, he had immigrated to this country as a nine-year-old and had settled with his parents in Pennsylvania. A student at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Rev. Erdey had been graduated from the seminary at Mission House. Prior to his coming to Indianapolis, he had been the pastor of Immanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Three months after his arrival, the new minister found himself encouraging—and challenging—a congregation about which he was still learning to sponsor a refugee family. With the Soviet Union’s invasion of Hungary to crush that country’s rebellion had come an outpouring of homeless from the devastated land. The folks at Carrollton Avenue were quick to respond.

Not many weeks passed before they had assembled household items, clothes and personal necessities for a little family that was fleeing the Communist take-over of Hungary. Stephen and Magda Oravec, their daughter and a grandmother came to our church on April 12, 1957 . . . and they would be remembered as the first of many such refugees our church has adopted.

That same year was an especially notable one for Carrollton Avenue for another reason, in addition. The congregation had succeeded in retiring the mortgage on our church building, and a “mortgage-burning” ceremony was held during worship to mark the occasion.

Probably the most important event for the church-at-large, though, was the merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church with the Congregational Christian Church to form a new denomination: the United Church of Christ.

The union was officially consummated at a meeting of Congregational, Christian, Reformed and Evangelical churches in Cleveland, Ohio, on June 26, 1957. Because of this melding of history and tradition, the now debt-free Carrollton Avenue Evangelical and Reformed Church would henceforth be known as the **Carrollton Avenue United Church of Christ**.

One of our church leaders was fortunate enough to be present at this important meeting. “We walked the streets of Cleveland on that blistering hot Sunday afternoon,” he recalled, “as national television recorded, and clearly reported, this religious merger as the ‘most significant event in Christian Church Union’ in the 20th century.”

For the next six years, nearly 250 churches around the Midwest would grapple with drafting a constitution, by-laws and procedures by which they would govern themselves as colleagues in this new denomination. In the spring of 1963, their hard work was finally finished, and the consolidation was complete. Our Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ was created as one of 34 such conferences nationally.

The Seventh Decade: 1965-1974

With two former pastors—Rev. Homrighausen and Rev. Gebhardt—in attendance, Carrollton Avenue celebrated its 60th anniversary in 1965. Gone were the eight days of festivities that had heralded our church’s Golden Anniversary a decade earlier. In its place was a reflective examination at where we had been . . . and where God might wish us to go.

As the city had grown and the population continued its steady march to the suburbs, Carrollton Avenue had held fast while the area around it was changing. The manse near the

church had been demolished to make way for the expansion of a needed parking lot in 1961, and another parsonage had been purchased at 6221 North Rural Street that same year.

The church's commitment to its surrounding neighborhoods had never wavered, though. The Boy Scout troop with which it had been associated since 1945 was blessed with ongoing leadership from Carrollton Avenue . . . and our congregation wanted to do more to address the youth who were then living in the vicinity.

Viewing this as yet one more challenge for our church, Rev. Erdey explained: "When Carrollton Avenue Church was established at the site where we now live and work, this was a new neighborhood of homes and families. In the past forty years, the area about our church has seen many changes; and many more will be on the way in a few years. With changes will come new avenues of service."

A proposal was made to offer a 4-H program for youth in the area that would operate during the summer. By 1968, those plans had become a reality. The following year saw 35 boys and girls from both neighborhood and church exhibiting their projects at the Marion County Fair. Joining our church in this project was the Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood Association, an organization that we had helped to form.

By January of 1970, the assorted 4-H clubs at Carrollton Avenue had become so popular that meetings were being scheduled every week, all year long. Thirteen adult leaders, four of which were drawn from our congregation, headed a program of 109 boys and girls: 60 percent of whom were African-American and 40 percent were white.

Despite an appeal to the neighborhood for additional leadership, there was no response; and a first-year student at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis was hired as the 4-H coordinator. That young man, who was also serving as the youth leader for Carrollton Avenue, would become the pastor of our successor church some 27 years later.

Early in 1971, Rev. Erdey resigned to take over the pulpit of St. John's United Church of Christ in Batesville, Indiana. An interim pastor, the **Reverend Hilbert H. Peters** from Huntingburg, Indiana, served at Carrollton Avenue only ten months before the **Reverend Arthur D. Zillgitt**, his wife and their three children took up residence in the parsonage.

Previously the new minister had served as pastor of a United Church of Christ church in Louisville, Kentucky, as well as in Grand Haven, Michigan. He also had been the organizing minister of a Congregational church in a suburb of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Rev. Zillgitt found his new church prayerfully considering its future. According to a survey recently undertaken by Carrollton Avenue, less than five percent of the congregation then lived within a mile of the church, and efforts to attract new members from the homes around us had not been particularly successful.

"Many of the members felt we were not able to serve the area and that we should make room for a new congregation to do the job," explained a parishioner of forty-plus years standing who had been one of the originators of the 4-H program. "The area is family-centered and should have a family church."

Within weeks of Rev. Zillgitt's coming, the congregation made the very difficult decision to relocate our church on the outskirts of Carmel, a small town on the far north side of Indianapolis. Property for the new site was purchased at the northeast corner of Keystone Avenue and Carmel Drive for \$29,800, and an Executive Building Committee was formed to oversee the construction.

"At some points it has seemed like selling your own mother," admitted the chairman of the negotiations committee and father of talk show host David Letterman. "When you have been

with a church for 29 years, your children have been baptized and married there, and it is painful to leave. You love it for what it is and for what it has done for you.”

Even though some did not welcome the move, the church proceeded. “Presently, members of the congregation are studying and working together to determine what will be included in our new facilities,” advised Rev. Zillgitt. “Soon an architect will be employed to begin making plans. Now, however, we are called upon to begin financing this important project, so that as God’s people we can minister effectively in this new community.”

On Easter Sunday, April 2, 1972, our congregation worshipped for its last time at Carrollton Avenue. The building had been sold for \$85,000 to the Womack Memorial Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, then located on Martindale Avenue.

Our most significant ecclesiastical furnishings—the Cross, Baptismal Font, Eternal Light and the Shields of the Apostles—would go with us to be incorporated into our new church home. Even our 713-pipe organ, with its majestic tonal qualities, was put into storage, waiting to be assembled anew in the Carmel location.

The minister of the African-American congregation that would sit in the pews of the Gothic structure was insistent that this did not mean a “black” church was moving in where a “white” church had moved out. “We are going to be there to serve the community,” he promised, “both black and white.”

With this change in address came a new name for our church. According to one of the early members of our Women’s Guild, “Joe Letterman suggested the name of St. Peter’s for our new church because of St. Peter building a church upon a rock for a firm foundation. And so the new church was named St. Peter’s.”

St. Peter’s United Church of Christ of Carmel, Indiana, held its first worship service one week after shutting the doors of Carrollton Avenue. Like the founders of our church had, nearly 67 years earlier, our members met in the empty rooms of an elementary school building.

For some two years, St. Peter’s managed to maintain an active worship life while gathering at the Carmel Elementary School. A talented carpenter in our midst—the gentleman who had crafted our Shields of the Apostles—even made an altar that was set up, every week, early on Sunday mornings for worship.

Fellowship hour for our makeshift church was held after the service in the school’s cafeteria. Meetings and choir practices occurred in various homes, and our confirmation classes met at the parsonage. Because the church had no address at which to receive correspondence, all mail was sent to Rev. Zillgitt’s residence.

Upon concluding the fund-raising phase of this project, construction began with a groundbreaking ceremony during mid-November of 1973. Thirteen months later, on December 1, 1974, Rev. Homrighausen—one of the first pastors to have tended our flock while it was housed on Carrollton Avenue—was invited to speak at the dedication of St. Peter’s.

“It was decided that, as a congregation . . . we wanted a sanctuary that was not overly large simply to accommodate the few seasonal large crowds . . .,” noted a booklet offered at the dedication “It was felt that as the congregation grows, multiple services would be initiated to take full advantage of the facilities. Therefore, we have a sanctuary that will seat 250, plus 35 in the choir. All are seated around the chancel area and altar like a worshipping family.”

The Eighth Decade: 1975-1984

Within seven months of settling into our new home, the congregation promptly took care of paving a parking lot north of the church and purchasing a parsonage on Wilson Drive in Carmel. That same month, our church observed its 70th anniversary.

Even though this new space was contemporary and very different from the traditional architecture of Carrollton Avenue, the church never wavered from its historical emphasis on outreach. As St. Peter's had since 1905, when the minister's wife had organized the Women's Missionary Aid Society, we had taken to heart—and heeded—the parables of generosity.

Regardless of which building or where we had been located, our church had consistently been engaged in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner and welcoming the stranger, tending the sick and offering the thirsty something to drink.

During the late '60s and early '70s, in fact, a missionary in Honduras received much of his financial support from our Women's Guild, our Men's Brotherhood and various classes in our Sunday school. The Women's Guild also sent materials for leprosy patients who were hospitalized in India as well as aided the Fort Wayne's Children's Home and the St. Labre Indian School in Ashland, Montana.

Another of our church's missions was one embracing the elderly, including those people who were living in the city's Altenheim Community. Opened in 1910 as a residence for older adults, this facility was originally located in a 12-bedroom Victorian mansion on North Capitol Avenue in downtown Indianapolis.

A more modern Altenheim was built and dedicated on November 24, 1974, near Beech Grove, a small town on the far south side of town. Several from St. Peter's were involved in helping move the residents into their new home during early 1975. Others served on the building committee, assisted with the programming and sat on the Board of Trustees of the Altenheim.

"Two of our members were early representatives to the Altenheim," remembered an older member of the Women's Guild. "We sponsored bingo games, annual card parties, helped with Christmas parties and the Annual Fall Open House. We also helped prepare the new Altenheim for its opening."

St. Peter's wasted little time in organizing another Boy Scout troop in its Carmel location. After all, we had been working with the Boy Scouts since at least 1929 when our church had organized a highly regarded group of some eighty boys. Our new troop, Troop #199, called its first meeting to order at St. Peter's in mid-November of 1975.

The year 1976 was especially significant for one young man in our church . . . he was the third member of our congregation to be ordained in its sanctuary. The first, the Reverend G. Scott Comrie, was graduated from Christian Theological Seminary and had been ordained at Carrollton Avenue in 1967. The second, during that same year, had been the Reverend Hyon Kim, a South Korean who had been a student at CTS.

The third was the Reverend David Allen Johnston, a graduate of Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. And the fourth would be the Reverend Larry Kleiman. (Named youth director of Carrollton Avenue in 1969 and later at St. Peter's in 1975, he would be ordained at our church upon his graduation from Christian Theological Seminary in 1980.)

"Five years after completing the first phase of our present church building, it became apparent to many leaders within the fellowship that we had a problem," wrote one of our parishioners. "To continue to grow in service and numbers in the Carmel community, we would need to also expand our facilities.

"A Long-Range Planning Committee was appointed, studied the problem, and made several recommendations about a building addition. The congregation adopted that proposal (in

September 1979), and a Building Committee was formed. . . . [A] building fund campaign is underway, working drawings are completed, and we look forward to breaking ground in the very near future.”

While the details of construction occupied some in our church, others helped with our sponsoring of another refugee family. Cha Van Nguyen, his wife Lam Thi Pham and their twin daughters Minh and Mai arrived from Vietnam during 1980. The four had fled their war-torn home as “boat people” during the previous spring, when the girls had been barely a month old.

“The family does not speak English,” reported an area newspaper. “In addition to acquainting themselves with their new environment, they are in the process of learning to speak and understand English. Church members [at St. Peter’s] are directly helping the family to become acclimated to American culture and daily activities.” According to one of our volunteers: “Getting them settled, jobs, etc., required many of our congregation.”

One year after the building project had begun, St. Peter’s dedicated our finished addition. A larger Fellowship Hall, a kitchen area and additional classrooms for education were welcome. With this extra space, the church’s “Mother’s Morning Out” program was turned into a day-long “Mother’s Time Out” during 1982—and our nursery school was born.

Along with new activities for the very young came the formation of a group designed for the more senior folks in our church. Beginning in 1983, members of the “Elderberries” would meet each month to share a meal, visit with each other, worship together and enjoy all kinds of special programming. No doubt many of them must have felt as though he or she had lost a special friend when Rev. Zillgitt submitted his resignation to our church at the end of that year.

Stepping into the shoes of the pastor who had brought us from Carrollton Avenue to Carmel was surely intimidating. But it was a task well managed by two of our denomination’s retired ministers who served as our interim pastors. The **Reverend Vernon Hoecker** and the **Reverend Victor Schoen** preached on alternating Sundays during 1984 until the **Reverend Donald E. Steedly** accepted a call from our congregation.

While the coming of the Baltimore Colts football team certainly generated more excitement in Indianapolis that year, the move that mattered most to the life of St. Peter’s was the arrival of Rev. Steedly, his wife and their college-aged son. They joined us during the fall of 1984 after spending 15 years at Christ Church United Church of Christ in Evansville, Indiana.

The Ninth Decade: 1985-1994

Just in time to help celebrate our church’s 80th anniversary in June of 1985, Rev. Steedly praised the “dedicated pastoral leadership and committed men and women who have worked and witnessed together” through the years. “It is my dream that St. Peter’s will grow numerically and spiritually . . .,” he wrote. “A long-range planning committee is hard at work exploring goals and dreams for our future growth and expansion in facilities, staff, program and mission.”

Rev. Steedly, though, was not the minister who long would walk into these new directions with our church. After some three years with us, he would resign. During his time with our congregation, however, St. Peter’s made significant strides in its mission outreach.

In 1985, for the first time, we succeeded in raising more than \$1,000 for the annual One Great Hour of Sharing. (This international union of UCC congregations helps to build sustainable communities, respond to disasters and minister to refugees from around the world.)

St. Peter’s also started sponsoring participants in the yearly Crop Walk. That first time, ten of us walked ten miles each to raise money for local hunger-fighting agencies as well as for

the global relief and development efforts of Church World Service. (This organization is the combined outreach of 36 Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican denominations in the United States.)

For all the mission work done collectively by UCC congregations on a worldwide scale, St. Peter's gathered almost \$9,000 for Our Church's Wider Mission. We also undertook a ministry to Native Americans living on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation along Cherry Creek in South Dakota.

During Rev. Steedly's watch, the church continued exploring new avenues. In 1985, we began celebrating communion on the first Sunday of every month; and, late in the year, the church bought a second piece of property at the corner of Keystone Avenue and Carmel Drive.

This land purchase was finalized in 1986, and it was then that St. Peter's formed a Pastoral Committee to evaluate and help support the minister in his or her work. An informal committee began getting together, as well, to consider enhancements to the pipe organ we had brought with us from the building on Carrollton Avenue.

Rev. Steedly left St. Peter's during the early summer of 1987, and in his place—as our interim pastor—was the **Reverend Clyde C. Flannery**. It is a testament to this retired minister's steady presence that St. Peter's was able to not only maintain all its outreach but to retire its original mortgage in July of that year. During his stay, we also upgraded and repaired the organ that had so joyously added its voice to the music of our congregation throughout the years.

In September of 1988, the **Reverend Brian Byrne** became St. Peter's eleventh full-time pastor. A graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School, Rev. Byrne wasted little time in sharing his goal that St. Peter's—in its mission programming—would become “more intentional” about tackling the needs of the local community.

In addition to donating some \$9,500 to the denomination's Our Churches Wider Mission that year, St. Peter's began its involvement with Habitat for Humanity. Marshalling volunteer laborers and money for materials, we teamed up with others in town to build or rehabilitate dwelling places in response to the lack of decent housing for the poor in Indianapolis.

Rev. Byrne brought a “hands-on” mentality to St. Peter's outreach programs, often rolling up his shirtsleeves to join in the hard labor. At one point, he traveled with some of our members to Old Monroe, Missouri, where they—along with the United Church of Christ church in Batesville, Indiana—helped clean up after devastating summer floods had hit the area.

“We worked hard, doing fairly miserable work for six hours a day,” recalled Rev. Byrne who, with his fellow laborers, was sleeping at the local UCC church. “Youth and adults worked together on four different projects. I was prepared for the hard work, but I was not fully prepared for the transforming power of the Spirit. . . . In retrospect, I went thinking about the difference we could make, and came back realizing the difference it made in all of us.”

By 1990, St. Peter's was becoming aware of relatively stagnant growth in the size of our congregation. Many of those who had come from Carrollton Avenue were no longer able to make the drive north to Carmel—and, with the building of other churches in the vicinity, there were more faith communities with which people could affiliate.

Focusing on “attracting and keeping new members,” St. Peter's modified some of its existing programs and put new ones into place that emphasized group activities. A “Calling Tree” that linked everyone in church was started as well as “Dine with Nine” parties that were hosted in members' homes. Our youth activities were also expanded to offer a “wilderness trip.”

St. Peter's initiated new outreach opportunities, in addition. Even though we did not build a Habitat for Humanity house in 1990, we began collecting food for Dayspring Center, a

shelter for homeless families in the city. We started to work with the Heifer Project, an organization addressing world hunger, and set up a recycling program for the church.

Our congregation's tradition of "welcoming the stranger" had continued unabated. In 1986, we had "adopted" a Jamaican youngster who was struggling in poverty, and in 1990, we supported two orphans who were living amid the strife in Jerusalem. During 1992, we provided a home for a second family from Vietnam whom we helped to settle. (Tragically, one of the children would drown two years later, and Rev. Byrne would handle his funeral.)

Shortly before Christmas of 1993 and well into 1994, St. Peter's was involved in helping six Muslims who had been released from assorted concentration camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina by the International Red Cross. In partnership with the pastor of Northeast United Church of Christ, Rev. Byrne organized the efforts of 12 other area UCC churches to resettle the refugees.

The needs of these Bosnians—caught up in the violence of rival ethnic fighting with the Croats in the former Yugoslavia—were many. Our pastor worked long hours to coordinate food, clothing, transportation and jobs as well as obtain food stamps, medical care, language lessons and psychological therapy for the half dozen men who were housed in two apartments on the far north side of Indianapolis.

"It has brought congregations together in a Christian effort that goes beyond politics and labels," explained Rev. Byrne. "About 30 of us have been directly involved in the process, and many others have donated in one way or another. It gives you a good feeling. It is horrible to think of the atrocities and brutalities these men have seen and suffered."

The Tenth Decade: 1995-2004

As our tenth decade opened, the people of St. Peter's were still reaching out to each other . . . and to those around us. Because of an earlier capital campaign, we had been able to build several more classrooms, meeting spaces for adults and a parlor during 1993. (The widow of George Jo Mess, a well-known artist and church member, had given us a painting by him to hang in the more formal room.)

With this new addition had come another ministry to the homeless. Beginning in 1994—once we had obtained the extra space—St. Peter's had joined with other faith communities in Indianapolis to provide shelter and support to families without homes. (Started in New Jersey in 1986, Interfaith Hospitality Network is now found in most states across the country.)

According to one of our IHN volunteers, we have "homeless families four times a year for a week's stay (in the church) each time. For that week, our guests get breakfast, lunch to go and dinner each day, clean towels, sheets and a safe place to sleep. The Network has grown this decade into two networks that are able to serve 30 people instead of 15 each week."

After seven years in our pulpit, Rev. Byrne resigned to accept a call from a UCC church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Taking his place, over the next two years, would be three very able interim pastors: the **Reverend Larry Kleiman** (who had served as the youth director at Carrollton Avenue and then at St. Peter's), the **Reverend Donald Kaufman** and the **Reverend Alfred Willhouse**. The latter two were graduates of Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis.

In November of 1997, Rev. Kleiman agreed to become our twelfth full-time minister. Immediately prior to his coming to St. Peter's, he had served as the director of admissions at Christian Theological Seminary (1994-97) and as the pastor at Northeast UCC (1980-1994) in Indianapolis.

As the months passed, St. Peter's began to see a steady increase in the numbers of guests who were visiting our church for the first time. Possibly drawn by the messages of our new minister, or warmed by the collegiality of our congregation, or inspired by our intriguing opportunities for service, more and more people joined with our membership.

Many of them were able to contribute almost immediately by becoming part of one of our "ministry teams." Instead of being run by the Consistory—where decisions traditionally had been made by our elected officers, Elders and Deacons—we had recently reorganized the manner in which we handled the work of St. Peter's.

Alongside the pastor, in managing the business of our church, were lay team leaders who headed up committees in the areas of spiritual life, education, building & grounds, community involvement, pastor support, associate pastor support, preschool, caregivers, service to others, giving and fellowship.

By the start of the new millennium, our church was faced with a familiar problem . . . we were running out of room. It had become a daily exercise in logistics to accommodate all the activities and all of the outreach projects—to say nothing of having adequate seating for worship in the sanctuary—of the people of St. Peter's.

In response, we formed the requisite committees and listened to our focus groups, we drew up architectural plans and assessed our varied funding sources—all to enable the congregation to better decide whether or not to pursue an ambitious building plan for the future.

In the end, St. Peter's concluded that a roomier sanctuary and more classrooms were not the answer. As one of the planners of the move from Carrollton Avenue to Carmel had so wisely noted: "It was decided that, as a congregation . . . we wanted a sanctuary that was not overly large simply to accommodate the few seasonal large crowds. . . . It was felt that as the congregation grows, multiple services would be initiated to take full advantage of the facilities."

In the fall of 2002, St. Peter's changed its worship schedule from one to two services on Sunday mornings. With the help of people from the congregation and several part-timers in the church office, Rev. Kleiman managed for a year until the **Reverend Lori Godich** had been graduated from the Boston University School of Theology.

This former student leader at St. Peter's became the first associate pastor in our congregation's nearly 100-year history. In addition to the immediate assistance she could offer to our very active church, the young woman brought a contagious enthusiasm for any and all of St. Peter's undertakings.

With her involvement, we were able to expand our ministry to the developmentally disabled residents of Rural Health Care Center in downtown Indianapolis. Initially, during the fall of 1999, when we had begun working with these folks—many of whom have spent their entire lives in institutions—we had started with a Christmas party and gifts for each resident.

"Since that time, they have had Valentine parties, summer parties, a Halloween party and always a Christmas party," explained one long-time church member. "Our young people have also helped with these, playing games with the residents, helping with crafts and the like. The residents are delighted with everything that is done for them."

Having two pastors, rather than one, allowed us to expand those ministries with which we were already active . . . and to add a few more. By the end of 2004, there were almost as many mission projects in the church as there were members.

St. Peter's has developed partner congregations in Bolivia, Cuba, and at Shell Creek on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. Our members work with HIV/AIDS issues and with clients at the Damien Center. We are involved with Our Lady of Mt. Carmel's H.E.L.P.

Food Pantry as well as with youth work camps; Brooklawn and Crossroads as well as with Veterans of the Cross; a prison ministry as well as with Neighbors in Need.

Always able to find ready hands, we continue to resettle refugees who have been trapped by the violence in their homelands. After helping Moses, Roda and Oliver Lasu—who come from the Sudan in September of 2000—get established, we took care of four from Sierra Leone five months later. During the spring of 2002, we sponsored a mother and her two teen-aged daughters from Afghanistan; and, in late 2004, we await the arrival of a family from Burma.

When Rev. Godich rejoined St. Peter's in mid-2003, she brought a fresh set of eyes to a church that had become comfortably familiar to many of us. Its joyful willingness to reach out to each other—and to the world—was something that some of us had begun to take for granted.

Holding a mirror before us in the 2003 Annual Report, she wrote: "I've returned to a place where outreach and mission are not taken lightly. St. Peter's is one of those rare places where serving others is considered the norm, not the exception. It is a place where academic study is balanced with spiritual practice, where strangers are welcomed and long-timers are valued, where every person has a voice. For this, I give thanks."

For this, we all give thanks.

May this "spirited community of faith" that we call St. Peter's continue to "be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord" in the years ahead.