



All interviews conducted by Bob Paulus

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Carolyn Pfrimmer

Carolyn Pfrimmer: *Reminiscences of our church and the pastors that led it.*

Carolyn Pfrimmer was born in Hollywood, California. She recalls, “My parents were married in Huntington Park and my three brothers and I were born in different towns in southern California. I attended school in southern California before moving with my mother to Rexford, Montana in 1946. I graduated from high school in Eureka.”

Carolyn’s mom began a career as a teacher in Eureka. Carolyn attended WMCE in Dillon for a summer with her mom and went on to earn a Bachelor’s degree from WMCE and later earned a Master’s degree in Education from The University of Montana.

She related, “I was hired the summer of 1951 at the only school for which I applied and found myself teaching 42 third graders in Whitefish School District. I retired in 1986 after teaching grades 1 through 4 for most of those years. I taught elementary music for the last three years of my career. After retirement, I taught music at Cross Current Christian School for over three years.”

When asked about her attraction to FPC, Carolyn replied, “I started attending FPC in 1951 when I lived in a room at Palmer’s Paint Shop which was one block west of our church. The church was close, people very friendly, and I was asked to teach the pre-school class on my first Sunday. I was 19 at the time and didn’t even have a drivers

license. I was drawn to teaching children of any age.”

Carolyn married Bruce in 1953. They have three boys, four grand children, and one great grand child.

Carolyn reminisced about her activities at FPC. “It wasn’t long before I became Superintendent of the Sunday School. For many years I made plans for classes of all ages and went to the session to request money for materials needed. During the summers in the 60s when Paul Neel and John Warning were here, I also led the Vacation Bible School program. I met so many friendly people to help teach classes. I led a children’s choir in the 60s when my oldest son, David, belonged. One of my first loves was music so I was also in the adult choir in the 50s and have continued until the present.”

Presbyterian Women, of which she was president for five years, has always been important for Carolyn. In 1999, she was honored with an Honorary Life Membership. Carolyn further related, “I have been an active elder for 21 years and always involved in music and education. An exciting year for me was 2003 when I worked on the Centennial book. I learned so much about not only the building, but the people that have made the church what it is today.”

I asked Carolyn what changes she has seen over the years at FPC. She replied, “With every new pastor, there came changes. Rev. Garner was praised for his organizational skills. I have fond memories of Paul Neel and his wife Della having study and prayer in the remodeled manse. John

Warning was only here three years but led the effort to implement much needed repairs to the building. Trustee duties became those of elders rather than deacons during his term.

“The 13 years Bob and Flossie Laird were here, the membership grew and attendance at Glacier Camp expanded. Christian Education grew in all age groups and a Boy and Girl Scout program was fostered. Flossie organized the Hand Bell Choir and was also the Choir Director leading 30 members through several musicals. This pastor also started a new type of service called *Family Happenings* which was a Bible education for all ages.

“Ken Peterson served the church for 14 years. The Fellowship Hall was build, the balcony renovated, and the basement remodeled. Changes also took place within the congregation. Polly, his wife, brought a sense of humor that delighted all with her puppets Zilch and Zelda. Our church became a *program style church* where lay people took more responsibility in activities. Prior to this, we were known as a *pastoral style church* where the pastor led his flock.

“After Ken left, an Interim Pastor, Keith Bebee, served for a year. In that short time, he left positive memories of his bible teaching and musical talent.

“Jack Deere was with us two years but the changes made have been felt for many years since. He was an excellent speaker but problems developed when the congregation felt the lack of communication between member and pastor that had been

known in the past. He was a well known writer of books on the gifts of the Spirit and spoke to the congregation on living more Christ-like lives. His short time here indicated to many that the majority of this congregation prefers traditional rather than contemporary style worship.

“Jim Patton was here for one year. He had the ability to promote reconciliation among the remaining members of the congregation. He held a reconciliation service that brought a closure to some of the problems that had been experienced in our church.

“Andy Kennaly brought in the Centennial. He, his wife, and three boys brought back some of the joy of youth and enthusiasm to the church. In the five years we were blessed with his presence, there were changes in attitudes in the congregation. The nursery and pre-school increased as younger members joined the church. As a beginning pastor, it was difficult to please an aging congregation *set in their ways*.

“I remember Rev. Louis Stoker as the person that came to our congregation with love and understanding at a critical time in the life of our church. He brought joy and hope to our church with his opening *jokes* always followed by sermons that touched your heart and conscience. He gave a moving sermon on youth Sunday, with a sermon called *Who is The Most Powerful Per-*

son You Know?. In all situations, he brought comfort and joy. It only took a short while before he met our church members and knew all their names. VBS that summer was called *Treasure Seekers*. I recall that our church was looking for a pastor that they could *treasure* and I feel that we found it in Rev. Stoker.

“I feel that all these pastors, including our wonderful new Pastor Dan, have been sent to our church to bless and teach our congregation to be more acceptable and loving of each other and our differences. This applies especially to those servants sent to bring HIS word to this weekly gathering.”

I asked Carolyn what memories are most treasured. She replied, “My most treasured memories are of each pastor already mentioned. I have a *not so treasured memory* in that Bruce and I had to change our wedding plans and were not married in my first choice of church, *this church*, but it became our choice for life. Many other activities over the years have made this church my second home and I treasure all of them over my 56 years of membership.”

Carolyn enjoys making scrapbooks of all 35 classes she’s taught. Her hobbies include gardening, collecting antiques, and photography. She also enjoys swimming, working out at The Wave, subbing at local schools, singing in Calamity Singers, playing bridge,

and attending concerts and plays. She has been on the Flathead Valley Concert Association board for many years, and at the present time is Drive Chairman. She belongs to Women of the Moose and has held all the *chairs* and won the Citizen of the Year Award. Carolyn helped organize the Stumptown Museum, working especially on the education section, and has organized the *receptionist* at the museum for 20 years. Delta Kappa Gamma she joined in 1958 and has been honored with Volunteer of the Year and Catherine Nutterville award which was presented to her last spring.

When asked about changes desired, Carolyn answered, “I would like to see the Sunday school grow to where it was when I first came to this church.”

I gave Carolyn the opportunity to express a message to the congregation. She stated, “I would encourage everyone to accept one another and be forgiving. When you are hurt by words or actions of another person, don’t hold your feelings in and build a wall between you and that person or this church of God. We need not only to *forgive*, but also to *forget* those feelings and move on. Many families have been pulled apart for the same reasons. But here in the church, God reigns so let’s remember He is in authority and asks us to *love and forgive one another*. At present, I think we are on the right track.”



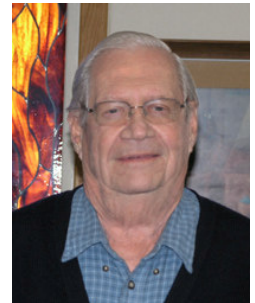
Bruce Pfrimmer



Joe Fagan



Glinda Fagan



Art Peterson

Bruce Pfrimmer:

Bruce wanted to write his own interview. After reading the draft he wrote, I thought— *sounds good to me*. In fact, Bruce saying it all himself presented him much better than I ever could have done. Here it is. Bruce, in his own words:

“Great Falls, Montana is where I was born and was the 7th child—weighed 7 lb. and born at 7 a.m. My dad, Bob, and mother, Lillian, took me home to our ranch on the foot hills of the Rockies where they raised horses. I was seven years old when we moved to Whitefish where I entered 1st grade. By that time, I had three sisters and

four brothers. I left High School in 1949 and entered the Army and was discharged in 1953. I was baptized in Tacoma, Washington in the Baptist Church while serving at the Army base in Fort Lewis, Washington.

“I met my wife, Carolyn, while on leave in January of 1952. We were married the following June. Before I left for the Army, I was a *Call Boy* working for the Great Northern Railroad and upon returning to Whitefish, I continued my railroad career as a Brakeman which lasted until I retired 41 years later. In between the times I was

laid off, I went to the U of M in Missoula until I got called back to the railroad. I worked on various jobs during these *off years* including the aluminum plant as an Iron Worker, drove trucks, worked as a city policeman, plus I oil painted. Many of my paintings sold and were sent to all corners of the U.S.

“I joined FPC in 1953, so I’ve been a member for 54 years. All three of our sons were baptized in this church and that may be the reason I wanted to be involved. I served as a Deacon and Trustee. I sang in the choir back in the 50s but railroading

made it difficult to make practice and Sunday every week.

“It seems the population in the church has dropped by over half during these years. Some pastors were popular but a few were here a short time because some members were unhappy with them. I miss the large number of children that used to go to Sunday School when my boys attended.

“My most treasured memory of FPC was

the huge attendance that turned out for my mother’s funeral in 1965. She had been in charge of the nursery for many years and was loved by many. The church was packed and flowers were everywhere.

“My hobbies are wood working, oil painting, and building. I should also note how much I enjoyed keeping the roads open with my plow during the winter so Carolyn could get to school. Filling out my

wife’s *honey do* list fills the rest of my time!

“I’m satisfied with the church the way it is and am pleased to have Dan as our pastor. I accept change as it comes with each new pastor.

“I think we need less gossip, as in the past, about church members and pastors and more *love thy neighbor as thy self*. I’d like to see more support for our troops expressed in our congregation.”



Joe Fagan:

Joe Fagan was born in Pontiac, Michigan and grew up in the Royal Oak suburb of Detroit. His father worked for General Motors. Joe recalled, “My dad earned a Master’s degree in Philosophy but never used it for employment. My mom was a full time mom and home-maker. She had five kids in five years!”

Joe has two brothers and two sisters. One brother is Joe’s identical twin who lives in Thompson Falls.

When Joe was ten years old, his family moved to Webster City, Iowa. Joe attended Catholic school through eighth grade and graduated from high school there. He attended a Community College for a couple of years and married Glinda in 1968. Joe elaborated, “We got married in Iowa and stayed there a little over a year. We bought an old school bus, packed up all our stuff, and moved to Missoula. I intended on going into Forestry but discovered that it wasn’t what it was cracked-up to be so I eventually switched to the Vo Tec school in Missoula. I graduated with a degree in Heavy Truck Diesel Mechanics and I’ve been twisting wrenches ever since.”

Joe and Glinda have two children—a boy and a girl, and three grand children.

Joe spent two years in Billings doing apprenticeship work. An opportunity arose to transfer to Kalispell so he and Glinda made the move. Joe continued, “In 1977,

after working in a shop in Kalispell for about two years, I decided to take off for Alaska. I was kind of *in and out* of there for awhile but in 1980, I went back to Alaska and have been going there pretty much steady ever since. I work for the Operating Engineers as a mechanic. The most I’ve ever spent in Alaska within a year’s time was seven months. The most time I’ve been continuously away from home was five months. Now, the most I spend away from home in a year is four months.”

The work hours are grueling in Alaska. Joe related, “I’ll work a hundred days in a row without a day off. We average 14 plus hours per day, seven days a week. I recall being bitten by a rabid fox one day. In fact, it was the same day I was coming home. When I got to Whitefish, I had to go to the hospital and get shots.”

Joe and Glinda have attended FPC for about 25 years. Joe related why they decided to attend here. “I grew up as a Catholic and was an Alter Boy. Glinda and I were married in the Catholic Church. After the move from Iowa, we had kind of dropped-out from church for a few years. At Billings, we attended a *bible preaching church* which was what we were looking for. After moving to Whitefish, we looked around for awhile for a church to go to. In all the churches we visited, the people were very friendly. But there was something about FPC, I’m not sure exactly what, but we were

looking for a bible preaching church and Ken, who was the pastor here at that time, seemed to be doing a pretty good job. We made it our home.”

When there is work to be done at FPC, Joe is always one of the people we can count on. He has served as a Deacon for four years and has been a Head Usher off and on. Joe has also done various repair jobs inside and outside the building such as: painting, roof work, cleaning, and decorating for Christmas. Joe remarked, “It’s hard to believe the amount of leaves that accumulate on the roof of our building. I’ll go up a couple times a year and clean it all off. This is especially important to do before the freeze in the late fall. I’ll make sure everything is cleaned out and drains are open to protect the roof.”

As for hobbies, Joe enjoys hunting, fishing, hiking, spending time at his cabin, gardening, and yard work. For the past 10 to 12 years, he has also devoted his time to the Boy Scouts of America.

As many before him have remarked, Joe said he would like to see more young families attend our church. He too misses the young people and Sunday School filled with kids.

Joe concluded by saying, “I think that if we all come together in the middle with no left or right and serve God, everything else will fall into place.”



Glinda Fagan:

Glinda also did her own writing for the interview. She also did a superb job—much better, in fact, than I ever could have done. Maybe these folks are starting a trend. Do I dare to hope? Here’s Glinda— In her own words.

“I grew up on a farm near Klemme, Iowa. I was an outdoor Daddy’s girl and loved driving tractor, helping with the cows and pigs, working in the fields, and got in trouble a lot. My favorite thing to do was going to stock yard auctions. Dad died 25

years ago and Mom is living at Wel-Life Assisted Living in Kalispell. My one sibling, Brenda Ritter, also lives in Kalispell. I can’t remember how Joe answered the *children* question but we parented the same two. I think our daughter was still in grade school

when we joined this church. Rachel is now 32 and living in Kalispell with her husband Paul and our grandkids, Alex-8, Trevor-3, and Lauryn-2. Our son Ben, who spent all his years in this church is nearly 20 now. He is working full-time and going to FVCC full-time and still snowboarding nearly year round.

“Maybe this is a good chance to thank all those who have mentored Ben through the years in Youth Group— Shelle, Men’s Tuesday Morning Bible Study, Andy K., John F., Dewey, John P., Ole, Bruce T., Art, Roger Hofaker, and many others. So very many men in our church family have had a huge impact on Ben and I don’t hold it against any of you that he’s still a *Snow-board Nut*.

“I worked at a variety of jobs before the kids were born— as a secretary, in Real Estate, Auto & Property Insurance, Veterinary Clinic, etc. Until recently, I worked at LPL Financial Services with Marge Fisher here in Whitefish for the past 20+ years.

“Joe was in college when we met and we *ran around* with the same group of friends. And, as a *friend*, he took me to my Senior Prom. We married a year and a half later in October, 1968. He’s a lucky man but I am also blessed. We moved from Iowa to Mis-

soula (*in a school bus we’d turned into a camper*) in 1969 with heads full of plans but God always has *other*, better plans.

“We attended First Presbyterian Church for a couple of years before joining on May 18th, 1986. I came as a guest/visitor of Pam Stolte’s and as a *Sinner* – an active alcoholic. I’ve been in recovery, thru God’s grace, since we joined. The attraction at FPC was the *Love*. It was everywhere, in everyone, flowing over all— spilling out the doors and pouring into the community.

“I served as an Elder for five years (*what an amazing education!*). I’ve worked with Christian Ed as a committee member as well as a teacher (*I showed up and kids taught me*). I’ve helped out in the nursery for Membership Classes when needed and was on several other committees. I sang in choir two years ago and am trying again this year. *Anybody out there who is teetering on the edge and might want to sing – just come once, you will be hooked!* *Karen Leftwich can make anyone sound good*. I was on the most recent Pastor Nominating Committee and grew more spiritually during that nine months than any other time in my life. I’m thankful to the congregation for trusting me to do the job and for the opportunity. I found it truly amazing—just how

Great God is and how he can work when we trust, obey, and get out of His way.

“My hobbies are knitting, sewing, tatting, cross-stitch, computers (*like in geek*), researching just about anything, kayaking, fishing, flower gardening, reading, identifying bugs, birds, and weeds—and Grand-kids!

“Changes, if any, I would like FPC to experience?—more *coming together* than I see and feel at present. I think I understand that there will always be some diversity or conflict but for the sake of our Lord it would be so awesome to see people with differing views, put them aside for awhile (*don’t give them up – just don’t make your views more important than God’s Plan*). I think of how many, many talented, educated, faith filled members we have who are willing to work and I can see that our Church is so ready to do amazing things— if we will just listen and follow our Lord.

“The message I would like to say to the congregation is: Accept each other as fellow children of God, show honor and respect to all (*whether they are left, right, red, blue, or any of the other differences we may focus on*). In other words: **Love** without judgment.”



Art Peterson:

Art Peterson was born and raised in Great Falls, Montana. He had one brother who is deceased. Art’s father was employed in the cleaning business and later worked as Auditor for the State Liquor Board. Art’s mother worked most of her life in the Clothes Cleaning business.

Art reminisced, “The family lived in a little one bedroom duplex. My brother and I slept on a pull-out davenport bed. This was my home from 4th grade until I came out of the service in 1945.

“We kept a large vegetable garden. I would come home from school to pick potato bugs and cut worms from cabbage and lettuce. I supplied meat by raising rabbits, pigeons, and chickens. Toys were stick horses and hand hewn swords and guns. Apple-boxes with old skates as wheels were scooters. We rummaged alley trash cans for bottles to sell to get 15cents to go to the movies. I did get some extra money by drying rabbit pelts and selling them to a furrier for 5 cents each and worked at a poultry store.

“I worked after school at Safeway for 25 cents an hr. I remember when they increased our wage to 28 cents. By gosh, you could take a \$5 bill, go out on a date, and bring change home!”

Art served in the Army Air Force during World War II. He recalled, “I was 17 and wanted to enlist in the Army Air Force but needed permission from my parents. They finally relented so a year to the day after Pearl Harbor— Dec. 7, 1942, I left high school and went off to war.

“I went to Florida for basic training. On Christmas Eve under the stars, a minister spoke to us about God and the Great Command and our future needs for the Lord. I sat there and burned holes in the bulletin with my cigarette, a new found habit, and gave little thought to the message. You see, I was raised in a home where Easter was church day. There was never a bible in the house as I remember. My father was brought up in a strict Lutheran home, attending church several times a week. After marriage, he became an atheist, never to go

back to church. Mother’s hectic work left her little time for her God.

“The Army put me in Air Force Supply. This meant college attendance in Weatherford, Oklahoma. After training, I was sent to *Jolly Ole England*. We built air bases for B-24 Bombers and supplied their needs. My first day, 12 planes came back with 9 missing. We took the dead and wounded from the planes and transported them to morgues and hospitals.

“To watch these kids get ready to fly each morning, knowing this might be their last day, you became very close to your God. I got through 2 years of this thru D-Day and became very close in my *walk* with the Lord.

“I was discharged from my home base in Great Falls November, 1945. The Lord found me the *main stay* of my life. I had some money left from savings and bought a set of rings and a new car. My child bride, she 18 and me 21, were married in 1947. We have four children, three grand children, and one great grand child.

“I ran a plant for Nash for four years but they closed the plant in Great Falls in 1950. I decided to chase my God given talent of art and entered Kansas City Art Institute. Soon after starting school, I had an offer to move to Detroit and work for American Motors. The salary and perks were so good I couldn’t refuse. Evelyn and children joined me in *Motown* but that didn’t last for long. I was promoted to run a plant in Chicago. We joined a Congregational Church. We were there for 12 years.

“Evelyn kept me involved with church life—trustee, stewardship, bible studies, and fund raising.

“Eventually, we moved to the headquarters in Milwaukee. The last several years of my employment was as National Purchasing Manager for Service and Replacement Parts. This was a life of constant travel.

“We moved to Whitefish in 1985 when I retired. I joined the Stump Town Historical Society and worked at refurbishing the depot. We raised \$250,000 and spent it as a memorial to the railroaders of Whitefish.

“We shopped for a church and fell in love with Ken & Polly Peterson. All the people were so friendly. They just glowed with the love of the Lord. We became Presbyterians.

“My first 3 years were spent on Building & Grounds. My claim to fame is I stained the entire sanctuary including the pews. Next, I spent 3 years as Head Usher, then, as Finance Helper until the computer challenged my intelligence. I have been active with Glacier Camp, chaired the Personnel Committee, Elder on Session, chaired the PNC, Personal Committee Chairman, and Nominating Committee Chairman.

“I sum it up this way—My 1st 20 years was a self centered venture. My 2nd twenty years, I had more exposure and stronger walk. My 3rd 20 years—my experiences grew, my walk more positive, but had a built in excuse—*always traveling and had no time for church*. But I felt stronger and recognized my blessings and the presence of the Lord. My 4th 20 years was a release from work-a-day pressure, retired, time to be in a great church with daily Christian life. My cup runneth over. The next 10 years (still 7 to go)—I’m almost a loner, church life is the main source, young people (under 70) are a mystery. I’m a silent person who never quits talking. Or so they say.

“The message I would say to folks in our congregation is: Love is the Lord’s most powerful word. Love the Lord, church, family, enemies, and everything will be OK.”



The Building:

I hung up the phone and rushed outside to my car. I had to hurry if I was going to make the time that had just been set up for my next interview. I had just spoken to my latest participant for the next issue of *Koinonia*. Surprisingly, this one had caved in easily to my begging, pleading, *doe eyes* routine I frequently employed whenever I was looking for someone to feature. The prospect told me “to come right up” and gave explicit instructions as to where I was supposed to meet for the interview.

I drove the mile and a half uptown and parked in the alley. I couldn’t help the giddy sensation of anticipation of the interview I was about to conduct. I had checked the batteries of my digital recorder last night and knew they were strong and energized in case I got lucky.

The door was open so I didn’t need my key. Taking the steps two at a time, I bounded up to the second floor. At the landing, I stood before a locked door. I inserted a key into the lock and entered the room. The door closed behind me locking itself. The bolt slamming home into the latch sounded deafening!

I had been in this room many times. In fact I passed through it, along with most everyone else, practically every Sunday morning on my way into the sanctuary. This was a small ante room within the bowels of what is known as the First Presbyterian Church of Whitefish, Montana.

There was a small table and one matching chair against a wall. Other than that, the room was mostly bare except for a display case of memorabilia concerning the history of the church.

I walked to the table, sat down, and placed my recorder on the wooden surface. I didn’t have to wait for long. “Turn it on.” a disembodied voice said.

“Turn on what?” I replied.

“That little blue box you have. I assume it’s the recording devise you told me about.”

I couldn’t help but feel a tad unnerved by the voice that came from nowhere but everywhere. I reminded myself that I was expecting this and I’d better suck-it-up if I was going to nail this interview with the precision it deserved. After all, how many people get a chance to interview the **building** of the church one belongs to?

“You want to get right to it I presume.” I stated with a quiver in my voice.

The voice answered, “Sure, why not? It’ll be fun. Ask your questions. I’m looking forward to this too.”

“Well.” I began. “Tell me about your beginnings. Where do you come from?”

“Well,” the voice began. “I was conceived as this edifice in May of 1921.

“The Presbyterian Church was meeting in the Masonic Temple in 1919. Because of

growth, it was decided that they needed to build a building to meet in.

“My corner stone was laid on May 10, 1921. I was designed to be not only a place of worship, but also a social center for the community of Whitefish. Dr. Taylor who was a doctor and had a hobby of architectural designing, drew up the design. When it was sent to a professional firm in Spokane, few changes had to be made to it. Dr. Taylor envisioned a Community Center as well as a place of worship. It cost \$45,000 to build me.

“I’ve always felt immensely proud of my stained glass windows. They were donated by a variety of people. The Japanese people of Whitefish appreciated the work being done for them by one of the early Pastors, Pastor Peck and his wife, and donated two windows.

“Shortly after the building was completed, the Sunday School had 300 members and the church membership was 240.

“The church had debt of \$8000 in 1922. PW gave dinners, entertainments, bake sales, bazaars, etc. until in 1931, the note was paid and ceremoniously burned.

“Berean Bible Class was organized in 1920 by the Pastor’s wife, Mrs. Fales. The name is taken from one of Paul’s letters where he states, “*And the Bereans searched the scriptures daily.*”

“Some of my fondest memories are of

the basement. It had walls that stood 15 feet high. This was necessary so there would be ample room for basketball and other games. For many years it was used for wedding receptions, church dinners, rummage sales, youth groups, basketball games, table tennis tournaments, shuffleboard, Boy and Girl Scout troops, and various club meetings, all on a regular basis.

“There was also a stage in the basement. I recall plays being performed there. One memorable night, a family Country & Western band played. Boy were they good! I can still hear the twang of that steel guitar. The stage area was also used as a nursery. Off to the left of the stage was the kitchen. There was a Shuffle Board court painted on the floor.

“For quite awhile, there were no gymnasiums in Whitefish. Basketball teams would practice and play their games in the basement.

“There was a wood burning furnace and during the winter, someone would have to stay all night to keep it stoked.

“There were also bath rooms and a large classroom. The place sure could get hopping at times!

“Organizations met in the basement— Boy Scouts, Toast Masters, and A. A. For many years, there was no place in Whitefish, other than churches, that could handle fairly large groups of people. Oh, the memories I have of the 1st Harvest Home Dinner in that wonderful basement. It was down-right glorious.

“I also remember the day Santa Claus came to visit on Christmas Day. The kids really got a kick out of that one. One year in May, a lady dressed up her first grade Sunday School class with graduation gowns on the stage. She made them diplomas showing they had graduated to the next grade. They were beaming with delight!”

I asked, “The basement doesn’t really exist anymore. At least not in any manner one could recognize it as being the social center it once was. It was completely filled in with separate rooms. What’s the story on that?”

“In the late 1970s, the church had experienced substantial growth. The members discussed moving to a larger building. They also explored the idea of using the existing building more efficiently and adding on to it. There was vacant area to the

east, so they drew up plans for expansion. There is now a Fellowship Hall, office space, and classroom area in this addition.

“They had such good luck getting money for the addition, they decided to include a basement renovation. The purpose for the renovation was to create space for Sunday school as the exiting rooms in the basement were quite small for classes—ten kids max. Later, they decided to include a *Prayer Sanctuary* in the basement space. Beautiful room isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” I replied. “It’s really nice, as is your layout in general but... look. Some Christians think that a building is a building, not a church. You have class, true—with your grand architecture, stained glass windows, historical past, ect., ect. But, you aren’t a church. The people are the church. You are merely where they choose to meet. They could meet where ever they liked. Why do you think they need you?”

“What you say has merit but let me explain something the *anti-tradition* church folks don’t consider much. Quite a lot of Christians are spurning tradition now. It is true that I and everything material in me does not appear in the New Testament. Everything from the pulpit to the choir loft to the pews all originated in *tradition*. But, why is that bad? Tradition is important to a lot of brothers and sisters in Christ. It fact for some, it is a life giving importance.

“I will give a couple of examples of what I’m talking about.

“When a brother hears a choir hymn resonating through the multi-hued light of windows beaming into a room where his parents worshiped, his spirit is stirred by an indwelling Lord. It’s an experience that repeats for generations on end.

“Consider a sister who delights in the liturgy of her youth in the fellowship of the sanctuary. She runs her hand over the old stained pews, gazes upon the walls decorated with banners she helped create, and recalls with joy memories of friends, family, study groups, and pot luck dinners within these walls.

“Tradition is part of their faith walk and I am a facet of that tradition. However, I’m in trouble.”

“Trouble,” I asked. “What kind of trouble are you in?”

“I’m decaying. Let me explain how bad it

is. My upper ramparts are 86 years old and need repair. The crown of my head, the capstones, have cracked mortar. Some has been rather crudely patched but it’s only a temporary fix. My roof was replaced 15 years ago but guess what? The life expectancy of the job is about 15 years! I need a new one. It leaks and the stains in the ceiling of the fellowship hall are embarrassing!

“The Plexiglas that protects my beautiful windows is brittle and cracking in places and the trim needs painting around them. Why, my whole exterior needs a good power washing.

“Have you examined the restrooms? The plumbing leaks for lack of maintenance and some fixtures simply need replacing. A couple of rooms are so bad that they are literally closed.

“My electrical systems are probably sub-standard. A man looked inside a service box recently and exclaimed, “It says installed by T. A. Edison.”

“It seems there is close to an acre of wasted space in what used to be the basement in between rooms partitions and ceilings and there are rooms that serve little or no purpose.

“The kitchen stove gives off constant heat which makes the fellowship hall practically uninhabitable during the summer months.

“If I am truly vital to the people of this church, they need to realize the importance of taking care of me. I know their tradition is very significant and I am at the very center of that tradition. I cling to hope that some day, I’ll be a semblance of the community center in the heart of Whitefish I once was— radiating the love of God into the community. I realize that it can’t be exactly like it was in decades gone by but perhaps we can catch the spirit of those days again.

“Do you understand where I’m coming from?”

I didn’t hesitate to answer. How could I? “Yes,” I said. “I do understand. Is there anything else you would like to say to this congregation?”

“No. I think I’ve pretty much covered it. Drop by again for a chat some time. I wish more would speak with me. I enjoy the conversation and the sharing of memories. I think it’s called *fellowship*.”

