

Stories Commemorating NJ's 50th Anniversary

We asked for stories commemorating the New Jerusalem 50th Anniversary and you'll find the stories we received below. Each is a gift, and we're grateful to those who shared them with us:

Mark & Cathy Brunner

Fred & Mary Carol Gennett

Klaus and Angela Hannemann

Neil Himber

Nese Leigh

Mike Lynch

Marilyn Maag

Paul Moore

Gayle Reichert

Cindy Heiselman Schulte

Maria (Robbins) Vanderwerker

Mark & Cathy Brunner

Our time at New Jerusalem was life changing. We have lifelong friends and a spiritual life that was nurtured and encouraged by those in our various small groups and of course Richard and John. We were in the community for 15 years from 1975 to 1990.

We opened our home to the Van Dulmans when they were seeking to buy a home, Anne Kolker, Barb Kaiser, Marilyn Gugel. Greg Pierson, Carl Emmerick, and Bill Carlson were our first tenants in the upstairs apartment on East Epworth.

Our street had many NJ members, including the Herdtners, Hanlons, Hoess's, Heisels, Joan Schuller, Tom Moorman, the Carroll Household and the Hoppers. I may have missed a few, however these were the ones who lived from the corner of Epworth and Mitchell.

Prayer meetings and liturgies were the highlights of our life there. The power of prayer was so strong and that prayer helped to heal our daughter Rebecca who was born in critical condition. Our daughters Angela, Rebecca and Emily grew up in the community. The children's musicians were a wonderful part of their growing in the community.

Social justice issues in the neighborhood were an important part of our life in Winton Place. This has led us to be involved in issues up to this day with refugees. We are grateful for all the gifts, love, and challenges.

Cathy and Mark Brunner

Fred & Mary Carol Gennett

Fred and I cherished our time in New Jerusalem! We felt it was such an honor to be a part of such a wonderful group of people! We were searching at a time where the Church wasn't making much sense to us. We listened to a homily today from scripture about building your life and future on rock not sand. We believe that our experience at New Jerusalem was foundational for us building our life on "rock" and we feel truly grateful for our time at New Jerusalem.

We love you,

Mary Carol and Fred Gennett

Klaus & Angela Hannemann

We thankfully think back to the time we have spent in Cincinnati at NJ more than 35 years ago. We knew NJ from Sybille Detmer and Andreas Ebert. Joe and John Metz visited our “Teestube,” a student community in Würzburg, already in 1977. Later, Richard gave talks in Europe and visited also our “Teestube.” As Klaus got the opportunity for a postdoctoral stay at the University of Cincinnati, we saw there a hint of God to learn more about community life and we wanted to be part of NJ for the time of our stay. We experienced the hospitality and openness of NJ in a special way. We arrived in Cincinnati in the middle of the night, with a few suitcases and our 9-month-old son Sebastian, not knowing where we would sleep. NJ’s guest ministry had organized that Patricia and William Brenner would share their home for 2-3 weeks with us until we found an apartment at Winton Place. The day we moved into our apartment, Ron came with a pick-up and collected furniture from community members so that we could move in and had a place to stay for the next one-and-a-half years.

Angela, Klaus and Sebastian Hannemann 1985 in front of their apartment at N. Edgewood Rd. We stayed in the upper floor, Sally and Dan in the ground floor. Before our long-term stay we had the opportunity in 1982 for a week with the guest ministry. The Hochauslers were our hosts. They lived on the same road with Weinbergs.

We appreciated that we could be part of a small group with Metz and Clapps to learn more about sharing faith and life.

We were impressed that NJ had a world-wide view. A symbol was the flag of the United Nation instead of the US flag in the Portiuncula, the engagement of some community members for Nicaragua, the participation at the “Hands across America” and the voice against nuclear weapons.

We loved the intense worship in the Portiuncula, celebrating the Eucharist with touching Christian songs and the sharing of life and joy in many parties.

Now, more than 35 years later, we gratefully think back on the time we spent together. NJ has played an important part in our faith journey and inspired our engagement in our local church in Lörrach, Germany. Both of us are still active in leading ministries of our church. Angela is a delegate in the county church counsel and Klaus is head of the board of elders in our parish. A special toast from Germany on the 50 years faith journey of New Jerusalem and the positive influence that is still visible in many lives.

Thank you for all!

The peace and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ are with you and guide you into the future.

Neil Humber

I drifted away from the Church for a few years in my twenties, but about 1978 I stumbled upon a charismatic prayer group at St. Joseph Church in Downingtown, PA. They had a tape library and I would borrow tapes and listen to them while driving to work. One speaker in particular appealed to me, Fr. Richard Rohr. My interest in church picked up as a result of his teaching. I hoped that I might meet him one day.

Sometime later I interviewed for a better job. Two positions were available, one in Pittsburgh and one in Cincinnati. After a second interview I was told that the Pittsburgh position was filled, but the job in Cincinnati was mine if I wanted it. I took the Cincinnati position in January 1980. I contacted the

community immediately upon my arrival, was interviewed by Roberta Tenbrink and happily joined in the initiation program. This, I concluded, was where I was meant to be.

I feel richly blessed to have been a part of NJ. It was such a unique experience. Living together in community and sharing prayers and concerns in circles of spiritual companionship, was healing and empowering. Through La Amistad we learned first-hand of the injustice in Central America and our government's role in it. We were given the courage through prayer and solidarity to speak out about scary existential issues like the nuclear arms race and economic injustice and climate change.

In the parishes I have joined since, I have, I hope, carried some of the NJ/Franciscan charism with me, as I have served on parish council, and sang in the choir, and facilitated NOVA programs with my wife Margie, etc. We have been meeting in our home with a circle of spiritual companions for the past 10 years. Still, I long for the spirit filled liturgies we experienced at New Jerusalem, and the variety of peace and justice ministries we were involved in.

It is my good fortune however, to live within 50 miles of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, where Sister Joan Chittister resides. Margie and I have been Oblates of Mount Saint Benedict for almost 20 years now. We were attending liturgy at the monastery every few months or so until Covid-19 closed things down. They are a small community of 100 or so mostly elderly sisters who are however very active and committed to peace and justice. As Oblates we support them financially and join with them in various public witness vigils. For the past five years we have also been participating in a public witness in front of our Warren County Pennsylvania courthouse, concerning issues such as the immigration crisis at our southern border, voter suppression, black lives matter, etc.

In summary, in my 77th year, I have to say *what a wonderful journey it has been*. I have been blessed to experience challenging and delightful times with both my Franciscan and Benedictine families. I will always cherish my time with the New Jerusalem Community. God is good.

Neil Himber

Nese Leigh

In 1973, I was a 16-year-old McAuley High school student. During this time, there was a charismatic renewal in the catholic church and all over the world and in other religions as well. Richard Rohr was a newly-ordained Franciscan priest teaching at Roger Bacon High School. Because of an event of the Holy Spirit coming on the students during his teaching he was now leading charismatic prayer meetings that eventually led to the Friday night prayer meetings at the Ursuline Academy gymnasium. Word spread of these meetings.

My mother, Dolores Leigh, introduced me to the New Jerusalem Community. Back then, the community had grown to approximately 1500 attendees at the Friday night prayer meetings. While I was in the New Jerusalem Community, I lived in the Juniper household in the Spring Grove area of Cincinnati. Others that lived with me in the household were Barbara Russell, Bonnie Kutsch, Marianne Brunner and Mary Carol Heiselman. I joined the music ministry and travelled with the retreat team giving charismatic retreats. We also travelled to New Mexico and I was assigned to teach music to the students. I was also part of the mime group that performed at the New Jerusalem Charismatic retreats throughout Ohio and other States. I lived in the Juniper household from 1975-1978. I left the community in 1979.

In 1981, I moved to Northern California with Mel Stenger and Gretchen Elbert Brice from the New Jerusalem Community. **The New Jerusalem Charismatic Community changed my spiritual life forever.**

Mike Lynch

Tom Shea, Lou Ross, and myself were on the "team" for that first TEC. Richard had asked the three of us to share what God was doing in our lives as a result of our own spiritual conversions prior to TEC so we gave our "testimonies", "witness" or whatever we called it back in the day. And so we were there the whole weekend, and in the Friary when everyone got "zapped." I was led to Richard early in 1971 as a result of my budding relationship with Sheree but that's a long story. In short, she challenged my spirituality which set me on a path that ultimately led to Richard and my involvement with what would become New Jerusalem. We started praying in the front room at the Friary which led to Mrs. Kremm's house, OLA, the Chapel at Ursuline, the gym at Ursuline, the Crosley mansion, and ultimately Winton Place. I might be off on the exact sequence. Yes, Dave Rieman is one of Sheree's cousins. The only person I remember from that first retreat was a guy named Pete Dunphy.

Sheree and I got married in 1974, and our first was born in 1975. Ultimately, our jobs, both of us going to school, and focusing on our relationship resulted in us "fading away" from the community. At the same time the community was changing, households were forming, and we didn't quite fit anymore.

Fifty years later, our relationship remains grounded in our experiences and learnings from New Jerusalem. We've been married 47 years, have 3 married children, and 7 awesome grandchildren. After NJ, we got involved with several parishes in various ministries. Today, Sheree owns and operates Positive Leaps, a pediatric mental health company that specializes in the treatment of very young children with moderate to severe behavior issues. I work for Sheree handling finances, marketing, and "other duties as assigned."

The relationship we had with Richard and NJ has forever changed our lives. I can't help thinking about the "Hound of Heaven" that Richard always used to talk about. Once you enter into a relationship with Jesus there's no going back. If you try, he just keeps pursuing you. Life has thrown us many challenges, but our faith has allowed us to grow through those challenges sometimes despite ourselves.

To paraphrase my favorite quote from Richard (from his ordination card): Such is the power of His giving that he gives us the power to give of ourselves. And then, as if by some Christic magic, life is transfigured, grace is everywhere, and we become God's miracle.

Joe, thanks so much for your efforts with the Facebook group, and your work with the committee to pull this off.

God Bless,

Mike (Michael P. Lynch)

Marilyn Maag

I was part of New Jerusalem when I was in high school and college, which was during the 1970s. I was such a young person, and yet so sincere in my spirituality and my desire to live out the Gospel life. I remember meeting with Tim Freeman, probably in 1975, to talk about my wish to be more committed and involved with New Jerusalem. I am grateful to him because with his support I was given the opportunity to live in the Magno Household on East Epworth Avenue in Winton Place. I believe I was only 19 years old at the time I moved in (and now I am amazed at my commitment at such a young age!).

I lived with both Roberta Tenbrink and Pat Brockman, two intelligent and independent women, who inspired me and affected the direction of my life. Elmer Fischesser and I were cooking partners, and neither of us was home during the day, so we made recipes from his cookbook, "Make It Now, Bake it Later." We would prepare casseroles in the evening and then bake them the next day for dinner. I remember Joe Magno telling me that the fresh spinach I added to a recipe tasted like sand because I had failed to wash it thoroughly!

I was beginning to learn to cook and, more importantly, learning to share a home with many different people. Most, or all, of the people I lived with were older than me and more experienced in all aspects of living. I listened to other people's thoughts and feelings, and began attempting to share my own. Life in the household was both fun and challenging.

I remember fun things we did as a household. Elmer Fischesser made a banana cream pie in something like a 9 x 13 inch pan; Steve and Mary Rae Carroll gave birth to their daughter, Clare; Tim Stanforth was a friend to me; Bob Stevenson, and those working with him, repaired, improved, and painted our home, to make it a comfortable place to live; Anne Magno, with her artistic style, made hot cross buns to celebrate Easter; Pat Brockman and I talked in the room that we shared; Roberta Tenbrink and I talked in her small room in the back of the house. Some people moved out of the house and others – like Sue Carfagna and Connie Deckenbach – moved in. I especially remember the joy of mass on Wednesday evenings with the New Jerusalem Community. I am grateful for the life-changing teachings, the excellent music, and the comfort of gathering with so many people I cared about.

I attended college at the University of Cincinnati while living at the Magno House, and I had no car and no money. I had worked to earn money to cover my living expenses while in college, and I turned the money over to my household. I remember packing a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and an apple in the morning, and then walking around the campus with not even a dollar in my pocket. To get to and from school, I caught rides with others, like Rob Martina and Bill Carlson, who were traveling to or near Clifton for school or work.

I left the household when Fred Miller and I got married. I got to know him at New Jerusalem and he is a special blessing in my life. He and I were part of a small faith community led by Ron and Chris Auer. In that small group I learned to care about, and share my life with, others of different ages and backgrounds, all pursuing spiritual growth and Gospel living. I stayed with my college education, and I graduated, and then I wanted to go out there into the world and make my own life. I wanted to grow in confidence and find my place in the world. As I write this, and remember my younger self, I am not surprised that I felt that way.

The training and the experiences of being part of New Jerusalem influenced the adult person I would become, my values, and my approach to God and spirituality. My spiritual journey continues to this day. I have been grateful throughout my life for the very unique experience of being right there at the heart of New Jerusalem for a time. Marilyn J. Maag

Paul Moore

I made the TEC retreat back in the spring of 1971 before Richard took over the TEC retreats. I can remember looking for the next step beyond the retreat and the Priest was not willing to give any support to any ongoing support beyond that retreat. But in the fall of 1971 when Richard was in charge of the TEC retreat he supported the retreatants in looking for the next step, which became New Jerusalem. I found out about New Jerusalem in the fall of 1972 and started coming. Thank you, Richard.

Paul Moore

Gayle Reichert

My spiritual life began in the narrow confines of the pre-Vatican II church. My god was elitist and he [sic] ruled with fear. I am grateful to the Franciscans, Father Richard, and New Jerusalem for their ongoing gifts which have revealed to me the God of love and forgiveness. Vatican II and the Community of Hope opened the door for me in 1967. Soon that group became so large that several satellites were formed. The satellite group my family stayed with went through what sociologists say is a common journey for intentional communities, growing to four times its original size, experiencing various ideological splits, natural attrition, and eventually in our case becoming too small to be able to pay the priests' stipends by the mid-1980s.

In 1989, I joined New Jerusalem and loved the energy, the music, the preaching, the optimism, and the immense pool of talent. "Not enough Indians" I wrote once on an evaluation sheet after a spirited Community meeting. I was referring to that old adage (albeit racist, I see now) "Too many chiefs and not enough Indians." There was so much talent, and so many extroverts, that I felt quite insignificant and could think of nothing to contribute. I loved it though in spite of my passive role.

The NJ split of twenty years ago came as no great surprise to me, having assumed all along that such things are inevitable. I missed that ever-flowing mountain of talent, and many of the NJ people who left and whose personalities had been a positive force in my life. However, as an introvert, I soon found myself participating at NJ for the first time because the group was smaller.

The slow transition from ordained celebrants to frequent celebrants and then to none at all did result in a re-emergence of my pre-Vatican II scrupulous self for a time, and I faithfully attended a second Mass in my local parish in addition to NJ. However, when Barack Obama became a candidate for president and the parish priest began openly preaching against him, I walked out twice and then came to the conclusion that God was not calling me to be there each Sunday.

I am eternally grateful to all the New Jerusalem members, especially those who have been my companions during these past 20 years in which inner peace is increasingly my constant companion. And I am eternally grateful to Richard Rohr whose teachings, especially in regard to the Universal Christ, have been a huge part of my life in the past 20 years. Today I give thanks to Richard for his ongoing writing, and for these NJ companions who speak of and live those teachings each and every day.

Gayle Reichert

Cindy Heiselman Schulte

We were part of NJ around 1973/74. My Mom Carol, my sister Mary Carol my brother Doug and myself. Mary Carol and I were in the "Entertainment Ministry." Haha! We would do little plays for nursing homes. This is part of a letter to me (Cindy Heiselman Schulte) from my sister (Mary Carol Heiselman Johantgen) when she lived in household at 759 E. Epworth around June 24, 1977. Mary Carol died too young at 37 on February 16, 1995.

"...The only thing I really want to do is live on a farm, raise sheep and have a garden.

I was talking to Joe Magno across the street (Joe & Ann Magno are heads of the house) while we were working in the garden. He is really a trip, he was picking beans and saying, "It's a hell of a life, a

farmers life – working close to the soil under the hot sun – toiling day after day.” I told him all I really wanted to do was be a farmer and he said to let it be known.

You see, I have this plan for the community to buy a farm and I would be a permanent member there. Then we would have everyone who wanted to, take turns staying there for about 3 months to learn what it is to live – to see the life and growing cycle of animals (most people have never seen anything being born). To see first-hand that a grain of wheat, which is alive, must die and be buried in the ground in order to amazingly bring about new life. Most people read or hear all this but they never see it, touch it, or experience it.

The Lord knows all this because he knows my heart... “They that wait upon the Lord” – you know how the song goes.....”

Mary Carol was a very unique person. She once told me when we were walking in a field, “Be careful, don’t step on the flowers.” She said that, I think, not because they were just pretty flowers but because they were alive and could feel the pain. She was an artist and botanist. She did end up having a garden and sheep. She had an area of her yard she let go wild because she was aware of nature and how it connected her to the Lord. She had a special place in Fort Ancient where she would sit and look at the beech trees. She would just “be” in the woods. She loved the woods...

New Jerusalem, Richard and John gave me a spiritual foundation to uphold me through all of life’s suffering. To quote Richard, “...we do not handle suffering; suffering handles us...” I am forever grateful for my time there and all I learned. Thank you all for being a part of that.

Maria Robbins Vanderwerker

It wasn’t until I was 18 and went away to college that I learned not everyone grew up like I did. I was unaware that not everyone grew up hearing “I love you” from their parents. Not everyone had both parents in their lives. Not everyone knew church as a community. It was my roommate freshman year who gently encouraged me to preface “the community” with ‘the church I grew up in’. Otherwise, she said it sounded like a cult. This is when I started to understand how lucky I was to have been raised in the New Jerusalem Community, to know my neighbors by name, and to have a true understanding of the word community.

Growing up in Winton Place and NJ had an immense impact on my life. Starting with a truly unique experience growing up in WP surrounded by community members and poor neighborhood kids; from working with John Quigley in Geneva, right out of college; to working with the Jesuits in Australia ten years later; to currently planning a family mission trip to Panama: this all started at NJ. My dad talks about how the community taught him to tell us kids every day and every night, “I love you.” I can’t imagine a life without those words from him. My mom dedicated her life to the six of us, to the community and to La Amistad. Her choices not only shaped my life, but helped continue to shape my decisions once I left the house. I could only hope to be half as selfless as she. I am blessed beyond measure to grow up with my cousins on the same block. My cousins are as close or closer than any siblings. We all recognize the gift NJ was to our larger family. We were able to grow up in the same church, same neighborhood, same friends, same faith, same everyday experience and love. It is surely the foundation that keeps all 13 of us still so close even as we spread across the country.

As a young adult traveling the world, it was truly amazing to experience peoples’ awestruck response when they learned I grew up in the New Jerusalem Community and was baptized by Richard Rohr. I remember two in particular. One lady in Switzerland treated me like a movie star and wanted to ask everything she could about my experience. Another young man in Australia literally reached out to touch me as if it were going to heal him in some way. Twice I’ve watched groups try to build an

intentional community forcing me to ask what was missing. Only decades later could I start to wrap my head around some of the things that made NJ so special. It was a blessed time and place for the holy spirit to burn ravenously. I'm eternally grateful for the adults who chose to give so much time and energy and money to truly make this church in a basement a community.

I value my childhood memories of going to mass barefoot, liturgical dances with ribbons, community picnics and the community musicals. And the music! The music and the spirit with which it was sung was and continues to be the strongest memory. I still sing our version of the Our Father to my kids every night. We are a blessed group of kids to grow up in NJ. Nothing compared. I've since learned to savor every bit of community I can find in various places, in and out of church. Thank you to all of you adults who were once the young adults building this community 50 years ago! I am eternally grateful!

Maria (Robbins) Vanderwerker