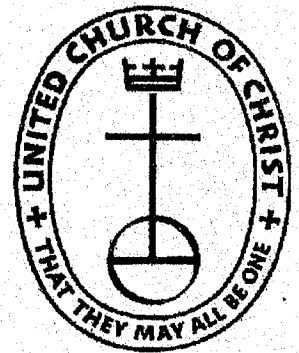


PASTORAL REMINISCING

by Ray Morris, Jr.

**A Summary Review of the
30 YEARS OF MINISTRY
of the FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
ANGOLA, NEW YORK
1967 - 1997**



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What follows is a year-by-year summary of the congregation's ministry during my 30 years as pastor. For the most part, the information was simply summarized from Pastor's Annual Reports.

You will notice, I hope, that something is missing. That is that I haven't listed many names. I haven't mentioned many names except as church employees changed. I didn't mention much about the Stitcheri, Guild, or choirs either. I even listed memorials without naming the donors. I hope the reason is obvious. After 39 years in the ministry I've learned that rather than slight some people, it is often best to avoid listing names. You are bound to miss someone!

I mention this at the beginning because I firmly believe the Church School Superintendents, Chairpersons of the Board, Organists and Choir Directors, Church Secretaries and Janitors have had a great deal to do with the effectiveness of our ministry. Their names are not listed here, but they are known by God and to many members of the congregation - and, hopefully, to themselves.

+ + + 1967 + + +

The first major task I faced when I became pastor was to help find a new choir director. A student at Fredonia, Maria Finelli was hired. We celebrated by purchasing new robes and stolls for the choir. In 1967 I had my first experience of preaching in a Roman Catholic Church - at an ecumenical Advent service at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Lakeview. Like many other congregations of the United Church of Christ, that first year together we began a study of the denomination's emphasis, "The Local Church in God's Mission".

+ + + 1968 + + +

Before the tragic fire on October 11, 1968, the Memorial Committee purchased a carrillon, Helen Landon was honored for her 12 years of serving as church secretary, the men were busy playing in a church volleyball league, Dan Belmondo was hired as choir director, and Bill Cox and I went to the National Religious Education Conference at Notre Dame. The church participated in a Community Vacation Church School at the First Church of Evans.

Of course, the night of Friday, October 11th is emblazoned in the memories of many people in Angola. That's the night our sanctuary was destroyed by fire. What can I say? I was at the football game at the high school. My neighbor Harold Bump came to get me. I ran the last part to the church due to a traffic jam on North Main Street. It was a severe blow - made easier, however, by the tremendous support and cooperation of the community.

+ + + 1969 + + +

The next two years were spent adjusting to interim locations and planning for the new building. We used eight different facilities - ending up by worshiping at the Angola Theatre and holding church school at Most Precious Blood School. The offices were next door at the Froehley home, then moved to the old basement of the church. In my Annual Report that year, I suggested:

"I think we have turned what might have been a crushing blow - the fire - into an opportunity or blessing. In 1969, churchmembers doubled their financial support. Significant improvements have been made in the church school and youth programs. Another study and revision of the By-Laws has begun. We have been involved in the most extensive experiment with worship this church has ever experienced."

In other words, we didn't simply "mark time" while the new sanctuary was being built. Nancy Ward was hired as our church secretary and Jim Ieda as choir director.

+ + + 1970 + + +

To get me away from the construction, the congregation sent me to Gowanda - not as a patient, but for 12-weeks of clinical training. Actually, the building went on with a minimum of strife. The architects drawings, financial plans, etc., were all approved unanimously by the congregation. Bill Houston was Chairman of the

Building Committee, Bob Engler the Clerk of the Works, and Wilford Clark led a crew of men in converting the heating in the old building to the new system. The cornerstone was laid on April 26th.

Placed in the stone were newspaper articles, newsletters and annual reports, UCC materials, and the names and addresses of those who attended the ceremony. The last few weeks before Dedication Sunday many people worked day and night, painting and getting ready for that first Sunday in the new church. That happened on September 13th, 1970 when three special services were held to dedicate the new sanctuary. An organ recital was held later that fall. Don Scarlett was the advisor for the Pilgrim Fellowship in 1970.

+ + + 1971 + + +

We began 1971 with a new program for the new building. We established the Community Nursery School that fall with Pat Minnick as the first Director. Dan Corbett, the Migrant Minister for the Buffalo and Erie County Council of Churches, had his office here. The church adopted a new Constitution and By-Laws with the Board of Trustees becoming the Executive Committee of the church.

Then, while attending the Annual Meeting of the New York Conference in Binghamton, I fell into an empty swimming pool. I fractured by hip, nearly severed a finger, and had to have plastic surgery on my head. I spent the next three months in bed and in a wheelchair. I'll always remember the ushers lifting my wheelchair up the steps into the chancel. I'll never forget the surprise Birthday Party in the church hall with the Bible Birthday Cake baked by Dot Wiser.

+ + + 1972 + + +

In 1972 we continued to do many of the same things but in new ways. We surveyed the congregation to see what type of worship service the members preferred. 35 new members were received and we improved communication among the committees and organizations of the church. We installed a new P.A. System with hearing aids - and also a fire alarm system connected directly to the Town Hall.

+ + + 1973 + + +

In the 110th year of the congregation, 1973, two former pastors returned to preach, the Rev. Hudson Phillips and the Rev. Worden Updyke. Many of our members participated in Angola's Centennial celebration. We held special services which included a walk to Most Precious Blood church. The Long Range Planning Committee began making plans, we started taping our worship services for shut-ins, held our first Strawberry Social, published a second Pictorial Church Directory, and began a Bible Study for adults.

+ + + 1974 + + +

Sally Mesi was hired as church secretary and Tom Zook as choir director. We participated in a Missions Festival sponsored by the Southtown's UCC churches in which Dr. Al Bartholomew was the keynote speaker. We started holding coffee hours after worship, p. 2

installed a new ceiling and lights in the old basement. Financially, we received \$3,182 more than the previous year and for the first time pledged the budget for the Rebuilding Fund.

+ + + 1975 + + +

Mady-ly Russi became our church secretary. The church adopted a Five-Year-Plan and installed a kitchenette in the church parlor. The Well Baby Clinics were held here and the Community Nursery School began mainstreaming with the Association for Retarded Children. A few eyebrows were raised with a Seder and Footwashing Service on Maundy Thursday. Yours truly was a delegate to the 10th General Synod of the UCC in Minneapolis.

+ + + 1976 + + +

The year of our nation's Bicentennial, 1976, we held several special services and installed a mobile in the sanctuary designed by Roberta Baer. We held our first church dance, "The Freedom Fling". The church honored six Deacons and Deaconesses, held a Family Camping Weekend, started a Divorce Support Group, and for a while held Saturday evening services.

During the March ice storm we served as a Red Cross Rescue Center. Dennis Dalglish was a Student Pastor here for the summer. Chris Morris was the Secretary and Anne Linehan the Director of the Community Nursery School. Our congregation helped organize the first Salvation Army Kettle Drive in the community.

+ + + 1977 + + +

During the Blizzard of '77 we were once again a Red Cross center. The blizzard left its mark for we had to install a new roof over the church hall at a cost of \$7000. Dennis Dalglish was ordained and our Conference Minister, Jim Smucker spent a weekend with us in the fall. Our church helped defeat a local referendum on casino-type gambling in Angola. The congregation adopted Guidelines for membership, baptisms, weddings and funerals. Denise DeJohn was hired as the church secretary. Yours truly went on a 3-week sabbatical to Israel and England. My father was the interim minister. We were welcomed home in royal style.

+ + + 1978 + + +

This was one of our best years financially. Not only did we make up a deficit, but we received \$23,982 more than was pledged - \$15,872 more than was even budgeted! This windfall made it possible to put a new roof on the parsonage and buy a new stove for the church kitchen.

Forty-one new members were received in 1978 - second in number only to 1980 when 46 new members were received. We held a Rededication Service in September repeating the service used in 1970. We hosted the Malone College Chorale and started a Junior Choir. David Matthewson was the choir director and Laura Heimburg the church secretary. I wrote a love letter to the congregation thanking the members for their support of the parsonage family during Thelma's serious illness.

+ + + 1979 + + +

In 1979 we started a church library, a Bell Choir, and an Adult Education program. Barry and Nita Dietsch were hired as choir directors. Trustees began serving as Head Ushers. The parsonage kitchen and downstairs bathroom were renovated. We held an Antique Show at the Middle School and our Church Picnic at the Dunkirk Conference Center. Vera McSkimming "signed" one of our worship services and Guy Berner and Gifford Swyers both preached during the year.

For the first time in my ministry, I was not in the pulpit on Easter Sunday. Due to Thelma's illness, I worked three-quarter time part of the year.

+ + + 1980 + + +

We sponsored a Laotian Refugee Family, the Eblums, housing them in a home on Beach Road. The church published another Pictorial Church Directory, painted the outside of the church, installed a new ceiling and lights in the new basement. The Confirmation Class went on a Heritage Trip to Pennsylvania. We had a visit from Elizabeth McClure, a UCC missionary in North India. Betha Scott was hired as church secretary. I attended my first retreat at Kirkridge in the Poconos. Yours truly shocked many in the congregation by announcing my separation and intention to divorce.

+ + + 1981 + + +

Saysamone Eblum and his family left us and went to the state of Washington. We purchased a high speed tape duplicator and a new mimeograph machine. A special dinner was held to burn our 10-year mortgage with the UCC. \$9818 dollars was raised for benevolences. Siding was installed on the parsonage. Antiphonal speakers were added to the organ. Don Heimborg began as our janitor. May 24, 1981 my father officiated as I was married at the church to Tamara Schreiber Mariani.

+ + + 1982 + + +

The whole community was frightened by the news that Bethlehem Steel was closing. Still, before recession set in, we installed new fans in the sanctuary and a new furnace at the parsonage. Fifty from our congregation attended the Western Association's German Night at the Club Lorelei in Lakeview. The Confirmation Class went on a Heritage Trip to Washington, D.C. The first of five Annual Men's Golf Tournaments was held at the Elkdale Country Club with a steak dinner at Ronnie Clark's cabin. Laura Mott became the Director of the Community Nursery School and Nancy Nelson Elsenheimer was ordained at a special service here in the sanctuary.

+ + + 1983 + + +

For the first three months of the year I was on sabbatical studying Biblical Spirituality at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora. Lay members of the congregation led our worship services - supplemented by Cheri Farr-Keipper and other guest ministers. The

church prepared another Lenten devotional booklet with messages written by members. The last of the Confirmation Heritage Trips went to Philadelphia. We sold UCC bumper stickers. That fall we began a new confirmation program using Church Friends as teachers. Enrollment in the Nursery School doubled and went from 2 to 4 classes. Members of our congregation helped start Operation Good Neighbor which began by feeding over 400 people a day.

+ + + 1984 + + +

A Junior Youth Group was formed with Laura Mott as advisor. A change was made to hold worship and church school at separate hours - 9:00 church school and 10:30 worship. Meals on Wheels began using our facilities. The church sponsored a Personal Finance Seminar and conducted an Every Member Visitation in connection with the annual finance campaign. A thorough evaluation was done of the pastor. Yours truly received an excellent rating with many fine strokes. The highlight of the year for many was the dedication of a ramp-entrance making the building accessible to people in wheel-chairs.

+ + + 1985 + + +

We held our first Winter Picnic at the Middle School. An Easter Vigil was held the night before Easter. We implemented a new structure of committees by combining several of the existing committees. The Senior Youth Group was started with Ronda and Amos Marvel as advisors. Along with the pastor, six of our members attended a Spiritual Renewal Retreat at Christ the King Seminary sponsored by the Southtown's Cluster of UCC churches.

* * * 1986 + + +

My Pastor's Annual Report listed the following highlights:

- continuing two active youth groups;
- starting a prayer group which meets regularly on Wednesdays;
- burning a mortgage four years ahead of schedule;
- drafting a Theological Vision Statement;
- a significant increase in our benevolence giving
- sponsoring a refugee from Iran, Javad Bozorgzad.

Although the Theological Vision Statement dealt with many controversial subjects and was a year in the making, it was adopted at a Congregational Meeting without much dissention. The statement promises the right of members "to follow the dictates of their own conscience" as guaranteed in the church's Constitution and By-Laws. Some of the significant points include that "We accept the responsibility that every generation has to make its faith relevant - and for all individuals and churches to witness to what they believe... Our goal is to be inclusive rather than exclusive... Although we respect historical tradition, we also believe God speaks in new and different ways. In this sense, we do not propose that this is a full or complete statement of what we believe. In fact what we have not said is more important than this statement since most of what we believe cannot be expressed in human words...."

The church held its second "Fun Night" or variety show sponsored by the Senior Choir. A bequest of \$36,000 was received from Ruth Helwig.

+ + + 1987 + + +

This was a very good year financially. Despite an \$18,000 deficit budget, we ended the year with our \$9000-Pledge to OCWM paid and a balance of over \$2,000 in the General Fund. 103% of what was pledged was paid - compared to only 88% the year before.

We celebrated our 20 years together and I was presented a beautiful new stoll and \$200. Our ladies hosted the Western Area's Fall Fellowship Day. We installed directional signs both inside and outside the building, held a Day of Recollection at the beginning of Lent, and began using Lay Readers in our worship services. We also started using the new UCC Book of Worship which we had previously used on an experimental basis. We mailed out over 8000 brochures about our church in the Pennysaver. We paved the church parking lot.

+ + + 1988 + + +

Over 100 people took part in our 125th Anniversary Pageant, Stars Lighting Up the Sky in 1988. Directed by Gene Burch and written by yours truly, the pageant told the history of the church in seven scenes and was presented in the church hall. In addition to saving the script, the pageant was videotaped and preserved for posterity. Reuben Sheares was a Guest Speaker in February, we had an Anniversary Dinner and presented the Great Parade. The Rev. Richard Bredenberg, husband of Huldah (Dawson) Bredenberg a daughter of the congregation, preached here in June.

Other activities included sponsoring the Covenant Players at Lake Shore High School, the Senior Choir presented Handel's Messiah, the Trustees had an afternoon retreat at Donna Straub's, and the church school began using a new curriculum. Our Quasqui-centennial was a very good year!

+ + + 1989 + + +

1989 was the year of my sabbatical. The Rev. Donald Huber substituted for six weeks and we exchanged churches and houses with the Rev. Howard Sharp and his family from Pontypridd, Wales. The exchange proved to be a good experience for both congregations and families.

Another highlight was the Testimonial Dinner for Mary Greene honoring her for 60 years of serving as our church organist. One of the lowlights was when the waterpipes broke in the old church basement. We raised \$11,400 for a new roof over the church hall, held a Seder Meal on Maundy Thursday, published a new Pictorial Directory, installed cushions on the pews and new microphones in the balcony. We continued with the Church Camping Weekend at Arkwright, Vacation Church School and the Winter Picnic at the Middle School. The church hall was formerly dedicated and named in memory of former pastor, the Rev. Worden Updyke. Two portraits were hung in Updyke Hall. David Eckles began as our janitor in June.

+ + + 1990 + + +

1990 was the year of the Capital Funds Campaign. Kicked off

with a spaghetti dinner in June. \$70,000 was pledged - over half of which was contributed in cash. A new roof was placed over the offices, our debts were paid, and the balance was invested to start a Trust Fund for an endowment.

A Personal Service Auction was held raising over \$1500. The women hosted the Community World Day of Prayer Service. We returned to having worship and church school both at the same time. Healing Services were held for four months on an experimental basis, then discontinued due to small attendance. A Harvest Home service was held in the fall. New bells and tables were purchased for the Bell Choir. Two computers and a printer were purchased for the church offices. Jim and Annette Ieda were hired to direct the choirs while Barry Dietsch was on a year's sabbatical.

After 33 years of collating and preparing the Newsletter for mailing, Inez Ahlers retired. Dwynell Milliken retired as Editor of the Newsletter after 18 years of service.

+++ 1991 +++

World and national events dominated the church's life in 1991. Week after week we prayed to God about the War in the Persian Gulf and for the release of hostages held in Beirut. In cooperation with the Lake Shore Association of Christian Churches, we sponsored a Military Family Support Group and an Ecumenical Peace Service. Conflict developed between the pastor and some trustees regarding Christian commitment and patriotism.

Our congregation joined 12 other churches in May for a celebration of the ministry of the Rev. John Spencer who found many of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches in WNY. We held another Personal Service Auction, Winter Picnic, Vacation Church School, and gathered food for the hungry at our Harvest Home Service. In September, we held a Homecoming Service during which many former members either brought or sent greetings. In spite of a budget deficit of over \$20,000, we ended the year in the black. However, we were \$2532.00 short in our Benevolence Budget.

+++ 1992 +++

We began the year with a visit from our Conference Minister, Bill Briggs. In February I received the Outstanding Citizen Award by the Evans-Brant Chamber of Commerce. We had another successful Personal Service Auction and Winter Picnic. Although there was rain, the Strawberry Social went very well. There was great response to the special appeal for a new roof for the sanctuary. We over-subscribed the cost by more than \$400 dollars. The Capital Funds Campaign began its third year with the good news that \$58,063.71 has been raised and \$33,000 of this has been invested. 45 pledges are paid in full; 44 are current; and only 13 pledges to the Capital Fund are behind.

+++ 1993 +++

The church's 130th Anniversary Year was memorable in many respects. A special Anniversary and Homecoming Service was held on September 19th. The theme was "The past must be abandoned to God's mercy, the present to our fidelity, the future to divine providence." Pictures were taken for a new Pictorial Directory which was distributed at the beginning of 1994.

In order to save from borrowing from a bank, 22 of our families offered 3-year promissory notes. We repaved the church parking lot, held a Talent Dollar program of sharing individual gifts, and hosted a meeting of the NY Conference Executive Council in February. We had a debate about purchasing the Sciarrino Property next to the church. At a congregational meeting, the vote was 34 families opposed to the purchase and 33 in favor. The matter was tabled.

Irene Chisholm, Krista Dietsch, Michelle Geouge and the pastor went to General Synod in St. Louis. The church hosted the Western Area Youth (WAY) Retreat. The Trustees held a planning retreat at Christ the King Seminary.

+++ 1994 +++

Two of our members visited our Partner Church in Nicaragua, Mision Cristiana - Tom Cyphert and Krista Dietsch, along with Wendy Urrutia from NYC. In May we hosted three visitors from Nicaragua - Pillar, Adonis and Carlos.

We exceeded our goal for the UCC Make A Difference Campaign by contributing \$10,556.00. We purchased 250 New Century Hymnals, repaid the roof over the church offices at a cost of \$2,275.00, placed stone in the driveway at the parsonage, updated equipment with a new digital printer, HP printer, postage meter and scale, and tape duplicator. The church newsletter was named **THE MESSENGER**, a name suggested by Nan Clark and the design by Bill Doherty. The men held a Spaghetti Dinner in February. Irene Chisholm and I attended a Global Missions Seminar at Camp Hill, Pa.

I was on sabbatical during June, July and August. I did individual study part of the time, then Tammy and I took a trip out west visiting some of the national parks. We saw a World Cup soccer match between Russia and Camaroon at Stanford University. Jack Bacon, a student at Christ the King Seminary, was our student minister for the summer. His enthusiasm and interest were well received by the congregation.

+++ 1995 +++

The 132nd year of our congregation was a good one. We ended the year with a balance of \$6,424.28. I visited Mision Cristiana in Nicaragua for 10 days and we hosted a visit from Pilar Ramirez Obando and Miguel Casco. The church co-sponsored a Youth Forum at the Middle School which assessed youth problems in our community. We held another Homecoming Service and Dinner. New blue Advent paraments were made and dedicated.

Vacant staff positions were filled with "Interim" appointments - Elaine Vincent as Church School Superintendent, Kelly Heimburg as Cherub Choir Director, and Tamara Morris as Bell Choir Director. Additional tapes were purchased for the carillon. Prisoners from Collins painted the inside of the church. We had the first Super Sub Sale.

+++ 1996 +++

For the first time in many years we did not have to borrow money. Our debt was paid off to the bank, so all we owe now is \$15,000 to members and ourselves. The reason for our financial success is a large end-of-the-year gift of \$16,400 by one of our members, and the funds raised by the Super Sub Sales.

We honored our Treasurer, Ronda Marvel, for her 13 years of service. We tried Saturday evening services at 6:00 pm for a few months. We had an experimental Tuesday Youth program during which 5th to 9th grades had their religious education programs on Tuesdays in conjunction with Junior Choir. A new carillon was purchased with funds from the Memorial Fund. My wife and I donated a Peace Pole which was planted between the bell and the driveway. In Seneca, Spanish, German and English, the Peace Pole asks "May peace prevail on earth"! Tammy and I attended the Five City Conference in Amiens, France in October, vacationing the week before in Paris.

+++ 1997 +++

Except for the improving financial picture due to the Super Sub Sales, we continued to do business as usual. We had another Winter Picnic, participated in the Lenten services and covered dish suppers with the Southtown's Cluster, and held a successful Vacation Church School with over 125 students attending. The church contributed over \$4000 to the Dunkirk 75th Anniversary Campaign. We had visits from Dr. Jorg Ettemeier from Dortmund, Germany and Dr. Jorge Bardequez from Nicaragua. We also hosted a visit by the Rev. Doris Moncado Membreno and the Rev. Flor Justina Mendoza Ponce from Nicaragua.

The Tuesday Youth program was discontinued and we returned to classes for 5th to 9th grades during the Sunday worship time. The church voted to give the pastor a housing allowance, then later decided to sell the parsonage. The Morrisises moved to Gowanda on June 23rd. We are in the process of publishing a Hymnal Supplement which will be included in the pew racks along with the new UCC hymnal. It has been a busy summer for the pastor. Between June and August I had 12 funerals and 10 weddings. We are holding a 30th Anniversary and Homecoming Service and Dinner on September 28th.

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WOW! That is my personal reaction to what we have been able to accomplish together with God's help. I am overwhelmed by what we have done in ministry - both for the community and for ourselves.

Again, this is "a summary review" and does not highlight what has been done here week after week and year after year. These past 30 years we have received 646 new members - 226 of whom were confirmands. I have baptized 412 persons, conducted 300 weddings and 382 funerals. I have manuscripts for 1297 sermons. Fortunately, a more detailed history is available for these 30 years in annual reports, minutes of congregational meetings, bulletins and newsletters. In fact, these 30 years are so well documented the historical records probably tell more than anyone will ever want to know.

Unfortunately, there are serious gaps in the earlier history of the congregation. There are good records about the early years, but we have nothing for some of the years in the 1930's. There are annual report booklets from 1949 to the present, bulletins and newsletters, a Music History prepared by Mary Greene, and the historical pageant "Stars Lighting Up the Sky" from the 125th Anniversary. More than what is in the church's archives, however, what matters most is the fond memories we each treasure in our hearts.

One of the hymns in our new hymnal which has become a favorite offers a good perspective on our years of ministry together. It's written by Natalie Sleeth.

"In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise; butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter, there's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future; what it holds a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see."

