

Gregg, Gene, and Tom Zeisler

Saint Peter Church began when a group of people petitioned the Saint Louis Archdiocese for a German speaking parish. Saint Charles Borromeo existed but it was for the French and English speaking people, like those in French Town. Various relatives of the Zeisler brothers have been Saint Peter parishioners throughout the years.

Their mom was from Minnesota. Her heritage goes back to France and Quebec, Canada and her family still owns land in Quebec. She spoke French fluently. Their mom studied to be a lab technician in Minnesota and later Mississippi. She eventually moved to Saint Charles, where she rented a room from Ralph Elmendorf's parents. She worked at Saint Joseph Hospital.

Their parents were married at Saint Peter Church in 1934 by Father Charles Weinig. Their dad, Joe, worked as a car mechanic at Brucker Motor Sales. Their mom, Jeanette, was a housewife. There were four sons: Gregg, Jim, Gene, and Tom. Jim passed away in June 2024.

Their dad passed away in 1972 and their mom in 1988. Mike Hannon, the cemetery keeper, came here in 1972 from Ireland. The first grave that he hand dug was for the Zeisler's dad. (He dug every grave by hand, even into his eighties.)

All the Zeisler brothers went to Saint Peter Grade School. They all have memories of playing softball and dodgeball at recess in grade school. Home plate was near Clay, now First Capitol) where the exit is. The church windows had steel mesh on them to protect them from batted balls. (The chapel had not yet been built.) They were able to walk home for lunch but some children brought lunch if they couldn't go home. They ate lunch quickly so they could get back to school to play ball.

Gregg was seven when WWII started in 1941. Both Gregg and Gene remember collecting cans and metal so the government could recycle them. School children saved money for War Bonds. (This was like collecting Eagle Stamps.) Children could buy a stamp for a dime. They received a bond when they had \$18.75. There were also fundraisers. Bingo was played outside on all the parking lots. Corn kernels were used for the markers.

Gregg remembers during World War II, the ACF plant was building tanks and testing them on the city streets, including Clay Street in front of Saint Peter Church.

Gregg made his First Communion in second grade. Boys wore white outfits. He should have been confirmed in third grade with his classmates but he contracted scarlet fever. Their house was quarantined. The brothers remembered people as dropping off food.

The brothers remember that their mom made them book bags from denim cloth. They could put their First Communion prayer book, Adoremus, in the front pocket.

All the Zeisler brothers were altar servers. It was normal for all boys to serve at Mass, but it was something they wanted to do. Until Vatican II, Mass was in Latin and the priest faced the main altar. The Epistle and Gospel were read on different sides of the altar. The altar servers had to move the heavy stand, which held the book for the Mass, from side to side and up the stairs. Normally the stand was wooden but it was a heavy brass stand for Holy Days.

There were four servers for a High Mass and twelve torch bearers (acolytes) for a Solemn High Mass. The Choristers (the grade school boys' choir) sat up front. There were three priests. The Zeisler's described the altar as being loaded with people.

Gregg and Jim were in the Choristers. In eighth grade as a Chorister's boy soprano, Jim sang Silent Night in German at Midnight Mass. Greg had sung Silent Night in English the year before.

When the Zeisler's were young, people could not eat between midnight and Mass time if they wanted to receive Communion. After Mass, Gregg remembers on First Friday's they would go to Cottage Bakery, where Pio's is now. They could buy a whole coffee cake for a quarter. Tom remembers on First Friday's they would go to Locust Hill Dairy on the corner of 2nd Street and Clay before Mass and buy doughnuts and chocolate milk. They would keep these things on the windowsill of the class and eat after Mass.

Tom remembers a Saint Peter High School teacher, Coach Don Anielak, while teaching, would sit on the windowsill when it was very hot. There was no air conditioning then. He would have students get him a shake at the confectionary.

Gregg, Jim, and Gene went to Saint Peter High School. Tom was at Saint Peter High School for two years until Duchesne opened in the fall of 1956. They could all walk to Saint Peter High School because they lived in the 600 block of Jackson Street. Tom had to get rides to Duchesne because there was no school bus.

Children from Portage, Saint Peters (Missouri), Saint Charles Borromeo, the Sacred Heart Academy, and Saint Mary's in Bridgeton attended Saint Peter High School. Families from Saint Mary's could choose between Saint Peter High School or Mercy High School.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame taught at Saint Peter High School and Grade School. There was one lay teacher who taught physical education and driver's education. Sister Cyprian was the principal but Monsignor Strauss really ran the school as well as the parish.

Father Bromschwig was the president of Duchesne and celebrated Mass at the school. Father went to other parishes between his time at Duchesne and Saint Peter.

Gregg was in the Glee Club (chorus) in high school and also played trombone in the band. He stated that Sister Ambrose taught both choir and band and must have worked twenty hours per day. In 1950 when Gregg was a sophomore, it was the 100th Anniversary of Saint Peter Church. All classes performed skits in the auditorium. Gregg said, "My front teeth got loose from practicing so much."

Jim played the trumpet in the Saint Peter High School band and was also in the Glee Club.

Gene attended Saint Peter High School for three years. He quit school to go into the Army. Since he was only seventeen, his parents had to sign papers for him. He was trained for the Korean War but it ended and he was stationed in Germany for two and one half years. Sister Cyprian, the principal, wrote to him when he was in the Army. When Gene came back, he attended O'Fallon Tech and got his high school diploma.

Tom played baseball and basketball. The high school was part of the Catholic League of Saint Louis. They played Chaminade, Saint Francis deSales, Mercy, Eugene Coyle, Saint Joseph's High, and Cathedral High of Belleville (now Althoff), among others.

The brothers mentioned that Ken Heintzelman went to Saint Peter High School. He was born in 1915 and pitched in the World Series.

Both Gregg and Gene mentioned Clay Street, which is now called First Capitol Drive. During their school days, it was the only highway through town. It was the USHWY 40 Bypass (which was replaced by Highway 70) and Missouri Route 94. USHWY 40 exited town via "The Bridge" which became the

MOHYW 115 bridge, and was razed in the 1990's. Highway 94 continued over Second Street on its way to North Saint Charles County on to Portage. Trucks trying to climb the hill sometimes had trouble because they were not as powerful as today's trucks, and consequently, could easily be heard inside the high school class rooms, just like the previously mentioned Army tanks. On work days, Sunday nights and holidays, it was necessary to have city policeman directing traffic at the bridge and other street corners on the route. Gregg and Jim both worked at the Saint Charles Dairy store on Clay Street. On Sundays and holiday nights, "week enders" passing through town to return to Saint Louis, or from cabins on the Mississippi River, sometimes caused traffic to move so slowly that a person could jump out of a car, run into the store, get some ice cream, and get back to the car before it had moved very much.

Gregg has been married for 61 years to Janet (Moers). She was from East Saint Louis and they met at McDonnell Aircraft. Greg was there for 37 years and worked in Accounting, was then Vice President - Controller, and then the Vice President - Business Management. He and Janet have three children.

Jim was married in 1974 at Saint Charles Borromeo to Joanne (Heinsz). He worked at Control Data Service Bureau as a computer programmer. Gene said: "His brain worked like a machine." He worked in payroll processing, including for the football and baseball Cardinals.

Gene was married in 1962 at Assumption in O'Fallon to Mary (Mennemeier). He and Jim both worked at Midwest Modeling. Then Gene drove a tractor trailer at Kroger for 22 years, National for 10 years, and then SUPERVALU. He and Mary have three children.

Tom was married in 1961 to Barbara (Keithly) at Saint Peter. He worked at TWA loading planes and Customer Service for 10 years, as a Customer Service instructor for 18 years, and then as a Supervisor in the Ticket Office. He worked at American Airlines for two years in administration. He and Barb got to go to London and Paris and many other places in the world. When the 747's were first in service, he and Barb flew from New York to Los Angeles and back to Saint Louis so that he would be knowledgeable about the plane. He and Barb have three children.

When the Zeisler brothers were younger, men always wore hats. There were spring loaded buttons on the back of pews to hold hats. Women needed to cover their heads at Mass. Most women wore hats.

There were four sections of pews (two on the left and two on the right). People dropped money into a glass box in the back of church at Sunday Mass for a "pew rental". There was felt on the bottom for sound proofing so people couldn't hear when a dime was dropped in the box.

There used to be a “real” Midnight Mass because it started at midnight. There was no Mass on Christmas Eve. There was a nine day Christmas Novena at 7:30 each night. It originally ended on Christmas Eve, but was changed to end on December 23 so that people would not have to be there on Christmas Eve to complete the Novena.

During Lent, a prayer service, sermon, and Benediction were held on Sunday evenings at 7:30. Starting on Passion Sunday and ending on Holy Saturday, all statues and pictures, except the large crucifix, were covered with purple cloths. On Good Friday, everything else was black, including the vestments. On Good Friday, there was a three hour devotion from 12:00 to 3:00. In some years it was based on the Seven Last Words of Jesus. There were lots of homilies and Holy Communion was not distributed.

On Holy Saturday, the Mass was from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. (This is like our current Holy Saturday evening Mass.) When Gregg was in school, the Glee Club members sang for this Mass. It was mostly Gregorian Chant, and of course, he didn't know what he was singing. Lent ended at noon on Holy Saturday.

They were required to fast every day in Lent except Sunday. They abstained on all Friday's and Ash Wednesday.

Pentecost (Monday) Picnic was held at Blanchette Park. First through twelfth graders marched in the parade. There was a band and dance.

There was also a long Communion rail, which was partially removed after Vatican II in the 1960's. Gene has an interesting story about the first time he saw people receiving Communion in the hand, which was in Canada. He had never seen this before and didn't know what they were doing. He didn't go to Communion.

The Zeisler brothers have all been very active in the church community. Gregg and Jim were very active in the Young Men's Dramatic Club (YMDC), which at one time did plays and minstrels. Their dad and uncles used to be involved in these performances. Gregg, Jim, and Gene used to set pins in the YMDC bowling alleys, which were in the basement of the high school. There was also a pool table, ping pong table, places to play cards, and a bar with a TV set.

Gregg has been singing in the choir and/or cantoring for over 50 years. He's gone through a dozen organists. Originally, lectors also served as cantors. Bill Boschert called Gregg to ask him to be an usher. Gregg told him he couldn't because he was going to be a lector/cantor. That's how it started. Gregg was the treasurer of the picnic for 40 years. He was recruited by Tom's father-in-law, Vince Keithly in

the early 1960's. Father Wesloh said that Vince told him that Gregg was taking over the next year. When Gregg retired, Father Bromschwig asked him if he could do the church financial reports. After all these years, he's still on the Finance Council. He worked on the Archdiocesan Development Fund (now Annual Catholic Appeal) at the parish and Archdiocese for many years. He "roped in" all his brothers to help on all these jobs.

Jim was also in the choir for a long time. The Zeisler brother's relatives were musical, and the family would stand around the piano and sing at parties.

Gene has been part of the Thursday Maintenance Group for 22 years. They rebuilt the chandeliers in church. They had to take them down one at a time and rewire them. He worked here every day doing that. New glass was made for them. He was an usher for many years. Old ushers are "always ushers" because they're always tidying up the church.

Tom sang in the church choir and now just in the Resurrection Choir for funerals. He has been head of the Cemetery Board for 15 years. He took it over from Irv Rufkahr. He was reading the church directory and saw that he was listed as the head. Father Bauer said: "God chose you." Three times per year, the old flowers are taken out. Monuments need to be approved, although Mary Lorenz has worked with funeral homes so they know the regulations for the monuments. People will sometimes call with complaints.

All the Zeisler brothers have been very involved with the Knights of Columbus. Council 823 started at Saint Charles Borromeo. Many members were from ACF because the Grand Knight in 1903 worked there. The ACF connection is how it also became associated with Saint Peter. Gene has been very involved for years. He has been Knight of the Year, and the Grand Knight in the 2000's. There have been over 1,000 members in many years.

All the Zeisler brothers are daily Mass goers. Gregg stated, "Our dad used to say we should go to church every time the bell rings."