



Being a part of St. John the Baptist parish has been a cornerstone throughout my entire life beginning with my baptism in 1948. Five generations were/are active parishioners beginning with my grandparents, my parents (Clement and Regina Napierala), myself and my wife Tonie, our children, and now our grandchildren.

So many changes not only to our church, but also to the Mass have occurred since the 50s. One of my earliest memories was assisting at Mass as an altar boy. At that time Mass was said exclusively in Latin and the hosts were distributed directly to the individual on their tongue. Part of my job as an altar boy was to hold a plate under the chin of the parishioner receiving their host at the communion rail so it would not possibly fall and hit the floor. One of the highlights for me serving at summer Masses was the opportunity to bike 5.5 miles to Edgar on my 1958 Rollfast bicycle crossing a significantly less busy Highway 29.

In my younger years at St. John's School, my sister Judy and I stayed at our grandparents (Pete and Frances Napierala), who lived to the southeast of where the original church stood on 4th Street. This was due to the fees that children who attended parochial schools would be required to pay to be bussed to and from school. So, as Grandpa Pete was the janitor at St. John's, Judy and I got the privilege to help clean and sweep the floors at school. We remember having to be careful to not tip the wooden desks to avoid spilling the ink in the inkwells in classrooms where fountain pens were used.

Other jobs we helped Grandpa Pete complete were clearing the 12 front steps of the church and the sidewalks of snow and ice as well as keeping the coal bins for the church, school, rectory, and convent full. Due to having no phones or cellphones, Father Cramer or the nuns would have to walk to Grandpa Pete's house to ask for help when the furnaces stopped working; you can bet though they didn't stop working due to a lack of coal in the coal bins.

As janitor, another part of Grandpa Pete's job was to ring the bells; this was one of the best parts of helping grandpa with his work. The south tower bell was rung at least 3 times a day for morning Mass, Angelus at noon and at 6:00 p.m. The north tower bell was used for Sunday Masses, funerals, and other special occasions. I remember ringing the bells in 1958 when Pope John XXIII was elected.

Through the years, Charlie Lang and I were often called upon to take on projects for St. John's at the school and church. In 2008, we were "volun-told" to inspect the malfunctioning church bells. This proved to be quite the project requiring replacing the deteriorated timbers supporting the bells in both towers.

The new hardwood timbers were generously donated by Myszka Lumber Mill. The hydraulic jacks to hold up the bells and all our tools were pulled up 30 feet outside the church alongside the new timbers.

Another memorable project we were called upon to spearhead was improving the hardwood floors at school. We started by refinishing a few rooms each year; by the end of three years all the classrooms were restored. This was a long-term project supported by not only Charlie and myself but also many other parents and students to sand the 5,800 square feet of floor by hand, as well as with power machines. This continues to be maintained yearly by cleaning with the power scrubber and finishing with a coat of sealer.

My early years assisting my grandpa influences my drive to serve and support my parish. It has been my privilege to serve alongside so many other individuals who support our parish by taking on projects like re-insulating the rectory, but also ones like spending a couple hours on Thursdays with a fun group of people to prep for the Lenten fish fries.

Our parish is full of committed members who don't hesitate to take responsibility for the well-being and growth of our parish church, school, and family. I have always admired those who have the courage and foresight to grow and continue to build our blessed community, just like the pioneers who founded our parish 125 years ago. It is my hope to continue to support our parish for many years to come and I consider myself very honored to be a member of St. John's.

The Tom Napierala Family



Pictured: Tom Napierala (class of 1962), wife Tonie (class of 1966), daughter Jenna (class of 2001), and granddaughter Claire who is currently attending St. Johns. The photo is of Tom's dad, Clement Napierala and Tonie's mom Florence (Knetter) Feltz who were part of the 1934, 8th grade graduating class.