

Growing Up at the Church of St. Michael and St. George

Ask Becky Melander and Lily Ott when they began attending The Church of St. Michael & St. George, they answer: always. The sisters, who grew up on Cecil Avenue with their parents, Bob and Liza Streett, can't remember a time when the church wasn't a part of their lives. Through baptism, confirmation, marriage and the births of their own children, St. Michael and St. George has been a constant.

Now they are all grown up and experiencing the church in a new way. Becky and her husband, Matt, have three daughters Willa, 8, Addie, 6, and Lucy, 4. Lily and her husband, Dave, have two daughters, Annabelle, 10, and Caroline, 8. Both are involved in various ways with the church. Despite their busy schedules, the sisters took the time to share some of their fondest memories of growing up in the church.

Living in the Neighborhood . . .

Becky: The church had a junior choir and that is what I did every Thursday. I'd scamper down the street from my house to go to choir practice.

Lily: I remember Mrs. Glickert (who lead the junior choir). When I see her at church now she looks the same as she did then with her long, blonde ponytail.

Every Thursday after school we would run down to the church. Our grandmother worked there, too. She was the rector's assistant. So we would see her and chat with her and go to choir practice.

One of the big things was living right up the street from the church. It felt like our territory because it was part of the neighborhood. We weren't just there on Sunday. We felt comfortable just walking in whenever we felt like it.

Becky: As little kids I remember, and mom said she did this too, whenever there was a wedding we would sit on the two benches outside the entrance to the church with some of our neighborhood friends. We would wait for the bridesmaids to come out and we'd try to guess what color their dresses would be. We would sit there and watch the brides. Looking back now that I'm married, that must have been so cute for the brides to have these little kids wanting to see you all dressed up coming out of the church.

Lily: I was sitting on the bench one day and I was probably eight or ten and out came my preschool teacher and I said, "Miss Star!" She said, "I'm not Miss Star anymore; I'm Mrs. [whatever her new name was]." It was such a surprise to see one of my preschool teachers walk out of the church all dressed up and fancy.

Memories of Ed Salmon . . .

Becky: I remember Ed Salmon up there preaching. He arrived while we were kids. Rev. Salmon had such an authoritative, commanding presence and he did everything with such confidence and in diction you could really understand. He was methodical and rhythmic. We knew his kids because they lived right down the street from us. Mrs. Salmon was such a great pianist. She had two pianos in the living room.

At one point she had taught cheerleading or gymnastics and I was trying out for cheerleading that year. I wasn't very good so my mom suggested I have her give me some pointers. I didn't make the team and I was really sad, but she tried to teach me how to better my skills.

I see Rev. Salmon now and even though he is older I still see him the same way. He is the patriarch of that church.

Lily: The Salmons were always so warm and welcoming. They just had this exuberance about them. I remember when the Barrett family, who lived next door, had a goldfish die. I think Claire Barrett had a goldfish that died and we went down to the church to ask someone to do a service for us. He put on his full regalia. He dressed up, brought his prayer book and came up. We had a little candy coffin from Halloween that we emptied out so we could put the fish in it. He was very serious about it; we weren't being silly. He had a real service for this goldfish. He did the whole thing and we had a reception afterward with vanilla wafers and apple juice in the Barrett's driveway. I remember the whole thing. We buried it and everything. And then we processed back down the street.

Attending Church School . . .

Becky: I remember Church School. Going upstairs for children's chapel. There was a little chapel with little pews and a little mini-organ. I remember saying the Lord's Prayer. (The chapel was located in the space that currently is the St. Michael School music room.)

Lily: What I really remember as a kid was Mrs. Clifford walking up and down the hallway ringing the bell. She was like the master of ceremonies.

Becky: And that meant class was over. We'd run down the stairs and try to get cookies. We didn't have donuts. We had those little cookies with the red, sticky jam in the middle. They were shaped like stars. We were all trying to get those before they ran out.

Becky: Church School was really focused on the Bible. I remember in one class we would read Bible excerpts. I remember mispronouncing a few words and being a little embarrassed. We studied different parts of the Bible and we'd play

games like sorting the Old and New Testaments, the different books. It was serious.

Lily: Mom said she did teach, but not when we were kids. I think she taught before she had kids.

Becky: I don't remember the teachers being parents I knew. They probably were parents, just not parents of the kids in the class at the time necessarily.

Becky: The other thing I remember about chapel is that we didn't receive communion until we were confirmed. We had to cross our hands over our chests and receive a blessing. Now they let little kids take communion. I was surprised when I walked into chapel and my kids were receiving communion.

Participating in the Youth Group . . .

Becky: I remember when I was in youth group. I don't know how aware the rest of the people in the congregation were about what we did in youth group. I remember we did a lot of fun stuff. We went on retreats and did a lot of non-churchy stuff but with church people. It was sort of a cool thing to blend the two.

We went on a ski trip to Copper Mountain. That was fun. Except for when I left my retainers in a Hardees. We got them back. I had to go through the trash bags from Hardees and find them. I boiled them when we got back to the condo.

But I also remember Don Armstrong doing a sunrise service on top of the mountain, at the top of the lift.

Lily: It changed a lot between your youth group time and mine. Our leader was Rick Veit. He was younger, just out of college. He came in when I was in high school and we had a really small group. There were about eight of us who came every week. At that time they were trying to make it more focused on religion and less on the social stuff. We did ski trips and I enjoyed them, but they were trying to do more community service. We did service projects and visited homeless shelters.

But at the time I was involved, the youth group was really small and it continued that way for several years. Now the youth group is such a big part of the church. It's great how much it has grown.

Attending after college . . .

Lily: I don't think I did much at St. Michael and St. George when I came home from college, but I did go to church when I was in college at Denison University in Ohio. There was a cute, tiny Episcopal church in Granville, Ohio. I went more

than I expected. I had a friend, Beth, who wanted to go so I went with her. We went regularly, probably once a month at least, which is a lot for college.

Dave and I started attending the church when we got married. He hadn't gone to church since he was a young kid. When we went to talk to the priest about getting married, he asked Dave what denomination he was and Dave said he was Presbyterian and later we found out he was really Methodist. He didn't even remember where he was baptized. But he converted. He's Episcopalian now and he was confirmed at St. Michael's. We went even before we had kids. We were really impressed with ourselves that we went. Once we had kids it became something much more important. And, of course, then we were up early.

Experiencing the church as a parent . . .

Lily: Right now it's still a lot of damage control. They go to the Great Hall and run around in circles. Sometimes they wake up early and want to go to church and that is nice to hear. It's not always the case. Sometimes they don't want to go and Dave and I are pulling them out the door. But they do really love going to church. It is such a great community of young families.

It's really nice for them to see the generations of their own family. They love seeing their family there, their grandparents. We see family at church who they don't really know in any other way. It's a nice way for them to connect with family members.

The kids really enjoy being part of the environment. I don't know how much they listen. I don't know how much I listened as a kid. But I know Annabelle is listening because she can recite the Lord's Prayer. Obviously something is sinking in there and that's part of the repetitiveness. That's why we go and repeat all these things because eventually it sneaks in.

The other thing I love is our grandmother who worked there, Jane Bertelson, is buried there. The kids don't all remember her, but they all run out and find her stone by the back door. They kiss it and say hi to her.

Becky: Lucy, my youngest, always asks to say hi to Mim. She never even met her; Mim died before Lucy was born. That's really a sweet thing.

Involvement in the church as an adult . . .

Becky: I am on the Church School Board and I serve as Communications Chair. It's been nice to get to know the core group of the church staff through my involvement writing for Duo. I've gotten to know Jane better. I went to the Learning Center with Jane as part of the Church School outreach project. I taught Lucy's class the last two years and I signed up to teach Addie's class next year.

I'm on the committee that brings food to people who need meals. Marian Clifford asked me to join.

My kids have gotten really involved with the outreach for kids, especially at Christmas. They still remember filling the shoeboxes at Christmas time and collecting quarters for the Learning Center playground. They got more involved than I gave them credit for at the time.

Lily: When Dave and I were young and the kids were really little, Heather Blewett would call ever so often and invite me to come to the Mom's Night Out. I remember feeling like I didn't really know anyone. I saw Heather at the park and we ended up chatting and I agreed to come. I started to get to know people in our age group. Then Jane asked me to teach Sunday School and of course I did that. Then Heather asked me to deliver baby blankets to newborns in the parish. I'm still doing that. It is really fun.

Once you get involved they draw you in. First Jane asks you to teach, and then you're on the Church School Steering Committee. The next people in line keep calling you. So then I got a call from Andrew asking me to be on the Vestry. That was a surprise. Now I'm on the Vestry and I'm glad to serve as a younger, female representative of the parish.

It's been interesting learning the interworking of the church. Even down to the people who have to deal with cracks in the foundation or water damage. There are so many things that you know need to be done, but you don't think about on a daily basis. When you go to church you think, "Gee, this is all for me." But there are so many components that go into running a church and you can see why we all need to be generous and support our church.