

March 28, 2009

# Larry Stephen Gehlken

## A Celebration of Life

Community Christian Church

Kansas City, Missouri

*Leader Participants in the Service:*

Dr. Robert Lee Hill

Rev. Melissa St. Clair

Rev. Kevin Snow

Donna Mueller, LM

La Teesha Jackson, Soloist

Gary Tannen, Guitar

Dr. George Flanagan, Guitar

Phyllis Curtis, Organ and Piano

*Preparations:*

Jeff Sidney - Sanctuary

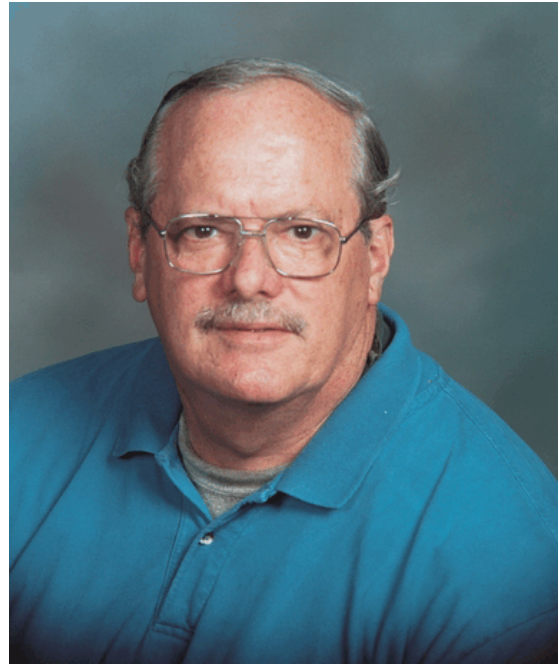
Levon Weaver - Video

Charles Ensor - Chancel Display

*Hospitality:*

Christina Brooks, Dawn Deines, Samantha Baldwin

Marce Ireland, Donna Mueller - Fellowship Meal



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### CALL TO WORSHIP

We have gathered together to celebrate the life and resurrection to new life of Larry Stephen Gehlken. On this sacred occasion, let us speak the truth in love: Today is a strange day.

Strange the way snow is strange: dazzling in its beauty and yet, if treated without the respect which snow is always due, dangerous to the point of tragedy.

Strange the way that shared love is strange: fulfilling beyond anything we could ever imagine and yet soaked with tears when one is absent from us.

Strange the way that nearly all memorial services and funerals are a bit strange: We are here for a time of testimony to the joyous grace of God, and yet we abide in a moment of deep mourning.

On this strange and sacred day, let us never forget that we do not mourn and bear our mutual pain together as those who do not have hope.

Let us now give voice to our faith as we rise and sing our opening song of praise "*For All the Saints.*"

### INVOCATION

Gracious Lord, how generous You are to have blessed us with Larry Gehlken - his goodness, his strong character, his constant helpfulness, his ever-present caring for others, his laughter, his loyalty, his love. And we are grateful for Your generosity. Make us generous and fill us with thankfulness in this time of celebration. Remind us of all the felicities of Your mercy and the saving ways of love. Embolden us in this occasion to claim and to be claimed by, as Larry did and was, Your everlasting grace. And

always and ever, bring to our remembrances the eternal theme that in Christ, we know one who lived and loved and was resurrected so that his joy might be in us and that our joy might be complete. For it is in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord that we pray. AMEN.

### **REMEMBRANCES**

Larry was born in Marshall, Missouri, on October 3, 1947, the second son of John and Virginia Gehlken.

On Tuesday, March 24, 2009, Larry died, at home, of natural causes, at the age of 61 years, 3 months and 21 days.

Between those two distinct dates there lived an even more distinct and distinguished individual.

After his birth in Marshall, Missouri and after a brief residence in Minnesota, the family moved to Sweet Springs, Missouri, where very early in his life Larry would display and exercise leadership skills as the founder and chief instigator of the Cobra Club. He would transfer that enthusiasm for leadership into his involvement with Boy Scouts and Explorers.

In Sweet Springs, Larry would graduate from Sweet Springs R7 High School.

After high school, Larry enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, in which he would serve for five proud years, most notably in the Strategic Air Command, 1966-1970.

He was a certified airframe-powerplant mechanic on B-52 B (or Buff) bombers. He was a Vietnam War Veteran and received the Vietnam Service Medal, National Defense

Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, & the Air Force Commendation Medal for Meritorious Service (given to him by Vice-President Hubert Humphrey).

After an honorable discharge from the Air Force, he attended and graduated from Mid-Continent School of Aviation with a certification in jet mechanics.

Larry then worked at various jobs until October of 1979, when he came to work on the building staff of Community Christian Church. You can easily calculate in your own mind that in Oct. of this year, Larry would have reached the 30th anniversary of his overall tenure as a staff member here, with nineteen of those years spent as Building Supervisor.

Larry grew up a Lutheran, and prior to coming to Kansas City, he was a member of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Sweet Springs, Missouri. Larry joined Community Christian Church on November 13, 1994.

Larry was preceded in death by his parents & his brother John, Jr. He leaves to our safekeeping Suzanne, his wife of twenty years, Jim Gehlken, his faithful brother, Kassandra Falls, his dear niece, his loving family of faith at Community Christian Church, and countless friends and admiring acquaintances.

### ***Shared Memories, including those by... Janet Fiebig***

*"It took me a couple of seconds to wrap my brain around [the news about Larry's death] ... - because that is the last thing I ever expected to hear. What a tremendous shock! ... Larry was so special to all of us, and I personally will miss him terribly. I still*

remember the first time I ever saw him. I didn't meet him right away, because he was working nights when I started there. I was leaving the Activities Center after seeing Carolyn [Schultz] about something, and he was going into the building with Karl [Barrett, then Building Superintendent]. He had on his baseball cap, his sunglasses and his quilted vest -- it was the 'uniform' of the 80s. I had to do a double take! He looked so much like Dave [my husband], because he wore that same 'uniform.' That's probably why I still remember it. We became instant friends."

### **Cynthia Weaver**

"Larry was always interested in you - he never turned the conversation to himself. He was so compassionate - you couldn't throw a worn out Easter lily, poinsettia, or office plant in the trash without finding it resurrected in his office - and thriving! No one could calm a "street person" down like Larry. Even the most agitated person would calm in his presence - and if not, Larry knew to be authoritative and move them out. I don't believe I ever saw him get ruffled or mad. He was the 'go-to' man - 'call Larry.' How many times did we say that!? He would work tirelessly and without comment - many times working when no one was aware he was still at the church. He loved to fish but rarely got the time. He loved the FLW building - Larry always had the most interesting tid-bits to share about the church when tour groups or tourists visited. Even though the church is pressed for storage, Larry could always find a place to put anything such as early arrivals for the church bazaar or old office equipment. The teachers and the kids at the school loved him. Larry loved Christmas and decorating

the church. He is the one who always put up the Christmas trees in Centennial Hall and the Activities Center. His office was a museum - he kept all the posters from concerts at the church; an antique 'wire' recorder; art work from homeless; hubcaps found through the years. When I would thank Larry for a job well done, he always thanked me for giving him the opportunity. He enjoyed gardening and planting flowers around the church.... Community was a real life-line for him."

### **SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 84:8-10**

8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! 9 Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed. 10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.

### **PRAYER OF COMFORT**

- by Rev. Melissa St. Clair

Living, loving God,  
Through your Son Jesus the Christ, you  
offer us this good news:  
In life we live to you; in death we die to  
you.  
Whether we live or whether we die, we  
are yours forever.

God, our shepherd, come to us,  
Sustain us now in our grief.  
Comfort us, allowing our tears to mix  
with your living water.

Even as the sparrow finds a home and  
the swallow a nest,  
so we too can rest in the comfort of your  
steadfast love.

As we remember and celebrate the life of our dear friend & brother, Larry – a doorkeeper in your house-- so too we celebrate the eternal rest and peace he has in you.

Throughout these moments, as we listen for a word of comfort:

Let your Word be a lamp to our weary feet and a light unto our path;

Let your gracious Spirit envelope our aching hearts;

Let your people draw strength not only from your wellspring, but also from one another.

We pray always in the name of the one whose resurrection is our ultimate hope, your Son our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

**SONG OF COMFORT** – LaTeessa Jackson  
*“His Eye is On the Sparrow”*

**SCRIPTURE READING** – Phil. 4:4-9, 13  
*4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of*

*peace will be with you.... 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

## **PRAYER OF CONSOLATION**

– by Rev. Kevin Snow

God of love and grace,  
Hear our prayers this day. Let your gentleness be known to everyone in this time of need. Our hearts are troubled in this time of loss, as a steadfast source of compassion and humility is no longer with us. Our bodies ache in the absence of one of your children as we recognize that we are not as complete as we once were. Our minds are still unbelieving, as we expect to turn the corner, and see a familiar smile. So we pray today, indeed, that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Instill within us the unshakable foundation that Larry provided for this faith community...as he strengthened and brought wholeness not only to our physical structure, but to our hearts and souls as well. Grant within us a portion of Larry’s soft-spoken humility, and his willingness to always go the extra mile for the church and its people.

God of all life, today we give thanks for the life of Larry. Continue to guide our hearts in the coming days as the dual shadows of sorrow and loneliness attempt to block out your light. Lift us up and shoulder our burdens especially in these coming days. We pray today that your abundant grace will continue to spill over into our lives, and that we will see daily reminders of your presence. Envelop our spirits with the

redeeming power of your resurrection. Grant us your peace. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE READING** – John 15:9-15

*9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.*

**PRAYER OF LOVE**

– by Donna Mueller, LM

O God, our strength and our redeemer, compassionate and loving, come among us now to witness our love for Larry, our brother in the faith, our co-worker and our friend. His life bore abundant fruit in a harsh world, and his love for his work, family and this church causes us to give you heartfelt thanks for such a one who lived among us.

We are grateful that Larry shared his life in ways that blessed innumerable people. His ministry of loyalty and devotion will shine as an example for all of us.

We thank you for his obedience to your instructions, that we give up our lives for one another, to be generous and thoughtful of them, that they may come to love one another as you have loved us. As one who loved others and wanted only the best for them, Larry lived his life in optimism and hope. He loved your world, creator God, and all were blessed by his delight in the beauty he helped to nurture.

Holy God, we are reassured of your abiding presence, and we pray that we may grow to strengthen the ties that bind us one to another. Renewed by your love, help us to love in ever larger circles so as to embrace your people everywhere till at last we are all united eternally through Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**SONG OF LOVE** – LaTeesha Jackson

*"How Great Thou Art"*

**EULOGY MEDITATION**

– by Dr. Robert Lee Hill

To repeat what has already been said, and to repeat it with as much gentleness and truth as I can muster: today is a strange day, a day with an unusual admixture of unavoidable pain and holy celebration.

While we grieve deeply and profoundly, we remember Larry's life and legacy with great gratitude. The mourning and remembrances we share are accompanied by countless tears. Such is the cost extracted by so great an affection as we shared with Larry.

But we also have hope, and we proclaim our trust in a God who always provides. And because God's provision fulfills our hopes, we can do more than merely endure; we shall prevail through this valley of the shadow with purpose and sacred celebration.

Now more than ever before, we can rely upon God and each other for comfort and courage.

There are many hallowing remembrances flowing in and through and among us this morning:

- how Larry was as loyal a friend as anyone could ever hope for, as faithful a husband as any wife could ever imagine, as loving a brother as you'd ever want, as caring a co-worker as most have ever experienced;
- how Larry loved the outdoors and was an avid hunter and fisherman;
- how he was a gifted artist and enjoyed sketching animals in their wildlife settings, particularly when he was younger;
- how he loved dogs, and was a coon hunter in his earlier years, and the devoted keeper of Oscar, his little dachshund, in his later years;
- how he was a neat dresser; meticulously clean in his appearance;
- how he was deeply emotional and patriotic toward his country but also a discerning, critical observer of it when we strayed from "the better angels of our nature;"
- how he had a sensitive touch with those whom Jesus called "the least of these" and no one was beyond care;
- how he took care of us and how we floundered in our attempts to take

care of him;

- how he poured himself into this place and how this place and the people who were a part of it filled him with such pride and gladness.

Let us also remember that Larry was....

### *I. An Imperfect Man Perfectly Graced*

So many have said, regarding his care for us and his unwavering care for Suzanne, that Larry was a "saint."

Let us be careful here. Let us not make Larry into a plasterized, petrified statue of saintly perfection. This is not a day for commemorating a perfect life. Rather we gather together to commemorate a committed life.<sup>1</sup>

Larry was a humble man, but he was oh so proud of you his family of faith.

Larry, so far as I know, never set foot in a pulpit to deliver an oral proclamation, but his normal bearing toward everyone who greeted him was a dynamic "sermon" about his faith in a glorious God.

Larry was a quiet man, but his attitude toward others spoke volumes about love and grace and dedication.

Larry's was not a perfect life, to be sure. But it was undeniably a noble and committed life, so obviously touched by God's perfect grace.

### *II. Still ... A "Saint"*

On the other hand, in another sense, we speak with exact precision when we say that Larry was a "saint." For Larry was a "saint" in the way the early church used to describe its members, as "saints," as those who cared for one another, who cared for Christ, and who were devoted to God.

Larry embodied the saintly sentiment of Psalm 84- *“O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer.... For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.”*

Larry enacted “saintly” care for us as a *“doorkeeper in the house of the Lord”* - involving the daily stewardship of Community's facilities for all of its congregational needs and all of its service to the wider community.

But even more significant than his steadfast stewardship of us and this place, Larry was a “keeper of the faith.” Close, long- standing friends and brand new acquaintances were always impressed by how clearly Larry conveyed the love of God and the saving ways of Christian hope. Larry knew intimately the profound reality Jesus shared with the first disciples when he said *“Greater love has no one than this, that a person lay down his life for his friends.”* As a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord and as a keeper of the faith, Larry laid down his life for his friends.

### **III. Larry's Gift**

Ultimately, let us remember that Larry was a gift. The shock of his passing has blunted, for a moment, the eternal and comforting character of that gift. But we will remember, again and again how much of a gift he was and will remain for us and for all those whose lives we touch.

When Christmas comes and trees rise up here, we'll recall Larry's gift.

When hubcaps pop up on the corner of 46<sup>th</sup> and Main, we'll recall Larry's gift.

When national holidays roll around each year, especially Memorial Day, and Fourth of July and Veterans Day and Thanksgiving, we'll recall Larry's gift.

When coffee percolates down in Centennial Hall at the top of the morning, we'll recall Larry's gift.

When a B-1 bomber swoops over Arrowhead at the beginning of a Chiefs game or the Blue Angels rattle windows on the Plaza at the time of the annual air show at the Downtown Airport, we'll recall Larry's gift.

When we break bread and share the cup in a moment of communion in worship and offer our prayers to God in the quiet of a prayer vigil and pass one another in the hallways with friendly greetings, we'll recall Larry's gift.

And when we see the Steeple of Light, as it stretches its beams into infinity, and we remember how Larry was the original caretaker of its luminous beauty, we'll recall Larry's gift.

When we behold all such reminders of Larry's gift, we will say, either quietly or aloud, what the Church has taught us to say about such imperfect saints: “Thanks be to God!” As we say it even now - “Thanks be to God!” And as Jim has said so eloquently, “Rest in Peace, my brother. You earned it.” AMEN.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Gracious and loving God, You know what we need in this sacred moment. Help us. While we would wish that time could reverse itself and the shocking news of Larry's earthly death on Tuesday had never come, help us, dear God, to make sense of this unavoidable reality. Help us, as well, to see how that

the undeniable and disturbing fact of mortality will touch us one and all.

Console us, dear God, with the more powerful news that death does not have the final say in human life, that love always conquers death, and that Your unconditional love is forever – for Larry, who is now in Your eternal embrace, and for us who remain, as we are held in Your present love and as we hold on to each other by that love.

Sustain us, gracious God, as we move forward from this occasion and into the days ahead. Illumine our paths as we step into new moments of life. Strengthen us as we take up new tasks. Continue to comfort us as we embody the exemplary ways of Larry's graced life within our own ways.

And remind us, out of Your infinite wisdom, God, that there is always more fulfillment and joy and compassion and care and love and life in our relationships with You than there is pain and heartache in the world.

In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, we pray this prayer and the prayer that he taught his first disciples which we pray together now, saying, (In Unison) *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.*

## SONG OF GRACE –

*“Will the Circle be Unbroken”*

## BENEDICTION

Depart now in the fellowship of God Your Creator, and, as you go, remember— In the goodness of God you were brought forth into this world.

By the grace of God, you have been kept all the day long, even unto this hour. And by the love of God, fully revealed in the face of Jesus of Nazareth – and in the life and resurrection to new life of Larry Stephen Gehlken – you are being redeemed. AMEN

## GRAVESIDE SCRIPTURES

Higginsville State Veterans Cemetery  
11:00 a.m., Thursday, April 2, 2009

### *Ecclesiastes 3:1-9*

*1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*

*2 a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;*

*3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

*4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

*5 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;*

*a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

*6 a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;*

*7 a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

*8 a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Cleophus LaRue for this reminder.