

Eulogy at the funeral of Connie Kline  
The Rev. Jim Horton  
St. Luke's in the Meadow, Fort Worth  
February 29, 2016

Almost 4 years ago, when Connie was 96 years of age, one Sunday morning she directed her penetrating eyes at me and asked: "Do you think I will live to be 100?" I believe I said to her, "Connie, as well as you are doing and given your exceptional determination, I would not be surprised if you live to be 100 or more." Connie lived within slightly less than two weeks of 100.

During the late '60s when this son of an accomplished Baptist clergyman was being indoctrinated into the Episcopal Church, I often heard it said that we Christians experience two "births." The first of course is the date of our birth into this earthly existence; and the second is the date of our death and our birth into eternal life, our birth into God's Nearer Presence. Today would have been Connie's 100th anniversary; less than two weeks ago, she joyfully experienced this second birth when she entered into the Presence of the Lord she loved and served for almost 100 years. It is entirely meet and right that today, as we celebrate a rare and accomplished Christian life, we say "Happy Birthday, Connie. Well done, good and faithful servant."

When Anne and I came to St. Luke's in the spring of 1978 and I became rector of this parish, it did not take me long to realize that whenever the doors were opened, Jimmy and Connie Kline were here, worshipping and contributing in an exceptionally positive way to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ on Meadowbrook Drive. Jimmy died in 2007, and for most of their almost 72 years of marriage they made immeasurable contributions to St. Luke's. Jimmy served on the vestry several times and worked as both Junior and Senior Wardens repeatedly. Jimmy was a hands on "nuts and bolts" kind of guy who could repair and maintain what the rest of us never really actually understood. In addition to working in the yard and helping to rebuild the rectory, Jimmy constructed many of the kneelers which we and the acolytes and servers enjoy today.

On a personal level, Jimmy and I shared a hobby which we frequently discussed. During my time as rector, I became a compulsive shutterbug and took literally hundreds and hundreds of slides and photographs of events and parishioners. The many books which preserve those images are among my most cherished worldly possessions. In fact, we have some poignant pictures of Jimmy and Connie providing music on their instruments while we gathered in the parish hall, and some of those will be given to the family later today. But Jimmy and I bonded in part because of our mutual appreciation of photography. Connie had a lengthy career working for B.F. Walker and then spending 26 years at General Motors; but her multiple contributions here are immeasurable. She was an accomplished needlepointer and made a famous needlepoint of the parish. She gave us a photograph of that needlepoint, and it has hung in every study I have had since leaving here and is now in my study in Benbrook. We also have a beautiful stool which she needlepointed.

In addition to the needlepoint, she was an exceptional quilter. When the diocese requested, prior to one of our annual diocesan conventions, that each parish make a parish banner, it was Connie who did that for us. When the diocese said there was to be a diocesan quilt, it was Connie who made the Episcopal seal for that quilt of the diocese. When it came to Connie's attention that there were five parishes who had no quilter to do the parish "blocks" for that diocesan quilt, our Connie made those five for other parishes. Connie worked, with Jimmy, in the yard; she worked on the flower guild; and both of them sang, for years, in the parish choir. In short, we today are deeply indebted to

this exceptional couple for their unselfish and multiple contributions to what this parish became during the first fifty plus years of our life. When I think of Connie Kline, I am always reminded of two sterling qualities which deeply moved me. First, Connie was blessed with an incredibly inquisitive mind, and this probing and keen intellect was an extension of her deep spiritual life. Many of us know that Connie had a disarming directness and a penetrating gaze when she was seeking understanding and clarification. I could always depend upon Connie, after listening or enduring one of my sermons or comprehending the complexities of a Sunday lunch conversation, to demand clarification, to offer a different point of view. And, again, this gift was more than an intellectual game; it was an integral part of her spiritual journey. Equally striking, as Connie aged, this sharpness of mind was neither subdued nor quietened; rather, in my judgement, she developed that cherished mature wisdom that gets right to the heart of the matter. This lady was no fading violet; she was no fluffy and superficial wallflower. She was a devoted child of God who sought truth whenever and wherever possible, and I marveled at her grace.

Second, she was blessed with a simple but deep and sustaining faith that carried her through ups and downs of almost 100 years. Connie did not need some well-intended and effete priest to explain what “the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” meant; she understood that profound truth in the depths of her devout soul. And this strong and undeterred faith was reflected in her determination, with or without a walker, even driving herself at age 96, to be in church every Sunday. After all, that is what God demands, and it is what serious minded Christians do.

I frequently run into Mike McQuitty, now at All Saints, who sang in the choir here with Connie and Jimmy. Last Sunday I told him about Connie’s death; he became thoughtful and emotional and said, “They were such strong spiritual support for my parents, Howard and Mildred, and I shall always be deeply thankful.”

I can only imagine that as so many of Connie’s friends predeceased her that without this sure and certain faith she might not have accepted those inevitable events as gracefully as she was able. Though many of us today might think, “how sad that she did not make it to 100,” as she hoped; I am told by family and others that Connie indeed was peaceful and quite ready to go. Remember it is we who cared so deeply about her and were moved by her example who feel the grief and absence; Connie is now at rest; and we believe, in faith, that she has been reunited with her beloved Jimmy, her life’s companion for almost 72 years.

There is one more truly glaring and significant fact about Connie to which I call your attention. Connie and Jimmy were parishioners at St. Andrews here in Fort Worth, when they and others united their talents and focused their good intentions to establish St. Luke’s in the Meadow Episcopal Church in 1946. And Connie was the last surviving charter member who signed the initial charter in 1946. That is profoundly important because Connie’s death is the mark of a great generation or more of matriarchs and patriarchs who made this parish what it became in those formative and subsequent years.

It is stunning when we pause momentarily to consider those formative leaders who have died during the past decade. There are many, but I call to your attention the following who contributed to the life of this parish and who rest from their labors: Jimmy and Connie Kline; Betty and John Alcon; Eleanor Schultz; Jerry Parris; Perry Craddock; Fr. Ray Abbott, Fr. Matt Tracy, Fr. John Salberg and Fr. John Buchanon; George Shannon; Bob Dick; Charlie Butts; Bob Wilmington; Ed Munson, Don

Cross; Marena Carter; Richard and Eleanor Vannoy and Katherine Runkle. Of course, there are countless others, and there is no intention, on my part, to overlook anyone. But when I think about a strong, vibrant and secure St. Luke's and think, realistically, about how much these departed souls contributed to our well being, I and all of us should be humbled and grateful. These people may well be what Tom Brokaw calls one of the Greatest Generations in the history of our parish.

In closing, as we celebrate the wonderful life and contributions of Connie and others today, one of the lessons we, who love this parish, must take away today is that we recognize our duty and responsibility to carry on. We now bear the challenging task, as does every generation, to perpetuate, to adapt, to live and to teach the unparalleled treasures of our faith during our generation. Connie would say there are no excuses; the good Lord will bless your efforts and multiply your work for His kingdom. Amen.