

Barbara Nickell & Kay Peterson Retire from the Alter Guild

An interview with Melissa Ball

Taken together, Barbara Nickell and Kay Peterson have devoted over 70 combined years of service to the Altar Guild at Christ's Episcopal Church. Additionally, they have contributed and continue to contribute to the welfare of our larger spiritual community at Christ Church and beyond. They have been tirelessly involved in just about every program the Christ's Church offers. They were the guiding lights directing the planning and implementation of the design and color scheme of the Christ's Church campus — and so much more. Some of these roles required them to take center stage, or at the very least accept the spotlight.

For this joint interview, I sat down with both of them, together, and focused on their devotion to the Altar Guild — that quiet, profound, and often misunderstood ministry. They each have a wickedly fun sense of humor. They are convivial and enthusiastic, but never at the expense of and always with respect for both the sacred and the individual. They were responsible not only for setting a place for worship, but also for purchasing and maintaining everything from wicks to wine, trainings, linens and lights, and more.

Melissa: Where and when did it all begin?

Kay: Frank and I grew up in Denver. I attended the Baptist Church down the street and Frank attended St. Thomas Episcopal. We walked to our churches as we grew up. At seventeen, I started dating Frank and we attended his church. Not only did I love the pomp and circumstance and the beauty of the parish, but the Episcopal Church spoke to my heart. Fr. Redingbah, a burly Canadian, was the parish priest. Upon his retirement in 1955/56, a young Fr. Marion Hammond stepped in as the new parish priest.

Barbara: In 2003, I was working for Kay. I would often accompany her on Tuesday afternoons to set up for 6 A.M. Wed. Mass. In 2004, Phillip and I started attending Christ's Church and I became an Alter Guild. member immediately!

M: Is there an individual or several people who influenced your commitment to service?

K: Fr. Hammond invited me to be a member of the Altar Guild, which I knew nothing about, so I immediately said, "YES!" I was trained by one of my former teachers from Smiley Jr. High, Florence Carlson. She demanded dedication and respect. She didn't remember me; however, I trusted every new lesson she taught me. I was on Altar Guild every six weeks: Sat., Sun. and any events during the week. I ended each service period washing and ironing all the linens — for 25 years! Frank and I moved to Christ's Church about 26 years ago. Fr. Rick Meyers invited me to join Alter Guild... I was honored and happily said, 'Yes!' Same job, different location. Again, delighted for 25 years.

B: Kay Peterson was my primary influence. She has been my best friend for 42 years and still counting!

M: What is/was it about Altar Guild that held your devotion and sustained your longevity? Have you observed any changes?

K: Altar Guild connected me to our faith and carried me through some tough times. I was always peaceful doing my Alter Guild! It doesn't change. It was life enriching! The support of the ministers and Alter Guild members sustained me. The members are still responsible for creating the celebration every Sunday and all special events: Weddings, Baptisms, Confirmations,

Funerals, etc. You can see that every one of life's special events is celebrated in the church. We are connected to it all.

B: Altar Guild is a calling to a sacred ministry that takes place behind the scenes in preparation for the celebration of Eucharist and other services. At first it was just a function which I did with my dear friend, but shortly I felt it was a true calling to serve Christ. I was making a positive contribution to my church community. There is a real sense of spiritual connection when serving. Membership on Alter Guild was considered an honor and privilege, now it is difficult to even get members, due to shifting priorities in society.

M: The Petersons and the Nickells' a force to be reckoned with' especially on vacations. You have decades of friendship, sharing rough roads and smooth sailings. A.G. is a team effort, and you also had your beloved husbands, Phil and Frank by your sides. Any comments?

K: Barbara and Phillip — our best friends for 40 + years! A.G — an extension of our joy. We did our Alter Guild duties together with love and laughter. Being together was perfect! Working with our spouses and best friends — a special treat! Being together — PERFECT!

B: Serving with our dearest friends was truly a joy!

M: You have remarkably keen eyes for detail, line, and color. Does this support or deter when creating worship space?

K: Barbara and I are both, Designers. Barbara is also a fine artist and more of a perfectionist than I. Again, not a requirement, but we love and understand color, line, purpose and each other — we work well together.

B: Hopefully the acceptable response is, support, LOL! Through our experience, especially in commercial interior design where the 'end user' is multiple employees with varying tastes and ideas about color and design, you quickly learn you can't please everyone! We do the best we can with the talent God gave us and skills we learned. I think attention to detail demonstrates a level of caring. If it is important, if it really matters, how do you demonstrate and share that?

M: Throughout the years, you've worked with lovely people, though a few of us did/do not come close to your skills. What kept you from running and screaming into the night after reminding or redoing for the umpteenth time, or as you were sitting in church, discover an unlit candle, a misplaced/forgotten linen, or no water in a cruet?

K: I don't remember night screaming. If something gets left undone or is done incorrectly, guess what? Jesus doesn't get excited or unhappy. We fix it in — between or after the service. Our parishioners are loving people eager to learn and help without a question.

B: We were thankful and grateful to everyone who became a member of this ministry, even though some didn't work out. We always said to the members that this ministry isn't for everyone, but they would only know by trying it out. When it's all said and done, we're all just human beings trying our best to make our way.

M: Often in the most solemn of occasions there can be awkward to humorous mishaps. Can you share an event?

K: I remember looking at the beautiful altar and brilliant office lights, and as if on cue, each candle's flame, one by one, by one flickered out. Of course, I couldn't do anything but sit there and watch. In between services, once everyone was out of the church, I got busy! The next

service — bright and beautiful. Life is filled with mishaps — we make the necessary corrections! We keep our sense of humor!

B: Several years ago, Christ's Church had a Sexton, who did some basic janitorial duties. She called me one Saturday afternoon and said there was a real problem with the Holy Water in the holders in the chapel narthex — when she made the sign of the cross on her forehead, it BURNED her skin! She added it had a slight chemical odor. It was discovered that someone on the Alter Guild team that morning had filled the Holy Water holder with wax remover instead of Holy Water!

M: Do you have any special moments or events that touched your heart while on Altar Guild? You've been friends through thick and thin and then some. Any final comments?

K: My Altar Guild commitment was filled with special moments so many joys and love!

B: There are so many special moments! Kay and I were responsible for setting up for and helping with funerals and weddings, two very significant and emotional occasions and connections! We always tried our best to be of humble service and support to our clergy, the families and their guests and to make everyone feel welcome in our church. When I stepped aside, it was hard for me to let go of things that weren't done a certain way, the 'old way'. I know that for new ideas, new energy and enthusiasm to come in and sustain this wonderful ministry I need to let go. It is a process!

M: You each have a wickedly fun sense of humor. You are convivial and enthusiastic but never at the expense of and always with respect for the sacred and the individual. You were responsible not only for setting a place for worship but ordering and maintaining everything from wicks to

wine, trainings, linens and lights and more. Your devotion and kindness stretch beyond Altar Guild. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and for your service.