

Spotlight on Crestwood The Patrick Gaines Lafferty Garden



When threads of many colors are woven together, a beautiful tapestry emerges. So it is with the Patrick Gaines Lafferty Garden that provides a place of refuge and beauty for Crestwood members today. Nestled in the area between the Sanctuary and the Childcare Center, the garden has grown and changed over the years. Each change added a new thread or story line that gave texture to the garden that Rev. Bill McDonald calls "A Holy Space." The history of the Lafferty Garden encompasses great pain but also incorporates examples of optimism, happiness, generosity, and a love of Crestwood that continues over the years.

It has been a difficult task piecing together this long history, but I've had much help from David Blondell, Bill McDonald, Ward Ransdell, and others. Some threads may have become a bit fuzzy with time, but the goodness of the stories make the garden more beautiful as they intertwine.

The story begins at the birth of Crestwood when James and Vivian Lafferty and their young children joined the ranks of the founding members in 1959. James was an engineer who developed the Department of Biomedical Engineering at the University of Kentucky. Rev. Blondell remembers that James was involved in the design of the spacecraft which took a chimpanzee to circle the globe in 1961.

Years passed as the Lafferty family helped Crestwood get off to a strong start. They were active in the life of the church, working and worshiping with rest of the congregation. Their young son Patrick joined the church's scouting program.

In the winter of 1970, a few days after Christmas, eleven-year-old Patrick left Lexington with the scout troop on a trip to Stone Mountain, Georgia. A few days later, Rev. Blondell was awakened at 1:30 am with a call from the scout leader. Patrick had gotten separated from the other scouts, probably slipped on wet moss, and fell from a cliff to his death. It took hours to find and rescue his body.

We often are unaware of the incredibly difficult tasks that fall to our pastors, but the pain in Rev. Blondell's voice was still evident as he recounted driving through the night to the Lafferty's home to tell them of the loss of their young son.

At this point of the story, detailed memories have faded. We know the sanctuary had just been completed and dedicated. It is uncertain whether the space behind it was just a rough lawn or had already been turned into a garden space. In any case, the garden was designed and dedicated to the young charter member, and it became known as the Patrick Gaines Lafferty Memorial Garden.

In its earliest stages, it was a sunken space with pavers through it, and it was surrounded by a wall of low bushes. The space was used for weddings, celebrations, and other church activities.

Over the years, the bushes grew, things got over-grown and shaggy as areas often do. There was a problem with drainage of the area. It was cleaned up periodically, but eventually it drew the attention of an Eagle Scout whose name, unfortunately, has been lost in time.

As his Eagle project, the young teen cleaned the area, unclogged the drains, and made some improvements in the drainage system. Like happens too often, actions done with good will, but which are later forgotten, have a lasting positive impact. The Eagle project

added another strong thread to the tapestry.

The scout's activities drew the attention of others in the church and as problems with drainage and the upkeep of the garden continued, active members began to dream.

By that time, Rev. Bill McDonald was serving as senior pastor, and he remembers an afternoon when he and Will Rouse sat alone on the steps of the garden and talked. The name of William Rouse entered every conversation as I explored the garden. He apparently was an active, giving, and unselfish benefactor to the church in many ways.

Rev. McDonald reminisced, "In 2005 or 2006, Will and I sat on the steps of the original Lafferty Garden and he told me of money set aside in his will to renovate and upgrade the garden. . . He spoke of a garden chapel and new pavers and steps and better plantings. I kept his ideas in my mind for future reference. Will died in the winter of 2007 at age 74, and his beloved wife Barbara died in the spring of 2008."

When the church received the promised bequest from the Rouse's will, a task force was formed and plans for the changes began. Will's wish to expand the narthex turned out to be too expensive but all his other plans for the garden were carried out. The generosity of Crestwood members continued to add to the garden tapestry.

John Carman (a Crestwood member) of Carman Landscape Architecture was hired to draw up the current garden design and plans for the Garden Chapel. The construction contract was given to Brett Construction, a company owned by Gyp and Beverly Setzer and their sons Brett and Jim. All of them were Crestwood members. Rev. McDonald remembers "In their work in the garden, the Carmans and the Setzers gave us more than we paid them for because of their love for the church."

As soon as the landscaping design was done and new drainage completed, Crestwood members donated trees, bushes, benches and more, according to the planned design. Today, plaques throughout the garden indicate each donor and the name of the memorialized person. With one exception, the donated benches remain unmarked. This was mentioned as I did my explorations. We really must find that memorial book and make sure the bench memorials are completed.

It was at this time, somewhere around 2008, that the garden committee was formed to keep the garden in tip-top shape. Like with the earlier garden, the committees worked hard, then aged out and another group took over as things became overgrown.

Another thread was added to the story. The daughter of Crestwood members Bob and Amy Wheeler wanted to be married in the Garden Chapel, but the grass and some plantings were wearing out. There were problems again with the drainage. In preparation for the marriage ceremony, the Wheelers contributed to the landscaping and paid to have the area refurbished. Again, members contributed to our church.

Today the Garden Committee is headed by Ward Ransdell, whose name ran through many accounts over the years, as did the names of John Gretz, John Royse, and Linda Ransdell. The present committee is working hard to keep the garden at its earlier glory.

The Laffertys eventually left Crestwood for another Disciples' church as they found the memories of their son became too painful to remain. But they didn't forget the church. Upon James Lafferty's death in 2013, the family asked gifts to be sent to Crestwood for the upkeep of the Patrick Gaines Lafferty Memorial Garden.

Rev. McDonald oversaw the building of the current garden, and he had a request when I referred to the beautiful wooden structure as a gazebo. He wrote, "Please help us get people back to calling it the Garden Chapel. It is not a gazebo. Will wanted it seen as a holy space."

I hope each of the readers can take a moment, sit in the garden, and send a little prayer to all the people who made that place special. It started with young Patrick Lafferty, who is buried at the Lexington Cemetery. His stone reads, "May God hold you in the palm of His hand." Perhaps the Garden with its rich history, is God's Hand.

If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together.

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