



The Church has the potential to change the world.

Are we squandering it?

If you are reading this, you likely identify as belonging to the Church. Or, at the very least, you are curious about conversations involving religious traditions. You are probably also aware that these days, the percentage of religiously unaffiliated persons in the United States (often called “nones”) is now larger than the number of Catholics and is growing at a much faster rate. Young people, especially, are walking away.

But even those of us who call ourselves Catholic have our doubts. A 2020 report called “The State of Religion & Young People,” published by the Springtide Research Institute, reveals that over half of young people who identify as religiously affiliated report low levels of trust in religious institutions. According to truly sobering data from the Public Religion Research Institute’s “2022 Health of Congregations Survey,” among those who have switched from their childhood religion to “none,” 39 percent were Catholic. As they leave, these former Catholics are heartbreakingly but accurately often referred to as “dones.”

As multiple studies also show, many of these nones or dones continue to wrestle with pressing questions about the meaning of life. They express a desire to relate to the world in ways that are expansive and compassionate; they just find no link between their concerns and religious faith.

We know from recent surveys that climate change is a major source of concern for young people. Pope Francis knows the importance of ecological awareness and activism, encourages it and nurtures this planetary attentiveness. The majority of our U.S. parishes apparently do not. When we fail to connect faith and action, the reign of God seems very far indeed.

What this (admittedly oversimplified) picture reveals is that we who are still active members of the Church must do our best to connect the Gospel message with our everyday lives; we must live out that message authentically and lovingly. And, as part of this effort, we are called to respond to those who have left (or are struggling to remain) with mercy. The Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino defines mercy as “a reaction in the face of the suffering of another, which one has interiorized.” If we attune our hearts to our present reality, we must grieve with those who have left the Church or are trying to find a reason to remain in the Church. Their experiences require our attention, and it is crucial that we respond not with temporary bandages but by asking fundamental questions.

The heart of these efforts is not about filling the pews, but about learning to be a better Church precisely because we dare feel the sting of the collective loss we are experiencing. There are many lessons to be learned from those on the margins. In exhorting the Church to go out to the peripheries, Pope Francis offers the central insight that “to embrace the margins is to expand our horizons, for we see more clearly and broadly from the edges

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Are we squandering it?

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of society.” This holds not just for the broader society but for our Church, too.

To take seriously what is being revealed from our peripheries and beyond them is good for the life of the Church. First, it helps us define why we even want to be Church. Second, it helps us see our present moment with more clarity. And third, it reveals new possibilities.

Why Be Church?

First, what we call the community of the Church has always been in flux. Our Church is not a phenomenon outside of history but a community dynamically enmeshed in the demands of history.

Jesus and his friends lived during difficult times, politically, religiously and economically. So do we. Their world, for all its difficulties, was quite small, and most scholars agree that Jesus was centered on renewing his Jewish religious community. Jesus confronted the reality of suffering not in generalities but in particular circumstances; and he did so primarily by expressing God’s being as pure unconditional love. Is that a reason to be church? Are we here to form a community that can effectively confront the accelerating chaos of history with the spirit of constant love? What about the difficult demands this makes? Are people leaving the church because we, as church, seem intent on looking away from the stark brokenness of our moment? Or worse yet, because we have a hand in amplifying the pain through our divisiveness and judgment?

Second, Jesus invited those who were moved by the vision of God’s abundance he presented to experience it flowing through him and then to share in his work. The feeding, the healing, the welcoming, the serving, the teaching – this was work to be done by all who knew him. Being sent meant doing something specific that made God’s love constantly present in the world. With great intention, Jesus did not keep his ministry and authority all to himself. He shared it, he guided, he empowered. Are people walking away because we hide behind layers of exclusionary rules (something Jesus also bristled against) rather than inviting them to become the gifts for others God needs them to be?

Why Be Church Now?

In a conversation recorded almost a century ago, Mahatma Gandhi said: “I like your Christ, but not your Christianity. I believe in the teachings of Christ, but you on the other side of the world do not. I read the Bible faithfully and see little in Christendom that those who profess faith pretend to see.” He said these words in 1927. With the horrors of the First World War still fresh and World War II not yet on the horizon, Gandhi described Christians as “the most warlike people” of the world and connected this to insatiable greed.

So let us imagine Jesus and his friends actually in

our midst right now. What would their reaction be to our current era? Would their hearts break because we are running out of clean water? Would they knock over the tables of our skyscraper temples to profit? Would they be scandalized that rather than feeding the 5,000 (Mt 14:13-21), some of us hoard every fish and loaf of bread, while the 4,999 starve? How loudly might they weep for the millions without access to health care, or education, or a living wage?

How could they make sense of a world where we seem willing to give up our freedom to think, make moral judgments and create so that something we call artificial intelligence can do the work for us? Where bombs rain down on the innocent, children are gunned down in schools, and strangers are turned away in their suffering? Jesus Christ, Wisdom of God, grant us peace.

So many young people in our world are longing for an invitation to go into the streets ready to right these wrongs. In this desire, aren’t they sharing in Jesus’ ministry and enacting Christ’s power-for-others? Does our collective inaction in the face of so much suffering communicate that, as a Church, we don’t know who this Christ we proclaim really is? That we have not taken this message to heart? If we did, who would not want to be part of that?

This is Christianity’s largely unrealized potential; the world-transforming power Gandhi saw squandered. This is the truth that Dr. King, Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day and many women and men before and since have understood. God is love; when love is denied to one another and to our fragile common home, we have denied God (1Jn 4:7-9). Our God has died and continues to die by our hand, repeating over and over again that fateful day at Calvary.

Where to Begin?

As Pope Francis explains in “Let Us Dream,” the sacred Scriptures are full of stories revealing “that crisis is a time of purification. [These stories] bring us to the same place, to a shaming of our arrogance and a trusting in God.” In this sense, to open our eyes to the pain of those who are leaving our communities requires us to listen to the promptings of the Spirit. Through the pain of this communal wound brought by the loss of so many people of good will, we are invited to a creative and fearless commitment to what Jesus wants us to know: The reign of God is breaking in and the reign of God needs us. It needs us now.

As surveys proliferate telling us Christianity is in deep trouble, let us open our eyes and see. Yes, it really is. But there is much to do in response. The Jesuit scientist/theologian Teilhard de Chardin a generation ago hoped that “The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire.”

Written by Cecilia González-Andrieuf.

*For the complete article, please visit **America Magazine** online at americamagazine.org*

All Things Considered

The last day of the calendar year may be a good time to share with you the end-of-the-year report that I gave to the Archdiocese of Detroit two weeks ago.

According to Canon law and Church teaching, each parish and diocese has its own unique set of rights and responsibilities, including the obligation to administer church property. The separate incorporation of parishes is the civil law structure that most accurately reflects our ecclesiastical law and theology. Creating non-profit parish corporations is the simplest and most effective way of ensuring that the rights of parishes regarding Church property are respected not only in canon law, but in civil law.

Now that every parish in the AoD is separately incorporated, as the CEO of St. Ambrose, I must by law present to the Board of Directors an annual review based on questions that are submitted to me.

The full report is quite lengthy and also contains detailed financial information including a reconciled bank balance, a budget report and other statistical information. In this regard, St. Ambrose is solvent and is carrying no debt. That is something that still amazes me, since throughout the bulk of my tenure here we were insolvent and paying off debt.

2023 collections and donations are, however, running behind. At the end of 2022 we were at \$692,483 as

compared to where we were at the end of November 2023 at \$502,227. The expectation is that a solid Christmas collection will close that gap.

The following is an abbreviated version of some of the non-financial indices of St. Ambrose that I presented to the Board.

Realizing Mission

St. Ambrose is an active member of the SAINTS OF THE LAKE Family of Parishes. As a Phase Two grouping we have accomplished all the foundation work for this new organizational plan, including our missionary strategic plan. The plan is ambitious and will take many months to become fully realized.

Our Family of Parishes planning sessions have gone well, and there is genuine respect and friendship between all the priests involved. The most visible collaboration has been in the area of Religious Education,

where we now have a unified curriculum and an interchangeable tuition base. Ambrose maintains its “Sunday School” model which it has had in place for almost 40 years. It allows families in all the parishes involved to select a non-weekday educational time. St. Ambrose has a family-oriented model of Religious Education that is based on multiple liturgical experiences on the weekend. This does not seem to be appreciated by all with a desire to consolidate things into one model and a single calendar.

From the beginning of our FoP grouping, Ambrose, Matthew and Clare worried that our parishioner bases and more urban cultures were not the best mix with Paul. I see that still to be the case. St. Paul’s organizational needs and ecclesiastical models are different than ours. Their size, by necessity, means that they are more efficiently run, with not much room for individu-

alization. I think that the “weight” of Paul in our group will always make a true family of peers difficult, or it will end the specific charisms of Ambrose and Matthew and Clare in the long run.

Having said that, however, I believe that the FoP agreement to staff a single Youth Ministry program is a good one since it can program to the Grosse Pointe High School students common to three of our four parishes.

Parishioner Base

Covid clearly impacted St. Ambrose in terms of participation at weekend liturgies. However, I observe a slow and steady uptick in participation. Interestingly enough, many of those who are now worshipping at St. Ambrose are different than the ones who left during the pandemic. There is an observable trend in this parish which sees a number of Catholics “parish shopping” and they are coming from all over the area – not just a particular parish or two.

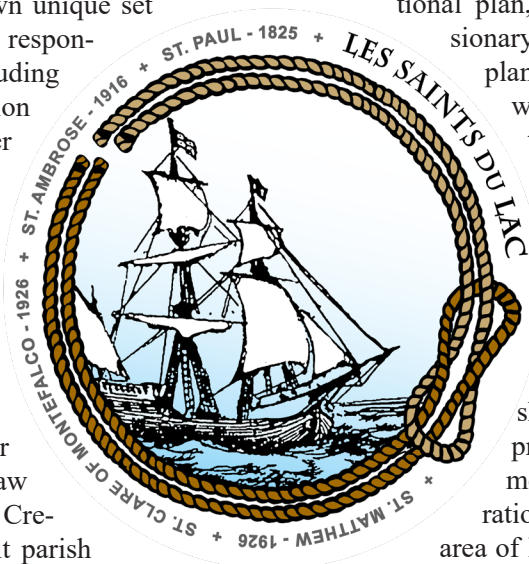
Our outreach to those seeking a parish is seen particularly in the hospitable way that couples for Marriage are received here. We use our smaller size to personalize ministry over constraints of larger scale programming. In the spirit of Pope Francis, we also do field-hospital ministry not only with weddings, but also with Baptisms, OCIA, funerals, annulments and more.

Family Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council

The FoP Pastoral Council is not constituted for us as of this writing. While we maintain our original Administrative Council, that group has expanded greatly in size to include an Infrastructure Sub Committee of 7 persons who have been meeting monthly for the past two years with the focus of preventing another catastrophic “water event” that took out all four of our buildings in the Summer of 2021.

This group adds qualified individuals all the time, including civic managers, architects, engineers, urban planners, etc. Consultation with the City of Detroit and with the neighborhood

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All Things Considered

Continued from page three...

groups on these matters has strengthened the parish and our outreach. This is an ongoing process that is destined to bolster our internal strengths as well as our credibility with the community.

Staff Competencies

By necessity and choice, St. Ambrose has been and continues to be lean when it comes to staffing. Because we are small, we were able to maintain all our employees during the pandemic. As our staff begins to age-out, we look first to the employees in the FoP. We recently added a person from the St. Matthew's staff for our business office team. After a lengthy search, a new Music Minister was brought onto the parish leadership team late this Fall.

A reasonably healthy income base that was made stable by a push to move the congregation to electronic giving was put in place pre-Covid. It allows us to give cost of living increases across the board every year.

Physical Plant

The destruction caused by the "water event" of 2021 was catastrophic for the physical plant of St. Ambrose. We have been engaged in a two-year rebuilding of all of our HV/AC and electrical systems, elevators, etc. In addition, the ARK at St. Ambrose (and its catering kitchen) is completely new. The ARK rebuilding is a year past its completion date.

In preparation for the Centennial of our church building in 2026 we have systematically engaged in exterior and interior upgrades and repairs to that building. This addresses exterior damage done by the "water event" but not covered by insurance, e.g. concrete replacement and leveling. A donation of \$50,000 was given for repairs to our Casavant Pipe Organ (with the approvals of the AoD) that are nearing completion. The instrument, which had been neglected for many years, is now in reasonably good playing condition – augmented with a rank of pipes that came to us from the demolished

St. Patrick's Church behind Orchestra Hall.

There is new interest, with potential direction from the City of Detroit, in the redevelopment of our convent property as mixed-use residential. This has been a long-term development project of our parish.

Safety/Security

The parish has had a PRES (Parish Response to Emergency Situations) plan in place for many years. The plan is inserted in each of the hymnals used at Mass. We are working with National Heritage Academies, the lessee of our school building, to review and upgrade their entrances. Required fire and safety drills are conducted on an annual basis.

All staff and volunteers who work with or have access to minors and vulnerable adults have received Archdiocesan-directed training in abuse awareness and prevention. All received criminal background record checks.

Our physical (paper) records are secured. The parish sacramental registers are well maintained: secured in a fireproof safe on the main floor of our rectory and up-to-date. Those older, *supplemental* records damaged in the "water event" have been freeze-dried and returned in archival banker boxes. They can be accessed if there is ever a need.

The parish uses normal software tools to secure its digital data and help staff and volunteers defend against cyber-attacks.

Properties

The parish is engaged in a protracted negotiation with the Urban Renewal Initiative Foundation – the builders of the Performing Arts Center on the property directly between our church and Jefferson Avenue. In addition to the strain we feel that this project puts on the infrastructure, it also requires concessions of us in terms of existing lot lines, easements, mechanical equipment, and parking. This is not going well. The previous joint parking arrangement between the URIF has been rejected by the parish due to the

conditions put forth by that entity. The URIF wants unlimited parking rights to the church parking lot. The URIF also seeks an emergency access road which would force the relocation of a section of our handicapped parking area. The Archdiocesan Properties Department, in particular, Mike McNerney and our Finance/Infrastructure team, are involved in trying to reach a settlement. The parish cannot cede being the controlling agent of its parking area. How this issue is resolved will have lasting effects on the campus of St. Ambrose and our abilities to function without unnecessary restraints. The Urban Renewal Initiative Foundation holds several parcels of property adjacent to Merit Academy which are desired for school expansion. At one time, this was a joint venture with St. Ambrose. It now is a venture of National Heritage Academies and the parish.

Closing Statement

"The Code of Canon Law emphasizes that the Parish is not identified as a building or a series of structures, but rather as a specific community of the faithful, where the Parish Priest is the proper pastor[30]. Pope Francis recalled that "the parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration", and affirmed that it is "a community of communities"[31]."

"The various components that make up the Parish are called to communion and unity. When each part recognizes its complementary role in service of the community, on the one hand, we see the fulfilment of the collaborative ministry of the Parish Priest with his Assistant Priests, while on the other hand, we see how the various charisms of deacons, consecrated men and women and the laity, cooperate in building up the singular body of Christ (cf. 1 Co 12:12)."

From the Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church," Pope Francis to the Congregation for the Clergy, 20.07.2020.

The Buzz

Technically this is Holy Family Weekend on the Church's calendar. For all practical purposes, it is New Year's Eve, and for the BUZZ it also includes the celebration of Epiphany. And because of early publisher deadlines, I'm writing this even before Christmas happens. For an elderly person, it's difficult to keep all of this straight!

20+C+M+B+24

There is a special emphasis on world peace every January 1st in the Church. For a while under Pope Paul VI, it seemed to be growing as the preferred theme to be celebrated for New Year's Day. But then under the very Marian Pope John Paul II it swung back to another old focus: the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God.

I think they both fit together. Read again today's Gospel. It continues the infancy story from Luke with the shepherds' visit to the manger, their understanding the message, and then going out to proclaim to others what the angels had told them. Meanwhile, Mary reflected on all these things in her heart.

All good moms want peace in their families. Who's in Mary's family – Joseph and Jesus and that's it? From ancient times in the Church, Mary has had the title Θεοτοκε, God-bearer, or Mother of God (because Jesus is God). Now jump from the birth of Christ ahead to the cross. In John's Gospel, at the foot of the cross are standing two people – Mary and the "beloved disciple." Jesus gives her to him as his mother, and he to her as her son. Who is the "beloved disciple"? Over the years he has very handily been identified as the Apostle John himself.

Today, scholars help us identify that the omission of a particular name in favor of a more mysterious title was intentional and inspired. Who is the beloved disciple? We are! And especially in communion with our "brother" Jesus – all children of one and the same Heavenly Father – Mary is given to us as our mother as well. And what does every good mother want? . . .

Let's do our part in 2024 to make peace more of a reality – wherever and whenever we can – than it was in 2023. Lord knows our world needs such help. How about if you and I support one another to stay on the plus side of peace in the equation that will see so much on the negative side in American politics, international relations, and even the inner workings of the Church during 2024. I'm bold enough to think it's what our Mother and our Brother would want from us.

20+C+M+B+24

Next weekend we celebrate another truth about Jesus that comes to us from the infancy story in Matthew. Epiphany always makes me wonder how billions of Christians have come to discover the Lord. What's your story? Is it one of dramatic personal encounter (ala St. Paul); is it one of cultural expectation (ala many of us through family, parish, school, etc.); is it one of personal search (ala the Magi)?

There are many valid encounter storylines about people with Emmanuel. Our scriptures and tradition assure us that they are often full of irony and surprise. The Magi were mysterious foreigners and Gentiles who used pagan, forbidden means (reading the stars) to search for a (most surprising) king. They responded well in their quest. Yet the people who were better prepared with the wisdom of scripture and history ... missed the point!

At the beginning of 2024, how are you and I doing at "getting the point"? We have a great foundation for faith prepared for us. It points us in the right direction; it warmly invites us to journey to meet Him. If you are reading this, it probably means you have come to this "house of bread" (beth-lehem). Did you find Him? Did you get the point of it all? The beginning of a new year is a good time to make a resolution to spend 2024 prayerfully ready to see Emmanuel in every surprising way He comes to us ... and to grow closer to Him each and every day. That would make for the best year ever!

Szczesliwego Nowego Roku! – Karolek (Chuck) Dropiewski

Ghirelli Rosaries

Six different custom designed rosaries were made by hand in Italy expressly for St. Ambrose Parish. The bead collection ranges from hard woods to various semi-precious stones.

The crucifix is modeled from the Ark Plaza sculpture and the center piece depicts the First and Second Coming of Christ from our sanctuary. The "Pater" bead is taken from details in our stained glass windows.

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The Beehive

is the parish weekly bulletin of the St. Ambrose Catholic Community Detroit/Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan

Priest in Solidum: Rev. Timothy R. Pelc

Pastoral Minister: Charles Dropiewski

Religious Education: Kelly Anne Woolums

Minister of Music:

Office Manager: Peggy O'Connor

Secretary: Mary Urbanski

Sacramental Celebrations

Masses: On the Lord's Day –

Saturday Vigil - 4:00 p.m.

Sunday - 8:30 & 11:15 a.m.

Baptism: Arrangements for both adults and infants to be made by contacting the rectory.

Penance: As announced and by appointment.

Marriage: Couples should contact the rectory office a minimum of six months in advance of the proposed date to make arrangements.

Funeral: Normally celebrated within one week after the deceased's passing.

Directory

Parish Office: 15020 Hampton

Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan 48230

Tel: (313) 822-2814 **Fax:** (313) 822-9838

Email address: stambrose@comcast.net

Religious Education: (313) 332-5633

Pastoral Ministry: (313) 332-5631

Ark Scheduling: (313) 822-2814

Parish Website: stambrosechurch.net

Liturgy Schedule

Monday, January 1

Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother
10:00 a.m. – For Peace in the World

Tuesday, January 2

St. Basil & St. Gregory Nazianzen,
8:30 a.m. Mass – Dr. Franklin McDonald

Wednesday, January 3

The Most Holy Name of Jesus

Thursday, January 4

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious
7:00 p.m. – Mass - Adeline Urbanski

Friday, January 5

St. John Neumann, bishop
12:00 p.m. – Mass – Dr. Robert Rownd

Saturday, January 6

St. Andre Bessette, religious
1:30 p.m. Confirmation Liturgy
4:00 p.m. – Mass – For All People
Sunday, January 7
The Epiphany of the Lord
8:30 a.m. - Mass – For All People
11:15 a.m. – Mass – For All People



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Scriptures for the Christmas Octave

January 1

Nm 6: 22-27
Ps 67: 2-3, 5-6, 8
Gal 4: 4-7
Lk 2: 16-21

January 2

1 Jn 2: 22-28
Ps 98: 1-4
Jn 1: 19-28

January 3

1 Jn 2: 29-3: 6
Ps 98: 1-3, 6
Jn 1: 29-34

January 4

1 Jn 3: 7-10
Ps 98: 1, 7-9
Jn 1: 35-42

January 5

1 Jn 3: 11-21
Ps 96: 1-3, 5b-6
Lk 2: 22-35

January 6

1 Jn 5: 5-13
Ps 147: 12-15, 19-20
Mk 1: 7-11

January 7

Is 60: 1-6
Ps 72: 1-2, 7-8, 10-13
Eph 3: 2-3a, 5-6
Mt 2: 1-12

Feast of the Holy Family

December 30th & 31st

Reference # in our Breaking Bread Hymnal or on your iPhone using the QR code

Opening: The Snow Lay on The Ground #91

Glory: Mass of Creation (Haugen) #885

Responsorial: Today Our Savior Is Born #799

Preparation of Gifts: What Child is This #97

Holy: Mass of Creation (Haugen) #886

Lamb of God: Mass of Creation (Haugen) #889

Communion: It Came Upon The Midnight Clear #105

Closing: Joy To The World #86



To participate electronically, go to: facebook.com/stambroseparish or better yet, to
You Tube at www.youtube.com/channel/UCbymbBGIQxUF6UqPct5xFg

Your Envelope Speaks ... the Inside Story

To operate, each week our parish requires a *minimum* of..... \$10,100.00

On Sunday, December 17, 2023

in envelopes we received \$5,347.00
in the loose collection..... \$2,172.00
in electronic donations..... \$5,179.66
for a total of \$12,698.66
Over budget for the week..... \$2,598.66
Number of envelopes mailed 621
Number of envelopes used 61



Join us on YouTube

www.youtube.com/channel/UCbymbBGIQxUF6UqPct5xFg

Our Sick

Please pray for those who are seriously ill or who are hospitalized:
Pat Blake, Donald Miriani, Bonnie McKenna, Matthew Elias, Mary Martin, Emilie Kasper, Anna Noto Billings, Eileen O'Brien, Liz Linne, Donna Barnes, Charmaine Kaptur, Frank Gregory, Alex Billiu, Jackie Walkowski, Maria Simcina, Sharif Hannan, Shirley Whelan, Ricardo Hernandez Montoya, Albina Checki, Judy Sivanov, Matthew Brown, Lily Faith, Patty Freund, Janis Ramsey, Colette Gilewicz, Al LaHood, Valerie Hudson, Jeanene Maples, Angela Hansen, John Freund, Kevin O'Connor, Tiffany Saine, Nick Piccione, Ann Billiu, Kiernan Tague and those suffering and hospitalized worldwide with Covid.

Our Dead

Dr. Maria-Gertrud Meingast

was born to Adele and Theodor Frenger in 1925 in Cologne, Germany. She lived an idyllic life in the countryside attending a convent school until it was closed by the Nazi regime. After WWII, she would earn a medical degree from the University of Bonn. Her family would relocate to Aachen where she resided before coming to the United States in 1968 with her husband, Johannes, a Doctor in Physics, who had secured a job in Detroit at Uniroyal.

They settled in Grosse Pointe Park and become members of St. Ambrose. Maria-Gertrud would relinquish her medical career and focus full time on being a mom to Hanno, Wolfram, Christoph, Klaus and Herbert.

The consummate “Hausfrau,” Maria-Gertrud would use her old-world upbringing to create a home surrounded by beautiful things: great gardens and greater cooking. Annual trips back to Germany would keep Maria-Gertrud and “Hanno” connected with relatives there. Augmenting those trips were adventures across this country.

She remained in Grosse Pointe Park following the death of her husband in 2016. Independent living for her ended during the pandemic when she moved to Ann Arbor to be with family. She died on November 26th and her funeral mass was celebrated here on December 21st in the presence of her American and German family.



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in
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