

INTERVIEW WITH WARREN DENNISON
October 4, 1989
WITH: RUTH REED AND CAROL WISTER

A 1952 ROSTER OF DIRECTORS

Warren: The Pamphlet I have here is called the Bulletin of the First Congregational Church of Greenwich; the subject, Religious Education at First Church from material presented at "Neighborhood Days", June 9 - 24, 1952. It talks about the basis of the beliefs of the Congregational Church, it's educational objectives and the thing of special interest to us today is the list of people who were doing what at that time. Of course the Pastor is Vincent Daniels. The Director of Music was Viola Worrell. The General Superintendent of the Sunday School was Mrs. Laten Lent (Emily). The Treasure was George Goldsmith. He was the Treasurer of the Sunday school; a tall heavy man, dark beard, I believe, mustache. The Secretary was Mrs. Jack Spratt (the first). The Junior Choir Director was Mrs. Paul Steavey and the Primary Choir Director was Mrs. George Rupenacher. Then of course the Departmental Superintendents included, Mrs. Robert Wilkins, Mrs. Arthur Wripple (Genevieve), Mrs. Russel Morgan (Rita), Mrs. Donald Kaiser, Mrs. Johnstone Mackey, and Mr. Dexter Bruce, (who is still with us, thank goodness). The Choir Mothers Guild was headed by Mrs. Roswell Potter (Mabel) and Church Hour Nursery was run by Mrs. Warner Finney (Betty is still around). And then Women's Guild included Alma Halsey, Mrs. George Stettson (Margaret), Mrs. D. Richard Young (Hia), Mrs. Willard Hoyt (Florence), Evening Guild, Mrs. Harold Hines, Mrs. Eland Grim who comes to our church still, Mrs. Donald Kaiser, Mrs. Thiel Ficker, (Marion), Mrs. Dexter Bruce (Martha), Mr. Leonard Hinkley (he was the Boy Scout Committee Chairman). Then, oh, this takes us back : The Chancel Choir, this had as it's President, Ed Owen, Vice President, Astrid Andrews, German Music was Arthur Cooke (he was on the Church Committee), Linda Worrell was the Librarian and the gowns were cared for by Mrs. John Weneski. Margaret Denison was the Corresponding Secretary for the Choir Mother's Guild, Joanne Westbrook was the Vice President of it, Mrs. Robert Birely, who lived in Havemeyer on Arnold Place, was the Secretary, Peg Brinkerhoff was in charge of Attendance, George Rupenicker directed the choir and Mrs. E. A. Yokum, Primary Choir Representative.

MUSIC

CAROL: Where is the part that you started to tell us about the origins of the Music Program?

WARREN: Well, as I recall, Norman Clayton came and he supplemented Viola Worrell who played the organ, but she was not a very dynamic Choir Director. The Choir was rather small. I don't believe I was in it at that time. Norman came and the thing started to grow. Norman was a much loved young man. He caused the choir to become a larger choir and better trained. We were still in the old church, of course at that time. I can't remember when he came, but it was probably in the early 50's. He stayed with us a few years and then Jerry Mack came. I wish I could give you an exact date. But, when Jerry came things began to really flourish.

CAROL: I would guess it was the mid 50's.

WARREN: I would too, Carol. Jerry was a teacher in the High School. In that capacity

he would invite his students, his voice students to come to the First Congregational Church to get additional instruction. One result was that our choir was immediately much larger and we had some fine voices in addition to the adult voices already there and already being recruited from the congregation. We had a platoon system. Remember in the old church, prior to 1959 we had two services; 9:15 and 11.00. So we had 50 choir members to compose a choir at each service. There were a great many who sang both services, Thiel Ficker, for example. He liked to sing both services, and I did too. So, for what it was worth I sang both services, as did quite a few others. But, on the rolls we had nearly 100 people in the choir. Jerry stayed until at least 10 years. In any event it made a great impression on the church. He had a willing partner in Vincent Daniels. I don't know whose conception it was initially. But, at one time the church set out to grow and train its own organists along with growth of a separate church service for young people. It happened contemporaneously with our own adult service in the meetinghouse.

CAROL: Where was this held?

WARREN: In the auditorium. They had their own lectern; they had their own sermon. They had their own organ. And, their own people who carried the thing in general. They decided they needed an organ not just a piano. They decided if the young peoples' service was going to sound genuine, give it the flavor of the adult service, it should have an organ also. So, we decided we would buy an organ. They asked me to solicit money. I got money from 169 individuals and organizations totaling a little over \$5,000. And with that money we bought an organ for the young people. Not only to use in the church but, for the budding organists to use for practice. So, they need not use the big organ.

CAROL: How long did we have that organ?

WARREN: Not very long, Carol, it was a beautiful thing. It had two speakers, big speakers, each one as big as that desk. One sat in the front of the parish house on the left the other in the front on the right and the organ console stood on a dolly so that we could move it around in the hall and take it out of that room. It was connected on the stage. Here is the organ fund record of solicitation. (The accountant that did this did not show the date). Two people came to compete for the sale of the organ. We even had a gadget inside that gave you the tremolo effect of a large pipe organ. Peggy was one of the students who used that organ. She would know (the date). I can guess at it because after that training she became the organist at the Jewish Synagogue down here at age 15. She was too young to drive. I had to go to the service with her every Friday night for two years. That makes it 1957. Martha and Dexter Bruce's daughter was one of those trained on there and Nancy Rosan and there was a girl named White also. Somewhere here I have a program where Peggy was the organist for the adult church service.

TOM STIERS, DUKE POTTER, VINCENT DANIELS

WARREN: I found an autobiography of Tom Stiers. He presented this when he was being installed, in 1976, after Vincent died. He died either one or two days before or after my first wife died.

RUTH: He died the Wednesday after Labor Day.

WARREN: Margaret died on Friday. The big funeral was on Saturday. They came from all over the County. The Fairfield County Association, of which I was moderator at one

time. Your father was on the committee that called Tom.

RUTH: He was on the committee that called Yinger; I'm not sure that he was on the committee that called Tom.

WARREN: He was on that one, too. I remember him talking to me about it. We looked and we looked and we looked and we finally realized that we had what we wanted already here. Like acres of diamonds, you know. This was in 1976. Before that, of course we had Duke Potter. Duke came with great credentials. He was a good preacher. He was a sailor, coming to a sailing town. He was youthful, he had had experience. It looked as if we could not miss. After he came, guess what? He didn't want to be a pastor, he wanted to be a preacher. This was a great disappointment to me and members of the committee because we were all so highly impressed. And, he had a lovely wife, Peggy, who was just a darling, pretty, personable, lots of fun. But, when the sermon was over on Sunday morning, the Reverend Potter got into his car and went home, upper Havermeyer. He did want to live down here in the old parsonage that we had. So, we got him a nice house. So, eventually, I guess he thought he had found what he wanted in Camden, Maine and, off he went.

CAROL: Do you remember any contributions he made to the community at all?

WARREN: Well, let's talk about changes rather than contributions. Vincent Daniels was the lifeblood of the Memorial Day parade involving the Sound Beach Volunteer Fire Department. And he, I believe, helped organize those annual parades as well as being the chaplain of the Fire Department. But, Mr. Potter, when he came, felt that that was not his function. So, that was very quickly dropped and has never come back to First Church again. In connection with Vincent's doing that, the parade ended right there in front of the church at that memorial rock that sits there by the disadvantaged parking spaces now was sitting in front of the church facing Sound Beach Avenue. Bill Vance stood out there one day after the parade I remember, and recited the Gettysburg address. After Potter gave up proprietary interest in the Fire Department, they no longer came to our church. They went over into the park to have their celebration.

RUTH: Warren, did they move the parade ending over to the park even before the church was turned around? I don't remember that we collected on the front lawn of the church after we turned the church around. Didn't that have some effect on the parade ending?

WARREN: I do not remember. What you say puts a different light on what I have said, but, anyway, the connection was severed when Duke came.

RUTH: Do you feel that Vincent was not only our minister, but the whole town's minister as well?

WARREN: That's a leading question, because, you know it, everybody knew it. He was the town minister. As he walked through town, (Old Greenwich) he knew every dog, every child. Many people came to our church because of Vincent. An example was John Sullivan, an Irish Catholic selectman). John came because of Vincent. We have Jewish people in our church because of Vincent. We have had some come since, but he had a universal appeal.

CAROL: Was he the minister at our church when you arrived in town?

WARREN: Oh, yes. We came in 1951. So, I'm a come lately. I wasn't even born here.

CAROL/RUTH: How did you choose our church?

WARREN: Same way most people did. We came into town, not knowing anything about it. Our neighbors told us that the largest and best equipped Sunday School was the one down there at that Congregational Church across from the park. "And, further more you want to know and make the acquaintance of the Pastor down there. His name is Daniels, he's quite a fellow". And, so we did. We came, and were assimilated. That's the story of about a 1000 people in this town. The Sunday School was building building building. I don't know what it was at that time, 1951, but, it was fairly large and it grew to 1100, before the decline set in. At that time there was no Presbyterian Church here in Old Greenwich. And, there had been some overtures from the Church to extend into the Eastern part of town. I believe Vincent did not encourage that. He felt that our church was adequate to provide for the spiritual needs in our end of the town and that a second church would dilute that effort. It was not until Vincent died, I believe, that that church was started.

CAROL: Are you referring to that little church next to the Old Greenwich School?

WARREN: Yes, that was a community church when I first came here, whose name I have forgotten, but it was a non-denominational church. He, that young minister, I'm sure he had some affiliation. Then, I believe the Presbyterians came in and somehow acquired control of the congregation, and the church which was originally built by Congregationalists. Eventually it was sold so that they could buy another property down on the creek where they built the building you see there now, on West End Ave.

CAROL: What do you think Vincent's special quality was?

WARREN: I can't be objective talking about Vincent. I think he was a great person. His feet may have been made of clay but it wasn't too apparent to me. He was an idealist, not always too practical. But, he wanted First Church to prosper as an institution. And, it did. From 1951 on through the next 20 years perhaps, Old Greenwich grew a pace. There used to be lots of vacant building lots when I came here. But, one by one, or two by two they disappeared. Until now there are hardly any unless someone wants to sell a part of their front yard. During that period the incoming families gravitated toward the First Congregational Church perhaps for the same reasons that Margaret and I brought our three children there. We found a well run, well staffed delightful place.

A DEACON

WARREN: I had not been active in a church for a good many years, because there was not a church I liked especially in the vicinity of where we live in Jackson Heights. So coming here was really an answer to a long felt wish on my part. I used to commute to New York with Cressy Monroe who lived around the corner from me. And, after some months Cressy said, "Warren, you know, I think you ought to be a deacon in this church". "Cressy, what in the world would I want to be a deacon for?" Soon after, Vincent enabled me as a very immature and inexperienced person in our church to handle the job. Later

as it turned out I became moderator of the Fairfield County Association. The entire County instead of half of it as it is now.

RUTH: Weren't you one of the first people to participate in the County organization for the church? As I recall we were not good members of that for a while. We did not contribute. Can you help me with that?

WARREN: Well, I don't know. I was there such a short time before I was moderator that I do not know the previous history. But, I have the impression that we were never very enthusiastic participants in the organization. Well, we later entered into it a little more fully. Particularly when the association decided to take a great gamble with the help of Walter Temple. He was not the moderator, but he was active in the organization. And, we decided we should have housing for the elderly. The outcome was Pilgrim Tower. There were various criteria for building something like that. First we wanted something for Congregational elderly people. There was a need for it. Then it had to be a place where elderly people would have recreation, transportation, hospital, shopping - within walking distance. That finally all came together in Stamford. We finally got that land back of Bloomingdales. And, it was built with Federal money on which the organization paid, I believe 3%. That is how they were able to charge such low rents. At the time that was built, mortgage money was much more expensive.

RUTH: Marcia Wilson's mother lives in that Pilgrim Towers now. So we have stayed active.

WARREN: And Ben Menegon is one of the directors and Curt Carlson. I have a letter: This was written in 1984. Curt Carlson, at that time, was president of the Pilgrim Towers association. He's writing to a man who was then moderator of the Fairfield West association. Furthermore the way our people became involved was thru seed money. Twice we went to the churches in the Association for seed money in order to get started. We had to have money for an architect. We had to have money for planning. We had to have transportation for people to go to Washington, or whatever was done. And Walter Temple was very active as the thing progressed. But, I was gathering seed money. It got started while I was moderator and did not come to fruition until afterward. My job was to gather the seed money that was needed. Always the best contributions, the most willing contribution, was from one of the Guilds, here in our church. They were so generous. They set the pace for the rest of them.

We were talking about Vincent and his influence on people's lives in Old Greenwich. He was a very intense man. You could not meet Vincent and ignore your recollection of him. He made an impression. When I was Senior Deacon, I used to have a question that could be answered in two minutes. The poor man worked so hard. I was ashamed to take any of his time. But, I would go to him sometimes in his office. "Vincent I have a quick question for you and I do not want to take your time. May I have just one minute of your time, and I mean one minute?" "Sure Warren, come in and sit down." An hour later I left. And the poor man would do that no matter what his backlog of work was. Many a time, sure he has gone into the pulpit without a prepared service. I said to him one time, "How do you do this Vincent, there are times when you do not have time to prepare a sermon?" "Well, I'll tell you Warren, it's like this; I've been giving sermons for a long while, and perhaps writing to, in my memory there are a number of five minute sermons. For a ten minute service I put together two of them. A twenty minute service, that's four of

them." I understand this because there were times when it seemed his sermons were constructed in that way. But, the poor man also had a misfortune, he was subject to migraines. He was practically blind with migraines and he would still go into the pulpit with a big smile on his face and an engaging personality. And, it would just hurt him terribly.

You mentioned that he was a friend of everybody in town. Most of the known drunks in town knew that Vincent was available for a heart to heart and reassuring talk any time they needed some moral uplift. The drunk coming down the street could look at Vincent's house and know when Vincent was willing and ready to receive because there was a little light on the house near the front door. When that light was on every drunk in town was welcome to come and talk to Vincent. It was an institution by the time I arrived. Vincent was never the best dressed man in town. He seemed to be careless of his attire. Not that he was not clean. But, sometimes he did not have an overcoat. The story is that Vincent could never stand to see somebody else in need if he could give anything that he owned to relieve that need. So, in the winter time, he no more than got a coat than he gave it away. He used to come to the church over there on COLD days, just a jacket and suit. He worked so hard. He did the shopping for his family (food shopping? - yes).

CAROL: He was often available; night or day, from what I recall.

WARREN: Telephone call from the chief of police. "Dr. Daniels, we have young Joe Zilch down here and he has been under the influence and he's in jail." Vincent says, "I'll be right down". I don't know how often this happened. I'm told it was many times. When young people got into trouble, Vincent would take personal responsibility for their appearance at a trial, if there be one, or perhaps if the guy had not hurt anybody, was just misbehaving he would be released - anyway for Vincent to see that the guy straightened up and behaved himself. There was a lot of that too. I'd forgotten about that.

RUTH: It didn't matter whether the child was a member of our church or not?

WARREN: No, all it needed to be was a young person; especially if they came from our neighborhood - our community. Vincent would see to it that the young man got as lenient treatment as possible from the law.

CAROL: Do you ever recall him being sick? You mentioned the migraines. But, he was always in motion, always there.

WARREN: Seemed to be, I can't remember. There must have been times when his doctor would tell him, "go to bed Vincent". I don't even know who his doctor was.

CAROL: What about Frank Reed?

WARREN: I'm hopeful it was Frank Reed. Frank would have seen to it that Vincent got some rest. As far as Frank was able to impose his will on Vincent.

RUTH: Well, the year he died, he was not in the pulpit, if you recall.

WARREN: That's right. He had been subject to fibrillation. That was one thing that failed him. Merton (Libby) of course was on board by that time. The day he died, Merton

wasn't getting any response on the telephone. Merton went over to the house and found that Vincent had dropped dead standing in front of the lavatory.

RUTH: It was in the morning.

WARREN: That's the story I got. Anything I say is subject to correction. I'm saying it as I recall it and as I understood it.

CAROL: How about in relation to turning the church around. Could we talk a little more about that? Were you involved on committees for that?

WARREN: I was Chairman of the Board (Trustees). The conversations went on and on. What should we do? Someplace I found a record of the attendance. You won't believe the number of people that came to our church. We had over 400 people a day coming to our service. It averaged pretty close to that.

CAROL: Between the two services - we just couldn't handle them in that little church?

WARREN: Couldn't handle them.

CAROL: Was it a single person's idea or was it a committee's idea to enlarge the church?

WARREN: I don't know whose idea it was originally, but it was a consensus. John B. Holbrook, he came from Pittsburg. He and I used to commute together and we talked about it for an hour, almost every morning. At one time we - a committee of 15 I think - I was not on it. My term as Chairman of the Board ended before the church was built, but I was in on it to the point that I appointed a fundraiser. It was Bob Guy, and a good one he was too. Bob was a good chairman and he raised the money. We got a professional to help us, his name was Paul Dudley. There was a cartoon character at that time called, Uncle Dudley. So, we called him Uncle Dudley. And he gave us a lot of help. These professional fundraisers do not actually raise the money for you. They tell you how to do it; they try to inspire you. Their organization writes a brochure that is appealing and helps prepare the way. It's a copy of that brochure that I am looking for.

We talked about enlarging the church by pushing it back; that is simply moving it back toward Sound Beach Avenue. But, nobody was quite satisfied with that. Ken Coffin was our architect. At one time we even talked about a separate new building made of brick, God forbid!, down there next to the Sound Beach sidewalk. If we had done that it, the long way, would have been North and South, parallel to the sidewalk. Finally one Monday morning John got on the train, "Warren we've got it; Jackson Smith has come up with the greatest idea. Wait till you hear this. We are going to turn the church around." "Oh yeh?!" But, the more he talked about it the more it made sense. Jackson made a rough design which was finally made into a workable design by Ken Coffin's organization. Originally, as I remember they did not plan that break in the roof. There is a break in the roof so that it will not look like one barn structure, where the height comes down; I think in the chancel. That was a refinement of it. Then we decided to put columns on the inside, decorative columns - but they weren't decorative, they were structural. That is stone, thin stone around a steel column that sits there. There's air space in there too.

RUTH: We have pictures showing the plasterer making those columns.

WARREN: The plasterer didn't make the columns - the arches. And they decided that visibility from the chapel into the pulpit was too impaired by one column there, so they took out one column and made that a compound curve. I watched the man make that. It was a fantastic thing. He had two fulcrums; one here and one here and a string. We had two - three breaks on the construction of that building; when it was finally approved in that fashion. The first was that Percy Letz learned that the First Presbyterian Church of Stamford had been torn down and that the stone had been sold to a man who in turn was going to sell it to the State of Connecticut to use as filler in the thruway that was being built at the time. So Percy came back and said, "You know, that stone comes from the same quarry that produced the stone from which our church was built in 1894, and we must get hold of it." So the Trustees said, "fine Percy, you get it!" So Percy paid \$5,000 for the stone. It was hauled over in trucks. We had no place to put it except in the far end of the cemetery which was not developed - where the chicken coops are. The stone was piled there for a year or more waiting for time and place and the way to use it. The second break was that somebody - our architect perhaps, went to a convention of building materials producers and found a producer of Indiana Limestone who was very anxious to sell Indiana Limestone for the price that you would sell for a cheap cement substitute. And so, that is how we happen to have limestone in there instead of a cheap cement substitute. It may have been Ken Coffin, I don't know.

RUTH: The Indiana Limestone; where is it used?

WARREN: In the steps of the Chancel, in the columns that you are talking about, in the capitals of the columns. That's all I can think of, Ruth.

CAROL: You said there was a third break.

WARREN: The third was that at the time we decided to do this there was a depression in construction. We were able to get the construction company to come and do the work at a price that perhaps would have been more had we done it a year later.

CAROL: Did it take about a year to build this church?

WARREN: Easily. Meanwhile they had torn the stone out of the end of the church next to the street. And had plywood and frame in there and insulation. We worshiped in the church with those circumstances while the workmen were working to extend the church. There was a time when we worshiped in the auditorium, too. Our worship was never interrupted; we never had to go elsewhere to do our worship. We could use either the auditorium or the meetinghouse - the old one. Of course the old arch was truncated on its side. They cut that down so that the old arch didn't look too archy any more.

CAROL: That would be in the rear of the church underneath where some of the organ pipes are.

WARREN: The Antiphonal Organ is back there on the balcony. That is a part of the arch. You can see it there. It is still there. When I first came here in 1951 they had just finished the Sunday School building. In doing so, they did away with a window that had

been in the front of the church. The picture of Christ was in the middle of that stained glass window, supposedly had been done by John Singer Sargent. Some woman in the congregation protested, it was offensive to her. And, because of it, she was not only going to withdraw from the church, but she was going to come back and protest and interrupt the morning the services because of losing this window. She thought it was a desecration.

CAROL: How was this handled?

WARREN: I don't know - I think she may have had a change of heart. I remember standing with Vincent, he said something to me after church. He had just greeted the people. He said, "Thank goodness, Warren, it didn't happen. There was a woman who said she was going to interrupt the service this morning and she didn't do so". There may have been several mornings like that, but I remember one, when he confided in me his anxiety.

RUTH: I remember briefly before we built the Sunday School wing we also changed the chancel; enlarged the chancel of the old church at one point. When we did that Christ's picture was still there. Then I thought that for some reason that they lighted it from behind, so that it could stay there. But, then when we built the Sunday School we changed the chancel again and that's when it disappeared. And we put what is now the chapel altar where Christ's head used to be. They had that lovely wooden paneling and that cloth hanging.

WARREN: That big beautiful carved oak thing is now sitting in the chapel and the other panel was moved to the new chancel. So when we reversed the church; this is the time to settle this old complaint. We'll take the life of Christ and we'll stick it in one of the old stained glass windows on the side. And, he was there on the side next to the old parish house; right now. And, this is when it occurred.

CAROL: At the back of the church.

WARREN: Yes. The old church didn't hold very many people; a couple hundred was really the maximum.

CAROL: You said you had recollections about the old pews when we first came.

WARREN: Yes, I can't remember the name of the church. One time a couple of years ago Betty and I went to that church as representatives from our church to the association. And, there they were. And, we sat in them.

CAROL: So this is in Fairfield County? So they are in use today.

WARREN: Oh, yes. There used in the church that was just being built and money was hard to come by, so, we gave them our pews. Deluca was the name of the organization that did the extension on the church. He was a Princeton graduate. He made quite a point of that and he used to like to kid some of the others who graduated from competitive Ivy Schools. Vincent Daniels was Yale, of course. Took his theological work at Yale; got his PhD in History I believe at Yale. But, he got his Bachelors Degree at Marietta College in Ohio. That is where Helen Daniels (Helen Brooks was her maiden

name) went to school. They were in school there at the same time; whether they met there or not, I do not know, I don't know where Vincent came from originally. But, he was an acknowledged intellectual amongst his peers, in the association. They had great respect for him.

CAROL: My father used to refer to him as a "Minister's Minister".

WARREN: I think that's a good description. Meanwhile Merton had come here before Vincent died in 1963. For how long I can't recall. Do you remember Carol?

CAROL: No. - Editor: He came in 1956.

WARREN: I would guess so; Merton and I became very good friends. We would sail together and visited together and chatted together; exchanged ideas. I was writing my sermon as senior deacon. I sat in Merton's office. I think it was 1957, it may have been 1956. He was not there. I was writing my sermon. There is a nice old black walnut tree in the parking lot. When I was a child we always gathered black walnuts in the fall. And hulled them. My hands were black. We hulled them and ate the walnuts on the cold winter nights at home in Ohio. Well, I was much interested in this walnut tree. I'd hear a walnut go thud, and I'd hurry out to go pick up the nut, before the squirrels picked them up. The squirrels were busy at the time. I can't remember when it was, but the Senior Deacon's sermon was given on Labor Day, Sunday. I was writing my sermon at the time the nuts were falling in the fall. Nellie Hutchinson had her office down there on the left front, down stairs, at the end of the Sunday School at the steps going out to the front door on Sound Beach Avenue. Anyway that was part of the design. Put in different colored doors in the Sunday school so that little kids who couldn't tell the difference between rooms A or B or one and two would know which was their room.

We had a company named "Willet". Willet did that beautiful big window that Mrs. Benson bought, the one in the chancel; the gold window with the colored glass. When it was new it was pretty bright and shiny. It's now dull and burnished, but I feel it is a most exceptional window in concept as well as execution. One of Don Fraser's sons took an interest in us and was going to the West Coast where Willet of Philadelphia had installed a window like the one in our chancel. He went out there and came back with a glowing report of its effectiveness. We had pictures of it, but we could not quite conceive of what it would be like full scale. So, we bought it and I'm so happy we did. I think we have, perhaps one of few like it in the United States. I think it's an outstanding thing. Because, at night, when there is no light beyond to shine in, you see only the gold. In the morning when the light shines through you do not know there is any gold there, you see only the stained glass. A remarkable thing. I've often thought that we were so blessed to have Willet conceive of this and Helen Benson to finance it. The good Lord was looking over our shoulder in lots of ways as this building took place. John Margenot worked on our building or his father did; maybe he did too. He mentioned it one day.

CAROL: Warren, do you remember the very first service we had in the church when it had been redone?

WARREN: I think so, before you came I was trying to remember that, the way it comes back to me. Vincent Daniels, sick as he was, came and sat in the chancel; I'm not sure

which side. I remember him standing at the lectern talking to us. I'm not sure, I cannot remember if he was the one who gave the sermon that day. As I recall it was our first service. It was a cold day in the wintertime. We thought we were blessed when an engineer told us we did not need to buy a new furnace for just the extension itself. That we could use the old furnace by putting additional pipes, simply extending the hot water pipes farther through our present church. We had an acid test that day. The day we had our first service it was as cold as "Billy be damned". It was reasonably comfortable. So I thought, I guess the engineers are right that we can depend on the old furnace to do double duty and heat water for both the original and the new portions. We've had doubts since that time, but anyway, at the time it looked as if that was the way to go.

RUTH: As I recall, Warren, wasn't the first service somewhere around the holidays; Thanksgiving or Christmas?

WARREN: I'm not sure of the date. I thought it was in January. But, you could be right. It was in the cold part of the winter.

CAROL: Is there anything special about that service that you recall?

WARREN: Just the fact that I was relieved that the furnace was able to keep us comfortable. The fact that Vincent stood up there. I remember those two things, that's about all I remember. Seeing Vincent. I have a picture of him standing there at the lectern. That sick man; he was so proud.

RUTH: What was wrong with him then. Because we are talking 1961 and he did not die until 1963.

WARREN: I think it was his heart, whether it was fibulation then or whether that developed later. I never knew that it was anything different that carried him off than what he was already suffering. It was in a period of sickness. He did not get sick that day. I mean he got out of bed and came to the house over there, and he had not been coming over to the services. He came over and participated in the service. I felt so happy for him, because, this was the realization of his dream. His church, that he had built. As a congregation it was now built as an edifice.

You know it is usually said that once you persuade people to increase their pledge, for whatever reason, they don't usually go back to their original. People made special pledges to build that church as an additional pledge, plus their operating pledge. So, we had two pledges; two payments every week. The effect of building that church was to increase the vision of the congregation whose pledges were increased thereafter for just operations.

Something that I have always enjoyed showing visitors and children too; in the nursery downstairs or in one of the rooms downstairs there is a picture of the animals going into Noah's Ark. A little monkey at the end is scratching his head because he has no partner. A bit of whimsy on the part of Willet.

RUTH: That wasn't planned?

WARREN: I don't know. It was one of the outcomes anyway. Willet redid some of the other windows, I think and improved some. Willet did all the windows in the chapel.

That represents the history of the Congregational Church. Other windows in the church represent the history of the Christian Church. Those things were, I think, the result of Vincent's dreaming and we have that orderly method of separation of the local history and the Christian Church generally.

CAROL: We are hoping to come out with a pamphlet that will be sort of a self-guided tour. Which will be nice for people to take home and reflect on. There is a lot to absorb if you go to one of those tours on the church windows. And, it would be nice to have something written.

WARREN: Interesting to hear you say that. I made that suggestion 15 years ago. I talked to Mike Chaplin about it; to revive it. Mike says, "great idea, great idea". We had a "Tree Top" party where we entertained all the workman who worked on the church. "Tree Top" means when they finish the roof structure. I don't know if they had the roof on, but anyway they had the steel framing up. They put a Christmas tree up there on top. When the church was all done, we had a book of memory where each workman signed his name. And, we had a party in the Parish House where the workmen and their wives were invited. They came and celebrated the completion of the church with us.

CAROL: Was this a dinner?

WARREN: No, No, I don't think it was - a tea party. Vincent and the committee treated Deluca as if he were a member of the family. When we had the dedication Deluca sat in the front row of the church.

We were going to buy the pews from some man, I do not remember his name, but, Ken Coffin, when he was designing the church, we asked how many people will this church seat. He said, "counting the choir and filling all the pews; 550". We said, "That's a lot. How did you figure that"? "Well, he says, "I figure 20 inches per individual". Each Congregationalist is no more then 20 inches wide. Somebody said that they knew some that were more then 20 inches wide. So, I think, as a practical thing, the maximum capacity of the church without chairs etc. is less than 550. But, you have to remember we have taken one complete row of pews out of the front and another out of the back.

CAROL: Since it was built?

WARREN: Yes, they were in there. And for years they were stored on the stage in the Parish House.

RUTH: Why did we remove them, Warren?

WARREN: Well, aesthetic reasons. Because you could see that if you had a pew and you took away that space from the back of the church. There is not much space for the choir to assemble back there and not much room to walk back there with the pews in there and in the front. We put the pews in there and in the front thinking they would be necessary and they were on occasion, but not as a rule so the decision was to take them out. I always felt a little uncomfortable about it, but we did do so.

CAROL: Do they still have them?

WARREN: I doubt it.

RUTH: Warren, would you go back to the ministers and reflect a little on them? You said that you were a good friend of Merton's and you sailed and visited with him. What was his contribution to the life of the church, different from others'? What was their special quality?

WARREN: Merton was a rock in the middle of storms. You know it's axiomatic. You cannot replace a beloved minister with the first candidate. Everybody expects the new man to be a clone of the one they lost. Nobody is a clone of somebody else. So we had interim ministers. We had a man named Harry Adams preaching here for a while. It was also the custom that the visiting minister was not a candidate.

RUTH: Merton was not preaching at the time.

WARREN: Oh, yes, but, Harry was preaching part time at least, maybe full time. Merton never wanted to be the principle.

CAROL: His love was not preaching, he reached out in many other ways.

WARREN: Administrative work was what he liked best, I think, but his own personal pastoral prayers were polished gems. He used to make sentences just as it should be. Every adjective was just appropriate, and so on. Harry Adams told me one day he would like to be a candidate. That's not customary. Of course, I was chairman of the search committee that finally picked Potter. But, to get back to your question. Merton was there, as an administrator, as a preacher if we needed one, as a counselor. If our candidates didn't please us we knew we could always fall back on Merton. I think he was the man for the job. He did not want to be Senior Minister. There was no contest and yet he could take care of all the necessary things. He kept the congregation together. It always worried me when I was Senior Deacon, the fact that the big congregation would somehow split over unimportant things. They may have been important, but I felt there was nothing more important than keeping the congregation together. As Senior Deacon that was my one aim over everything else. Keep the congregation together.

RUTH: This is back in the 50's.

WARREN: Yes, incidentally that's when we joined the United Church of Christ.

RUTH: Under your Senior Deacon time?

WARREN: I think so.

RUTH: That was the big issue when you were Senior Deacon.

WARREN: It was divisive. But, we thought that we had to.

RUTH: Did Vincent feel that we had to?

WARREN: He was one of the architects of the thing. He was enthusiastic about it.

RUTH: So, you then, as the Senior Deacon, had to sell the church?

WARREN: I did what I could. And without a lot of dissent. There was a lot of discussion that went on before hand, but when it finally came to the decision, as I recall it was without any protest.

RUTH: Wasn't Mr. Sickles against that rather strongly?

WARREN: Don't confuse that - well, maybe he was, I don't know. I don't recall that he was. But, he and I were both opposed to this COCU. We were invited to join with nine other church denominations in 1967.

RUTH: Who invited us?

WARREN: Well, a bunch of them got together. There was the American Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, The Disciples of Christ, are all I can recall right now. And, they had a big meeting. I'm not sure but what the Catholics were involved in the discussions. This was a booklet put out selling the program. Ed and I were put on a committee to render a report about what we thought the church should do. Ed and I both agreed that we didn't think that we should do that. We were a Congregational Church under the United Church of Christ that all the people could not worship in our church or we in theirs even if we wanted to, because there would be too many of them. As long as we were physically divided and our properties were divided, why not just leave it as is with all the mutual cooperation that we wanted to put into it. The idea was to have one denomination in the whole United States. For these nine denominations, of course, there were many that were not participating in that discussion and were not a part of issuing this little booklet.

CAROL: What does COCU stand for?

WARREN: Consultation on Church Union.

RUTH: Who was the Senior Pastor at this time? We are talking 1967. It must have been Duke Potter.

WARREN: I don't know who was the Pastor. After the church was built I was not so active.

RUTH: Can I pull you back to more ministers? Because you have been here since Vincent and right through everyone?

WARREN: Paul Yinger was a Thespian. Anyway he enjoyed dramatics. He would sometimes give us a recitation from something or other as part of his sermon. Do you remember that? I didn't know him very well. There were others in the church who knew him much better than I.

RUTH: Did Merton leave before Paul came?

WARREN: I think Merton was here with Paul, that's my recollection, but don't hold me to

it, please. Zan Harper was here during one interim also. Zan the handsome, the debonair, the musician who built his own spinet and brought it from his house and played it in the church. Then Tom became pastor.

RUTH: He was Associate Pastor under Yinger was he not?

WARREN: I believe he was.

RUTH: That's why I think Merton left before Paul and Tom came.

CAROL: Merton was here with Duke Potter, but after that he left and went to Massachusetts.

RUTH: They both ended up on the same square in Lexington Massachusetts. Duke in one church and Merton in another. I visited Merton there one time.

WARREN: When Betty and I were first married, we made a trip to Boston and went out to see Merton on Cape Cod. I have a letter from him at Christmas time. He is out in California now.

CAROL: We're hoping he'll be back for the festivities or a part of them next year.

RUTH: You said that one of the issues when you were Senior Deacon was making the decision to join the United Church of Christ; to go along with the other Congregational Churches that became a part of that. Were there any other major controversies at the time and how did you handle them?

WARREN: We worried about running out of space in the cemetery. We were not worried, but we wondered what to do. We tried to buy property around about. Finally Vincent and the trustees agreed that we would try to own the property of the entire block. Meanwhile though we owned one or two properties across the street, temporarily. We owned that property across from Vic Smalley's house on Forest Avenue. We used the barn there as storage of church properties. I wish we had it now. The old wreck of a house next to our cemetery we tore down. It stood on a little knoll, remember?

CAROL: To make room for the parking lot expansion.

WARREN: Well, originally we wanted to have more cemetery. We got turned down on that. Then we thought we would extend the parking lot; got turned down on that. We also owned the house at the end of the cemetery at Rockland Place.

RUTH: Two lots there, too.

WARREN: Those two lots were where the old shack had been, I think.

RUTH: Wasn't the old shack right behind Dale's house that became the parking lot extension?

WARREN: No, the old shack was down the block on Rockland Place. We bought it and tore it down. But, the people on Rockland Place didn't want us to have a cemetery in

there - didn't want us to have a parking lot. They were not good neighbors. So, one day, Duke Crain, and uncle Reg (Gisborne) and I got in the car. We looked at a property over here on Old Orchard, an old golf course; \$100,000. We wondered how that would be as a cemetery. We gave it consideration. Had we only been more daring - just bought it. The house where Tom lives is on that property. There used to be a golf driving range there.

RUTH: I didn't realize we had gone that far to look. At one point we even thought of building a church in Havemeyer Park, did we not?

WARREN: That was one of the discussions that preceded the building of our church. Enlarge our church or build a chapel in another part of town. And, even subsidize the new little church to get it going. And relieve the pressure on our church which was uncomfortably crowded on Sunday mornings. It was the same type of discussion that they had years later when they were deciding what to do with the old high school. Not large enough, so, would they add another high school in another part of town or one big high school for the entire town. In essence it was the same type of discussion. The outcome in each case was for the same reasons, I think. Because in a big church we could have better facilities for more people than we could in two small churches.