

**What I owe to the  
Royal Oak  
First United Methodist Church  
(ROFUM)**

*By Keith J. Leenhouts*

How often do we think we are only giving to the church?

Actually, the church is giving far more to us than we are giving to the church.

These pages are a weak attempt by a member of nearly 80 years to say, “thank you, thank you, thank you” to the Royal Oak First United Methodist Church in Royal Oak, Michigan.

*Keith J. Leenhouts*

This is a letter to Chris Christopher, one of the finest members of our church (ROFUM) written in the year 2013 by a very grateful Keith J. Leenhouts, retired judge.

*Dear Chris Christopher,*

*Recently you asked me a very interesting question.*

*“Did you ever thank the church for what it has done for you?”*

*After thinking over this question for several days I had to answer that question with “No.”*

*Chris then said, “Don’t you think you should?”*

*This answer is “Yes.” A loud and thankful “Yes.”*

*So Chris, here is an attempt to answer your question.*

## **The Church**

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts is the gathering of believers who help bring the love of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to each other.

This love is expressed in many different ways, a few of which are mentioned in this book.

Thank you, God. Thank you for my many gifts.

## **My Parents**

The first thing I should say is “thank you” for my parents.

My mother, a lifetime Methodist and my father, who became a Methodist when he married my mother, were great parents. My father had been born into and was Dutch Reformed and became a Methodist when he married my mother.

They were tremendous parents. I was a very slow learner who barely graduated from high school and just made it my first semester of college – barely.

In spite of my academic problems, they loved me, and I never doubted they loved me. That great love came first from a Methodist church in Grand Rapids, Michigan and later, and mostly, from ROFUM.

To have loving parents is a blessing. Thank you, ROFUM, for this great gift.

Although I did not understand it at the time, I realized later that for punishment to be effective should be punishment followed by a total and complete forgiveness. Where did they, and all of us, learn that from? Our church. In my case, from ROFUM.

One example of my parents’ love was sitting close to them on Sunday evening and listening to the “Children’s Prayer” from the Hansel & Gretel opera.

I knew that somehow, in some way, things would finally be all right. That day finally came about in many ways. One being when my dad woke up friends early one day and said over and over, “Yes, he passed the bar exam. He’s a lawyer.” My father prayed many times for that day which was made possible by the love of my mother, my father and, of course, the source of much of their love, ROFUM.

Thank you, ROFUM, for my parents.

## **Judge Arthur Moore**

The second source of my love for our church (ROFUM) is my high school Sunday school teacher, Judge Arthur Moore.

His class consisted of half Sunday school kids and half court kids. (Judge Moore had jurisdiction over juveniles 16 and under who had been found guilty of juvenile offenses.)

In our class led by the judge we learned that the court kids were not all bad and the church kids were not all good. We are all a paradoxical mixture of good and bad. We church kids and the kids in court both needed God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

I think it was in Judge Moore’s Sunday class that I first began to really love, honor and serve Jesus as best as I could.

The judge not only sat in court and made decisions but he also did all he could to rehabilitate kids 16 and under. He helped form committees in the various cities and townships to counsel troubled 16 year olds and younger. He formed committees to have an alternative to jail. He was active in what became known as Camp Oakland for court kids.

It was because of Judge Moore that I first began to dream that someday I might be a judge like Judge Moore.

I think it was Judge Moore who first spoke of being a judge. He said, “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

Over the years this verse in the Bible has become one of my favorites. It is all I ever saw in Judge Moore, my ideal as a judge.

So, when I became a judge I tried to follow Judge Moore and the prophet Micah.

I also remember well a saying of the judge. “If you stick your head above the crowd you will get mud thrown in your face.”

The saying of Judge Moore helped me to prepare for the days when we used volunteers in our court to help rehabilitate misdemeanor offenders. Thank you, ROFUM, for Judge Moore.

## **Sunday School Class**

The next great gift from ROFUM was teaching our high school Sunday school class for some 30 years. Some of those years I was a lawyer, some a judge and some working for a national program to encourage and help courts nationwide to use volunteers.

The “kids” were great. There is an old saying that “you can never teach as much as you learn.” It is so true. I learned much.

Of the thousand or so of the “kids” I had in Sunday school, all were a pleasure to know and love.

In class we really concentrated on the Bible. One of my favorite books to teach from was “Understanding The Bible” by Rev. H. E. Fosdick.

Our canoe trips and weekend outings were great.

The highlight of the year was our midwinter retreats. Most of our time was split between Bible study and fun. Our version of hockey – much safer than the pros – was very popular.

The highlight of the weekend was our Saturday night communion-worship service. Usually one of the kids gave the sermon. The quality of their talks was very, very fine.

When the service was over the kids could stay as long as they liked. All stayed and prayed for a good half hour and some for over an hour.

I stood at the only exit door and hugged each boy and girl as they left. We nearly all had tears in our eyes.

How I loved those kids. How they loved me. And, more important, how they loved Jesus.

The retreat ended the next day, Sunday, with a service where one of the kids gave the speech and we got home about 6:00 p.m. from the camp some 60 miles from home.

A reunion some 30 years later was attended by about 300 “no longer kids.”

It was a tremendous gift from ROFUM to teach the high school class for so many years.

## **Church Members**

The next great gift from ROFUM was the members of the church – so many inspirational members. Most of them were older and wiser. One exception my own age was Don Mills, one of the finest Christians I ever knew. We are still excellent friends in our late 80's.

The friends in ROFUM were true friends.

The one who illustrates this so very well is Harry Hassberger whose children were about my age. Harry put on Fish Fries for our Sunday school class and was a real model of a Christian and member of ROFUM.

The role he performed, which was the greatest in my eyes, was helping to administer our volunteer court probation program. The program grew fast and attracted many volunteers, most of them serving as mentors.

When the program grew to over 100 volunteers, my thoughts grew to Harry. As a kid we lived close to Harry. When the fathers came home for supper they all parked their cars and went into their houses. Not Harry. He parked his car and hurried to where the most kids were and joined in the fun.

When he retired he “worked” as a school crossing guard and after his duties he came up to the court.

As the court probation volunteers grew, so did the need for excellent administration. I thought of Harry.

Harry came to be our full-time court administrator. He was great. He was everywhere and knew everything. He ran everywhere. We called him “Harry the Horse.”

Then one day he went home sick. It turned out to be very serious. Soon he was on his deathbed in the hospital. Of course, I visited him most every day.

One day, he was very sick – on his deathbed – and I went to visit him one last time. I said, “Harry, I want to thank you.”

Harry said, “don’t thank me – let me thank YOU! Working for the court is the best thing I ever did. Business never satisfied me. Now I can die in peace. I am ready to meet the Lord.”

A few hours later he was gone. But my love for Harry never died. He is so much my memory of what is great about ROFUM. Again, thank you, ROFUM.

## **Family & Clergy**

The next great gift from ROFUM is family. The church was always there to bring the love of Jesus and God to our family.

One occasion I remember best is when the second child(ren) of our sons’ was born. They were twin boys. They sure were very tiny. One lived only a few hours. The other battled with all of his 3.4 lbs. or so and survives to this day. He is a minister in a Methodist church in Ohio.

I remember so well at the hospital that night. Our head minister, Dr. Paul Durham, rushed to the hospital and was there to comfort us. He got there just before the twin died. I will never forget the comfort he brought to my wife and I that night.

The next days were very tense as the surviving twin struggled for life. During those days ROFUM was also there comforting my wife and I.

As the family grew we became even more devoted to our church. The boys had good Sunday school teachers and two of them sang in the Children’s Choir.

It makes me wonder how many families had a church with so many people there to help them grow into manhood. A head minister, an associate minister, a youth minister – Wow! What a staff of consultants.

Since their education was quite like mine for years of college, when I took many classes on theology and was accepted to divinity school, their advice was probably even more effective.

It’s strange how much effect little things have on you. Once when I was about eleven years old I went up to the church to play basketball in the gym. The gym was good sized and we kids loved it. It was located on the second floor where the stage, the youth room and Sunday school rooms are now.

The rule was you had to have an adult for a group of us kids to use it. And, horrors! Our adult did not show up. We were walking down the stairs leading to the basement with a combination of frustration and anger on our faces when suddenly, our head minister saw us. He asked, “what’s wrong, boys?”

We told him of the awful tragedy – we couldn’t use the gym for basketball because we had no adult.

Then the minister grabbed “heaven” from the jaws of defeat and said, “I think the work I have planned for the next hour can be done in the balcony of the gym. You can play. I will be your adult.”

That was without a doubt the greatest sermon I had ever heard or seen! The minister, whose name I have forgotten, had just saved the day. While he worked in a cramped position for the next hour or so, we kids had a great time playing basketball.

It was the fulfillment of what a great minister in Detroit once said. “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day.”

I cannot remember our minister’s sermon the next Sunday but I will never forget him. ROFUM, I loved you from that day on.

## **Denny Nickel**

Another great lesson you learn in church and, most likely not elsewhere, happened when one of our most popular members of our high school Sunday school class died.

His name was Denny Nickel. He had just graduated from high school, joined the Marine Corps and was soon shipped overseas for special training. Suddenly and completely without expecting it, Denny died of a heart attack.

For most, maybe all, of our high school kids, it was the first experience of a tragic death of a friend they loved. Denny’s parents were also devastated. Denny had been their only child.

Denny’s parents had groups of our Sunday school kids over to their house and we had special services for him in Sunday school.

The kids were great and a picture of Jesus – a gift from Denny’s folks – still hangs in our youth room many years later. Life went on with all of us knowing how deep love can be. As our family suffered, we learned yet another gift from ROFUM. The time comes to suffer no more. He is in God’s hands.

## **Fun**

The next gift from our church was just plain fun.

Like the time we were on one of our canoe weekends. The canoeing ended at a low bridge. One of the funniest persons I ever knew (we called him “Jeep”) seized the opportunity.

“Jeep” finished the canoeing first and went to the top of the bridge and jumped off and grabbed the side of each canoe and tipped it over. The kids were all wet on a warm great summer day already so it was the climax of a fun Saturday on the canoe outing.

Another time in one of our retreats in the winter, two of the most-gentle people I ever knew were playing fun hockey. They accidentally skated into each other and both fell down. The announcer (me) said in a loud voice “the most vicious moment in hockey history” when they stood up.

We all laughed so hard, play was suspended while we regained strength we lost in laughing on the shallow river.

There were two public high schools in our city and the kids in Sunday school were divided almost equally in one of the two schools. What fun we had kidding each other about the school “the other guy went to.”

One of the girls in the class was a cheerleader for her school. Every time her team won she would hug all her friends with great happiness. All the kids who went to her school would seek out after her for their hugs. Even the Sunday school teachers would get a hug, along with my wife. It was great to be in the happiness of the crowd.

Once the kids put on a program that one of the fathers in the audience laughed so hard he nearly fell of his chair. His face was beet red, he laughed so long and hard.

In church later we often met, that father and I, the Sunday school teacher, enjoyed reliving that moment. Thank you, ROFUM.

### **Miss Margaret Brockman**

Another gift from my church, ROFUM, was Miss Margaret Brockman. Margaret was my sixth grade teacher in grade school. She was probably the most important teacher I ever had.

They passed out the boys’ safety patrol belts in the beginning of sixth grade and I was the only boy who wanted one but did not get one. I guess the principal decided how well the boys were doing academically and I was the slowest learner – a dumb kid. No patrol belt for me.

I went home that night and told my parents I was through with the American education system. I told my Mom and Dad “I ain’t ever going to school again.” I was heartbroken.

Of course, the next day I was back in school under parental supervision. I stood in the hall outside Miss Brockman’s class and fought the tears. I was heartbroken.

Suddenly, Miss Brockman left the classroom just before the first morning class was to begin. She left all those kids and walked out in the hall where I stood. She had her hands behind her back.

When she got to me she smiled and reached behind her back and pulled out a boy’s safety patrol belt. She put it on me saying, “We need another boy safety patrol. Will you take the job?”

Would I take the job? “Yes, yes, a thousand times, yes!” It was like being born again.

How I loved Miss Brockman. When I got older I was going to marry Miss Brockman. Later, as Judge, she would invite me to talk to her sixth grade class. She told me to wear my robe. She introduced me and said, “any questions?” I was bombarded with questions.

I still think to this day that to the extent I was able in some way to be a Miss Brockman in the life of a misdemeanor offender who stood before me was to thank God and my church, ROFUM, and Miss Brockman, a member of ROFUM.

I never knew anyone who was a member of ROFUM, or anyone else, who guided me more. Her last gift to me – I gave the eulogy at her funeral. What an honor.

Thank you again and again, ROFUM.

### **The Girl in Sunday School**

Another blessing bestowed upon me was a high school girl in our Sunday school class. She had older sisters and an older brother who were all “A” students. Like me, she was a slow learner. Her father was a very smart man academically and in total frustration, due to her school grades, she would too often, while in her high school class, come in tears to our home. We felt sorry for her and we all prayed for her. She graduated and married without academic honors.

A few years later she called our home and asked if she could come and see us with her husband. We, of course, were delighted to hear from her and she and her husband drove about 100 miles from their home and spent all afternoon with my wife and I.

Then she told us about a pre-school program for kids that she and her husband ran. She “worked” full-time and her husband helped her after his job.

What they did absolutely amazed me. Working with kids a year or two before they went to school and a year or two after they started school, she taught all about piano and about Jesus.

She showed us how the kids actually wrote their own songs and told us how they played them. Then she played the piano beautifully. The love just poured out of them. The music the kids wrote for themselves was absolutely amazing.

She then told us that all the love she received from the church, the Sunday school and the Lord saw her through the hard days.

I was never prouder of ROFUM, which caused all this to happen. It was the pastors and members of Royal Oak First United Methodist Church of Royal Oak, Michigan, (ROFUM) that brought about this miracle.

Thank you, ROFUM.

## **John LeBeau**

The next hero in my life from ROFUM is John LeBeau.

John and his lovely wife, Marion, had three daughters who made an excellent addition to our high school Sunday school. John worked in a shop, which among other things, made and sold clothing custom-made.

John had a friend we will call Bill. He worked for the Readers Digest periodical. This periodical had – and maybe still has – the largest number of readers in the world. John told Bill about the Royal Oak Court using volunteers to, not only fine and jail those who were found or plead guilty, to a misdemeanor, but also received help from volunteers.

John told Bill that to the best of his knowledge the program was very effective and unique.

Bill went back to the Readers Digest office and told his fellow employees of the Royal Oak program and arranged a time for the judge (me) to meet Mr. Wallace in New York City, close to the Readers Digest office, about 50 miles north of New York City.

Mr. Wallace was the founder of the Readers Digest and it's president and owner.

Then the Readers Digest sent a writer to Royal Oak to visit the program. The writer was very impressed with the volunteers and the program that the first of three articles appeared in the Readers Digest. The spread of the concept of volunteers began to travel nationwide.

One of the first courts to use volunteers was in Pennsylvania. There, a man named Ed was in a hospital recovering from surgery. He picked up a Readers Digest and talked to this judge who was not convinced until a defendant – once considered hopeless – made an amazing change. The program then really began with a visit in a kick-off meeting with the Royal Oak judge, the main speaker.

After the speech ended, the mayor was so overcome that, when he got up to give his closing remarks, three times he tried to talk and no words came out. Finally he shook his head and sat down without saying a word. It was the most effective “speech” I ever heard.

Thank you, ROFUM.

## **Important People**

It was about this time that ROFUM worked more of its magic in my life.

Several trips to the Readers Digest office in New York continued and a total of three articles about Royal Oak appeared in the Reader's Digest over a period of time. All

were very instrumental in the spread of the use of volunteers in misdemeanor courts nationwide.

Then one evening in Grand Rapids, Michigan, my Aunt Mary and Uncle Chris were entertaining John Leslie, a Chicago millionaire and his wife.

We were close to all our aunts and uncles on both sides of our family but particularly close to Aunt Mary, a nurse. She was with my mother when I was born and often visited us. Our particularly close friendship to Aunt Mary was sealed by her close relationship with her church and us to our church, ROFUM.

Aunt Mary was particularly close to Mrs. Leslie. In the course of the conversation she gave John Leslie a copy of our court's annual report, which devoted most of its pages to our volunteers.

John Leslie began to read our annual report, soon excused himself, put on his reading glasses and, in a separate room, began reading the report carefully.

A few days later I got a call from Mr. Leslie who wanted to come to Royal Oak and visit us.

About a week later John came to Royal Oak and sat at a table with about 8 of our volunteers and asked very good questions. He sensed the religious foundation of our program.

On the way back to the airport as we drove along he said, "if I were to give you enough money would you resign as judge and head up a program to spread the idea of volunteers in courts?"

I said "yes" and the program of spreading the concept of volunteers in courts nationwide began.

What was the role of our church, ROFUM? The entire program was dominated by volunteers who were Christians, and some really devout Jews.

Again and again – thank you, ROFUM. Thank you to my Sunday school teacher, Judge Moore, my Sunday school kids and all ROFUM for the inspiration to use volunteers and spread the idea.

Then a series of events which I never dreamed, for a kid from Royal Oak who flunked Latin and was let through by kind teachers when he could not add or subtract or read or divide, happened in my life.

One of the first was getting to know Tom Clark – Mr. Justice Tom Clark of the United States Supreme Court. He was a very fine gentleman and a member of our board of directors of our new organization, Volunteers in Probation, Inc.

The time I remember him the best was at the Detroit airport about 3:00 p.m. I had just returned from a V.I.P. (Volunteers In Probation) meeting and presentation and was running down the hallway as fast as I could. Our oldest son, Bill, had a cross-country meet that day. I had to really hurry to see him run.

Suddenly, in front of me was honorable Mr. Clark, Supreme Court Justice. He was walking in one direction and I was running in the other. I barely stopped in time to

avoid hitting Tom Clark. Wow. Mr. Tom Clark of the U.S. Supreme Court, the highest court in the nation, said to me, a Judge in the lowest court of the nation, “What is your hurry, Keith?”

I told him I was running to see our son run in his cross-country meet. I started to ask if I could be of any help to him.

Then Mr. Justice of the Supreme Court said to me, a Judge of the lowest court in the land, “Well, don’t stand here and talk to a fool like me. Run as fast as you can. You have serious business to attend to.”

I said “Yes, Sir” and ran as fast as I could to get to my car and be in time for Bill’s track meet.

What a tremendous privilege to know Tom Clark – a really fine person and judge.

Thank you, ROFUM, for setting in motion a series of events that ended up with an ordinary man to know Mr. Tom Clark, a Supreme Court Justice and member of our VIP board.

Then ROFUM set aside a series of events, which resulted in an event – a bigger series of events, so that I ended up with an unbelievable experience.

I was at the home of the Readers Digest when I was invited to have lunch with Mr. Wallace, owner and founder of the very successful publication.

When we were seated for lunch there were six chairs at the table. I was told to sit at the foot of the table, Mr. Wallace sat at the head and four of his writers were seated on either side.

The lunch was served and about half-eaten when I said to Mr. Wallace, “I bet some very important guests have sat where I am sitting.”

His answer bowled me over. “Yes,” said Mr. Wallace. “Two of them you will recognize – Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt.”

Wow! I, of course, did not deserve such an incredible honor. I could only thank our church, ROFUM, for setting events in motion to bring about such an honor for our court.

## **Fatherhood**

I want to thank ROFUM for fatherhood, in many different ways the greatest experience of all.

Saturdays were always for the sons – Bill, Dave and Jim. I would often end up with three or four of their friends on Saturday afternoons for an adventure of fun.

Saturday mornings were usually for the city league for young boys – softball, touch football, basketball and other activities, when they were in season.

During other times of the year we would go to a piece of property of some 200 acres owned by friends. It was located about 25 miles north of Royal Oak. It had two small lakes and lots of woods and open fields.

We had all kinds of fun. Sometimes a Sunday school boy would come along.

As my vacation time allowed, we would spend time at our cottage in Northern Minnesota, the hometown of my wife, Audrey.

Thank you, ROFUM, for the gift of fatherhood.

## **Eddie Edwards**

Another experience – a gift from ROFUM – was meeting and becoming a friend until his untimely death when he was just too young; a man named Eddie Edwards.

We met in Toronto, Canada. Someone told me at a conference on court volunteerism where I was one of the speakers that he and about 10 others were meeting first thing in the morning each day for a Bible study. I was asked if I would like to join them and, of course, I said “Yes.”

The next morning early I met a man from Detroit named Eddie Edwards. We immediately began a conversation, which soon led us both to say we worked with kids from Detroit.

Then Eddie said, “I have lots of kids, but no camp.”

I said, “I have a camp, but no kids.”

So we decided as soon as we got home to Detroit we had to get together and so we did.

Eddie’s group used the camp for several years – about 4 weeks for girls and 4 weeks with boys. They were mostly 10 years old. It was the answer for a dream from ROFUM.

They swam in the pool and played games in the fields and had Bible study each day. Most of the groups had a canoe trip down a nearby small river.

The campers I remember best were two young boys about 11 and 9 years old. While sitting as a visiting Judge in Detroit, I had the preliminary hearing which had testimony of the wife/mother was she shot her husband while he was coming at her with a knife. Two sons – about 10 and 12, were in the courtroom ready to be called as witnesses, if necessary.

I thought, “What chance do they have?”

However, at the camp on a Sunday afternoon while I was helping the new campers settle in, those 2 boys ran up to me and said “Hi ya, Judge.”

I said to myself, “They have a chance.”

Thank you, ROFUM. Without you there would have been no camp.

## **Bible Study**

Another great part of my life, thanks to ROFUM, was Bible study groups.

One day, an older member of our church said to me, “I’m in a Bible study one morning a week. Why don’t you come to a meeting? You might even like to join the group of about 12 men.”

I went the next time they met and was very impressed with the men and their discussion of somewhat over an hour. I became a member of the group for about 25 years until health forced me out. I learned a lot from the group.

I think the most I treasure was the study of about 12 weeks about the prodigal son. Our teacher, a fine student of the Bible, used for much of our time a book written by a theologian who had spent about half of his life in the United States and about half his life in the Holy land.

His insights were amazing. He made the suffering of the father very real when his son asked him for his share NOW! It was perhaps the greatest moment in all the study of the theology of our Bible study leader – a son demanding his share with the intent to leave.

The only other time our theologian heard of such a thing the nearby people had a ceremony for the deceased and the son was declared dead and he left never to return.

We became very close. When one of our youngest members got cancer, we visited him and his wife often. When he died, two members of our group gave his eulogy. I was honored to be one of them.

We did have our lighter moments. When he died, he left a beautiful widow. Another lawyer in the group and I helped her through the maze of legal matters.

She let Audrey and I use a cottage as a thank you. She left a beautiful picture of herself. When our friends visited us I would tell them we were using the cottage of a

“little old widow”. Then I would show them her picture. Their responses were much to be remembered.

Thank you, ROFUM.

## **The Jesus Painting**

Another great gift from my church, ROFUM, is the beautiful large painting that hangs in our youth room.

The room is slightly modified from how it was when I taught the high school Sunday school class for all those great years.

When Dennis Nickel died shortly after his high school graduation, our Sunday school kids really got to know his mother and father.

Several times they had small groups of our kids in their home. They also visited our class a few times. I think it helped his parents and our kids with their time mourning. We all loved Dennis and, as mentioned earlier, that picture.

Dennis’ parents gave us that great gift in memory of Dennis. It is, a large, beautiful painting of a ship at sea in a storm. A young man of about 19 is holding on to the steering wheel. Standing right behind him is Jesus with the hands of Jesus directing the boy as he steers the ship in a vicious storm.

It says so much about life. As we come upon difficult times, there is Jesus guiding us through the turbulent days.

I have lost track of exactly when the painting was given to us and hung on the wall of our youth room. But I will never forget it was from Dennis’ parents. I guess more important than ‘when’ (which I think was more than 30 years ago) is the fact that the picture is still there. And more important is the fact that it is still there after all these years. And more important by far is the fact that those of us who knew Dennis, and those of us who know the story, are still trying to love, honor and serve Jesus with greater dedication and love of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit because of Dennis who still lives in the hearts of many of us.

And all this happened in our church, ROFUM, which inspires us to love, honor and serve Jesus.

Thank you, ROFUM.

## **Canoes**

Another great gift from our church, ROFUM, is my love for the canoe.

It began by being a counselor in a church camp with two of my classmates the summer after we graduated from high school. One of the two was from our church, ROFUM. I am sure the church, which owned the camp, when it needed counselors, recruited them from ROFUM.

I started college that fall after the camp. Then I went into the army (World War II). So once, again, thank you, ROFUM.

At the camp I was put in charge of the canoes. Until then I had never been in a canoe. It was love at first sight.

The other counselors would take my kids, mostly sixth through ninth graders, while I took their kids canoeing.

After the war and college, I began to teach Sunday school. Both the kids and I wanted two or three weekends a year and it usually was in a canoe trip. I fell deeper in love with the canoe.

Thus, it was our church, ROFUM) that first got me to love the canoe.

After my second year of law school I took a trip with a fellow law school friend. By mistake (a bee sting) I ended up in northern Minnesota in a town call "Cook."

We found a lake, which was seldom fished. We needed a canoe and borrowed one. It was there that I began my life long love with the canoe.

I met my wife there and her brother and I began canoe trips on my vacation and his work schedule of 10 days at work and 4 days off.

Why is this so important? Because our high school Sunday school kids began to take weekend canoe trips usually 2 or 3 times a year. (And I even squeezed a canoe trip from Lake Superior area to Hudson Bay where we met and began to support a missionary.)

I think those canoe trips with the Sunday school high school kids played a real role in our some 1,000 high school kids during the years I taught.

And who began and maintained those trips? Our church, ROFUM. Once again, thank you, ROFUM.

## **22 Minutes**

After about 10 years with a volunteer court in Royal Oak we got the chance to disseminate the volunteer court program nationwide.

Again, the key man was John LeBeau, who first got us in contact with the Readers Digest. John and his family were members of ROFUM. His three daughters were in my high school Sunday school class. Once again, thank you, ROFUM, my church.

The Readers Digest then published the first of three articles about us. Their circulation was very large.

Then I resigned as Judge to disseminate the concept of a court using volunteers to rehabilitate offenders. This took me all over the country speaking mostly to judges.

It was on this program of dissemination the concept really began its nationwide spread.

To illustrate the commitment of many of the judges who heard the message, I remember a Federal judge in a southern state. I was in his state to speak to a large church. After I arrived the judge told me the speech that next day (Sunday) was going to be on television. "It has to be exactly 22 minutes long. The TV lights will go off after 22 minutes."

I was scared silly. My talk was usually about 25 minutes but I never timed it. I went back to my room and timed my speech several times. Each time it was too long or too short. To make matters worse, it was a large Methodist church and was filled the next morning.

As they introduced me, I prayed again "Lord, if you want me to speak 22 minutes you have to do it. I cannot do it."

Then the miracle – I spoke exactly 22 minutes and finished just before the bright lights for TV went off!

I said to myself, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord" again and again.

I learned in that church – a very large Methodist church – to pray for His guidance before a situation you just can't handle. You pray! I learned that first in our church at home – ROFUM, a very important lesson.

## **Christian Living**

Another lesson I learned in ROFUM was to respect people with physical disabilities.

In our Sunday school class we once had twins who were very disabled. A canoe trip was scheduled and their mother called me to ask if the twins could go in my canoe. She asked, "Do you think I should let them go?"

I told the mother "yes" and they went on the trip. They seemed very happy to have gone canoeing.

For years a girl who grew up in the church is badly crippled and can barely walk. I never saw her without a smile on her face. She is a careful student of the Bible. She is a living lesson in Christian love.

Years later, in my late 80's, she is a constant source of inspiration for me in my wheelchair. And in our church is a blind man who is a living example of how we should live if we are blind or if we can see.

Thus, ROFUM has given me another gift – examples of living a Christian life – regardless.

## **Wilbur**

Of course, no gift from ROFUM was greater than the gift from my high school teacher in Sunday school – the gift from Judge Arthur Moore.

An example was Wilbur, who committed a very serious felony. Intended as a joke in the presence of his friends, he went up to a car stopped at a red light with a toy gun in his hand and said, "Give me your wallet."

The startled driver quickly gave him his wallet and drove away. What Wilbur had intended as a joke, was a serious felony.

Fortunately, Wilbur's dad knew an attorney who went to court for Wilbur and volunteered to be a mentor to Wilbur. Wilbur quickly pled guilty to a misdemeanor and the one-to-one volunteer relationship began.

After about a year, Wilbur had graduated from high school and wanted to go to college about 100 miles away. His volunteer had a friend at the college town and he became a second volunteer. After about 3 years the case was dismissed and Wilbur graduated from college.

A few years later, I happened to see Wilbur in a restaurant. Wilbur was now working and going to graduate school. I said to myself, "Thanks, God, for ROFUM and a judge – Judge Arthur Moore, who years ago taught us what to do."

## **Volunteers are Effective**

And so once began by a ROFUM Judge Arthur Moore, in a Sunday school class in the Royal Oak First United Methodist Church, the idea began to spread nationwide – volunteers are effective!

Three national forums on court volunteers were attended by 2,000 probation officers and others becoming involved in the use of court volunteers.

The little program begun years ago by Judge Arthur Moore in Royal Oak, Michigan, spread to include nationwide organizations and thousands of court volunteers.

And, I suspect, the real heroes of this movement, which research proved was very effective and prevented much, and many times, more serious crime, was ROFUM.

This brought a smile on the faces of the real heroes – Judge Arthur Moore, Harry “The Horse” Hassberger and the many others who were and are involved and who inspired so many others to be involved in court volunteerism.

## **The Best Messiah**

The next ROFUM heroes are Joe and Peggy Waisanen who took us to a superb Messiah in one of Detroit’s most elegant music halls a few years ago.

Because of my leg braces I could not sit in my seat in the balcony. While being transferred to a seat I could sit in by a woman usher a young man said, “I’ll take care of him.”

I immediately recognized one of my former Sunday school kids. He took my wife Audrey and I to a private box of 12 seats and told us to enjoy the music. Wow!

The music was the best Messiah I ever heard. The orchestra, the singers, the soloists were absolutely the best I had ever heard or sung in.

The box seats were in a perfect place and we heard the whole Messiah perfectly looking down on the orchestra. It was a special thrill looking down at the audience all standing as the choir sang the “Halleluiah” chorus.

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I remembered the times I had sung in the Messiah. The most memorable time I had sung in the Messiah was in college.

What a gift from my church, ROFUM. That wonderful Messiah I will never forget.

## **“Kids”**

Thus it is that my church brought me times that I will never forget – times that made me a better Christian. What do I owe to my church? To describe it in a few words – more than I can imagine.

The last tremendous experience I will describe was our Sunday school reunion when we celebrated what I think was our first 15 or 20 years.

We packed the large room in the basement before it was made smaller by creating new rooms. I am sure we had 300 or more “kids”.

The “kids” wrote and performed most of the skits and music. They were great. They even gave me a University of Michigan football jersey.

The climax was great. A live-wire redheaded girl took off her shoes, stood on a table and had the kids spread out all over the big room, mostly touching shoulder-to-shoulder as they sang their farewell song. I could not sing. I was crying.

Those kids inspired me to try to be a good judge like my old Sunday school teacher – Judge Arthur Moore.

ROFUM, what do I owe to you? Almost start out with everything.”

So, Mr. Chris Christopher, is this a start on answering your question, “Have you ever thanked your church for all it has done for you?”

I hope I have scratched the surface. There is so much more.

Keith Leenhouts  
Member of Royal Oak First United Methodist Church  
1934 to 2013 and continuing

## **In Conclusion**

As I close my thoughts on what the church has given to me, I am overwhelmed by what other church members could write about their activities and programs. I think especially of two great programs – Lithuania and the Detroit Inner City program of Faith Fowler, who grew up in our church. Our great church, ROFUM, has been so involved in so many great Christian causes and so many of our members have been very much involved.

Even as we must not lose the memory of the very important role of Judge Arthur Moore in the history of courts in the United States in the early 1900's, we must not lose the history of Lithuania, the Inner City program of Rev. Faith Fowler and many more in our days.

*This book is dedicated to our church, Royal Oak First United Methodist Church (ROFUM), to my wonderful wife, Audrey, to our three great sons, Bill, David and Jim, and their families – our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. With gratitude to our great typist, Candy Ather-Putman, for finding and correcting my errors.*

Keith J. Leenhouts