

Preparing the Lord's Table...by Eldon Horner

About eight years ago I was still very new to Central Church and had not made many friends or acquaintances here yet and was looking for a way to become more connected. I had moved to Traverse City from Ft. Wayne, Indiana where I had been involved in a number of community and public art projects. Some people at Central had seen my work and commented that it would be great if I could do something here as well. I thought doing a painting on site at church would be a great way for me to meet new people and also a way for me to give of my talents.

I presented the idea to then pastors John Ellinger and Tamara Williams, both thought it sounded like a fun project that people could watch unfold over time. We talked about several different ideas and they left it up to me to decide on the subject. From the very first time I walked into the sanctuary at Central I felt a great sense of warmth and peace. The beautiful stained glass, the dark aged woodwork, and of course that wonderful dome spoke to me. That's what I would paint! My focus was on the architecture but I wanted to include a human element as well. So I began coming to church early on Sunday morning to see who might be in the sanctuary at that time. It was one of those Sundays when I happened to catch Boots Berklint, who was communion steward at the time, preparing the alter table for communion service. Laying out the perspective presented some particular challenges, but after doing some preliminary drawings, I set up shop in "Central Perk" the church lounge, and would come in early in the morning and work for a couple of hours at a time.

In the beginning, nobody would come up and talk to me or ask me what I was doing thinking I did not want to be disturbed while working. I had worked for a number of years in Ft. Wayne as artist in residence at places such as the public library, botanical gardens, and corporate office buildings so I was very used to having people watch over my shoulder and ask questions or make comments. Occasionally groups or classes would meet in the lounge while I was working and gradually people became more comfortable talking to me while I worked. More and more folks became aware of what I was doing in the lounge and would make a point of stopping in on Sundays to check on the progress being made. Soon I was being stopped by folks who would ask "hey, are you that guy doing the painting" and then they would proceed to make comments or tell me about their daughter or grandson or whoever that happened to be a good artist. It was wonderful for me, I was meeting and talking to people that I otherwise probably never would have and as a result I have made many wonderful lasting friendships.

When I started out doing the project, I really hadn't given any thought to what I would do with it once it was finished. I also began to wonder if I ever would finish it as I was spending a lot more time on it than I originally intended. Once I had finished however, I felt it belonged to the church. Not only had I invested so much time at the church but many others commented that they were sad to see it finished because they enjoyed watching the process so much. By this time of course we had new pastors here at Central. I told Pastor Dale that if they wanted it, I wanted to give the painting to the church. He replied that they would be honored to accept the gift and even planned a dedication ceremony following a Sunday worship service. A lot of people also expressed an interest in having prints of the painting, so I arranged with a local printer to make available a couple of different sizes with all of the profits after cost to be donated to missions at Central. The painting is titled "Preparing the Lord's Table". Eldon Horner