“I enjoy the openness and inclusivity of the church and its members. All walks of life, lifestyles and points of view are welcome. These Christ-centered principles are a peace-building mission, and peace is a topic of interest to me.”

BACKGROUND: Music has been an integral part of choir member Carla Neeld’s life since she was a toddler. She says, “My mother told me that my first words were “Achi! Achi!” while watching the musician, Liberace, on TV. Carla was born in Berwyn, IL (near Chicago), and moved to Buena Park, CA at age 3 with her parents, Carl and Mary Blaze, and younger brother, Paul. They lived across the street from Knott’s Berry Farm, and on Sundays, her parents dropped the kids off for Sunday School in the caboose at Knott’s while they attended worship in Knott’s little white church.

After Carla’s sister Nancy (who also sings in the St. Mark choir!) was born, the family moved to Anaheim, and Mary made sure that piano lessons were part of their childhood activities. They sang in their choir at Grace Lutheran Church, and Carla sang in all the choirs at Loara High School. While at Loara, she and Nancy were also members of Southern California’s first color guard, and Carla also participated in student government and the track team.

While completing her two years of undergrad requirements at Revelle College (the science campus at UC San Diego), Carla sang in three campus choirs. She then moved back to Anaheim and toured Europe with the Chapman College Choir. Carla worked as a chairside dental assistant in Tustin, and joined the Hour of Power Choir at the Garden Grove Community Church, singing for Dr. Schuller’s TV program.

Singing took a back seat for a while when, in 1979, Carla began her 20-year career as an international flight attendant for Pan American and later, United Airlines. About 10 years into her career, she met Ken Neeld, an electrical engineer for Hughes Radar Systems—and an accomplished jazz trombone and keyboard player! They were married six months later and started a family, welcoming sons Tom and Andrew. The family moved to Fountain Valley, where they lived for 20 years. When Tom and Andrew were 8 and 10 years old, Carla returned
to college, graduating from UCI with a BA in Political Science at age 50. During that time, Ken
started Delphi Display Systems in their home, and the company is now located in Costa Mesa
and employs 60 people.

FINDING ST. MARK: Carla discovered St. Mark when they moved to the Newport area in
2012. She says, “I came one Summer morning and sat near the back of the church next to a
great singer named Jean Galloway. We shared a hymnal, talking a little choral music. She
introduced me to Rich Messenger after the service, and boom! I was in the choir! What a
blessing the choir, its members and spiritual and musical leadership have been to me during
the last six years. It is my new musical family!”

Carla decided to join St. Mark after Mark Davis became our pastor and invited her to a new
members class. Besides the choir, Carla is a Deacon, and says she enjoys the outreach
mission and the way the Deacons volunteer outside of church to help local nonprofits.

INTERESTS: Carla says their sons’ involvement in school instrumental music programs led
her to a second career—as a community volunteer. She served as president of the Fountain
Valley School District’s Fountain Valley Education Foundation, leading the effort to found and
provide seed funding for a Middle School Choir and Marching Band. With both sons in
drumline, she also served as Vice President Percussion for the FVHS Royal Regiment
Marching Band, witnessing how music programs can transform and in some cases, literally
save the lives of students and leading to a passion for working to ensure music education
remains a part of the public-school curriculum.

She is also a member of the Board of Counselors Governing Committee for the Pacific
Symphony, and enjoys traveling, jogging, and looks forward to St. Mark’s annual Great
Decisions program because it stimulates her continued interest in political science.

FAMILY: Carla and Ken are now empty nesters. Tom graduated from Penn State and worked
as a mechanical engineer for Cummins Diesel in Indiana. He will begin a new job working and
training to be an acoustical engineering consultant for CSDA, an architectural firm in San
Francisco. Andrew graduated from UCLA and first began working in data analytics for SpaceX
in Hawthorne. He is now continuing that work for Los Angeles-based Hyperloop, a conceptual
high-speed transportation system originally put forward by entrepreneur Elon Musk. Both sons
played in their college marching bands and continue as musicians in their free time.

We are blessed that Carla discovered St. Mark and continues to bring her considerable
gifts for music and community service to benefit so many!