

Couple Directing 'Last Supper' Pageant For 24th Time

By Wanda Dobson

With a pile of wrinkled robes at one end of the table and 12 pairs of brown leather sandals, wigs and beards lining the rest of the table, Mrs. Ann Witzke breathes a sigh of relief after she has finished ironing the eighth of 12 robes.

The sandals have all been tied together and matched the beards and wigs are labeled and the stoles are all pressed and marked.

Mrs. Witzke and her husband were preparing these costumes for the 12 disciples in the pageant, "The Last Supper," which is presented each year at the United Evangelical Church.

24th Time

Tonight the tableau will be presented for the 24th time in the 100-year-old East Baltimore church. A capacity crowd is expected, just as in previous years.

At the request of their former pastor, the late Rev.

Titus Lehmann, the Witzkes organized and have directed the pageant each year.

The idea originated when Mr. Lehmann and his wife were vacationing in St. Louis, and attended a performance of "The Last Supper," presented by the men of a church there.

First Performance

When it was over Mr. Lehmann secured a copy of the life story of each disciple. He brought it back to his church and in the fall of 1949 the Witzkes went to work.

Their first performance was on Palm Sunday night April 12, 1950, and has been presented one night during Holy Week ever since.

Mr. Witzke, 68 and a retired maintenance man for Regal Laundry, takes pride in saying, "We have only had to cancel two performances. One in 1955 due to lack of men and again in

1968 because of city riots." There were two performances in 1957.

Like 12 Sons

From behind the ironing board and underneath a cheery smile of excitement, Mrs. Witzke said, "I dress the men and fix the costumes every year and I just get so excited."

"We have two grown children, one in California and one in Florida, but when the men get there the night of the performance, it's like having 12 sons," she said.

Carefully ironing between intricate gathers, Mrs. Witzke pointed out that "sometimes, the robes get wrinkled before we start, but I just can't let them go unironed." She estimates that it takes her about four hours to iron all the robes and stoles.

After 21 years of use, new robes were purchased in 1971, but the performance is still the same.



Sulpapers photos—Weyman D. Swaggar

AT WORK—Mrs. Witzke continues her ironing.



Mr. Witzke checks sandals