



1908-2008  
*Celebrating 100 Years*

*These articles are a series prepared by member Bill Feezer in preparation for St. John's 100th Anniversary in Summit.*

# St. John's Nears 100th Anniversary



*From its completion in 1910 until the congregation moved into 587 Springfield Avenue in 1963, this quaint brown stucco edifice facing DeForest Avenue, on the southeast corner of Beechwood Road, was the home of St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church.*

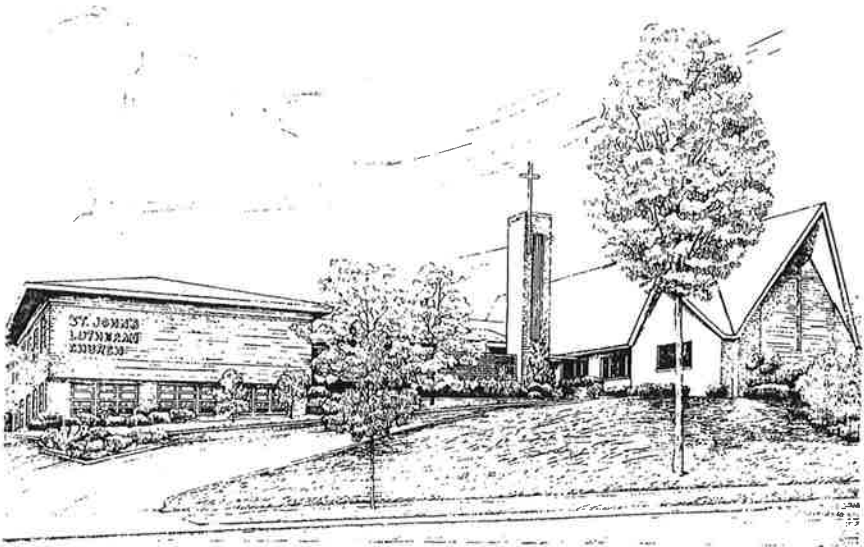
One hundred years ago, in 1904, the pioneer group that founded the church held informal services, using both the German and English languages, first in the Old Baptist Church, then in the present one, under the direction of the Rev. J. I. Miller. This group organized in 1906, but disbanded when Pastor Miller left Summit, so it was not until December 1908 that the congregation was permanently organized as "St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church," with 42 members under the pastorate of the Rev. Gustav C. Blessin.

The cornerstone of this, our first building, was laid November 25, 1909, and the building was dedicated May 15, 1910. A parsonage was added behind the church facing Beechwood Road in 1920, and in 1930 this was converted into a parish house.

In 1956, St. John's sponsored the organization of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Florham Park, and in 1958 it aided in the organization of Gloria Dei in Chatham.

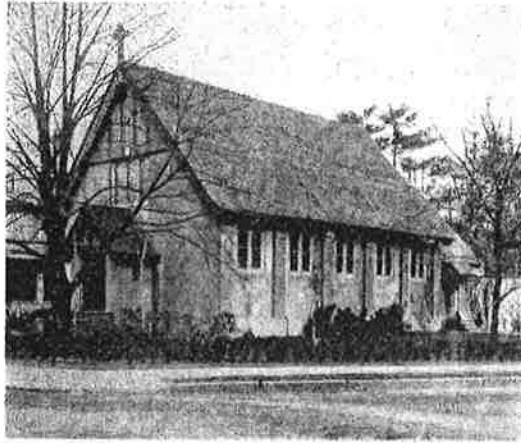
The pastors following Gustav Blessin were:

- The Rev. Dr. Julius Knapp (1912-1919)
- The Rev. Dr. Herbert T. Weiskotten (1920-1921)
- The Rev. Charles E. Rudy (1921-1925)
- The Rev. Samuel I. Herbster (1925-1928)
- The Rev. Niels H. Christensen (1929-1930)
- The Rev. Dr. Willis S. Hinman (1930-1964)
- The Rev. Dr. Richard Lee Peterman (1964-1970)
- The Rev. Charles R. Anders (1964-1965)
- The Rev. H. Peter Unks (1965-1968)
- The Rev. Herbert E. Anderson (1967-1969)
- The Rev. Dr. Franklin D. Fry (1971-1996)
- The Rev. Rick L. Bair (1973-1979)
- The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Oldenburg (1980-1984)
- The Rev. Susan E. Nagle (1984-1992)
- The Rev. Helga Jansons (1992-1993)
- The Rev. Dr. David J. Lose (1993-1996)
- The Rev. Bruce H. Davidson (Interim Pastor, 1996-1999)
- The Rev. Susan E. Miller (Interim Pastor, 1996-2000)
- The Rev. Dr. Wayne Dreyman (2000-2005)
- The Rev. Dr. Andrea Walker (2003-present)



*St. John's Lutheran Church*

# *St. John's Prepares to Celebrate* **100 Years of Ministry in 2008!**

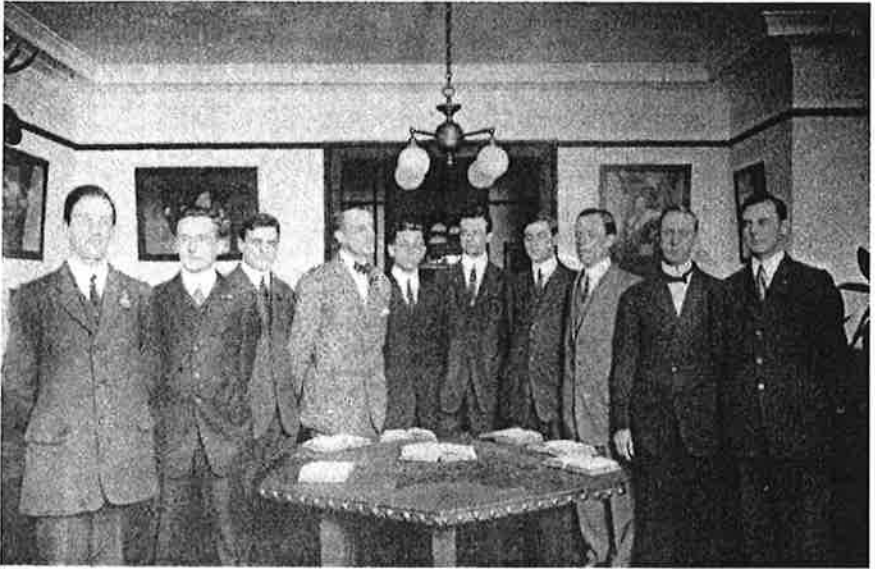


*St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church on Beechwood Road.*

As we begin the process of looking back over the 100 year history of St. John's in Summit, we will find that two complementary forces joined together to produce a congregation that has made a significant and vital contribution to the life of the community, to the life of the Church, as well as the spiritual lives of its members. Those forces are the persistence of those who have chosen St. John's as a congregation in which to bear witness to their Faith, and the patience of God with this congregation as it has evolved and grown as an instrument to do His work here on Earth.

St. John's earliest beginnings were in the early 1900s, when Summit was known as a summer retreat for the wealthy from nearby Manhattan. The relative coolness offered by the elevation and trees of the Watchung Mountains, and the convenience of the train line, made Summit an appealing place to live and work, and gave rise to a number of immigrants who followed the wealth to Summit to pursue their own dreams and ideals. Although the town already had a number of successful and imposing places of worship, the founders of what would eventually become St. John's sought to establish a Lutheran congregation with a German influence.

St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church was officially established on December 6, 1908, a little over 5 years from the earliest stirrings of German Lutherans in Summit. As the Church struggled from its earliest days, both the *persistence* of its members and the *patience* of God became increasingly evident. For 35 years following its inception, St. John's would remain as one of the smallest churches in the New Jersey Conference. In the coming months, we will focus on some of the details of the development of the congregation, as patience and persistence together forged an institution that will soon celebrate its 100th Anniversary with a solid record of accomplishments and spiritual leadership.



*Members of a 1916 Men's Bible Class at the YMCA are shown above. Some of those who have been identified are Harold Metz, John Hood, Henry Horn, Ray Tuttle, Sam Robbins, Seymour Coeyman and William Newton. Of these men, Harold Metz was a founding father of St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church.*

# *Looking Back 100 Years*

## **A Look at Life in the Early 1900s**

*"Summit for more than 50 years past has been noted as a great health resort, and has been called by some of the leading physicians "The Colorado of the East"*

*– Summit Record, 1901*

As we look forward to celebrating the 100th Anniversary of St. John's, it is worth a look back to the period in which the congregation had its beginnings. Much has changed, except for the resilience of the human spirit in seeking to bind together in fellowship. Although the Congregation was officially founded in 1908, there were earlier "stirrings" that preceded that event, so we will take a look back to the turn of the century both in Summit and the nation.

The early 1900s were marked as a period of great change for much of America. New York had experienced a wave of new immigrants in 1900 – over a half-million people – swelling the city's population to over three million – one-third of them foreign born. Many moved on beyond the New York area, but many remained nearby where transportation and jobs presented mobility and opportunity.

In 1900, America was a country of few more than 76 million people – there were eight thousand cars, and less than ten miles of concrete roads –



*The upper end of Beechwood Road in Summit, 1911.*



*Summit High School's graduation class of 1908 - one of St. John's founding families' daughter, Marguerite Alleman is shown seated second from the left.*

the horse was the dominant means of transportation. In that year as well, Galveston was hit by the most destructive hurricane in the nation's history, at least until now – Katrina may win over that ignominious title just over 100 years later.

During the next several years, President McKinley will be assassinated, Teddy Roosevelt will become President, and man will fly for the first time from a beach in North Carolina. In 1906, California will suffer the Great Earthquake and Fire. That year will also mark the first radio broadcast in America. The Ford Model T made its debut in October 1908 – great strides were being made in science and invention.

Closer to home in Summit, the first automobile appeared in town in 1900. The speed limit for automobiles was set at 7 mph – the biggest complaint about the new machines was that they scared the horses.

Summit was incorporated from a township to a city in 1899 – a city then of some 5,000 people. It was known as a resort for the wealthy from New York and Newark, as well as a local manufacturing center. It was home both to the Union Tack and Nail Company, as well as the Summit Silk Company, which occupied the land that now is home to Douglas Ford on Morris Avenue.



In 1906, Overlook Hospital was founded – in 1907, the horse trough, which now resides near the Summit Diner, was installed on Union Place, just in time for the advent of the automobile. The railroad, which has been so key to the history of Summit, underwent a major change in 1904, when a “cut” was made through Summit, and the tracks laid well below street level, which served to open the town up as the busy tracks no longer impeded the flow of commerce across town.



*There was an air of boldness, as well  
as innovation that served to motivate  
them a century ago.*



It was around these times, in these surroundings and in this atmosphere of change and innovation that a small group of Lutherans began to dream and interact to consider forming a congregation that better met their spiritual needs. There was an air of boldness, as well as innovation, that served to motivate them a century ago – an air that seemed to permeate the Nation. It was in these times and surroundings that our congregation stirred to life, and began the undertaking that has brought us to this point in the life and history of the congregation.

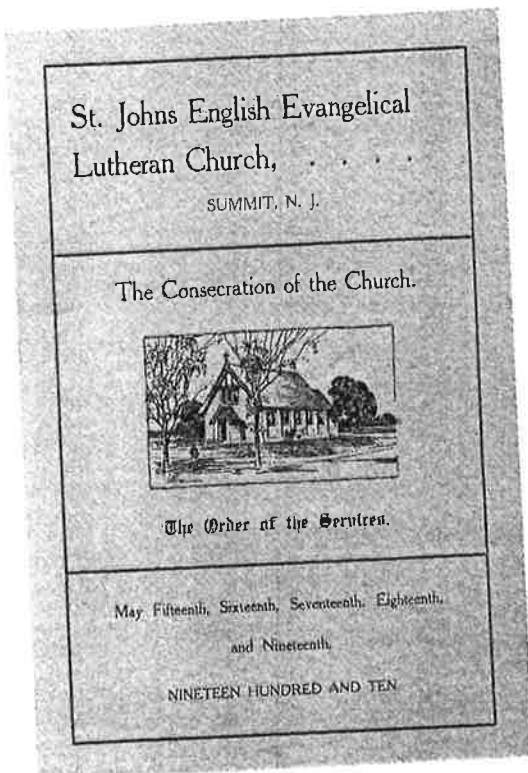
# An Idea Whose Time Had Not Come - Quite Yet

*"For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them."*

– Matthew 18:20

In November, 1909, on Thanksgiving Day, a cornerstone for a church building was placed on land occupying a corner of Beechwood Road and DeForest Avenue in Summit. This act was an important step during the early days of our congregation. However, it was over seven years after the first "stirrings" before this cornerstone was set in place marking tangible progress in the efforts to establish our congregation. The intervening years were certainly both difficult and frustrating to the small, early group, which sought to enrich their spiritual lives, but failed to see their hopes fulfilled – at least right away.

Not a great deal is known about what transpired between 1902 and December 1908, when our congregation was officially founded. This early group that conceived the idea of starting a new congregation was driven by the desire to worship in the German Lutheran tradition. St. Teresa's, Calvary Episcopal, Central Presbyterian and the Baptist Church were all established, visible centers of worship. The Swedish Lutheran Church had been founded in Summit in 1897, but the services were in Swedish – a



*Program for the Consecration of the Church, May 15-19, 1910.*

less than ideal setting for the German Lutherans, or anyone else really, besides Swedes. A nucleus of German Lutherans formed, and began to take up collections in the hopes of attracting a Pastor, and to cover basic expenses. Shortly before Christmas in 1903, the first service was held in the Baptist Church on Springfield Avenue near Morris Avenue, and then in the YMCA, as well.

Despite the boldness and well-intentioned ambitions of this early group, their efforts did not bear fruit. Spiritually strong, but financially weak, the initiative for this new Lutheran congregation did not get off the ground, and it finally succumbed in 1906. However, the embers that were left behind continued to smolder, and eventually would be fanned back into life less than two years later, when St. John's finally became a sustainable enterprise of faith.

### Notices and Announcements.

**The Main Service** in this church begins at eleven o'clock Sunday Mornings.

**The Vesper Service** at eight o'clock P. M.

**The Sunday School** meets in the lecture room at 9:45 A. M.  
Mr. F. H. Allemann is Superintendent.

**The Women's Society for Christian Work** holds its meeting at 2:30 P. M., on the last Thursday of every month in the lecture room. Miss Etta Fackinen is President.

**The Young People** of the church have organized a society which meets bi-monthly. Mr. George Theurer is President.

**The Church** is fortunate in securing the services of Mr. Harold L. Ritch of Brooklyn, at the organ. Mr. Ritch will take charge on May 22nd.

**Applications for Regular Seating** may be made to Mr. Leonard Bender, Chairman of Ushers Committee.

**The Seats of this Church** are free, and a cordial welcome is extended for their purpose.

# Persistence and Patience Prevail

1906 was not a good year. Instead of building a nest egg intended to attract a called Pastor and fund future expansion, by April 1906 the early worshippers had managed to accumulate a debt of \$154.90. This may not sound particularly daunting today, but when \$5 was a reason to rejoice when the offering was counted each month, as it was then, the deficit quickly became unmanageable. If God loves cheerful givers, this must have been a very glum group indeed.

In addition to their financial plight, the congregation developed some splinters, and the Pastor who presided over most of the services apparently was called away. This combination of factors brought an end to this new experiment in faith, at least in terms of regular services. The reservoir of hope and enthusiasm, however unfulfilled, remained intact. The need to express faith was persistent – and God was patient – a combination that would eventually come to fruition less than two years later.

It came together in 1908, when this small nucleus of faithful eventually became the critical mass for a new initiative. It was then that the Home Mission Board of the Church's General Council launched an effort to determine if Summit was ready to sustain a new congregation. The Rev. Gustav C. Blessin, along with the Rev. P.C. Wike, a District field missionary, were sent to assess the viability of a new Lutheran congregation in the Summit area. Whether

it was owing to the resolve not to fail again, the support and guidance of the Home Church, or the fortuitous combination of both, this new effort started to show promise, and began to finally fulfill the dreams of the faithful.



*Rev. Gustav C. Blessin*

Facts obtained from papers held  
by Miss Fackiner.

offerings from German services  
1904 (April Bnd) to March 11, 1906 -  
Monthly except 3 in July 1904 &  
2 in April 1905, ranging from  
\$1.70 to \$7.30

Expenses for same period show  
deficit over receipts. - Amounts to  
Rev. Henderson & Brezinokian  
chiefly.

offerings from English services  
1903 to Mar. 18, 1906  
Dec. 30, 1903 to Dec. 3, 1902 &  
Receipts from Dec. 3, 1902 to  
Mar. 18, 1906 with a note of offer-  
ings were received.  
Jan. 1, 1904, then monthly, Jan. 1  
July 31, 1904, then monthly, Jan. 1

Gathered memories of the  
church's beginnings as  
recorded by Miss Fackiner.

Historical items from program of  
consecration of church building 1910.  
Temporary organization 1906 &  
failed.

Census under Board of Home Missions  
of Gen. Council by Rev. G. C. Blesoin  
in fall of 1908, resulted in organiza-  
tion of self-sustaining congregation  
Dec. 21, 1908.

Property purchased fall of 1909.  
Ground broken Nov. 10, 1909.  
Corn storm in snow storm Thanks-  
giving Day 1909.  
Building Com. - F. H. Allman, C. H. C.  
Jagels, Fred. Bender  
Organ of 392 pipes given by Jagels

As we have seen here, the evolutionary process of our human endeavors is full of trial and error - very seldom do we get it right the first time. The process proceeds at a pace that God is comfortable with, but we often become impatient with, and the results grow stronger along the way. It was in this month - December of 1908 - that St. John's was founded - a full five years after that first service which marked the earliest "stirrings" in the life of our Congregation. It was a fitting month for the birth of our community of faith for these past 100 years.

# A New Adventure in Faith

With the support of the Board of Home Missions, our congregation rapidly began to take form in the fall of 1908. Together, Field Missionary Wike and Pastor G. C. Blessin surveyed the community to determine whether a congregation was viable. They apparently found fertile ground, for only several months later, following the morning service on Sunday, December 6, 1908, a meeting was called to order to organize the congregation. During that meeting, a constitution was adopted, article by article, and a name was chosen for the congregation. God's work on earth was being taken up in earnest by this new adventure in faith – the first lasting steps had been taken along what would be a long path of service and dedication for the people of St. John's. The meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer.

The Congregation was then formally established on December 21, 1908, and little time was lost in taking up the matter of acquiring property, with the construction of a church building being the ultimate goal. Cautious, after the false starts in the preceding years, the members that made up this new fellowship in faith proceeded deliberately, with no grandiose gleam in their eyes.

The early records of 1908 show a membership of 42, a Bible School membership of 30, a church budget of \$548 (with no added zeros!), and no debt. Eager to find a home for the fledgling congregation, the search began for a modest, but suitable site on which to build the church. Not wasting any time, in the Fall of 1909, only a year after things started coming together, a property at the corner of Beechwood and DeForest Avenues in Summit was acquired. A three person Building Committee was established, and their plans advanced quickly. The prospective structure was to be a one-room, brown stucco building with 20 pews designed by a leading architectural firm in New York City.

Once again, moving quickly, but deliberately, ground was broken for the new home of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church on November 10, 1909 – the 426th anniversary of the birthday of Martin Luther.

Meeting of Dec Sixth 1908.

After the morning service on Sunday Dec 6th - 1908 a meeting of the Lutherans of Summit who had been worshipping together in various places for some time was called in order to perfect an organization. Rev P.C. Wike, District Field Missionary, announced the purpose of the meeting and was thereupon called to the chair with Mr F.H. Allemann as Secretary for the time.

The name "St. Johns English Evangelical Lutheran Church of Summit" was on motion of Mr F.H. Allemann seconded and adopted.

A constitution for Lutheran Congregations in accordance with the General Council formula was prepared by Reverend P.C. Wike, Rev. Carl Beccain and Mr F.H. Allemann and presented for adoption. Articles I to IX were adopted article by article. The constitution was then adopted as a whole. Meeting was then adjourned with Gods Prayer.

F.H. Allemann Secy Pro Tem  
per S.C.B.

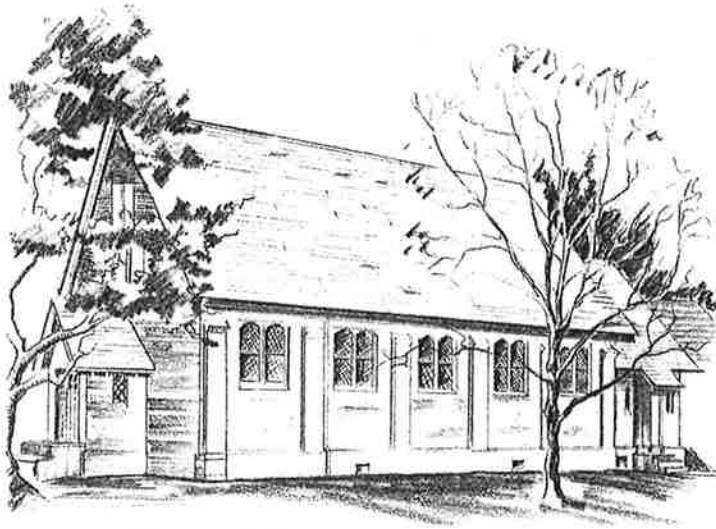
Copy of Minutes of the December 6, 1908 meeting.



# Zealous Labors...

The groundbreaking for the building which would house the new congregation known as St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church was held on November 10, 1909. If you happened to pass by the corner of Beechwood Road and DeForest Avenue in Summit on the way to Thanksgiving dinner later that month, you would have observed a group of dogged, mostly German Christians struggling to lay the cornerstone of a new church in a heavy, early season snowstorm – a less than auspicious sign. It is safe to assume that anyone who witnessed this event had severe doubts whether this new congregation would succeed. This chilling, prematurely-wintery scene had the ominous look of faith-testing futility, but the cornerstone was determinedly set that day with a few timely treasures tucked inside for a future generation to ponder.

The building that was shortly to follow was designed by Crow, Lewis, and Weickenhoffer, which was then a prestigious New York architectural firm. When a member of the congregation finally went to ask Mr. Crow for a bill, the reply was "You will never get a bill from me. If you can give the town the church, I can give it its architecture." An attractive, but modest, one room stucco building which held twenty pews was constructed by a local Summit builder over the next five months.



*This brown stucco edifice, facing DeForest Avenue on the southeast corner of Beechwood Road was the home of St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church from 1910 to 1963.*



In contrast to the inauspicious circumstances of the wintry cornerstone laying ceremony, the consecration of the new church in May of the following spring was more along the lines of a "DeMille-like" production. A full five day panoply of events was strung together to include a full gamut of well-wishers and gustatory delights. The actual consecration of the new church building took place on the afternoon of Sunday, May 15, 1910.

The following prayer was offered to open the Service of Consecration:

*“Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with Thy most gracious favor, and further us with Thy continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

May we be mindful of what has been done and said before us as we take up the work that lies ahead for our Congregation.



*Janssen Memorial Chancel, St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church*

# The (Not So) Good Old Days

1910-1930

The period between 1910, when the first St. John's building was consecrated in Summit, and 1930 was less than idyllic – this 20 year period was hardly the “storybook” example of a prospering endeavor that quickly blossomed into a model congregation. The congregation was one of the smallest in the New Jersey Conference (not yet a synod), and would remain so until the early '40s – its small size made for intimacy with the Pastor and other church family, but put a large burden of time and resources on the individual members, who, by and large, all had significant roles in the life and administration of the church.

It was a constant struggle for the members to make ends meet, and the congregation seemed to be inextricably mired. It is difficult to imagine how things could be so tough, when the substitute organist for Sunday evening services was paid \$2, and the church was spruced up on Saturday for 50 cents. In 1918, the total church budget was \$2,724 with a membership of 46 (remember how many there were originally in 1908?), and a mortgage of \$11,450.

Pastor Blessin was paid \$65 each month, and reportedly had to resort to dipping into the “poor box” from time to time to make it through the last few days of the month. Pastor Blessin's successor, Pastor Knapp, took a room at the YMCA, and made himself a conspicuous and consistent guest at parishioner's tables in order to get by during his six and a half year tenure.

Despite the small size of the congregation, and its obvious financial difficulties, the congregation began a tradition of extending itself through benevolences. Some were very modest, as was the \$5 for a boy's school in India. With the onset of WWI, the congregation, despite its precarious finances, designated \$324 for German war orphans in 1916, and in 1919, the American relief effort in Europe received \$225.

There were six pastors that served St. John's between 1908 and 1930. Throughout this period, there were a lot of ups and downs, and the pastors



*Rev. Dr. Julius Knapp*



*Rev. Dr. Herbert  
T. Weiskotten*



*Rev. Charles E. Rudy*



*Rev. Samuel I. Herbster*

ran the gamut from inspiring to "he tried our patience." The church was unsettled and had not found itself, but God's patience held fast, as did the perseverance of the Congregation. Ironically, as the country faced one of its darkest periods after the Crash of 1929, St. John's was on the eve of a strange, but fortuitous turn of events in the spring of 1930 that brought it out of the doldrums of the previous 20 years.

### **Budget Estimate, 1923**

Coal	\$ 300.00
Organ and Piano	40.00
Sundry Items	80.00
Interest	1,100.00
Repairs	75.00
Gas, Electric, Water	200.00
Printing	75.00
Ash Removal	30.00
Pastor	1,800.00
Pastor's Expenses	75.00
Synod	300.00
Music	600.00
Janitor	250.00
Pulpit Supply	75.00
	<b>\$5,000.00</b>

# Darkness before the Dawn...

St. John's seemed to wobble its way through the 1920s, remaining a small, relatively isolated congregation, which remained on its feet, going nowhere fast. As the decade drew to a close, the congregation rather abruptly sank into the depths of misfortune, and flirted with extinction.

The limited progress that had been made since its beginnings in the early 1900s was largely undone by an unfortunate choice that was made for the sixth pastor. Despite being pastor for little more than nine months, the congregation quickly withered during the tenure of Niels H. Christensen, which began in March 1929. A rift developed between the congregation and the Council, with attendance and involvement in church activities falling off dramatically. A dozen worshippers represented "a good Sunday" during the dark days of 1929. The Sunday Church School was closed. To add to the general level of despair, the stock market crashed late that October, and the Great Depression loomed directly ahead.

The plight of St. John's did not go unnoticed by the New York Synod. Under pressure from the synod, the Council relieved Pastor Christensen of his duties early in 1930. While the actions of the synod and Church Council were not well documented, it appears that the Pastor was involved in "personal ventures that severely compromised both the spiritual and financial missions of the Church." The crisis deepened, and the future of the 20 year-old church became murky, at best.



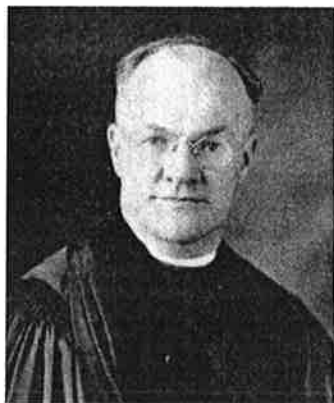
*Rev. Niels H. Christensen*

The latest roilings at St. John's proved to be the last straw for the synod. They chose and dispatched someone to ring down the curtain on the struggling congregation. He was a scholar and professor at Wagner Memorial Lutheran College in Staten Island – a strange, but ultimately fortuitous choice for the person given the unseemly assignment of closing the doors of St. John's in Summit. Divine intervention was at work.

Not entirely comfortable with his task, Willis S. Hinman left Staten Island in the late spring of 1930 for the three-hour trip to Summit, New Jersey. He would preach there one Sunday morning, with his synod-assigned mission not evident to the Council and congregation. He quickly

stepped into the breach and moved almost immediately to reopen the Sunday Church School.

The beneficent hand of God was to become strikingly apparent in the choice of Pastor Hinman to resolve the crisis at St. John's. Not only would he rescue the congregation, rather than preside over its demise, but he would forge an unusual bond with St. John's that would last for 34 years.



Rev. Dr. Willis S. Hinman



Sunday Church School promotion certificate issued to Catherine Buckholz.

## *A firm foundation...* **and faith renewed.**

The early 1930s was a pivotal period for St. John's. The congregation had been splintered over several issues, the most recent pastor had resigned under a cloud, the church finances were shaky, and the country was in the throes of the Great Depression. Pastor Willis Hinman had arrived on the scene to – as recalled by a former Pastor of St. John's – “give the congregation a decent, Christian burial.”

Choosing to postpone the burial for as long as he possibly could, Pastor Hinman immediately began working with the Council and congregation to breathe life back into St. John's. His efforts were not directed at new, flashy tactics to revive his new charge, but rather a firm, disciplined application of sound practice meant to build and provide a sustainable environment in which people could anchor their faith and develop a fellowship with other Lutherans.

There was no immediate growth spurt or financial windfall as a result of the new pastor's efforts. The progress was slow, but steady – the gains were a yard or two at a time, amidst a cloud of dust. There was mention of building a four-layer foundation cemented by worship, education, support activities, and stewardship. This basic formula would be the driving force behind St. John's as it took up the task of again being an instrument of God's will here on Earth.

On September 7, 1930, the church was “reopened,” and the Church Bible School reinstated. Furthermore, the Church would henceforth not be closed during the summer, and the Bible School would take a



*St. John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1930*

renewed prominence in the Sunday worship experience. Bible studies were expected to be attended by all, regardless of age. Pastor Hinman taught the adult sessions, and integrated the studies into the worship service. Pastoral calls began immediately with 17 calls being made the first



*Children's Day, 1931*

month he served St. John's. Visitors to St. John's could expect a warm welcome, followed up by a visit later in the day by the Pastor and his wife.

Average attendance in 1931 was 44, 49 in 1932, and 58 in 1933. The church budget for 1934 was around \$3,500 and showed a projected deficit of \$129.12. The balance in the debt payment fund was \$2.51. Finances were strained to the limit because of the Depression and church members suddenly finding themselves out of work. The church had a mortgage on the property, and was asked by the local bank to reduce it by \$2,000. Unable to reduce the principal on such short notice, members of the congregation persuaded the bank to keep the note at \$12,000, with the pledge that it would be reduced as much as possible if and when funds became available. Recognizing their fiscal plight, Pastor Hinman requested that his annual salary be reduced from \$1,500 to \$1,200 – and that he only be paid at a \$900 per year rate to conserve working capital. Fortunately for St John's, retaining his position at Wagner College gave him the flexibility to provide his new congregation with some breathing room.

Despite the financial adversity, the congregation continued to support its benevolences, which has become a hallmark of St. John's. In some ways, the difficult times made the congregation a more cohesive group and the glue binding them together became a little stronger. With each month they survived and made some progress, their confidence in themselves grew, as well as in the course the new pastor had set for them. Their faith that God still had plans for St. John's in Summit was renewed and strengthened by the perseverance demonstrated during those difficult times.

# Days Full of Grace

Having been tested by the Great Depression, St. John's measured up to the task of surviving the renewed hardships of the early 1940s brought on by World War II. Many were called away to fight and some never returned. The church was used as a sugar-rationing center for the community, and a patriotic spirit welled up within the congregation. Church funds were diverted to benevolences related to the war effort and the congregation purchased war bonds, as well, to demonstrate its support.

One of the significant developments in the life of St. John's was an unforeseen by-product of the war. As colleges and universities saw their enrollment dwindle, life in academia changed as well. In 1944, Pastor Hinman, reacting to the wartime college environment, decided to make his ministry at St. John's a full-time commitment. He had already served the congregation in a part-time capacity for 14 years. In appreciation, the church purchased a \$9,000 brick, timber and stucco Tudor-style home at 659 Springfield Avenue to be used as a parsonage for Dr. & Mrs. Hinman, who then moved to Summit from Staten Island.

The year 1944 was also significant in that the mortgage on the church building was paid off after 25 years and the document was gleefully burned on April 23, 1944. Although the retirement of the mortgage debt was facilitated by a special bequest, the financial picture of the congregation was steadily improving. The upswing in economic activity during and after the

St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit, N.J.  
Rev. W.S. Hinman, Ph.D.

PEACE SERVICE, August 14th, 1945

"Peace, Perfect Peace" Sung by choir, lighted window only.  
Doxology by congregation.

Invocation

Hymn "Come, Thou Almighty King" 164

Responsive Psalm 29, page 169

Gloria Patri

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Hymn "Now thank we all our God" 283

Scripture, Luke 19/ 41-48 "If thou hadst known the things  
that belong unto thy peace."  
Prayer for our Responsibilities as a Nation.

Hymn "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past" 505

Scripture Rev. 11/15 "The kingdoms of this world are become  
the kingdom of our Lord."  
Prayer for the Unity of the Nations

Hymn "Before Jehovah's Awful Throne" 492

Scripture, John 14/25-31 "Peace I leave with you"

Suffrage, page 153

Collect for Peace

Benediction

"America" 490

Peace Service,  
August 14, 1945

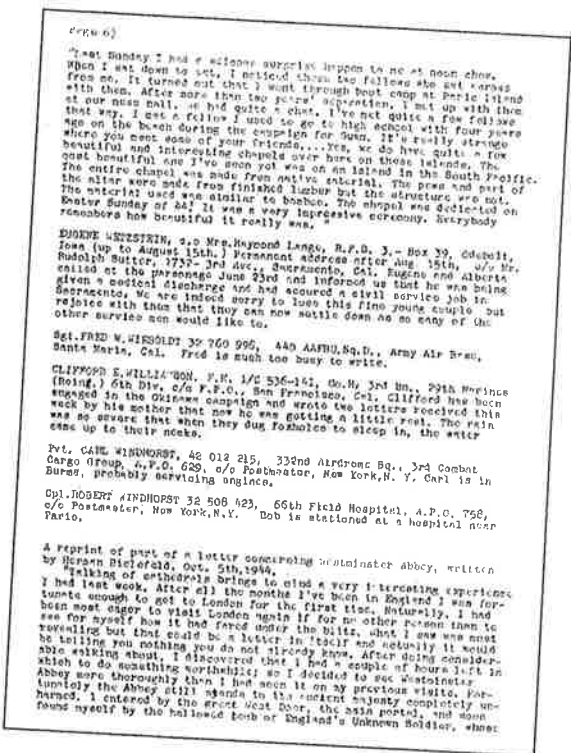


*Rev. Hinman wrote to each member of the congregation that was in the service during WWII.*

war years directly benefited the church budget, and the \$6,200 mortgage taken out on the new parsonage was subsequently paid off in less than four years. St. John's found itself on a sound, debt-free financial footing for the first time as it emerged from the war years. The congregation was well positioned to expand its presence in the community of faith.

The changes that occurred in the nation and the local environs after World War II were profound. The economy was on an upswing, and household incomes were rising rapidly. The complexion of the economy was changing as well – the emergence of a more service-oriented economy prompted a migration of business activity away from industrial and manufacturing centers. The New York metropolitan area began to grow rapidly as the finance and telecommunication industries pushed to expand. Worker mobility suddenly became a new phenomenon as competition for talent and experience grew. Benefiting from an ideal location and excellent transportation, Summit and surrounding towns saw a significant influx of new residents and development, and St. John's was there in the middle of it.

By 1948, St. John's was experiencing significant growth. As a stable and established ULCA congregation, it was naturally attractive to families moving to the area. It was not only demographics that fueled the growth of St. John's. Even during the lean years, the church managed to launch new programs, remain committed to evangelism, maintain benevolences, and develop a regimen and rhythm that greatly enhanced the experience of practicing one's faith and receiving the Word and Sacraments.



Moving from being one of the smallest congregations in the New Jersey Conference, the membership more than doubled from 105 in 1938 to 254 in 1948, putting it then in the middle of the conference rankings. The church budget had grown to \$8,500, and the church school had a record attendance of 120 in October of 1948.

The congregation was on a solid footing, and learning to adjust to rapid growth as it prepared to celebrate its fortieth anniversary in December 1948. The church added a second service to its regular worship schedule, and the congregation was outgrowing the facilities that it had called home for forty years. The fortieth anniversary was celebrated on December 15, 1948. Attendance was described as "sparse" because of a heavy snowstorm – reminiscent of the earliest days of St. John's. However, the Spirit was very much alive within the congregation as it prepared to deal with the "growing pains" that would lie ahead.



*Part of the Primary Department of the Bible School of St. John's, 1948*

# Growing Pains

As the faithful gathered during a heavy snowstorm on December 15, 1948, to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of St. John's, they were largely unaware of the challenges and tough decisions that would accentuate the coming decade in the life of the church. The phenomenal growth of the area would become both a bane and a blessing for the congregation. Major demographic changes led to the creation of a separate New Jersey Synod in 1950 as suburban communities experienced explosive growth, especially in areas served by commuter rail service to New York.

Being somewhat prescient about what would lie ahead, the congregation started a church building fund in 1948 to ostensibly fund the expansion of the Parish Hall, which was adjacent to the sanctuary and had originally served as the church parsonage. The modest worship facilities, with the sanctuary originally designed to seat 154 people, were bulging at the seams during special occasions on the Church calendar. Worshippers waited outside to enter the sanctuary, were crowded enough once inside to be able to touch the Pastor during the service, and there was no space to congregate afterwards for fellowship and discussion. Some captured glimpses of the service through the doors to the sanctuary, even as many stood through the entire service – folding chairs occupied every possible space. The 3/8 of an acre belonging to the church was being used to its maximum potential, and it was becoming clear to many that some significant steps had to be taken to accommodate the growth of the congregation and its expanding range of activities.



*Fellowship picnic, 1944*

Although the congregation's finances were on a solid footing, the burden of financing a major expansion program had to be kept within limits. In 1951, the Council embarked on the project of expanding the facilities either by renovation or acquisition with a spending cap of \$65,000. Although the property directly adjacent to the Parish Hall at 39 Beechwood Road was for sale, it was tantalizingly just beyond the congregation's financial reach. Remarkably, as plans for renovating and adding to the old Parish House were being finalized, the owner of 39 Beechwood agreed to sell on terms that fell within the Council's budget for expansion. This "gift from God" offered a better solution than the expansion and renovation of the old structure, and was actually more cost effective. The new acquisition was dedicated on October 28, 1951. Much volunteer work was accomplished as the building was fully annexed to the existing structure, and converted primarily for Church School use.

Despite this near-term solution to the immediate problem of physical space, the attention that was focused on the "problem" of a rising enrollment and increasing demands on the physical plant steered future thinking toward the need for a much more drastic and permanent solution to the congregation's "growing pains." The Council studied demographic projections for the area's growth, and estimated when the mortgage on the recently acquired property might be paid off. Although they had bought some time with the extra space in the Parish Hall, it was becoming evident that St. John's would have to eventually relocate to accommodate expected growth.

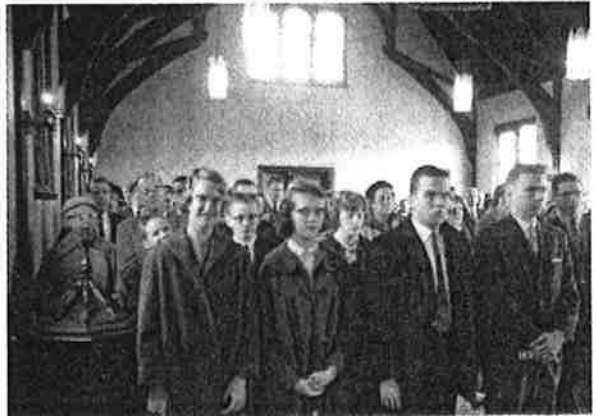
As we look back, the progress that was made and the process that enabled it seems to us now to have been both orderly and logical. However, we can be quite sure that it wasn't. Our congregation was testing its wings amidst a formidable array of challenges and no one had the road map for sure success. In 1955, no less than three architectural firms were asked for their opinion as to whether the congregation should stay and renovate further, or move – it was unanimous – all three recommended that the church find a new site and erect a new building. The road ahead seemed daunting, and as the congregation would discover, they were not in control of certain new variables that would influence the makeup and stability of the "family of faith" known as St. John's over the next several years.

# Crunch Time

The mid-1950s was a period that promulgated further rapid change in the make-up and direction of St. John's. In 1955, Disneyland and the first McDonald's were opened. It was the year that Rosa Parks declined to give up her seat on a bus in Atlanta, and was arrested. In that same year, Bill Gates was born and Albert Einstein died. Pastor Hinman was serving his 25th year at St. John's, and the congregation was busy with upgrading its modest facilities to improve both the appearance and the efficiency of the physical plant.

Financially, the congregation was sound. Benevolence objectives were consistently met and often exceeded, and the congregation received praise from the Synod for its financial support for many causes. The Pastor's salary was raised to \$5,100. Total receipts for 1955 were about \$32,000, and the mortgage that had been taken out in 1951 to acquire an adjoining property to be used as a Parish House was projected to be paid down next year in 1956, long before its due date. A new electronic organ was to be installed in 1956 at a cost of \$4,200 to improve the worship experience.

The "monster under the bed," however, was the impending collision between the growth of the congregation and its cramped facilities at Beechwood Road and DeForest Avenue in the center of Summit. Various committees and study groups were involved in analyzing the situation, and discussion between the various camps was often heated. It seemed clear that the projected growth of the community would render St. John's small parcel of land and modest structures to be inadequate within a few years. To further add to the urgency of the situation, a survey had determined that St. John's was growing at a rate above and beyond a parallel with local population growth. Some of this growth was drawn



*A full house was a common event on a Sunday morning.*

Various committees and study groups were involved in analyzing the situation, and discussion between the various camps was often heated. It seemed clear that the projected growth of the community would render St. John's small parcel of land and modest structures to be inadequate within a few years. To further add to the urgency of the situation, a survey had determined that St. John's was growing at a rate above and beyond a parallel with local population growth. Some of this growth was drawn

from outside the immediate community, but St. John's was clearly a fellowship of faith that was attracting more than its share of new members.

Adding to the variables that weighed on the congregation as they wrestled with alternatives was a new two year initiative by the national church to commit to the establishment of "mission" churches in a number of American towns. These "mission" churches would be founded by members who "commuted" to churches outside their hometowns. This initiative also coincided with the move of the Swedish Lutheran church (which had earlier been renamed First Lutheran) to Murray Hill, which then became Faith Lutheran. The members and council of St. John's were being buffeted by developments outside their control, and these added to their consternation over the course the congregation should take in dealing with the prickly issue of inadequate space and facilities.

The decision about how to cope with future growth was put off by the uncertainty surrounding the potential impact of the new Lutheran congregations that were springing up. Two new churches were formed – Good Shepherd in Florham Park, and Gloria Dei in Chatham. Of the two, the Gloria Dei phenomenon would potentially have significant impact, since about 50% of the congregation was then coming from Chatham. It did not take long for the members and council to realize that the issue of space was not going away. By 1958, over 60 members of St. John's had left the congregation because of dissatisfaction with the facilities.

Faced with defections, the next two years loomed as a critical time for decisions to be made and actions to be taken, and for differences to be set aside in favor of a unified course of action. Precious time had been lost as the congregation gauged the impact of new Lutheran congregations being established in the area. St. John's, however, remained a strong magnet for people looking for a church home.

In 1958, to the dismay of many, including the Pastor, all studies and analyses strongly argued in favor of relocation from the church's original site. Now that the course appeared to be set, meetings were planned to involve the congregation in the process. Once the choice was made to relocate, rather than renovate further, the congregation had to unite to face a number of challenges, not the least being the cost of relocation, and leaving behind the financial "comfort" they had been enjoying. The first steps were taken down a road that many would have preferred not to take. Girded by their faith in their God and confidence in their church leadership, the congregation began the daunting process of finding a new home – one that would culminate in November of 1960.

## *After the First Fifty Years* **Focusing on the Future**

*W*ith St. John's marking its 50th Anniversary year in 1958, the congregation found itself being drawn into a period of transition and uncertainty that again tested its faith and the abilities of its leadership. It was apparent to all that a crucial juncture was at hand, and that the choices that had to be made would have far-reaching impact on the future of St. John's.

As early as April 1951, the Council was wisely considering courses of action to solve the space and facility problems that only seemed to get worse with time. Despite new congregations being established in nearby communities, St. John's continued on a projected growth path that would force it to take bold steps to accommodate future expansion. In February 1957, the Planning Committee established requirements for a new structure which was then envisioned as occupying the existing site. As late as August 1957, the Bureau of Church Architecture was recommending that a new church building be erected on the original site. However, that opinion was changed in November 1957, to favor relocation to a new site.

Although the matter of a new building was rapidly assuming center stage, the congregation remained busy with other, more routine matters. The office typewriter needed an overhaul, and the pastor's screen porch needed repair. New service books and hymnals were ordered. The name of the congregation was changed to eliminate the word English, and the constitution was meaningfully revised early in 1958. All the signs were there of a vibrant congregation attending to its physical plant and spiritual health and expanding its benevolence. The major hurdle was for the Pastor and Council to galvanize the flock into focusing on the



*Students conducted the opening exercises of the Sunday School in the 1950s.*

challenges to be met in the years ahead.

The ball got rolling at the Congregational meeting of January 1958, when it was decided that architectural plans be commissioned and that a Building Fund be established in earnest. The Lutheran Laymen's Movement for Stewardship was to be enlisted to assist in the fundraising, which would not be a small undertaking. A Building Committee was established consisting of no less than 14 people. A special congregational meeting was called for May 28, 1958, to specifically address and take those actions required to embark on erecting and funding a new structure, which included the sticky issue of site selection. Prior to this meeting, the Building Committee had voted to recommend that alternate building sites be investigated and presented. At the meeting on May 28, the congregation voted in favor of a new church building being erected at another location, if land could be found that was acceptable to the architect and congregation. This was a definitive step in molding the future of our congregation that was faced with leaving the church home it had known for half a century.

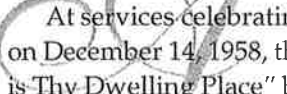
Thus began a rather agonizing process of finding and acquiring a new property which could accommodate the congregation's facility needs – a process that held its share of twists and turns, consternation, and intrigue over the next several years.



*The parsonage was built in 1920, but by 1930 the congregation had grown so much that it was converted for use as the Parish Hall.*



# Finding a New Church Home



At services celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of St. John's in Summit on December 14, 1958, the congregation heard the choir sing "How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place" by Brahms. Their thirsty souls by now desired and longed to find a new church home they could build on and settle into. Earlier that year, they had taken the bold steps necessary to move the congregation from the original location at Beechwood and DeForest in Summit to another larger site in town, but a suitable property had yet to be found.

Much had been accomplished over the span of the first 50 years. The congregation had enlarged and improved the original facilities, aided in the founding of congregations in Florham Park and Chatham, and established a solid record of benevolence. Pastor Hinman had served the congregation since 1930, and was eager to guide the congregation through the process of finding a suitable site and erecting a new church building that would accommodate future growth. He would retire from Wagner College in the spring of 1959 to devote all of his energies to St. John's.

In 1958, the church membership had grown to 450, the Bible School membership was at 277, there were 28 baptisms, the church budget was \$27,349, and the church was debt-free. The newly established Building Fund stood at \$11,665.13 in October 1958. By April 1960, it would stand at \$27,494.71 – testimony to the commitment of the congregation to building a new church home. The congregation seemed ready for the significant challenges ahead.

The first challenge was to find a property suitable to the congregation and the architects. After briefly flirting with buying a property at Tulip & Prospect streets, the congregation decided against it at a special congregational meeting. A property at Hillcrest and Woodland was dismissed by the architects as an unsuitable site. Another prospective property at Prospect & High Streets turned out to be unavailable. As the congregation searched, the property that emerged as a favorite was a combination of two adjoining pieces of land that were for sale simultaneously – the addresses in Summit were 230 Springfield Avenue and 7 Edgewood Road. Both properties were available for a total of \$72,000.

On November 12, 1959, the Site Selection Committee voted to recommend to the congregation that these properties be purchased for that

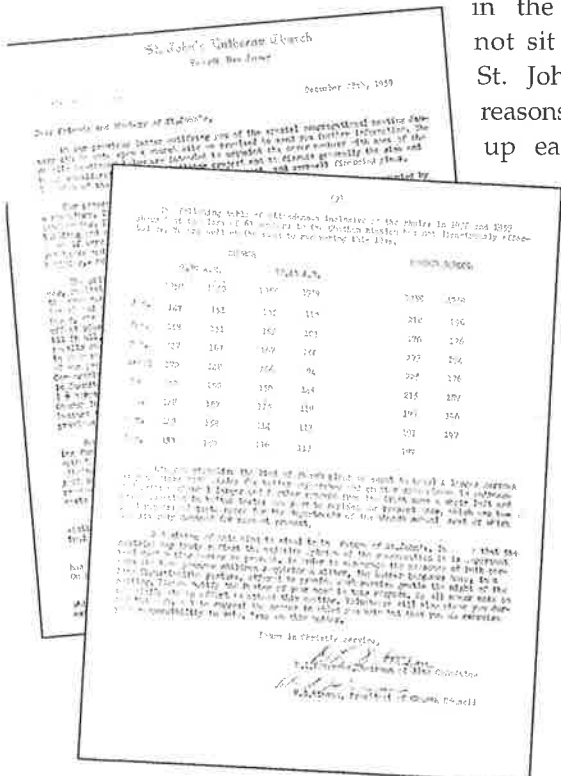
amount. At a special congregational meeting in January 1960, the congregation voted 166 to 39 – with one blank ballot – to go ahead with the acquisition of those two properties and to borrow funds to make the purchase. A bit more than eighteen months after the congregation had approved a move to a new location, it appeared the property for a new church home was about to be acquired.

There continued to be the normal wrangling and revision of clauses in the real estate contracts until March 1960, but the deal was essentially consummated to acquire the two properties. In 1959, however, the zoning laws in Summit had been quietly changed. Previously, a house of worship could be constructed anywhere in Summit. The recent change in zoning laws would require St. John's to apply for a variance in order to move forward and build, which they subsequently did.

The April 7, 1960, issue of the *Summit Herald* apparently contained an article that not only concerned, but prompted council members to attend the next Zoning Board meeting at City Hall and to appoint ten persons to visit nearby residents of the properties being acquired. The church representatives were to lobby on the church's behalf with the property owners in proximity to the chosen site and explain the congregation's plans. Unexpected resistance had sprung up to having a house of worship

in the neighborhood, which did not sit well with the Lutherans of St. John's – for any number of reasons. They were not about to give up easily, and over the coming months some rather heated exchanges ensued with the potential new neighbors as well as the City Council of Summit. The spirit of the congregation was piqued and lifted by the resistance to the church's plans, but the current location of St. John's speaks to the fact that their efforts were ultimately to be in vain.

*A letter from Dec. 28, 1959 to the congregation details the church's needs, attendance figures and the pastor's vision for a new facility.*





*How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts, to me!  
My thirsty soul desires and longs within thy courts to be;  
my very heart and flesh cry out, O living God for thee.*

*Beside thine altars, gracious Lord, the swallows find a nest;  
how happy they who dwell with thee and praise thee without rest,  
and happy they whose hearts are set upon the pilgrim's quest.*

*They who go through the desert vale will find it filled with springs,  
and they shall climb from height to height till Zion's temple rings  
with praise to thee, in glory throned, Lord God, great King of kings.*

*One day within thy courts excels a thousand spent away;  
how happy they who keep thy laws nor from thy precepts stray,  
for thou shalt surely bless all those who live the words they pray.*



In 1958, the year the decision was made to move to another location and the year of St. John's 50th Anniversary, the following chart was published:

Year	No. of Members	No. in Sunday School	Church Budget	\$ Debt	Baptisms (cumulative)
1908	42	30	548	0	0
1918	46	42	2,724	11,450	17
1928	65	50	5,150	15,550	35
1938	105	98	6,370	4,700	44
1948	254	144	8,500	0	75
1958	450	277	27,349	0	199

## *Hopes and aspirations dimmed ...* **but sustained in Christian hope**

*"A request for a zoning variance which would have permitted St. John's Lutheran Church to construct new facilities at Springfield Avenue and Edgewood Road was unanimously turned down by the Board of Adjustment Monday night following a stormy three hour public hearing before a capacity City Hall crowd of 200."*

So began the lead article in the *Summit Herald* on April 14, 1960. That City Hall meeting would mark the demise of the congregation's initial best-laid plans to move to a new location. All the effort that had gone into the site selection and building requirements had been in vain. No less than three pastors of other churches in Summit wrote the Board prior to the meeting in support of St. John's. The pastor of Christ Church spoke at the meeting, and Temple Sinai's Rabbi Bial later wrote the *Herald*, as well, in support of St. John's.

Emotions ran high as the religious community in Summit felt that churches were being singled out unfairly and depicted as less-than-desirable elements within the town. Pastor Hinman and the members of St. John's took the issue as an affront, feeling they were unfairly targeted by the city officials and the residents of the neighborhood in proximity to the proposed site. Pastor Hinman wrote to the *Herald*, and in a published letter, referred disparagingly to the ordinance that had been passed in 1959 that required a special variance for a church structure in residential areas. Prior to this ordinance, other churches had been built in such areas, specifically Temple Sinai. Pastor Hinman wrote that this new ordinance had purposely been presented and passed in the summer of 1959 "when churches were at their lowest ebb and their ministers away on vacation," suggesting a deliberate attempt to keep the controversial issue from attracting attention or opposition from the religious community and its leaders.

Bruised and probably feeling more than a little chastened, the Pastor, Council, and congregation went back to the business at hand – re-focusing efforts on doing God's work, and finding another suitable site for the new church – with a set of new criteria. Things began to settle down during the summer after such a rancorous spring. A new organist was hired, Pastor

Hinman continued the search for an assistant, and Richard Youngdahl took over as Chairman of the Site Selection Committee in August, 1960. Nothing at all promising had appeared on the real estate horizon.

After the summer had passed, the Council met on September 6 to resume a full agenda after vacations and some well-deserved rest. At this meeting, Mr. Youngdahl presented a site known as 587 Springfield Avenue, which was available for approximately \$100,000. The Council had "a lengthy discussion," but virtually all present agreed to proceed immediately to acquire the property, and the President and Building Committee were authorized to negotiate the taking of an option for its purchase. An option until November 15 was subsequently obtained from the owners, and a Congregational Meeting was called for November 1.

Despite the fact that the property consisted of 2.18 acres rather than 2.8 acres, as originally thought, the Council unanimously recommended to the congregation that the property be purchased for \$95,000. On November 1, 1960, the congregation voted 141 to 33 to purchase the property known as 587 Springfield Avenue and borrow such monies as needed to fund the transaction. A deposit was paid to the sellers, and the deal was struck. Despite the celebratory air, there was a whiff of caution as concerns remained about the zoning and how to pay for the ambitious plans that were to take shape as a new St. John's. There were some indications from fund raising experts that they might have bitten off more than they could chew.

*Article from the Summit Herald,  
April 14, 1960*

Office of Summitt, N. J. Under the Act of March 3, 1979  
Taxable at Summitt, N. J.

\$6 a year 15 CENTS

## Zone Board Rules Edgewood Road Not for Churches

A request for a zoning variance which would have permitted St. John's Lutheran Church to construct new facilities at Springfield Avenue and Edgewood Road, was unanimously turned down by the Board of Adjustment Monday night following a stormy three-hour public hearing before a capacity City Hall crowd of 200.

The meeting was punctuated by sharp verbal exchanges between those opposing the request and representatives supporting the church. At one point in the proceedings, James B. Burke, chairman, had to remind those in attendance "to refrain from hickering."

The application, which was opposed by most of those in attendance on grounds that such a move would tend to lower realty values, cause traffic hazards and "violate the purposes of the zoning code," called for permission to construct a church building, a Sunday school and other auxiliary buildings and facilities as well as an off-street parking lot on a three-acre site. The properties which lie across from Edgewood Club, are in an A-25 one-family residential zone.

### Churches Barred in A-25

Under present zoning laws, churches are not permitted in A-25 zones. Clubs, churches and organizations already in such zones are permitted although they are termed under the law as non-conforming.

The two properties sought by St. John's are presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Doughterty, Clark and Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Frick. Both sites comprise an area of three acres and contain existing buildings.

The plans call for a building capable of seating 200 persons and a parking lot with a minimum of 84 parking spaces.

Estimated membership by 1970 has been put at 700, while the Sunday school enrollment by that time is expected to reach 400.

Speaking on behalf of St. John's, Russell T. Keeley Jr., of the law firm of Moser, Griffin and Keeley, attempted to gain the variance under a Zoning Ordinance clause which states that the Board of Adjustment can permit a variance if "special reasons exist and can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and not substantially impair the intent and purpose of the zoning ordinance."

He cited as special reasons overcrowded conditions at the present building located at Beechwood Road and DeWolfe Avenue where the seating capacity is limited to 154 for an active membership of 486, while the Sunday school enrollment of 310 is confined to premises limited to 200.

# Rising and accepting the challenge...

*St. John's will take her place as an attractive and adequate church if we have faith enough to make it so. The proposed new structure will create an outstanding church in our community where many in the years to come will find the blessings of the gospel in word and sacrament, in Christian education and in Christian fellowship. God has placed the future of St. John's in our hands. Let us rise, accept the challenge, and build.*

*Pastor Hinman, in a letter to the Congregation*

In November, 1960, St. John's acquired the property known as 587 Springfield Avenue after a great deal of anxiety and prayerful deliberation. The purchase marked the close of the initial phase of relocating to a larger new facility. The next leg of this arduous project would culminate almost two full years later in September, 1962 at the groundbreaking for the new building. Although the congregation was strong and ambitious, it would be tested during this period in many ways. For some, the new church building was a challenge, and an exciting test of their faith and commitment. For others, it represented a threat to the status quo, an evolution to a "big church" mentality, and meant increased financial support.

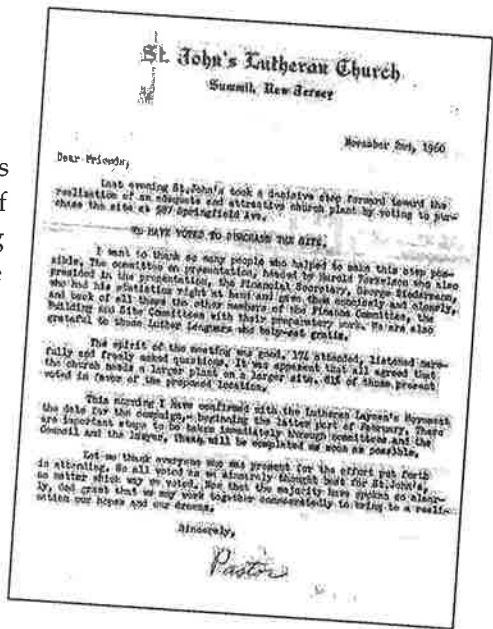
It was during this time that Pastor Hinman floated a trial balloon about his possible retirement after more than 30 years as Pastor. The Council urged him to stay until the new building was dedicated, and he agreed. The congregation was in a relatively high state of flux. A new young President was in office, and the whole nation seemed to be on the move. There were many families moving in and out of the community, and hence, the congregation. There was even a squabble with Faith Lutheran over membership issues, which actually made it into the local press, and precipitated a formal complaint to the NJ Synod. The congregation was still cramped into the small original space, with attendance averaging 275 each Sunday. The Council deliberated over providing a program of activities for the 34 college students that would be home for the Christmas holidays. Would the glue that had been holding St. John's together be strong enough to weather the changing times and the transition to a new home, especially the cost of the project?

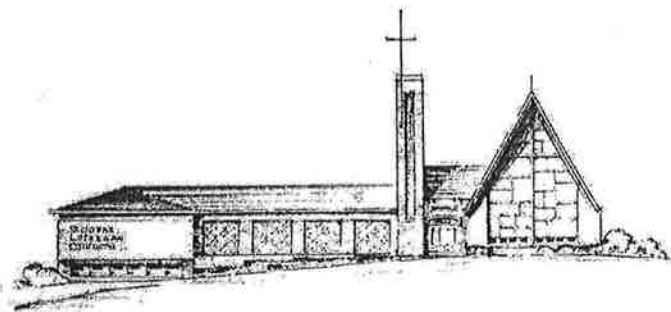
A letter to the congregation announcing the purchase of 587 Springfield Avenue.

To get a sense of what was going to be financially required of the congregation on an ongoing basis, one has only to look at the difference between the 1961 and the 1964 budgets – the projected 1964 budget would represent the first full year of occupancy in the new facility. Excluding benevolences, the annual expense budget would jump from \$19,357 in 1961, to an expected \$42,748 in 1964! The cost of the new structure, (not including the cost of the land) was \$525,000. The congregation would realize \$165,000 from the sale of its original location. The balance would have to come from a combination of savings, a mortgage, and contributions by members to the Building Fund. The Council, knowing the concerns of the banks being solicited for a mortgage, imposed a "borrowing cap" which meant an aggressive "target" for the remaining money which needed to be raised in the Building Fund.

After a few false starts, the Building Fund finally had gotten off to a slow start. Pastor Hinman had originally hoped that a spirited drive by the Lutheran Laymen's Movement (LLM) would spur on the process of finding and relocating to a new church site. However, once the site was finally purchased, it became imperative that the LLM prod and assist the congregation to meet certain goals to ensure that the Building Fund would cover a set percentage of the total cost of construction. After the site was purchased, and plans were being drawn, the LLM took another tally after renewed efforts, and the congregation was still short about \$80,000, even after having made major increases in their pledge commitments.

The Building Committee wisely presented the options to the Congregation, which included a less-ambitious structure if sufficient funding could not be counted on from member pledges to the Building Fund. Faced squarely with the options, there was yet a further outpouring of financial support from the members, including some stand-by additional loans to the Church, if necessary. St. John's put together a financial package





that qualified them for a \$225,000 twenty-year mortgage. With the Congregation having met its goals – surprising themselves as well as the Lutheran Laymen’s Movement – definitive work on the building could now go forward.

Having been given the options of settling for half a loaf, or fully realizing the ambitious plans of a congregation straining to do God’s will, the people of St. John’s rose to the challenge, and committed themselves in full measure to support God’s work. They trusted that God would provide, and they would come to have the spiritual rewards of their doings.

With the financial support of the congregation in place and the financing in hand, the contracts were awarded. On September 16, 1962, ground was broken on the new site for the new building that would become the current home of St. John’s. One month later, the Cuban Missile Crisis would cause many to focus on their faith and evaluate its role and place in their lives.



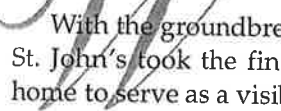
*Russel Sibole presenting plans for the new site at the fund drive dinner held at the Summit High School cafeteria on March 8, 1961.*



# A manifest testament to St. John's faith in the future...

*"Summit residents should be justly proud of St. John's Lutheran Church, not because they have built such a handsome edifice, but proud that its congregation has faith in the future. In an era when cynicism and negativism are popular sociological concepts among some of the so-called intelligentsia, it is refreshing to see the course altered, at least locally, by a group of people who see the Church as a foundation upon which men of goodwill can build a world based on the concepts laid down by Christ."*

*Editorial in the Summit Herald, November 14, 1963*



With the groundbreaking for the new building on September 16, 1962, St. John's took the final step on the path to establishing a new church home to serve as a visible and lasting platform for their enduring interest in doing God's work here on Earth. In just one day shy of a year, the cornerstone of the new building would be laid on September 15, 1963, signifying the completion of the new structure fifty-five years after the congregation was founded.

The groundbreaking finally represented the tangible product of dedication, sacrifice, and commitment by the congregation and Council over many preceding years. There was clearly a level of excitement and electricity within the congregation. They had proven to themselves and others that they could provide the financial support necessary for such an ambitious undertaking. There had never before been such a test of the spiritual, financial, and talent resources of the congregation. By arriving at this point, the people of St. John's proclaimed the depth of their commitment to take their faith seriously.

The process that had led them to this point was not always a smooth or uncontentious one. Looking back, there were some decisions and courses taken that could have been improved upon, but none of them materially jeopardized the final outcome. At crucial points, the leaders of the congregation had to make some tough calls, the wisdom of which would only be validated by time. They never lost sight of the goal or abdicated their responsibility to the congregation. Many on Council and in the congregation were asked to assume tasks or responsibilities that were brand new to them, but they committed themselves to the betterment of the worship and fellowship experience at St. John's.

At first, work proceeded slowly because of bad weather during the winter of 1962/1963, but the contractors persevered toward the projected completion date of next October. The congregation was busy with a myriad of efforts aimed at coming up with new furnishings and appointments for the new building. There was an endless series of tasks that had to be undertaken as the new structure took shape. In addition to the generosity it took to fund the new building, the congregation continued to donate time, talent, and funds to appoint the new facility in a manner that would enrich their experience together – the altar and rail, kneelers for the chancel, the Janssen chapel and window. The furnishing of the new adult lounge was accomplished by the frenetic hoarding of books of green stamps, which were a household hallmark of that era.

What distinguished this project and made it notable was the boldness of the congregation in planning and providing for a structure that satisfied all the needs of the congregation in terms of a sanctuary, a fellowship hall, and education rooms – all at once – not in a piecemeal fashion. Not only did it satisfy their immediate needs, it provided ample room for the congregation to grow, which further demonstrated the vision and commitment of its members. In one bold stroke, St. John's expressed both its sense of "place" in the structure that was being erected and furnished

at 587 Springfield Avenue, as well as its confidence and faith in the future.



*Groundbreaking ceremony,  
September 16, 1962.*

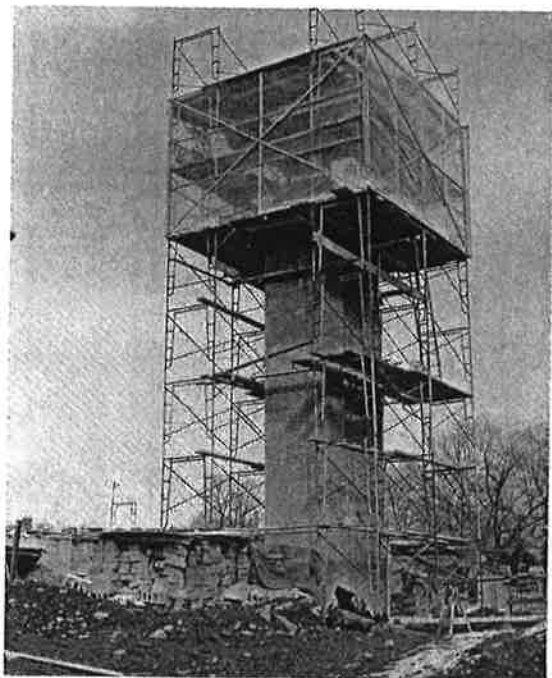


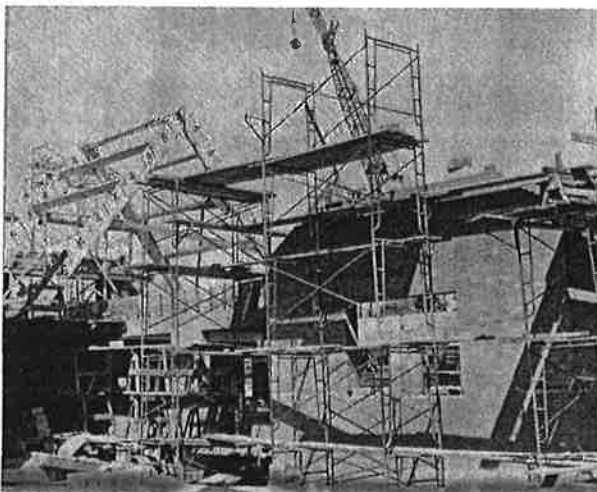
# Construction Begins

*Foundation construction, January 3, 1963*



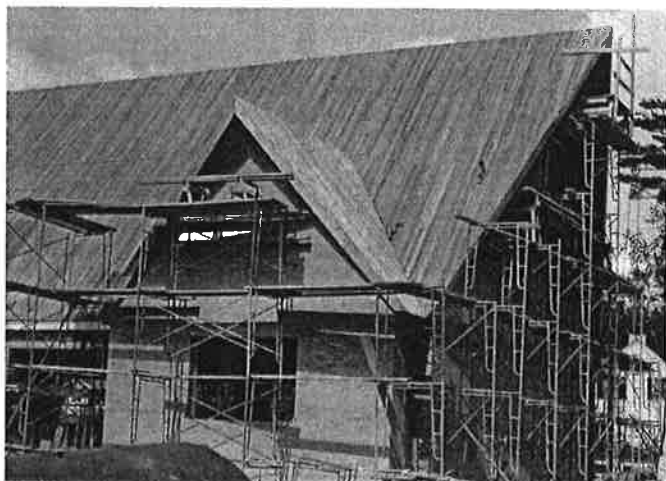
*Construction of the tower,  
March 3, 1963*





*Framing of the nave,  
April 13, 1963*

*Roofing the nave,  
May 12, 1963*



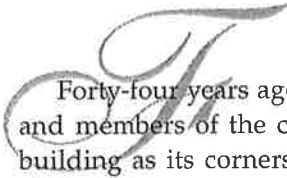
*Nearing completion...*

# *Celebration, transition...* and new prayers to be answered.

*"Today, a realization of a dream is conveyed to each and every member of St. John's; a dedication of Christian love and service is imparted to our congregation and our community; and God's reflected spirit in human achievement is communicated to all. Yes, we cross the threshold of our new sanctuary knowing that with spiritual guidance, our prayers have been answered."*

*Pastor Willis Hinman*

*- from the Dedication Service booklet, 1963*



Forty-four years ago, on the afternoon of September 15, 1963, friends and members of the congregation stood outside the newly completed building as its cornerstone was laid. The doors were locked since the required occupancy permits from the City had not been issued, but those in attendance were bursting with pride at the both handsome and functional new structure. Over 600 people gathered to celebrate the completion of this new testament to both God's blessings and the resolve of a congregation that had a clear vision of its mission. The *Summit Herald* proclaimed that the city's newest building was evidence and a reminder "that God still plays an integral role in our lives."

The new church was officially dedicated at a service in the new sanctuary held on November 3rd. The last services in the old church building took place the previous week. For the 648 people who attended the dedication, the old building, in retrospect, seemed even smaller as the new structure swelled with the many hundreds of the admiring faithful. The pride of accomplishment was clearly evident. The congregation was both determined and spirited, and was blessed with a Council that pushed an aggressive agenda with bold efficiency. With the congregation on such a sound footing, it was a propitious time for a change in pastoral leadership.

Since 1930, Willis Hinman had served as Pastor of St. John's. He was never officially installed as Pastor, but tirelessly served to instill his Christian values and precepts into St. John's. The course he had set for the congregation had been unwavering, and at age 69, he decided that the new

building represented the advent of a new era, and his retirement was the best thing for him and his wife Erma, as well as St. John's. Pastor Hinman had revealed his desire and intention to retire to the Council during the construction of the new building, but was persuaded to delay the timing until after the new structure was dedicated.

On January 26, 1964, Dr. Willis Hinman delivered his last sermon at St. John's. Over 600 people again crowded into the services at the new church. That evening, 341 people enjoyed a turkey dinner in the new Fellowship Hall to celebrate the event. The congregation had been blessed by its association with both the Hinmans. Erma Hinman had been an enormous resource for her husband and the congregation. She worked tirelessly in the church office, was often characterized as the "de facto" Assistant Pastor, and was described as a "little dynamo of energy." It was her birthday, as well, on January 26, and she was presented with a lovely bouquet of red roses.

The "Hinman era" was drawing to a close – it marked the end of a distinguished academic and pastoral career, during which St. John's was enriched by 34 years of Christian service to the congregation and community. A member of the congregation graciously presented the congregation with a portrait of Pastor Hinman, which now hangs at the entrance to the hall that bears his name.

The congregation now took up the important task of finding a successor, trusting that God, through his infinite grace, would continue to answer their prayers.



*September 15, 1963 – Rev. Willis Hinman laying mortar for the cornerstone with Harold Torkelson (VP), Rev. Knudten, DD president of the NJ Synod and David Truckess, acting mayor of Summit.*

# Here I Am, Lord

As the congregation celebrated the 34 years of illustrious service the Hinmans had provided to St. John's in late 1963, and then bade them farewell early in 1964, the wheels of the Church were already starting to turn ever so deliberately as the logistics and mechanics of finding a new pastor were set in motion. The first order of business, ironically, was to be assigned a pastor by the Synod that would attend to the pastoral needs of the congregation, but would not be in the pulpit every Sunday, or spend the majority of his time at the church. There just happened to be someone on the staff of the Board of World Missions at the Home Church Office in Manhattan who lived in Madison, and he agreed to serve as an interim pastor at St. John's, and was to be known as Vice-Pastor Richard Peterman.

The Council established a six person Pulpit Committee on December 3, 1963. On December 20th, the Council and members of the Pulpit Committee held a special meeting with Dr. Knudten, the President of the New Jersey Synod. The meeting was turned over to Dr. Knudten who explained "at length" (we can only imagine!) the twelve procedures that were to be observed in the process leading up to a congregation vote on a pastoral call. Armed with their check list, the Pulpit Committee wasted no time in taking up the task of casting a wide net for the best qualified and most suitable person to be pastor of St. John's.

The pulpit committee called for a special Council meeting on February 13 to report their progress. By that time, nine candidates had been investigated – three having been submitted by the Synod and six by members of the congregation. The committee recommended that the Council consider a candidate from Lewisburg, PA, and this candidate was to later be further recommended to the congregation. In April, Vice-Pastor



*Rev. Dr. Willis and Erma Hinman*

Peterman reported that over the past month, he had performed 13 sick-in communions, three weddings, and four baptisms, with two weddings scheduled for May. Another special council meeting was called by the President to be held on April 16th. The council would hear a detailed report from the Pulpit Committee, which by then had considered 18 candidates from 10 different states. Ten different candidates from five states had been invited to preach to the congregation, and the results were to be presented and discussed. But now, as is said, comes the rest of the story.

The Pulpit Committee dutifully explained that it had worked diligently, having followed the Synod's twelve procedural guidelines, but opined that it had not yet completed the comprehensive search it had originally intended. Nevertheless, they felt strongly compelled at this time to put forward the name of a candidate for a potential call to St. John's! In the words of the Committee, based on a "groundswell of enthusiasm exhibited on the part of the Congregation which had been communicated to the Council, as



*Rev. Dr. Richard Lee Peterman*

well as the feeling of the Council members themselves," the name that was presented was none other than Richard L. Peterman, the Vice-Pastor who had been serving on an interim basis. A committee was immediately appointed to meet with Pastor Peterman to probe his willingness to meet with the Council anticipatory to a call from St. John's.

Who was this man from the Church Home Office in Manhattan? What qualities did he possess and display that motivated the congregation to lobby the Council so forcefully for him to be their Pastor? After fewer than six months of less than full-time work, this individual had made a deep and indelible impression on the members of St. John's - to the extent that they were willing to make their choice for Pastor known to the Council in explicit, unsubtle ways - Pastor Peterman had won their hearts. He did not campaign to be called at St. John's - he simply performed his duties and expressed himself to the best of his considerable abilities. The real question was whether he would even consider, or much less accept a call from St. John's and take up the challenges of full-time pastoral duties, leaving his "9 to 5" position with the LCA Board of World Missions.

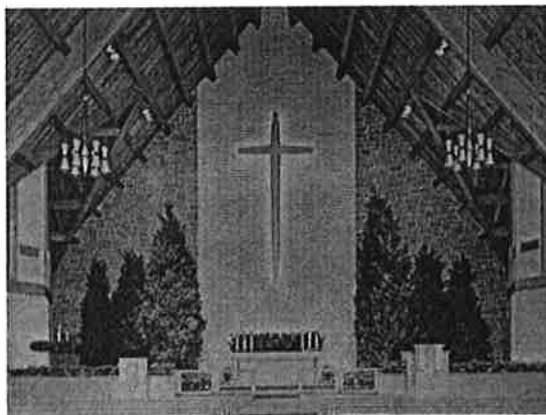


A Congregational Meeting was called for May 17th, at 2:30 p.m. for the purpose of issuing a call to Richard Lee Peterman. The call would have to win the approval of two-thirds of the eligible voters present. There were five salient qualities that were enumerated in support of his call:

1. Dignity of the service
2. The application of the sermon to every-day life with theological background.
3. The interest of Pastor Peterman in and appeal to the young people of the church as evidenced by the favorable reaction of the youth.
4. His appeal to organizations of the church.
5. Observations of his abilities in the area of leadership and organization.

There were 204 members in attendance at that meeting. The vote was taken, and of those voting, 196 were in favor, and two were opposed. The Secretary called Pastor Peterman, advised him of the vote, and he was then invited to come and talk with the assembled members. He was presented with the official call documents, which, believing it was God's will, he accepted to the glee, surprise, and relief of the congregation.

Again, God had provided his flock at St. John's with an individual whose special qualities endeared him to them, and who would prove over the coming years that he possessed a set of attributes that would guide and propel the congregation to new heights of spiritual dedication, influence, benevolence, and prosperity. The congregation's prayers were answered as this man of God was placed in their midst, and joined with them in their prayers and aspirations. As his new labors began at St. John's, the innate qualities that drew the congregation to him would begin to blossom and bear fruit, to the glory of God.



*Christmas at St. John's, 1960s*

## *Make us your living voice...* **Christ, be our light!**

The 1960s was a decade of radical change, and in the minds of many, represented a time that produced a pronounced drift in the nation's moral compass. In 1964, as Richard Lee Peterman became Pastor of St. John's by virtual acclamation, the country was recovering from the assassination of John F. Kennedy, about to aspire to become The Great Society, and was preparing to wrestle with conflicts both home and abroad that would tear at the very fabric of the nation.

The unsettled, "anything goes" mood which characterized that period would not descend over St. John's – instead, the Sixties would become a time in which St. John's would set a definitive example of how a congregation can focus itself inwardly, but at the same time identify and employ its resources to impact the world around it through innovative and Christ-centered initiatives and benevolences. This "awakening" of the congregation was encouraged and led by Pastor Peterman, who seemed to surprise both himself and the congregation by agreeing to return to pastoral duties as the Pastor of St. John's in Summit in 1964.

Plucked from the offices of the LCA Home Church in Manhattan where he served in a post for the Board of World Missions, Pastor Peterman had been ordained in May 1953, and began his ministry at Christ Church in Tincum, PA. Prior to graduating from the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia that same year, he had worked for the *Pottstown Mercury* newspaper in Pottstown, PA for ten years, and had served in the Armed Forces in World War II. He was 41 when he came to St. John's with his wife, Mary, and his three children. He believed that a great opportunity presented itself if he could motivate and mobilize this congregation whose latent capabilities had been largely untapped. His goal was to push St. John's to recognize its potential in terms of human and financial resources, and then translate and channel those resources into programs and deeds that would address Christian concerns both in the neighborhood and the world at large.

Being a gifted speaker, Pastor Peterman would make every person assembled in the sanctuary feel as if the message of the morning's sermon was personalized for them. His topics seemed perfectly suited for the tenor of the times as he captured the essence of the issues of the day and how faith in the word of God should guide our conduct as Christians. The words flowed smoothly and effortlessly as he referred to only a few notes



*Stained glass windows created by Willet were added to St. John's in November 1966.*

on a small index card to deliver his sermons. His topics were often controversial, as it was his style to address the issues of the day in a "head-on" fashion. During his tenure, a Sunday night discussion group was formed where 30-40 people would return back to church in the evening where the sermon of the morning continued to be debated and discussed. The sermons rang true and frequently replayed themselves through people's minds, with some of them still popping back now and then into people's consciousness.

During Pastor Peterman's tenure, the church both prospered and expanded at an extraordinary pace. The stained glass windows were selected and installed. The Christian Education program boasted an enrollment of 246. The music program of the congregation was expanded not only in terms of choral participation, but also into appreciation of other forms of artful expression. The Holtkamp organ was designed, built and installed and became a premier example of pipe organ architecture in the area. The Council submitted itself to a number of self-examinations and the future of the church was embodied in long range plans that were frequently reviewed and revised. The landscaping of the church grounds was accomplished, the skateboarders on the parking lot were dealt with, and the annual stewardship dinners (catered at a cost of \$2.50 per person) had become a highlighted event. The Community Pre-School was conceived and founded and allowed to use St. John's educational space which was vacant during the week.

In his report for 1966, Pastor Peterman put the baptized membership at 1,064, the confirmed membership in good standing at 802, and the communing membership at 742, which increased 6% from the previous year and represented 93% of the confirmed members. Attendance at the Adult Forums ran between 75 – 100 people, and the annual budget had

grown to \$160,000. The percentage of the church budget allocated to benevolence increased steadily, and it became the stated objective of St. John's that this trend be continued. The financial support to many external causes grew both in number and in dollars, and the congregation was often cited as an example of effective stewardship with tangible results. The congregation's initiatives were highlighted frequently in articles appearing in *The Lutheran* magazine.

There was clearly a climate of innovation and social interaction that permeated the agenda of the congregation. One of the main factors in producing this climate was the unique leadership of Pastor Peterman. In December 1968, he opened the Council meeting by enumerating three guiding principles that would make clear what motivated him:

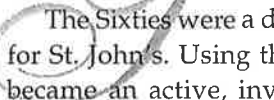
- Be captive to the word of God.
- Be concerned with strengthening the community of believers.
- Be willing to make demands in Christ's behalf.

He was intensely personal with the congregation, devoting much time to individual counseling and conducting "Meet the Pastor" sessions. He confronted the emerging issues such as drug use in the community and abortion. A liaison was established with local schools to address emerging issues with teenage children. He challenged everyone's motives and expectations in a constructive fashion, whenever he could, and promoted stewardship aggressively as a necessary facet of church life that should be an active topic of discussion and frequent self-examination.

A hallmark of his approach to the people of St. John's was to emphasize that religion and theology – the taking of one's faith seriously – was not meant to be directed at those only in need or troubled in some way. He was convinced that becoming a part of doing God's will and walking in His ways should appeal to what has been characterized as the "up and overs" as well as the "down and outs." He demonstrated the importance of faith to the relatively secure and prosperous congregation of St. John's, and how faith could be manifested into Christian activism by revealing to people how they could make a positive and notable impact on the world around them.

The ways and teachings of Pastor Richard Peterman resonated with the people of St. John's as well as with the mood of the times. Although sometimes controversial, like many people and events of the times, he steered a course that would open up to the people of St. John's a fresh vision and a realization of how they could indeed be ministers in their own right, and set an example of how Lutherans could exert a positive force within the rapidly changing world around them. They had become a living voice for Christ in their world – a light shining in His church.

# *The Lord's Blessings* sprout and grow...



The Sixties were a decade of enormous change, both for the nation, and for St. John's. Using their new facilities as a platform, the congregation became an active, involved participant in many innovative initiatives under the leadership of Pastor Richard Peterman. As this pivotal decade ended, the people of St. John's could certainly look back with pride at what had been accomplished.

The congregation provided financial support for a member of the congregation who had been called to Tanzania as a missionary. They also supported urban ministries in Jersey City and Elizabeth as an intended outreach from the growing affluence of the surrounding community. The D.A.R.E. drug program for teens in Summit had its beginnings at St. John's. A major emphasis was placed on benevolence, which enabled St. John's to share its blessings and its vision of how God's work should be carried out across a wide range of programs and initiatives which were overseen by the various council committees. By 1969, our congregation was the largest contributor in New Jersey in support of its synod.

In addition to a significant and effective benevolence program, St. John's also became a strong influence on the workings and agenda of the larger church. As the LCA moved in the mid-Sixties to "modernize" the Church, St. John's eventually had three members of the congregation serving on national LCA boards – the most of any in the nation. It had become a visible, persuasive, and influential group of Lutherans which asserted itself in a positive, understated manner. It was in many respects a "model" congregation.

Having accomplished so much in such an innovative and challenging fashion, Pastor Peterman announced his intention to resign as Pastor on July 5, 1970, to be effective September 30. He accepted a call to direct an important national fundraising campaign for the LCA. Having met his objectives in coming to St. John's and expressing confidence in its lay leadership, he would be leaving a healthy congregation that possessed significant forward momentum.

With Arthur Bauer appointed the following month as Vice-Pastor for the interim, the congregation began the process of finding and extending a call to a new pastor. With just six years passing since the Hinman-

Peterman transition, the congregation was still somewhat attuned to the process. As the search progressed, a name familiar to many Lutherans surfaced – a fourth generation Pastor serving in York, Pennsylvania, whose name was Franklin Drewes Fry. His father, Franklin Clark Fry, sometimes known as “Mr. Protestant,” was a key figure in the formation of the newly created LCA, served as President of the LCA until shortly before his death in 1968, and was a leader in the world ecumenical movement.

It did not take long for either St. John’s or Pastor Franklin Fry to realize the attractiveness of the other party as discussions progressed. The candidate was a gifted theologian, administrator, and preacher, and St. John’s was a thriving, innovative congregation 25 miles from New York City – each had quite an understandable allure for the other. Pastor Fry was called to St. John’s on June 4, 1971 and was installed on October 3. By the time he was installed, the membership of the congregation had crossed the 1,000 mark – providing pastoral leadership for such a congregation was clearly a challenge that would require a full measure of dedication, energy, and vision.



*Rev. Dr. Franklin D. Fry*

Franklin D. Fry was born March 13, 1928 in Yonkers, New York. He graduated from Hamilton College in 1949, and received his M.Div. in 1952 from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He was ordained that same year, and became Pastor of St. Philip’s Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York, a congregation he served until 1958. He was then called to Christ Lutheran in York, Pennsylvania, and served until September, 1971, when he was called to St. John’s. Since the parsonage occupied by the Hinmans had been sold in 1964, the newly called pastor purchased and moved into the roomy house at 610 Springfield Avenue with his wife Mary and their five children. He was quite fond of saying services at St. John’s would never be cancelled because of weather since he lived but a stone’s throw from the church. In addition, he reveled in the fact that he was in such close proximity to New York City and all that it had to offer from sports teams (the Yankees!) to music and concerts, especially jazz.

# “...To weave our lives together significantly as Christ’s people in this place.”

*Pastor Franklin D. Fry, from Report of the Pastor,  
Special Congregational Meeting, June, 1972*



Pastor Franklin D. Fry arrived at St. John’s in September, 1971 along with his first wife Mary, five children and 4,000 pounds of books. Much to the relief of the Council, he moved the books himself to reduce his moving expenses, which St. John’s had earlier agreed to pay. The 4,000 pounds of books, which would continue to grow through his years at St. John’s, were not the coffee-table variety – meant to look nice and be seen, but seldom used or thumbed through. Instead, they mostly rested close at hand in his office, and eventually became part of a more than respectable library in his home at 610 Springfield Avenue. They were an oft-used foundation and resource for a keen, well-rounded and theologically gifted mind that could sense and find God’s hand everywhere and in everything – in his texts, in his daily life, and especially in the gifts and talents of the people of St. John’s. He would aspire for the people of St. John’s to become its ministers, a legacy he left for us to embrace and uphold.

He set about to establish priorities for his ministry in Summit. He strove to make our understanding of word and sacraments, the exploration of the mystery of faith, and the importance of being mindful of Christ and his teachings in one’s daily life both interesting and fulfilling. He would draw on the myriad of talents and significant resources of the members to strengthen the congregation - enabling it to fulfill its mission by embracing evangelism and benevolence, and by directly supporting a number of worthy initiatives and struggling institutions that embodied basic Lutheran ideals. In return, he would provide a sense of place at St. John’s that met the



*Pastor Fry in his office.*

needs of a growing congregation in terms of an attractive and well-maintained physical plant as well as a rich menu of programs meant to stimulate Christian thought and dialogue.

Starting with adult education, and extending down through the age groups, there was an impressive curriculum of speakers and materials meant to benefit our understanding of the Christian faith and Lutheran tenets, and how they could influence and play a role in our daily lives. There was a steady



*Pastor Fry leading the Adult Forum.*

stream of Adult Forum topics that engaged the congregation in diverse dialogues both with prominent and informed speakers and with themselves, since St. John's seemed to attract a number of members who were prominent in their respective fields of endeavor. There was a persistent and obvious emphasis on education at all levels that connected the Sunday worship experience at St. John's to the other six days of the week.

A significant commitment to enhancing and expanding the educational programs and social activities for youth at St. John's was a result of the congregation calling Rick Bair to be Assistant Pastor following his graduation from the Philadelphia Seminary in 1973. He soon launched the Junior and Senior Eagles groups that provided inclusive programs for young people as they approached adulthood and sought to understand

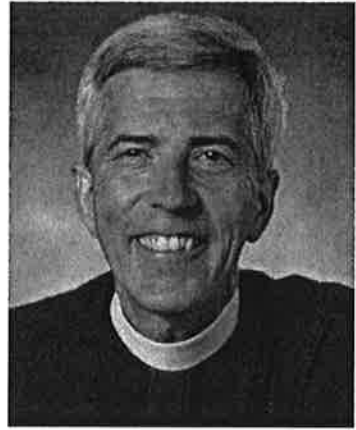


*Pastor Rick Bair greeting the congregation.*



the relevance of the church in their lives.

Pastor Fry made it his business to explore the potential contributions each member of each family in the congregation could make to the church, and a wide variety of activities made it possible to assimilate everyone who cared to participate into an element of church life. While he always made it a point to encourage members openly from the pulpit or in other forums to participate and share their talents and experiences, he would consistently follow-up with personal behind-the-scenes phone calls or visits. He was extremely effective at relating to people on a personal level, and it was a rare individual that could resist his pitch.



*Rev. Rick L. Bair*

When it came to finance and stewardship, he believed the finances of the church should be like the engine of a Rolls-Royce – silent, but powerful. Never one to encourage bake-sales or similar fund-raising events which he viewed as distractions to the central theme of tithing and giving, he pursued stewardship in a very mature and proactive manner, expecting the congregation to generously support the church without an endless stream of minor solicitations or cajoling sermons. It was remarkable how at year-end, any shortfall in revenues or pledges miraculously disappeared as he personally encouraged the gifts and financial support that enabled St. John's to meet its budget objectives.

As the congregation continued to grow in the 1970s, so did its influence with the larger church and community. By 1975, the St. John's budget was approximately \$200,000 and continued to show respectable growth. Each year, the congregation exceeded its expected contribution to the Synod, and in 1979 it contributed 175% of its expected Synod apportionment. In addition, the members responded generously to wider LCA efforts such as the World Hunger Appeal, for which the congregation raised \$30,000 in 1978. In addition, a number of St. John's members held important committee positions within the LCA, board memberships on Lutheran affiliated colleges, and numerous posts within synod sponsored endeavors. Pastor Fry also held important posts for the LCA (including membership on the Executive Council), the American Bible Society, Lutheran Social Services of New Jersey, and was a leading figure in the worldwide ecumenical movement.

With the '70s drawing to a close, the congregation honored Pastor Willis Hinman at his funeral in September 1978 and the Hinman Scholarship fund was established in his memory. In July 1979, Assistant Pastor Rick Bair announced he was leaving St. John's to become Campus Pastor for Syracuse University. His contribution to St. John's had been significant, particularly in the area of Youth Ministry. The previous year, he had enlisted 22 children and 22 adults to tutor Spanish-speaking students over the summer to help them maintain the skills they had gained during the regular school year in English and other subjects. The children themselves asked that the program be repeated the next year, and the Spanish-speaking community hosted a dinner in October for those at St. John's who shared their summer with the students.



*Rev. Dr. Mark W. Oldenburg*

The new decade of the '80s started on an auspicious note with Mark W. Oldenburg being called to St. John's as Assistant Pastor in June 1980. He would carry on the important work of Youth Ministry, as well as augment the tenor section of the choir with his fine voice and musical skills. The music program at St. John's had become an integral part of the worship experience led by the Director of Music, Wayne H. Dietterick, a gifted musician and composer. A harpsichord kit was purchased and the instrument was painstakingly constructed over three years, to be finally dedicated in February 1981.



*Wayne Dietterick and Pastor Fry*

As 1983 approached, the congregation began to focus on a meaningful celebration of its 75th Anniversary year.

# “Taking Faith Seriously”

*“Therefore, as a servant church, we here confess a new readiness to follow where the Spirit shall lead, God guiding us to grow towards the glorious end we are promised for God’s household, begun and continued in Jesus Christ, to whom his church be glory.”*

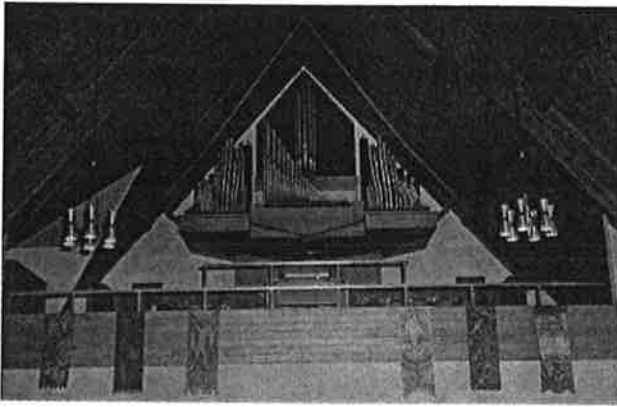
*Eph. 2:19-21, 3:20-21*

*From Ecumenism – A Lutheran Commitment  
– adopted by the 11th Biennial Convention, 1982*

St. John’s 75th Anniversary was celebrated in 1983, approximately 20 years after the congregation had moved to its Springfield Avenue location and approximately half-way along in the 25 years Franklin D. Fry would serve St. John’s before retiring as its Pastor in 1996. The theme slogan was “Honor the Past – Launch the Future” and served as a focal point for a major Capital Fund Appeal begun in March 1983. In keeping with the benevolent traditions of the congregation, and the wise attention paid by Pastor Fry and the church leadership to maintaining and improving the physical plant, the appeal would fund a \$ 75,000 contribution to the Synod, as well as accomplish a significant renovation and expansion of the aging church worship, education and office spaces.



*Easter, 1983*



*The newly completed renovations to the choir loft and altar, Easter 1984.*



It was anticipated that this Capital Fund Appeal would raise a minimum of \$225,000. The funds pledged to the synod would be earmarked for a capital appeal of its own, which coincided with that of St. John's. The contribution to the Synod would support urban ministry at the Philadelphia Seminary, new facilities and scholarships at Upsala College in East Orange, major construction at Camp Beisler (now CrossRoads), and start-up funds for a 120 bed nursing facility for the elderly spearheaded by Lutheran Social Services of New Jersey. The balance would be applied towards major repair, refurbishment, and expansion of the Church worship and administration facilities which had been on the drawing board for a number of years. This included additional office space, more classrooms, a new altar, additional work and storage space, a new and larger rear entrance, along with new carpeting and improved sound and lighting in the sanctuary. Peter Biber, a well-known local architect, and Willy Malarcher, an award winning liturgical designer, were commissioned to draft the final plans. By July 1983, almost \$267,000 had been raised for the 75th Anniversary Capital Fund Appeal.

In addition to this particularly noteworthy endeavor, the "Fry years,"



*Additional office space was added.*

which extended to 1996 when Pastor Fry retired, contained other noteworthy accomplishments, some tangible – others intangible. One was the role that he and St. John’s played in the professional development of a number of Assistant Pastors – all of which have continued on in the Church as spiritual leaders or leading educators in the Lutheran faith. I am sure that they all can look back at their experiences at St. John’s and point to many things they learned here that served them well after they left. Although all of them undoubtedly “had their days,” they left enriched by the theological environment fostered by Pastor Fry, as well as by the experience of serving a well-developed, involved and motivated congregation.

There were five assistant pastors that served with Pastor Fry – Rick Bair, Mark Oldenburg, Susan Nagle, Helga Jansons and David Lose, who served his internship at St. John’s and then returned newly ordained as an assistant pastor. For those such as Pastor Nagle who remained fairly close by in their new endeavors, they returned to St. John’s frequently and were warmly welcomed by the congregation. To the extent St. John’s contributed to the development of these five ordained Lutherans who continue to do God’s will among his people on Earth, St. John’s continued its mission of spreading its Christian influence well beyond the immediate community.

Another major contribution to the Lutheran faith that was conceived and made a reality during Pastor Fry’s tenure was the funding and endowment of the St. John’s Visiting Professorship at the Lutheran



*Rev. Susan E. Nagle*



*Rev. Helga Jansons and  
Amy Wirth*



*Rev. Dr. David J. Lose*

Seminary in Philadelphia. As a testament to the ongoing importance of education and ecumenism in the spiritual lives of Lutherans, a fund was started in the mid-eighties by an initial gift of over \$100,000, with the intention of being able at some point to fully endow a visiting professorship at the seminary.

This was an ambitious goal and would become a gift from St. John's of Summit that would constitute a significant statement of the congregation's belief in and commitment to providing an enriched intellectual environment for Lutheran seminarians. The visiting professors would be selected by the seminary from a diverse ecumenical group of distinguished theologians and religious leaders. The only string attached was that each visiting professor must come to St. John's in Summit to share their knowledge and experiences with the congregation. St. John's presented a gift of over \$1,000,000 to the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia to endow the visiting professorship which will stand as an ongoing testament that this group of Lutherans, the "ministers" of St. John's, takes their faith seriously – Soli Deo Gloria.

Anticipating Pastor Fry's retirement in 1996, St. John's and the Synod began to make preparations for a transition period as the congregation would examine itself prior to calling a new pastor.



*Ruth Maehl,  
Thelma McNulty  
and Betty Foreman,  
1983*

*Property Day*



*A performance of  
"Amahl and the  
Night Visitors,"  
1992*



*The members were assembled for a group shot which was then used on the cover of a Good News Bible.*

*Church picnic, 1993*



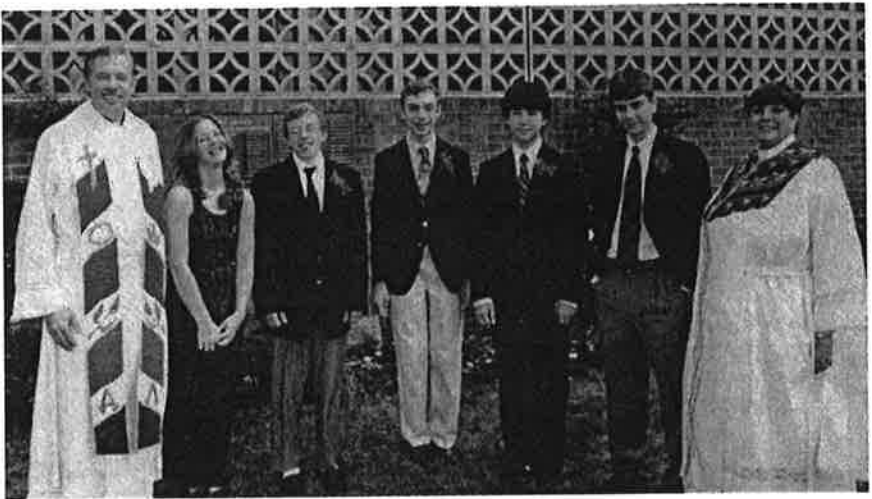
*Confirmation Class, 1996*



# *St. John's in Transition –* **Drawn together in the Spirit's tether**

*O* During the summer of 1996, the Congregation Council of St. John's prayerfully deliberated the first steps that would be taken along the path to immersing St. John's into a formal transition period which would eventually culminate in a call to a new pastor. For a year before his retirement date in 1996, Pastor Franklin D. Fry had inserted a series of introspective studies and events into the church calendar which were intended to prepare the congregation for his separation from the family of faith he had led for 25 years. Given the mature nature and complexities of the congregation, there were obvious concerns and questions about how the congregation would be best served in making the break from a long-serving pastor – how to best provide for pastoral care, the administration of the Word and Sacraments, and how to conduct a search for a successor. It could also involve preparing for a pastor whose skills and approach could be substantially different from his or her predecessor.

These concerns and questions were shared by the leadership of the New Jersey Synod and Bishop E. Roy Riley was keenly aware of the relatively unique nature of the congregation and the importance of its continued



*Confirmation Class, 1998 with Pastor Davidson and Pastor Miller.*

health to the Synod. He counseled the leaders of St. John's as they approached this critical period and proposed and recommended a course of action that was a new approach within the Synod for a congregation with the characteristics of St. John's. Although the approach had been utilized elsewhere in the ELCA, "transitional ministry" had not been undertaken in the New Jersey Synod by a congregation as healthy or dynamic as St. John's. In a new twist, instead of being viewed as a congregation in crisis, which was the typical candidate for transitional ministry, St. John's was construed to be a healthy congregation that would be reinforced by the transition process. It had the attributes and qualities of a congregation that was up to the test, and if it was going to err, it was willing to do so by being bold. St. John's would become a congregation that would undertake the regimens of the full transition process and move forward under a transitional ministry in partnership with the Synod.

From the outset of the transition, it is safe to say that few, if any, would have predicted that it would take over three years for the congregation to call a new pastor. It was widely felt that a line would form immediately to fill the pulpit at St. John's, and that the transition process and ministry would be a productive, but brief, interlude before a new pastor was called and in place. This being the case, there was a natural temptation for the congregation and its leaders to "go through the motions" during the transition period – to not take it seriously. However, there had been only one way to do things at St. John's, and that was the "right" way. To their credit, the congregation and its leadership took seriously the tasks and



*George Moser, Director of Music with musicians on Consecration Sunday, November 15, 1998.*



*Pam Isbrandt and Penny Barth represent St. John's in the Summit Centennial Parade, September 1999.*

disciplines of the transition process as they were laid out for them – there was no “corner cutting.” Given the duration of the transition, the value of the initial focus on and commitment to the principles and objectives of transition ministry was increasingly evident as time passed.

The transition ministry was constituted by the assignment of two interim pastors to St. John's, along with Synod participation by The Rev. Paul J. Joncas, Assistant to the Bishop. The Rev. Bruce H. Davidson, who graduated from the Philadelphia Seminary and was ordained in 1974, came to St. John's as a full time Interim Pastor. Prior to his coming to St. John's, he was the Director of HIV/AIDS Ministry for a combined project of the Synod and Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey. The Rev. Susan A. Miller joined Pastor Davidson as a part-time Interim Pastor, having recently completed an Interim Ministry at Holy Trinity Lutheran in West Caldwell. She was a resident of Summit and had graduated from Yale Divinity School in 1981 and was ordained in the LCA in 1985.

Whereas Pastor Miller had prior experience in transitional ministry and had undergone training in that specific field, this would be Pastor Davidson's first experience as part of a transition team. They did not know each other beforehand and met when they arrived at St. John's. Despite their outward enthusiasm, there were certainly reservations, as new ground was going to be broken in transitioning St. John's and both of them wanted the endeavor to proceed smoothly and be deemed a success. As they acclimated themselves to the congregation and began to feel its pulse, they were pleasantly surprised at the openness and creativity of the congregation.

Once in place, the two pastors sorted out the division of labor between them as they assessed the needs of the congregation and what each had to offer. The broad objectives of the transition were for the congregation to be able to express their feelings and emotions relating to the departure of their pastor, provide for a period of introspection and self-assessment, and to define a congregational identity that would help in the search for the right "match" in a new pastor. In the words of Pastor Miller, "It's a time for the congregation to consider its focus, its mission and ministry, its gifts. Then it can share that information with candidates and tell them, 'This is where we are going. Are you comfortable being our companion and guide on the way?'"

After a year had passed and the anticipated line had yet to form, there was some restlessness about the progress of the transition. Was it on the right track? Was St. John's being too picky? Was there an adequate pool of talent from which to pick? Was St. John's being perceived as a "difficult" environment for a prospective pastor? Despite some renewed misgivings about the process, the Call Committee continued to proceed thoughtfully, prayerfully and with integrity while periodically updating the Council and congregation about their progress. For the interim pastors, they were pleased to find themselves being pulled along many times by the congregation rather than having to push. Given the longer-than-expected term of the pastoral search, and the broad, ongoing needs of the congregation, Pastor Miller's commitment was increased to a three-quarter time position.

The transition would last for over three years before a new pastor was chosen and accepted a call from St. John's. The interim ministry lasted far longer than anyone involved in the process would have suspected. There was a great deal to be learned from the process, both for the Synod and for the congregation. St. John's retained much of its momentum during the transition, thanks to the dauntless spirit and efforts of many. Of critical importance to maintaining that momentum was the extraordinary level of commitment and professionalism of the Church Staff, which seamlessly supported the interim ministry and agenda of the congregation through a sensitive time.

In December 1999, St. John's prepared to emerge from transition as a new pastor accepted the congregation's Call to Word and Sacrament.

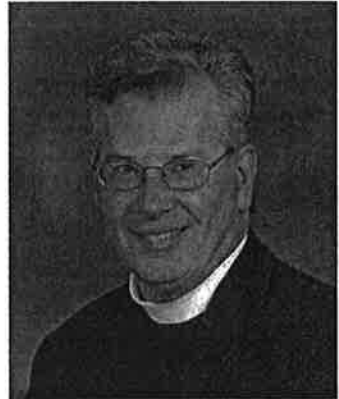
# *May we with humble courage be open to God's will...*

*"A lot of people have been asking deep spiritual questions about the meaning of life and the mystery of suffering in the world. But we are in a post-Christendom world where many people are experiencing a spiritual renaissance outside of institutional religion."*

*– Pastor Wayne Dreyman following the tragedy of 9/11*

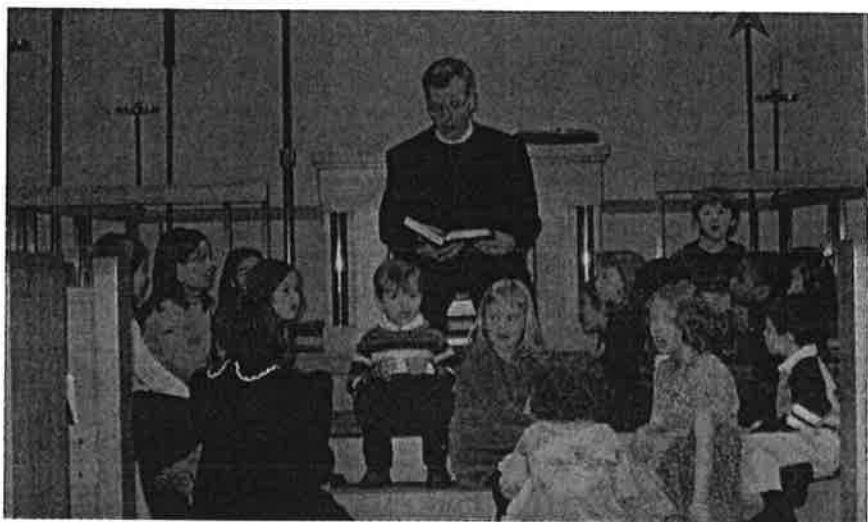
After emerging from the crucible of a lengthy transition, St. John's was anxious to select and welcome its tenth senior pastor. The Call Committee consisted of six members of St. John's, who worked closely with the New Jersey Synod in terms of identifying potential candidates, and following the scripted protocol for calling a pastor. A number of candidates were considered, mostly from within the Synod, and the process to identify, approach and interview candidates kept the process at a very deliberate pace. Finally, a candidate was suggested to St. John's and approval to approach the individual was pursued with the Synod, since the person in question was outside the New Jersey Synod. Hastened by the growing impatience with a lengthy transition, the Call Committee moved as quickly as possible once the candidate seemed to hold promise.

The Call Committee approached and proceeded to consider the qualifications of Pastor Edgar Wayne Dreyman, who goes by Wayne. He was subsequently submitted as the candidate for a call to lead the congregation. He was born in New York City in 1952 and graduated from Susquehanna University in 1974. In 1978, he received his Master of Divinity degree from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and was ordained later that year, serving first at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Philadelphia. He also was conferred a



*Rev. Edgar Wayne Dreyman*

Doctor of Divinity degree in the area of Family Ministry by Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. At the time he was approached by St. John's, he was a family and counseling pastor at St. Philip the Deacon Lutheran Church in Plymouth, Minnesota. His call was approved by a nearly unanimous



*Pastor Dreyman during the Children's Message, 2000.*

vote at a special congregational meeting held on December 12, 1999.

Pastor Dreyman was called to a congregation eager to regain momentum after a lengthy transition. The length of the transition was both a surprise and an aggravation for many, but finding someone who was the right fit for St. John's was found to be more daunting than first calculated. It did, however, allow seemingly ample time for selective memories to be somewhat dimmed, and the focus to shift to the future. It seemed fertile ground for the ambitious ideas and plans of Pastor Dreyman, whose experience in a large, Midwestern "corporate" church setting would hopefully prove of value in the smaller, "parish-type" environment of St. John's – a more intimate venue where his leadership and influence could be applied more directly as an instrument of God's will.

While steeped and well-grounded in traditional Lutheran theology, he sought to relate it to experiences we seem to share each day together as people of God, and broaden the appeal of the Word and Sacraments with a more contemporary, inclusive approach. He sought to deepen the appeal and impact of church life on all those whose faith brought them to worship in the Lutheran tradition. To this goal, he revised and expanded the confirmation process to include a thread of lay persons who involved themselves in the spiritual life of the confirmands outside the time and space of classes and worship. It was also clearly evidenced by the broad menu of worship experiences he chose to offer, as well as recognizing the positive impact a congregation might have on the physical well-being of its members. By advocating the position of Parish Nurse, he connected the

health needs of the congregation with a professional within the Church that could provide basic medical services, as well as education and counseling on other medical issues.

In addition, Pastor Dreyman was particularly adept in providing pastoral care and family counseling to the people of St. John's. Whereas this role was not as visible to all, and he chose not to wear these stripes on his sleeve, he had a combination of a soothing temperament and a personal, relatable understanding of the meaning and importance of faith that distinguished and endeared him to many in times of personal tragedy or loss. This was to be a valuable asset, for on September 11, 2001, the fabric of faith throughout the nation was tested during his time at St. John's – a time when millions simultaneously witnessed the unfolding of an enormous human tragedy and many thousands close by were impacted directly by the loss of loved ones or dear friends. Both in the congregation and in the community, the grief was palpable and profound, and the bereaved turned to their faith and their spiritual leaders. Pastor Dreyman's experience, training and demeanor enabled him to provide comfort and emotional support in a manner that enabled a better understanding of how God impacts our lives in ways that cannot always be explained.

Annealed by the events of September 11 and their aftermath, Pastor Dreyman pushed forward with his agenda for St. John's. As part of his agenda, he launched a Sharing God's Grace Appeal, which included funding for the addition of an Associate Pastor to St. John's staff, as well as the Parish Nurse position. Not one to avoid the path less taken, he believed the best candidate for Associate Pastor was someone who had served her internship at Transfiguration Lutheran Church, and was then the Pastor of St. John's in the Bronx – a choice that clearly would bring new perspectives to the congregation. Pushing ahead, he was determined to be successful, and although some of his initiatives were perceived as "ambitious," he pursued them as if time were short, and as fate would have it, his restiveness was well founded.

On September 6, 2003, Pastor Dreyman suffered a debilitating stroke that made it impossible to bring his plans for St. John's to fruition. Despite making remarkable progress, and eventually returning to his post at St. John's, his last Sunday was on April 10, 2005 and he resigned as Pastor effective on April 15. The Associate Pastor who had joined the congregation had suddenly been thrust into a demanding role just six months after she arrived. It was onto Pastor Andrea Walker's shoulders that had fallen the responsibility for leading the congregation during this difficult period. Once again, the members of St. John's put their trust in God's plan for them as His people in this place.

# *To keep the lamp alive, with oil we fill the bowl...*

*William Cowper*

**P**astor Andrea L. Walker was called to St. John's, a congregation that was characterized to her as "cross-cultural," as an Associate Pastor on January 12, 2003. Her candidacy for the position was supported by Senior Pastor Wayne Dreyman who recognized her potential to "stretch" St. John's further towards an unrefracted view of its place in the community, its mission and outreach, and the teachings of Christ. Before even a year had passed with her new congregation, she was suddenly thrust into a leadership role when Pastor Dreyman suffered a stroke in September 2003. Buoyed by her faith and toughened by her life experiences, she stepped into the breach and began to assume the pastoral duties for St. John's, which presented a significant challenge, but one she accepted with confidence and dignity.

Working closely with the church leadership and staff, she demonstrated her abilities as a preacher and administrator, as well as capably meeting the needs of the congregation for pastoral care and counseling. With the resignation of Pastor Dreyman in April 2005, St. John's again found itself facing another possible difficult period of transition, which few in the congregation relished. Given her achievements at St. John's under difficult circumstances, Pastor Walker was a logical and desirable candidate for the Senior Pastor position. The leadership of the congregation and the Synod agreed that another transition should be avoided, and if both the congregation and Pastor Walker were amenable, the congregation was free to extend a call to her. After prayerful deliberation by all, the decision was made to call Andrea Walker as Senior Pastor, and the call was extended on January 29, 2006.



*Rev. Dr. Andrea L. Walker*

Pastor Walker was awarded her BA degree from Georgia State University in Atlanta, and M.Div. (1999) and D. Min. (2007) advanced degrees from The Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. She served as





*2008 Confirmation Class with Vicar Matthew James and Pastor Walker.*

an intern at Transfiguration Lutheran Church in the Bronx. Following her internship, she studied Spanish in Antigua, Guatemala. She was ordained by the Metro New York Synod of the ELCA on June 16, 2000, and served as Pastor of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Bronx.

Prior to ordination, she served as Treasurer of the African American Lutheran Association and Vice President of the Southeastern Lutheran Black Pastors Conference. For seven years, she worked at the Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta coordinating a number of youth programs at various levels for the Lutheran community. Since ordination, she has also held a number of important multi-year committee assignments within the ELCA.

She lives in Summit with her cat Mercee, and despite her youthful appearance, is a proud and loving grandmother.

In the eyes of her friends and colleagues, Andrea is defined by her love for God and commitment to the Church. Her faith journey has carried her beyond any discernable stained glass ceiling by her model stewardship of her many gifts and talents. She is here to proclaim grace among us, and there will be much more to say about her ministry beyond what has been written here. This chapter remains open-ended as she leads our congregation into the next century of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Summit... perhaps beginning to hear some "Amens" after her sermons.

Christ is alive in her ministry and her lamp burns brightly – revealing Christ to us through her faithful preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments.



*St. John's held a Jazz Concert to raise funds for Bethlehem Lutheran Church in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina damaged their facility.*

*Carol Choir*



*Minstrel Laura Snyder brings music to our Sunday School classes.*

*Vacation Bible School*



*Susan Colaneri, Director  
of Parish Education during  
a Stewardship Fair..*



*Education is important  
to St. John's, evident in  
the dedication of many  
volunteer Sunday  
School teachers.*



*St. John's, 2008*

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