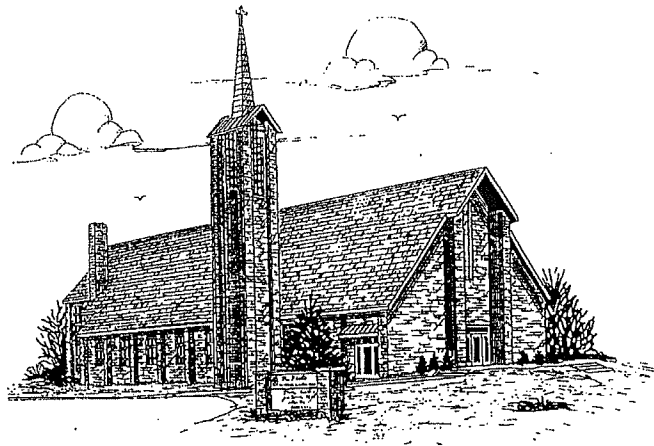


St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church Arlington, MN:

1982-2009



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How does a church recover from controversy? What steps are taken? What words are spoken to help mend any hurt feelings? These are a few of the questions St. Paul's Arlington had to answer in 1983. One year before, in 1982, this church was "rocked" by a split that saw one third of the membership leave to start a Missouri Synod church on the other side of town.¹

The causes for the "split" were numerous and the remaining membership was faced with many tough decisions and a long healing process. The "split" was more than pastors disagreeing on how to do the bulletin. The "split" was about fellowship, direction of the church, and its school. The "split" divided families and friends and a church that had known unity for over 100 years.

How has St. Paul's Arlington fared since the "split" of 1982? Are they better? Or has the situation worsened in the year of 2009? Only by looking at the "modern" history of St. Paul's Arlington can one make any kind of intelligent judgment.

St. Paul's Arlington started out as an independent congregation. They were not affiliated with any of the other synods in the area. St. Paul's, however, made use of the Minnesota Synod and then later the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) to provide their teachers and pastors. St. Paul's therefore, was independent by association but WELS in leadership. St. Paul's Arlington was also surrounded by many Missouri Synod Churches and was even started by St. John's, of the Missouri Synod, ^{which} still is in existence today just outside the city of Arlington. The membership, therefore, was Missouri Synod and the leadership was Wisconsin Synod. When Missouri and Wisconsin parted ways in 1961 that may have foreshadowed what the future would hold for St. Paul's. In 1977 Pastor Frederick Fallen was called to serve St. Paul's Arlington, alongside Pastor John Bradtke, who became pastor of St. Paul's in 1941.² Pastor Fallen came in with the idea that Pastor Bradtke, whose health was failing, would soon leave and he would be the only

¹Schone, Jeff. "St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church Arlington Minnesota: 125 years 1872-1997" (Hereafter cited as Schone's History)

² Ibid

Pastor. Pastor Fallen said that he knew he was called into an interesting situation when Pastor Bradtke told him, “We commune all Lutherans.”³

St. Paul’s, was still independent at this time and didn’t join with either Missouri or WELS when the break in fellowship happened in 1961. Pastors Bradtke and Fallen were both graduates of the Wisconsin Synod’s Seminary and followed Wisconsin’s teaching. Pastor Bradtke, however, went astray in many ways in the area of fellowship and seemed to favor many of Missouri’s teachings over the WELS.

Pastor Bradtke had many friends who were from the Missouri Synod and he did not want to lose them so he did not do a good job of disciplining them. Pastor Fallen was troubled by the lax discipline. When he asked the authorities in the Wisconsin Synod why he was the one who was called to St. Paul’s, he was told, “They knew he was a man who would bend and not break.”⁴ Pastor Fallen did exactly that.

It was obvious that the two pastors did not get along because of personality issues and circumstance, but to say that this was the reason for the “split” would be oversimplifying the issue. Lack of discipline for those who were no longer in fellowship with what St. Paul’s taught, members not contributing to the mission of the church, and lack of support for the grade school, were all contributors to what happened in 1982.

Pastor Fallen and the elders took action. The meetings leading up the “split” were not very pleasant. Jeff Pinske, a lifelong member had this to say about what was going on, “The situation was horrible. I just started attending voter’s meetings in 1982 and I just felt sick to my stomach.”⁵ In one of these meetings Pastor Bradtke resigned and many of the members left with him. “I still remember hearing one of the members turning back and saying, ‘And you call yourselves Christians.’”⁶

³ Fallen, Fred. Interview by Jacob Hanneman. 13 October 2009. (Hereafter cited as Fallen)

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Pinske, Jeff. Interview by Jacob Hanneman. 11 October 2009. (Hereafter cited as Pinske)

⁶ Ibid

As a result of this “split” St. Paul’s Arlington went from two pastors to one, the membership dropped by one third, and a new Missouri Synod Church was started on other side of town. Families split. Friends and co-workers were on opposite sides. “To say that those were trying times for the congregation would be an understatement.”⁷

How did this affect St. Paul’s Lutheran in the immediate future? In reality it did not in terms of support. “400 were released at one time. We still had 600 coming regularly and after the split the regular attendance dropped to 590.”⁸ What accounted for this lack of change in attendance was, “The ones who wanted a split brought those who did not attend Church to fight on their side.”⁹

In reality the “split” purged many of those who were in need of discipline and were not really members any longer in practice. St. Paul’s Arlington in the immediate future looked to be able to rebound well from the “split.” “After the split we had a solid core.”¹⁰

Now that Arlington had its core it was time to move on and that was what Pastor Fallen promoted when he said, “What about 1983? What do we see ahead in this New Year that the Lord has given to us? I see a number of things, friends. I see a church that is somewhat smaller, but a great deal stronger. I see a church where we may disagree over the ‘BEST’ way to do the Lord’s work, but a church where it’s the Lord’s work they want to do.”¹¹

“The “split” immediately was good because we were solid on God’s word and we were no longer very liberal.”¹²

⁷ Schone’s History

⁸ Fallen

⁹ Pinske

¹⁰ Kolander, Frank. Interview by Jacob Hanneman. 11 October 2009. (Hereafter cited as Kolander)

¹¹ 1982 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited 1982 report)

¹² Kolander

Now it was time to move forward and only history would prove if St. Paul's would recover from the "split" of 1982.

Pastor Fallen would continue to serve as sole pastor until he took a call in 1991. In these years many important milestones were reached at St. Paul's in their attempt to recover from what happened in 1982. At the quarterly meeting in July of 1983 the congregation voted to join the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association and pledged itself to support this new WELS school. St. Paul's has historically sent a small number of children to MVL. When the congregation split much of the dispute was over the Lutheran day school. "It was a major step for us to join MVL since the school wasn't supported by those who split and some thought our school wouldn't happen if they split."¹³ When St. Paul's started supporting another Lutheran School, they showed their commitment to Christian Education.

Pastor Fallen also reported that St. Paul's was indeed growing stronger in the 1983 Annual Report.

I saw a church drawn closer together in love and fellowship, and that has come true. You can see it in the narthex before and after services. You can see it in the Advent and Lenten fellowship hours. You can see it in the Easter breakfast, the closing program of the Couples' Club, the Christian Education Society, the re-started Youth League, the Council, in the Bible Class, in the Ice Cream Social, and in so many ways and places.¹⁴

Another major step in the right direction came at the quarterly Voter's Meeting, April 25th 1985. A motion was made and approved that St. Paul's Lutheran Church seek membership in the WELS. This required a change in the constitution especially concerning fellowship. Pastor Fallen thought there was not a fellowship issue after the "split" at first but found out that many people were having issues with close communion and sponsors at Baptisms.

"When those who split formed the new church Peace, they practiced close communion, and it was the right thing to do but, many at St. Paul's had a hard time understanding it. Many families were split up at

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ 1983 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited 1983 report)

this time and they wanted to commune together. I had to do a lot of teaching and we made a new constitution. When the split happened, fellowship with WELS and close communion happened.”¹⁵

In 1986 St. Paul’s Lutheran was received as a member congregation of the WELS during the June convention of the Minnesota District in New Ulm. “Becoming WELS has been great. We now have an identity and I feel this led us to becoming a normal church body.”¹⁶

A topic that is major in every church, and was no different at St. Paul’s Arlington, is expenses. When about one third of the membership leaves, there will be some concern about how the bills are going to get paid. Remember, however, that many who left St. Paul’s were inactive and did not really support the church or school. What did that mean for St. Paul’s? Pastor Fallen had this to say,

I saw a church that would be willing to sacrifice and to work to see the Lord’s program go forward, and that has come true. Our offerings this year to the General Fund were \$127,412.46. Last year they were \$125, 442.10. When you put General Funds, Missions, and Major Repair together, we came behind last year’s total envelope offerings by only \$3,851.86. Does that show a smaller church working harder? I think it does.¹⁷

The church, in the following years of Pastor Fallen’s term, would pay for many major projects that would test its ability in giving to the church. The city put in a curb and gutter system around the church that the church had to pay for, new colored windows were installed, a playground was built for the school, a new gym floor, remodeling of the library at school, and the remodeling of the kitchen at church. In most cases the bills were paid for and the church did not go into debt.

Even with all these projects it seemed that only a part of the congregation was paying for it. Many times Pastor Fallen had to encourage every member to do ^{his} their part in supporting the church and school with their offerings. This was a theme that seemed to repeat itself in the following years as will be pointed out later on.

¹⁵ Fallen

¹⁶ Pinske

¹⁷ 1983 report

The reality of paying the bills and the importance of giving to the church was never seen for its importance as vividly as it was in 1988 when the school building was inspected for asbestos. The cost to fix the problem was quoted to being around \$40,000. This would be a test for the church to see how they had grown seven years after the “split.” Remember, the school was not widely supported by those who left and many thought the school would not last if there was a split. Were their prophecies going to come true?

Pastor Fallen described some of the issues surrounding the payment for the school in the 1989 report.

The big story of the year continued to be our school and the difficulties and problems which constantly face us. A good deal of time was spent at the Annual Meeting last year discussing the asbestos problem. We engaged a consultant to advise us. In April it was determined that we would have to reduce the size of our faculty because of a lack of students, and on June 1st Mrs. Pat Grabitske resigned. Her resignation was received with deep regret. In July it was determined that we should contact the State Fire Marshall because there seemed to be many areas where we were not in compliance with the state fire codes. It was also determined that the 5 fuel storage tanks on the church and school property would have to be dug up and removed as this was the law. In September the tanks were removed and we were visited by the Fire Marshall. Because of some irregularities committed by the people who dug up the tanks, we are not yet finished with the project. While we are not liable for the mistakes, the government will have to retest the ground where the tanks were. Fortunately, to this point it has not cost us anything. The report of the Fire Marshall, however, was different. We were cited with a dozen violations of the state fire code. Unless these things are corrected our school will have to close. In November the congregation voted to do all we can to keep our school in operation and the year ended and the New Year began with an attempt on our part to see if this can be done. That answer must now be given.¹⁸

That answer was given and the school never closed its doors. The problem was finally taken care of the following year of 1990. St. Paul’s passed an important test regarding the direction it wanted to go as a church. St. Paul’s showed that they were going to support the school and do what it took to keep it even when letting it go was the easier move to make.

Pastor Fallen took a call to South St. Paul, Minnesota in July of 1991. When he left, the church was slowly growing smaller and smaller. Church attendance was also growing smaller, but it was not because

¹⁸ 1989 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited as 1989 report)

St. Paul's was becoming smaller. Many who had split were members who did not attend church, but not everyone who did not attend church was the ones who split. When Pastor Fallen left only 50% of the people did not attend church on a regular basis. Because of the lack of giving the church was \$10,000 in debt.

The reason was not because they had to use the money in their budget to support the extra projects mentioned earlier. The projects were all paid for. However, since only a small number gave to the church, these people paid for the major projects which left things like supporting MVL, Missions, and the General Fund in the background. The people of St. Paul's appeared to be half and half. Half were moving forward in a direction that supported the church and school and who would be in God's word. The other half did not support and, most importantly, did not find a need to be in God's word. Could this be the signs of another "split?" That question would be taken up by a new Pastor, Jeff Schone.

After Pastor Fallen took his call and moved in July of 1991, it was not until February 16, 1992 that Jeff Schone was installed as pastor of St. Paul's Arlington.

"At that time the congregation seemed somewhat unsure of what work it could do and as a result there did not appear to be a great deal of membership activity that focused on serving people with God's Word, especially on the part of the men. A large portion of the congregation's energy and effort was focused on maintaining the physical property and paying the bills."¹⁹

Pastor Schone expressed his concerns in his first Annual Report for 1992.

I find that St. Paul congregation is not really organized for the members to carry on the Gospel work themselves. It seems from observing past history and practices of our congregation that much of the work seemed to fall into the pastor's lap. It is my goal as a pastor to help the members become more and more involved in the "people-oriented" work of our congregation. Why should the men and women of our church, so obviously blessed by the Holy Spirit with great talents and abilities along with the faith to use them... why should they only take care of our property and buildings and money? We need to put our talented people to use in building up our spiritual house – and together we can do that. This is where the Holy Spirit promises to help us.²⁰

¹⁹ Schone's history

²⁰ 1992 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited 1992 report)

Pastor Schone expressed that when he arrived there were still some fellowship issues that needed to be ironed out along with a large number of live-ins²¹. Pastor Schone gave his reason for why he thought the congregation seemed somewhat unsure of what work it could do. When Pastor Bradtke was pastor he ran a dictatorship type administration. It seems that Pastor Fallen had taken this same approach. Pastor Schone remembered that when he first arrived at St. Paul's and attended his first voters meeting he sat in one of the back chairs. The voters looked at him and asked him if he was going to take his spot at the head of the meeting. Pastor Schone responded by saying that this was not his church; it was their church. Pastor Schone meant that the voting members made the decisions for the church and his job was to advise them spiritually. He was not supposed to tell them what to do or how to do it, but simply to remind them of the mission of the church while they make their decisions.²²

Pastor Schone served St. Paul's Lutheran for five years. In that time he and the congregation made some key changes to the structure and organization of the church's constitution. Pastor Schone lays out the details in what it took for the constitution to form in his 125th historical booklet of St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

In 1993 a committee was also formed to review St Paul's constitutional organization, review the constitutions of other congregations and then write a completely new constitution for their own congregation which would incorporate outreach work, special ministry work, elders work, and overall leadership responsibility into the very structure of their organization. The committee took its time and after two years completed a new document. The new constitution was presented to the congregation at a series of special meetings and quarterly meetings. Every person was given every opportunity to review the suggested constitution and ask questions and make recommendations. At the quarterly voter's meeting in July of 1996 the constitution was approved and in January of 1997 they began to operate under its guidance.²³

²¹ Schone, Jeff. Interview by Jacob Hanneman. 9 October 2009. (Hereafter cited as Schone)

²² Ibid

²³ Schone's history

Before the new constitution would officially organize the different groups and committees being formed, St. Paul's started implementing the changes right away in Pastor Schone's administration. In 1993 an Outreach Committee was formed and began the work of reaching out to the community with the Gospel. A Special Ministries Committee was formed to help oversee the work they did for those with special needs, college students, shut-ins, etc. A Lutheran Girl Pioneer program was started which benefitted the grade school girls socially and spiritually.

Pastor Schone encouraged the members to see their church as a fellowship and a family and not merely an organization. "I have entertained the thought that my purpose for being here is to help the members get themselves better organized for doing the people-centered, Gospel-centered work that the Lord lays before us. The days when Der Herr Pastor ran the congregation like an autocrat and also did the majority of the spiritual work are gone.²⁴"

An organization takes care of its business; a fellowship or a family takes care of its people. This is the crux to understanding our congregation along with its joys and problems. Our God-assigned purpose is to take care of people with Word and Sacrament, but sometimes we get bogged down with the idea that we are here to manage our organization. Let me illustrate with this example. We commonly say that we "give offering money to the church." Of course, there's nothing wrong with saying that...unless we fail to understand or forget that we are actually giving our money to the *people in our church*, to people around the world and to that most important person, our Lord. We aren't putting money in our envelopes merely to pay heating bills, but to keep our fellow members warm and comfortable when we worship and learn together. We aren't just giving Mission Offerings to the Synod but are actually taking care of people in Africa and Indonesia and in suburban Minneapolis with the Gospel. We need to remember that we don't merely pay our teachers a salary, we're putting food on their table, sending their children to school, allowing them to go to the dentist, putting a car in their driveway, letting them buy gifts for their families and relatives, etc., etc. It ought to bring us great satisfaction to take care of our called workers and their families in the same careful and considerate way that we take care of ourselves and our own families... It seems to me, that many at St. Paul have the idea that the pastor's job is to take care of people and the members' job is to take care of business. This is evident at our council meetings, our voter's meetings, by the way our constitution is written and our congregation is structured and by the work that takes precedence among us. To some extent,

²⁴ 1994 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited as 1994 report)

this is an outcome of our church's unique history. This is a dangerous and counterproductive idea, however. The "organizational" bent, if left unchecked, could well be the death of our congregation.²⁵

Another change the constitution placed was the salaries for the called workers. In the past the ^Pastor received what was expected, but the teachers were left with a meager salary at best. With the new constitution the budget would change and the goal was to get the salary of the called workers up to the synod code. Pastor Schone reported that they were 70% to code when he left in 1997²⁶.

Pastor Schone's history booklet points to a significant change for the better spiritually at St. Paul's. "The most significant occurrence in the last 25 years has been the expansion of ^Bbible study opportunity. Pastor Fallen instituted a Thursday evening Bible ^Class. That class continues to meet, and a Sunday morning class now meets as well. Bible class is also offered to those members who live at Highland Commons apartments.²⁷"

Regular ^Bbible study was started during the ministries of Pastors Fallen and Schone. One might wonder if this should have been a priority from day one. To put it simply, yes, but for St. Paul's that was not the case. The people were not being fed spiritually and most likely this was one of the reasons the church split back in 1982. Bible study is very important in the lives of Christians and cannot be taken for granted. St. Paul's certainly was taking steps in the right direction since the "split" of 1982 by implementing more bible study opportunities.

St. Paul's seemed to be making more giant steps in their recovery from what happened in 1982. However there were still some signs that the attitudes that helped shape the "split" still lingered in the air.

If we are concerned about raising our high school students to be responsible and well equipped Christians, the members will have to get involved with the youth. If we want our children and grandchildren to receive an education undergirded by the bible, then the members must become involved in our school. If we want people to live free from Satan's traps, if we want our

²⁵ 1993 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited as 1993 report)

²⁶ Schone

²⁷ Schone's history

Christian friends to live at all times in a manner that pleases God, then the members must become active in the work of Christian discipline and encouragement. If we want guests and visitors to receive a good first impression of our congregation and its people and its doctrine, then the members must be friendly and warm and eager to share their faith. If we want our worship services to be “closer,” “warmer,” and “more personal,” then the members will have to overcome the architecture of our church building and, for one thing, sit in the front pews rather than the back pews!²⁸

We made no progress in increasing church attendance in 1995. This is disheartening and certainly our congregation’s chief problem. If over 50% of our members can’t seem to find enough interest or energy or enthusiasm to come to God’s House, how can we ever hope to muster up enough resources, etc. to tackle other problems or challenges facing our congregation?²⁹

The congregation made many strides in the years Pastor Schone ministered to the people of St. Paul’s. They became more “family” and less “organization.” They became more “mission” than just simply “me.” They supported Christian education more and contributed to the support of their teachers. However, many were still not coming to church on a regular basis. Many were still not in support of the church and often times would accuse one another for various reasons. These accusations seemed to have been a big enough issue that it was actually made a goal for them to accomplish stopping for a whole year.³⁰

Another issue at St. Paul’s was school support. The congregation was still declining in membership due to many funerals and members leaving. While St. Paul’s was moving forward it seemed to be carrying with it a type of cancer, a cancer that was present in 1982.

In 1997 Pastor Schone took a call to serve at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. The next to serve was Pastor Bruce Hanneman, who is still serving at the present time.

Pastor Hanneman was installed February of 1998. In his first year as pastor, Pastor Hanneman noticed some of those lingering feelings arising from the events of 1982.

²⁸ 1994 report

²⁹ 1995 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited as 1995 report)

³⁰ 1994 report

I get the impression that there are some old wounds that need to be healed between those who are very supportive of our elementary school and those who support it with less favor. We need to take advantage of every opportunity for encouragement. Our elementary school children can be examples in our Sunday School, and those who are not a part of our Elementary School need to reconsider why they are not taking advantage of our Lutheran school.³¹

In this writer's opinion, when attending school at St. Paul's Arlington, it seemed that there was disconnect between the Lutheran School children and the Public School children. An attitude that was evident from the Lutheran School children was that since they were in school hearing God's word everyday they did not see the need to come to Sunday school which as when the Public School children would be able to hear God's word.

Right away, at least from the children's perspective, there seemed to be a type of "split" on the value of Christian Education from both sides. No doubt, if it was evident between the children then it would be even more evident with their parents. The problems never developed into much because there was no more talk about this issue again in any of the following reports given.

A major problem in the "split" was the number of inactive members who joined the sides of those wanting to split. Interestingly enough, Pastor Fallen noted that when these inactive members helped form the new church, Peace, they started attending church. The inactive became active. In fact, the members of Peace had in mind to join in fellowship with churches in the area, but the pastor they received from Missouri raised Luther's Small Catechism in the air and said that this was what they were going to follow and nothing else. The inactive members became active and even developed good fellowship principles.³²

The problem of the inactive, at St. Paul's, lingered. Pastor Fallen reported that only 50% were coming to church and that hardly anyone was taking the opportunity to partake of the Lord's Supper. Pastor Schone had the same issues with inactive members. Pastor Hanneman also made early mention of this very issue. "In last year's report it was noted that one area that needs some attention is encouragement of the

³¹ 1998 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Hereafter cited as 1998 report)

³² Fallen

inactive. Your pastor and elders attacked this problem with a visitation program. Much work remains, but there has been some progress.³³

Over the years Pastor Hanneman would work with the elders to find ways to reach out to the many inactive members who belonged to St. Paul's Lutheran.

In the year 2001 we had a total of 15,372 people attending 51 regular Sunday Worship services (one service was canceled due to bad weather). The average number of people attending a regular worship service is 301. This figure indicates that only 43% of our baptized members attend worship on a regular basis. The numbers for those who are beyond the age of confirmation seem a little better, 55%, but still not good. What this shows is that 57% (or 45% respectively) are skipping worship on a regular basis every Sunday of the church year! This ought to send up a red flag. I have heard comments that it is nobody's business whether or not "I" am in church. Such people feel that this is a private issue. I can't do anything about such feelings, but I can point out that God has instituted his church for the purpose of gathering together with fellow believers Hebrews 10:24, 25. Not only does God expect that we "meet together" as a matter of habit, he tells us that we ought to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Church attendance is not a private issue! It is a congregational issue! We are to hold one another accountable. We are accountable to one another by divine design. It is the responsibility of every member to spur one another on toward love and good deeds.³⁴

The Pastors were not the only ones speaking out concerning the issues plaguing St. Paul's. Other members voiced their concerns. These members became the leaders of the church as they echoed the same sentiments of each of the three pastors in the annual reports.

A witness to this church's current condition is that the council has failed to find the required 5th member as the constitution states for the outreach committee. This shows the level of commitment that this church has with regard to the desire to reach out to those in our own community with the Gospel of Christ... There is little growth within the church. Change I leave to God. It is His department. I am only the messenger. Time is running out! May God send His judgments to awaken us from our slumber.³⁵

Many of St. Paul's symptoms may have come from lack of study of God's word. "Average attendance at our Sunday morning Bible studies is 7% of our adult membership, when adding to this total

³³ 1998 report

³⁴ 2001 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. (Hereafter cited 2001 report)

³⁵ 2002 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran n Church. (Hereafter cited 2002 report)

the average attendance at our Tuesday evening session, (which includes some of the same people who attend on Sunday) that percentage increases by 1%.”³⁶

The percentages never increased beyond these throughout the history of St. Paul’s when it came to bible study.

St. Paul’s decline and many of its members’ lack of desire to hear God’s word seemed to have some correlation. However, much of the decline has come from many of the members passing away from this life into the next and from others who simply move out of town.

The Twin Cities in Minnesota have been expanding west towards Arlington and, according to a metro map, Arlington is right on the border. Arlington should be in the middle of a population boom as the metro moves farther west but for some reason that just has not happened. St. Paul’s continues its decline in membership.

Yet, this does not account for why only 50% come to church. The devil always plays a dominant role when it comes to church decline. He loves to make the word of God seem foolish and out of date. He tries to convince God’s people that God really is not going to be angry with them for neglecting God’s word. It is the same lie he used on Eve in the garden. “Did God really say that?” The question arises, who are you going to trust? Oftentimes, God’s people forget that wherever God builds a church the devil builds a chapel, as the saying goes. The devil is crafty and he has been studying human behavior for thousands of years and he knows what works and what does not. What works? People not being in the word. When God’s people are not in God’s word they start to lose focus on what God says he wants all people to know; Jesus lived and died so all can go to heaven. When people are taken away from the word of God they can be lured away from the truth, which leads them to doubt what God says in his word and the beautiful Gospel message that it contains. Once again, it becomes a question of whom are you going to trust: the devil or God? Unfortunately it seemed that 50% of the people of St. Paul’s Arlington had taken the bait.

This problem never seemed to go away as the following segments from annual reports state.

³⁶ 2008 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. (Hereafter cited 2002 report)

“This past year again saw your elders spending much time discussing what to do about inactive members. These have to be discussed and acted on an individual basis and, quite frankly with over 100 inactive members, the issue can be overwhelming.”³⁷

One other change that has taken place over the course of this year, our outreach committee has taken on a little different direction and a new name. It will now be known as the Membership Committee. Their goal is to contact and encourage members who have become inactive to get back to worshipping on a regular basis. So far the members of this committee have met with moderate success and to a man and women have expressed joy in their work.³⁸

Another problem that existed during the “split” and still exists is an unwillingness to give in support of the mission of the church as the following entries show. “It was stated last year that 20% of our people are funding 80% of the budget. This still seems to be the case. We all need to challenge ourselves to increase our personal contributions for the Lord’s work.”³⁹

As we review our annual report we will notice a number of issues for concern. One issue that never seems to go away is the issue of financial stewardship. God has blessed us as a congregation, yet we can’t seem to get beyond the pattern of contributing to needs rather than contributing for ministry. Our Thrivent matching funds program is a case in point. Instead of people giving generously and allowing the matching funds to help us do things above and beyond what we would otherwise be able to do, we are instead falling behind on our outside commitments. It appears that people are using this program to give less than they are able because Thrivent funds will make up the difference.⁴⁰

Although these projects are good for the church and are needed, we are facing financial problems every month with the church. We have borrowed money from the Arlington State Bank this year to meet operating expenses. With the bank note, the parsonage is their collateral. Even with Thrivent Giving, we are still not meeting our budget. Other years we somehow have cleared our debt at the end of year. We have usually done it with endowment money interest. However there is a lot more money at stake in 2007.⁴¹

³⁷ 2005 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. (Hereafter cited as 2005 report)

³⁸ 2006 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. (Hereafter cited as 2006 report)

³⁹ 2004 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. (Hereafter cited as 2004 report)

⁴⁰ 2006 report

⁴¹ 2007 Annual Report of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. (Hereafter cited as 2007 report)

The most consistent item our council agenda is budget shortfall. We seem to manage, but we never seem to have enough funding for extra ministry needs. Last year we even put together a special stewardship task force to address this issue. Research was done, and several ideas were shared, but due to a lack of volunteers to make visits, it never really got off the ground, so we struggle still.⁴²

I urge all members of this congregation to recommit to leaving all things to God's direction...keep coming to him for directions! Instead of speaking in negative tones about programs and procedures devised to address problems and issues, offer constructive counsel and volunteer to help. No human being is as efficient and effective as to hit the perfect solution the first time-so much trial and error. We acquire heavenly wisdom as we turn to God's Word for direction.⁴³

St. Paul's congregation appears to have people who do not want to serve, not come to bible study, worship, or communion, nor show support of the called workers and other missions of the church. Sounds familiar does it? Has anything changed? Is St. Paul's Lutheran Church better off than they were when they split in 1982 or are they heading into a second split?

If one looks at only the problems of St. Paul's Lutheran one might get that impression. However, that is true of all churches on this side of eternity. Christians are fighting a war as part of the Church militant. This fight is hard and can get ugly at times. There may even be times when it seems that God's people are losing the battle to the forces of the devil. The Lord reminds his people in his word that the fight must go on until the end of time, but God's people do not need to worry because God is with his people every step of the way. The battle is not in vain.

Constantly urging people to hear God's word and to come to church or to give their offerings for God's people to use for God's mission is not a lost cause or losing battle. The Lord tells Daniel in the twelfth chapter of the book of Daniel that even though in the end, the times will be even worse than ever before, God's people can rejoice knowing that they are written in the book of life. The Lord promises his people that in the end God will come out on top and he will guide his people to victory.

⁴² 2008 Report

⁴³ Ibid

Therefore, for constantly fighting the battle he will make his people shine like the heavens and like the stars in the sky forever and ever. This promise is one God's people can hold on to right now. The Lord oftentimes shows that his people are indeed shining in his eyes and that his people are not fighting in vain by allowing his people to see "little" victories along the way.

How has the Lord encouraged St. Paul's Arlington that they are on the winning side? One point of interest that surrounded the "split" was the school and supporting the youth of the church. As of 2009 St. Paul's Lutheran has a fully functioning youth group.

Our Youth Group "year" runs from September –May. In August of 2008 our annual Planning Committee meeting was held. After each meeting a copy of the Youth Group News is printed and published in the church bulletin. This has been continued as a resource for Youth Group members and parents to know what is going on with the group if they were unable to join in on the meeting. The Youth serves their Lord by serving the community in various ways and they are also able to grow together spiritually as they gather around the word of God.⁴⁴

Having a youth group is a major improvement from before. In the past there was no program designed to encourage the children to be leaders and even to keep coming to church. This is just one of many victories the Lord has revealed to St. Paul's Lutheran.

The inactive list has been a major problem. Since the outreach committee changed its focus to do more inreach to the members, the inactive members have been reached and encouraged by their fellow brothers and sisters to join them in fellowship. People are coming to the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins more often than before. These are all "little" victories the Lord has provided for St. Paul's Lutheran.

There were even victories when it came to finances. "In August we adopted a budget for the year 2000, which is higher than any year previous. This brings the compensation levels of our called workers about where they belong."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ 1999 Annual Report of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. (Hereafter cited as 1999 report)

St. Paul's has also advanced its outreach, even without a specific committee, in how it proclaims God's word to the area. "As an attempt at getting to know each other and our visitors better we have implemented the 'Friendship Register.' In the past three months we have identified four times as many visitors through the Friendship Register than having people signing the guest book in the narthex."⁴⁶

In 2001, St. Paul Church purchased video equipment with memorial money. This was the start of taping our services for shut-ins. Eventually, we were able to have our services aired on local cable Channel 8. With having our services broadcast on TV, our church is able to outreach to our community and county. In 2008, we taped 52 Sunday services and 13 special services.⁴⁷

St. Paul's was reminded of one such victory when they celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Laying of the Cornerstone. As long as St. Paul's Arlington is still standing and faithfully proclaiming the message of God's word they will never lose.

Is St. Paul's Lutheran Church better off or worse off since the "split?" It's hard to say since a lot of the elements that were "fuel for the fire" in 1982 are still present. However, St. Paul's Lutheran has made some major strides since the 1982 split. What do the people have to say to this question?

"Yes, we are better off. We are part of the Minnesota District, we are part of MVL, and we are part of the WELS and working with them."⁴⁸

"Life at St. Paul's is good now."⁴⁹

"The wounds of the past are healed and the people are moving on."⁵⁰

"We are finally a normal church body."⁵¹

"Yes-we are solid on God's Word now."⁵²

⁴⁶ 2001 report

⁴⁷ 2008 report

⁴⁸ Fallen

⁴⁹ Hanneman, Bruce. Interview by Jacob Hanneman. 11 October 2009.

⁵⁰ Schone

⁵¹ Pinske

The Lord works in mysterious ways and even though we KNOW that he works all things to our good, we all had a sinking feeling in the pits of our stomachs. Our human nature worried about the loss of financial support losing a third of the membership might mean to the budget, and of course, we worried about the spiritual welfare of those leaving. As time went on the members seemed to bond and there was a unified feeling. The congregation had been independent for its entire history. Now voters decided to join the WELS. Sometimes the voters still appear parochial in their views – a “charity begins at home” outlook – but we are seeing some evidence of a growing global view of sharing the gospel message. St. Paul joined the MVL association; LWMS contributions are rising; several men have been attending the church leaders’ workshop in Belle Plaine each spring. The congregation’s spiritual health is improving. So, yes, I believe St. Paul is in a better place spiritually than it was in 1982. I won’t go so far as to say the split was a good thing – it would have been better for all to talk things out according to the guidelines in Matthew 18, but the Lord uses even our failings to bless us.⁵³

In the end St. Paul’s is better off because they are led by their Lord. They do not follow their own agenda but they are grounded on the word of God. Every blessing that came from the “split” was by the grace of God. The Lord shows his guiding hand in the life of St. Paul’s Lutheran. Therefore, God is the one who deserves all the glory.

But we should be careful not to give all our attention to work and programs and numbers and membership involvement and the like. We should look at our own hearts and lives...and look at the people all around us at St. Paul...and thank God for putting Jesus among us. God gets the glory and God gets the praise for rescuing each of us. God gets the glory and praise for preserving us in true Christian faith. God receives all our glorious songs of praise for bending our backs and opening our hands to love one another as humble and caring Christians.⁵⁴

A great deal has been accomplished over the last 26 years since the “split” in 1982. More needs doing. Of course, it cannot all be done, nor should God’s people take credit for every accomplishment. All the glory goes to the Lord. The Lord has commanded his people to make disciples while they are going: baptizing and teaching. This is not what the devil wants. He wants God’s people to fail. He will do everything he can to make God’s people fall flat on their faces. No one is immune to the devil’s attacks. He

⁵² Kolander

⁵³ Grabitske, Pat. “St. Paul’s Arlington.” 9 October 2009. Personal email (9 October 2009).

⁵⁴ Schone’s history

is an equal opportunity destroyer. What does this mean? God's people are in for a lifelong battle against the devil, world, and sinful flesh.

The battle will not be easy as the last 26 years have shown. Doing God's work takes a lot of time, effort, and patience, but God's people can rest assured that their work is not in vain. Jesus Christ lived for the world, died for the world, and was raised again for the world. Jesus Christ won. Jesus Christ has credited that victory to his people. One day God's people will pass from this life into the next. There they will be gathered before their victorious Lord Jesus Christ and they will be gathered with all the saints in heaven. There they will shine like the brightness of the heavens and the stars in the sky. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen!

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