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**A History of St. John's,
Clinton Ave.**

Church History 331

Professor Brenner

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As a young boy and young man growing up in and around the activities of St. John's, Clinton, Ave., I wasn't too observant when it came to many of the minor and major historical occurrences of the congregation. I didn't know any better. I didn't realize I was supposed to know some of these interesting historical facts. I didn't know that a little knowledge of the history of St. John's could prove to be very helpful down the road. As one ages, he begins to realize the importance of history and the historical occurrences within his own life. He realizes that such history has meaning to him. He begins to learn that this history has impacted his life, playing a crucial part in the very person he came to be. With this in mind, I decided to undertake a study of the history of St. John's, Clinton Ave. I desired to answer three questions as I studied St. John's history: How did my church, which I have attended virtually my whole life, get started? What history took place at St. John's during my life and during my father's ministry at this congregation? What does the future hold for my church, which holds a dear place in my heart? The answers to these three major questions form the structure and goal of this historical essay.

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded on July 30, 1863, by a group of nine German-Lutheran immigrant families under the leadership of Pastor John Henry Sieker. Pastor J. H. Sieker was presently serving the Salem congregation on West Granville while he helped to found St. John's congregation on north 43rd Street and W. Good Hope Rd. "In 1865, the small group of nine families decided to draw up incorporation papers. The incorporation papers state the name of this congregation as 'The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Hope.'"¹ St. John's, presently located one block north of Good Hope Rd. on Clinton Ave., was off to a fast start. And things didn't slow down. Within three years of its founding, land was donated and St. John's first building project was underway. By the fall of 1867, the congregation's first building

structure was completed. Divine worship in that new building began on November 3rd of that same year. This first church building served the congregation for eighty-nine years. The members of St. John's had to leave this building, because it was officially condemned by the city of Milwaukee in 1956. Apparently, St. John's must have lacked the funds and resources to build a new structure before the city had to step in and declare it "condemned." In 1867 St. John's was on its feet and running, so Pastor John Sieker accepted a call to serve a congregation in St. Paul, Minnesota.

In a collaborative effort with Salem congregation of West Granville, St. John's congregation called Pastor Hermann Hoffman in the spring of 1868. He was installed on March 8th of the same year. The busy Pastor Hoffman became even busier when he undertook the responsibilities of serving the newly founded Trinity Lutheran Congregation of West Mequon. On March 3, 1874, the original name of St. John's, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Hope," was changed to "The Evangelical Lutheran St. John's Church."² It seems that Pastor Hoffmann was rather active in his mission work. By 1892 St. John's congregation numbered forty-eight families. At this time it seems that the congregation was thriving as a Christian Day School was begun. Classes were conducted in the church basement mainly for upper grade students. Somewhere along the line the school was closed. "Records do not show how long this Christian Day School was conducted."³

In 1895 Pastor Hoffmann took a call to serve a congregation in Bay City, Michigan. Pastor Hoffmann's successor was Pastor Christian Frederick Duecker, who came from Gresham, Nebraska. Pastor Duecker served only five years. He was the last pastor to serve the three

¹ "History of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church" (1988), p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 3.

Ibid., p. 4.

congregations of St. John's, Salem, and Trinity of West Mequon. He left these three congregations to become Superintendent of Missions in Kansas.

On November 11, 1900 Pastor Auerswald was installed to be pastor at St. John's. He could be considered to be a man who was well ahead of the times, since he was the first pastor at St. John's to serve their sister congregation, Trinity of North Milwaukee. His service also included being a pastor to the people of Trinity, West Mequon.

For forty-two years up until 1905, St. John's congregation was without a resident pastor. They had always had pastors who served a number of congregations. When Pastor Bast accepted the call to St. John's, the congregation decided to build a parsonage. The parsonage was built on a sixty foot by 150-foot plot of land donated by Magdalena Siebenhuenner at a total cost of \$1,408.00. It was during the tenure of Pastor Bast that a Ladies' Aid group was started. To the present day, St. John's Ladies' Aid has been a wonderful blessing to the congregation through its many service projects. In 1929 St. John's finally had a pastor all to themselves. Trinity West Mequon called its own pastor. Having a pastor that served the St. John's congregation alone proved to be a blessing to this group of Christians. Consider how the ministry of the word was impacted negatively in its early years of sharing pastors. "In the earliest days of the congregations history, services were held every two weeks, some Sundays in the forenoon and others in the afternoon. This caused great confusion."⁴ In 1929 St. John's had a full-time pastor who could faithfully and consistently served the congregation with the word of God on a weekly basis. It was also during the pastorate of Pastor Bast that the congregation began to make the slow move away from German to English. At first, the membership voted that only quarterly meetings be conducted in English.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5..

Pastor Bast became ill and tendered his resignation in the spring of 1936. On August 9, 1936, Pastor Buenger became the next pastor of St. John's. 1937 saw the congregational constitution translated from German to English. In keeping with the trend of moving from German to English, the congregation changed its name for the third time to "St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church" in 1939. This title remains as the name of the congregation today. After ten years of service Pastor Buenger resigned at St. John's to serve a congregation with his father in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The Lord of the Church was faithful again in giving St. John's another pastor in November of 1946. The new pastor was Pastor Armin C. Kiebel. Perhaps mostly due to the anti-German sentiment of World War II, the congregation decided to eliminate all German services. From 1947 on, all services would be held in English. Kiebel's tenure at St. John's was short. He took a call in 1950 to be a missionary in California. Pastor Kiebel left in January of 1950. Pastor R. L. Wiechmann of Salem congregation served as the vacancy pastor for five months until Pastor Martin A. Braun accepted the call and was installed on May 14, 1950.

Pastor Braun's service at St. John's would prove to be years of activity and steps forward for St. John's. The parsonage was not quite fifty years old, but repairs and changes were needed desperately. The congregation decided to go ahead and build a parsonage on the plot of land donated by some faithful members. The new parsonage was dedicated on August 10, 1952. This house was sold thirty-two years later when a new parsonage was constructed. This house still stands on the northwest corner of 38th Street and Good Hope Road.

Even more pressing were the needs of building a new church building. The congregation decided to begin the process of building a new church on January 15, 1954. "This decision was prompted by the deterioration of the church, soon to be condemned by the city of Milwaukee as

unusable.”⁵ It was decided by the members to build a basement, which would serve as the place for worship, meeting, and Sunday school. This basement was constructed as a temporary structure until a superstructure could be added. The building of the basement structure began on September 9, 1956 and was dedicated on February 24, 1957. It seems that the congregation had some difficulty with money and finances. Perhaps their troubles with estimates and actual costs delayed the building of the full superstructure a number of years beyond their original intent. “The cost originally figured at \$40,000.00. To the dismay of the congregation it rose to \$73,000.00, and, at completion, was \$96,273.10.”⁶ Nine years later, on April 11, 1966, the congregation resolved to go ahead with the building of the superstructure. Building began on May 19, 1968. It was completed on August 4 of the same year. The superstructure was dedicated on September 29, 1968. A year later, November 21, 1969, the organ was dedicated. Pastor Braun continued to serve faithfully until his retirement in 1975.⁷

1975-2000

The year 1975 saw the ministry of Pastor Braun come to a close. During Braun’s final years he was assisted by a senior vicar named Vicar Jahnke. All reports indicate that Vicar Jahnke was responsible for the congregational instruction in the word. During Vicar Jahnke’s stint as vicar, only twenty members attended Bible class on a weekly basis.⁸ The senior vicar was also provided the spiritual leadership for the Young People’s Society. Perhaps these low figures in Bible classes coupled with a large amount of responsibility placed on the vicar reflect quite well that Pastor Braun was on his last leg of being the full-time servant at St. John’s.

⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷ The brief history of the congregation’s earlier years was developed mostly from a history that was compiled in 1988, the year of the congregation’s 125th anniversary. This was done partly for the sake of brevity and partly due to the lack of early year resources. This brief history of the early years serves mostly to give the reader a point of reference that precedes a more detailed account of the events of the congregation’s most recent history, 1975-2000.

⁸ Church Council Minutes – January, 1975, p. 3.

Pastor Braun was also less active in his ministry, because he had suffered a heart attack a year earlier in May. “[Much of] The work in the Congregation, however, was [also] continued by the efforts of the Visiting Elder Pastor Pope, the preaching by Seminary Professors during the summer months.⁹ The leaving of Vicar Jahnke in the spring of 1975 brought an end to the short-lived existence of vicars at St. John’s. St. John’s desired to continue its vicar program. Braun felt he could’ve used the help. However, “The need for a full time vicar was discussed and Pastor Braun reported that the size of the congregation did not warrant a full time Vicar.”¹⁰

In March of 1975 Pastor Braun announced his retirement. He indicated that he would be leaving in the fall of that same year. Pastor Braun had been serving faithfully for twenty-five years. With a total salary of \$9,700.00¹¹ in 1974, it is safe to say that Pastor Braun did not have much to retire on. Nor did he have a pension. “[So] Pastor Braun also asked for financial assistance from the congregation in his retirement. It was suggested that the congregation rent an apartment for the Pastor and his wife.”¹² “A motion was made and seconded that the Council recommend to the congregation that the church congregation allot \$125 per month to Pastor Braun in his retirement.”¹³ Needless to say, the people of St. John’s were kind to their pastor upon his retirement.

In April of 1975, with the announcement of Pastor Braun’s retirement, the congregation formed an ad hoc meeting to begin the process of calling a new pastor. St. John’s held a voters’ meeting on June 16, 1975 to call a new pastor. Led by the Spirit of the Church, the congregation unanimously voted to call Pastor Douglas Bode from Denver, Colorado, to be their next pastor.¹⁴ Pastor Bode returned the call a month later. In another voters’ meeting held on July 26, 1975,

⁹ Pastor’s Annual Report for 1974, p. 1.

¹⁰ Church Council Minutes – March, 1975, p. 2.

¹¹ Treasurer’s Report – 1974, p. 1.¹¹

¹² Church Council Minutes – March, 1975, p. 2.

the voters of St. John's voted unanimously to call Martin Schwartz from St. Paul, Minnesota to be their next pastor.¹⁵ Pastor Schwartz also returned the call. It was already approaching the first of September, and St. John's had found no pastor to accept the call. Pastor Braun's retirement was a little more than a month away. So the congregation called together another voters' meeting to call again. On September 8, 1975, the congregation unanimously voted to call Pastor David Seager from Prescott, Wisconsin to be the next pastor of St. John's. Pastor Seager accepted the call in an official letter dated, September 30, 1975. Pastor Seager was installed on November 9 of the same year. St. John's now had a pastor and could continue on with the work the Lord had given them to do.

By the end of Pastor Braun's full-time ministry, congregational activity was limited only to divine worship. Council meetings were short. The reports were even shorter. It was time for a new a pastor to come in and instill new life into this congregation. Pastor Seager did this when he began his ministry at St. John's. Pastor Seager arrived with the reports of that year indicating that the total communicant membership of St. John was 472, 372 of which were active.¹⁶

When Pastor Seager arrived there was no Christian day school. So he made this one of his first priorities. He began to make suggestions of the importance of Christian education to the Church Council only one month after he was installed. The minutes read, "Pastor Seager stated that he thought St. Johns [*sic*] needed a Christian Day School. He also stated that the council should enlarge on a Board of Education that would elect a chairman to attend council meetings."¹⁷ Pastor Seager recognized the importance of a school that would educate the congregation's children in the word of God. By early 1976 a resolution was made to the

¹³ Church Council Minutes – April, 1975, p. 2.

¹⁴ St. John's Special Congregational Meeting Minutes – June 16, 1975.

¹⁵ St. John's Special Congregational Meeting Minutes – June 26, 1975.

¹⁶ Church Council Minutes – January, 1975, p. 3.

constitution to include on the church council a chairman of the Board of Education. By February 1976 the council approved a motion to amend the constitution under the following terms:

The Board [of Education] recommended that the following four point program be Instituted: Step #1. Educate the Congregation about the need for a Christian Day School. Step #2. Survey the Congregation to determine what their desires are regarding the establishment of a Christian Day School. Step #3. Subsidize the tuition of those children already attending a Christian Day School. Step #4. Establish a Christian Day School at St. John's to begin in the fall of 1977.¹⁸

Within three months of Pastor Seager's arrival a Board of Education was in line, and the plans were already being developed to create a way to provide Christian education for the children of the congregation by the fall of 1977. Through further cottage and congregational meetings it was established that St. John's "be financially responsible to the elementary school Congregation (Kindergarten through eighth grade) of members of the Congregation, upon approval of the Board of Education, in that the Congregation pay the tuition for any child attending a Wisconsin Synod Christian Day School."¹⁹

The desire was there both by the pastor and by the members to begin a Christian Day School. The major problem impeding the process of reaching their goal was the fact that St. John's had no facility in which to educate the children. Professional opinions were sought to see whether St. John's could educate the children in the basement of their church structure. Cottage meeting were planned for discussion of this new congregational issue. Architects and engineers were consulted to inquire what building code requirements were necessary in order to use the basement for educational purposes. The architect, a Mr. Griebe, that St. John's sought for

¹⁷ Church Council Minutes – December, 1975, p. 2.

¹⁸ Church Council Minutes – February, 1976, p. 1.

¹⁹ Church Council Minutes – July, 1976, p. 2.

guidance in establishing a day school in church basement agreed to back the efforts of St. John's to start a school in the basement.²⁰

By October of 1976, surveys were sent out to the entire congregation to see if St. John's had the support of the entire congregation to establish a Christian Day School. It was reported that "the response was favorable but that the members of St. John's weren't sure that the Congregation could support the financial requirements of the school."²¹ It seems that these congregational concerns were not taken too seriously, since Pastor Seager had already proceeded to purchase an occupancy permit for the basement for \$25.00.²² Cost estimates for the conversion of the church basement were acquired. With those estimates subject to review, it seemed that St. John's was ready and willing to begin a Christian Day School in their basement. The basement would be converted into a setting befitting an educational facility. To help St. John's in their endeavors to begin a Christian Day School, North Trinity invited the members of the Board of Education of St. John's to attend a council meeting at North Trinity. This invitation would prove to be the beginning of a renewed, prosperous relationship between St. John's and North Trinity.

By January of 1977 two separate approaches were proposed for the starting of Christian education at St. John's. Gary Prange, the chairman for the Board of Education reported these approaches. "The first approach consists of calling a teacher and establishing a school in the Church basement providing all necessary alterations can be made and approved by the City of Milwaukee. The second approach consists of calling a teacher and providing North Trinity with his/her services and sending our students to that school."²³ There were some concerns for

²⁰ Church Council Minutes – September 1976, p. 2.

²¹ Church Council Minutes – October 1976, p. 1.

²² Ibid., p. 1.

²³ Church Council Minutes – January, 1977, p. 1.

starting a school in the church basement. There were also some concerns for sending the children of St. John's to be educated at North Trinity. The following are a list of the pro's and con's for starting a school in the basement of St. John's as drawn up by the Board of Education:

[The pro's]:

- a. We would have our own school.
- b. We would draw people into our congregation because of that.
- c. We would develop greater loyalty towards St. John's and hopefully the new generation would stay with us.
- d. Give new direction and interest to the people of St. John's.

[The con's]:

- a. Conflict of use of the basement with other organizations of the church.
- b. Limited equipment to begin with.
- c. Re-duplication of existing schools in the area.
- d. One teacher per 9 grades.²⁴

The Board of Education also drew up a list of pro's and con's if the congregation were to send its children to be educated at North Trinity:

[The pro's]:

- a. Use of other teachers at North Trinity.
- b. The direction of an excellent principal.
- c. The use of a fine school.
- d. The knowledge gained from experience if in the future we wanted to start a school here.
- e. An opportunity to sell Christian Education to the whole congregation.

[The con's]:

- a. Transportation – although something can be worked out.
- b. Are we going to draw St. John's through this means? – a mission arm
- c. Deep friendships evolve and where does the loyalty exist – here or there?
- d. Will it affect our Sunday School as it already has this year.
- e. Will parents want to send their children to North Trinity when they agreed to send them here????
- f. What about the students who are located in other Christian Day Schools?²⁵

²⁴ Church Council Minutes (Report by the Board of Education) – January, 1977, p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

These issues were discussed at length, but no formal decision was made concerning the aforementioned issues. It seems that the church was stuck at this point. They did a wise thing and decided to leave it in the Lord's hands.

In a congregational meeting held in January of 1977, the congregational voting members made the decision to initiate the second option, that being, using the school operated by North Trinity while providing our own teacher. The congregation then decided to get the approval of the Wisconsin Synod Board for Parish Education to call a teacher to serve at St. John's. The Wisconsin Synod Board for Parish Education approved. So the congregation called Miss Ruth Huebner. Miss Huebner returned the call. So St. John's called another teacher, Miss Susan Haar.²⁶ Miss Haar also returned the call to teach at St. John's.

St. John's would begin her educational endeavors with North Trinity in the fall of 1977. But St. John's had no teacher. St. John's decided to call a teacher through the assignment committee of D.M.L.C. The June 6th council minutes report the acquiring of St. John's first teacher. "G. Prange was happy to inform the Council that the assignment committee at D.M.L.C. has provided us with a graduate student [*sic*], Miss Susan C. Wonoski."²⁷ She was installed on August 14, 1977. The first day of Christian education at St. John's was September 8, 1977. This was the report of the events and numbers of St. John's first year of education collaborating with North Trinity. "We started our own Christian Day School at North Trinity, called our own teacher, set guidelines for the school and at present have 21 children enrolled in that school."²⁸ The first teacher at St. John's only served one year. This was due to the fact that her soon-to-be husband received a call to teach in Watertown, Wisconsin. St. John's then called Mrs. Dori Winkler, the wife of a Seminarian to teach. She accepted the call and became St.

²⁶ Church Council Minutes – May, 1977, p. 2.

²⁷ Church Council Minutes – June, 1977, p. 2.

John's second teacher. By late 1978 the congregation decided that the option of building their own school was no longer in the best interest of the congregation.

At first, St. John's and North Trinity agreed to a joint-school on a year to year basis. Each year they would assess the situation to see if they should continue together. In 1978, it was established that St. John's would no longer join with North Trinity in Christian education ^{on} _a year to year basis. It was decided to form a full-time joint school.²⁹ This would allow both congregations to move forward in educational decisions in the future. The "Articles of Agreement" that signify the inception of a joint school between North Trinity are as follows:

- I. It shall be the intent and purpose of St. John's Congregation to accept the policies that North Trinity Lutheran Church and School have established in order to efficiently conduct a school with high academic standards and which submits to God's Word in every respect.
- II. Teacher(s):
 - a. Responsibility for providing teacher(s)
 1. St. John's Congregation will provide a teacher at the inception of this agreement (the operation of a joint school).
 2. For each 20 students or multiple thereof from St. John's, (20, 40, 60, 80, etc.) St. John's will be invited to call a teacher when an opening on the faculty occurs or if there is a need for an additional teacher due to the increased enrollment.
 3. St. John's will always call according to the need of the school and its faculty.
 4. The number of teachers provided by St. John's will be reviewed annually
 - b. Teacher(s) Call and responsibilities
 1. The main responsibility of any called teacher from St. John's shall be to the class and children of that class assigned by North Trinity.
 2. The teacher(s) shall be expected to comply to the routine work load, visitations, and other responsibilities.
 3. The teacher(s) called by St. John's will be a North Trinity faculty member(s).
 4. The St. John's called teacher(s) shall be responsible to the school principal and North Trinity's Board of Education as are the North Trinity Faculty members.

²⁸ Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting – January 16, 1978, p. 1.

²⁹ Church Council Minutes – Demeber 1978, p. 1.

5. For any school problems, the St. John's teacher(s) will follow the normal administrative chain of command.
- c. Teacher(s) remuneration
 1. St. John's salary code will follow the salary code as found at North Trinity.

III. Financial Responsibilities

a. Operating Expense

1. The prevailing tuition charge each year will serve as a basis for sharing education costs.
2. The prevailing tuition charge will be based on the total cost to operate North Trinity School.
3. Total St. John's liability is to be based on the number of students from St. John's enrolled times (X) the prevailing tuition charge. The salary, benefits, and other costs for a teacher(s) will be deducted from St. John's liability. And additional tuition would be due monthly.
4. North Trinity Congregation will never have any financial liability to St. John's even if student enrollment from St. John's times (X) tuition charges is less than teacher(s) benefits.

IV. Representation on North Trinity's Board of Education

1. One member of St. John's Board of Education shall be chosen to serve as its representative on North Trinity's Board of Education.
2. St. John's voting representation shall be reviewed and established in proportion to their enrollment.
3. This representative from St. John's shall have full voting status.
4. All other members of St. John's Board of Education are invited to attend North Trinity' Board of Education Meetings, but only in an advisory capacity.
5. St. John's representative shall not hold any office on North Trinity's Board of Education.
6. St. John's pastor shall be an ex-officio member of North Trinity's Board of Education.³⁰

The "Articles of Agreement" between North Trinity and St. John's were unanimously ratified in an October congregational meeting. The joint school between North Trinity and St. John's had begun. This was the beginning of many favorable and fruitful years together.

For years, St. John's had difficulty keeping their teaching staff. Their second teacher, Dori Winkel submitted her resignation in the spring of 1980. The congregation extended to Miss

³⁰ Articles of Agreement, 1979.

Terri Amos the call to be their teacher in a March congregational meeting of 1980. She soon returned the call. A month later St. John's called Miss Jane Freeze. Jane Freeze accepted the call. She taught during the 1980-81 school year. She resigned, so the congregation needed a teacher again the following year. So in the spring of 1981, St. John's called Marylin Orth and Ruth Hirschfield, but both returned the call. Finally, Miss Anita Rupprecht accepted the call to teach fourth grade. Miss Rupprecht would teach from the 81-84. She would have the longest tenure as teacher of St. John's until Mr. Kevin Sonntag was assigned from D.M.L.C to teach at St. John's. Kevin Sonntag was called to begin teaching in the fall of 1983. In accord with the "Articles of Agreement" Kevin Sonntag was called. The school enrollment had reached forty students and was expected to increase to forty-six by 1984. Mr. Kevin Sonntag continues to serve at St. John's to this present day. He has been serving faithfully at St. John's for seventeen years. By 1983 St. John's was supplying two teachers to the faculty of North Trinity.

As North Trinity and St. John's entered into the joint school agreement of 1979, it was soon realized that North Trinity's facility on 35th Street needed some added space and extra classrooms. This joint agreement coupled with the congregational growth of both churches made the prospect of adding on to their school a topic worthy of discussion. Discussion among the members of St. John's about helping North Trinity with the project of adding on to the school began in early 1981. By April of 1981 this decision by Gary Prange was reported. "Gary reported that the expansion is going to include three classrooms and a workroom."³¹ By August of 1981 the ground breaking for the expansion at North Trinity School had begun.³² St. John's contributed \$30,000.00 to North Trinity to help with the payment of the expansion.³³ This

³¹ Church Council Minutes – April, 1981, p. 1.

³² Church Council Minutes – July, 1981, p. 1.

³³ Church Council Minutes – September, 1981, p. 1.

expansion was well needed. The enrollment at North Trinity was 224. Thirty one of those students were from St. John's. And these figures would continue to grow throughout the eighties. The dedication of the expansion structure took place on November 15, 1981.³⁴

In 1979 St. John's purchased the land east of its present church building. They completely reworked the land. They tore down the trees, leveled the ground, and planted grass. This was all the beginning of building a new parsonage on that land. The earliest discussions of building a new parsonage began in September of 1981. The October congregational meeting reported this discussion: "Don reported that the committee set up to study what we should do with the property east of the church has looked at the possibility of selling the existing parsonage and lot and using the proceeds to build a new parsonage on this lot [*sic*]."³⁵ A parsonage study committee was soon assembled in June of 1982. At first the parsonage study committee met to discuss and consider the following issues: 1. Moving the old parsonage. 2. Improving the old parsonage. 3. Building a new parsonage. 4. Selling old parsonage.³⁶ The October study committee report gave the council good reason to go ahead with talks to sell the old parsonage and to build a new parsonage on the land east of the church. On October 17, 1983, the parsonage study committee put together the following statement that was approved by the voters of the congregation on the same month. "It is the consensus of this committee that we should proceed with the sale of the existing parsonage and lots. Further, that we begin construction of the new parsonage immediately."³⁷ The estimated cost of building the new parsonage figured to be around the \$90,000.00 price range. The construction of the new parsonage began in February of 1984. The old parsonage was sold to a private party buyer for \$55,000.00 in April of 1984. The

³⁴ Church Council Minutes – November, 1981, p. 1.

³⁵ St. John's Congregational Meeting – October 19, 1981, p. 1.

³⁶ St. John's Congregational Meeting – April 19, 1982, p. 1.

³⁷ Parsonage Study Committee Report – 10/17/83.

vacant lot that was adjacent to the old parsonage was sold to the Wisconsin Synod. On that land the Wisconsin Synod constructed a furlough house that gave missionaries a residency during their months of furlough back in the states. The Wisconsin Synod bought the vacant lot adjacent to the parsonage for \$19,000.00. The new parsonage was completed in October 1984. It was dedicated at a special service on November 4 of the same. With much of the concrete and landscaping work still needing to be done, Pastor Seager, his wife, and his four children did not move into the new parsonage until the fall of 1985. The parsonage still stands today as what the writer believes to be a model parsonage for a pastor and his family. The congregation of St. John's was very kind to its pastor by building this new place of residency.

In June of 1984, St. John's had another teacher leave them as Miss Rupprecht took a call to serve a congregation in California. Miss Sheila Hughes was called in April of 1984 to take the place of Miss Rupprecht. Miss Hughes accepted the call. She was installed as the sixth teacher at St. John's on August 19, 1984.

The years of 1985 and 1986 were silent years for St. John's as far as any significant historical significance is concerned. I figure that these quiet years were due mainly to the fact that St. John's, a church that always prided itself on being in the black financially, was concentrating on paying off the debt of the parsonage and the superstructure of the church. St. John's was also intent on meeting its financial obligations to North Trinity and Wisconsin Lutheran High School.

The Christian education status of St. John's was in good order for St. John's in 1986. They had an enrollment of sixty-six in the Sunday School and forty-seven in the Christian Day School. Things were going rather smoothly for St. John's. They now had opportunities to delve into new areas of ministry. One of those new areas was the introduction of the synod's new

hymnal through the sampler. So in September of 1986 "Pastor Seager requested that the congregation participate in trying the synod's new hymnal."³⁸ A discussion concerning the new hymnal sampler took place in the December council meeting. No significant objections were voiced concerning the sampler. "The council recommended that Pastor Seager act on the sampler as he sees proper."³⁹ With the leadership of Pastor Seager and the open mindedness of the council, the sampler was introduced without any significant problems.

The new year of 1987 brought about a discussion of having both a common cup and an individual cup in the communion services. Pastor Seager introduced the idea in January of that year and discussion over this issue continued over the next several months. The discussions and the education of the council by Pastor Seager were significant in bringing about the introduction of both the common cup and individual cup in communion services already by March 4 of 1987. It was reported that "the individual cup for communion went well."⁴⁰ No objection were so apparent that they were reported. Communion services with the individual cup and the common cup are still taking place in present day services.

The church structure of St. John's was built in such a way that no place in the church was accessible except by means of stairs. There were four entrances to the building. All four entrances were stair entrances, whether to the basement or to the narthex or to the nave of the church. Although many of St. John's members were younger, as is shown by a student enrollment of 61 in the grade school and 77 in the Sunday School in 1987⁴¹, many of its long time members were aging. The stairway entrances to St. John's ^{were} posing ~~to be~~ ^{problem} a big hassle for many of these older members. By the spring of 1987, discussions were held to see what could be

³⁸ Church Council Minutes – September, 1986, p. 1.

³⁹ Church Council Minutes – December, 1986, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Church Council Minutes – March, 1987, p. 1.

⁴¹ Church Council Minutes – December, 1987, p. 1.

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to make the church more handicapped accessible. These three options were given to the congregations to make St. John's church more handicapped accessible:

1. Mechanical Type Lift (elevator type)
2. Ramp to Mother's Room
3. Ramp in front of Church in addition to Air Lock double-door lock entry way⁴²

Pastor Seager reminded the congregation that "the main goal [of a handicapped accessible church] is to provide access for all congregational members so that they all can hear the word of God."⁴³ This handicapped accessible entrance would not only serve the congregation's aging members, but also to assist the physically and mentally handicapped worshipers from Hearthside. In the January congregational meeting the voters accepted the plan to go ahead with option three, to provide a ramp and air lock vestibule with double doors. This plan would not succeed.

"Pastor Seager reported on the ramp design and problems encountered by the architect with the proposed symmetrical design."⁴⁴ Discussions continued as to what St. John's should do in regard to a new handicapped accessible entrance. Discussion began to turn away from the ramp entrance toward a wheel and chair lift. It was decided that the handicapped accessible ramp/air lock project was simply too expensive. A new route had to be chosen. And the wheel and chair lift seemed to be the best way to go and the most affordable. The council finally decided "to go with a chair lift at a cost of \$3,874.00."⁴⁵ The project was finally completed in the fall of 1989.

In 1988 the fifth teacher at St. John's, Miss Sheila Hughes resigned her call. She left her teaching duties, in order to get married later that fall. St. John's again went to the assignment committee to call another teacher. In May of 1988, Miss Karen Wolff was assigned from

⁴² St. John's Congregational Meeting Minutes – August 20, 1987.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Church Council Minutes – April, 1988, p. 1.

D.M.L.C to be St. John's next teacher. She was installed on August 21, 1988. The teaching staff of St. John's now consisted of Kevin Sonntag and Karen Wolff. Karen Wolff only served St. John's for one year, since North Trinity no longer needed her services.⁴⁶ St. John's was without a second teacher for one year. In the spring of 1990, a faculty member from the North Trinity congregation took a call. This left an opening for St. John's to again call a second teacher. In April of 1990, St. John's extended a call to Robin Mundstock to teach third grade. Miss Mundstock returned the call. Again, St. John's went to the assignment committee of D.M.L.C. Through the assignment committee, St. John's called Miss Cheryl Haag. Miss Haag was the seventh teacher to serve at St. John's.

The year 1988 was a significant year in the history of St. John's, Clinton Avenue. This was the special year St. John's celebrated its 125th anniversary. The service to commemorate those 125 years of God's grace took place on November 13. It was also a sad year. St. John's had to say good-bye to their former pastor, Martin Braun, after thirty-eight years of service. Pastor Braun was called home to his Lord in the fall of that year. Since 1988 was the year of St. John's 125th anniversary, 1988 figured to be a year of momentum for St. John's as we will see.

The debt of the parsonage and the church superstructure was repaid in 1987. This gave St. John's an opportunity to undertake a new project. The interior of the church as it stood in 1989 was over twenty years old. It was beginning to show signs of wear and tear. Besides that it was beginning to look out of date. Discussions for the renovation of the church began to take place in early 1989. By July of 1989, the voters accepted the motion to renovate the interior of St. John's for a total cost of \$44,000.00. The renovations of the church began in late summer and were completed by the end of November. The renovations of St. John's were as follows:

⁴⁵ Church Council Minutes – August 7, 1989, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Church Council Minutes – March 6, 1989, p. 1.

1. Remove forty-four pews and two frontals.
2. Install forty-two pews and four existing hymnal racks. Pews to be anchored with news corner brackets and raul bolts to the concrete floor.
3. Remove existing altar, pulpit, lectern, and dispose. Frame out new floor and risers using 2 X 6's 16" O.C. with 1" T & G plywood deck – glued and screwed to 2 X 6 sleepers. The entire area has to be maintained as a cold air return.
4. Install metal communion rail framing and oak cap.
5. HVAC – install new duct and floor registers.
6. Paint existing HVAC registers – figuring one (1) painter, one (1) day.
7. Carpeting and base as per selections – includes all removals and sub floor repairs.
8. Millwork – furnish and install new pulpit, altar, lectern, riser vent, wood communion rail cap. Includes refinishing of existing Baptismal.
9. Furnish and install new wardrobe in sacristy.
10. Ornamental brass rail – set in sleeves for removal.
11. New kneeler and pew cushions.⁴⁷

St. John's was able to renovate the entire interior of their church for \$47, 754.00.⁴⁸ No doubt, the 125th anniversary of their church gave St. John's the impetus to proceed in their efforts to beautify their place of worship. The church presently stands with these new renovations. In the writer's opinion, St. John's stands as a model congregation for updating, beautifying, and renovating a church. St. John's recognized the need for this renovation in the overall life of the congregation. And St. John's acted upon this recognized need. Through this renovation St. John's was also able to help out a sister congregation by donating the old paraments, altar linens, and electric candelabras to a church in Lexington, Kentucky.⁴⁹

Following the major renovations in 1990, St. John's undertook no major projects. A few minor projects were undertaken. The basement of the parsonage was remodeled for \$5000.00.⁵⁰ Discussion were held concerning the improvement of the church organ by adding some new

⁴⁷ Letter of contract from Johnson Construction Solutions, Inc. to St. John's Lutheran Church, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁹ Church Council Minutes – November, 1990, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Church Council Minutes – February, 1992, p. 2.

registrations. The church embarked on improving the organ. The organ was completed with chimes, oboe, and salicional registrations for \$11,077.89 in September of 1992.⁵¹

January of 1991 brought about the discussion of the Wisconsin Synod's new hymnal. St. John's was a congregation with a long ~~time~~-history. They cherished things the way they used to be. This cherishing of the old way of things applied also to the new hymnal. The members were by no means obstinate. However, they did voice their opinions and concerns over the issue of the new hymnal. One council meeting reported the following: "A discussion took place regarding a request to Synod that pages 5 and 15, as they appear in the old hymnal, be included in the new hymnal as written."⁵² Concerns like this were voiced on a number of occasions. However, they were legitimate concerns. They were concerns that had to do with doing what was orderly and according to God's Word. After the sampler was used over a period of years and the people were educated with regard to the new hymnal, the transfer to the new hymnal was rather smooth. The voters finally voted to purchase the new hymnal in April of 1993. Many members faithfully and willingly covered the cost of these hymnals by special personal gifts. Such gifts signified the congregational support of the new hymnal. By November of 1993, St. John's congregation made the permanent switch to the new hymnal, *Christian Worship*.

January 26, 1994 was a tragic day in the history of St. John's. On that cold January evening a number of vandals broke into the church through the basement. They vandalized the church interior rather thoroughly. The following is a detailed list of all that was vandalized:

1. Cleaning of the church \$43,874.78
(This included the cleaning staff of 6 people for a period of 14 days. This also includes the millwork, touch up areas damaged by the vandals, remaking doors to the bookcase, renting crane, removing

⁵¹ Treasurer's Report – September, 1992.

⁵² Church Council Minutes – January 1991, p. 1.

old fans in the church and installing new
one '\$1,500.00,' repair to our candelabra

2. Organ clean and repair	\$4,000.00
3. Precision woodworking	\$1,400.00
4. TV, VCR, tape deck	\$724.00
5. Copier	\$700.00
6. Typewriters	\$64.00
	\$50.00
7. Fire extinguishers	\$75.00
8. Altar cloth	\$116.50
9. Wine, candles, frames of pictures	\$79.00
10. Gas and electric bill adjustments	\$434.00
11. Play balls	\$21.00
12. Cordless phone	\$149.00
13. Photos	\$21.70
14. Repair on couch	\$100.00
15. Replacement of salt and pepper	\$20.00
16. Installation of glass block	\$6,000.00 ⁵³

St. John's was able to suffer through this set back by filing this claim with their insurance company. They also received some kind gifts from sister congregations throughout the area. The congregation continued to worship in the basement facility in spite of the vandilization of the church proper. The gathering of believers and the proclamation of God's Word continued. The final repairs were completed by December of 1994.

The year of 1995 was another quiet year after a rather busy 1994. The changes that did take place in 1995 were minor. Miss Cheryl Haag, St. John's teacher of five years resigned her call at St. John's to teach the children of WELS missionaries in Japan. It was recognized that she would not return the following year. St. John's again went to the assignment committee of D.M.L.C. Through the assignment committee called a teacher to replace Miss Haag. Miss Robin Richards was assigned in May of 1995 to be the first and second grade teacher. She was installed on August 27, 1995. Miss Richards served diligently and faithfully from 1995 to 1999

⁵³ "Cost of the Vandalization of our church – March 1994.

when she took a call to teach in Livonia, Michigan. Miss Richards was replaced by Mrs. Kerri Esmay upon Mrs. Esmay's acceptance of the call in July of 1999.

In 1996 further maintenance was begun on the church structure. In 1996, St. John's church still had its original wood shake shingles. These needed to be replaced desperately, both for the sake of efficiency of the structure and for the sake of its appearance in the community. The church structure was roofed for a total cost of \$39,634.70.⁵⁴ The roof project was completed by September of 1996.

The final large scale project at St. John's took place in 1998. St. John's felt it was necessary to make the church as comfortable as possible throughout the year. Many times throughout the years, worship in the summer months was often unbearable. This made worship not only distracting for members, but it was also a turn off to visitors. St. John's decided to install central air conditioning at the church. The voters approved to install central air conditioning at St. John's for a total price of \$20,372.00.⁵⁵ The project was completed in 1998 before the hot summer months arrived.

By and large, major projects were put to the side in the mid to late 1990's. The major issue that lay before the congregation of St. John's was not so much what the congregation will do in the next months or year. The late 1990's was spent in much discussion concerning the overall future of them. Declining Sunday School enrollment, declining day school enrollment, and decreasing church membership gave St. John's reason to consider what the future held for St. John's. Not only was St. John's beginning to struggle along the aforementioned lines, but neighboring churches throughout the north side of Milwaukee were also experiencing significant drops in membership. St. John's along with North Trinity, and St. Mark's in Brown Deer began

⁵⁴ Contract from Standard Roofing Company, August 22, 1996.

⁵⁵ Church Council Minutes – April, 1998, p. 1.

talks in the early to mid 1990's concerning the idea of amalgamating all three churches into one strong church. The idea was to make three weakening churches become one strong church with strong opportunities for growth. St. John's talks with North Trinity and St. Mark' were primitive and short at first. But these opening talks would prove to be the beginning of more serious discussions concerning the idea of merging of these three churches. The final part of this history of St. John's will now focus mainly on the issue of continued talks of merging with North Trinity.

Amalgamation? – plans for a future ministry

Under the spiritual leadership of Pastor Seager and a faithful church council, St. John's had always been future oriented. Even in the early 1990's St. John's recognized it declining membership and school enrollment. They didn't put their hand over their eyes and so ignore the situation. They had always tried to deal with their situation of declining membership by having a vision and looking into their future. Already in 1991 a committee was formed to deal with the future of St. John's. Was St. John's fine as it was? Would St. John's thrive in the future? Do changes need to take place? What needs to be done ensure St. John's future as congregation? Was St. John's doing something wrong? I'm sure these were just some of the questions this committee tried to deal with. The following is a list of things that were already being discussed in a meeting held on October 14, 1991:

STATEMENT: To ensure the future existence of our congregation as a viable force in a godless society, do we need to examine direction and commitment in this community and to other communities?

- I. Do we need to do this: to be concerned with relocation, with amalgamation, with individualization?
 - a. Compared to Synod's statistical report we are a larger congregation.
 - b. At the present time we are financially stable.
 - c. We continue to hold our own, despite number losses.

- d. Needed in our thoughts is an awareness of our relationship to North Trinity and what repercussions any decision we might make would have on them.
- II. The direction we should go.
 - a. To St. Mark's
 - b. To the Germantown area.
 - 1. Look at other congregations which have made this decision.
 - 2. Tough decisions now might result in greater blessings later.
- III. Why now?
 - a. The trends
 - 1. Fewer baptisms – does this indicate fewer younger families settling in the area?
 - 2. Our own congregation is getting appreciably older.
 - 3. A continued exit of members to the suburbs.
 - 4. A community which does not offer large scale evangelism work.
 - aa. Roman Catholic influence
 - bb. Large amount of land that will remain dedicated to industrial and entertainment direction
 - cc. Existing settlement not interested in what we have to offer.
 - dd. No new construction.
 - b. Is our property still marketable property? = (loss of profit on home because it suddenly is found in an undesirable location)
 - c. Loyalty to the church, to pastor (maybe a new pastor would do wonders)
 - d. A time to challenge this congregation??
- IV. Implementation of such a change in relocation, amalgamation?⁵⁶

Discussions such as these followed throughout the years. Reports indicate that several meetings were held at St. John's in 1992 and 1993. The prospect of spinning off a daughter congregation in Germantown was mentioned, but it was determined to be unfeasible. In 1993 "Divinity-Divine Charity in Whitefish Bay approached Pastor Seager with the idea of amalgamating the two congregations."⁵⁷ This idea never developed. By July of 1997 discussions of relocation and merging developed strictly between St. Mark's, St. John's, and North Trinity. Reports are clear that discussions developed more and more in 1998 and 1999 between the three churches. By 1999 "Pastor Seager reported that it appears that St. Mark's is quietly backing away from

⁵⁶ Committee Meeting_ Re – Future of St. John's, 10/14/91.

⁵⁷ Church Council Minutes – July 1993, p. 1.

amalgamation talks.”⁵⁸ Amalgamation and relocation talks were limited to just St. John’s and North Trinity.

Why? Why such intense talks between churches that were at the present time healthy and meeting all their financial obligation? Was it really necessary for these discussions to take place? The following is a list of statistics and figures that indicate St. John’s was and is on the downswing as a church. The point of these statistics ~~was~~ and is to show that if something is not done, things will continue to decline at St. John’s and North Trinity until St. John’s and North Trinity have no choice but to shut down with no hope of a future. These reports were presented to the congregation in an April 9, 2000, congregational forum. They were presented by means of a power point presentation. They were given in the hopes that the people of St. John’s could view for themselves that the amalgamation talks were not born out of haste and ignorance. Rather, such talks were begun and continued ^{with} out of foresight and vision. These statistics were presented to show the obvious need for amalgamation and relocation. And then, with a congregational understanding of its future needs, the voters could, in the future, vote to go ahead and proceed ^{with} in talks with North Trinity to begin an amalgamation with her. St. John’s was clearly trying to be proactive rather than reactive (when it would be too late):

Over the past fifteen years, significant changes have taken place in our congregation. Because of these significant changes, 2 possible directions exist for the congregation. We are here today to share with you the information that we have gathered so that, together, we can make a decision that will be in the best interests of Christ’s Kingdom. . . .

The membership of the Wisconsin Synod is not growing, but actually showing signs of decline.

In Milwaukee, specifically on the North side, our WELS congregations, known as the “Metro North Conference” are showing significant decline in numbers.

⁵⁸ Church Council Minutes – December 1999, p. 1.

St. John's has also experienced a significant decline in membership and the rate of decline is continuing. St. John's has experienced a 23% decline in membership from 1984 to 1999.

But as you know, St. John's is not alone. A number of churches in the area have closed or have been merged. St. Albert's, formerly located just one block from school, no longer exists. At one time, their school have over 500 students in it. Our Lady of Good Hope once had an enrollment of 850; now has 425.

Why has this happened? What factors have contributed to the decline of so many churches in the area?

One reason is the 'Great American Dream' – to live in a newer home in the suburbs. This dream has impacted St. John's. Whereas, at one time most of its members of the congregation lived within a five minute drive, now, a lot of the members spend twenty to thirty minutes commuting to church.

What has happened to St. John's?

The congregation is aging, and we are not gaining new members in proportion to the losses.

It is not because we are not trying to gain new members. There have been evangelism efforts, door to door canvassing, and door flyers for VBS. But these efforts have not provided new members.

What we have learned is that a large segment of the population in the neighborhood has very strong ties to other churches.

As a result of all these things, our attendance at church services is down and the enrollment at our school is less than 90.

Where are we today?

Officially, we have 313 members, but do we really have that many?

In addition, St. John's has approximately 25 members who are shut-ins.

So if you subtract the 25 shut-in members, that leaves us with a church of 288 active communicant members, 67% of whom are in church on any given weekend, a real blessing which enables us to be a very viable congregation (average attendance – 43% in almost all other WELS churches).

Now, if the current trend continues, and there is no reason to think that the trend won't continue, here is what we think will happen.

The graph shows, that from 1995 to 1997 there has been a 6% decline in membership. From 1997 to 1999 membership increased by 4%. Looking ahead within the next 10 years, based on overall trend, there will be approximately 225 communicant members left in our congregation. This is based on a decline of approximately 3% per year. (Losses incurred come through transfers of membership and the natural process of aging and death).

At one time there were 11 classrooms of children in our school. Currently, there are only 5 classrooms being used. In ten years, the school enrollment will reach the point where there will be only enough students for two classrooms. The cost to educate is over \$3,000/student and this will increase as enrolment declines.

Large items improvements will need to be made to the church:

The boiler will need to be replaced in the future at a cost of \$25,000 or more. The exterior of the church requires painting.

An elevating may also be needed for handicap access – at least \$100,000.

Parking lot repairs are on the list also – the cost will vary depending on the extent or repairs.

Plus all the normal repairs required as property ages. Many of these are costly, such as were the new roof and the plumbing repairs which took place in the not-too-distant past.

There are huge repairs at North Trinity and the School

The replacement of the church roof at North Trinity – estimated cost of \$40,000. Major repairs on North Trinity's boiler/heating system – at least \$25,000.

Replacement of the school roof at an estimated cost of \$75,000.

The school boiler will need a new burner soon – estimated cost of \$10,000.

The school asphalt playground needs to be replaced – at least \$25,000.

Plus all the normal repairs a 75 year old church building and a 40 year old school building.

Borrowing to pay for all needed maintenance is certainly not good stewardship.

Money is not the only resource we need to consider.

There is a severe shortage of pastors in our synod. Today there are more than 80 vacant pulpits throughout the Synod. With the current number of students in the seminary, this number of vacancies will only increase in the foreseeable future. Adding to the shortage is the number of home and world missions being opened.

Ultimately, we have to make the best use of the pastoral resources available.

Currently, each of the pastors of North Trinity and St. John's is preparing a sermon every Sunday. Wouldn't it be better use of resources if the pastors only had to preach every other or every third Sunday, and have time to concentrate on other responsibilities such as evangelism and youth ministry?

Are we making the best use of our pastors?

Another resource is our facilities.

Presently, we heat, light, insure, and maintain buildings for 2 congregations.

The combined cost for these items is \$34,000.

Is this the best use of our resources?

Since we have been unable to reverse the decline in our congregation, this is our future! A church that is presently half-empty and soon will be even more empty.

Is this the future we want?

There are two possibilities:

1. Continue on our own.
2. Merge with others

In order to evaluate whether St. John's should continue on our own, whether North Trinity should continue on their own, a special planning committee, looking at the future, visited Atonement, Siloah, and St. Marcus. They learned that. . .

These three congregations interviewed felt that canvassing was not successful.

The result of our canvassing is no different.

Two of these three congregations are not able to generate enough income from the members to meet operating expenses. Therefore they receive Synod support. However, Synod has recently told another inner city congregation that they could not even be considered for assistance for four years, and then it is doubtful that assistance would be available. Grants from third-source funding are relied upon heavily by these congregations. The third-source funding is **responsible for more than 50%** of the budget in one of these congregations we visited.

In order to operate their schools, these three congregations charge both member and non-member families tuition in addition to book fees.

We presently charge a \$115/child 'operational fee' in addition to books. Do we really want to put the burden of hundreds of dollars of tuition fees on our members with children? As a result of a 'no tuition' policy at our school, the congregation must, out of its budget, pick up the cost of each student = approximately \$3000.00 for each child who attends school.

These three congregations that were interviewed have their church and school adjoining and have off street parking. **All three felt this was essential.**

These three congregations felt providing technology and up-to-date facilities for school athletics was important.

Our technology is now comparable to other congregations, **but our athletic facilities are lacking.**

Two of the three congregations accept tuition students without requiring church membership.

Do we want to operate a school for predominately non-church members? For many, school choice has also become an option. This means that they receive government money to pay for children, not necessarily from their congregation, who attend their school. Is this proper?

The transition that the other north side congregations made occurred over a 10 to 20 period of time.

We have already demonstrated that St. John's and North Trinity do not have 10 to 20 years left as viable congregations.

The leadership of North Trinity is in favor of a merger with St. John's.

The leadership of St. Mark's has expressed some interest in a merger/joint school.

The thought of a merger would seem to be beneficial to the congregations.

Just think for a minute, what that could mean.

Imagine what it would feel like for the church to once again be filled for worship services.

Imagine what it would be like to hear the church reverberate with joyful worship because the church is full. We have experienced that during Advent and Lent – almost 400 people in worship at a mid-week service. What a joy!

Imagine having a number of Bible classes to attend at various times during the week.

Imagine having a revitalized evangelism effort to reach out with the gospel.

With a combined congregation, this^{is} what the future could be.

Imagine having a school with a gym. . .

Imagine having computers and state of the art technology in every classroom.

Imagine having expanded preschool and day care programs in our school.

Imagine having facilities and programs that would attract new students to our school.

Imagine a school standing next to the church, reminding parents of the purpose of the school! Imagine how we could then train our children in worship and use the church for greater identification in the children's life. Too often the school is looked at as a separate entity, private education instead of **CHRIST-CENTERED** education.

With a combined congregation, this is what the future could potentially be.

But how do we accomplish this? How do we make this 'dream' a reality?

By being ONE.

One church. One school. One congregation.

We need your approval and your whole-hearted support to move forward to create a merger plan.

Presently, such a plan had⁵ not yet been started. Only after you have given your approval will the two congregations begin to meet to draw up a plan.

While the task before us is great, the task God has given us is even greater. He has commanded us: 'Go and make disciples of all nations.....' With God's blessings, this plan will make it possible for us to better carry out the 'Great Commission' and continue to proclaim the saving message of the gospel.⁵⁹

Needless to say, this report solicited much discussion from the members who were present at this open forum. The writer was present at the open forum to witness and listen to the discussions. By and large, members considered the report to be rather wise. I believe it

impacted a large contingent of congregation in a positive way. There was a contingent of the “good old members” who were not too happy with some issues of the presentation. They could understand the very pertinent point of why merging North Trinity and St. John’s was so important. But these people had a very difficult time with giving up their precious St. John’s facility. Certain members really couldn’t bear to think that they would lose the church where their parents were married and buried, where they were baptized, confirmed, and married. So they took up the point of discussion that amalgamating with North Trinity should be considered at the St. John’s facility. The main committee member along with Pastor Seager pointed out that amalgamating at the present sight would not foster a true merger. Members from North Trinity would never feel at home at St. John’s. They would always think it was St. John’s church. It was pointed out that amalgamation must be done by building a new facility at a new, neutral sight. However, no location had yet been found. One congregational member, a Seminarian by the name of Mr. Christopher Esmay, silenced those of the members who were discussing that the St. John’s church building *must* be the facility of the merged churches if St. John’s and North Trinity were to merge. Esmay spoke up confidently, “We all must keep in mind what God’s Word says. God’s Word says that the church isn’t a building made of bricks and mortar. The church is a living organism of people, that is, believers.” Along with the support of Pastor Seager, Mr. Esmay’s comment really silenced those who had negative ideas about amalgamating at a neutral sight. The open forum discussion lasted for nearly an hour. By the end of the session it seemed that the congregation was in favor of the idea. It was now up to the voters of the congregation to decide and approve of forming a committee to begin serious, full-time discussions about amalgamating with North Trinity. This has not yet taken place.

⁵⁹ This report concerning merger discussions with North Trinity by means of a Power Point presentation was presented to St. John’s congregation in a public forum– April 9, 2000.

The writer is of the opinion that St. John's and North Trinity must merge if they want to continue to exist as churches. No one knows what the future holds for these two churches but the Lord of the Church. Who knows? Perhaps in five years, these two congregations will be one strong, thriving confessional Lutheran church on the north side of Milwaukee in a new and magnificent facility faithfully spreading the gospel of Jesus. My prayer is that the Lord of the Church might bless these two congregations in the way that he so properly sees fit.

St. John's certainly has a long and rich history. Some might consider much of St. John's history as small and insignificant. Others might consider the history of St. John's to be filled with many marvelous and magnificent accomplishments. Whatever the case may be, no part of St. John's history compares with what the Holy Spirit has accomplished throughout the history of St. John's through the faithful and consistent proclamation of the Savior who died and rose again to remove the sins of the world.

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