

**A Brief History
of
St. Philip's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

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Beginnings in a Broom Factory:

In 1952, the district mission board of the Southeastern Wisconsin District acknowledged the need to do outreach within the city of Milwaukee.¹ The need had been identified through surveys conducted in the late 1930's and early 1940's by a joint effort of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, both of whom were members of the Synodical Conference at this time. The Southeastern Wisconsin District Mission Board further reported in 1952 that direction and supervision of this mission field was placed into their hands by the Synodical Conference Missionary Board.²

Work in this mission field commenced that same year. Missionary Bertram Sauer began a major canvassing effort on the near north side of Milwaukee. Meanwhile, the Synodical Conference purchased a worship facility located at 5th and Meinecke from the Seventh Day Adventists at a cost of \$25,000. Prior to its remodeling and use by the Adventists, the structure had been a broom factory. The fruits of Missionary Sauer's canvassing were evident in two adult information classes which had begun. One of these met in the church at 5th and Meinecke, the other met in the home of Nathaniel and Laura Harris. In all, about 10 people were being instructed through these two classes and the roots of St. Philip's were being planted and watered.³

Not long after beginning his work in this new mission field, Missionary Sauer was forced to resign due to poor health.⁴ For a time, Pastor Elton Huebner served as vacancy pastor and with the help of a few students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the work

¹ District Mission Board report, Southeastern WI, 1952

² District Mission Board report, Southeastern WI, 1952

³ St. Philip's Lutheran Church: A History, Willard Marquardt p.2

⁴ District Mission Board report, Southeastern WI, 1954

continued. In 1953, the district mission board called Pastor Paul Knickelbein from the Northern Wisconsin District to continue the work begun by Missionary Sauer. He accepted the call and arrived in May of that year. In 1954, the district mission board reported that a nucleus had been established and currently 16 adults were being instructed.⁵ Plans were made to officially organize the congregation after the confirmation of those who were in adult class. The Synodical Conference Mission Board continued to finance the pastor as well as the running expenses of this mission during its early stages.

In October of 1955, the congregation was officially organized under the name St. Philip's. Within six months, however, Pastor Knickelbein accepted a call to St. Marcus Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. On February 19, 1956, Pastor Milton Burk was installed at St. Philip's where he would remain until 1966. Under his leadership the Lord blessed the work going on at St. Philip's to the extent that the mission board made special note of the "substantial growth", with both attendance and interest growing.⁶ Few transfers were being accepted into the congregation; therefore growth at St. Philip's depended primarily on adult converts.⁷ From 1956 to 1959, Pastor Burk reported 60 adult confirmations and 62 baptisms. The small group that had made up the nucleus reported in 1954, had grown to 205 baptized members and 98 communicant members by 1959. Another positive ~~that~~ ~~is notable~~ in the statistical reports from these earlier years is the fact that Sunday School attendance grew from a remarkable number of 51 in 1956 to an astonishing 99 in 1959.

⁵ District Mission Board report, Southeastern WI, 1954

⁶ *ibid.*, 1958

⁷ *ibid.*, 1956

This certainly qualified as “substantial growth”. Along with this growth, however, came new decisions for the young congregation.

10th and Garfield:

The increase of new members and their children soon had St. Philip’s searching for a larger facility which could also accommodate their desire to open a Christian day school. There were already about 25 children from the congregation attending school at Bethesda Lutheran.⁸ St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church and School located at 10th and Garfield had decided to relocate further west to follow their members who were moving in that direction. The decision was made to purchase this facility which included the sanctuary, five classrooms and an auditorium, as well as all of the furnishings. The bulk of the costs for this facility were covered by a joint effort of the Wisconsin Synod and some of its individual congregations in the Milwaukee area.⁹ The members of St. Philip’s also raised a substantial amount of money to defer the costs and the Lord granted a further blessing when an anonymous donor gave a large sum of money to cover maintenance costs at the new location.

St. Philip’s moved into their new location in 1958. Permission was soon granted for St. Philip’s to begin a one room school. Five calls were extended for their first teacher and all were returned. Therefore, Edward Meyer, a graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, was assigned to begin the school that St. Philip’s was hoping for. 36 students were enrolled in the first year. In the following year, Miss Patricia Radsek was called as a second teacher and St. Philip’s school enrollment jumped to 59.

⁸ Marquardt – p.4

⁹ District Mission Board report, Southeastern WI, 1958

Both church and school flourished in the early years at the new location on 10th and Garfield. In 1960, just five years after its founding, St. Philip's counted 231 baptized members and a school enrollment of 72. In its report to the 1960 Southeastern Wisconsin Conference, the district mission board referred to St. Philip's as an "interracial mission" which was now able to afford the full salary of the missionary. During the course of 1960 through 1961, St. Philip's was noted for the number of adult converts that it was gaining; each year more adults than children were being confirmed. Financially things were also progressing well for St. Philip's since they continued to be able to support the missionary as well as cover the maintenance costs of their new facility from congregational giving.

The school followed suit with the success of the church. What began as a one room school soon expanded to three, encompassing grades one through eight. During this period of time, those students of kindergarten age enrolled at St. Marcus just a short distance away. In 1961, two new teachers were called to St. Philip's, Joyce Vetting and Paul Thomas. One of these would replace Ms. Radsek who had married Ed Meyer the previous year and resigned soon after to begin a family. The additional teacher then was needed to facilitate the growing enrollment at the school which soared to 95 students in the 1961-62 school year. In 1962, all of the attending children belonged either to member families or prospects. This is remarkable considering the fact that in the present day, about two-thirds of the St. Philip's student body is made up of non-members. The Lord was truly blessing every aspect of this congregation's work.

In 1964, the district mission board's report brought both good news and bad. Membership had reached the 300 mark and school enrollment was sitting just below 100

students. A new teacher, Else Flegel, was called to replace Mr. Thomas. St. Philip's continued to grow and adult confirmations still far exceeded those of the children.¹⁰ However, the property at 10th and Garfield was becoming a burden. Having already made an expensive repair to the heating system, it was also found that a great deal of interior as well as exterior work on the facility would need to be done soon; this would not be cheap.¹¹ To further complicate the matter, the route of the planned expressway, Interstate 43, was threatening the property as well. In addition to this, many of St. Philip's members were located or moving farther north than the 10th and Garfield location. Once again St. Philip's would have to consider a move.

A Difficult Decision:

Circumstances dictated that St. Philip's would have to move. Upcoming repairs meant that it would be more beneficial to move sooner rather than later. However, deciding where to move would prove to be a very difficult decision. Two sites especially were being considered, Bethesda Lutheran at 11th and Chambers and Divinity Lutheran at 1st and Chambers. Both had recently become available as the congregations had relocated either further west or further north. The first choice, in the eyes of the members of St. Philip's was Bethesda. This choice was logical for several reasons. First, it was a bit closer to the present location at 10th and Garfield, and also closer to more of the membership. Second, and perhaps more important, it had a very large school on site. The major setback however was the cost. The asking price for this property was \$75,000 and the mission board decided that this was more than it was willing to spend at this time.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 1964

¹¹ *ibid.*

Bethesda was eventually bought by the Baptist Church. The second option of Divinity was not popular among the membership of St. Philip's. The major reason for this was the lack of an onsite school. St. Philip's school which had begun with about 25 students was now nearly 100 strong. Principal Ed Meyer was absolutely opposed to relocating at the Divinity facility.¹² (He would accept a call elsewhere before St. Philip's began classes at the new site.) The congregation and teachers had worked hard to make the school a success and the Lord had certainly blessed their efforts. It is not surprising then that many had doubts about moving to the proposed 1st and Chambers location.

Reluctant to move to this property, several other plans were suggested. One thought was to disband the congregation and join membership with St. Marcus.¹³ This plan had some positive aspects; however it would mean the end of St. Philip's. Also, there were concerns what the reaction would be at St. Marcus. This plan didn't receive much support. Another option would be to remain intact as a congregation and hold separate services at St. Marcus.¹⁴ This was similar to a plan St. Philip's would consider in the future. Although, St. Philip's would remain organized under this plan, there were still concerns about losing their identity and again how St. Marcus would react to such a plan. The final option was to simply remain at their present location at 10th and Garfield in spite of the perceived difficulties of the coming freeway as well as the mounting maintenance costs.¹⁵ After deliberating the pro's and con's of each choice, the congregation reluctantly decided that the Divinity property on 1st and Chambers was the

¹² Interview with Nathaniel and Laura Harris, p. 1

¹³ Marquardt, p. 8

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 8

best option. The final agreed price for the facility was \$48,000. This was \$27,000 less than the Bethesda site and \$17,000 less than the cost of their previous facility at 10th and Garfield. But \$48,000 was not the final cost for this move. There was no organ at the new location and so St. Philip's would have to pay the costs to move the organ from their previous location. Also, the congregation refused to give up the idea of having their own school. It was determined that with a remodeling effort, one wing of the church as well as its basement could be converted into three school rooms. The cost for this was estimated at \$15,000.¹⁶ When this figure is added to the \$48,000 already paid and factored in with the cost of moving the organ, for which I could find no figures; all of a sudden the \$75,000 asking price of the well equipped Bethesda site doesn't seem so high. The decision to relocate on 1st and Chambers would have an enduring impact on the congregation, both good and bad; an impact that would be felt for the next 35 years of its history.

Turbulent Years:

June 13, 1965, marked the first worship service held at the new facility on 1st and Chambers.¹⁷ During the course of that summer the necessary renovations would take place to facilitate the plans for the on-site school. When the school began the following fall, three new teachers were on staff. Miss Else Flegel had resigned following the end of the 1964-1965 school year. Over the summer months, the remaining two teachers Joyce Vettings and Ed Meyer received and accepted calls elsewhere. Janet Bitter and Delores

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 16

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 13

Cook were assigned to St. Philip's upon graduating from Dr. Martin Luther College.¹⁸ Mr. Norbert Sprengeler accepted the call to be the principal for the newly relocated school. School enrollment leveled off in the mid 70's during these years at 1st and Chambers. The members viewed the new location as "not conducive for a school, it was too small and very crowded."¹⁹ This may have taken a toll on the teachers as well. In 1968, the school once again had three new teachers; Daniel Feldt, Diane Kloke and Kathleen Schumacher.²⁰ The school would see the arrival of three new teachers once again in 1970.²¹

Pastor Burk, who had been serving the congregation since 1956, saw them through the difficult transition from 10th and Garfield to 1st and Chambers. In the fall of 1966, Pastor Burk received and accepted the call to be Dean of Men at Wisconsin Lutheran College. Pastor Burk was described as a "sincere, trusted, and well-liked pastor."²² When Pastor Burk left St. Philip's, membership stood at 286 baptized and 160 confirmed; enrollment at the school was 72.²³ The Lord had blessed his nine years of service at St. Philip's and after accepting the call to Wisconsin Lutheran College his love for St. Philip's was manifested in his continued service to them as vacancy pastor until this position was filled the following summer.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14

¹⁹ Harris Interview, p.1

²⁰ District Mission Board Report, Southeastern WI, 1968

²¹ District Mission Board Report, Southeastern WI, 1970

²² Harris Interview, p.1

²³ WELS Statistical Report, 1966

Pastor Daniel Pautz replaced Pastor Burk in the summer of 1967. It is recalled that later in the evening on the same day that Pastor Pautz was installed at St. Philip's; the Milwaukee riots broke out. "There was concern for all the people who had come to St. Philip's for this special service."²⁴ The large scale riots did not break out until well after the installation service. Pastor Pautz' service to St. Philip's would not last long. His wife suffered from severe arthritis.²⁵ On advice from several physicians, Pastor Pautz accepted a call to Arizona a year later.²⁶ After his one year of service, St. Philip's membership stood at 271 baptized and 161 confirmed; enrollment at the school was 72.²⁷

A New Image:

In the summer of 1968, Pastor Gary Schroeder was called to serve St. Philip's. In a brief history written by several members of St. Philip's, it is noted that the congregation took on a new image during the years Pastor Schroeder served.²⁸ Just seeing the look on the faces of members who remember this pastor could tell you much about their love for him, but their words say even more. "He was young and enthusiastic; he had good ideas and formed good relationships. We appreciated his personal contact."²⁹ "He was mission-minded", "a people person", "a teacher", he was "up front" with people and they

²⁴ Harris Interview, p.1

²⁵ Marquardt, p. 17

²⁶ Dan Helwig, *WELS Evangelism Through St. Philip's, Milwaukee: Past, Present, and Future*, Senior Church History Paper, 1989, p. 8

²⁷ WELS Statistical Report, 1967

²⁸ Nathaniel and Laura Harris, *Church History*, p. 4

²⁹ Harris Interview, p.1

appreciated that.³⁰ Membership at St. Philip's reached an all time high of 580 baptized souls in 1974 under Pastor Schroeder's care and the Lord's blessing.³¹

Soon after Pastor Schroeder's arrival, an extensive evangelism program was launched.³² Emphasis was placed on member involvement in outreach. During this time, seniors from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary also lent support to evangelism efforts at St. Philip's.³³ St. Philip's had taken on the same image that had brought them into existence as a congregation, the image of outreach. A change in the congregation's image could also be seen in a revised liturgy devised to make the "worship service more relevant in meeting the needs of the congregation."³⁴ Vacation Bible School also exploded during Pastor Schroeder's service at St. Philip's. 187 students were enrolled his first year.³⁵ Just two years later there was a massive enrollment of 650 kids for VBS; 30 teachers were needed to manage the large group.³⁶ By tracking the membership numbers through Pastor Schroeder's seven years of service, it is evident that the outreach efforts were a great success. Membership stood at 278 baptized and 164 confirmed at the end of 1968, Pastor Schroeder's first year of service.³⁷ Two years later, at the end of 1970, baptized

³⁰ Interview with Mrs. Bessie Lynch, p. 1

³¹ WELS Statistical Report, 1974

³² District Mission Board Report, Southeastern WI, 1972

³³ Marquardt, p. 17

³⁴ Harris, *Church History*, p. 4

³⁵ WELS Statistical Report, 1968

³⁶ Marquardt, p. 18

³⁷ WELS Statistical Report, 1968

membership rose to 438 and confirmed membership to 222.³⁸ When Pastor Schroeder's service to St. Philip's came to a close, membership stood at 576 baptized and 288 confirmed; enrollment at the school was 71. These seven years of service were anything but lean. From St. Philip's, Pastor Schroeder accepted a call to serve as a missionary to Hong Kong and his departure brought to a close an important era for the congregation.

The significance of the Christian day school that St. Philip's was operating during this period of incredible growth should not be underestimated. About four years after Pastor Schroeder began, Ned Goede was called to teach at St. Philip's. Eventually Mr. Goede would become the principle of St. Philip's and remain with the school as a stabilizing factor throughout the remainder of its years at 1st and Chambers and well into its present location at Holton and Chambers. When the evangelism efforts of Pastor Schroeder's years cooled off a bit, the school remained an important outreach tool bringing new prospects through the doors of St. Philip's every year. It was mentioned before that the decision to relocate at 1st and Chambers would have a lasting impact on the congregation. This is perhaps most evident in the operation of the school. In its final years of operation at 10th and Garfield, the school's enrollment hovered around 100 students. During the course of its stay at 1st and Chambers, enrollment averaged around 74 students per year; a 25% drop. It was not for lack of interest that numbers in the school were down, but rather for lack of space. This roadblock to school growth would prompt yet another move in St. Philip's history which will be discussed later.

Four Four-Year Pastors:

Following Pastor Schroeder's seven years of service, St. Philip's would find itself with four different pastors, not counting vacancy pastors, within a sixteen year period.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 1970

Pastor Kurt Mahnke arrived at St. Philip's in 1975. Membership when he arrived stood at 576 baptized and 288 confirmed.³⁹ Just one year later, membership had declined to 411 baptized and 229 confirmed.⁴⁰ One explanation for this may be found in the District's Mission Board report from that same year. They write regarding St. Philip's, "they face the same erosion of membership as other churches in the inner city. As its members rise on the economic ladder, they move out of the inner city and affiliate with other congregations."⁴¹ That this was the case to a certain extent is verified by the testimony of several who were members during this time. However, it should also be noted that these members are among those who moved out of the inner city and yet continued to attend St. Philip's. Perhaps the change in pastoral personalities also played a factor in this decline. In the spring of 1978, Pastor Mahnke received and accepted a call to serve in Arizona. Membership when he left stood at 438 baptized and 252 confirmed with a weekly average attendance of 160; school enrollment stood at 72.⁴²

Seminarian James Witt III was serving as vicar during the final year of Pastor Mahnke's stay. Upon graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, James Witt was assigned as St. Philip's new pastor. Despite his young age and lack of experience, Pastor Witt would lead St. Philip's through a change that would alter the course of its history. The financial burden of operating a school was taking its toll on the congregation, even with the support it received from the synod. Just a few blocks away, Jerusalem Lutheran School was facing difficulties of its own. Its membership was on the decline and along

³⁹ WELS Statistical Report, 1975

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 1976

⁴¹ District Mission Board report, Southeastern WI, 1976

⁴² WELS Statistical Report, 1978

with it, enrollment in its school. St. Philip's had plenty of students, but lacked space and financial resources. Jerusalem had plenty of space, but lacked students and financial resources. In the fall of 1979, talks regarding a merger of the two schools commenced.⁴³ Its not all together clear what the origin of this move for merger was, whether from synod or one of the two congregations. However, both were in favor of discussing the matter. The main issues at hand in these discussions were over who would pay what percentage of the costs, what facilities could be used by each of the merging entities and who would have final say over administration and policies.⁴⁴ The discussions heated up quickly. In order to facilitate a resolution of the desired merger, Dr. Gary Greenfield was called in to serve as a mediator between the two sides.⁴⁵ In March of 1980, an agreement concerning the school was reached. The stipulations for the merger stated that the school would remain the property of Jerusalem. St. Philip's would pay 45% of the costs while Jerusalem would pick up the remaining 55%. In addition to this, Jerusalem reserved the right to revoke this agreement if any problems arose from it.⁴⁶ The newly merged school assumed the name Beautiful Savior Lutheran School and opened its doors in the fall of 1980 with an enrollment of 118.⁴⁷ Pastor Witt remained at St. Philip's until 1982.

⁴³ Matthew Brown, *The History of Jerusalem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI. 1960-2000*, Senior Church History Paper, 2000, p. 15

⁴⁴ Marquardt, p. 21

⁴⁵ Harris Interview, p. 3

⁴⁶ Brown, p. 15

⁴⁷ Marquardt, p. 21

Membership when he left stood at 404 baptized and 251 confirmed with a weekly average attendance of 121; school enrollment stood at 115.⁴⁸

After serving as vacancy pastor and once returning the call to serve as full-time pastor, Helmut Flegel, a counselor at Wisconsin Lutheran High School became the eighth pastor to serve St. Philip's in a full-time capacity.⁴⁹ His years would prove to be a sad period in the history of the congregation. Those who remember him described him as "very good, a counselor, he could talk to people."⁵⁰ "Pastor Flegel was very well liked."⁵¹ But, this well-liked pastor was suspended in 1986 for seeking an unscriptural divorce.⁵² Further offenses by Pastor Flegel have been outlined in a previous paper written about evangelism efforts through St. Philip's.⁵³ Flegel's well begun ministry turned bad. This sad note in St. Philip's history will lead those who read it to heed the Apostle Paul's word's all the more: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) Following his suspension, Pastor Flegel remained in the Milwaukee area serving a congregation not in our fellowship.⁵⁴ Membership when he left stood at 308 baptized and 193 confirmed with a weekly average attendance of 150; school enrollment stood at 104.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ WELS Statistical Report, 1982

⁴⁹ Marquardt, p. 22

⁵⁰ Lynch Interview, p. 2

⁵¹ Harris Interview, p. 3

⁵² Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention Proceedings, 1988, p. 21

⁵³ Helwig, p. 9

⁵⁴ Harris Interview, p. 3

⁵⁵ WELS Statistical Report, 1986

In July of 1987, graduate Terry Reich, was installed as St. Philip's new Pastor. Several outreach efforts that same year brought new members into the congregation.⁵⁶ Pastor Reich followed suit by implementing new programs geared toward evangelism, stewardship and youth discipleship.⁵⁷ Just two years later, a promising report by the district mission board concerning St. Philip's was given:

Weekly worship attendance is up 16% over the past two years. A marked renewal in fellowship through active youth, men's and women's clubs. A Gospel Choir serves as an arm of outreach.

A dramatic increase in offerings projects total self-support within four years. A real sense of 'friendship evangelism' finds people actively bringing in relatives and friends to share the Savior.⁵⁸

Although not all of the encouraging news in this report came to fruition, it is evident that the Lord continued to bless his people at St. Philip's despite a frequent turnover in pastorates. This same year marked the tenth anniversary of Beautiful Savior Lutheran School's joint operation by St. Philip's and Jerusalem. A self supporting daycare program was added and serving well as an additional outreach tool for the congregation.⁵⁹ Pastor Reich was well-liked by the congregation. His wife was especially remembered for being very involved and active in the congregation; "she was an asset."⁶⁰ Pastor Reich served St. Philip's until 1990. Membership when he left stood at 260 baptized and 187 confirmed with a weekly average attendance of 143.

⁵⁶ District Mission Board Report, 1988

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 1990

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Lynch Interview, p. 2

During this sixteen year period in St. Philip's history when a number of pastors came and went, it should also be noted that on several occasions, Pastors Mark and John Jeske served vacancies for the congregation. Their service was greatly appreciated and they are credited with holding things together during some difficult times in the history of this congregation.⁶¹

One More Move:

In November of 1991, Pastor Raymond Kimbrough arrived at St. Philip's and has remained with the congregation up to the present day. During the course of his years of service, St. Philip's again underwent many changes; but these are changes that have brought them to the position they are in today, and these are changes that promise to keep them in the position they are today. When Pastor Kimbrough arrived, he found a congregation that had weathered some difficult times due to change, and yet, through change, had remained in tact. And, there were opportunities here. The neighborhood was filled with kids, and the school remained a wonderful tool for outreach. However, financial difficulties remained a constant roadblock to the congregation. "Just to pay the bills was a continuing challenge and struggle."⁶² This was perhaps the biggest factor in St. Philip's next and probably final move.

Already in 1992, the idea of merging St. Philip's congregation with Jerusalem congregation was floating around at St. Philip's. Before long, Jerusalem was approached. It was appealing on both ends because of the financial burdens that could potentially be lifted by banding together. Only one property would need to be maintained. Perhaps

⁶¹ Harris Interview, p. 3

⁶² Interview with Raymond Kimbrough via e-mail, November 18, p. 1

only one pastor would need to be retained, at least in a full-time capacity. St. Philip's would no longer have to shuffle back and forth between their school and their church. Jerusalem, ^{which} who had very few students remaining in the joint school, would be relieved of a great financial burden. Merger made sense; but it would not happen.

The merger talks were moving a little to fast for Jerusalem. In a voters assembly held on September 20, 1992, Pastor Duane Erstad of Jerusalem stressed the need for this decision to be a spiritual one, not a financial one.⁶³ It seems that those who favored the merger didn't view it as being either a financial or a spiritual decision, but rather both. The merger talks would continue. As Jerusalem's membership continued to dwindle, the idea of some sort of merger with St. Philip's became more probable. Several ideas about the form that this merger might take were offered. One idea was, of course, a complete merger. Another idea was to sell the property to St. Philip's or to share the property with St. Philip's, but remain separate entities.⁶⁴ The idea that finally won the day came from Pastor Erstad and was passed soon after by Jerusalem's voters. They would simply give the property to St. Philip's.

A motion was made and carried by the Voter's Assembly on September 19, 1993, that Jerusalem congregation give St. Philip's congregation complete ownership, including deeds, of Jerusalem's entire church and school property. Jerusalem will retain (1) the right to occupy and use any and all of these facilities, on a shared basis with St. Philip's, as long as Jerusalem congregation exists, and (2) equal representation and authority on an "operations committee" which will oversee the operation and maintenance of the church property only. Jerusalem will pay to St. Philip's (1) one-half of all maintenance capital repair expenses for the church property only, for as long as it is able to do so, and (2) school tuition for Jerusalem member students according to a Jerusalem member-parent policy for as long as it is able to do so. Specific details for this arrangement will be developed

⁶³ Brown, p. 19

⁶⁴ Brown, p. 19

to the mutual satisfaction of Jerusalem and St. Philip's congregations prior to executing any binding agreement and/or transfer of property.⁶⁵

In October of 1993, the specific details had been arranged and St. Philip's voters accepted the proposal made by Jerusalem. St. Philip's sold their property at 1st and Chambers and moved into their new and current home at Holton and Chambers in March of 1994. For nearly the next ten years, both congregations would exist and worship under the same roof, but never merge. Jerusalem worshiped at 9:00am followed by St. Philip's at 10:30am. They kept their own pastors, their own worship styles, their own traditions and their own routines. To adequately answer why these two congregations never officially merged would be a difficult task, yet there are many reasons offered.

In a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article by Felicia Thomas-Lynn entitled *Praying Apart*, the situation between the two congregations is described as follows: "In this tale of two congregations – one almost all black, the other white – under one roof, attempts to combine the two Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregations have failed."⁶⁶ The writer goes on to refer to the situation as a "metaphor for Sunday morning in metropolitan Milwaukee."⁶⁷ Lynn implies throughout the course of the article that race is the prime issue in preventing a merger. It was certainly *an* issue, but not one that prevented the merger in my estimation.

All sorts of issues came into play and together resulted in a decision not to merge. Both congregations had long, rich traditions; to simply lay aside their identities and merge with another group of Christians would not be as easy as it might appear from the

⁶⁵ Brown, p. 19-20

⁶⁶ Felicia Thomas-Lynn, *Praying Apart*, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, June 2, 2002

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

outside looking in. Because of the racial difference between the two congregations, there were also different worship styles; not drastically different, but different none the less.

There is confusion in the Journal-Sentinel article over this very point. Both the writer of the article as well as a Jerusalem member quoted in the article point to a different message in worship when in reality the difference lay in the medium. There are certainly two different styles of worship; yet they both center on the cross. There were two different congregational identities, two different histories, two different worship styles, two sets of differing traditions and two sets of differing personalities both among the membership and the leadership in each congregation. These would all be lost, or at least changed had a merger taken place. In 1989, Pastor Mark Jeske of St. Marcus, was asked what the benefit would be if these two congregations were to merge. His response is worth considering when looking at the issue. He says, "It might not be the unalloyed blessing that it might appear to be."⁶⁸ He goes on to say, "There is no doubt that when two churches are merged into one that some of the uniqueness is lost, that the merged identity is going to be less than the sum of the two parts. The WELS would be poorer for having one church instead of two."⁶⁹ It would be difficult to point to one single factor that explains why the two never merged; and while some are surprised that the congregations never did merge; it may have, in fact, been more surprising if they had.

Now, however, the point is mute. Jerusalem congregation officially disbanded in 2003. Whatever interest they had remaining in the property at Holton and Chambers was officially relinquished to St. Philip's upon their dissolution. St. Philip's, however, continues; both church and school. (Now once again called St. Philip's Lutheran School)

⁶⁸ Helwig, p. 15

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p. 15

Their ability to adapt over the years to changing circumstances and changing scenery may be one of the keys for their continued growth at the present location. Just as in the 1950's when this neighborhood was undergoing much ethnic and social change, so also now, this same sort of change is coming again as the inner city moves farther out and the east side moves farther west. St. Philip's may very well find itself in a situation very similar to that of Jerusalem and other former congregations in that area, facing many of the same decisions about whether to adapt, move or disband.

Recent Developments:

Several other items of note should be mentioned concerning St. Philip's in recent years. One of these is St. Philip's decision to go to the School Choice or Voucher plan. This plan allows qualifying families to receive a voucher from the State of Wisconsin to use at various private or religious schools in lieu of the tax-payer funded education their children would receive in the Milwaukee Public School system. This has indeed been a blessing for the school and the congregation as a whole. It has allowed them not only to remain open, but to thrive at a time when other synod schools are either merging or closing. Current figures show that approximately 85% of students enrolled at St. Philip's participate in the Choice program.⁷⁰ Many of these come from non-member families. In fact, two-thirds of the students enrolled at St. Philip's in 2003 are from non-member families.⁷¹ So the reinvigorated school remains as a valuable outreach tool to this very day, a tool that both the current pastor and principle of St. Philip's are working hard at utilizing well. The down side of the School Choice arrangement is the lack of a back-up plan should these state monies be cut off. There is no doubt that the congregation has

⁷⁰ Kimbrough Interview, p. 3

⁷¹ *ibid.* p. 3

their trust in God, and not the wealth of the state; however, judging by the current enrollment figures and the cost of operating a school, it's hard to imagine that St. Philip's could continue at its' current level without the Choice program in place.

Another item to note in St. Philip's recent history is the remodeling that took place both within the school (on a smaller scale) and in the sanctuary on a grander scale. In the year 2000, the school underwent minor cosmetic changes, receiving a new paint job and new carpeting throughout. The result is a much more comfortable atmosphere for the students. Just two years ago, the interior of the sanctuary underwent a major facelift. Cracking plaster, dark wall paper and dim lighting had been calling for renewal for some time. At the cost of approximately \$90,000, all gathered internally, the sanctuary was renovated and repainted top to bottom with marvelous results.⁷² To this day St. Philip's enjoys both an excellent and beautiful church and school, filled with kids and growing in members.

Final Thoughts:

The history of St. Philip's congregation is both interesting and mobile. Throughout the years of its existence, what is evident at every stage is the Lord's guiding hand and sustaining blessing. Decisions that were difficult at the time were turned into blessing by our God at the proper time. I asked the Harris' what they would have said if someone had told them when they were worshipping in the former broom factory that in 50 years they would call the facility at Holton and Chambers their own, a facility that they knew then as Jerusalem. They smiled. Having had the privilege to worship with this congregation on many occasions and having gotten to know many of the members

⁷² It should be noted that different contractors than those who painted the school were used in repainting the sanctuary.

here, it is my prayer that the Lord would continue to bless this congregation of believers in the same fashion as he has for some 50 years.

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