

Glimpses

of
St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church



Awaiting the Opening of the Church 9-14-52

By Ivan Quandt

Pastor Voss rose to the challenge. We don't know how many new members found their own way into St. John's and how many he brought in, but there are members today who joined St. John at his invitation. During his first four years, from 1952 to 1956, membership rose from 90 to 175.

But membership was not the only good news - the time period during which the congregation was served by Pastor Voss and Pastor Janssen, who followed him, is regarded as a very favorable time. The post World War II era of prosperity, growth, and American pride was in evidence everywhere.



Pastor Kurt Voss

This series of Glimpses has followed the history of St. John Lutheran Church since it began in Philadelphia in 1848. In the last issue, we looked at the details of one of the most dramatic undertakings of this congregation, the move to Springfield. Construction on the new building was begun in 1951, but it quickly fell behind schedule. Finally, after worshipping for some time in a school auditorium and after losing their pastor, Rev. Alfred Leja, the congregation dedicated its new building and installed its new pastor on the same date, September 14, 1952.

Perhaps Pastor Kurt Voss felt both the excitement and the challenge that September day. Those who remember him describe him as a humble and a dedicated man. But, serving this congregation was to be quite different than serving as a missionary in China, his previous placement. Only a remnant of the old Philadelphia membership was living in the Springfield area and the church had to adjust to a new environment. Besides, there were many debts to pay related to the construction of the new building.

Church attendance was a socially acceptable activity. The Philadelphia region was experiencing its last growth spurt. In Springfield and the surrounding communities, new housing developments were mushrooming everywhere - in many, many of those new houses (and some old), newlyweds and other young couples invested their futures. And so it was that many young couples became members of St. John.

Some of the membership growth, then, was internal, as St. John's members made their own contributions to the baby boom. Sunday School at-

tendance increased, Pastor Voss addressed the growing number of children in his sermons (even using puppets in the pulpit), and Walther League (youth organiza-

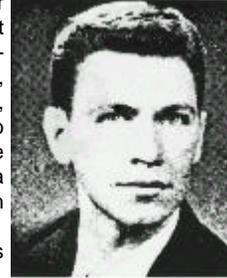


Eli & Kurt Voss prior to leaving for Korea

tion) membership grew to about 20. A kindergarten class was established in 1954 and continued until 1971, when the Springfield School District established its own kindergarten program.

The favorable times for St. John's Church did not prevent the congregation from experiencing a recurrent problem however, rapid turnover of pastors. In 1957, Pastor Voss decided to return to the foreign missions field. He accepted a call by synod to a Mission in Korea and the church was again left with a vacancy.

The vacancy was not filled until the following year, when The Reverend Arlo Janssen accepted the call from St. John. Under his leadership, much of the vitality of the congregation continued and grew. This was a time of much activity among the members. In addition to the Sunday School and a l-



Pastor Arlo Janssen

also had its opportunity to develop during this time period.

One of the most remarkable church groups from this era was the Mr. and Mrs. Club. With so many young couples among the membership and with so much vitality in the church, it is not surprising to learn that this club was large and very active. Such names as Purcell, Freeberger, Howarth, Morris, Minter, and Mars were on the attendance lists. The church basement became the frequent scene of dinners, various social events, mother and daughter banquets, hosted by the husbands, and father and son banquets hosted by the wives. There was even an annual show put on by the couples of the club for the congregation at large.

Then Pastor Janssen was overcome by some very upsetting personal problems. He felt it necessary to abruptly leave the congregation and in 1961, less than three years after his arrival, he accepted a call that allowed him to fill a vacancy in California. St. John was left, for the thirteenth time, without a pastor.

Even before Pastor Janssen departed, an old problem began to once more rear its head - declining membership. But, this is where



Kindergarten Graduation
Congregation president Bruce Stewart presents diploma to future president Steve Howarth

ther League already mentioned, the Mary-Martha Guild (which celebrated its one hundredth anniversary in 1957), the Lutheran's Women's Missionary League, and adult Bible study groups flourished. Since an organ had been purchased and a music director engaged during the final year that Pastor Voss was at St. John, the new choir



the story will

Church Bazaar

(Dee Howarth, Midge Moros, Dick & Joyce Purcell, Bill Englander)

St. John 150 Years!