

# Glimpses

of  
St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

By Ivan Quandt

In the December issue of Glimpses, a view of 150 years of history at St. John, we saw how the congregation became one of the early members of the English District and we saw it poised to make St. John the "Mother Church" of Missouri Synod Lutheranism in the Philadelphia area. Already under Pastor Schwehn, the congregation established the Church Advancement Committee and charged it to investigate the possibility of founding new Lutheran congregations in the area. When Pastor Behrens arrived in 1927, the Church Advancement Committee changed its mission from *Investigating* the establishment of new congregations to that of planning for them.

Over a period of 17 years, from his second year at St. John until somewhat close to his last, Pastor Behrens and his congregation founded (i.e., helped with organizing, initiating, and supporting) five new mission congregations in the Philadelphia area. Here are those missions as they appeared around 1948:



Church of the Redeemer,  
Mayfair section (1928)



Bethany Church,  
Trenton, N.J. (1934)



Martin Luther Chapel,  
Pennsauken, N.J. (1935)



Grace Lutheran Church, Broomall, PA (1943)

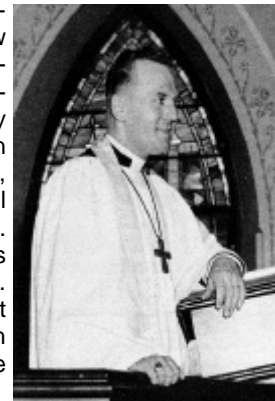


St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Castor Gardens (1945)

Note that the first 3 were founded during the great depression and the last 2 during World War II. In addition, Pastor Behrens is given credit for establishing a mission in Princeton, N.J.

Meanwhile, the St. John congregation: continued to thrive on Wharton Street in South Philadelphia. In his 1993 history of the congregation, Pastor David Liefeld described the twenty year ministry of Pastor Behrens as a period of vitality, a "high point" in the church's history, and described the congregation as "active and alive".during this time.

Eventually, however, Pastor Behrens saw the need to leave the congregation. In 1947, he accepted a call to a newly established congregation in Arlington Heights, Illinois, and delivered his farewell sermon on September 7. Evidently, Pastor Behrens has never forgotten St. John. In June of 1993, at the congregation's 145th anniversary, he visited the church once more and served as guest liturgist.



Pastor Alfred Leja

Once again, the congregation was faced with the task of locating a new pastor. A call committee was formed. Among its members were the president of the congregation, William Beckler, and the chairman of deacons, Horace Garton. We know little about the calling process that followed, except that the first list of candidates did not contain the name of the pastor who eventually accepted the call and it was a long vacancy.

Whatever the circum-

stances, during the first half of 1948, St. John's was blessed with the arrival of The Rev. Alfred Leja. Pastor Leja was to stay only 4 years, but 2 important events took place in that time period.

When Pastor Leja arrived, plans were well along for the first of these events, the celebration of the congregation's one hundredth anniversary (1848-1948). A refined anniversary book was published for the occasion and it included a long list of organizations within the congregation: Ladies Aid, Junior and Senior Walther Leagues, Sunday School, Choir, Lutheran Laymen's League, and Lutheran Women's Missionary League. The anniversary book also honors 2 men, Theodore Miller and Carl Dieter, Sr., each of whom served the congregation as minister of music for at least a half century.

The second event, and the one of greater significance for our current membership, was the decision to abandon the site of the church in Philadelphia and find a new location.

As might be expected, finding that new location was very problematic since members and former members of St. John lived in every direction from the existing South Philadelphia site. St. John historians report, "many meetings were held, opinions expounded, and surveys conducted." The choice to move to Springfield was a difficult one and the task of designing and building an edifice was formidable.

However, this is the story for the ninth issue of Glimpses.

## St. John 150 Years!