





THE HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S

When recording the history of a church one must recognize an intertwining of people and things. A building is the outward manifestation by which our neighbors tend to identify a church; and this "thing", with its appurtenances, is relatively easy to record as history. We tend to be more definite in accounting for money spent, hence the information remains for posterity to follow.

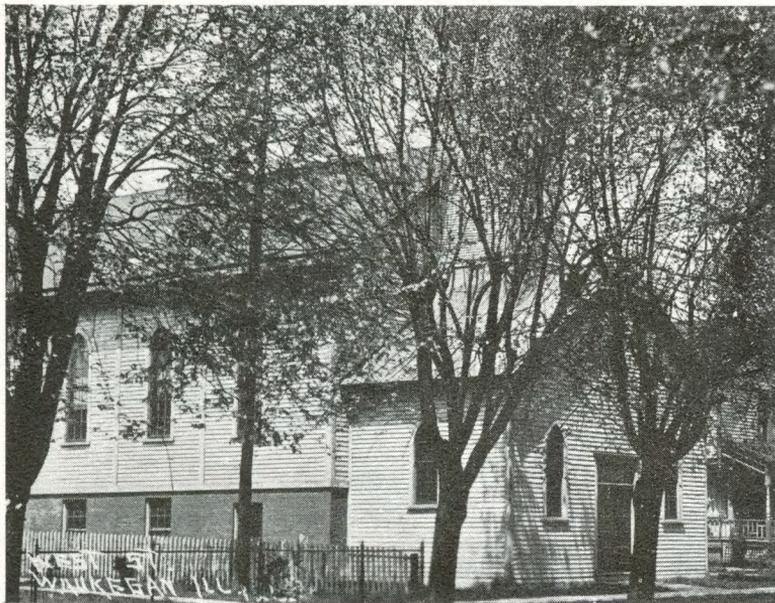
People, however, are the motivation behind the chronological happening of these "things," and are, in truth, what constitutes the church so far as its conscientious members and God are concerned. Unfortunately, it is impossible to adequately record for history the relative importance to the church and its history of the many members and friends who pass through its doors and contribute to its existence and welfare through time.

Consequently, much of this written history of St. John's will be in terms of things; but it is hoped that each reader will be reminded thereby of the people they have known and the contributions made by those people throughout that chronology.

In 1863 some 63 persons formed what was called the German Evangelical Protestant Church of St. John's Congregation in Waukegan, Lake County, Illinois. This group, for some eight years, had no building to call "home," nor leader to call "pastor." With what must have been strong determination this group is believed to have met in such places as the old Central School, in a building on County Street which was once known as the Salvation Army building, and even in the Court House basement. Ministers from neighboring churches were called upon to conduct services and offer the sacraments.

In 1871 they called their first pastor, the Rev. August Becker. In the same year the church was reorganized as the German Reformed Church of St. John's Congregation. The German language was spoken in their services, which probably accounts for the early strength of this group. It served the German element of the community at a time when some people of this background may not have otherwise comfortably received the ministry.

This congregation laid the cornerstone on August 5, 1872, for its first building, still standing at 110 North West Street at the time of this writing. The building cost \$850 and was dedicated in November that year. It was designed to include facilities for a parochial school, which was, in fact, operated for ten years with a curriculum that included the German language. The Rev. Mr. Becker was listed as principal and a teacher of this school. November 25, 1872, was the date of incorporation of St. John's, and it is from this date that we celebrate our centennial.



Church building erected in 1872

The Rev. H. Holliger served as minister from 1914 to 1927, during which period the transition from the German language to English was completed and the name of the congregation was changed to St. John's Reformed Church. Also during this period "things" were changed: central heat replaced the stove in the sanctuary, an electric organ replaced the one which was pumped by hand, and art glass memorial windows were installed.

From 1927 to 1930 the Rev. Ray Klingeman was our minister, and during these years the membership made some significant and

lasting strides as a result of the strong emphasis on the youth program. This organized program continued through the depression and until World War II. As in all churches the youth program has suffered from the effects of the draft, then the exodus to college, then the general apathy and influence of other activities which have taken their toll on church life during the past decade.

In 1934 our denomination, the Reformed Church in the United States, merged with the Evangelical Synod of North America, and we became known as St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church.

For the celebration of our 75th anniversary in 1947 major remodeling of the building was undertaken, including rearrangement of the organ with addition of a new, remote console, providing a more attractive and functional rostrum with paneling across the front of the sanctuary, new lighting, flooring, and decorating. The building took on a new appearance with removal of the original steeple in favor of a short belfry and small spire, and a new entrance.



Exterior remodeling for 75th anniversary



The house at 108 North West Street was acquired in 1952. It became the parsonage in 1955, allowing the house behind the church to become the Fellowship House for use as Sunday School rooms and for other meeting purposes.

1957 was another milestone in our denominational life. In that year the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged with the Congregational Christian Church to form the United Church of Christ. We adopted our present name, St. John's United Church of Christ.

By 1961 we saw the population of Waukegan spreading away from the downtown vicinity while there continued to exist some seven major protestant churches within a few blocks of each other. In the hope of better serving the city's population in the direction



Ground-breaking ceremony in 1967

of its growth, we acquired a seven acre tract of land at 1400 Mc-Aree Road and developed plans for building. Ground was broken in 1967, the first service held in the present building on August 25, 1968, and the building dedicated in 1969. For the first time we had facilities primarily designed for a Christian Education program, having deferred plans for the ultimate sanctuary wing until adequate finances would be available. As it is, this "thing" cost \$23,000 for the land and \$120,000 for the building - considerably different from the \$850 spent for the first building.



Our beautiful Chapel Garden
with the hand-hewn cross



The new sundial
adds to the beauty
of the church grounds



So the efforts of the faithful have continued through the years. Paramount through this century of work have been the ministry to the faith of Christian believers, provision of sacraments, and education of our children. Recent years have seemed to bring the greatest of changes. The very doctrines of Christianity and the purpose of ritual have been challenged as never before throughout



this 100 years. While our society is necessarily developing a do-it-yourself attitude in the home, it is fostering a let-someone-else do it approach in our church life, which gives us pause to ask ourselves whether there is hope for as much progress in the next hundred years as we have experienced through this first hundred.



How do we at St. John's measure our progress? Not by doctrine, for we have remained stable as an autonomous body owning our own property and calling our own ministers while affiliated with a given denomination throughout its several mergers. Not, either, by numbers. In 1874 our membership numbered 137 - today, not more than 185.

Rather, it seems, we measure our progress by the spiritual growth of those who have passed through our membership. Just as we have had, during these 100 years, some 21 ministers, each promoting progress in some particular way, so we have ministered to many hundreds of people who have, we hope, made Waukegan and the world a better place in which to live.