

HISTORY MINUTE

Presented by Edward Spannus

September 27, 2015



Celebrating our 200th Anniversary

On October 3-4, 1965, we celebrated our 200th anniversary. The celebration included:

1. The publication of the first comprehensive history of our congregation, *A People of God, 1765-1965*, written by Pastor Michael Kretsinger. Although we now think of this as “Volume I” of our church history, at the time it was undoubtedly ground-breaking: the first in-depth treatment of this congregation’s history: our pastors, the buildings, the membership, our music through the years, our national and global outreach (through work of the Council, for which, he wrote, the time was past when the Council’s labor was just to attend to repairs and patching, hitching posts, fences, and the pastor’s salary. He also cited the Woman’s Missionary Society, later merged into Lutheran Church Women and WELCA), and the Luther Leagues and Lutheran Men’s program). As Pastor Kretsinger wrote: “Since the mid-1940s and the early 1950s, the church’s ministry has exploded to include the world, literally. We might even say that since Christ issued the command of ‘Go into all the world,’ the church for the first time is in the threshold of actually doing it. This writer believes that if the ‘1765, Rev. Schwerdfeger’ could see this local Church Council ministering the way it does to the WORLD—he wouldn’t believe it!”
2. Three anniversary services: The first on Saturday evening, with the sermon by Dr. Frank Fife, the president of the Maryland Synod and a long-time friend of New Jerusalem; the second service a communion service on Sunday morning, with Dr. Luther Mauney of the Virginia Synod; and the third service held on Sunday afternoon, which featured the welcome of a new church, with Pastor Gordon Hite, the pastor of the new mission church in Leesburg, now Holy Trinity. The bulletin noted that, “It is significant that exactly 200 years after the organization of New Jerusalem, a new Lutheran Church organizes in Loudoun County.”

3. The fact that the presidents of both the Maryland and Virginia Synods participated, reflected the somewhat turbulent situation around the mergers that created the LCA (Lutheran Church in America) in 1962. We had wished to remain in the Maryland Synod, but were forced against our wishes to join the Virginia Synod—an action about which Pastor Kretsinger had some strong words in his 1965 history. But, as he commented, we got over it, and we moved on.
4. The Sunday afternoon service concluded with the closing of the cornerstone. The old cornerstone had been opened a few months earlier, after a copper box was removed from the corner of the church tower built in 1903. They believed that the box was placed when the church was rebuilt after the 1868 fire, and was moved to the tower when that was built around the corner of the church building. The copper box contained old religious memorabilia, old newspapers, and other items including a coin dated 1795. At the end of the service, the copper box was re-sealed—by Lee Moore—and placed back in the corner of the tower, where it rests today, until who knows when.

Some important lessons for today are found in the concluding section of Pastor Kretsinger's 1965 history, entitled "Threshold," and which was accompanied by a photo of the Old Cemetery:

Why conclude our 200th Anniversary booklet with a section called, 'Threshold?' Because if the pine tree and the stones on the Old Cemetery could speak, this is what they would say:

"YOU—YOU PEOPLE OF GOD, 1965—YOU ARE NOT AT THE END OF AN ERA—YOU ARE ON THE THRESHOLD!!"

The tree would then say:

"TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT MY LOWER LIMB—I MET WITH DISASTER ONE DAY. DID I COMPLAIN AND TURN MY BACK? DID I GIVE UP AND SAY, 'OH, WHAT'S THE USE?' NO!! WITH WILL AND DETERMINATION, I MADE THE BEST OF IT—I REACHED FOR THE 'LIGHT' AND TURNED MY BROKEN LIMB UPWARD."

Next the stones would speak:

"DON'T WEEP OVER US. OUR LIVES HAVE BEEN SPENT IN THE SERVICE OF GOD, COUNTRY, AND OUR CHURCH. OUR RECORD IS HISTORY NOW. WHAT WILL YOURS BE?"

Then together the tree and the stones would say:

"AS WE HAVE TAKEN A STAND IN OUR DAY—YOU TAKE A STAND IN YOUR DAY!! MAKE CHRIST MEAN SOMETHING IN YOUR GENERATION! DON'T YOU

DARE LET HIS NAME TAKE A BACK SEAT! LET HIS NAME BE A HOUSEHOLD WORD OF STRENGTH, DETERMINATION, AND COURAGE. ABOVE ALL, DON'T BE ASHAMED OF HIS GOSPEL. ARE YOU PROUD OF YOUR CHURCH AND ITS HISTORY??

WELL THEN SHOW IT!!!”

And here comes a message from Pastor Mike, directly for us today:

“YOU’RE ON A THRESHOLD. LET THE GENERATIONS THAT CELEBRATE THE 250TH AND 300TH ANNIVERSARIES KNOW MOST ASSUREDLY:

... HERE STOOD A PEOPLE OF GOD!!!”