

## ***Chapter Two***

### **Decades of Growth: 1960s and 1970s**

*“The past is but a prologue to the future. There will certainly be mundane housekeeping tasks and further financial commitments. There will be exciting outreaching and exuberant celebrations. There will be frustrations and grief, and there will be loving fellowship and renewals of faith.”*

*“St. Mark’s Lutheran Church—1953-1978”*

During the 1960s and 1970s, St. Mark’s expanded rapidly and dramatically, along with the broader Washington metropolitan region. Yet even as the congregation grew steadily in numbers and in its physical plant, the membership retained the warmth of close fellowship and communion. Ruth Hellwig said it well when she recalled that “all aspects of our lives revolved around St. Mark’s.” This remarkable statement—about a worshipping community that nurtured a strong feeling of identity while expanding rapidly—came to distinguish St. Mark’s during these decades.

The 1960s appear in the early church histories as “The Growing Years,” a decade of accelerated development of programs and major physical expansion. “During the formative and growing years,” these documents report, “many people were contributing their time and talent” to a variety of activities, including “Sunday School, administrative duties, Women’s Guild, St. Mark’s Garden Club, Boy Scout Troop 881, Vacation Bible School, confirmation classes, choirs, special music, visiting, yard maintenance, and other special tasks too numerous to mention.” St. Mark’s also had a key role in the founding of ECHO, a coalition of churches organized to distribute food to the area needy. Behind all of these efforts were committed church members, each one important to the larger story of St. Mark’s growth during this period.

Then, as now, the music program of St. Mark’s was vital to the life of the congregation. Olaf Homeland was the first choir director. He was succeeded by Fred Wygal, who remained in that position until 1964, at which time Joe Adgate inaugurated his long and successful tenure as choir director. Two years earlier, Adair McConnell became organist, a position held initially by Grace Donlos, William Harris, Lorna Homeland, and Richard Keller.

In 1962, the Augustana Lutheran Church, United Lutheran Church of America, Suomi Synod, and American Evangelical Lutheran Church joined in the historic merger that resulted in creating the Lutheran Church of America. As part of that merger, St. Mark’s joined a newly organized Virginia Synod. From the beginning of the merger process, the people of St. Mark’s followed Pastor Carlson’s strong support for Lutheran ecumenism. And as the new Virginia Synod formed, the congregation emerged as a leader in the new body.

The growth of St. Mark’s in the 1960s was evident in two developments. The first was the continuation of building the church’s physical infrastructure. In 1963, the building committee addressed the need for additional space for the teaching and learning function of the church. The committee, consisting of Russell Brundage, Bud Hellwig, Charles Major, John Ostby, and Morgan Percy, with Claire Mueller serving as chair, created a plan that would result in construction of the last unit, as well as expansion and improvement of the parking lot.

After four years of planning and fund-raising, St. Mark’s broke ground on a new educational wing during fall 1967. Completed at the end of the next year, the new unit, costing \$440,000, opened with great celebration. Dr. J. Luther Mauney, President of the Virginia Synod, presided over the dedication. Fifteen years after the congregation had been founded, a large and expansive physical plant was in place.

Throughout this period of physical expansion, the congregation had emphasized the importance of visual art as part of the religious experience. They accordingly commissioned Una Hanbury, a

sculptor, to create three pieces expressive of the shared spiritual and community values of the growing congregation. Her contributions are the statue at the entrance to the church entitled "Family" and two relief sculptures, one in the lounge and the other at the entrance to the education wing.

The second important event was the arrival, in February 1964, of Richard A. Berry as the first associate minister. Pastor Carlson remembers him as "a very able, likeable, and effective pastor," in part because his young colleague provided much needed assistance in ministering to a growing church and also because Pastor Berry brought his own particular strengths to pastoral care. For the next six years, the two worked side-by-side.

Meanwhile, St. Mark's extended its efforts into the field of pre-school education. A few weeks before the educational section was officially dedicated, St. Mark's School opened under the leadership of Esther McCary with strong support from Jim and June Harvey, members of the congregation. Following the Montessori Method of child-centered learning, the new school sought to provide early education to the children of both the congregation and the surrounding neighborhood. A few years later, Judy Carter-Sanford became director and the school is now in its forty-seventh year of operation.

In many ways, the 1970s represented a continuation of the 1960s. As families such as the Harveys and others arrived to take part in congregational initiatives, the circle of activism widened. New members joined steadily throughout the decade, filling positions of responsibility vacated by positions of responsibility vacated by members relocated to service and communities elsewhere. The numbers of children and communicants continued to expand over these years, although not at the same dramatic pace as in the previous decade. In 1973, the church had 1,302 communicants and 1,852 baptized members. These numbers remained firm, increasing slightly each year of the new decade.

The 1970s also found the congregation, like much of the nation, confronting social issues on a scale never before encountered. The twenty-fifth anniversary history framed this development with clarity and honesty: "The Church could not separate itself from the social issues that had surfaced during the sixties. The issues of the Vietnam War, ERA, abortion, drugs, Watergate, and others had dramatically affected the lives of many who worshiped at St. Mark's. New programs were instituted in the form of adult forums, educational programs, and seminars to assist in the search for understanding of the current issues."

As debate of these issues unfolded, both formally and informally, St. Mark's acted to sponsor a series of refugee families. Over the course of the decade and beyond, three families from Vietnam and one from Afghanistan received church sponsorship and direct financial assistance. Other challenges of the 1970s included the inauguration of the first communion service for youth who had not yet been confirmed, revision of the confirmation curriculum, election of Charlotte Lutz as the first woman to serve on Church Council, and inclusion of girls along with boys to serve as acolytes for services of worship. The decade was, in so many ways, about change within the life of the congregation and its consequences.

Pastoral staff turnovers occurred steadily throughout the decade. Pastor Berry resigned in 1970 and Lance R. Braun, newly graduated from Gettysburg Seminary, replaced him. Six years later, Alan Rider became the second seminarian to graduate from Gettysburg and join Pastor Carlson as associate pastor, taking over from Rev. Braun, who entered the campus ministry. The changes in the pastoral ranks brought a series of talented and varied personalities into the life of the congregation.

In the 1970s, as St. Mark's became a large suburban congregation, hosting a substantial membership in a modern physical plant, the church matured and evolved beyond its founding years. Yet the original impetus and commitment that had led to its creation remained intact and at the core of the church's sense of identity. The 1970s tested the varied strengths of St. Mark's and found the congregation secure within itself as a spiritual community, always ready and prepared to serve humanity locally and the larger metropolitan region.