

Introduction

The Past That Informs the Present: Writing the History of St. Mark's

*“Let us sing together, let us sing together,
One and all a joyous song.
Let us sing again and again . . .
One and all a joyous song.”*

“Rounds,” St. Mark's Song Sheet (1960s)

The history of St. Mark's Lutheran Church has long been the “joyous song” that members of the congregation sing time and again. Founded 59 years ago near the crossroads of Northern Virginia, the church has served as an intersection that brings human need into contact with God's redemptive action.

The writing of the congregation's history has been undertaken many times. During the fall of 1962, a small group of St. Mark's members formed a committee to honor the upcoming tenth anniversary of the founding of the church. Working on this project were Russell Brundage, Carlton Moorefield, Claire Mueller, Karl Saalbach, and Betty Sommer, who also served as chair.

Many events were planned but much of the energy of the group was focused on recording the young church's brief history. The next fall, an eighty-page booklet entitled “St. Mark's: The First Ten Years” appeared. When read today, that booklet remains an impressive testimony to the strong feelings associated with the early years of the congregation.

Over the next twenty-five years, others followed in the footsteps of the first church historians. In 1973, the twentieth anniversary was also acknowledged with a similar vigor. Gerald Burke headed a committee that included his wife Fae, Pastor and Alice Carlson, “Mo” Haupt, Morgan Percy, and Thea Thompson. A special Christmas-time dinner at the church featured “The First Twenty Years” and included a “Sketch of History” that was presented to the assembled gathering. Five years later Bob and Iva Parrott joined Joan Enerson in creating a twenty-fifth anniversary update of the church's founding and early years. Then in 1988, the Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Committee, led by Marlys Renner, took that effort yet another step with the addition of recent events and photographs of new members.

In 2003, the Fiftieth Anniversary Committee, chaired by Alice McRorie, reviewed these earlier church histories and, among many other efforts, produced “Founded in Faith, Growing in Grace: A Fiftieth Anniversary History.” This study sought to honor all those who had, over the years, contributed to telling the story of how the congregation had evolved. At the time, four members of the original congregation generously shared their remembrances of the first days of the congregation: Fae Burke, LaVon Clark, Ruth Hellwig, and Eleanor Saalbach spoke of services in the old farm house that functioned as the original place of worship, the young families who became the core of the new church, and the arrival of a young pastor and his wife who would provided the leadership that soon led to a flourishing congregation.

The story of writing the history of St. Mark's, therefore, has always been a group effort. And that effort represents the past that continually informs the present congregation. Today, more than ever, that “joyous song” needs to be remembered as the church continues its mission at the same crossroads where it has been located for over a half century. Thanks be to God for His presence and inspiration in leading our congregation through those years and the ones yet to come.