



# THE HISTORY OF ST. MARCUS

Mark Jeske











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# **The History of St. Marcus Lutheran Church & School**

Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
2025

The story of St. Marcus is a tale of a remarkable congregation in a remarkable neighborhood in a remarkable city. How God has blessed all three! On the occasion of St. Marcus' 150th anniversary, here is a collection of stories of how our congregation came to be what it is today. May they inspire your heart to praise our God and Savior for His mighty works in history. May you thrill to realize how vast are the multitudes of thousands and thousands of people on whose shoulders we stand today. And may these stories inspire your heart and mind to invest your passion and energy into St. Marcus' next 150 years.









# The Origins of Milwaukee

No one knows for sure where the name “Milwaukee” came from or what it means. As good a guess as any is that it means “Gathering of the Waters,” which is certainly appropriate for a city built around the junction of three major rivers in southeastern Wisconsin: the Milwaukee, running north, the Menomonee, running west, and the Kinnickinnic, running south and west.

Wisconsin was home to a variety of native American tribes: Potawatomi, Menomonee, Ho-Chunk (a.k.a. Winnebago), Sauk, Fox, Ojibwe, and others. At one time there were many Indian burial effigy mounds in Wisconsin. One was quite close to the neighborhood where St. Marcus would later be built on what would one day become 6<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets. French fur traders worked a string of trading posts throughout Wisconsin from their bases in Fort Michilimackinac (Mackinaw) and La Baie (Green Bay). A number of those traders found it profitable to operate part-time trading posts in the area around the three rivers mentioned above. The first to choose to live here full-time was Solomon Juneau with his wife Josette in 1822.

Present-day Wisconsin was then part of the vast Northwest Territory, which at one time included everything in the Midwest today that is west of Pennsylvania, north of the Ohio River, and east of the Mississippi. As such it was all federally owned. One by one, states were formed from the Territory after their populations reached a certain size: Ohio in 1803, Indiana in 1816,

Illinois in 1818, and Michigan in 1837.

Wisconsin, in 1848, would be the last of the Northwest states to be formed (not counting the piece of what would become part of Minnesota in 1860). The most significant event in Wisconsin's time as a territory was an extended conflict in 1832 between the Illinois and Wisconsin militia and a band of Sauk Indians and their leader, Black Hawk. Black Hawk had decided to reject an 1804 treaty that paid the Sauk and their allies to move west, across the Mississippi, and allowed white settlers to build farms in northwestern Illinois and southwestern Wisconsin. After initially crossing the Mississippi into Iowa, Black Hawk returned to Illinois in 1830 and 1831, and then again in 1832, with a band of 1,100 Sauk, Meskwaki (Fox), and Kickapoo that were nicknamed the British Band, determined to reoccupy the land around the Rock River in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Ironically, the Black Hawk War began as an inter-Indian conflict. After the Meskwaki attacked the Menominee, leaving forty-one dead, the Illinois governor called up the militia to push the Sauk and Meskwaki back across the Mississippi. The first clash with Black Hawk's forces in May 1832 was a disaster for the militia, and the terrified Illinoisans called for a reorganization and a bigger force. Fun fact: a lawyer named Abraham Lincoln was a captain in the Illinois militia that summer, but he didn't see action. After a string of skirmishes in Illinois and Wisconsin along the Rock River, including some massacres of settlers, the Sauk and their allies were utterly crushed along the Mississippi. The survivors fled into Minnesota, and Black Hawk was captured in Prairie du Chien. This was the last serious military threat from native Americans in the Wisconsin Territory and led directly to the federal government's decision to start selling land to settlers. Land offices opened in Green Bay and Milwaukee in 1835. Milwaukee's real estate was soon snapped up.

Three energetic visionaries bought large tracts of land around the three rivers, confident that a great city would one day flank them: Solomon Juneau bought the land that now comprises Milwaukee's first and third wards on the east side; Byron Kilbourn bought the land west of the Milwaukee River and north of the Menomonee, which became the second and fourth wards; and George Walker, a Virginian, bought the land south of the Menomonee. At least he tried to buy it—it took ten years to gain clear title to his development, and thus, the fifth ward lagged the development of the other two villages. The three entrepreneurs quickly platted their quarter-sections and offered lots for sale. People poured in, checked briefly by the Financial Panic of 1837. The three villages spent the first decade frantically competing for settlers and finally agreed to

## The Origins of Milwaukee

merge in 1846 and incorporate.

Juneautown got off to the fastest start, probably because of Juneau's political connections and his access to capital. The east side became the site of the city hall, county courthouse, central police station and jail, central firehouse, Catholic and Episcopalian cathedrals, post office, most of the newspapers, federal building, biggest banks, premier shops, and most of the mansions of the well-to-do. Kilbourntown had most of the breweries, and later, the Exhibition Building, the central library, Marquette and Concordia Colleges, and most of the theaters. (Much later the west side got the county courthouse and central police station). Because Kilbourntown could expand westward without limits, it eventually vastly outgrew Juneautown. Walker's area ("the Point") had none of the main city buildings and a much smaller population, but that meant that it had room for industries. The South Side became Milwaukee's machine shop. It also had the harbor and the main train station on Reed Street (now 2<sup>nd</sup> Street), although the depot soon split into two—the Milwaukee Road built a new station in Kilbourntown and the Chicago and Northwestern built its grand station at the foot of Wisconsin Avenue on the east side.

Milwaukee's first economic engine was to be a merchant, bringing goods into the harbor from the Great Lakes and selling things to the farmers living in southeastern Wisconsin. The Civil War (1861-1865) greatly accelerated Milwaukee's transformation into an industrial power because of the Union Army's insatiable need for food, leather, and iron.

Wisconsin's farmers planted a lot of wheat in those days, and they brought it to Milwaukee for processing. Milwaukee had five immense **grain elevators**, located at convenient junctions between rail lines and river docks. There were at least seven huge **grist mills** producing flour. Milwaukee from 1870-1890 was the center of the world's grain trading and set prices for the whole country.

Milwaukee's German immigrants came with knowledge and skills for processing animal hides into leather. The city quickly sprouted a dozen **tanneries**, some of them huge, among them Pfister & Vogel, Gallun, and Trostel. Milwaukee became a world leader overnight in leather production. Big factories also produced finished leather goods, such as boots, shoes, saddles, and harness for horses.

Milwaukee quickly became the nation's fourth-largest **meat packer**. John Plankinton, Frederick Layton, and Patrick Cudahy operated large plants.

Milwaukee became the dominant **rail hub** in the state. The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific Railway, better known as the Milwaukee Road, though officially headquartered in Chicago, had its massive yards in the Menomonee Valley, where their shops built locomotives and a daily stream of rail cars.

The first **brewery**, built where Clybourn Avenue began at the lake, was organized in 1841, and within a generation, Milwaukee was the nation's leading brewing city.

The first wave of non-Indian settlers in Milwaukee were Yankee-Yorkers, people from New York and New England. The first Germans arrived from Pomerania and Saxony in 1839, and that trickle became a massive flood. Germans became the largest ethnic group in the city. They were followed by Norwegians and then an avalanche of Poles. Italians and other southern Europeans came after 1900; Mexicans and Puerto Ricans came in the 1920s, and African Americans in large numbers in the 1950s

The city's population in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

**1840:** 1,712

**1850:** 20,060

**1860:** 45,246

**1870:** 71,440

**1880:** 115,587

**1890:** 204,468

**1900:** 285,315 *That year Milwaukee was the nation's fourteenth largest city.*

The years in which St. Marcus was founded were boom times for the city. The city limits in 1870 were 35<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, Keefe Avenue on the north, and Cleveland Avenue on the south. Very few of those streets were paved—most were dirt, which became nasty mud every time it rained. Downtown sidewalks were made of wood. There was horse manure everywhere and often dead animals on the streets. Some of the streets had newfangled gas lighting, which gave a small bit of illumination at night. There were almost no sanitary sewers, and all drinking water had to be supplied by individual wells. Transportation on land was by foot, horseback, carriage, or wagon. Starting in 1862 a few of the city's main streets had tracks laid for small horse-drawn streetcars. The streetcars would become electrified in the early 1890s.

## The Origins of Milwaukee

Major city events in the years just before St. Marcus' founding:

**1868:** Detroit industrialist Eber Brock Ward built the Bay View Rolling Mill, producing countless iron railroad rails. This was the first of a huge wave of Milwaukee heavy industry factories.

**1871:** The city got its first full-time firefighters. Joseph Phillips was the mayor from 1870-1871—he lived for a while in our neighborhood at 1823 N. Palmer Street. Harrison Ludington was the mayor from 1871-1872 and 1873-1876. His “country” house still survives and is located across the street from Wisconsin Lutheran High School on Glenview. Ludington, Michigan, is named after him.

**1872:** Milwaukee had 268 deaths from smallpox. There was massive labor unrest, with strikes by tailors, coopers, cigarmakers, printers, trunk makers, pipe layers, coal heavers, sailors, brewery workers, shoemakers, ship carpenters, and even hotel bellboys.

**1873:** The new courthouse on Jefferson Street and Kilbourn Avenue was completed. The North Point Water Tower construction began. A huge water reservoir was constructed on North Avenue, which would bring running water to the north side. Milwaukee's *Germania*, America's largest German-language newspaper, began circulation.



## Sherman's Addition/Brewers Hill

Kilbourntown was almost all west of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (now Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive). The neighborhood where St. Marcus is located thus is not part of the original old city or part of Kilbourn's west-side purchase. The original owner of what was to become our neighborhood, Daniel Patterson, bought 160 acres from the federal government in 1835 and, a year later, sold it to a group of Chicago land speculators and investors headed by Francis Sherman. Their initial plat was declared "illegal" for unknown reasons. It was acquired in 1851 by Milwaukee early champions Garrett Vliet and Cicero Comstock and re-platted, but they kept the older name, calling it Sherman's Addition. The development became the heart of the city's new 6<sup>th</sup> Ward, which stretched from Vliet Street on the south, 7<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, the city limits on the north, and the Milwaukee River on the east.

In those days, real estate was like the stock market—people bought and sold lots not to build on but as strategic investments whose value, they were certain, would only go up. Lots would thus often change hands many times before anyone actually constructed anything.

The southern end of St. Marcus' neighborhood became Milwaukee's first industrial area. Byron Kilbourn had worked in canal building in Ohio, and he cooked up a fantastic scheme to build a canal from the Milwaukee River all the way to the Rock River at Fort Atkinson, getting over

## Sherman's Addition/Brewers Hill

the hump of the subcontinental divide via a long string of locks. His dream was that boats and barges would be able to sail or float southwest from Milwaukee and connect with the Mississippi River and its trade. He put a syndicate of investors together, got territorial approval, formed the Milwaukee and Rock River Canal Company in 1839, and started digging. After three years they had dug only about a mile, and the enterprise looked so shaky that the territorial legislature withdrew its charter. The age of canals was just about over, and the age of railroads was beginning.

But Kilbourn had hedged his bets by digging a huge millrace. There was a crude dam on the Milwaukee River with a four-foot water drop just below North Avenue. Kilbourn had his diggers breach the river above the dam and then dig that mile of canal snaking parallel to the river. In between the canal and river was now a beautiful piece of industrial real estate. The canal was capped off at McKinley Street, and as a result, the water level in the canal was four feet higher than the river. Mills and factories could now use the force of falling water to turn wheels that would power their machinery. Two dozen shops sprang up, including sawmills, planing mills, grist mills, and a foundry. Milwaukee's two biggest flour mills were built along the river here--the Phoenix Mill and the Eagle Mill--along with the fifth largest, the Jupiter Mill, on Cherry Street. Eventually steam power made waterpower obsolete, and in 1884, the canal was filled in to become Commerce Street.

Another huge digging project cut a railroad track bed into the bluffs on the west bank of the river. Since the main freight on this stretch of rails was beer from Pabst, Schlitz, and the smaller breweries, it acquired the name the Beerline. There was a huge roundhouse and turntable for the La Crosse and Milwaukee Railroad -- later known as the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific Railway (a.k.a. Milwaukee Road) -- on the southeast corner of Humboldt and North Avenues, which is now occupied by a Pick 'n Save grocery store. Right on the river, just below North Avenue, was a massive icehouse, which serviced the breweries; a summer swimming school was located just above the dam. Both are gone.

August Krug had started a brewery on 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Juneau Avenue in 1849. When he died, his bookkeeper, Joseph Schlitz, bought the brewery, married the widow Krug, and renamed the brewery for himself. He moved the operations to 3<sup>rd</sup> and Walnut Streets, and its rapid growth soon had it sprawling over multiple blocks. Schlitz died in 1875 in a shipwreck, and ownership of the brewery passed to his four nephews, the Uihlein brothers. Through savvy marketing, good distribution, and a loyal customer base, the company grew to be one of the top breweries in the nation.

The neighborhood was also home to several huge boot and shoe manufacturing companies. F. Mayer Boot & Shoe, Weyenberg, and Nunn-Bush capitalized on the easy availability of quality leather from the nearby tanneries such the Albert Trostel & Sons Tannery along the canal. Back to Francis Sherman, his syndicate, and the housing above the canal. Sherman's group included Cyrenius Beers, Isaac Harmon, Mark Beaubien, and Alexander Lloyd. After Vliet and Comstock had re-platted Sherman's Addition, the syndicate members modestly gave their own names to the streets. Walnut Street is the last of the old tree-name streets and has always been known that way. Next north was Sherman (now called **Vine**), then Beers (**Reservoir**), Harmon (**Brown**), Lloyd (still called **Lloyd**), Beaubien (renamed **Garfield** in 1881 to honor the slain president), and **North**, so-called because in the 1856 plat, it was the northern city limit.

After the number streets ran out after **1<sup>st</sup> Street**, the next north-south street was called **Short Street** because it was only a few blocks long, stretching originally only from Garfield Avenue down to the canal. It was later renamed **Island Avenue** because its bridge across the river was in two parts due to a slender island that used to exist in the river at that point. In 1923 it was renamed again, now called **Palmer** after Henry L. Palmer, president of Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company from 1874-1908 and a state senator. **Hubbard Street**, originally a deep ravine running down the bluff, was named for Christopher Hubbard, a Chicago meatpacker and fur trader; **Richards Street** for Daniel Richards, a state assemblyman who launched Milwaukee's first newspaper in 1836; **Buffum Street** was named for David Buffum, an early real estate attorney, and **Holton Street** for the famous Edward D. Holton, wheat trader, merchant, railroad promoter, and bank president.

After the 1851 plats were recorded, lots were sold, and houses began to sprout up. Incredibly three of the houses from the 1850s are still standing in the 1800 block of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Sherman's Addition was unique in the city in that the mansions of the wealthy and the cottages of working folk were on the same streets. By the 1890s, almost all the blocks had been completely built up, and some lots had cottages on the back of the lot to add rental income. The neighborhood began its long decline in the 1920s, but because by then Sherman's Addition was kind of a backwater in Milwaukee, no big urban renewal projects or industrial expansions came through. As a result, the neighborhood called Brewers Hill since the 1980s is a remarkably intact Victorian neighborhood. Thanks to historic designations and attention from the City of Milwaukee's Historic Preservation Commission, plus an insane amount of sweat equity and personal financial risk by owners, the neighborhood has retained a considerable amount of its 19<sup>th</sup> century charm.

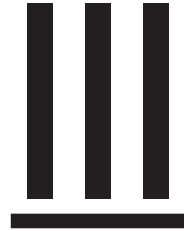


## Sherman's Addition/Brewers Hill

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street was a shopping district second only to Wisconsin Avenue. It was lined with stores from Wisconsin Avenue all the way to Capitol Drive. Because the neighborhood was so overwhelmingly German, the stores had names like the Berlin Arcade, Rosenberg's, Heinemann's, and Schuster's. German Catholics founded parishes on 4<sup>th</sup> and Lloyd Streets (St. Francis), 2<sup>nd</sup> and Burleigh Streets (St. Elizabeth), 11<sup>th</sup> and Cherry Streets (St. Joseph), and 11<sup>th</sup> and Center Streets (St. Boniface). There were German Baptist and German Methodist churches too.

Germans were big into exercise and fitness, and the Milwaukee Turners, a German voluntary association, built several athletic and social clubs it called Turner Halls. One of several was located on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Reservoir Avenue. There was another on 11<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets and still another on 11<sup>th</sup> Street and North Avenue. The Philip Altpeter malting company and brewery was on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Vine Streets.

Sherman's Addition was full when the Poles were moving to Milwaukee, but there was land in the Riverwest area east of Holton Street. The Poles built their duplexes and Polish flats there as well as three huge Catholic churches: St. Hedwig in East Village on Brady Street, St. Casimir on Bremen and Clarke Streets, and St. Mary of Czestochowa on Burleigh Street.



# The Great German Immigration

The building of the Lutheran church in the United States was strongly driven by the immigration of people who were already Lutheran from central and northern Europe. Germans had been coming to the New World like all other restless Europeans, beginning in the early 1600s, but there was a big spike in German immigration in the 1840s, and then an enormous wave from 1865-1895. The majority of Germans settled in the Midwest. To this very day German ancestry is still the largest ethnic heritage of Americans. Ninety percent of German emigrants chose to come to the United States. What drove this mighty dislocation of peoples from north-central Europe?

- *Religious persecution.* In 1817 the Prussian king forced Lutheran and Reformed Protestants into the Prussian Union. Traditional Lutherans hated and resisted that forced union. Those church leaders who opposed and resisted the union were called out, pressured, sued, fined, and imprisoned. Milwaukee's first Lutherans, Rev. Johann Grabau's Saxons and Pomeranians, were refugees from this persecution.
- *The Abolition of serfdom in 1820.* This sounds like a great leap forward for peasants, right? In practice, it meant that the landed nobility who still owned much of the land now felt that they no longer had any obligations to their workers. The former serfs were now free—free to starve.
- *The failed Revolution of 1848.* Germany was not really a country for the first two-thirds of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The German-speaking people of northern and central Europe had been governed by a patchwork of duchies and small kingdoms that for centuries had

## The Great German Immigration

been loosely federated into the so-called Holy Roman Empire. Napoleon's rampage of conquest in the first decade of the 1800s blew up the HRE, and it was replaced with a loosely organized German Confederation. The nobility of the two largest pieces, the Hohenzollern dynasty in Prussia and the Habsburg dynasty in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, forcibly resisted any ideas of constitutions or democracy. The democratic uprising of 1848 failed and was put down; many fled the country. Authoritarian aristocracy triumphed, if only for another two generations. Quite a few of these Forty-eighters ended up in Wisconsin.

- *Revocation of special conditions in the East.* For centuries German farmers were the gold standard in agriculture, and rulers of Slavic countries to the east (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Romania) invited Germans to come and settle there, bringing their advanced agricultural techniques to ramp up food production. They were offered cheap or free land and allowed to settle in their own communities, maintain their own language, and practice their own faith. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Slavic rulers started to revoke those invitations, forcing German farmers to head back west, once again landless.
- *Insufficient available farmland.* The aristocracy in the German states owned much of the available farmland, and that meant everybody working that land would never be more than a tenant farmer. For example, the two archdukes of the huge northern province of Mecklenburg owned over half of all arable land. In addition, laws in northern Germany encouraged breaking up farms in inheritance so that each son could own a piece of land. In actual practice that meant that the average German farm was only one and a half acres. The prospect of acquiring a 160-acre farm in Wisconsin in the mid-1800s for five dollars an acre was a mad and exciting dream that lured multitudes to the Midwest.
- *Fear of military conscription.* Otto von Bismarck had become Prussia's foreign minister and minister president in 1862. Under his energetic leadership the fragmented states of central and northern Germany were finally integrated into a single German nation in 1871. Wouldn't that make a proud German want to stay and enjoy the new country? Maybe not. The price of unification was almost constant warfare, with Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866, and mighty France in 1870. Life was cruel and hard in the Prussian army—conscription was universal, five-year terms of service were mandatory, and the pay was only four cents a day.

For these reasons and others, Germans emigrated in droves, chiefly to America:

**1840s:** 434,000

**1850s:** 951,000

**1860s:** 787,000

**1870s:** 718,000

**1880s:** 1,452,000

**1890s:** 505,000

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Milwaukee was the most German-flavored city in America.

# IV

## **St. John's, St. Marcus' Mother Church**

The first Lutherans in Milwaukee were a group of Saxons and Pomeranians who had fled religious persecution in Germany and come to America. Their first stop was Buffalo, New York; some stayed there, but part of the group decided to head farther west and settle in Milwaukee and its surrounding farmland. They planted five congregations in southeastern Wisconsin and decided to form a national denomination. Even though the constituting convention met in Milwaukee, the Pomeranians named their new organization the Buffalo Synod in honor of their leader, Rev. Johann Grabau, usually referred to as J.A.A. Grabau, who had stayed in Buffalo, New York. They founded Milwaukee's first Lutheran congregation in 1841, St. Paul's, whose location bounced around to various places in Kilbourntown. Finally, in 1870 St. Paul's built a beautiful church with a tall steeple at 7<sup>th</sup> and Galena Streets. That building was sold to Croatian Catholics in 1917, and St. Paul's bought and rebuilt a Congregational church building on 28<sup>th</sup> Street and Wisconsin Avenue, where they remain today.

St. Paul's had a very controversial and strong-willed pastor, and a big chunk of its membership became disgruntled with his heavy-handed ways, split off, and started another church in 1843, which they called First Lutheran. This church also had various locations in Kilbourntown. When their pastor left Milwaukee in 1872, the congregation ran out of gas and disbanded. St. John's Root Creek in the Town of Greenfield began in 1846. The Missouri Synod's mother church in Milwaukee, Trinity on 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Highland Boulevard, was founded in 1847. Salem Lutheran in the Township of Granville began also in 1847 and became the site of the signing of the constitutional documents for the founding of the Wisconsin Synod in 1850. Grace Lutheran had been founded in Juneautown in 1849, and its pastor, Johannes Muehlhaeuser, was elected the

first president of the newly formed Wisconsin Synod.

St. Johanneskirche (St. John's) was founded in 1848. They had a mighty stroke of luck (or maybe God's blessing?) in that the Episcopalians' attempt at starting a church in Kilbourntown failed. The Episcopalians had built a nice church building on 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Highland Boulevard (called Prairie Street back then) which they then sold to the Lutherans. St. John's had some strong-minded members who didn't want to be absorbed by one of the existing Lutheran congregations or bulldozed into joining a denomination until they were good and ready. In 1856 they got a new pastor, Rev. William Streissguth, and he persuaded St. John's to join the Wisconsin Synod the next year. He served the congregation for twelve years and it grew vigorously, driven by the huge German immigration into Milwaukee, especially into Kilbourntown's second ward. Rev. Streissguth also served as synod president from 1864-1867.

St. John's next pastor was a phenomenally talented and energetic man of God, Rev. John Bading (pronounced "Bodding"). He had emigrated to America in 1853 at the age of twenty-eight and served parishes in Calumet, Theresa, and Watertown, Wisconsin. He came to St. John's in 1868 and stayed there for forty years, overseeing its massive growth. He served simultaneously as president of the synod from 1860-1864 and 1867-1889, vice president from 1889-1908, and chairman of the board of directors of Northwestern College from its beginning in 1865 to 1908. (Seriously!) Fun fact: Rev. Bading's son Gerhardt would be Milwaukee's mayor from 1912-1916.

St. John's built a school on the lots just north of the church, and the building was soon bursting at the seams with pupils. In the 1870s and 1880s there would often be 300 baptisms a year and confirmation classes of 100. In 1875 St. John's had 96 funerals and 60 weddings. The congregation would sell its buildings in 1889, moving to a bigger lot up on the hillside, and building a massive new church and a school on 8<sup>th</sup> and Vliet Streets.

In 1872 St. John's was privileged to be the site of the formation of the Synodical Conference, a historic quasi-federation of the Missouri, Illinois, Minnesota, Norwegian, Ohio, and Wisconsin Synods. The core of that blessed fellowship lasted until 1961 and formally disbanded in 1965.

In 1873 the congregation was approaching its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and facing overcrowding in its school. The members were not yet ready to leave their 4<sup>th</sup> Street campus, but they hit on a plan to relieve the crowding a little and to do some outreach among the newly arrived Germans on the edge of town. St. John's decided to buy a house across 3<sup>rd</sup> Street on the fringes of the city in Sherman's Addition and start a branch school. In September of that year, they paid \$775 to Robert and Fanny Gunyon for a house on the fifty-foot-wide Lot 16, the southeast corner of the block bounded by North Avenue, Short Street, Beaubien Street, and 1<sup>st</sup> Street. The house was the only building on that block of Short Street at the time. They called a teacher, John Denninger, from the Lutheran school in Oshkosh and set up a classroom on the first floor of the house. The new school opened for business on January 1, 1874. (There wouldn't be electrical service until the mid-1880s.)

## St. John's, St. Marcus' Mother Church

From a human and economic point of view, St. John's could not have picked a worse time to launch a new ministry venture. After almost two decades of economic boom, speculators had vastly overbuilt America's railroad network. It would be years before freight charges would yield enough income to service the huge debts. The great Chicago fire of 1871 had severely damaged insurance companies' cash reserves. The massive Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871 had wreaked havoc in European financial circles, which affected the U.S. as well. In 1873 Germany took its financial system off the silver standard, and then America did too. This depressed the price of silver, hurt miners, and made farmers' debts harder to pay. What finally blew the lid off the economy was the financial firm of Jay Cooke and its failure to find buyers for its latest round of bonds for more railroad building. Cooke's bank urgently needed the cash from new bonds to pay off old ones, and after a failed bond issue, it declared bankruptcy in September of 1873, just days from St. John's house purchase.

The failure of Cooke's bank set off a chain reaction of other bank failures. The New York Stock Exchange ceased trading for ten days. In two months, 55 railroads went bankrupt, and they would be followed by 60 more in the next few months. Eighteen thousand American businesses failed. Unemployment spiked up to 8.5%. Wages were cut; business profits dried up. It took five years for the country to crawl out of this hole.

And yet this was the glorious moment that God had chosen for ministry on Palmer and Garfield to begin. Perhaps he wanted the saints there always to remember that it was not by might, not by power, but by his Spirit that his agenda would be accomplished.

The new one-room schoolhouse attracted not only several St. John's families living in Sherman's Addition but some families from three other Lutheran congregations as well. A group of these families began to meet and dream of starting a new congregation out of the school. They inquired if St. John's was amenable to this venture, and St. John's agreed. A planning committee was formed, a constitution and bylaws drafted, and at its signing on June 13, 1875, St. Marcus Lutheran Church was formed. Thirteen men and their families made up this first group.

The only stipulation put forth by St. John's was that the new congregation would need to join the Wisconsin Synod. St. Marcus agreed. Its trustees finalized the purchase of the house-church from St. John's two years later, on November 21, 1877, for the price of one thousand dollars. (It probably took the tiny congregation two years to come up with that kind of big money.)

# V

## The Founders

So who were these courageous and visionary men and women? Most of them lived in Sherman's Addition, most were employed in the construction industry, and most were north German immigrants, coming from either Mecklenburg or Pomerania. (*See Appendix A for more detailed information.*)

Three couples came from St. John's: Joachim & Elizabeth (?) Bismark, Friedrich & Bertha Mueller, and Ferdinand & Albertina Harrass (also spelled Harass and Harras). Mr. Harrass was elected the first president and served also as the treasurer. Mr. Bismark became the custodian.

Two came from St. Matthew's, which had been founded ten years earlier, in 1865, on 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Garfield Avenue: Johann & Caroline Puestow and Joachim & Maria Siggelkow. The Puestows' son, Wilhelm, was St. Marcus' first baptism in July 1875. The Puestows' granddaughter, Edna Vitense, was later to serve as St. Marcus' office secretary for over fifty years.

Five came from the Missouri Synod's Immanuel Congregation on 11<sup>th</sup> Street & Garfield Avenue, founded a year after its neighbor St. Matthew's in 1866: Christoph & Johanna Differt, Hermann & Frederike Erdmann, Wilhelm Last (marital status unknown), Carl & Ernestina Jeske, and Carl & Julia? Krueger. Mr. Krueger had the sad distinction of being St. Marcus' first deceased member—he died on August 14, just two months after the founding. The congregation then hired Mrs. Krueger to clean the church/school for the salary of fifty cents a month.



## The Founders

Three came from the Missouri Synod's historic Trinity Congregation, founded in 1847: John F. & Alvina Helm, Dietrich Engel, and Friedrich Zink (marital status of the latter two unknown). Mr. Engel was elected financial secretary. Mr. Helm was probably the most prosperous of all the founders—he owned a hardware store on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. He had come to America in 1839 at the age of four. His father died on the voyage, and his tough and amazing mother traveled to Wisconsin, bought some wilderness land in Ozaukee County, and built a prosperous farm. Young John worked in the hotel business, ran a grocery store, worked in a hardware shop, and then in 1874 opened his own hardware store on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and prospered until his retirement in 1895.

# VI

## Shaky Beginnings

The brand-new congregation now faced its first major dilemma—they had a functioning one-room school, taught by Mr. Denninger, for whose salary they were now obligated. But they didn't have a pastor. Mr. Denninger probably realized that the congregation couldn't afford two workers, but he soldiered on, knowing that his time at St. Marcus would probably be short. He served as the congregation's first recording secretary, and our first minutes are in his hand. He would teach school all week, and then they would convert the classroom into a chapel, finding worship leaders wherever they could. Usually, Mr. Denninger would provide a service and read a prepared sermon, and sometimes the congregation was assisted by St. Louis seminary student Andrew Schroedel (who had the sad duty of presiding at the funeral of founder Carl Krueger). Pastors from other Milwaukee congregations would sometimes provide Sunday afternoon services. In July the congregation called Rev. George Reinsch, a former pastor at Immanuel in town, at that time serving in Janesville. He declined. In August they called Rev. Streissguth, formerly of St. John's on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, but he declined also.

In September Teacher Denninger received and accepted a call to serve at St. Mark's in Watertown. The congregation reluctantly granted a peaceful release and in the same meeting extended another pastoral call. They had been informed that a ministry candidate had just become available. Rev. Joseph Westenberger had received his theological education in the Iowa Synod at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque. He was serving his third congregation for the Iowa Synod at St. Peter's in Prairie du Chien. At the Iowa Synod convention in the summer of 1875, he and various other pastors expressed some vehement concerns, which led to his exit from the Iowa Synod. After a colloquy with the WELS president, he was made available to St. Marcus,

## Shaky Beginnings

who called him at that same September meeting. He accepted. He and his wife Lisette and the first half-dozen of their eventual ten children moved into an upper flat on Garfield Avenue, just west of the house-church and across the street. His salary initially was forty dollars a month; in November he got a raise to fifty dollars.

Since Mr. Denninger had departed, Pastor Westenberger had to begin teaching school immediately. In January of 1876, the congregation removed all the interior walls of the second floor of their house-school and converted it into a chapel. That summer the congregation was accepted into the Wisconsin Synod.

Money was extremely tight because most of the little flock were poor. The congregation ran on fumes at the beginning. At the end of March 1876, after nine months of operation, the congregation had a cash balance of \$2.41. Pastor Westenberger faithfully and loyally taught school all through 1876 and into 1877. Finally in May of 1877, the congregation felt itself ready to support two workers and called a teacher to take over the one-room school—Mr. Friedrich (“Fritz”) Risch. During this time Rev. and Mrs. Westenberger suffered the loss of their three-year-old daughter Mathilde (“Tillie”).

Alas, Mr. Risch stayed only until February of 1878. He was temporarily replaced by candidate Theodor Voss. In February of 1879, Teacher Michael Walz accepted the teaching position, replacing Mr. Voss. Alas again, he served only until August of 1880, leaving for Winona.

Back to 1878. That October Rev. Westenberger accepted a pastoral call to Grace Lutheran Church in Ripon. St. Marcus needed a pastor. Hmm ... the Wisconsin Synod had struggled mightily to build a pastoral training system, but the fledgling synod was too small and poor to build everything at once. They started seminary classes in a house in Watertown in 1863. When Northwestern College was founded in 1865 and built a fine new building, the seminary conducted classes there. After five years of growth, the college needed the space in their building and asked the seminary to move out. In 1870 the synod reluctantly decided to send its young men to the Missouri Synod’s Concordia Seminary in St. Louis for their graduate work. But synodical leaders never gave up their dream of having a WELS seminary of their own.

In 1878, after eight years of sending the young men to St. Louis, enough money could be found to rent two houses on Hubbard Street and Garfield Avenue to relaunch a WELS seminary in Milwaukee. Presumably a professor and his family stayed in one and the students slept and studied in the other. Pastor Adolf Hoenecke of nearby St. Matthew’s served as one part-time professor, another was Professor August Graebner, and the third was Professor Eugen Notz. When Pastor Westenberger left St. Marcus in the fall of 1878, St. Marcus called Professor Notz to serve as its pastor in addition to his seminary teaching load. After all, the new seminary was only a block away. He accepted. In 1879 he married Dorothea Bading, daughter of Rev. Johannes Bading of St. John’s.

The Hubbard Street houses were always intended to be temporary. The synod had acquired several acres of land near 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Reservoir Avenue from what had been Eimermann's Shooting Park. It was their intent to turn the pavilion into a residential seminary. Professor Notz would be moving onto that campus, and he decided that he could not adequately serve St. Marcus too. Thus, after the 1880 school term concluded, Professor Notz resigned from St. Marcus' pastorate. Fun fact: that campus, after the Seminary moved out in 1892, later became the home for the Lutheran High School in 1904.

That June the congregation once again called Rev. George Reinsch, now serving in Helenville, and this time he came. He and his wife Clara and their two children lived at 2200 N. Hubbard, probably in one of the two homes that had temporarily housed the WELS seminary. Thankfully, in September, Teacher Simon Richter accepted the school call and classes could resume.

# VII

## Remarkable Growth

In spite of this incredibly chaotic and shaky beginning, the congregation had been growing steadily, and by 1880, the worshiping group was simply overwhelming the second-floor chapel above the schoolroom. The congregation resolved to contract with August Kelling to build them a proper church. First, the house/school was jacked up intact, put onto a set of heavy dollies, and moved to a new foundation at the west end of the lot.

Then construction began on a 44'x70' frame edifice. With great joy the congregation dedicated it in December of 1881. The cost was \$5,800. It had a beautiful Gothic altar, high pulpit, and gaslight illumination. That same month, the congregation contracted with the William Schuelke Organ Company of Milwaukee to build a pipe organ, at a cost of \$1,700. Its bellows had to be pumped by human power since the electric blower hadn't yet been invented; in fact, there was no electrical service at all. Neither was there a sewer or water connection, and so the only rest room was an outhouse in back.

December of 1881 was another milestone—so many children were packed into the one-room schoolhouse that the congregation resolved to call a second teacher. A Mr. Bauer got it started, though he left in April of 1882; he was replaced by Carl Daus, who served until 1885. In 1883 the school finally got a break. The Lord of the church sent one of his champions, Rudolph Fritzke, to take over school leadership when Simon Richter left in 1883. Mr. Fritzke stayed a magnificent seventeen years and provided not only outstanding school leadership but also served as the congregation's organist. His sons would vigorously pump the organ while he practiced or played for worship.

The congregation was ready to expand again. They bought the next fifty foot lot to the north from the Froemming family for \$2,350, moved the old house/school to the back of that lot, and on the front of the lot, built a two-story frame school building for \$1,843. In October Mr. Fred Nimmer accepted the call to serve as the teacher of the third class.

The following year, 1884, the congregation engaged carpenter/contractor August Kelling, builder of the church, to build a parsonage for the Reinsches on the west end of the original lot, where the house/school had until recently sat. Its cost was \$1,600.

In 1887 the congregation built a U-shaped horseshoe balcony in the church to increase the seating capacity. In those years, there would be an afternoon Sunday School called *Christenlehre* at 2 p.m. At the annual meeting, Julius Kohls was elected president of the congregation and held that important job for the next forty years.

In the fall of 1888, the congregation was ready to open a fourth class, and Miss Ueckert from Grace Lutheran School downtown was called to teach the youngest children. The teachers' workload was brutal in those days—one photograph from those years shows an unsmiling Miss Ueckert with the seventy-six children of her classroom. Rudolph Fritzke had eighty-six, Herman Gruel had ninety-five, and Fred Nimmer had seventy-three.

In December of 1890, as the church documents report, “regrettable happenings, blown up by a great deal of idle gossip, led to the resignation of Rev. Reinsch.” He was asked to continue serving until his successor, Rev. August Pieper of Menomonie, Wisconsin, arrived in February of 1891. This apparently was the last pastoral ministry position for Rev. Reinsch. Milwaukee census reports for 1900 and 1910 list his employment as a clerk for a medical dispensary and an agricultural office. Miss Ueckert resigned from the ministry in 1891 from “nervous exhaustion.”

Pastor Pieper decided that one of his first tasks was to “clean up” the annual school picnics. He was scandalized both by the Las Vegas-style games of chance and the congregation's practice of making money by selling beer to all comers, and he put a stop to both.

The school was growing like crazy. By 1894, 322 children were crammed into four classrooms in the two frame buildings on the second lot. The congregation bought the adjacent twenty-five-foot lot from John and Friederike Suetterle for \$2,800 and another twenty-five-foot lot from John and Wilhelmine Teich for \$2,400. They sold the houses on those two lots and had them moved off, realizing \$925. They also sold and moved the two school buildings. The newer one was moved to 21<sup>st</sup> Street and North Avenue, where it functioned for a while as a hardware store before being demolished. The original house-school was moved to serve as a rear house at 2717 N. Pierce in the Riverwest neighborhood, where it is amazingly still standing, though much altered.

The congregation contracted with noted Milwaukee architect Henry Messmer and son Robert to design an entirely new and modern brick school building. Mr. Messmer's firm had also done

## Remarkable Growth

design work for St. Hedwig, St. Peter and Paul, St. Hyacinth, and St. Casimir churches.

The new school building cost \$13,132. It was a magnificent improvement on the two old frame buildings. It had six large classrooms, a small conference room, and a fine auditorium on the second floor. A dumbwaiter would later be built into the wall to haul food to the auditorium from the kitchen. A huge basement and spacious attic provided storage, rest rooms, and an indoor place for children to play and exercise. A generous setback from Island Avenue meant that there was room for the children to play outdoors.

The beautiful central tower carried the school's name in stamped galvanized iron, and a bell, donated by Rev. Pieper, carpentry contractor August Butzke, and masonry contractor Gustave Jeske, soon hung in the tower. In raised bronze letters is the legend: "*Lasset die Kindlein zu mir kommen*" ("Let the little children come to me"). It was cast in Milwaukee at Gardiner Campbell's Centennial Bell Foundry. The congregation had a joyful and proud dedication on November 4, 1894.

But history repeated itself. The congregation incurred new debt for real estate and new construction on top of existing debt of \$5,500, bringing the new total to \$22,152. And then the national economy crashed again.

Europe's major investments in Argentina, South Africa, and Australia had gone sour in the early 1890s, leading to a run on U.S. banks, which would still redeem paper money for gold. After the Great Plains' wheat crops had had a series of great yields, oversupply of wheat caused its price to collapse in 1893. The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad was overleveraged and failed. The largest stock on the New York Stock Exchange, the National Cordage Company, went bankrupt after trying to corner the hemp market. One after another, 500 banks failed along with 15,000 U.S. companies. Depressed commodity prices hurt farmers and miners. Unemployment rose to 19% nationally and was far worse in certain states; Michigan's and Ohio's industrial employment were hit extremely hard. In 1893 salaries of the St. Marcus faculty had to be cut.

The financial panic and subsequent depression lasted until 1897, or by some measures, 1899. Despite earnest hard work and saving, the congregation was able to reduce its debt only to \$17,300 by 1900. But nothing could dim the joy of the congregation's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In celebration they had offered to host the synod's convention that year. Another blow was to hear that both Teachers Fritzke and Nimmer needed to resign their calls, citing "nervous exhaustion." In 1901 Herman Gruel resigned as well. A merciful God brought three more workers to fill the holes: Edward Gleichmann, Richard Dorn, and William Amling as principal.

St. Marcus made a very visible change in its worship space in the 1890s. It is not known what kind of work of art occupied the central large rectangle above the altar when built in 1881. But in 1890 the German painter Heinrich Hofmann painted a scene of Christ praying in Gethsemane that took the Christian world by storm, especially in the United States. St. Marcus commissioned an oil-on-canvas copy and placed it in the altar. The members grew so fond of

Hofmann's face of Christ that when the subjects of the figures in the new stained-glass windows of 1913 were being chosen, all scenes were taken from Hofmann's portfolios. (*See Appendix K for the story of Hofmann's life.*)

Pastor Pieper was a strong advocate for Christian education, especially for teens. The Missouri Synod had a prep school in town, Concordia, which enrolled boys, especially those planning to go into the ministry, but there was nothing for girls. Pastor Pieper was a vocal and relentless advocate for a Christian high school that would enroll girls. That hard work paid off as the Lutheran High School was launched in 1903. Both Pastor Pieper and his wife Emma were volunteer teachers that first school year. The Piepers' daughter Gertrude was a proud member of the first graduating class in 1906.

In those years St. Marcus had a young men's and a young women's group, a mixed choir of thirty-eight, male choir of thirty-two, a Ladies' Aid of ninety, and a mutual aid society with eighty-three members to help out families during illness or death.

All the congregation's ministries in 1900 were conducted completely in German. They took their communion celebrations very seriously--it was offered only four times a year. The names of all communion guests were carefully recorded, and it was expected that communicants would give a special financial offering. It was the custom back then to receive the host standing at the left of the altar, to walk around the back of the altar, give your Communion gift in a *Klingenbeutel* on the shelf behind the altar, and then receive the chalice standing at the altar's right. For some reason it also seemed good to seat the men separately from their families. The men were expected to sit along the left and right aisles, while the women and children sat along the center aisle. Apparently, men and women communed separately as well.

English language worship in the Lutheran church in Milwaukee was just beginning. Redeemer Lutheran (now on 19<sup>th</sup> Street and Wisconsin Avenue) was chartered as an English-only congregation in 1890, and the Missouri Synod launched Mount Olive, whose organizing meeting was on February 5, 1894. Since that little group had no building, they held evening English services in various local congregations, St. Marcus included. Mount Olive successfully bid on a former Episcopal building on 4<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets. On their triumphant dedication day in 1895, St. Marcus' own Pastor Pieper was the evening speaker. And when they outgrew their first building by 1904, they held English services in St. Marcus' school auditorium. But St. Marcus continued in German-only.

Despite all the financial and staffing stresses, God's hand was clearly with the congregation. It wasn't so little anymore. In 1900 it counted 1,240 communicant (adult) members, 315 students in the school, a confirmation class of seventy, and eighty-six child baptisms.



# VIII

## A New Century

More change. In August 1902 Pastor Pieper received a call to teach at the seminary, which since 1892 had been located in Wauwatosa on 60<sup>th</sup> and Lloyd Streets. He decided to accept it. He would serve there till 1943 for an astounding total ministry of sixty-four years. The congregation had been impressed by the speaker for one of their anniversary services, Rev. Ernst F. Dornfeld of Kenosha. They called him, and he accepted. He was installed in October of 1902.

Although the mad flow of German immigrants had slowed down considerably, the congregation was still growing. Families were huge, and the immigrants and their children still clung together around a common language and customs. Pastor Dornfeld was loved, and the congregation made slow but steady progress on its debt. In 1905 Pastor Dornfeld began official publication of a quarterly church newsletter, the *Markusbote*. With great joy the congregation celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June with a morning, afternoon, and evening service. Interestingly, that one evening service was conducted in English. Henry Braun became school principal in 1907.

The packed anniversary services now led the congregation's members to dare to dream of building a larger sanctuary. In 1905 the Ladies Aid had begun to gather funds for furnishings for a new church. In 1910 Pastor Dornfeld organized a building committee that began the planning in earnest.

Then a heavy blow fell: while on a pastoral call on Booth Street on January 2, 1911, Pastor Dornfeld slipped on ice and broke his arm. For days he experienced considerable pain. On January 11 he suffered an agonizing attack of gallstones and decided reluctantly to go in for

surgery. As he was convalescing, hoping for improvement, a previously undetected abscess in his lungs ruptured. He died just before midnight on January 23 at the young age of fifty-four. A bronze plaque hangs above the main doors to the sanctuary, which was placed in his honor, and his portrait graces the history wall in the church's café. The congregation elected to call his son, Rev. Ernst Ph. Dornfeld of Mishicot. He accepted the call and stayed an astonishing forty-four years. That same year Dora Gamm became the first kindergarten teacher.

At some point before 1916, the congregation built a small addition to the school's basement, which lengthened the room and enabled the construction of four bowling lanes. Church groups occupied the lanes almost every night of the week plus weekends. Middle-school-age boys would set pins for a dime a game. It was said that the profits from the concession stand brought in enough money to pay the coal bill.

The congregation's growing size, strength, and prosperity could be seen in the fact that after worrying and straining for fifteen years to pay off the debt from the school building, in one year St. Marcus raised \$18,689 for a new sanctuary. In July 1912 the congregation contracted with the Milwaukee design firm of Leiser & Holst, and they went to work on the drawings. Leiser & Holst was well known in the city; they had done the design for Mader's Restaurant, for Holy Ghost Lutheran Church on 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Concordia Avenue, and for Emmaus Lutheran on 23<sup>rd</sup> and Hadley Streets.

Interestingly some leaders wondered if the congregation should relocate to a "more central location." Even in 1912 they were aware that the great German population of Milwaukee was shifting steadily westward. They tried the market for selling their Island Avenue campus but received no interest. They decided to stay put. To help finance construction, the congregation requested loans from congregation members and offered 3% interest.

February 1913 saw the last worship service in the frame church, and demolition began. The cornerstone was laid on June 8. During construction, worship services were held in the school auditorium. The current café's history wall includes a photograph of the large construction site, with its mountains of bricks and lumber. The building was completed in February 1914, and dedication Sunday featured not one but three services of praise, each drawing 1600-1700 people. Professor August Pieper spoke in the morning service, Rev. Carl Dietz from Immanuel Lutheran on Garfield Avenue spoke in the afternoon, and Rev. John Brenner spoke at an English service in the evening.

The altar, pulpit, and baptismal font from the old church were installed in the new. Local artist Carl Reimann designed and built the stained-glass windows, and he likely did the two oil paintings high above the hymn boards as well. The building cost \$50,748, and after all the fund raising and special gifts, a debt of \$24,880 remained. The Young People's Society pledged \$4,000 for the organ project. (*See Appendix D for the full story of the organ.*) It took them five years, but by golly, they got it done. The new church's design was widely known and respected. The LCMS's Professor Paul Kretzmann's 1921 book *Christian Art* includes a handsome photograph of the

## A New Century

façade. (For further information on the building of St. Marcus' new sanctuary, see Appendix C.)

1914 was a milestone year also in that regular ministry in the English language was begun. Miss Eleonore Otto began to teach an English language Sunday School, and twice-a-month Sunday evening worship services were held in English at 7:30 p.m. These proved so popular that by 1918, they were being offered every Sunday morning. The congregation settled into the pattern of a 9:30 a.m. German service and English at 11 a.m., later shifted earlier to 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. The congregation was proud to display its new sanctuary as it again hosted the synod's annual convention in 1916.

In 1915 an eighth grade was added to the school. In 1917 Herman Martin became the new principal. In 1918 Dora Gamm's kindergarten/first grade class was split in two, and her sister Leonore took over the kindergarten portion. Those two extraordinary women served on the school faculty until 1956! William Kirschke was another faculty standout, serving from 1917-1954. He followed Mr. Heine as principal in 1944.

The United States entered World War I in 1917. Twelve of St. Marcus' young men were in the Army and Navy by November. By April 1918 there were twenty-two, and by war's end, a total of sixty-three young men had served. Ed. Koenig was killed in action, and Rudolf Wolfram was badly injured and later died of his wounds. A son of the congregation, John G. Jeske, who had become a pastor, was called as a military chaplain at the army base in Camp Sherman, Chillicothe, Ohio, where he served both American boys and German prisoners of war.

1918 brought two blessings and a curse. St. Marcus and seventeen other Milwaukee Lutheran congregations formed an association to take over operations of the Lutheran High School on 13<sup>th</sup> Street, which up till that point had been owned and operated by a syndicate of individuals. November 11 brought an armistice which ended the Great War. But the Spanish Flu epidemic panicked the nation. On October 10 local health authorities closed all churches, and two days later closed all schools. After several months, churches were gradually allowed to reopen, and all restrictions were lifted by Christmas.

During the war years, the school's enrollment dropped to half of the boom years of the 1890s. Why was that? Likely the main reason was that, by 1912, the children of the German immigrants wanted *their* children fluent, educated, and networked in *English*. The immigrants didn't need to huddle so closely together anymore. Use of German in the school fell away rapidly; the last holdout was catechism class, and it too became all-English in 1926.

St. Marcus' leaders looked at the fallen numbers and resolved to build up the school again through neighborhood outreach and low or no-cost tuition. Pastor Dornfeld's quarterly *Markusbote* repeatedly and earnestly defended the school's value and pleaded with parents to send their children and recruit neighbor children. By the 1920s, the enrollment was once again over 200.

The congregation knew that Pastor Dornfeld's workload was enormous, and they called some pulpit assistants to help him. The first was Rev. Richard Siegler, who was serving the synod as a "collector" – a pastor-at-large who would travel around the synod, preach sermons on stewardship, and encourage individuals and congregations to support the synod's ministries and missions. He was a great help to Rev. Dornfeld but decided in 1916 that he couldn't serve St. Marcus adequately. In 1916 Rev. Francis Uplegger was installed as the director of the new Lutheran High School in Milwaukee. St. Marcus called him as a part-time pulpit assistant to Rev. Dornfeld, who appreciated him immensely. Alas for St. Marcus, in 1919, Rev. Uplegger took a call to the Apache mission in Arizona, where he had a distinguished career not only bringing the Word to the Apache but helping them to write down their language for the first time. He spent the rest of his life on the San Carlos Reservation. The congregation voted not to call to replace him, but to give Rev. Dornfeld the authority to spend one hundred dollars on guest speakers in 1920. If he didn't spend the entire amount, of course, the balance would stay in the treasury.

The congregation was shocked in 1921 when Pastor Dornfeld received a call to Northwestern College. He said that he was not physically up to the crushing workload at St. Marcus and thought he should accept the call. Example: in just the first half of 1920, Pastor Dornfeld had conducted twenty-four funerals. The alarmed congregation wanted to keep this talented worker in their midst and resolved to call a full-time assistant pastor. Seminary graduate Gustaf Adolf Zeisler was assigned and was installed in August of 1921. After a brief stay, he took a call to Minocqua in 1923. He was replaced by Rev. Walter Gieschen of Goodrich, Wis, who was installed on September 10, 1923. Because of a school faculty vacancy, Pastor Gieschen had to teach school that fall until Teacher Christian Heine accepted St. Marcus' call and was installed in December as principal and teacher of grades seven and eight. This brilliant and talented leader was a fine musician who played organ and took over leadership of the mixed choir. In 1925 Pastor Gieschen was again pressed into service in the school, this time as teacher of grades four and five. He was finally relieved of school teaching in the fall term of 1926 when teacher Guenther Waidelich accepted a call.

The congregation also resolved to upgrade Rev. Dornfeld's living conditions. They bought a lot across North Avenue and built a beautiful new brick parsonage in 1926. The 1884 frame parsonage became a residence for the church's custodian and his family, who were finally able to move out of the school building where they had lived. This made another classroom available. Ruth Hahm was called in 1924 to open a sixth classroom.

In 1924 the first English language article appeared in the *Markusbote*. The transition to English was well underway—the Sunday School and confirmation instruction were now offered only in English, but the *Markusbote* had German articles until 1937. As the congregation reached its golden anniversary in 1925, it was probably at its all-time numerical peak. There were 1,730 communicants, 370 child members, 2,100 total souls, 240 enrolled in the school, 150 in the Sunday School, and there had been eighty-three baptisms. A 1925 Youth Society photograph shows sixty-five people.

# **IX**

## **Steady**

Pastor Dornfeld was a strong and steady leader for the next quarter-century. There was a brief setback when Rev. Gieschen left, called by neighboring Jerusalem Lutheran, but to the congregation's joy, distinguished Seminary professor John P. Meyer then consented to serve as a pulpit assistant, and this happy arrangement lasted, with a brief hiatus from 1949-1953, until his death in 1964. Professor Meyer (known to all as "Nixie" because of his snow-white hair, *nix* being the Latin word for snow) continued to assist at St. Marcus even after the seminary moved from Wauwatosa to Thiensville in 1930. He did not drive or even own a car. But when he was to speak on a Sunday, he would take the interurban streetcar on Saturday evening from the Thiensville station all the way to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street & North Avenue and walk the rest of the way to the church. He slept overnight on the couch in the sacristy and was good to go in the morning—in both German and English services.

The congregation brought relief to Pastor Dornfeld in another major way—hiring Edna Vitense in 1932 as the first full-time office secretary. Edna became a legend—hard-working, devoted, careful, detail-oriented, and passionate about St. Marcus' mission. She served in the office for over half a century until 1985. She was also the Sunday School superintendent for decades.

The rise of the automobile caused Milwaukee's population to spread out much more rapidly. St. Marcus' membership was decentralizing and moving out too. In 1926 there were thirty-eight children of the congregation who attended other Lutheran schools. Eventually the families would transfer to those congregations, and St. Marcus would begin its long and slow decline in membership. Financial appeals in the *Markusbote* were frequent. The congregation set the

minimum acceptable level of contribution of “dues” at ten dollars per year, and “collectors” were sent out to those in “arrears.” Rev. Dornfeld pleaded with the members to contribute toward retiring the church’s construction debt, now fifteen years old, still amounting to \$14,000.

Those golden years of the 1920s didn’t last. The stock market crashed in 1929, and the whole world slid steadily into the greatest economic depression it had ever known. Banks failed, businesses closed, people got caught with debts they couldn’t repay, and unemployment skyrocketed. For four straight years, things got worse instead of better. Like churches and businesses everywhere else, St. Marcus couldn’t think of new programs or growth—it was all they could do just to survive. And survive they did, though salaries had to be cut and sacrifices made. The school kept going, with enrollment consistently above the two hundred mark. In 1932 the congregation had to hold back some of the teachers’ and pastor’s salaries, promising to pay them back when things got better. Sadly, in June 1941, still with hardly a dime to spare, the congregation rescinded its 1932 promise. There would be no payment of back wages. But somehow the congregation found the resources to present Pastor Dornfeld with a new car in 1935—he was thrilled.

Rev. Dornfeld’s leadership was steady as a rock, and the congregation survived, just in time for the next catastrophe. German Americans in 1917-1918 had gone through the trauma, stress, and shame of having to fight a world war against their German fatherland. It must have seemed like a surreal nightmare when they had to do it again in 1941. The congregation loyally bought war bonds, accepted the rationing and sacrifices, and contributed their sons to the military. By 1943 there were sixty-five St. Marcus men and a couple of women in the service, eighty-eight in 1944, and an unbelievable 145 in 1945. V-J Day in August 1945 brought great relief to the Allies everywhere.

Fun fact: in the 1940s, Bob Uecker and his family lived on the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Garfield Avenue. After an uninspiring major league stint as a catcher with the Milwaukee Braves, St. Louis Cardinals, and Philadelphia Phillies, he would later achieve national fame as the voice of the Milwaukee Brewers.

As the congregation neared its diamond jubilee in 1950, it was maybe dimly aware of the challenges that lay ahead. After fifteen years of economic sacrifice and hardship, with the older part of the city looking shabby and dirty, the city’s energy and growth would be in the outer edges. People began to flee the central part of the city even faster than they had been, seeking larger lots, newer homes, and less congestion.

St. Marcus wanted to keep up with the times. The congregation appointed a building committee to do a large-scale refurbishing of the sanctuary. It also released Professor Meyer from his part-time ministry obligations in 1949 and called a 1948 seminary graduate, John Jeske, to serve as Rev. Dornfeld’s assistant pastor.

## **Steady**

In 1950 St. Marcus claimed 1,200 communicants, 300 child members, 1,500 total souls, a school enrollment of 195, twenty-six youth confirmations, and forty-two baptisms.





# **Photo Essay**



St. Marcus' mother church, St. John's Lutheran, in its original home on 4th & Highland in 1872.

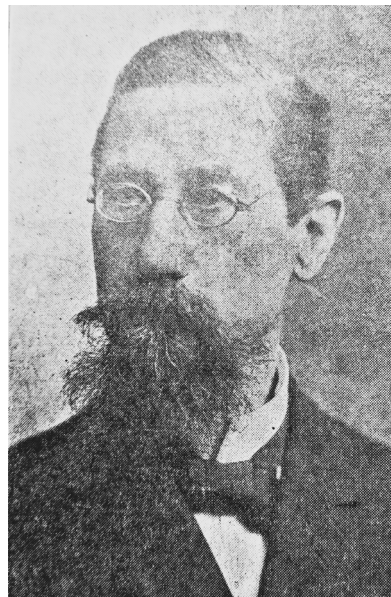
St. Marcus' original house church, serving the congregation and school from 1875-1881. It was then moved to N. Pierce St. in the Riverwest neighborhood where it stands today, though much altered.



## Photo Essay

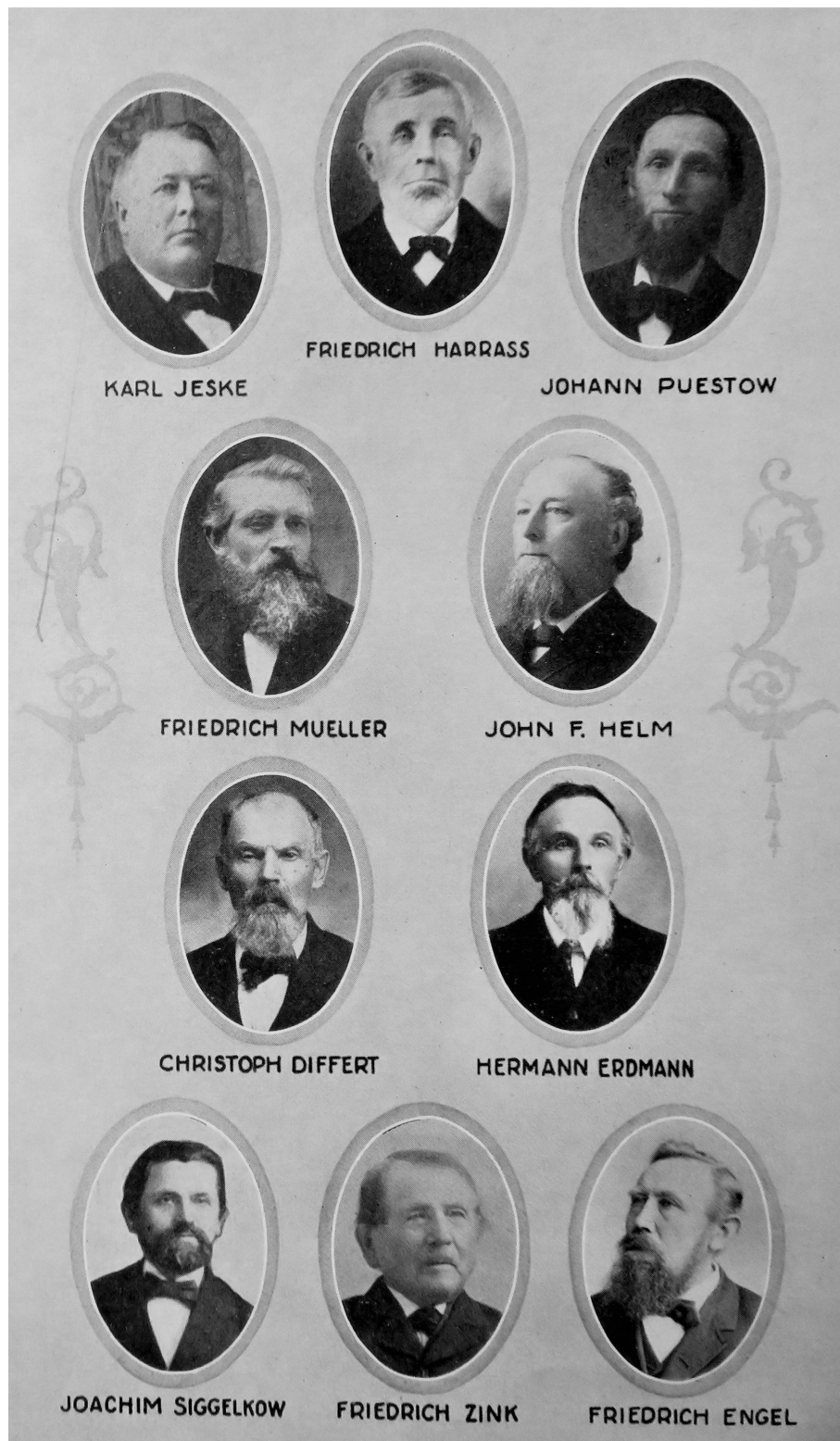


Founding pastor Joseph A. Westenberger, 1875-1878. He also taught in the one-room school for most of his three years.



Rev. Prof. Eugen A. Notz, 1878-1880. During his two years at St. Marcus, Rev. Notz also served as a full-time professor at the WELS seminary, located during those two years at Hubbard and Garfield.

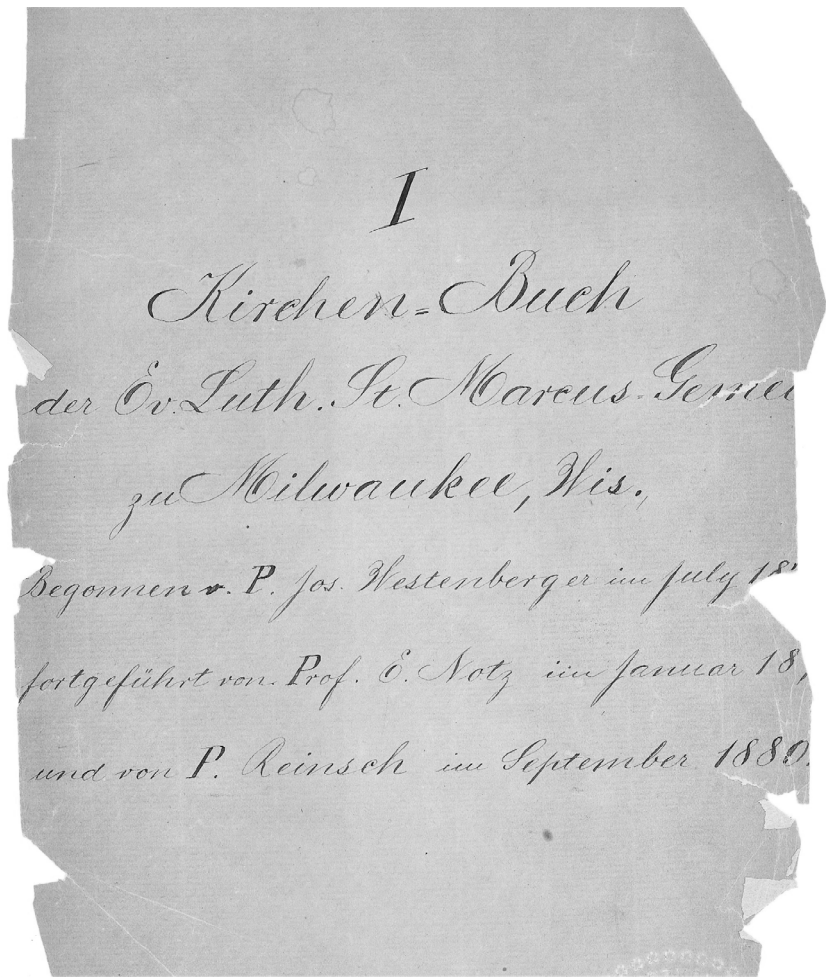




Ten of the thirteen founding members of the congregation. This picture, from the 1925 anniversary book, mislabeled the name of the first president. Mr. Harrass' first name is Ferdinand.

## Photo Essay

The title page of the congregation's first Protokollbuch, or compilation of the minutes of the church council. It is written by hand in the old-fashioned German script.



The hardware store on King Dr. (3rd St. in those days) was owned by one of the founders, John F. Helm.





At left is the frame church built in 1881, which served until 1913.  
At right is the 1894 school, which was demolished in 2002.

## Photo Essay

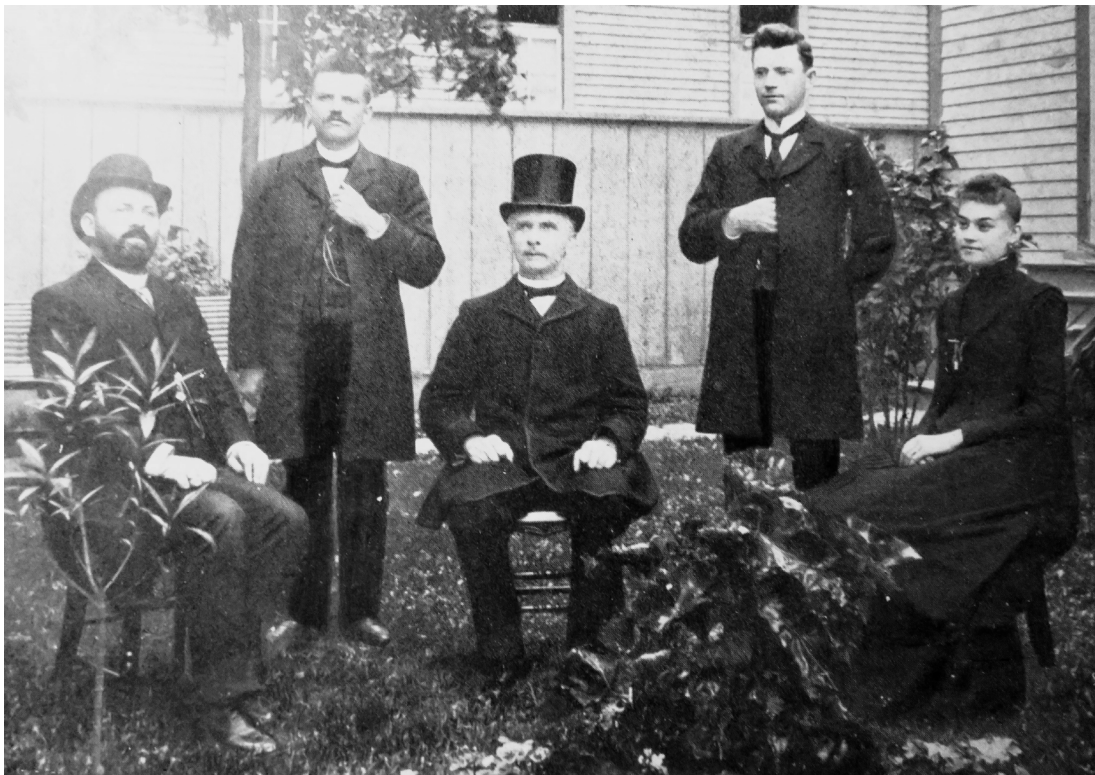


The original parsonage on Garfield Ave., just to the west of the church building. It was built in 1884. When a new parsonage was built on North Ave. for the Dornfelds in 1926, this house became the custodians' residence. It was moved to 202 E. Brown in 1998.





The oldest known photograph of the congregation's ministry. It is part of Teacher Fred Nimmer's class of 1886—note that only the boys are in this picture.



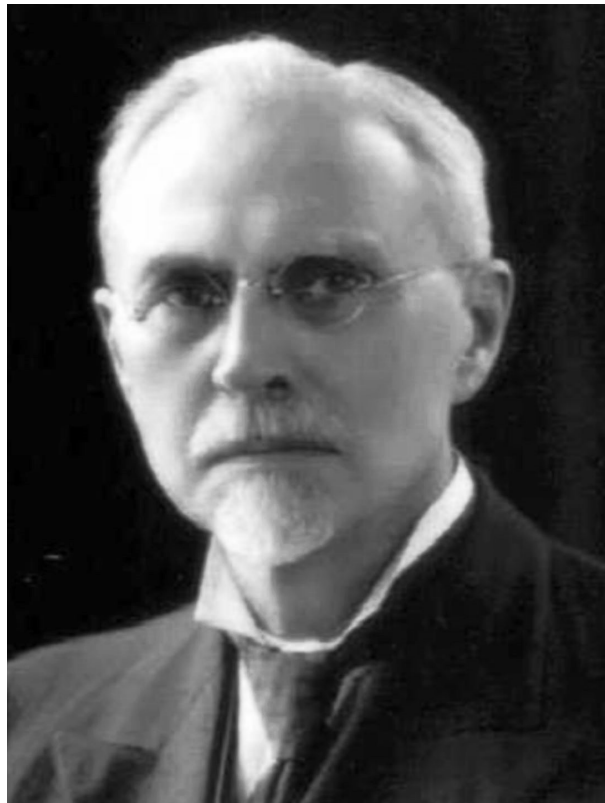
Pastor George J. Heinrich Reinsch (1880-1890), flanked by the faculty in 1890: from left, Rudolf Fritzke, Fred Nimmer, William Amling, and Miss Ueckert



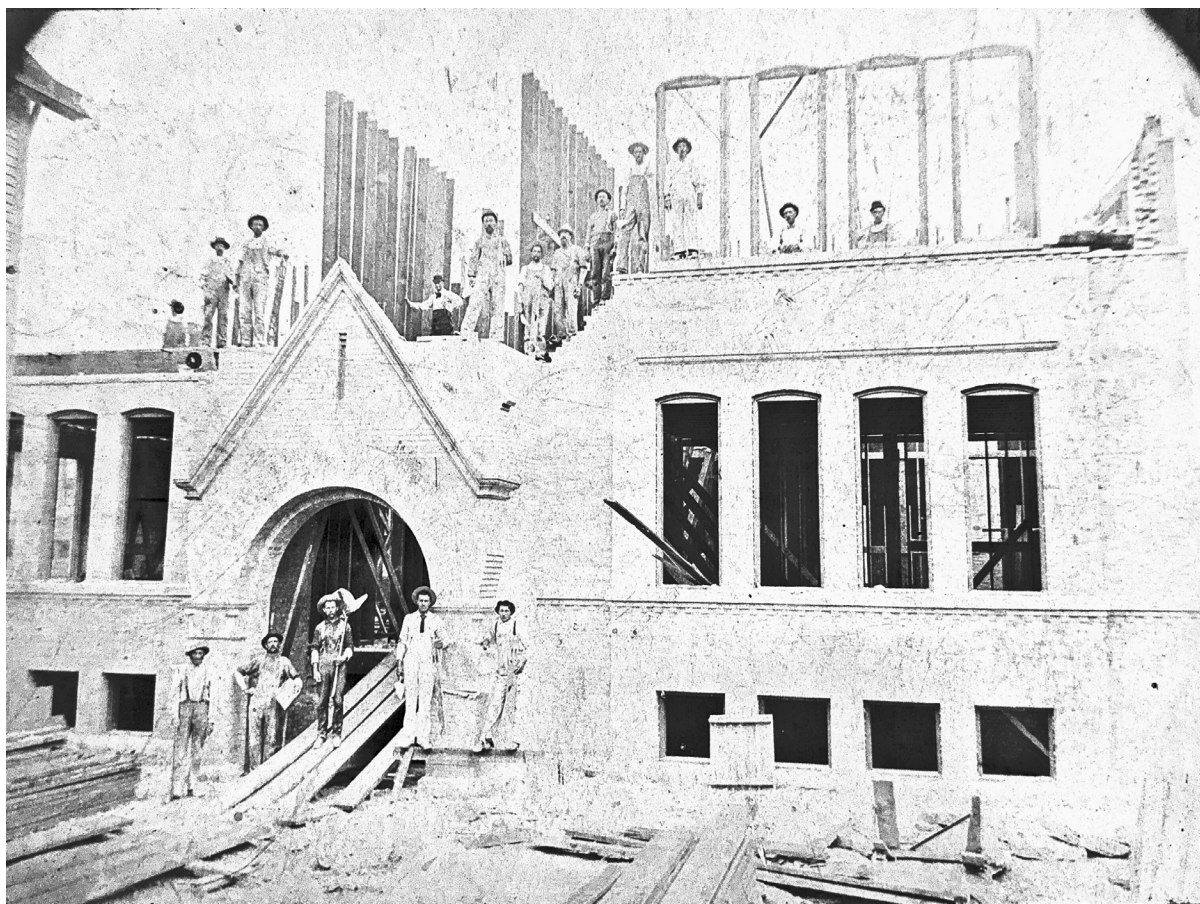
## Photo Essay



Miss Ueckert's primary class, c.1891



Rev. Prof. August O. Pieper,  
1891-1902



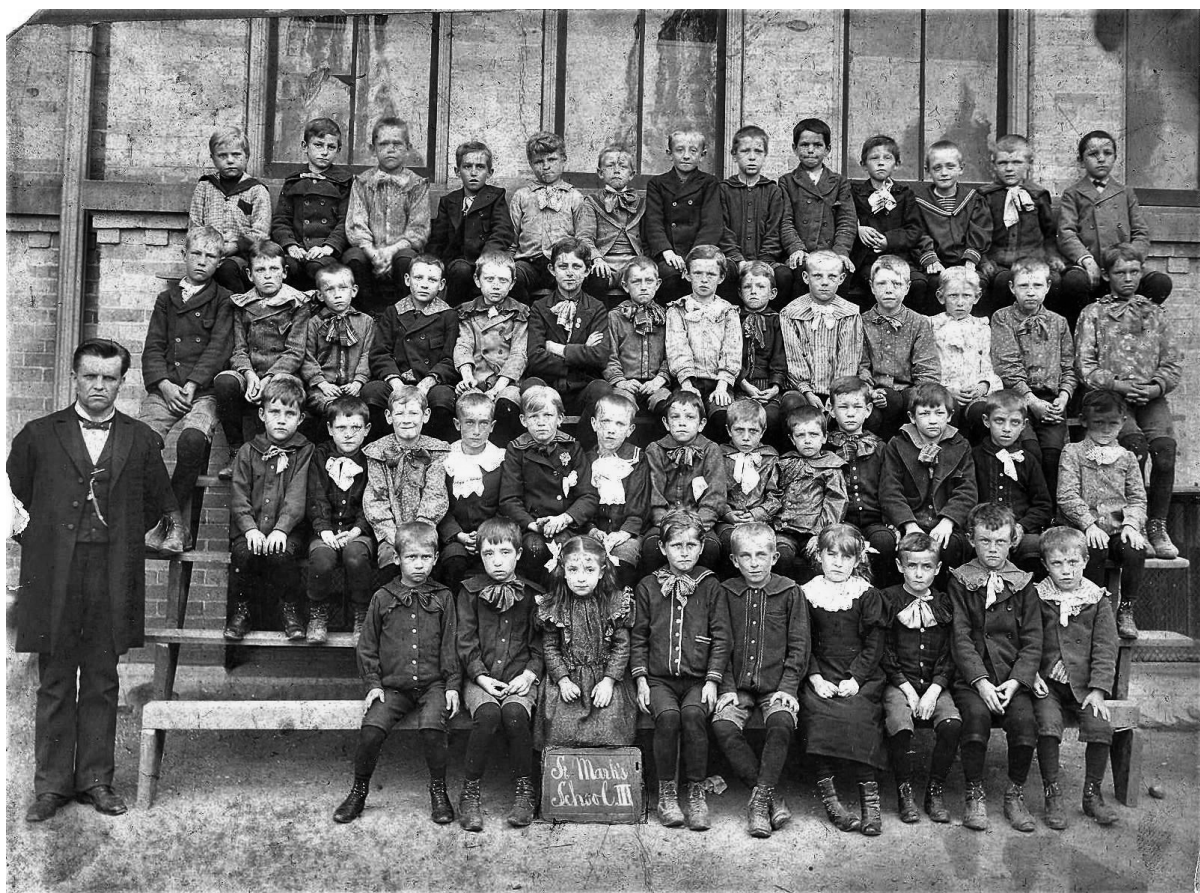
The 1894 brick school under construction. The masonry contractor was Gustave Jeske and Son.



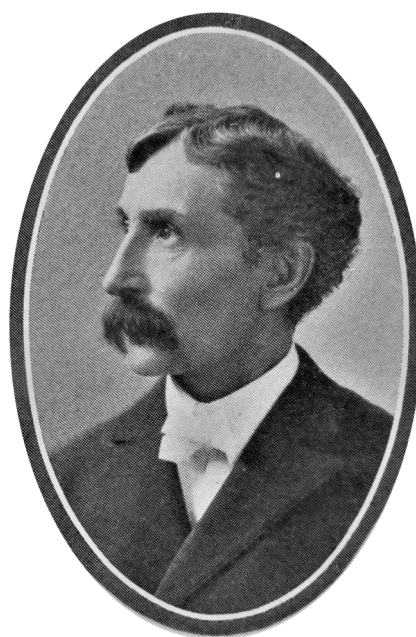


The 1894 school. The low one-story projection at right allowed the basement activity room to be converted into a bowling alley with four lanes.





Mr. Nimmer's primary and middle-grades class  
seated in front of the new school in 1896.

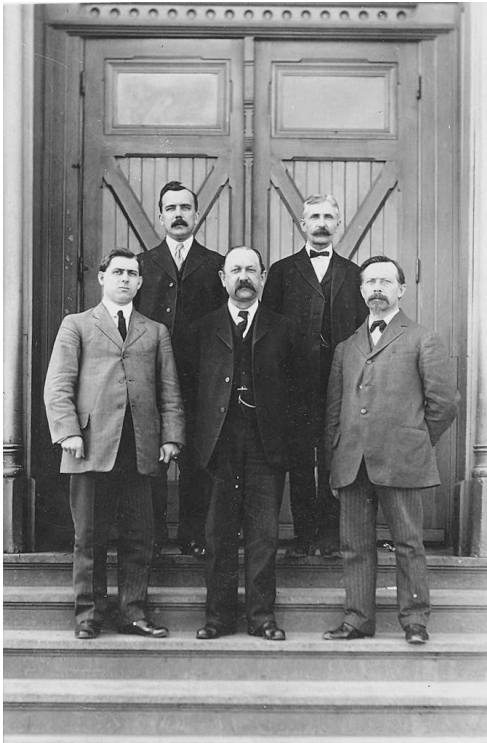


Rev. Ernst F. Dornfeld, 1902-1911

## Photo Essay



Teacher William Manthey and his class in front of the 1881 church in 1909.



The faculty from 1907-1911:  
from left, William Manthey,  
Henry Braun, Richard Dorn,  
Rev. Ernst F. Dornfeld, and  
Principal Henry Wagner





Rev. Gustaf Adolf Zeisler, 1921-1923



Rev. Walter A. Gieschen, 1923-1926

Rev. Prof. John P. Meyer,  
Assistant pastor, 1927-1964.  
He also served at the WELS  
seminary in Thiensville (Mequon)  
from 1920 until his death.

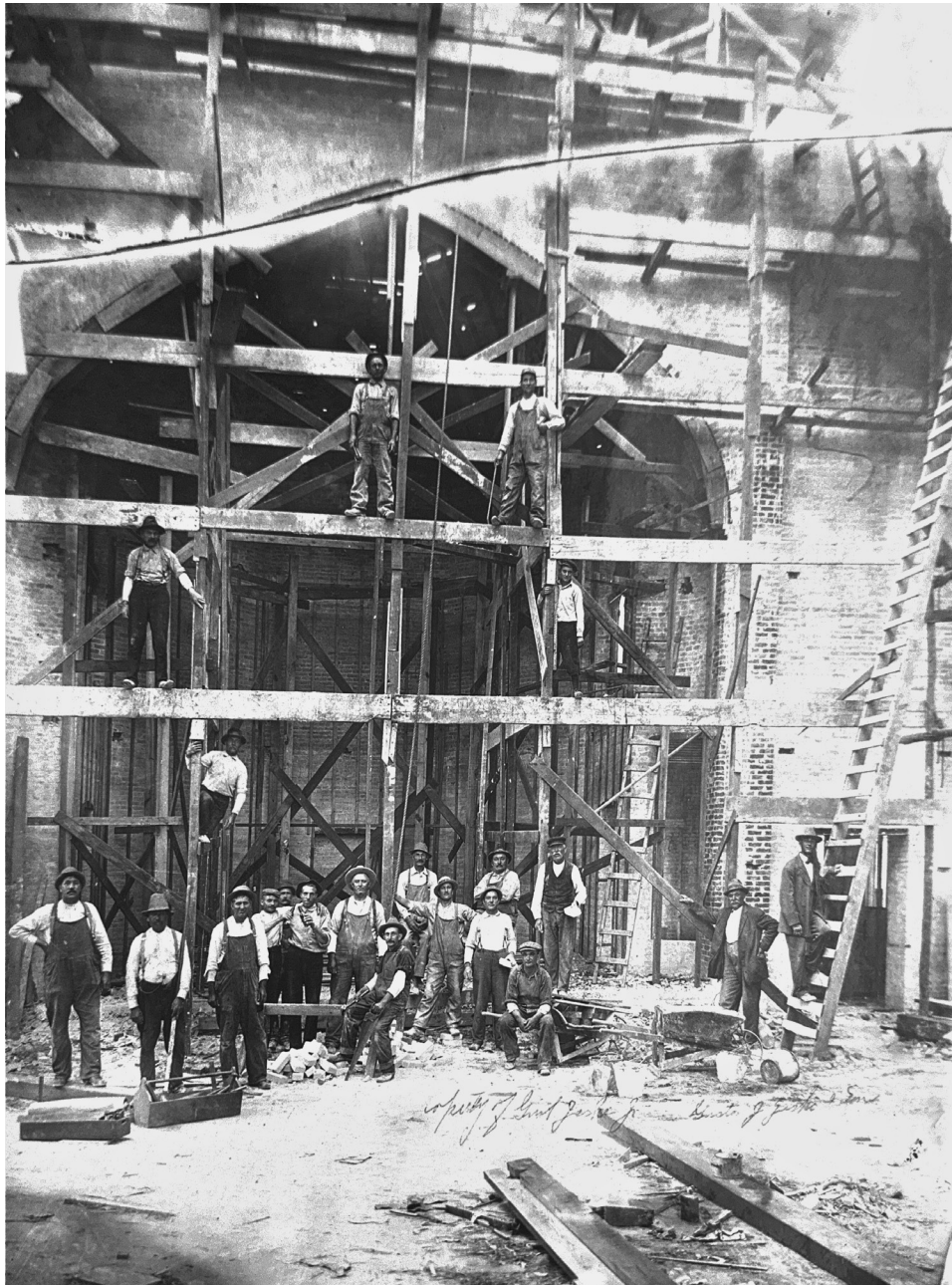


## Photo Essay



Rev. Ernst Ph. Dornfeld, 1911-1955, and assistant pastor John C. Jeske, 1949-1953, seated in the office in the school's basement in 1950.





The new church under construction in 1913.





**Fresco-Malerei.**  
Ev.-Luth. St. Markus-Kirche, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Referenzen.**  
Einige von den Kirchen in welche meine Arbeiten in Fenster oder Decoration zu sehen sind.

**In Milwaukee, Wis.**  
Ev.-Luth. Markus-Kirche  
Ev. Friedens-Kirche  
Ev. Tabor-Kirche  
Ev.-Luth. Golgatha-Kirche  
Ev.-Luth. Salems-Kirche  
Lake Park Eng. Luth. Kirche  
Milwaukee Hospital

Ev.-Luth. Friedens-Kirche  
Hartford, Wis.  
Ev.-Luth. Kirchen  
in Lake Mills, Wis.  
Ev.-Luth. Kirche  
Tomah, Wis.  
Ev.-Luth. St. Joh.-Kirche  
Madison, Wis.  
Ev. St. Pauls-Kirche  
Wausau, Wis.  
Swed. Ev.-Luth. Kirche  
Joliet, Ill.

Viele andere Referenzen auf Verlangen.

---



**Kirchen-Fenster**  
in echt christlichem  
Style.

**Fresco-Malerei**  
Wand- und Altar  
Gemälde.

**CARL REIMANN**  
Stained Glass and Mural Decorating.  
521 Jackson Street      Milwaukee, Wis.

Diploma erhalten 1894.  
Kunst-Akademie, Weimar.

A magazine ad for Milwaukee artist Carl Reimann, who used German painter Heinrich Hofmann's designs to execute all the stained-glass windows in the church. He probably also did the two oil-on-canvas paintings high on the wall, flanking the chancel.





The new red-brick church in 1914.



## Photo Essay



Some of the 8th grade graduates in 1915.



Some of the delegates to the synod convention  
of 1916, held in St. Marcus' new church.



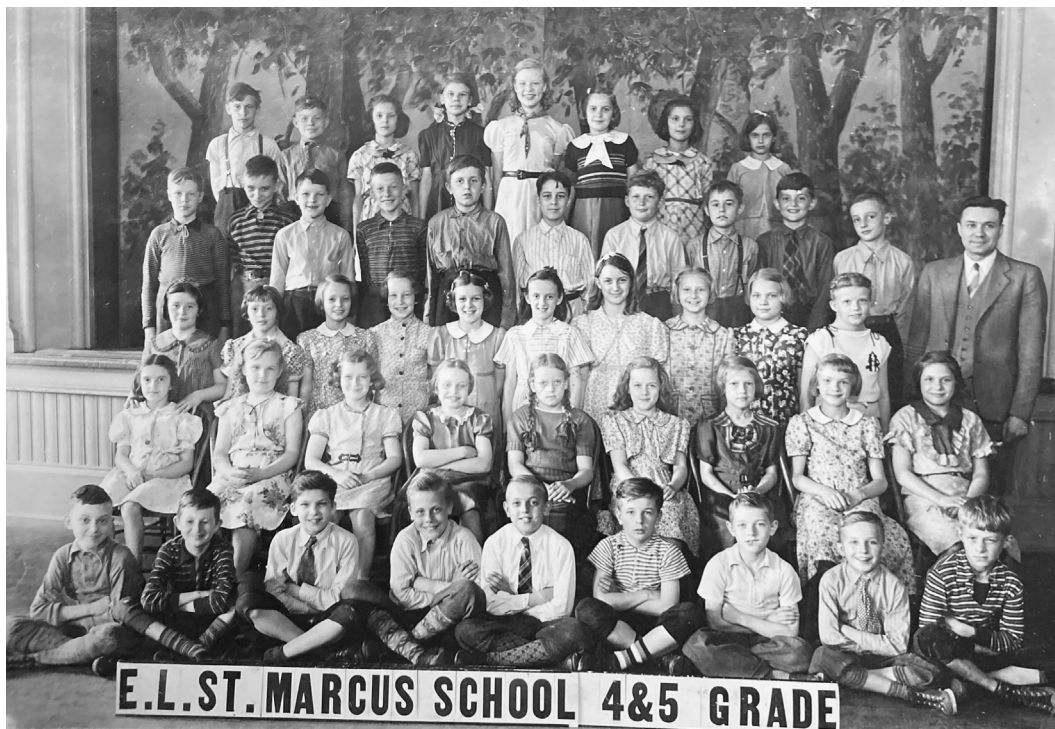
Some of the school graduates from 1924. Seated in front are teachers Lenora Gamm, Dora Gamm, William Kirschke, Hugo Wachholz, Christian Heine, Pastors Gieschen and Dornfeld.



The Young People's Society in 1925.



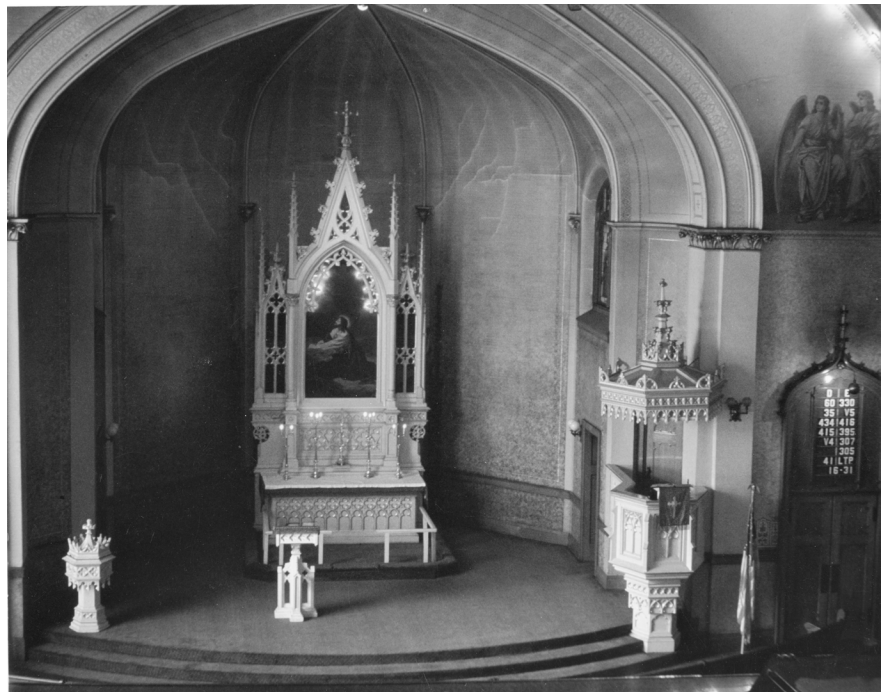
Photo Essay



Teacher Walter Denninger's 4-5th graders in 1937.



The pre-1950 pulpit with its canopy. You can see the stenciling and silver leaf.



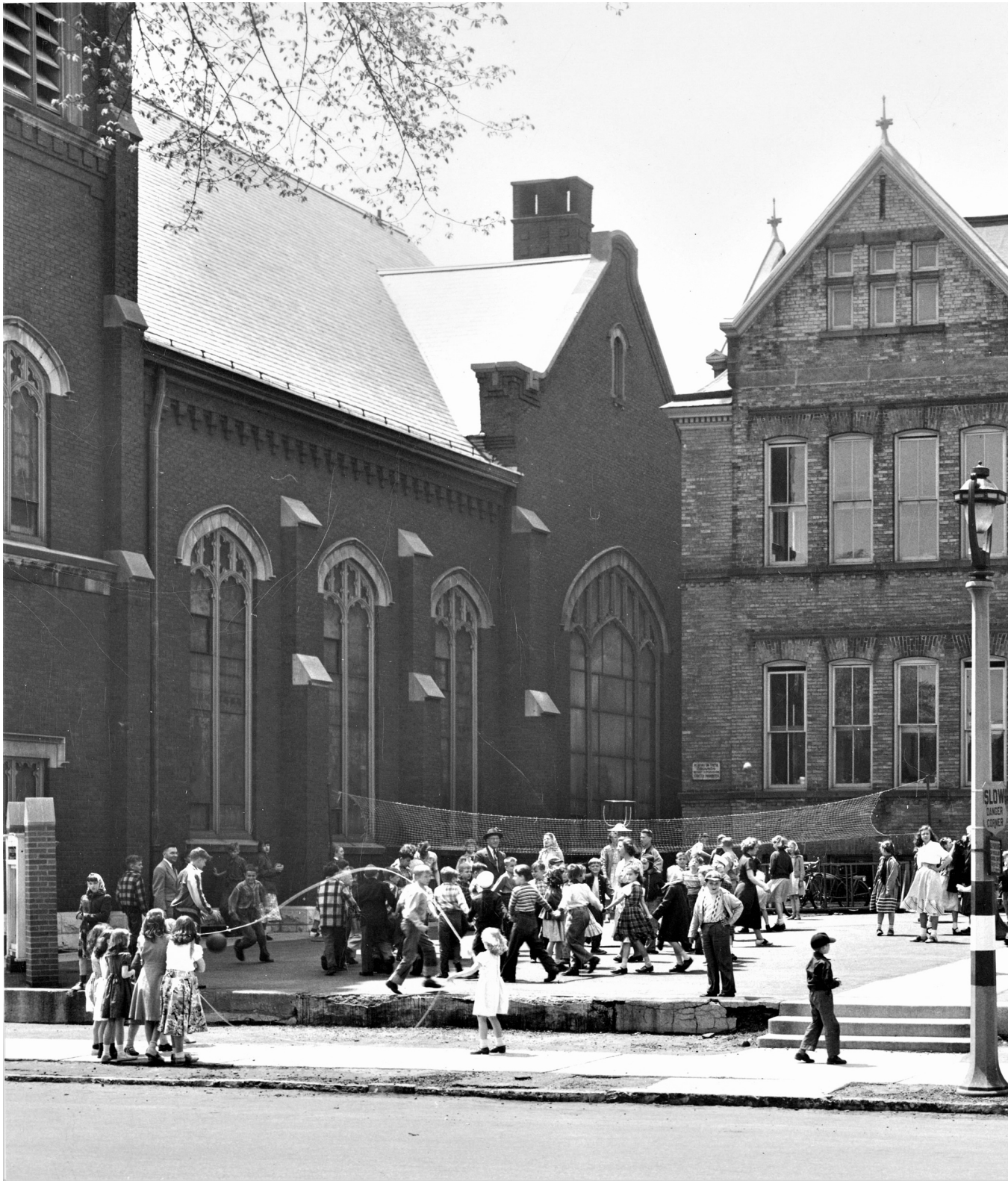
The pre-1950 altar, font, and pulpit. At the upper right, you can see the illumination provided by rows of electric light bulbs on the ceiling arches.

## Photo Essay



The chancel was redesigned and rebuilt in a Danish modern, blond look in 1950. Pictured is the wedding of Pastor Mark and Carol Jeske in 1986.









Children on the playground in front of the 1894 school in 1950.



The Sunday School staff in 1950. Legendary church secretary and Sunday School superintendent Edna Vitense is in the back row; Mission Society president Eileen Uttecht is third from left in the front row, and parish nurse/food pantry/altar guild leader Pat Steliga is fourth from the left in the front row.



Pastor Paul W. Knickelbein,  
1955-1967

## Photo Essay



School graduates in 1957. Faculty in back row: Dorothy Wolf, Bob Eberhard, Pastor Knickelbein, Principal Walter Vater, Ruth Schaller, and Rose Wisenbaugh.



Pastor Richard and Shirley Seeger,  
1967-1979, in the school parking lot.



## Photo Essay



Henrietta Taylor and friends enjoying  
the centennial dinner in 1975.

Some dinner guests  
at the centennial  
celebration in 1975:  
front right: Martha  
Vanselow. Second  
table facing camera:  
Pat Steliga (with  
white collar), Ella  
Fehrmann, Helen  
Semerau.







Mr. Gartner's 7-8 graders in 1976.



Mr. Gartner in his classroom in 1976.



Photo Essay



Pastor Mark A. Jeske, 1980-2022





Kindergarten teacher Judy Gartner in her classroom in 1982.



Photo Essay



Mrs. Gartner's classroom in 1982.







The school after its 1994 renovation.



## Photo Essay



The student body in the gym with its beautiful new stage curtain and refinished floor in 1995.



The gym renovation in 1994 made it possible to have home games. Seating was extremely limited, but the cheerleaders loved it.





Juneteenth Day in 1995. The Gospel choir, augmented by volunteer VBS teachers.



Juneteenth Day flyers.



Outdoor Juneteenth worship in 1995.



Photo Essay



Juneteenth soloists Willie Reynolds and Gwen Roebuck-Banks.



Kente cloth colors in Juneteenth Day worship.



A baptism on Juneteenth Day.





Gospel Choir director Darlene Jones-Grams.



Juneteenth Day 1997



## Photo Essay



The St. Jacob's Lutheran Church's historic altar being installed at St. Marcus in 1998.



Career Day in March of 2000 in the gym. Visible are teachers Sue Keese, Sandy O'Brien, Shana Retzlaff, and Lynne Kelm. The scoreboard was donated by Herb and Honey Schaper.





1894 School  
Building Demo,  
2002

The 2003  
school under  
construction.



The 2003  
classroom wing is  
enclosed—now  
for the gym.



## Photo Essay

The north tower  
being built in 2003.



The 2003 school  
is almost done!

The new school  
was dedicated on  
September 20, 2003.





Pastor James  
Skorzewski,  
2002-2008



Koiné begins: from left, pianist Seth Bauer, drummer Bob Buss, bassist Pete Reese, singer Brian Davison, and guitarist Benj Lawrenz.



## Photo Essay

Jeff Krumbein,  
Minister of Music,  
1994-2019



Schoolchildren doing the California Raisin  
dance for a fundraiser lunch in 2008.



Rev. Dr. Paul S. Steinberg,  
2008-2017



Rev. Kelly B. Huet,  
2009-2015



Rev. William J. Schaefer,  
2011-2015





## Photo Essay



School chapel devotion in the sanctuary, 2011.





Construction of the 2011 Primary School.



The Primary School is finished in 2011.



## Photo Essay



The Gospel Choir singing at Martin Luther College chapel in New Ulm, MN in 2011.



K3-K4 children singing for worship in 2012, directed by Carol Jeske.





Christmas, 2013



Panoramic shot from the balcony, 2014. Most of the carpeting has been removed from the chancel and front of the nave to boost the acoustics.



## Photo Essay



The Krier Gym  
under construction  
in 2013.

Middle School  
drumline in 2014.



Principal April Richter addresses students and  
parents at the Center Street Campus in 2014.



Rev. James M. Hein,  
Lead Pastor, 2016-present



Rev. Prof. Daniel Leyrer,  
2016-present. Rev. Leyrer also  
serves as the President of the  
Southeastern Wisconsin  
District of the WELS



Ron Kelly, Pastoral Assistant,  
2019-present



Rev. Joel Krieger,  
School Pastor, 2022-present



## Photo Essay



Saturday  
night outdoor  
worship in  
2017.



School children  
play xylophones  
for Easter  
worship, 2018.





Joel Schwartz,  
Church Music Director,  
2020-present



The new organ console being hoisted into the balcony, 2017.

## Photo Essay



The rebuilt pipe organ, together with the five timpani, 2017.





Kole Knueppel, Executive Director, 2021-present,  
also served as the School's Principal from 2001-2004



## Photo Essay



Henry Tyson, Superintendent, 2008-Present.  
Principal, 2004-2008. Vice Principal, 2002-2004.



Center Street Campus signage, 2024



April Richter,  
Director of Early Education  
Programming, 2024-Present.  
Center Street Campus  
Founding Principal,  
2014-2024 (Total time  
served: 2003-Present)



Brittany Krause, Center  
Street Campus Middle  
School Director & Principal,  
2024-Present (Total time  
served: 2018-Present)



Sarina Scott-Owens,  
Center Street Campus  
Kindergarten & Primary  
Director & Principal,  
2024-Present (Total time  
served: 2019-Present)



## Photo Essay



St. Marcus scholar,  
2024



Center Street Campus, 2024; historic natatorium section at right.





Tracy Eastburn,  
Karl J. Schlueter Campus  
Principal, 2021-Present  
(Total time served: 2019-Present)



Karl J. Schlueter Campus,  
First St. façade, 2024.

St. Marcus scholar,  
2024



## Photo Essay



St. Marcus scholar,  
2024



Karl J. Schlueter Campus,  
2024, Burleigh Street  
view.



North Avenue  
Campus, 2024,  
Primary School  
Building



Rebecca Hannemann,  
North Avenue Campus  
Kindergarten & Primary Grades  
Principal/Director of Student  
Services, 2023-present  
(Total time served: 2006-Present)



Garrett Mandeville,  
North Avenue Campus Middle  
School Principal/Director of Talent  
& Recruitment, 2023-Present  
(Total time served: 2016-Present)



## Photo Essay



St. Marcus scholars, 2024



North Avenue Campus, 2024, Primary School Building entrance

St. Marcus scholar,  
2024



North Avenue Campus, 2024 Middle School Building



## Photo Essay



North Avenue Campus, 2024 Middle School Building entrance



St. Marcus scholar, 2024





St. Marcus Church, 2024





The balcony window, "Come Unto Me", shows Christ hearing the prayers of people in need and speaking his blessing on them.





Gospel Choir, 2023









**St. Marcus Board of Directors, 2024**

(Left to right: Jeff Underwood, Vice President; Kirk Fedewa, Secretary; Ben Hannemann, President; Brenda Jashinsky, Business Council Chair; Andrew Lamers, Treasurer; John Rhodes, Facilities Council Chair; Ethan Degner, Community Council Chair. Not pictured: Amy Heffelfinger-Miles, School Council Chair & Mark Ricke, Church Council Chair)



**Brent Krohn, School Campus Evangelist, 2024-present  
and Saturday Worship Leader, 2023-present**



## Photo Essay



Altar Guild, 2024

Row 1. Heidi Sebald, Joylyn Rehm, Mandy Hanson, Jolene Wierschke, Debbie Lemke  
Row 2. Sandy O'Brien, Rosalind Perry, Lilli Gust  
Row 3. Sherry Hartman, Janine Burr, Deb Jaeger  
Row 4. Carol Jeske, Barbara Mays, Cindy Strehlow, Teena Wigley, Suzanne Knapp  
Not pictured: Lynda Arndt, Tracy and Terry Eastburn, Kole Knueppel, Bonita Lathan,  
and Tracy Lechinger





Pastor Mark & Carol Jeske Atrium, 2024









Pastor Joel Krieger distributes Holy Communion, 2023



















## **The Times They Are a-Changin’**

Postwar America wanted to throw off everything that seemed old and worn-out and dirty. People finally had money to spend, and after a decade-long depression and then war shortages, there was stuff to buy again. In the 1950s Milwaukee’s clanking steel-wheeled streetcars all gave way to rubber-tired buses. New suburban shopping malls killed the old downtown department stores. Cars got huge and flamboyant.

St. Marcus wanted to be changing too. As the congregation was getting rid of the last vestiges of its immigrant past, the renovation committee decided that the “old-fashioned” look of the church had to go. The congregation wanted to celebrate its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1950 by getting with the times. The tall, carved white and gilt altar, pulpit, and canopy were torn out and disappeared. Only the oil painting of Christ in Gethsemane survived; it was framed and hung in the school’s second floor hallway. (It was later moved to the south gym lobby and is visible each day to every child and teacher who walks down that corridor.) A new altar was designed to make St. Marcus look more modern. It was Danish blond and simple—no curlicues or gold leaf. A dark-blue dossal curtain hung above the altar. The high pulpit was replaced by a low pulpit, also plain and stained blond. Blond wainscot paneling lined the chancel, and two big, heavy blond chairs flanked the altar. Since 1914 the church had been illuminated by rows of light bulbs set into the plaster arches in the ceiling. It must have been a beastly job to change out the dead ones. These were all removed and new hanging chandeliers were installed. Total cost: \$23,000.

A weary world groaned in 1950 as large-scale warfare broke out again, this time in Korea. At least 34 young men from St. Marcus served in the armed forces until the ceasefire in 1953.

In 1953 Assistant Pastor Jeske accepted a call to St. John's on the south side. The congregation persuaded Professor Meyer to come back to his old preaching schedule, and he was put back on the payroll. In September the council minutes report a significant change: "A delicate subject, in regards to a colored family seeking admittance to our school, is to be presented to the congregation without recommendation." At the voters' meeting five days later, it was pointed out that the Todd family was of the Lutheran faith. The Todd children were admitted, but all other families of color would have to have their applications acted on separately by the voters.

School principal William Kirschke died suddenly in November 1954, having served at St. Marcus for thirty-seven years. The next June, Pastor Dornfeld submitted his resignation, partially because of age but also because the death of his daughter-in-law was going to require that the senior Dornfelds move in with their son. Pastor Dornfeld still had a powerful urge to serve in the church, however, and he continued in a semi-retirement ministry, leading Nathanael Lutheran Church on 50<sup>th</sup> Street just north of State Street. The two incredible Gamm sisters, Dora and Leonore, retired in 1956.

Some new leadership emerged. Henry Frank, a city professional, came to serve as organist and choir director. He would play the organ regularly for forty years. Walter Vater, on staff since 1945, served as principal from 1954-1961, and he had a very fine faculty around him: Robert Eberhardt, Dorothy Wolf, Rose Wisenbaugh Petschel, and Ruth Schaller. In 1954, younger women of the congregation founded the Women's Service Guild, which would meet in the evening—the Ladies' Aid continued to meet in the daytime. In 1956 Marge Wolfgram started the Altar Guild, a group that would attract and put to work many dozens of bright and passionate women. In 1956 a Men's Club was organized.

1955 was a triply significant year: it was the end of the Dornfeld years; it was the year of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott; and it was the year St. Marcus School graduated its first African American student. Leon Todd was the Jackie Robinson of St. Marcus—likeable, patient, relational, and even interested in the ministry. He opened the way for a trickle, and then a flood, of other African Americans who called Milwaukee's near North Side home to give St. Marcus' ministries a try.

There had been a few African Americans in the city since Milwaukee's beginnings, but very few. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 forbade slavery, although the ordinance was not always rigorously enforced. Milwaukee was a stop on the Underground Railroad, helping escaped slave Caroline Quarlls in 1842. The amazing story of Joshua Glover is cast into the concrete of the McKinley Avenue freeway abutments. As early as 1869, there were enough African Americans to found the first black church, St. Mark's African Methodist Episcopal, on 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

But the few African Americans in Milwaukee in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were overwhelmed by the tide of incoming Europeans. As late as 1910, there were only 3,000 African Americans in the whole state. But that would change.



## The Times They Are a-Changin’

Milwaukee’s changing black population:

<b>1860</b>	122
<b>1910</b>	980
<b>1930</b>	7,501
<b>1940</b>	8,821
<b>1950</b>	21,772 (still only 3.4% of the city’s population)
<b>1960</b>	62,458
<b>1970</b>	105,000
<b>2020</b>	228,000

Jim Crow laws in the South and insatiable demand for industrial labor in the North, especially during 1940s wartime and the 1950s and 1960s manufacturing boom, intensified what historians call the Great Migration, that is, the huge movement of African Americans from South to North from 1915-1970.

By 1950 there was a recognizable Milwaukee Bronzeville, extending roughly from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street on the east, North Avenue on the north, Juneau Avenue on the south, and 12<sup>th</sup> Street on the west. Walnut Street was its commercial heart. Bronzeville’s concentration was due in part to the tendency of newer groups to clump together for solidarity and the comfort of common culture, but it occurred also because of insurance redlining, racial steering by white realtors, restrictive real estate covenants, and the difficulties for African Americans to gain access to capital for home and business loans.

America’s civil rights movement was just beginning, and St. Marcus played a part in it. After World War II, Milwaukee’s WELS Lutherans knew that there were unserved African Americans in the city, but there was doubt about whether all-white congregations were ready to throw open their doors. Instead, St. Marcus resolved to petition the synod’s district mission board in October 1947 “to make a thorough survey of the Negroe (sic) district to determine whether or not this area is ripe for mission work.”

It took a couple of years to gain commitments for financial support, but in 1952, Rev. Bertram Sauer was ordained and commissioned to canvass the heart of Bronzeville to see whether there was interest in what the Lutherans could bring. He worked at it for two years before ill health compelled his resignation. Rev. Paul Knickelbein was called from Sault Ste. Marie in 1954 to continue Rev. Sauer’s work. This big rambunctious guy actually pulled it off—after a year’s work he helped St. Philip’s Lutheran Church organize in 1955. Their first worship space was a converted broom factory on 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

But then—St. Marcus called him to succeed Rev. Dornfeld. And then—he accepted. Mercifully, St. Philip’s survived his early departure and flourishes today. Rev. Knickelbein brought his missionary’s heart and spirit to St. Marcus and helped it to reinvent itself. If it had been Rev. Ernst Ph. Dornfeld’s great mission to guide St. Marcus through the transition from German to English

and survive the hardships of depression and war, it was Rev. Knickelbein's special destiny to help St. Marcus become multiracial, and joyfully so.

As he was discussing accepting St. Marcus' call, Pastor Knickelbein left no doubt about his evangelistic intent. From the September 1955 council minutes: "Pastor Knickelbein desired an expression concerning the policy which the congregation might follow in the event that a Negro would request membership. The council felt that a Negro could best be served by referring him to St. Philip's church, but if this should not be satisfactory, then the matter would have to be referred to the council for special consideration."

With Rev. Knickelbein's prodding, the school enrolled more and more African American kids, and by 1960, he was starting to instruct and confirm some of their parents. Some very talented and passionate African American families decided to trust a historically white congregation: Rose and Zora Waller, Betty Boyd, Vernice and Crystal Ross, Thelma Gee, Nancy Maye, Leon and Marshall Todd, Earl Shaw, Mary Tyler, Dr. James and Sarah McDuffie, and many others all joined in the early 1960s. St. Marcus had become racially diverse.

In 1957 they closed the bowling alleys, not only because nobody was bowling there anymore, but because they needed ministry space. That basement room in the school would become the main meeting and fellowship space for St. Marcus for the next forty-five years. In 1960 the deacons recommended reducing the German services to only once a month. German services ceased entirely in 1963 because of low attendance.

The overall membership and financial declines were real, and they were troubling. Voters' minutes in 1960 report that accumulated operating deficits exceeded \$15,000, and the congregation reluctantly decided to discontinue the \$150 per month pension it was paying Pastor Dornfeld (six months later, it backtracked and re-committed to one hundred dollars per month). Just to keep operating, the congregation found it necessary to loot the organ fund of its \$1,337 and refused to repay the endowment fund the \$2,725 it had "borrowed."

The church council constituted a special committee, chaired by architect and city planner Richard Perrin, to come up with a plan for what to do. Mr. Perrin sent out a congregation-wide letter in September of 1960 sharing the painful facts that from 1950-1960, St. Marcus had lost half its membership and half its school enrollment. All were invited to a major congregational meeting later that month. (*See Appendix I.*) One of the options was to leave Palmer Street and head west. But the congregation stayed.

The turn of the decade saw a complete turnover of faculty in the school at that time. Dorothy Wolf left in 1959, Rose Petschel left in 1960, and Walter Vater, Bob Eberhardt, and Ruth Schaller left in 1961. Pastor Knickelbein was pressed into service as emergency principal and taught grades seven and eight.



## The Times They Are a-Changin'

But during that bleak time, the Lord sent more talented and passionate temporary and permanent workers: Lois Lemke, Charlotte Wacker, Eunice Jessen, Yvonne Janosek, Fred Berg, Russ Schwalbe, Sandra Jaber, Mary Deglow, and new principal Jerry and wife Miriam Gronholz. (*See Appendix J for Jerry's memories from 1962-1965.*)

Since the church had decided to stay put on Palmer Street, all knew it was really time to renovate the school. What was not clear was whether the congregation could afford it. In December 1961 the church had to take out a \$5,000 loan at 6% just to cover operating expenses. The council and voters' minutes from these years are filled with the stress of the lack of funds and steady out-flow of members. The congregation occasionally couldn't make payroll.

Richard Perrin's special committee reported gloomily in September 1962: "... the congregation is barely solvent ... operating expenses of the congregation have barely been met, and met only because necessary repairs and other maintenance items have been deferred ... the conclusion must be reached that St. Marcus is a poor congregation. The undersigned committee makes its recommendation that the contemplated capital improvement program is not possible of attainment at this time."

But the council must have rejected Mr. Perrin's advice, because a huge project was launched even though they had absolutely no money. Carl Buege was the lead planner and driver. In 1963 all rotting wooden window sash was replaced with metal-framed windows; plaster was repaired, vinyl asbestos floor tile installed, and new fluorescent lighting hung. The classroom and kitchen on the northwest corner of the school's first floor were converted into a proper church office, plus a school office, school work room, nurse's room, and restroom. In order to have the old assembly hall on the second floor turned into a gym, steel supports had to be installed to help bear the extra stress. A basketball backboard and hoop were nailed to the south wall. Since the bowling alleys in the basement were out of business, the gutters were filled with concrete and the room became a fellowship hall with a kitchen at the east end. The total cost was over \$70,000, and most of the money had to be borrowed commercially—first \$50,000, then another \$10,000, plus \$6,700 in direct loans from members. But they got it done, and the members were proud of the refreshed look, even if the renovation debt became a financial albatross around the congregation's neck.

In the church sanctuary there had been a long-running debate over the lack of central image above the altar—apparently some people still missed the large oil painting of Christ in Gethsemane. The small brass cross was not very visible. The solution? A six-foot tall oak cross, stained blond to match the altar, was commissioned from artist Jerome Harders, whose mother Bertha was a member. The multicolored dossal curtains were replaced by a single deep red curtain.

Kindergarten teacher Marie Sprengeler joined the team in 1966. That November the congregation allowed Pastor Knickelbein to assume additional pastoral leadership of a small Lutheran Church on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Concordia Avenue called Ephrata that couldn't afford a full-time pastor;

essentially Ephrata and St. Marcus now constituted a dual parish.

1967 proved to be a pivotal year. After twelve eventful years, Pastor Knickelbein received a call to Cleveland, Wisconsin. The constant pressure of operating financial shortfalls, capital debt, the pastor's having to serve as school principal, and racial issues had stressed his relationship with the church council. When the council couldn't give him a clear message to stay at St. Marcus, Pastor Knickelbein realized that it was time to move on. After his farewell service on Easter Sunday, the congregation entered a pastoral vacancy. Rev. John Chworowsky from Wisconsin Lutheran High School served as interim pastor.

Then all hell broke loose in the central city. Racial tensions had been mounting throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. For two hundred consecutive days, protesters marched for open housing laws, which were eventually passed. In late July 1967, a false rumor flew around the central city that an African-American boy had been assaulted by white Milwaukee police officers. A riot broke out on July 30, and its epicenter was along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, now King Drive, terrifyingly close to St. Marcus. Groups of young people roamed the streets, throwing rocks and bricks, smashing windows, setting fires, knocking down power lines, looting, setting vehicles on fire, and discharging firearms until 3 a.m. The police set up their command center on 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Garfield Avenue. Mayor Henry Maier declared a curfew, and the National Guard had to be called out. The inner city was sealed off from Michigan Street to Capitol Drive and from 20<sup>th</sup> Street to Holton Street. The riot left four dead, including a police officer, and one hundred injured, and it led to the arrest of 1,740 people. St. Marcus' vacant parsonage was entered by vandals and looters and twice by arsonists that summer.

The damage to the neighborhood took decades to heal. People and businesses fled, turning an already distressed 3<sup>rd</sup> Street into a ghost town. The commercial heart of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street shopping district, the huge Gimbels-Schuster's department store on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Garfield Avenue, was crippled and would soon close. The congregation eventually sold its damaged vacant parsonage to the city for a mere \$2,000. Things looked very bleak for St. Marcus at the end of summer 1967.

Fred Berg was willing to teach but strongly preferred not to be the principal. Fred Hagedorn accepted St. Marcus' call as upper grades teacher and principal, and when the church realized that Ada was a trained teacher too, they called her for grades one and two. The Hagedorns had had experienced working in a diverse ministry at the Indian Mission School in Gresham, Wisconsin. Fred received quite a welcome in his third month in the classroom—a large rock came crashing through the window, just barely missing his head and gouging a chunk out of the chalkboard. The shattered glass injured some students.

Blessedly the pastoral vacancy was a short one. St. Marcus called a world missionary, and he accepted. Pastor Richard Seeger was a 1957 Seminary graduate who had been sent directly to Japan to rebuild the WELS mission. In 1966 he and his wife Shirley moved to Hong Kong to help launch the WELS mission there. They came to Milwaukee in October 1967 and chose to



## The Times They Are a-Changin'

live in Wauwatosa.

Pastor Seeger invested new energy into the congregation. He was a great big man with a great big voice, both for speaking and singing. He showered love on the long-time members and enthusiastically continued to do neighborhood evangelism and welcome new African American confirmands. Church attendance and overall membership perked up. When he received a call to develop a Lutheran mission in Hawaii, the panicked council gave him a rising vote of confidence and pleaded with him to stay. He did.

The school's lower-level kitchen was renovated. The school building was sandblasted in 1971. This removed seventy-five years of grime and coal soot from the porous Cream City brick, but the sandblasting tore the protective crust off the brick and left it slowly spalling and dissolving like Alka-Seltzer. Pastor Seeger inspired the starting of a Mission Society in 1972 and a Sunday School program for adults with cognitive disabilities. The debt on the 1963 school renovation was finally paid off in 1972.

The congregation had a great opportunity in 1971—to buy a decrepit house and lot just north of the school building for \$700 at a sheriff's auction, plus \$513 in back taxes and an unbelievably low demo cost of \$490. They bought it, paved the lot with asphalt, installed a catch basin, fenced it, and voilà—after 96 years St. Marcus finally had off-street parking for about a dozen cars. The school kids enjoyed the extra play space. One can sense the level of fear among members at that time by the request that the council made of the city to be allowed to put barbed wire along the top of the fence. Eight years later the congregation seized another opportunity and bought from the city a vacant lot across the alley facing Garfield Avenue. This is the land where the multi-purpose room and conference room now stand. The price? \$125.

Pastor Seeger had agreed to continue the relationship with Ephrata Lutheran Church. He would lead worship at an early service at Ephrata and then hustle down to North Avenue for St. Marcus' later service. When Ephrata finally closed its doors in 1977, their members showed their appreciation to Pastor Seeger in two ways: about 30 members came over to St. Marcus membership, and the congregation gave the \$35,000 proceeds for the sale of their church building to St. Marcus.

The school had survived the 1967 riot, but white flight only intensified. The last white kids attended in 1972, and then the school became all-black. Principal Hagedorn had the heart of a lion, but his body was being slowly frozen into Parkinson's Disease, and he had to retire in 1974. In 1971 Dan and Judy Gartner were called from the Apache Reservation school in Cibecue, Arizona, and enthusiastically threw themselves into St. Marcus' mission. Dan became principal in 1974, and Judy joined the team as an organist and then kindergarten teacher and school secretary in 1979. Faculty stalwarts in the 1970s included Mary Deglow, Bonnie Lange, Carol Sbresny Niedfeldt, and Steve Hahnke.

The congregation set aside a whole year to celebrate its centennial in 1975. Each month brought

a new guest speaker and guest choirs to worship. The congregation had contracted with the famous Conrad Schmitt Studio the year before to repaint the church interior for the centennial.

St. Marcus in its centennial year of 1975: 326 communicants, eighty-six child members, 412 total souls, fourteen baptisms, eighty-eight children in the school, thirty-one in Sunday School, average Sunday attendance of 269. In 1979 Pastor Seeger received a call to the relatively new mission church on the island of Antigua in the Caribbean, and his missionary's heart could not say no. The congregation bade him and Shirley a tearful farewell in September.



# XI

## New Winds

Despite the burst of centennial energy and brief membership boost because of the reception of the Ephrata members, membership declines continued steadily. By 1980 St. Marcus was down to 330 members and 287 communicants with fifty-six children in the school. Forty-five of those 287 adults were shut-ins. Average Sunday church attendance had shrunk to 199. When Bonnie Lange took a call and left that summer, she was not replaced, and thus the school downsized from four and a half teachers to three and a half. Principal Gartner sadly predicted in 1981 that the school might have one year left. The entire ministry operating budget for both church and school was \$101,000. On the balance sheet, restricted funds amounting only to about \$10,000 were less than the capital debt. What nobody at St. Marcus knew at the time was that God was letting the congregation live small for a time so that when he opened up his hand of blessings, they would appreciate it.

Pastor Elton Huebner, the executive for the synod's Board of Trustees, served the vacancy. Anticipating that housing would be an issue in calling the next pastor, the congregation used its funds from the sale of the Ephrata building to make a down payment on a parsonage on 67<sup>th</sup> and Melvina Streets. Since the Pentecostal church buyer of the Ephrata property could not obtain financing, St. Marcus decided to take the risk of selling to them on a land contract.

The congregation called four times for a new pastor but was turned down by all four. In desperation they requested a candidate from the seminary's graduating class, and in May of 1980, candidate Mark Jeske was assigned. He was ordained and installed in June, moving into his bachelor parsonage that month.

Alas, the church looked terrible. Something had gone very wrong with the Conrad Schmitt paint job. It was peeling off the walls everywhere in huge, palm-sized peels. The company accepted no responsibility, blamed whatever kind of paint had been on the walls and ceiling before, and offered only to provide new paint. Then came the kind of miracle that God had been doing for decades—he had a high-energy, selfless leader on the property committee (known in those days as the “trustees”) by the name of Bob Rehm. Since Schmitt wouldn’t repaint, Bob would organize a group to do it. The custodian at the time, Bill Hall, owned five sections of scaffolding, and night after night, Bob and the trustees would scrape, spackle, and paint. They chose a soft golden color that has become the St. Marcus “look.” It took a whole year, but it looked marvelous when it was done. This time the paint stuck.

The school didn’t die. New talent joined Dan and Judy on the faculty. Bob and Ruth Huebner had come via Dr. Martin Luther College assignment in 1979, and Judy Thrans in 1983—three very strong and gifted teachers. In 1985 Virginia Engel was called to launch a half-time four-year-old kindergarten class. She set up shop in a freshly renovated room in the southwest corner of the school’s basement.

The neighborhood, sagging badly with few businesses, many vacant lots, and frequent condemnations and fires, probably hit bottom about 1985. Vandals stole one of the church’s exterior lanterns and two downspouts for their copper. Windows in both church and school were shot out. Young men used to sit on the church’s front steps and throw rocks at passing cars. The whole neighborhood suffered a grievous blow in 1981 when Schlitz Brewing collapsed. First Local 9 went out on strike, and then the company’s directors sold the brewery to the Stroh Brewery Company of Detroit. The massive campus was closed.

But out of the ashes of that disaster came hope—the Grunau Company bought the entire sprawling campus and renovated one building at a time to transform it into the Schlitz Park office complex. The F. Mayer Boot & Shoe building at Palmer and Walnut Streets was redeveloped into apartments and space for small businesses, and people slowly started buying up the once-grand Victorian houses and putting a lot of sweat equity into them. A small band of pioneer owners formed the Historic Brewers Hill Neighborhood Association in 1981. One by one, the vacant lots were bought and tasteful new homes were built whose facades had to conform to certain rules laid out by the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission.

In 1983 new member Darlene Jones, a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s music program, asked if she could launch a gospel choir. Polly Belcher, Doris Hagedorn, Dennis Piggee, Aurelia Piggee, Annette Hunter, Phyllis Butler, Leon Mays, and Rosalind Perry were the first singers, and the choir slowly and steadily grew from there. For the first time, an upright piano was moved from the school into the front of the church, enabling the gospel choir and school choirs to sing from the chancel. Initially the group sang just a cappella or with piano, but eventually they added bass guitar and drums. In the late 1980s, they started singing with the St. Philip’s gospel choir and did quite a few joint appearances on the road, adopting the touring name of the United Voices of Praise.



## New Winds

In 1984 Marge Wolfgram turned over the Altar Guild leadership to Pat Steliga, and Pat, with her formidable mother Nelda at her side, supercharged the organization into a force for improving worship life and the worship space. The Guild bought new paraments and pastoral stoles, bought Italian plaster nativity figures for the manger scene, bought the paschal candle and the Advent wreath, refinished the brassware and Communion silver, and upgraded the altar linens. Their greatest achievement was tackling the rebuilding of all the sanctuary's stained-glass windows on the south and east sides of the building. They were all removed, disassembled, re-leaded, and reinstalled, with a little extra iron bracing added for rigidity. Mismatched and broken panes were all replaced. The cost exceeded \$45,000, but the Guild's leadership raised the entire amount.

The Guild also encouraged the creation of banners, using words, images, and splashes of color to signify a church year season or Scriptural truth. Judy Perkins made the first one, dark red for the Festival of the Reformation. She ended up making at least half a dozen. Joni Matson made two, and Polly Belcher made the baptism banner that is mounted permanently. Many years later, in the 2010s, Heidi Sebald started to produce her own beautiful banners to upgrade the set.

The windows in those days were protected on the outside by large, homemade, wooden-framed screens with heavy-duty mesh. They provided a bit of protection, but when panes of the clear protective glass behind the screens were broken, there was no way that the Trustees could get at them for repairs. Ada Hagedorn made a special gift to remove all the (ugly) mesh screens and frames, remove the broken outer glass, and install clear Lexan protective coverings. They looked great and did a better insulating job as well. Eventually, the Lexan would yellow and be scratched by wind-driven dust, but for twenty years, the Lexan panels did an important job protecting St. Marcus' priceless windows.

St. Marcus had always kept a small store of groceries in the school building to be able to respond when people came to the door asking for help. During these years Nelda Steliga and Zelma Piggee began to organize a more robust program. They borrowed half of the archive room at the west end of the old bowling alleys, scrounged some steel shelving, and solicited donations of non-perishables. The food pantry was born! It did so well and experienced such a huge increase in requests that a larger space was created in the junk room outside the boys' basement bathroom. Now there were floor-to-ceiling shelves in two spacious aisles with lockable sliding doors.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, St. Marcus was blessed with some special gifts to be able to hire a part-time vicar from the seminary's senior class. These young men, often accompanied by their wives, brought energy and new ideas to St. Marcus' ministries and learned to enjoy cross-cultural urban ministry. There were fifteen of them: Tom Behnke, Lawrence Olson, Rich Warnecke, Kurt Ebert, Dave Sellnow, Randy Nepsund, Paul Prange, Jim Sherod, Bill Sebald, Tim Kemnitz, Paul Stratman, Dan Witte, Ken Fisher, Wayne Oblender, and Dave Schleusener.

In 1985 disaster struck the church office. Dear Edna Vitense suffered a stroke and became homebound. The congregation had made no provision for a pension for her. Much of her salary allocation was now used as a pension, meaning that the church no longer had money for a full-time church secretary. The congregation had to shift to a system of part-time paid and volunteer help—Joan Vitense, Cindy Strehlow, Polly Belcher, Leola Gruenzel, Ruth Mueller, and Janet Edlund all pitched in at various times and kept the office functions going. Eileen Uttecht ran the Mission Society and Leola Gruenzel was the ringleader of the Women's Service Guild. Leola also spearheaded the Guild's project to hand-craft chrismons for the Christmas tree.

In July of 1986 Pastor Jeske and Carol Wynkoop were married in a gala St. Marcus wedding on a tropical afternoon. In 1987 they bought a house on Astor Street, and the 67<sup>th</sup> Street house was used as housing for teachers and vicars. In November there finally was a baby in the parsonage again as John joined the congregation, followed by Sam, Liz, and Michael. Carol wasted no time getting involved in the school. She started a Junior Choir immediately in 1986 and conducted it for many years. In 2013 she shifted to leading a Cherub Choir of younger children. She also cheerfully helped teachers of all grade levels to prepare music for their children and direct when it was their turn to sing in worship. Carol was also instrumental in launching the school's Learning Center to help kids with special needs.

The 1980s saw some creative new ministry expressions. An annual Sunday observance of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday provided a venue for gospel music and Scriptural reflection on issues of racial reconciliation. The church library was reborn, located on shelves in the basement fellowship hall; computers came to the school with their first Apple IIe machines, followed by the church office's acquisition of an expensive, used IBM dual floppy disk drive. An endowment fund was begun.

In 1989 the very first Juneteenth Day took place, thanks to Barbara Mays, Marion Flowers, Roz Perry, Sandy O'Brien, Chris Laird, and Dorothy Young. It was linked with the annual June Vacation Bible School. For a week, a team of volunteers would canvass the neighborhood. Sunday was a day of Gospel music worship and BBQ ribs, followed by a week of VBS classes. Over the years, quite a few neighborhood kids were recruited by the school.

Even in those stressful years, St. Marcus was blessed with positive, hard-working leaders who kept hope alive: Carl and Evelyn Buege, whose Mequon stone farmhouse and grounds were the scene of many congregation picnics, Tony and Trudy Collura, Marge and Arlon Tietz, Jessie Jones, Rodger and Ellen Weber, Sister Henrietta Taylor, Doris and Ada Hagedorn, Barbara Mays, Leola Gruenzel, Eileen Uttecht, Craig and Polly Belcher, Fred and Hildegard Berg, Don and Sylvia Bergh, Bob and Judi Rehm, Irene Lewark, Ruth Harrison, Bill Hall, Dave and Cindy Strehlow, Elfie Henkel, and a host of other willing workers who kept the ministry moving forward.

In the late 1980s, St. Marcus' campus benefited from some very talented new members. Gary Evans was a hydraulic engineer from England who came to St. Marcus through Malawi, and



## New Winds

Steve Edlund was a Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning wizard who brought fresh eyes and fresh energy to the church's physical plant. In 1990 Steve reported to the council the dreadful news that the mortar joints in the entire church were crumbling and would need tuckpointing right away. He then dropped the bomb that doing just the two towers would cost \$90,000. But then he added, "We can do this." He might have been the only person in the room who believed that at first, but he was right. Through a campaign called "Mortar and Miracles," the congregation raised the entire amount in a year. And then he challenged the church to do it again—it would take another \$90,000 to tuckpoint the rest of the building. St. Marcus raised that money too and did the job. The two projects were an enormous confidence-builder.

Also in 1989 the property at 2227 N. Palmer Street, to the north of the congregation's mini-parking lot, came up for sale. Dave Strehlow said, "We should buy that." The only problem was that the church had no unrestricted funds at the time, and the asking price was \$19,000. The idea caught fire, however, and the congregation dared to make the insulting offer \$12,000, which amazingly was accepted. The congregation borrowed \$26,000 from the members at their choice of no interest, 5%, or 10%, to cover the real estate and then the eventual demolition, grading, drainage, and fencing. Thus St. Marcus temporarily acquired a small duplex and a rear cottage. Pastor Jeske became landlord to the three units, and Bob Rehm inherited the job of maintaining two more buildings. The rental payments helped to amortize the loans. This was the first splash of what would become a huge wave of property acquisitions.

St. Marcus in 1990: 396 total members, 293 communicants, Sunday worship average of 197, school enrollment of eighty-three.

# XII

## Hey—We're Growing Again

The congregation entered the 1990s with new confidence. One of the leaders remarked, “We’re not in survival mode anymore.” He was right. There was a new spirit growing that the church’s best days were still coming. The Brewers Hill neighborhood was doing better too. A local housing cooperative, the East Side Housing Action Committee, bought a string of vacant lots in the neighborhood and constructed new two-family units with size, design, and scale that complemented the existing Victorian homes. More and more of the battered, absentee-landlord-owned homes were being bought and renovated by new owners.

In 1990 Steve Edlund organized a determined crew of volunteers to overhaul the custodial house next to the church. It had not been painted in many years and was a dull, dirty gray. With Bill Hall’s scaffolding, Steve led his crew to give it a beautiful multi-color paint job. The Victorian trim really popped.

There was a big turnover on the school faculty—Dan and Judy Gartner took a call to Florida, a double loss. Bob Huebner took a call to Luther Prep, and he and Ruth moved to Watertown. But God sent new talent: Paul Jacobs accepted our principal call and led the school through the decade. He brought his talented wife Karen along, who anchored the early education program. Under her leadership, the school opened up an optional afternoon kindergarten, which was enthusiastically received. In 1992 Martin Luther College graduate Brad Schaper was assigned, and he quickly won the hearts of all the athletes and their families as a phenomenal coach and middle grades teacher.

## Hey—We're Growing Again

The church's music department got some big boosts in the 1990s. Fred Bartel, a marvelous musician, joined the organist corps, and he brought along his brilliant cellist wife Grace, daughter of former principal Fred Hagedorn. Their duets from the balcony were gorgeous. A Milwaukee Public Schools music teacher at nearby Palmer School wandered in one day and said he'd be interested in playing the organ once in a while—his name was Jeff Krumbein. Worshipers liked his playing a lot, and his role steadily expanded.

In 1993 the new WELS red hymnal *Christian Worship* arrived, which the congregation enthusiastically embraced. One Sunday in March the worship team arranged some hymns of Irish background with a Celtic sound, and thus the Lutheran Ceili Orchestra was born. Wisconsin Lutheran College student Joey Schumann was in attendance on one of those early Celtic Sundays and “demanded” to be included, bringing his phenomenal musical talent on whistles and uilleann pipes. Joey also did a lot of research on prayers, songs, and liturgies from the Celtic lands. Ever since 1992, St. Patrick's Sunday has been a regular feature at St. Marcus and opened the door for other cultural adventures like Cinco de Mayo and Oktoberfest. After completing college and medical school, Joey decided to locate his physician practice in Appleton and has continued the Lutheran Ceili Orchestra up there.

By the 1990s the Women's Service Guild had run out of energy and decided to dissolve. The older women still loved it, but the younger women all worked now and didn't want to attend all the evening meetings. The Guild's demise left a big hole—they were the organizers of all the fellowship gatherings. They were the worker bees and fund raisers. A new ad hoc group arose to take up some of the slack—they called themselves Loving Hearts/Helping Hands, and they would organize cleaning brigades, painting crews, and fund raisers. Barbara Mays, Sandy O'Brien, Judi Rehm, Carol Jeske, and Sue Keese were the ringleaders.

One arbor day around 1992, Fred Bohlmann and Nate Sebald were raking the grass on the little lot west of the church and looked at the west half of the block that faced 1<sup>st</sup> Street. “We should buy some of these properties too,” they said. Indeed, the 1989 property acquisition on Palmer Street had led the church to ponder further acquisitions to enable the dream of off-street parking and a gymnasium. The neighborhood's severe urban stress was hard in many ways, but it brought a quiet and powerful benefit—real estate prices were severely depressed. The wood-frame houses that had been built in the 1880s and 1890s had been used hard and were mostly not well-maintained. The 1990s brought amazing opportunities to buy eleven properties ranging in price from \$16,500 to one dollar. These lots expanded the church's presence on Palmer Street and also on 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Notable also was the City's agreement to vacate the south half of the alley since the church now owned the property on both sides.

When the congregation acquired the next two lots on Palmer Street to the north of the school, they were able to pave and fence it, thus increasing off-street parking to a total of sixty-eight spaces. Members loved it—the new lot looked beautiful, made people feel safer, and attracted visitors and guests. Church attendance jumped.



A committee of volunteers used to count and record church offerings on Monday nights. One November evening, Tony Collura and Carl Buege drove the weekly deposit to the Bank One night depository and were held up at gunpoint. They were unhurt, but the robbers made off not only with Sunday gifts but those from Thanksgiving Day as well. The total hit was over \$17,000, a catastrophic loss. But the dear Lord stretched out his hand. All the members who had made gifts by check immediately stopped payment and issued new checks. Insurance covered the \$2,000 cash loss, and the TV coverage on all three local channels was priceless. The church received at least \$10,000 in gifts of sympathy and even won back a long-lost member.

Thirty years after its 1960s-era renovation, the school's appearance was suffering. None of the windows had storms, and in winter, the children could feel cold drafts. As an emergency measure one winter, the trustees had built inner storm windows of two-by-two frames and sheet plastic. The plastic soon got cloudy, and no one could see outside any longer, and with the passage of time, they started to rip and crack, hanging in shreds. The outsides were just as bad. In the worst days of the racial unrest, the congregation had put huge external protective screens of metal hardware cloth on both the church and school windows. Back then it seemed like a good idea to paint them and all the outdoor wood trim *pink*. Seriously. The school's mortar joints were failing, the roof leaked, and roughly one-fourth of the asbestos floor tiles were missing in the auditorium/gym. The old stage curtain was torn and faded.

In 1994 the church council authorized an aggressive remodeling. The entire building was tuck-pointed, which helped slow down the brick spalling caused by the 1971 sandblasting. New roof sections stopped the leaks. Handsome new bronze anodized aluminum windows with built-in storms made the homemade plastic storms and the pink hardware mesh disappear. Bob Rehm organized a project to cut kerfs in a series of particle board sheets and fit them to the curved gym/auditorium ceiling to cover the many holes in the plaster. All exterior pink wood trim was painted in three beautiful new colors of olive, dark red, and cream. New trees were planted along Garfield Avenue.

One day Brad Schaper lost his patience with the auditorium floor. He started prying up loose floor tiles. The adhesive was so bad that they just popped off. Soon he had them all off. Now what? He knew there was a wood floor under there, but it was covered in thirty-year-old, dried-out black mastic adhesive. The trustees hired a professional sander, who burned through a lot of clogged belts and disks but managed to reveal the gorgeous one-hundred-year-old maple underneath. Members took up the old linoleum on stage and sanded and varnished that floor as well. The new gym floor looked amazing! To celebrate, the council authorized the purchase of a portable basketball hoop for the north (stage) end and now the kids could play full court. A new dark blue velvet stage curtain made musical performances a lot more fun.

The church got a big boost when the council finally took a financial risk and had air conditioning installed in the sanctuary. Church attendance that summer jumped by twenty-five immediately. Also that summer, Nelda and Pat Steliga decided to add clothing distribution to their food pantry offerings, and the women's bathroom in the school basement was completely remodeled.

## Hey—We're Growing Again

The synod in the mid-1990s was doing well financially, due in part to the significant extra income from the Schwan Foundation. The Home Mission board decided to use some of that money to give seminary students in their intern (vicar) year some experience working in missions, including urban missions. This Vicars in Mission Settings subsidy enabled St. Marcus to expand its ministry workforce with a string of six full-time vicars starting in 1995. The roster of all-stars: Jon Hein, Tim Glende, Josh Stahmann, Mark Gunderson, Christian Winkel, and Jeremy Mattek. They all went on to distinguished ministry leadership in their careers.

In 1996 several members led a planning team to research ways of increasing St. Marcus' touch with the community. Led by Linda Baacke and John Hartman, they launched a program they called Wandani, an African word meaning "friends" or "companions." John and Linda recruited fellow members, and a raft of Wisconsin Lutheran College students and professors, to become after-school mentors to neighborhood kids. Each night featured homework help, personal counseling, a devotion, and sports or games. Dr. Peter Fraser from Wisconsin Lutheran College was a passionate supporter and recruiter. The program touched the lives of many hundreds of children from the neighborhood in its seventeen-year run.

By 1997 church leaders were getting serious about expanding the school, dreaming of two more classrooms and a gym. Bill Hall by now had remarried and moved out of the custodial house. A local construction contractor named Brad Babor offered to move the house to a vacant lot on Palmer and Brown Streets. The council saw no usefulness for it any longer and was delighted that the historic 1884 building could be saved. So, the house was sold for a dollar, lifted, set on rubber-tired dollies, and slowly rolled down Palmer Street. It is still there with the new address of 202 E. Brown Street. The now-vacant lot was filled, paved, and used for parking.

Back in the early 1980s St. Marcus had been gifted the ornate altar, lectern, and pulpit from the old St. Jacobi Lutheran Church. In the 1970s St. Jacobi had finalized its strategic plan of leaving its campus on 13<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell Streets and moving out to Greenfield. Gilbert Manske assembled a syndicate of heartbroken St. Jacobi members who couldn't bear the thought of losing their beautiful chancel furniture. They bought the salvage rights to it all from the church (except for the pulpit canopy). The items were stored for years in the Manske garage. When they heard St. Marcus might be interested, they loaded it all up on trucks from Goede Trucking and hauled it all to Palmer Street. The pieces were stashed in storage spots all over the old school, including the attic and basement. A proposal to install the pieces had enough votes to pass, but there was no money for such a project, and there were enough doubts that the plan was put on hold. Then, a steam pipe break in the basement scalded the paint off some of the pieces. The "hold" lasted for fourteen years.

In 1997 the chancel floor needed to be partially torn up to replace some aging electrical wiring. It was time to make a decision about the St. Jacobi altar, but this time, there was a plan and resources. Some local architects, as well as the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, were strongly in favor of bringing chancel furniture more appropriate to the building than the 1950s Danish blonde pieces, and they lent their names in support. Also, donors had pledged

\$40,000. This time the vote passed unanimously. The blonde 1950 furniture was given to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School.

The trustees hired Marvin Ritchie of Ritchie Bros. Painting, a superb choice. Marvin removed the blonde wainscoting, restained the blonde doors and woodwork to a walnuty brown to match the pews, coated the cracked and peeling walls with fiberglass, coated it all with a special polymer that he designed, painted everything a beautiful gold, and then stenciled in designs that accented the architectural features. Marvin and his team assembled the altar and pulpit, painting them in a soft cream, dark red, gray for shadow, and gold leaf highlights. Since the St. Jacobi syndicate was not able to salvage the pulpit canopy, Marvin had his friend Mark Kant of the Janesville Church Furniture Company craft one. Mark also made the curving Communion rail. Since the lost 1905 St. Jacobi sanctuary was architecturally very similar to St. Marcus', the altar looked like a perfect match in both style and scale.

The trustees liked Marvin's work so much that they hired the company to come back two years later and do the fiberglass treatment, painting, and stenciling for the rest of the sanctuary. Worship services had to be held in the strange gloom of full scaffolding, but the results were well worth the inconvenience and cost. The members were wowed.

In 1998 it was the organ's turn. That poor instrument had been subject to a lot of neglect, dirt, and leaked rainwater damage over the years. The church hired Peters, Weiland & Company to clean and re-leather the chests, repair some of the wiring, and add three new ranks of pipes. Seven different organists presented a jubilant rededication concert.

Also in 1998 Brad Schaper took a call to La Crosse, breaking a lot of hearts. Weary of the principalship but still loving teaching, Paul Jacobs moved into Brad's middle grades room. The church called Tom Guenterberg to teach upper grades and serve as principal. Tom brought his musical wife Wendi with him, and she brought wonderful organ music to the church's worship life. That year the church added two part-time staff ministers: Dr. Peter Fraser, who worked with the Wandani program and did men's Bible studies from his home, and Rev. Roger Plath, who did a lot of visitation ministry and also started a weekday morning men's Bible study. Nurse Pat Steliga and Linda Golembiewski launched the Parish Nurses, who did health screening in the school, annual health fairs, and before- and after-church blood pressure checks.

There was supposed to be a stone cross at the apex of the church gable facing Palmer Street, but it had disappeared so long ago nobody remembered that there had once been one. Then some guys doing roof repairs found it—it had snapped off, slid down the roof, and had come to rest in a valley, invisible to the street. Professional masons said there was not enough healthy stone left on it to reset it. Brendan and Sue Keese heard about it and quietly donated the funds to have a new cross carved and placed on the pedestal.

Speaking of Sue, she had come on board the school faculty on a part-time basis in 1990 and has been steady as a rock ever since. As of this writing, she is the longest-tenured teacher on the



## Hey—We're Growing Again

faculty. 1998 was also the year when the Extended Learning Center really took off—this was the beginning of services to special needs children. Carol Jeske and Mary Clemons were instrumental in getting it started. A lot of volunteer mentors, parents, and Wisconsin Lutheran College students came in and did great work with kids who needed help. These efforts slowly grew into the well-developed special education programs of today. In 1998 the Milwaukee Symphony put on a free Christmas concert in the church sanctuary—a fabulous experience.

Keeping the school alive was helped immeasurably by several years of operating subsidy from the synod and also from years of scholarships to low-income families for tuition that came through Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE). The biggest boost of all was that the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program came to the Lutheran world. School Choice, sometimes called vouchers, had first come to Milwaukee in 1990 with strong support from Governor Tommy Thompson, the state assembly, and the state senate. Only non-religious schools were allowed in at first, but the success of these schools, coupled with a growing army of happy parents, led to the legislature's expansion of Choice to religious schools in 1996. That expansion was immediately challenged on constitutional grounds, and the whole program went into litigation, driven by the American Civil Liberties Union and the NAACP.

In the summer of 1998, the Wisconsin Supreme Court issued the 3-2 decision that using the voucher program for religious schools was not unconstitutional. St. Marcus had only a few weeks to make up its mind about whether to join it. The church's school board was not in favor, the church council was, and to clear the air a congregation-wide meeting was called. The sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of giving the program a try but being prepared to leave if the state ever mandated things the church could not abide. That fall, at least twenty families who would not have been able to afford the tuition payments were able to enroll their children.

In 1999 the planning for a school building expansion kicked into gear. Gary Evans was chosen as the overall project chair. Bob Connolly from the James Company was selected as fund-raising counsel. At the time, it seemed like a bold and daring plan to build (only) a gym and two more classrooms. The outer limit of the church's fund-raising and borrowing potential was thought to be about one million dollars. But Bob went to work interviewing leaders and teaching the congregation how to organize a capital campaign. Kary Wiesler and Sara Baumgarten helped to start a series of Friends Lunches to bring in people from outside the congregation who might be interested in supporting the campaign.

In February, St. Marcus pillar Carl Buege passed away, ending an era of outstanding leadership and service. A bequest from his estate became an important piece of the capital expansion project. That summer Paul Jacobs took a staff ministry call to Tomah, and the congregation bade him and Karen a grateful farewell.

St. Marcus in 1999: 544 total members, Sunday worship average of 279, school enrollment of 102.

# XIII

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## Ignition

No one but God could have foreseen the dramatic growth that the congregation would experience as the new century began. St. Marcus had had only a modest celebration of its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, possibly because the energy of all the leaders was being consumed by the expansion project. The anniversary celebration was called “Remember! Rejoice! Reach Out!” The members enjoyed a beautiful anniversary fellowship dinner at Alioto’s. The inimitable Jessie Jones, in one of her impromptu speeches, had the biggest applause line: “We not movin’ out--we’re diggin’ in!”

The year 2000 was like the ignition of a rocket. For starters, the church could finally afford a full-time office manager again, a gem named Sara Baumgarten. Bob Connolly, the capital campaign counsel, reported that between existing funds, projected pledges, and the church’s borrowing capacity, he thought a campaign of three million was doable. The church council was blown away with excitement. Suddenly a mad idea tore through the room—what if they gave up trying to figure out a way of adding on to the old building? What if they demolished it completely and built an entirely new structure? The new possibility won everyone over.

Gary Evans contracted with Cerreta Architects, and their designer Chris Manske came up with some intriguing conceptual ideas, one of which quickly rose to the top. Enthusiasm swept through the congregation, and by year’s end \$1.9 million had been pledged, of which \$650,000 was in cash. The church had hoped to break ground in 2001, but there just wasn’t enough money given and pledged yet, and so the council wisely decided to wait another year and keep working.

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In May, a newly formed exploratory board made up of WELS lay businesspeople interested in Lutheran television broadcasting recruited Pastor Jeske and St. Marcus. The group's ministry would be called Time of Grace. They went to work building the infrastructure.

Also that May, a consulting team, led by educators Ray Dusseau and Jim Rahn, audited St. Marcus School's ministry structure and came back with a powerful report, the central idea of which was to separate the jobs of upper grades teacher and principal. School Choice funds now made it financially possible. The council agreed, but the congregation would have to wait until the next calling season began in November. Principal Tom Guenterberg was a fine teacher and dearly loved, but his dream was to teach social studies in a high school. When Fox Valley Lutheran called him, the congregation knew he needed to accept and wished him Godspeed. That November the church called Kole Knueppel as the new full-time principal, and he accepted. He would come on board in the summer of 2001.

Time of Grace's new producer, Chad Johnstone, spent much of 2001 getting the sanctuary ready for television. He hung high-powered TV lights from the balcony ceiling and on poles on the side walls. He had a recording control booth built in the large belfry, at the level where the bell ropes hang, and installed two robotic cameras underneath the balcony. Recording began on Sunday, September 2, and the first broadcast aired on Fox 6 Milwaukee on November 18.

The new school's building plans came together quickly. Cerreta's design was received with great enthusiasm and immediately adopted, and the design-build contractor, Anderson Ashton, did the rest with its in-house design team. St. Marcus' design chair, Jeff Tredo, also contributed considerably to the thought process. Real estate acquisition continued. In 2001 the church bought the last two properties between the alley and Palmer Street, clearing the way for the entire new building and a large parking lot. Anderson Ashton's bid came in at \$4.1 million, and with furnishings, relocation costs, and contingency reserve, the total project had risen to \$4.9 million.

Fund-raising was the number one pressure. The Friends Lunch team had a series of events which were very successful. One of the church members, Kristyn Greenfield, was an Aid Association for Lutherans financial counseling rep who had a knack for marketing and communication. She proposed a fund-raising dinner auction and threw herself into organizing it. The very first fund-raising gala was held at the Elm Grove Women's Club in March. There were 122 guests, and St. Marcus raised \$24,000. Everyone was ecstatic. By year's end, the building project had \$1.3 million in cash and total pledges of \$2.7 million. Proceeds from the sale of the 67<sup>th</sup> Street house were added, and the hard strategic decision was made to liquidate the endowment fund and use the proceeds to get the total close to \$3 million.

2002 began with excitement but also nervousness—there were still some serious loose ends. The church was hoping to begin demolition of the old school in May, but as the year began, no one knew for sure where the church office functions would then take place, where meetings would be held, and worst of all, where school classes could be held. In addition, the hoped-for bond deal for major financing just wasn't coming together.



God had the answers, but he made St. Marcus wait until the eleventh hour, possibly so that every member would realize that the project had divine backing. The church had approached the owner of the funeral home on 1<sup>st</sup> Street and North Avenue several years prior with an offer to purchase, but she wasn't interested in selling. At just the perfect time, she called and said she would sell. She asked for \$250,000, and the church agreed. The closing was in July. Suddenly there was a place for Sunday School, Bible studies, meetings, and the church office. The upstairs apartment brought in some rental income as Sara Baumgarten and her new husband Dave Kreuter moved in.

The original design called for the new building to be built "on slab," in other words, without a basement. But the Time of Grace board was interested in space for an editing studio and offered to pay half the cost of excavating a basement. The church agreed. The other half was provided by a special gift from Karl and Marva Schlueter. The campaign's finance committee gave up on a bond deal to finance the new school construction and settled in on a more conventional loan package: the base loan of \$1.5 million with Park Bank, and an additional \$400,000 from PAVE and the Helen Bader Foundation for the basement and other change orders.

An even bigger miracle occurred that spring. The new YMCA on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and North Avenue opened, freeing up their old campus on 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Garfield Avenue, less than a mile away from St. Marcus. St. Marcus and the Y came to terms for a 15-month lease on that campus. The pool was not wanted, of course, and it was drained and locked up. But there were six offices, a big gym, ten rooms suitable for classrooms, and off-street parking. Mr. Knueppel couldn't wait to fill it up. He did a lot of work bringing in Wandani parents who had come to love St. Marcus through the after-school programs. By May it looked as though the fall enrollment would be over 200.

The school year in 2002 was ended two weeks early to give Anderson Ashton more time. The last two weeks of May were a frenzy of emptying the old building—the church office and all church equipment were moved to the funeral home, now called the St. Marcus House, and all the schoolbooks and equipment had to be trucked over to the YMCA. Judy Eggers brought twenty-six members of the Wisconsin Lutheran College dorm staff to clean and landscape the place.

Early in June the demolition of the old school began. Four major pieces were saved: several skids of cream city bricks, which were used to line the new school lobby, the galvanized metal "Schule" sign, which was mounted above the new gym inner doors, the 1894 cornerstone, now also in the lobby, and the old school bell, which hangs in the new tower. It can be rung electronically.

Mr. Knueppel had spent the 2001-2002 school year running the existing programs and studying the entire operation. In 2002 he brought in Henry Tyson as vice principal and Val Young, first as a classroom aide and later as dean of students. That fall, as the faculty welcomed an enrollment of 217 students at the Y, he made some significant changes in school life:

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- Heavy emphasis on explicit phonics in all language arts classrooms
- An extended school day for the middle school, now lasting till 4:30 pm
- New uniforms for all students in blue and white, mandating neckties for all boys; blazers mandatory for the middle school
- Striped ties for honor students
- Full-time aides in all K4-4 classrooms
- Intense expectations of quiet and respectful behavior in hallways and the dining hall
- “No excuses” for bad behaviors or missing homework

The congregation had loved having the six vicars, but leaders were convinced that it was time for St. Marcus to step up and call a second pastor. The first to be called was former member Rev. James (“Ski”) Skorzewski. He and Janinne Rhodes had gotten married at St. Marcus and were members while Ski was at the Seminary. They had been in Florida for four years. There was great rejoicing when they accepted St. Marcus’ call in October. They lived for a brief time on the northwest side and then bought a house on the corner of Palmer and Center Streets. They brought daughters Abigail and Megan along, and Jack joined the family in Milwaukee. Janinne got involved right away as a teacher’s aide, but she soon had a full-time teaching call.

Pastor Ski’s unique area of responsibility was first centered around the school. He was the pastor to the faculty, led school devotions, and taught catechism class. He was charged with community evangelism and to cast a vision for a second worship service that would be geared to the school community. He also started the first lay-led home Bible studies that are now called growth groups.

The YMCA turned out to be a great place for the school’s “exile” year. The big, sprawling building was able to handle the 200+ kids. The gym gave the basketball team the delirious pleasure of having its first ever home games. On November 9, 2002, Kristyn Greenfield’s second (now annual) gala dinner auction was held in the YMCA’s gym. It was a smash success and pushed the capital campaign’s cash total over \$3 million. As if St. Marcus had not been richly blessed enough, in fall 2002, a grateful member donated the Yamaha grand piano for the front of the sanctuary.

One of the Gala committee volunteers, Christine Safranek, was a school mom who was drawn to St. Marcus’ commitment to diversity. She worked tirelessly to solicit donated items for the event and seemed to have a special knack for meeting new donors, telling the St. Marcus story enthusiastically, and managing volunteers. She was trained as a nurse, but she was between jobs and ready for something new. She was pitched the position of becoming St. Marcus’ first ever director of development, and she accepted.

The new building took fourteen months to build. It is a concrete block building, faced with red brick. The contractors were blessed with unseasonably warm and dry weather in late autumn and December. The roofers got the membrane on the roof in early January, and then God cut loose with a lot of snow. But the building was now enclosed, and portable heaters kept the workers

humming. The construction team worked feverishly and finished literally at the last available day. Cleaning crews worked like mad all day Labor Day, and classes in the new building began the very next day. The dedication day on September 20, 2003, was the greatest day in recent St. Marcus history. It utterly transformed the congregation's self-image.

The southern end of the block west of the alley, along with grass on the big vacant lot, became a huge playfield. Kids played on it every day, and for a stretch of years, the Juneteenth Day outdoor festival was held there.

September of 2003 made history in another unusual way. Pastor Ski had been tasked with launching a non-traditional service to reach a different group of people. He found some talented new musicians to help. New member Benj Lawrenz was living on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street nearby, a carpenter contractor, who was a phenomenal guitarist. Brian Davison was a staff minister intern that St. Marcus liked so much, it called him to stay on full-time. He was a terrific tenor singer. Pete Reese was an old school friend of Benj's who played bass. Bob Buss was a schoolteacher who could drum like Ringo Starr. Seth Bauer was a fine keyboard player. Together they founded the group Koiné and became the new Sunday night service's house band. Pastor Ski went all casual—no pastoral robes, no hymnals, no pipe organ. Koiné still played Lutheran hymns, but with a contemporary groove. Eighty-eight people came to the first service, and they were underway.

One of St. Marcus' brightest lights passed away in 2003 after forty too-short years. Amy Madson was loved by all, and she loved especially the students of St. Marcus School. There was an absolute avalanche of memorial gifts to St. Marcus in her name, and those gifts formed the core of an endowment fund chartered to support the school. No surprise—it was named the Amy Madson Endowment, and the early childhood motor skills room in the coming 2011 primary school building would forever be dubbed Amy's Room.

In spite of donor fatigue, the council launched a three-year "Keep It Going" capital campaign in order to retire the approximately \$1.7 million in building debt. By year's end \$500,000 had been raised. New member Daryl Raabe led a strategic planning effort that generated a lot of energy. Kole Knueppel shocked everyone when he accepted a position with the Hope Schools. Henry Tyson became the new principal, and the congregation was pleased when Jim Holman took the call as vice principal, accompanied by his talented teacher-wife Cindi. They both assumed their new positions in July of 2004. The new school building welcomed an enrollment of 270 children.

After the church office had moved out of the parish house and was settled in its new digs, the congregation invited Time of Grace to move out of its expensive rented quarters on King Drive and move into part of the parish house. Jim Johnson and his crew jumped on it, and they would base their ministry there through 2021. Their footprint at first was small, but eventually they rented the entire building.



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Pat Steliga started selling Scrip cards and, over the next twenty years, raised a ton of money for the Altar Guild. Pat, Linda Golembiewski, Kary Wiesler, and Beth Evans expanded the Parish Nurses, whose mission was to advocate for healthy living in the congregation and work with public health issues in the school. The third annual Gala in November raised over \$50,000. Another innovation—Pastor Ski's Sunday night worship, started using a projector and a huge temporary screen to enable slides and video. Eventually, a permanent drop-down screen was installed, as well as a permanent shelf for the projector on the balcony wall.

Jeff Krumbein, whose church music role had been steadily expanding, finally agreed to become St. Marcus' first ever minister of music. After the old Senior Choir had passed away when the Bartels left, Jeff launched a new singing group that he called Joyful Noise. In 2004 Jeff began the custom of bringing his Fond du Lac choir, the Winnebago Lutheran Chorale, later renamed Joyful Witness, to present their Christmas concert at St. Marcus. Jeff had a great interest in all different kinds of Christian music and was instrumental in launching Cinco de Mayo Sunday, featuring bilingual Spanish/English music, and Oktoberfest, celebrating German worship music and culture. One other group that arose during those years was a quartet drawn from the Gospel Choir that called itself Distinctively Different. Darlene Grams, Heidi Sebal, Lynda Arndt, and Paula Adamson not only sang frequently at St. Marcus but did a little touring in the Milwaukee area to sing for other congregations.

2005 brought Jackie Wilder as a classroom aide, but the next year she moved to the school office and has been the official "school mom" ever since as the Kindergarten and Primary office manager. 2005 also brought the sudden death of congregation president Ken Fockel. The following January, Daryl Raabe was elected chair of the church council and the congregation. Daryl was serving also as the chair of the Time of Grace board, and he brought his unique energy, drive, and strategic focus to the congregation's leadership. The mortgage balance was down to \$1.1 million.

2006 was the year in which the Jesus & Mary Magdalene lancet windows, removed from the north wall of the church sanctuary, were relocated into the large aperture high above the Atrium's east end. Stained-glass wizard Andrew Paremski from Enterprise Art Glass Works then designed and built six more large panels to expand the scene. The Atrium also received magnificent red oak wainscot paneling and trim, courtesy of Sebal Millwork.

In 2006 Rebecca Hannemann joined the faculty. Over the years she has done it all—classroom teaching, mentoring, administration, accreditation, and Title program organization. Pete Fraser, Brian Davison, Henry Tyson, Kevin Festerling, and others created a new youth ministry that they called D4L (Down for the Lord.) An 8 a.m. service was added to the schedule, intended to be more traditional, whereas the 10:30 a.m. service would include the television taping crew and the message delivered by Pastor Jeske in street clothes from the chancel floor. A completely new video system was installed with a large, drop-down screen. Daryl and Nancy Raabe donated a beautiful children's play structure for the new playfield.

The congregational meeting in June retired the old governance system of a traditional church council with thanks and set up in its place a true board of directors, mandated to make strategic decisions. Underneath it, five councils would do the hands-on tactical work: a Church Council, School Council, Business Council, Facilities Council, and Community Council. The meeting also authorized the hiring of St. Marcus' first-ever business administrator, Barry Spencer, who came with his wife Lindy from Medford, Wisconsin. Barry took over all human resources functions, including called worker salaries and benefit plans, government compliance, cash management, vendor relationships, capital project supervision, and facilities management. Barry's calm demeanor and business skills raised the bar considerably in developing a more professional business operation. Not long after, Lindy and daughter Nicole took over management of the church library, based in a sweet little space just off the Atrium. Lindy went to work immediately, first as a volunteer, then in the Time of Grace warehouse, and then as a part-time office manager in the church office.

Pete Fraser decided to resign his part-time staff ministry call to join the Hope High School team. The school welcomed 310 kids into the building. Shawn Sprewer was hired to run an evening College Prep Center to help at-risk high school kids get the mentoring, coaching, and homework help they needed to have a shot at college. The Gala dinner netted \$260,000, a record by a mile.

In fact, though it seemed as if the new school building should have been adequate for decades, many school and church leaders were convinced that God was opening the door to serve many more children, and thus it was time to build again. Through a special grant, the architectural firm of Korb Tredo was hired to begin interviews and planning for a major building expansion. Having acquired all the land on its block east of the alley, St. Marcus now turned its attention to finishing the acquisition of the three remaining properties on the west side facing 1<sup>st</sup> Street. In 2008 came the difficult but ultimately successful acquisition of the red brick house at 2216 and the north half of the alley, which was vacated by the City. Gary Evans was once again chosen as project chair, Mark Tredo, Jeff's twin brother, became the owner's rep, and Catalyst Construction was chosen as the general contractor. Design development continued.

In 2008 Pastor Ski started the first small-group Bible studies/fellowship groups, meeting in people's homes. Some of those original leaders still had groups meeting in their homes two decades later. The number of groups slowly increased, eventually numbering more than twenty. For a string of years, member Al Fernandez from Mama Mia's restaurant donated a ton of pasta, sauce, and garlic bread, and the mission advancement team put on a Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser. In addition to the great Mama Mia's food, the kids gave spirited dance and music performances and a silent auction raised money.

When Time of Grace requested more of Pastor Jeske's time, the congregation decided to add to the pastoral staff. The call went out to Rev. Paul Steinberg, the Spencers' former pastor in Medford. He accepted, and he, wife Rebecca, and their six children came to Milwaukee. Also new to the staff was Jon Boche, who became principal after Henry Tyson was bumped up to superintendent.

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In September 2008 Pastor Ski dropped a bomb—he was accepting a call to do a new church plant in downtown Appleton as an extension of a larger suburban church. It was a double loss, because all-star teacher Janinne would be going too. Pastor Steinberg took over the school pastoral ministry.

2009 brought the great news that Sandy O'Brien would bring her fabulous skillset to serve as the school's primary school administrator. Brian Davison reported that he would be resigning from his Wandani ministry to work full-time for Koiné.

After unsuccessfully calling from the field to replace Pastor Ski, the congregation requested a seminary graduate and received candidate Kelly Huet and young wife Katie, a teacher. The Huets bought a house on Palmer Street. His main assignment would be to lead Sunday night worship and drive the growth of the small-groups ministry. During these years, Koiné quickly began to get noticed and answered many requests for performances, often augmented by singer Tracy Fedke. Eventually, all five members quit their day jobs to work for Koiné full-time. They recorded five albums, traveled the country, and published their hymn settings. Their signature artistic achievement was their multimedia Good Friday presentation, which would usually be offered twice and attracted many hundreds of people to a packed gym.

St. Marcus also gained another part-time pastor. Rev. Kurt Gruenewald, Rebecca Steinberg's father, had retired early from a church in Elkhorn and moved in with the Steinbergs on 1<sup>st</sup> Street with wife Sara and Sara's mother. Pastor Kurt agreed to work for St. Marcus part-time, he said, as long as he didn't have to attend any meetings. His great love was evangelism and teaching basic Bible studies to new members.

The Joyful Noise Choir and various instrumental groups preferred to make their music from the choir loft in the balcony, but there was a problem—there was no piano up there. St. Marcus' piano tuner, Kris Klein, tipped the church off to a great opportunity—the Catholic archdiocese was selling some of its older instruments at bargain prices. St. Marcus obtained a hundred-year-old Steinway with beautiful sound and had it hauled upstairs. The trustees built out a platform so that the organists and accompanists could move easily back and forth.

In 2010, the Time of Grace board came to St. Marcus and asked for 100% of Pastor Jeske's time but asked that he would still lead Sunday worship so that he could be recorded. What to do? St. Marcus' board wasn't sure. St. Marcus at the end of 2010: 1,026 total souls, 804 communicants, a weekend average of 507 worshipers, and a school enrollment of 450.

With great joy the congregation finished paying off the loan for the 2003 building project and celebrated with a jubilant mortgage-burning in Sunday morning worship. That debt freedom didn't last very long, though. In October ground was broken for the kindergarten and primary school. It was an unfortunately late start, and it meant that the building would not be fully enclosed when the cold weather hit. Many times, concrete had to be poured in very cold or snowy weather, but the Catalyst crew persisted. Final project costs: \$10,178,056.



2011 was a momentous year. The church finally acquired the last property on 1st Street, a massive, tottering three-story wreck of a frame house that had been vacant for many years. It was demolished, and now St. Marcus owned the entire block from North to Garfield and Palmer to 1<sup>st</sup>. The alley was gone. Five parcels on the east side of Palmer Street were purchased, some of which were placed into service as rentals until the master plan was completed. The vacant Baptist church in the 2100 block of Palmer was purchased. Although at first there was some hope that the building could be used for some St. Marcus ministry purpose, structural analysis showed that re-use of the building for any conceivable purpose would be almost impossible. The board had it demolished and converted into parking and green space.

The completion of the kindergarten/primary school was celebrated with great joy. As usual it was finished just in the nick of time. All students from K4 through grade 4 were lodged here. The classrooms were on the second and third floors and the first floor had a large meeting room, conference room, a faculty work room, counters and workspace for volunteers, Amy's Room for developing little ones' large motor skills, a school office, and a row of five individual offices. The lower level held the school music studio, a large art room, the business office, and a huge unfinished space. The Wandani crew took it over and built out a clubhouse that they used for a few years. But when the Wandani program was closed down, the space was rebuilt as the mission advancement office. The construction staging area on the northwest corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Street & Garfield Avenue was rebuilt into a small parking lot and fenced. The maintenance crew finally got a decent shop with access directly to the parking lot, and a gorgeous children's play structure with rubberized base was built just north of Amy's Room. The former church office space and conference room were converted into a café that has turned out to be one of the most heavily used spaces on campus. The constant use led to its rebuilding with stainless steel worktables and cabinets, thanks to the generosity of Thrivent Financial.

The kindergarten/primary school had been financed with an innovative bond deal supported by New Market Tax Credits. One of the deal's requirements was that an organization separate from corporate St. Marcus had to hold the assets backing the bond loan for seven years. Thus the St. Marcus Foundation was launched and incorporated. Rev. emeritus Ron Muetzel was the first chairman, and a separate board of directors was constituted. The tax credit arrangement worked without a hitch, and after seven years, the debt was retired. The Foundation lived on and now holds the church's endowment and the school's Amy Madson endowment. Lilli Gust became the Foundation chair when the Muetzels decided not to reside in Milwaukee year-round.

Daryl Raabe declined to run again, and Merlyn Kruse was elected church president. In 2010 the Time of Grace board of directors had stated their wish to have Pastor Jeske's services full-time, and so St. Marcus finally decided to call a new executive/lead pastor. In 2011 the congregation extended a call to Rev. William Schaefer of Minneapolis. He accepted, and he and his wife Judy bought a house in Germantown and joined the team. (Pastor Schaefer had been on the board of directors of St. Croix Lutheran High School back in the 2000's when Merlyn was its president, and then Merlyn had hired him to be St. Croix's development director.) In 2012 Merlyn and his wife Lee decided to move back to the Twin Cities, and Rev. Jim Kleist was elected St. Marcus'

new congregational president.

The strain on the facilities of the main campus because of the hugely increased student census was really showing, and it showed up most urgently in the lack of play space. The kindergarten/primary building had destroyed the huge grass playground at the same time as it brought hundreds more children onto the campus. What to do?

Mr. Tyson knew. Build another gym between the 2003 and 2011 buildings. Even though there was still substantial debt from the 2011 building, a planning team swung into action, chaired, of course, by Gary Evans. Korb Tredo once again provided the design services, and Catalyst was the general contractor. A significant major gift by St. Marcus friend B. Bruce Krier made it possible to break ground in 2012, and the second gym would be named after him. The gym would have a rubberized floor and a full basement for storage. A basement tunnel would connect to the lower level of the kindergarten/primary building. Total cost: \$4,058,314. Its debt was paid off in full in 2015.

Mr. Tyson was active also in the wider educational community as a leader and mentor. He and former principal Kole Knueppel were instrumental in founding Schools that Can Milwaukee, which in 2018 merged with PAVE and emerged as City Forward Collective. Both organizations advocated for political support for low-income children and urban school reform.

One might think that opening capacity for two hundred more students would have eliminated the student waiting list and provided capacity for years to come, but you would be wrong. There was still a huge waiting list. Mr. Tyson had been trying to negotiate buying a vacant Milwaukee Public Schools building and thought he had a deal for either the Malcolm X campus or the Lee School, but after years of frustrating conversations, St. Marcus gave up. The Aurora Weier Educational Center building on Center Street came up for sale. Built originally as a natatorium, or indoor public pool, the south half had smallish classrooms and the north half, where the pool had been, had been converted into a gym and play space for smaller children. St. Marcus acquired it, closing officially in December of 2014, but classes had been able to start already in the fall. The congregation called April Richter as principal; that first year she welcomed one hundred students. Emergency building repairs and cosmetic changes were rushed through. Two years later, a proper educational wing was built to the south, Catalyst again being the contractor. The design was by Rinka Chung Architecture. Its official name became The North Campus, and it was later renamed the Center Street Campus.

The 2010s saw quite a few changes in turning the stark white walls of the church Atrium into a gallery for Christian art. Fiber artist Joni Matson designed, wove, and mounted the “Love, Joy, Peace” hangings on the north wall. Stephanie Barenz was commissioned to paint the triptych on the north wall, imagining what the Day of Pentecost might have looked like if it were happening in St. Marcus’ neighborhood today. Emily Ebeling’s massive three-panel painting of the Last Supper was acquired and mounted on Nate Sebal’s red oak shelf. Design Fugitives designed “Abraham’s Starfield,” a glittering mobile offering hope. Nate installed the bracing, cut the

reflective stars, and hung it. Andrew Paremski and Bruce Medema created and installed the sixteen “Gifts of the Reformation” stained glass panels in the windows of the Atrium’s west wall. A blow-up of Lance Meyer’s beautiful watercolor of St. Marcus’ façade graces the café. Nate also built the beautiful new baptismal font that Amanda Gerken Raabe had designed.

In honor of their percussionist father, Jon and Tim Sternberg donated a set of five timpani. A permanent place of honor was prepared for them on the highest tier of the balcony. It was joined by a set of orchestral bells a few years later.

Pastor Steinberg was always looking for new ways to engage school children and their parents, and he decided to launch a Sunday afternoon worship experience that would be geared to the school community. He recruited musician Ken Daniel and accompanist Harold Simelson to provide service music, and the singers who volunteered to be part of Ken’s group took the name Forgiven. Pastor Steinberg accepted a position in a new group called Chaplains in Schools, which provided pastoral services to various Choice schools in the Milwaukee area which were not connected to a congregation. Happily, the Steinbergs could stay in their 1<sup>st</sup> Street home, and Rebecca could continue to teach at St. Marcus. But the Sunday afternoon services were discontinued.

After Sara Baumgarten left the church office, there was some frequent turnover. Carolyn Young brought her gracious presence for a few years, Kristen Kapler brought her exuberant women’s sports energy, and Kendra Abbott filled some important holes. In 2013 God sent a mighty superstar to the team—Nelle Speerschneider. Nelle’s quiet competence, love for St. Marcus’ funky diversity, spirit of innovation, and passion for recruiting volunteers made the church office hum. She brought along her amazing husband Mark, who ended up on the St. Marcus staff and using his wide scope of talent on the maintenance crew, tech team, and his biggest love of all, playing music with the various praise bands. Mark passed away in 2021, and Nelle decided to return to the business world.

In 2014 the congregation celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the construction of the sanctuary. Thank offerings were used to replace the carpeting, begin an organ fund, and rebuild the Emmaus stained-glass window. Kyle Safranek tore out the chancel carpeting and the old pine floor underneath and built a stunning white oak chancel floor and steps. It was stained dark to match the pews.

St. Marcus’ mother church, historic St. John’s on 8<sup>th</sup> and Vliet Streets, had seen drastically reduced membership over the decades since its peak around 1900. Worse, the congregation decided to leave the synod in the 1990s. When they experienced a pastoral vacancy, they reconsidered and applied to be readmitted to the synod. They called Pastor Schaefer in 2015 and he accepted, working diligently to rebuild the congregation until the time of his retirement four years later.

2015 brought an absolute gusher of God’s blessings and generosity when St. Marcus was informed that it was the beneficiary of the Richard and Lydia Gamm Trust. Richard was a graduate of St. Marcus School, WWII veteran, and then chemist who founded a company in



## Ignition

Milwaukee, which he led for decades. This major gift was first tithed. Colette Bohlmann led a team of members who disbursed 10% of the bequest to their choices of various Lutheran ministries. Some of the remaining 90% was used for capital improvements, such as the organ fund, facilities “sinking fund,” school ministries, and a new roof for the church. Over half was invested in the Foundation. *(For the story of the remarkable Gamm family, see Appendix N.)*

The St. Marcus Parish Nurses had always done a lot of public health work with the children of the school. Nurse Beth Evans relentlessly advocated that a proper school nurse needed to be part of the school’s annual budget, and finally her efforts were rewarded. She became the first salaried school nurse, and after she and Gary left to serve the Central African Medical Mission, she was succeeded by Kary Wiesler. Incidentally, Kary is also the secret angel who does all the plantings in front of the church every spring.

The congregation made a big change in administration and hired a lay executive director to oversee all business operations. Mark Reinemann, a retired executive at Manpower, Inc., accepted the position and did an outstanding job. Unfortunately, after only a year and a half, his elderly mother passed away, and that was really the only thing keeping him and Wendy in Milwaukee. They retired again and moved to North Carolina. Ken Krueger served as an interim executive director and also did a splendid job. Ken helped the congregation find Fred Lautz, who had recently retired as the managing partner of the law firm of Quarles & Brady. Fred came on board, assisted by his marvelous wife Mary Jo, and provided outstanding executive leadership.

The church was now short two pastors. In 2016 the congregation called Rev. James Hein of Rochester, Minnesota, as the lead pastor and he accepted. His primary focus would be administration, development of the growth groups, and leading worship on Sunday night. He soon found out that Sunday night was not a good time slot and moved the service time to 5 p.m. on Saturdays. That move proved immensely popular, and the Saturday services grew steadily. When Koiné went into hiatus, ceasing touring and regular St. Marcus worship playing, Pastor Hein recruited Forgiven, homeless ever since the Sunday afternoon services were discontinued. Regular singers included Ken Daniel, Vicki Provencher, Rebecca Steinberg, Darlene Grams, and Andy Berger. The Salt band, Addy Keese, and Laura Tyson also served as worship leaders.

St. Marcus called again in 2016 and was blessed to be given a “yes” from Professor Dan Leyrer from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, where he had served in the fields of New Testament and evangelism. Pastor Leyrer’s focus was to serve as the pastor to the massive school faculty, staff, and students, sourcing and orientation for new teachers, and teaching Bible studies.

St. Marcus’ pastoral staff received a big boost when one of the members of the board of directors, a realtor named Ron Kelly, expressed an interest in pursuing pastoral studies. He was immediately enrolled in the Seminary’s Pastoral Studies Institute, which provides an alternative path to second career students, enabling them to learn in place as they are working in ministry. Ron serves as a pastoral assistant. In 2018 Pastor Jeske retired from Time of Grace and accepted a half-time position at St. Marcus, continuing as the main Sunday morning pastor. Rev. Jim Kleist

agreed to serve as a part-time visitation pastor.

In 2013 an organ committee, led by Jeff Krumbein and including Jerry Siegmann, Chara Fedke, and new organist Joel Schwartz, had been investigating rebuilding and updating the St. Marcus organ. It was suffering some serious mechanical problems and aftereffects of water leakage into the chests over the years, which had been patched in the past but never truly repaired. With some limited funds from the sanctuary anniversary offering, the committee contracted with Nolte Organ Building of West Allis to move the organ case façade several feet farther forward to create room for a hoped-for expansion in the future.

The Gamm bequest fulfilled that dream. With Joel Schwartz as point man, Nolte and the committee designed a significant expansion of the pipework, new console (keyboards), new wind supply, and a complete rebuild of the Great Organ (the south enclosure). Work began in 2016. For a whole year, the grand instrument was silent, and worship had to be led from the piano downstairs. The rebuild was completed in the fall of 2017. A stunning Friday evening recital featured organists Karen Beaumont, Lynn Kozlowski, and Doris Rindfleisch, and the following Sunday the organ was rededicated in special worship services. The organ is now a magnificent worship instrument, one of the best in Milwaukee, and is reinforced by the superb acoustics in the St. Marcus sanctuary. (*For the full story of the St. Marcus Organ, see Appendix D.*)

Joel and the organ committee were so heartened by the enthusiastic attendance and response to the dedicatory concert that the members began planning a Fine Arts series, which would seek to bring in the very best musicians to play in the church's sanctuary. Some of the guest organists in this first musical wave: David Porth, Dr. John Behnke, Dr. Samuel Eatherton, Dr. Steven Wentz, Dr. Philip Berger, Dr. David Cherwien, and Benjamin Culli. Guest choral groups included Chant Claire, the Lutheran Chorale, and Canticum Novum.

The New Market Tax Credit financing package worked exactly as planned. The congregation had a jubilant mortgage-burning ceremony in 2018 as the debt for the new kindergarten/primary school was paid off in full. Craig Huebner was elected congregation president, and he served until 2023.

Electrician Al Vormann had a busy 2019—he changed out all the sanctuary lamps to LED lighting, rebuilt the entire switch panel in the narthex, and arranged for the balcony window to be lit each night so as to be viewable from the street. It's a lovely sight, and the five hanging doorway lamps brighten up a previously dark street corner.

Jeff Krumbein announced his St. Marcus retirement in December 2019, marking the end of a brilliant twenty-five-year run. He and Heidi had always lived in Fond du Lac. He finally wearied of the long drives and wanted to be with his huge family more. There were many tears and much gratitude. He entrusted musical leadership to Joel Schwartz.

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St. Marcus in 2019: 907 souls, 729 communicants, average weekend worship attendance of 510, and school enrollment of 850.



# XIV

## New Decade, New Leaders

It didn't take long for things to go south in the new decade. By the end of February 2020, a strange new virus named COVID-19 was racing throughout the world, leaving sickness and death in its wake. Midway through the next month, federal and local health authorities were mandating the shutdown of all religious services and school classrooms. Schools had to scramble to find a way to carry on instruction virtually, and so did churches. Both St. Marcus Church and School were severely disrupted. Both had to find ways to use technology and the internet to do their ministries.

One of the unintended consequences of shutting down schools was that it dealt a blow to the educational progress of almost every student in the state. Urban schoolchildren were hit especially hard, and the already serious challenges of urban ministry got harder. St. Marcus' test scores in reading and math were still significantly higher than other near north side schools, but they now disturbingly lagged the state average.

COVID caused the shutdown of the Food Pantry, and it never reopened. Director Pat Steliga decided to retire from leading it as well as stepping back from heading up the Parish Nurses and Altar Guild. In gratitude for her decades of faithful service, the Altar Guild members named their work room Pat's Room. Heidi Sebald was chosen as the Altar Guild's new leader.

In 2016, the church had hired Martin Smith as a full-time video and sound technician, serving both the school and church. When the shutdown happened, Martin was ready to go. Both the Saturday and Sunday worship services were streamed live on Facebook and then also archived

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on YouTube to enable remote worship. The school did its best to augment its video teaching with personal homework packets and instructions for parents. In 2021 Jack Albert was hired to assist Martin, with sound and editing as his focus. Slowly the health authorities began to allow worshipers to trickle back in with mandates for masks and every-other-pew social distancing, but there was no common cup distribution of the sacrament for a while.

By 2022 all COVID restrictions were lifted, but some worshipers still wore masks, and other fearful members stayed home. You would have expected a collapse in church income, since no offering baskets could be passed, but the members stepped up and supported St. Marcus' ministries with over 90% of the pre-pandemic level of support. Many now made use of methods of electronic giving. Even after the restrictions were lifted, the board decided to keep the streaming and archiving services going for both services, and many hundreds of people each week make use of them. Pastor Hein also uploaded regular podcasts and his daily posting of *Two Steps Forward*, a Bible study produced with his wife Adrian. There are thousands of subscribers to St. Marcus' content in Facebook and YouTube.

Pastor Hein led a movement to provide more support to parents of young children. He saw to the refurbishing of the Cozy Cove next to the café, better to serve parents with infants and toddlers, set up childcare during worship, and launched a Children's Church activity for parents who needed a break. The Sunday School during all this time was thriving under the steady, loving, and resourceful leadership of Suzy Welsh, Jess Kock, Alyssa Schwartz, David Burleton, and others. They rebranded their ministry as Club 516. Their singing performances in church were highlights, especially when the school groups stopped coming. A special treat each year is their Christmas pageant with full costuming. The growth groups grew in number too. The current roster is around twenty-two, taking place all over the county and beyond.

Christine Safranek had been steadily growing the mission advancement office, and over the years the team attracted some real all-stars. They raise millions of dollars each year to support school operations and capital campaigns. The November 2023 Gala Auction set another record, bringing in over \$1.2 million. In the first twenty-three years of the twenty-first century, this group raised over fifty million dollars in capital gifts and thirty million dollars for operations.

With two campuses full and continuing enrollment waiting lists, Henry Tyson was still restless to expand the school, as was executive director Fred Lautz. When the owners of the former Harambee Community School indicated they were prepared to sell their building on 1<sup>st</sup> and Burleigh Streets, St. Marcus was immediately interested. The board and congregation gave the green light, and in 2020, St. Marcus owned a third campus at a cost of \$1.9 million. Tracy Eastburn accepted the position of principal.

The main building is a handsome one, done in the Mediterranean style popular in the 1920s. It was built originally as the school for St. Elizabeth Catholic Church. The basic brick was in decent shape, but cornices, roofs, mechanicals, and a host of other internal issues needed a lot of work. The former tenants moved out in February 2021. Phase I of the rehab work was done in a blur

that late spring and summer. The campus was able to open in the fall of 2021 with 150 students in K4-2nd grade in completely renovated classrooms, restrooms, and office spaces. Renovation costs in Phase I: \$3.2 million.

The second phase involved renovation of the remaining second floor spaces, renovation of parts of the first floor (gym, cafeteria, art and music rooms, health suite, counseling suite), installation of all new mechanicals, and expansion of the building that involved filling in a two-story courtyard. A special gift by Keith Mardak and Mary Vandenberg made possible a three-floor addition on the northeast corner, which included a new, secure entryway and front offices on the first floor with classroom spaces on the second and third floors. Phase II also included extensive concrete and landscaping work on the east side of the building. Phase II cost: \$10 million. It was completed in September 2022, when the campus welcomed over two hundred returning and new students.

Phase III, which began in the winter of 2022-2023, involved construction of a library on the second floor of the courtyard infill, construction of classrooms and meeting rooms on the second floor of the northeast addition, the completion of a large motor skills room and a multi-purpose room, and the renovation of the kitchen at a cost of \$4 million. In the fall of 2023, approximately 280 returning and new students were welcomed to the campus.

Phase IV would be the renovation of the third-floor restrooms and classrooms, resurfacing of the parking lot, and the construction of a playground area on the north side of the building. Approximate cost: \$4 million. The Burleigh Campus now has an estimated capacity of 550-600 students.

In 2021 Nelle Speerschneider, church office manager extraordinaire, left to take a position in a local company. Lindy Spencer took over many of her tasks on a part-time basis. Fred Lautz retired in June 2022, and Kole Knueppel returned to the St. Marcus staff as executive director. In July Pastor Jeske retired. Members donated over \$40,000 to the Foundation in his name. Brendan Sullivan was hired as the new day-to-day facilities supervisor.

At the Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention in June 2022, Pastor Leyrer was elected the new district president. He stayed on at St. Marcus as a part-timer, but the bulk of his time was now to be spent in district-supervising duties. In compensation for his time, the synod provided a seminary graduate to the staff. Candidate Joel Krieger was assigned, and he was ordained and installed on August 14. Joel brought his wonderful wife Kate and children Reuben, Armin, and Ramona.

Music director Joel Schwartz recruited a first-rate team of church organists. In addition to his playing, the members now regularly hear member Amy Zietlow, plus regular guests David Porth and Dr. Philip Berger. Joel also reconstituted a Sunday morning choir after the COVID shutdown and assembled a regular Sunday morning praise band. Brent Krohn was appointed to lead the Saturday night praise band. In 2022 the synod published its new gray-blue hymnal, still titled



## New Decade, New Leaders

*Christian Worship.* The red hymnals were retired with much affection and thanks. All the pew Bibles were replaced. That fall the 8 a.m. Sunday service was moved to 9 a.m. Ben Hannemann was elected president of the congregation.

In the summer of 2024 the school received a stunning gift of \$6 million from the family of Karl Schlueter, the long-time owner of Karl's Rentals and Karl's Propane Exchange, who had passed away in 2018. Karl had grown to love the children of St. Marcus School and became an enthusiastic donor. This gift allowed St. Marcus to begin and finish the final phase of the Burleigh St. project, which is to renovate completely the 3rd floor for middle schoolers. The campus was renamed in Karl's honor. It will be ready for the 25-26 school year.

At this writing, one year shy of its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, St. Marcus counts 1,069 members, 828 communicants, weekly worship attendance of 517, and school enrollment of 551 at the North Avenue Campus, 313 at Center Street Campus, and 213 at the Karl J. Schlueter Campus.

2025, St. Marcus' 150<sup>th</sup> year, will be a year of praise, celebration, and rededication to the congregation's mission of helping to connect people with their Savior and mobilizing them for lives of joyful service. As St. Marcus' people and its leaders look ahead, they have big plans, big energy, big optimism, and anticipate big resources from God. Here are eleven features of the identity the people of St. Marcus have chosen:

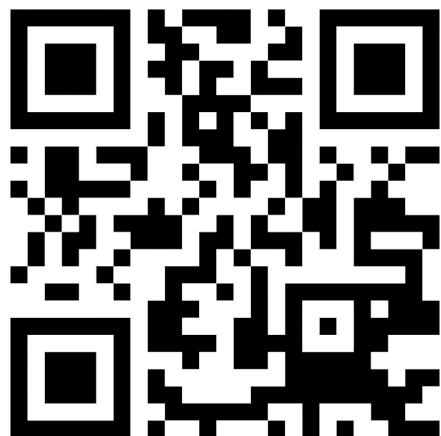
- *Biblical*—the Scriptures are true, inerrant, inspired of the Spirit, and the power in all we do.
- *Entrepreneurial*—the congregation is not afraid of trying new ways of connecting with people.
- *Relational*—the people genuinely love and care for each other.
- *Digital*—Time of Grace got it going, but the congregation is now even more committed to investing in digital communication of the Word via social media and member communication.
- *Diverse*—we are better together.
- *Urban*—St. Paul had an urban strategy. St. Marcus loves its city location, because cities are platforms for change and cultural influence. Cities are where the most people are.
- *Outreach minded*—restlessly connecting with people outside the congregation is just as important as providing services to members.
- *Musical*—music is foundational to the Lutheran heritage of worship, and St. Marcus is committed to bringing the best to and from its members.
- *Passionate about lay leadership*—St. Marcus seeks to live out St. Paul's words about lay people in Romans 15: "You are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another."
- *Networked*—St. Marcus does not wish to be an island unto itself, but networked with the neighborhood, its people and organizations, and connected to the philanthropic community, to carry out its mission.
- *All in for Christian education*—after all, the church was born out of the school, wasn't it?

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

# Appendices

Follow the link below to access the digital appendices.

A digital version of this book is also available at the link.



[stmarcus.org/book](http://stmarcus.org/book)



