

CELEBRATING
125
YEARS

**St. Paul's is Celebrating its
125th Anniversary
October 8, 2023**

Saint Paul's Exodus

"Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" Genesis 12:1

The turning and remodeling of St. Paul's Lutheran Church on Sherman Street in 1951 only temporarily and partially alleviated the congregation's problem with a building that was too small. There were no classrooms or meeting rooms and the available space for social events was cramped. Tommy and Dee Livingston and Pam Meadows remember how members of the congregation had to find quiet corners in the sanctuary to hold classes and meetings. As Tommy put it, the old church was only capable of comfortably serving a congregation of around sixty people.

Meanwhile, Decatur was continuing to grow dramatically. The city's population in 1950 was 19,974 but by 1960, it had grown to 29,217, a 46% increase. While Decatur in earlier decades had had larger percentage increases in its population, these large increases were the result of the annexation of pre-existing nearby communities such as Albany where the Sherman Street church was located. In 1960, industries were continuing to move to Decatur, bringing with them more people moving from the North including more Lutherans. That trend would continue through the 1960s so that by 1970, Decatur's population reached 38,044.

On 25 June 1961, St. Paul's got a new pastor, Ronald Reinhardt. The previous pastor, Emil Krohn had accepted a call in Nebraska after serving over ten years as pastor of St. Paul's. Fortunately for St. Paul's, there was only around a three-month gap between Pastor Krohn's departure and Pastor Reinhardt's arrival. Six-months later, the congregation appointed an Expansion Committee during January 1962. The committee consisted of Ed Johnson, Norman Meyer, Clarence Heiserman, and Louis Nebrig. Its charge was to look into buying land nearby the old church on Sherman Street. The committee discussed the situation with local landowners and discovered that no one was interested in selling. Sherman Street was a pleasant residential neighborhood consisting of houses built during the 1910s and 1920s. It is now part of the Albany Historic District. Across Fourth Avenue, there was a school and the National Guard armory, the site of old Fort Decatur. At the time, both of those entities were seemingly permanently in place. As a result, the Expansion Committee reported that with such a static real estate market, there was no prospect of St. Paul's being able to expand at its current location.

The problem of the old church's cramped physical plant was not going to go away. So on 12 April 1964, the congregation reactivated the Expansion Committee with the same membership as the first committee. They were tasked to find a suitable property with room for growth at the new location for St. Paul's. What they found was a five-acre tract of land on Carridale Street. At that time, the area around the Carridale address was vacant and undeveloped. There was no mall.

There was no national guard armory. There was no branch of the Decatur General Hospital. Most importantly, there were no residential developments to provide homes for potential members.

When members learned about the potential new location for the church, Bobbie Seibert and Pam Meadows both recalled that many people initially thought the plan was crazy. Pam Meadows tells that Pastor Reinhardt gave the Expansion Committee's members Norman Meyer and Clarence Heiserman much of the credit for successfully promoting the move to Carridale Street. Both men were practical businessmen who could see that the future expansion of Decatur lay in the southwest of town where Carridale Street was located. Expansion north across the Tennessee River was impractical and the city had expanded to the east about as far as it could go. Tommy and Dee Livingston and Ron and Bobbie Seibert remember that the congregation came to support the move with little opposition. Pam Meadows heard from her parents that they thought moving was the right thing to do. One issue, however, did cause some concern. People wanted the beloved church bell to be part of the move to Carridale Street. Pam Meadows and Beth Hornish both report this concern. Beth remembers a conversation she witnessed between her father and Pastor Reinhardt. Pastor Reinhardt told how the issue of the bell caused some resistance to the move. Once it was made clear that the bell was coming along, the resistance dissolved. Pam Meadows heard that some members also wanted to take the rose window in the altar area of the sanctuary of the Sherman Street church and install it in the new church (pictured on the back page). This wish had to be abandoned as removing the window would have caused some serious damage to the old church.

Meyer and Heiserman were right as the future growth of businesses and homes around St. Paul's attests. So, when the full congregation met, it voted to purchase the five-acre tract for \$40,000. With the new location assured, the voters meeting of January 1965 created a committee to conduct a facility needs study and hire an architect. The committee chose Eldon Mack of the architectural firm of Simoni, Heck, and Associates of New Orleans. St. Paul's exodus had found its destination. Next month it will get its new sanctuary and buildings.

Ron Fritze and Beth Hornish



Groundbreaking on Carridale St SW - can you name these fellas?