

CELEBRATING

125  
YEARS

October 8, 2023

St. Paul's Exodus: Part II

*And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. Ezra 3:11*

The ground breaking ceremony for St. Paul's new location on Carridale Street took place on 13 August 1967. It was the culmination of several years of planning and discussions. Things went smoothly with the construction that followed. In less than a year, the congregation was able to conduct a dedication service for the new church on 19 May 1968. The building cost \$150,000 with an additional \$50,000 to purchase the land, to provide furnishing for the new building, and to pave the parking lot. In total, the process for St. Paul's to commit to moving and building a new church took over six years.

Keep in mind, the new church facility, while larger than the old church on Sherman Street, it was a lot smaller than the current church complex. Still, it was a significant improvement, the new church had offices and rooms that could be used for classes and meetings. The new sanctuary included a choir loft. Dear to the hearts of the members of the congregation, the new church included a bell tower where the beloved bell was moved and mounted safely. Various stories in the *Decatur Daily* indicate that St. Paul's bell had a reputation that made it something of a local celebrity. Justly proud of their new church, the congregation invited the Decatur community to an open house on 24 November 1968.

St. Paul's, along with Decatur, continued to grow. In 1970, the population of Decatur was 38,000. By 1990, the city had grown to almost 49,000. During the late 1980s, the congregation of St. Paul's realized that it needed to expand its facilities if it wanted to provide Christian education for the congregation and the community. In January 1988, the congregation passed a resolution authorizing the creation of an expansion committee to develop a plan for an educational facility.

The building expansion committee consisted of Bill Miller as chair, along with members Gail Pisani, Carol Alldredge, Jim Forthman, Duron Crider, and Esther Wilkening. The plan they formulated called for a new fellowship hall, a new kitchen, new restrooms, a church parlor, ten additional classrooms, church offices, and a covered drive. The voters meeting of the congregation on 16 October 1988 approved the committee's plan. Construction commenced soon after and on 11 June 1989, a dedication service for the new building was held.

St. Paul's growth continued both in terms of numbers of members and in the scope of its mission. The congregation was committed to expand its outreach to the local community educationally, socially, and spiritually. Another building expansion committee was established in 1998. Its chair was Pastor David Lewis. Other members were Rhonda Reece, Bill Miller, Tommy Livingston, Doug Kurz, Pam Meadows, Carol Morgan, and Bill Jordan. The committee's first meeting took place on 5 March 1998. It was immediately decided that a member of the LWML or the Ladies' Auxiliary needed to be added to the committee. In subsequent meetings, the committee decided that a Christian Life Center was what was needed. The Fellowship Hall would be relocated and, four new classrooms would be added along with the library, the lobby area, and a new kitchen. All the new facilities were built according to the specifications required for schools. Pastor Lewis and the congregation wanted to keep open the option of creating a K-6 grade school for the children of the congregation and the community. A gym was included in the expansion which included two locker rooms along with the classrooms currently housing the Preschool and the Sunday school. The parlor would also be remodeled. The gym is now known as the ARC (Activity and Recreation Center).

Over the years much wonderful community outreach by St. Paul's has occurred and continues including the Boys and Girls Club, the KTT, youth recreation, and after school and summer programs. St. Paul's has steadily contributed to the local community and beyond. Its efforts have been a rich blessing for both the receivers and the givers. We current members are the heirs and custodians of that legacy.

*Beth Hornish and Ron Fritze*

