

Calvary History - 1970-79, Decade 6

It was April 16, 1972—Confirmation Sunday—and 16 Calvary confirmands were prepared to make public confession of their faith in front of family and friends. But the pastor who had helped bring them to this point in their faith walk would not complete this portion of the journey with them. No one knew then, but the Rev. Marvin Reichert was “going home.”



On that Spring morning, after the minister was admitted to Lutheran Hospital for treatment of

an esophageal, hemorrhage, numerous calls were going out to clergy around the area, asking if they might be able to conduct Confirmation rites just hours later. The Rev. J. Walton Kempe, a visitation pastor at Salem Lutheran Church, stepped in to lead the service. Confirmation Sunday would go on.

The next day, worried congregational members were heartened by news about their beloved pastor: Doctors had been able to stem the bleeding, and Rev. Reichert was “resting nicely.” But complications arose, and the pastor—who had endured more than one lengthy hospitalization during his time at Calvary—was transferred to what is now University Hospitals in Iowa City. It was there that he entered Life Eternal on May 1. Calvary members were devastated by the news. “We have not only lost a minister and a teacher—we have lost a friend,” one person noted.

Pastor Reichert’s wife, Jan, sent a heartfelt letter to the congregation after her husband’s passing. The letter concluded: “Our six years at Calvary will always be remembered for our wonderful friends, lovely home, beautiful church, (and) many cooperative, faithful Christian workers.”



The Rev. Leland Jackson was appointed vice pastor of Calvary while members searched for Pastor Reichert’s successor. The congregation would call the Rev. Kenneth H. Swanberg, who joined Calvary in January of 1973.

The new pastor seemed to hit the ground running. A

proposal to allow youth to begin receiving Holy Communion in fifth grade, rather than waiting until the Rite of Confirmation, was studied and approved. A “Tape Ministry” was launched, with the worship service recorded and delivered to the church’s shut-ins. The balcony was finally completed, and the narthex and stairway were carpeted. What’s more, Calvary met its pledge to the Illinois Synod benevolence, after having retired its mortgage the previous year. Other successful programs included a Visitor Open House Service, a balloon launch to spread God’s message of love, and a prayer vigil. Meeting with less success was Pastor Swanberg’s attempt to get worshipers to sit closer to the pulpit by roping off the back pews: Folks sat there anyway.

The following year saw more changes, with new carpeting in the chancel and nave areas, and replacement of the church’s 20-year-old sound system. A Young Adults group for those 18



and over was formed. And there was a recommendation to add a coffee hour between services for “informal fellowship”—the start of what would become a Sunday morning staple.

During his tenure, Rev. Swanberg placed a heavy emphasis on evangelism, noting that *all* were responsible for the effort—not just the clergy. This was at a time when 70 members were dropped from the rolls due to inactivity or by their own request (an effort to give a more accurate picture of congregational size). The pastor encouraged members to “speak positively” about their church. “Consider the many assets that Calvary has and don’t be afraid to tell others about them.”

One way Calvary reached out was by sponsoring a South Vietnamese family who had escaped on a U.S. Navy ship following the fall of Saigon to the Communists in 1975. “After a series of delays through New York and Fort Chaffee, our family finally arrived in late summer, and



were greeted warmly by friends of Calvary at Moline Airport,” wrote Jean Hallstrom, who helped spearhead the effort along with Don Carlson. Vinh Pham, who arrived first, initially stayed with the Hallstrom family. Later, Vinh’s brother, Quy, Quy’s wife, La, and their 3-year-old daughter, Dung, arrived, along with a family friend, Huy. Calvary members secured housing for the refugees and pitched in with donations of furniture and household goods. They also helped them find jobs and provided transportation until they could become self-sufficient. Later in the decade, the congregation would “adopt” a family from Laos, also aiding them in their resettlement.

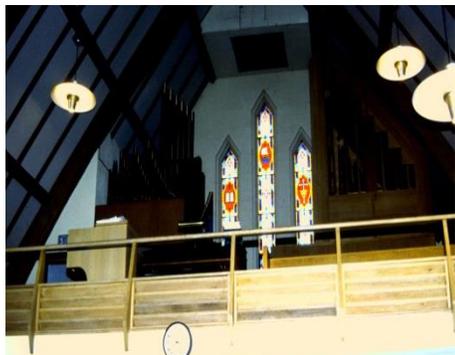
Other major events in the church in 1975 included the renovation of the narthex, the installation



of a commercial dishwasher, and a facelift for the church nursery. For the latter, member Arla Olson would use her artistic talents to add paintings of Noah’s Ark. The large oil painting of

Christ in the garden was moved from the downstairs fellowship hall to the east entrance at this time.

The nation’s Bicentennial year (1976) proved to be an eventful one for the church, too. The Altar Guild was formed (those duties had been previously handled by the women’s groups). The church was burglarized not once, but *twice*. But the big news was the planned purchase of a Wicks Pipe Organ, and related improvements to the acoustics in the sanctuary. The “horsehair” material that had long deadened the sound in the soaring ceiling was covered over with panels that would reflect it, instead. Worship was held downstairs during the renovations, as pews had to be removed to accommodate the scaffolding. The custom-built organ was installed in the balcony after the paneling process was completed. The pipe organ—with a hefty price tag of \$28,630—



was expected to deliver superior sound quality and last a hundred years. It was dedicated on April 3, 1977, with a special recital given by Marilyn Volquardsen of Davenport. The old electronic organ that had been located in the choir alcove was sold.

Also in 1977, Calvary sold its parsonage, with a plan to invest the proceeds to help pay the pastor’s housing allowance. Church improvements that year included updates to the kitchen and the church office, and the raising of the floor of the ladies’ restroom to make it more accessible. One piece of real estate that didn’t need any fixing was “Little Calvary,” an impressive cardboard structure that for many years was a prominent feature in the Sunday School opening room (now the library). The kid-sized church even had its own dedication service that year!

The following year, the custodian who had so faithfully tended the church property for 21 years, Martin Hertz, retired. His sons, Steeg and Bob, would take over his duties.

Congregational life remained active during this decade, especially among the youth. After creating “Chrismon” (Christian symbols) to decorate the sanctuary Christmas tree in 1971, members of the Luther League took a Christmas Break trip to Bark River, Michigan, where they were hosted by the Rev. Charles and Lorraine Beckingham, former members of Calvary. The League later would venture to Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp in Colorado and go backpacking in Canada’s Boundary Waters, financing their trips through fundraisers such as car washes and newspaper drives.

Also notable during this decade was the adoption in 1979 of a new worship hymnal to replace the “red hymnal” (the congregation reportedly had a little difficulty mastering the new music); the addition of a Saturday night joint service at First Lutheran, with Calvary, Faith, First and Salem taking turns conducting the worship; the establishment of the Calvary Blood Assurance Program (to replace pints used by members); and a move to increase member participation by having lay people read the scripture lessons, as had been the practice in the early church.

The 1970’s concluded with a grand 60th anniversary celebration for Calvary and the creation of a new pictorial directory. But 1979 might be best remembered in these parts for its brutal winter temperatures and record snowfall (nearly 53 inches), which had its effect on area churches. “Perhaps the first time Sunday worship services were cancelled in Calvary’s history was on Jan. 14,” Pastor Swanberg wrote in his annual report. “The inclement weather caused us a drop in attendance for January and February, but also buried us in a financial snowdrift until later in the year.” Calvary members were happy to welcome Spring—until the church basement flooded with the snowmelt!