

After World War II, the church became more and more restricted in its facilities for Sunday School. The Sanctuary was beautiful, with stained glass windows, high ceiling with cathedral-type trusses, carved woodwork screens. Its seating capacity was adequate - the pews in our present church are the ones used in the old church, including the old choir pews. But we had three Sunday School classes running simultaneously in the Sanctuary, and youth schools in basement classes with temporary wood floors placed on the ground, and very low ceilings - most unattractive. These were in addition to classes filling the rest of the education wing.

The return of the veterans, and return from the war economy to a period of steady employment, started to make attendance greater, especially in the Sunday School. Then the Baby Boomers started to make their presence felt. It became obvious that something needed to be done. On Jan 26, 1949, a Committee on Building Expansion was formed.

The problems were very difficult to solve. Finances, as always in churches, were difficult, with Trustees struggling with paying bills. And it was beginning to be noticed that there was no convenient parking place for the increased number of cars - it was suddenly apparent that not many people walked to church anymore. The church, with its adjacent manse which had recently been changed to an area for offices, was hemmed in by McClory's Five and Dime on High Street, and by the solidly constructed YMCA in the rear, which expected to be there forevermore. In addition, building codes would not permit vertical expansion without very major difficulties in exit facilities, which available space made impractical.

The committee struggled with the problems, which seemed to be larger than initially imagined, and would take a long time to solve. A few stopgap measures were taken: the old manse was renovated to allow a meeting room of reasonable capacity for a large class, in January of 1951. In May, 1951, the Sunday School wing of the church was renovated to improve classroom sizes. In January 1954 the basement rooms were repaired to be a little more healthy looking.

Meanwhile, the committee continued looking at alternatives, and finally decided that the only possible solution to continue as a viable, growing church was to find a large enough lot to accommodate its needs, and build a new church.

At a very heated congregational meeting, the Committee recommended we take steps to build on the new site. Several trustees vehemently insisted that there was no way that the members would ever raise enough money to build a new church: They were struggling to pay bills on a budget of about \$20,000, and so to pay 20 times that for a new church was absolutely impossible. After some opponents declared they would leave the church (and later did) if this was attempted, Elder George Robins, a highly respected leader, calmly asserted that the project was necessary to serve God in our community, that we should move ahead in faith in God. The measure passed.

We had to get Presbytery to approve our plan to build the new church. Presbytery's Finance Committee stipulated that we would

have to demonstrate the ability of our congregation to finance the project, and make it feasible, by raising a down payment of about a third of the estimated cost, and then get pledges for much of the remaining cost, before starting construction.

Committees then took a sequence of steps. First, selection of a site. Seeking a central location in Pottstown, in an attractive neighborhood, with adequate acreage for parking, beauty, and future expansion, several sites were inspected, and one lying between the high school grounds and the then Pottstown Hospital looked ideal. Dr. Elmer Porter was the owner, and he offered to donate about half the land, saying that was quite large enough for our purpose. The Committee said we needed it all, and persuaded him to sell us the rest. (One corner lot had been promised to Mr. Wilson, to build a funeral home.) This agreement was approved by the congregation on March 20, 1955. We could later say that we could furnish cradle-to-grave service, in cooperation with the hospital and funeral home. Later, his heirs donated another corner to us, on Evans Street, and the Borough agreed to abandon their right-of-way for St. Johns Street, giving us more space.

Rev. Hallock resigned as of 1/1/56, leaving us without a pastor until 11/28/56 when Rev. Gunther arrived. He quickly revived the building program.

A Building Fund campaign for \$160,000 was started in September 1958 on a 3-year payment plan. In an enthusiastic whirlwind campaign, pledges of \$174,296 were received. Hard times hit Pottstown, with many laid off, but by the end of the period, in December 1961, about \$150,000 had been received.

The next, Building Construction campaign, for \$120,000, was made in Dec. 1961; pledges of \$121,365 were received. In January, 1958, the congregation approved going ahead with construction, and Presbytery was satisfied that we could pay for it.

Meanwhile, committees continued to work. In selecting an architect, the Construction committee received dosiers and listened to presentations by several interested architects, then visited some of the churches they had designed and talked to members of those churches. At the same time, they got impressions of what type design they preferred, and available materials that seemed desirable. The committee selected George Savage, who specialized in churches, as his father had before him. Mr. Savage prepared presentation plans for use in the Building Construction campaign. In many meetings with the Construction committee, designs were worked out - eight major design revisions were made before the committee felt the needs were best met.

Once the design was satisfactory, contractors were asked to submit bids. Warren Zern, a reputable Pottstown contractor, was selected. As his bid was greater than our budgeted amount, we worked with him to change a few items and eliminate others, to bring us within budget. Groundbreaking ceremony was performed Dec. 31, 1961, and construction began.

On Sep. 23, 1962, the cornerstone was laid with ceremony. Behind it was placed a box of items submitted by organizations of the church for the amazement of future generations. (It is proposed to open this in the 150th Anniversary celebrations).

From the old church, the pews, the carved wood screens, lecturn and pulpit, communion table and service, cross above the table, the overhead sanctuary lights, the organ, and the boiler were reused in the new church.

In June, 1963, a series of programs officially dedicated the completed church and its organ. At last, our problems were solved! Pleasant, adequate rooms for Sunday School, a delightful Sanctuary, offices, classrooms, a large Fellowship Hall with attractive kitchen. Ideal!

But we still had a mortgage. So in October, 1965, we launched a \$100,000 Debt Retirement Fund. This, too, was successful: 3 years later, we burned the mortgage. Hooray!

Young people were attracted to the new church - we soon noticed that they were a larger percentage of the congregation, and the number of children grew rapidly. The rooms became full; eventually we put dividers in the Fellowship Hall to run about a half-dozen classes there. A class was placed in the kitchen. Even the ladies' lounge was used, and toilets were covered over to provide more space. It was time to expand again.

Again, a committee studied the situation, determined the needs of the Sunday School and other church functions, and the areas required. There was some resistance from a few members of the congregation, but the congregation voted to proceed with building an addition. We selected a local architect, Richard Frantz, from several bidders, and went through the procedure of design and revise until a workable extension was approved. This time, it was felt that an up-to-date heating and air conditioning system should be installed for all-year comfort, and an elevator for accessibility. Again, three financial campaigns were required to pay for the new extension. It had been decided that construction should be started immediately after the first campaign was made, instead of waiting for its money to come in, as in the original structure, so much more interest has been paid. In a few months, we can burn another mortgage.

The extension has allowed a larger HENS dayschool program, provided much better facilities for all Sunday School activities, made our church handicapped accessible, and provided for a steadily increasing youth attendance.