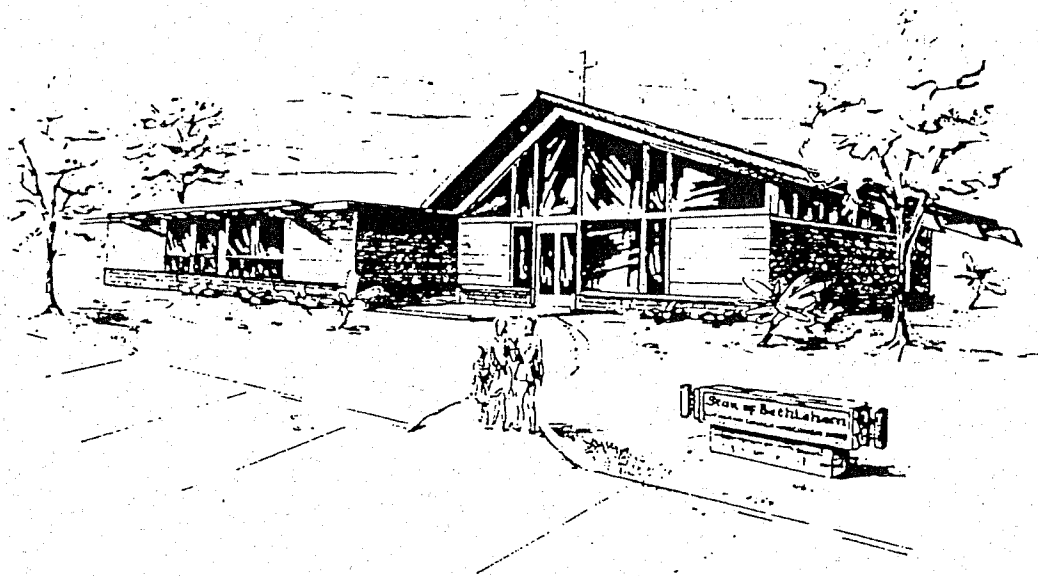


"STAR OF BETHLEHEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH: THIRTY YEARS OF GRACE"



*"I was glad when they said unto me,
let us go into the house of the Lord."*

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The year is now 1998 and God's grace continues to be showered upon Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Star of Bethlehem celebrated its 30th Anniversary in September of 1997; therefore the title of this historical paper is "**Thirty Years of Grace**". Pastor John Gawrisch expands on this thirty years of grace in the booklet that was put together for this eventful occasion;

"For 30 years now, the Lord has held His hand of blessing over our congregation. From small beginnings, the congregation has grown to almost 600 communicants and nearly 800 souls. For 30 years, the Lord has permitted His Word to be proclaimed among us in truth and purity. For 30 years, His Sacraments have been administered for our blessing just as Christ instituted them. For 30 years, the Word of God has been a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. For 30 years, God's people have come to this church, received comfort and strength, and been pointed toward our heavenly home. For 30 years, those people have been letting their lights shine like stars in the universe, as they beamed forth the light of God's love in our community. Today we give thanks and praise to God for each one of those 30 years of grace, and recommit ourselves to our task."¹

Presently, Star of Bethlehem, by God's grace, has: a membership of 621 communicants and 838 souls, one full-time pastor and presently calling for a full-time associate, a Lutheran Elementary School that has an enrollment of 151 students, a dedicated teaching staff of seven, a beautiful facility with a new multi-purpose gymnasium and four additional classrooms, and the list goes on and on. Star of Bethlehem has been clearly blessed by God; not only spiritually, but also physically. The eight original families, who made up the nucleus of Star of Bethlehem back in the year of 1967, would never have guessed how greatly God would bless them in the following three decades.

The Year 1967

Reading a newspaper back in the year that Star of Bethlehem was officially organized, you would have come across headlines like this: STALIN'S DAUGHTER DEFECTS TO U.S., ISRAEL SMASHES ARABS IN SIX DAY WAR, and U.S. TROOPS IN VIETNAM INCREASES FROM 300,000 to 474,300. 1967 was the year three U.S. astronauts died in a flash fire, race riots occurred in 100 U.S. cities, the U.S. population reached 200 million, and the year Elvis and Priscilla married in Las

¹Pastor Gawrisch. These words were written in the small booklet for the 30th anniversary celebration.

Vegas. The best big screen picture of the year was *"In the Heat of the Night"*. You would have been greeted with songs like these if you turned on your radio: *"All You Need is Love"*, *"Ruby Tuesday"*, *"Up, Up and Away"*, and *"Penny Lane"*. It was the year that Jack Nicklaus won the U.S. Open, and the year that the Green Bay Packers won the Super Bowl. The average annual income was \$7,400. A gallon of gas would have put you ought \$.33 and a new car could be purchased for \$2,700. The minimum wage was a \$1.40. And your life expectancy was 70.2 years.² Some things have changed a lot and some haven't at all over the past thirty years.

History of New Berlin

The best way I found to provide a brief yet adequate history of New Berlin was to quote directly from the booklet that was printed by *The League of Women Voters of New Berlin* in 1971.

NEW BERLIN - A FRONTIER TERRITORY

"Wisconsin immigrants came from Michigan, Ohio, New York and New England. The first settlers of the frontier now known as New Berlin were Sidney Evans and P. G. Harrington and his wife. They were former New Englanders who had located in White Pigeon, Michigan.

The Harringtons and Evans left Michigan for the Milwaukee area in the spring of 1836. At the end of May the two men set out to explore the wilderness following an old Indian trail. They decided to settle in the eastern area along a road we now know as National Avenue. Harrington returned to Milwaukee for his wife while Evans began constructing a log hut. This claim shanty was built up on three sides and open to the fire in front. The roof and floor, made of elm bark, were about six feet in length.

Another early settler was a young man, John White, who located in the southwestern part of this area, now known as Prospect Hill. Soon after White made his claim in June 1836, claims were made on behalf of Hugh Wedge and Isaac Dewitt. Wedge and Dewitt built the first saw mill.

Alva Hetherington built a hotel in 1836 and later that year Waterman Field, Iva Stewart, Curtis Davis, a blacksmith, and a Mr. Ellison settled in the town. Davis became the first tavern owner. Field became the first Justice of the Peace and first postmaster in 1837.

The frontier, technically called Township 6 of Range 20 east, was in-

²Kardlets. 1967: *Pages of Time*. Interactive Publishers.

cluded in the town of Muskego on January 2, 1838. The area witnessed a large influx of immigrants after an Autumn land sale in 1839.

Muskego was divided into quarters in 1839. The northeast quarter was called Mentor but this name was changed to New Berlin and approved by the State Legislature on January 13, 1840. Waterman Field and Sidney Evans selected the name of New Berlin in honor of Evan's native place in Chenango County, New York, pronouncing the name New BURR-lin.

In 1840, the first school was organized and taught by Elvira Hunkins in Hiram Hollister's home. A school was built of logs on land donated by P. V. Monroe in 1841.

Mass was offered by the Reverend Kundig, of St. Valerius Roman Catholic Church in Andrew Snyder's cabin in 1844. This later became Holy Apostles parish.

German Lutherans built the first church in 1847, Catholics the second in 1856, and the Free-Will Baptists a church in 1858. The Baptist church still stands on National Avenue."

NEW BERLIN - A GROWING RURAL COUNTRYSIDE

"During the early 1900's the New Berlin countryside was dotted with orchards, fields of grain and grazing sheep. In 1933, New Berlin was advertised as Farm Bureau picnics as the town with 'Three A's: apples, alfalfa, and Asiatic (Karakul) sheep.' Gravel was discovered in the rolling hills of the southwestern area. Residents would pay for road improvements with taxes or by hauling their own gravel for the portion of road that ran past their property."

NEW BERLIN BECOMES A CITY

"By 1958 New Berlin could easily claim the unofficial title of the state's fastest expanding community. An important decision faced New Berlin -- whether or not to incorporate as a fourth class city. In 1959 New Berlin voted to become a city. Anthony Stigler, formerly the town chairman, was elected first mayor of the city. After the 1960 census reported a population of 15,788; New Berlin officially became a third class city in 1962.

The city presently covers an area of 36 square miles. It is located on the eastern edge of Waukesha County, bounded on the north by Brookfield, on the west by Waukesha, and on the south by Muskego.

Subdivisions have replaced many farmlands. State and county highways cross through the city, including the Rock Expressway (Highway 15). A growing

business community reflects the progress of the city."³

From small beginnings to one of Wisconsin's fastest growing communities, New Berlin caught the eye of the WELS in the early 1960's, as Mr. Hallauer, Chairman of Home Mission for the Southeastern District of Wisconsin, reports:

*"Hales Corners and New Berlin, immediately west of Milwaukee, need to be entered at once. Not only are many homes being erected in these cities, but many of our members are occupying them. Since the Milwaukee area expects a 33 percent increase in growth in the next seven years, every effort will be made to conserve our membership so that our Synodical mission program may not be impeded. To this end we pray the Lord that His name be hallowed and His kingdom come."*⁴

New Berlin proved to be a field ripe for harvest. The door was open to go into New Berlin, but the Synod's mission power was stressed at this time. Three things contributed to this stress of the Home Missions department of the WELS, they were: shortage of adequate moneys compared to the skyrocketing building costs, shortage of manpower, and the split with Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. The Synod's physical health in the early 1960's is captured best in the words of R. L. Wiechmann, the Chairman of the Board for Home Missions in 1963:

"We sense a Hope in the hearts of your District Mission Board members as they submit their requests for new projects in new areas, and for much needed facilities in existing fields. For the requests we need the adding machine, and when we press the 'total' key, we are given a figure of \$642,000 for land, and \$676,000 for chapels. These requests will come before our General Board for Home Missions in May, and some groups will have to be disappointed, for less than one-fourth of these projects will be allowed. Our expansion is determined not only by the available monies, but also the available manpower. True, there is no available manpower, but we are determined to proceed in opening new mission stations, convinced that the Lord who charged us to 'Go' will also provide the men to carry out His will.

A combination of things that have happened and are happening have made our work more complex. Our suspension of fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, with its accompanying invitation to all who stand with us to identify themselves with us, has resulted in requests coming to us from many parts of the country. These appeals dare not be ignored. Your Board will have to spend considerable time in studying how we can serve these people who want to come to us,

³The League of Women Voters of New Berlin. *New Berlin: Past & Present.* pages 1-3, 1971.

⁴Hallauer, L.; *Proceedings of the 37th Convention of the WELS.* pg. 150, 1963.

as well as the people of our own Synod who find themselves situated in localities where our Synod is not represented.

This brings us to a second complexity of our work, that of the mobility of our population. Our people are moving out of the rural areas and out of the small cities, into the metropolitan areas. In larger cities there is the movement of people from the inner city to the suburbs. As we follow these people, especially those who migrate into the densely populated areas, we find ourselves faced with the necessity of paying exorbitant prices for land. (\$50,000 is not unusual in such areas.)

Building costs have also skyrocketed in most areas. As a result, our mission dollar goes only a fraction of the way it formerly did. All of this points up the fact that our giving to the Lord's treasury must be more sacrificial. Ways and means must be found to provide funds with which to purchase land in new areas before the costs become exorbitant."⁵

Times were rough and the future for a mission church in New Berlin wasn't looking too good. But, what would be first of many times, God's grace showered upon the suburb of New Berlin, which would eventually be the home of Star of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Early Beginning's

God's grace could be clearly seen already in the beginning stages of what would one day be known as Star of Bethlehem. The Wisconsin Synod was suffering from the Missouri split, decreased giving compared to the increasing property costs, and the shortage of pastoral manpower, yet God's grace prevailed and shined brightly on the mission undertaking in New Berlin.

September 24, 1967 was when the mission church in New Berlin was officially organized. Yet, the foundation work was done many years in advance. Already as far back as February of 1963 the Mission Board of the Wisconsin Synod voted to start a Mission Church in New Berlin. Two months later, in the month of March, property was purchased on Grange Avenue in New Berlin. However, this property was soon sold when a parcel of the Koeppen farm was offered for sale. The Mission Board saw that the parcel of the Koeppen farm was more ideally located and would be most favorable for a future church. So, in the August of 1964 the Mission Board bought the 13 1/2 acre parcel of the Koeppen farm, which would turn out to be the future home of Star of Bethlehem. The booklet that

⁵Wiechmann, R. L., *Proceedings of the 37th Convention of the WELS.* pages 143-144, 1963.

was put out for Star's Fifteenth Anniversary stated that the reason that so many acres were purchased was because they intended not only to build a parsonage, but also a teacherage. However, this land was soon disposed of and sold.⁶ It wasn't too long after that that the Synod's Church Extension Fund allocated \$25,000 for the construction of a new chapel. These beginning years are caught best in the actual church history notes of Star of Bethlehem:

"In the past years many Wisconsin Synod Lutherans moved into New Berlin. Soon requests were brought to the Mission Board to open a mission in the area. In February, 1963, the Mission Board voted a new mission. The members of the Board toured Hales Corners and New Berlin area. In March, 1963, it was decided to purchase property on Grange Avenue. In April, 1963, it was resolved to eventually open two missions in New Berlin. In August, 1964, the motion prevailed to buy the Koeppen property, 13 1/2 acres, on Casper Road, north of National Avenue. In 1965 \$25,000 was allowed from the Church Extension Fund for a new chapel or chapel-school."⁷

The ground work was done and the mission work could now be started. The first step needed to carry out the harvest of this ripe harvest field was to call a mission pastor. It was in April 1965, that the first call was sent for a mission pastor; but frustration soon set in when the call for a mission pastor kept being declined. The original church notes document that the original call for a mission pastor was sent out and declined ten times.

The Lord soon answered the prayers of the Mission Board when Pastor John Raabe accepted the call to be the mission pastor of the New Berlin area in the Spring of 1967. Pastor Raabe's credentials and new ministry in southeastern Wisconsin are explained by an article in *The Northwestern Lutheran*, by Lyle Hallauer, the Chairman of the District Mission Board;

"After the District Mission Board had issued calls for a missionary at large for many years, the Lord persuaded Pastor John Raabe to accept this position in the Southeastern Wisconsin District. He was installed on the evening of November 13, 1966, at the Seminary Chapel.

Mission work and establishing missions is not new to Pastor Raabe. He himself has been a missionary for several years as well as chairman of the

⁶*Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace*. Author unknown, pg. 1, 1982.

⁷Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown.

Minnesota District Mission Board. With this experience, he will be well able to evaluate the many new fields that have been calling for investigation over the past years. After he has explored these fields and they present good possibilities, his work will entail the beginning of exploratory services, and then organizing and advising regarding suitable building sites. He will work hand-in-hand with the District Mission Board and under its supervision.

The necessity of a missionary at large became apparent when calls began to come from distant states where Wisconsin Synod was not represented. It became impossible for the members of the Mission Board, who have their own congregations to take care of, to take the time to properly investigate these calls. Many an opportunity has been lost as a result. Pastor Raabe will be able to give the necessary time so that there will be less possibility of 'guessing' as to the probabilities of a given field."⁸

Star of Bethlehem Under Pastor John Raabe 6/9/67 -6/22/69

Pastor John Raabe has to be remembered as a missionary pastor who started the nucleus of families which would eventually be the charter members of Star of Bethlehem. Pastor Raabe's family, educational, and early ministry histories were laid out best in the bulletin that was prepared for his funeral in 1981:

"Pastor Raabe was born on December 30, 1912. His parents were Herman Raabe and Oliva Raabe, born a Schapekahm. Pastor Raabe attended the St. Paul Lutheran School of New Ulm, four years of the Preparatory Department of New Ulm, Northwestern College, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He completed his theological training in 1937. He tutored at Northwestern College from 1937 to 1939. From 1939 to 1943 he served the congregation as Schickley, Nebraska. From 1943 to 1946 he served as the Executive Secretary of the Spiritual Welfare of the Synod. Our Brother in Christ started and served the Faith and Good Shepherd congregations of Fond du Lac from 1946 to 1950. In 1950, he was led by his Lord to serve St. Paul congregation of Litchfield, Minnesota. He served here for 16 years. During this time, he also served as chairman of the Minnesota District Mission Board for several years. From 1966 to his retirement in 1978, Pastor Raabe served as the District Missionary of the Southeastern Wisconsin District. In that ministry he started many congregations: Grafton, New Berlin (Star of Bethlehem), Hubertus, Palatine, Aurora, Ill., Louisville, Ky., Indianapolis, Ind., Huntsville, Ala., and Nashville, Tenn. He has also served the Store Front in Milwaukee.

⁸Lyle Hallauer. *The Northwestern Lutheran*. vol. 54: 1967.

Pastor Raabe was united in marriage to Lorraine Muenkel of Caledonia, Minnesota, on January 25, 1946. To this union four children were born: Anita, Becky, John, and Debbie."⁹

Pastor Raabe began his work in the New Berlin area in the early Spring of 1967. He started to canvass the area with the help of a Seminary student. Canvassing was increased greatly when teams from Mt. Lebanon Lutheran Church assisted the mission effort in New Berlin. God blessed their outreach efforts over the next two years. There was soon enough interested families to begin a small congregation. So, plans for the first worship service were made.

The first service was held in the basement of the New Berlin Bank building, on July 9, 1967. The attendance for this first service was 69 people. Pastor Raabe speaks of this eventful day in his personal diary: "*We started services in the New Berlin State Bank basement on July 9, 1967. Sixty-nine attended the first service. We used a small collapsible organ that I believe originally came from Mt. Lebanon Church.*"¹⁰ The text that was used for that first service was I Kings 3:5-10, which is based on Solomon's request for wisdom. This basement of New Berlin State Bank was home of the Mission Church until May, 1970. The monthly rent payment for this facility was \$75, which was paid for by the Synod.

This temporary worship facility was blessed with many donated items from other WELS churches in the area. The items that are listed below were either donated or lent to the Mission in New Berlin; this list is actually written out in the original church history notes:

<i>Organ</i>	<i>Mission Board</i>
<i>Mimeograph machine</i>	<i>Mission Board</i>
<i>Chairs</i>	<i>St. Paul's, Tess Corners</i>
<i>Folding Chairs (20)</i>	<i>Harvey Rindt Family</i>
<i>Lectern</i>	<i>St. Paul's, Tess Corners</i>
<i>Altar, pulpit paramounts</i>	<i>St. Paul's, Tess Corners</i>
<i>50 Hymnals</i>	<i>Good Shepherd, West Allis</i>
<i>Offering plates</i>	<i>Christ the Lord, Brookfield</i>
<i>Cross</i>	<i>Christ the Lord, Brookfield</i>
<i>Candelabra</i>	<i>Christ the Lord, Brookfield</i>
<i>Communion set</i>	<i>Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee</i>
<i>Baptismal Fount</i>	<i>Our Savior, Grafton</i>

⁹Bulletin from Pastor Raabe's funeral, April 22, 1981.

¹⁰These words of Pastor Raabe's diary were printed in the booklet that was made for Star's 25th Anniversary, pg. 2.

Again, God's grace was clearly evident as this small congregation continued to grow.

Not too long after that first service, the congregation officially organized on September 24, 1967. This was also the date of the organization and start of the Sunday School. Fifteen children made it to that first Sunday of Sunday School. It was on October 22, 1967 that the congregation adopted "**Star of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church**" as its' official name. The first choir rehearsal was held on November 8th. Four days later, on November 12, the first constitution of the congregation was adopted. The year of 1967 was an exciting and eventful one for Star of Bethlehem.

Pastor Raabe's faithfulness to his call was evident as Star of Bethlehem grew from a mission idea to an organized and official Mission Church. But the Lord had some other plans in store for Pastor Raabe in 1968 when he was asked to serve as vacancy Pastor at Gethsemane Lutheran Church. Pastor Raabe again served his Lord faithfully with his added responsibilities of assisting two congregations.

It was at this time that Star of Bethlehem was granted permission from the General Board for Home Missions to call for a resident pastor. Several calls were sent, but all were declined. The hopes of erecting a worship facility were cast away when the Synod reported that there was no available money. But later that year the General Board and the Board of Trustees granted Star of Bethlehem \$80,000 for the construction of a new chapel. But the bad part about this deal was that this money would not be available until late 1969 or 1970. But again God's grace was showered upon Star as can be seen with what happened next as reported in the church notes: "*Then the Lord with His usual dispatch caused a devote Christian to give a large sum of money to our Synod through his will. We were given the green light to proceed at once with our building plans.*"¹² But the ground was not broken until September of 1969 because the city was still putting a road in to give access to the church property.

The year of 1968 was one of ups and downs as seen in the previous paragraph but God's grace still abounded, as reported in the summary for the year of 1968 in Star's church records:

¹¹Listing is from actual church records, the author is unknown.

¹²Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown.

*"Another milestone in the time of Grace allotted to us is reached with this report. Again we have heard the Word of Truth and have been permitted to serve our Lord. Our outward progress has been slow, but the Lord has granted us many blessings, and with great anticipation we look forward to the blessed tasks confronting us in 1969."*¹³

There were not many tasks but many joys in 1969. Here are some of the excerpts from the church notes from 1969:

"If ever a people came close to knowing what it felt like for Moses to stand on the top of Mt. Nebo and view the Promised Land, it was the members of Star of Bethlehem in the year 1969 as they saw all that they had hoped for and prayed for coming ever more distinctly into focus.

The Psalmist was right when he wrote, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.' Psalm 34:8 -- The members of the Star of Bethlehem know this to be a fact!!

*About the best way we could end this year is with the prayer, 'O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.'*¹⁴

The reasons for such joy in 1969 were threefold: first resident pastor, building project starts, and membership starts to increase.

Star of Bethlehem Under Pastor Julius Wille: 6/69-7/72

Star of Bethlehem's frustration over their calling for a resident pastor was ended when the Lord sent them Julius Wille, a Seminary graduate. His life history prior to Star of Bethlehem is best captured in the booklet that was put together for Star's Fifteenth Anniversary:

"Pastor Julius Wille was born on June 10, 1930, in Watertown, Wisconsin. He grew up in that area, with the exception of a few years when he lived with his parents in Horicon, Wisconsin. He attended Northwestern Preparatory School and graduated in 1949. He entered Northwestern College to prepare for the ministry, but his studies were interrupted by the death of his father in his freshman year. In the years that followed, he served as a plant superintendent for the Village Blacksmith Company in Watertown. He also operated a farm in the same area. In 1962, the Lord led him to resume his studies for the ministry. He graduated from Northwestern College in 1965. He entered Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Mequon, Wisconsin, and graduated in 1969. He served his vicarship at North Trinity

¹³Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown.

¹⁴Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown.

Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Following his graduation, he received the call to become the Pastor of Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

Pastor Julius Wille was married to the former Joan Wuestenberg of Watertown, Wisconsin. Pastor and Mrs. Wille have three children; John, Judy, and Jean."¹⁵

The installation of Pastor Julius Wille, as Star's first resident Pastor, was the first of three events that made 1969 a joyful and unforgettable year for Star of Bethlehem. The second event is best captured in the words from the actual church records;

*"A second event which brought the object of our hopes and prayers into focus came through our progressing Building Program. By the beginning of the year the number of architects being considered to plan our new church had been narrowed to two. After a visitation of projects of both of these architectural firms, 'Architects III' was chosen and given the contract. This firm immediately set to work drawing the plans for our new church in accord with the Mission Board guidelines. The plans were submitted, adjusted, and approved by the Mission Board and on September 7, 1969, ground was broken for our church home. The first shovels full of earth were turned by Pastor Wille, Mr. Kenneth Hahn, chairman of the Building Committee, and Mr. Clifford Buchholz, President of our congregation. By the time the first flakes of snow began to fall, the walls of our new house of worship stood erected."*¹⁶

The chapel and educational wing were soon completed and on June 28, 1970 the building was dedicated. In the bulletin that was prepared for this dedication service was this description of the new chapel and educational wing, which reads;

"The emphasis in the design of these new facilities was to incorporate simplicity with durability. The rough-sawed Western Cedar siding offset with redwood trim, which will be allowed to weather, provides a durable, relatively maintenance free exterior. The interior features rough-sawed Western Cedar, offset with roughly textured plaster and oak trim, & strives to bring out the natural beauty of the components.

The unit was designed so that it can readily be expanded to meet the future needs of the congregation. The master plan includes a chapel which, when fully expanded, will seat approximately 400 worshipers and an education wing consisting of four classrooms and a gymnasium.

¹⁵*Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace.* Author unknown, pg. 16, 1982.

¹⁶Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown. If the pages had been numbered it would be on page five.

The building site consists of approximately five acres. To limit the cost of the excavation the construction follows the contour of the site."¹⁷

This is what Architects III, who engineered the project said about this new facility;

"This building exists now as an outward sign of your presence within your community. It is hoped that it physically displays a certain humility, simplicity, and unpretentious expression, for these qualities were your honest and admirable desire. It was to be humble and simple in relation to the earth just as man is humble in relation to his Creator. As a man receives life from God, this building, its wood, its clay, its colors and tones, draws its life from the earth from which it was grown. It strives to be natural, calm, honest, and content in union with Earth.

Through its simplicity, may this building be pleasing and satisfying but if there be any real beauty in it, may it be the beauty of the Christian love that abides and flows from within the spaces that it has created."¹⁸

The actual church facility was not the only thing that was growing in that year of 1969, but the membership too was seeing some very promising growth as well. This new growth in membership has continued steadily throughout the past decades and into our present day. Again God's grace was shining brightly on the members of Star in its early years.

Pastor Wille continued to shepherd the flock at Star of Bethlehem in the year 1970. With the passing of the event-filled year of 1969 came the "Year of Firsts" of 1970. It was the first time that the members of Star were able to worship the Lord in their new church. The first confirmation was held in that same year. Vacation Bible School was also a first in that year. It was also the first year that the thought of having a Christian Day School was being stirred around, which was put down by the Mission Board, which thought it be best for Star to affiliate with the other WELS churches in the area which had Christian Day Schools.

The historical notes of the church also speak of 1970, as a year of much physical labor. There was painting and finishing to be done in the new facilities. There was much to be done with the church's landscape, including the many Saturday afternoons of laying sod. The church records tell us that Pastor Wille will never forget that summer of 1970, the reason being as follows; *"Pastor Wille will never*

¹⁷Quote from the bulletin that was prepared for the dedication of the new facilities, on June 28, 1970.

¹⁸Quote from the bulletin that was prepared for the dedication of the new facilities, on June 28, 1970.

forget the telephone calls that came to him late on Saturday afternoons, when he was busy studying his Sunday sermons, that sounded something like this, 'Pastor, we've got a load of sod to pick up -- could you come and help us get it and lay it?'"¹⁹

Yet the highlight of that year came with the dedication of the new church. The historical notes of the church paints us a picture of what the feelings were like on this eventful day;

"A days sense of humility filled our hearts on this day. We realized that without our good and gracious God this day would never have come. Inside the cover of our Dedication Booklet were these words, 'This house Human hands designed this house Human hands gathered the materials, formed and shaped them into this house. But without the Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and all merciful God who loves sinners this house would not have been possible. This house stands, then, as a testimony of the power and goodness of our God. To God alone be glory!!!' --- May all our members of the Star of Bethlehem -- past, present, and future -- ever remember what these words express!!"²⁰

The formations of the "Lutheran Ladies League" and "The Lutheran Teens" also belong to this "year of firsts". This year came to close and the person who recorded these events on the beginnings of Star of Bethlehem concluded with this statement for the year of 1970; *"So another event-filled year has come to a close. I am sure I could speak for all the members of the Star of Bethlehem in saying, 'This is a year we shall never forget. It was a year that flowed with God's richest blessing.'"*²¹

The year of 1971 was a leveling off year; a year to catch up. All the congregation's attempts to reach the next step of becoming a more established church failed, or at least they were put on hold for a little time. This slow down is expanded on here;

"As the Lord in His infinite wisdom balances each life with just the right amount of sunshine and clouds -- and after every storm gives us days that are calm -- so He also exercises His wisdom in the Church. This became evident to the members of the Star of Bethlehem in 1971. After the busy, eventful year of 1970, He gave us a year in which our activity leveled off."²²

¹⁹Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown. If the pages were numbered this would be found on page 6.

²⁰Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown. If the pages were numbered this would be found on page 7.

²¹Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown. If the pages were numbered this would be found on page 8.

²²Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown. If the pages were numbered this would be found on page 8.

The first matter the congregation attempted to do in 1971 was to relocate the parsonage to being a little closer to the church. The Mission Board approved their plan to place the new parsonage to the site just north of the church itself. However, the percolation tests that were done failed; so the plans for the construction of a parsonage were put on hold.

The next major concern that Star experienced in that year of 1971 was the issue concerning the Christian Education of its school-aged children. Meetings were held with various other WELS congregations in the area that year to explore the possibility of a joint Christian Day School. It soon became evident that these hopes would not become a reality. So the members of Star resolved the issue by deciding to send their children to Woodlawn Evangelical Lutheran Church. This setup came with the agreement that if the number of children from Star exceeded fifteen or above Star of Bethlehem would supply Woodlawn with another teacher. The calling of a teacher was delayed when only 12 children from Star enrolled at Woodlawn. But the members of Star took this setback in stride as shown here in the words of the member who recorded this portion of Star's church history:

"But even though we didn't attain our goal, we believe and know that the Lord has not said 'no' to our prayers for eventually establishing a school where His little lambs can daily be nourished on the green pastures of His Word. He has mere said, 'Wait a while!'"²³

The most notable event that Star experienced that year was the greatest surge in numerical growth that the congregation had ever experienced before. There was a total of 80 communicants and 123 souls on January 1, 1971; by the end of the year the number of communicants reached the number of 114 communicants and 175 souls. Again, it was clear that God's grace was being brightly shed on the Star of Bethlehem that year.

The push for a Christian Day School was again the main event on the church's agenda in the early part of 1972, but again the support that was needed from the congregation was lacking. Therefore, the plans for opening a school were shelved. To remedy the craving for a strong Christian upbringing the Lutheran Pioneer program was started that year.

²³Quote from actual church records, the author is unknown. If the pages had been numbered this would be on page 8.

In July, Pastor Wille received a call to be the Pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Clatonia, Nebraska. The Lord led Pastor Wille, after many prayers, to accept the call to Zion. The voters of the Star of Bethlehem in response to this vacancy called Professor Wilbert Gawrisch to be the vacancy Pastor. He, in turn, readily accepted the call even though it was necessary that he double his duties since he also continued to serve as a full-time Professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Professor Gawrisch served as vacancy Pastor from 7/72 to 7/73. The booklet that was put out for Star's Fifteenth Anniversary had this to say about Professor Gawrisch; *"The congregation continued to grow under his guidance while he cared for the spiritual needs, as well as the business of the church."*²⁴

The Council recommended that a call for a Seminary graduate be placed with the Assignment Committee, since many calls had been sent out and all were returned. Candidate Ronald Baerbock was assigned to be the next resident pastor of Star of Bethlehem. Pastor Baerbock was ordained and installed on July 15, 1973.

Star of Bethlehem Under Pastor Ronald Baerbock: 7/73 - 1/15/80

Again, Star of Bethlehem had for its Pastor a fresh graduate from the Seminary. The background of Star's new Pastor was presented in the bulletin that was prepared for his installation service.

"The Rev. Ronald E. Baerbock was born June 9, 1947, at Elkhorn, Wisconsin. He grew up on the farm of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Baerbock, in the East Troy area.

He received his grade school education at Adam's School, a one room country school in the Adam's community. During all these years he attended St. Paul's Lutheran Church of East Troy, where he was baptized and where he was confirmed by Pastor Elmer H. Semenske in 1961.

At the encouragement of his pastor he began to prepare himself for the Holy Ministry by entering Northwestern Preparatory School at Watertown. He continued his studies in the college department at Northwestern and graduated with a B.A. degree.

²⁴*Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace.* Author is assumed to be Pastor Horner. pg. 17, 1982.

He entered Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Mequon in September of the same year. As part of his ministerial training he served for one year as a vicar at Grace Lutheran Church in Oshkosh under the supervision of Pastor Clarence Koepsell. He graduated from the Seminary May 30.

Pastor Baerbock was married to the former Karen Kasten of Saukville on August 1, 1970. His wife is a graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College of New Ulm, Minnesota. Pastor and Mrs. Baerbock have a daughter, Brenda Jean, born June 3, 1971."²⁵(They since have had another daughter and a son.)

Pastor Baerbock led the congregation faithfully for six years. In the course of those six years many things happened. The membership increased from 124 communicants and 187 souls in 1973 all the way to 295 communicants and 438 souls ending in 1979. His ministry also experienced the construction of the 1200 square foot addition to the church educational unit, which was dedicated in the June of 1976. But by far the biggest physical accomplishment of his ministry at Star was the opening of Star's very own Christian Day School in the September of 1977. God's grace again was clearly demonstrated in this span of Star of Bethlehem's history.

The first thing that laid in store for Pastor Baerbock when he arrived at Star was the problem of the overcrowded Sunday School facilities. It was a good problem to have but nonetheless still remained a problem that would have to be dealt with soon; the booklet put out for Star's Fifteenth Anniversary speaks of this problem here;

*"Star of Bethlehem continued to grow in numbers and also to outgrow the facilities. The Sunday School was severely handicapped by the confined space. Classes were separated by cardboard dividers. The noise of many classes interfered with efficient teaching. Plans were being made for an addition to the educational wing to accommodate the Sunday School."*²⁶

There was a lot of emotional support to add on an addition, but financial support was lacking. That was until the year of 1975, when the gifts to the Lord from the members increased tremendously. Now that there weren't any more obstacles in the way but only a lot of enthusiasm, a Christian Day School seemed to be in reach. The Building Committee began the planning that would soon add on an additional 1,200 square feet to the educational wing. Synod saw Star's enthusiasm and granted a loan

²⁵Bulletin for Pastor Baerbock's ordination and installation, July 15, 1973.

²⁶*Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace.* Author is assumed to be Pastor Horner. pg. 5, 1982

of \$25,000 for the project on October 26, 1975. The ground breaking took place the same year and was dedicated the following year on June 6, 1976.

It soon was realized that everything was now in place to seriously consider starting a Christian Day School. The congregation then voted in the October meeting to open a school in the fall of 1977, with grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The call that was sent for the principal/teacher position was accepted by Mr. Michael Wiechmann, who had been serving as principal at Emmanuel Lutheran School in Tempe, Arizona.

The steps were all in place for a smooth transition into Star's Christian Day School era when the enrollment for the school exceeded all expectations. Two additional teacher's were needed quickly, and the Lord answered the need quickly when Miss Suzanne Kuhl and Mrs. Karen Baerbock accepted the calls that were sent their way. Pastor Baerbock speaks of this unusual chain of events in the letter he sent to Pastor Wicke, who requested the information of Star's new school for publication in the *Northwestern Lutheran*;

"How the Lord must have laughed at our shortsightedness. All of our planning had revolved around the thought of having 15 children and one teacher when we would open our doors in the Fall of '77. Sometimes we fail to recognize the capabilities of a gracious Lord in our planning. Little did we know at that time that we would not begin with 15 students and one teacher, but rather 42 children and three teachers. As smoothly as things progressed, it was evident that the guiding hand of God was present at all times."²⁷

Amazingly, the school still was opened as planned on September 6, 1977.

The month of September, in 1977, must would have been the highpoint of the members during the years that they were shepherded by Pastor Baerbock. That memorable September was remembered specifically for two things as shown in the words of Pastor Baerbock;

"On Sunday, September 25th, there was a certain festive atmosphere at Star of Bethlehem Ev. Lutheran Church in New Berlin, and well there should have been. On that particular Sunday the members and friends of Star of Bethlehem were celebrating the 10th anniversary of their congregation. The messages proclaimed from the pulpit on that day revealed the truth that God had been good to this congregation

²⁷This quote was found in the letter that was sent to Pastor Harold Wicke, who requested the information for publication in the *Northwestern Lutheran*.

*which had grown from a handful of dedicated people worshipping the Lord in the basement of the New Berlin State Bank to a communicant strength of 270, had much to be thankful for. All glory and credit belonged to God. ----- However, there was something else that was special about the month of September, 1977, in this congregation. It marked the opening of another Christian Day School in the Wisconsin Synod."*²⁸

The Lord continued to bless Star far beyond the member's expectations. Only two years had passed, since Star had dedicated the new extension to its educational wing, when it was starting to once again feel cramped for space. Already in 1978 the Vacation Bible School was filled to capacity with 89 children enrolled. The Sunday School enrollment also increased greatly. Over 70 children were taxing the new facilities and the available teaching space. Everyone knew that some plan of action had to be taken in order to solve this new problem; so in 1979, a survey was conducted to see what the congregation's needs were. That survey revealed and motioned that these things would be needed to conduct Christian education in a proper teaching atmosphere: three new classrooms, two additional bathrooms, a fellowship hall, and a larger narthex. A Building Committee was formed at once to do the necessary groundwork for this future expansion.

It was during this busy, yet exciting, time that Tri City and King of Kings Ev. Lutheran Churches of Kennewick, Washington, extended a call to Pastor Baerbock. The Lord led Pastor Baerbock to accept this call in the September of 1979. The church notes speak of Pastor Baerbock's decision in this way;

"Pastor Ronald Baerbock had been our shepherd for six years, his only consideration was to serve God when and where he was needed. On September 18, 1979, Pastor Baerbock received a call to serve Tri City Church, a mission, and King of Kings, jointly. The churches were in the vicinity of Kennewick, Washington. After meditation, he felt inclined to accept the call, knowing that "Star" was in the capable hands of all the Boards with a good principal and teachers for the school.

*We were in the midst of a large building program, but he was needed elsewhere. It was with heavy heart that the members agreed to release him with their blessings."*²⁹

²⁸This quote was found in the letter that was sent to Pastor Harold Wicke, who requested the information for publication in the *Northwestern Lutheran*.

Star's Trying Years

Pastor Baerbock stayed at Star throughout the duration of the Christmas season before he left for Washington. The congregation then called Pastor Raabe, who was still residing in the area, to be their vacancy Pastor. Two other pastors, Pastor William Fischer and Pastor Roger Flemming, who were members of Star at that time, assisted Pastor Raabe in carrying out the church work.

The vacancy was one of short duration, since the call that was sent to Pastor William Neumann, who had been serving Faith Lutheran Church, in Elizabeth, Illinois, was accepted by him on January 20, 1980. Pastor Neumann's life history was briefly described in the service bulletin for his installation;

*"Pastor William Neumann was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on April 3, 1949. When he was in the fourth grade his parents moved to Menomonee Falls, where he completed his grade school training at St. John's Lutheran School of Lannon, Wisconsin. He enrolled at Northwestern Prep at Watertown, Wisconsin, and graduated from there in 1967. After spending a year at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, he returned to Northwestern College and graduated in 1972. He graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary May 26, 1976. He is married to Kristine Fredrick of Watertown. They have two sons, John 5, and Matthew 2."*³⁰

There is really no need to have a title before Pastor Neumann's ministry at Star, since it lasted for less than a year when he resigned for personal reasons, which will be discussed more in depth later. Yet, under his leadership the building project was completed and the membership stayed the same.

However, the building project this time didn't go as well as planned. The problem that surfaced during this building project was that the architect that was hired made many errors in meeting the codes and standards. The Twentieth Anniversary booklet speaks of this misfortune;

*"The building program encountered problems along the way. The cost of the project about doubled due to architectural errors in meeting codes and standards. This led to an eventual lawsuit against the architect and an indebtedness that was difficult to bear. In retrospect, God's promise of making all things work out for good to them that love God proved true. The completion of the building additions was accomplished through the efforts and dedication of many congregational laborers working every spare minute on the church property."*³¹

²⁹*Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace.* Author is assumed to be Pastor Horner. pg. 8, 1982.

³⁰Bulletin for Pastor Neumann's installation service, February 10, 1980.

³¹*Forget Not All His Benefits!* The booklet put out for Star's 20th Anniversary, pg. 5.

Nonetheless, school opened on time for the 1980 school year, and the new additions were dedicated that same month.

The congregation then experienced the untimely resignation of Pastor Neumann. The church history records had the original handwritten notes regarding this issue; they are as follow:

"On 10/14/80 Pastor Neumann resigned before the joint meeting of Elders, Trustees, Board of Education and later the Council.

His reasons for this action was as follows: Proceeding his action, he had discussed with the Elders his concern about the pressures on the Pastor due to the numerous things he is required to do -- giving him little or no time for his own family, relatives, friends, personal business etc. His peace of mind was at stake, whenever he did other than church work, feeling that he was neglecting his church duties which seemed to be overwhelming.

Pastor Neumann agreed to stay until a call was accepted by another Pastor. He served in this capacity until the month of February in 1981. At this point the three pastors who were members of Star again agreed to fill the pastoral void until a Vacancy Pastor was found. The three Pastors again were: Fischer, Fleming, and Raabe.

Pastor Leo Gruendemann accepted the call that was issued to him to serve as Star's Vacancy Pastor. At the time he was living in Wauwatosa and serving St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Franklin as assistant Pastor. He served this vacancy faithfully from February to July in 1981, when Star received again a Seminary graduate to be its Pastor. During the short duration of Pastor Gruendemann's assistance to Star Pastor Raabe, Star's founding Pastor, died. Hard times were hitting Star at this point in its history, but under the guidance of Pastor Gruendemann managed to stay afloat and remained focused to its purpose. Pastor Thomas Horner writes this about Pastor Gruendemann's service to Star in the Pastor's Report for 1981;

"During the latter part of the first and second quarter the Lord Jesus accomplished His work through His servant Pastor Leo Gruedeman serving as interim pastor bearing his own cross of age with joy in the wisdom and grace of God while baptizing, confirming, administering Holy Communion, and the preaching of the Gospel in the name of the risen Christ."³²

³²This was taken from the Pastor's Report from the 1981 Annual, pg. 2.

Here is also a portion of the thank-you letter that was sent to Pastor Gruendemann, by Robert Luethy, Star's President at that time:

"The congregation of the Star of Bethlehem Church has always enjoyed a feeling of togetherness in doing the Lord's work in New Berlin. In the fall of 1980 we began to sense that we were losing our unity and purpose. At that time of great frustration, a resignation to deal with, a building program in difficulty, with finances gone awry, and in the midst of growing responsibility to our congregation, our school and our faculty, we needed leadership from one who would understand our problems both spiritual and temporal, and who would deal with them in a God pleasing way. It was then that our prayers found an answer to this problem.

*The congregation of the Star of Bethlehem wishes to inform you of their heartfelt appreciation for serving as vacancy Pastor from January 1981 through June 1981. May this time in our church's history serve as an example of love and devotion always."*³³

The members of Star once again decided to go to the Assignment Committee to receive a candidate from the Seminary. They received Thomas Horner to be their next Pastor. This is what was said about him in the anniversary booklet published a year after his installation:

*"Pastor Thomas H. Horner is the son of Mr. & Mrs. Herbert Horner. He was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, baptized in St. Luke's Ev. Lutheran Church of Danube, Minnesota, and confirmed in Pilgrim Ev. Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1964. He received his elementary education in a public school. He was graduated from Minnetonka High School in June, 1968. He then attended St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, during 1968-1970. From 1970 to 1972, he attended the University of Minnesota from which he graduated with a B.A. degree in Chemistry. He served 16 months in the Peace Corps in Puerto Rico and Venezuela. He was led by the Lord to prepare himself for the ministry and in 1975, he enrolled at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, for our Synod's pre-theological training program. He continued his theological training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in May, 1977. He was married on July 15, 1978, to Bonnie Becker, daughter of Prof. and Mrs. Robert Becker. The Horners have a daughter Stacy and a son Paul."*³⁴

The first matter of importance that awaited Pastor Horner as he arrived was the low ratio of offerings. The church reports show that Star was unable to meet all the commitments to Synod and to the High School; they also showed that the contributions for each week were falling short by \$600.

³³Actual letter found in Star's history files.

³⁴*Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace.* Author is assumed to be Pastor Horner. pg. 21, 1982.

Pleas were made to every member to review their giving so that no child would be turned away from a Christian education due to financial reasons. The congregation under Pastor Gruendemann tried to get this shortcoming under control before Pastor Horner arrived, so they set up an every-member visitation in order to try to remedy this situation; the booklet put out for the Fifteenth Anniversary speaks of this attempt:

"In May, an every-member visitation was organized to reveal to our congregation the blessings which God had bestowed upon us through His word. Twenty-five members volunteered to participate in the visitations and address the question: 'Why is there a Star of Bethlehem?' This crucial time was an opportunity to demonstrate our faith; a time to pull together, to start growing, and trusting God's promises. Our stewardship was made stronger with a sharper understanding of God's love."³⁵

The giving increased but it still fell short of what was needed. Programs were started to save money. Soup labels were cut and saved, newspaper drives were started, and the Home and School Association held a combination bake sale and rummage/auction to meet that year's budget. As the attempts to save increased so did the problems. The parsonage was badly in need of paint and landscaping, the roof of the church was damaged and had to be repaired, the church lawnmower had to be replaced, and the city of New Berlin put in sewer and water lines in the subdivision in which the parsonage was located, which also added another sizable expense for Star's members.

In the midst of all this the congregation had reason to be happy and rejoice because this was also the year of Star's Fifteenth Anniversary. The celebration gave the members a time to look back and see all of the blessings that had already been given to them. This anniversary celebration also gave them a chance to see how gracious God had been to them in the past and this recollection gave them the needed assurance that He would be gracious to them in the future even though they were now experiencing growing pains.

But when stability seemed to be set in again, after a couple of trying years, Pastor Horner received a call. This call that he received was to be a missionary in Puerto Rico. The Lord led him to

³⁵*Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace.* Author is assumed to be Pastor Horner. pg. 10, 1982.

accept this call and he was commissioned in a special service at Star on December 19, 1982. Star was again without a pastor.

The early eighties were not being too kind to Star of Bethlehem from a human stand point. So, Star again called upon the "Old Faithful" Pastor Gruendemann to carry them through this difficult time. This is what the church history notes had to say about his filling the vacancy a second time:

"Pastor Leo Gruendemann was again called to be the Vacancy Pastor. The Lord blessed Pastor Gruendemann with unusual health and strength. During this vacancy, Pastor Gruendemann celebrated his 80th birthday. His experience in the ministry was a great blessing for this congregation."³⁶

Pastor Gruendemann filled this vacancy from October of 1982 to April of 1983 when Pastor John Gawrisch accepted the call to be the resident pastor of Star. The members rejoiced at his accepting the call to be their pastor; and on April 24, 1983 he was installed. This is what was printed up about him and his family in the bulletin put together for his installation service:

"Pastor John Gawrisch was born on May 9, 1952. He is the son of Professor and Mrs. Wilbert Gawrisch, Mequon, Wisconsin. He attended Christian Day School and was confirmed at Calvary Lutheran in Thiensville, Wisconsin. He attended Northwestern Preparatory School, graduating in 1970. He then continued to study for the Ministry at Northwestern College, graduating in 1974. He went on to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He served his vicarship at Peace Lutheran, in Hartford, Wisconsin. He graduated from the Seminary in 1978, and was called through the Assignment Committee to serve King of Kings Ev. Lutheran Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, as the first resident pastor.

The first few years in Little Rock were spent building up the nucleus of the congregation's membership, and leading the congregation through the phases of a building program to the dedication of its first worship facility in May, 1981.

In January, 1980, Pastor Gawrisch also began serving an Exploratory Group in Russellville, Arkansas, which is about 75 miles from Little Rock. The Lord continued the work in Russellville, so that this Group received permission to Call their own pastor. A Seminary Candidate was assigned and installed in June, 1982.

Mrs. Gawrisch, Wendy, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gullickson, of Muskego, Wisconsin. Pastor and Mrs. Gawrisch were married in December, 1975. The Gawrischs have been blessed with four children, Laura, Lisa, Kelly, and

³⁶*Forget Not All His Benefits!* The booklet put out for Star's 20th Anniversary, pg. 7.

Kimberly. (Dave and Dan were soon added.) The Gawrischs are looking forward to many happy years in New Berlin, Wisconsin."³⁷

Star of Bethlehem Under Pastor John Gawrisch 4/83 - Present

There is a teddy bear that currently resides in Pastor Gawrisch's study and it has the word "RELIABLE" spelled out on its sweater. Star needed someone who would be reliable and this is what they received. Reliable, trustworthy, dependable, and faithful are just a few of the words that describe Pastor Gawrisch's ministry at the Star of Bethlehem. Under his leadership Star grew in many ways. The membership of Star in 1984 was 348 communicants and 488 souls, and by 1997 it grew to 621 communicants to 838 souls. This is not the only place where Star grew but it also expanded its facilities greatly; a parsonage was built in 1988, and in 1997 four new classrooms plus a multi-purpose gymnasium were constructed. But most importantly the members of Star grew in their knowledge about their salvation during these years. Again God's Grace was clearly portrayed over the earlier years of Pastor Gawrisch's ministry at Star and is currently being seen in great abundance today.

The presence of a new face was comforting for Star and gave them a lift when they were desperately in need of one. But it didn't take too long before the first problem surfaced. The problem was that the \$70,000 that was received from the Church Extension Fund for the completion of the last additions to the church and school was due. A program called "Participation Loan Program" was put into effect to try to meet the money that was needed. God's Grace moved the hearts of His people to give generously and by the end of June the loan was repaid.

In July, 1983, the voters approved the formation of an Evangelism Committee. The purpose was to organize the efforts for mission outreach into the community. This new emphasis to evangelism paid off and the membership started to see an increased volume of visitors.

Finally, things seemed to be going in a positive direction again in 1983, which was reinforced by a smooth sailing 1984; this is what the anniversary booklet for Star's 20th Anniversary had to say about the year of 1984;

"1984 was a year that seemed to be a return to stability for the congregation. Star of Bethlehem once again had a pastor for more than a year. The Lord was

³⁷Bulletin from Pastor Gawrisch's installation service, April 24, 1983.

taking care of the financial difficulties through the blessing of growth in membership. Increased offerings also enabled the congregation to meet their financial commitments to the Synod and Wisconsin Lutheran High School, and also, to accomplish some much needed building improvements; a principal's office, carpeting for the classrooms, a new organ, and acoustical ceiling tiles for the fellowship hall."³⁸

This is what was found in a letter that was sent out to every member by the Finance Committee in late December, 1984, regarding the increased outpouring of offerings:

*"As we approach the close of 1984, we can't help but give thanks and praise to God for another year of blessings, both material and spiritual. Provided that our offerings remain generous and consistent throughout the remainder of 1984, it appears that we will meet our Budget for the first time in several years. Both offerings and worship attendance have increased substantially in 1984. We would like to thank you for your support and response to our Savior's love for the needs of His Church."*³⁹

The congregation continued to grow throughout 1985 and 1986. Another full-time teacher was added to the staff for the 85-86 school year. The lawsuit that was still pending from 1980 for the miscalculations by the architect and failure to meet certain codes was finally settled. The congregation received a settlement of \$60,000. The years marked by financial dilemmas and pastoral instability had finally come to a close. Those difficult years created many strong leaders and a strong congregation in all. It was God alone who gave them the necessary strength to continue on.

The Lord was not only good to Star financially but also physically in 1986. In that year the church parking lot was finally paved and plans were being made to build a new parsonage on the actual church grounds. This new parsonage was completed in 1988.

1987 was the year of Star's Twentieth Anniversary. It was during this year a stewardship program entitled "Discipleship: Obligation or Opportunity" was conducted. The program was well received since a stewardship program had not been conducted for many years. This was also the year that the WELS churches of the Milwaukee area introduced an evangelism-centered program called "Gospel Outreach '87", in which Star participated. The members goal was to canvass 3,000 homes. This effort was good for two reasons: the goal was met in which many prospects were uncovered, and

³⁸*Forget Not All His Benefits!* The booklet put out for Star's 20th Anniversary, pg. 7.

³⁹Portion of a letter sent to the members of Star by the Finance Committee on December 23, 1984.

the congregation grew closer together. The year of Star's Twentieth Anniversary was another positive year, here is what Pastor Gawrisch had to say about this anniversary:

*"Anniversaries are good. They afford us an opportunity to look back and behold God's presence through the years. Certainly, in our congregation's 20-year history, God's blessings become abundantly clear. Oh, yes, there were times of great difficulties and hardships. Then, too, God was right there strengthening and encouraging us each step of the way with His Word. Through the years, He has been the real Source of joy. He was our only Comfort in times of difficulty. Still, day by day, His work was done. More souls were brought to faith in our Savior Jesus. And others, were comforted, encouraged and sustained along the way."*⁴⁰

With the continued growth of the church pastoral assistance was being talked about in 1988 in order to help Pastor Gawrisch with the new and larger responsibilities of a larger congregation. The concern was talked about and it was decided that a Senior Vicar from the Seminary would be the way to go to remedy the situation. That same Fall, Star received its first Senior Vicar, Eugene Andrus. This pastoral assistance was provided for eight years, when the congregation decided that a second full-time man was needed.

It was in the year 1989 that the church was remodeled in order to obtain additional seating. This problem of not having adequate seating carried on through 1990, so Thursday night services were introduced and carried out year round. Obviously the mission outreach of "Gospel Outreach '87 & '89" was paying off with the increased membership. To extend a helping hand to many of the new members that had come a new member assimilation committee was formed. This enthusiasm extended to new members and to those who were visiting did not go unnoticed, as Pastor Gawrisch comments: *"Visitors have often complimented the congregation for its friendliness and on the fine spirit and enthusiasm that flow from the church on a Sunday morning. May this always continue."*⁴¹

Things continued to run smoothly and the year for their 25th Anniversary was upon them in 1992. The congregation was once again experiencing the growing pains of becoming a larger congregation. The word that could explain how everyone thought of Star in 1992 would be

⁴⁰*Forget Not All His Benefits!* The booklet put out for Star's 20th Anniversary, pg. 9.

⁴¹Quote from Pastor Gawrisch's letter to the congregation in Star's 25th Anniversary booklet.

"overcrowded". This feeling is evident in Pastor Gawrisch's address to the members in the booklet that was put together for Star's 25th Anniversary:

"I have been privileged to serve as pastor of Star of Bethlehem for almost 2/5 of those twenty-five years. That has been a gift which God has given to me for which I will always be thankful. Oh, yes, there have been many challenges over those years; some of them very difficult with no quick solutions. But one by one the Lord resolved them. Now our problems are of a different nature; crowded services, overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of parking spaces on Sunday mornings, lack of space during Sunday School and Bible classes, long range expansion, etc. Those, too, are challenges that the Lord will resolve in His own time. And the results will be great!"⁴²

With the membership increasing to over 500 communicants and 700 souls, and with the record enrollment of 114 for school that year, something had to be done. The congregation retired its loans for the parsonage and the paving of the parking lot that year; and again enthusiasm was high as the congregation was again staring in the face of another building program. The congregation hired Architect Robert Strass, Inc. to draw up the Master Site Plan, which would include classrooms, church, and a gymnasium. The congregation decided it to be best that the extra classrooms and gymnasium should be built first; and then when it came to building a new church services would be able to be conducted in the multi-purpose gymnasium.

In May of 1993 the Master Site Plan was adopted. With the problem of overcrowding being an every day hassle, enthusiasm and much zeal were shown to get the program going ASAP! A Building Committee was quickly set up in January 1994. Thus, began the era of volunteerism at Star. Many hours were spent by a lot of different members during this period of Star's history. Many dollars were given to fund this building project. And, yes, many smiles could be seen as the preliminary steps were completed for the much anticipated ground-breaking.⁴³

It was during the time of all this building hype that the congregation decided that another full-time pastor was needed to carry out the responsibilities of a larger congregation. Pastor Dale Tollefson, who had been giving pastoral assistance to Star since 1991, was called to be the Associate of Pastor

⁴²Quote of Pastor Gawrisch's from his address to the congregation on its 25th Anniversary.

⁴³These were the feelings I perceived when members talked to me about this project during my Senior Vicarship at Star.

Gawrisch. The Lord led Pastor Dale Tollefson to accept this Call back into the pastoral ministry. Pastor Gawrisch explains the major focuses of Pastor Tollefson's call in his report for the 1995 Annual:

"On June 25, 1995, Pastor Dale Tollefson was installed as our first associate pastor. His call was to focus especially on sharing the Good News of Jesus with the people of the community, together with working with the youth of the church. Pastor Tollefson has also been instrumental in initiating additional Bible Classes since his arrival, thereby strengthening the congregation spiritually for the challenges of our building program as well as the motivation for the work of evangelism."⁴⁴

With two full-time pastors, a dedicated teaching staff, and dedicated membership, the planning continued in a timely fashion. Everything was going just as planned when architect Robert Strass died in the Spring of 1996. The Anderson-Ashton, Inc. was hired out to replace Robert Strass and to complete the necessary planning before the ground-breaking could take place. Anderson-Ashton picked up where Robert Strass left off and the day for ground-breaking quickly arrived. Ground was broken in June 1996 and the construction began.

During the excitement of seeing the dreams of the congregation take place on the outside it is sad to report things were not going as well inside. Pastor Tollefson resigned for the good of ministry that year. Once again, Star was under one shepherd during this exciting time of Star's history. The members remained focused on the task at hand and volunteered in any way they could to complete this new extension.

After all the years of planning, after all the hours that were spent to help reduce the actual cost of building, and after all the generous offerings, the building project was completed in time for the 1997-98 school year. These new facilities were dedicated on August 17. Pastor Gawrisch speaks of this newest extension of Star's:

"Today we dedicate to God's glory our new addition of classrooms and a multi-purpose gymnasium. In these expanded facilities, we trust that God will train additional people of all ages in that task of shining like stars. One classroom will serve as our preschool, where little children can assemble and begin to twinkle. Groups and organizations will now have added space to plan how we will better hold out the Word of Life to the people of New Berlin and discover new stars for our Savior. Special areas of our new facility have been set aside for adult Christian

⁴⁴Quote from the Pastor's Report in the 1995 Annual Report. pg. 5.

education, where our adults can continue to grow in their knowledge of God's Word, and be recharged for shining brighter in their homes and workplaces. In our multi-purpose gymnasium, the bonds of unity among us can be strengthened by countless fellowship activities for all ages, and in larger Worship Services. People from the metropolitan area can come to this new 'observatory', and behold how 'the Stars' truly shine with love for God and one another! Today we give thanks and praise to God for this wonderful tool and gift, and recommit ourselves to our common work."⁴⁵

There it is "Thirty Years of Grace" at the Star of Bethlehem. Throughout the beginning stages of the mission church to the present day, God's Grace has been very evident at Star of Bethlehem. Many pastors have come and gone but still God's Word was preached and taught in truth and purity. To God Alone Be The Glory!

Presenter's Comments

As I prepared this paper I soon realized that Star of Bethlehem might be considered a young church, but a young church with a lot of history; of which I only painted a brief history of. Many more things could have been said about the dedicated teaching staff at Star, and the dedicated members that call Star "home". These were not brought up but must never be forgotten to their importance of Star's history.

Today, Star stands overcrowded again, especially in its worship facility, and planning to build a new church and again more classrooms. The date they are wishing to begin this next phase is sometime in the Spring of 2001. The increase in membership is at an all time high; and the school has had to turn down some families interested in schooling their children at Star due to the overcrowding. Star has decided to once again go to the Assignment Committee for a full-time Associate; this decision was made after their Call was sent four times and returned four times. So, here I sit waiting to see what one of my classmates the Lord will choose for the next period of Star of Bethlehem's history. By God's Grace and by His Grace alone this congregation was started; may He continue to shed His amazing Grace upon the Star of Bethlehem until He comes again.

⁴⁵Quote of Pastor Gawrisch's, which is found in the booklet that was put out for Star's dedication of its new facilities and also for the celebration of its 30th Anniversary.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Pastor Gawrisch, *Shine Like Stars: Phase 1 Dedication* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1997), page, 2.
- 2 Kardlets, *1967: Pages of Time* (Goodlettsville, TN: Interactive Publishers, no copyright mentioned), pages throughout.
- 3 The League of Women Voters of New Berlin, *New Berlin: Past & Present* (New Berlin, WI: published by themselves, 1971), pages 1-3.
- 4 Hallauer, L., *Proceedings of the 37th Convention of the WELS* (Held at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, WI: August 7 to 14, 1963), page 150.
- 5 Wiechmann, R. L., *Proceedings of the 37th Convention of the WELS* (Held at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, WI: August 7 to 14, 1963), pages 143,144.
- 6 Author Unknown, *Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1982), page 1.
- 7 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 8 Hallauer, Lyle, *The Northwestern Lutheran* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1967), vol. 54, January issue.
- 9 Quoted from the bulletin produced for Pastor Raabe's funeral, April 22, 1981.
- 10 Pastor Raabe, *Twenty-Five Years* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1992), this booklet included a section of Pastor Raabe's actual quotes found in his personal diary, page 2.
- 11 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 12 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 13 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 14 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 15 Author Unknown, *Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1982), page 16.
- 16 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 17 Quoted from the bulletin produced for the dedication of the new facilities on June 28, 1970.
- 18 Quoted from the bulletin produced for the dedication of the new facilities on June 28, 1970.

- 19 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 20 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 21 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 22 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 23 Quoted from the actual handwritten church records with the author remaining unknown.
- 24 Author Unknown, *Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1982), page 17.
- 25 Quoted from the bulletin produced for Pastor Baerbock's ordination and installation, July 15, 1973.
- 26 Author Unknown, *Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1982), page 5.
- 27 Quoted from the actual typed letter that was sent to Pastor Harold Wicke, who requested the information concerning Star's Christian Day School for *The Northwestern Lutheran*, September 28, 1977.
- 28 Quoted from the actual typed letter that was sent to Pastor Harold Wicke, who requested the information concerning Star's Christian Day School for *The Northwestern Lutheran*, September 28, 1977.
- 29 Author Unknown, *Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1982), page 8.
- 30 Quoted from the bulletin produced for Pastor Neumann's installation service, February 10, 1980.
- 31 Author Unknown, *Forget Not All His Benefits!* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem for 20th Anniversary, 1987), page 5.
- 32 Quoted from the *Pastor's Report* from the annual for 1981, page 2.
- 33 Quoted from the actual letter sent by Robert Luethy, Star's President at that time, to Pastor Leo Gruendemann.
- 34 Author Unknown, *Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1982), page 21.
- 35 Author Unknown, *Fifteen Years Shining Under God's Grace* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1982), page 10.

- 36 Author Unknown, *Forget Not All His Benefits!* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem for 20 Anniversary, 1987), page 7.
- 37 Quoted from the bulletin produced for Pastor Gawrisch's installation service, April 24, 1983.
- 38 Author Unknown, *Forget Not All His Benefits!* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem for 20th Anniversary, 1987), page 7.
- 39 Quoted from the letter sent to the members of Star by the Finance Committee on December 23, 1984.
- 40 Author Unknown, *Forget Not All His Benefits!* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem for 20th Anniversary, 1987), page 9.
- 41 Pastor Gawrisch, *Twenty-Five Years* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1992), pages unnumbered.
- 42 Pastor Gawrisch, *Twenty-Five Years* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1992), pages unnumbered.
- 44 Quoted from the *Pastor's Report* for the 1995 annual, page 5.
- 45 Pastor Gawrisch, *Shine Like Stars: Phase 1* (Produced by Star of Bethlehem, 1997), page 3.