

NO OBSTACLE TOO LARGE,  
NO STUMBLING BLOCK TOO GREAT.

<sup>MN.</sup>  
A brief history of how the Lord  
enabled Bloomington Lutheran  
Church to build its present  
house of worship.

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"For nothing is impossible with God." These were the words that the angel used to assure Mary that she would be the mother of the Savior even though she was a virgin. Mary questioned the angel's words, but the angel assured her that the Lord could overcome this obstacle. Philip presented a boy to Jesus who had two small fish and five loaves of bread. But he doubted that these could even begin to feed 5,000 men and said, "but what are they among so many?" Yet our Savior overcame this obstacle with his almighty power. Abraham wondered how two people who had long ago lost their ability to have children, could produce an offspring who would multiply and be as many as the stars of the heavens. But the Lord overcame this obstacle with his power.

No obstacle is so great that our Lord cannot overcome it. With him, all things are indeed possible. This was true during Bible times, and it is still true today. No matter what obstacle stands in the way of his kingdom, the Lord is able to overcome it. The planning and construction of Bloomington Lutheran's present house of worship is a beautiful testimony to this truth. It is the purpose of this paper to briefly show how the Lord carried the members of Bloomington Lutheran Church over numerous obstacles so that they could build and dedicate a house of worship for the God of free and faithful grace.

The story of Bloomington Lutheran's house of worship actually starts at the beginning of Bloomington Lutheran's history. In 1950 the Mission Board of the Minnesota District decided to found a preaching station in Bloomington. Bloomington Lutheran's obstacles started at that time already. Although the Mission Board wanted to start a preaching station the Synod was unable to provide the financing for this preaching station. But the Lord overcame this obstacle by moving one of the men of the Mission Board to borrow money on his own so that he could purchase a house and two lots of land on the corner of 88th and Nicollet.<sup>1</sup> After purchasing property for a preaching station, the Mission Board next had to place a man at the preaching station.

At this point another obstacle fell in Bloomington's path. Although the Mission Board had been calling several men to serve the Bloomington area, no one had accepted. The Lord again stepped in and overcame this obstacle by moving the late John G. Hoenecke to accept this call and become Bloomington's founding pastor.<sup>2</sup>

The first service was held in the parsonage on May 27, 1951, and the following week the first Sunday School classes were held. The little mission grew rapidly from there. In November, 1951, ground was broken for the construction of the first chapel. On May 4, 1952, less than one year after the

<sup>1</sup>Minnesota District-Golden Jubilee History. Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1969. p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

first worship service was held, the chapel for the mission at Bloomington was dedicated. Later that month, on May 22, the little mission formally organized itself as a church, and they took the name Bloomington Lutheran Church.

The field of Bloomington was ripe with many souls, and the Lord was greatly blessing his harvesters at Bloomington Lutheran Church. Again, only two years later, in mid-1956, the number of souls topped 400. By the end of 1958, the number of souls almost numbered 500. These numbers of souls gained in such a relatively short number of years, tells us that the Lord wasn't just showering his blessings on Bloomington Lutheran, he was pouring them out by the bucketful. The congregation's membership continued to enjoy a steady increase through the early sixties, also. In 1964, membership reached the 600 mark. Certainly, Bloomington was a field ripe for the Lord's harvest. This bountiful harvest was a tremendous blessing from the Lord of the harvest, and was a wonderful display of his saving grace. To God alone be glory!

However, while Bloomington Lutheran had grown greatly in number during its short existence, it was still worshipping in its original chapel. This chapel, which was designed to seat 125 people, was now being called upon to house a congregation which numbered four times that amount. In 1962, the congregation was compelled to hold three Sunday services. While this brought temporary relief to the bulging little chapel, it did not prevent the seams from starting

to split.

The writer himself remembers the overcrowded conditions. He remembers the special problems during Lenten and other festival services when there were so many chairs set up that those walking in the center aisle were crowded. Even with extra chairs, there were times when parents and children had to split up in order to be seated for the service. Truly, the need for a new house of worship was there. The first obstacle was showing that need to others.

The others the church had in mind were the Synod's Board of Trustees and the Home Mission Board. They too had noticed Bloomington Lutheran's rapid growth, and they knew that there was something that needed to be done. So they arranged a special meeting with us in order to discuss a future plan for our church. However, their plans for Bloomington Lutheran did not follow the same paths as Bloomington's.

These Synod officials wanted to meet with Bloomington in order to work out a plan which would enable Bloomington to become self-supporting. The first obstacle the members had to overcome was convincing Pastor H. Eckert and Pastor R. Wiechman that Bloomington Lutheran needed a new house of worship more than it needed to go self-supporting. The church's plans to build hinged on this meeting for two reasons. In the first place, there was no way Bloomington Lutheran could take on the financial strains of becoming self-supporting and still be able to build a new house of

worship. Secondly, in order to build, Bloomington as a mission needed the Synod's help in order to finance a new building.

This historic meeting which took place on June 19, 1964, again saw the Lord overcoming obstacles for this congregation. The Lord moved the hearts of these men. After hearing Bloomington's case, they were sympathetic to her need for a new house of worship and they promised to give whatever assistance they could.

Overcoming this first obstacle led directly into a second one- financing. The congregation could not finance this project by itself and was dependant upon Synod for help. However, Bloomington already had one CEF loan upon which it was still paying. The Synod had a number of pressing needs for CEF money already. They had hoped Bloomington would be able to retire that debt so the money could be used for other missions. Since the Synod wanted to retire her current CEF loan, they would not extend to Bloomington an additional CEF loan. This left the church with her next problem, "Where will we get the money?"

The Lord again came to Bloomington's rescue and enabled her to overcome this obstacle through a type of compromise. Bloomington Lutheran was not able to get a loan on her own, and the Synod would not give the church a CEF loan. But the Synod decided to secure a loan from a local bank for the congregation. The Synod was not lending the money it-

self, but provided the backing so that Bloomington could take on the loan herself. The Synod did this under two stipulations. First, the church was to increase her payments toward her present CEF loan by about 15% a month. Secondly, the church was to reduce the subsidy it was receiving for her teachers' salaries at a rate of \$45 per month, each year. With this plan, Bloomington was expected to become self-supporting/within ten years. Under these stipulations, the Synod agreed to secure a loan of \$106,000 for Bloomington Lutheran.

Plans to construct a new, larger house of worship led to another practical obstacle. Where would the congregation put the church? The two lots which were originally purchased back in 1951 were very adequate for the original chapel and parsonage. However, the addition of a new church building twice the size of the chapel would definitely require a larger area of land. But where would it come from?

The Lord again took care of his people and overcame this obstacle by putting the answer in the church's own backyard. On the very same day as one of the 1964 Finance Committee meetings, the house and lot next to the southside of the church went up for sale. That same night, the Finance Committee decided to recommend the purchase of this land to the voters. The next week the congregation voted to purchase the property. This led to yet another obstacle.

The members of Bloomington realized that the purchase

of this property was essential for Bloomington's future building needs. The members also realized that paying for this property was also essential. And paying for the property was an essential the congregation was not able to handle. But it was an obstacle the Lord was able to handle.

The Lord enabled Bloomington to purchase this needed property by moving Pastor Palmer of Pilgrim Lutheran in Minneapolis to loan money to the church out of his own pocket. He also moved the local Lutheran Brotherhood chapter to loan the church the remaining portion. This enabled the congregation to purchase the lot next door.

The next obstacle for the church to tackle was finding a company who would build their desired house of worship and still keep the cost below the \$106,000 which the Synod promised to secure. The Lord provided "Church Builders, Inc." of Milwaukee for this purpose. Their bid of \$103,000 was accepted by the congregation even though they knew that some modifications would have to be made.

These modifications ended up pushing the cost above the \$106,000 figure. But "Church Builders, Inc." pointed out that there were some things that could be done by volunteer work from the congregation. These included the congregation assembling its own pews, tiling the basement, and removing trees with volunteer help. This brought the cost to about \$108,000. It was this figure that Pastor Hoenecke



presented to the Synod as our needed loan. Again, the Lord moved the hearts of the Synod officials and they gave their cooperation.

With "Church Builders, Inc." now on the scene, the next item on the agenda was going to the city of Bloomington to get a building permit. Dealing with the city seemed to be an obstacle in itself. "Church Builders" met with the city representatives, got the code requirements, and then proceeded to adjust Bloomington's plans accordingly. When it seemed things were adjusted and the building permit could be secured, the city of Bloomington threw another obstacle on the course. They presented the church with some additional codes which they had not previously mentioned. This forced the church back again to the drawing board.

Among other things, the city was pressing for a sprinkler system in the basement, more parking, and the proper amount of shrubbery. The hassles involved in trying to iron these problems out, moved Pastor Hoenecke to tell Synod officials that, "the city of Bloomington is following the ultimate in building codes, the uniform builders' codes and then the latest edition."

But again the Lord helped his people overcome their obstacles. By raising the grade of the church building itself several feet above the level of Nicollet Ave., the church eliminated the ~~ne~~<sup>ne</sup>ed for a basement sprinkler system. This not only was acceptable to the city requirements, but it also saved the church a bundle of money. The city also gave a little on the number of shrubs and trees which would

be required. The church also was able to expand their parking area and satisfy this code.

However, by expanding parking to meet city requirements, the church met another obstacle. The church property and parsonage were next to an apartment complex. The people who ran the complex were none too keen on the idea of Bloomington Lutheran expanding and possibly cramping their complex. Before they knew it, the church was back meeting with the city of Bloomington again in order to try to solve this problem. The Lord overcame this obstacle by moving the owner of the apartment to permit Bloomington Lutheran's expansion if they would construct a redwood privacy fence to keep a barrier between the two. This the two parties agreed upon.

Finally, after numerous hassles with city hall and a number of revisions of congregational plans, it seemed as if things would finally start rolling. On March 11, 1966, the final specifications for the new building were reached. On March 15, the contract was signed, and on March 20, an eager congregation broke ground. "Church Builders, Inc." then hired Mar-Kay Construction Co. as the local contractor and all was ready to begin. Or was it?

Just when it finally seemed that everything was ready to go, nothing happened. The reason? Another stumbling-block had sprung up in Bloomington's path. This one involved "Church Builders, Inc." On June 16, 1966, Pastor Eckert and Pastor Wiechmann met with the congregation and in-

formed them that "Church Builders, Inc." was financially unable to begin construction on Bloomington's church and several other building projects it had with mission congregations in the Synod. Pastor Hoenecke reported in the bulletin on the next Sunday that the church's entire building project could well collapse. Fortunately the Lord saw to it that it didn't collapse.

In order to overcome this obstacle, the Lord moved the Synod to step in and rescue Bloomington's building project. The Synod took all sub-contracts that dealt with the construction of the church, as its own and saw to it that the construction was carried out. Under these circumstances, Bloomington Lutheran Church became its own general contractor. Finally on June 22, 1966, over three months after the congregation had held its ground breaking service, construction on the new house of worship began. Construction of the building began in June, but by fall there were more stumbling blocks in the congregation's path.

"Church Builders, Inc." in its attempt to keep costs to a minimum, contracted an establishment named Custom Electric to do all the wiring and set up all electrical systems for the church. It soon became apparent why "Custom Electric" was cheaper than other electrical companies. It was non-union. When the local union discovered this, they didn't take it lightly. They threatened to picket the church. Since all workers who were loyal to the union would refuse to cross the line, all work on the church could have come to

a stand still.

In order to avoid this, the congregation immediately contacted a local union company, and worked an agreement with them to carry on with the work that was started by Custom Electric. As one might imagine, Custom Electric was not pleased with the idea of losing business and threatened to keep on showing up at the job. To prevent this, the congregation made plans to get a court injunction to keep them off the job site. Custom Electric had no choice but to leave the job. By Thanksgiving a final settlement had been reached with this company. Once again the Lord led his congregation over another stumbling block and kept work on the building going.

It might be pointed out that the cornerstone of the new house of worship was laid on October 20 of the fall. This was one event where there were no stumbling blocks, no obstacles, and even no cost. The Lord moved the children of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Delano to give Bloomington Lutheran her new cornerstone as a gift. This was a gift that they paid for with their own mission offerings.

With the settling of the problem with the electrical union the members of the congregation gave a sigh of relief and waited to see construction continue in full force again. They didn't have much of a chance to get going before another obstacle was thrown in the road. The local contractors,

Mar-Kay Construction Co. dissolved the partnership they were in. Again the congregation was forced to play a waiting game, as the partners had to work out their own details and agreements. This process took time and caused another delay in construction.

Construction was resumed again and continued until March 1967, when yet another stumbling block fell in Bloomington's path. The previously dissolved, and newly structured Mar-Kay Construction Co. declared bankruptcy. This left the congregation with a partially constructed church and no contractor to finish construction.

But as had been the case time and time again, the Lord rescued his flock and helped them overcome another obstacle. The Lord had moved the congregation to have its contract bonded. This meant a bonding company could take over the building responsibilities when Mar-Kay collapsed. This was a two-fold advantage for Bloomington Lutheran. Not only did the bonding company assume all obligation to finish construction, it also assumed a goodly amount of the unpaid bills. This enabled the construction of Bloomington Lutheran's new house of worship to be completed. A final meeting between all major parties involved in the building process took place on April 22, 1967. The purpose of this meeting was to tie up all loose ends and reach a final settlement. After five hours of meeting and discussion a final settlement was reached. In this meeting Glen Falls Insurance Co. agreed to pay all of Mar-Kay's bills and free the congregation from all obliga-

tion as far as the church construction was concerned. The Lord's hand again was present, as he brought such a favorable settlement for Bloomington Lutheran.

One final necessity that needed to be taken care of was the removal of the original chapel. Carey Housemovers, Inc. were brought in by the Lord to purchase and move the chapel for the congregation.

After three years of planning and meeting and dealing with one obstacle after another, Bloomington Lutheran dedicated its new house of worship to God's glory on April 30, 1967. 1,210 people attended two services in order to praise the Lord for all the wondrous things he had done. The writer remembers singing in the services as a student in the Christian Day School. He remembers thinking that he had never seen so many people in a church at one time. He also remembers the special sense of joy that spread throughout the people who attended that day.

Many members of Bloomington Lutheran will remember that day. It is also hoped that they will remember what happened in order to ~~have~~<sup>make</sup> that day possible. It is hoped that the people will pause for a moment and again thank the Lord for taking this congregation by the hand and leading her through obstacles, stumbling blocks and many trials not mentioned here. Most of all it is hoped that the people will always keep first in their hearts their reason for having a house of worship, their reason for gathering as a congregation,

and their very reason for living- namely to praise and thank the God who overcame for us the greatest obstacle of all - our sin! Because he is loving, because he is almighty, the Lord is able to overcome our sin and give us salvation through his Son.

All of this will move the people of Bloomington Lutheran to praise the God who overcame the obstacles standing in the way of our salvation, and obstacles standing in the way of our worship. We praise the Lord. With him there is no obstacle too large, no stumbling-block too great.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Other information for this paper was taken from the minutes of church meetings, bulletin notes, church pamphlets, personal recollections by the author, and from interviews with people directly involved with the building of Bloomington Lutheran's house of worship.

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