

# THE 'JESUS SENDS YOU' MISSIONARY CHAPEL

*Proposal for the "Old Church" at St. John's Lutheran Church, New Minden, IL, as of August 24, 2017*

*Note: The following information is part of an oral presentation (with Power Point pictures) made to the Congregation at an informational meeting Monday, July 17, 2017, and information distributed Sunday, July 23, 2017, in preparation for the Voters' Meeting on July 27, 2017. At that meeting the Voters' Assembly, by a vote of 30-8, voted to proceed with the restoration building project. All page numbers refer to our 1996 history book, Our God, Our Help in Ages Past.*

Opening Devotion: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God," Hebrews 12:1-3, ESV.

These words, which are also in the Preamble to the Bylaws of the Historical Society, tell us of the blessings that God has given to us through the witness of the people of God who went before us. It is not that we take comfort in them watching over us; they are all safely with the Lord; they do not have to worry about all the challenges and sorrows that we face. The Lord Himself watches over us and sends His angels to protect us. However, their testimony is still heard in the earth. We will take to our grave the memory of the words taught us by our parents, grandparents, and others from previous generations. Many of them, along with faithful pastors and teachers of old, have left us letters and sermons and other written testimonies. And then there are the things they made with their hands that outlive them, things that were constructed out of testimony to their faith in Jesus Christ—like the remains of the old church and the 1863 church building in which we sit tonight. In all these things we are pointed to Jesus, the "Founder and Perfecter" of our faith. The church of God itself, and indeed our whole life, is built on the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus looked past the shame and suffering of the cross to the joy of providing redemption and eternal life. Faithful Christians before us, walking with feet of clay, were brought through great tribulation into eternal life by looking to Jesus. Having been raised from the dead, He now is present everywhere to rule over all things for the benefit of the church. One day He will return and we will join all those in glory. We sing together:

For all the saints who from their labors rest,  
Who Thee by faith before the world confess,  
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock their fortress, and their might;  
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;  
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light. Alleluia!

Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,  
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old  
And win with them the victor's crown of gold! Alleluia!

Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia!

And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;  
Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest;  
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia!

But, lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day:  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of Glory passes on His sway. Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia! *Lutheran Service Book, 677*

By way of introduction, let's look at the Mission Statement of St. John's. It was developed by a committee of the Congregation—as I recall, they deliberately excluded the Pastor from the process so that it would actually be the voice of our members—and adopted in about 2001. It says, “In response to God's love, the mission of St. John's is to extend His kingdom by using our God-given talents to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ within our community and the changing world.”

I would submit to you that “God-given talents” involves not only the gifts and abilities with which the Lord has blessed each one of us, but also brings to mind all the things we have as individuals and as a congregation. All are to be pressed into service for proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed. For example, asking the question, “How can we best use these 42 acres for the kingdom of Christ?” led us to set aside ‘God's Garden’ so that we can grow produce to give to food pantries. God has given us this land, these buildings, His word and sacraments, our bodies and life—and, yes, He has blessed us at St. John's with a heritage and with the remains of this old church. How can we best press them into the service of proclaiming the kingdom of God?

The mission statement also speaks of the “changing world.” Yes, everything around us whirls by in a hurry. So many things change with the passing fads year by year. But we have been given a message to proclaim that does not change, the message of Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and forever. It is solid and lasting and unchangeably dependable. Our old church can reflect that unchanging quality of the Gospel message given to us.

# **Part 1**

## **Where We Have Been: The Seven Different “Lives” of the Old Church**

We need to back up and take a running start at this topic. Let's consider “Where We Have Been: The Seven Different ‘Lives’ of the Old Church.” They say a cat has nine lives. The old church has had seven different phases in its existence since it was first built 170 years ago.

### **1. 1847-1853, Parsonage (12' x 20') and Church/School (20' x 20')**

You will recall that the building was constructed out of locally available materials, such as white oak from the timber and also clay from the earth. The Pastor and his family lived behind a partition twelve feet from the outside wall. Pastor Scholz wrote about that in his memoirs, but previous to the tornado there was no obvious visible evidence of this dividing wall, either in the attic or from below. I remember very vividly working through the rubble after the tornado. The tie beams in the attic were two feet apart, so we expected that number six would show something different. Sure enough, it did. At several intervals there are mortises cut in that piece and the tenons still pegged in there. These tenons were cut off in 1853 when that dividing wall was taken down.



Pastor Scholz and his bride lived in there for six years. Two sons were born to them during that time. One, named Laurentius Fuerchtegot Philip, became a physician in St. Louis. I would like to find out more about him some day. The other, Friedrich Theopherus Johann, became a stone cutter in Evansville, Indiana. Many of the old flat tombstones on the old cemetery are initialed with his name at the bottom. Later he got involved in politics and eventually became the treasurer of the state of Indiana.

To the historian, a building like this is especially valued because its history is so well-documented. Usually if someone finds an old building like this, it happens while they are tearing down an old house and they find it encased within the modern walls. They struggle to find out who built it and under what circumstances. Here we have the remains of a 170-year old building with only one owner. We know who built it, where the timber was cut and how. We know its purpose and use. We know that Pastor C.F.W. Walther came here to visit in the year 1847-1848, the first official visit of a Synodical President. (We know that he almost drowned on the way when the drunken driver of his coach tried to cross a flooded creek.) Later in our history we had District Presidents and then Circuit Counselors, which are now called Circuit “visitors” because they are to model what Paul and his teammates did in the book of Acts: they are to go and encourage and strengthen the churches and their pastors and other workers. That practice of visitation, now widely practiced throughout the 6000 congregations of the LCMS, began here at New Minden, one of the 14 charter congregations of the Synod.

## **2. 1853-1863, Church (20' x 33')**

The second phase of existence was as a church. Mrs. Scholz was about seven months pregnant with their third child when a separate parsonage was ready for them in July, 1853. The Congregation was also growing and needed more space for worship, so they took down the dividing wall and made the whole space into a church. On the day of its dedication, July 10, 1853, Pastor H. Ficke from New Melle, MO, came out and preached. He wrote about it in *Der Lutheraner*, the Synod's paper, and said, "The church is 33 feet long and 20 feet wide, built out of strong durable tree trunks and enhanced with a pretty little tower [Thuermchen]. Built on a hill in the grand prairie, it towers upward over the woods, allowing it to be seen from a distance" (p.39).



The building as it was used in those ten years is the model for what we hope it will become. If you were to mark out an area 20' x 33' in our present church, you would note that there is room for nine pews on each side, with room in the front for a little altar and lectern/pulpit. A half pew from each side of the aisle would fit into the Chapel. With four people in each pew, the capacity of the Chapel would therefore be 72 people.

## **3. 1863-1879, School for All Grades**

When the present church was dedicated in 1863, the old church began to serve solely as a School. This was the third "life" or phase of its existence. Apparently all the grades were crammed into this building at first. Some relief occurred when the Coon Branch School was opened in 1868.

## **4. 1879-1920, School for the Lower Grades**

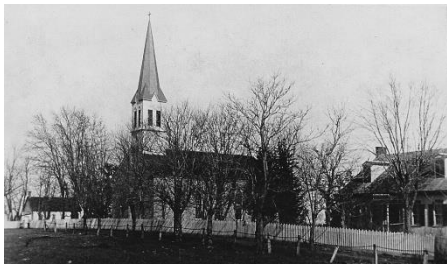
As the years went on the Congregation continued to grow. Conditions in the schools must have been very crowded. In 1879 a brick school (one large room) was dedicated on the site where the west end of the current schoolhouse stands. This became the school for the upper grades, while the lower grades continued to meet in the old church. Believe it or not, at the end of that year the Congregation reported to Synod that it had 210 pupils in its three schools (Upper Grades, Lower Grades, and Coon Branch). We know that absenteeism was a big problem in those years, but if they were all in attendance, that would be 70 children in each classroom!

It is from this time that we have our first photographs of the building. Here is one of my



favorites. The date was September 3, 1899, and over two thousand people were on hand to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Pastor Michel Eirich in the ministry, including 33 years here at New Minden. Martin Sachtleben remembered Pastor Eirich as the elderly retired pastor when Martin was in grade school. He had terrible hearing and sometimes he sang at the wrong time in the service—just because he couldn't hear. Martin also remembers going to school in this building. (The men, by

the way, are cooking coffee. Do you think one of those pots has decaff?)



In 1906 a vestibule was added on the west end. Here (left) is a picture from sometime the following winter. You can see that the original placement of the old church was



such that the site later became part of the old cemetery. It was also closer to the road than the current church. That postcard is perhaps part of the inspiration for the water color that Carl Krause commissioned (right). You may recall that Carl is the great-great grandson of Pastor Scholz. He commissioned artist Philip Wilson of Nashville to paint what it would look like if the old church (or the “Scholz house,” as he calls it) would be rebuilt today north of the church, near its original location. You may remember that it was Carl's father who donated Pastor Scholz's memoirs to the Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis. That's why, in 1994, when we began doing research for our history book, we were able to find that 84-page handwritten document that provided so much interesting new material.

The old church sustained damage in both the 1896 and 1907 “cyclones.” Here is how it looked after the 1907 storm. Notice that the roof is gone, perhaps in that pile on the ground to the right. This fits with the observation from the attic before the 2013 tornado that the roof we have known for the last hundred years is not the original roof structure. The floor was not original, either. It probably dated from around 1900.





## **5. 1920-2013, “Most Historic Tool Shed in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod”**

With the Fifth “Life” of the Old Church we come to our own lifetimes. In 1925 it was moved to its familiar location east of the church, as we see it in this picture (right) from 1963,



when the Congregation was preparing to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the “new” church. At the left you see Carl Nieman, Gerhardt and Bertha Sprehe, and Mr. and Mrs. Ted Miessner having a conversation about the old church. Most of them probably started their education in this building.



(Martin Sachtleben told me he remembered the boys sitting on one side and the girls on the other, with a pot-bellied stove in the middle. His teacher was a man named F.J. Luecke, who liked to smoke a pipe and read the newspaper in front of the kids.) In 1971, when this picture was taken, the vestibule was still attached. Between then and 1988 that vestibule was removed. For years there was also a lean-to on the east side to make more room for mowers (right). We don’t know what year that was added, but it was necessary for keeping a riding mower. You can see here the two new doors in the south (originally east) wall. Because of this adaptation and the cuts that were made in the timbers, this wall was in the worst shape of the four by 2013. But using original tie-beams from the attic, most of which are still in very good condition, we can restore this end to be much like it was at first, with two windows. In the new orientation, this wall will be the east wall—which is what it was originally.



Efforts to restore the old church are not new. By the 1990’s the Twenhafel family took action toward making it a reality. After Kenneth died the family constructed a new tool shed (right), at no cost to the Congregation, so that the mowers and other tools could be taken out of the old church and it could begin to be returned to what it was. This was Kenneth’s wish.



In 1996, for the 150th anniversary of the Congregation, the lean-to on the old church was removed and the building was emptied out. On the big reunion day in August, when we had 800+ people in attendance for the outdoor service, we invited people to stop by the old church and check it out. We were disappointed that, as far as we knew, nobody went in there all day. The lesson we learned from that is that it takes more than just having something available to draw people in; you will get people in there if you plan an event or at least have someone there to give a tour and to explain to people what they are looking at. We did not have a placard or a piece of paper or anything explaining to people what they saw. The following spring, in April of 1997, when the Synod celebrated its 150th anniversary, we hosted the Southern Illinois District pastor’s conference. As part of our closing devotion on the second day, several dozen of the pastors were in there as we stood and closed in the Lord’s name.

## **6. Oct-Nov, 2013, “Illinois’ Oldest Mobile Home”**

After approval from the Congregation to move the old church to a new location, ground was broken September 22, 2017, right after Sunday worship, for a new, more prominent location. New footings were poured to support a cement-block foundation and a slab of concrete was poured to serve as the floor of the future crawl space. In the weeks that followed, John Friar (and his son by the same name) prepared the building for moving, put it on wheels, brought it to the new location, and set it up on cribbing there. In fact, it was not until Friday, November 15, 2013, that the final positioning was complete. A team of masons was scheduled to arrive Monday morning, November 18, to lay the cement block foundation.

## **7. November 17, 2013 – Present, “Giant Jenga Puzzle”**

We all know that weekend did not go as planned! The tornado that hit Sunday knocked the building off the cribbing on which it sat. Floor, wall, ceiling, and roof were piled on top of each other like pancakes. With all the other efforts that were going on at the time (ministering to hurting and homeless families in the community, cleanup, repairing the parsonage, teacherage and cemetery, building a new shed, and, most of all, rebuilding the ruined portions of the Church, etc.), the “old church” project was put on a back burner. Slowly but surely, however, the rubble was sifted through by volunteers. Much to the amazement of many, the 1847 timbers were largely intact. They were salvaged, numbered, marked, and diagrammed for future use. (In fact, builders Kasten and Brink marked each joint in 1847 by carving Roman numerals into each piece. No doubt the frame was originally laid out and raised in a day.) They are currently in storage in a shed belonging to Alvira Redeker.

While the tornado put a stop to our simple plans of moving and repairing the building, it did open up some new opportunities. It gives us at least five advantages:

- **Elimination of Toxic Paint:** One architect told us that in the years before lead was put into paint, it contained substances even more toxic. This would have made for problems in exposing the clay walls with their 1850’s white wash or using the paneling that dated from the 1860’s. As it is, all the paneling was ruined or discarded and the timbers will be cleaned and the last remnants of the 1850’s whitewash removed before it is reconstructed.
- **Straightening of Bowed Walls:** Due to the earlier tornadoes (1896 and 1907) and/or the moving of the building in 1925, the side walls were actually “wracked” (bowed) a few inches. We can put it back together plumb and straight.
- **Replacement of all Damaged Pieces:** Previously certain pieces were hidden from us and we could not be certain which were sound and which had suffered from rot over the course of 17 decades. Now all suspect pieces can be replaced.
- **Modernization for the Americans with Disabilities Act:** By moving the upright timbers in the new sill a few inches from where they were previously we can make plenty of room for wheelchairs to roll right in across the threshold.

- **Increased Resistance to Wind Damage (120 mph).** The engineers have specified that certain metal straps, braces, and screws be inserted (hidden) at various locations in order to strengthen the building against future storms. Whereas the typical house is rated for winds up to 90 mph, we have asked that this be engineered to withstand winds up to 120 mph. We believe this is especially important in the new location, away from the protection of the big church.

## Part 2

### Where We Would Like to Go:

## THE ‘JESUS SENDS YOU’ MISSIONARY CHAPEL

The Historical Society would like the Voters to think about how the “old church” could be used to fulfill our Congregation’s mission, mentioned above: “In response to God’s love, the mission of St. John’s is to extend His kingdom by using our God-given talents to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ within our community and the changing world.” We would like the Congregation to think of it as *a tool to create more opportunities for proclaiming the love of Jesus*. Like the talents that God has given to each one of us, this old building can be used in service to God. You might ask, “What can we do in this building that we cannot do anywhere else?” The answer is that with this building we can create more opportunities for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus than we would otherwise have. With this tool in place we can do more teaching and proclaiming of the Word of God. We believe there are people who would come to events in this building who may not be likely to come to events in the regular church.

God’s kingdom is made up of people, people for whom Jesus died. It is the word of Jesus that builds and sustains His kingdom in the hearts of people. A *chapel* is an intimate place for people to gather in Jesus’ name. We believe it is better to fill the building with people than to fill it with stuff. The words “mission” and “missionary” come from the word “send” or “sent.” We have been sent, or placed here, in order to reach this community and changing world. Apart from the Good News of Jesus, the only One who is the same yesterday and today and forever, what do people have that they can depend on? What is there in this world of changing fads that can serve as a foundation for our lives? By resurrecting this old building and inviting people to join us for various interesting events held in it, we are saying to the world, “We have something different here. We have something that lasts. Come and hear about the One who never changes, whose love is constant, whose promises will never fail you.”

The first two pastors of our Congregation, the two who preached and taught in the old church, were overseas missionaries. The first of them, Pastor C.F.W. Scholz, even lived in the building for six years with his wife, and eventually, two children. I can tell you in a sermon, “the four of them lived in a space 12 by 20 feet” and you can try to imagine it. But how much more effective to bring you into that very space and look around at those very timbers and say, “This is where they made their home. This is where their two boys were born. They gave up nice houses in Germany to come to the wild open country on the American frontier and endure hardship in order to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. What are you willing to give up in order that others may hear about Jesus? To whom is God sending you so that you might share the love of Christ in word and deed? Have you ever considered becoming a pastor or teacher or missionary?”



You might ask how we can justify spending tens of thousands of dollars on this restoration project when there is so much mission work that needs to be done here and around the world. Besides the fact that the money given to this project has been given for this purpose (pretty much unsolicited), consider that this Chapel would be a blessing for the mission of the church if it were truly a seed-bed for missions. The very name will remind all visitors that “Jesus Sends You” and that we, His church, are missionaries to the world today: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). The Chapel could be a launching pad where Christian people are inspired more intentionally to share the Good News of Jesus, as Pastor Scholz said, “Through the stirring of the Holy Spirit there arose in me the desire to become a missionary.” He wanted to sign up for work in India, but there were no openings, so he trained to come to America instead.

What kind of opportunities would be created? First consider the “drop-ins.” Already we have people every now and then stopping and walking the old cemetery or taking a look at the church or wanting to look at old church records. We believe that with the Missionary Chapel in place we could draw more of them and, once they are on the property, we could share the faith with them more intentionally. It could be as simple as posting a sign at the Chapel, “For a free guided tour, call...” Then we can arrange a person-to-person encounter whereby we share Christ with them. People will stop for a sign on an empty lot that says, “Historical Marker.” How much more when there is a building that they can enter and where they are welcome to sit down and pray and think and ponder—and where someone can explain it all to them.

Second, consider special events. For each of these events an offering would be taken. Half of the proceeds would go toward expenses for the Chapel and half would go for a designated mission project. Here are a few ideas we have discussed regarding events that could be held:

- A “Come as You Are” Christmas Eve Candlelight service late on Christmas Eve or an Easter Vigil the night before Easter or even a “come as you are” early morning service for deer hunters.
- “A Pioneer Christmas” -- On a Saturday or Sunday afternoon near Christmas, hold a worship service patterned after a typical service from the 1850’s. Create an inspirational atmosphere for contemplating the Good News of Christ’s birth in the stable of Bethlehem—the Good News shared in an intimate, simple, “primitive” setting, away from all the fancy decorations and modern materialistic celebration of Christmas. If necessary, hold it more than once and ask for reservations ahead of time.
- Hold a “Pioneer Missionary Day” for area Lutheran Schools, one school at a time. Children from Lutheran Schools would travel here for a field trip and our volunteers would give them a tour of church and chapel, cemetery, etc. It could include a short worship service in pioneer style (boys on one side, girls on the other, etc.), a lesson taught in teaching style of mid-1800’s, service projects such as working in Braille Center, God’s Garden (depending on season), cutting quilt blocks for mission quilts, working to support an overseas mission, mission education, evangelism training, etc.

Third, consider that the Chapel could be a more suitable location for events now held elsewhere, such as weddings and funerals with a small attendance, Vacation Bible School opening and closing, Circuit Pastors’ worship, Voters’ Assembly and other meetings. Even many of the evening services we now hold in the church might better be located in the Chapel.

Consider that our church easily seats 292 people without adding a single chair. Yet we routinely “crank” the thermostat up or down for worship services with one-tenth that number in attendance. In 2016 we averaged 39 for Lent and 27 for Advent services. Our crowds for New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day, and the Saturday evening services would also fit easily in the Chapel, which will seat 72 people comfortably in a space that has about one-ninth the volume to heat and cool.

Our goal is simply to draw people unto the property so that we can share the Good News of Jesus with them, and then “send” them on their way inspired.