

Reflections on Salem's History During Salem's 175th Anniversary Celebration

Early Days by Judy LeGath

The story of Salem's founding begins with a group of local German Immigrant farmers. Having left Germany to move beyond the unstable political and economic conditions of the 1830s and 1840s, they did not leave behind their love of God or their reverence for their Lutheran heritage. Having no Lutheran church to attend here, they worshipped at the newly formed St. Timothy's Episcopal Church. They missed their own traditional German language worship but were encouraged when Adolfus Frost, originally from Germany, joined St. Timothy's clergy team.

His offer to conduct services in German was warmly welcomed, but when Frost was reassigned to a post in New Jersey, these services ended. But help was on the way. And once again it came from a connection at St. Timothy's.

In 1848, a wealthy Baltimore couple, Gustav and Frances Lurman, bought a 600-acre farm in Catonsville to serve as a summer home. Gustav himself was a German immigrant and had established a highly successful import-export business in Baltimore. The Lurmans were Episcopalians and surely must have become acquainted with our founding families at St. Timothy's.

Recognizing their understandable desire for a church of their own, Lurman called a meeting for September 30, 1849 to be held at the home of Paulus and Anna Reich. On this day, our congregation was founded, and a name was selected. They called their new church Salem.

The early life of the church was filled with much activity. Their first task was to build a house of worship. Gustav Lurman with his own \$300 purchased a lot on Ingleside Avenue and soon after donated an additional \$500 of his own money to help pay for building supplies. Members of the congregation joined in the work of constructing the stone building, which was dedicated on Sunday, June 16, 1850. Soon a decision was made to use the churchyard as a graveyard, called "God's Acre," and to replace the schoolhouse that had been on the property at the time of purchase. They hired a teacher who instructed in both English and German and had as an additional duty ringing the school bell.

Salem's first pastor was Charles A. Brockman. Popular at first, he fell out of favor with some in the congregation, possibly due to emotional stress coming from the death of his wife and two children over a three-year period. He was succeeded by Dr. George W. Ebeling in 1854.

Dr. Ebeling's pastorate included steady growth and significant change. By the end of the 19th century, Salem's membership had doubled from its 1849 beginning, and the congregation looked beyond its original German ethnic orientation. As early as 1858, Sunday afternoon English language services were offered, in 1895 Sunday School instruction in English only was initiated, and at Dr. Ebeling's death in 1901, all worship in German was discontinued. The development of Frederick Road as the community center of activity was also apparent to the congregation. In 1901 Salem began to hold Sunday evening services in

English at Library Hall, a meeting and multipurpose facility on Frederick Road. At this time, Salem's group for women of the church, organized with the German name Damen Verein, scheduled a series of dinners to raise funds for a new downtown location.

Salem's History 1901-1953 by Ed Whetstone

By the grace of God, that second and third generation of our Salem ancestors were stirred by a new vision. There were no longer any services in German and soon no country lane, either. Like their parents who forged a new church home in this new land, the next generations envisioned their church transplanted into the mainstream of American life. They launched a monumental effort making plans and raising capital, and spending two years worshiping in Library Hall in the village till their new home was ready. They extended a call to a young seminarian, Martin Luther Enders, who was ordained and installed as they began worship in their newly dedicated building in 1903.

I've often tried to imagine what that must have been like for the congregants that first Sunday in the building we know so well. Those folk who crowded into the little country chapel first entering the comparatively spacious "New Salem", a nave several times as large. It must have been altogether breathtaking.

Its appearance was not as now. The chancel everywhere was dark oak—altar, reredos paneling, pulpit and railing. It would be several decades till all the stained-glass windows were installed.

But the primary story, of course, was not the furniture and walls. That story is the congregational life that bloomed and abounded now in the center of Catonsville. Once a rural waystation, it was now a bustling little town with trolleys riding the rails to and from the thriving port city of Balto.

A new era dawned for Salem. Membership steadily swelled. Pastor John Bowers was called in 1911, and would serve Salem for 36 years. Parish organizations were established for men and women, people of all ages. There was the Sunday School, Ladies' Aid Society, Men's Brotherhood, Women's Missionary Society, Salem Missionary Helpers, World Friendship Society, Luther League for the young folk. A great portion of the members centered their week's activities and their sense of belonging in the parish life of Salem. These groups flourished, most all of them into the next half-century.

Such vibrant activity prompted a variety of improvements. A parsonage was built behind the church in 1911, along with a stable. In 1917 the back of the church was extended to enlarge space for the Sunday School in 1917. That same year the basement was dug deeper to provide a kitchen and rooms for meetings and dinners. Some of us can remember how the large space was partitioned with folding wooden doors so it could be opened as a large hall.

Changes were apparent in their worship, too. In 1906 the Jesus' Ascension was marvelously painted over the altar. A pipe organ built by the Moller Organ Company in Hagerstown was installed in 1929, at that time the largest and most widely acclaimed pipe organ company in the world. In 1932 the chancel was renovated in a Byzantine style, with the oak paneling and furnishings of the chancel replaced by mosaics, marble and brass.

Following Dr. Bowers' retirement in 1947, Pr. Wilbur Newby was called as our sole pastor. Salem,

like most all churches in the US was on the cusp of a boom in membership and attendance. In our centennial year of 1949 Salem listed 1249 members, 954 of them confirmed, and 534 communing members. Growth continued. Churchgoing in the 1950s was at its zenith. Never before so many, nor so large apportion of the population. And never since.

A Sunday School wing was inevitable. Ground was broken and the new building dedicated in 1955. Soon enrollment in Sunday School was 570, children and adults.

Even so, there were changes and challenges already in motion. Catonsville's distinct identity as a small town was losing hold, and increasingly the community was pulled into the much larger orbit of the Baltimore metropolitan area. Its increasing population was less tethered here, as it attracted commuters who worked in Baltimore and Washington, and as others moved here from the city, only then to settle farther out.

The times, as was recently sung on Salem's stage, they was a changin'.

Renovation Talk 1997 to Present by Ray Giuliani

I suspect that when many of us think of Salem's Renovation, we focus on the actual demolition and construction that took place in 1996 and 1997.

But there was a very lengthy period prior to that where an enormous amount of preparatory work took place. As part of that effort, we considered how to make our church more accessible, versatile and useful.

The result was the setting of 5 primary goals for our updated building.

They were:

- A more welcoming entry from the parking lot. The old entrance was small, hidden and certainly unwelcoming. Inside, it was cramped and unsafe with a downward staircase precariously close to the entry door. With the change, access to Reformation Hall from the entry would now be possible for the first time.
- Greater accessibility throughout the building. The new elevator would give easy access to all 3 levels. A ramp to Bethany Hall and the kitchen, and a bridge to the choir loft would ease movement to those busy areas.
- More flexible meeting and classroom space. The number of rooms would be increased and sizes would vary to accommodate more community groups, Salem meetings and our Sunday School. Restrooms in the lower level would make this space much more useful and "friendly."
- An expanded Narthex that could provide a greater opportunity for fellowship. The new space would triple the size of the old gathering area and increase opportunities for a variety of functions. Today we use this large area for fellowship before and after services and other events, for Marketplace, for Fair Trade sales, for food collections,

sign-up sheets, displays and more.

- Air conditioning for the sanctuary, Reformation Hall and the church offices. For Salem's staff and those of us who attended services, meetings, receptions, plays and volunteered in the summer, the air conditioning would be, and still is, a welcome relief from the heat and humidity.

So, the 1996/1997 Renovation reconfigured, modernized and enhanced our church, but our renovation budget didn't allow for us to do all the necessary improvements and updates at the time. Some projects needed to be put on hold. And, as the years passed, other new projects became necessary, too.

For years, our RSVP Fund has made numerous, important, large projects possible. (By the way, RSVP stands for Renew, Sustain, Venture and Proclaim. This fund was established after the Renovation.). Using RSVP, we have been able to fund the following projects because of your generous contributions.

These are in no particular order:

- Create an Associate Pastor's office, an office for the pastors of St. Dysmas and an archives room.
- Air-condition additional spaces in the building.
- Repair, clean and refurbish the mosaic tile in the sanctuary.
- Repaint the sanctuary.
- Renovate the first-floor bathrooms.
- Install new energy efficient windows in all of the education building.
- Install energy efficient boilers for our heating system.
- Clean and repoint all of the exterior stone work.
- Repair and recover the exterior stained-glass windows.
- Put a long-lasting new roof on the entire building.

Also, a little-known fun fact: In addition to the physical improvements to our building, money from the RSVP Fund also helped launch the call of Salem's first Associate Pastor, Pastor Dave.