A Tale of Two Cities/ A Tale of Two Churches

Let me tell you a story that takes place in a somewhat small Wisconsin community. Back in the 1860s – that's a long, long time ago – a gathering of Lutherans became known as St. John's Lutheran Church. The goal then, as even now, was to celebrate and strengthen the connection between Christ and his lambs of all ages. These Lutherans held to God's Word as inerrant and verbally inspired.

In time, the original worship facility was no longer up to the task required of it, so about a hundred years ago St. John's resolved to build a new, larger, more adequate facility. And build they did. It was Gothic in style, all brick with stone trim,with a tall cross-topped steeple reaching high above any other structure in town. Embedded in that inspiring steeple were large clocks, as though to remind the townsfolk that it's always time to worship.

Some years ago a not-so-Gothic addition was added to the back of the church to house offices and work spaces. Also some years ago – a couple dozen or more – consideration was given to building a new facility. Off and on over the years the idea was resurrected and then laid aside.

In the meantime, members – and visitors – noticed that the building was not handicapped accessible. Some reported issues with mold. One said the church “smelled like mold and may have been a turn-off for visitors.” There were plumbing, electrical, and maintenance concerns.

Permit me to digress a bit in telling this true story. The congregation also supported a Lutheran Elementary School, or an LES, as it's called. Because of circumstances and space concerns, the school was not attached to the church, but was rather some blocks away. Over time, it became clear that a single site and single facility would do much to enhance the ministry of outreach.

In addition, the congregation, in federation with many other WELS congregations, supported Christian education at the secondary level, an area Lutheran high school, or ALHS, as it's called.

But now back to my story. Even though the old building had served the congregation well, and will always hold a special place in the hearts of the members, the realization grew that in order to continue to reach out and serve others, change was inevitable. The congregation contracted with architect Tom Schermerhorn of Excel Engineering of Fond du Lac, and Catalyst Construction, of Milwaukee.

Under the skillful guidance of the architect, plans were put to paper for a facility that, God willing, would serve the next generations as faithfully as had the old structure. And under the skilled hands of Catalyst's construction crews and sub-contractors the building arose from the ground, not in tall Gothic style, but in forms and shapes entirely fitted for worship and ministry today.

Now some of you, especially those who've been here in Wrightstown for a lifetime, might choose to quarrel a bit with some of the minor points in the description as I've shared it. Before you register your concern, realize that I have not been describing St. John Lutheran Church in Wrightstown, WI. No, I've been describing St. John's Lutheran Church in Two Rivers, WI.

St. John's of Two Rivers dedicated their new facility, now bringing their church and school into one structure, on January 6, 2019. They have lost none of the love and reverence they have for the old structure, but rejoice in the possibilities presented to them by the new facility. They notice things like handicapped accessible parking, close seating, well-located restrooms, a multi-purpose room on the same floor, a fireside room, and so much more that there's no space here to tell it all.

For your sake, members of St. John, I pray that your story, so similar in many details, will also end in so great a victory. An Observer. #8 September 2019

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