

The Special Committee on Economic Affairs

Members: Richard W.E. Perrin, chairman, Rev. Paul Knickelbein, Paul Wolfgram, William E. Jens, Edward C. Gruenzel, Rudolph Wolfgram, R.R. Ristow, and Verle Stellmacher

8 September 1960

Dear Member:

Our St. Marcus Congregation is 85 years old, having been organized in 1875 by 13 families, of which three came from St. John's, two from St. Matthew's, five from Immanuel, and three from Trinity. In 1873, two years before St. Marcus was founded, a branch school had been established by St. John's Congregation, and it was in this school that St. Marcus Congregation had its origin.

In 1875 the city limits of Milwaukee were Burleigh St. on the north and 27th St. on the west. The area served by the newly founded St. Marcus Church was sparsely populated, especially north of North Avenue, where much open farmland was still to be found. St. Marcus, therefore, originally served a semi-rural area, undoubtedly with the thought in mind that urbanization would follow, with a high percentage of the people coming in being of German origin with possible Lutheran affiliations. This, of course, is the pattern which actually developed, and as a result St. Marcus experienced a steady growth in membership, which reached its peak in the late 1920s when over 2,000 communicant members were numbered.

With the years, the character of the Near North Side changed materially, the past fifteen years witnessing the influx of a large number of Negro families, with relatively limited church connections. Due to the rapid transition of the area, various social and economic problems have appeared, causing the city government a great deal of concern. The district in which these problems are most serious has been designated as the "Inner Core" and is bounded by Keefe Ave., Juneau Ave., Holton St., and North 20th St. St. Marcus Church and School are, of course, in this area and therefore certainly not free of its influence. Coupled with these neighborhood changes, an increasing number of members of St. Marcus Congregation have moved away, and while maintaining their membership, actually live some distance from the church.

Viewed statistically, St. Marcus Congregation appears to be in a declining cycle. During the past ten years it has lost half of its communicant membership, dropping from 1,200 in 1951 to 582 in 1960. School enrollment has also dropped to about half of what it was ten years ago. From a fairly level enrollment of approximately 200 children ten years ago, the anticipated enrollment this year will barely come up to 100. Church and school costs have, nevertheless, continued to rise, with 1951 showing total expenditures of \$56,691, and 1959 at \$63,568. This rise in itself would not be serious, but the continuing loss of membership results in fewer and fewer members being available to meet higher and higher costs.

Stated another way, even though the annual expenditure has increased only \$6,877, the cost per communicant member has gone up from \$47.24 to \$97.94. The cost of operating and maintaining St. Marcus School rose from \$17,298 in 1951 to \$24,815 in 1959, an increase of \$7,517. While here again the rise in cost is not precipitous, and certainly understandable in the light of continuing

inflationary trends in our economy, it is the decline in communicant membership, as well as in school enrollment, that results in a cost of \$178.52 for educating one pupil for one year, as compared to \$89.16 in 1951. The cost of the school to each communicant member rose from \$14.41 to \$38.23 per year over the same period. The net result of this situation has been an annual operating deficit, overcome only in part by special drives and other fund-raising efforts.

St. Marcus Congregation literally stands at a crossroads. It is obvious, on the one hand, that the present trend of permitting operating expenses to exceed income, with a resultant accumulated deficit, can only prove ruinous in the end. Already excessive, costs of educating a child at St. Marcus School will also continue to rise unless basic policy changes are initiated.

To move out of the neighborhood and re-establish elsewhere would mean assuming a new debt of perhaps three quarters of a million dollars to duplicate the facilities the congregation now has. Since a number of congregations have already made this move, a similar action by St. Marcus would definitely compete with these other congregations.

On the other hand, St. Marcus Congregation cannot survive in its present location unless new members are gained to compensate for those lost by deaths, as well as other causes such as transfers and separation. St. Marcus stands in a new mission field which has been brought to its door. If it will but reach out, there seems to be little question that many new members will be gained for the church. It may be true, as in all mission endeavors, that some new members, like infants, often must first “learn to crawl before they can walk.”

Because of the low economic status and other factors, it cannot be expected that their ability to contribute financially will necessarily be as fully developed as with older, established members. On the other hand, it may truthfully be said of many members of longstanding that their gifts do not reflect much appreciation for what they have received.

If any conclusions can be reached at this time, they would seem to be the following:

St. Marcus Congregation has every reason to stay where it is. In order to assure its growth, the people of the neighborhood must be reached. Realizing that this involves an element of transition, the present members of St. Marcus must continue to work even harder. In terms of meeting the school costs, it would seem wise to establish a tuition fee program as follows:

(Here the committee lays out a proposal for raising tuition fees to \$8 a month, in the hope of raising annual tuition income from \$1,600 to \$2,800). Also a concentrated effort must be made to win the cooperation of those members of St. Marcus who have given little or nothing in contributions. During 1959, nearly 300 members gave less than \$25, of which 43 gave nothing, and 126 have less than \$10. It is fully realized that due to unemployment, sickness, or other adversities some members have been unable to contribute, but it is reasonable to assume that many members simply do not realize how serious the financial plight of the congregation has become. It is proposed that each member who has given little or nothing be invited to appear before the church council for the purpose of giving him an opportunity to explain his reasons for not contributing more. It is hoped that with this approach additional contributions will be realized.

The foregoing items are offered by the undersigned committee as the best recommendation it is able to make at this time. Each of these matters should be the object of continuing study, and modified or amended as circumstances indicate.

Finally, it should be pointed out that there are no easy solutions to the congregation's financial and economic dilemma. In the difficult months and years ahead, it become increasingly important that the members of St. Marcus Congregation give evidence of their faith by a continued willingness of hearts and hands to stand by the Church, come what may.

For the purpose of further discussion, the recommendations of this report will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the congregation on 12 September at 7:30 in the evening. The meeting will be held in church. Your presence is needed. Please do not fail us.

Richard W.E. Perrin was a trained architect who had worked in the office of noted Milwaukee architect Richard Philipp. He became the first director of the city's Department of City Development and was one of the founders of Old World Wisconsin. He is the author of several books and numerous articles on Wisconsin's and Milwaukee's historical architectural treasures.