

Augustana Endowment Society
Historical Reflections from March 2019
by Janet Moline

Campus Church History

For 17 years from Feb. 13, 1966 to August 31, 1983, the Augustana Campus Church was a congregation in the Lutheran Church in America. Formed on the principal that "A church membership is not something one leaves 'back home.' Rather, church membership goes with a person and is kept alive in a community of Christians where one lives." There were 102 charter members. The Rev. Dr. Arnold Carlson, professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology, Rock Island campus, served as the vice-pastor.

By Oct. of 1966, the congregation had extended a call to Rev. Richard A. Swanson, who began his ministry on Dec. 1, 1966. He was joined soon by Lorian and their sons Scott, Craig and Kai.

By 1969 a church school had formed. The winter of '69 was the beginning of the "Midnight" Service, which began at 11:30 p.m. The "Acid Rock" liturgy, written by Tom Robin Harris and Richard Swanson produced cries of heresy, but soon was being used at other churches. In the fall of 1970 John Greenwood introduced the Chicago Folk Service. Written by Art Gorman and Pastor Phil Bigelow for Grace Lutheran Church in Chicago, it became a favorite of the ACC. Chuck Olson and Bill Simpkins on guitar, Janet Christian on piano and Mark Dale Johnson on vibraphones, and others had Ascension Chapel resounding with joy.

In 1970 the congregation decided that all baptized persons should be welcome at communion, even children, much to the disapproval of the LCA. With few exceptions, all worship services included communion. Summer worship began in 1970, including Wednesday night potlucks.

Some of the ministries in 1968 to the early 70's included anti-war ministries, Concern for Sexual Reality, Racial Reconciliation Encounters, and a major Death and Dying Symposium necessitated by the death of 9 college student mostly due to car accidents, including two Church Council members, Deborah LaCroix and Rueben Kron.

There were Ecclesiastical Grassers (picnics in the Fall for new students and others), Quiet Retreats usually at Andover Retreat Center, always with a midnight walk to Jenny Lind Chapel for communion, the Joy of Christmas, Past Present (still held in December), and Easter events. The best attended services were the Wed. night Evening Prayer and Holy Communion.

Thirty-eight men and women from the Campus Church became pastors in the Lutheran Church in America.

Social ministry programs included: Generations, relating Augie students with senior citizens, the Jewish-Christian Dialogues, which brought Elie Weisel to campus and continues today, world hunger concerns, peace action programs, "Women, Wholeness and the Church", and other concerns.

In the Spring of 1980, the congregation called Rev. Gwendolyn S. King, from Philadelphia, Gettysburg College and Howard University Divinity School, to be Associate Pastor.

In 1976, the Congregation and College encouraged the Roman Catholic Bishop of Peoria to begin a ministry to Roman Catholic students, which also continues today.

By 1982, the congregation voted to disband, making way for a new campus ministry, just as the Augustana Association for Christian Mission and the Lutheran Students Association had disbanded to form the Campus Church. The final celebration of the Augustana Campus Church's life occurred on Sat. April 23 with a dinner in the College Center, greetings from the Illinois Synod, the Rock Island-Moline District, a moving statement by Tom Tredway, singing of the old favorites, and then the Holy Communion in Ascension Chapel, with elements from the Chicago Folk Service, the Lutheran Book of Worship, the Service Book and Hymnal, and the old Acid-Rock Liturgy. A shower of multi-colored origami paper cranes, symbols of hope for peace, was suspended from the Chapel ceiling. Tom Robin Harris and Janet Christian White were at the piano, Janet McKelvey Stodd played the flute; Mark Dale Johnson was there with his vibraphone, the now Rev. Chuck Olson played guitar...for one brief moment it was all there again. Pastors Mike Clark and Nancy Feniuk assisted Pastors King and Swanson. Lisa Paulson, Betty Peterson, Sister Mary Fran, Fred Peterson, and others all took part. They sang and cried and laughed and hugged their hearts out. And then it was over. Judy Nyberg wrote a tribute to Campus Church:

"There is life after Campus Church. It is possible to again become part of the church of the real world but it is a little dull.

Campus Church was just too much.

--Sashaying up the aisle to the tune of MISTY on the vibraphones and bass. The music was too much.

--The first Messianic Banquet when someone made the mistake of putting whole bottles of wine on the tables...a Passover Party. The Joy was too much.

--Easter egg hunts and squealing children among gray gravestones at Andover. There were ants in the jelly beans. ----Trumpets and sunsets. The noise was too much.

--Origami birds, freezing feet on the prairie waiting to commune with wine and hot chocolate, midnight pigs, morning pancakes, Wednesday soup and tough bodied bread. We ate too much.

--John Eck crawling under the pews guerilla style, Eric Adolphi hanging around the altar in the middle of the service and a baby named Caleb screaming in the back. The children were too much.

--Should we commune children, should we discover the Jewish community, should we disband Sunday School, should we fast, should we ever again ask Stan Hauerwas to preach at Homecoming. We worried too much.

--We accepted too much, we changed too much, we partied too much, we celebrated too much.

Thank goodness.

In the church of the real world, you can't put dandelions on the altar."