

United in Faith
A Five-Year Journey
1998 – 2003

United in Faith Lutheran Church
A Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America -
Metropolitan Chicago Synod
6525 West Irving Park Road
Chicago, Illinois 60634
(773) 283-2326
www.unitedinfaith.org
ChicLuth@aol.com

Easter...Resurrection...Rebirth. Easter 1998...the rebirth of eight struggling churches on Chicago's Northwest Side. An event The Lutheran magazine called one of the top five religion stories of 1998 in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Eight Lutheran congregations of the Chicago Metropolitan Synod consolidated as United in Faith Lutheran Church. Hundreds worshipped at Taft High School on April 12th to witness, support and celebrate a church formation based on a call to mission. For this was not a consolidation to extend the life of the congregation another few years, but rather to become a leader in urban ministry, to serve rather than to be served. While celebrating their histories, the new congregation entered the wilderness, guided by a mission to serve God but in yet undefined ways. The eyes of many, inside and outside of the church, were watching, waiting to see if this model would work.

United in Faith Predecessor Congregations

*Gladstone Park
Holy Communion
Medill
Nebo
Our Lord's
Our Saviour's
Peace
St. Andrew's*

The Journey Begins

The journey to Easter 1998 began many years before. Lutheran congregations (and later an Episcopal congregation) on Chicago's Northwest Side had long partnered for support, planning and programming as a larger parish organization under names such as 5 Point Parish, 10 Point Parish, and finally the Northwest Lutheran Parish (NWLPP). Clergy and lay representatives from fifteen churches were delegates to this organization. Discussion in the early 1990s was focused on the congregations' dwindling memberships, high cost of building maintenance and repair, difficulty in attracting and keeping clergy, lack of funding, people and energy for mission. All of the churches, some more than others, could relate to these issues. Open forums were held to discuss possible solutions and actions. Consolidation of all of the congregations seemed to offer the most promise - and the most risk. Never before had so many churches attempted consolidation.

In November 1995 a Transition Team began to focus on the urgency of the situations and the opportunities and strengths within the congregations. Meetings were held with all congregation councils and clergy to communicate the situation.

Sharing the Vision

Joint programs across all of the congregations to expand ministry became the highest priority. Worship and Music and Children and Youth planning teams were started. Programs, a way for members to get to know each other, included Vacation Bible School, Confirmation, children's choir, a monthly Saturday Night service, potluck dinners, parish interns, youth director and youth group, Advent, Lent, Reformation, Thanksgiving Eve and Epiphany services, Bible study and women's retreats. An Adult Day Care Center partnership with Lutheran Social Services of Illinois was explored and the Retirement Research Council under the MacArthur Foundation donated a bus for this purpose through the Synod. This program was later put on hold due to difficulty in finding a suitable space for the program.

A ParishWide Page, containing news from the Transition Team and information on parish wide events, was published and distributed to all congregations. Retreats were held to deepen faith and focus on how to live out that faith. The differences between a maintenance church (the current churches) and a mission church

(the dream of the future) became sharper, the task of forming a new church became clearer and, at the same time, more formidable. Congregations were asked to vote on whether to “continue to participate in a process of negotiation with the other NWLP congregations toward some form of consolidation of these congregations to assure a revitalized Lutheran ministry on the Northwest Side of the City of Chicago” by March 1997. Nine congregations voted to move forward. In addition, Friends of the New Church (FONC), people who were interested in becoming the church of the future, organized. Some of the FONCs were members of churches that voted not to proceed with the consolidation.

Moving the Process Forward

To assist in the process of further negotiation between congregations, Lutheran Brotherhood underwrote expenses of consultants. A Leadership Team, comprised of two delegates from each of the nine congregations, replaced the NWLP Transition Team and delegates. This team would define the proposed process of consolidation, lead information sharing, and facilitate discussion and dialogue on key issues and decisions – including grieving and celebration. The consultants and the Leadership Team began their Journey of Hope with a retreat in May 1997. The goal of consolidation on Easter 1998 was set. A parishwide public Commitment Liturgy was held at Luther North High School on June 1, 1997. The joy and excitement of worshipping together continued with monthly Sunday joint worship services.

Congregation involvement in defining the new church community and in identifying neighborhood mission opportunities began with a Future Search Conference prior to the Commitment Liturgy and continued with small group meetings over the summer. The summer meetings offered a chance to share information and hear members’ concerns. In September 1997 each congregation voted on a binding resolution to consolidate. Eight of the nine churches committed to continue on the road to consolidation as United in Faith Lutheran Church, a name determined by popular vote. For many, the decision to consolidate was logical, as it seemed there was no other way to continue ministry. But many hearts were saying ‘no’ to losing individual congregations. In October 1997 the formal decision was made to come together as one congregation on Easter Sunday 1998. The symbolism of Lent as a time of letting go and Easter as a time for celebration of rebirth was appropriate.

Developing a Structure

The formal vote for consolidation into one not-for-profit corporation, known as United in Faith Lutheran Church was taken in January 1998. The first church council was formed, comprised of two elected members from each of the predecessor congregations and the FONCs. (The size of the church council would gradually be reduced to eight members as predecessor church affiliation became unimportant and a more workable size was desired.) Staffing and location issues were temporarily resolved. Early in the process the decision was made that all current pastors and staff would resign with the consolidation. None of the pastors were to be considered to lead the new church, as new pastoral leadership without ties to the old was desired. A similar decision was made regarding the church buildings. None of the current church facilities would be considered as a permanent location. If one congregation had to give up their facility, all would do the same.

Generous severance packages were provided to all pastors. Interim pastors were selected for the start of the new congregation. Staff members, such as administration assistants, musicians and choir directors were invited to apply for new positions as they were redefined. An office administrator and business manager were hired as well as a music team. A decision was made to temporarily locate at St. Andrew’s until a permanent site could be found.

As the countdown to consolidation continued, each of the congregations held special events to celebrate their histories. Archives were compiled, farewell dinners and final services were held. Good Friday services were a time for grieving losses.

Celebrating a Rebirth

Easter Sunday 1998 – the celebration of our Lord’s resurrection – also marked the renewal of the congregations. The following Sunday the first services were held at St. Andrew’s - an early morning traditional service followed by a contemporary service. The tasks before the council were numerous. The first youth were confirmed in May 1998. Members signed the Charter on July 12, 1998. A constitution, reflecting the mission driven purpose, was ratified later in the year. A pictorial directory was published to facilitate the ‘getting to know you’ process. A mission statement was adopted in August:

Together in Christ,
Reaching to God
Reaching to Grow
Reaching to Serve
To share God’s love

Strategies and priorities for living out the mission statement were developed and budgeted. These two areas prompted some of the most contentious discussions as opinions differed on how to do neighborhood mission and how much it should cost. A Community Inquiry Report was completed by the consultants and considered as input to this process. These issues would not be resolved until a pastoral team was in place.

The combined membership at the time of the consolidation was just under nine hundred. Over the next two years this number, as expected, dropped to less than half. Most membership lists from the predecessor churches reflected inflated numbers for active membership. Some members decided that the merger was the time to transfer to a church closer to home. Other members transferred after finding the new church was not what they expected - programs were taking too long to get up and running, communication between the leadership and congregation was perceived as lacking, and disagreements characterized most meetings. The entire church council resigned in February 2000 due to disagreements and distrust, facilitating the election of members with fresh perspective and energy to move the congregation forward.

Selling former buildings and finding new sacred space were major hurdles to overcome. In September 1998 a firm was retained to auction the properties and a project team prepared the properties for sale. In December the auction, called the largest offering of churches, was held, resulting in the sale of all properties. A lease arrangement allowed for the continued use of the St. Andrew’s building until permanent space could be found. Meanwhile, a Sacred Space team was seeking a permanent site. Little vacant space was available for construction of a new facility. The focus moved to purchasing an existing facility. In April 1999 the congregation voted to negotiate the purchase of the former Vail printing site on Irving Park Road. The one-story, two-building property was desirable for:

- Location - on a major street with a bus route and in an area changing from light industrial to business and residential;
- Parking - its own lot plus neighboring business’ lots and street parking; and
- Handicapped accessibility – ground level buildings.

The near unanimous agreement to purchase this facility was a major turning point for the new congregation. Finally, it would have a place to call its own - contemporary sacred space that reflected the new beginning and outreach into the community.

Renovating the Sacred Space

After the building purchase was final in November, the committee and congregation reviewed architectural plans and provided input. Initial plans to remodel both buildings were revised to first renovate the larger East facility with offices, sanctuary, lounge and fellowship hall to keep the project on budget and facilitate an earlier move. Construction began in May 2000 with a target completion of November 1. Furnishings were chosen, donations of over one hundred sanctuary chairs were made, and an organ was purchased. The physical move was monumental. The first worship services at the new site were held on November 5, 2000. A 3-year capital appeal, Windows to the World, began in Fall 2001. Additional repairs, reconfiguration and rehab provided by this fund included replacement windows in the East building, painting

the exterior front of the buildings and opening the West building for youth and children's programs. Two new external signs were purchased to identify the buildings as the Worship Center and the Ministry Center. Upgrades to the West building and both facades, including a cross and atrium, will continue as funds are available.

Choosing the Leaders

Interim pastors served while the pastoral call process proceeded. In October 1999 the congregation voted on two candidates. One of the candidates received a positive vote but removed himself from the process. A second vote took place in September 2000. Votes for both candidates were positive and both accepted the calls. Drawn by the challenges of urban ministry and the mission focus of the congregation, Pastors Dawn Mass-Moser and Greg Moser arrived in late November and were installed on November 26, 2000, the day the new church building was also dedicated.

Endorsing a New Vision

Developing a new vision and values for the mission-driven congregation became a high priority. With input from pastors and the congregation, the following was approved in March 2001.

Our Vision

United in Faith is a community of united disciples
offering gifts to the world that can be found no place else.

Our Values

Weekly worship
Children and Youth
Every person who walks through our doors
The Gospel of Jesus
Prayer
Faith Development
Caring for the Elderly
Feeding the Hungry

Now the focus moved to using the vision and values to design the ministries of the congregation. To support the new ministries, permission-giving amendments to the constitution were adopted in October 2001. Governance structures, including the church council, became separate from the ministries structures. Ministries no longer reported to the church council. The council was freed up to oversee that the congregational life, business issues and ministries were congruent with our vision and values. The ministries would focus on living out the mission, lead by the vision and values.

Governance and Committees

*Church Council
Executive Committee
Audit Committee
Mutual Ministry Committee
Finance Committee
Property Management Committee
Nominating Committee
Call Committee
Education Endowment and Scholarship Committee
Mission Endowment Fund Committee*

The Ministries of United in Faith

*Worship, Music and the Arts
Stewardship
Outreach and Hospitality
Youth Ministry
Children's Ministry
Faith Development
Service and Mission
Homebound Visitation
Prayer
Fellowship
Women's*

A ministry directors team - a representative from each ministry - began meeting semi-monthly in May 2001 to plan and program mission initiatives of the congregation. Three-year plans for each ministry area were developed at a retreat in April 2002. To find gifts within the congregation to carry out ministries, Faith Development and Stewardship ministries partnered to offer programs for the discovery and deployment of gifts in the church organizations, committees and ministries.

The format of an early traditional service and a later contemporary service on Sunday mornings continued. A third Sunday service will become reality as the congregation grows. A choir provided music for the contemporary service with occasional appearances at the traditional service. A second choir for the traditional service was later formed. Midnight Mass, a musical group, accompanied worship at the contemporary service and a hand bell choir rang on special occasions. A Decorative Arts team provided seasonal decorations.

Financial giving during the first few years was lower than anticipated due to the loss of members and, perhaps, some level of dissatisfaction. Acquiring a building, calling pastors, clarifying the mission, and an active Stewardship program has reversed the trend. The congregation has increased weekly giving and contributed generously to special appeals, despite the economic downturn in 2001 – 2003.

Living the Vision

An Education Endowment and Scholarship Fund, established with funds from predecessor churches, each year has provided scholarships to students at all levels and tuition discounts to Luther North High School students. The Mission Endowment Fund, for gifts to the church through estate plans, was approved in

December 2001. This fund was established to provide annual distributions to benefit the congregation's ministries, the community and the ministries of the ELCA.

The Outreach and Hospitality ministry communicated to the community "gifts we offer that can be found no place else". On-going programs included: Our Daily Bread, a gift package delivery containing a loaf of bread to visitors; a website; major marketing campaigns including invitations, posters, banners, flyer distribution in the neighborhood, and newspaper advertising and publicity; a fall pig roast party and mission fair open to neighbors and friends (co-sponsored with Fellowship Ministry); and 'Explore Belonging' classes that explained what United in Faith was all about. This ministry also pursued grants to further outreach activities. The success of this ministry and others can be gauged by the one hundred new members received in the past two years. United in Faith was one of the few congregations in the ELCA to increase membership in this time period.

In December 1999, a Youth and Teen Group ministry was started by two of the congregations' young couples. The group experience was enhanced with the arrival of Pastor Dawn, a leader in Youth Ministries. In Fall 2001, the Northwest Chicago Community Youth Ministry, based on a successful model developed and implemented by Pastor Dawn in South Dakota, was launched in forty churches in the city and suburbs. Monthly events brought over two hundred youth together for speaker and musical events. At the local level, the program included Confirmation, resources for families, small group experiences, and learning, service and fellowship opportunities, all with the goal of passing on faith to the kids. A monthly Jesus Java Café, held between Sunday services, was only one of the many fundraising events that supported the entire youth program. Youth have attended national gatherings (a group of nineteen are planning to attend the 2003 Atlanta event) and mission trips (eight youth went to the Bahamas in the summer of 2002). In 2002 participation in this ministry was large enough to form two distinct groups – first year Confirmation and high school ministry. Youth also remained a part of the Lutheran Youth of the North Side organization that provided additional monthly service and fellowship opportunities with neighboring congregations.

Families with young children were one of the faster growing groups at United in Faith, often attracted by Vacation Bible School and Sunday School. The 2002/2003 school year marked the start of a rotational model Sunday School where stories from scripture were taught in innovative and creative ways. A video theatre, science lab, storytelling area, puppet theatre, pre-school room, drama stage and computer lab were all situated in the West building. Units of study lasted one month and members with varied gifts volunteered as teachers for each unit. While children were always welcomed at worship services, a staffed playroom was available during the contemporary service.

Faith Development opportunities expanded, offering spiritual gifts discovery, Lutheran Spirituality study, 'how to do Bible study' classes, adult Christian education targeted to those beginning their faith journeys, Lent programs (including the 2003 speaker series, The Holy Land in Conflict), The Lutheran magazine 'every home' subscription, a donation drive which supplied the church with seventy Bibles and Pastor Greg's Book Club. A Resource Center began to be developed.

Service and Mission ministry focused on feeding the hungry and caring for the elderly. The group has been instrumental in bringing the Golden Diners and the Food Pantry to United in Faith. They have offered individuals opportunities to serve in many arenas such as the food pantry, Golden Diners and a soup kitchen.

In October 2001 the City of Chicago's Golden Diner program, housed in one of the predecessor churches, was welcomed to United in Faith. Participation reached capacity as seniors received an inexpensive, nourishing lunch four days a week along with companionship, exercise, entertainment and educational events.

The St. Cyprian's Food Pantry relocated to the West building in February 2002 when its former site was shut down. United in Faith continued to donate food and money, and Christmas gifts to over seventy of the children served by the pantry.

A Homebound Visitation ministry began in March 2001 to involve members in shut-in visits. Volunteers regularly brought the sacrament and devotional materials, gifts from the Arts and Crafts group, and news from the congregation. Audiocassette tapes and VHS tapes of Sunday services also became available.

Prayer Ministry began to engage in intercessory prayer in June 2001. New methods to submit individual prayer requests were designed.

Fellowship in the faith community was an important aspect of the identity of United in Faith. Fellowship ministry directed the Sunday coffee hours, the annual pig roast (along with Outreach Ministry), holiday celebrations such as St. Patrick's Day dinners, Oktoberfest, Veterans Day Salute and Mardi Gras parties (along with Youth Ministry).

The Women of the ELCA organization continued to offer lunch and programs on a monthly basis. The first annual Women's Spring Brunch was held in May 2001. The church men served the women and a worship opportunity included Pastor Dawn's personification of a biblical character. One circle, Dorcas, continued to meet monthly for Bible study.

The Arts and Crafts group created gifts to sell (using the proceeds to donate to worthy causes) and gifts to donate, brightening the day for someone with a special remembrance.

The Seniors Club met monthly and provided educational events, fun, entertainment and food to sixty-five seniors.

What is a Lutheran church without bazaars and rummage sales? These have occurred annually and proceeds were donated to the special funds of the congregation.

The ministry of hospitality became well known and organizations sought meeting space. Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Al-Anon, AA, Survivors of Incest Anonymous, and a Hispanic Bible study were all housed in the buildings. Ministries and programs at United in Faith brought over one thousand people through the doors each week.

United in Faith has become a model for church consolidations, taking bold moves for mission and not for survival. It has become a model for ministry by setting a vision and values to guide its ministries. Members and pastors are often asked to consult with congregations across the nation. The Board of Directors of The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago has made a site visit.

United in Faith has been blessed. It is no longer a congregation wandering in the wilderness. Ministries may change, expand and grow as they respond to the mission to serve God in the neighborhood and the world. United in Faith has a vision "to be a community of united disciples offering gifts to the world that can be found no place else".

Thanks be to God!

TIMELINE

November 1995	Northwest Lutheran Parish (NWLP) Reconvened Transition Team Elected (for planning purposes)
February 1996	First Parishwide Page in congregational newsletters established
June 1996	First Parishwide Vacation Bible School
September 1996	NWLP Retreat to deepen faith in the Gospel and focus on how to live out that faith doing God's mission Parishwide Confirmation Program began
October 1996	Monthly Saturday Night Service began
February 1997	Easter 1998 first suggested as goal for starting date of new consolidated church
March 1997	Deadline for vote on continuing participation in process of moving towards consolidation in each NWLP congregation (result: 9 churches voted to continue in the process)
April 1997	Friends of the New Church (FONCs) formed
May 1997	First meeting of Leadership Team (2 members elected from each church which voted to continue participation, replaces Transition Team and NWLP Delegates) Future Search Conference
June 1 1997	Parishwide Public Commitment Liturgy at Luther North High School; Leadership team installed
Summer 1997	Small group meetings to share information and hear concerns, dreams Monthly joint Sunday worship service began
September 1997	Eight churches vote 'yes' on binding resolution to consolidate Final vote on new church name: United in Faith Lutheran Church New church council formed (2 members from each predecessor church and the FONCs)
October 1997	Decision made to come together as one congregation on Easter Sunday 1998
January 1998	Final vote for consolidation of 8 churches into one Not-For-Profit corporation known as United in Faith Lutheran Church
February 24 1998	Incorporation for United in Faith Decision made to hold worship services at the former St Andrew's site until a permanent site was found
Good Friday 1998	Last services in former churches
Easter 1998 (April 12) Service at Taft High School marked beginning of consolidated congregation of United in Faith	
April 19 1998	Worship began at the former St. Andrews Church
May 1998	First Confirmation
July 12, 1998	Charter Sunday
August 1998	Mission Statement adopted
September 1998	Firm retained to sell the former church properties; project team appointed
November 1998	Constitution ratified
December 1998	Auction of 8 former churches (largest offering of churches) Easter Service sited in Pioneer Press 1998 Year in Review First mission fair held Call committee commences work
January 1999	'8 struggling churches on Chicago's Northside merged' was named as one of the top 5 religion stories in the ELCA in 1998 as reported in The Lutheran magazine
April 1999	Vote to enter into negotiations to purchase former Vail printing site
June 16 1999	Contract to purchase former Vail site signed
October 1999	Congregation consideration of Community Inquiry Report – defining mission and determining how to best reach out to neighbors First vote on pastoral candidates
November 29 1999	Closed on the purchase of the former Vail site

Nov – Dec 1999	Forums to review architectural plans
December 1999	Youth and Teen Group formed
February 2000	Resignation of entire council
May 2000	Construction started at Irving Park site
June 2000	Second call committee began work
September 2000	Second vote on pastoral candidates
October 25 2000	Began moving from former St Andrews site to new United in Faith site
November 5 2002	First worship services at new site

November 26 2000 Dedication of new church building and Installation of Pastors

February 2001	Monthly Jesus Java Café began
March 2001	Home Communion ministry begun
	Adoption of vision and values
May 2001	First Annual Women's Spring Brunch
May 2001	Ministry Directors began to meet
June 2001	Prayer Ministry began
July 2001	Ministry director and ministry descriptions created
September 2001	House of God Warming Party
Fall 2001	NW Chicago Community Youth Ministry begins
Fall 2001	Windows to the World Capital Appeal for additional facility rehab
October 2001	City of Chicago Golden Diners program came to United in Faith
	Permission giving constitution adopted
December 2001	Mission Endowment Fund formation approved
February 2002	St. Cyprians Food Pantry moved to United in Faith
April 2002	Ministry directors and teams hold planning retreat to develop 3 year plans
Summer 2002	8 youth and 3 adults went to Bahamas on mission trip
September 2002	Come as You are Party
Fall 2002	Opening of West building to Sunday Church School after renovations; began new rotation with labs in Arts & Crafts, Puppet Theatre, computer, Story Telling, Science Lab, Pre-Kindergarten
	19 youth and adults signed up for July 2003 National Youth Gathering in Atlanta

United in Faith Represents 730 Years of Ministry

United in Faith	1998-	5 years and counting!
Gladstone Park	1936-1998	62 years
Holy Communion	1966-1998	32 years
Belmont Park	1918-1966	48 years
Gethsemane	1921-1966	45 years
First Gethsemane	1870-1921	51 years
Lebanon	1904-1921	17 years
Medill Avenue	1927-1998	71 years
Nebo	1901-1998	97 years
Our Lord's	1934-1998	64 years
Our Savior's English	1909-1998	89 years
Peace	1923-1998	75 years
St. Andrew's	1924-1998	74 years