



1975 - 2000

*I rejoiced with those who said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.”*

*Psalm 122:1*

The fourth quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, also the fourth quarter of First Lutheran Church’s first century, began with our church being led by Pastor Paul Blunck. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Pastor Blunck was installed on October 3, 1965. He served our congregation faithfully until his retirement on October 3, 1993.

On December 13, 1977 First Lutheran’s Youth Group applied for permission to the office of the city clerk to use Higgins Avenue on December 24, 1977 for a procession of the Nativity scene. Approval

was granted for 5 to 6 people and 1 donkey. All went well until late in the evening when the 4 foot high welsh pony mare (donkey) that participated in the Nativity scene was reported missing. A few minutes after the mare was reported lost, authorities were informed that a “little horse” was running loose near the intersection of Beverly and Arthur Avenues. Eventually she was caught and returned home. The practice of having a “live” Nativity scene at First Lutheran during the Christmas season continued for many years and was a favorite sight noticed by many Missoulians.

In May of 1979 LWML hosted a Mothers Day Tea. All ladies were asked to wear their wedding gowns to the tea. Some borrowed gowns from friends or family. Traffic on Higgins was slowed to a crawl as heads turned to view the scene of many “brides” posing for pictures in front of the church.

In 1980 First Lutheran purchased a new organ which was dedicated in a special service on December 7. The organ was furnished and installed by Rogers Music Co.

In September of 1982 the first stained glass window, “The Ascension” (pictured on the first page of this chapter), was designed and crafted by Lisa Blunck (Pastor’s daughter), and installed in our church by Art Miller. Lisa crafted 7 additional stained glass windows which were installed during the next few years. These beautiful windows were later incorporated into our new South Avenue sanctuary.



*In September of 1987 Pastor Paul Blunck was honored for his 30 years in the Ministry. Pastor and Doris were chauffeured to the church by Pete Wiltgen in his antique car. Pastor Pullmann (shown above near Pastor Blunck) was a special guest at the event.*

In August of 1984 Rev. John Fritz was installed as Assistant Pastor of First Lutheran. He was ordained at Trinity Lutheran Church in Wausau, WI. His ministry at First would include service to the University of Montana students and deaf people in the Missoula area. In January of 1988 Pastor Fritz accepted a call to serve Hope Lutheran church in Aurora, Ill.

In early spring of 1988 Vicar Mark Piepenbrink began a year of vicarage working mainly with the youth of First Lutheran. In the summer of 1989, several youth attended the LCMS gathering in Denver under the leadership of Vicar Mark.

Pastor Mark A Schultz was called to serve First Lutheran as assistant pastor and was installed on January 14, 1990. He was born in McCook Nebraska on Nov 5, 1954 and graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary at Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1983. He served Concordia Lutheran church in Forsyth preceding his call to First Lutheran. In the fall of 1998 Pastor Schultz accepted a call to serve in the mission field of Thailand.

In June of 1989 considerations were underway for larger facilities - either a new building or different location. Voters authorized the Parish Planning council to explore the possibility of a new facility. Fred Eggers from Denver conducted a feasibility study of present location expansion and also for new facilities.

His report was presented to the voting assembly in January 1990. As a result of this meeting, a Facility Planning Committee was established to investigate all options regarding the present facility and or a different facility. Members appointed to serve on this committee were Dede Leineau, Norm Balko, Glenn Kautz, Chip Johnson, Glen Stocking, Dave Christensen, Beverly Baisch, Susan Weatherly and Loretta Chambers.

Several parcels were selected by this committee for review by the congregation and voting assembly.

Parcel A: Six acres located between McDonald and 34<sup>th</sup> on Russell Street.

Parcel B: 5.63 acres located on Gharrett, approximately 500 feet below the water tower and bordering backyards of the homes on Kinnikinnik.

Parcel C: 1.92 acres bordering Hillview Way and Longview Drive Parcel:

D: Zipperian property located across from Cold Springs School. Wall-Mart presently occupies a portion of this property.



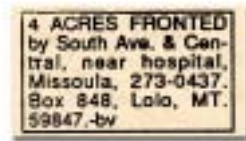
*Pastor Paul Blunck and Doris and Pastor John Fritz and Carla. Christmas 1987*



*Pastor Mark Schultz, Arnie Rigoni, and Pastor Blunck in the office.*

In the fall of 1991, members of First Lutheran responded favorably to financial recommendations by Lutheran Stewardship Counselors from Concordia in Portland, OR. Tom Grunow and Roger Clark for land acquisition and later, a building phase. This special funding effort would be pictured as a “stepping stone’ in stewardship and ministry growth for members of First Lutheran. Continued funding for the proposed building could be made with some consideration to the availability of Lutheran Church extension Fund for a loan, as well as utilizing Laborers For Christ.

The present site for future First Lutheran was advertised in the Messenger on March 3, 1992. In early 1992 after many months, hours and days of questionnaires, videos of present facilities and valued input from congregational members a parcel of land was purchased on South Avenue near Reserve Street in anticipation of building a new church home for First Lutheran. The congregation stepped out in faith to fund the major construction project.



*The newspaper ad - shown actual size - listing the property First Lutheran eventually purchased for its new church site.*

In September of 1993 Mark Hofferber, son of Lee and Judith Hofferber of First Lutheran was installed as Vicar at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Poway, California.

In early 1998, “The First in Christ” Stewardship Campaign was undertaken with the assistance of consultant, Pathways Ministries. The focus of the effort was on stewardship renewal and spiritual



*The 'First In Christ' Leadership Committee, Pictured are: front row Steve Stiff, Butch Lloftsgarden, Naomi Madden, Meighan Hanich, RuthLentz, back row: Pastor ?, Bob Lehmann, Lee Hofferber, Paul May, Jayne Hanich, Norm Balko, Greg Hanich, Dona Boschee, Sandy Druyvestein, Terry Druyvestein, Melissa Johns, Herb Hanich, Bob Boschee, and Stacy Timm. Not pictured - Jack Sundt.*

growth with goals to increase stewardship of life, develop financial support for a new worship facility and increase congregational fellowship. The process to achieve these objectives included Bible studies, prayer vigils and fellowship events.

God blessed the “First in Christ” effort with the desired spiritual growth, increased stewardship and fellowship and with pledges of about \$450,000 for the new worship facility on South Avenue. The increase in ministry and membership and the completed church facility give evidence of the blessings shared through “First in Christ.”

After many years of discussion, planning, and prayers the day of groundbreaking to expand and improve our church’s facilities arrived. As it turned out, the date for this major event wasn’t the most ideal due to the time of year...February 28, 1999. Yet, because of commitments and scheduling of contracts of earth moving and site preparation in a few days following, there was no alternative. Ideal weather conditions could not be a factor. What was necessary was to provide facilities for the congregation in the event of inclement weather.

During this time we were in a vacancy and in the process of calling a pastor. We were being served by Pastor Ray Wiegert of Messiah Lutheran Missoula, and Pastor Herbert Schiefelbein-retired, living at Seeley Lake. Both were able to serve us on the afternoon of the scheduled groundbreaking date.

A committee was appointed to prepare and provide the needs for this joyful, historical, and God pleasing event. The first consideration of the committee was to provide shelter in the event of snowfall or rain. A 20’x 40’ tent was erected. The vacancy pastors prepared the service program including several hymns. So, we needed accompaniment to lead us in an outdoor festivity. Our church organist,



*February 28, 1999 - The Groundbreaking ceremony at the 2808 South Avenue property.*

Melissa Johns, came to the rescue by establishing a youth band. She led and directed the band with an electric keyboard. The choir also sang with the keyboard accompaniment.

A staff of men marked out a parking area to keep traffic flow organized, which, at the time, was rough terrain. The LWML prepared food and refreshments to serve at the close of the service to help us celebrate. Everything worldly and physically we could provide for was in order. All we needed was nice weather.

February 28, 1999 was a Sunday. Regular worship services were held as always at our church on Higgins Avenue at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m. We drove to church that morning in a cold, drizzling, winter rain. It was severe enough to cause the Board of Lay Ministers to consider a postponement of the groundbreaking event. However, the Groundbreaking committee decided to inform the members to dress for the weather and enjoy the wonderful event we had long been looking forward to. Despite the rain and cold, at 2:00 p.m. the people came and the parking lot was overflowing! The tent was too small to shelter us and fortunately, many brought umbrellas and wore rain gear.

Pastor Wiegert and Pastor Schiefelbein, began the service under the tent roof because the rain poured. The youth band accompanied us in the opening hymn. After the sermon, the Pastors led the march to the cross placed at the groundbreaking site. As we were walking to the cross it stopped raining and the sun broke through the clouds and shined down on us. The groundbreaking ceremony was glorious with Pastors and Board Chairmen each turning a shovel of earth in His name. The service concluded with a hymn sung by the congregation and the benediction by Pastor Weigert.



*The Groundbreaking Ceremony  
February 28, 1999  
Pastor Schiefelbein, Pastor Wiegert, Josh Reil*

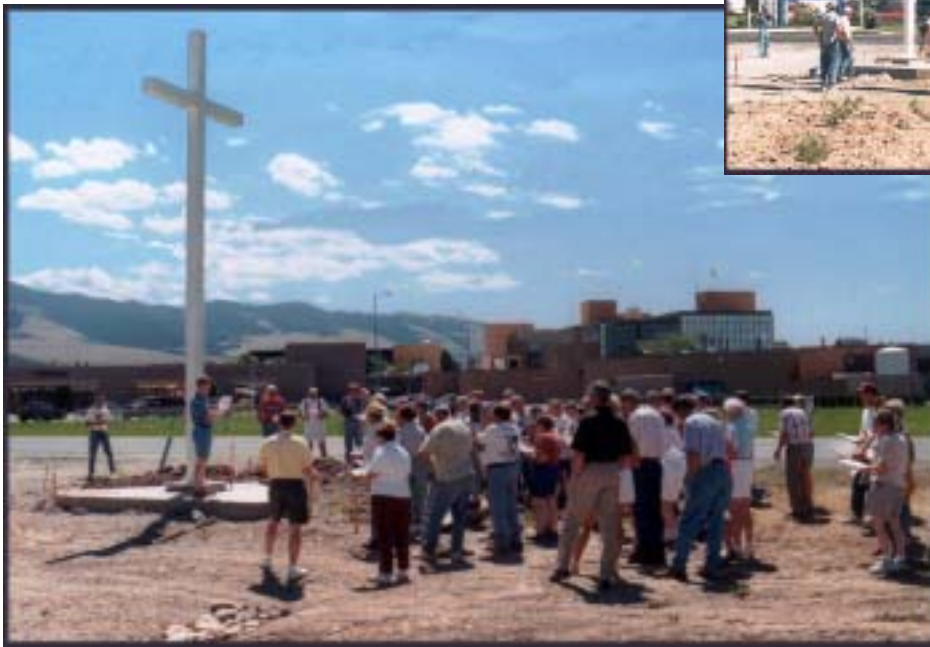
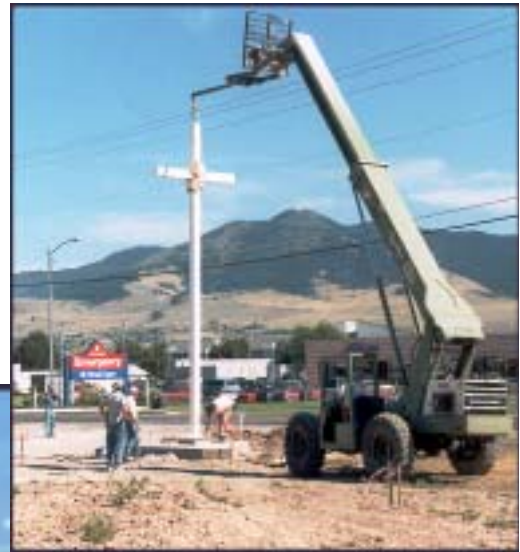
As we proceeded back to the tent, where the food provided by the LWML was sheltered, it began to rain once more. We all knew that God's Divine presence was with us at the very beginning of the building of our new church home...is today...and will be forever.

Pastor David W. Renfro was called to serve First Lutheran in the spring of 1999 and was installed as our shepherd on July 11, 1999. Pastor David Renfro was born April 10, 1960 at Wichita, Kansas, the son of Robert and Doris Renfro. He graduated from St. John's College, Winfield, Kansas in 1982 and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1986. He was ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry and installed as pastor of St. John Lutheran Church, Clarinda, Iowa on June 28, 1986 and served that congregation until November 1989. He then served as pastor of St. Paul Lutheran, Aurelia, Iowa until June 1999.



*Pastor Renfro's Installation July 11, 1999*

On July 31, 1999 First Lutheran held a special service dedicating the beautiful cross placed at the street entrance of our church property. The cross was donated by Walt and Dena Becker and built by the Becker Fire Equipment Company in Casper, WY. It is approximately 24 feet tall and 8 feet wide at the cross bar. Constructed of aluminum and transported to the location by truck, it stands tall as a reminder of God's grace and forgiveness through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Two other crosses enhancing our facility were also donated by the Beckers.



*Installation, above right, and Dedication of the cross, July 1999.*



In the wall behind the cornerstone a time capsule was placed containing the following items:

LCMS Medallion	FLY Paper
Construction & Building Pictures	Welcome to First Lutheran Brochure
Communion Card	Missoulian – <i>January 1, 2000</i>
Cross-section of outdoor cross	First Lutheran Newsletter
LSF Newsletter	First In Christ – Crosses and Materials
Member Name Tags	Hymnal – Lutheran Worship
Portals of Prayer Book	Bible – NIV
Membership Directory	Current Congregation Constitution
News from our New Church site	History of Congregation
Church Bulletins	Signatures of dedication service attendees

First Lutheran Church's cornerstone was laid on March 5, 2000 - one year and five days after groundbreaking. Much of the structure was now complete. The stone walls were laid during the month of February 2000 and the cornerstone was placed in the stone at the main entrance in the carport. The celebration service was held during the time scheduled for Bible class between the 8:30 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday worship and was attended by the majority of the membership. Church services were still being held at the Higgins Avenue church and people traveled to the South Avenue site for the ceremony.

On Sunday, May 21, 2000 the dedication service of praise and thanksgiving for our new church building was held. Many former members, Laborers for Christ workers, as well as current members and new members shared in the celebration.

Notes of interest from the day's bulletin described several of the beautiful features incorporated in the sanctuary. The altar, pulpit, and lectern were designed and constructed by Eugene Lange of Lolo, Mt. in oak wood with a cherry stain. The baptismal font was commissioned from glass artist Lucartha Kohler of Pittsburgh, PA. It is handcrafted of fine glass in the shape of a scallop shell, an ancient symbol of Holy Baptism within the Christian Church. A beautiful stained glass dove suspended above the font was donated by the Greg Hanich family in celebration of the baptism of Madeline Hanich - the first baptism in our new church! The stained glass windows were brought from our former location. The windows, designed and crafted by Lisa Wills (Blunck), of First Lutheran, depict familiar Bible stories. Windows on the east side show the Old Testament stories of Cain and Abel, Noah, Jacob's Ladder, and Daniel. West side windows illustrate events from the New Testament including the birth of Christ, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The balcony railing was designed and constructed by Norm

Balko of First Lutheran. The focal point is the Lamb of God (symbol of Jesus) flanked by the Alpha and Omega - the Beginning and the End - biblical symbols of Jesus.

Not only was the inside of the church beautifully appointed for the dedication day, but the outdoor landscaping was complete with blooming flowers, bushes, shrubs and trees. Thanks to many hours of volunteer work by Inga Baitis and her many helpers.



*Dedication Service - May 21, 2000*

Today, First Lutheran offers a variety of ministry opportunities to enhance the spiritual and fellowship life of its members. Wednesday family night brings people of all ages together for camaraderie and spiritual growth. The Lutheran Women's Missionary League - formerly the Ladies Aid society - serves those in need both locally and throughout the world. Other ministries include Christian childcare and preschool, youth groups, choir, Bible studies and fellowship groups.

First Lutherans Centennial Celebration, a service of praise and thanksgiving celebrating 100 years of sharing His blessings was held on December 3, 2000.

First Lutheran members and guest pastors assisted in the service of celebration. The evening concluded with a catered dinner for approximately 300 guests. A slide presentation of events and pictures during the last 100 years was a walk down memory lane for many of those present.

The faces may have changed over the past 100 years, but First Lutheran has continued the mission Jesus established nearly 2000 years ago—to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptize them and teach them about the truth that Jesus revealed.



*May 14, 2000*