



Merger News

BETTER TOGETHER

When First Lutheran opened its doors in 1944, it was the first Missouri Synod congregation in Greenwich, though not the first Lutheran church. St. Paul, a member of the Slovak Synod, had been formed some forty years earlier. In those days, the Slovak immigrants of St. Paul held services in Slovak, while the membership of First Lutheran consisted mostly of English-speaking Germans.

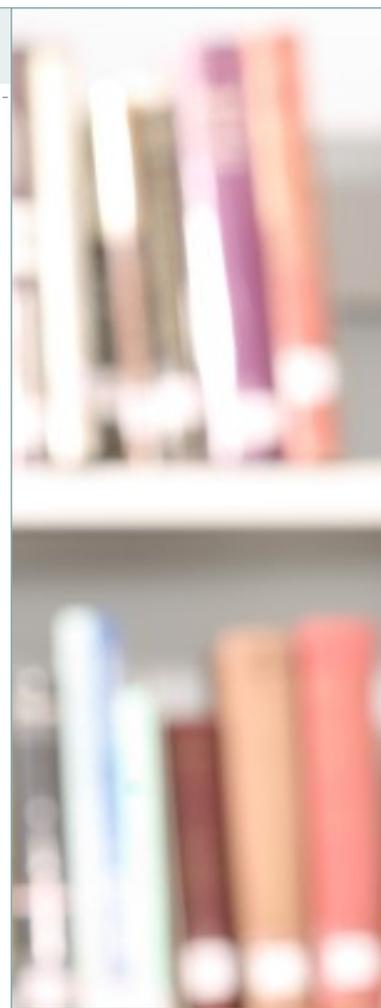
Nearly 80 years later, much has changed. With the merger of the Missouri and Slovak synods, St. Paul has been a member of the LCMS since 1971. Services at St. Paul have been conducted only in English since the retirement of Pastor Ballas about twenty years ago. For the last six years, First Lutheran and St. Paul have been served by a single pastor. No longer divided by language or synodical affiliation, the members of both churches have increasingly considered a joint future as a merged congregation. In May of this year (2021), the voting members of both churches made the unanimous decision to merge. Even though many details still need to be worked out, it is clear that First Lutheran and St. Paul will be better together.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Mergers are bittersweet. Difficult decisions and compromises must be made. However, in the following areas, our churches are far ahead of the curve:

- **Pastor:** If each church has its own pastor, they must agree on who will continue to serve the merged congregation.
- **Church Administrator:** Likewise, if there are two administrators / secretaries, one of these must be let go.
- **Location:** Many churches considering a merger are 40 or 50 miles apart. Neither membership wants to drive a great distance to church.
- **Property Value:** By the time many churches begin to seriously think about merging, their properties and buildings have been mortgaged or fallen into serious disrepair.

These issues can be major hurdles for congregations considering a merger. Thankfully, not for us. First Lutheran and St. Paul are blessed to be served by the same pastor. This year our churches jointly hired a new office administrator (Peter Cerow). Our locations are only two miles apart (this is exceedingly rare), and our properties and buildings are in relatively good condition. Certainly, we still face some difficult choices, but we have a great head start on our road to the merger.



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MERGER COMMITTEE

At the end of last year (2020), the members of St. Paul and First Lutheran authorized the formation of a joint Merger Committee. This committee was tasked with studying and discussing the issues related to our merger, and then presenting its findings and recommendations to the congregations. Along with Pastor, three members of each congregation agreed to serve on the committee.

The committee members are as follows:

- Tony Dorazio, Chairman
Board of Stewardship, FLC
- Amy Young
Treasurer, FLC
- Sue Darula
Financial Secretary, FLC
- Jack Dobrucky
President, St. Paul
- Tom Dianis
Treasurer, St. Paul
- Bea Walko
Board of Education, St. Paul

“Institutions come and go, but the church founded by Christ will endure.”

BUILT ON THE ROCK

In Matthew 16, Jesus said to Peter, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). Later, Peter would preach a sermon leading to the baptism of three thousand people. Perhaps we could consider this the founding day of the First Church of Jerusalem.

But where is that church today? In 70 AD the city of Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by the Roman army. That church no longer exists. And yet, Jesus kept and still keeps his promise to build his church.

Like the church of Jerusalem, First Lutheran and St. Paul are transient institutions, temporary shelters for believers as we travel this vale of tears. But our true membership is with the Church Triumphant in heaven. Institutions come and go, but the church founded by Christ will endure.

— Pastor Scamman

PLAN OF ACTION

At our last congregational meeting, Stephen Walko, a member of St. Paul, made an excellent observation: There are two approaches an organization will often take in making big decisions, such as a merger:

A Single Big Package: This method requires that every last detail be spelled out up front. The advantage is that people can consider all the facts before making any decisions. The disadvantage is that people may reject the whole package if they disagree with a single point.

One Bite at a Time: This method tackles each issue individually. It is possible in this way to make great progress by agreeing to focus on one item at a time. However, because one decision often affects another, people may be hesitant to make what they consider to be uninformed decisions.

Stephen Walko suggested a third way, which is a hybrid of the methods above:

The Roadmap: This method lays out a basic roadmap of the path ahead. People are given a list of important decisions that will need to be made, along with an estimated timeline for the process. Although not every detail is spelled out, people will have enough of an overview to feel comfortable making incremental decisions.

After discussing the three methods outlined by Stephen, the Merger Committee recommends the Roadmap as the best approach for our congregational merger.



A few twists and turns are to be expected.

ROADMAP

The Merger Committee has identified a working draft of items to be addressed. (This list is not necessarily exhaustive or in order. Target dates are subject to change.)

- ~~Formation of Merger Committee~~ (December 2020)
- ~~Declaration of Intention to Merge~~ (April 2021)
- Decision on Church Name (September 2021)
- Decision on District Affiliation (September 2021)
- Retention of Legal Counsel (September 2021)
- Professional Assessment of Properties (Fall 2021)
- Approval of New Constitution & Bylaws (Winter 2021/2022)
- Signing of Legal Documents (Winter 2021/2022)
- Transfer of Active Members into Merged Congregation (Winter 2021/2022)
- Election of Officers (Spring 2022)
- Consolidation of Bank Accounts & Assets (Spring 2022)
- Decision on Church Properties (Summer 2022)
- Final Service in Retiring Building (Summer 2022)
- Possible Formation of Legacy Trust Fund (Fall 2022)

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

Every congregation has a life cycle. While the one church of Christ is eternal, congregations are not. As a congregation nears the end of its life, the surviving members are often troubled by feelings of guilt or shame. “What did we do wrong? How did my grandfather’s church die on my watch?”

Here’s the truth: things change. This is not a mark of failure; it is simply a fact of life. When it is time for a congregation to close its doors, though there will always be a certain degree of sadness, it is important to remember to celebrate a mission accomplished.

For nearly 80 (First Lutheran) and 120 years (St. Paul), the mission of God has been faithfully carried out in our congregations. The Word of God has been preached. The Sacraments have been rightly administered. Many, many saints have now been transferred to the kingdom of heaven. This is worth celebrating, indeed!

And now, in a changing landscape, it is clear that the path of our two congregations will be joined in some way. There will be change, but this does not mean failure.

God has blessed both congregations with assets that can be used to further his kingdom. Many possibilities are open to us. Rather than being filled with regret by how things have changed over the years, we can rejoice in what God has done through our congregations as we consider how best to move forward.

No matter what happens, the mission of God will continue to be accomplished, and the future of Christ’s church will be glorious beyond all imagining.

— Pastor Scamman

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

Our merged congregation will need a new Constitution and Bylaws. Sue Darula (FLC) and Bea Walko (St. Paul), both members of the Merger Committee, volunteered to work with Pastor to draft these documents.

The existing Constitutions of First Lutheran and St. Paul are remarkably similar. Much of the work so far has been a simple matter of “copy and paste,” though each congregation will need to be ready to make some concessions.

When the drafts of the Constitution and Bylaws are complete, the documents will be presented to both congregations for discussion and review. If and when they are approved by the congregations, they will be sent to the district for a final review before taking effect.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Tom Dianis (St. Paul) and Amy Young (FLC), treasurers of their respective congregations, collaborated to prepare the following financial report:

ASSETS / LIABILITIES		
	FLC	St. Paul
Cash/Liquid Assets	\$76,725	\$346,767
Debt	\$86,534	–
Property Value / Assessment	\$7,683,690	\$4,157,370
Total	\$7,673,881	\$4,504,137
PROJECTED YEARLY INCOME		
Envelope / Plate	\$65,000	\$61,000
Hispanic Church	\$9,600	\$37,200
Parsonage	–	\$37,200
St. Paul	\$66,214	
Byram Library	–	\$6,000
AA	–	\$5,000
Tag Sale	–	\$2,600
Parking	\$19,160	–
Misc		\$13,900
Total	\$159,974	\$162,900
PROJECTED YEARLY DEFICIT		
	\$30,000	\$20,000

If our two congregations were to merge while continuing to use both buildings in the same way we do today, the combined yearly deficit is estimated to be around \$50,000. However, the sale (or lease, if a suitable tenant could be found) of either building would substantially alter this projection.

TEMPERATURE CHECK

On July 25th, voting members of both congregations met after the Divine Service with the intention of voting on a new name and district of affiliation. In the course of discussion it became clear that we were not yet ready to vote on these matters. The following areas of concern were raised:

- A lack of written information concerning the merger process and voting procedure
- The need to hear directly from the presidents of our two current districts
- Some confusion about the wording of the ballot

Instead of a binding vote, the chairman opted to use the prepared ballots as a sort of temperature check, to see where the members currently stand on the issues of church name and district affiliation. The results of the vote showed that the members of First Lutheran are willing to adopt the name St. Paul. Regarding affiliation with the New England District, it was clear that some members of St. Paul had unresolved questions.

The Merger Committee is working to address the issues raised above. This newsletter is the first effort to provide more written information about the merger. In the coming weeks, we will hear from both district presidents. And any future ballots will address a single issue at a time.

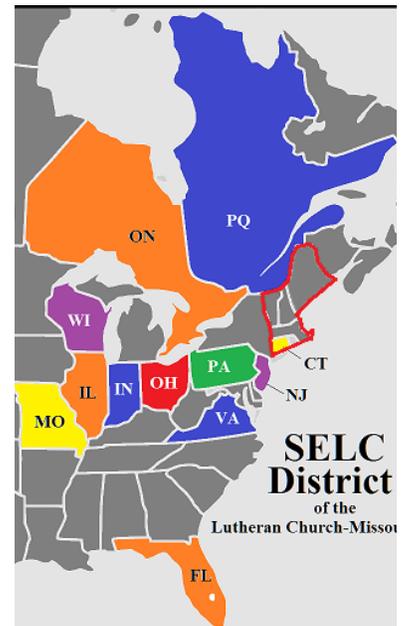
DISTRICT AFFILIATION

Our merger presents a unique challenge: First Lutheran and St. Paul, though only two miles apart, are not in the same district (sub-division) of the Missouri Synod. First Lutheran is in the New England District (pictured right with a red outline), while St. Paul is part of the Slovak District (SELC), which extends from Quebec to Florida.

Each district is further divided into circuits of about 8-10 churches. First Lutheran is in Circuit #7—Greenwich to Cheshire, CT. The pastors of Circuit #7 meet one morning each month, and the drive is usually never more than an hour.

St. Paul is part of the Eastern Circuit of the SELC—Quebec to Virginia. Depending on the location, it may take the pastors of the Eastern Circuit 8 hours to travel to a meeting. The Eastern Circuit meets once or twice a year, usually for an overnight conference.

District affiliation especially affects a congregation during a pastoral vacancy or when district leaders resolve a congregational dispute. Otherwise, the district is chiefly a means of support for the pastor. As a simple matter of geography, the Merger Committee recommends that our merged congregation be part of the New England District.



“Each congregation will need to be ready to make some concessions.”

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

When two congregations merge, they may choose to keep one (or both) of the original church names or adopt a brand-new name. For example, when St. John and Zion Lutheran of Wisner, NE merged, they chose to be called Zion-St. John Lutheran Church.

Some people have thrown around this sort of hybrid name for our merged church: First St. Paul Lutheran Church, or perhaps, St. Paul the First Lutheran Church. The latter is an attempt at humor, but in either case, a hybrid name seems a bit unwieldy.

Were we to choose a brand-new name, there are many good possibilities: Hope, Peace, Faith, St. Peter, Zion, Redeemer, Good Shepherd, Our Savior, Trinity, etc...

There are pros and cons to choosing a new name. With a new name comes the idea of a fresh beginning—two churches coming together to form a brand-new entity. On the other hand, a new name would mean starting from scratch with the outside community. (It also would require more paperwork with the state, IRS, etc...) In addition, if we begin using a new name, it is likely that the community would simply

continue referring to the church by its original, more familiar name.

Having weighed these considerations, the Merger Committee recommends that we keep one of our existing names. The names First Lutheran and St. Paul have earned nearly 80 and 120 years of goodwill within the community, respectively. But which name should be kept? Of the two, the committee finds that the name St. Paul has more to offer.

Firstly, it is a solid, biblical name. St. Paul was one of the Apostles, chosen by Christ to proclaim the Gospel. Secondly, the name St. Paul is more widely known within Greenwich. Many outside groups use the building during the week, and St. Paul, with its larger membership, has been able to offer more services to the community. (i.e. VBS, spaghetti creole dinners...)

For these reasons, the Merger Committee recommends that our new congregation be called St. Paul Lutheran Church, capitalizing on the goodwill and recognition this name has within Greenwich and the surrounding area.



TOO MANY MEETINGS?

Some members are of the opinion that we need more time to meet and discuss each issue. Others were ready to make decisions months ago. How can we move forward with unity?

The merger committee recognizes that many of our members care deeply about certain issues, yet are not able to attend every meeting.

In the future, a printed summary of the notes from each congregational meeting will be made available at the back of the church. This will allow members not in attendance to stay abreast of current issues and still be able to cast an informed vote when the time comes.

CALENDAR

- **August 18th, Wednesday:** Meeting with Pastor Beinke, acting president of the New England District to discuss district affiliation. Dinner: 5:30 pm; Meeting: 6:30 pm.
- **August 25th, Wednesday:** Meeting with Pastor Vinovskis, president of the SELC (Slovak) District to discuss district affiliation. Dinner: 5:30 pm; Meeting: 6:30 pm.
- **August 29th, Sunday:** Congregational meeting following the Divine Service to discuss the name and district affiliation for our merged congregation. Printed copies of the ballots for the September 19th vote will be distributed at this time.
- **September 19th, Sunday:** Congregational meeting following the Divine Service to vote on the name and district affiliation for our merged congregation. Each issue will be addressed separately by individual ballot:

BALLOT FOR CHURCH NAME

Name of our merged congregation:

Circle one:

- a) St. Paul Lutheran Church
- b) First Lutheran Church
- c) Other: _____

BALLOT FOR DISTRICT

District affiliation of our merged congregation:

Circle one:

- a) New England District
- b) SELC (Slovak) District

