

A Chapel for Our University Youth

To Own or to Borrow?

One day, as I walked to the campus, I passed a medical fraternity house. There were several students in the front yard, among them a dentistry student who belonged to our Lutheran Church. I asked him what he was doing among the medics. He said, "I came here to borrow a shirt so that I could attend the Gamma Delta meeting tonight."

For all these years, Gamma Delta, the large group of Lutheran students at the University of Minnesota, has been borrowing somebody's shirt to carry out its program. For the students the week begins with a Sunday morning service, which is conducted in a borrowed building. The meetings, the Bible classes, the discussions, the social hours, and the many other activities are held in rented quarters. This situation has not been conducive to a healthy church-life for our students. The need for a church home of our own is great.

A Parish Without a Church

You may have read or heard that the Lutheran Church in Notown, Minnesota, was destroyed by fire. The church edifice, the parish hall, and the parsonage were totally razed. The members did not feel that they could replace the plant. So they instructed their pastor and his family to rent themselves living quarters. Several times the pastor was evicted and the members had a hard time keeping up to date on his address and telephone number. He was spending too much time seeking parsonages instead of seeking souls.

It was further decided that Sunday services should be held in the town hall at such times when the building was available. Sunday school and society meetings were to be held here and there, wherever a place could be found. Sometimes the services and meetings had to be cancelled the last minute because the owners of the buildings needed them for their own functions. The members became confused, some disgusted. Some did not come to the services anymore. The visitors and missionary prospects were not greatly impressed. People in the community kept asking the members, "Where is your church?" Finally, it became very, very evident that a congregation cannot function and flourish unless it has an adequate church plant of its own.

Our Challenge at the Campus

Change the above scene to the campus of the University of Minnesota, and you have a parish where such conditions literally prevail. It is a place where we number our Lutheran students by the hundreds and unchurched persons by the thousands. The University with an enrollment of 27,000 students is one of the very large institutions of learning in the country. It is a city in itself, comparable to one of the large cities of our state. An ordinary city of so many inhabitants we would not dare to overlook. The University is further a city that is expected to grow even larger, and to hold its size in the years to come. Higher education is not a fad. It is not only something that is here to stay. It is a movement gathering momentum each year as the demand for highly schooled and skilled persons

increases. Some educators predict that the state universities in the more populous states will harbor up to 40,000 students in the not too distant future.

The University of Minnesota, if considered a one-campus school, is rated the largest university in the United States. Located in a state that is largely Lutheran, there can be no question but that the University will have its share of Lutheran students. In fact, it now has more Lutheran students than any other university in the world. Even if we confine ourselves to Lutherans of the Synodical Conference, there is a large group for us to serve. Only the University of Wisconsin surpasses us in the number of our own Lutheran students enrolled. At that, we have 800 on the list this year, including the Twin Cities students. This is a place where our Church should build herself a strong fortress. The Minnesota District has decided to do this. The time now has come to implement these resolutions with action.

What We Ask of You in the Centennial Year

Important milestones in our history have been the three decisions:

1. To call a full-time University pastor (1939)
2. To build a University chapel and student center (1946)
3. To use the top third of the Centennial Thank-offering for the University project (1947)

The success of the first two decisions depends largely on the outcome of the third. A student pastor without a student chapel works under serious handicaps. The resolution to build a chapel and parish center reads well in print. To translate it into action, we must have the money. Rather than to come with a special collection, your District has decided to dovetail two collections. This does not only simplify matters, but puts a real selling point into the Centennial offering as far as Minnesota is concerned. For years, we have talked about the real need for a chapel at the campus. We are all in favor of building one. We know, too, that the needs of our Church at large are very pressing. The Centennial Thank-offering enables us to do justice to both causes.

Since 33 and 1/3 cents out of every dollar you give for the C.T.O. will go for the University chapel and center, I want to tell you something of the work among students, so that you can give with knowledge and with joy.

The Student Congregation

Our student assembly functions as much as possible as a normal congregation. Ours is the only Protestant group on the campus that meets on Sunday morning for a worship of its own. As a church of, for, and by the students, it meets the special spiritual needs of its members. Dr. Edmund Williamson, Dean of Students, has given his endorsement of this plan of doing church work among students. Other church bodies send their students to regular congregations in the city, where many of them will be nothing more than guests, if they attend at all. The Rev. James Boren, who serves the Presbyterian students, said at a recent meeting that the establishment of a student congregation is the best way of

meeting the spiritual needs of students. We have that kind of a campus church, in which the students take an active part. The attendance and the participation have been very good this year.

However, without a chapel of our own, we operate under crippling restrictions. The building we now use is available for an hour of worship on Sunday morning. Vespers services and the like cannot be held. With a church-home of our own, on the beautiful site that has already been purchased, attendance at the services will be even better. The chapel will preach sermons during the week. People will be able to find it of their own accord. Then it will not be necessary for that young man to say as he recently did, "Pastor, why do you keep on announcing the chapel services? We already have more than we can handle."

Needed- A Student Center

There have been times when we packed as many as ninety students into a home for a Sunday night supper. A family home is a nice place, but it cannot serve as a student center. For every event we schedule, the committees have to scout around for a place to hold it. Last fall, after considerable correspondence, we were able to announce that Dr. Walter A. Maier would speak to the students. Publicity was sent to the newspapers. A good attendance was assured. A day or so before that Sunday we were informed that place reserved would not be open to us. Then followed frantic telephone calls to lodge halls and youth centers in the area to find a place to meet. All previous plans were knocked into a cocked hat. When finally a place was found busses had to be chartered to transport the students. Yes, everybody had a good time. On the other hand many man-hours of work could have been saved if there had been a student center of our own.

Every fall we organize a chapel choir. This year we have a very good one. It consists of 40 voices. But where shall the choir rehearse? The Baptist church on campus wouldn't have us. The Student Union only rooms for conferences. When it was learned that we reserved these rooms for singing, the management threw us out. Negotiations are now going on to the choir practice in the Church of Christ auditorium and in the meantime, the choir meets in the pastor's study, that is, a part of the choir meets in the study. The other section spills over the family living room. One night of Feb. 11, that part of the parsonage which was not occupied by the choir was turned over to the three committee meetings. Even the kitchen was in use. Where, you ask, is the pastor's family on such nights? Where are his children aged 3 and 5? You guessed it. They are all over the place; that is, every place but where they should be, namely peacefully in bed.

There is, for instance, the annual Christmas party and vespers. The students want to make this colorful and attractive event. But how are they going to arrange the place and put up festive decorations when the people who own it occupy the building up to starting time? It dampens the festive spirit when you must ask the loiterers to leave and afterwards clean up their leavings.

If we had a student center that belonged to us, these preparations for a party could be made leisurely in advance. Why has that Sunday morning adult bible class not been started, when none other than the Rev. H. J. Boettcher, Counselor for Education in our District, has offered to teach it? Why, people will surely want to know, are we not having service this Good Friday? The answer is always the same: No place can be found to have them.

Let Us Not Discourage Our Youth

One beautiful night last October a Mississippi River excursion boat was chartered for a ride. There were two hundred of our young people aboard. Speaking over the public address system, the Rev. F. S. Janzow of London told of the indifference of European youth of the Christian religion. He said that this fine group of Christian students gave him courage to go back and to work the harder. A student from Denmark was asked about organized church work among the youth of his country. He said he knew of no organization in Denmark that could compare with Gamma Delta. The least we as a Church can do is to provide the physical facilities so that our Christian young people in American will maintain their interest.

One could wish that all of you parents had been present at our banquet a few weeks ago. There they were, your sons and daughters, over 150 strong. This was college youth at its best because it is a Christian youth. Their faith in Jesus Christ gave them that fine balance that unbelievers do not have, be they ever so educated. The young ladies in their formals and young gentlemen once again dressed in civilian garb would have made their fathers and mothers feel very proud of them. The wholesome enthusiasm, the clean humor, the serious reflection, the emphasis give to the part Christianity plays in the life of a collegian, all this was in evidence.

Friends, I have been on the campus six years. I see students every day, singly and in groups. I have seen them waltzing in the ballrooms, walking across the stage with their hard-earned diplomas, shouting at football games, or relaxing between classes in the union lounges. Nowhere have I seen a finer group of young people than the group we had at the banquet. If you have seen young people in places of doubtful amusement, smoking, drinking, cursing, then you will agree with me that one of the most beautiful sights one hopes to see this side of heaven is that of our Christian young people at Gamma Delta functions. I wish, too, that you parents and pastors could have been there when I, their pastor, announced that the top third of the Centennial Offering had been set aside of the University chapel and center. The spontaneous rejoicing gave every evidence of their appreciation.

A Good Investment

A business man will consider his money well invested if it earns ample dividends. Students are a good investment in the spiritual sense. They are that even now. In the course of this school year, we raised over \$1,200 for church purposes, of which the sum of \$600 has been sent to the District treasurer for missions. We have few young people who come from wealthy homes. Most of them wash dishes or work at other jobs to help their way through the University. Even at that, they are now serving us. The young man from New Ulm whose Sunday offerings average \$3.00 per Sunday is serving us more than we are serving home. The U of M graduate who founded two congregations in Kansas; the co-ed who got the ball rolling down in Louisiana and started missions there; the young couple that writes us of his efforts to start a Lutheran church in West Virginia; the many college men now on church councils, all these are serving us now.

As professional people, these students will one day be in the higher income bracket. They will be in positions of influence. By all means should we hold on to such Lutheran laymen and laywomen who represent the higher thought. The Church, like trees, should not die on tip. We need an educated laity in our church. If we want our college-bred youth to have great visions in later life and love for their church, it is for us to give them that vision at the University. It doesn't engender great devotion to one's church if the later expects her children at college to worship in empty store buildings and out-of-the-way places. At the campus is where we should put our best foot forward. An attractive church plant at the University will serve many generations of MN people, young people, that is who will come from practically every town, city, and community in the state. The blessings will feed back to the Church in countless ways.

A Gospel Church Needed At The Campus

These days, one does not insult the other Protestant churches when saying that they no longer preach the old saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. They themselves readily admit that, and boast of it. Because we are a church that still has the full Gospel, God calls us to preach it in the haunts of religious modernism. Several years ago, a high ranking official of the Mennonite Church was a summer student at the University and attended our chapel services regularly. He did this only after making sure that we were of the Missouri Synod, which he had come to know in Chicago. Why did he come? We will let him say it: "When I attended a Missouri Synod Lutheran service I am sure of hearing the Gospel." There are students of other Protestant bodies who walk past their own churches to attend our worship. There was that Southern Baptist girl who considered the chapel her church-home while studying at the university. When the mother visited her, she also came to the Sunday worship. The mother said: "You preach the old-fashioned Gospel here. My daughter has told me all about it. That's why she always come share." We must keep that type of preaching on the campus. We as the Lutheran Church, particularly as the Missouri Synod, have that sacred obligation. For this reason, too, we should lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes of God's house in this place.

When Princess Juliana of the Netherlands watched a parade of her subjects from a balcony in the royal palace, she asked her mother: "Do all those people belong to us?" "No," replied Queen Wilhelmin, "we belong to all those people." All these young people at the University do not belong to us. We belong to them. May the love of Christ constrain us all to give freely and liberally for the Centennial Thank offering and for the hoped-for, planned-for, and prayed-for University Chapel.

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