

St Paul's has embraced a "growth" theme throughout 2009. We saw it in this year's Ministry Fair, "Grow in Grace... Branching Out Through Ministry." The special congregational meeting in May centered on growth and laid out key activities for the next four years that addresses our growth. And we've themed this year's stewardship campaign "Answering God's call to grow at St Paul's."

Thirty years ago, members of St Paul's moved into a new church building. It incorporated an existing barn, which even today continues to house and lend its rustic beauty to our fellowship hall, and a newly-built sanctuary, in which we still have our Sunday worship.

Granted, over these past few years, it's been a tight squeeze with scheduling and classroom space, but we've managed. Our reconfiguration last year of the seating, instruments, altar, and speakers helped to open up the space, accommodate more people, and also to be more versatile. Those efforts have given us a little breathing room, both in terms of the space and of the Long Range or "Master Plan."

Other tangible actions we've taken to address our meeting space issues are the modular buildings, which are providing us with much-needed educational space. The cramping and close quarters experienced during Sunday School time in previous years has been alleviated. Even the nursery benefits from no more double-duty use and opens up new possibilities.

It's quite an accomplishment for those who planned our current building to have anticipated—and fairly accurately estimated—the space requirements for the then-next 30 years! To bring the numbers current, we've increased our membership by on average 5.2% each of the past four years. We need to be prepared to welcome growth as part of our mission. We expect to continue moderately growing (at 3 to 5% each year) for at least the next four years... and likely beyond. While it's good to think about our next thirty years, we'll focus tonight on the next year or two, sharing the plans and visions we anticipate to accomplish in 2010 and a little beyond, and how you can help to support these efforts.

Let's quickly examine and celebrate what's been going on at St Paul's, both over the years and at this present time:

Theatre for all ages has engaged and entertained members, family, and friends of all ages. The St Paul's Players has survived 20 years of musicals and murder mysteries. The Troupe of Acts celebrated its 10-year anniversary and participation is increasing every year. Even the Junior Troupe Workshop has been active for at least six years now.

We already recognized that our youth are special and we want to provide for their spiritual growth in addition to wonderful fellowship and service opportunities that help draw new families to St Paul's. And in time for the new school year, we welcomed Kelly Sullivan back home here at St Paul's as our new assistant youth director. From attending workshops with other churches, we found our youth program nearly unique and that our "problem" of rapid growth, particularly of worship attendance, is almost equally rare in our area.

In the past five or six years, we've seen several ministries be started and/or cultivated here at St Paul's. The Rejoicing Spirits Ministry, which has spread to over a dozen churches nationwide, celebrates its sixth anniversary this month (October 2009). Since beginning a Stephen Ministry at St Paul's in 2007, we've raised up and trained 10 Stephen Ministers and 5 Stephen Leaders. Our focus on servant ministries that extend "beyond the walls at St Paul's" is also significant and increasing. We're fostering the relationship we have with our sister parish, Muheza Lutheran Church, plus aiding other ministry efforts in Tanzania. We've also formed group of members from our congregation that will mentor and support a homeless single mother who is in the Bridge of Hope program. We're also helping to build houses in Thrivent Builds with Habitat for Humanity projects both near and far—we're currently working on a house in West Chester and will travel to Biloxi, Mississippi, in March of next year. Our youth have gone on some mission trips recently and have more planned for this coming summer.

We've also seen growth in our education opportunities, which isn't just for our children and on Sundays. We have several Bible Study groups that have formed in the last five years: Smarter Choices meets in members' homes in the evenings, enabling whole families to attend and fellowship together in a smaller group setting; the Women's Bible Study, which meets on Wednesday mornings; and a Bible Study for Mothers of Young Children, which meets in the mornings with available childcare. We've had *four* new households join our congregation where the mothers came through this Mom's Bible Study group!

And we're revitalizing some of our longer-existing ministries, such as our fresh stewardship team. Energized with the eagerness of our new Stewardship Chair, Lou Anzalone, the team is meeting the stewardship topic and our theme, "Answering God's call to grow at St Paul's," with enthusiasm.

And those are just a few of the activities and ministries that are going on at St Paul's! From St Paul's Ministry Opportunity Guidebook, there are over 100 ministries and even more opportunities than that to—as St Paul's

Mission Statement says—Announce the good news of Jesus Christ, Celebrate Christ's gracious gifts, Teach and nurture so all may grow in understanding of the gospel, Serve and minister to the needs of all people.

That's just what we have right now. There's so much more that could be done, but such enrichment can't be accomplished with the budgets, meeting space, or pastoral care that we currently have. This is where a second pastor can help to meet some needs and create opportunities. Having an additional pastor can ease the full-plate and overflowing-cup schedule of our single pastor, providing both more time and opportunity to do new member follow-up and visitation. And having two pastors won't be just double of what we currently have: Our pastors can have different foci, allowing one to develop and lead Sunday morning adult classes, while the other conduct the worship services that day. Plus there will be room on the pastors' plates to explore new opportunities and help establish new programs. ☺ Naturally, with more families joining St Paul's and more adult education classes to be held on Sunday morning, we'll need more space, which further necessitates our Building Project.

The official decision about whether to proceed with seeking for and calling a second pastor will be made in January, at the 2010 Congregational Meeting. At our congregational meeting this past May, we the members of the congregation of St Paul's Lutheran Church approved a Four-Year Plan that provided key milestones in our plans for a second pastor and building projects. We anticipate approval of a search for a second pastor at that meeting and hope to install him or her by the fourth quarter of 2010.

To recap the rest of the Four-Year Plan, we also expect to begin the multi-year capital campaign in 2010, providing a fundraising report at the 2011 annual Congregational Meeting. At the same meeting, we anticipate approval of the new building and the beginning of its construction in 2011. In 2012, another fundraising report will be given at the annual Congregational Meeting and we aim to complete construction of the new building by September. We also plan to put a new mortgage in place that year.

We hope that we've increased your awareness of the myriad of ministries and activities we have at St Paul's. We also hope that we have inspired you to bigger dreams for what we can accomplish in the next two, three, ten, and maybe even twenty or thirty years! We invite you to share your experiences and ideas here, encourage you to continue these explorations over the coming days, and to prayerfully consider what you will give to support our Mission at St Paul's throughout the coming year. Together, let's answer God's call to grow at St Paul's!