★

CHAPTER

IV.

UNIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND BUILDINGS

Another union, in the meantime, was taking place between the English-speaking Chapel Church and the German-speaking Zion Church. As early as 1906 a committee was appointed in the College Congregation to plan to raise money for a church building. First there was a proposal to unite with Zion Church, but this was deemed inadvisable at that time. Then there was talk of building a church on the campus, half of the $30,000 to be paid by the chapel congregation, half by the college. Partly because of financial difficulties, no definite action was taken by the committee.

Not only in Naperville but in many conferences all over the country between the years 1905-1910, there was much discussion of unifying the English and the German congregations. Motions were made, tabled, rescinded, and often remade. Everywhere there were "die-hards" who wanted their church services conducted in their native language, even if by this time all communication in their homes and business places was carried on in English. They seemed to feel closer to their Creator when worshipping Him in German! If only ten per cent of a congregation wanted services in German, that was sufficient to warrant their continuance in many of the churches.

In 1910 the following recommendation was sent by the trustees of the Zion (First) Church to the English chapel: "Resolved, that we, the Trustees of the First Evangelical Church of Naperville, . . . deem it advisable and believe the time has come, that we as Zion and College congregations should unite our strength and extend our usefulness in our community and lessen the burden of both societies." (By this time "Zion" and "First" are used interchangeably.) Then came a list of considerations under which union might be consummated. The offer was accepted, with some modifications, by the College Church. The services were to be conducted in English, but there might be one German preaching service held each Sunday, as long as any members so desired, but not at the time of the regular morning or evening service. (This practice actually continued until 1955 at the death of Reverend Charles Rodeseiler.) German prayer-meeting and Sunday School classes could be continued under the same regulations. The amalgamation of the two churches had been greatly accelerated in the

preceding years by the wise guidance of their respective pastors: Reverend G. W. Hallwachs of Zion and Reverend George Manshardt of Chapel.

About 1918 President Charles Blanchard of Wheaton College stayed two nights at the home of President Rall (Saturday and Sunday nights) to be able to attend a church meeting Sunday afternoon without traveling on the Sabbath Day! But it was not only PEOPLE who were not supposed to travel on Sunday. Evangelicals were admonished, "Mail your letters early enough in the week so they will reach their destination without traveling on the "Lord's Day."

The first joint meeting of the two churches was under Reverend W. A. Schutte, on May 6, 1910. This newly-appointed minister was a very gracious person, full of vitality. Dean George J. Kirn used to say, "He was so energetic—oh, so energetic!" Old timers have told how his sermons just rolled out in either German or English. Nearly every Sunday he preached three sermons.

With such a dynamic leader, it is not surprising that later on that same month at the first congregational meeting held by this "First Church of the Evangelical Association of Naperville," a committee was appointed to investigate the possibilities of building a larger church. It was resolved immediately, however, that "no operations shall be begun until $25,000 shall be secured in subscriptions and cash."

There were conflicting emotions among the members of the congregation at the tearing down of the "Old Brick Church" a few months later, in order to rebuild upon the same site. Some of the older German-speaking people in particular were nostalgic in their reminiscences of revival meetings, of marriages and ordinations and funerals held in this fifty-year-old place of worship.

Many others, however, were thrilled as they watched the new building emerge, "a stately and commodious structure," erected at a final cost of around $66,000. (The first contract for a new building let in 1910 was for $34,609, without organ, pews, lighting, plumbing, or window glass.) Much careful study on the part of Reverend Schutte and a special committee was devoted to the design of the windows. We are told that at the memorable dedication February 25, 1912, just fifty years ago, Bishop Spreng was so thrilled that he led the congregation through three "singings" of the doxology without any intermission! The sum of $7000 was pledged and paid at the dedication ceremonies.

Other contributions came from friends in Naperville and from conferences all over the country that gave generously for the building of this college-related church. When the remainder of the debt was

wiped out seven years later, we find the following comment entered in the "Jubilee Church Book," published in 1919: "This project was no small undertaking by this society, but with the enthusiasm and marked liberality, so characteristic of the members of this church, the task was finally completed."

Another building dear to the members of First Church about which many people have been making inquiries is the parsonage that shares the west side of the block where the present church and church school building now stand. Through its various renovations, this house has emerged as one of distinction and beauty. Because there has been so much discussion as to the year in which it was first constructed, two members of the history committee searched records in the vault at the Wheaton Courthouse for enlightenment. We found that Morris Sleight had received this land from the United States government on Feb. 4, 1845, without any exchange of cash. Five years later (1850) James J. Hunt purchased it from the original owner for $65. Hunt sold it four years later (1854) to John Hall for $100. Two years later (1856) Victor Fredenhagen purchased the lot for $1809. That jump in price (from $100 to $1809) established to our complete (and gleeful) satisfaction that the parsonage must have been built sometime between 1854 and 1856! Fredenhagen was the proprietor for fifteen years; then the property had two other owners before it was sold to the Zion Evangelical Church on March 31, 1874, for $2000. Since that time the house was repaired in 1893 and strengthened and rebuilt in 1908, at which time it was valued at $4500.

* * * *

But to go back to those first years in what one of the members spoke of later as "our magnificent new place of worship." There were other problems besides that of language. Some of the church people objected greatly to having any meals served in the church. One man even refused to pay his $1000 pledge because a kitchen was equipped in the basement. At the first annual administrative meeting of the congregation, some refused to come because it was preceded by a church supper.

Then there were people who objected to any kind of entertainment being held in the church, cultural as well as social. The sanctuary would seat more people than the chapel in Smith Hall, and soon the college was asking permission to use the church for concerts and lectures. Scott's Hall downtown had become too cosmopolitan and secular for some of these good brethren, and many controversal discussions were held on the subject in the church basement, on campus, and in favorite downtown meeting places.

Gradually the opposition lost out, and for many years the church basement was the banquet hall for the college. All the programs for the Concert and Lecture Series were given in the spacious sanctuary which seated more than 800 people. Among the renowned speakers were Dean Holgate of Northwestern University and Helen Keller, who was fast becoming the world's best-known handicapped lady. All the festivities of Commencement weekend were held here. For the

first fifteen years after its construction, this was definitely the college church.

After the completion of Pfeiffer Hall in 1926, cultural activities for the college shifted to the auditorium of that building. Many of the banquets, however, continued to be held in the basements of both First and Grace Churches until the present Student Union days.

* * * *

But we must "back up and fill in" what has been taking place in the relationship between the Evangelical Association and the United Evangelicals during this second decade of the 20th century. While the new church was being built by the Association in 1911-12, on the site of the Old Brick Church, the United Evangelicals offered the use of Grace Church (newly constructed in 1909) to the First Church congregation for funerals and weddings. Soon after this, in 1911, appointed commissioners from Evangelical churches all over the country, both the Association and the United groups, met at the Adams Street Church in Chicago to try to resolve the difficulties sundering them. As Miss Bucks has expressed in her Centennial Reminiscences: "As years went by, we all became homesick, and had a longing to become one church again; and kindly Providence and wise leaders in both churches brought this hoped-for victory into fulfillment."

On October 14, 1922, at the General Conference in Detroit, Michigan, the consummation took place. So came into existence the denomination known for twenty-four years as The Evangelical Church.

After five more years of "careful study and wise adjustment," on March 31, 1927, the Illinois Conference and the Illinois United Conference met separately in Naperville for the last time—the Illinois Conference at First Church, the Illinois United at Grace Church. That evening in Pfeiffer Hall a "merging" ceremony occurred, marking this as a time for joy and gratitude on the part of many people from both congregations. Now the two churches were again in the same conference, having the same bishop, presiding elder, and other conference officials.

Miss Bucks has expressed the feeling shared by many on that eventful evening: "What a time of rejoicing! I can never forget the happy event and how the reality of the blessed victory thrilled our inmost being. I am so thankful I could be present at this blessed meeting." From that time on, a much more cordial and cooperative spirit has existed between pastors and congregations.

* * * *

During these decades of union and expansion in the early 20th century, the Woman's Missionary Society (now the WSWS) was "a very much alive society, truly missionary, with a strong sense of mission in its programs and in all its activities." Ethel Spreng, a long-time national leader in this organization, told an amusing incident in connection with a yearly election of officers:

> Mrs. August Muench was a colorful personality, with strong convictions, and she never lacked the courage to emphasize what she earnestly believed in. One such con-

viction was that nominating committees were all wrong. People should be permitted to vote for the person of their choice and not told whom they could vote for.

Now it so happened that it was time for the annual election of the Society. Some of the women had thought beforehand that Mrs. G. B. Kimmel would be just the right president and talked to her about it. But she had said she could not possibly serve as president at that time. However, they thought she could be persuaded to change her mind. So word was passed around and she was elected on the first ballot. She said again, firmly, that she could not accept the election, and asked them not to vote for her again. They still tried to persuade her, but she finally convinced them that she meant what she said. Then what to do? There was no second choice offered, so the women were told to cast their ballot for the woman of their choice. The result was that nearly every woman there received at least one vote. They voted again several times, but no one was found willing to take the responsibility. Then it was that Mrs. S. J. Gamertsfelder rose up and expressed her conviction that it was too bad that in all that group of fine young women, all members of the WMS, and capable, there was not one consecrated enough to be willing to serve the Lord in this position of leadership in His work. There was silence when she sat down, and then another ballot was called for. Yes, you guessed it. Mrs. Gamertsfelder was unanimously elected. By that time it was 5:30 of the clock. At the time of the next year's election, a nominating committee was appointed!

Some strong-minded women in the earlier days of the Missionary Society objected to having the money they had earned and collected put into the general budget of the church, as many of the men thought should be done. Under Mrs. Solomon Gamertsfelder and Mrs. E. M. Spreng the women won out and were able to say where the money should be spent.

Also sponsoring and promulgating various projects both social and ecclesiastic during these same decades of the 20th century were some strong and well organized Sunday School classes. This was a period of enthusiastic work in Sunday Schools all over the country in most Protestant denominations. This part of the work of the church could be ably done by laymen, who were often encouraged by their pastors.

The oldest organized classes in the Evangelical Association Sunday Schools in Naperville were the Sheal and the Berean. Both originated

in the College Chapel Sunday School before the union of the English and the German congregations. A class of young women, taught by Mrs. G. W. Sindlinger, had been meeting regularly for seven years or more before they organized about 1906 as the Sheal class. Mrs. Sindlinger was a much loved and a devoted teacher. Some of the women who succeeded her were Mrs. G. B. Kimmel, Mrs. McKendrie Coultrap, and Mrs. L. H. Seager. It was much later before this class of women chose to have men as their teachers—even college professors!

The Berean class of men and women was organized under the pastorate of Reverend George Manshardt in 1906, with Dr. S. J. Gamertsfelder as its first great teacher. The name for the class owes its origin to Acts 17:10-12. (Look it up!) The Bereans were a people who received the word of Paul "with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." All through the years this class has been known for its serious and scholarly Bible study, under outstanding leaders like Bishop Spreng, Reverend F. W. Umbreit, and Professor W. H. Heinmiller. Its average high attendance surpassed all other classes for many years, with the exception of the Immanuel Class. At one time each of these two classes reached a peak of eighty-five.

Both the Sheal and the Berean classes helped in various church projects, local and general, and furnished many teachers for the Sunday School, as well as superintendents of many departments.

Not long after the building of the new church there was a noticeable increase in attendance at Sunday School. In 1913, the enrollment was 644. By 1915 it was over 700. One local commentator remarked: "The Sunday School rooms blossom as the rose after the uniting of the German and the Chapel Churches."

Much encouragement was given the Sunday School movement by Reverend Schutte and by Reverend F. F. Jordan, who held the pastorate for two years (1914-1916) after Reverend Schutte's death. Reverend Jordan was also a bilingual preacher of great evangelistic force. One of the church ladies of today, who was a Sunday School girl in those days, called him a highly emotional man "who was tall and thin and who used to get his arms and legs all twisted up in his earnestness to put across a point." The children found him fascinating.

In 1912 two other classes were organized: the Immanuel Bible Class for men and the Sigma Zeta Class for young unmarried men. The Immanuel Class was organized under Judson Gamertsfelder and was soon competing with the two earlier classes in enthusiasm and attendance and in promoting church and social projects. This friendly rivalry continued through the succeeding decades as the Immanuels also strove for scholarly leadership under such teachers as Dr. Kimmel, President of Evangelical Theological Seminary and Dr. E. E. Rall, President of North Central College.

There was enthusiasm also for social and manual projects. These men had monthly dinners which they themselves prepared. Once a year, on Valentine's Day, wives and sweethearts were allowed to invade this masculine sanctum! There were many projects of shared manual labor, such as the building of the twenty-two plywood tables still being used for dinners and pot-luck suppers.

The main spirit behind the organization of the Sigma Zeta Class for "grown-up boys" was W. W. Spiegler. At the Old Brick Church for a number of years he had been teaching the young men's class of post-high school age, and he combined this with a group from the College Sunday School in 1912. Gordon Gamertsfelder, John Schutte, and Milton and Wesley Stauffer were among the early members. There were also young men from families outside the church membership. This democratic group never became very large because as soon as a man married he was dismissed from the class! It was "Gordy" Gamertsfelder who elicited the help of his classically educated father in changing the chosen name for the class, "Life Savers," to Sigma Zeta. These were the days when Greek letter names for all kinds of organizations were filtering down from academic levels!

Much of the inspiration and leadership for this class came from three outstanding and dedicated men, each of whom gave years of teaching and guidance: W. W. Spiegler, J. N. Lehman, and Lester Schloerb. Besides the class sessions on Sunday mornings, for which they made hours of preparation, there were over-night trips to camp grounds and river sites as well as summer vacation trips to Lake Geneva and Lake Wawasee.

The Forward Movement apportionment for First Church in the five years following World War I was $9,000. The church actually raised over $25,000! Almost unbelievable, but so the Church Record Book relates.

With all this enthusiasm and growth in numbers, including many other classes in many departments, it soon became evident that the size of the rooms and the facilities available were absolutely inadequate. There were at least eight classes of college students alone: one each for freshman, for sophomore, for junior, and for senior men; one each for freshman, for sophomore, for junior, and for senior women. Later the classes were not so arbitrarily segregated when there were fewer college students attending Sunday School. Many of the teachers were on the college or seminary faculties, including Professor Thomas Finkbeiner, one of the most popular teachers both at college and at the church. It is impossible to evaluate the contributions of these faculty families to the life of the church in many departments during these decades. The Sunday School continued to develop, however, in spite of physical handicaps.

According to the Jubilee Church Book, the years of Reverend A. J. Boelter's pastorate (1916-1921) were prosperous from a financial standpoint: "A debt of $9000 was wiped out. All local and general obligations were met in full."

The pastor's salary was raised from $1300 to $2100. All of this was during and after World War I. To quote again from the Jubilee

Church Book: "During our National Crisis . . . this church proved herself loyal and patriotic to a remarkable degree. This was evidenced by the large sums of money which were contributed for the support of our government, for the benevolent and philanthropic institutions, and especially through the large contributions of many of her best and noblest young men to the services of their country. The heroism, the unselfish service, the sacrifice and love for humanity of her 223 brave young men will be cherished as a sacred memory by every member of the church."

* * * *

In 1921 Reverend Rolland Schloerb began his seven-year tenure at First Church. A man with liberal views and scholarly interpretations, yet he could talk without offending those who were more (or less!) orthodox in their thinking.

The diplomacy of Dr. Schloerb can be epitomized in one short story. In the twenties, a very young faculty couple bought a new car. It was their first. Spring roads, though full of ruts, mud, and pitfalls, were enticing. Three Sundays in a row the young couple took to the unpaved, uncluttered highways, "without benefit of clergy." The next week Dr. Schloerb came calling. After a pleasant conversation, in which Sunday driving was never mentioned, Dr. Schloerb said to the bride, "I understand you have been trained as a teacher. We have a lively Junior Class without a teacher just now. Would you fill in for a few Sundays, starting next Sunday" Of course she would. She did—and has been busy in some phase of Church School work continuously ever since.

His awareness of the "doings" of the young people of his congregation coupled with his concern for promotion of a superior Church School program made Dr. Schloerb the logical guiding force for the building of a new Educational Unit.

A new unit was becoming a great necessity. Classes were being formed as the need arose. Two classes for women had been organized in the early 20's: the Work-to-Win, in 1920, and the Fidelis Class in 1923.

At its peak enrollment the Work-to-Win Class numbered around fifty. For many years the membership was enlarged by the wives of seminary students. Mrs. Naninga, mother of Mrs. Wilber Harr, was the first teacher of the Work-to-Win Class. Later, Mrs. Solomon Gamertsfelder was the beloved and inspiring teacher for thirty years.

The women believed in calling at homes in the parish, and one year thirty-five women made 500 calls. The strong missionary spirit in the class resulted in many contributions overseas, in money as well as in food and clothing. They also presented the local church with innumerable furnishings, especially the altar and the Bible which are now in the chapel, given in honor of Mrs. Gamertsfelder. Mrs. Elizabeth Wahl, who with her husband, the late Carl Wahl, was a missionary in China, is now teacher of the class.

In 1923, at the suggestion of the minister, Rolland Schloerb, and the officers of the Sunday School, a class was organized for the single