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CHAPTER

V.

SOCIAL GOSPEL

On May 12, 1935, the Reverend Dewey R. Eder began his ministry at First Church. Across the top of the bulletin which he carried into the pulpit with him that first Sunday he had carefully written, "Acoustican!" Just to be sure he wouldn't forget to turn it on!

This desire to have the service flow smoothly never changed during his seventeen years of work at First Church. Everything was methodically planned so that there were as few distractions during the worship service as possible. Regular church goers eventually became aware that a discreet touch of a folded white linen handkerchief on Mr. Eder's forehead meant, "Please, some ventilation. It's stifling in here!" The ushers always got that message, and others, probably, which the congregation never caught onto! This concern for a smooth-running organization was felt in all areas of the church at work.

On May 26th, just after the Eders' arrival, one of the all Church School pageants, written for First Church, but published for use in the entire Evangelical denomination, was presented. This pageant was called, "Ambassadors of Peace," and it seems a strangely appropriate title, for Mr. Eder's entire ministry was encased in a firm webbing of the struggle for peace and the effects of the aftermath of war.

The social gospel was making its impact upon our culture, and Church pageantry reflected this. First Church young people became world symbols in "Ambassadors of Peace." John Riebel was World Missions; Charles Daniels, Mars, the god of war; Lola Fuhrman (Hornback), the Church; Muriel Sievert (Conners), Peace. The children's departments under their superintendents, Mrs. Rall, Mrs. Domm, Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Muehl, all participated. Betty Lou Phelps (Reichenbacher) and Mrs. Henry Moy directed some of the groups representing missions in Africa and China. Mrs. Paul Mayer helped with the historic Japanese and American Doll-Exchange scene. The sanctuary and chancel were beautifully decorated by the Fidelis and Sigma Zeta Classes with Gordon Gamertsfelder as Chairman. Bishop S. P. Spreng impersonated a German minister and Mr. Klingbeil led the group in German songs. Karl Hochradel, a German student from the college, participated.

The German scene in the pageant was one in which the theme reflected the statement which the Committee of Reference and Counsel of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America had made in their Fortieth Annual Report. The German Christians had said they felt an unbearable burden because "the treaty of Versailles forced the representative of their nation to sign the declaration that Germany alone was to blame for the World War. . . ." The Conference of North America tried to bring Christian understanding in their statement, ". . . While conscious of incompetency to deal with any of the political implications of the question, which we approach only by reason of common spiritual concern with our German brethren, the members of the Committee of Reference and Counsel take this opportunity of expressing the judgment that the World War was the inevitable outcome of historical national rivalries which found expression in competitive military and naval armaments; and state their conviction that for the existence of these rivalries and their inevitable result in the World War, no single nation can justly be declared solely responsible."

Rev. A. J. Boelter had his own particular methods of recruiting. He was much interested in individuals and families. Often when he was visiting in a home he would say to a talented child, "Johnny (or Susie), you certainly are cut out to be a missionary!" And Johnny or Susie would feel the call immediately!

It was in the midst of these attempts on the national and local level to heal hurts and assuage breaches made by World War I that Mr. Eder began his ministry at First Church. But it was also in the midst of the sowing of Hitler's seeds of World War II. Almost at once First Church began to feel the depth of Mr. Eder's conviction that the Church Universal must assert itself aggressively on the Peace road.

We find many topics all through the church reflecting Mr. Eder's concern. Dr. Heininger in 1936 spoke on: "If Jesus Had Been a Militarist." Youth groups were selecting such topics as: "What Are Some of the Causes of War?" "What Keeps the War Tree Green?" "War and Its Horrors."

Thought expressed in the bulletins were slanted toward this passion for peace—e.g., Sundays of November, 1936:

> Next Sunday morning: "Christians But Not Pacifists???" Are you ready to put your convictions on record against war?
>
> and
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> Have you signed your pledge for PEACE? See your pastor if you wish to do so.

While the undercurrent of peace seemed to run through all channels of church life, other social issues were receiving their measure of

attention. After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, the liquor problem was again before the public. Speakers such as Mrs. Ida B. Wise Smith, National President of the W.C.T.U., Dr. Albion Roy King, who spoke on: "The Psychology of Drunkenness," and Dr. Tripper of the Keeley Institute, were presented. Professors from the science department at the college spoke frequently to youth groups on such topics as: "The Physiological Effects of Alcohol."

The W. C. T. U. of Naperville had among its leaders a number of women from First Church: Mrs. E. Grant Simpson, Mrs. E. N. Himmel, Mrs. R. Kemmerer, Mrs. O. Mehnert, Mrs. August Muench, and others. Mrs. Lottie Holman O'Neil, representative from this district to the General Assembly in Springfield, and later the first woman state senator, spoke a number of times to the W. C. T. U. on alcohol and the way the issue was being handled in the state legislature.

Mr. Eder, who often used the bulletin to present little homilies on matters of current moment, wrote in 1936:

> According to the report of an insurance company, not one passenger was killed in a train collision or derailment on an American railroad in 1935. During this same year 36,400 met their death on motor highways. While many factors contribute toward this condition, the fact that booze is taboo in an engine has much to do with railroad safety.

Gifts for Sherwood Eddy's Cooperative Farm in Mississippi; collections for the Deaconess Hospital in Chicago (canned fruit, vegetables, lard, butter, eggs, household linen, etc.); studies on the awareness of the Negro problem by the presentation of leaders like Mr. George Arthur, author of "Life on the Negro Frontier"; visits to our church by groups of foreign children; and the giving of money to help Bishop Stauffacher with the founding of the Chinese Conference all were in keeping with the social outreach of First Church.

In 1937, the one hundredth birthday of First Church received recognition. In September there was a Preaching Mission to enrich the spiritual life of the church before the Centennial celebration. In November a Teaching Mission was held with Professors Heininger, Himmel, Kalas and Finkbeiner as leaders. The Naperville Evangelical Choirs presented a concert of sacred music; Dean Charles Gilkey spoke at a Centennial Community Service; and Bishop Epp preached on "Evangelical Landmarks." A Centennial Pageant consisting of ten historic tableaux was written and directed by Mrs. Thomas Finkbeiner as a climax to the celebration.

An Institute of International Relations was held at North Central College for several summers in the late thirties. Such speakers as T. Z. Koo, Max Yergan, and Norman Thomas appeared on the program. Dr. W. A. Visser t'Hooft, brilliant international student leader, became a popular figure on the North Central campus and spoke a number of times. All members of First Church were urged to attend these meetings.

In the next few years before the actual outbreak of World War II, the Church entered with a good spirit into Community activities. Many attended Sunday evening services at Pfeiffer Hall in winter and in Central Park in summer. Dr. H. Augustine Smith appeared several times to present one of his world-famous pageants or his art exhibit. The charm of Central Park, before the days of elm tree disease and parking-take-all, was described in connection with one of Dr. Smith's art exhibits: "The Gothic arches of the elms of Central Park provide an inspiring setting for this service at the twilight hour." (Note: In case of rain meet at First Church.)

The Naperville Council of Churches had three community goals: Community betterment; Week-day School of Religion, Vacation Bible School and Naperville Youth Council; and Interchurch activities, including the community Sunday evening services. First Church gave the council its loyal support.

In 1938 the combined choirs of First and Grace Churches sang at Orchestra Hall for the Sunday Evening Club. This was just one of many instances of the growing cooperative spirit between the two churches. The college E. L. C. E. (Evangelical League of Christian Endeavor) alternated between the two churches for its meeting place. Grace and First held many Sunday evening services together. The Woman's Missionary Society often shared programs and speakers. The names of Dr. and Mrs. Paul Eller, members of Grace Church who had begun to travel widely, appeared often on First Church programs as they generously showed pictures and told of their travels to interesting far-away places. Dr. Paul Keen came often to First Church to show and discuss his growing Bible collection. In turn, members of First Church taught classes at Grace Church and presented programs.

The year 1940 at First Church, the last before our entrance into World War II, had many interesting events. Perhaps it was because it had started out beautifully. On New Year's Eve, a "Service of Lights" was held in the sanctuary. Each member brought his own light and the lighted candle held by each person as he left the service was the only light there was. Out into the cold, crisp, snowy night went dozens of glowing candles. Up and down and across every street, the tiny flames pierced the darkness of the new year.

On the wall of the tower exit hangs the following plaque:
In Memory of
G. B. Kimmel, D.D.
1874-1939
Beloved Teacher
Immanuel Bible Class
1913-1939

On April 10, Dr. H. R. Heininger, who had served in many capacities in First Church, was inaugurated as President of Evangelical

Theological Seminary in the sanctuary of his home church. In May, a Naperville Music Festival was held in Pfeiffer Hall under the direction of Dr. Frederick Toenniges, who later became director of First Church Choir. A ninety-piece orchestra, a massed chorus of the church choirs in Naperville, and a large Children's Choir from the grade schools under the direction of Arthur Hill (one-time First Church Choir Director), made this a spectacular event. This festival was broadcast over the Aurora radio station WMRO.

On October 20th of this year, the long-dreamed of Victory Sunday was celebrated. Professor James Kerr, Building Fund Secretary, had previously reported that this date would be satisfactory, as the building debt would be cancelled by this time. Dr. Rolland Schloerb, under whose capable guidance the Church School building had been erected in 1925, spoke on the subject, "A Channel for Christian Energies."

Looming now on the horizon was the reality of the Evangelical merger with the United Brethren Church, and Bishop G. E. Epp brought an informative address in November on the subject, "The Proposed Merger with the United Brethren".

Care of the church building has always been a matter of deep concern to the trustees, and although some work was done in 1940—the Church School roof repaired, a platform built for the Junior Choir and the building redecorated in spots—the sanctuary seemed to call for a more complete redecorating job. In 1941 the trustees authorized new lighting and repairs to the auditorium ceiling up to $5,000. Rededication Sunday was October 12, 1941. A new grand piano for use in the Junior Choir loft was given by Mrs. Hofert and her daughter, Wilma. Mr. and Mrs. George Wicks gave four elaborate church lanterns. The Homebuilders' Class erected a new sign for the front of the church. Mrs. Druschel, organist, gave fifty music folders for the choir.

During this year, the urgency for educating for peace was greater than ever before. President Rufus Bowman of Bethany Biblical Seminary of Chicago lectured on "The Quaker Philosophy in a World at War". A meeting was held in First Church for the members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Conscientious Objectors, and others interested in peace. Money was collected for boys in army camps, and also for those in Conscientious Objector camps. One speaker from a Christian Public Service Camp in Indiana told "What Conscientious Objectors Do."

After December 7, 1941, all hope for peace was gone, but the desire for an ultimate peace was kept alive. In January of 1942, the congregation was urged to pause each noon as the twelve o'clock whistle blew for a moment of intercessory prayer for our missionaries who were in constant danger, and for peace.

In March of 1942, John Riebel and a quartette of young men from Merom Public Service Camp presented a program of music and short talks on "The Effect of the War on the Conscientious Objector." Mrs. Koerner's Church School Class served tea to the friends who attended. It had been reported that certain groups were not pleased that these men were going to speak, and that objections would be raised at the meeting. The young men, however, conducted themselves with

such poise, dignity, and goodwill that any who may have come to protest left without uttering a word.

Lists of our boys in service, with their addresses, began to appear on the bulletins. Letters were being sent regularly from our church and members were urged to write. One Sunday the altar table was piled with New Testaments which were to be sent to the boys. The S. O. S. Class did the mailing and addressing of the letters and packages. On February 21, 1943, the fiftieth name was posted of men and women in the armed services. By November there were 83 names. On December 5 a meeting was held to honor all our members in national service. By May, 1945, the list on the Service Roll was 107. There were twelve honorably discharged. Two young men, Sgt. Paul Hensley and T/Sgt. Oliver John Ebinger, both employed on bombers over Europe, were reported as missing in action. Pfc. Arthur Schnabel was killed in action in France on March 16, 1945.

Occasionally a little slip would be stapled to the church bulletin asking for signatures of donors to the Blood Bank. Henry Moy was in charge of this project. The women of the church were urged to help make surgical dressings.

Word was received in September, 1942, that Dr. and Mrs. Paul Mayer would be returned on the next trip of the repatriation ship from Japan and that Miss Lois Kramer was well and would continue her work under limitations of war. She was interned in 1941, and it was not until September, 1945, that her family received word from Guam that Miss Kramer would be coming home.

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In the midst of the all-consuming cover of war, other projects of moment were going on in the church. In June of 1942, Mr. Eder joked about the unfinished parsonage repair job. To quote him: "Since June 1st it has been 'Open House' at the parsonage: everyone could look straight through!" Thirty or more men came for a number of evenings through the summer and early autumn, under the direction of Ed Miller, and the parsonage was ready for a real Open House by November. Necessary modern changes were made without eliminating the charm of many of the older features. Even though we still find today on the north wall of the southeast bedroom upstairs a picture of Mt. Fugi painted right on the plaster, nobody seems to mind!

Of course, it was essential to get the refurbishing done before the General Conference of the Evangelical Church met in Naperville. This was the last General Conference of the Evangelical Church before the merger. The Ladies Auxiliary had worked for months in advance to have food and shelter ready for the delegates who came October 7-16, 1942. Of special interest to the members of First Church was the fact that this was Bishop S. P. Spreng's sixteenth General Conference. He had attended every one since 1883.

During this period in the forties, a Week-Day School of Religion was organized by Professor E. E. Domm with Harriet Miller as the teacher; the Woman's Missionary Society celebrated its sixtieth anniversary with a birthday party; the Centennial Session of the Illinois Conference of the Evangelical Church was held in Naperville; Mr.

Quentin Lansman became the first Associate Minister, his main job being to work with the youth; speakers were beginning to use "Juvenile Delinquency" as a topic.

At the General Conference session a new pattern had been suggested for the youth work. On October 22, 1944, First Church was the scene of the transition from the old E. L. C. E. pattern to the new E. Y. F. (Evangelical Youth Fellowship). Four commissions were appointed: Spiritual Life, Missions, Social Action, and Recreation. The Campus Youth Fellowship (C. Y. F.) and the Grace Church young people joined with First Church in a candle-lighting consecration service. Both choir lofts were filled with dedicated youth.

John Eigenbrodt and Martha Himmel became co-editors of the first paper for the Youth Fellowship of the Illinois Conference called "The Illini Courier." During the next few years Patsy Horman and Clyde Galow served as presidents of the State E. Y. F.

The reorganization of the denominational young people's work displaced and augmented the work of the former Young People's Missionary Circle. The group had been organized in 1913 as Young Woman's Missionary Circle. In August, 1916, dues are recorded as five cents a month. Names of some of the officers during these early years were: Mrs. C. B. Bowman, Ethel Spreng, Lillian Faust, Bertha Schutz (Shisler), Minnie Jaeck, Vida Good. Later, Mrs. E. E. Domm became president for several years. Study books, Happiness Boxes, Spend-a-Days were recorded in all records. Delegates were sent to all Woman's Missionary Society Conventions.

Not without a struggle did some of the German-speaking people from the Old Brick Church give up holding services at the regular hours in their beloved language after they joined with the chapel congregation in the new church. It took an outspoken young man like Arthur Goodge to say indignantly to one of the most obstinate of the older opposition: "But this is America, Mr. Brown. If we want to empty our church before we fill it, let us go on speaking German!"

The group sponsored the Mother-Daughter Banquet in 1934. In the 1940's they took their turn in arranging outstanding monthly displays in the Missionary Visual Education Case in the second floor foyer, which had been presented to the church by the Clarence Eggestein family.

In referring to the group as the Young *People's* Missionary Circle, Helen Lueben writes humorously: "All records from 1933 on show Y.P.M.C., but nowhere can a boy's name be found on the membership lists."

Another change was taking place in the youth program of the church. This one was not brought about by the General Conference

but by the War. On account of war restrictions the regular assembly was not held in 1945, and there were no services for the public at the Camp Grounds. This broke a tradition of Camp Meetings which had been in existence for more than a century.

The Camp Meetings had played such an important role in the life of the whole area during the early years of the 20th Century that the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (C. B. & Q.) trains stopped at a little station a mile or so outside Naperville so that the camp-meeting attendants could be discharged and board the trains there. The path is still visible where the thousands of feet made glad procession to the huge Ebenezer tabernacle and well-run hotel.

For many, many years Professor E. N. Himmel taught classes at the campgrounds on the beauty and wonder of Nature. In 1958, he wrote "The History of Camp Seager," in which he paid tribute to Dr. I. L. Schweitzer, District Superintendent, and to Mr. A. L. Tholin, both of First Church. Dr. Schweitzer was honored for successfully completing the involved transition of transferring the ownership of the Camp Grounds from a small group of shareholders to the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and for his vision of a larger program of improvements. Mr. Tholin, Administrator of Public Works in Chicago was credited with supervising the replacement of the old sanitary system and the building of a number of small cabins.

Many other workers from First Church—camp directors, youth counselors, teachers, program supervisors, and preachers—made the camp alive and vital after it was converted entirely to Boys' and Girls' and Youth Camp. As the old Camp Meeting concept gave way to the vigorous accent on Youth which was permeating our Society, there were those who worried during these years, lest the "Spirit" be lost. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The week of Youth Camp had every hour filled with wholesome Christian training: morning worship, classes in Bible study, churchmanship, manners and morals, nature lore; hours of recreation—swimming in the beautiful Naperville Centennial Pool, baseball games of great rivalry, volley ball; and early evening treasure hunts and stunt nights.

The most sacred time of all came on Saturday. All during the week preparation had been made for this time of dedication. On Saturday morning each camper with a small piece of note paper, a pencil, and an end of string, found a solitary spot somewhere on the big, shady camp grounds. There, alone with his God, he wrote a commitment—in his own words, in his own way—of how he would serve the Master. Then he gathered together a few twigs and tied his written words around the small bundle.

That night when total darkness and peace rested on the green acres, the campers divided into four groups and went out into the night. First one group sang a beloved camp song, and then another, as each group moved slowly toward the campfire which illumined an enormous white cross. Then Silence. One by one the campers dropped their faggots into the fire, which flared higher and higher as their commitments fused together. The night of silence held.

In the soft Sabbath dawn, the campers came again to the cross.