STORIES OF PROMISE, GIFT AND WITNESS

Intersecting Narratives of Mission
From the Acts of the Apostles and a Local Church

by

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From the Acts of the Apostles and the Local Church

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To: The People of St. Pauls United Church of Christ for sharing their stories
and to Joseph JaQuay for sharing my story.
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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this Project/Thesis was to put stories from the Acts of the Apostles in conversation with stories of mission from St. Pauls United Church of Christ in order to place the congregational narratives within the wider story of God’s mission in the world. It studies the Holy Spirit as a character in Acts through methods of narrative criticism and it engages stories from the history and understanding of mission at St. Pauls using qualitative research methods from congregational studies to create a thick description of the practical theology at work. Stories from Acts and St. Pauls are intersected to engage the congregation in reflection about their continued mission in God’s world.
A motto of my denomination, the United Church of Christ, is *God is Still Speaking*. A question that could be raised to that statement is: How? How do we discern God’s voice in the midst of our noisy world? What are the signs of God’s presence in our lives, within our local congregations, within our culture? Congregations live by narratives that they tell about themselves. There are characters within their stories, such as founding mothers and fathers, pastors and lay-leaders, people who may have not been in leadership yet who shaped the life of the congregation in meaningful, and sometimes damaging, ways. There is a setting for those stories, the place in which the gathered community feels called to be the church and engage in mission. There are actions that drive the plot, decisions made, conflicts that arise. All of the elements that go into making up a good story are part of the story a congregation tells about itself. James Hopewell writes, “Even a plain church on a pale day catches one in a deep current of narrative interpretation and representation by which people give sense and order to their lives.”¹ Sometimes, we even find that God shows up in that story. Through eyes of faith, God is seen as present and speaking, directly and indirectly, in the stories of our lives. Robert Schreiter writes,

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“Narratives are the stories that shape and transmit the memories of a congregation.”

Pastors, congregational leaders, and members all have stories they tell about their congregation. How those stories are narrated can give us clues about how a congregation understands the presence and voice of God in their midst.

The church has inherited a narrative view of the world through being people of the book, our religious life shaped through the words of scripture. The Bible consists largely of narrative texts. Mark Allen Powell, who has applied literary criticism to biblical texts, defines narrative as a work of literature that tells a story. The narratives of scripture are part of the raw material that Christians use for theological reflection and for forming how we live our lives. In some narratives of the Bible, such as the Song of Solomon or Esther, God’s presence in the story can only be interpreted indirectly. In others, like the Exodus and the stories around Elijah and Elisha, God plays a starring role in the action. God speaks and acts directly within the narrative. Recognizing that the Bible consists largely of narrative texts, Bible scholars in the later decades of the 20th Century began to apply methods developed within the sphere of literary criticism to biblical studies. This was in addition to the more common methods of historical criticism.

The purpose of narrative criticism is not to get at the historical origins of the narratives, or what they originally were supposed to mean, but at the internal meaning of the narrative itself as story. Elizabeth Malbon writes that it’s not what the text means but

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3 Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 23.

4 Ibid., 1-10.
how the text means.\(^5\) How has the author used the elements of plot, events, character, setting and rhetoric to tell the story as we have it?

This study focuses on the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles in conversation with the stories that the congregation I serve tells about itself. I have been drawn to Acts because of the way that its narrative, in its outbursts of mission, resonates with stories that the members of St. Pauls tell about their history of mission as a congregation. St. Pauls\(^6\) United Church of Christ has a nearly170-year history in the city of Chicago. It served as the home base for several generations of German Protestant immigrants moving into and passing through Chicago. At the same time, it has managed to evolve and adapt to its changing environment and grow beyond its German roots. Its history is marked by periodic outbursts of mission – founding an orphanage after the Civil War, a home for the elderly in the 1920’s, a homeless shelter in the 1980’s. These stories of St. Pauls’ history are told to every confirmation class and every class of new members who become a part of the ongoing story of St. Pauls. They have been repeated in books and in sermons and in memories passed along from long-time members to newcomers who are being grafted into the St. Pauls story. The congregational narratives are stories that are interpreted alongside of scripture as authoritative for who they are. Peter Hodgson writes, “Theology cannot dispense without external authority and historical tradition, for without it the mind has no capital with which to work; but tradition and authority must be


\(^6\) There is no apostrophe in the name St. Pauls, as there is no apostrophe in the German language. Leaving out the apostrophe was a subtle protest in the early 20\(^{th}\) Century to the congregation changing its name to English at a time when German Americans were suspect.
critically evaluated, inwardly appropriated and imaginatively re-envisioned.” Scripture and tradition are capital to work with for theological reflection. They are tools, narratives that come alongside each other within the context of contemporary experience. Larry Goleman speaks of “deepening people’s stories by linking them with the biblical narrative.” The stories that a congregation tells about itself are part of the much longer narratives of scripture, narratives that give shape to the understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the world. A congregation shapes and performs those authoritative stories of scripture in its own time and place. Looking at the narratives of scripture alongside the narratives of a congregation offers an opportunity for a congregation to see itself as part of God’s larger story in the world and to imaginatively re-envision its own mission.

In the course of doing a Bible study on Acts with folks at St. Pauls, the narrative that Luke tells of the early church in Acts reminded me of the narratives the people of St. Pauls tell of their congregation. Both tell stories of origin and outreach. While scholars like Richard Pervo have shed critical light on Luke’s agenda and the sometimes dubious historical merits of Acts (“Luke’s achievement as a historian lies more in his success at creating history than in recording it.”), the book remains the only major narrative we have of the early years of the Christian community. It is Luke’s version of the primary story of origin - the primary raw material - that we have to work with in that era. Scholars

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disagree on the specific type of narrative that Acts is, ranging from Hellenistic historiography\textsuperscript{10} to a “popular” work belonging to the realm of novelistic narrative,\textsuperscript{11} yet whatever the genre of narrative, it still contains the elements that all narratives share: plot, events, characters, settings and rhetoric.

The first chapter of this project looks at how the Holy Spirit acts as a character within the narrative of Acts. The Holy Spirit tends to show up in the story whenever the church engages in new and innovative mission, such as enabling bold speech on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4) or instructing Peter to meet with the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:19-21). When the Spirit is present in Acts, Luke is signaling that God is involved in what is going on, God is in the story. William Shepherd has focused work specifically on the narrative function of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts and he will be a primary conversation partner in this project.\textsuperscript{12} Shepherd notes that in Acts, God never appears onstage as an actor. Luke presents God’s actions in indirect ways, one of which is to speak of the Holy Spirit. To recognize the prophetic Spirit is indirectly to recognize God in the story.\textsuperscript{13} The Spirit is the onstage representative of the offstage God. In looking closely at how Luke tells the story of God, through the Holy Spirit, as part of the life of the early Christians, motivating them as they engaged in new mission in the world, I hope to be able to put that story in conversation with stories that the people of St. Pauls tell about their own history, identity and mission in the world.

\textsuperscript{11} Pervo, Acts: A Commentary, 18.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 255.
For those German Protestants and for their contemporary mainline church heirs, it has not always been as easy to talk about how God is directly working in their midst as it was for the writer of Acts. If the Holy Spirit signals the presence of God in the Acts narrative, what language signals the presence of God in the stories of St. Pauls? They do not use the language of "God told me," or, "The Holy Spirit said." Their faith is spoken of less directly. In that sense, the stories of Acts and St. Pauls are narrated very differently from one another. And yet, God is active in both in ways that result in mission and good work in the world. Although the major events in the St. Pauls stories are already well-known by the congregation, I hope in this study to make the faith that is embedded in those stories more explicit. By hearing the faith that is narrated in their stories of mission alongside the faith narrated in the book of Acts, I hope for an enriched understanding of their own narratives and an even greater sense that it is part of God’s story in the world.

Narrative critics of Acts tend to use categories taken from the study of the modern European novel, categories of plot, character, events and setting. Shepherd uses these modern categories to focus on character. Other narrative critics who will be my primary conversation partners in this study vary in their approaches: Richard Thompson and Mikeal Parsons focus on the ancient Greco-Roman schools of rhetoric in order to examine how Luke has constructed his story, while Luke Timothy Johnson approaches

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the narrative from the framework of historiography. This study is limited to the elements that go into characterization, specifically of the Holy Spirit.

Powell defines characters as the actors in the story, the ones who carry out the various activities that comprise the plot. Characterization is the process of reconstructing a character from the narrative. It’s an active task on the part of the reader. Whether in the modern novel or an ancient narrative, characterization is achieved through telling and showing. These are the direct and indirect ways of developing a character. I can say, “Jim is a compassionate man,” or I can say, “Jim volunteers each week visiting shut-ins from the church.” The first is direct and the second indirect. Calling the Holy Spirit “holy” is another example of direct characterization. The reader is simply told. Indirect characterization relies upon more work on the part of the reader to interpret, filling in the blanks in constructing the character. Jim might be visiting the shut-ins not because he is compassionate but because he is greedy and he hopes they might leave something for him in their wills when they die. Thus, indirect characterization is something that builds up over time as we see a character behave in consistent ways.

Citing the work of structuralist Seymour Chatman, Shepherd notes that in reading, we develop a “paradigm of traits” for a character that builds up over time as new information about a character is introduced in the narrative. Unlike contemporary novels, there is not much in the way of direct characterization in ancient literature. One will search in vain for a physical description of Jesus in the Gospels or lengthy descriptions of his deep,

17 Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 51.
18 Ibid., 52.
internal thoughts and motives. Characterization in Greco-Roman literature mainly happens through indirect means, what characters say and what they do.\textsuperscript{21} How the Holy Spirit acts or speaks, in relation to its direct description when it occurs, will be the primary focus of this study.

In addition to direct and indirect means of characterization, narrative critics also speak of point of view. This applies especially in the case of direct characterization. Whose point of view about the character is being given? Shepherd writes, “Direct definition is based on the reliability of the speaker.”\textsuperscript{22} Evaluative point of view is the degree to which a direct characterization can be accepted as true by the reader. Powell notes that the implied author – that is, the author that the reader reconstructs through reading the text\textsuperscript{23} – defines those terms for the reader. In texts such as Acts, God’s point of view is utterly reliable. What God thinks is, by definition, true and normative.\textsuperscript{24} God’s point of view comes across in various ways in Acts – through divine agents, such as angels and prophets; through quotes from the Hebrew Bible; through Jesus; and, of course, through the Holy Spirit. Since, as Shepherd says, the Holy Spirit is the onstage character of the offstage God, the Holy Spirit is both a reliable character within the narrative of Acts as well as a reliable witness to the character of others within the text.\textsuperscript{25}

Although setting in which the plot takes place is not a primary focus of this study, settings can provide important information about characters. Questions of setting that

\textsuperscript{21} Thompson, \textit{Keeping the Church}, 18.
\textsuperscript{22} Shepherd, \textit{Narrative Function}, 87.
\textsuperscript{23} Powell, \textit{Narrative Criticism}. 5.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 23-42.
\textsuperscript{25} Shepherd, \textit{Narrative Function}, 246.
relate to character would be: In what sorts of settings does the Holy Spirit typically show up in Acts? What might the setting reveal about what the Holy Spirit is doing and why? What does the Spirit do to its setting? Based on where we’ve seen the Holy Spirit in the story, can we make assumptions about where it might show up in the future?

Shepherd says something helpful about characterization: “The way we come to know characters is similar to the way we come to know people. In both cases, a model is generated as we interact with the other, and that model changes and develops as time, life and the text move on. Life and literature are connected but not identical; that is why we can learn from life how to read, and from reading, how to live.”

My study focuses on Acts 1-15. Acts 15, the Jerusalem Church Council in which the Gentile Christians are formally accepted by the Jerusalem leadership, is a turning point in Acts and the activity of the Spirit builds up to that point. Although the Spirit does enter the narrative as a character beyond that point, those instances do not build substantially on the characterization arrived at by Acts 15, and so I only mention them briefly before the conclusion. Each section of Acts in which the Spirit appears is introduced by the specific references in those chapters. This study of the Holy Spirit as a character in Luke’s story of Acts becomes a resource for me to use within my congregation as we look at our own stories, to sense more keenly how God is at work and still speaking in our lives as we attempt to discern how to live out God’s mission in our world.

26 Shepherd, Narrative Function, 66.
The second part of this project focuses on St. Pauls. Recently, St. Pauls saw a homeless shelter that it had housed for 20 years move to a new and better location, and so the congregation faces questions about what its next outburst of mission might be. There are some who are hoping for the “next big thing.” The Lincoln Park Community Shelter is an important, recent part of the narrative of mission that church members tell. Using the qualitative research methods found in the discipline of congregational studies, I explore the narratives that the members of St. Pauls have told about themselves in the past and that they tell in the present, specifically in relation to mission and outreach. Analogous to my study of Acts with a focus on the Holy Spirit, I pay attention to what they say about their own sense of mission, and I look for an articulation of the divine. How is the presence of God signaled in the story? What implicit as well as explicit theology is present? What is the practical theology at work at St. Pauls? What do they believe God is doing and what does God want to do in the world? What do they believe God is calling them to do and be? How do they experience God and the leading or communication of God in their lives? My study is informed by the research methods of Nancy Ammerman, Mary Clark Moschella, and Diana Butler Bass among others. My goal, in the words of Bass, is to “identify characteristic language to arrive at a thick description of the congregation and the phenomenon of intentional practice.”27 My focus is narrowed to how the congregation narrates its understanding of mission and outreach in language of faith, looking for places where God enters their narratives, places where theological language is used, and where scripture is quoted. This is not an historical study, though to an extent it necessarily entails some historical review. Overall, the

project examines how the faith of the congregation enters into the stories it tells of its mission. Larry Goleman, writing about narrative approaches to congregational studies, notes, “One can chart the worldview of a church by mapping the most common images and phrases used by members.” That is my goal as I study St. Pauls, to flesh out those common images and phrases that have signaled for them that God is at work in their story, and then to weave that into a thick description around significant events in their narrative into the present. While doing so, I am aware that I am the one who is weaving that description from my own power and place of privilege as a pastor in their congregation. I am not a detached observer, but part of the St. Pauls community in a position of leadership and so in this research I construct my interpretation of their stories out of that location. One of my roles as a pastor at St. Pauls is to be the staff member for the Outreach Committee and so, like every teller of a story, I hope to construct a narrative, through documents and interviews, that interprets the stories of outreach at St. Pauls in a way that is generative for future mission. What I choose to include and exclude out of that research comes out of that particular location. Others would, and do, construct and interpret the stories at St. Pauls differently.

My congregational research focuses on the practice of mission that the people of St. Pauls have engaged in since the early days of their 170-year history, focusing on a limited number of actions and events that I believe have shaped their identity as a congregation. Nancy Ammerman writes, “The act of remembering is essential for the creation of identity and corporate integrity in any community. A community is by

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definition a sharing together of significant happenings.”  

I have limited the research to five significant happenings - key stories of mission that predominate in the narrative that contemporary St. Pauls members tell about themselves: the founding of an orphanage following the American Civil War; the founding of a home for the aged in 1921; opening the church to Vietnam War protesters in 1968; helping to launch the Lincoln Park Community Shelter and becoming officially Open and Affirming to gays and lesbians in the late 1980’s. While there are countless other examples of outreach and mission in the long history of St. Pauls, in my experience with the congregation, these five tend to surface the most regularly and are highly definitive in shaping the congregation’s identity. Though others would surely lift up a different combination of events as significant – and would interpret them differently than I have - these five are significant happenings in the life of St. Pauls that do recur when their story is told – informally in conversations, in church literature, in sermons, and in new member and confirmation classes. The orphanage and the home for the aged are enshrined in stained glass windows in the church sanctuary. The 1968 event is legendary as a time of conflict in the church. The Shelter remains an ongoing part of the outreach ministry of the congregation. Being Open and Affirming is one of the main reasons that new members cite when they join the congregation – they want an inclusive church in which to raise their children. There are numerous other important events in the St. Pauls history of mission and outreach, but the well-kept archives of this congregation are deep and the history is long. There is enough material there for several DMin projects. But, in my ten years’ experience there as a

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pastor, these five episodes seem to be among the most memorable of their stories and rich for exploration, at least for me.

For the earliest stories, the material I will research is, of course, written. The St. Pauls archives contain newsletters and other documents going back to the 19th Century, the earliest ones in German. These narratives are privileged ones, the accounts of insiders. But for tracing their dominant narratives, that is not a bad thing. Moschella notes, “Written materials generated by insiders in the community…are of particular interest. This is not because we can expect them to be completely accurate, but because they may reveal a great deal of insight into their authors’ worldviews, vocabularies, and preoccupations.” In later chapters, there are people living who remember the events, and so I am able to include the memories of people who were leaders and people who have been volunteers or observers of what was happening. Narratives are not only written down, but are also found in oral tradition and the stories that individuals tell. I used methods consistent with human subjects research protocols. My protocol is found in the appendix. Before beginning this project, I presented it to the St. Pauls Church Council and received their enthusiastic approval and support to do research within the congregation as there is a growing desire at St. Pauls to engage in some new form of outreach that will continue the congregation’s story. As part of the congregational study, I conducted a church-wide, on-line survey. I also conducted two focus groups. One group included members who were in a non-leadership position in the church, including some who were born and raised at St. Pauls, some who had been coming for a number of years,

as well as newcomers. Their activity in the church reflected the congregation from 1940 to the present. The other group was the St. Pauls Church Council. Through questionnaires, email exchanges, and in-person interviews, I interviewed six previous pastors of St. Pauls. It was wonderful to sense their delight to participate and to remember and tell their stories again. In addition to the congregation-wide survey, I asked more detailed questions to a selected group of current members. These included all of the past church council chairs, past chairs of the Outreach and Benevolence Committee, members of various ages who grew up at St. Pauls, and members who are actively involved in current outreach programs. I also used my archival work and Acts work in two adult education settings and in an activity which engaged members of the governing committees of the congregation. My consistent goal was to try to flesh out dominant themes, images, and phrases that recur consistently in the narratives that the people of St. Pauls tell. How do they see God at work in their midst and in their story? How does their faith inform their understanding of mission and outreach? Following on the characterization of the Spirit in Acts, I look at their stories with an eye toward narrative criticism, looking especially for how God enters the stories that the people tell. I attempted to give a thick reading of their responses to lift out explicit as well as implicit theology. This is a privileged place to be in, trying to weave a story together out of a variety of responses to a particular time in the history of the congregation, but I hope in my research to privilege their story, not one that I wish to tell, though of course I am doing both. Moschella writes, “When we invite someone to describe a religious practice, we are inviting…privileged self-interpretation with a specific focus on faith-in-action. Often this involves listening to ways in which someone brings his or her personal or
group stories together with biblical stories or theological interpretations.” She quotes Edward Foley who calls this process one of weaving together the human and the divine. “Inviting a congregant to tell his own faith stories empowers him to name his experiences of the divine, in his own words…free to express his own thoughts about God, rather than merely receiving the ideas of experts.”

I handle the stories of the congregation with care. They are not my stories, but their sacred stories of God at work in and through their lives.

Throughout the chapters that explore the congregation’s narrative, I put a thick description of the practical theology that surfaces in dialogue with the narrative of Acts - an exercise in intertextuality. My hope is that by integrating the narratives that they tell about themselves in relation to the Acts narrative of mission, the St. Pauls stories can be seen as part of a bigger picture of God’s story in the world. Talking about their own stories and understandings of mission is beneficial in itself, and I also believe that describing their stories in relationship to a God-energized biblical narrative such as Acts will bring new energy to their own sense of mission in God’s world as they look to the future in this new era of their church.

Intersecting the texts happens in three ways. In each chapter, I construct a description of the faith that grounds the St. Pauls narratives and put it in conversation with the Acts narrative. Are there commonalities or correspondences that emerge? Do these narratives challenge each other, diverge or converge? I look for themes and places of dialogue to emerge between the two texts.

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31 Ibid., 145.
A second aspect of my project entailed asking the committees of St. Pauls to engage a selected text from Acts as part of their normal meeting or gathering. They were invited to reflect on a text in light of the mission of their group and what they perceive to be the goal of their work and their understanding of the church. What might this particular text from Acts say to this committee? What questions would this committee ask of the text?

Finally, throughout the period that I was researching this project, I preached sermons that draw from the two texts. I put the narrative of faith that I have heard in the mission stories of St. Pauls in conversation with selected stories from Acts. The stories of St. Pauls are lifted up, interpreted and affirmed, while placed in dialogue with stories from Acts as an offering to the congregation. My hope is to be able to articulate and point toward some hopeful and helpful trajectories for their future: “Here’s what I’ve heard you say about yourselves. Here’s another story told about the church. Here’s what the two might be saying to each other as we think about our future mission as St. Pauls United Church of Christ.” Each chapter ends with a sermon related to that period in St. Pauls’ history.

In citing the work of congregational researcher Diana Butler Bass, Goleman notes that congregations tell their stories not just to reclaim the past but primarily to help discern the present and imagine the future.\(^{32}\) In the course of completing this project, St. Pauls has called a new Senior Pastor, only its 10\(^{th}\) in its 170 year history. There is new energy in the congregation and new hope and anticipation for the future. My own hope is

that this look into the past can be helpful as they seek God’s guidance to be faithful, creative and courageous in their present generation.
CHAPTER 1
THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTS

How do we account for newness? How do we account for great movements that have changed the world, or even just small moments of creative outburst and energy that change our personal lives? How do we speak of that experience theologically? Can we speak of that theologically? You might hear someone speak with passion and it resonates deeply and powerfully with your soul. You have a new idea and it actually takes fruit and leads somewhere. You sense that there is more going on than you can account for. Something gets started and then takes on a life of its own and grows beyond anything you ever imagined or thought could be possible. How do we narrate those stories of our lives? Were we in the right place at the right - or wrong - time? Luck? Fate? Karma? Where does that spark come from that gets something going? Are we aware of it when it’s happening, or do we discern it only in looking back?

In the Acts of the Apostles, the spark is the Spirit. The Spirit initiates, prompts, reveals, fills, empowers, guides, sends, drives, propels mission – and gives the content of that mission. When the Spirit shows up in Acts, it means that God is involved in what’s going on. The Spirit gives theological significance to what the humans in the story are doing. There are other clues in the narrative that Luke uses to give it theological weight – such as the rare appearance of Jesus (Acts 9:5), an angel (8:26) or a quotation of scripture.
from the Hebrew Bible (8:32-33). But this study focuses on the Spirit in order to flesh out answers to some questions: What does God’s activity in the narrative look like? What is God concerned about? What understanding of God does the Spirit’s activity suggest?

Through a close reading of the Spirit as character, I will arrive at a description of that Spirit that leads to answers to those questions as found in Acts. That description, along with selected stories in Acts, will be put in conversation with the signs that point to the presence of God in the narrative that the people of St. Pauls tell. Because this is limited to the Spirit as character, it will only address those passages in Acts 1-15 in which the Spirit appears as a character in the narrative. Each section of Acts in which the Spirit appears is introduced by the specific references in those chapters.

**Acts 1 Waiting for the Holy Spirit**

1:2 Jesus gives instructions through the Holy Spirit

1:5 “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

1:7 “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses.”

1:16 “The scriptures had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas.”

The Acts of the Apostles is part two of a story that began in the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Luke ended with a command from Jesus to his disciples to wait in Jerusalem. He is going to send them what the Father promised. They will be clothed with

The Holy Spirit is named four times in the opening chapter of Acts. Although obvious, it should be noted that the adjective “holy” serves as direct information about the character of this Spirit. When holy is part of a name, then the reader knows that within this narrative the Holy Spirit is reliable and completely trustworthy.

There are significant parallels in this chapter with the opening of Luke. The setting is Jerusalem. At the beginning of Luke, we meet characters who are praying and waiting – Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-24), Anna and Simeon (Luke 2:25-40) – just as the disciples will wait and pray (Acts 1:14). The disciples, like Mary (Luke 1:38), are also obedient to the word they have been given to stay in Jerusalem. Richard Thompson, in *Keeping the Church in its Place*, studies the church as a narrative character in Acts. He notes that these descriptions in Acts 1 highlight the positive, communal bonds of these earliest Christians and links Acts 1 with the beginning of Luke where the Holy Spirit is connected with prayer.33 Mikeal Parsons believes that the narrator is using the disciples to shape the audience’s view toward a particular understanding of discipleship.34 These are the types of human settings in which the Spirit has already been found at the beginning of Luke. Here the human setting is no longer one devout individual, but a united human community that practices obedient waiting and prayer. This is the sort of setting into which the Spirit is promised to come.

33 Thompson, *Keeping the church*, 35.
34 Parsons, *Acts*, 31. Note that Parsons uses the word “audience” instead of “reader.” Since Acts was written to people who would most likely listen to it in a group setting rather than read it on their own, he believes this reflects more the “implied reader” of the text.
The promise of Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:35) is nearly identical to the promise Jesus gives his disciples: the Holy Spirit will come upon you and that means power (Acts 1:8). Mary, the one character besides the Spirit who is present in both narratives, will presumably get to experience this coming upon twice. These are times of waiting, pregnant with possibility, pregnant with hope and anticipation for something new to happen in the arrival of the Spirit. And if the name Holy isn’t already enough to make this Spirit reliable, it is vouched for by two utterly reliable characters, Gabriel and Jesus. Shepherd observes that the Spirit’s reliability is reaffirmed by the other character in the story who is equally reliable, Jesus himself.\(^{35}\) The Spirit, here, is given a rare direct definition in Acts. Jesus calls the Spirit the promise of the Father. The Spirit is promise. This echoes Jesus’ words at the end of Luke (Luke 24:49). Peter will take the promise further in 2:39, in which the Spirit is promised to “everyone whom the Lord calls to him.”

As in Luke, the Holy Spirit is involved in communication – Jesus gives instructions through the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit will empower the disciples to be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). The empowered speech that the Spirit gives is for mission through this praying, waiting community of disciples. This echoes the Song of Simeon in Luke in which Jesus is called “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32). The mission is going to be international in scope.

This Holy Spirit who will empower speech and mission in the future is the same Holy Spirit who foretold through David a thousand years earlier (1:16). Jesus speaks through the Spirit, the Spirit spoke long ago through David, and the Spirit will empower

speech in the future. “Since the common bond among all prophets is the Spirit, Luke reinforces his characterization of the Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy,” says William Shepherd.36

The Spirit has a history outside of the story that Luke is telling. Not only was the Spirit present in the ministry of Jesus, but the Spirit was active generations earlier in David (Acts 1:16). The Spirit was present in the temple with Simeon (Luke 2:25) and in Galilee with Mary (Luke 1:35). Therefore, Spirit will be present in the future. The disciples can count on it. This is a character that is found in settings not limited in time or place.

In the meantime, though, the disciples must wait and pray. At this point the Spirit is absent. It is an in-between time. For the plot to move ahead, the Holy Spirit has to enter into the narrative. The disciples need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit needs to come upon them. And that will happen. It is a promise of God reconfirmed by Jesus. But until that happens, they can only stay put.

What does this part of the story say about in-between times, about times when nothing much seems to be happening? This is an Advent-like period. It is a time of waiting. Although the plot is not moving forward, this is not empty waiting. It is a pregnant time of promise not yet fulfilled, but the promise can be counted on. The time is prayerful, expectant, listening. And the community is taking care of business, seeing to its leadership needs, preparing for the promise. Mission will happen, the power and inspiration of the Spirit will come to the new community, but not until after a season of prayerful waiting. It cannot be forced, but they can prepare for it.

36 Ibid., 155.
Acts 2 – The Holy Spirit Makes an Entrance

2:4 All of the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.

2:17-18 God declares, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh…and they shall prophesy.”

2:33 Having been raised up by God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has poured out what the crowd sees and hears.

2:38-39 The repentant and baptized will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for everyone.

The period of waiting is over, and the Holy Spirit makes a dramatic entrance into the narrative of Acts in wind and fire. More than a subtle foreshadowing, the baptism in the Holy Spirit was predicted by John the Baptist (Luke 3:16), and the promise reaffirmed by Jesus to the disciples, and reminding Luke’s readers (Acts 1:5). Now, the Spirit acts directly in the Acts narrative as a character who gives the disciples the ability of inspired speech (2:4).

This is a good time to remember that the name of our character carries within it more than the idea of holiness. The word pneuma also means wind. There is a powerful force inherent in that name, hence the association of the Spirit with power. This is a holy wind. Sometimes blowing violently as in this chapter, sometimes refreshing, as in Acts 9:31 when the church is said to live in the comfort/encouragement of the Holy Spirit. Wind is movement, and so we can expect that the Holy Wind will also be on the move or propelling movement in other characters, like the wind in the sails of the ship. The word
pneuma can also mean breath. Without that breath of life in our lungs there would be death. Without that wind of life there would be no speech. Not only does the Spirit inspire prophetic speech in this new community, it is the very breath of life itself within the community. Just as wind and breath are part of the meaning of spirit, so power and speech and life accompany the presence of the Spirit in Acts.

In Acts 2, the Spirit is both gift and giver of gifts. In Peter’s sermon to the curious crowd, he quotes from Joel in which God promises to pour out the Spirit on all flesh like water from a jug. Here God says, “My Spirit” (Acts 2:17). Through the text from Joel, God becomes another character witness for the Spirit along with the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:35), Jesus (Acts 1:5), and Peter (Acts 2:33). Peter, Shepherd observes, has now taken on the most reliable human commentator function in the text from Jesus.³⁷

Later in his sermon, Peter speaks of the gift of the Spirit being for all (Acts 2:38-39). While Luke prefers to use indirect description of the Spirit through its actions and speech, this is one of the few times in the narrative that the Spirit is defined directly. Peter directly defines the Spirit twice in this episode, first as promise (2:33), as Jesus has already done (1:4), and then as a gift (2:38). Promise puts the activity of the Spirit among the disciples in continuity with the preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:16) as well as with the ancient prophets, specifically Joel in the context of Peter’s speech (Acts 2:16-21). Gift reflects the gracious hospitality of God in creating the new community. The Spirit is a gift poured out on all flesh (2:17). The gift is for everyone.

Although the Spirit is a gift given by God, the Spirit also acts independently as a subject. At the beginning of chapter 2, the Spirit acts within the community, filling them

³⁷ Ibid., 163.
and giving them ability to speak (2:4). Through the Spirit, the disciples are able to do something they never could have done on their own – speak in other languages. This correlates with the direct action of the Spirit as subject in Acts 1, as the Spirit had foretold of events through David (1:16). Direct action being an especially important element for Shepherd in characterization, he writes: “Here the Spirit acts directly in the here-and-now to inspire the disciples.”

Paul writes of a variety of gifts of the one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4), but as Acts 2 begins, the Spirit’s main gift is that of inspired speech.

After three thousand listeners in this international Jewish audience are cut to the heart by Peter’s sermon, he promises that if they repent and are baptized, they also will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift not just for certain inspired prophets. “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (2:39). The same Spirit who filled the priest Zechariah (Luke 1:67), the young girl Mary (Luke 1:35), and her son Jesus (Luke 4:14), is now promised to all flesh (Acts 2:17). Shepherd sees this as Luke foreshadowing, ever so gently, a major development in his narrative - the Gentile mission. Schweizer notes, “In the new age of salvation all members of the community rather than special individuals are bearers of the Spirit.”

Three thousand are baptized (2:41), and the community formed through the addition of these new, Spirit-filled disciples is consistent with the prayerful community of Acts 1 that was waiting for the Spirit – they devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching

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38 Ibid., 162.
39 Ibid., 166.
and fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and the prayers (2:42). It is a community of signs and wonders and of radical sharing of material possessions, as any had need (2:43-47). At the beginning of Acts 2, Luke gives the Spirit the direct activity of inspiring speech in the community of disciples (2:4). Now at the conclusion of this episode, the Spirit has vastly increased the size of the community through that inspired speech. The narrator gives the reader a direct description of the sort of community that the Spirit produces. Thompson writes: “Even though this group of more than three thousand persons has apparently come from a diversity of backgrounds within Judaism, the fulfilled divine promise enables communal bonds to form among them. This initial description of the Christian believers after the Pentecost event, therefore, directly correlates the divine activity and presence among the believers with the positive, communal ties among them.”

Thus, in this description of the early Christians, the reader is given an indirect view into another activity of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit creates a community that joins together in communal practices of worship and study and where people care for each other’s needs, sharing freely with one other. Acts 2 has furthered the characterization of the Spirit: the Spirit is a gift (2:38). It inspires speech (2:4). It forms a community that is characterized by specific practices of mutual support (2:44-47). The Spirit will then send that community out again with inspired speech (4:8). Shepherd notes that Luke here moves the functions of the Spirit beyond traditional prophetic activities and into the activity of forming a community.

In terms of the setting, the Spirit creates its own setting in Acts 2. At the beginning of this chapter, the disciples, who have been constantly devoting themselves to

41 Thompson, Keeping the Church, 49.
prayer (1:14), are gathered together in one place, continuing the theme of unity and waiting begun in Acts 1. This is the sort of setting that the Holy Spirit comes into. By the end of the chapter, the Spirit itself has transformed that setting and deepened it further into a place of mutual care and support, where the practices of prayer, teaching and hospitality are found (2:42). Thus, the Spirit enters into a setting that is welcome to the Spirit and at the same time makes itself at home by creating and beautifying its own setting through the lives of the people it fills.

Just as in the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, in Acts it is the Holy Spirit that is the driving wind that gets the plot moving. Without the Spirit’s presence in the narrative, the disciples would still be waiting and praying in Jerusalem. Without the presence of the Spirit in the narrative the global mission given by Jesus in Acts 1:8 would not have been launched. Without the presence of the Spirit, presumably Peter would not have stood up to give this speech. Without God giving the gift of the Spirit, the community would not have grown. What does the Spirit do? The Spirit empowers bold speech in other languages. The Spirit launches international mission. The Spirit forms a community of mutual care and support. And that Spirit is a gift given freely to all.

As on-stage representative of the off-stage God, Luke is using the Spirit in this dramatic, opening narrative of Acts to bring deep theological significance to his story. This is a God who loves the world and whose action is outward, beyond the small community of disciples and beyond the center of Jerusalem. God’s call into the new community launched by Jesus is universal. At the heart of the preaching inspired by the Spirit is the story of Jesus (2:22-36). Jesus is the Lord of the world, whose life, death and
resurrection make possible the new community that is formed by the Spirit. The Spirit’s presence gives power to the story and authenticates its truthfulness.

Acts 4 A Spirit of Boldness

4:8 Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter speaks before the council while under arrest.

4:25 God spoke by the Holy Spirit through David.

4:31 The believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak the word of God with boldness.

The verbs found in the three references above demonstrate that as the narrative continues, the Holy Spirit continues to do what it does best – it enables speech. Peter and John have been arrested following the healing of the lame beggar and subsequent speech in the temple (3:1-4:4). When asked by the ruling council by what power and by what name they have done this, Peter gives his answer that the name in question is Jesus (4:7-10). He makes this speech while filled with the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples were at Pentecost, affirming his reliability as a speaker. This episode fulfills something that Jesus had said previously in Luke, “When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:11-12). This gift of bold, extemporaneous speech is presented by the narrator as

43 Ibid., 168, “The narrative reminder that a character is ‘filled with the Spirit’ functions to ensure the reliability of the discourse which follows; what Peter says, he says as a Spirit-inspired prophet.”
all the more remarkable because the members of the council realize that Peter and John are “uneducated and ordinary men” (4:13).

After being threatened and told by the authorities not to preach, Peter and John are released. They return to the community and have a prayer meeting (4:21-31). In their prayer, they mention again, as in 1:16, how the Holy Spirit had spoken through their ancestor David in the Psalms (4:25). This reminds the reader that the Spirit in this narrative is in continuity with the faith of ancient Israel. The same Spirit is at work inspiring prophetic speech. They ask God to give them boldness to speak God’s word despite the threats they’ve received. After the prayer, in a sort of mini-Pentecost event, the house they are in is shaken, they are filled with the Holy Spirit and do indeed speak the word of God with boldness (4:31). Prayer answered.

Immediately following the Spirit-filled prayer meeting, the narrator provides a second description of what this Spirit-filled community is like: it is characterized by common purpose, unity “of one heart and soul” (4:32), a radical sharing of possessions and powerful speech (4:32-37).

The action of the Spirit to inspire speech has been reinforced again in Acts 4. The Spirit overcomes fears in ordinary, uneducated people who have been threatened by those in power to continue speaking boldly the word of God. The same Spirit who inspired their ancestor King David’s speech (1:16) inspires the speech of fishermen. Luke continues to add depth to the character of the Holy Spirit that he has been developing. The Spirit inspires speech and boldness, overcoming fear. The Spirit does remarkable things through ordinary people, just as it had in the opening chapters of the Gospel of Luke.
Luke also builds on the description from Acts 2 of what sort of setting the Spirit is found in. The Spirit fills a community that “raised their voices together” in prayer (4:24). In fact, the Spirit is given in direct answer to prayer when the community prays for boldness. The Spirit provides this gift of bold speech after the release of Peter and John because it’s what they will need in the midst of future conflict and opposition.\textsuperscript{44} This answered prayer had already been promised by Jesus who, in Luke, said, “If you, then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Luke 11:13) Matthew, in the corresponding text, has “good gifts” as the answer to prayer (Matthew 7:10) where Luke has Holy Spirit. For Luke, then, the Spirit is the good gift that God gives and the ultimate answer to prayer. The presence of the Spirit also serves to further deepen the bonds of this praying community, not just in a spiritual unity but economically in the physical sharing of resources. Thompson and Shepherd both think that by immediately following the outpouring of the Spirit upon the praying community with a description of the unity of that community and their sacrificial sharing of resources, Luke is joining those communal dynamics with the Spirit’s activity among the believers just as he had done at the end of Acts 2.\textsuperscript{45}

The Spirit got things moving in Acts 2. Now, when that going gets tough, the energy of the Holy Wind returns with renewed energy to re-fuel the fire. In chapter 4, Luke repeats and continues to fill out themes that have already been encountered, serving

\textsuperscript{44} See Thompson, \textit{Keeping the Church}, 69, who says, “The amazing scene at the end of this narrative section leaves the reader with a sense of expectation and excitement, as the Holy Spirit provides the believers with what is needed to face their opposition;” and Parsons, \textit{Acts}, 67, “Such boldness will surely be needed as the believers face conflict both within and without the community in the next episodes.”

\textsuperscript{45} Thompson, \textit{Keeping the Church}, 76, and Shepherd, \textit{Narrative Function}, 170-171.
to reinforce his characterization of the Spirit. The Spirit inspires bold, prophetic speech; fills ordinary people; comes in answer to prayer; its presence deepens community bonds while promoting an atmosphere of generous sharing of resources. The Gift forms a community of giving.

Acts 5 Lying to the Spirit Leaves You Out of Breath

5:3 “Ananias,” Peter asked, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?”

5:9 Peter to Sapphira: “How is it that you have agreed to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?”

5:32 Peter, under arrest, to the Jewish council: “And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

In Acts 4, Luke brought conflict with the local authorities into the plot. Now he turns to conflict within the new community. The first time that the word church is found in Acts is at the end of a church council meeting at which two of the members drop dead (5:11). This unusual and unpleasant episode doesn’t show up in the Revised Common Lectionary, but the Holy Spirit does show up here. Up to this point, Luke has described the new, Spirit-filled community in idyllic language of unity. “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (4:32). It’s a beautiful picture. Members of the community would sell property, lay the proceeds at the apostles’ feet and distribute to each as any had need (4:35). This is a characteristic of what Luke
Timothy Johnson calls the “spirit-community.” This is not, however, a characteristic of Ananias and Sapphira, whom Johnson calls a “counter-community of avarice.” They sold a piece of property and kept back some of the proceeds for themselves, while making it seem as if they were laying it all at the apostles’ feet (5:2).

How Peter finds out, the reader is not told. But Peter says that rather than being filled with the Spirit they have been filled with Satan. Their behavior amounts to lying to the Holy Spirit and putting the Spirit of the Lord to the test (5:3). One of the categories that Shepherd uses to justify the legitimacy of looking at the Holy Spirit as a character in Luke-Acts is conflict. Not only is the Spirit an actor in the story, the Spirit also gets into conflict, an ingredient in the plot of any story. This episode is one that he cites as an example of the character of the Spirit in conflict.

In this episode, the Spirit is presented as a character that can be lied to and tested, but that sees right through those lies. Peter says, “You did not lie to us but to God” (5:4). In this statement, he has done two things. He has identified the Holy Spirit itself with the new Spirit-filled community and he has also directly identified the Spirit with God.

Johnson notes that an alternative translation for 5:3 could be “falsified the Holy Spirit.” Rather than lying directly to the Holy Spirit, this sense of the phrase would mean that Ananias has counterfeited the actions of the Holy Spirit that had created the generous sharing of the community. He wishes to be a part of that community but has, through his lies, copied the work of the Holy Spirit in a false way. The narrator does not say what makes the couple drop dead, but the closest answer in the narrative is the Holy Spirit.

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47 Ibid.
Indeed, Shepherd says that the death of Ananias and Sapphira may be counted among the many signs and wonders the apostles do through the power of the Spirit. At any rate, the Holy Breath is life, the very life of the community. Whether that breath has been taken from Ananias and Sapphira or they have simply suffocated themselves by their deadly behavior, this is a character to be taken very seriously. And so Luke says, “Great fear seized the whole church” (5:11).

The references to the Holy Spirit in this disturbing episode build further upon Luke’s characterization of the Spirit as being closely identified with a generous and united community. That is the sort of setting into which the Spirit comes and the sort of community that the Holy Spirit creates, a life-giving community. Ben Witherington speaks of the Spirit that “dwells in the community.” That is the narrative language of setting. Ananias and Sapphira serve as a counter-community, or a counter-setting, in the narrative, a setting without the presence of the Spirit. Their deception and their lack of generosity signify a community of death, a community without the life-sustaining presence and breath of the Spirit.

At the end of Acts 5, Peter finds himself once again arrested and standing before the Jewish council to defend his speech (5:27). He says that the apostles are witnesses to the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, as is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey God (5:32). The Spirit has already been directly defined by Peter as promise (2:33) and as gift (2:38), now, through Peter, the Spirit is directly defined as a

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50 Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 173.
52 See Thompson, *Keeping the Church*, 80-81, who ascribes to Ananias and Sapphira “a unity of dishonest and deceptive action that contradicts the unanimity of the community of grace. The narrative description of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, therefore, vividly contrasts these negative examples to the life of the Christian community.”
witness. These are the only three direct definitions of the Spirit in Acts. Each word carries important meaning for the developing character of the Spirit in Acts: As promise, this is the same Spirit who spoke through the prophets of Israel, not some different, evil spirit, and is a Spirit promised to all (2:33). As gift, this Spirit is freely given to all and creates the new spirit-filled community (2:38-39). As witness, this is the Spirit who inspires bold, prophetic speech while testifying to the authenticity of the speakers and the veracity of their message (5:32). Shepherd notes that by naming the Spirit a witness at this point in the narrative, Luke is hinting of the significant witnessing by the Spirit yet to come, especially in the stories about the Gentile mission in Acts 8 and 10-15.53

By directly defining the Spirit as promise, gift and witness, Luke is speaking to the ongoing activity of God in the world. These are active words. Promise anticipates an ongoing narrative, a past and a future shape to God’s relationship with the world, through the Spirit. God was faithful in the past and will be faithful in the future. God will not abandon the world. Gift and witness are active words in the present. The Spirit is God’s gift of hospitality and welcome into the new community. The Spirit as witness serves to authenticate the story of Jesus, but also is a reminder that God works through the speech of human beings. In these active words of promise, gift and witness, the direct description of the Spirit describes God’s involvement with the world as engaged, ongoing and generous.

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53 Shepherd, *Narrative Function*, 175.
Acts 6 and 7 Spiritual Leaders

6:3 & 5 As deacons are chosen to see to the daily distribution of food, one requirement is that they be full of the Spirit. Among them is Stephen.

6:10 Stephen preaches with wisdom and the Spirit.

7:51 Stephen accuses the Council of forever opposing the Holy Spirit.

7:55 Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen has a vision of heaven and Jesus at the right hand of God.

The Spirit-filled community is a sharing community, but the twelve Apostles become increasingly distracted with the administration of the goods that the growing community shares. They decide it is time to appoint seven men to see to the daily distribution of food. “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables” (6:2). The requirements for these new leaders are that they be of good standing, full of the Spirit and wisdom (6:3). Although the Spirit does not act directly here as a narrative character, the implication is that leaders in this community, including the ones who will manage the money, are to be people through whom the Spirit clearly works. The presence of the Spirit authorizes them for ministry and aids the community in discerning who its leaders will be. This passing along of authority is done through prayer and the laying on of hands (6:6).

The attention turns to Stephen, one of those Magnificent Seven, and it becomes clear that the way the Spirit works in him is through one of the repeated themes in Luke: inspired speech (6:10). Ministering among the people, we find that Stephen is “full of grace and power” (6:8), and Luke tells us three times that Stephen is full of the Spirit
Stephen becomes the first martyr because of his Spirit-filled speech. Johnson notes that there is no obvious connection between waiting on tables and the prophetic, inspired ministry of Stephen, and later of Philip, another of the Seven. He says, however, “the discrepancy disappears when we remember Luke’s consistent habit of using authority over material possessions as a symbol for spiritual authority.” Table service and prophetic, inspired ministry go hand in hand. Jesus implied as much to his disciples, “The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:24-30). The apostles themselves were engaged in this type of work in chapter 5 in the episode with Ananias and Sapphira. Shepherd agrees that the authority of the Seven over material goods symbolizes the transition of prophetic power between the apostles and the Seven. This is a transitional narrative, preparing the reader for the Spirit-led developments to follow. The Spirit acts in the community to raise up new leaders. These leaders will have a prophetically powerful ministry, just as the apostles. But at their heart, just as Jesus said of those who would come after him, they are servants. As in previous episodes, the presence of the Spirit is at the heart of a community of sharing and giving.

The extended speech of one of these new leaders helps to drive the narrative forward. Ever since the arrest of Peter and John, conflict has been building in the narrative. There has been conflict with the authorities (4:4-22), conflict within the community (5:1-11), and now the Holy Spirit is directly linked with creating additional conflict as well as a martyr through the speech of Stephen. The coats of those stoning

55 Shepherd, Narrative Function, 177.
Stephen land at the feet of a man named Saul. A widespread persecution follows and the community scatters out of Jerusalem and into the countryside of Judea and Samaria (7:58-8:4). By repeatedly stressing that Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit becomes directly implicated in this conflict through Stephen’s speech. This conflict serves to send the church out in mission, not because of any strategic planning or prayer meetings, but because they are running for their lives.

The material in Acts 6-7 begins with the Spirit once again at the heart of a community that is concerned with the practical matter of providing for the material needs of everyone. But as the story of Stephen unfolds, it adds a new edge to the character of the Spirit. Through the bold speech of Stephen, the Spirit appears to deliberately provoke the authorities in order to create conflict in the narrative. Shepherd notes: “The words that spark Stephen’s execution are explicitly said to be inspired by the Spirit; ironically, the persecution sparked by this event serves to spark evangelism in Samaria and beyond, in fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy (Acts 1:8).”56 In this episode, you can almost hear the voice of Joseph, whom Stephen mentions in his speech, echoing from Genesis, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good” (Gen. 50:19). Would the church have moved out of Jerusalem without the introduction of this conflict? Not the way Luke tells the story. Luke uses the trauma of persecution through the prodding of the Holy Instigator to move the plot forward. And so, “those who were scattered went from place to place and proclaimed the Messiah to them” (8:4).

For Luke, God is not just present in the midst of the peaceful, caring community. Through the presence of the Spirit, Luke signals that God is also in the midst of conflict,  

56 Ibid., 177.
even creating it. God’s purposes are being worked out in ways that would not be immediately present to those on the receiving end of persecution. But in the hindsight witness of the Spirit, God is shown to be very present in time of trouble, if not exactly a very present help. If Luke was indeed familiar with the letters of Paul, then the story of Stephen is a narrative version of, “all things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom. 8:28).

Acts 8 Philip’s Adventures with the Spirit

8:7 “Unclean spirits” come out of many through Philip’s ministry in Samaria.

8:14-17 Samaritan believers receive the Holy Spirit when Peter and John come down from Jerusalem and pray for them.

8:18-20 Simon the magician wants this same power, and is rebuked by Peter.

8:29 The Spirit tells Philip to join the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot.

8:39 The Spirit of the Lord snatches Philip out of the chariot and deposits him elsewhere.

Philip, one of the Spirit-filled seven chosen as leaders to oversee the daily distribution of food to the widows (6:5), is also one of those scattered out of Jerusalem in the persecution following the death of Stephen. He goes to Samaria (8:4-5). As a result of his preaching, curing diseases, and casting out unclean spirits, many believers in the name of Jesus are baptized. When word gets back to Jerusalem, Peter and John come down to investigate. Although the Samaritans had been baptized, they have not yet received the Holy Spirit, which they will eventually receive when the two apostles lay
their hands on them. A magician named Simon sees this happen and wants that power for himself (8:9-19).

The Spirit acts in a couple of ways in this episode. First, this is one of the few places in Acts where the word spirit is used for something other than the Holy Spirit. Implicitly, God’s Spirit is coming into conflict with the unclean spirits of Samaria through the ministry of Philip, whom we have already been told in Acts 6 is filled with the Holy Spirit (Compare 16:16-18 and 19:12 where Paul gets into a similar conflict with spirits). Johnson sees geography as a major part of the literary structure of Acts. In the Gospel of Luke, the movement is toward Jerusalem. In Acts, it is away. Johnson notes that Luke joins that spatial progression with a demographic expansion among the Gentiles and the culturally Greek world. Expansion into each new territory is accompanied with a symbolic conquering of evil powers. Philip’s Spirit-filled ministry comes into direct conflict with the spirits of oppression in this world. Shepherd sees the human conflict between Philip and Simon as indicative of the underlying cosmic conflict between the Spirit that empowers Philip and the demonic forces at work in magic. Indeed, Shepherd uses this episode to support the thesis of his work, namely that the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts is best understood as a character in the narrative because one of the defining characteristics of a character is being involved in conflict. The mission in Samaria came about because of the Spirit-instigated conflict in Jerusalem in Acts 7. Now in Samaria, conflict continues. I do not read any real conflict between Philip and Simon in the text. Simon seems as amazed and open to Philip as everyone else. The real human

57 Johnson, Act of the Apostles, 11.
58 Shepherd, Narrative Function, 181.
59 Ibid., 2 and 183.
conflict enters this episode later, between Simon and Peter, when the former offers money for the power of the Spirit. Their conflict is heard in advance in the loud shrieks of the unclean spirits.

A second way in which the Holy Spirit enters this narrative is when the Spirit is given to the new Samaritan believers at the hands of the apostles. This gift (8:20), the same word used in Acts 2:38, serves to confirm the promise of Jesus in 1:8 of an expanding witness into Samaria, and it also foreshadows the gift of the Holy Spirit that is coming in Acts 10 to the Gentiles.

This episode continues the theme of locating the Spirit among issues of possessions and money. In Acts 2, 5 & 7, the Spirit is indirectly associated with giving, generosity and with caring for the needs of everyone in the life-giving community. Simon the magician, however, wishes to purchase the gift of the Spirit for money. This is where the actual human conflict enters the episode in Samaria. Echoing the conflict with Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), Peter says to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God’s gift with money!” (8:20). Simon, in response, asks the apostles to pray for him. This is the last we hear of Simon. We can only hope that he did not drop dead, suffering the same fate as the unhappy couple of Acts 5, and have the life sucked out of him.

The account of Philip’s adventures quickly moves along (8:26). In Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, the Holy Spirit acts directly in the narrative, telling Philip to join the eunuch in his chariot where he tells him the good news of Jesus. The eunuch is baptized. There is no mention of him receiving the Spirit. When he comes up
from the water, the Spirit of the Lord abruptly snatches Philip away and Philip finds himself in another place (8:26-40).

Although the Spirit has already given the ability of bold and prophetic speech to humans, this is the first time that the Spirit speaks directly in Acts. An “angel of the Lord” gets Philip going to a particular location, the Jerusalem-Gaza road (8:26). Once Philip is there, the Spirit narrows it down to a particular person and gives him direct instructions to go to join the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch (8:29). Lest there be any mistake on the part of the reader that Philip was making this innovative and provocative move on his own, we have this double sending from two utterly reliable characters, an angel of the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Yes, this is the right thing to do. Shepherd notes that this direct action of the Spirit underscores the divine origin of Philip’s mission. The Holy Spirit is acting directly to promote mission to someone who was an outsider, ethnically, physically and potentially sexually. Because Cornelius, in Acts 10, gets all the attention as the first Gentile Christian, commentators disagree on whether or not the Ethiopian was, in fact, Jewish and simply working in Ethiopia, since Luke says he had come to Jerusalem to worship (8:27), or whether “eunuch” was merely the title of his office. Pervo writes that readers who ask such questions are missing Luke’s point: the official is moving away from the temple and towards the prophets in his reading of Isaiah. Parsons, who thinks that perhaps pseudo-Aristotle might have been in the cultural repertoire of Luke’s audience, quotes him in regard to Ethiopians: “Those who

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60 Ibid., 186.
61 Shepherd says it is “implied by the context” that the eunuch is Jewish, Ibid., 185.
are too swarthy are cowardly; this applies to Egyptians and Ethiopians."

Parsons, whose commentary focuses on the Greco-Roman rhetoric of Acts, notes that Luke’s primary way of referring to the Ethiopian eunuch is simply as “the eunuch,” and then cites a variety of first century sources on their contemporary views of eunuchs: despised, derided, evil people, greedy, sexually ambiguous, hybrid and monstrous, alien to human nature, yet at the same time holding important offices of trust. They were liminal figures, trusted yet treated with suspicion. These could easily have been the assumptions of Luke’s implied readers. All of this has the potential of adding up to make of the eunuch a truly unsavory character in the eyes of Luke’s readers. What is not at all ambiguous, and something that Luke and the audience of Acts would have definitely had access to, is Deuteronomy 23:1: “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.” If the prohibition in Deuteronomy is unambiguous about prohibiting temple worship for the ambiguous eunuch, the contradicting promise of Isaiah 56 is equally unambiguous: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give an everlasting name that shall not be cut off… for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:4-7). Coincidently, the Ethiopian eunuch happened to be reading Isaiah 53 in his chariot (8:32-33). While Philip says that the passage the eunuch is reading applies to Jesus, Parsons, in inspired speculation, thinks that perhaps the eunuch was drawn to it in thinking that it might apply to himself, in sympathy with the

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63 Parsons, Acts, 119.
64 Ibid.,119-220.
despised, physically marred, and humiliated character.\textsuperscript{65} By sending Philip to the eunuch at this precise moment, just as he is reading this text from Isaiah, the Spirit is meeting the eunuch precisely where he is at and is confirming in advance what the eunuch will shortly be reading within the Isaiah scroll as he travels down the road. The Spirit is beating Isaiah to the punch. Philip reads the good news of Jesus into the Isaiah narrative, a Jesus who inhabited the same sort of humiliating place as the eunuch, and with that gospel tells the eunuch that he is welcome to be baptized, the mark of initiation into the church, and so become part of the community of Jesus. Philip is fulfilling the very promise of Isaiah to eunuchs as this particular eunuch is baptized.

Based upon past behavior, the reader might expect the Spirit to fall upon the eunuch, confirming his conversion (e.g. 8:17). But as soon as Philip and the eunuch come up out of the waters of baptism, the Spirit does not fall upon the eunuch but upon Philip (8:39). The Spirit again acts directly in the narrative and snatches Philip away. It’s a violent, grasping word, as if the wind of the Spirit were a tornado picking him up to deposit him elsewhere. Philip, however, does not land in Oz. He finds himself in Azotus, 22 miles away, where he continues to proclaim the good news (8:39-40). In this episode, the Spirit is able to move Philip at will and put him in a new region to preach, almost like moving a piece on a chess board. Pervo\textsuperscript{66} and Shepherd both note that this snatching echoes the traditions of Moses and Elijah, further stressed in that here the Spirit is called by the Hebrew Bible name, “Spirit of the Lord.” Shepherd adds: “Luke’s rhetoric serves to assure the reader that God, through the Spirit, is in charge of the story.”\textsuperscript{67} The Spirit’s

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 121.
\item\textsuperscript{66} Pervo, \textit{Acts: A Commentary}, 226.
\item\textsuperscript{67} Shepherd, \textit{Narrative Function}, 187.
\end{itemize}
actions show a determined intent to have the message of Jesus rapidly spread geographically.

Left alone in the chariot with his scroll of Isaiah, we can expect that further down the road the eunuch will be reading his own experience into the narrative of Isaiah 56 just as he might have been doing in the passage Philip found him reading. The text says that the eunuch went on his way rejoicing (8:39). Although the narrator has not said directly that he received the Holy Spirit while Philip was being snatched away, based on the experience of the Samaritans earlier in the chapter (8:15-17), and the Jerusalem community in Acts 2, we can expect that he has. Later in the narrative, being filled with joy will directly accompany with being filled with the Holy Spirit (13:52).

In what settings do we find the Spirit in Acts 13? For the first time in Acts, the Spirit makes an appearance outside of Jerusalem. Just as the Spirit has spoken in the past, unbound by time and foretelling future events (1:16), neither is the Spirit bound by place.

In Philip’s adventures in Acts 8, we see the characterization of the Spirit deepened in familiar and new ways. The Spirit is found in the midst of conflict. The Spirit confirms the acceptance of new believers among the Samaritans and authenticates them as a community. For the first time, and at a time of potentially controversial mission, the Spirit speaks directly in the narrative to confirm the legitimacy of crossing a boundary with the good news about Jesus and shows a determined intent to rapidly expand the geographic boundaries of the message. The Spirit continues to lead the way as trailblazer and innovator, limited neither by place nor human will. The innovation was no mere human idea, but came directly from God. These episodes continue to build upon the inclusive theology of Acts. The off-stage God is concerned about diverse populations and
individuals whom the main characters had never met and who are not part of the central narrative. Divine providence leads and directs mission into new territories through the on-stage presence of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9 Saul Enters the Spirit-filled Community

9:17 Ananias, after finding the blinded persecutor Saul, lays his hands on him, telling Saul that he has been sent by Jesus so that Saul might regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

9:31 “The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

Jesus dramatically re-enters the narrative of Acts in chapter 9, both in the calling vision of Saul on the road to Damascus (9:4-5) and in the confirming vision to Ananias to go and meet this infamous persecutor and welcome him into the community of disciples in Damascus (9:10). Previously, an angel of the Lord and the Holy Spirit had directed the mission of Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-29). If there could be any more reliable witness in this narrative than an angel and the Holy Spirit, this is it. Jesus is the ultimate witness to the reliability of a character, and so he enters the story at this point precisely to confirm the reliability of the controversial persecutor Saul for the rest of the Acts narrative. Saul has the divine imprimatur on his ministry from here on out.

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68 Ibid., 189, “Luke uses the most reliable commentator, the risen Jesus, to explain the significance of the story,” forming a programmatic prophecy of Paul’s career.
Unlike the direct speech of Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters into this narrative only indirectly through the speech of Ananias. But the narrative contains elements we have come to expect that are associated with the Spirit’s filling and presence: the laying on of hands, a faithful community of disciples, and bold, missional speech. The filling of the Spirit does not come independent of contact with a representative of the Spirit-filled community. Saul does not receive the Spirit while alone with Jesus on the road. He has to have contact with another disciple. But noticeably different from the episode between Philip and the Samaritans (8:14-15), no apostles from Jerusalem are necessary for the Spirit to come upon Saul. In this case, Jesus sends someone previously unknown in the narrative, a disciple in Damascus named Ananias (9:10). This is a special calling, independent of the Jerusalem hierarchy. After the experience with Ananias, accompanied by baptism, Saul is brought into the larger community of disciples in Damascus. His conversion is immediately followed by bold speech about Jesus (9:18-20). Because the details of Saul’s interaction with the Damascus disciples are sparse, the reader must fill in the blanks based on what has already happened in the Acts narrative. The events of Acts 9 fit the same general pattern as in Acts 2 and 4. All the main elements are there: filling with the Spirit is associated with baptism; it is followed by entry into the community and subsequently by bold, missional speech. Thompson notes: “Saul’s proclamation and the resultant effects (cf. 9:21-22) not only implicitly confirm that Saul has indeed been filled with the Holy Spirit; they also imply that the disciples have accepted him as part of their koinonia, thus providing him with communal support for the task.”⁶⁹ While in Acts 2 and 4 the koinonia of the Spirit is demonstrated in the radical sharing of resources among

⁶⁹ Thompson, *Keeping the Church*, 123.
the believers in Jerusalem (cf. 2:44-46 and 4:32-35), in Damascus we see that same spirit of community indirectly in the concern that the Damascus disciples show for their former persecutor. They save his life when he himself becomes the persecuted one by lowering him in a basket through an opening in the city wall (9:25). Although the Spirit is not directly mentioned in this action, the narrative has been directly and indirectly building up an image of a Spirit-filled community as one that is evidenced by mutual caring and support.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Saul is initially greeted with fear and suspicion by the disciples, based on their past experience with the man (9:26). But a reliable witness and evidence vouch for his character: Barnabas, who had previously entered in the narrative as a generous financial contributor to the community (4:36-37), now shows his support for Saul and narrates Jesus’ own support for Saul on the road to Damascus as well as Saul’s bold proclamation of Jesus (9:27). Thompson describes the character of Barnabas as functioning here as a mediator between the apostles and Saul, suggesting that the apostles are part of the larger group in Jerusalem that is suspicious of Saul’s motives. Through all of this accumulating evidence of reliable witnesses – Barnabas, Saul’s bold witness for Jesus, and even Jesus himself - Luke continues to make his case that Saul/Paul is an utterly reliable character in his story, a case being made to the apostles within the narrative as well as to the reader outside.

This section ends with a summary statement such as we have already encountered in 2:43-47 and 4:32-34, which both described the Spirit-filled community in Jerusalem. Here, however, the community has expanded and the summary includes Judea, Galilee

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70 Ibid., 127.
and Samaria (9:31). The church had peace, was built up, and, living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. Once again, the Holy Spirit is associated with the community of believers, a community that is no longer limited to Jerusalem but is extending toward the ends of the earth. The setting in which we find the Spirit is not limited geographically. The setting of the Spirit is Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and, as we saw earlier in the chapter, the Spirit is also found in Damascus.

Furthermore, the Spirit gives *paraklesis* to the community. Translated as exhortation, encouragement, consolation, or comfort, the word is found three additional times in Acts. First, Barnabas is called the “son of encouragement” (4:36). Next, while visiting the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, after the reading of the scriptures, the officials of the synagogue say to Paul and Barnabas, “Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, give it” (13:15), at which Paul gets up and preaches. Finally, when the Gentile believers read the letter sent by the Jerusalem Council, “they rejoiced at the exhortation” (15:31). Shepherd notes that the use of this word is associated with the proclamation of God’s salvation. He reads it as an instrumental dative, so that the phrase “in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” refers to the last part of the sentence. That is, the church increased in numbers because of the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Just as Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 13:13) and Luke both use the word koinonia in relation to the Holy Spirit and the community, Luke is not the only New Testament writer to use a form of paraklesis. The related word parakletos, comforter or advocate, is used in John 14 and 15 for the Holy Spirit. In Acts 9:31 we continue to see the Spirit at work within the community. The Spirit does not merely enter into and bring others into the setting of the believing

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72 Ibid., 195.
community, the Spirit is also at work creating the setting in which it is found. The Spirit gives the comfort and exhortation which provide for the wellbeing of the community and that make continued growth possible.

Acts 10-11 Crossing Boundaries with the Spirit

10:19-20 The Spirit speaks directly to Peter saying, “Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.”

10:37 Peter tells how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

10: 44-48 The Spirit falls upon the gentiles gathered with Cornelius, astounding Peter and the circumcised believers with him when they hear them speaking in tongues. Peter asks if anyone can withhold the waters of baptism from them since they have received the Holy Spirit. With no objections raised, they are baptized.

11:12 Peter reports to the church in Jerusalem that the Spirit told him to go with the representatives from Cornelius and “not to make a distinction between them and us.”

11:15-16 Peter reports that the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles just as it had upon them at the beginning and how he remembered how Jesus had said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

11:24 Barnabas is said to be a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, when he encourages the Hellenists in Antioch.

11:28 A prophet named Agabus predicts by the Spirit a severe, world-wide famine which results in relief being sent from the believers in Antioch to those in Judea.
The setting at the end of Acts 9 is Joppa, on the Mediterranean coast. Peter has been going “here and there among the believers” (Acts 9:32). Summoned to Joppa following the death of a beloved disciple named Dorcas, whom he raises from the dead (Acts 9:40), Peter stays for some time at the home of one Simon the Tanner (9:43). Perhaps foreshadowing of what is to follow, Pervo reminds us that this setting is the same city to which Jonah fled when trying to avoid a mission to the Gentiles (Jonah 1:3). Meanwhile, up the coast from Joppa in Caesarea, a Gentile named Cornelius is having a vision (10:3). Something new and innovative is about to happen – the inclusion of Gentiles into the community of disciples. Johnson calls this “the church’s most fundamental and dangerous step,” and the Holy Spirit is going to play a prominent role every step of the way.

The Spirit enters this narrative relatively late in order to confirm things that have already happened. Acts 10 opens in Caesarea with a description of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his clear vision of an angel of God. The angel gives him specific instructions for how to find Peter at the house of Simon the Tanner in Joppa. Cornelius responds immediately by sending representatives to find Peter (10:1-8). Back in Joppa, Peter has a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven, full of unclean animals, and he hears the voice of the Lord telling him to get up, kill and eat. Peter refuses on religious principle. Meanwhile, as the vision is ending, Cornelius’ emissaries arrive at the gate (10:9-18).

It is at this point that the Spirit enters directly into the narrative. While Peter is reflecting on his puzzling vision, at the precise moment when three Gentiles are

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downstairs knocking at the door, the Spirit says to him, “Look, three men are searching for you. Now, get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation” (10:19-20a). This is the second time that the Spirit has spoken directly in Acts. The first was in the episode with Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in which the Spirit says, “Go over to this chariot and join it” (8:29). In both instances, the Spirit tells another character to get moving, to go and speak to someone, someone that Philip and Peter might ordinarily resist approaching. That is, the Spirit sends them out in mission. This mission to the Gentiles does not emerge out of a committee meeting. It was not Peter’s original idea. It was not a part of a strategic plan for increasing church membership. Within the Acts narrative, the mission to the Gentiles comes from the Holy Spirit entering directly into the narrative and putting radical ideas into the heads of the other characters.

Before Peter descends the stairs to meet the three men, the Spirit adds one more bit of information to its brief speech: “for I have sent them” (10:20b). So, not only does the Spirit send the Spirit-filled apostle to meet the Gentiles, the Spirit has already been at work in the life of the Gentiles themselves, independent of the mainstream disciples. The Spirit has already crossed the boundary that it is telling Peter to cross. The Spirit is already in the place where it is calling Peter to go, influencing characters who have never heard of Jesus.

Peter goes downstairs and meets the strangers, extends hospitality and welcomes them in. The next day he travels with an entourage of believers to the home of Cornelius in Caesarea. He tells them the story of Jesus, mentioning that Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. While preaching, that same Spirit once again enters the narrative and falls upon everyone who is listening, including the unbaptized Gentiles (10:23b-44).
The narrator directly defines the Holy Spirit as a gift (10:45), just as Peter had on the day of Pentecost (2:38). This direct definition by the narrator signals that once again, as at Pentecost, gift identifies the Spirit as the creator and expander of the community. Parsons also notes that the word “gift” fits the context of hospitality. Peter had shown hospitality to the messengers of Cornelius, and now Peter is welcomed in Cornelius’ home. God extends hospitality by giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. The circumcised believers hear the evidence of this outpouring when the Gentiles start speaking in the inspired speech of tongues. The Spirit has enabled speech in the Gentiles just as it had in them, and they are astounded. The Spirit has surprised them. Peter asks the irrefutable question, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (10:47)

The Spirit acts repeatedly in this episode as an utterly reliable witness to this innovative mission to the Gentiles. This whole episode is full of reliable witnesses that signal to the reader that this huge, boundary-crossing step is not a human invention at all but is ordained by God: the angel of God that speaks to Cornelius (10:3-6); Peter’s vision of the sheet (10:9-16); the voice of the Lord (10:13-15); the voice of the Holy Spirit (10:19); Peter’s claim that God had shown him not to call anyone profane or unclean (10:28); Peter’s claim that God shows no partiality (10:34); Peter’s claim that the prophets testify that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name (10:43). Shepherd notes that the entire arsenal of divine figures is brought to

75 Parsons, *Acts*, 155. “Gift-giving by the host to the guest was customary in ancient hospitality and often marked the transition from a temporary to a permanent hospitality relationship.”

bear.\textsuperscript{77} This crescendo of reliable, substantiating witnesses climaxes with the thunderous waterfall of the Spirit coming upon the Gentiles of Cornelius’ household (10:44).

In Acts 11, objections are raised by skeptical persons in the church back in Jerusalem (11:2-3). Although involvement in conflict is one of the main justifications that Shepherd gives for viewing the Spirit as a narrative character, he surprisingly does not mention it in the context of Acts 11. The Spirit’s acceptance of the Gentiles has led in turn to Peter’s acceptance of them in the church (11:17). Cornelius, Parsons observes, is not the only one who has experienced a conversion. Present at the conversion of Cornelius, the Spirit has also effected a conversion in the heart of Peter.\textsuperscript{78} That conversion to acceptance has created conflict for him within the church. This bold step will require some explaining. Peter summarizes the experiences we have just read in Acts 10, driving the point home once again for the reader that the Spirit serves to validate the Gentile mission. Peter says, “The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us (11:12). And, telling his opponents that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, he states in different words his motive for baptism, “If then God gave them the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (11:17). One can almost see Peter raising his hands and saying, “It’s not my fault. Blame God!” Luke has pulled out all of the stops in this episode to support the claim of his narrative that the mission to the Gentiles is the work of God, initiated by God and fully endorsed by God. The Spirit plays a pivotal role in driving

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 199.
\textsuperscript{78} Parsons, \textit{Acts}, 148.
Luke’s point home. Shepherds uses the word discernment in relation to Acts 10 and 11, and it is a good word to use for the role of the Spirit, especially in this section of Acts. The presence of the Spirit gradually helps the disciples to discern what God is doing in the world. Its presence changes the hearts and minds of the disciples about who is in and who is out. Step by step, the Spirit is moving the mission of the church outward. The character of the Spirit is free, innovative, inclusive, boundary-crossing, and it drives the church into places it would not ordinarily go on its own, leading the way and yet already present there when the church arrives.

The episode involving Cornelius also adds to what has already been seen in Acts about the sort of settings in which the Spirit is found. It is not upon any old Gentile that the Spirit falls. Shepherds sees Cornelius as characterized in the same terms as Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke’s Gospel and as the main figures in the book of Acts. I see the character of Cornelius especially resembling the disciples in Acts 1 and 2 as they were “constantly devoting themselves to prayer” (1:14 and see 2:42). The narrator gives us a direct description of Cornelius as “a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God” (10:2). He was a praying man. He was a generous and giving man. This echoes the generous sharing of the community of disciples in Jerusalem who “would sell their possessions and goods and

79 Johnson, Acts of the Apostles, 201. Johnson notes another effect of Peter’s experience of the Spirit – it helps him remember the words of Jesus. Seeing the Spirit fall upon the Gentiles reminds him of something Jesus said, “‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ‘The words of Jesus are given a new understanding because of the continuing work of the Spirit.’”

80 Shepherd, Narrative Function, 205. Johnson agrees, saying, “The struggle Luke seeks to communicate to the reader is the process of human decision-making as the Church tries to catch up to God’s initiative.” He also notes that human confusion and conflict are caused by God’s action, Johnson, 186-187.

81 Ibid., 198-199.
distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (2:45). The only thing that the Cornelius and his household appear to lack, something that the Jerusalem community had, is the apostles’ teaching (2:42), and that is precisely what Peter provides in his brief message about Jesus (10:36-43). This setting into which the Holy Spirit is poured is the same sort of setting into which the Spirit has already come and which the Spirit’s presence creates: prayerful, generous, life-giving, in which resources are gladly shared and in which all are welcome, whether Parthians, Medes, Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia (1:9) or a Roman centurion and his family.

The concern for the poor that characterizes the Spirit-filled community and the Spirit-called centurion is evidenced again at the end of Acts 11. Up north in Antioch, the church has seen spectacular growth among the “Hellenists” (11:21). Spirit-filled Barnabas, that generous son of encouragement that the reader first met selling his property in 4:36, approves of this mixed Jewish-Gentile church, where the narrator notes that disciples were first called Christians (11:26). Once again, the Spirit serves to ensure that the witness, in this case Barnabas, is reliable. At a prayer meeting in this new, ethnically diverse Christian church, a prophet named Agabus predicts by the Spirit that a famine will spread over the world, so the church in Antioch decides to take up a special offering to help the believers living in Judea. Again, the Spirit is again found a setting of prayer and it promotes the sharing of resources. Shepherd highlights how Luke takes a new direction here in that Spirit-inspired prophets are now active among Gentiles. The content of that prophecy is, I believe, also important to note. Here, the Spirit makes the church aware of a need, it opens their eyes, and the disciples respond to that Spirit-given

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82 Ibid., 208.
awareness by planning a work of mission. This time the mission is not evangelical proclamation but financial relief. Shepherd notes that the prophetic activity of the Spirit and the sharing of resources works to establish a connection between the Jewish and Gentile churches.⁸³

In Acts 10 and 11, the Spirit appears in abundance, indicating the importance of this episode for Luke in the story he is trying to tell about the origins of the church. With much exposure comes much character development. The Spirit is a driver of innovative mission and a boundary-crosser. The Spirit acts independently of the church, and is found in places that the church has not yet gone. It gives the church radical, new ideas. The Spirit acts directly in the narrative as a character, and yet is also given as a gift to show the hospitality of God. It breaks with the habits of the past, including new and outsider groups in the community of Jesus, stirring up conflict and inspiring bold speech. It creates and gives beauty to the setting that it enters, fostering a community of sharing and giving that reaches beyond its immediate setting. The Spirit changes minds and opens hearts. It gives discernment that looks to future mission, not just in evangelistic efforts but in the sending and sharing of material resources as well.

Acts 13-14 Set Apart by the Spirit

13:2 The Spirit speaks directly to the worshiping and fasting church in Antioch, telling them, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

13:4 Barnabas and Saul are said to be sent out by the Spirit.

⁸³ Ibid.
13:9 In confronting opposition from a false prophet named Bar-Jesus, Saul, now renamed Paul, is said to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

13:52 Following success among Gentiles and persecution stirred up by Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

At the end of Acts 11, at the prompting of the Spirit, the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul with financial help for the church in Jerusalem (11:30). There is no direct mention of the Spirit in Acts 12, which is centered in Jerusalem, but at the start of Acts 13 we find ourselves once again where Acts 11 left off, in the Spirit-filled worshiping community in Antioch. By now, Barnabas and Saul have been there a year (11:26). In this scene, the Spirit speaks directly in the Acts narrative for the third time. Previously, the Spirit had given instructions to Philip regarding the Ethiopian eunuch, “Go over to his chariot and join it” (8:29). Later, when messengers from Cornelius are downstairs knocking at the door, the Spirit tells Peter, “Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them” (10:19-21). In this episode, the Spirit speaks to the prophetic, worshiping community, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (13:2). Each time the Spirit speaks directly in Luke’s narrative it is with an imperative. And each time the Spirit speaks directly, it is to get specific people moving.

Shepherd notes that the appearance of the Spirit in Acts 13 helps to establish Paul’s credentials. It is at this point in Acts that the focus will shift primarily to the activities of Paul for the remainder of the narrative. And so Parsons observes, “Luke

84 Ibid., 209.
wants to make it clear that just as the Holy Spirit was involved in the beginning of the public ministry of both Jesus (Luke 3:22) and the apostles (Acts 2:4), the Antiochene church sets Saul and Barnabas apart under the direction of the Holy Spirit.”  

The Spirit sets them apart for a particular work (13:2). Though the Spirit does not explain at this point what the work is, after the reader has followed Paul and Barnabas on their journey to Cyprus and into Asia Minor, Luke tells that they have completed their work (14:26). Based on the summary that Paul and Barnabas give when they return to Antioch, the work appears to be all that God does with them in their travels, in particular that God has opened a door of faith for the Gentiles (14:27). While the Spirit enters the narrative to tell Philip and Peter to cross boundaries, here the Spirit is using Barnabas and Paul to widen the boundaries of disciples to extend throughout Asia Minor (14:21).

With his focus on the church as a narrative character in Acts, Thompson observes how closely the activity of the Spirit is aligned with the activity of the church in Antioch. The Spirit tells the church who they should set apart from among themselves. The church then sends Barnabas and Saul on their way and at the same time the narrator says that they are sent out by the Spirit (13:3-4). The Spirit previously directed individuals within the narrative, as with Philip and Peter, here the Spirit is acting within and through the community.

Sent out by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul sail for Cyprus. How they choose that destination, the reader is not told. They are not alone as they begin their journey. John Mark, who has returned with them from Jerusalem (12:25), is along to assist them (13:5). When they leave Cyprus for the mainland, John Mark returns to Jerusalem (13:13)

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85 Parsons, Acts, 184.
86 Thompson, Keeping the Church, 165-166.
and will eventually be the cause of a split between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-40).

Barnabas wants to bring John Mark with them on a return visit to the cities that he and Paul have evangelized, but Paul does not want to take with them “one who had deserted them…and had not accompanied them in the work” (15:38). There’s that word “work” again. The Spirit had called Barnabas and Saul to a particular work, the mission to the Gentiles, but John Mark had not remained a part of that work. C. Clifton Black observes that in this episode Luke gives narrative clues that cast subtle suspicion on John Mark, foreshadowing this split.⁸⁷ Among other things, John Mark’s name is not included along with Barnabas and Saul when the Holy Spirit sets them apart in Antioch (13:2). Further, John Mark is never said to be filled with the Holy Spirit as both Barnabas (11:24) and Saul (13:9) are. So, one might conclude that just as the presence of the Spirit authenticates the ministry of Barnabas and Saul, the lack of any association of the Spirit with John Mark diminishes his credentials as part of the Spirit’s work, precisely what Paul affirms in Acts 15.

When Barnabas and Saul come to Cyprus, they run into conflict with “a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus” (13:6). The only direct mention of the Spirit in Cyprus is when Saul, first called Paul at this point, confronts Bar-Jesus (13:9). Echoing Peter’s confrontations of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11) and of Simon the Magician (8:18-24), we again find the Spirit present in a situation of conflict, inspiring bold speech. In this, as Shepherd notes, Luke’s characterization of the Spirit remains consistent.⁸⁸

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⁸⁸ Shepherd, Narrative Function, 213.
The last words in Acts 13 are Holy Spirit, “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (13:52). Paul and Barnabas have just been run out of town after getting into conflict with the synagogue leaders of Pisidian Antioch who stir up persecution against them – again the Spirit is close to conflict - while at the same time many Gentiles had become believers (13:48-52). What is not clear in 13:52 is exactly who the disciples are that are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Does this refer to Paul and Barnabas or to the new believers they leave behind in Pisidian Antioch? Johnson, Thompson, Pervo and Witherington all think it refers to the new Gentile believers. Shepherd, however, assigns the joy and Spirit to Paul and Barnabas. For him, the Spirit’s presence signals that, despite the setback and conflict of persecution, things are going according to God’s plan. If, on the other hand, the new Christians are the ones filled with the Spirit, the Spirit’s presence would serve to confirm them as a true Christian community, just as it had previously in the Jerusalem church (2:38) and the church in Antioch (11:28, and 13:2). Further, joy characterizes the Ethiopian eunuch after his baptism (8:39). The evidence seems to weigh on the side of the new disciples as the ones who are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Whichever it is, the Spirit as character in Acts continues to behave consistently. In Acts 13, the Spirit’s presence in the narrative has confirmed the validity of a church community – Antioch, and possibly Pisidian Antioch (13:2, and 13:52). The Spirit has confirmed the validity of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas and has called them to a specific work, directly aiding the Antioch church.

90 Thompson, *Keeping the Church*, 147.
in its process of discernment (13:2-4, and 13:9). The Spirit has again been present in conflict (13:9). And the Spirit has once again been found within a setting of people at prayer (13:2).

Acts 15 *It Seemed Good to the Spirit*

15:8 In Peter’s speech before the Jerusalem Church Council, he says that God testified to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit just as God had to them.

15:28 In the letter to the Gentile Christians, the Council says, “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials.”

Acts 15 begins in conflict, when “certain individuals” go from Jerusalem to Antioch and tell the believers there that they must be circumcised in order to be saved (15:1). Paul and Barnabas debate the matter with them and then travel to Jerusalem in order to clear up this issue with the mother church (15:2). The debate continues when a council is convened of the apostles and elders (15:6). Peter stands and briefly alludes to an experience. Although Peter does not mention him by name, the reader recognizes immediately that he is speaking of Cornelius. He says that God has given the Gentiles the Holy Spirit just as he had given it to them, making no distinction (15:7-9). This is the same argument that Peter used the first time he spoke to this same council about the conversion of Gentiles (11:15). The presence of the Spirit validates the Gentiles as accepted and welcomed by God. Shepherd observes, “Note that the Spirit’s testimony, as experienced by Peter, is offered as evidence to resolve a conflict within the church.”

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94 Ibid., 217.
not only does the Spirit create conflict in the narrative, but an experience of the Spirit also serves to resolve conflict. James, who is now the leader of the Jerusalem church, will turn to tradition by quoting scripture in the discussion (15:15-17), but it is notable that a major part of the argument in Luke’s narrative for acceptance of Gentiles in the church is experience, specifically experience of the Spirit. Further, Peter’s speech reminds the reader that in Luke’s story the Spirit had preceded the church in accepting the Gentiles (15:8). The Spirit had led the way. “The upshot,” writes Parsons, “is that God, not Peter (or Paul), is responsible for the inclusion of the Gentiles.”  

The other mention of the Spirit in this chapter is in the letter that the council sends to the Gentile Christians (15:28). It outlines those parts of the Mosaic Law that James expects them to keep; namely, abstaining from eating food sacrificed to idols, blood or strangled animals, and from fornication (15:29). The justification is that “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (15:28). In addition to the leaders in Jerusalem, the Spirit is a character who has made a decision and who chosen sides in the conflict. As in the identification and commissioning of leaders in the church (6:3, and 13:2) and in the earlier approval of Cornelius (11:12), the Holy Spirit remains involved in the discernment process of the church. As Luke narrates the story, it was the experience of the Spirit that was one of the deciding factors in this debate. Johnson speaks of discernment not in terms of coming to the specific decision to accept the Gentiles, but as the process of discerning God’s activity in the world.  Discernment in this council involves Peter and the rest of the Jerusalem leadership being able to recognize where God is at work. The experience of being able to discern evidence of the Spirit in an unexpected place, among Gentiles,

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95 Parsons, Acts, 211.
allows James and the council to interpret scripture in a new light. When the council cites the Spirit’s approval in the letter, along with their own, the narrative signals to the reader divine authority in the council’s decision. Pervo rightly reads between the lines of this narrative and calls Acts 15 a brilliant example of Lucan Art.\(^{97}\) Luke’s idealized portrait of this situation likely glosses over deep conflict at a time when Paul and his opponents remained controversial figures. As presented, the council is “an opportunity to celebrate church unity based on utterly reasonable compromises.”\(^{98}\) The presence of the Spirit in this narrative gives weight and legitimacy to the portrait that Luke is trying to paint of a unified, unanimous acceptance by the council.

In terms of the setting, Acts 15 begins in Antioch, moves to Jerusalem and then returns to Antioch. The narrator has already shown the Spirit to be present in both settings: present in Antioch (13:1-3) and present in the Jerusalem church (4:31). The Spirit’s presence in both settings has already signaled to the reader that these two different communities, one Jewish and one of mixed ethnicity, share something in common. The council enacts formally and officially what the Spirit has already done independently in the narrative. It brings both churches, both settings, together.

Acts 15 does not advance the development of the Spirit’s characterization. We have already seen the Spirit at work among Gentiles (10:44). We have seen the Spirit in multiple settings (13:2, and 13:52). We have already seen the Spirit involved in discernment, establishing credentials and legitimizing leadership (11:12, and 13:2). But the decision in Acts 15 is central to Luke’s narrative and so it is vital that the Spirit be there as a reliable witness to what is taking place at the council. Shepherd notes that there

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\(^{98}\) Ibid.
are relatively few references to the Spirit in the rest of Acts as this character has fulfilled its literary purpose. For Luke, much of that purpose has been to validate the mission to the Gentiles and to validate the work of Paul. Acts 15 is a central narrative, as Pervo points out, because it brings together the various threads of the plot: Peter, Barnabas and Paul; those concerned with observance; and the geographical bases of Jerusalem and Antioch. That is, characters, plot and setting all converge in this chapter along with the character of the Holy Spirit.

Now that the question of the Gentiles has been officially settled by the council, the remainder of Acts turns to focus primarily on Paul and his mission in the Gentile world. The Spirit will continue to act in ways that have by now become familiar to the reader. The Spirit will act to give directions for mission (16:6, and 21:4) The Spirit’s presence will authenticate new believers (19:6). It continues to authenticate the ministry and inspire the bold speech of Paul (19:1-8). The Spirit will give discernment (19:21). It will inspire prophetic speech (20:23, and 21:4). The Spirit will authorize and set apart leaders in the church for ministry (20:28). At the end of Acts, the Spirit is again said to have inspired a writer of scripture. Luke gives the Spirit some of the last words in the narrative when Paul quotes the Holy Spirit’s speech through Isaiah, using it to justify Paul’s turn to the Gentiles (28:25-28).

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100 Pervo, Acts: A Commentary, 368.
CONCLUSIONS

I grew up in a Christian tradition in which the Holy Spirit did not often enter into the narratives that were told about individual lives and life together. Although evangelical, it was not in the Pentecostal tradition, so when a divine character entered a story it was typically as God or Jesus or “the Lord.” God was usually spoken of as the one who led, gave direction, forgave, provided grace and healing or comfort - life-affirming activities that I continue to believe, though I have moved far away from the inerrant approach to scripture of those evangelical roots. I also knew that God could be invoked in ways that were harmful and manipulative, legitimizing oppressive power structures, suppressing unacceptable stories and keeping them in the closet, including my own. So, when I hear someone say, “God told me,” or, “God said,” I grow immediately suspicious. God is frequently used to justify our human agendas in ways we are not even fully conscious of.

Luke uses the Holy Spirit in the Acts narrative to lend weight to his agenda. As Shepherd affirms, the Holy Spirit in Acts signifies God, who never appears on stage as an actor.\footnote{Shepherd, \textit{Narrative Function}, 255.} The Holy Spirit is an utterly trustworthy and reliable witness in the narrative. So, when the Spirit is present, one can assume that Luke is using God to further his agenda and theology, whether rightly or wrongly. The episode with Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40), the encounter between Peter and Cornelius (10:1-48), the presence of the Spirit in the ethnically-mixed congregation in Antioch (11:28, and 13:2) and Peter’s testimonies before the Jerusalem Council (11:1-18, and 17:7-29), in each of these the
Spirit acts as a character witness to put God’s stamp of approval on the mission to the Gentiles, indeed to show that this mission was entirely inspired and thought up by God and not by any of the human characters. The Spirit also plays a major role in authorizing the ministry of Paul (9:17, 13:2-4, and 13:9). Pervo maintains that Paul and his letters were still controversial at the time Acts was written.\textsuperscript{102} This accounts for the deference that Paul shows to the Jerusalem leadership as well as the absence of any letters written by Paul in the work. The Paul of his letters would never have agreed to the terms of the letter that he delivers with his own hand from the Jerusalem Council to the church in Antioch (15:30, cf. Gal. 2:1-14). Luke smoothes over the controversy between Jerusalem and Antioch and brings in the Holy Spirit as character in order to give the divine imprimatur to his version of events. Through the Spirit, he legitimates Paul’s ministry and the mission to the Gentiles.

Beyond these two major purposes of the Spirit’s character in this narrative, looking closely at how the Spirit is portrayed both directly and indirectly has allowed several characteristics to emerge, and it has also brought some surprises that I had not expected to find in this study.

Luke defines the Spirit directly with only three words: promise (1:4, and 2:33), gift (11:17, 10:45, and 2:38), and witness (5:32). Unlike modern novels, the Acts narrative mainly describes its characters indirectly, through their words and actions; therefore, these rare but revealing direct definitions stand out. Direct definition takes less work on the part of the reader and so, especially in the mouth of a reliable witness, leaves nothing to interpretive chance. Mark Allan Powell writes, “Statements such as these

\textsuperscript{102} Pervo, \textit{Acts: A Commentary}, 379.
present the implied author’s view of the characters in a way that is blatant but accessible.”

A blatant description is a solid description, and promise, gift and witness function well as solid headings under which to sort out the characterization that emerges indirectly in Acts.

**Promise**

While the word promise occurs several times in Acts, referring to God’s faithfulness to God’s word, the Spirit is directly defined as promise by Jesus (1:4) and Peter (2:33). Both are reliable to make this evaluation. The Spirit as promise assures the reader that this is the same Spirit who spoke in ancient Israel, because the Spirit in Acts is the same Spirit whose words are recorded in scripture, directly quoted in the psalms of David (1:16, and 4:25). This narrative is in continuity with the narratives of Israel and the same Spirit, the same God, is at work.

Indirect description of the Spirit related to promise is seen when the Spirit is given as an answer to prayer. Indeed, prayerfulness often characterizes a setting into which the Spirit enters and that the Spirit creates. When the Spirit speaks directly in the narrative, everything that it predicts comes to pass. The leading of the Spirit within the Acts narrative is as utterly reliable as the ancient promises of God. Just as the Spirit spoke through David (4:25), the Spirit fills the disciples, enabling them to boldly speak the word of God (4:31).

Also related to promise, the Spirit is not bound by space or time. For Luke, the Spirit spoke in the past as evidenced in scripture, and the Spirit continues to speak in the

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103 Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 52.
present. Peter says on Pentecost, “The promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (2:39). Thus, this Spirit crosses borders. Its activity is not limited only among the disciples, but is found in places where Jesus has not yet been heard of.

**Gift**

The Spirit is directly called gift three times by Peter (2:38; 8:20 and 11:17) and once by the narrator (10:45). Again, this is reliable witnesses to this characterization. As gift, the Spirit is free; it is a sign of God’s hospitality and welcome; it is given universally to all (2:38-39).

The Spirit is not only given as a gift, but the Spirit transforms the settings into which it comes. Associated with this theme of gift are the joy, comfort, encouragement and exhortation that characterize those who have received the gift (2:46-47, 4:33, 9:31, and 13:52). The settings of the Spirit are characterized by the sharing of meals and resources, mutual care and support, communal worship, study and prayer (2:41-47, 4:32-37, 11:27-30, and 13:1-3). The gift of the Spirit inspires the giving of gifts between human beings.

The gift of the Spirit also raises up leaders and gives them gifts for their work (6:1-6, and 13:2-4). The Spirit ensures that the community will have the type of leadership that it needs. In sum, the Gift creates a community characterized by gift.
Witness

The Spirit is directly described as witness by Peter (5:32), but the word occurs repeatedly throughout Acts (1:8, 1:22, 2:32, 3:15, 6:13, 7:58, 10:39, etc…). Indeed, one of the major functions of the character of the Spirit in Acts is to inspire bold speech in the other characters within the story. The speech of Pentecost (2:4), the public speech of those it sends out in mission (13:9), the inspired speech of prophets (11:28), the speaking in tongues of new Christian communities (10:46) – all are activities, indirect descriptions, of the Spirit that affirm its direct description as witness. The Spirit witnesses to the authenticity and authority of characters and their acceptance by God.

Indirectly, the Spirit also serves as a witness to authorize those it has gifted for ministry, for example, Stephen and the Seven (6:1-6) and the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul (13:1-3). Its presence serves as an utterly reliable witness to the character of the apostles and other disciples within the narrative (4:8, 6:5, 7:55, 11:12, 11:15, 11:24, and 15:8). It serves as a witness to aid the community in discernment of leaders (13:2) and in making decisions about who is in the community and who is out (11:12-18, 15:8011, and 15:28). It serves as witness to God’s acceptance of new, marginal and potentially suspect characters in the narrative (8:29, and 10:19-20).

Sometimes the bold witness inspired by the Spirit creates conflict, both within the community, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11) and without, in the witness of Stephen (6:8-8:1) and the incident with Simon the magician (8:4-24). The witness of the Spirit also serves to resolve conflict in the Christian community when Peter testifies – twice – before the Jerusalem Council (11:1-18, and 15:1-31).
Witness points to the indirect development of the Spirit’s character in the realm of mission. The Spirit crosses boundaries when it sends Phillip to the Ethiopian eunuch and then whisks him away to another location to preach (8:26-40). The Spirit is a trailblazer that opens new doors when it sends messengers from Cornelius to knock on Peter’s door (10:19-20). In these episodes, the Spirit directs people, makes connections, and facilitates introductions that would not have otherwise been made. The Spirit drives the mission that advances the plot of Acts when it sets Saul and Barnabas apart for work that it has called them to do (13:2) and even in the conflict generated through Stephen’s inspired speech that results in an unplanned scattering of the Jerusalem church (7:1-8:4). The Spirit is characterized in these episodes by movement and innovation that show the Spirit itself as the one that frequently takes the initiative.

INTERSECTING STORIES

The above characterizations of the Spirit have helped to broaden my imagination of how the Spirit can be a character in my story and in the story of those I minister among. While character development takes place within the text, it also takes place within the mind of the reader and I have certainly brought my own reading and convictions into the development of the Spirit’s character in Acts. Prior to this study, I saw the Spirit’s role in Acts as driving evangelism. While that is definitely present and a primary characteristic of the Spirit in Acts, converting people to the true faith is not one
of my priorities, nor, typically, a priority within mainline Protestantism. Witnessing to an experience of God is one thing, but going out to make converts is another. I was surprised to find more depth of character, beyond evangelism, than I had initially thought. I was surprised to find the Spirit inspiring the sharing of resources and the giving of financial assistance to a greater degree than I had noticed before in this text; for example, in the community it produces in Jerusalem (2:43-47 and 4:32-37) as well as in Antioch (11:27-29). That is the sort of mission and outreach that members of St. Pauls tend to relate to – the sharing of resources. But, as we look to the future, perhaps mainline Christians also need to think about how to do evangelism in a way that’s authentic to them.

I find the role that the Spirit plays in breaking down divisions in the book of Acts a hopeful resource for theological raw material in the contemporary world. With the deep divisions that exist among people, this inclusive characteristic is an especially valuable one to seek out as I look for God’s activity in the world and try to discern what God is up to. The discernment that the Spirit brings is also a hopeful and generative theme. On the one hand, the Spirit helps other characters in the narrative to see what they could not see, such as God’s equal acceptance of all persons (11:15, and 15:8-9). On the other hand, it is through discerning the Spirit’s presence in unexpected places that characters such as Peter and James are able to see at all (15:6-29). This characterization of the Spirit is an encouragement to open one’s eyes; to look around; to expect to be surprised by the Spirit. It encourages openness to God doing new things in places where one had not thought of looking before.

I am also drawn to the way that the Spirit in Acts puts people together who would not normally meet. In two of the three times when the Spirit speaks directly to other
characters in the narrative, the Spirit speaks in order to get them talking to someone else: Philip and the Eunuch (8:29), and Peter and Cornelius (10:19-21). For Luke’s purposes, the dramatic effect of the Spirit directly speaking in these two episodes heightens the divine authorization of the mission to the Gentiles that he intends to impart to his audience. That is no longer an issue in the contemporary church. But today, the characteristic of a Spirit that opens up communication between people can give new life in situations where divided parties have stopped talking and listening to each other. The Spirit inspires speech, and the Spirit inspires speech between people who would have otherwise never spoken with each other before. I find that hopeful as my congregation thinks about its future mission in Chicago. There are deep racial and economic divides in the city. The members of St. Pauls know this well and are concerned about it. It is also a violent city, in need of peacemakers who are willing to cross boundaries that divide.

Luke used the character of the Spirit in his story in order to address certain issues – the inclusion of Gentiles and the authority of Paul – issues that have faded into the history of the church. Yet, I believe the characteristics of the Spirit in Acts, found in promise, gift and witness, can still speak in my congregation. A Spirit of promise, gift and witness speaks in the narrative of St. Pauls in its value of inclusiveness and its attempts to intentionally live out that value as a faith community. The promise of the Spirit is for all, a gift freely given to all, and a witness to God’s presence in the lives of people whom the church has historically excluded, and so serves a challenge to a congregation that prizes diversity but that it still predominantly of European stock. The witness of a Spirit that drives the church into places it had not planned to go, giving discernment about leadership and mission, speaks to the context and history of St. Pauls,
as it has looked in each generation to discern how to best live out its faith in its ever-changing context. A Spirit that creates life-giving settings of hospitality and sharing of resources is deeply needed in Chicago, a city full of violence, wide economic disparity, inadequate funding for education, and so much potential for creative beauty. The Spirit of promise, gift and witness continues to be a character that can transform the stories of our lives, the church and our world.
CHAPTER 2

_Leibestätigkeit_

Nancy Ammerman writes, “In the telling of the congregational stories, certain tales rise above the others to take on the special quality of myths. Myths are stories that ground our history in something bigger. They speak of divine actions in ways that define who we are. When members tell about the congregation’s founding or its survival of a crisis in terms of God’s unfolding will, they are giving the story mythic quality.” The stories that Luke told in Acts have that mythic quality – the tongues of fire at Pentecost, the calling of Saul, Peter’s visions surrounding the conversion of Cornelius. Luke constructed those stories with mythic elements to make them larger than life, and by including the presence of the Holy Spirit, Luke seeks to show that God is active in what is happening in the narrative. Similarly, though not as fantastic, the myths of the St. Pauls story are the great deeds of the mothers and fathers of the church who, as sturdy German immigrants, grounded in faith and inspired by God, did great things to meet the needs of their community. Certain tales rise above the rest. Larry Goleman describes the generative possibilities of such mythic stories. “People who can reframe life events – especially those of hardship and tragedy – into stories of resilience, discovery and growth

104 Ammerman, “Culture and Identity,” 95.
can shape a life narrative that funds personal agency, faithfulness and civic responsibility.”

Golemon’s words could describe the stories of Acts as well as the early narratives of St. Pauls - stories of resilience, discovery and growth. In Acts 1, not much happens - outside of the Ascension, of course. The plot does not move forward. It is the period in which the church waits for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Somebody died and rose again and the disciples have been left to figure out what it means to be the church. For St. Pauls, the founding of the church in 1843 represents, for me, this prologue period. Somebody in the German Protestant population of the young city died, but did not rise again, and they needed to have a funeral. They needed to figure out their church. Like the story of Easter that runs through Acts 1, new life began with a death. With Acts 2, the narrative of outreach begins and the story moves forward.

St. Pauls also saw an outburst in mission that would become larger than life. It moves their story forward and continues to inspire its members to this day. This is how it is described in the St. Pauls archives:

As the men in the St. Pauls congregation went off to fight in the Civil War, many in the congregation gathered to plan for their families in case they did not return. But it was the women of the congregation who, in 1868, did something concrete: they organized and made provisions for the founding of an orphan home. The first ‘home’ consisted of two rented rooms at the corner of LaSalle and Ohio Streets…one for the boys and one for the girls. The children were cared for by Mrs. Christine Rathsfeld. It was called the ‘Deutches Weisenhaus’ – the German Orphan Home.

106 St. Pauls archives history board celebrating the 140th anniversary of Uhlich.
Fifty years later, another outburst in mission would occur:

“It is done. St. Pauls House has been dedicated. A glorious chapter has been added to the glorious history of Old St. Pauls.”

Uhlich Home and St. Pauls House. The founding of these two institutions makes up the central part of the primal narrative of St. Pauls Church. When one asks current members of the church to tell the story of St. Pauls, Uhlich and St. Pauls House inevitably enter in. The births of these institutions were separated by just under 50 years. It was only natural that the children and grandchildren of the women and men who looked after orphans would find a call to look after widows in their distress. Although separated by 50 years, the origins of Uhlich and St. Pauls House come out of a common faith understanding within the congregation. The character of St. Pauls would change during those years, but the theology and the understanding of their calling as a congregation would not drastically change.

When it was officially incorporated in 1869, the orphanage would become known as the Uhlich Evangelical Lutheran Orphans Asylum, in honor of benefactors Carl and Johanna Uhlich who, in celebration of their golden wedding anniversary, donated a tract of land on the near south side of Chicago to support the home. Uhlich Home is now known as UCAN, an acronym for Uhlich Children’s Advantage Network. The agency continues its work in Chicago and has grown beyond an orphanage (called a therapeutic youth home). UCAN has services in teen parenting, foster care, a host home program for LGBT youth, a therapeutic day school, clinical counseling services, and is active in preventing gun violence in the city of Chicago. Once made up entirely of members of St.

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107 St. Pauls Bote, November, 1921.
Pauls Church, its board has diversified greatly. I am currently the St. Pauls pastoral representative.

St. Pauls House was originally set up as an independent institution, with St. Pauls Pastor Rudolf John its original director. In the changing economic landscape of caring for the elderly, St. Pauls House is now a Lutheran Life Community, but it continues to have ties to St. Pauls Church. At its 90th Anniversary celebration in 2011, two former Senior Pastors of St. Pauls Church spoke at the worship service and members of St. Pauls continue to actively volunteer at the home and some still go to live there.

It is to the faith of the congregation that gave birth to Uhlich and St. Pauls House that we now turn. How did their understanding of God and themselves lead them in giving birth to two organizations that continue to do good work in Chicago today? Much of this will be in their own words or in the words of people who remembered or knew them. The texts that they left behind, sermons, newsletters, hymns and poems are the sources that express what motivated them and what they believed.

Piety on the Prairie

Rudolf John recorded much of the faith narrative through which to read this early part of the St. Pauls story of outreach. He was not the pastor of St. Pauls when Uhlich was founded, and little source material remains from those earliest days. Whatever once existed was likely lost in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 that destroyed St. Pauls Church, along with much of the rest of the city. Like Luke’s stories in Acts, Rudolf John would be
the first person to actually write down the oral history that would become the story of St. Pauls and its founding of Uhlich Home. He was a storyteller, so how much he embellished on the memories of his congregation is unclear, but he put it to paper. And his reflections give an understanding of the faith that grounded the congregation and the ways that they believed God entered into their narrative.

John was born in Missouri to German immigrant parents and grew up in the St. Louis area. His father was a pastor in the German Evangelical church, and John followed his father into the ministry, an expectation of an eldest son that had been in his family for generations. He began his studies at Elmhurst College in Illinois, but did not stay there long, just a few months. In 1928, on the 50th anniversary of his ordination, John remembered:

“The members of the faculty had a fight, which we boys did not mind so very much, because while they were fighting each other they could not teach and so life for us was one long, sweet dream. Unfortunately, my father was not fond of dreams and said: ‘You come home and go to school here.” So, John went home and completed his undergraduate education at Washington University in St. Louis and then went to the German Evangelical Seminary in Marthasville, MO. John was a son of the German Evangelical church, a Lutheran and Reformed hybrid. That united character of the denomination would be a characteristic of the congregation that he would serve for forty years – as pastor and then as pastor emeritus. The theology that comes out of John’s writing reflects the German Pietism that strongly influenced the German Evangelicals of

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his day. His writing rings with echoes of the “Six Proposals” for church reform out forth by the early Pietist Philipp Jakob Spener.109

Although Uhlich was founded in 1868, the written narratives of the Uhlich story and the birth of St. Pauls House begin in 1890. In that year, the church began publishing a regular newsletter, called the Bote, meaning Messenger. Pastor John, who came to St. Pauls in 1888, began the monthly paper as a way to keep the congregation informed of what was going on in the church. It was not a religious paper, but more of a community paper, with ads from local business and a sort of church society column about the comings and goings within the congregation: weddings, funerals, elaborate descriptions of church social and service events and gung ho commentary which kept the congregation enthusiastic. The Bote is the primary direct source for the church’s understanding of mission and outreach at the time. John served as editor until he left to manage St. Pauls House.

The first edition, in German110, announces that St. Pauls will report monthly on the activities of the various societies in the congregation, including the Waisenhaus (orphanage) and the Witwen und Waisen Verein (Widows and Orphans Society), at the time the oldest society at St. Pauls. In that first issue, in speaking of the mission work of the church, John quotes from Galatians 6:10 to inspire his congregation, “Let us not tire of doing good to everyone, but especially to our fellow believers. Do not forget to do

110 I am grateful to Patricia Mayer for her German translations of the old Botes.
good and share, for such sacrifice pleases God greatly…Giving shows our thankfulness for our blessings.”\textsuperscript{111}

The newly-formed \textit{Frauenverein}, or Women’s Society, takes that verse as their motto, “Let us do good to everyone, but especially to our fellow believers.” Doing good begins at home, but it is not limited to home. This stress on love beginning within the faith community and flowing out to others is a strong current in the stream of German Pietism found in Jakob Spener 200 years earlier. Spener’s thought continued to influence the German Evangelicals who immigrated to the United States in the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century. In his Six Proposals for church reform, Spener wrote: “If we can therefore awaken a fervent love among our Christians, first toward one another and then toward all men (for these two, brotherly affection and general love, must supplement each other according), and put this love into practice, practically all that we desire will be accomplished. For all the commandments are summed up in love.”\textsuperscript{112}

The early editions of the \textit{Bote} show that the motto of the Frauenverein, “Let us do good to everyone,” has been taken to heart by the whole congregation. The outreach of St. Pauls extends to include people outside their community: a collection is taken for flood victims in Johnstown, Pennsylvania; there is a custom of taking up an annual collection for invalids, widows and orphans of the Synod as well as the elderly poor; they take up a Thanksgiving collection for the nearby German Hospital. Giving comes out of a “joyful thankfulness for the many gifts of God.” They are committed to their work in the city, and their giving extends to people they do not personally know. Pastor John speaks

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{St. Pauls Bote}, 1890.  
\textsuperscript{112} Spener, \textit{The Living Heritage}, 234.
of “forgetting yourself and serving others.”

In John’s annual report of 1891, he speaks of the importance of finding strength, peace and healing in “turning to God and to his Son, our Savior, Jesus…This is how the church can go into the future without care. If the word is gone, the roof and walls fall in.” For mission to happen, for the church to even exist, church is grounded first in the word of God. This again echoes the thought of the Spener, for whom more extensive use of the Word of God was his first proposal: “The more at home the Word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits.”

This emphasis on word and deed would find its way into the music of the German church. The great cantatas of J.S. Bach express that “heart and mouth and deed and life must bear witness to Christ.”

The emphasis on word and deed would find its way into the Evangelical Catechism in America. In the stream of German Pietism, the stress is on word and deed together, grounded in a deep love for Jesus.

The Frauenverein joined word and deed and love in their continued work with the poor. In just a year, the group grows from thirty women to over one hundred. Emilie John, wife of Rudolf John, is the head of the Frauenverein. In a letter to the group, she expresses hope that these women will always remain faithful to their motto, “Do good to all.” She writes, “Dry tears, and show pitying ‘Samaritan-love’ (Samariter-Liebe) to those who are abandoned and helpless.” The women go into homes touched by poverty to help, comfort and advise. Their work is among poor families in Chicago, widows and the

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113 St. Pauls Bote, 1890.
114 Spener, The Living Heritage, 231.
sick. They provide financial assistance - rent, groceries, shoes, clothing and they even collect money to provide someone with an artificial leg. They call it “the work of God’s Kingdom.” There is a reticence and humility in reporting on their activities. The names of those who are helped are kept anonymous. They express confidence that the blessing of Jesus will be on this work. There is no need to bring out the details publicly about the people they are helping, for, “Jesus sees it surely, and that is enough.” They quote the words of Jesus found in Matthew 26: “What you have done for the least of my brothers, you have done it for me.”

The Frauenverein work “quietly but industriously.” Their work is frequently compared to the sisters Mary and Martha, who apparently represent the flip sides of the word and deed coin. As the Frauenverein celebrate their one year anniversary, Pastor John writes that they are doing God’s will, blessed by God. He hopes that they will always combine the quiet Mary-consciousness with the active Martha zeal. “They do work women can do best,” the Bote reports.\(^{116}\) And once again we hear the words of Jesus from Matthew 25, “What you have done for one of the least among my brothers, you have done for me.” There is a strong sense that in serving the poor they are serving Jesus, and that they in fact meet him there.

Meanwhile, in addition to the charity work in the community, the congregation shows real, corporate ownership of the orphanage. It is a work that engages the whole congregation, whether as board members, financial backers or sewing clothing for the children. Reports are given monthly in the Bote on Unser Waisenhaus, “Our Orphanage.”

\(^{116}\) *St. Pauls Bote*, 1891.
They contain detailed descriptions about how the children are doing, their sicknesses, trips, activities, picnics.

In 1893, St. Pauls celebrated the 25th Anniversary of Uhlich with a special Orphanage Sunday. While the congregation celebrated, Mutter Rathsfield, the first matron of the orphanage, lay dying. With the help of the congregation, Rathsfield had founded the orphanage at the corner of LaSalle and Ontario streets, a block from the old St. Pauls Church. After outgrowing its space, it moved up to the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871, the congregation built a new orphanage, just as they would need to rebuild their church. The Bote reports on Rathsfield’s death using the verse from Matthew 25 that is now becoming a familiar refrain: “She went home to the one who said to her, ‘What you have done to one of the least of these you have done for me.’”

Working for God’s Kingdom out of love for Jesus comes through once again as Pastor John reflects on the story of Mary anointing Jesus with expensive oil. “What matters first of all in acts of love and all work in God’s Kingdom is that one truly works for the sake of Jesus, out of pure and selfless love of Him.” And again, “All that Christian love does occurs for the sake of Jesus. There can never be too much done of this Reichs-Gottes-Arbeit (Kingdom of God Work). For the field is large, the crop is ripe, but the workers are few. And all that occurs to translate Christian confession into Christian action must fill our hearts with great joy.” The work of the orphanage and the Frauenverein are called Liebestätigkeit, or love-activity.117

117 St. Pauls Bote, 1893.
Word and deed. Love for Jesus. Love expressing itself in love for others.

Whatever you do for the least, you do for Jesus. These themes of German Pietism keep building in the early editions of the Bote, like the refrain of another pietistic text, the words of the Bach Chorale Jesu bleibet meine Freude, “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring”:

Jesus remains my joy,
The comfort and life’s blood of my heart,
Jesus defends me against all sorrows,
He is my life’s strength,
The delight and sun of my eyes,
My Soul’s treasure and joy,
And therefore I shall not let Jesus go,
From my heart and sight.\(^\text{118}\)

It isn’t only classic German hymn texts that sing out the theology of German Pietism. In addition to writing for the Bote, Rudolf John himself wrote words for hymns. St. Pauls published its own hymnal during his tenure, St. Pauls Blaubuch, the Bluebook. It was compiled by John and the St. Pauls organist, C.A. Weiss. Many of the hymns contain German or English lyrics written by John. The lyrics that John wrote express in verse that deep love for Jesus that grounded the congregation in its mission:

**Christ, Thou Blest Redeemer**

Lord, we adore Thee
Christ, Thou blessed Master,
Thou hast called us to Thy heart;
Bless us, we implore Thee,
Hear us, bless us! Amen.\(^\text{119}\)

\(^{118}\) Bach, “Cantata BWV 147.”
God’s Love

I sing the praise of Love unbounded,
Which God in Christ has shown to man,
I sing of Love that hath been founded
E’re yet the stars their courses ran,
The Love that offers free salvation
To sinful man in ev’ry nation.

While life shall last, I’ll sing the glory
Of Christ the Saviour, and His Love,
With angel hosts I’ll tell the story
Of Christ in Zion’s home above.
God’s love is mine, death cannot sever
Me from that Heart, that loves forever.

Only Thine

The sweetest songs I fain would offer
Unto Thy glory, Saviour mine!
The grandest gifts my hands could proffer,
Should, Lord, be Thine and only Thine.
And all for which my soul hath striven,
And all that life hath ever given,
Only Thine, only Thine,
All should be, oh Saviour mine!

The fairest flow’rs that e’er were hidden
To grace the dewy morn in Spring,
The treasured gold the earth hath hidden
I fain, oh Lord, to Thee would bring.
And all that fortune hath awarded
And all that earnest toil rewarded,
Only Thine, only Thine,
All should be, oh Saviour mine.

John’s florid poetry displays a personal faith, a warmth and tenderness that springs out of that deep stream of German Piety. He responds to the unbounded love of

\[120\] John’s translation of this 18th century German hymn is also found in the 1974 United Church of Christ Hymnal.

\[121\] John, St. Pauls Hymnal, 79.

\[122\] Ibid., 163.
God that he feels in his heart with grateful thanksgiving and with gratefully giving back of life and beauty and treasure to the God who loves him and whom he loves. The theology continues to echo Spener’s proposals for the German church:

The people must have impressed upon them and must accustom themselves to believing that it is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice. Our dear Savior repeatedly enjoined love as the real mark of his disciples…Indeed, love is the whole life of the man who has faith and who through his faith is saved, and his fulfillment of the laws of God consists of love.\(^{123}\)

Spener writes that in circumstances where religious controversies exist between people, and when faced with people with whom one disagrees, the Christian life should be characterized by humility and neighborliness:

In other things which pertain to human life we should demonstrate that we consider these people to be our neighbors (as the Samaritan was represented by Christ in Luke 10:29-37 as the Jew's neighbor), regard them as our brothers according to the right of common creation and the divine love that is extended to all…and therefore are so disposed in our hearts toward them as the command to love all others as we love ourselves demands.\(^{124}\)

For Spener, Christians must be continually encouraged in acts of neighborly love that come from the heart. The mark of the Christian is simplicity of faith, accompanied by humility and grace toward those with whom one might disagree. The model of behavior is the Good Samaritan. These all sound a lot like the marks of the Frauenverein found in the *Bote*.

\(^{123}\) Spener, *The Living Heritage*, 234.

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 236.
An Evangelical Faith

German Piety is distilled within the pages of the Evangelical Catechism. The Evangelical Catechism outlines the united faith of the Evangelical Synod, this church with Prussian roots, combining Lutheran and Reformed doctrine. It reflects the German Evangelical faith in which the people of St. Pauls were raised and confirmed. Frederick Trost, eighth Senior Pastor of St. Pauls, wrote, “The Synod’s warm-hearted, yet theologically sound ecumenical piety offers a key to understanding the life of the congregation.” Rudolf John expressed that piety in his writing for the Bote and in his hymns, but the roots of St. Pauls Church itself ran deep in that tradition. In his history of St. Pauls Church, Thomas Henry, ninth Senior Pastor of St. Pauls, writes of the deep involvement that the congregation had within the German Evangelical church in the United States. Hartmann, pastor at the time of the founding of Uhlich Home, was one of the founders of the German United Evangelical Synod of the Northwest. Their organizing meeting was held at St. Pauls. He was elected president and Josef Fischer, St. Pauls Pastor from 1848-1851, was vice president. Henry writes: “Hartmann and St. Pauls were also instrumental in the merger of all of the German Evangelical groups in the United States in 1874 – the German Evangelical Synod of North America.”

Frederick Trost writes in his introduction to a new translation of the Evangelical Catechism,

There is no doubt the Evangelical Church Society of the West and the Evangelical Synod sought to be a community that lived by the light, compassion, and

125 Frederick Trost, email message to author, January 21, 2013.
teachings of Jesus, as well as by the work of Christ on the cross and the wonderment and grace of the resurrection...These German-speaking immigrants of nearly two hundred years ago understood who they were. They perceived themselves more as a *Liebesgemeinschaft* (a community of love) than as a *Lehrgemeinschaft* (a community of doctrine). In establishing hospitals, orphanages, and other ministries of service to others, they insisted that it is ‘the love of Jesus that compels us.’ The text of the Evangelical Catechism seeks to reflect this foundational commitment.\(^{127}\)

He also writes, “Combining deep commitments to mission, to the unity of the Church, to an educated clergy, and to deeds of mercy that are the fruits of faith, the pietist spirit rests deep within what became well known, after several revisions, as *The Evangelical Catechism*.\(^{128}\)

St. Pauls Church did not directly use the Evangelical Catechism, for reasons that I have been unable to uncover. Just as it had the resources to publish its own hymnal, it had its own self-published catechism. Much of the St. Pauls Catechism, however, contains the Evangelical Catechism word for word along with the congregation’s own variations.\(^{129}\)

The 11\(^{th}\) Edition of the Small Catechism of St. Pauls Church, published in 1939, begins, “What should be the chief concern of man? Man’s chief concern should be to seek after the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.” About the Ten Commandments it asks, “How did Jesus endorse and summarize them? By commanding to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves.” When it asks what is meant by the Sixth Commandment, “thou shalt not kill”, the answer is given, “We should so fear and love God as not to do our neighbor any bodily harm or injury, but rather assist and comfort him in danger and

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\(^{128}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{129}\) In personal correspondence, Trost wrote that the Evangelical Catechism was in use at St. Pauls when he arrived at the church in 1962.
These are the words that the young people of St. Pauls were being raised on, words that summarized the faith of the congregation: seeking God’s kingdom; loving God and neighbor; moving beyond doing no harm to actively taking responsibility for the neighborly care of others. This is the sort of faith that grounded the congregation in its identity and mission.

Another characteristic of St. Pauls Church that shows its roots in the German Evangelical tradition was its open spirit to diversity. The German Evangelicals were a united communion, a combined Lutheran and Reformed Church. When St. Pauls wrote its first Constitution in 1848, the name of the church was *Deutsch Evangelish Lutherische Saint Paulus Gemeinde*, German Evangelical Lutheran Saint Pauls Congregation. Tom Henry, in his history of the congregation writes, “Only after a skirmish between pastor and people led to a clearer definition of St. Pauls Prussian theological and doctrinal heritage did the name of the church become *Deutsch VEREINIGT Evangelish Lutherische St. Paulus Gemeinde: the German UNITED Evangelical Lutheran St. Pauls Congregation.*” The skirmish in question was that the first pastor of St. Pauls, August Selle, held to a rigid Lutheran orthodoxy. He opposed the united Protestant hybrid out of which the St. Pauls people had come. When he wanted St. Pauls to join the newly forming Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, the people refused. He went on to form First St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, a Missouri Synod congregation that still exists in Chicago, while the people of St. Pauls would eventually become a part of the Evangelical Synod of North America.

The united faith of the Evangelicals is found in their early confessional statement of 1848:

We recognize the Evangelical Church as that communion which acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the Word of God and as the sole and infallible rule of faith and life, and accepts the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as given in the symbolic books of the Lutheran and the Reformed Church, the most important being: the Augsburg Confession, Luther's and the Heidelberg Catechisms, in so far as they agree; but where they disagree, we adhere strictly to the passages of Holy Scriptures bearing on the subject, and avail ourselves of the liberty of conscience prevailing in the Evangelical Church.132

The 1928 Constitution of St. Pauls Church reflects that open spirit:

This body of believers acknowledges allegiance to the Evangelical Synod of North America, accepting the Bible as an infallible guide in faith and ethics. It endorses the doctrines laid down in the various symbolic documents of the Evangelical churches where there is agreement in essentials of faith. Where there are differences in non-essentials, freedom of conscience shall be an inalienable right of membership.

That same document states the purpose of St. Pauls Church. “The worship of the Triune God, the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the practice of loving service towards the needy, the building of the Kingdom of Righteousness, the furtherance of Christian unity, and the promotion of Christian Fellowship among the membership.”133 This is a broad and ecumenical faith, with a heart of loving service at its center.

The openness of the congregation also found expression in its work at Uhlich Home. Chicago was home to a large German population. The German language newspaper, the Illinois Staats-Zeitung, reported regularly on the Uhlich Orphan Asylum in order to interest the wider German population, Catholics as well as Protestants, to support “this wonderful institution”:

132 St. Pauls Church Constitution, 1848.
133 St. Pauls Church Constitution, 1928.
The institution is completely under the supervision of the First United Lutheran Community. This does not imply that only children of Lutheran parents are received in the institution. A number of Catholic children have been admitted and only children who have never been baptized are baptized according to the Evangelical Lutheran rite.\footnote{134}

By 1879, the wider German population has pitched in to help with fundraising for Uhlich, and the \textit{Staats-Zeitung} reports, “Since children of all creeds are accepted to it, the appellation ‘German Orphanage’ is well justified. In theological matters a sensible course prevails; the children are brought up religiously without resorting to bigotry or stressing any particular dogma.”\footnote{135} These newspaper articles show that the irenic faith of German Evangelicalism is being practiced in the orphanage, just as in its founding church. Love that begins with the family of faith extends to all children, regardless of creed.

An article in the 1918 \textit{Bote} captures that spirit of openness and freedom of conscience, and a spirit of unity not based on doctrine. It is found in a lengthy introduction to a proposal by Pastor John, asking the Church Council to begin calling on all members of St. Pauls to make an annual financial pledge to the work of the church. He speaks about the nature of their congregation. St. Pauls has an identity problem, he says. Although they are not Lutheran, and no Lutheran body would ever recognize them as such, never-the-less, “I know that nine out of ten people will call our Church a Lutheran one.”\footnote{136} He says that although the word “Evangelical” in the name of St. Pauls speaks to their German heritage, he does not like that the term is part of their name because all Protestant churches preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what evangelical means. Therefore all Christian churches are evangelical:

\footnotetext{134}{\textit{Illinois Staats-Zeitung}, August 13, 1875.}
\footnotetext{135}{\textit{Illinois Staats-Zeitung}, August 12, 1879.}
\footnotetext{136}{\textit{St. Pauls Bote}, 1918. In my experience, contemporary United Church of Christ members can have a similar identity problem in terms of the wider church.
In my opinion the greatest need of our church and our Synod, our Denomination, if you please, is a name which shall clearly, positively, with brevity but unmistakable (sic) precision proclaim our character and our purpose. That name is simple “UNION.” “St. Pauls Union Church” or “St. P. United Church” is the one name which tells the world not only what we are, but what we want.137

John writes that the name reflects the liberty of the individual in the Evangelical Synod churches, that their church is free. There is respect for the conscience of the individual and no congregation is compelled to use a particular catechism or creed. Some people have derisively called St. Pauls an Allerwelts Kirche – an all-world church. But he claims the label. He owns it: “I am glad of it. To me there can be no prouder name, no more desirable title. If I have done anything, even the smallest part to make of St. Pauls an Allerwelts-Kirche, a church that wants to serve the world, then I shall die a proud and happy man.”138

Although nine out of ten St. Pauls members thought that they were Lutherans, their congregation reflected another aspect of their Synod. The work of the Frauenverein, and the other women’s groups at St. Pauls, stands in the tradition of the deaconess in the Evangelical Synod. These specially-commissioned women had a ministry in caring for the poor and the sick. Deaconess Adele Hosto described their work in city parishes in 1916, and it sounds very similar to the sort of work that the Frauenverein were doing in Chicago:

It is evident that in no other branch of the work can a deaconess serve the Lord in such manifold ways as are opened to her within the confines of a large city parish, which affords an abundance and variety of work. The deaconess in going from house to house, comes in contact and keeps in touch with all the people, and by getting acquainted with the situation and circumstances of the individual, has

137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
occasion to serve all, the sick and the well, the rich and poor, and the senior as well as the junior members of the church.  

Deaconesses were trained at the Evangelical Deaconess Home in St. Louis. Though the St. Pauls Frauenverein were not consecrated for a special office in the church, as the deaconesses were, their work sounds very similar:

The Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital of St. Louis is the property and under the management of the “Evangelical Deaconess Association of St. Louis,” which was organized in 1889 by a number of pastors and members of the German Evangelical Synod of North America. It has for its object the nursing and care of the sick, the poor, and those who need loving Christian ministry. What characterizes a deaconess in the true sense of the word is her service in the Church of Jesus Christ, in which it is immaterial where she does it, whether in the ministration of the sick, epileptics, orphans, aged or poor, or the education of children or young girls, or perhaps by facilitating pastoral communication with the members of the Church.

Of note for this study, the language in the order of consecration for deaconesses draws heavily on the story of the consecration of the first deacons found in Acts 6. Loving Christian ministry, shown in care for the poor and sick - this tradition ran deep in the Evangelical Synod, and the ministry of the women at St. Pauls reflected their Evangelical heritage – even if they did think they were Lutherans.

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141 Ibid., 269.
The old *Botes* show a deep commitment to social justice, another way of joining word and deed. Just as the motto of the Frauenverein was “Do good to all, especially the family of faith,” the concern for children in the congregation extended beyond those cared for at Uhlich. There is a deep concern over justice for the children of Chicago and their education and health care. In particular, there is repeated consternation expressed over the use of children to sell newspapers on the street when they should be in school. John, who could be just as poetic in his satire as in his hymn lyrics, calls them “perambulating foghorns selling papers at six o’clock in the morning,” and he notes the hypocrisy of the Chicago newspapers that do not join word with deed:

> The Tribune, the Daily News, and a few other papers, discuss the “Young Hoodlum Question” in more or less able editorials. Then they send their wagons to certain street corners, where there are mobs of howling, cursing and swearing boys waiting for their wares. Why not take them off the streets? Children have no business selling papers or anything else on the streets. Send them to school and to play or help as best they can about the house. Send the old men and women, the lame and crippled and infirm to keep the little newsstands on the street corners. Oh what a beautiful world this would be, if Christ’s injunction “Love thy neighbor as thyself” could be instilled into the hearts of old and young; if everybody endeavored to be kind to everybody else and tried to help him or her along.

John thinks that society needs to get to the roots of poverty. “If a boy is selling papers because his mudder needs der money, then go and help the mudder in some way, so she need not depend upon the pennies picked up in the slums of a wicked city by her child.”

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142 *St. Pauls Bote*, 1903.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
Ahead of his time, he is concerned about health care equity and access for all: “Will there ever be a rich man who will build and sufficiently endow a hospital where the poor man will get exactly the care and attention given the man ‘able to pay’, a hospital without ‘wards’ where the poor are herded together and private rooms for the sick who can pay?”\textsuperscript{145} He writes of the injustice of laws that single out the poor while the crimes of the wealthy go unpunished. If the poor steal, they go to prison. “If you can steal a million without being caught at it, you are a great fi-nan-cier.”\textsuperscript{146}

John was hardly a Puritan. In addition to hymns, he wrote original plays and music for the youth of the congregation to perform and he had a wonderful sense of humor. He uses that humor in the \textit{Bote} to make jabs at the materialism and greed of the city and of a Chicago culture that was obsessed with pleasure and entertainment. He writes of the unequal distribution of resources in the city in which some squander great wealth and others perish from hunger and exposure:

\begin{quote}
Standing before the gorgeously decorated show windows of a down-town store, the thought comes to the halftone-man: If I were to go to one of the ladies, who pay $500.00 for a gown and say: Madam, I need a little money to do good to others. I want to bring happiness to orphans, the poor, the sick, the aged. I want to help young people to see and learn and love higher things. Will you help me a little? - How much money would he get? ... It is a good thing to teach young people that it is more blessed to give than it is to receive is it not? This is a selfish age in which we are living. The desire for amusement and pleasure has grown to a passion. Selfishness is the ruling vice and it is eating away the best impulses, the noblest qualities of our souls. “Have all the fun you can. Indulge every whim. Gratify every desire. Take, take, take!” Is not that the gospel of our time? And then the church comes, the child of the gentle Nazarene, and it preaches even to children: “Deny yourself if you can help others thereby.” Is not that good advice? Will it not make nobler men and better women of our children? The monuments which the world builds are dedicated to the memory of men and women, who
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{St. Pauls Bote}, 1905.
were strong and great enough to bring sacrifices, to deny themselves that others might be richer and happier. That’s the truth, my boy and girl, that’s the truth.\footnote{St. Pauls Bote, 1907.}

Prophesying Daughters

The role of women in the mission of the church is another theme that comes up repeatedly in this era. It was noted above in the creation and work of the Frauenverein, who were said to minister in the spirit of both Mary and Martha. Women are repeatedly credited with the birth of mission movements within the congregation, beginning with Uhlich Home and continuing with the vision for St. Pauls House that started to take shape after the turn of the century. This narrative takes root and is repeated often.

In 1915, serious attention is being paid to the dream of St. Pauls House, “A Churchly Home for the Aged.” After the Great Chicago Fire, the congregation rebuilt at the corner of LaSalle and Ohio Streets, just across the Chicago River from the Loop business district. But after the fire, as the congregation sold their property to business developers and moved north, John decided that the church needed to follow the people and move north to Lincoln Park. The women of St. Pauls began a birthday fund to pay off the debt of the new building. The 1915 Bote reports:

Some six or seven years ago…our good ladies turned their attention to the work, which, for a long time, had lain close to their hearts. For years they had gathered birthday pennies for the debt on the new church. And when the last dollar of that debt was paid, they decided to save their birthday money so that at some time they might offer a churchly home to them who are alone “when the darkness comes.” With them it has been a labor of Christian Love – a beautiful work. And God prospered it and put a great and rich blessing upon it. When the work became
known which St. Pauls’ church was quietly, unostentatiously doing through the labors of her women, the world smiled upon it, just as God smiled upon it. Money began to flow to St. Pauls House, a modern parish house in the best sense of the word. The women are working to the best of their ability as sisters of the good Christ. And their “House” is to be governed and conducted very much like our Uhlich Orphan Home.\textsuperscript{148}

The 1918 \textit{Bote} repeats a similar theme. In a long and colorful narrative, John relates what is currently going on in the congregation to the days when Uhlich was founded, as it works toward making St. Pauls House a reality in the present. The founding narrative of Uhlich is beginning to take on a sort of Pentecostal significance for the congregation, and John constructs and relates that narrated in a way to motivate his congregation in a new outreach. God is directing the congregation in mission and is doing so primarily through the women of the church. Pastor John, ever the imaginative mind, tells a “Fairy Tale, or, a story of the Angels.” The Fairies and the Angels represent the voice of God whispering new visions into the congregation. He speaks of “good Fairies,” which are the embodiment of “Love and Kindness and Friendship and Sacrifice and Unselfishness and of a great Faith, a noble Hope, and abiding Charity…If you want to picture these beautiful things, which make life worth living, you paint the Fairies. And you must believe in them if you want to believe in a good God who puts fine thoughts and high ideals and splendid purposes into the hearts of His children…We said that the friends of St. Pauls House had always believed in the Fairies.”\textsuperscript{149}

John says that the church of their fathers and mothers had grown old. Most of the people who began their work back in 1840, had died. Some people were predicting that their church would die with them. John writes of the founders of St. Pauls,

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{St. Pauls Bote}, 1915. \\
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{St. Pauls Bote}, 1918.
They wanted to perpetuate their *German* Faith. That is no longer our mission. That chapter is closed. It’s a fine chapter of love and sacrifice and courage and patience, as was ever written by good and honest people. But it is closed. The good Lord has long since put the finished volume upon the shelves of his great bookery. The grandchildren of these pioneers hold different views in all things, in churchly things too, they have different standards, they live different lives, they speak a different language. What they have inherited from their fathers they still carry in their heart, but not in their mind.

People see the church today and say, “If it only did a great big work which the world would bless and of which it might say, ‘See? The Spirit of the Christ! That’s what a Church must stand for! But, alas, it’s all yesterday, the Glory of the Past.’”\[^{150}\]

But the Fairies keep speaking to the church, “They say, ‘God does not grow old, His Church should not and need not and shall not. If only you people of St. Pauls will understand the needs of your day, as your fathers understood the needs of *their* day. They knew. They were plain people, but good and wise. Their church stood for what they wanted and *needed*. Are you not as good? Not as wise? Do you understand what the Church will do for you to-day and your children of tomorrow?’”\[^{151}\]

Just as the angel of the Lord whispered into the ear of a good woman before the Christ was born,

> Ever since, the Angels have poured their best and sweetest stories into the ear and the heart of good women. So it was in old St. Pauls Church. Half a Century ago they heard the cries of little children whose mother had gone away. Then they said: Should we not have a fine and beautiful home for children? You know the rest of the story. The Uhlich Home has just celebrated the Fiftieth Anniversary in a glorious glow of glittering gold. Then again the Fairies whispered. They came to some of our oldest mothers, to good women who have said their dear prayers in St. Pauls Church for fifty years and more. And they *understood* and said: “Yes, dear Fairies and the Angels, yes, we should now build a fine and beautiful Home for the Aged, for the Wanderers whose sons and daughters have gone away and left them in the deepening shadows of the evening.”\[^{152}\]

\[^{150}\] Ibid.  
\[^{151}\] Ibid.  
\[^{152}\] Ibid.
And so the story of St. Pauls Church goes on, as John interprets it for his generation. Through the women of the church, God had inspired the work at Uhlich. Once again, through the women of the church, God was inspiring a new work, a new thing in their generation for the aged - at least that is John’s hope. St. Pauls House is not yet a reality, yet it is a growing dream of many in the congregation. John uses the narrative history of the congregation as a resource in his time to encourage his congregation in a new work of ministry in the city. In ten years, St. Pauls House would be dedicated in 1921.

In 1928, a new building for Uhlich Home would be dedicated right next door to St. Pauls House. At the dedication, a similar Pentecostal narrative is related. The prophecy of Joel 2, found in the Acts 2 story of Pentecost, is referenced in a history of Uhlich around the Women’s Aid Society, organized a few years prior to the founding of the Home in 1868. It repeats the theme of the Spirit moving among the women of the church, “Old St. Pauls on Ohio and LaSalle Streets was blessed in the years of old, as it is blessed today, with a type of womanhood, or more accurately a motherhood, that can see a vision of higher purposes and dream dreams of hidden glory.” The history notes that no accurate list of members of that early women’s society existed, those women who saw visions and dreamed dreams. The writer goes on:

> It is probably no unwarranted statement that to these Christian women’s influence and inspiration is due the first beginning of Orphan Home history…May the protecting and guiding Hand of the bountiful Father of all His children on earth and in heaven ever be held firm over this Home. We are confident that the faithful Mother Church that has stood in kindness and charity over this Christian Home for 60 years will never withhold its benedictions in the future nor will this Home ever desire to function or serve, except to do so under the shadow of the wing of

153 Dedication Services of New Uhlich Building, booklet, Sunday, June 10th, 1928.
the Almighty and of the faithful people of St. Pauls, as whose spiritual child it will ever desire to be known.\textsuperscript{154}

In this narrative, Uhlich Home is the spiritual child of the Mother Church, inspired by the mothers who gave birth to the idea of a home for the motherless and the fatherless.

That story continued to be shaped in later years. In 1946, “A Brief History of Uhlich Orphan Home” is presented to a gathering of the Uhlich Women’s Aid Society. It honors women, inspired by God, as the ones who planned and who were the driving force behind the work. “It was godly inspiration which called Uhlich into being, and it has been His spirit which has helped through many difficult and trying periods of Uhlich’s history.”\textsuperscript{155} Again, it was God’s Spirit moving among the women of the church, women who had ears to listen, that drove the congregation forward in mission.

Another example of a progressive view of women that was growing within the church: in 1905 the St. Pauls League, a young people’s club, puts on a mock U. S. Senate of the year 2000. In the United States of 1905, women did not yet have the right to vote, but in their vision of the year 2000 not only are women serving in the Senate, but the US has a female President: “Woman is intellectually and politically man’s equal…The President of the Senate appointed a committee to inform the President of the United States that the Senate awaited her pleasure and a moment later she appeared.”\textsuperscript{156} They wondered whether in A.D. 2000 the Senate of the United States would really look like “the beautiful picture they had just seen.”\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} A Brief History of Uhlich Orphan Home, booklet, 1946.
\textsuperscript{156} St. Pauls Bote, 1905. In that same Senate, they are considering a bill to move the seat of government from Washington to Chicago. The motion passes and in 2000 Chicago becomes the U.S. Capitol. These youth clearly loved their city.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
It would be the late 1960’s before women would be allowed to serve on the St. Pauls Church Council. The first female President of the Congregation would be elected in 1975, still ahead of the United States envisioned by the St. Pauls League for the year 2000.

The ideas, the hearts of compassion, the words that were expressed in the deeds that gave birth to Uhlich and to St. Pauls House were visions that God had given the women of the church. The rest of the congregation enthusiastically followed their lead. The 1913 German edition of the *Bote* reports that the Frauenverein had named a special committee and chairperson to oversee fundraising and planning for St. Pauls House. The plan is already 7 years old for this *Altenheim*, a home for the old, “members of our church who need it, there they will be cared for with love.” Pastor John spoke at the meeting of the Frauenverein and described his vision for St. Pauls House. He said that the residents should feel totally at home, with no strict rules, and that each person should be able to stay as long as they want.158 That value for home found expression in another one of his hymns:

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\begin{align*}
\text{God bless our home,} \\
\text{On earth my pilgrim’s dwelling place,} \\
\text{Sweet home of rest in life’s mad race,} \\
\text{God bless our home,} \\
\text{God bless our earthly home.}^{159}
\end{align*}
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A 1966 brochure of St. Pauls House depicts a home in which John’s words have become a reality that lasted: “Everything is done to make the residents feel ‘at home.’” There are no printed rules displayed in each room. Residents are free to come and go at will. They

158 *St. Pauls Bote*, 1913.  
159 John, *St. Pauls Hymnal*, 111.
are permitted to entertain guests. As far as possible, the ‘institution’ atmosphere is eliminated.”

The plan in 1913 was for St. Pauls House to be next door to St. Pauls Church on property in Lincoln Park. A group of church men bought up the lots adjacent to St. Pauls Church at the corner of Orchard and Fullerton streets (on which the Parish House now stands) in order to save the property for future use by the congregation. The church would pay the buyers off over time, with the help of money lent by the women of the church who had been saving their birthday money for St. Pauls House. A German article in the Bote reports, “How wonderful to have church, orphanage and old people’s home so close together. How wonderful for our old people to be so near the church.” The congregation hopes for God’s help and direction toward a good conclusion to these plans, this “work of love of neighbor.” One woman who gave a donation to the cause exclaimed, “A home in which old people can live without having the burden of housework - that is true religion. I’m for that!”

Something Big In A New Generation

In 1905, the first English language service was held at St. Pauls Church. Pastor John began the service hoping that it would keep the youth engaged and involved. There was a concern that if the St. Pauls story were going to continue, the youth would have to

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161 St. Pauls Bote, 1913.
claim the faith of the mothers and the fathers of the church as their own. Following that
service, the Bote reports:

The young people must take up the burden of the old and continue to build on the
foundations laid by our fathers in the years that are past. If we get this firmly
fixed in our mind and in our heart the future will be very bright. For all good
things that our fathers and mothers leave us, the greatest legacy is the “Old Faith.”
It is to be hoped that the older people who attended this service and the second
English service two weeks later will have been impressed with this thought: “The
faith of the fathers is the same even when preached and prayed and sung by our
children in their tongue.”

In 1916, on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the St. Pauls League young people’s
association, a heart-felt poem appears in the Bote:

Our work had never been a hopeless fight
For it has always been a fight for right,
For God, for Church, for Country, Home and Truth,
For things ennobling to old age and youth.

For twenty years this band has worked in faithful search,
To bring new treasures to the dear old church.
For twenty years this band has glorified
The cross on which the Savior died.

For twenty years we’ve kept a watchman at the gate,
To keep without the advocate of Hate.
Ennobling thoughts and actions pure and strong,
Ideals high, that lift one o’er the vulgar throng.

And gentle kindness, patience, mercy mild,
Integrity of man and woman’s virtue undefiled,
The Love that heals the aching wound which bled,
The Christian Love, that can forgive and then forget.

The fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Man,
That build the bridges that eternity can span.
The Faith that made our noble fathers strong,
And made of our mother’s life a tuneful song,

The Hope that drives away despairing doubt
And pins a golden star upon the darkest cloud,

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162 St. Pauls Bote, 1905.
The Charity that blesses where the world despised,
Transfiguring Man, that he might be like Christ.
These are the things which our program named
And after twenty years – we’re not ashamed.163

The author of the poem is not cited, but the language sounds a lot like the poet Rudolf John. (Spelling Love with a capital “L” is a big clue.) Whoever wrote it, if it is any indication of the faith of young St. Pauls, then they drank deeply from the well of German Pietism: thought and action, word and deed are joined; divine Love is expressed in love for all; it is a Love that reaches out to the despised, “the least of these”; it is a united faith that joins humanity, inclusive and broad in its scope; it expresses a Love that transfigures human beings as they reflect Christ in the world.

In the years leading up to the founding of St. Pauls House, there is a sense that the congregation wanted to do something big in their own generation, and that they would need the youth to help accomplish it. In the “Fairies and Angels” story, John said “If [St. Pauls] only did a great big work which the world would bless and of which it might say, ‘See? The Spirit of the Christ! That’s what a Church must stand for! But, alas, it’s all yesterday, the Glory of the Past.’” The present generation needed to be engaged for the next big thing. At a meeting of the St. Pauls League of young adults, John encourages them to action, “A great deal is often expected from larger churches in our cities. But is it not true, that such churches as ours have a tremendous responsibility and endless tasks in the Good Samaritan work that confronts us daily in such a city as ours?”164

While working to pay off the debt on the property that had been purchased adjacent to the church building, and keenly anticipating a new St. Pauls House for the

163 *St. Pauls Bote*, 1916.
164 Ibid.
aged but held back by the debt, Pastor John writes to prod the church on. You can sense his passion. Just as the first generation did something big in getting Uhlich going, he wants his generation to leave a legacy of their own:

Is this all clear? Understand it? We are sick and tired of that dodgasted debt – and now we’re paying it off, see? Please use a gimlet and get this into your dome of thought: St. Pauls church has a great Future. But this Future is wedded to big things, not little things. We are not a “neighborhood church” but a great metropolitan church of German descent and we must do something big, something that all Chicago, all Illinois, all Uncle Sam will see, understand and appreciate. If we don’t do this big thing we will die of dry rot. We will do it. But first we will pay this old debt, every dollar of it and every cent. We will not stick a spade into the ground until the last dollar is paid. And while we are paying the old debt we are carrying on the preparations for the big new work.  

Doing a “big work” was important to the people of St. Pauls, a matter of pride. It was a big church, and a church whose leader had a keen sense of the teaching of Jesus, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required” (Luke 12:48).

By 1915, most of the congregation appears engaged in the “big new work.” The men have followed the lead of the women. They’ve pitched in by doing research on other “Old People’s Homes” in Chicago to learn and appropriate what’s best. The young people are active in fundraising. The church unanimously endorses the work of St. Pauls House and John can write, “And so it has become the work of the whole church, old and young, men and women.”

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165 St. Pauls Bote, 1914.
166 St. Pauls Bote, 1915.
The Story Lives On

The congregation has continued its relationship with Uhlich and St. Pauls House up to the present. In the 1970’s, children from Uhlich were still attending Sunday School at St. Pauls, but the congregation found it increasingly difficult to minister to these abused and neglected children who needed specialized care. In 1974, a report from John Drost, the Secretary of Uhlich Children’s Home, notes a new program that attempts to develop a closer relationship between the children of the home and the families of St. Pauls:

The Uhlich children attending services are seated individually with church member families in the front rows instead of one group in the back row, those children considering themselves a part of a family, are better controlled, and showing great interest in the church service. Some of our children are also visiting the homes of church members.\(^\text{167}\)

In the same issue, the Church School shows a real heart for connecting with the Uhlich kids and is trying to find ways to meet their special needs. They show a focused effort to accommodate the youth in their report:

A special emphasis has been given this year to the relationship of children from Uhlich Home to the Church School. Much time has gone into this effort, believing that the Christian nurture of these children is also a part of our mission. We found that because of the severe problems many of these children have, they did not respond well to the curriculum and classroom approach. So, a new program has been initiated. While the Uhlich children are an integral part of the Church School, teacher’s aides have been assigned to children on a one-to-one basis. These aides can respond to the individual needs of the children. The reasoning behind this approach is that the children from Uhlich need to come here on Sunday morning and find a relationship with people.\(^\text{168}\)

\(^{167}\) *St. Pauls Bote*, 1974.

\(^{168}\) Ibid.

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Unfortunately, this new plan was not a success. Members of St. Pauls began to feel frustrated that the Uhlich staff were not getting the children to Sunday School on time. There was a breakdown of communication between the church and Uhlich staff, yet Pastor Fred Trost writes that church members are committed to making the Uhlich boys and girls feel welcome, warmly received and cared for:

The congregation cares about the Church School and we want the children of Uhlich Home to have the best possible experience on Sundays at St. Pauls. This takes preparation and commitment on the part of the laity. And, I assure you, we’re doing that here. We intend to fulfill our responsibilities towards the children. Our hope is for a concerned and loving community of Faith in which the children feel at home and wanted. We are not there yet, but we want that to be, and with God’s help it will be.\textsuperscript{169}

Despite the commitment of the congregation to fulfill its responsibilities, the Uhlich children eventually stopped attending Sunday School at the church. The care they needed was beyond the training of the volunteer lay Sunday School teachers. One church member at the time remembers:

My memories carry me back to the time here at St. Pauls, when it was thought to be a good idea that the children of confirmation age living at Uhlich Children’s Home should attend the Sunday morning service. Accordingly, the captives, some fifteen or twenty of them, were led in, seated at the rear of the sanctuary and squirmed noisily throughout the entire hour of the service. The rubber grommets, which were designed to house the empty communion glasses, made excellent missiles with which to pelt one another, and could be seen flying through the air with an occasional empty soft drink can. Fortunately and foreseeably, the policy of enforced attendance did not last long and events were allowed to return to normal.\textsuperscript{170}

Though the involvement of the congregation in the work of UCAN and St. Pauls House has waned over the years, they have remained an important part of the founding, primal narrative of the congregation. Later generations have retold the story in their own

\textsuperscript{169} Frederic Trost, letter to the Uhlich Director, December 9, 1974.
\textsuperscript{170} Bill Rieck, written memory in St. Pauls Archives.
language and have used it to spur the people of St. Pauls to action in their own time. A perfect example is the sermon “Proud, Rugged Heritage.” It was preached by Pastor Fred Trost on the 99th Anniversary of the founding of Uhlich Children’s Home. Trost uses the founding narrative of Uhlich to encourage his congregation to bold action in the present. The story has taken on a mythical quality. (This sermon was preached a year before the events of the next chapter):

Our fathers were from a bold, sturdy, adventurous stock. Among them were some riskers and some gamblers. They often fought great odds, and they laughed in the face of many troubles. The founding of Uhlich Children’s Home was an act born of faith. Boys and girls were alone in the city. The church was there to serve God. Therefore, the members of St. Pauls poured out their hearts, rolled up their sleeves, and dug in to help. They were a pious folk in the best sense of the word. They knew something about the fear of God, and they were glad for the blessings of being alive. When it came to saying so, they weren’t timid. They let the city know. So it was that in 1868, Mother Rathsfield moved into two rooms at the corner of LaSalle and Ontario Streets and began to care in the name of the congregation for a handful of children who were bereft of their parents.

He speaks of how civic leaders became involved and fought in the State Legislature for the benefit of the children. “They were not the only ones. The mothers of St. Pauls often refrained from attending to their own household duties to sew and patch and cook for the children.” In the sermon, he connects the congregation’s history of founding and supporting the Home with the needs of the present generation. He uses the history of the congregation as a resource to respond to those contemporary needs. He notes that the time, the faces, and the neighborhood have changed since the founding of Uhlich. It now serves a very different population, but the energizing faith has not changed:

The situation is in some ways still quite the same. For here is where some of God’s children are living; some of them fresh from the “old country,” some of them caught in the struggle for life as many of those children of old. What makes the people around us so different? Their faces? Yes! Their language? Perhaps! Some of their customs? Surely! But we are bound to them as the roots of the tree are anchored to the earth. Bound to them by the fact of our creation. Bound by the
fact that we live in the same city at the same time. Bound by the fact that some men have heard the Gospel while others have uttered a cry.

Much of our father’s joy and purpose came from believing that God could work through human lives to accomplish some of His purposes, and that the Gospel they preached and taught to us has the power to heal people and flood dark places with light and bring hope to the broken. God knows how the world and our community pants for such power in our day. What we need so badly are people who stake their lives on Jesus Christ alone…some riskers and some gamblers, some pious folks who fear God and love the city and cannot stand the brokenness of it.

He writes that if Mother Rathsfeld and the early founders and supporters of Uhlich could speak today they would surely say,

“Well on, dear sons and daughters! Press on, and let neither your fears nor your weakness nor your discouragement nor powers and principalities nor things present nor things to come separate you in any way from the love and service of God!” Some knitted, some cooked, some laid bricks, some fought in the Legislature, some prayed, some put their arms around the children, while others did nothing at all. Nearly one hundred years later, we give thanks for some of those riskers and riskers of old who were moved by the Holy Spirit and whose lives, anything but perfect, became a means through which God chose to love and serve His children.\(^{171}\)

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Finding God in the Story

From a narrative perspective, where is God found when stories of St. Pauls mission and outreach are told in this era? The grounding faith was in German Pietism and in the congregation’s roots in the Evangelical Synod – a faith that joins word and deed, characterized by neighborly “Samaritan” love. It is practical, practiced and humble.

Works of love begin at home, but extend to all. Service to others is grounded in a deep

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love for Jesus and an answer to his call to self-sacrifice for others, for the “least of these.”
All of this is “love activity” is *Reichs-Gottes-Arbeit*, Kingdom of God Work. God in these narratives is the giver of good gifts. Service to others flows out of gratitude for God’s gifts. The Giver of gifts is pleased by self-sacrifice, and so can be depended upon to prosper the labor of love and the work of one’s hands. The name of Jesus is used interchangeably with God, so that these same characteristics apply to both. Just as God is pleased by the congregation’s acts of self-giving love, so is Jesus.

This God is not just their God. The motto, “Do good to all, especially to the community of believers,” is grounded in a belief that God is the Father of all. God’s goodness extends to all people, and so should their good works. This is a God who is especially concerned with widows and orphans, with all who are in distress or neglected. It is in that place where Jesus shows up in the congregation’s stories as a character in their narratives. When they show compassion to “the least of these,” they are showing compassion to him.

God also drives the plot. God does that especially through women. God acts in these narratives through whispering fairies and angels, giving dreams and creating visions in the minds of the women of the congregation. God guides and directs and allows the people, and pastors, of St. Pauls to imagine “big things.” These are powerful foundational narratives that emerge in the early years of St. Pauls Church. It began as an oral history among people who never dreamed that their lives would be written about. Their story was repeated and crafted into a story by the next generation through the words of Pastor John.
Intersecting with Acts

Both the story that Acts attempts to relate and the foundational narratives of St. Paul's were written down by later generations. Luke used the sources that were available to him to shape his story of the early church with his own agenda in mind. Pervo describes that agenda as the “legitimacy of Pauline Christianity,” one that includes Gentiles and approves of Paul’s ministry. Rudolf John tells stories of the earliest years of St. Paul's in his own words and through his own interpretation, based on the living, oral sources that were still a part of the congregation when he came to St. Pauls. He, too, had an agenda: to inspire the congregation in founding St. Pauls House. Both narratives have their mythic qualities that give power to the narratives and that signal that God is involved in what is happening. Like the Spirit giving birth to the church at Pentecost, John describes the founding of Uhlich as a spiritual, God-inspired event. Fifty years later, Fred Trost uses mythic language of rugged pioneers, fighting against great odds, to found Uhlich Home, “an act born of faith.” Like Pentecost, it becomes the first dramatic example of the church reaching out in mission. In the words of Golemon cited earlier, Trost reframes a story of hardship into one of resilience, discovery and growth. It works much in the way that the Luke uses the aftermath of the killing of Stephen as a period of growth that comes out of pain (Acts 8:1-4). For German Pietists, though, mission is not expressed primarily through evangelism but through “doing good to all.” Despite that different understanding of mission, Rudolf John uses the imagery of Pentecost to inspire his congregation in their own understanding of outreach.

In more recent years, pastors at St. Pauls would use the Pentecost story, which speaks to a strongly inclusive church, in precisely that way. A Pentecost sermon I preached while researching this project is found after Chapter 4. In reading through sermon archives, I found that a similar sermon had been preached twenty years earlier by the ninth Senior Pastor of St. Pauls, Tom Henry:

The marvel of the first Pentecost is still a marvel. For we are also a diverse gathering of people. We have come from all over the country and all over the world to live in Chicago. We come from Iowa and from Puerto Rico; from Pennsylvania and from Lebanon; from the Far East and from the eastern United State; from Germany and Poland and Czechoslovakia; We have been Methodists, and Presbyterians; Roman Catholics and Jews; Baptists and Episcopalians and Unitarians; Congregationalists and Lutherans and Evangelical and Reformed; we are all ages and races and colors. We are straight and gay. St. Pauls United Church of Christ, according to demographic statistics, is the most diverse in membership of any church in our denomination. But still we can gather to pray and to break bread together and to share in holy communion. The miracle of Pentecost continues with us, even if there is no wind rushing through this place, nor tongues of fire dancing upon us.

However, lest we get too puffed up with pride in our accomplishment and strain the muscles in our arms by patting ourselves on the back, we have to recognize that our unity is not only the work of our hands, but is primarily the work of God through the Holy Spirit. And further, even with all the diversity within our fellowship and communion, there are still those who would not feel welcomed among us and there are those who, in our heart of hearts, we wish would just go away.174

The context of the above sermon, a context described in Chapter 4, is one in which inclusiveness and being Open and Affirming were part of the congregation’s understanding of its mission. Relating the Pentecost narrative to the congregation’s mission has been generative even when that understanding has changed – from John’s purpose of encouraging the St. Pauls House endeavor, to Henry’s purpose of encouraging the congregation toward greater inclusiveness. Nancy Ammerman writes, “Which stories

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174 Tom Henry, Pentecost 1990.
get told at which time depends in large part on both the need of the hour and the memories of those present.”

It is not only the Pentecost narrative that relates to this period of the St. Pauls story. Acts 2, 4 and 9, in their summary statements about the church, speak of the Spirit-filled community building itself up in love (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35; 9:31). St. Pauls’ history is not only about outbursts in mission. It is about German Americans taking care of their own: their widows and orphans; the new waves of German immigrants coming after repeated world wars; teaching their youth in a huge Sunday School, teaching their version of the Evangelical Catechism, and passing on their united, German Evangelical faith. The church saw to the faith formation as well as the physical needs of their own while they also reached out in love to people not a part of their church. The Frauenverein’s motto, “Do good to all, especially those of the household of faith,” reflects this congregational care - care that is not myopic but that extends beyond the community of faith. The words of Acts 9:31 would feel very much at home were they quoted in the context of an early 20th Century Bote, “The church...had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

Another way that this part of St. Pauls history connects with Acts is related to the presence of women in the narratives. One of the activities of the Spirit in Acts is to inspire bold, prophetic speech, but when it does, we only hear the Spirit speak through men. Only once are women called prophets in Acts, after the initial promise of Acts 2. They are the four daughters of Philip, mentioned in an aside in Acts 21:9. A male

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175 Ammerman, “Culture and Identity,” 94.
176 There were around 1000 children enrolled in Sunday in the early 20th Century.
prophet, Agabus, speaks for the Holy Spirit in this passage. Luke keeps the prophesying daughters silent. O’Day observes: “These four virgin daughters, children of a well-known church leader, may have been so renowned in the tradition that Luke could not avoid mentioning them when he discussed the church at Caesarea. The reality of women’s prophetic activities in the church may have constrained Luke from suppressing all mention of it, but he did succeed in keeping this ministry at the margins of his story of the church.”177 Pervo, who agrees that the tradition of these prophesying daughters must have been in Luke’s sources, notes that this episode reprises the situation in Luke 2:25-28, in which a prophet named Anna appears but the prophecies in that passage are assigned to the man Simeon and not to her.178 In reading Acts, one looks in vain for a full account of women in the narrative. Women are included in the groups that receive the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues and so, presumably, are among those who are given the gift of Spirit-inspired speech. But there are no accounts of their prophetic speech in Acts. Historian Gerda Lerner writes, “Women have lived in a world in which they apparently had no history and in which their share in the building of society and civilizations was constantly marginalized. Women have also for millennia been denied the power to shape the formation of the dominant institutions of society.”179 Women clearly had a role in the formation of the early church, shown by the presence of women like Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43) and the daughters of Philip 8 (Acts 21:9), yet when the Spirit enters the narrative as a character, it is essentially in relation to men. In Acts,

women who are moved by the Spirit are anonymous and not given a voice. Never-the-
less, despite the absence of Spirit-filled women in Luke’s selective narrative, O’Day says,
“It is important to note also that the heart of Acts’ theology, the universal appeal of the
gospel and its spread to the Gentiles, has possibilities for contemporary women’s lives in
the church that also subvert Luke’s attempt at control.”180

While Luke diminishes the presence of women that he found in his sources, John
included them as a strong presence at St. Pauls. It was one of the surprises in reading the
St. Pauls story. John frequently writes about the women in the church, gives voice to
what they are saying and credits them for initiating the major outbursts of mission that
would shape the St. Pauls – the founding of Uhlich and St. Pauls House. It was the
women who heard the voice of God and put the plans into action. They led the way and
the men followed later. Reading against the grain of Luke, both Mary and Martha are
lifted up as the two faces of the Frauenverein. In the language of Acts, the Spirit has
inspired bold and prophetic speech in the women of St. Pauls throughout its history. That
story needs to be remembered.

At St. Pauls, there is a main hallway that connects the two wings of the church,
the Sanctuary at one end and the Chapel at the other. Along that hallway there is a long
line of portraits of the Senior Pastors of St. Pauls. They are all white males. That is the
visible face of the history of St. Pauls to a visitor who enters the building. That is the
visible face of the leadership of St. Pauls to the members who walk down that hallway.
One single mother remarked that this is what her boys walk past every Sunday and she
wonders what to say about it and how to explain why there are no portraits of women on

that wall. The scope of my project was not a women’s history of St. Pauls, nor of Acts, but that story could and should be told in an intentional way. The stories of the mission and outreach of the congregation are grounded in the stories of women of deep faith who joined word with deed. I hope one day to see a wall of portraits of the women whose lives have shaped St. Pauls: women like Christian Rathsfeld, the first person to care for the Civil War orphans; Emilie John and Pauline Pister, the pastors’ wives who led the Frauenverein and whose words are frequently quoted in the Bote; Louise Keitel, the woman who had the generative idea for St. Pauls House; Alma Atzel, a member of the congregation who was a visiting nurse in the Deaconess tradition who went to China in 1916 to work as a medical missionary. The list of names goes on. Their names and faces need to be remembered as much as Pastor John and Pastor Trost. Anyone reading in the archives will get to know their names well, so should the congregation. One of my goals in the future, as I continue to reflect on the St. Pauls story as a resource, will be to lift up their lesser-known history.181

Mary Clark Moschella, in *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice*, writes of taking the step of sharing your congregation’s stories in sermons: “Sharing your research in a sermon is powerful because it brings together ‘mighty stories’ with the ‘dangerous ritual’ of proclamation.” [citing Anderson and Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals.*] She continues, “When preaching is combined with the emotional and spiritual power of narrative sharing, the conditions are ripe for theological engagement.”182 In the sermon that follows, I relate a passage of Acts to material that I gleaned from my study of this

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181 On the St. Pauls website, there is now an historic timeline which reflects the women of the congregation more clearly than the hall of pastors. www.spucc.org.
182 Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice*, 220.
early period of the St. Pauls story. The sermon uses the story of scripture and the history of the congregation to encourage the congregation in its present mission.

Allerwelts-Kirche
A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter
Text: Acts 11:1-18

It’s been four weeks since Easter Sunday, but we continue to be in the season of Easter. Unlike Christmas, that seems to go on and on for weeks, thanks to the gigantic engine of commerce, we tend to think of Easter as being only one day out of the year. But the opposite, in fact, is true. In the church calendar, the season of Christmas is really only 12 days long – from Christmas Day to Epiphany. Easter, on the other hand, lasts for seven whole weeks – all the way from Easter Sunday to Pentecost. The season of Easter hasn’t yet been co-opted by our culture the way Christmas has, maybe because cradling baby Jesus in our arms is a lot easier and safer than dealing with a risen Christ who is on the loose, and who just might not want to keep things the way they are. The scriptures we’re given to reflect upon during these seven weeks of Easter are meant to get us thinking about what it means to live as people who follow a risen Christ.

What does it mean to live like a Christian? That’s a question that the church has struggled with since the very beginning. We heard a reading from the book of Acts this morning. Acts is a story of the first generation of Christians after Easter and their struggle to be the church. At this point in our story, the church was a sect within Judaism. All Christians were Jews. Peter is now a leader in that church. And he has been called on the carpet. Some of the members of First United Church of Jerusalem are not too happy with what Peter has been up to.
A few days earlier, Peter was spending time in prayer. It was noon. He was hungry. And while he’s praying, he goes into a sort of trance and he sees a vision. In this vision, Peter is pushed beyond his comfort zone of how he looks at the world. He sees a huge sheet coming down out of heaven. And inside are all of these animals and creepy crawlers – reptiles, snakes, lizards, foods that no good, observant Jew like Peter would ever eat. And he hears a Voice from heaven telling him to get up, prepare those foods and eat them. And Peter protests. “No way!” God is telling Peter to go against the very words of scripture that prohibit eating certain kinds of food. Imagine that - God telling you to disobey the Bible. (God is, apparently, no fundamentalist.) And Peter argues with God about it. But the Voice says, “What God has made clean, you must not declare profane.”

While he’s having this vision, a knock comes at the door. And it soon becomes clear that this vision isn’t about food. This vision is about people. It’s about who Peter will eat with, and who he will hang out with, and who he will welcome into the church. It’s important to stress that this vision is not for Jews. Jewish customs, tradition and scripture have helped them to survive as God’s people over centuries, no matter what empire happens to be in charge. No, this vision is told for the church. It’s for us.

God’s Spirit tells Peter to go downstairs and answer the door. It turns out that the people knocking are messengers from a very unlikely man. They’ve come from someone named Cornelius. Cornelius is a centurion. He’s a leader in the Roman army. He’s part of the force that’s occupying and oppressing the Jewish homeland. Why on earth would Peter ever want to associate with someone like that; break bread with one of his oppressors? But God’s Spirit is already at work in places that we don’t expect. Peter is
beginning to learn that the risen Christ isn’t just concerned with people who look and act and talk like he does. The vision of God for our world – a vision of healing, of wholeness, of reconciliation – extends even to those that we might call enemies. This story is about a God who keeps pushing the church into new territory, into new places where we would rather not go, places that will make us feel uncomfortable. The Spirit of the risen Christ is always going ahead of us, and it’s not easy for us to keep up. Sometimes we would rather die than change.

This Roman centurion Cornelius is our great-great-great-great-grandpa in the faith. If Peter hadn’t taken the risk of crossing ethnic, religious, and social boundaries to welcome somebody like Cornelius, somebody like us, then none of us would be here today. There would be no St. Pauls Church. If that first generation of Christians had been unwilling to change and evolve and imagine the church in new ways, then the church would have petered out, and that would have been the end of that. But remember, we don’t follow a dead Christ who just lets things peter out. We follow a living Christ who keeps pushing us to understand in newer and deeper ways what it means to follow him. The challenge for us is to keep on following.

In our baptism liturgy at St. Pauls, we promise every child that we will show him or her with our lives how Christians live. That suggests that we’re not as concerned about saying what we believe as in showing what we believe. That liturgy was developed by Tom Henry in the 1980’s. Like the change Peter saw happening in his church, it was a time of great change in this congregation. The neighborhood was gentrifying, the congregation was growing. We were moving away from being a German-American congregation, in which everyone had the same roots, to a congregation of people with
different ethnic backgrounds, different sexual orientations, different faith traditions, bringing with them a variety of beliefs.

How does a diverse community like that express its faith? Like Peter’s first church, the Spirit of God was calling people into the congregation who would help St. Pauls to evolve in new ways, and in 1989 St. Pauls would become an officially Open and Affirming congregation, a church that welcomes all, regardless of sexual orientation. Through this welcome, the people of St. Pauls believed that they were showing with their lives how Christians live.

But this step wasn’t a brand new innovation. Becoming officially Open and Affirming grew out of the history of St. Pauls. I believe our story as a church is a sacred story and worth reflecting on. It’s a sacred story because God has been at work here for generations, calling people to show with their lives how Christians live. One of the ways the church has tried to live out that call is in being an inclusive congregation, even in the early days.

Picture it: 1918. It was a very difficult year. The United States was at war with Germany. It was not an easy time to be a German-American. Anti-German sentiment ran high. Germans were suspected of being anti-American and unpatriotic. In the June edition of the St. Pauls newsletter, the Bote, a German pastor of another congregation is quoted saying, “Why not, as evidence of our sincerity, put away from us everything which is German and everything which might bring us under suspicion of being disloyal?” He says that his congregation is going to completely do away with anything German, get rid of German language worship. It was clearly a difficult time to be German-American. The
leadership of St. Pauls, however, did not do away with German services. But they also
made it clear that they were loyal Americans.

A service flag flew outside the church, with a star on the flag for each St. Pauls
boy that was serving their country in the armed services. There were soon so many stars
on that flag that they became impossible for passersby to count. Each issue of the *Bote*
listed the names of St. Pauls enlisted men. The war also brought economic hardship.
There was food rationing. The *Bote* tells its readers: limit your wheat consumption,
tighten your belts and eat potatoes.

But things got even worse. On top of the horrors of war, the pain of separation,
and tough economic times, one of the greatest epidemics in history hit the world in the
fall of 1918. An H1N1 flu epidemic killed more people than World War I. 20-40 million
people worldwide died. 1 in 4 Americans suffered from it and nearly 700,000 Americans
died. It was most deadly for young adults. And it seems to have touched every family at
St. Pauls. In October 1918, there were 56 deaths in the congregation. 32 of them were
under age 40, and most were in their 20’s and 30’s – young adults at the prime of life,
young parents leaving behind little children. The epidemic was so bad that funerals had to
be limited to brief graveside services. The pastors of St. Pauls could not enter the homes
of the ill. Church meetings were cancelled. The St. Pauls League, the 21/41 Club of the
time, had to stop meeting for several weeks.

When it came time to celebrate St. Pauls’ 75th anniversary that fall, the church
was utterly exhausted. The church council published a notice that, given the
circumstances, the 75th Anniversary would be observed in a quiet, dignified manner.
There would be no social functions, just an English and a German worship service. They
said it was because they didn’t have any money. They were $2,000 in the hole - around 30,000 in today’s dollars. It’s an understatement to say that this was an incredibly difficult time for the people of St. Pauls. They needed to hold on not just to their beliefs but to their faith.

In the November 1918 issue of the Bote, there is a long letter to the congregation from their pastor, Rudolph John. He had been their pastor for over 30 years. He writes to address the financial challenge the church is facing. And he proposes, for the first time ever, a system in which every member would make a financial pledge to support their church. Each member, he says, should be given a pledge card to complete. In return for making a pledge, they would be given a membership card, good for one year. And the following year they would have to renew their membership by making a pledge once again, and so on. It was a pretty radical idea. I think it must have been too radical for the congregation. They did start a system of pledging in 1919, but it wasn’t made mandatory for church membership.

But what’s really remarkable about John’s letter is what he says about congregation’s core identity. He reminds them of their faith. He says that while financial questions are of great importance, the first question a church must consider is not the financial question but the spiritual question. He asks “Why has the worldwide Christian church become so weak in responding to the current world crisis?” It’s because the church is so divided. American Christians and German Christians were fighting and killing each other; gassing each other. What does that mean? It didn’t make any sense.

He says, “St. Pauls is just the sort of church that can boldly proclaim and show to the world what a truly united church is. For 75 years, you have been a church practically
without man-made laws. You respect the conscience of every Christian. You admit people to communion without question. You baptize children without question. You unite in marriages all who ask. You take the ministrations of the church to every grave to which you are asked. You officiate at the grave of the suicide as readily as that of the man who has died with the last sacrament. You administer baptism to the adult without question, to the Jew who asks for it, to the children of the Atheist if opportunity offers. You open the doors of the church to all who care to enter…I know that we have sometimes been termed an Allerwelts Kirche. I am glad of it. To me there can be no prouder name, no more desirable title. If I have done anything, even the smallest part, to make St. Pauls an Allerwelts-Kirche, a church that wants to serve the world, then I shall die a proud and happy man.” An Allerwelts Kirche: In German it means all-world, every person, everyone, a church that embraces the whole world.

In 1918, the people of St. Pauls could have chosen to turn inward. Other churches had. This is the same era when fundamentalist Christianity was born in reaction to all the change that was happening in the world. But the people of St. Pauls chose to turn outward. They chose to remain an Allerwelts Kirche. They knew who they were. They knew what their faith was. God had called them to be a church whose doors were open for anyone, a church that embraced the world.

Today we have our own problems to deal with: Global financial crisis. Our nation is engaged in ongoing war. We are deeply divided around ideology and partisan politics in this country. Some people want to make their church an ideological church. Is it possible to still remain an Allerwelts Kirche? I think it is, but it’s not always easy. Since the beginning, the faith of this congregation has been to be an open, welcoming
community. Respecting the conscience of each individual, and joining together people who have a wide variety of beliefs but who share a common faith. That’s a rare thing.

It’s not easy to be an Allerwelts-Kirche, because when you invite the whole world inside your doors, there is so much diversity that the differences might tear a church apart. But the world belongs to God, and God loves all of its colors and textures and languages and cultures. God’s Spirit isn’t concerned with having us look and act and talk alike. The story of our church, of God’s church, is about a God who keeps pushing us into new territory, into new places where we would rather not go, among people who might make us feel uncomfortable. The Spirit of the risen Christ is always going ahead of us, and it’s not easy for us to keep up, but an Allerwelts-Kirche is exactly what our world needs.
One of the major functions of the Holy Spirit in Acts is to inspire bold speech. “Witness” is one of the few direct descriptions of the Spirit (Acts 5:32), along with “promise” (Acts 2:33) and “gift” (Acts 2:37). The apostles Peter and John are filled with the Spirit, enabling them to speak boldly before the authorities in Jerusalem (Acts 4:8-13). After their release from arrest, they continue to pray for boldness to enable a public witness and in response to their prayer meeting “they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). This equips them for further conflict with the authorities, and when arrested yet again they say, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29). Stephen, among many others, speaks boldly in public and dies violently, and the ensuing conflict produces a scattering of believers (Acts 7:1-8:4). Bold speech before the authorities, civil disobedience, and conflict – these are not qualities that come out strongly in the narratives of outreach at St. Pauls, but they are present. The narratives of witness and conflict in Acts relate most directly to August, 1968 at St. Pauls.

On the night of Tuesday, August 27, 1968, the doors of the St. Pauls gymnasium were opened to the world. The Democratic Convention was in Chicago. Lincoln Park, just down the street from the church, was filled with young people who had come to protest the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. Frederick R. Trost, Pastor of
St. Pauls at the time, noted that St. Pauls welcomed about 2,000 people from the streets in the days during and surrounding the convention. Trost made the call to open the gym after protestors were tear-gassed by Chicago police in order to enforce a curfew and to drive them from the park. Alongside him stood his Associate Pastors, Herbert Davis and Mark Miller.

St. Pauls had been a member of the North Side Cooperative Ministry of churches since 1964. In the violence following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. earlier that year, the group was alerted to the potential for violence surrounding the convention. The Cooperative Ministry petitioned Mayor Richard J. Daley to issue a variance to the ordinance that prohibited any presence in Lincoln Park between 11p.m. and 4 a.m. Although rarely imposed, the Mayor decided to take a stand and the police enforced the ordinance with tear gas and beatings. Earlier in the week of the convention, a young man who worshipped at St. Pauls, a student from McCormick Theological Seminary, which was located at the time a few blocks west on Fullerton Ave. from the church, received a smashed skull from the police. It was a deciding factor in the clergy determining to enter the park as a public witness to try and deflate the tension.

On Monday, the clergy association held a press conference at which they charged that Chicago had been turned into a police state. A Chicago Sun Times articles said that the group reported having witnessed police beatings without reason in Lincoln Park. One

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183 Frederick Trost, letter to Colleen Henry, Epiphany 2007, St. Pauls Archives.
184 Trost wrote that after the student’s recovery he helped him to decide to leave for Canada. “We supported him there with resources from the ‘Pastors’ Fund’ which was established for pastoral ‘emergencies’ in 1964 and was outside the congregation’s budget – thus not subject to criticism.” Frederick Trost, email message to author, January 2013.
185 Frederick Trost, letter to Rev. Randy Deckworth, Associate Pastor, June 20, 1996, St. Pauls Archives.
priest said that only his collar had saved him from a beating. They announced that several Near North Side churches would provide lodging for the protesters if the police continued the ban on sleeping in Lincoln Park. The clergy decided to have a worship service in the park that would coincide with the 11 p.m. curfew on Tuesday night. An announcement from the North Side Cooperative Ministry called it a “service of celebration” at the corner of Stockton Drive and La Salle Street. “Clergy will gather at Church of the Three Crosses at 9:00 p.m. and process to the park. The service will celebrate the Love and Justice of Jesus Christ, and pray for its presence in Chicago. The service will consist of the Procession in Songs, Sermons, and Prayers in Lincoln Park. It will continue as long as it is physically possible. Although the participants have a broad spectrum of views, they agree that Lincoln Park should be open 24 hours a day for Free and Peaceful assembly in Lincoln Park.”

Carrying a huge wooden cross, borrowed from Church of the Three Crosses, the clergy processed into the park.

The Chicago Sun Times reported what followed:

Police laid down a cloud of tear gas in Lincoln Park early Wednesday to clear out about 2,000 demonstrators. It was the second straight early-morning gas attack to enforce the park curfew. Scores of clergymen and hundreds of Yippies and anti-war protestors had just finished singing ‘America the Beautiful’ when police lobbed the first canisters of gas into the area. The choking crowd retreated into the Old Town area as police swept across the park… The Lincoln Park gas attack came at 12:30 p.m., following repeated police warnings: “The park is closed. Anyone left here is in violation of the law.” Clergymen were conducting an informal worship service that included the singing of protest songs before a rude, 8-foot cross.

Trost remembers:

187 North Side Cooperative Ministry, August 1968, St. Pauls Archives.
188 “Police Use Gas Again in Lincoln Park,” Chicago Sun-Times, August 27, 1968.
The clergy who moved into Lincoln Park on Tuesday at 11 P.M. were clearly in violation of the ordinance and were prepared to accept the penalty in the hope that far greater evil might be averted through their unlawful presence. An interesting aspect of this was the decision of the Lutheran pastors to remain on the perimeter of the park in obedience to the ordinance. The drama of those hours raises theological problems some of us would consider important; especially the necessity to break a just law in the interest of an even greater good, if there seems no other course.\(^\text{189}\)

That same night, the pastors opened the doors to the gym to provide shelter for the young people who were being driven from the park. They believed that they were acting with authority that had been given to them at a church council meeting earlier in the year. A motion had been passed that authorized the pastors to use the St. Pauls building and resources in cases of emergency in the urban crisis. The North Side Cooperative Ministry Passed out flyers with the heading “CRASH PADS A SANCTUARY for the HOMELESS PEOPLE.” It listed seven Lincoln Park churches. St. Pauls was at the top of the list, and word quickly spread on the street. Trost remembers:

Mark Miller, who later became Conference Minister of the UCC in Texas and Washington State, was fresh out of Yale Divinity School (1966). He stood outside the parish house for hours and, along with others, greeted everyone who entered. Drugs and alcohol were not permitted. Most memorable of all were the women of the congregation, including some of our oldest and most faithful members. People like Erna Knaphurst, Emily Wahlenmeyer, Edna May Haddock and Hertha Mohr and many others, who stayed much of that night making sandwiches, preparing soup, and engaging in conversation with some of the young people. Members of St. Pauls and people from other churches who heard what was happening brought the sandwich spread, kettles of soup, etc… It was quite a sight!\(^\text{190}\)

One of Trost’s great disappointments was that the Board of Trustees of McCormick Seminary down the street had said no to his request to open up the grounds of the

\(^{189}\) Frederick Trost, letter to Rev. Frederick Traut, Minister, UCC Chicago Metropolitan Association, September 11, 1968, St. Pauls Archives.

\(^{190}\) Letter to Colleen Henry, Epiphany 2007, St. Pauls Archives.
seminary as a place of refuge, citing concerns from their insurance company. The gates were locked and guards were posted to keep the unwanted young people out.

Meanwhile, back at St. Pauls, young people were spread throughout the gym and the Oscar Mayer Room, named after the sausage king, a member of the church who had donated money to build the parish hall. The youth were understandably noisy, afraid, and full of energy. Trost writes:

At 1:30 a.m. Emily Wahlenmeyer walked to the center court of the gym. A hush fell over the noisy kids. She welcomed them to St. Pauls. She wished them good night, and she recited from memory the 23rd Psalm and we did not hear a peep from them the rest of the night. It was astonishing. This was a wonderful 80-year-old laywoman who had the courage to walk among the kids. A lot of women in the congregation seemed to make a connection with the kids. Throughout the week we had conversations with the kids who were here. An intermingling and a listening to the kids’ stories and fears. A lot of members were like parents or grandparents to the kids, listening and empathizing.¹⁹¹

This is a story that continues to be told at St. Pauls, but usually as a story of conflict. It was an unusual event in the life of the congregation. It was not without controversy, and it created conflict and change at St. Pauls that would linger for years to come. One current member tells of his understanding of the event, “Although I don’t think it is deliberate, the lesson I have internalized from discussions about 1968 at St Pauls is that the congregation should not put itself out publicly on – or possibly even discuss - controversial matters (especially if there is not a strong congregational consensus).”

¹⁹¹ Frederick Trost, video interview with Hope Basil, January 6, 2007, St. Pauls Archives.
Anticipating August, 1968

The actions of the summer did not occur in a vacuum. Strong faith supported this decision on the part of the pastors and on the part of the lay people who welcomed these young strangers into the building. Well before the August 1968 event, organized conversations were occurring among the laypeople of St. Pauls around the social issues of the time. They watched films, they had Bible studies, and they reflected on issues impacting the neighborhood and the wider world. Fred Trost writes, “We brought in speakers who knew more than we did. A minority of the congregation participated in these, yet they served as something of the vital ‘leaven’ in the lump.”

A special Commission on Church and World was formed of laypeople. The congregation was asking questions about how their faith intersected with the significant changes that were going on in the world around them. The Commission submitted a report to the Annual Meeting of the Congregation in January 1967. It referred to the history of the congregation while asking questions about the present:

1. We can be thankful for the proud and wonderful tradition which we share together as members of St. Pauls; a tradition which has been embraced by joy and pain. But how will we shape history in our own day? Under the guidance and inspiration of God? In faithfulness to His Gospel? Then we must be prepared to follow Him. And to follow means death. We must die to ourselves in order that we may live to God. But what does this mean in terms of today and tomorrow and the next day, and my own aches and pains and those of my brother?

2. We can be thankful for the institutions to which we have given birth: Uhlich Children’s Home, St. Pauls House, and Grace Convalescent Home. But

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192 Frederick Trost, email message to author, January 2013.
how does our love, which we profess for the children and for the elderly, find expression in simple, meaningful ways? How do we show the children, for instance, who worship with us Sunday to Sunday [referring to the children from Uhlich Home who were brought to St. Pauls for Sunday School and worship], that we are a family to which they belong, that there is love and warmth and acceptance at St. Pauls for all the children of God, of whom we are the least?

3. We can be thankful for the opportunity we have to study together and work together. But how to move from a view in which study and discussion of our common Faith are “good” to a view in which they become a part of our style of life at St. Pauls. And how do we begin to honestly face some of the hot issues of our time with an openness to the Spirit of God and a frankness about ourselves? How do we break down the walls of silence?

4. We are thankful for our place in the city and the possibilities for sharing in the mission of Christ’s church here. But how do we become informed and how do we participate in the painful process of witnessing to our faith in God when it comes to some of the problems of man in the city? How do we confess in this time of revolution and change that we are all sons of Adam and that we are all sons of God?

These questions reflect a deep concern for the world and a deep struggle over the place of the church in society. But along with these questions about the relationship between church and society is a question about how to keep the church itself healthy. Just as Acts mixes summary statements of how the church was caring for itself in the midst of bold witness (Acts 4:32-37), the St. Pauls congregation recognizes a need to care for themselves in the midst of a time of great change and stress:

5. We are thankful for oneness and unity as members of Christ’s Church. But how, in response to the beckoning of God, shall a sense of true community be shared by all of us and in such a way that our love and concern and compassion for one another become visible? How do we bridge the blocks and miles that keep us apart during the week? How might we share together the responsibility for visiting the lonely, comforting the aged, aiding the tired and the needy within our congregation, welcoming the newcomer, sitting down with the stranger and helping to bear one another’s burdens?

Associate Pastor Herb Davis echoes this conviction, remembering that time nearly 45 years later: “Fred [Trost] and I agreed that the congregation had to relate to the community and at the same time hold together the faithful and loving members of the
congregation.” They knew that urban congregations were rapidly declining. An outward focus was good, but they also needed to pay attention to the health of their congregation.

Finally, the Commission on Church and World asks a question that foreshadows the coalition of churches and clergy that would coalesce to respond together to the events of August, 1968:

6. How deep is our commitment to a unified witness of the Church in the Lincoln Park community? How can our unity be more faithfully expressed? In what ways can the Christian congregation give visible evidence of one calling and one Mission? While the Commission on Church and World may have included only a small sample of St. Pauls members, these resolutions were brought before the Annual Meeting of 1967. The report was approved unanimously.

The God that is found within their questions is a God who guides and inspires. This is a God who calls the church to bold witness and sacrifice. Like the activity of the Spirit in Acts, this is a God who calls the church to speech. This is a God who beckons the church to a deeper sense of community and compassion among its own members while asking the church to critically engage the hot issues of its time and place. This is a God who also calls the church to engage in ecumenical witness with other Christians. The questions affirm a strong sense that God was at work in the midst of St. Pauls, calling the congregation to discernment of its sense of mission in their time, a mission that faithfully embodied the gospel in the world and for the world.

193 Herbert Davis, interview by author, January, 2013.
At that same annual meeting at the start of 1967, Assistant Pastor Herb Davis writes,

I am convinced that St. Pauls has more health and vigor than most of us imagine. In many ways we are more open and confident than what some expect. Therefore, it is not out of fear but with confidence and trust in the Spirit of God working his will in us that we urge the people of St. Pauls to move ahead into some of the difficult problems which divide and dehumanize modern man.\(^{195}\)

Assistant Pastor Mark Miller, newly installed and fresh out of Yale Divinity School, is equally full of enthusiasm about St. Pauls and describes the 123 year old church as “alert, concerned and dynamic.” He quotes a professor of his from Yale, a “keen critic of the institutional church,” who said the following after attending Miller’s installation: “After being at St. Pauls, I think that there is some hope for the church after all.”\(^{196}\)

Both of these young pastors discerned a youthful energy and excitement in the old church and willingness, at least on the part of some, to engage what was happening in the world. There is an air that something new could happen. Davis speaks of the Spirit of God inspiring courage and working in the leadership of the congregation to urge the people of St. Pauls to get moving. This is a new kind of language from what’s present in the writings of Rudolf John, 60 years earlier. It is the language of Acts. The language of the Spirit.

It was not just the pastors who made these observations. A report of the 1967 “Youth Sunday,” in which the church youth group conducted the entire Sunday morning worship service, also shows a strong sense of mission. The words of a young man who spoke in that service reflect, again, a strong belief that faith meant engagement. Faith needs to be embodied. Active faith needs courage:

\(^{195}\) Ibid.  
\(^{196}\) Ibid.
Far more important than what we do at St. Pauls is the reason for which we do it. To be a Christian in the strictest sense of the word, one must serve and love his fellow man. Only by loving man may we love God. To pay lip service to our omnipotent deity is not enough. One must have the courage and faith to act up to his convictions. It is easy to say what must be done. It is much harder to do it. We of the Youth Fellowship try to both say and do.\(^{197}\)

In a report from the Dorcas Society, a women’s group that had a mission focus, the same theme is repeated. At one of their meetings they read these words from the Sermon on the Mount: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Erna Knaphurst, Dorcas Society Secretary, reports on the implications of the scripture: “The wider issues of war and peace, racial injustice, the ethics of nuclear weapons and the economic exploitation; all these and more, belong firmly on the agenda of the church.”\(^{198}\) Later in 1967, the Dorcas Society watches a film on and discusses “The Bill of Rights.” A strong advocacy of freedom of conscience and speech were a part of the long-time history of the congregation. These rights were actually enshrined in the Constitution & By-Laws of St. Pauls Church in editions going back to 1926. The Preamble to the 1956 Constitution includes the statement: “As heirs of the Reformation and of its stupendous spiritual gifts, especially those of freedom of conscience and speech, we believe it our duty to preserve the spiritual inheritance of the fathers and to impart it unto our children.” The protection of freedom of conscience and speech would play an important part, the following year, in the decision of the pastors to be a part of the group that carried that cross into the park at curfew and to open up the gym to the war protesters.

\(^{197}\) Ibid.  
By 1967 another group has formed within the congregation, the Human Relations Committee. The Autumn 1967 *St. Pauls Quarterly* reports that this committee believes that responsible Christians have the duty to read the best books available on the great and painful human issues, so that they may take a stand which has integrity to the gospel and to the problems in society. Speaking out, taking stands, and engaging contemporary issues was clearly part of the faith and understanding of the gospel of many within the congregation.

Not everyone, however, was in agreement. There is conflict in how the members of the congregation understand the war and its protesters. Pastor Trost writes a letter to the congregation in 1967 entitled, “Light Amidst Much Darkness.” He writes of some children in the congregation who had been moved by the suffering of the Vietnam War to take up a collection to help shelter the lost and orphaned children of Vietnam. At the same time, he speaks of the many people he visits each week who are troubled by the war. “In our congregation, Vietnam is being discussed by the old as well as the young. Many of us cannot understand the actions of some who have chosen to protest the war by burning the flag of our country, and some of us are suspicious of those who would question the policy of our government.” He speaks of his opposition to the escalation of conflict and his hope that a better way can be found to protect “our national interest” than bombs and guns. He speaks of sitting with members who have poured out their fears and misgivings to him. “I know that our love for God and our love for this land may lead us to different conclusions about the War.” He strongly encourages continued discussion in the congregation.

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While there may have been disagreement about the war, there is support for the men and women who are caught up in the conflict. The Autumn 1967 issue of the *St. Pauls Quarterly* lists the name and addresses of 11 members of St. Pauls who are serving in the military. The congregation is encouraged to send them Christmas cards.

Tom Henry, who became an Assistant Pastor at St. Pauls in 1974, and who would follow Trost as Senior Pastor in 1982, writes of that time,

> When Trost came to St. Pauls, the UCC was only 5 years old. So, with a young denomination and a new building and a 28-year old senior pastor, it seemed God was making all things new at old St. Pauls. But when God makes all things new, there is pain as well as pleasure; excitement and energy, but suffering, too. The old ways struggle to survive, and the new ways have yet to stand the test of time. God was making all things new, not only at St. Pauls, but also in the city of Chicago and in the United States of America.\(^\text{200}\)

Struggle was definitely evident at St. Pauls - hope, excitement, struggle and conflict. In the convictions of both clergy and lay-members, the conversations that were going on in the congregation, and the differing opinions on the relation of Christians to the war, the struggle Henry speaks of is evident. As in the story told of the early Christians in Acts, a God who brings newness also brings conflict.

In the summer of 1967, a major outreach event opened up the church to the community: a 6-week Summer Day Camp. It was directed by the young assistant pastor Mark Miller with the cooperation of several other churches on the near north side of Chicago. Neighborhood kids, church kids, and children bused to the church from the nearby Cabrini Green housing project were brought together. It was a racially diverse camp that gave inner city kids experiences that they had never had before. They spent

time on a farm and flew in a corporate jet airplane, generously offered by Church Council member A.C. Buehler, President of Victor Comptometer. In his report of the camp,

Assistant Pastor Mark Miller wrote:

Perhaps the most significant aspect was that almost 130 children who normally would grow up being strangers discovered they were a community. These children were meeting new friends and learning to get along with children of the same age, but of different racial or religious or cultural or economic backgrounds. The result was that each of these children gained in their knowledge and understanding of others. They learned that it is possible to live out their lives with all kinds of people, and in doing so they now know what it means when they exalt in Chapel: “All ye people, clap your hands; and shout for joy, the Lord has made all mankind one, so raise your voices high!”

Trost’s annual report of 1967 interprets the significance of the Summer Day Camp for the congregation:

One of the finest examples of youth ministry in the country was held here last summer under the leadership of Pastor Miller, the laity of St. Pauls and other congregations. Black children took part with white children and there was an attempt among all to celebrate life in the city rather than destroy it. Who could say that the doors of the church should be shut to this?

Another story illustrates the open attitude that was present among members of the church. When Trost first came to St. Pauls, the doors of the church were always left unlocked so anyone could enter at will. Street people would come in looking for assistance. Trost used to keep his office door shut when he was studying, but there were street people who knew where to find him and he would regularly hear a knock, knock, knock at his office door. He writes,

I remember how perturbed I was initially by the sound of a knock at the door. It was so annoying that I went to the members of the Church Council and complained, saying, ‘We’ve got to do something.’ One of the Council members, a distinguished looking German-speaking man, a house painter who every year varnished the doors of the church as his gift to the congregation, said to me.

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201 St. Pauls Quarterly, January 1968.
202 Ibid.
“Have you ever considered, dear Pastor, that the ones who are knocking at the door may be sent by God?”

That house painter’s words to Trost are strangely similar to what the Holy Spirit says to Peter when the three messengers from Cornelius come to his door, “Get up, go down and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them” (Acts 10:20). The belief that God can send people to each other, and in Trost’s case, outsiders sent to insiders, was alive at St. Pauls. The belief that “the Lord has made all humankind one” was something that the whole congregation was discovering as they lent their support to the Day Camp. Should the doors of the church be shut to a celebration of life in the city? Should the doors of the church be shut to a preservation of life in the city? Trost’s question and the house painter’s answer anticipate that the doors will indeed be opened wide in just a few months.

In addition to the Summer Day Camp, the congregation showed an overall strong orientation toward mission, both in its activities and in the use of its building, in the years around August, 1968. They were involved in projects with the mentally retarded, the patients of Children’s Memorial Hospital across the street, residents of St. Pauls House, the children of Spanish speaking refugees in Chicago, the victims of famine and natural disasters in distant places. They were involved in helping to maintain affordable housing in the gentrifying Lincoln Park neighborhood as increased rents and urban renewal were driving low and middle income people out of the neighborhood. Along with other neighborhood churches, they helped to found the Common Pantry that provided food


204 The Common Pantry still exists, now housed at Epiphany United Church of Christ in Chicago.
to low-income neighbors. Members were involved in creative responses to a riot at nearby Waller High School: integrating teachers, finding housing for new teachers, engaging in tutoring programs and organizing extra-curricular activities. The parish house was in continuous use by community groups, including Project Headstart, a nursery school, and English classes for Spanish speakers. Two ethnic congregations, Assyrian and Korean, were using the church for worship. Outside giving also reflects the mission priorities of the congregation. “Benevolence Fund” giving totaled over $25,000 in 1966. General operating expenses were $94,000. Over $30,000 was used from the Memorial Endowment Fund. Despite the deficit, the congregation’s budget reflects a strong sense of mission. They did not use the church’s endowment fund, built up over generations by the members, only on themselves. They used it on behalf of others.

Bonhoeffer, Barmen and Barth

Language in the first question quoted above, asked by the St. Pauls Commission on Church and World, echoes the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. “Then we must be prepared to follow Him. And to follow Him means death.” It’s the language of
Bonhoeffer’s *Discipleship*, “Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads to death.”

Bonhoeffer, the German Pastor who resisted the Nazis during World War II and who was involved in the Confessing Church movement in Germany of the 1930’s, is a name that comes up often during this era at St. Pauls Church. Church members were reflecting on the meaning of his words and witness in their own time. A full section of his work *Discipleship* is dedicated to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7, a text that the Dorcas Society was reflecting on, with its themes of radical love for neighbor, both friend and enemy.

Bonhoeffer was a favorite of Pastor Trost. He relates another Bonhoeffer quote to the events of August 1968 and the larger history of St. Pauls: the early struggles of the 1940’s, the decision to form an orphanage in 1869, the Chicago Fire of 1871, the move north to Orchard and Kemper, the move from German to English in worship, the emotional impact of the World Wars and the founding of St. Pauls House. He says:

> It was a tiny footnote in the larger scheme of things but it attempted to reflect (incompletely/faintly) a belief of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote (while leading the Confessing Church seminary in Finkenwalde in 1935) that “the service of the church has to be given to those who suffer violence or injustice…the church takes to itself all the sufferers; all the forsaken of every party and of every status. Here the decision will really be made whether we are still the Church of the present Christ.” In one form or another, this was one of the “basics” back then and still is, at least for me, today. As Bonhoeffer had said, “prayer and the deed” as true marks of the Church! Word and deed…always together… Bonhoeffer modeled for the church the meaning of Proverbs 31:8-9, a favorite of Bonhoeffer’s, “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of the all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

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206 Frederick Trost, email message to author, January 2013.
In 1970, a “Bonhoeffer Festival” would be organized by St. Pauls, 25 years after his death at the hands of the Nazis. A lay-woman from the congregation reflected about his legacy: “To me, Bonhoeffer looms up not only as a heroic figure, but as a committed Christian who, in the midst of tremendous political chaos and personal danger, found the direction that not only led him through the chaos, but made it possible for him to live a life of significance – and to die significantly.”

She saw a parallel between the turbulent times that Bonhoeffer lived in and their own, a parallel of “hatred, violence, suppression, death and the replacement of God with man and his power, man and his glittering values of tinsel. Beyond the political, the Church was in trouble then and is in trouble now. Then, the Church tried to save its institutions – and perhaps now we are doing the same thing. The Church is, again, in some ways trying to be popular.”

She finds in the choices made by the Confessing Church of Bonhoeffer’s day “the lifting up of hope in the midst of despair and in the midst of the confusion and troubled dreams of man.” She sees in Bonhoeffer a bridge between the invisible Christ and “man’s potential of being that Christ in the world, that man for others.”

Along with Bonhoeffer, a document that was influencing members of the congregation in the build up to 1968 was the Barmen Declaration, authored by the Confessing Church in 1934 in opposition to the German State Church. The document was important to the congregation, and Trost said it was quoted often. He called it a “guiding light” for him throughout his years at St. Pauls. It appears inside the front page of the

207 St. Pauls Quarterly, Christmas 1970
208 Ibid.

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Spring 1970 St. Pauls Quarterly newsletter. It was so influential that in the 1969 revision of the St. Pauls Constitution and By-Laws it was added as an authoritative interpretation of the essential truths taught by scripture alongside the documents listed in earlier versions of the church Constitution: Luther’s Catechism, the Heidelberg Confession and the Augsburg Confession, all confessional statements of the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Evangelical and Reformed Church that St. Pauls had been a part of. The Barmen Declaration speaks of the claim of God upon one’s whole life. God frees people from “the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.” It affirms that the whole life of a Christian belongs to Jesus Christ and to no other lords. The church has to testify in the midst of the sinful world that it is solely the property of Jesus Christ. The ministry of the church is entrusted to the whole congregation. And it rejects the totalitarian state. The task of the state, it declares, is to provide for justice and peace. It is not difficult to see how a document such as the Barmen Declaration could have served as a theological resource for a congregation whose pastors would engage in civil disobedience and whose gym would be opened in free service to young people who were suffering violence and injustice. The language is similar to the scripture that the apostles use in Acts as a theological resource in the midst of their conflict with the authorities:

Why did the Gentiles Rage, and the peoples imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered against the Lord and against his Messiah (Acts 4:25b-26).

--, In 1986, the names of these documents were replaced in the Constitution and By-Laws with “the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers.”
The name of Swiss Theologian Karl Barth also surfaces. Barth was important in the authoring of the Barmen Declaration and Trost counted him as an enormous influence in his theological thinking during his years at St. Pauls. Trost remembers:

I returned again and again to his insistence that “knowledge of God is not an escape into the safe heights of pure ideas, but an entry into the need of the present, sharing in its suffering, its activity and its hope. The revelation which has taken place in Christ is not the communication of a formula about the world, the possession of which enables one to be at rest, but the power of God which sets us in motion. There is work and struggle at every point and for every hour.”

The witness of Bonhoeffer, Barmen and Barth in the life of the congregation speaks of people who took great political risks in their own time and who suffered for it. They speak of a commitment to following Jesus in the world with feet to the ground, facing with courage the witness of the gospel in the present age, speaking a truthful witness to the powerful. Prior to the events of August 1968, the congregation had a solid theological foundation, rooted in the history and traditions of their church, yet also looking outward, aware of their call to city. They were critically engaging their faith with the world and they had a strong commitment to joining word and deed.

After August, 1968

In his annual report to the congregation in January, 1969, Pastor Trost begins:

The world came to us in the past year in some of its dirtiest and most socially unacceptable forms and you know what happened. I tried to explain the decision I made and there were some in the congregation who agreed with me and offered

210 Frederick Trost, email message to author, January 2013.
encouragement. Others told me honestly that I was dead wrong. A few, twelve as far as I know, resigned, but others have remained away from worship or have diminished their support in other ways.  

The opening of the church to the protesting youth was met with strong opposition from some of the members of St. Pauls. The Sunday following the incident, Pastor Trost trusted in Assistant Pastor Herb Davis to preach. Although the text of the sermon is lost, it became known as the “Keystone Cops” sermon. Assistant Pastor Mark Miller remembers that service:

In the middle of his sermon – which was more prophetic than pastoral – Herb compared the Chicago Police to the Keystone Cops. Not exactly well received! When he said that, a woman bolted up from her pew, pointed an arthritic finger toward Herb and shouted for all of Lincoln Park to hear, let alone those worshipping. “Pastor Davis, you are a disgrace! You should leave immediately and either go back to Pennsylvania or hell…whichever is closer!” As she huffed out the sanctuary, Herb waved to her, “Have a good day. See you next Sunday!”

There were members who could not understand how the church could be used as a refuge for “trouble-makers.” Trost told of a man who, on the first night of sanctuary, drove to the church and parked out front on Orchard Street and watched the young people arrive. He came to the door and told Trost, with tears in his eyes, what he thought of the disgrace into which they had brought the church.

One of the reasons that members opposed the action was that they had come to St. Pauls following World War II as refugees from eastern Germany and German-speaking parts of Eastern Europe. Trost says that he felt a great deal of compassion for them as they had lost their property, their homes, and in some cases even family members to the Soviet dominance, and they believed sincerely that the Vietnam War was a continuation

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212 Mark Miller, letter to Georgia Smith, November 8, 2010.
213 Frederick Trost, letter to Rev. Randy Deckworth, August 30, 1996, St. Pauls Archives.
of policies from Moscow that had brought such grief into their lives. Most of them remained a part of St. Pauls despite their concerns. Throughout that time, Trost and the other pastors did whatever they could to stay connected to those with whom they disagreed and to interpret and explain their actions to them. Forums were held in which their actions were related to the gospel and “the story of Jesus and his love.”

An early rationale for the actions taken that summer is found in a pamphlet from September 5, 1968 addressed to the congregation, From the Pastor’s Study. Trost writes:

I wish to express appreciation to you who helped during last week’s emergency in the city. For all who have not yet heard, I made the decision to permit some of our facilities to be used as a place of refuge from the fear and anger that had gripped our community during the convention. The decision had nothing to do with the “politics of the parks” or whether or not the young people had a right to be in our neighborhood, or whether or not society approves of their appearance or deportment. The facts simply were these: the young people were in the city, they would not be permitted to stay in the parks, they had no place to go except the streets, and the danger they would bring to themselves and others might have been explosive if they had roamed through our neighborhood in the middle of the night. With the help of ministers, priests, rabbis, and a large number of volunteers from the church and community, including about twenty members of our own congregation, we cared for children in their early teens as well as for older youth. Some were re-united with their families. Many were simply frightened and bewildered. They slept on the floor in the gymnasium and each morning picked up after themselves, swept and mopped the areas in which they had been. Contributions to support the work we were doing came from everywhere, including the Cenacle Convent, first Baptist Church, Temple Isaiah Israel, Sisters of St. Dominick’s parish, Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ, the National Guard, St. Pauls Episcopal Church, Temple Sinai, the Old Oxford Pub, KAM Temple, and the students and faculty of McCormick Seminary. The use of a church as a place of refuge for all sorts and conditions of men is documented abundantly in the pages of church history. But more important, the decision to share our facilities was made in obedience to the Word of God; note especially Matthew 25:31-46 and Luke 10:25-37, and the whole spirit of the Scriptures… That the church attempted to express its faith in word and in deed in the turmoil of last week makes me very thankful. It was a week none of us will ever forget, especially perhaps, those who served through the nights at St. Pauls.

Trost refers above to the same scriptures that had been important in articulating the work of Frauenverein generations early serving “the least of these” (Matt. 25:31-46) and the...
parable of Samaritan-Love (Luke 10:25-37). The context has changed greatly since the founding of Uhlich Home and St. Pauls House, yet these grounding narratives are called upon as a resource.

While the theme of witness connects this era to the stories of Acts, witness is not limited to the civil disobedience of the “Service of Celebration” in Lincoln Park. Both Trost and Davis point to the women, many of them elderly, who showed hospitality to the youth as being some of the most important and persuasive reconcilers in the midst of the conflict. Like Rudolf John 60 years earlier, who said that women as the motivators behind Uhlich and St. Pauls House, women are again cited as prominent in their witness. Herb Davis said, “They were true witnesses of the Holy Spirit and conveyed the hospitality of Christ as mothers to frightened youth.”

Thinking back, many of the “testimonies” that were given in support of opening the doors to the church were made by members of the congregation; courageous people like Erna Knaphurst, Edna Mae Haddock, Emily Wahlenmeyer, Bertha Bohnenberger, Irma Strickland, Mr. Ernst, Harold and Liz Raiman, Art and Betty Beckers, and many others who stood up and said their “piece.” We also spent quite a lot of time that autumn making pastoral calls among members of the church who had expressed discontent/disagreement with the decision to open St. Pauls as a place of “sanctuary.” As far as I know, twelve people left the congregation at that time in protest to what had taken place. We also lost, I was told, $100,000 in estate-planning gifts. There could be a stiff wind through which we made our way from time to time.

Assistant Pastor Mark Miller remembers one of those testimonies in a letter he wrote to long-time member Georgia Smith:

Then, Georgia, came the meeting. Here I was only two years into ordained ministry…I just knew the congregation wanted to fire us. We had covenanted, knowing that Fred was the one they would throw out, if that happened, we would walk with him. Member after member chastised us for what we had done. I remember one very elderly lady shaking her head and proclaiming, “You

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214 Herbert Davis, email message to author, January 2013.
215 Fred Trost, email message to author, January 2013.
ministers have baptized our church with a bag of urine!” I truly believe, Georgia, we had no chance. We were out of our ministry at St. Pauls. Until. Until you stood up and explained you had been baptized and confirmed [Georgia actually grew up Methodist] and married at St. Pauls and you hoped the same for you daughters. You explained you worked on the geriatrics floor of Bethany Hospital. You then shared about how a St. Pauls parishioner was dying…and one day she got a post card from Pastor Trost, sent to her…in German…while he was vacationing with his family in Germany…that he was praying for her and wished her the peace of Christ. You shared that you read her the post card and she died the next morning, knowing the love and care of her pastor. When you finished, Georgia, the silence was deafening. Then one of the members, one as I remember was the most angered, suddenly stood and started to sing the Doxology.216

The pastors in this era are all consistent in crediting the women of St. Pauls both for the ministry to the youth as well as the testimony that helped to defend the action.

Despite the conflict, the witness of women and a well-laid foundation of pastoral care helped the congregation weather this storm. Not all the pastors did, however. Neither of the assistant pastors was at St. Pauls a year later. Mark Miller says that the event was not a reason that he left. For Herb Davis, however, the event did play a role in his leaving St. Pauls. He writes: “I may have been seen as the problem for some in the congregation because of that [Keystone Cops] sermon. It was suggested that I leave town… It was wise that I leave. Mark Miller also left. It was wise that Fred stayed. He was the right man for the right place at the right time. I believe his ministry was the work of the Holy Spirit.”217 Although there had been much joy and excitement around the event of August 1968, there was also conflict, pain, separation and loss.

In addition to the women who spoke up in the congregational meetings, there were other testimonies that arrived at the church in letters, some from within the congregation and some from without. (All of these letters are found in the St. Pauls

216 Mark Miller, letter to Georgia Smith, November 8, 2010.
217 Herbert Davis, email message to author, January 2013.
Archives.) One member thanks the pastors for their “participation in Christianity in the last week.” St. Pauls represented to her the true church embodying Christ as “the man for others.” She notes how thankful the young people were and how they pitched into the work of cooking and cleaning. One young man asked her if she was a member of this church saying, “I just want to tell you how really great I think this church is. I haven’t had much regard for the church in the past, but seeing this I have to change my mind.”

For her, the action meant that the church had not deserted these young people. Its doors are open. She wishes more church members could have met the young people.

Another woman wrote:

Suddenly I saw the church acting out the role I assumed to be her usual posture, but one all too seldom enacted, even though the Christ we follow consorted with all manner of men and directed his disciples to go into all the world preaching and reaching the gospel of good news. A funny thing happened at St. Pauls last week. The world came to us and for a short time we didn’t know what to do with it…with those scrappy, idealistic, hopeful, unhappy, intense, on-a-lark, belligerent, perhaps misguided young people who gathered from across the country. But we opened our hearts, our pockets, our homes and our churches to them and rewards came fourfold…For whatever reason, here they were and what answer could the church possibly give but a warm “Come in. This is your home in Chicago in the name of Christ who welcomes all.”

She speaks of the exciting energy in the church at all hours that week. When a friend told her that the youth did not deserve it, she replied, “The church doesn’t make a distinction between deserve and need. We’d all be in a sad way if the church or God could only give us what we deserve.” The friend also pointed out that he thought they were nuts. “Oh, I hope so,” she replied. “Because then maybe we have caught some real spirit of Christ who has been suspected by many for his radical views. If the church quits being that fresh wind that rustles the foundations of our pompous society, if we become safe and tradition

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218 St. Pauls Member Letter, September 1968, St. Pauls Archives.
bound, limited and turned in on ourselves, then I think we cease to be the church; we will be salt without savor.” She also wished that more St. Pauls members could have shared in the “exciting, rewarding experience.”

Another member writes, “It is at times such as this that we as Christians must respond primarily to the Gospel of our Lord, who was indeed a man for other men.” Still another member reflects the same theology. He was initially unsure of the decision but agreed to go over to the church to help out on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. “The pastor was completely right in opening the church up. If the Church is to be Christ’s Church we have to care for people whether we approve of their style of life or not. Christ didn’t ask about such things, and I guess we can’t either.” His interaction with the hippies changed his view of them, though he did not agree with them. For St. Pauls Church, as part of the body of Christ, he says that there was no other course. And as for the kids, he realized that only someone who never shook hands with them could find them obnoxious. “I’m proud of St. Pauls for doing what we did.”

Letters also came from the youth who found sanctuary in the gym:

Thank you for being the kind of people who say “welcome” instead of “get a haircut,” who greet us with smiles and peace signs instead of insults, and who offer us food and a place to stay instead of tear gas and clubs. Thank you for being the kind of people who not only know what love is but who live it in their day to day lives. And most of all, thank you for being the kind of people who do more to promote peace and understanding in this world than all the armies, police forces, politicians, and even peace demonstrators together. As one of the many who took advantage of your kindness during the Democratic Convention, I only wish that I knew how to thank you enough. God lives – in beautiful people such as you. Signed, A “hippie.”

The joining of word and deed; the intentional work of maintaining relationship; lovingly facing conflict with people who strongly disagreed with you; the grounding of the action

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in the gospel story of Jesus; a history of consistent, loving pastoral care; and the bold
witness of women – all of these Christian practices contributed to the congregation
weathering this period of pain with healing.

The war, of course, did not stop after the protests. The congregation continued to
discuss and ask questions about their Christian response. Assistant Pastor Herb Davis,
who had preached the “Keystone Cops” sermon, continued to show prophetic passion
when he wrote in his annual report in early 1969:

In recent months the initial response to our difficulties was to say, “The Church
should not be involved in the questions of peace and urban unrest.” I don’t believe
that statement can begin to solve our problems. The crisis will not go away. The
spirit that is forcing life upon us will not lessen. I don’t believe that the members
of St. Pauls don’t care about the hungry, the naked, and the powerless. I can’t
believe that the people who share the great history of St. Pauls are warmongers. I
will not believe that the men and women who built this great church are “n****r
haters.” I think that there is an agreement on our concern for justice and peace and
that what we desperately need is a means whereby we can decide how to serve.220

The Dorcas Society continued to reflect on mission, encouraging reconciliation
and diversity within the conflicted congregation, “In 2 Corinthians 5:18 we find: All
things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us
the ministry of reconciliation. God wants us to use our individuality, both by living
within us through Christ’s spiritual presence and by influencing others. A diamond has
many facets, each capable of reflecting light. The Church, the body of Christ, has many
faces – individually members – each having the ability to reflect the love and light of
God. God can use each one of us to show the Christ way to others.”221

A 1973 brochure lists various agencies that the church supports financially. Along
with the Board for World Missions of the UCC, the Heifer Project and the Christian

220 St. Pauls Quarterly, Spring, 1969.
221 Ibid.
Children’s Fund, the other three agencies directly address the problems created by the Vietnam War: Cam Ranh City Christian Orphanage, Vietnam Christian Service that cares for refugees, and the Committee of Responsibility that provided “direct and immediate medical relief to the many war-injured children who comprise the major portion of those injured in the war.” These agencies show a continued strong commitment to youth, and especially children who were suffering because of the war. The support of these agencies echoed the history of St. Pauls Church, a congregation that had once reached out to care for the orphans of the Civil War at Uhlich and that continued to care for children who suffer trauma from violence. The brochure grounds their actions in two authoritative narratives of the congregation: the story of scripture and the story of St. Pauls Church:

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me” (Matthew 25:35-36).

This little brochure has been prepared to give you an idea of several ways that we as Christians might be involved in the healing and reconciling ministries which belong to us as members of the Body of Christ. It is in the biblical tradition and part of the history of our own congregation at St. Pauls, that we reach out to others in the Spirit of our Lord Jesus. It was His Spirit that moved our predecessors to found a Home for the orphaned children after the Civil War, and it was in His Name that many of you helped to feed the hungry and clothe the naked of Europe following World War II. We live in a world where the cross is always present, calling us to discipleship and to sacrifice and love which are marks of God’s presence on earth.222

In a letter written in 2007 to Colleen Henry, wife of St. Pauls’ 9th Senior Pastor Tom Henry, Trost situates August 1968 within a longer St. Pauls narrative:

Looking back, August, 1968 was, in some respects for me, a defining moment in the life of St. Pauls Church. It reflected the same faith, I believe, that gave birth to Uhlich Children’s Home following the U.S. Civil War, that rebuilt homes and businesses (and the church on La Salle Street) after the Chicago Fire of 1871, that made the move to Orchard and Kemper at the end of the 19th century, that

222 Pamphlet, 1973, St. Pauls Archives.
founded St. Pauls House in 1920, interceded on behalf of the hungry and needy in Germany at the end of World War II, rebuilt after the fire of Christmas night, 1955, when many congregations were closing or abandoning the city, helped build Grace Convalescent Home in 1974, took the initiative in founding the Common Pantry in 1967, held the first discussion in any church in Chicago on the morality of the Vietnam War. It seemed to me to be in accord with the teachings of Jesus and the “Sermon on the Mount.” August, 1968 is quite a wonderful story and, as you know, not without its pain and challenges. The years since then, in which you and Tom have been so crucially involved, have reflected that same courage and love.

Finding God in the Story

So, how to summarize the faith that was present in the people of St. Pauls that prepared them and grounded them for the actions of August, 1968?

It was:

- An Informed Faith: Well before the event occurred, the congregation was engaged in discussions, learning, reading, watching films, listening to the voices of each other but also the voices of people from outside their congregation, voices of people of other backgrounds and races.

- A Questioning Faith: Members were not afraid of asking difficult questions about the issues of their day and wondering how the gospel was calling them to respond.

- A Costly Faith: They looked to the example of Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church in Germany and were prepared to face the cost of following Christ in their own time and place. This German-rooted congregation found inspiration in the lives of other Germans who had practiced a costly faith that had put them at odds with their government.
- A Historic Faith: They continued to look to the history of their congregation as well as the historic German Evangelical faith as a resource, yet they were not living in the past but using it as a resource to inform the present.

- A Located Faith: They were aware of their place as a church in and for the city. After the fire of 1955 that destroyed their sanctuary, they were determined to remain and live out their faith in the context to which they believed God had called them. God had called them to the city and they would serve the city.

- An Active Faith: Both pastor and youth affirmed the conviction that word and deeds are inseparable. To be a Christian meant to serve others. In loving human beings, one showed one’s love for God. Faith had to be embodied.

- A Faith Grounded in Community: Although the eyes of the church were looking outward, they knew that they needed to keep St. Pauls strong through creating a community where visible signs of love, concern and compassion were evident.

When God enters into their narratives in the years around 1968, God guides. God inspires ideas, speech and witness. God beckons and calls and sends strangers knocking at the door. God makes all things new, creating conflict while working in the struggle to make all humanity one. Christ calls the church to follow. Christ calls them to an incarnational faith, costly discipleship, embodying the gospel in their context.
Intersecting with Acts

While language that speaks of God or Christ predominates in this period, the congregation also talks about the Spirit in new ways. The women who speak up are witnesses of the Spirit. Leaders in the church are called the “work of the Spirit,” and speak of “listening to the Spirit.” This clearly intersects with the role of the Spirit in Acts, inspiring bold witness and leadership. Perhaps it was the intensity of the experience for those involved that it could only be spoken of in terms of Spirit. As in Acts, the Spirit legitimates the activity and the decisions that were made, but speaking of the Spirit also captures the excitement and energy of the time.

This was not so much a Pentecostal moment at St. Pauls as it was some Spirit-inspired conflict. At the end of this chapter is a sermon that I preached that reads the events of August, 1968 alongside the martyrdom of Stephen that set off a wave of persecution – conflict that dispersed the members of the Jerusalem church. It lifts up a part of that event that was not as well known, the civil disobedience of the pastors in the “Service of Celebration” in Lincoln Park. As noted above, the episode of 1968 had been seen in the eyes of at least some in the congregation as a bad thing, a source of conflict that has kept the congregation from similar bold moves of witness. The night after preaching the sermon, at a church council meeting, the new Sr. Pastor of St. Pauls, Matt Fitzgerald, presented a proposal around some specific actions for future outreach at St. Pauls. It came out of his research in the congregation and in conversation among the pastoral staff. Along with Fitzgerald’s proposal, the sermon I had preached came up in the discussion as council members wondered about what the “next big thing” at St. Pauls
will be. One council member, who has served on the council for many years, said afterwards, “Last night's council discussion was really the best conversation I have ever heard at a council meeting.” And so I asked for some thoughts on the meeting and my sermon for this project from some of those who were there. One member saw the sermon as a “re-telling or re-imagining of the events of 1968 and how they affected St Pauls Church.” He said, “My sense is that the congregation (or its leaders) came to fear dissension and the possibility that someone might leave the church because they disagree with the church (or its pastors) being a prophetic witness on one issue or another. In addition, we put a premium on the value of getting along with each other.”

He went on to say, “I am delighted with the pastoral staff’s plan for increased congregational engagement in life beyond the walls of St Pauls. It will be good for us as a congregation and, given the remarkable talents found in the congregation, good for society. With this enhanced outer focus, I believe we will also bring in interested and compassionate new members who like what we are doing for the community and the world.” Another council member, reflecting on the meeting, said a similar thing, “I doubt that there is a deterministic sequence involved, but St. Pauls Church started inward and is evolving to outward.”

Reflecting intentionally upon the history of St. Pauls in relation to mission and outreach and the faith the grounded it, and putting their stories in conversation with an ancient story in Acts, is bearing fruit as the congregation considers its future. The stories of Acts 7-8 and of 1968 intersect with the epidemic of violence in the city of Chicago of 2013. And members of the congregation wonder what they can do to address the violence

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223 Richard Peterson, email message to author, February 2013, page 155.
and work for peace in the city. Another council member pointed out that while St. Pauls has a record of doing big “bricks and mortar” things like UCAN and St. Pauls House, these did not start as big ideas as much as seeing individual needs, meeting them and watching it grow. As St. Pauls emerges from a time of building itself up, recovering after the lean years of the 1970’s and building a strong congregation, the focus is turning outward again in an intentional way, and the “mighty stories” of the past, when the church acted boldly, can serve as a memory that inspires the present.

\[Dropping the Cross\]
A Sermon for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Sunday in Lent

We have a couple of tough scripture readings today, don’t we? But this is Lent, after all, so if there’s any season to hear about the first Christian martyr, this should be it.

Somehow in our language the word martyr became an insult. “Don’t be such a martyr!” And the martyr complex describes a neurosis of people who use self-sacrifice and suffering to control or manipulate others. “After all I’ve done for you, and this is the thanks I get?” I’ve said before that I am fortunate that I have a partner who, at those times when I am prone to self-pity, says to me, “Get off the cross; someone else needs the wood!” Maybe we started thinking of martyrs as people who are sick and self-centered as a way of distancing ourselves from them, as self-defense from becoming martyrs ourselves. The world of people who die for their faith seems pretty remote from our middle class Christianity.
Stephen, the first martyr of the church, was neither sick nor self-centered. He’s remarkably bold and resilient even in the face of death. There’s almost a joyful quality to him as he dies. His portrait is in one of our sanctuary windows, next to two other martyrs, Joan of Arc and John Hus. In the window he looks more like a dashing young German in lederhosen than the 1st Century Jew that he was; but I give the people of St. Pauls of 56 years ago credit for putting him there. Stephen wasn’t one of the apostles; he wasn’t a member of the executive committee or the council of First United Church of Jerusalem. He was a deacon, sort of like our Connectors group at St. Pauls. He looked after the shut-ins and made sure the widows were getting enough to eat. That’s the sort of person who the Spirit would empower to make a bold witness to his faith. That’s the sort of person who would be the first to follow Jesus to a violent death. The first centuries of the church are full of people like Stephen, for whom following Jesus meant literally laying down their life.

As Stephen is being stoned to death, there is another man looking on with approval at what’s happening. His name is Saul. Saul’s face can also be found in one of our stained glass windows. In fact his name is on our corner sign, all of us together are named for him. Saul was just another name for our good old St. Paul. We’re not named for the first martyr. We’re named for the violent man who approved of his death.

Now, I don’t think that’s why the mothers and fathers of St. Pauls Church chose him for a namesake, but it’s good to remember that we are named not for someone who was practically perfect in every way. We were not named for St. Stephen but for a violent man who needed amazing grace as much as we all do. We don’t make ourselves saints. God makes us saints.
The death of Stephen set off a wave of persecution, and the other members of First Church Jerusalem run for their lives to escape the city and escape Saul. Not all of them were called to be martyrs, but all of them were called to be witnesses. And as they flee they carry the story of Jesus with them and start churches in other cities. God used the pain of Stephen’s death for good.

When we hear this account of Stephen being stoned to death, we might be tempted to think, “My, what a violent city old Jerusalem was, what barbarians.” Until we remember the violence of our own city, where young men aren’t stoned to death but shot to death every weekend.

I’ve been doing research in the St. Pauls archives and I learned that it wasn’t that long ago that a young man in our own congregation was severely beaten up, and his beating got some of the people in this church moving. His name was Roy Ries. He was a seminary student at McCormick Theological Seminary, which used to be just down Fullerton, this side of the “L” tracks. It was in August 1968, when the Democratic Convention was held in Chicago.

At the time, St. Pauls belonged to what was called the North Side Cooperative Ministry. They were a group of churches that were coming together to try and address some of the deep needs of the city. They had seen violence erupt in Chicago following the death of another martyr, Martin Luther King, earlier that spring, and they were afraid of a repeat of those events during the convention.

Youth from all over the country came to the city and gathered in the parks to protest the Vietnam War. With no place to stay, they tried to camp out in the parks. There was an ordinance that prohibited any presence in Lincoln Park between 11pm and 4am.
But it was never enforced….until that convention. The clergy tried to get Mayor Daley to keep the parks open, but he refused. He took a stand for law and order, and the police were duty-bound to clear the park. They used clubs and tear gas to enforce the law. Roy Ries had gone into the park to try to advocate for peace among the protesters, and he was hit in the head with the butt of a police shotgun.

Fred Trost, who was Senior Pastor of St. Pauls in 1968, remembered, “We knew that something needed to be done to insure that no one would be badly injured or killed. On Sunday night, one of the students from nearby McCormick Seminary had received a smashed skull from the police, and this was a factor in the clergy determining to enter the park, breaking the law, to try to deflate the tension.”

And so what did they do? They did what clergy know how to do. They planned a worship service. They called it a “Service of Celebration”, and it would take place at 10:30 pm in Lincoln Park at the corner of Stockton Drive and LaSalle Street, perfectly timed so it would coincide with the beginning of the curfew. They said that the service would celebrate the love and justice of Jesus Christ and pray for its presence in Chicago.

The pastors of St. Pauls, along with about a hundred other clergy, gathered at Church of the Three Crosses just a bit south of here. They wore their clerical collars to identify themselves as ministers, and they put white armbands with black crosses around their arms. Someone got the idea to take the enormous, old wooden cross from the church and they processed with it into the park for the service of celebration.

Studs Terkel was there that night and he remembered, “We followed the young clergymen across Clark Street and into the greenery. They were bearing a huge, rugged cross. It was a wistful pilgrimage. Crowds of the young gathered. Songs were sung.
Testimony was offered. It reminded me of a storefront church. We saw the police across the field about 200 yards away. No faces. Just helmets.”

Fred Trost said, “Shortly before 11pm, the police demanded that everyone leave the park. It was as the clergy and demonstrators began to sing ‘America the Beautiful,’ that the violence began.”

The police came into the park, standing abreast and holding clubs. They wore helmets and gas masks, with a huge machine spitting out yellow smoke. The gas was unbearable. The ministers took off their armbands, the ones with the crosses, and gave them to the protestors to cover their faces and use as gas masks. And in the midst of it all, there was that ten-foot wooden cross, propped up and outlined against the yellow smoke.

Ministers who were there that night say that the service of celebration was gassed three times until they had to scatter in confusion, along with everyone else, and get the heck out of the park. Protestors, not all of whom were peaceful, were beaten by police as they fled. In their rush to leave, Trost remembers that the cross became too heavy to bear, and so they dropped it. They dropped the cross and left it behind in the park.

It’s not clear, exactly, in the confusion of that night, what happened to that old rugged cross. Some say it got dropped into one of the Lincoln Park lagoons. I like to think that it’s still in there somewhere, stuck in the mud.

That’s where the cross should always stay, stuck in the muck of our world. God did not abandon us, even when we nailed the best that our world has ever seen to a cross. On Good Friday, along with all of his disciples, we will run away from the cross. It’s too violent. It’s too frightening to stay. But Jesus stays. He stays dropped in the midst of our
violent city to the very end. He takes all the violence our world can throw at him and he takes it upon himself.

But we have a way to go until Good Friday. Today, Jesus is still journeying toward the city. In our reading from Luke, he turns toward the violent city and we hear him say to it; “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.” The symbol of the occupying forces of the Roman Empire was an eagle with its wings outstretched to swoop in on its prey. Jesus compares himself to a mother hen, her wings outstretched to cover and protect.

One of the great themes of scripture is that God has a heart for cities. God has a heart of compassion for the dense brood of humanity that lives here. God sends Jonah to the violent city of Nineveh to preach repentance. Christianity began in an urban environment. All of Pauls’ letters are addressed to churches in cities. The last book of the Bible envisions the Kingdom of God coming to earth as a city, the New Jerusalem.

Cities magnify and intensify human life. Cities are a concentration of wealth and power, of crime and poverty of beauty and talent. Cities are where the misfits and marginalized go to find others like us. If you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere, and in the city you can also fall flat on your face into the depths of despair. Is it any wonder that the God we meet in Jesus has a heart for cities? This city. Our city.

The youth who were being gassed out of Lincoln Park into the streets had been given a flyer that said: CRASH PADS. It listed the churches that said they would open their doors to them for shelter, and at the top of the list was St. Pauls Church. Pastor Trost had made what would be a controversial decision in the congregation - to open up St.
Pauls as a place of refuge and sanctuary. And like a mother hen stretching out her wings to gather her brood, 2,000 young people would find a safe place to stay in the St. Pauls gym and Oscar Mayer Room throughout the nights of that violent week.

Trost said, “The kids were very noisy and very nervous, frightened, and I remember we could not get them to settle down that first night…then Emily Wahlenmeyer (an 80-year-old woman from the congregation) walked into the gym, went to the center of the floor, and began reading the 23rd Psalm, and there was a hush and the whole building was silent, and only her voice, reading the Psalm, could be heard.” The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of my enemies. “It was a moving moment, a deeply spiritual moment, and from that point on the young people did all they could to cooperate.”

After the convention was over, the Chicago Police Department sent Pastor Trost a letter, thanking St. Pauls for taking in the young people and saving the city even more violence.

I wondered what kind of faith moved the people of St. Pauls to do what they did. In August, 1968, one of the theologians who was being talked about in the congregation was another martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who resisted the Nazis and lost his life for it. Bonhoeffer wrote about the call of Jesus, who said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Bonhoeffer said that for Christians, the cross is not a terrible end to a pious and happy life. The cross is at the very beginning of our lives. When Jesus calls us to follow him, he says, “Take up your cross.”
So, how do you know what your cross is? Well, Jesus just says, “Take up your cross.” Take up your cross, not somebody else’s. We each have a cross, and they are not all the same. You don’t have to go out looking for it. It’s lying right in front of you. Jesus just says to pick it up. And it is not a difficult burden to bear, for his yoke is easy and his burden is light. In fact, when you pick up your cross, it is a joy, because it is work God has given you to do.

For those pastors in Lincoln Park, carrying the cross into the midst of a tense and violent situation became a service of celebration. And when the doors of St. Pauls were opened, the people who welcomed the hippies in have some of the best memories of their lives around that time. Their cross was right there, they picked it up, they gave their love to the world and it was a joy.

A few years ago, one of the young women of St. Pauls, Hannah Basil, interviewed Fred Trost about those events. He told her, “The deciding factor was the faith of the church and the love of God in Christ. This decision was not made on the basis of politics but on the basis of faith. Our understanding was that it’s a faith that gets expressed in the world God loves. It’s not something that’s lived off on a cloud someplace but that’s got its roots in the earth. The cross is planted in the earth and Christ dies on the earth, and the faith of the church ought to be lived on the earth.”

Becoming a martyr, like Stephen or Bonhoeffer or King, is a cross that only a few are called to bear. But giving of ourselves in love, in our own unique and creative ways, is a cross we are all called to bear.

God has called St. Pauls to the city. It’s even our motto. God’s heart is right here in Chicago. I don’t know how God will continue to call St. Pauls to make its joyful
sound, but whatever our cross is, it’s lying right in front of us, ready to be picked up. In a few moments we will say to our new members: with your hands, God will touch the city. Under your wings, God will gather her brood.
“Gift” is one of the direct definitions of the Holy Spirit in Acts (Acts 2:38, 8:20, 10:45, and 11:17). As gift, the Spirit is freely given to all the baptized on Pentecost (2:38) and the gift of the Spirit is a sign that God has welcomed and accepted Gentiles into the church (10:45, and 11:17). This holy gift grounds Luke’s argument for an inclusive and diverse church. Standing before the Jerusalem Council after being called to account for baptizing Gentiles, Peter asks, “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (11:17). Similar to Luke’s desire for an inclusive church, inclusiveness emerges as a strong value of the members of St. Pauls in the 1980’s. Even the language of “gift” is used at St. Pauls to express its inclusiveness. At St. Pauls, though, gift applies not to the Holy Spirit but to human beings. In the 1980’s their mission statement is changed to affirm the uniqueness of every individual as a gift from God. This strong affirmation of inclusiveness emerges as one of the closest points of contact between the priorities of St. Pauls and the Acts of the Apostles. Inclusiveness will be a driving force in the congregation’s mission around two major parts of its history: the founding of the Lincoln Park Community Shelter and becoming a congregation that is officially Open and Affirming to gays and lesbians.
The March, 1985 edition of the St. Pauls newsletter *Now You Know* contains this news item:

Shelter Program Underway: The January Meeting of the Session of St. Pauls approved the use of our facilities as a temporary overnight shelter for up to five guests each night during the winter. The program is organized by the Lincoln Park Shelter Organization and involves four neighborhood churches (St. Pauls, St. Clement’s, Church of Our Savior, and Lincoln Park Presbyterian).

In November, 1989, at the Annual Meeting, the Congregation of St. Pauls would approve a new church constitution. In his annual report, Senior Pastor Tom Henry writes:

Comments in the [strategic planning focus] groups and in the [congregational] survey celebrated our decision to be a church that was accessible to the physically handicapped and supported the Mission Statement revision made in the by-laws for our new governing structure, in which we declare ourselves an open and affirming congregation, accepting members without regard to race, color, age, marital status, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, or handicapped status…All in all, we continue to thank God for the many blessings that we have at St. Pauls Church, and that we are able, in Christ’s name, to make a joyful sound (and difference) in the city.

He also notes that the church building is in use 24 hours a day, being a “home” to the Lincoln Park Overnight Shelter for the Homeless.

While becoming a shelter to the homeless and declaring itself Open and Affirming might appear unrelated, both aspects of the mission of St. Pauls Church come out of the same time period in the history of the congregation and the same theological mix. The founding of the Lincoln Park Community Shelter and becoming an Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation come up repeatedly, along with Uhlich, St. Pauls House and the August 1968 event, as part of the defining narratives that members of St. Pauls tell about their church and as expressions of their lived faith as a congregation.
When doing theology within a congregation, Robert Schreiter says to be aware of the explicit theology, but also the implicit theology that is present in the church. Explicit theology is found in official doctrines, creeds and statements, such as the 1989 Constitution of St. Pauls, declaring itself Open and Affirming. He writes that there is also an implicit theology at work: “Theology does not exist in the abstract; it is always rooted in a context…Theology does not begin when a congregation turns to its explicit beliefs. It has already begun from the moment it begins to describe where it is located and what it has been.” He adds, “Theologies do not begin when a congregation sets out to create them. They are already operative in the congregation before such conscious activity is undertaken.”

The founding of the Shelter and becoming ONA both come out of the implicit theology of the people of St. Pauls. Both are expressions of what the congregation was already doing or had to do. At the same time, explicit theological statements were bubbling to the surface in this period when the congregation was going through rapid growth and change.

By the mid-1980’s the church as well as it context were quite different from what they were during the events of August 1968. There was a new pastoral team in place. Thomas Henry, who had been called as an Associate Pastor in 1974, was now Senior Pastor, following Fred Trost’s move to be the UCC Wisconsin Conference Minister. Henry was joined by two Associate Pastors, Carol Munro and Glenn Loafmann. The

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224 Schreiter, “Theology in the Congregation,” 25.  
225 Ibid., 31.
1980’s were a period of rapid growth for the church, so much so that St. Pauls was studied and cited by the national UCC offices as one of the fastest growing churches in the denomination. That growth and change correlated with major changes in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago. Although the church had been an advocate for affordable housing, gentrification had kept moving full steam ahead.

In an article on growing churches in the UCC, Henry writes of the gentrification that the neighborhood has undergone and that young, urban professionals are moving into the neighborhood and into the church. In a sermon preached in 1987, Munro speaks to the situation and relates it to the conquest narrative from the book of Joshua:

Gentrification is a justice issue, and we claim to be a justice people. This doesn’t mean that we oughtn’t encourage and celebrate the renewal and growth in the neighborhoods on the north side. We should, but we should also remember as we do so that we are not God’s only people, all these other people are God’s people too, and the true mark of our faith may be in the kind of neighbors we’re willing to be.

“All these other people” included an increasing homeless population in Lincoln Park. An article titled “St. Pauls Pursues Ministry to the Homeless,” in the 1984 church newsletter, reports on how members of the congregation were strategizing about how to address the needs of the homeless:

Ministry to the homeless has always been a tradition at St. Pauls. Recently the numbers of the homeless who turn to us for help has been growing, like the number of homeless throughout America. Those who come to our door have a variety of needs and the traditional “handout” for a “cup of coffee” or a meal is sometimes helpful, but often inadequate. Many hungry persons have been helped by the Common Pantry [a ministry St. Pauls helped found in the 1960’s], but there is a growing need for shelter.

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227 Carol Munro, sermon, Nov. 15, 1987.
228 St. Pauls Church, Now You Know, February, 1984.
Carol Munro Mosley remembers that something had to be done for them, “Decisions around the Shelter were pragmatic more than theological. There was a problem in Lincoln Park that needed to be dealt with and so we did something.” Other early volunteers express similar thoughts. They were not answering a particular “call from God” to start this ministry. It had to be done. One woman, who grew up in the same Evangelical and Reformed tradition but in a different Chicago congregation, remembers that her work with the Shelter was not so much based on consciously thinking about God or her faith, but on “that deep sense that you needed to share and to listen to others.” She said that her sister was a Methodist and often talked about God telling her to do this and go there. But for her, God is not directly guiding you so much as putting things in front of you. She says, “You make the choice. You do your thing. You help others. God speaks to us in many different ways.” The homeless were standing in front of the people of St. Pauls. The homeless were a claim on their lives, and so they answered that human call to do something.

The presence of the homeless population of Lincoln Park became a source for theological reflection. Tom Henry, in a sermon preached in 1990, tells the story of encountering a woman rummaging in the alley. She had found a bottle of cheap wine and offered him a drink, “Would you like a little of this with me mister? Just a little, I want to make it last.” His middle class fear of germs took over and he declined. She went off, saying, “OK, I gave you your chance to drink with me.” He reflects, “I saved my life from germs out there in that alley, but somehow I still feel I lost a bit of my soul in that

229 Carol Munro Mosley, interview by author, Feb. 2013.
230 Interview by author, Jan. 2013.
encounter. I was just seeking to save my life, that’s all.”

He uses that experience as a call to communion with all kinds of people: the ones we wish to avoid, forget, or just not be bothered with. Today, Henry remembers:

People felt the disparity between their standard of living and those they saw sleeping in doorways and in the courtyard of the church. They were uncomfortable giving handouts but they were also uncomfortable not giving handouts. So when I came to a congregational meeting with a proposal for joining with other Lincoln Park churches in creating a shelter, there was almost a sigh of relief. There was a certain “Christian” pride in using their church building to do good, to do what Jesus might do. St. Pauls had the most resources [compared to other neighborhood churches] - gym, large kitchen, showers, laundry - so St. Pauls took on the greater share of the program. The building use became a kind of extension of their personal desires to do something good. There really was very little controversy over the creation of the Shelter at St. Pauls (within the congregation and in the neighborhood). There was some resistance from some parents but that dissipated pretty quickly.

The church had the resources and space. There was a pressing need in the neighborhood. The church responded. Glenn Loafmann, another Associate Pastor in the 1980’s, reflects the same view: “It was a natural.”

In the early days, the Shelter was staffed by volunteers. The Shelter guests initially slept at St. Clement’s Catholic Church and Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church, both within two blocks of St. Pauls. The City of Chicago, which had few rules about homeless shelters, required a phone in the room where guests would be sleeping. There was a delay in getting a phone installed in the St. Pauls social hall, so the church became a housing site a few months after the other churches. A December 1985 church newsletter thanks volunteers from the congregation who have given time and care at the Overnight Shelter for the Homeless: “St. Pauls people have also been contributing generously in a

231 Tom Henry, sermon, Pentecost 1990.
233 Glen Loafmann, email message to author, Jan. 2013.
financial way to the Shelter. MORE FUNDS ARE NEEDED AND ARE CONTINUALLY NEEDED, since it costs $1500 a month to run the Shelter.”

By then, the Shelter was housed at St. Pauls, in addition to St. Clement’s and Lincoln Park Presbyterian. Eventually St. Pauls would become the primary meal and overnight location for Shelter guests.

One early volunteer remembered his experience. Again, it was not so much that he was consciously acting on his faith, but that there was a need and he could do something about it:

It was 27 years ago that I was urged to volunteer to stay overnight at a newly-founded shelter in my neighborhood. The original idea was that of a priest from the area’s Catholic Church, a couple of blocks north of our Protestant Church where we had been members for nearly five years. One of our active church members, who helped start the Shelter’s program, invited me to help out with the duties of volunteering for the care of the guests of the Shelter. *I could do this.* My job at the time was to manage an Information Systems night shift operation. I was very accustomed to being awake all night, and I had nights during the work week when I was available. It was a good fit.

That good fit was transformative for him. Staying awake in the church at night, while the homeless slept, shaped his theology. Making the implicit theology explicit, he remembers:

Many nights, after all the guests had settled in…I would be awake all night. During those quiet interims, I would play classical music on my cassette player, and reflect upon my God given-blessings. The Shelter allowed me to contribute to God’s benevolent plan; one of alleviating human suffering. The revelation of how God cares for us, regardless of how hopeless our circumstances become, is reflected in all the shelters and other human services God helps us provide. There have been many volunteers of our own shelter who served more hours and more meals than I did. I hope that their experiences were as meaningful to them as their efforts were appreciated by those they served.

235 Interview by author, Jan. 2013.
236 Ibid.
For him, this practice of giving shelter to the homeless and of giving generously of his own time helped to shape his faith and his understanding of God. He describes it as a revelation. It instilled in him a conviction that God’s plan is one of compassion for the suffering and that God uses human beings to accomplish that plan.

Serving at the Shelter was a revelation for another early volunteer, who serves on the Lincoln Park Community Shelter board. She has seen the Shelter grow in size and increase in services, and as she looks back sees God in that work, “I’ve said for many years that the Shelter is a modern day miracle. Through the years, the program has certainly become much more sophisticated, but there is certainly still a lot of divine intervention when you think about the reality that a meal (and now more than one meal) is served every day (with few exceptions) by volunteers to more than 30 people.” Like the man who spent quiet nights staying up so others could sleep, she sees God at work through the lives of the volunteers who serve at the Shelter every day of the week. Divine intervention happens through the human hands that prepare the meals night after night. Just as Uhlich Home and St. Pauls House were responses to an unmet need, the founding of the Lincoln Park Community Shelter was not a response to any specific, articulated theology so much as it was doing the right thing to address a need in the community.

Glen Loafmann, an Associate Pastor in the 1980’s whose ministry involved overseeing the church’s outreach, came from a Baptist tradition. He draws a connection between this “just do it” and “it was a natural” attitude of the congregation with the German Piety in St. Pauls’ roots:

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237 Interview by author, Jan. 2013.
The St. Pauls tradition had a rich history of substantive roots. The German Reform tradition, I am led to understand, since the time of the Hundred Years' War, or the Thirty Years' War, or some such, has given “piety” - service to others, prayer, etc. - priority over “belief” or “dogma” or “doctrine,” as the substance of faith. “After all,” [someone] once told me, “in those days, doctrine was determined by whatever church the local Prince belonged to, and who knew whether he would be Catholic or Lutheran in the morning, so faith came to be defined by something more stable – your neighbor is hungry, you take her some potatoes.” Honest to God, I believe that tradition was the basis for St. Pauls practice at the time I was there. You could argue about what God was like, joke about it, differ and quibble about doctrine and so forth, but if somebody needed help, the consensus was you just do what you can do, and that's the important thing… Overall it was done more or less “because it's the right thing to do,” without a lot of fine parsing of the theological or moral or ontological basis of what made it right.238

Their work with the Shelter did not come out of any focused theological reflection; rather it became a source for theological reflection. Members who started the program and who served faithfully in getting it up and running were ordinary human beings using their intelligence and commitment to respond to real human need. Like the “Samaritan-Love” of the 1890’s, they were doing the right thing because they were there, they could, and they had the resources. It was later, in looking back, that those involved saw a revelation of God in the midst of their outreach to the poor. As the Shelter became a regular part of the use of the building and the volunteer activity of the congregation, it became an important part of their identity and another chapter in the St. Pauls story. Whether or not church members were actively involved in the work of the Shelter, they saw it as a defining source of pride for the congregation.

Implicit theology was also at work when the congregation becoming officially Open and Affirming to all, regardless of sexual orientation.239 Tom Henry, Carol Munro

238 Interview by author, 2013.
239 The 2010 revision of the St. Pauls Constitution and By-Laws would also add “gender identity” to its mission statement.
Mosley and Glen Loafmann all remember that this official statement merely reflected an actual fact of the congregation, a practice that had already been in existence for several years. Loafmann says:

The flippant answer is that the congregation appreciated good tenors – people who contribute to the life and well-being of the church were welcome. More of that pragmatic faith thing. There were gay people in the congregation when I joined the staff; the organist was gay, and none of that was a big deal as far as I was aware. Becoming officially Open and Affirming was much in the nature of “Oh, yeah, let's go ahead and put it in writing, since that will be a helpful example to other churches.”

And it would be a helpful example. St. Pauls was an early-adopter of an ONA Statement, the 40th congregation in the UCC to do so, and the church would later sponsor a resolution calling for all settings in the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ to become ONA.\(^{240}\) One member, who felt that the events of 1968 led the congregation to avoid conflict and to avoid taking outspoken stands for social justice, says:

There is one exception to the general rule of St Pauls Church not wanting to step out on controversial social issues in the last several decades – that is regarding LGBT equality. While many churches and denominations struggled mightily on these issue, St Pauls declared itself to be open and affirming of all people, including those who are LGBT, in the late 1980s – and this was not a difficult process overall. It was a recognition and public declaration of who we were. Lesbians and especially gay men have been very involved in the life of St Pauls since before I came here in the early 1980s…There was never any question that when St Pauls was approached to hold a meeting for the Illinois Conference Chapter of the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns or to sponsor a resolution for the Illinois Conference of the UCC to become open and affirming, it would say “Absolutely Yes, and what can we do to help?”

The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns encourages congregations to go through an “ONA Process” in which the members engage in group studies and conversations before officially declaring the church ONA. St. Pauls did not do this. The language of the constitution was changed by church leadership in a routine update, it was voted on at the

\(^{240}\) There are now over 1000 ONA congregations in the UCC.
1989 annual meeting, and that was that. Carol Munro Mosley remembers the attitude of one leader, “Let’s just do it and see whether anyone gets pissed off.” When the first same-gender commitment ceremony was performed at the church, she remembers the pastors wondering at first if they should get permission from the congregation, but then concluding among themselves, “Do we ask the congregation about whether we’re allowed to perform other weddings?” The answer, of course, was no. By side-stepping the process, conflict was avoided and no particular group was singled out for examination. The pastors were able to do this without problem because the practice, culture and implicit theology of the congregation were already ONA.

An unofficial process had been going on for several years through the congregation’s practice of welcoming gay and lesbian members into the life of the congregation and its openness to gays serving in positions of leadership within the church. Church publications of the time reflect that practice. For example, a Now You Know newsletter from 1983 reports on the UCC General Synod. It recognized that a person’s sexual orientation is not a moral issue but that sexual behavior does have moral significance. On the tough issue of ordination for homosexuals, the Synod said that sexual orientation “should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination.” It added that the same should be true for all staff in the UCC and the use of volunteers. “There is no place for homophobia in the church.”

A bulletin announcement from August 1987 indicates that members of the congregation were engaged in the ONA movement in the wider church: “The Illinois

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241 Carol Munro Mosley, interview by author, Jan. 2013.
242 Ibid.
243 St. Pauls Church, Now You Know, Aug. 1983.
Chapter of the Coalition for Lesbian/Gay Concerns is planning a get-together in the Chicago area on Tues. 9/15 at 7:30. The Coalition is one of the special interest groups of the United Church of Christ. The Illinois Chapter is working on building fellowship groups and informing the church’s response to the AIDS crisis.”

Carol Munro Mosley describes St. Pauls as “the church where the gays didn’t come in drag and the old German ladies didn’t try to fix the single men up with their granddaughters.” A woman who was a teenager at St. Pauls when the congregation became Open and Affirming remembers, “It just seemed like what we needed to do. Of course we were ONA, half the men I knew at church were gay (at least it seemed that way) and I thought they all were good individuals who taught me a lot about myself and about the world.” She relates becoming ONA to the founding of the Shelter:

Of course we housed a shelter, people needed a place and a warm meal and support and if I had to hold my nose on Christmas Eve when going through the Social Hall after acolyting the late service because it smelled like body odor, then that was just the way it was. I guess it was my youthful “well of course we should do this, it is the right thing,” and I wasn't in on all the discussion and wrangling that might have gone on with adult members. I know the parents of some of my youth group friends struggled much more with these decisions, but I don't remember there being much dissent among the youth.245

It wasn’t just her youth. “Of course” reflects the attitude of most of the adults in the congregation at the time. A woman who was raising her children at St. Pauls in the 1980’s said, “We’re all just people, no matter what our place in life, no matter what our sexuality or race.” She liked that at St. Pauls you didn’t just see WASPs, but people from all walks of life. “You need to accept people for who they are, not what you want them to be.” She thinks of the church like her work as a hospital nurse. “The church should be

244 Carol Munro Mosley, interview by author, Jan. 2013.
245 Interview by author, Jan. 2013.
like that. All kinds of people, all walks of life, all kinds of behavior and emotions, they come and you welcome them.” Becoming Open and Affirming was just the right thing to do, not the result of a complex process or an explicit biblical or theological study so much as stating who they already were.

The congregation had a long tradition of openness and inclusion. In Pastor John’s *Allerwelts-Kirche* (All-world Church) letter to the congregation of 1918, the one in which he said that the name of the church should be changed to St. Pauls United Church, he speaks vividly of the inclusiveness of the congregation:

Think for a moment: For 75 years you have had a church here practically without laws…You have recognized the Christian Conscience of the individual as the supreme lawmaker. You have no Church Discipline. You admit people to Communion without question. You baptize children without question. You do not watch over the offices of sponsors to determine whether or not they do their duty by the child. You confirm every child brought to you. You impose no obligations on their parents. You unite in Marriage all who ask it. You take the ministrations of the church to every grave to which you are asked. You have no question to ask. You officiate at the grave of the suicide as readily as at that of the man who has died with the last sacrament. You administer Baptism to the adult without question, to the Jew who asks it, to the children of the Atheist if opportunity offers. You open the doors of the church to all who care to enter.\(^\text{246}\)

This statement of welcome predates the “radical welcome” slogan of the United Church of Christ by nearly a hundred years. Being inclusive and welcoming to all was already a deeply ingrained part of the congregational culture of St. Pauls. Carol Munro Mosley sees “inclusiveness” as one of the defining characteristics of the congregation since its earliest days when it opted to not follow its first pastor into the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church because of its practice of closed communion.\(^\text{247}\)

\(^\text{246}\) *St. Pauls Bote*, 1918.
\(^\text{247}\) Carol Munro Mosley, interview by author, Jan. 2013.
This implicit theology of welcome and acceptance worked its way into the members of the congregation. One woman who grew up at St. Pauls talks about the influence the church had on her father, a man who was baptized at St. Pauls in 1919, just a year after Rudolf John wrote his *Allerwelts-Kirche* piece, and who was a life-long member. She speaks of how her father faced a situation of racism within his own family and overcame it, “I know that my father’s attitude about racial issues definitely changed later in his life. I believe that St Pauls led by example throughout the 60s and 70s and that this example influenced his beliefs and thoughts. In a similar way, I think his views of gay rights made a similar change over the later years of his life.” She speaks of how her father taught Sunday School at St. Pauls for over 50 years and how that experience shaped him. One of the Bible stories that influenced him deeply was the story of the Good Samaritan. She remembers how he would pull the car to the side of the road whenever they passed a stranded motorist. “He told this story [of the Good Samaritan] to us more times than I can count, and he really tried to live it, in a literal way, in his life. The story of the Good Samaritan resonated with him, and through his example, resonates in me.”248 The story of the Good Samaritan, of course, is the story not of someone who goes out looking to hear God’s voice to guide him into mission. The Samaritan comes across a human need right in front of him, lying beside the side of the road, and he just does the right thing. Since the days when Emilie John used “Samariter-Liebe” to describe the work of the women of St. Pauls in 1891, that story remained, and continues to remain, an important one in the congregation. This woman’s account of her father points to the

248 Interview by author, Jan. 2013.
implicit theology at work around both the Shelter and ONA – an inclusive acceptance and welcome that responds with compassion to the human need that’s in front of you.

Before the congregation became officially ONA, the building itself was already an Allerwelts-Kirche. The first semi-official ONA document is the building use policy of 1986. Among other criteria, St. Pauls would only provide space to an organization whose principles of organization were “compatible with the humanitarian ideals of our Judeo-Christian heritage, which promotes freedom and justice for all individuals regardless of sex, age, etc…,” and sexual orientation is included in the list. Carol Munro Mosley remembers that the issue came up when one congregant wanted the church to sponsor a Boy Scout troop. The church leadership would not do so because of the Scout’s discriminatory policy against gays and lesbians. ONA was the practice of the congregation. Everybody had to be included and no one got singled out.²⁴⁹

The youth at St. Pauls were picking up the same inclusive values. Every year there was a “Youth Sunday” in which the young people of the church led the entire worship service, including preaching the sermon. This 1986 sermon by a teenager shows a congregation that has welcomed her questions, is open in its theology, and is open to a diversity of beliefs:

This church allows us to have doubts about religion and to ask questions about beliefs without being condemned. The church should be the place where we can ask questions about God, and the world and the universe, and be able to check out our ideas with other people’s ideas. In that way, we can see if we are on the right track, or if both the kids and the adults need to learn something new and become better Christians…The church should be the place where lasting Christian values and beliefs are passed on from adults to youth. But it should also be the place where we can hear God’s voice saying, “Behold, I make all things new.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Carol Munro Mosley, interview by author, Jan. 2013.
An additional clue to the theology that the youth were picking up is found in a prayer that another teenager wrote for that same Youth Sunday service:

Dear Lord,
You are the essence of care.
We come to you in time of need
And you provide.
We turn to you in times of doubt
And you lend reassurance
When we are troubled,
You provide guidance.
We pray, and you help us to serve
And benefit those around us,
As you have cared for us.
We are not always able to control every situation,
But with our prayers to You,
We hope we can become a little more influential.
We pray that those who need – receive;
That those who have – will give.
We hope that we can touch the heart of others,
Lend a helping hand, and
Give as we would like to receive,
In Your name.
We want to serve under God’s will.
To do as He would want us to.
To help provide a peaceful and tranquil
World and society.
We hope that we can help the world as Jesus did.
Amen.

Like the faith expressed by the overnight Shelter volunteer, her prayer reflects a belief in a compassionate God, a giver of good gifts, who works through human lives so that their gifts might show God’s compassion in their world.
One of the changes at St. Pauls in the 1980’s was liturgical, as new words began to be used to express the faith of the congregation. The explicit theological statements that were produced at that time reflect the inclusive welcome and the “you just do it,” Samaritan-Love attitude that were already at work in the congregation.

Along with the gentrification of the neighborhood came an influx of “Yuppies” into the church. They brought with them the language of corporate America, and the language of the documents of the time reflects that change. Members engage in strategic planning and focus groups. Minutes of meetings, unofficial church documents, and newsletters all reflect that secular shift. Carol Munro Mosley describes it as a time when it transitioned from being a congregation where you take what you get at church and bring it into the workplace to a congregation where you take from the workplace and bring it to church.\(^{251}\)

In the summer of 1984, Senior Pastor Tom Henry goes on sabbatical and studies at Garrett Theological Seminary and Northwestern Graduate School of Management. His study plan is titled, “Ecclesiastical Theology and the Management of the Church.” That fall, Henry reports on his sabbatical and what he has learned in the form of Sunday bulletin inserts. The inserts reflect the language of the business school while they also incorporate the historical narrative that the church tells about itself. He notes that St. Pauls has a strong culture, with stories, myths and legends from its past history. The

\(^{251}\) Carol Munro Mosley, interview by author, Jan. 2013.
environment has changed from when German was its primary identity, and the membership now comes from diverse ethnic and church backgrounds. Henry writes:

> In order for us to hold fast to that which is good from our past and to incorporate this into the present church culture, we must consciously share the stories, myths and legends. Some of these stories are serious; some are humorous; but all become a part of what uniquely shapes us as a congregation. With many new people coming into St. Paul's, we cannot assume that everyone knows the stories or legends of long-past, or even recent, history. From an analysis of successful business corporations...it was discovered that successful corporations are those in which stories and legends about the company’s founders and leaders were circulated regularly among all employees. The same is no less true for the church.

St. Paul's also has some core beliefs and values. Perhaps these are best articulated in the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith and in our own Mission Statement: “We express our faith joyfully in the city through worship, fellowship, education and service. We affirm the uniqueness of each person as a gift of God to us, and we encourage growth in Christian life and dedicated involvement in the ministry of the church.” We believe our heritage calls us to serve as good stewards in our community and world (to meet social and spiritual needs in ways that fulfill our commitment to being witnesses to God’s love).²⁵²

Henry says that that all staff and leadership must be able to articulate these beliefs and values in their own words, and be conscious of how they are being acted out in the life of the church. He lists questions they must ask themselves: “Is our action consistent with our statement of faith and mission? Are all staff aware of these values and required to act on them? Do newcomers ‘pick up’ on these values and begin to share them?”

He mentions the importance of slogans in a corporation and that St. Paul's has its own slogan, “Making a Joyful Sound in the City,” a phrase coined by Henry himself. He says that successful companies have slogans that all employees and customers can sincerely believe in and should convey the truth about the organization. St. Paul's, he says, also has its own “niche-manship,” a distinct identity. He believes that niche is the church’s celebrative worship of God each Sunday morning, “Our niche among churches is our

worship. We are strongly Sunday-morning centered. There are strengths and weaknesses
to our church identity, but it is a fact of our culture.”

While identifying the above, he goes on to ask some questions. They are
reminiscent of the questions the congregation was asking of itself prior to 1968 and
questions that St. Pauls is asking today. They are grounded in the past story of the
congregation but look for relevance in the present:

What is Lincoln Park like today? Who visits St. Pauls? What are the spiritual,
social and physical needs? We must hold fast to the core values, but be ready to
try out some radically new things. We must be willing to tolerate the failure that
comes when new things are tried, and we must celebrate (with some hoopla) the
little successes that come. As I read St. Pauls history, I see that this has been true
in the past, and this is why our history is so strong…and colorful!

Showing perhaps inadvertently how the ethnic identity of this congregation has changed,
he ends his reflection on this historically German congregation with a quote from French
Socialist, “As we continue to build the St. Pauls culture it is important that we hear some
words of wisdom from Juan Jaures: ‘Take from the altar of the past the fire, not the
ashes.’”

With the rapid growth of the congregation in the 1980’s, new people brought a
variety of faith traditions and ethnic backgrounds with them. The church is no longer
grounded in the Evangelical and Reformed identity as it once was, with the language of
German Piety and Bonhoeffer, Barman and Barth. It is evolving into a truly United
Church of Christ congregation and the Allerwelts-Kirche that John had spoken of nearly
70 years earlier. Henry identifies the niche of this congregation as the Sunday morning

253 Ibid.
254 Though Bonhoeffer would continue to be remembered and quoted in the congregation,
the Barman Declaration was removed from the church constitution as one of its
theological sources in the 1980’s. The only faith statement in the church’s constitution
would be that of the United Church of Christ.
worship service. Worship was the heart of the community’s life together and was the place that would form this diverse community into a church. The slogan “Making a Joyful Sound in the City” is well-suited to that worship niche and the emerging identity of the congregation. Everyone knows the slogan, they embrace it, and it remains a part of the church’s identity today.

At the same time, some people within the congregation wanted the congregation to take on a more social justice niche by declaring themselves a sanctuary church for Central American refugees. Shortly after Henry’s sabbatical, a sanctuary resolution was brought to a vote at the Annual Meeting of the Congregation. The resolution did not pass. Worship, not activism, was to be the distinct identity of St. Pauls, and would be the unifying mark of the congregation, making of a diverse population one community. The big tent of worship could provide space for smaller niches: there was room for the sanctuary folks as well as those who disagreed. Giving sanctuary to the shelter, however, did not mean an act of civil disobedience.

The sermons of the time often speak to the diversity of faith traditions, or lack thereof, within the congregation. Carol Munro Mosley states in a sermon from 1989: “The danger for we people of faith who tend to be more liberal is that we are so rarely aware that the decisions we make are informed by our faith, while more conservative Christians are quite happy to talk about their political positions in terms of faith.” In reflecting on those years, she remembers that it was the time of the rise of the Religious Right. “They were claiming the language so that it became more difficult for liberal

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255 A couple of members did leave for a nearby sanctuary UCC church when the congregation voted against it.
256 Carol Munro Mosley, sermon, July 23, 1989.
Christians to use it. For example, liberal Christians supported life, but ‘Right to Life’ was now associated with being anti-abortion.” She links the rise of the Religious Right to the decreased use of explicit faith language at St. Pauls and to the increased use of the language of Corporate America in the church documents of the time.

In a sermon from 1990, Tom Henry notes the diversity of religious backgrounds in the congregation. No longer do they share a common German heritage, and no longer do they even share a common understanding of what “church” means: “That is not bad; in many ways it is good. But it demands that we have to dig deeper to find our common roots. We have to consciously repeat our common stories in order to give us a history in which we can all share; something we can pass on to the next generation.” This statement affirms the importance of telling the stories of the congregation in order to create a community in the midst of diversity. He adds that one of the contributing factors in mainline Protestant decline is the loss of purpose. And purpose has been lost as the stories of the faith have been forgotten: “In place of faith stories, we have put forth psychological, sociological and educational theories. And in doing so, perhaps, have taken out the heart of the faith.” It is not, he says, that those theories are bad. They are just not the heart of the Judeo-Christian faith. The stories are the heart. The stories give a common history, put forth a theology and give roots. They form a community that is able to act in the world. He writes, “The biblical stories become our stories, as we listen to them again and again for the first time.”

The story of St. Pauls and the biblical stories were told alongside each other to give the community roots.

257 Carol Munro Mosley, interview by author, Jan. 2013.
The congregation was one of 17 UCC churches that were bucking the mainline decline and that were profiled in a 1990 book, *Good News in Growing Churches.* Tom Henry writes about the years leading up to the time when the Lincoln Park Shelter was founded and the congregation became ONA. He notes the continued commitment of the congregation, throughout its history, to the city: rebuilding after the Great Chicago Fire, moving to Lincoln Park to follow its members, but then choosing to remain in that location when the church sanctuary was once again destroyed by fire in 1955 and many of the members had moved away from the neighborhood:

Within ten years of that rebuilding, however, Chicago was facing serious urban problems, and these problems affected churches. Membership in city churches was declining dramatically, while the expenses of buildings and ministries grew. By the early 1970’s the church had to make some decisions once more concerning its commitment to urban ministry. These decisions were made, with prayer and some degree of struggle within the congregation, and St. Pauls’ commitment to put its human and financial resources behind a mission that would make a joyful sound in the city. Their decisions were faith decisions made with a trust that God still had work for St. Pauls’ Church to do in the community in which we were located. The decisions were followed with plans for doing that work, but we often found ourselves running in many directions at one time, using resources to respond to every request that came our way. The results were mixed. So, in 1982, we launched a strategic-planning process, which include objectives for church growth in our area of the city, an area that included both promise and problems. 

Henry writes of the gentrification of the neighborhood and the young, urban professionals who are moving into the neighborhood and into the church. The niche the congregation had found to attract and keep the new neighbors coming, as well as to retain the old, is a strong focus on worship. As he describes the traditional worship at St. Pauls, he notes the stress on welcome that is part of the worship service, making people feel at home and comfortable with the liturgy: “An uneasy worshipper who feels left out and embarrassed

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that he or she does not know the local customs will not return.”  

The goal is to give people a feeling of being at home. He ends his chapter with an echo of the mission statement: “Every active member of a congregation is a unique gift of God and adds to the personality of the church.”

While worship is the niche of St. Pauls, his essay strongly stresses a concern for welcome, for inclusion, for honoring all persons - from old time member to newcomer from young to old - and inclusiveness is part of the feel of the worship service. “Being at home” is a deep value of this congregation in 1990. The Mission Statement says that every individual is a unique gift from God. If that is the case, then everyone counts – from the homeless man in the Shelter to the Yuppie who is cooking dinner for him. No one should be excluded, no one singled out, no one lifted up on a pedestal.

With an increasingly diverse body of worshippers and with a more strongly UCC identity emerging, the 1980’s show an evolution and experimentation in the Sunday morning liturgy as the pastors seek to find the right explicit words to express the congregation’s implicit faith. The old forms inherited from the Evangelical and Reformed tradition no longer connect and the old words no longer reflect a congregation from diverse faith backgrounds.

Two of the new liturgies that show up in the 1980’s mark points of entry into the congregation: the Reception of New Members and the Service of Christian Baptism. With the rapid growth of St. Pauls, the words of the new member liturgy will be heard and repeated often by the congregation. Henry wrote this liturgy as a dialogue on the UCC Statement of Faith:

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261 Ibid., 256.
262 Ibid., 261.
LITANY FOR THE RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

PASTOR: Let us affirm together our faith as we receive these new members into our community.
CONGREGATION: We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, who is made known to us in Jesus our brother and to whose deeds we testify.
PRESIDENT: God calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the Divine Image, and sets before us the ways of life and death.
CONGREGATION: God seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin. God judges all persons and nations by God’s will declared through prophets and apostles.
PRESIDENT: In Jesus Christ of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, God has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death, and reconciling the whole creation to its Creator.
CONGREGATION: God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the Church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues and races.
PASTOR: God calls us into the Church.
NEW MEMBERS: We accept the cost and joy of discipleship.
PASTOR: Will you promise to support this congregation with your time, talents, and resources, participating regularly in the worship and work of this Community of Faith and contributing to its life and ministry in the city?
NEW MEMBERS: We do promise.
PASTOR: God calls us into the Church.
NEW MEMBERS: We will be servants in the service of the whole human family,
PASTOR: With your love, God will love. With your hands, God will touch the city. With your lives, God will bring justice and compassion to the world.
CONGREGATION: Together with you as members of this Body of Christ, we will proclaim the Gospel to all the world.
NEW MEMBERS: And with you, we will work to resist the powers of evil. We will share in Christ’s baptism and eat at His table. We will join Christ in His passion and victory.
PASTOR: God promises to all who trust in the Gospel, forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end.
ALL: Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto God. Amen. (italics mine.)

Henry has woven the church’s urban call to the city into the UCC Statement of Faith. It is an incarnational faith that is expressed several times a year when new members join. It echoes the theology of the Shelter volunteer who reflected on how God was using him to further God’s mission of compassion. It is a statement that reflects a primary grounding
in mission to the city – a determination expressed in the history of the Congregation to
rebuild after the fire of 1955 and to remain an urban church. This is a city church and it
believes it is called to minister in the city. God will bring justice and compassion to the
world through them, but it begins in their neighborhood, just as it had when Uhlich and
St. Pauls House were founded and when the doors of the church were opened to
protesters in 1968. You can hear in it an echo of the verse that the Frauenverein took as
their motto a hundred years earlier, “Do good to all, especially the household of
believers.” Here, the good begins in the city and moves out into the world. As in the UCC
Statement of Faith, here are two calls of God in the litany: God calls the worlds into
being and God calls them into the church.

The Service of Christian Baptism also evolved to increasingly reflect that
churchly call to touch the city for God. With an influx of singles and young couples, St.
Pauls experienced a baby boom in the 1980’s. Just as the building was welcoming in the
homeless, the building had to adjust to the baby boom with an expanded nursery. The
babies would be welcomed into the community several times a year in the many baptisms
that would take place. The words of the baptismal liturgy would be absorbed by the
congregation as they found a common identity in worship.

The baptism liturgy shows a great deal of flux during this period. The language
would often change only slightly from one Sunday to the next. A new form might appear
one Sunday and then an earlier version would reappear a month later. But over time the
liturgy became fixed. A survey of the words of the liturgy from 1985 to 1991 shows its
gradual evolution (some parts have been omitted):
<table>
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<th>JUNE 1985 BAPTISM</th>
<th>SEPTEMBER 1985 BAPTISM</th>
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| **PASTOR:** According to St. Matthew, our Lord Jesus Christ commanded the Church to “go and make disciples of all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have taught you, and now I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” The Lord also has said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for of such is the Kingdom of God.” Who brings this child to be baptized? **PARENTS:** We do. We ask the Church to baptize our children into the Christian Faith. **PASTOR:** Inasmuch as the promise of the Gospel is not only meant for us but also for our children, let us pray that NAME may receive the promise of the Spirit this day, and that the Spirit be with his parents and with all the baptized. **ALL:** O gracious God, send your Spirit to NAME. Bless what is about to take place with Your presence. Grant him the gifts of freedom, of creativity, of responsibility, that he may become a faithful member of Your Church and an heir of Your Kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  **The Baptismal Birthday Candles** **PASTOR:** Receive now the light of Christ. May you walk always as a child of light. May your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to God. **ALL:** Lord Jesus Christ, inspire the life of this child of God, and be with him throughout his years upon the earth. May he sing many songs, know many joys, heal many wounds, embrace many people in Your Name, and may we walk together with him as Members of Your Church, as witnesses of Your Gospel, as those for whom You have lived and died and live. | **PASTOR:** The Sacrament of baptism symbolizes the love by which God reaches out to us even when we are very young. We are here today to declare that God loves NAME, and to offer ourselves as the instruments of that love in her life. Who brings NAME to be baptized? **PARENTS/SPONSORS:** We do. Because of God’s love shown to us in Jesus Christ, we want to have NAME baptized into the life and faith of this community. We ask God’s guidance in helping NAME to grow to respect herself and others. We bring her here today with joy, accepting the trust that has blessed us with her life. **ALL:** We, as a community, promise to care for NAME by our actions and style of life. We will teach her the joys of God’s world. We will love her. We are, by this affirmation, inseparably bound with her. **After the baptismal candle:** **PASTOR:** Receive now the light of Christ. May you walk always as a child of light. May your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to God. **ALL:** Almighty God, giver of life, you have called us by name and pledged to each of us your faithful love. We pray for your child, NAME. Inspire her life. May she sing many songs, know many joys, heal many wounds, embrace many people in your name. We pray for her parents. Help them to know you; to love with your love; to teach with your truth, so that NAME may hear your
again.

word and know your presence. May we walk together with this family as witnesses to your Gospel, as those for whom you have lived and died and live again.

JUNE 1987:

ALL: We, as the church, promise to care for NAME. We will teach him the joys of this world, and help him understand the evils. We will love him and show him, with our lives, how Christians live. We are, by this affirmation, inseparably bound with him.

SEPTEMBER 1988

ALL: We, as the church, promise to care for NAME. We will help her hold fast to that which is good, and to return to no one evil for evil. We will love her and show her, with our lives, how Christians live. We are, by this affirmation, inseparably bound with her.

SEPTEMBER 22, 1991:

This is the first time that the written liturgy includes the baptism formula in the name of God, “Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.” The week before there was a baptism in the traditional language Trinitarian language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Often the names of the Trinity are simply omitted in the baptism liturgy insert in the bulletin.

As this liturgy evolves, it moves away from the traditional baptism language found in June 1985. The God of June 1985 is a God who inspires lives to active, compassionate service in the world: healing wounds and embracing many people. In the fall of 1985, that incarnational faith gets increasingly expressed as the church becomes an instrument of God’s love in the life of the child. By 1987, the church promises to show the child with their lives how Christians live. Faith is expressed through action. Word and deed are joined. This diverse congregation, coming from a wide variety of religious
traditions, does not affirm in the liturgy that they will tell the child what to believe. Rather, they will show her how Christians live. Christianity is expressed in lifestyle more than creed.

The liturgy also increasingly reflects the inclusive nature of the congregation. The prayer for the child is that he will embrace many people in God’s name. This is an arms-wide-open embrace. In the fall of 1985, the congregation professes that it is inseparably bound with the child. There is nothing that child can do that will take that connection away. This is a congregation where everyone is included by rite of baptism in unbreakable bonds. That is an important quality if you are going to be an Open and Affirming congregation. If nothing can separate us from the love of God, a love that reaches out to the very young, then nothing can separate the members of the congregation from each other - at least so claims that liturgy.

The inclusiveness of St. Pauls is also seen in the increasing use of inclusive language. There is an inconsistency in how to name the Trinity throughout the liturgies. Sometimes “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” are present. As noted above, sometimes there is no baptismal formula written down at all, simply the word “Baptism” at the point in the liturgy when the baby is baptized. Tom Henry remembers:

All the liturgies were in flux for a while. The church vs. community issue was a somewhat hot item from the early 70s through the 80s. Churches became “Communities of Faith” because for some the word church seemed to connote rigidity. So I imagine that was reflected in the liturgies. Father, Son and Holy Spirit to Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit was a change in the written liturgy that reflected what the pastors had been saying orally. I think that not including any written reference was a way of allowing for individual pastoral preference.\textsuperscript{263}
While one pastor might say, “Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” another might say, “Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.” This freedom reflects diversity not only within the congregation but also within the pastoral staff.

The congregation was making a conscious attempt to use inclusive language in other ways during this time. A note in a September 1985 worship bulletin beneath a hymn titled *As Those of Old Their First Fruits Brought* gives these instructions for singing: “vs. 1, line 2, change ‘men’ to ‘those’; vs. 2, line 2, change ‘man’ to ‘all.’” The back of the bulletin has the notice: “In worship at St. Pauls we make a conscientious attempt to use inclusive language, believing that the words we use help to form the images we have of ourselves, of other people and of God. However, some hymns, scripture passages and creeds cannot be changed without destroying the poetry, the original meaning, or the historic value.” Apparently the changes made to *As Those of Old Their First Fruits Brought* did not destroy any of the above.

Additionally, the liturgy is removed from traditional baptismal language that connects baptism with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God’s love has been shown in Jesus, but baptism is not about being buried with Christ in death and raised in Christ’s resurrection. Instead, the liturgy is increasingly focused on the life of the congregation and the promises that the people make to the child. The address of the final prayer also signals that move as it changes from “Lord Jesus Christ” to “Almighty God, giver of life.” Christ is someone to be followed, but Christ is no longer prayed to in the evolving liturgy. It is the Creator God who is addressed, the God who in the new member liturgy calls the worlds into being and “calls us into the church.” Rather than

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264 Tom Henry said in a conversation that he would still use the death and resurrection language for adult baptism as it made more sense to him in that context.
focusing on the story of Christ who sends the church into the world to make disciples, as in June 1985, this liturgy puts the focus on the church: the promises that the people make to the child, and their commitment to embody in their lives the meaning of “Christian.”

The words spoken when the baptism candles are given, reflecting the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, are also said at the end of the Reception of New Members, when they are given candles and welcomed into the church: “Walk always as children of light and let your lights shine in your good works” (Matt. 5:16). The church embodies Jesus as the light of Christ in the world. The changes in the liturgy in this period reflect that the church welcomes all. The church will always be there for you and will be a demonstration of what it means to walk the walk. When asked how he would describe the theology of St. Pauls around mission and outreach Tom Henry said, “I believe that you could capture the theology of St Pauls outreach with the words of the hymn ‘Lord, I want to be a Christian, more loving, more holy, like Jesus in my heart.’ It definitely is an incarnational theology.”

One other change to note in the baptism liturgy occurs in September 1988 when the congregation begins to say, “We will help them hold fast to that which is good and to return to no one evil for evil.” Throughout his ministry at St. Pauls, Tom Henry concluded every worship service with the same benediction, based on the words of Paul:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Go forth in peace}, \\
\text{Being of good courage,} \\
\text{Holding fast to that which is good,} \\
\text{Returning to no one evil for evil,} \\
\text{Giving strength to the fainthearted,}
\end{align*}
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\text{265} \text{In the mid-2000’s the liturgy would further evolve when the children of St. Pauls were given their own promise to make in the liturgy: to welcome the newly baptized into the church family and be a friend to them as they grow up together.}

\text{266} \text{Tom Henry, interview by author, Jan. 2013.}
Supporting the weak,  
Comforting the afflicted,  
Honoring all persons,  
Loving and serving God,  

These words became a beloved part of the memory bank of the congregation, and Henry added some of those words into the baptism liturgy. Now, in the liturgy, the congregation promises to help the child embody the benediction that they hear every week. That benediction itself is less a benediction than a call to action and to embodied faith. It is a call to service that lives faith rather than preaches it. The benediction is a commissioning of the congregation to enact in the world in which it lives the worship that has been forming them as a congregation. Baptism and benediction are joined.

In a sermon preached in 1990, Henry speaks of the importance of worship in shaping their life together:

There are people in our national denominational office who are fascinated with St. Pauls Church. They ask me again and again: “What makes it work?” I believe what makes it work is our worship together…the marriage of word and music; sermon and anthem; prelude and prayer. However, when I try to answer these national denominational people, I have a hard time because rational explanations don’t capture what happens here. I suppose the only thing I can really say is that we allow the Spirit to do things with us that we cannot understand.

Preaching the Faith

The themes that come out in the implicit and explicit theologies of the church are articulated weekly in the sermons of its pastors. I read through the sermons of the

267 A choral anthem was commissioned based on these words when Henry retired in 2010.
decade, and incarnational faith, God touching the city through their hands, loving and serving all people, being the body of Christ in the world, being Open and Affirming – all of these themes converge repeatedly in the sermons of the 1980’s.

A 1986 sermon by Tom Henry reinforces that worship niche of the congregation and why it was important: social action will flow out of being formed together in worship of God. He says that the demand upon the church is to consciously and intentionally form Christians who are part of a body, the Body of Christ. In order for this to happen, they will need to be committed to coming together in worship. The church’s primary task is to develop Christian identity, not “good people” or “good citizens.” From Christian identity follows social action, ethical decision-making, Christian caring and fellowship: “It is in coming together in community that our ethics and values and life goals and dreams are tested.”

In a sermon from 1990, he highlights once again that formational function of worship. In noting the decline of the mainline church, Henry says that St. Pauls must be less self-satisfied and not take for granted its situation as a healthy, growing church. They need to claim their identity as Christian first. To know themselves first as Christian, and then as mother, father, brother, sister, male, female, gay, lesbian, black, white, etc… By 1990, sexual orientation was in sermons, just as it had become a part of the church’s inclusive mission statement.

In a sermon from 1987, after the death of Gerhard Grauer, seventh Sr. Pastor of St. Pauls, Henry’s sermon text is Micah 6:1-8. Here it is not the German heritage of the congregation that is stressed, but the UCC identity of Dr. Grauer, an identity that the

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congregation was increasingly embracing. He notes that Dr. Grauer was instrumental in the founding of the United Church of Christ in 1957: “Some of the convictions by which he lived are an integral part of the United Church of Christ, which is a witness to social justice, to a church that must live in society and must affect that society, urging it to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly in the presence of God.”

A week later, Carol Munro continues the justice theme in a sermon on being the salt of the earth. The sermon reflects on those words from the Gospel of Matthew that are repeated when children are baptized and when new members join:

It is our good works people must see in order to recognize the glory of God, not little things to spice life up a bit, but big, major statements made with our very lives to save the world. And if we are not able to do that, Jesus says, we are useless, of no value, like salt that has lost its qualities or a light that is darkened so it has no effect. By devoting our acts of faith, as the prophet Isaiah describes them, to loosing the bonds of wickedness, letting the oppressed go free, sharing with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into shelter, by seeing our Christian vocation as the removing from our midst of the yoke of affliction…by doing these things we become salts of the earth, we answer Jesus’ challenge to save the world.

Bringing homeless poor into shelter was exactly what was happening within their own church building.

An Epiphany sermon by Munro Mosley, originally preached in 1984, was so popular that people asked to hear it again. I also found her sermon referred to in one preached by her colleague, showing its ongoing significance in the congregation. It is about the situation of Mary and Joseph after the Magi have left Bethlehem. Again, it speaks to a faith that is to be embodied and incarnated within the lives of the members of the congregation:

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271 Tom Henry, sermon, Feb. 1, 1987
272 Carol Munro, sermon, Feb. 8, 1987.
After the magi have left, we are still here with the responsibility; we are still stuck with that savior. We cannot simply celebrate this birth and the glory of his resurrection any more than Mary and Joseph could simply have him and be done with it. We must risk what he risked. We must at least try to become what it was he stood for. If that baby in the manger is to be our baby, our savior, our Jesus, then we must be his people. We must do as he taught us. We must feed the hungry, clothe the naked. We must refuse to invest our trust, and our energies, in machines of destruction. We must recognize the divine gift that lies in every single human life. We must risk being persecuted and hurt for the sake of what we stand for, for the sake of loving our enemies, for the sake of doing good to those who hate us. We must live our lives as though we really believed that the Kingdom of God exists and that we are a part of it...After the magi have left, and the angels have returned to their heaven, and the shepherd have gone back to their fields, after we’ve celebrated the glorious birth of the savior, the responsibility of our faith has only just begun.

Using different words, her sermon echoes the message of the Henry Benediction. The church has been formed in celebratory worship as together they make a joyful sound in the city. In worship they have encountered Christ, but worship must lead to action, to owning the baby and what he stood for. Worship is meant to form a people who live as Christ in the world.

Throughout this period, current events and social issues appear regularly in the sermons: Central American refugees, the nuclear arms race, the first Iraq War, abortion. One issue that shows up repeatedly is AIDS. Members of the congregation were dying of AIDS. It left its mark again and again. Carol Munro Mosley tells the story of meeting a woman whose husband had become sick 5 years earlier. It turned out that he had AIDS and had led a double life as a gay man. The woman came from a church that did not have an open and affirming attitude. But she stood by her husband, and after he had died she took on the vocation to help other people who had AIDS, and their families, try to cope with the devastation that the disease brings:

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I do not know that I have ever personally met anyone I felt so filled with grace, that quality of unexpected acceptance that truly qualifies as God-like. What Jesus wanted of his followers was a life-giving alternative to the life-draining world in which they lived; he wanted them to be different, he wanted them to try to be like God would be. He still wants the same thing – for us, as his followers, to be different. We are called on to act as nearly like God as is humanly possible…This is a whole new set of rules, the set that Jesus gave us to use.  

Even with the open and affirming atmosphere at St. Pauls, not all gay members were open about who they were. Telling stories like this helped the congregation to not only affirm its inclusiveness but also to think about compassion. Just a few months after the above sermon by Munro Mosley, Henry tells another poignant story:

A young man, who in finding out that he had AIDS, decided in his own head that the only way he could tell his family was to make a somewhat half-hearted attempt to kill himself. When I arrived at the hospital, a member of the family greeted me with the statement: “To think that his mother didn’t even know he was the kind of person who could get AIDS.” He followed that knowledgeable and sensitive statement with another: “I can’t say I’m thankful that he’s alive for he’ll never be well.”

But, in fact, he is becoming “well” for perhaps the first time in years. Why? Because he is now able to say to his family, “Please…help me,” and, “thank you for standing by me,” and “I need you.” He is not cured, but I think that he is in the process of being made well, and the family is in the process of being healed.

Wellness meant being open about who you are, whether or not those around you are affirming. St. Pauls was trying to be both.

One sermon that is still remembered at St. Pauls was preached two years before the congregation became officially ONA. It is from March 9, 1987. The entire sermon is on the AIDS epidemic, at a time when so many questions were still unanswered about the nature of the disease. Henry gives what he believed to be the Christian response. He begins the sermon by recounting the story of a young man who had just died. The man had called him four days before his death but could not bring himself to talk to his

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274 Carol Munro Mosley, sermon, Feb. 18, 1990.
minister about the one thing he needed to talk about, the disease that plagued his mind, body, and spirit: “He called to talk, but then he couldn’t because one does not talk about being the carrier of a plague.”

Henry related the AIDS epidemic to the story of Jesus touching the leper: “What we cannot do is imagine that any one of us will come through this period in history untouched by the horror of AIDS. I can say with sad assurance that we all will in some way be touched.”

He goes on to say that AIDS is not God’s punishment, but that like all disease is from living in a free world that allows for evil as well as good in life: “God desires the healing of the world, and we are God’s hands for healing. So, we must begin with a right belief and an understanding of our Christian purpose.” He says that purpose is,

- Careful attention to the facts about AIDS
- The urging of research and support of places where sufferers can be cared for with compassion.
- Affirm monogamous relationships, where there is love and commitment of one person for another, no matter what the sexual orientation of that relationship.
- Take the risk of being with one who is suffering the disease, because sometimes one must put compassion before limited knowledge, just as Jesus did when he went out to the lepers. As healers, we may be compelled by Christ to act with foolish wisdom that demands our compassion so that one person might not suffer in shame and die alone.

As we receive new members into this church, these words are spoken: “With your love, God will love; with your hands, God will touch the city; with your lives, God will bring justice and compassion to the world.” So be it.276

The sermon expresses the open and affirming theology of the congregation even before it was official. And he links it directly with the new member liturgy that was forming the worshipping community. They are called to embody the touch of Jesus in their city,

especially to those who are the most in need of compassion and least likely to receive it. With their hands God will touch people with AIDS. It’s another expression of Samaritan-Love.

Sermons in the later part of this period struggle less with the need to find a common identity and start to express that identity. The theme of welcome emerges. It is a theme that captures the welcoming of the homeless into the church building and showing them hospitality. It is a theme that captures the welcome expressed in being an Open and Affirming congregation. “All Are Welcome” would be one of the hymns chosen by Tom Henry for his last worship service as Senior Pastor in June, 2010, and that phrase seems to sum up the inclusive practice of the congregation.

Glen Loafmann writes of a diverse group of welcomed strangers who have been formed into a community of worship over his nine years at St. Pauls. He connects their story with the story of the Exodus and the story of the German immigrants who founded St. Pauls. He uses both the biblical narrative and the congregation’s narrative as resources for reflection. He does so through honoring the old Germans who still meet for a separate German language service at the church:

Our religious heritage at St. Pauls is fragmented: new members come from every Christian tradition under the sun – the pastors have a pool on which denomination will have the strongest representation in any particular class, and it seems pretty random. Our faith is expressed in a collage of doctrines, images, and downright superstition gleaned from perhaps the Presbyterian Sunday School we attended when we were six, a Universalist Youth Group we visited one time, a few sentimental religious movies, and threats made by the nun who taught our fifth grade class. Like most Protestant Americans, we do not retell our story often enough to retain it in more than a haphazard way, and we do not know denominational stories – the individual strands of Christian history and faith – in any coherent fashion at all. Except for Christmas, Easter and communion, our religious community is built of pieces of experience and tradition we have brought along with us – things grabbed
in a hurry when we left home and hit the road and found a job in the wilderness – Chicago.277

He notes that the German service, a monthly gathering of just a few members, represents their strongest common bond, their defining experience and common history. They have all lived out what the German service recalls, the text from Matthew 25 that is repeated throughout the history of St. Pauls: “I was a stranger, and you took me in” (Matt. 5:35).

The congregation has welcomed immigrants for almost 150 years.

That is the heart of St. Pauls’ peculiar covenant with its history and with God: “I was a stranger, and you took me in.” We are all refugees and descendants of refugees from Iowa, Nebraska, from California and Oklahoma and Ohio. The German service is not an accommodation to those folks who want it or who worship there; it is a part of the renewal of our own covenant; it keeps our faith alive because it reiterates the experience we all share. From our diverse and distant past, we collect ourselves here, and present ourselves before God, trusting that the past we have experienced leads us to a future we can share.278

A similar theme of welcome is expressed in a Mother’s Day sermon in 1993 in which Henry relates the congregation’s identity to the outreach of its history. He speaks of an encounter he had with a homeless man in a coffee shop and says that we often have to create homes for ourselves in unlikely places. He believes that Jesus would understand those kinds of homes – an abused child who finds a home at Uhlich, an old woman in a room at St. Pauls House, a nurse creating a kind of home in the AIDS ward at the hospital.

“A family can be created among friends, and a home can be found at a church…Homemaking is our ministry, as it was the ministry of Jesus…On this Mother’s

278 Ibid.
Day, we also recognize that Mom for us may be the mothering God who makes a home for us.”

Refugees looking for a home in the city, strangers finding a home and in turn becoming homemakers, this narrative theme connects the contemporary life of St. Pauls with its history and with the great primal narratives of its past. The founding of the Lincoln Park Community Shelter and becoming an officially Open and Affirming congregation converge in the Christian practice of showing hospitality, creating a home where all are welcome, a practice that reflects the mothering heart of God.

Finding God in the Story

In the period of founding of the Lincoln Park Community Shelter and becoming an Open and Affirming Congregation in the 1980’s, God enters the St. Pauls narrative indirectly as a character. God reaches out to us when we are very young, but the arms that embrace us and that hold us are human arms. God does not save the world through miraculous events. God saves the world through people, who reach out to the world with the same love that God has shown to them. It is through the actions of human beings that God shows compassion. It is through human hands that God touches the city and the person living with AIDS. It is through human hands, cooking dinner 365 nights of the year, that God feeds the hungry poor who spend the night in the homeless shelter. God keeps vigil in the dark through the volunteer who stays up all night while the homeless

279 Tom Henry, sermon, Mother’s Day 1993.
sleep. It is through a human hand that God reaches out to the hand of the gay and lesbian, welcoming him and her into the church with the right hand of fellowship. It is us up to us to be like God. We can be like God in the world. That is God’s way of relieving human suffering – through human beings themselves. Like the faith of the Frauenverein and the faith of the 1960’s, this is an incarnational faith. The love of God is made flesh not only in the life of Jesus but in the lives of those who are being formed in the identity and light of Christ.

God does not speak into the ears of the congregation, like the angels and fairies speaking to the women of St. Pauls 100 years earlier to give them ideas and direct them in mission. Mission is right there in the person at the doorstep. God’s call is the call to respond faithfully to the human need that is present, to do what you can, use your gifts and resources and “just do it.” The need itself is the only call that is needed, and one need not look for any other sign from heaven. Human beings are accountable for their actions, and to face those needs with compassionate service.

God does give gifts, however, and the primary gift God gives is people. Each human being is a gift from God, and therefore is to be welcomed and received as one of God’s good gifts, whether it is a Yuppie, a homeless person you meet in an alley, or a gay man who walks into church. Through baptism, God binds the diverse community together in inseparable bonds. Christians are formed through passing on and learning the practices of the Christian life in the company of those with whom they share those bonds. Since our lives are gifts, then whatever gifts and resources we possess are meant to be shared with others. God does intervene in the world, but does so through the direct action of
humans, using their God-given gifts. All of this can be summed up in the word welcome. Welcome to the need when it arises, welcome to each individual, welcome to the church.

Intersecting with Acts

The priorities of this era intersect most clearly with the inclusive agenda of Acts. In Acts, the gift of the Spirit is a sign of God’s acceptance of Gentiles. At St. Pauls, each person is called a gift, and so each one is a sign of God’s welcome. The Spirit telling Philip to approach the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:29) and the Spirit telling Peter to approach Cornelius (Acts 10:19-20) are both obvious points of connection. Robert Schreiter writes: “How does the congregation’s story illumine and give a fresh perspective on the biblical story or other stories from the congregation’s heritage? And how do these stories illumine or challenge the congregation’s story about itself? This is what Groome calls a ‘dialectical hermeneutic,’ that is, a situation in which two sets of stories interpret each other and offer each other new insights and perspectives.”

In adult education, an activity that I am responsible for at St. Pauls, we used stories from Acts and St. Pauls to interpret each other around the practice of testimony as it relates to being an inclusive church.

Telling our personal stories, our testimonies, can be transformative for individuals as well as effect change within a congregation. We read Peter’s testimony in Acts 11 before the Jerusalem church about his experience of the Spirit in Cornelius and how that

280 Schreiter, “Theology in the Congregation,” 23.
changed the minds of the leadership about who was in and out. We related that story to when St. Pauls sponsored a resolution calling for the Illinois Conference to become officially Open and Affirming. Unlike St. Pauls Church, the Conference went through an ONA process, holding discussions and study sessions before the resolution would be voted on – an extended version of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. At one ONA discussion, a large contingent from a UCC church that was opposed to the ONA resolution was present. The conversation was heated and tense. I related how, like Peter, I had brought my personal narrative into the conversation and that it was transformative in that tense meeting. One woman in the adult education group remembered the sermon from 1987, referenced above, in which Tom Henry preached about AIDS, saying that everyone’s life would be touched by AIDS in some way. She still remembered what a powerful witness that was to her. It opened her eyes to the different people who were around her and part of her community. She said it personalized the shaping of St. Pauls to be an open and supporting congregation.

That dominant narrative of inclusiveness is resilient, but conversations have also brought out less inclusive stories about St. Pauls. In another session with the adult education group, a woman who has been a member of St. Pauls all her life said that although St. Pauls invites anyone and everyone to be part of it and expresses welcome, it has not always ben that way. She remembered, “Years ago you couldn’t just join a group. You had to be a certain person. You had to get an invitation to join most of the groups, and some people never got invited anywhere. You used to have your own pew.” That surprised newer members of the church. The culture, she said, really changed in the 1960’s when those who were newcomers, and therefore outsiders to the old German
groups like the Frauenverein, began to form their own inclusive groups. Her story underlined the fact that the church has evolved, just as Luke describes an evolving 1st Century church as it struggled with issues around who is in and who is out. It also underlined the fact that there are many different stories within a congregation, and not just one dominant narrative.

With the rapid growth of St. Pauls in the 1980’s, this era could be described with the summary statement in Acts 2:47, “…praising God and having the good will of all the people…day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Worship and growth characterize both the inclusive community of Acts and the St. Pauls of the 80’s. The era is remembered as a time of rebuilding the congregation after a long period of struggle to survive through the late 1960’s and 1970’s. In a church council meeting in which they discussed possibilities for future outreach, someone expressed that there are long-time members who remember how this church body has come back in the past 25 years from a time when a vibrant future was in question. Another member who remembers the 80’s said, “I do think we were ‘rebuilding’ a congregation. I think this is also a result of Tom [Henry]’s quiet, introverted personality. ‘Hospitality’ gives people welcoming refuge. ‘Mission’ requires people to, in a more intentional way, look outside of themselves.” That is what the leadership of St. Pauls is currently doing, looking outside. After a period of conflict and decline, the church grew as it focused on an inclusive welcome; now they are focusing their attention outside, toward the city, in a renewed way. Churches go through cycles of pain and renewal. Following Saul’s “ravaging of the church” (Acts 8:3), and subsequent conversion (Acts 9) the narrator of Acts can say, “Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace.
Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers” (Acts 9:31). That is a good summary statement for St. Pauls in the 1980’s.

Catching Our Breath
A Sermon for Pentecost
Text: Acts 2:1-21

I would like to read an excerpt from one of our official church documents that was produced in the past few months. You may not be familiar with it, but it contains important information about our life together as St. Pauls Church. The document is the newsletter of the St. Pauls Confirmation Class, and the article I’m quoting from was written by Max Davis and is entitled “Munchkins.” I quote, “Inside of the confirmation room, munchkins bring our class together as well as produce a friendly atmosphere. They give us something to eat but most of all they bring our class into the religious mindset. Even though we all didn’t go to the same school, and all aren’t best friends, through the church, and through munchkins, we have been brought together by something as simple as small pieces of cake.” Brought together by small pieces of cake. That sounds a lot like communion to me. Max is engaging in what theologians call practical theology. Practical theology looks at our beliefs about God that bubble up from within a congregation.

The Confirmation Newsletter is full of wonderful reflections in practical theology, written by each of our confirmands about their experiences over the past two years: doing outreach together, having fun together, learning about our faith as well as other faiths, performing together in Bible Story Theatre, and worshipping together with all of us. All
of their experiences go into the history that we share together as St. Pauls Church, and become a part of the ongoing story of who we are.

Being a church means sharing a common story. Last Thursday we began a series of new member classes, and one thing that Avena asks us to do on our first night together is to go around and each one share something of his or her own faith journey and how we got to St. Pauls. And it’s remarkable to hear all of the different places that we’ve come from to form this congregation. In the latest class we had people who had been Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Catholic, Pentecostal, people with no church background, and even a couple of folks who actually grew up UCC, coming together to form this particular United Church of Christ. The religious diversity of this congregation is amazing. And God calls us, this diverse group of people, to be the church.

After we’ve said something about our personal faith journeys, I stand up and with limited success attempt to condense 500 years of UCC history into 15 minutes. And in another session, we see Tom Henry’s famous slide show, now a Power Point presentation, about the history of St. Pauls Church: how our ancestors decided that they needed to start a church because somebody died; how they went on to found Uhlich Children’s Home and St. Pauls House, and in later years helped get the Night Ministry and the Lincoln Park Shelter going. Those are all stories about different generations of St. Pauls Church taking risks to faithfully respond with the compassion Jesus to the new challenges that their world faced.

All of these streams flow together, all of these different stories converge, to make us who we are as a congregation. When God calls us to be the church, we become a part of a story that began before we were born and that will keep on going long after we’ve
died. We’re part of something greater than ourselves, and that’s an exciting thing to know. It gives meaning to our lives. It’s good to pause and take time to reflect and catch our breath, to remember the stories of where we’ve come from.

Our culture tends to make us into people who live without a story and without memory, especially as Americans. We are people who are obsessed with what’s new and what’s now, as if that’s all that matters in life. We move around so much that it’s difficult to put down any roots, and our busyness leaves us breathless. Why are we always so busy, anyway? But as Christians, we learn to live as people who are formed by rich and deep memories, stories that help us live fuller and more faithful lives in the present.

The thread that holds all of those different stories together, the thread that links all of us into an ongoing story of faith, is the presence of God’s Spirit. The wind of the Spirit has been blowing in the church in every generation. The day of Pentecost is when the church breathed its first breath of life, and we find that story in the book of Acts.

After Easter, Jesus left behind a church with just 120 members. That’s it; after 3 years of ministry you’d think that the Son of God could have done better than that, wouldn’t you? Jesus didn’t plant a mega-church, just a congregation of 10 dozen people who were uneducated, unsophisticated folks, mostly peasants and fisherman. But Jesus tells his disciples: you will receive power to carry on my work, and you will keep telling my story.

And on Pentecost the Spirit comes with the power of a mighty, rushing wind, like Kevin pulling out all of the stops of the Aeolian-Skinner organ, the very Spirit of Christ comes within them and among them. If you read to the end of the 2nd Chapter of Acts,
you would find that by the end of the day of Pentecost, the church had gone from 120 members to 3,120. A new member class of 3,000 people in a single day.

But by the time Luke wrote the book of Acts, those early days were just a distant memory. A couple of generations had passed. Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans, the first Christians had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. They were under a great deal of stress. Peter, who preached his first sermon on Pentecost, ended up in Rome where like Jesus he was crucified - upside down - and Paul had been martyred in Rome as well. The going was tough, and so Luke wrote Acts to remind his contemporaries where they’d come from, what their mission was all about, and to give them hope to keep carrying on. You’ve got to know where you’ve come from to know where you’re going.

It’s important to hold on to your memories of how God has been faithful to you in the past. It’s important to hold on to your memories of how God has seen you through life, because those memories give us strength. When we forget where we’ve come from, we can end up being paralyzed by fear in the present. We can close in upon ourselves. Or we can find that we’re doing things that don’t really matter, spending our time and energy in ways that no longer have anything to do with the sort of lives we’ve been called to live.

There’s a story about a little girl who sees her mother cutting the wings off a chicken she is about to roast. When the little girl asks why, the mother says, “Because that’s the way my momma always did it.” So, the girl asks her grandmother, who
answers, “Because that’s the way my momma always did it.” Finally, the girl asks her
great-grandmother, who says, “Because my pan was too small.”

They forgot their story.

Today we commission a new generation of St. Pauls to go on a mission trip to
Appalachia. Going on a mission trip is one of the main themes of the book of Acts. The
Spirit of God keeps pushing the church out on mission trips, outside our comfort zones,
saying: “Go talk to people who don’t look like you. Go talk to people who don’t live like
you or talk like you.”

The miracle that occurs on Pentecost is the gift of tongues. The Spirit enables
those 120 uneducated Galileans to speak in other languages. There are people from all
over the world gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. And they hear the
disciples speaking their own languages. The Spirit gives the disciples the gift of speaking
somebody else’s tongue. That’s how the Spirit is. Just like the wind, God’s Spirit pays
no attention to our national borders or ethnic divisions. The Spirit blows right over our
borders. The Spirit is multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-lingual.

If we want to keep up with the Spirit, then the church always has to keep on the
move, because like the wind, the Spirit never sits still. And when we follow the Spirit,
we find that God transforms our own lives just by taking the risk of going.

Logan Frank, in his confirmation article, writes about going on the Crop Walk to
raise money to feed the hungry, and he says, “The Crop Walk changes lives of many
people and it changed my life too. This experience gave me confidence to go out and do
what’s right.” Peter Contos, writing about cooking dinner at the Lincoln Park

281 Samuel G. Freedman, *Upon This Rock: the Miracles of a Black Church* (New York:
Community Shelter says, “Even though we were at the Shelter to feed people, I was the one who walked away full.” Walking away full. That’s what happens when we follow the Spirit. God surprises us with more than we ever imagined.

Peter the Apostle stands up to preach his very first sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The last time we saw Peter around here was five weeks ago on Good Friday. He was sitting by a fire in a courtyard, warming himself, while Jesus was inside under arrest. Denial follows denial as Peter tries to save his own chicken skin. “I don’t know him. No, you’ve mistaken me with someone else. I never knew the man!” The cock crows, and Peter slinks away into the night weeping bitterly, a miserable failure of a disciple.

But the Spirit breathes new life into Peter. The Spirit breathes new life, giving Peter the courage to stand up in broad daylight, in front of an international crowd, and this uneducated fisherman preaches his very first sermon and says, “Yes, I really did know Jesus, and this is how it all happened…”

The good news of the story of Pentecost is that God’s Spirit keeps on breathing new life into disciples like us, people who are often frightened failures, bent on saving our own skins. The Spirit keeps breathing new life into us again and again. Peter tells the crowd that that’s what it means to be the church. “God declares, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your young people - your sons and your daughters - shall prophecy; your young adults shall see visions and your senior citizens shall dream dreams.’” What visions do you see? What dreams do you dream? Take a deep breath of God’s Spirit; take a deep breath, because the story that we will tell as the church is found in the dreams and the visions that God has promised to give to every one of you.
CHAPTER 5

The Contemporary Lens

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke writes about the past in order to inspire the present. As a character in the narrative, the Holy Spirit provides continuity, linking the people of the distant past, such as David (Acts 1:16), to Jesus (1:2), to the group of disciples gathered at Pentecost (2:4), and to all future communities of believers (2:38). The Spirit is defined as promise (1:4, and 2:33), signifying this past, present and future orientation. As promise, the Spirit connects the faithfulness of God to every generation. That theme of promise could also be used to describe St. Pauls in 2013. As the congregation looks to discern their future mission in the city, they are also remembering God’s faithfulness in the past.

In 2013, St. Pauls is both similar to and different from what it was in the 1980’s. There is a new Senior Pastor. Matt Fitzgerald was called in February 2012 to be the congregation’s tenth, following Tom Henry’s retirement in 2010. Associate Pastors Avena Ward and myself have both been at the church for over ten years. Some of the members were around in the 1980’s, when the Shelter was founded and when St. Pauls became officially Open and Affirming, but many newcomers have joined or been born into the congregation. The church has a large Sunday School and there are many families with young children. The congregation has gone through regular strategic planning and they deeply explored the identity of the congregation when they produced their Local
Church Profile as part of the Senior Pastor search process. That document reflects the mission priorities of the congregation. In many ways, the faith that grounds the mission and outreach of St. Pauls today is spoken of in similar language to the 1980’s, and, in fact, tends to deepen those themes. The liturgical changes of the 1980’s were standardized by the 1990’s and have become a part of the common language of the congregation.

The congregation remains involved with the Lincoln Park Community Shelter, though Shelter guests no longer sleep at St. Pauls but in a permanent facility built within the basement of Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church a block away. There is a Shelter Community Engagement Program at St. Pauls on Sunday afternoons during which homeless persons on the Shelter’s waiting list can take a shower, do some laundry, and receive medical care and case management. Church members still cook dinner for Shelter guests, but the absence of its daily presence in the building has left a void, and some people are wondering what is next. Like Pastor John a hundred years ago, some members are wondering what the “next big thing” might be.

As they sought a new Senior Pastor, their Local Church Profile remembered the past while it wondered about the future:

We are humbled and inspired by our congregation’s 167 year history of outreach and mission, a history that includes the founding of homes for the aged and for orphans and helping create the Night Ministry and the Lincoln Park Community Shelter. At the same time, we are committed to expanding our outreach and mission in new directions. We are prepared to discern anew God’s call and respond with vitality and faith. In this spirit, we will call a new Senior Pastor to bring his or her own sense of mission together with ours to make a joyful sound in the city.282

282 St. Pauls Church, Local Church Profile, Jan. 20, 2011.
In this time of transition, the congregation looked to its history of mission and outreach, not to rest on its laurels, but as inspiration, as a call to fresh discernment in the present. The current period is one of looking to the future. Nancy Ammerman, in *Studying Congregations*, writes about the importance of telling stories in just this sort of time: “Which stories get told at which time depends in large part on both the need of the hour and the memories of those present. Knowing those stories can often be helpful when planning for the future. When people can make connections between proposed changes and some episode in their past, the new activities are often more comprehensible.”

In order to get a grasp on how the contemporary congregation understands mission and outreach in relation to their faith, I conducted an online survey of the congregation to get a broad range of perspectives from both newer and older members. I also sent more detailed questions to church leaders, past council presidents, past Outreach Committee chairs, members who are active in outreach and also to people of various ages who have grown up at St. Pauls. In collecting data for a study such as this, practical theologian Robert Schreiter says that those whose skill, longevity, and influence put them at the heart of the congregation’s life have a special role in the theology of the congregation. “They typically have the best overview of the congregation, although they may not all agree among themselves…Leaders often embody the memory of the congregation.” Leaders, he says, are essential in correlating the congregation’s story with scripture and heritage.

The survey asked what issues related to outreach and mission were important to them; how that importance is influenced by their faith; and what mission and outreach

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283 Ammerman, “Culture and Identity,” 94.
284 Schreiter, “Theology in the Congregation,” 29.
they believe God might be calling St. Pauls to engage in. The focused leadership questionnaire pushed the narrative theme further, asking how they thought that the congregation’s faith understanding was expressed in the church’s mission and outreach priorities; where they saw God at work in the life and history of St. Pauls, especially in relation to outreach; what they thought the story of St. Pauls is about; and what they thought God might be calling St. Pauls to do or to be. I also gathered two focus groups around a timeline of St. Pauls’ history of mission and outreach over the decades and engaged them in questions about the larger narrative of St. Pauls, listening for how they saw God within their story. At the end of this chapter, I give an account of an activity that engaged the various committees of the church in a text from Acts, relating it to their own context.

The congregation continues to be diverse, as it was in the 1980’s. When asked in the survey about the role faith played in their sense of mission, the responses ran the range from “my faith drives many, if not all my interests,” to “faith has no influence at all in the issues that are important to me.” For most, however, the answer was somewhere in between.

A Lens Formed Through Liturgy and Gospel
Congregants described faith as a being like a lens through which to view the world:

- “My faith helps me see the world from other eyes.”

- “I guess [faith] is the tint or medium through which the world and experiences are viewed and lived through.”

- “I suppose in [faith] teaching about helping the weak and poor, doing good, etc... It’s not a conscious link I reflect on a lot.”

- “My faith influences how I look at different ways society should be using compassion and justice.”

This is typical language of faith at St. Pauls. Faith teaches, it informs, it frames the world and it is a resource for how to live in the world. God’s action is indirect and subtle. Their own action comes out of being formed in the language and culture of the church. Faith helps them to see the world and informs their outreach without a necessarily conscious link between the language of faith or the divine and their convictions about mission.

Because of that lack of specificity, a church leader wonders,

There may be a language and a positioning gap between all the activity and the clarity and expectation for “mission.” This congregation does not use elevated theological language nor Southern Baptist church fire-speak when talking about mission. Neither would be accepted. But we may have a language gap as a result. What does “mission” mean, anyway? How can language make it more visible, so the setting of expectations, the dreaming of dreams, the ideas for where and what to do next and what is currently being done are more visible?

I am aware that I run the risk of over-generalization in a thick description of the faith of this diverse congregation, and that others would describe it differently. In fact, it might be better to speak of a diversity of faiths. But like the wish expressed above to narrow the language gap, I hope to make their language more visible. In reflecting on the faith they express around mission and outreach, clear themes do emerge. First, their lens

285 Except for the quotations from former pastors of St. Pauls, all of the interview and survey responses are reported anonymously in this project.
for viewing the world has been greatly shaped by their liturgy of worship. It has also been shaped by the gospel narrative of Jesus. In regard to mission, that shape of the lens expresses itself in outreach that clusters around some recurring themes. It is outreach that is inclusive, generous, incarnational, and urban.

The Language of Liturgy

Turning first to the shapers of the lens, liturgy and Gospel, Ammerman recommends paying special attention to which stories from sacred texts are particular favorites, retold in sermons…or sung in hymns. “Those stories are likely to tell you something about whom people identify with and how they understand their own lives.”高标准

The language that is present in the liturgy of the congregation surfaces repeatedly when they speak of how faith informs their outreach. The words of the Service of Christian Baptism and the Liturgy for the Reception of New Members, that evolved in the 1980’s, are especially prominent, showing the power of liturgy to shape how they articulate their faith. Phrases that frequently occur include: “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works” (Matthew 5:16), words that end both liturgies; “With your love God will love, with your hands God will touch the city,” a phrase from the new member liturgy. One member, echoing the words from Matthew, said, “God speaks through what we do as a congregation – letting our light shine.” And when asked about the faith that grounds her outreach priorities, a young woman quotes the baptism liturgy

286 Ammerman, “Culture and Identity,” 95.
she grew up with: “I believe that we are inseparably bound to one another and are all deserving of a home.”

The congregation’s motto, “Making a Joyful Sound in the City,” although not a specific piece from the liturgy, is an official description of the church and reflects, as Tom Henry said in the 1980’s, that worship is their “niche.” Members use that phrase repeatedly to describe not only their worship in the sanctuary, but also their outreach into the community: “St. Pauls is an optimistic place. Looking for the good around us – and sharing it with others (making a joyful sound in the city);” “Loving Christians who make a joyful, faithful sound and honor the less fortunate;” “It really is about ‘Making a Joyful Noise in the City,’ by joyfully reaching out to the community, both locally and globally, and showing God’s love and care for people in need;” and again, “That to me is St. Pauls United Church of Christ, carrying on while continuously making a joyful sound in the city.”

That motto has clearly taken on the life that Tom Henry, who coined it many years earlier, said it should: “Successful companies have slogans that all employees and customers can sincerely believe in and should convey the truth about the organization.” It still conveys today the identity and mission of the congregation.

Other official words are used. The Statement of Faith that the congregation says weekly is echoed: “God calls us to be the church.” “The church is called to seek justice and to resist evil.” A slogan of the United Church of Christ shows up repeatedly, “God is still speaking.” One member uses the language of the St. Pauls Mission Statement that describes each person as a gift of God. He writes, “Viewing each person as a gift from

God transforms assessments of how social and societal issues should be addressed. Social proposals to ‘balance the budget’ that harm the poor and the near poor do not past theological muster.” One focus group response combines both the UCC and St. Pauls slogans with words from the liturgy: “God speaks through what we do as a congregation – letting our light shine, making a joyful sound. The mission is when we are out making a difference in someone’s life. Living and doing. God uses us to do his work.”

The Language of Gospel

In Acts, the name of Jesus is a common confession of faith (e.g., Acts 2:38, 3:15-16, and 4:10-12). At St. Pauls, it is not so much the name of Jesus as the words of Jesus. Along with the language of liturgy, the language of Jesus from the Gospels is common when the congregation talks about mission – just as it was a hundred years ago in the old Bote newspapers edited by Pastor John. These words from Matthew continue to sum up the faith for many: “Whatever you did for the least of these…” (Mt. 25:40). One young woman connects the history of St. Pauls to those words when she says, “I feel that God is calling St. Pauls to continue to work with the least of these; that St. Pauls should keep working with the Lincoln Park Shelter, the Night Ministry, UCAN and St. Pauls house. I think God also is calling St. Pauls to right injustices and be more of an advocate on behalf of the least of these.” “The least of these” was being used at the time when those organizations were founded. Another member, when asked how faith influenced what issues are important to her, simply answered, “Matthew 25. I take it quite literally.” The
Golden Rule also comes up a lot: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt. 5:12). As does the great commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:37-39).

The Congregational Profile quotes that verse as well. The document includes portions of a sermon by Pastor Emeritus Tom Henry, which it says succinctly summarizes the congregation’s theological position:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. One hundred and forty characters, including letters and spaces. One Tweet on Twitter. That’s impressive! ‘That about sums it up,’ says Jesus. That’s what you need to know. That’s what you need to do. If you and I can live that commandment to love God and our neighbor, we will live and love like Jesus.”

After referring to that sermon text, the Profile goes on to say,

When we speak of our mission, our strengths, and our heritage we are pointing to this straightforward theology and enterprising spirit. Fundamental traits of our “collective” personality, they bring us together with a common purpose. Our congregational motto, “Making a Joyful Sound in the City,” summarizes this sense of common purpose and the richness with which it is imbued, for together we “sing many songs, know many joys, heal many wounds, and embrace many people in Christ’s name.”

The words of Jesus are joined with the church motto and with their liturgy of worship as authoritative texts that express the faith that grounds them in mission. The Profile also says that worship serves the greater purpose of [helping them] worship with their lives through day to day experience.

A woman who grew up at St. Pauls grounds the outreach of the congregation in that corporate experience of worship:

288 St. Pauls Church, Local Church Profile, Jan. 20, 2011.
289 Ibid.
I think that the Prayer of the Church is exemplary of how we express our faith. There is rarely a Prayer of the Church that does not include a political issue, a call to action, a national controversy or global tragedy. While a prayer among congregants may not seem like outreach, I do believe the collective energy and focus impacts far beyond our sanctuary. When we are asked to pray for politicians rather than to subscribe to one political belief, we can take that and do the good we feel we each need to do throughout the week. Being linked by that prayer, that call is using faith to move out into our own worlds, on our missions, and it all begins centered on God.

Much like Tom Henry did many years earlier, she relates their common worship experience to one of the deep values they share – inclusiveness. Worship is what brings a diverse group of individuals together and makes of them one people. At the same time, she says, the diversity of the congregation reflects an evolving God:

At St. Paul’s I’ve learned and felt that God is ever-evolving. Individually, our congregants come from many different backgrounds and experiences and churches and denominations. We have varied beliefs and relationships with God. And yet, we meet up in this one space and say the same words of prayer and statement of faith together. I think of God working in the same way -- moving and revealing herself in different ways at different times and then settling in among a people.

She says that the “simple traditions and common core beliefs” of the congregation are a safety net that they can return to when they have been pushed to the limits of faith and have gone into uncomfortable places.

The lens through which the congregation views the world is shaped through the words of the liturgy that it repeats year after year: the covenantal “inseparably bound” language of baptism; and the incarnational language of church membership as God touches the city through their hands. The lens is shaped by the motto of the congregation that reflects its joyful worship in the city as well as the UCC’s openness to a God who is still speaking in the world. It is shaped by the life of Jesus and his call to neighborly love, treating others according to the Golden Rule, especially “the least of these,” whom he
calls brothers and sisters. This theological foundation shapes the way in which they look at mission and outreach. Liturgy and scripture give the lens a shape that’s inclusive, generous, incarnational and urban.

An Inclusive, Generous, Incarnational & Urban Lens

The lens for mission and outreach is first of all inclusive. Coming out of the United Church stream of German Evangelicalism that runs through Pastor John’s Allerwelts-Kirche, and that keeps flowing through the Open and Affirming declaration of the 1980’s, the members of St. Pauls continue to have a strongly inclusive bent in 2013. When asked what causes or issues they support, LGBT equality, women’s rights and civil rights are very important. But being inclusive also reflects a strong commitment to issues of poverty and homelessness. Since God loves everyone, everyone deserves to share in the resources of life; everyone deserves a home and a good education. One woman, for whom GLBT rights are important, said, “Jesus’ call to ‘love one another’ did not have an asterisk next to it with a disclaimer that said ‘except for XYZ people or those who have XYZ beliefs.’” That inclusive love makes equal rights and respectful treatment of all persons important issues for her. She believes that the church should promote skills related to peacemaking and respectful dialogue in the midst of an increasingly divided society. Another young woman comments around inclusion:

I think it’s important to be good to everyone, and nothing sums it up like the good ol’ Golden Rule, something I remember learning in early childhood. It’s always bothered me how people who call themselves “Christians” can turn away certain people, for any reason at all. If there was one person who would accept everyone & anyone, it would have been Jesus.
Because of that inclusive embrace, when she answers the question about what mission God might be calling St. Pauls to engage in, she says, “One thing that St. Pauls would be especially well-equipped to handle would be gay rights. Possibly marriage equality or teenage homeless due to gay ostracization?” GLBT inclusion is often cited by straight members as a reason why they want to raise their families at St. Pauls.

Another member speaks of how she had come to St. Pauls from a place where the church was used to justify excluding her and her family. At St. Pauls she feels at home and accepted:

I think God helps people build connections to one another, providing them with strength and a feeling of support and community. The Open and Affirming philosophy of the congregation enriches all by making sure the church is home to any who care to come. What a wonderful, eclectic combination of folks. There’s never a dull conversation. The sense of respect for others, and for diverse opinions, is refreshing. One of the common denominators that binds the congregation is a belief in caring for others and for the world.

For her, and many others, the inclusive love of God calls a diverse group together, an eclectic mix of people, and God builds the connections between them. Those bonds are strengthened as they engage in outreach together.

Another member believes that the focus on inclusion has been constantly evolving at St. Pauls. She remembers when AIDS struck hard:

It felt like our whole church was shaken to watch men we loved deteriorate and die, as well as to be discriminated against even more than they already had been. It wasn’t enough to be a church that welcomed people no matter their sexuality, we had to fight harder to support those men battling AIDS, to honor their memory and educate kids about what was going on. This was a real call to faith during a time of harsh judgment and fear.

Inclusion means a call to justice. It means a call to love, to support, to educate and to fight on behalf of those who are being marginalized.
Inclusion also means that outreach and mission is not typically done at St. Pauls in a top-down manner. The decision of 1968 was unusual in that it was the direct decision of the Senior Pastor to open up the gym to the protesters, one of the reasons it proved controversial. The ideas for Uhlich and St. Pauls House came up through the women of St. Pauls, gaining support within the wider congregation, the Lincoln Park Community Shelter began quietly through the work of a group of committed volunteers, and outreach at St. Pauls today continues to be as diverse as the congregation and tends to be inspired by lay people. Members are involved in a wide variety of projects: Church School classes, the women’s group, the GLBT group, and the young adults have all engaged independently in mission. Ideas for outreach are often brought by individuals within the congregation who then might enlist the support of likeminded friends and members to get something going. Most recently, a member who volunteers for Vital Bridges, an organization that provides meals for impoverished people living with HIV/AIDS, had noticed a drop in food donations. He inquired about doing a food drive at St. Pauls. The pastors and Outreach Committee lent their support and now church members are invited to bring food every communion Sunday to “share the table of Jesus” with this organization.

A member comments on the diverse callings for outreach within the congregation:

“I believe that we must facilitate the giving of the individuals in our community, so that both they and the recipients benefit. That requires listening to each one's personal calling to serve and doing our best to incorporate it into our giving plan. However, we must also coordinate our efforts so that we maximize our result.” It is the diversity that is within this inclusive community, expressing itself in a variety of outreach projects, that many
members say they find appealing: “We appreciate the variety of outreach that takes place by both members and the church. The varied programs and projects represent a diversity of thought and needs that we find invigorating.”

One couple reflected on the scattered creativity and the grassroots outreach that happens at St. Pauls. If the congregation were told what to do in a more top-down manner, they said, “We do not think the congregation would feel compelled to follow. Nor would it want to do a ‘singular’ thing. We are blessed with too many talents and interests to be so focused.”

Another member sees this lack of focused outreach as a real weakness. She wishes that more members would be engaged in a common mission project:

I think there are individuals at St. Pauls who do wonderful things out of their own motivations, and I assume we could call that God’s work… But I do not see the church as a whole concentrated on something that could be called God’s work, if we are talking about mission and outreach… I think for most of the members who come to worship, their experience at St. Pauls is personal (not a bad thing, certainly), but we are missing a corporate sense of God at work in the church.

This is a minority view in the congregation. People seem to like the variety of what is going on, and most express satisfaction with what the congregation is currently doing. However, her wish to see a corporate outreach endeavor, one that engages the whole congregation, the “next big thing,” finds wide support.

In an example of a grass-roots idea, members remember one elderly woman who at every annual meeting of the congregation would stand up and say that St. Pauls needed a memorial garden for the interment of ashes. She persisted, year after year, until the congregation finally said, “Yes, let’s do it.” And it became a reality. Perhaps the most important example in recent years has been the youth mission trip with the Appalachia Service Project, doing home repair among the rural poor. This began as an idea among a
small group of members. They enlisted some staff support, planned it, recruited the youth and adult team leaders and made it a reality. Now in its eleventh year, the youth mission trip is cited by members who have never participated in it, and who never plan to, as one of the most important expressions of the outreach of the congregation. Like the work of the Shelter 25 years earlier, the whole congregation claims it as a source of pride and supports it financially, even if they are not directly involved.

Tom Henry writes that when he was Senior Pastor outreach came up through the congregation rather than mission being imposed from above:

I worked hard at trust in leadership, both lay and clergy. I didn't want people to take action just because I said we should, but on the other hand I wanted the congregation to trust that I wanted the best for St. Pauls and for them and that “best” meant being a prophetic community in relation to societal issues. I resisted the pressure of some in the congregation and denomination to be a lone prophet!290

The theme of inclusion comes up so often in relation to outreach that it would be impossible to exaggerate its significance. Being an inclusive, Open and Affirming church has shaped the way the people look not just at who they are in terms of welcome, but it also has strong significance for social justice beyond their walls. Because every person is a child of God, every child deserves a good education and support; God loves everyone and so all are equal and deserve the same love; because all are created in God’s image, everyone has a right to food, clothing and housing. At St. Pauls, inclusion and diversity go hand in hand in how they see themselves and how they engage the world.

The lens for mission and outreach is also focused on a sense of generosity that gives out of gratitude and stewardship of God’s good gifts. In narrating the themes of the story of St. Pauls, one young woman said, “I think it began with and by people who had

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290 Tom Henry, email message to author, January 2013.
traveled far, worked hard and were grateful for what they had, especially their heritage, traditions and faith. They therefore perpetuated them and worked to give these good things, and the example of faith they had experienced, to others.” Another credits the ability of the congregation to survive through the lean years of the 1960’s and 1970’s to the generosity of previous generations:

Mostly I see St. Pauls’ life and history as the history of a Christian immigrant community in America. Immigrants devoted to God and their church. There are examples of selflessness in the history of the church in its many structural rebirths. The generosity of its members to the building has endowed the congregation over a long period of time to provide a community to its members and to the neighbors.

Many individuals over many years left gifts in their estates for a Memorial Endowment Fund that would maintain the building. This allowed the congregation to engage in outreach in its community, keeping a full pastoral staff, even when operating at an income deficit.

In addition to seeing generosity as a theme from the past, it recurs as a motivation for outreach in the present. One member says,

[My faith] helps me remember that we have an abundance of gifts that come from God rather than just by our own efforts. It is too easy to end up in trouble if just one thing goes wrong - job loss, illness, disability, personal relationship collapses, or there is a death in the family - which can have a knock-on effect and cause other things to go wrong too. We are called to be a community, to reach out with emotional, financial and practical support - to those within our church and within the larger society, too, who need help.

Another says, “I believe that to whom much is given, much is expected. Therefore I have an obligation to give back to my community.”

This theme of generous giving, done by people who are keenly aware that they are privileged, is as strong in the congregation as the theme of inclusiveness. Just as God’s inclusive love for them calls them to have that same orientation toward the world,
so does a sense of having been given many gifts in life call them to generous giving in their world, sharing time, talents and resources. “I believe I must try to use whatever resources and talents I can bring to the table to love my neighbor and seek justice,” sums up the prevailing attitude.

There are some voices that express that the church is not giving enough. One long-time member, speaking of giving, describes St. Pauls this way: “A large and beautiful church but with too much emphasis on wining and dining ourselves and not devoting enough of our resources to helping others. I know St. Pauls has done a lot of good things, but we are a wealthy congregation and should be doing more.” There are likely many in the congregation who believe that they and others could be giving more, but what comes through clearly is that they do indeed sense a call and an obligation to give generously. “Live Generously” has been the recent stewardship campaign theme. Pastor Emeritus Tom Henry says, “For some members ‘doing good’ is a kind of antidote to the way they feel they have to live and act in a ‘cut throat’ world and to their relative affluence. To whom much is given much will be required.”

**Incarnational** is a third way to describe the faith lens through which members of St. Pauls view mission and outreach. God is encountered in other people, and it is through human beings that God acts in the world. It comes out of the incarnational teaching of Jesus that surfaces repeatedly: “Whatever you have done to the least of these you have done to me” (Mt. 25:40). It flows from their liturgy: “With your love, God will love; with your hands God will touch the city,” and, “We will love you and show you with our lives

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291 Tom Henry, email message to author, January 2013.
how Christians live.” Faith must be lived. It must be performed. Word and deed must be joined together, as every generation of St. Pauls has proclaimed.

One woman says that what attracted her and her husband to St. Pauls was this sort of incarnational faith:

Part of what we enjoy about the church, then and now, is the many ways that St. Pauls members live their faith through volunteering, social outreach, and activism…St. Pauls resonates with the strong belief that God works through people. People care for one another and the world. People live their faith. Faith is active and alive. This has been very refreshing for me after growing up in a church that taught me that God finished speaking when “He” wrote the Bible.

A member sums it up when she says, “In short, when people ask, I simply say folks at St Pauls live the gospel.”

One couple links the desire for “hands on” outreach to the history of the congregation. Founding Uhlich and St. Pauls required physical work. Rebuilding after the Great Chicago Fire, building again in Lincoln Park and then rebuilding after the Christmas 1955 fire may have reinforced the practical, common sense feeling that actions are much more important than words. They say, “Remember, those Germans were farmers up here in Lincoln Park.” Another man relates the history of the congregation to how it has embodied its faith. In the youth mission trip, the Shelter, Uhlich and St. Pauls House he says, “The congregation at St. Pauls not only puts its money where its mouth is, it also puts its hands and hearts where its mouth is.”

Someone who has been active since the early days of the Lincoln Park Community Shelter links that incarnational faith with the story of Jesus: “I think faith/theology/God is played out overall as ‘faith’ through works/actions, rather than simply insular or individual worship. This is not to say that worship is not important, but St. Pauls people, in my experience, like a call to action, seeing Jesus as a servant leader.”
When asked to describe the plot of the St. Pauls story, a member of the Church Council said, “People who show by their actions what a Christian community is about and what God looks like.” Another Council member said, “I try to walk the walk...I would hope that one would know that I am a Christian by my actions. I want my church to identify ways for me to walk the walk and then encourage me/support me in these actions....and of course, it's always more fun to do it with friends/as part of a community.”

There are many comments like this that surfaced. The consensus is that no matter what their level of involvement in the hands-on outreach of the congregation, they believe that faith is to be lived in daily life through compassionate service to others. There are some who would like to see church members engaged in more hands-on outreach. A regular volunteer with the Shelter, and who often sees a last-minute scramble for volunteers, says,

[What is God calling St. Pauls to do?] To get our “hands dirty” and get more physically involved in helping those in need. I believe our members have an obligation to become active in helping those who do not share the same good fortune our congregation has been blessed with. I think financial support is good, but we are woefully short in our hands-on outreach efforts.

Someone who is active in volunteering says, “Personally, I would like to see us more outreach oriented as a congregation,” and she hopes to work toward that end. As in the case of generosity, some think that the people of St. Pauls should be giving more. I suspect that these comments reflect a more general feeling that people should be doing more. Wherever and however the doing is done, a core belief of the congregation is that it is through the hands of the members of St. Pauls that God will touch the city of Chicago. It is an incarnational faith.
That connects to the fourth characteristic of the faith lens for outreach: it is **urban**. St. Pauls is a city church. Born when Chicago was just 6 years old, it has grown up with the city. It chose to remain and rebuild in the city, understanding that their location is part of God’s call. It has a strong sense of place in the city. Thomas Edward Frank, in *The Soul of the Congregation*, writes that churches are uniquely situated to be advocates for a sense of place. “A sense of place is in our bones wherever we work, live and worship. The task is to attend to it and nurture it, in order to enhance the well-being and justice of our communities and world. Churches that worship a God incarnate who loves the whole world can surely find ways to advance this vital sense.”

Their liturgy and slogan both reflect their location: “With your hands God will touch the city.”

“Making a Joyful Sound in the City.” Even though many members travel into the city from the suburbs for worship, they still see Chicago as the primary place for the church’s outreach. The St. Pauls Outreach Timeline (see appendix) shows a consistently urban location. In every new member class at St. Pauls, newcomers view a presentation of St. Pauls’ history as a way of grafting them into the narrative of the church. Its central themes are how the congregation has responded to the challenges of life in Chicago, how they have evolved from being a solely German-American congregation, and how they have made a determined choice to hang on and remain in the city, even while many members were moving away and other congregations in their neighborhood were dying or were leaving.

When asked to describe the plot of the St. Pauls story, Church Council members connect it directly to the story of Chicago:

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- “A congregation of immigrants shapes identity in new world, grows with the city and becomes very mainline progressive congregation – a reflection of the north side of Chicago.”

- “It’s an urban story that centers around people who love art and music and theatre and are very open and affirming of all people.”

- “A group of people that have formed a community of support and faith entwined in the history of Chicago.”

- “A church that started to support the worship needs of German Protestant immigrants, that embraced change to serve a diverse urban congregation, and has managed to survive without abandoning its German heritage.”

- “Serving and surviving in the city through many changes and challenges.”

Part of that urban calling has meant responding to the needs of the church’s location: founding the Uhlich orphanage, St. Pauls House and the Shelter. Like the Good Samaritan coming across a man lying in the ditch, the church had to do something: for orphans of war; seniors without proper housing; hippie youth without a safe place to sleep; an increasing homeless population on their doorstep; the presence of gays and lesbians who came to the city to find a home; a concentrated population of people affected by HIV/AIDS. These issues are not all exclusive to an urban environment, but they were all magnified in the dense population of the city. A member who is an active Shelter volunteer sees the connection in the church’s history:

In terms of the priorities, it seems the church and its people have responded to the most pressing human needs of a particular time/era. And, moreover, we seemed to have responded to fill in a void in service. For example, Uhlich (UCAN) in the Civil War era and the Lincoln Park Shelter when the city did not have a good response for the homeless. In addition, I see the St. Pauls response as perhaps different than others in that we are acting out of faith but not necessarily expecting those receiving services to be people of faith.

Another says,

The congregation has responded primarily to needs in its community. First, by calling a pastor to administer to members needing sacraments. Second, by the
formation of Uhlich Children’s Home to care for orphans of the congregation. Third, by the forming of St. Pauls House to care for the elderly of the congregation. Most recently, in Lincoln Park Community Shelter, to care for the homeless in our community.

In line with the outreach of the past, when current members of St. Pauls are asked what they believe God might be calling the congregation to focus on today, it is consistently urban mission:

- “God is calling us to address hunger, homelessness, gun violence and gay rights, simply because these are issues that so intensely affect Chicago and our neighborhood.”

- “Big question, not sure I have a full or complete answer yet...but it does seem logical being a city church that our opportunity to assist and drive improvements in the lives of the people in our city that have challenges is a unique opportunity for us. For example, while I think raising money and sending people to villages in other parts of the world is important and highly impactful...however, it just feels like we are so close to the “action” here in Chicago that our attention possibly should be focused in our own backyard in order to maximize our impact and positive derivatives that result.”

- “Financial support/ mentoring for inner city children in Christian elementary/high schools might be an option for St. Pauls.”

- “I think we are being called to be a progressive church, a modern Christian church that is open to a DIVERSE population. I think we’re being called to serve in the city of Chicago where great problems such as poverty and gun violence separate our safe community from the reality of many families in Chicago. I think we are called to engage in the solution of this segregation and violence.”

The issues cited as most important in the outreach survey are urban needs. The top five issues specifically named are: homelessness, education in the Chicago Public Schools, hunger/nutrition, LGBTQ equality, and violence prevention/peace-making. These are not all exclusively urban issues, but they are some of the deep needs in Chicago. Many other issues were mentioned that are urban in nature: poverty, social justice, economic disparity, neighborhood vitality. Members are also deeply concerned about
environmental issues, women’s rights, employment, health care justice, immigration, and concerns around parenting and early childhood education.

As the people of St. Pauls work at discerning their future mission in the city, there is a consistent theme that they want to keep close to their historic connections: UCAN (Uhlich), St. Pauls House, the Night Ministry\textsuperscript{293} and the Lincoln Park Community Shelter. And although it is not urban mission, they strongly support the youth mission trip to Appalachia as being good work that at the same time is transformative for the mostly comfortable middle class youth. Some members would like to see an adult mission trip in the future and some speak of the need for a national or international focus to complement the local efforts of St. Pauls. Overall, though, the predominant call they hear from God is urban: through their hands God wants them to continue to touch their city in an inclusive and generous way.

Finding God in the Story

In this snapshot I have taken of how the people of St. Pauls understand their faith in relation to mission and outreach, God is mostly spoken of indirectly. As in the 1980’s, the implicit theology is one of “you just do it.” There is need out there in the city. They

\textsuperscript{293} Although in this project I did not include The Night Ministry as part of the central mission narrative of the congregation, I could have, and others do. St. Pauls helped to found the Ecumenical Night Ministry to minister on the streets of Chicago along with a few other north side congregations in the 1970’s. Many people still remember and talk about this important act of mission. In my experience, it does not, however, appear as frequently as Uhlich, St. Pauls House and the Shelter when people describe the history of their church.
are a gifted, resourceful and well-off congregation and it is their responsibility to do something to meet those needs. God has called them to do good work in the city in which they live.

Although God is typically spoken of indirectly – as one person said, “We’re not Southern Baptists” - that lens through which they view their call to outreach has been shaped by their faith. God is found in their hands. God is also found in the people that Jesus calls them to serve. God’s love for them is a wide, inclusive love, a broad embrace, and so they are called to show that same inclusive love to others. Because that love is inclusive, it embraces diversity. Mission and outreach can and should be engaged in in ways that are as diverse as the ideas and gifts of the congregation. While they support congregation-wide efforts and take pride in them, they are also glad that their outreach reflects the diverse interests and callings within the individual members and smaller groups of the congregation.

When language surfaces that reflects the direct action of God as a character within their stories, it tends to come out of their liturgy. God calls them to be the church. God touches the city with their hands. God is still speaking in the world, not through a divine voice from heaven but in indirect ways, in the needs that they see in the city, in their worship together and in the lives of other members in the congregation. One young woman speaks of how she sees God in the people of the church: an old woman who complained vehemently that the Christmas Eve service had far too much fanfare, and yet tried very hard to get herself into her place in her pew on that night; the confirmation youth who question their beliefs in front of adults who tell them it is absolutely OK to do just that; the pastors when they are all in the Gay Pride Parade and when two moms
baptize their baby before an unflinching congregation. She says, “In the quirkiest, most unpredictable, toughest moments when the people of our church pull through -- that is God at work to me.” Another said, “I see God in the way I and others are welcomed here. In the way people are accepted here. In the way people are invited to be involved here.”

Schreiter writes that the end result of studying a congregation is “a picture of a living community of faith that struggles to be faithful to its understanding of God and God’s purposes for the congregation and for the world.” The members of St. Pauls do earnestly want to be faithful to God’s call in this time and place. They are hopeful and resourceful and imaginative. Overall, they reflect their joyful slogan. How they will continue to engage in mission and outreach in the city is wide open. Many members, though less than I anticipated in this study, would like to see the “next big thing.” Others are happy with what they are currently doing but open to discerning new areas of service to Chicago.

Whatever outreach God calls St. Pauls to engage in, I believe it will find strength in doing so in ways that are intentionally grounded in the lens of its faith. It is a call that is inclusive; it is a generous response to the gifts of God; God’s love is embodied in human love; and it is centered in responding to deep need within its urban context. The words of a woman who grew up at St. Pauls reflect well the spirit of the congregation as it reflects on its past and considers its future:

**Historically, I think St Pauls has tended to reach forward, looking not just at how they can support the current charities and needs of the community around it, but looking at the bigger picture, seeing what is needed and creating new solutions, new dialogue, and new ways of viewing the world around it. And the act of creating this change has in turn changed the members of St Pauls in positive ways. I certainly see this as God working through us to help the world around us.**

294 Schreiter, “Theology in the Congregation,” 27.
and at the same time God working with the world around us to help us personally. God is still speaking and creating and St Pauls seems to listen and take that creating out into the world to make it a better place.

Intersecting with Acts

I ended my study of the Holy Spirit in Acts by using the direct descriptions of the Spirit as promise, gift and witness as a way of organizing its characterization. The promise of the Spirit places the mission of the early Christians in continuity with past and future (Acts 1:4, and 2:33). The gift of the Spirit speaks to the inclusive nature of that promise (2:38-39). It is a gift for all who are called by God. The witness of the Spirit empowers bold speech to share the story of Jesus (5:32) and it confirms God’s inclusive welcome (15:8-9). These three direct descriptions of the Spirit relate well to the different periods in the St. Pauls story: the promise of the Spirit found in the mighty stories of the early days; the witness of the Spirit in the events around August, 1968; the gift of the Spirit in the 1980’s in the inclusive welcome of the homeless into the church and of gays and lesbians into the church.

Today, the St. Pauls community is again characterized by promise as it looks to discern its calling in a new era in its history. Promise connects them to the mighty stories of their past. The same God who inspired the birth of Uhlich Home and St. Pauls House is the same God who calls them to be the church in their own time and place. Gift and
witness also speak to the lens of faith through which contemporary St. Pauls views itself and its world today.

\[\text{A Community of Gift}\]

The gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts reflects God’s free grace, hospitality and welcome. This intersects with the inclusive understanding of God at St. Pauls. It reflects the generous God who has gifted the members of the congregation where, “each person is a gift from God.” They, in turn, feel it their duty to share their gifts with others. Gift also speaks to an incarnational faith. In Acts, the gift of the Spirit fills human beings. In the story of St. Pauls, God is found in people and works through people. God is still speaking through human lives.

In Acts, the gift of the Spirit creates a community of sharing and mutual support (Acts 2:43-47, and 4:32-37). As part of this project, I engaged the committees of St. Pauls in an exercise in intertextuality, putting a story from Acts in conversation with a St. Pauls story and connecting it with St. Pauls today. All of the committees meet on one night. At the opening gathering of about 70 people, everyone was invited to be a part of an activity that would be a part of this project. The text of Acts 4:32-37 was read, in which the Jerusalem church is described as a community of mutual sharing and support. Next, portions of a sermon by Fred Trost, “Proud, Rugged Heritage” (quoted in Chapter 2), was read. It was the sermon he preached at the 99th Anniversary of the founding of Uhlich Children’s Home in which he uses the mighty stories in the founding narrative of Uhlich to encourage his congregation to bold action in the present. After reading these texts in
the opening gathering, everyone split off into their respective committees and engaged the same questions: how does the community described in Acts resemble their own ideas about an ideal church? How is the story from Acts similar or different to St. Pauls today? The committee chairs led the discussions and reported on what they heard.

Themes that described their vision of an ideal church included: unity without conformity; the need to be well-resourced; always learning and exploring; support, welcome, love and care; a shared sense of mission or purpose; faith that is not insular but that reaches out in action. When they compared the Acts community to their own, they mostly saw areas of commonality. These are some of the things that they said:

- St. Pauls does make an effort to give back, as in the Pastor’s Emergency Fund, but the Acts congregation gave up everything to distribute equally; we’re not giving up a great deal for those who are poorer. But, there is unity, and our people come together.

- Like Acts, we are part of a community that gives readily and we are supportive of each other. And while we don’t sell our homes, we give in many other ways to support the church and those who are in it.

- I like how the people in this story care for each other. Hearing these stories [of Acts and the founding of Uhlich Home] inspires me and makes me wonder what big things we can do.

- It struck me that the people in the Acts story are able to make their needs known to the rest of the church. It’s a safe place. That’s not like the church I grew up in. At St. Pauls, though, there are people that I know that I can call on for help if I need it.

- The way they live is so opposite of our country and the American way of life. This is a radical community. I like their openness and that there’s no power struggle.

- We do have needy persons among us. We give the church some of our resources and the pastors give it to the poor and those in need.

- It makes me stop and think about priorities. The Acts church reminds me of the kind of people who started Habitat for Humanity.
- There is an excitement in taking initial risks; for example in the creation of the Shelter.

- The Acts church reminds me of when we hosted a refugee family and prepared for their arrival by furnishing and apartment.

- Different: we are more scattered. We have more priorities than just the wellbeing of the church, including social and community concerns. Our members seem to be more involved in the world and not just the church, but it would be great if we had a more common mission that everyone is involved in.

- Like them, we’re big on documenting our story.

Given the nature of this project, that last comment was utterly appropriate.

Themes that had emerged in my interviews and survey of church members are consistent with what come up in their response to this activity. Some members expressed a desire to do something “big” again as a congregation. There is a sense that St. Pauls could be doing and giving more. At the same time, others think that they are currently doing a good job. The responses strongly reflect the values of inclusiveness and generosity that came out of the interviews.

Hearing the excerpt from Pastor Trost’s sermon alongside the description of the early church sparked a connection between Acts and their own story of mission. They cite experiences with Habitat for Humanity, work with a refugee family and the starting of the Lincoln Park Community Shelter. The Shelter is a powerful piece of memory and identity. While the gift theme of sharing and support in the church was present, the discussions moved beyond taking care of one’s own to a desire to see the people of St. Pauls involved in a church-wide project of mission, another “next big thing.”

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[295] Although not referred to in this project, Habitat for Humanity and refugee sponsorship have also been part of the St. Pauls history of outreach.
A Community of Witness

Characterization of the Spirit as witness in Acts, inspiring bold, prophetic speech, has less correlation to the St. Pauls of 2013, at least in terms of a congregation-wide justice witness beyond Open and Affirming. Witness does, however, intersect with the incarnational facet of the lens. The people of St. Pauls are not as interested in saying the gospel as they are in doing the gospel. They want to show with their lives how Christians live more than talk about it. Witness is embodied. The word becomes flesh. Indeed, the prologue of John 1 is an important part of the congregation’s liturgy. Portions of it are read every Christmas Eve at a dramatic moment when the church is darkened at the beginning of the worship service and the Christmas Candles are about to be lit, “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). It is read again at the other end of the liturgical cycle on Good Friday, at the service of tenebrae, when the church is gradually darkened while the passion narrative is read. After the death of Jesus has been read, and the last candle has been snuffed out, the congregation sits in total darkness and hears these words from John 1:

In the beginning was the Word.
And the Word was with God.
And the Word was God.
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
Full of grace and truth.
The Word was Light, the Light of the world.
But this is the judgment:
The Light had come into the world,
But the world loved darkness rather than light.

Word takes on flesh. Just as Jesus embodied God’s word in the world, the witness of St. Pauls is embodied in the city.
In reflecting on the themes that emerge out of the St. Pauls story, Herb Davis, Assistant Pastor in the 1960’s, said this:

The Incarnation. The affirmation of the creation, the union of Flesh and Spirit, The Word become flesh! I remember Dr. Grauer [seventh Senior Pastor of St. Pauls] saying that when the church burned down in 1955 he wanted to build a church nave that would house a million dollar organ. The union of a great mechanical instrument with human voice, choirs and congregational singing, as a sign of the Word become flesh. The building of an institution in the midst of the city, Word become flesh. No spiritual withdrawal from the life of the city, a presence, God with us. Not pure spirit but reach of the spirit and pull of the flesh.  

Here Davis links that incarnational theology of the congregation to its worship. Their hands do touch the city, but their voices also witness to the word through their worship. It is the joyful sound of God’s word becoming flesh through their voices and through their daily lives.

*Samariter-Liebe*
Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Lent

The sociologist of religion Nancy Ammerman writes that all congregations tell stories about themselves. Certain stories rise to the level of myths that ground our history in something bigger. At St. Pauls we definitely have our mythic stories, and every class of new members hears them - the founding of Uhlich Children’s Home and St. Pauls House and rebuilding after two fires. Those stories speak of hard work and resilience, of survival and hope.

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296 Herb Davis, email message to author, January 2013.
As I’ve gotten to know the stories of this congregation, they’ve reminded me of the stories about the early Christians found in the book of Acts. Acts is about the first generation of Christians after Easter. And like the history of St. Pauls, you find the church in Acts engaging in outbursts of mission. We have very little direct information from those early years. What we do know is that Christianity went from being nothing in the year 25 to 100 years later being enough trouble for the Roman Empire that they had an official policy for punishing Christians.

The first church was in Jerusalem. I initially thought that St. Pauls was like the Jerusalem church, because it was the mother church that gave birth to other congregations. But the more I’ve thought about it, the more I believe that we are not like the Jerusalem church but another congregation, the church in Antioch. Antioch was the Chicago of the Roman Empire. It was the third largest city, after Rome and Alexandria. It was a crossroads, like the city where the railroads meet and where the ships dock at the tip of Lake Michigan.

First United Church of Antioch was founded by people who had left their homeland, people who were displaced and uprooted, like the immigrants who founded St. Pauls. Antioch was a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city. And it was the first multicultural church. Like St. Pauls today, its members varied widely in terms of beliefs. They had to figure out what it meant for a diverse group of people, from many different backgrounds, to be a church. Antioch was the place that followers of Jesus were first called Christians.

The word Christian didn’t originally mean a believer in Christianity. And it wasn’t a name that Christians chose themselves. It was first used as an insult by
outsiders. Christian was the sort of label that got applied to people who followed somebody’s politics – like McCarthyite or Reaganite or Marxist. Christianity was understood as a political movement, a movement about how you live your life with other people. Their only creed was “Jesus is Lord.” That meant, “We take the direction for our lives from Jesus and not Caesar.” The earliest Christians called themselves followers of the Way. They were people who walked a certain pathway, who had a distinct way of life.

Today we heard that Saul, who just a couple of chapters ago was persecuting Christians, is now one of them himself, and he’s already a teacher in the church in Antioch. The ordination process was clearly much less complicated back then. The book of Acts doesn’t tell us what those early Christians were being taught, but we can guess that they were trying to figure out what it meant to follow in the way of Jesus. They were listening to the stories that would eventually be compiled in the Gospels, like the story of the Good Samaritan that we also heard.

One of the first things that this young church does is to send two of their members on a mission trip. A man named Agabus stands up at the annual meeting of the congregation and prophesies by the Holy Spirit that a famine was coming, an economic disaster. I wonder what prophecies we’ll hear today at our annual meeting?

When they realize that a famine is coming, the first impulse of the United Church of Antioch might have been to cut the budget, hold on to their reserves. But instead, they take up a special offering. They increase their giving to outreach and benevolence. They ask, “Who is this economic crisis going to hurt the most? Who is most vulnerable? How can we help?” Hunger is about social class. Famines affect those who don’t have the
savings to ride them out. And the thoughts of this congregation immediately turn toward the poor.

The politics of the Empire is about protecting its own interests and power. The politics of Jesus means looking out for the least among us. In the words of our baptism liturgy, this was how the church in Antioch would show with their lives how Christians live.

Like the stories in Acts, the early days of St. Pauls Church were written down many years after they occurred. Pastor Rudolf John began writing a newsletter in 1890, and he was the one who really began to write down the oral history of the congregation. When John writes about the founding of the Uhlich orphanage during the Civil War, he says it was the women of St. Pauls who anticipated the need and made it happen. Like Agabus, standing up and prophesying that a famine was coming, John says that God whispered the idea of an orphanage into the ears of the women of St Pauls. Their world was at war and so they asked, “Who is this crisis going to hurt the most? Who is most vulnerable? How can we help?” John also credits the women of his generation for coming up with the idea to create a home to care for the elderly, St. Pauls House. Angels, he said, were whispering in their ears. The women dreamed the dreams and saw the visions. Eventually the male leadership came on board.

The women of St. Pauls formed a group called the Frauenverein, or Women’s Society. John’s wife Emilie was the first leader of that group. Their motto was “Do good to all.” They weren’t just active in the orphanage. They went from home to home touched by poverty to help, comfort and advise. They provided financial assistance - rent, groceries, shoes, clothing. There’s even a record that they collected money to provide
someone with an artificial leg and helped him find a job. They express confidence that the blessing of Jesus would be on their work. They knew that faith is about more than beliefs. Faith is about how you live your life.

In reading the old St. Pauls newspapers from 100 years ago, one of the stories that gets repeated again and again is the Good Samaritan. Emilie John calls their work an act of Samariter-Liebe, or Samaritan-Love. The story shaped how they lived their lives. I have a hunch that those early Christians in Antioch knew that story as well.

Samaritan-Love. It’s a particular kind of love. You know the story: a lawyer jumps up and quizzes Jesus, “Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus says, “Well, what do you think?” The lawyer says, “Love God and love your neighbor.” Jesus says, “You’re right.” The lawyer’s got his doctrine right. His beliefs are in order. He’s orthodox. But anyone can say what they believe. It’s faith that matters, because what you really put your faith in determines how you’ll live.

Looking for a loophole in the law, the lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor?” And Jesus answers the question with the parable. It begins with a certain man, robbed, beaten up and left half naked in the ditch. It’s just a certain man. He could be anybody. He could be nobody. We don’t know his religion or ethnicity, whether he’s gay or straight, Republican or Democrat. He’s just a certain man. A human being.

A priest walks by and then a Levite. Levites worked in the temple as assistants to the priest, like associate pastors. So, a Senior Pastor comes driving down the road. She sees the man lying beat up and half-naked in the ditch; she puts the pedal to the metal and keeps on driving. Next, an Associate Pastor drives by, moves away from the shoulder and into the center lane and keeps on driving. Jesus doesn’t tell us their motives. He doesn’t
tell us why they didn’t stop to help, but I’m certain that the clergy had excellent reasons. The Senior Pastor had a sermon to write or a committee meeting to get to. The Associate Pastor had a Doctor of Ministry project to finish. Perfectly good reasons. Undoubtedly, one of them called 911 as they drove by.

Then a Samaritan comes along. Despite the name of this parable, Samaritans were not considered good. Unlike the lawyer, they were unorthodox heretics. They would not have passed the theology quiz.

The Samaritan comes driving by. He’s on a business trip. He’s got somewhere to be. He sees the man, lying half-naked in the ditch, and he’s moved with compassion. That’s the only difference between the three men. Compassion. It’s the one word on which this whole story turns. He was moved with compassion.

In the ancient world they didn’t think that your emotions were in your heart, but in your guts. Right in the pit of your stomach. That’s what the word literally says here. When the Samaritan saw the man lying in the ditch he could feel it in his guts.

That word is used only three other times in the Gospel of Luke. The first time it’s about God who sees the pain of sin and death in our world. God is deeply moved with compassion and has to do something about it and so God comes to us in Jesus. The second time, it’s Jesus who sees a widow weeping over the death of her only son and he’s moved in his guts with compassion over her grief. The last time this word is used is in another parable – the one about a father who sees his prodigal son coming in the distance. The son has wasted his life; he has squandered his dad’s money, and has become a miserable failure. But when the father sees his son in the distance, coming home, he is moved with deep compassion for his son, right in the gut.
That’s Samaritan-Love. Samaritan love is God’s love. It’s about what we do with what we see. It’s a love that’s moved with compassion over the suffering of another human being. Samaritan-Love dares to be bothered. It dares to stop, to get involved, to get mixed up in someone else’s pain and do something. It’s the very love of God that we meet in Jesus.

That story of Samaritan-Love was powerful at St. Paul’s 100 years ago. It shaped the lives of the women and men who reached out in compassion to this city. And it remains a powerful story here. It turned up more than once in the Outreach Survey that many of you completed.

Sue Finkle, our Youth Education Chair, who grew up at St. Paul’s, told me about her father Bill. Bill Rieck was baptized at St. Paul’s in 1919. Rudolf John was still pastor. Bill taught Sunday School here for 50 years. His favorite parable was the Good Samaritan. Sue said, “He told this story to us more times than I can count, and he really tried to live it, in a literal way. We spent a lot of time when I was a kid, driving back and forth from Chicago to Des Plaines, both to church and to the family hardware store on Grand and Pulaski. Whenever we passed someone on the highway or road who had pulled over because of some problem, very often a flat tire, my Dad would pull over and take a look. If it was someone who looked like they were able to take care of the problem, we would continue on our way. But if not, we always stopped. It could be freezing cold, pouring rain, we could be running very late for something, but we always stopped and my Dad would go and help.

He changed dozens of tires, once even giving away our spare tire because the stranded person didn’t have one. We drove people to the nearest service station so they
could get help. He made sure they were taken care of before we moved on. My mom would complain, we would be late again, but we always stopped and helped. Even today, I cannot pass a stalled car without thinking about stopping. My dad worked very hard his entire life and never really had a lot, but he was always willing to give things away. The story of the Good Samaritan resonated with him, and through his example, resonates in me.”

The stories that we put our faith in have the power to shape our lives. Certain stories rise to the level of myths that ground our own lives in something bigger. They connect our lives to a much longer story – the story that Bill Rieck tried to live out, and Emilie John, and the early Christians in Antioch, all the way back to the storyteller himself, Jesus.

Like that first church in Antioch, St. Pauls is a diverse congregation. Our beliefs range from Evangelical to Agnostic. But whatever diverse beliefs we might have, compassion is always at the heart of a church that wants to follow in the way of Jesus, because compassion is the heart of God. As we look around at our city and we wonder, “How will we show with our lives how Christians live?” Then we have to ask questions, just as Christians have asked since we were first called by that name. Who are the most vulnerable? Who is it that’s been robbed, beaten up and left half naked in the ditch? Who are people walking right past and leaving for dead? If we allow the compassion of God to move us, then we will know the answer to those questions, because we’ll feel it in our gut.
CONCLUSION

Our self-representation, the way we define who we are, also takes the shape of the life story we tell. What we remember, what we stress as significant, and what we omit of our past defines our present. And since the boundaries of our self-determination also delimit our hopes and aspirations, this personal history affects our future.297

- Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters*

Gerder Lerner’s comment applies not only to a personal narrative but also to a corporate narrative, the story of a group of people. The life story of a congregation defines what it is and affects its future. But a congregation’s story is not limited to the years of its particular time and place. It is wrapped up within the larger story of God at work in the world. Both the Acts of the Apostles and members of St. Pauls Church remember and omit certain events, and the stories they tell are told for particular purposes. Luke wrote what he did in order to legitimate the Gentile mission and Paul’s ministry, as well as to make Christianity credible in the Roman Empire. The St. Pauls stories are also selectively narrated with specific aims in mind. Events of survival, overcoming odds, and meeting pressing needs in a changing world are shaped and retold by pastors and parishioners in each generation to inspire the contemporary congregation to meet the needs of its own day through hard, committed work and an optimistic, joyful

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spirit. This project has constructed another narrative to accompany the many other narratives that the people of St. Pauls tell.

When I anticipated this project, I had a hunch that stories from Acts and St. Pauls would intersect in significant ways, and they have. Both tell stories that reflect a spirit of promise, gift and witness at work – the promise of God’s faithfulness that connects one generation to another; the gift of God’s inclusive welcome to humanity in all its diversity; the witness of God through women and men who seek to be faithful to following in the way of Jesus in their time and place. That continuity, over 2000 years of separation, is evidence of God at work, and of the power of the story of Jesus to shape each generation of those who feel called to follow in his way.

In my reading, the Acts of the Apostles and the St. Pauls stories connect most strongly around the theme of inclusiveness. When I began this project, I imagined that St. Pauls would most closely resemble the first church in Jerusalem, because of the history of St. Pauls in giving birth to other congregations. But in the course of the work, I have changed my mind. St. Pauls most closely resembles the description in Acts of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30), a diverse, inclusive church that becomes a center of mission.

Digging deeply into the stories of Acts and of St. Pauls Church has given me an enriched understanding of and appreciation for both narratives, and has allowed me to offer another perspective on their story to the people of St. Pauls. A thick description of the theology that has grounded their history of mission and outreach had not been written to this extent before, and this work has provided some new raw material, new capital for them to work with, as they re-envision their future outreach together. I anticipate drawing regularly from this work in the near future as the congregation discerns new areas of
ministry in Chicago. One of the tasks I will be working on in the coming year is to explore together with the St. Pauls leadership, including the Church Council, Outreach Committee and its Faith and Public Issues group, how the strengths of St. Pauls might best address a specific need in its urban setting. I hope that the experience of this project will be put to good use right away as we look to see how, as in the past, the gifts of the congregation can best meet an unmet need in the city.

Along with coming to better understand the faith that grounds the mission of St. Pauls, one of the joys of this work was to re-discover some of the congregation’s forgotten stories. I have uncovered some “mighty stories” that are not necessarily related to mission and outreach and which were no longer being talked about at St. Pauls. That has been part of the generative nature, as well as one of the distractions, of this work. Using narratives that are outside of the main events that are typically recited has allowed me to tell their stories as a resource for reflection in new ways. After preaching a sermon I would often hear someone say, “I’d never heard that story before.” Some of those stories are not included in this project because I used them to intersect with texts other than Acts that have come up in the lectionary. I found stories that ranged from the heartbreaking to the macabre. In a Father’s Day sermon I told the forgotten story of the death of Rudolf and Emilie John’s teenage son Theo and the impact it had on the congregation, and how the members ministered to the Johns in the midst of their deep grief. Although most people knew about the 1968 gym opening, carrying the cross into Lincoln Park was a part of that story that many had never heard. It allowed some to hear the events of 1968 narrated for the first time in a positive light, rather than remembered merely for the conflict it generated. I uncovered the story of a sort of St. Pauls Sweeney
Todd, one that no one in the congregation remembered. Adolf Luetgert, a sausage-maker, murdered his wife Louise in 1897 in the ovens of his sausage works. They had been married by Pastor Hartmann. The case was solved by another member of the church, Herman Schuettler, who would later become the Chicago Police Superintendent.\textsuperscript{298}

Which lectionary text to pair this story with remains, however, unclear.

In addressing the question of whether or not history has any meaning, the philosopher Karl Popper wrote, “We must find our justification in our work, in what we are doing ourselves, and not in a fictitious ‘meaning of history’…Although history has no meaning, we can impose those ends of ours on it; and although history has no meaning we can give it a meaning.”\textsuperscript{299} Through the lens of faith, the work of Christians in the stories of Acts and in the stories of St. Pauls gives them a meaning that is a part of God’s story with the world. That meaning is signaled in Acts by the presence of the Holy Spirit. That meaning at St. Pauls is signaled through the language of its liturgy and the story of Jesus.

Popper’s words remind me of the members of St. Pauls who, working quietly and in the background, did the right thing simply because it was the right thing. One woman was thrilled that she was able to share her story about how much it had meant to her to work as a volunteer in the early days of the Shelter. It was an experience she had never articulated before and she was glad to have someone listen. History, Popper said, cannot tell us what we ought to do. However, stories from the congregation’s past that speak of

\textsuperscript{298} See Robert Loerzel, \textit{Alchemy of Bones: Chicago’s Luetgert Murder Case of 1897} (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

people making decisions in their own time and place to promote justice and healing in the
city can give a fresh perspective on how to be faithful in our own context, especially
when heard alongside the older narrative of scripture. The story of Jesus is one of self-
giving love. That’s not the kind of story that typically gets written up as history, yet his
story shaped the lives of his followers and continues to shape the ongoing narrative of
what it means to follow him.

We might be successful in creating something like Uhlich or St. Pauls House, the
“next big thing”, but our success in history and whether or not we are remembered in the
mythic stories does not determine the rightness of an action. The action is an end in itself.
Getting into the “textbooks of history,” Popper writes, cannot possibly be the morality of
those who favor equality and justice: “For the historical frame cannot be just, and it can
be attained by only a very few. The countless number of men (sic) who are just as
worthy, or worthier, will always be forgotten.” Lifting up forgotten stories reminds us
of the anonymous people who are not in the official narratives, people who did the right
thing simply because it was right. Listening to stories of people who were not in
leadership and not the main storytellers of the congregation gives voice to the faithful
lives that are lived at the margins of a community.

Writing 100 years ago, Pastor John thought that St. Pauls needed to do something
that the whole world would notice and appreciate. Yet when he wrote of the many
members of the Frauenverein, whose names are no longer remembered, he said, “They
forgot themselves and served others. Jesus sees it surely, and that is enough.” They did
forget themselves, but their names were also forgotten by the congregation. To be fair,

300 Popper, The Open Society, 255.
John did honor them in the pages of the Bote, but there is a tension in the St. Pauls narrative between wanting to do something big that others will see and notice, and of doing what is right whether anyone sees or not. Jesus remembers, but it is important that the congregation also remembers the stories of the forgotten or marginalized, and the stories of those who were not in leadership. I have attempted to do some of that in my sermons, highlighting the words of the youth in the congregation, Emily Wahlenmeyer, who spoke words of calm in the storm of 1968, remembering Bill Rieck who took the Good Samaritan literally.

The greatest benefit of this project was not the Acts study. It was digging deeply into the story of St. Pauls and fleshing out details of the narrative that had been forgotten. I hope that those stories can continue to be remembered as a resource, whatever scripture text shows up in the lectionary. The other great benefit was to try to construct a thick reading of how the congregation understands its call to mission and outreach today. The biblical texts that have been most influential in the congregation, and that continue to come up in contemporary interviews, were stories and verses from the Gospels: the Good Samaritan, the Great Commandment, the Golden Rule, portions of the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7 and the “least of these” verses from Matthew 25. An alternative way of doing a project such as this would be to look first for those Bible stories that turn up repeatedly and powerfully within the congregation’s stories, and then use those texts as a basis for looking at intertextuality – in sermons, Bible studies and even strategic planning. Those stories already reside organically within the congregational narratives. I did some of that in the last sermon when, in addition to a text from Acts, I deliberately used the Good Samaritan story. When I began this study, I had no idea what, if any, Bible
stories I might find. But they were there. Working on this project allowed me to listen to and give voice to some congregational stories that were on the margins and to identify biblical texts that are already within their own narrative, and it inspires me to look further for forgotten stories in the congregation that I serve and to bring them to the surface as a resource. Another potential of this project lies within the congregation itself: to provide more opportunities for them to tell their stories as ones in which God is an active character and to situate their lives within the larger working of God in the world.

St. Pauls continues to wonder about what it will be and do in the future in regard to mission and outreach. Pastor Fitzgerald has done good work in exploring the hopes of the parishioners and has involved the associate pastors in that work as well. I have been welcomed and encouraged to bring the findings of this research into that conversation. We are finding a consistency in themes, and the work of this project is helping us to think about how we look at potential areas of mission in our city for the future – asking questions about what need is right in front of us that we can do something about, using the gifts that God has given this congregation and its values of inclusiveness and generosity. Church members are eager for God to continue to touch the city with their hands. That, in the end, was the goal of this project: that the stories of the past can be a resource as the people of St. Pauls seek God’s guidance to be faithful, creative and courageous in their generation.
Appendix 1
St. Pauls Outreach History Timeline

1843: St Pauls Church founded
1850: Clergy protests fugitive slave law
1860’s: Founding of Uhlich Home
1860’s: St Pauls founds three new churches
1859: Helps found German United Evangelical Synod
1873: Members rebuild after the Great Chicago Fire
1898: St Pauls moves to Lincoln Park
1910’s: Dorcas Society supports mission
1921: St Pauls House opened
1926: Pastor Pister supports religious tolerance for World Eucharistic Conference
1920’s: Support of German war refugees
1920’s: *Bote* protests anti-Japanese prejudice
1940’s: Compassion urged toward Germans & Japanese
1952: Parish House dedicated as community center
1950’s: Rebuilds in the city after another fire
1950’s: Pastor Gerhard Grauer helps form UCC
1960’s: Low-income apartments at 638 Kemper, Friendly Seniors, Common Pantry, St Pauls School for the Retarded and Cluster on Vine affordable housing
1968: Women can serve and vote on church council
1968: Vietnam War protesters welcomed into church
1972: Pastors support amnesty for war protesters

1975: Refugee family from Indochina sponsored

1975: Founding of the Night Ministry

1970’s: Vision of church building’s use as benevolence

1970’s: Lincoln Park After School Center

1970’s: Chapel used for new congregations

1970’s: Sanctuary used for community music

1970’s: Bible story theatre begins

1980’s: Sarah’s Sisters begin feeding ministry

1989: Officially Open and Affirming

1991: Building becomes handicapped accessible

1990’s: AIDS ministry

1990’s: Faith and Public Issues Taskforce formed

2000’s: Interfaith dialogue groups are formed


2000’s: Tibetan refugee family sponsored

2000’s: A founding congregation in the Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches

2010: “gender identity” added to ONA statement

2010: First rummage sale; includes an outreach to the poor

2000’s: Summer youth mission trips begin

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Tom Henry, *Making a Joyful Sound in the City*, was used as a resource for the pre-1993 events on this timeline.
Appendix 2

Human Subjects Research Protocol

The main research for this project was conducted at St. Pauls United Church of Christ, 2335 N Orchard St, Chicago IL. Research began in August, 2010, and lasted through March, 2013. This research was approved and enthusiastically supported by the St. Pauls Church Council as the idea behind it was to be a resource for the congregation in future mission and outreach.

Data was collected using St. Pauls Church archival material, through interviews, an online survey of the congregation, a leadership questionnaire, two focus groups and an activity that engaged the congregation’s committee members.

1. Pastoral Interviews: Six former pastors of St. Pauls were interviewed via emails, and two included face-to-face interviews. They were informed that this was for a Doctor of Ministry project at Eden Theological Seminary, the nature of the project, and that their responses might be quoted as part of this work and would not be anonymous. Each pastor was asked questions related to their understanding of the narrative and theology behind St. Pauls’ history of mission and outreach, with an emphasis on the period of their ministries at St. Pauls:
• How did the congregation’s, and your own, understanding of faith/theology/God influence the mission and outreach of St. Pauls while you were here?
• How did faith/theology/God influence the decision to [engage in the specific outreach of their era]? What sort of discernment process did the leadership of St. Pauls go through?
• How did you see God/Holy Spirit at work?
• How did you explain [the specific outreach of the period] to the congregation theologically/biblically?
• How do you think that the outreach of your era fits into the larger history of St. Pauls?
• If the history of St. Pauls were a literary work, what would you say that the story is about? What themes emerge?
• How does God enter into the narrative of the St. Pauls story, in particular in relation to the mission and outreach of the congregation?

2. Congregation-Wide Survey: A web-based survey called “St. Pauls Mission and Outreach Survey” was sent out to the email list of the entire congregation. The introduction to the survey said that responses would be used as part of this Doctor of Ministry project. It also said that the results would be used by the church’s Outreach Committee to plan future mission and outreach, and that if they wished to be contacted they could leave their name. All responses are quoted anonymously. The survey asked:

• What is your age? Gender?
• How long have you attended St. Pauls?
• What area of the city or suburbs do you live in?
• What groups, committees or special events do you participate in at St. Pauls?
• What other organizations do you volunteer with and in what capacity?
• What specific outreach projects have you participated in through St. Pauls?
• What causes or issues are important to you? For example, hunger, homelessness, the environment, etc…
• How does your faith influence the issues that are important to you?

• What mission and outreach do you think God might be calling St. Pauls to engage in and why?

• In addition to the organizations we currently partner with, are there others that you think would be a good fit for St. Pauls to support financially and/or through hands-on outreach?

2. Leadership Questions: In addition to the survey, current leaders, past council presidents, Outreach chairs, active volunteers, and individuals who had grown up at St. Pauls were asked to answer a few focused questions. They were informed of the nature of this project and that their responses would be part of it. Responses are quoted anonymously. I interviewed three people directly for whom an oral interview was preferably, but asked them the same questions. The questions were:

• How long have you been attending St. Pauls?
• How do you think the congregation’s understanding of faith/theology/God are expressed in the mission and outreach priorities of St. Pauls Church, both currently and in the past?
• How do you see God at work in the life and history of St. Pauls, especially in relation to mission and outreach?
• If the history of St. Pauls were a literary work, what would you say that the story is about? What themes emerge?
• What do you think God is calling us to be and do as a congregation?

3. Focus Groups: I assembled two focus groups to discuss identical questions. One group included a variety of members who are currently not in official leadership, representing different ethnicities, gender, sexual orientation and length of church membership. The other group was the St. Pauls Church Council. They were informed that this activity was
a part of this project, and their answers are quoted anonymously. Each group was engaged in a discussion of the same three questions:

- Describe an experience of outreach or mission (as part of St. Pauls) that you found to be meaningful
- If the Story of St. Pauls were a book you were reading, what would you tell a friend that the story is about?
- How do you see God in the story of St. Pauls?

4. Committee Night

Most of the committees that do the work of St. Pauls meet the first Monday of the month. I invited them all to engage in an activity that intersected a text from Acts with the St. Pauls story that would also be able to relate to the unique work of each committee. They were told that this activity was a part of my DMin project. Their answers are used anonymously. At the opening gathering, when everyone meets as a large group, I introduced the activity. Acts 4:32-35 was read as well as portions of a sermon written in the 1960’s by Frederick Trost on the occasion of the 99th Anniversary of Uhlich Children’s Home. The committees then divided up into their various groups. Before they did the actual work of their committees, the committee chairs took notes as they led discussions of these questions:

- Some people think that the passage from Acts is a description of an ideal church community. Describe your concept of an ideal church.
- How is the group described in Acts 4:32-35 similar to and different from our group?
- What are some of the resources that our group members can share with one another as we do our work together?

This research was done with the benefit of the congregation in mind, to lift up their understanding of mission and outreach, to provide for them a thick description of the faith that grounds it, and to offer them a resource as they look toward outreach in the future.

Bach, J.S. "Cantata BWV 147." Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben.


John, R. "Fifty Years a Minister." In The House Boat: Devoted to the Interests of St. Pauls House, a Churchly Home for the Aged, July-August 1928.


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