

HOLY CROSS
LUTHERAN CHURCH
ATHENS, GEORGIA
A HISTORICAL SKETCH

BY

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PRESENTED TO PASTOR DAVID L. HART
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RETIREMENT
MARCH 1982 – MAY 2008
BY THE PEOPLE OF HOLY CROSS

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CHAPTER ONE

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First Words

On a cool, cloudy day in early October 1960, a motorcade left the Georgian Hotel in downtown Athens and drove exactly two miles west out the Atlanta Highway to a three-acre site in what was almost country property. The cars contained a community of faith—a group that had been a mission development of the United Lutheran Church in America since 1955 and was breaking ground for its first sanctuary and educational building.

The small congregation had high hopes and a dream. They had for more than three years been approaching the minimum size for membership as a church in the ULCA, but each time the goal was in sight, a family might move, or a member would leave. On this Oct. 2, however, dreams had begun to come true. The church had been meeting for several months in the ballroom of the hotel, and this morning, the Rev. Raymond Wood, president of the Georgia-Alabama Synod of the UCLA, was on hand to preach the sermon and lead the congregants to the ceremonial groundbreaking.

In December 1959, the Rev. Arne Markland had been officially installed as the first ULCA pastor in Clarke County history, though his congregation was still receiving mission support and would do so for some years. Dr. Wood had presided over that installation, too, and, in fact, Wood had visited Athens often from his Atlanta office, determined to see the creation of a new church. By early 1960, the congregation was working hard in committees toward raising funds for a church building, and by May, the small group had entered the final phase of a pledge drive.

While the church that would become Holy Cross Lutheran was getting off the ground, significant changes were afoot in the denomination itself. While the Georgia-Alabama Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America had been around for a century, the country was dotted with much-smaller groups that were seeking to gain strength in numbers by uniting with the ULCA. There was the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, and even the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Merger talks had been going on for many months, and the new national church, when it came together by January 1, 1963, would have 3.2 million members—a substantial church, though not close to the other staples of Protestantism in the South, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians.

While change was accelerating at the national level, the Athens congregants were prayerfully excited, too. After meeting at two locations in the city’s Five Points area for several years, the church had moved its Sunday school and worship to the Georgian Hotel’s large ballroom on July 31, and on September 4 had voted during a congregational business meeting to accept the bid of the C. C. Robertson Construction Company for the group’s first church building. The design would be “contemporary,” and the structure would have central heating and air conditioning.

A new church was beginning, and now, nearly half a century later, it continues to be a witness to Christ’s love in Athens and northeast Georgia.

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HOW DOES ONE WRITE THE STORY OF A CHURCH? Should it be like a series of historical markers or should it breathe with the memories of those who have been there along the

way? In truth, church histories tend to become dry recitations of facts. What must we celebrate and when? For instance, Holy Cross began as a mission development in 1955, so 2005 actually marked the 50th anniversary of the church, though it was not a formal congregation until 1959. An early church memoirist said that “At one point it [getting to the point of being a full formal church] seemed futile, but perseverance paid off, and the powers that be finally decided that we were not to be defeated and allowed us to organize with 45 confirmed members and 64 baptized members on February 15, 1959.”

Thus, the actual 50th anniversary will be in February 2009. Whatever the date or dates, all members now—and those still living from the past—will agree that we have much for which to be thankful, much to celebrate. Though the last remaining charter member of Holy Cross still on its membership rolls passed away in 2003, many members still worship here who have been with the church for three decades and more.

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THERE WAS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION WE HAD TO ASK WHEN WE started compiling this history of Holy Cross: Who is it for? Current members? Prospective members? New members? In fact, how does this congregation fit with the national community of fellow believers? Who are we and what do we believe?

Such rhetorical questions could go on for many pages, but it seems self-evident that in order to know who we are and from where we have come, we must know what the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is now. We are a group of faith that has grown through mergers and new members to a body of more than 6 million now.

We will come back presently to the origins of Holy Cross itself, but it's important, we believe, to trace the history of the ELCA itself briefly. The denomination's own brief

description, excerpted here, is essential. It may surprise new members (and some veteran ones!) to know that the ELCA was formed only in 1988, through mergers of existing synods and long, prayerful deliberation through meetings and the local, regional, and national levels.

So, here is a condensed history of who we are and how we got here. Don't be thrown by all the acronyms—they are the best evidence of the rich cultural and religious past of our synod.

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“THE ELCA, ALONG WITH OTHER LUTHERAN CHURCHES, CAN TRACE ITS ROOTS directly to the Protestant Reformation that took place in Europe in the 16th century. Martin Luther, a German monk, became aware of differences between the Bible and church practices of the day. His writings, lectures, and sermons inspired others to protest church practices and call for reform.

“By the late 1500s the Reformation had spread throughout Europe. Followers of Martin Luther's teachings were labeled "Lutherans" by their enemies and adopted the name themselves. Lutheran beliefs became widespread, especially in Germany and the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Finland), later spreading throughout the world as early explorers took their faith with them on their voyages. Lutheranism came to the Americas that way; some of the earliest settlers in the Americas were Scandinavian, Dutch, and German Lutherans. The first permanent colony of them was in the West Indies, and by the 1620s there were settlements of Lutherans along the Hudson River in what are now the states of New York and New

Jersey. (Swedish settlers near New Castle, Delaware, formed the earliest Lutheran church. The church building still stands.)

“As the number of these congregations grew, scattered groups would form a "synod" or church body, and as the nation expanded so did the number of Lutheran church bodies.

“By the late 1800s the 20 or so Lutheran church bodies that would eventually merge to become The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America had been established.

“There were "revivalist" and "confessional" movements within Lutheran churches in Europe and in America, and as Lutherans migrated to this country they were influenced by the "fundamentalist" movement here. Consequently, there developed a wide variety of expressions of Lutheranism in North America.

“Nineteenth century Lutherans still looked to their homelands to supply pastors and worship materials, but as second- and third-generation Americans spoke English more than German, Norwegian, or Danish, a need arose to provide formal theological training, hymnals, catechisms, and other materials.

“As early as 1812 the North Carolina Synod had inquired about the possibility of better “inter-synodical” cooperation, and that synod worked with Pennsylvania publishing houses and the new theological seminary at Gettysburg rather than set up its own support systems.

“Immigration of Lutherans continued to be heavy through the first two decades of the 20th century, and the first significant mergers of church bodies happened in 1917 when three Norwegian synods joined to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of

America (NLCA) and in 1918 when three German synods joined to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). With World War I taking place, the next logical step in denominational consolidation was to form a joint agency of these two large synods and other smaller ones in order to provide relief.

“The National Lutheran Commission had been formed in 1917 because the churches were concerned about the spiritual well-being of U.S. service personnel being sent into combat. In a short time 60,000 laymen were involved in the effort, which proved a vast and complex enterprise. The laymen stayed active in the relief and ministry of the commission, but formed their own organization, the Lutheran Brotherhood, which supported the work of the commission by building facilities and supplying equipment. After the war the Lutheran Brotherhood continued to develop lay leadership and to foster intersynodical relationships.

“The various Lutheran churches, with the exception of the Synodical Conference, continued to work together closely, but were limited to soldiers' and sailors' welfare efforts. There was a growing need to provide missionaries to America's expanding industrial centers and to render aid to Lutherans in Europe, and by September 1918 the National Lutheran Council (NLC) was formed to meet those needs. Representation on the council was proportionate, based on membership figures of participating church bodies.

“For the first 12 years of its existence, the NLC concentrated on overseas relief programs, then from about 1930 through the entry of the United States into World War II it developed its domestic programs. In 1930 three churches with German origins had

merged to form the American Lutheran Church, which had become one of the eight member churches in the NLC, along with the ULCA.

“In the late '40s and '50s there were proposals by the ULCA and Augustana to merge all the member churches of the NLC, and although they failed, in 1952 the American Lutheran Conference Joint Union Committee presented the document *The United Testimony* to its member churches, agreeing they were in "essential agreement" with the positions of the ULCA and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The next round of mergers occurred in the early '60s.

“In 1960 the American Lutheran Church (German), United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Norwegian) merged to form The American Lutheran Church (ALC). The Lutheran Free Church (Norwegian), which had dropped out of merger negotiations, came into the ALC in 1963.

“In 1962 the ULCA (German, Slovak, and Icelandic) joined with the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church (Swedish), Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish) to form the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).

“Meanwhile, the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) 1957 resolve to study contemporary Roman Catholicism with the possibility of entering "interconfessional conversations," and the reforms proposed by the Second Vatican Council, led to a series of theological dialogues. Lutherans also accepted the invitation of Reformed churches (Presbyterian) in America to begin discussions of possible pulpit and altar fellowship. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), not a member church of the NLC or the

LWF, participated in these ecumenical dialogues at the national level, and joined the NLC churches in 1967 to form the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. (LCUSA).

“The LCMS, firmly rooted in confessional conservatism and relatively unchanged since its organization in 1846-47 as "The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States," stood firmly on its belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.

"Historical criticism," an understanding that the Bible must be understood in the cultural context of the time in which it was written, was gaining ground in both Europe and America. Trouble was brewing in the LCMS as some seminary professors began to adopt historical critical methods in their classrooms. A new seminary president with experience in inter-Lutheran and ecumenical affairs was challenged by the new conservative synodical president. A three-year investigation ensued, and the 1972 convention voted to censure the faculty. In 1974 the seminary president was suspended, and many seminarians and faculty left the seminary to continue their work in another setting, forming "Seminex," a seminary-in-exile. Meanwhile, a moderate movement in LCMS called Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM) was formed.

“The issue of whether or not to ordain graduates of Seminex led to the removal of four district presidents at the 1975 convention, and by 1976 the moderates had gathered forces to form the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). Approximately 300 congregations and 110,000 people moved into the AELC from LCMS with a stated goal from the beginning of promoting unity with the ALC and LCA.

“In 1977 the LCMS decision to place fellowship with ALC "in protest" along with the AELC's "Call to Lutheran Union" nudged the three church bodies, ALC, LCA, and AELC, toward merger. The 1978 ALC and LCA conventions adopted resolutions aimed

at the creation of a single church body. The AELC joined them, and the ALC-LCA Committee on Church Cooperation became the Committee on Lutheran Unity (CLU) in January 1979.

“Presiding bishops of the ALC, the LCA, and the AELC met with the CLU over the next 16 months, and the 1980 conventions of all three church bodies adopted a two-year study process. Documents were in the hands of congregational leaders by November of that year, and by 1982 all the pieces were in place for the three churches to have simultaneous conventions so that, on September 8, 1982, with telephone hookups so each could hear the others' votes, all three church bodies voted to proceed on the path toward a new Lutheran church.

“The CLU proposals included the structure and operating procedures for a new group, the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC), and a timetable for the churches:

“The 1984 conventions to discuss, review, and respond to a statement of theological understandings and ecclesial principles, and a narrative description of the new church;

“The 1986 conventions to discuss, review, and respond to the articles of incorporation of the new church, the constitution and bylaws of the new church, and be able to take action to cease functioning by Dec. 31, 1987.

“The 70-member CNLC, its members deliberately chosen to be widely representative of the membership of all the merging bodies, met 10 times over the next five years, making full reports which were widely disseminated to church members.

“By August 1986 the CNLC had completed its work and again the three church bodies met in simultaneous conventions, again with telephone hook-ups, and voted overwhelmingly to accept the constitution and bylaws of the new church as well as the proposed agreement and plan of merger, thus creating the fourth largest Protestant body in the United States.

“The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was finally born at its constituting convention in Columbus, Ohio, April 30-May 3, 1987. The three churches had "closing conventions" the day before, taking care of constitutional matters and saying good-bye.

“At 12:01 a.m., Central Standard Time, January 1, 1988, the ELCA became the legal successor to its predecessors, a mosaic reflecting not only the ethnic heritages of traditional Lutherans through its original churches, but also the full spectrum of American culture in which it serves, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.”

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IN TRUTH, ALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH HAVE GONE THROUGH such complicated organizations, and the change continues to this day. Like most Protestant denominations, Lutheranism has conservative and more moderate branches of faith and belief. The Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church is the conservative branch, and our group, the ELCA, is the more moderate. Some of our differences are cultural, but there are also theological differences. We believe that the world is large enough for all of us!

At Holy Cross, we, like all churches, have had periods of calm sailing and stormy seas, but we have emerged strong and dedicated, firm in the joy of Christ's message and determined to be witnesses for his peace and love in the world.

CHAPTER TWO

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A Mission Church

The summer of 1955 was a difficult time in the South. Racial problems had been brewing for years, and on December 1, a black woman in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man and was arrested. She went to trial, and the event led to a 381-day boycott of the public transportation system, before the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in November of 1956 that segregation on public transportation was unconstitutional.

The world was also in the midst of the Cold War, with the Korean Conflict not long ended, and President Dwight Eisenhower, the hero of World War II, still in his first term as president. School children were taught to “duck and cover” if a nuclear bomb fell nearby. Bestselling books that year included *Marjorie Morningstar* by Herman Wouk, *Auntie Mame* by Patrick Dennis, and *Andersonville* (which won the Pulitzer Prize) by MacKinlay Kantor. While popular culture gave us “Leave It to Beaver,” a new group of poets called the Beats took center stage, and Allen Ginsberg's reading of his poem “Howl,” led to charges of obscenity.

“Gunsmoke” started its record-breaking run on television. Vladimir Nabokov's sensational novel *Lolita* was the talk of the literary world. *On the Waterfront* had swept

the Oscars earlier that year, and three days before the mission church that would become Holy Cross first met in Athens, movie star James Dean was killed in a car accident.

But in those days, when Athens had only three TV channels, long-distance calls were still a bit unusual, and there was, of course, no Internet, and the term “small town,” wasn’t just an idea. Though Athens and Atlanta had daily newspapers and had for more than a century, in many ways, the town was vastly different from what it is today.

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THAT SUMMER, IN JULY, A MISSION DEVELOPER FROM THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH in America, the Rev. Ernie Parrish, arrived in Athens. He was a young man, and he found a small but deeply interested group of potential congregants in Athens.

Parrish had been serving in the small town of Cox’s Creek, Ky., when he received that February an inquiry about coming to Athens to form a mission—the precursor of an actual church. Athens and Clarke County already had a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, but with 60 or 70 Lutheran students at any one time at the University of Georgia, officials of the Georgia-Alabama Synod of the ULCA thought Athens might be ripe for a congregation. An official from the Synod went so far as to send Parrish a copy of “Shellhart’s book” about the forming of a mission so Parrish would know what he would face.

The whole idea of starting a ULCA mission in Athens was based less on a demonstrated need for it than a sense that there were a large number of “undecided Christians”—those who wanted to attend a church but did not quite fit with any other congregation in town. ULCA Lutherans were already meeting in the nearby town of

Elberton (some 35 miles northeast), and Parrish was warned that somehow the Elberton congregation might be part of his responsibilities when he arrived.

Charles Fritz, then president of the Georgia-Alabama Synod, met Parrish in Dayton, Ky., where they talked of the challenges in Athens. Fritz was blunt: It would take several weeks of calling and making contacts before services could even begin. Parrish was interested, but, as it turned out, he was finishing his studies at Hamma Theological Seminary in Springfield, Ohio, as well as serving in Cox's Creek, so Fritz made a decision. Subject to graduation and ordination, Parrish would become a mission developer for the Synod and start work in Athens on July 1, 1955.

To be fair, the idea did have some foundation in fact. In the summer of 1954, the Synod had conducted a survey and found, to their satisfaction, interest in starting a congregation of the ULCA. The major response was in what they called the "south-southwest part of the city"—the area known as Five Points, which included (then and now) numerous UGA professors and their families. Ultimately, the Synod agreed there were three reasons to come to Athens: the number of "unchurched," the presence of the University of Georgia, and the existing congregation in Elberton.

Unfortunately, as Fritz had to admit to Parrish in a March 1955 letter, the survey was, in fact, more anecdotal than rigorous. In fact, Fritz said "Only a small portion of the city was surveyed," and it was a "spot survey and very incomplete." In fact, only 38 adults and 20 children were identified as possible members of a ULCA congregation. Some 338 people were listed in the survey as "not at home" (!) while there were in the area, an astonishing 22 vacant houses.

Half a century ago, Athens in almost no way resembled the town it was to become. The city's population was 32,000, houses cost from \$8,000 for a typical ranch home to \$40,000 for an "estate." The University of Georgia was home to only 8,000 students, and out of that number less than 75 could be identified as possible Lutheran members. In fact, Elberton was far more successful already, with 70 enrolled members. (Lutheranism in northeast Georgia and northwestern South Carolina had been around for more than a hundred years—many of the earliest founders of Oconee County, S. C., for example, were Lutheran.)

Unfortunately, as Fritz wrote to Parrish at the end of March, the pastor of the Elberton congregation had resigned. Despite the uncertainty of it all, Parrish liked Athens and decided to move here.

During the summer of 1955, Parrish began making calls and visiting potential congregants, using the Shellhart book as a guide on how to start a mission church. Because an actual congregation needed an enrolled membership of at least 50, there seemed little expectation in the short run that anything more than a mission might be developed.

Finally, on Thursday evening, Oct. 2, the small group Parrish had been able to gather met for the first time in the Franklin Room of the Davis Brothers Cafeteria in downtown Athens (currently the location of The Grill). The meeting "a la Shellhart, as Parrish reported to Rev. Fritz," went well, and the room was fine, with a piano, indirect lighting, and a curtain covering one wall, which served as a suitable backdrop for an altar.

In a gesture of solidarity, Pastor Deffner of the Missouri Synod Church in Athens loaned the new group a portable “field altar” for the first service. With 19 at the initial meeting and 24 at the first service, things were going well, and Parrish told Fritz “We will soon start a church school.”

But what name would the new church have? Because the first service was on St. Michael’s Festival Day, several in the group suggested calling the church St. Michael’s. Others suggested Holy Cross, but the name with the strongest initial support was Christ the King. Fritz very much liked calling it St. Michael’s, since, as he noted, Holy Cross and Christ the King ring “RC in my mind.”

Berdia Brittain, the last surviving charter member still enrolled at Holy Cross, who passed away in 2003, taught the first Sunday school class at the still-unnamed mission with two pupils—the “Ridenhour boys,” as she remembered them. Eventually, as she wrote in her sketch of early church history, the class grew to six and often more and included Jimmy and Lois Bergeaux and Jimmy and Billy Jordan, sons of a noted professor of Romance languages at UGA.

“The Mission Board was interested in a Lutheran church in Athens,” said Mrs. Brittain, in an interview taped some years ago. “They felt as if it was time to see if one could be started. Ernie Parrish was a mission developer, and he came down to help us establish a congregation.”

The basement of the restaurant soon proved an uncomfortable venue, and the congregants moved to the Chamber of Commerce facilities in downtown Athens. It wasn’t until the group was settled here that they voted to name the mission organization Holy Cross, even though it was not yet a full church. The Chamber must have soon

realized that allowing any group to use its space in off hours meant they would have to make it available to others who applied, so it asked Holy Cross to find another place for worship.

A new location didn't come easily. Finally, however, the congregation wound up in an unlikely place: the basement of the Henrietta Apartments in Five Points—a building that still exists. While the group was pleased to have the spot for worship services, the roar of washers and dryers in an upstairs laundromat often meant shouted sermons and bellowed hymns. One large room in the basement served as sanctuary, while the Sunday school used a smaller one attached to it. The location did offer one huge advantage: No one else wanted it. Before, services meant, as Mrs. Brittain wrote, “assembling everything each Sunday, from the folding altar to setting up chairs, pulpit, and lectern. Now everything could be left in place and the doors locked.”

The women of the church set about making and donating sets of paraments for the services, with Mrs. Bessie Player and Mrs. Lessie Vogelsang creating green ones, and Miss Dora Mullendorf red. Mrs. Brittain added white and purple sets, while a Mrs. Player and Mrs. Karl Garrison made and donated two Fair Linens for the altar.

Some parishioners of Holy Cross were already pushing Rev. Fritz to consider approving a full-time minister for the mission church, but the number of congregants who consistently came never yet approached 50, so the point, for the time being, was moot. Throughout the spring and summer of 1956, much church correspondence concerned the Elberton congregation and sought ways it could be helped from the Athens group.

For a time during that year, Holy Cross looked at a piece of property at the corner of Milledge and Rutherford as a potential church site, but it was sold before the church could act. Parrish reported that year that the church might get a site “for a very good price” on Alps Road, which was then on the far western boundary of town. Little was in the vicinity yet, but soon Athens’s first shopping center—Beechwood—would radically alter the entire area.

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CHURCHES, IN THEIR EARLY YEARS, ARE TENUOUS THINGS. Enthusiasm can ebb and flow unpredictably, and Holy Cross suffered the same kind of growing pains. While the church had many faithful members—some of whom stayed their whole lives—others came in for a time and then left, and the church could not sustain enough members to approach full membership in the ULCA. Worse, the location in the basement of an apartment complex meant the congregants had to put up with laundry noises and—according to Mrs. Brittain—a “giant roach population” that was “fast taking over.”

At the Georgia-Alabama Synod office, Dr. Fritz was concerned that he was not hearing from Parrish as much as he wanted, and he wrote Parrish saying, “Both the Board and Mission Committee of the Synod are deeply concerned.” Despite the gloomy basement and the uncertain mission membership, Parrish pressed onward, going so far as to write to pastors in Sharon, Penn., about possible Lutherans who might be moving to Athens with the opening of a new General Electric plant.

By early 1957, Dr. Fritz’s confidence in the Athens mission had improved to the point that he was hopeful that it could become an organized church by Easter. Still, Holy Cross could not approach the necessary minimum 50 members, and correspondence

between the Athens mission and the Georgia-Alabama Synod trailed off during the rest of the year.

Sadly, Parrish's wife was ill during much of the winter and spring of 1957-58, and complicating matters was that a Lutheran church in Anniston, Alabama, had called Parrish to become its minister. The decision was not an easy one, however, with Mrs. Parrish ill and the Athens congregation still struggling to survive. By this time, Parrish had invested three years of his life here, and leaving would be difficult. As a result, he took a long time deciding, and four weeks after the Anniston church had called Parrish, he still had not decided what to do.

In February 1958, Dr. Raymond Wood had taken over from Fritz as president of the Georgia-Alabama Synod, and he pressed Parrish for an answer. Finally, Parrish decided to stay in Athens, where, despite problems, he felt more needed and at home. "It was not so much a negative call to Anniston as a positive reply to the present call," he said to Wood.

Despite his feelings for Athens, however, Parrish was less than sure the Georgia-Alabama Synod really wanted a church in Athens. He said the Synod had offered him "little support," and wrote Wood that it was "true the church sent me here, but after that the attitude seems to have been to prove the necessity for our existence." Considering the sketchy nature of the original needs survey, Parrish probably had a point.

After its initial successes, the mission was, at best, unsure of itself, according to letters in the church files. Parrish reported the departure of five families who felt Holy Cross was "not a growing concern," understandable for a congregation meeting in a basement beneath a laundromat.

With the coming of warmer weather, however, things began to look up, both for Holy Cross and for Parrish. Wood wrote him a gentle, kind letter of thanks for all Parrish had done, and shared his sorrow at the illness of Parrish's wife. By the end of May, the idea of a church site on Alps Road was once more moving to the forefront, and Parrish said it "was on a high spot diagonally behind the proposed shopping center." (In fact, it was diagonally *in front* of what would become Beechwood.)

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FOR MORE THAN THREE YEARS, HOLY CROSS HAD BEEN STRUGGLING to stay alive, but the new era of hope and good feeling that began in the spring of 1958 continued unabated through the summer and into the fall. Finally, in what can only be called a leap of faith, Dr. Wood, in a letter of September 5, 1958, told Parrish that the Synod would be moving ahead with plans to change the Athens mission to an organized ULCA church, possibly as early as February 1959.

"Our goal will be 50 charter members," wrote Wood, "but"--in a policy change that would become important in the history of Holy Cross--"it can be done with less."

The idea was that the conversion of the congregation from mission to full church should take place on February 15, 1959—the first Sunday in Lent. Wood drove to Athens and met with Parrish to discuss the plan—one of many trips Wood would make during a period of concentrated hard work, without which Holy Cross might never have been formed.

Mrs. Parrish's health finally got much better, to the relief of all, but the whole issue of becoming a full church had somewhat unexpected complexities. As he was a mission developer, Parrish would not be available to be the first called minister of Holy

Cross, though Wood hoped he would stay a few months to “smooth the transition.” Also, the Georgia-Alabama Synod had to apply for special permission for Holy Cross to form without 50 members to the national Board of American Missions.

Still, the time had come: Holy Cross would change from a mission to a church. It would usher in a time of growth—and challenges ahead.

CHAPTER THREE

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February 15, 1959, was a cold day in Athens, but the congregation that crammed into the basement of the Henrietta Apartments was warmed by the knowledge they had beat the odds and would become a full church this day. Despite the washers and dryers pulsating upstairs, the parishioners felt nothing but delight as they listened to a sermon by Pastor Merle Franke, a regional secretary of the Board of American Missions for the ULCA. The organizational service itself was led by Dr. Raymond Wood, president of the Georgia-Alabama Synod.

The service opened with Hymn 60, but exactly which hymnal was being used remains unclear after 45 years. The group ended with Hymn 90, pleased indeed that Rev. Franke had come all the way from Chicago for the organizational service. Also present was the Synod’s Mission Superintendent Compton Usina. The *Athens Banner-Herald* published a brief story about the church’s foundation.

Franke’s presence wasn’t just ceremonial. The Board of American Missions, in fact, was so committed to making Holy Cross a formal church that it budgeted funds to

assist the church in buying the long-discussed property on Alps Road for a new church, as well as a tract on nearby Janice Drive for a parsonage.

That evening, even though darkness came early, the members of the church had a family night supper at Memorial park at 5:30. A photo of the service in the basement of the Henrietta Apartments shows the group, folding chairs, and a cross hanging neatly from a steam pipe.

While the church began its mission to the glory of God and Jesus Christ, the problems with the basement location had multiplied, and finally, on March 29, the group took its portable altar, paraments, and other possessions around the corner to a large, cream-colored brick house at the Five Points intersection. This house (no longer in existence) had been a home and then had been used for numerous other functions before Holy Cross rented part of it for services.

The congregation held a business meeting on February 22 and voted to purchase the Alps Road property and the tract for a parish house at 215 Janice Drive. The church site is now in the heavily commercial area just before the intersection of Alps Road and the Atlanta Highway, but a 1959 photograph of the land shows nothing but woods and open land.

The move to the house in Five Points was logical. Holy Cross had begun to expand, since its formal designation as a congregation attracted more members and kept others from leaving. The laundromat seemed to be blasting during every service, and as far as the roaches were concerned, Mrs. Brittain wryly noted, “We decided to let them have the place.”

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AS THE NEWEST CHURCH IN ATHENS, HOLY CROSS NO DOUBT had serious challenges ahead, not the least of which was hiring a pastor. But the overall business decisions of a church are not the only parts of its history. For instance, by April of that year, the Lutheran Church Women were working strong.

On April 12, a Friday evening, the church met to begin planning a fund-raising drive. Assisting in the effort was one Edmund Foehle of Woodhaven, N. Y., a member of St. Luke's Lutheran church in New York City. Part of what was described as the Lutheran "lay movement," Foehle attended the April 17 service to talk about how to raise money to build a new church on the Alps Road land.

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ON JUNE 28, THE REV. PARRISH ANNOUNCED TO THE CHURCH that his services would be "terminated" on August 31. He was, after all, a mission developer, and Holy Cross had gone beyond that stage. Parrish, of course, had known the truth of it for several months, but during the establishment of the church, he worked hard for Holy Cross without letting on, since the congregation was working harder than ever for stability.

Meeting in the new facility, Holy Cross selected a pulpit committee to start the search for its first full-time minister. (The committee consisted of David Werner, Bill Westley, and Will Seifert.) This news—and the usual summer doldrums—hit the church in the pews and the pocketbook. (Actually it would be some time before the church had pews, but the metaphor is apt.) Dr. Wood in Atlanta wrote to W. A. Seifert, the secretary-treasurer of Holy Cross, expressing confidence, but it was clear that the congregation was worried about its ability to pay a new pastor.

While Parrish would feel pride in what he had accomplished, his concentration was understandably elsewhere, because his wife delivered their daughter, Christine Elizabeth, on July 2 at Athens General Hospital. While Mrs. Parrish and the baby were fine, the Sunday church bulletin couldn't resist: "So far, the father is doing all right, too."

With the return of fall and University of Georgia students, however, Holy Cross lifted itself from the summer blahs and began focusing more strongly on hiring its first pastor. With the help of a new mimeograph machine, bulletins were easier to print. The Church Council met several times with the omnipresent Dr. Raymond Wood, and it took only a brief few weeks for Holy Cross to call the first full-time minister in its history: the Rev. Arne Markland.

A native of Brooklyn, Markland and his wife Jean had a small son, David, and on August 20, he accepted the call and began making plans to move to Athens. Markland had received his bachelor's degree from Augsburg College in 1949, taught high school for a while, and then went back to school, receiving his bachelor of divinity degree from the Northwestern Lutheran Seminary in 1955. He had served as a chaplain in the Air Force for four years and during that time had been stationed in Georgia (as well as Texas and Japan), so he wasn't entirely a stranger to the South. Jean was from Minnesota.

Markland came at a time when Holy Cross was beginning to gather steam. That November, the first issue of the church newsletter, the *Holy Cross Messenger*, was printed, and the Georgia-Alabama ULC Women received the Holy Cross chapter as a member.

“Hoping for an assignment to a parish located near a major university, I wrote Dr. Wood, explaining my situation,” said Markland, retired and living with his wife in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2005. “His reply came within a few days, mentioning the possibility of serving Holy Cross in Athens. I interviewed with the Church Council and was then extended a call. The congregation had finished its organization process the previous February, and a building program was a distinct possibility.”

While church leaders hoped that the new church could be built by spring, the coming of winter and usual construction-related delays pushed the date back, and while some congregants must have been frustrated, most knew that the church had come far in a very short time.

Markland and his family were received into Holy Cross on November 15, transferring their membership from Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. Markland was not officially installed as the pastor of Holy Cross until December 13, 1959—the first United Lutheran Church in America pastor ever in Athens. The always-faithful Raymond Wood presided over the event.

“Shortly after Jean and I, with our son David, arrived in Athens, the Church Council held a special meeting with Roy Murphy of Urbana, Ill., giving an orientation of the proposed new building,” said Markland. “Murphy, it turned out, was not only an architect but was involved with a construction company that the ULCA was using for building first-unit structures throughout the country.”

Markland noted that the preliminary drawings for Holy Cross were in a modern style “similar to many Air Force designs.” The first reactions from the parishioners were skeptical at best.

“Murphy and Compton Usina [the Synod’s home mission coordinator] proceeded to give the group their presentation, while the Council, an exceptionally talented group, listened in stony silence. This was my first look at the building proposal, so I paid close attention to the dynamics of the meeting.”

Markland said the Church Council wanted a more traditional structure, but being aware that the ULCA Board of American Missions and Synod controlled the purse strings, “accepted the inevitable.” After that, the internal support for the structure and organization for it went very smoothly indeed.

That Christmas was a time of promise and reflection for Holy Cross. From the days in 1955 when it began in the basement of a restaurant in downtown Athens, it had grown until it had a full-time minister and a parsonage, and it had bought land to build its own church.

“Athens was a small city at the time,” Markland remembered, “mostly colonial in style. Its downtown was also small, located in a two-three block area. Alps Road, where the new church building was to be located, was in an attractive semi-rural area. Janice Drive, site of the ranch-style parsonage, sat in a brand-new development. Two other Holy Cross families lived on the same street.”

Markland had some awareness of what it would be like to develop a Lutheran congregation in the South because he had become friends with several pastors in the Savannah area, attending their services and visiting with them about Lutheranism in Georgia.

“I had also served for some six months in Virginia during World War II, so I had an idea of what to expect,” he said. “My approach was to build a strong community of

believers who would think of themselves as family. It seemed to work. The congregation worked harmoniously during the two years I was there. Members were exceptionally loyal, dedicated, and generous with time and money.”

Still, there was much for Markland to learn about Athens. While he found himself warmly accepted by other local pastors, he remembered one pastoral meeting, held at a Baptist church, where he was told that the following week’s political business for the city of Athens was often conducted on the front steps of the building immediately following Sunday’s service.

“I also remember being asked by one of the senior Baptist pastors what a Lutheran was,” said Markland. “I smiled nicely and told him a Lutheran is a member of the world’s largest denomination outside of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Would he like to attend a class of mine on grace? He smiled back. The point was taken, and I felt at home with the brethren.”

CHAPTER FOUR

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By 1960, when Holy Cross was moving toward groundbreaking on its first sanctuary and educational facility, the Georgia-Alabama Lutheran Synod was celebrating its 100th anniversary. It is unclear why this branch of the Lutheran Church took so long in reaching Athens and Clarke County, but part of it was likely cultural, since what was then the United Lutheran Church in America had originated in the upper Midwest with the descendants of Germans and Scandinavians.

The days of the ULCA, however, were already numbered, as the tide of mergers, mentioned earlier in the brief history of the ELCA, was already being planned. In 1960, however, the still-in-business ULCA had 58 congregations in Georgia and Alabama (though only 51 pastors), along with 60 temporary and mission churches, with 40 pastors serving them.

The Georgia-Alabama Synod was about to be history: a meeting that year would change it to the Southeastern Synod, a designation the combined church still has. Instead of many groups of different Lutheran churches, the newly combined denomination would have more than 3 million members—nothing to rival such Southern staples as the Baptists and Methodists, but substantial nonetheless.

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AS A SIGN OF ITS NEWFOUND ENERGY AND COMMITMENT, Holy Cross on January 24, 1960, began using a new Service Book and Hymnal. The church had also, once and for all, stopped singing the Doxology. Congregants came in heavy coats and cars to the parsonage on Jan. 10, to an open house where they got to see the Markland family in the first structure bought by Holy Cross.

The church's Building Committee stayed busy throughout the winter and spring, working with architect Roy Murphy on a proposed design for the new church. Interior design consultant Robert Hurt of Creative Buildings, Inc., met with the group, as did Ted Carson, also of Roy Murphy Associates. The church eagerly anticipated groundbreaking.

Holy Cross entered a building drive with vigor, securing pledges, and plans for the church revealed a modernistic design that looked like something like a Spanish

mission as designed for the Jetsons. (To be fair, that entire era was one in which the old was considered passé, and numerous historic mansions in Athens were torn down to make way for single-story brick buildings. Years later, a local paper, *The Athens Observer*, would publish a two-page spread called “Vanished Athens,” that documented the disastrous building—and destruction—practices of the early to middle 1960s in Athens. So a “modern” design for Holy Cross was simply fitting in with a well-established national trend.)

While all this was going on, Miss Diane Black became the first youth to be confirmed at Holy Cross on June 5. The congregation also had a vacation church school that summer, with 21 children attending. A week before Black was confirmed, the new buildings were dealt a setback when the church voted to formally reject the bids for the sanctuary and educational buildings. The job went out for new bids, which were expected by July 15.

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IN THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, HOLY CROSS WAS LOSING ITS LOCATION in the cream-colored brick building in Five Points and was in the odd position of being adrift just as it was trying to nail down a start-date for its new structure. Luckily, the ballroom of the Georgian Hotel at the corner of Washington and Jackson streets in downtown Athens became available.

On Sunday, July 31, 1960, Holy Cross took its altar and other possessions on the road yet again, and met for the first time at the hotel, which was not only large and comfortable but \$125 a month less than the house in Five Points. Just six weeks later, the congregation voted to accept the bid of the C. C. Robertson Construction Company

to build Holy Cross Lutheran Church. was set for Sunday, Oct. 2. Total cost was set at \$63,017.

A large painted sign was placed on the site with pride: “Site of the Future Home of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, ULCA, present at Temporary Chapel at _____.” The sign, obviously put up about the time Holy Cross was losing its Five Points location but before it moved, had, in a photograph, a board over the blank with “Georgian Hotel” on it. Then, at the bottom, the sign said: “For information, call R. Markland at LI8-3329.” (The familiar “54” prefix on many Athens phone numbers was in those days referred to as LI or Liberty, matching the letters on those numbers on a telephone. Thus, Markland’s number at the Parish House would have familiarly been referred to as Liberty 6-8424 and the church would have been Liberty 8-3329.)

The *Banner-Herald* considered the construction of a new church in town to be news, and the week before groundbreaking it published the architect’s drawings. On Oct. 2, understandably excited, the church hung a new shingle over the sign on Alps Road: “Groundbreaking today.”

The motorcade from the Georgian Hotel to the site went out the Atlanta Highway—an almost rural two-lane road, nothing like the multi-lane business district it is today. The parishioners must have felt a thrill of pride—five years had passed since Ernie Parrish had first come into Athens to start a mission church on the basis of an obviously thin survey. And yet, despite meeting in basements for years, struggling financially, and never quite reaching the required minimum number of members for a congregation, here the church was, headed for the site of its first sanctuary.

Dr. Wood—who had worked so hard for so long to get Holy Cross going—broke ground with the first shovelful of dirt, followed by Will Siefert, representing the congregation of Holy Cross. Acolyte Billy Jordan stood with the groundbreaking team as photographers took pictures and joy mingled, almost certainly, with a few damp eyes.

Grading began the next day, and by Oct. 12, the floor level was staked, and the contractors had constructed a gravel parking area and a small tool shed. By Oct. 21, the contractor had dug the foundations and partially poured the concrete, and work on concrete blocks and furnace ductwork was going strong by Oct. 29.

In fact, Athens was in the midst of a church building boom, with Holy Cross, Princeton Methodist, and Beech Haven Baptist all going up at the same time. Work was steady on Holy Cross, though members were startled to realize about this time that they hadn't included pews in the bids and would thus be forced to sit in chairs. Finding this unacceptable, the Building Committee started yet another project—the Pew Fund.

Members drove by the site and watched construction:

*Nov. 6: Floors poured for the educational building

*Nov. 14: Framing started for same.

*Dec. 4: Roof on educational structure.

*Dec. 13: Roof going up on the sanctuary, which was being referred to as the “chapel.” In fact, despite winter working conditions, the church and educational buildings never lost momentum, and the contractors moved with what, in 2005, would seem remarkable speed.

Even before the church was finished, the church office at the Georgian Hotel was selling picture postcards with the drawing of the new Holy Cross Lutheran Church for

two cents a piece. Church members were delighted, too, when they found an entire set of used church pews that could be refurbished “at a huge savings.”

Five and a half months after groundbreaking, Holy Cross Lutheran was ready to move in, and the first meeting for the new facility was set for March 19, 1961. As Markland said, “Truly God has blessed us.”

CHAPTER FIVE

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The day had finally arrived. Holy Cross Lutheran Church, on March 19, 1961, held first services in its new sanctuary at 155 Alps Road in Athens, and all was shining that day. Though temporary pews were used since the ones purchased had not yet been fully restored, nothing could stem the tide of faith and happiness from the community of believers.

The day was picked with some deliberation, since the Church Council clearly wanted to be in place for Palm Sunday (March 26) and Easter the Sunday after that. During the service and open house later in the afternoon, nearly 300 people from Athens and surrounding towns visited the new church.

As the weather warmed, Evergreen Landscaping donated its time and talents to beautifying the church grounds.

“Though small and modern-looking for its time, our church structure was pleasantly attractive,” said Markland. “Jean and I designed the pulpit, baptismal font and pew screens, and also drew the church symbols, which were attached to the chancel’s side screens. We also fabricated a redwood sign which was installed close to

Alps Road. Needless to say, when the first service was held in the new building, the congregation was justifiably pleased at a task well done, and thanks to God were gladly given.”

While much effort had gone into building the new church—which was widely praised for its modern look—the life of the church went on as it had for several years now. Parishioners came to church and Sunday school to restore their souls and increase their faith. Teams visited hospitals and nursing home, taking flowers and spending time talking to people there. Men and women of conscience and thoughtfulness talked about Christian education for children.

One early indication of how Holy Cross might be unusual for its time and place was a church-sponsored multicultural program—an evening of Indonesian dance, featuring Ms. Rubia Hutasoit, a visitor to the home of Dr. Jordan’s family.

Aware of how much the church owed other congregations that had given them help in time of need, Holy Cross donated its old chancel furniture to a mission congregation in Macon, St. Luke’s. Members of Holy Cross also demonstrated their own generosity as they had since 1955, providing funding for the pews, chancel furnishings, kitchen appliances, and new hymnals.

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THE CHANGING OF PASTORS IS ALWAYS A DIFFICULT TIME for congregations, and Holy Cross was no sooner settled in its new structure on Alps Road when it found out that Rev. Markland would resign at the end of August. Minister since the fall of 1959, Markland had been accepted as a student at New York University, where he would begin work on a

doctoral degree. Complicating matters was that church organist, Louise Chapman, was resigning at the same time.

One of Markland's last duties was touching: He solemnized the marriage vows of two Finnish exchange students at the University of Georgia. Apparently he managed to get through the service and still pronounce the names of the groom (Alpo I Aapola) and the bride (Helena Maija-Liisa Huatala).

"I found my two years at Athens to be rewarding and enriching," Markland said. "For the first time in my life, I went door to door, meeting people and inviting them to worship. Only a few took up the offer, but it wasn't for a lack of my trying. The people in the congregation proved to be exceptionally helpful, generous, and dedicated to the project, making my contribution most enjoyable. I remember the people with fondness and gratitude."

Holy Cross didn't have to wait long for a new minister. On Oct. 1, 1961, Rev. Edward Breuer, First Vicar of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, saw an opportunity in Athens—which had by then begun the growth spurt that would continue unabated through the turn of the century.

Breuer was young—he had graduated in May from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia after earning a bachelor's degree in sociology from Lehigh. (He had been captain of the Lehigh Soccer Team his senior year. Unfortunately, the soccer craze that would one day engulf Athens like the rest of America was years in the future.) The local newspaper ran his photograph, and indeed he was youthful. The faithful Rev. Raymond Wood came back yet again from Atlanta for Breuer's installation service on Oct. 29. Married to the former Theresa Ann Heisler of Atlanta, they had a

new baby with an appropriate name: Philip Luther Breuer had been born in Atlanta on August 9.

When Rev. Markland and his family moved to Staten Island, the Breuer family relocated into the parsonage on Janice Drive, where an open house was held from 2:30-6 on November 19, just before Thanksgiving.

With a new pastor and new church facilities, Holy Cross had a blessed Thanksgiving and Christmas, and the first Christmas dinner was held at the church on December 18—turkey and all the trimmings. Chaplain Don Wilson of the U. S. Navy Supply Corps School in Athens, his wife, and Theresa Breuer presented a musical program.

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FROM THE BEGINNING, MUSIC WAS AT THE HEART OF HOLY CROSS as it had been with all Lutheran churches since Luther's day. Unfortunately, choir robes are expensive, and with all the other expenses facing the congregation, they had not been high on the list of priorities.

Proving yet again that God provides for those in need, however, in March 1962, St. John's Lutheran Church in Brunswick purchased new choir robes and looked around for someone who might need their old ones, which were still in very good condition. The new and growing church in Athens had a need, and St. John's gave the choir robes free to Holy Cross.

The effect must have been important, as a robed choir, all will agree, adds considerably to the elegant formality for which Lutherans are known.

The major news during 1962, however, was the dramatic realignment of the Lutheran Church, which had been under discussion for more than two years. On June 29, the *New York Times* made clear the importance of the event when it ran a story with this headline: LUTHERANS MERGE INTO GIANT CHURCH. The event drew nationwide comment, and Holy Cross members watched with interest and fascination.

The new church was suddenly a major force. The United Lutheran Church in America, which was the synod to which Holy Cross belonged, brought its 2.5 million members. These were “chiefly of German background,” according to the *Times*. The Augustana or Swedish congregations brought 630,000 members, while the Finnish church added 36,000. With the 25,000 members of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the new church had 3.2 million members, more than the 2.6 million confessing members of the Missouri Synod.

The entire church was reorganized, and the Georgia-Alabama Synod became the Southeastern Synod, with Rev. Wood, active as always, being named the first president of the synod.

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THROUGH THE FALL OF 1962 AND INTO 1963, HOLY CROSS went about the business of being a church. Prayer was needed in October 1962 when the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted. Athens and other Georgia cities watched with fascinated horror as long convoys of military vehicles streamed south, heading toward Florida, and—for all the congregants knew—an invasion of Cuba or full-scale war with the Soviet Union.

Prayers around the world were answered when the crisis was defused and war averted.

Church records during the rest of 1962 and on through 1963 are scarce, but the area around Holy Cross Church was changing dramatically. With the construction of Beechwood Shopping Center, other businesses began to spring up, stretching farther and farther out the Atlanta Highway, which, until the late 1950s, had been a two-lane country road going through woods and farmland. Despite the fact that Holy Cross owned three acres, it found itself suddenly beginning to be hedged in by businesses, and more than one parishioner probably worried that not long in the future, the church would find itself surrounded by restaurants and retail stores.

Rev. Breuer had a serious illness in late 1963 and recuperated at the parsonage, but the signal event that fall was the assassination on Nov. 22 of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas. On Nov. 25, Holy Cross held a service in memory of the country's fallen leader, and prayers were offered for Kennedy and his family.

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ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1964, HOLY CROSS CELEBRATED its fifth anniversary as a full church, and it was a time of celebration and homecoming. While Wood, who must have by now seemed like a part of the congregation, delivered the sermon, Rev. Ernie Parrish, the original mission developer, returned to assist Rev. Breuer in the liturgy. Since 1959, Parrish had been at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Newport, Tenn., but returning to Athens and a new church must have brought him pride. (After all, he had seen the congregation through its early days in a basement beneath a coin-operated laundry.)

By that year, Holy Cross was beginning to outgrow its facilities, and though there was room for more buildings on the site, a proposal to the congregation to begin another building program lost by the staggering vote of 40-3. (As far as this writer can tell, this is

likely the most lopsided vote against a proposal in the history of the church.) Still, with 71 enrolled in education classes on some Sundays, something had to be done, and so a trailer was added to the lot, and it held the pastor's office and two Sunday school classes.

The church also began what was called a two-year "radical long-range program" to study Christian education. Average attendance at 11 a.m. services was about 75, though that dropped by about 15 during the summer. Whatever the actual number, church records show a "serious need for space and teachers."

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DURING THAT YEAR AND 1965, TWO WOMEN'S "CIRCLES" were formed within the overall organization of the Lutheran Church Woman for the first time. They were active in clothing drives, delivering Christmas baskets for shut-ins, collecting magazines for the hospitals, and giving love and care for patients in nursing homes. The Altar Guild also came into being, and a chapter of the Luther League was organized, and its members did everything from "making cancer bandages" to trick-or-treating for UNICEF.

Until the advent of the so-called "mega-churches" in the past 15 years, virtually all small-town congregations have gone through regular cycles of financial feast and famine. If a church exists long enough, you can count on two things: there will be a financial crisis, and some issue will become so serious the church either considers dividing or actually goes through with it.

During 1965, as the war in Vietnam was beginning to be a national concern, Holy Cross faced two oddly simultaneous facts: the church had grown so much that the new church was uncomfortably crowded while financial problems caused the church to drop its janitorial service. While the church had a paid secretary, a volunteer in the position

made it possible to lower that salary, even though the Church Council voted against it as a bad precedent. The property committee flatly admitted frustration, since the exterior of the church badly needed painting, but no funds were available for it.

Still, the church in 1965 and 1966 increased the music budget slightly, noting in its annual report that, “We may say without boasting that we are a singing congregation.” Still, there was yet another change in the church’s organist and choir director in those days—something that was not uncommon with other, long-established churches.

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PASTOR BREUER HAD BEEN AT HOLY CROSS SINCE THE FALL OF 1961, and by late in 1966, he had decided it was time for a change. The church turned to 36-year-old Rev. Robert Hauss, who at the time was a chaplain and counselor at Grady Hospital in Atlanta.

More than once in the life of Holy Cross, temporary or supply pastors have held things together while the congregation sought a new leader. This was the case now, as Breuer left after the service on Jan. 31, 1967, and Hauss wasn’t able to start until that fall.

Hauss moved to Athens with his family: wife, Mae Ann; daughter, Susan; and son, Stephen. He was installed as new pastor of Holy Cross on Sept. 10, 1967, though a family reception wasn’t held until late October. Pastor Harvey Huntley, new president of the Southeastern Synod, who had replaced the irreplaceable Raymond Wood, led the installation service.

Unfortunately, church records on the Hauss ministry from 1967-1974 are almost non-existent. The current writer hopes someone will be able to add some depth about these years.

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BY THE EARLY 1970s, HOLY CROSS FOUND ITSELF SITTING ON an increasingly valuable piece of property as Alps Road turned into one of the city's most vital shopping areas. Set well back from the road itself, the church decided, after long discussions, to sell part of its property to the Sambo's restaurant chain. While this took a considerable amount of pressure off the church financially (and added to the county's tax rolls), it also meant that the church was starting to be closed in.

After six years of leading Holy Cross during a fairly quiet time in its history, Hauss felt compelled to return to counseling and decided to leave the congregation in Athens. He left in February 1974, and Holy Cross called, as its new minister, Rev. Kenneth Ellsworth Morelock, who had been serving at the First United Lutheran Church of Memphis, Tenn. He, his wife, and five children moved to Athens in February.

The six years of Morelock's pastorship of Holy Cross brought a number of profound changes for the congregation, and challenges beyond anything the church had yet faced.

CHAPTER SIX

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The year 1974 will principally be remembered as the year of the Energy Crisis. With Arab nations flexing their muscles and dramatically reducing the flow of crude oil,

energy prices in the U. S. skyrocketed for the first time. Higher bills and a new reality hit every home and business in America hard. Cheap oil was about to become a thing of the past, and the promise of nuclear energy—once called a technology that would be too cheap to meter—was falling under closer and closer scrutiny.

Non-profit organizations were hit especially hard. Even after the sale of part of its Alps Road property to Sambo's, Holy Cross found itself facing an uncertain future. Partially in response, the church sold its parsonage on Janice Drive—the first and last parsonage Holy Cross would ever own.

Rev. Morelock, not long after starting his ministry in February 1974, gave the congregation a challenge that went to the heart of Christian ethics and a response to economic woes: “What lies ahead is the denial of one's self,” he said, “and the acceptance of the cross.”

Responding to the energy from a new pastor, Holy Cross looked inward and concluded that it needed a youth group, a constitution, a better budgeting process, a long-range solution to its building problems, and an evangelism program. The church did add an early service in June 1974—perhaps not the best month of the year to add a new program—and began using liturgical services from a new service book, along with more contemporary music, using instruments such as the guitar and flute.

The church also continued its long-standing involvement in the community, donating funds and time to Recording for the Blind, the Retired Senior Citizens' Volunteer Program, and the Athens Community Council on Aging. The church also, perhaps whimsically, appropriated the funds to send “20 needy kids to the circus.”

During the following year, the lack of a youth program worried church leaders and Pastor Morelock, who said at the church's annual meeting that Holy Cross "must" have such a program. There had been a youth choir for a short time, but it dissolved due to "lack of participation and support."

One financial issue weighed heavily on the church's mind in those years. The property and church at 155 Alps Road had been bought using loans from the Division of Missions from the Lutheran Church in America. The church was paying interest on the loans, but it wanted, in fact, to operate on its own now, without help from the national organization, and considerable discussion went toward moving the congregation in this direction.

Problems were cropping up with the building itself as well. During the mid-Seventies, the sanctuary leaked so much some joked that Holy Cross should be known as "the church with the inside waterfalls." Hogan Lumber Company sold the church lumber for roof repairs at "a very special price," and Bill Bennett, of the building committee spoke for all when he said, "Hopefully, if it is raining on Sunday, January 11, 1976, you can be anywhere in our sanctuary and be dry."

To raise money for repairs and to keep the congregation going during this period, Holy Cross had one increasingly valuable asset: the land around the church itself. Bought inexpensively before the building boom started, the land was now quite valuable. Still, members were divided on selling off parts of the property (though ultimately they did just that). In early 1973, for example, the Church Council recommended selling all or part of the property, but the church members weren't so sure and refused to go along.

So Holy Cross entered its own kind of limbo. The current building was in bad shape and being patched together all the time, but there was no real movement from within for a new church structure.

Rev. Morelock was displeased to report on the state of the church at the annual meeting in 1976, for the buildings problems remained, and the growth of the church had been very small during the previous few years. On the other hand, member Willard Snyder made and donated to the church a candle stand for the Paschal candle.

By that year, controversy about whether to look for a new location or stay was an almost daily affair. Finally giving in to what seemed inevitable, the church authorized, apparently, “several” realtors to show the property, but nobody really thought Holy Cross wanted to sell. Finally, however, the church sold two parcels of its land, and with the proceeds, hired David Lunde as architect for a new sanctuary on a small parcel of land the church had bought just down the street past the Beechwood Shopping Center.

With plans for a new church underway, the church began to move forward once more. A youth ministry was finally “in bloom” at the church, and in 1976 one Christian who brought his witness to the group was University of Georgia quarterback (and future head coach) Ray Goff. Holy Cross also hired a part-time secretary after a time of not having one. Two new choirs were added for children and youth

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THE YEAR 1977 IS IMPORTANT IN THE HISTORY OF HOLY CROSS. The church approved preliminary plans for an elegant church on its new property on West Lake Drive, enlarged the Church Council from nine to 12 members, and launched Phase Two of the Building Fund Drive with a dinner at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education. In a

congregational business meeting, members accepted the bid of the Weekly Construction Company on a 50-14 vote—perhaps not a vote of overwhelming confidence, but approval anyway.

On a sultry Sunday, July 31, 1977, the church gathered at the site for its second groundbreaking. Perhaps no one imagined giving up the location on Alps Road this quickly, but with businesses swelling all around it, there was little choice. Crews started cutting down trees on the new site August 8.

While plans moved ahead for the new church, the old one had needs that could not be ignored. The congregation repaired the gas stove, refurbished the air conditioner, added gravel and grass, trimmed hedges, painted, and repaired the plumbing.

The church held a fine picnic and service at Watson's Mill State Park, and Holy Cross distributed to local motels 200 copies of *The Good News Bible*, a modern-language text that for a time was wildly popular. Music in services continued to show signs of creativity, and in one service Libby Howell played the autoharp and Carol Wissinger the guitar.

By January of 1978, 34 percent of the construction of the new church had been paid. The first bulk-mailing permit was issued by the Post Office for Holy Cross. Rev. Morelock was dividing his time between the Elberton congregation and Holy Cross, and the Athens church continued to fret about attendance in Sunday school classes.

Finally, after delays from weather and other problems, the new church was nearing completion on West Lake Drive, and though the sanctuary was not yet ready, the congregation decided to hold a service of dedication in the educational annex on November 19.

It's worth noting the names of some faithful members at this point. The Building Committee, which had worked hard on the new church, included Michael Taras, chairman, and members Berdia Brittain, Howard Jordan, Jerome Paulin, Vernon Robinson, and Ivan Roth. Church Council members included Henry Marks, chairman; Fred Friedrichs, secretary, and Marie Hagaman, treasurer. Members were James Anderson, Walter Edwards, Richard Gnann, Willard Snyder, John Stuedemann, Adrian Thomas, and Glenna Wilson.

In keeping with the importance of the day, the preacher was Rev. Dr. Gerald Troutman, president of the Southeastern Synod of the LCA, while lector was Rev. Charles Wessinger, pastor of Peachtree Road Lutheran Church in Atlanta. Rev. Morelock was the liturgist, while choirmaster was Richard Gnann, Jr., and organist Bobby Wheeler. Acolyte was Albert Morelock, crucifer Danny Marks, and ushers Jim Hansen and Fred Yount.

The members gathered in front of the educational annex and the still-unfinished sanctuary and sang "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation" as they prepared for the first-ever services at what is still the location of Holy Cross Lutheran Church. The responsive reading was Psalm 24: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof . . ." (It's worth noting at this point that earlier in the church's history, the Psalm each Sunday morning was sung, but this had been discontinued a few years before. Singing the Psalm would ultimately return and stay part of the services at Holy Cross.)

At this point, Building Committee chairman Michael Taras unlocked the doors for the first time and ceremonially gave the keys to Pastor Morelock. The processional began to the sound of Henry Purcell's well-loved "Trumpet Tune." Once inside, the

congregation read in unison what must have struck everyone as the perfect Psalm, number 122: “I was glad when they said unto me: Let us go into the house of the Lord.”

After the liturgy, the Nicene Creed, and the singing of “Lift High the Cross,” Dr. Troutman delivered the sermon. Chairmen of the Building Committee and Church Council spoke of dreams fulfilled and promises yet to come. The recessional hymn was “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,” set to Haydn’s familiar music. The “Hornpipe Finale” from Handel’s *Water Music* ended the service.

On this day, only five founding members of the congregation from 1955 still remained at Holy Cross: Mrs. H. H. Brittain, Dr. and Mrs. Howard Jordan, Miss Dora Mollenhoff, and Mrs. Sanford Ritchie.

WHILE CONCERNS ABOUT SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REMAINED, that was hardly the most important thing on the horizon. In the following year, controversy engulfed Holy Cross and threatened to destroy it—just as it began worship in a new sanctuary.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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Every church, in its life, faces crises that seem to arise from nowhere. The Early Church itself battled almost perpetual problems: What do you believe? In whom should we place our trust? Stability often seems a fleeting thing for congregations, and yet these problems are the least discussed in the histories of churches.

The reasons for this aren’t hard to find. For many people, it resembles the airing of dirty linen—things that should be “kept in the family.” It is embarrassing, too, and it can drive away potential new members, the necessary lifeblood of any congregation.

Still, it's a perplexing fact that few church histories deal with their controversies in a straightforward manner.

Sometimes, it's a matter of apportioning blame. Often, a few strong-willed people are willing to wreck a church in struggles over power. Martin Luther would have probably blamed the Devil—to him a very real personage against whom we fight every day of our lives. If we have grown beyond speaking of the Devil, we have not gone beyond studying evil and believing that it is a real and palpable thing.

Churches rarely fall into trouble because of such things, though. The Holocaust was evil. It may seem facile to blame church problems on “personality clashes,” but often it comes down to that. Whatever the reason, as 1979 moved forward into 1980, it was clear that Holy Cross was facing perhaps the most serious crisis in its history.

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LETTERS STARTED COMING TO THE CHURCH COUNCIL SOMETIME DURING the fall of 1978. They had a single theme, according to unclear church records: dissatisfaction with Rev. Morelock. He had served for five years at the church and had been minister in charge of huge, positive changes. Holy Cross had moved from its increasingly poor location on Alps Road to a better site on West Lake Drive. Though it was still near the business district that has grown around Beechwood, it was in the edge of the residential district and buffered from the businesses by trees.

The sanctuary was finished, and services in it deepened the spirituality of many. It seemed a holy place. Efforts had been made to increase the scope of Christian education, and music continued to grow as part of the church, with several people already saying that a real pipe organ would make a great difference in the services.

The congregants who wrote apparently had two issues with Morelock: an alleged lack of visitations and a lessening involvement with administrative details for the church. When asked by the Church Council to respond, Morelock was contrite, saying he admitted, “to having not pursued a vigorous visitation program.” The Council asked him to become “more aggressive” in those areas until a second Council meeting could be held on Oct. 19 to further discuss the problems.

If the Church Council was troubled by its relationship with Rev. Morelock, the Pastoral Relations Council was even more concerned. It apparently posed some questions to him in writing on September 11, but more than a month later, there had been no response. Deeply troubled, the Pastoral Relations presented a recommendation to the Council that must have stunned many:

“It is in the best interest of both Holy Cross Lutheran Church and Pastor Kenneth Morelock for him to accept a call elsewhere.”

The response of the congregants was swift and probably predictable. Sides formed, both in favor of and against Rev. Morelock, and a deep division opened in the church. While the congregation had had its troubles over the years since it had first become a mission outpost, no problem had come close to this one.

It is possible some in the congregation might have been blindsided by the issue, but it is unlikely, since church records show that there had been a “year-long discussion between the Council and the pastor concerning the ministerial program at Holy Cross.” Before acting the Pastoral Relations Committee listened to concerns over a period of four weeks.

The Church Council listened to the report and motion from the Pastoral Relations Council and approved it on a 7-2 vote and agreed to forward the resolution to the president of the Southeastern Synod. Perhaps bowing to the inevitable, Rev. Morelock on Nov. 6 asked to be put on call to any congregation seeking a pastor in either the Southeastern Synod or the Maryland Synod.

Morelock's one request was that he be allowed to serve through spring so that one of his children could be confirmed at Holy Cross and another graduate from high school. In a letter tinged with more than a little irony, Morelock said that it was his "fervent hope" that neither "you nor another pastor get to `enjoy' the peculiar situation that has developed here."

As it turned out, Morelock officially resigned as of Dec. 31, 1979, but the problems within the congregation were now out in the open, and the church was without a pastor at all.

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BY THE BEGINNING OF 1980, THERE WAS, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL RECORDS, a "chasm" in the congregation, with the church being split into three groups: those who were in favor of Morelock; those against him; and those in the middle. Wherever one stood, Holy Cross was a "deeply divided congregation," and no solution for the problems seemed near.

If Holy Cross issued a call for a new minister during 1980, no one answered it. A series of supply pastors that included Revs. Cole Reasin, Harvey Huntley, and James Clark would serve as interim and temporary pastors of Holy Cross for the next two years—a time of trial in the history of Holy Cross, to be sure. Reasin served for the first six Sundays of 1980 as supply pastor, and Huntley was named interim pastor after that.

Despite its fine location and new church, Holy Cross had, according to its annual report “a lot of wounds in the congregation”—wounds that were healing “all too slowly.” Traditionally, each committee of the church presented a report at the end of the year to be included in the annual report, but in the 1980 report, presented in January 1981, seven committees didn’t present a report at all.

The church has “little outreach, little caring for each other, no youth group, no organist, and no choir director.” Many members left the church, and some Sundays, services were thinly attended. About the only substantive changes during 1980 were the adoption of the Lutheran Book of Worship as the official text for services and the addition of children’s sermons to certain services.

After the disaster of late 1979 and the dark days of 1980, little changed on through 1981. Rev. Huntley was still at Holy Cross as interim pastor, but he left that April, and the church issued a call to a Rev. Joseph Griffin of Quimby, S. C., and though church records are unclear on what happened, Griffin declined to come.

As it turned out, a man who would utterly turn around the fortunes of the church stood in the wings and would become a guiding force at Holy Cross for more than two decades: Rev. David Hart.

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HART HAD TAKEN AN UNUSUAL ROUTE TO THE PULPIT OF A LUTHERAN CHURCH. Though his own father was a Lutheran minister, Hart had been a star high school and college football player and was always interested more in sports. After graduating from Newberry College (where he met his wife, Paula), he accepted a teaching and head-coaching job at a high school in Alabama.

He loved coaching, but he could not get out of his mind an urge to follow his father as a pastor. Something about it was necessary to him. And so he decided to go to seminary and study to be a pastor—something that took courage and determination.

Hart was almost forty when he preached a trial sermon at Holy Cross in the fall of 1981, and the congregants were immediately taken by his sincerity and open, friendly manner. After the problems of the past two years, he seemed, truly, to be a Godsend, and the congregation issued a call on an overwhelming vote: 66-4-1. They gave him until November 30 to decide on coming, but it was an easy choice. And at the writing of this history, some 24 years later, Pastor David Hart remains at Holy Cross, his tenure nearly four times longer than any other pastor in the church's history.

In his first annual report as pastor, Hart said he came to Holy Cross believing it had “much potential.” He was right. Though healing of the wounds of the past several years would take time, it began when Hart and his wife, Paula, moved to the area. Standing committees began once more, and they set regular meeting times to make sure that the business of the church moved forward. The church established visiting teams, shepherding programs, and even a weeknight Bible study. A church softball team was active during the summer.

All that was somewhat in the future, though. Pastor Hart was formally installed as minister of Holy Cross Lutheran Church on March 7, 1982, and a new era for the church began. It is worth noting that during the times of uncertainty, Jim Hansen and Bill Bennett served as supply pastors, and two decades later, Hansen was still fulfilling the same role.

For a period of nearly two years, Holy Cross was at the brink of division as a congregation, if not outright collapse. It's worth remembering that though it was a traumatic time for the church, such schisms are not at all unusual, even in the Athens area, where several congregations have split, sometimes over theological issues and others over location or personalities.

After Pastor Hart arrived, a new day came to Holy Cross.

CHAPTER EIGHT

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In the years immediately after Hart arrived, Holy Cross showed a new sense of purpose, a desire to put the problems of the past behind it. A committee began to study rewriting the church constitution, which was reported to be “badly out of date,” but the most important event in the early 1980s was the addition of a new educational annex.

So much of a church is the day-to-day, week-to-week schedule that does not include great events or controversies. In those years, Holy Cross started a puppet ministry with eight young people and two adult supervisors. It added an 8:30 service (later changed to 9), and in general looked for ways to find a deeper and richer relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

Still, church records often report on major events simply because they take such prolonged effort. That was the case with the new education annex, and the building committee went to work in February 1984, hoping to have the addition ready for occupation no later than the summer of 1985. Ed Helmey was in charge of this. (*Note: See interview with Ed Helmey later in this history.*)

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HOLY CROSS EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH HAD MUCH TO CELEBRATE ON Oct. 7, 1984. Not only was the church growing again and not only did it have a new pastor and a new purpose. It was celebrating its 25th anniversary. The world had changed dramatically since 1959, and of that congregation, only two charter members remained: Mrs. H. H. Brittain and Miss Dora Mollenhoff.

Some of the former pastors came, as did former members who had moved on but wished to celebrate with the congregation of Holy Cross. The program printed the roster of pastors:

Ernie Parrish—1955-1959

Arne Markland—1959—1961

Edward Breuer—1961-1967

Robert Hauss—1967—1973

Kenneth Morelock—1974—1979

Cole Reasin—1980

Harvey Huntley—1980—1982

James Clark—1982

David Hart—1982—

The service began with Johann Sebastian Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in B-flat Major*. Bach, a Lutheran himself, is at the center of Lutheran music and so the selection of his work to begin the 25th anniversary service was appropriate.

Presiding minister and homilist for the day was Rev. Gerald Troutman, bishop of the Southeastern Synod. The entrance hymn was the familiar and much-loved "O God

Our Help,” followed by an apostolic greeting and the Kyrie from the *Mass in G major* by Franz Schubert. Other hymns of the day were “Lift High the Cross” and “Now Thank We All Our God.” Special music included a solo, “Go, Congregation, Go,” a 16th century Moravian hymn, and the choir’s rendition of “Go Not Far from me, O God” by Zingarelli.

A church is not its bureaucratic structure of course, but its people, and so it is perhaps right at this point to mention some of those taking leadership roles at Holy Cross at the time of its 25th anniversary.

Member of the Church Council were: Linda Bennett, June Gnann, Edgar Helme, Gordon May, Eileen Paulin, George Pearson, Sonya Pileggi, William Spratling, Edward Staniek, Calvin Stansell, Ralph Verrastro, and Stanley Wallace. The anniversary committee consisted of Shirley Marks, Ralph Verrastro, Berdia Brittain, Miriam Huebner, Pat Snyder, Willard Snyder, and Morene Williams.

On the Reception Committee for the day were Berdia Brittain, June Gnann, Elma Helmreich, Miriam Huebner, Audrey Kattenhorn, Eileen Paulin, Diana Pearson, Elva Radcliffe, Midge Spratling, Toni Stansell, Morene Williams, Glenna Wilson, and Judy Verrastro.

Those assisting in the service were lecturers, Berdia Brittain and Edward Staniek; communion assistant, Miriam Huebner; organist/choirmaster, Joseph DeLoach; soloist, Mary Fritz; crucifer, Eric Longman; torchbearers, Annelie Klein and Vicky Saye; acolyte, Jake Wakefield; book bearer, Wesley Thomas; and trumpet soloist, Edward Sandor. Fritz and Sandor were faculty members visiting from the University of Georgia.

Then, as now, the church’s most active members shouldered many roles and much of the load!

A short history of Holy Cross—the only kind compiled until the current effort—was printed in the back of the bulletin. The prayer of the day is worth repeating, because it encapsulated much of the pride of Holy Cross in what had been accomplished:

“O God, you have promised through Your Son to be with your Church forever. We give you thanks for those who founded this community of believers and for the signs of your presence in our Congregation. Increase in us the Spirit of faith and love, and make us worthy of our heritage. Knit us together in the Communion of Saints and make our fellowship an example to all believers and to all nations, we pray through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

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WITH THE NEW EDUCATIONAL ANNEX COMPLETED IN 1985, THE CHURCH set out on its next ambitious goal: the purchase of a pipe organ for Holy Cross. The organ had been at the heart of church worship for more than a thousand years, but there were those in some congregations who were going to audio tape tracks for music (later CDs) and who were switching entirely to contemporary, pop-oriented music.

Lutherans (fortunately, we believe!) don't give away history so fast. Pipe organs have been the glory of the church for hundreds of years, and the craft and art of organ building had reached an amazing height by the time of Bach (1685-1750). In fact, Bach was known largely in his own time as one of the greatest organists in Europe.

So the idea that Holy Cross should have a real pipe organ and not an electronic version was both visionary and courageous. In fact, plans for a pipe organ at Holy Cross went all the way back to 1982, but other needs came first. After the new annex was first

used on Sept. 22, 1985, and dedicated on Oct. 6, the church was ready to go full-bore on selecting and purchasing a pipe organ.

At first, the church invited three firms to bid (later expanded to five), and each company came to present its plan. The Council knew from the outset that it would be an expensive proposition: Pipe organs aren't retail items stored in a warehouse somewhere. They must be crafted and built for the space available, and installing and tuning such a vast and complicated instrument is a slow, painstaking process. After listening to the companies' pitches, in late 1986 Holy Cross signed contracts with the Schantz Organ Company for a pipe organ, which would cost, installed, just under \$63,000—a huge sum for a relatively small congregation.

As it turned out, the organ would not be installed until 1988, but that length of time was not unusual. Church member Stan Wallace in early December 1987 visited the Schantz factory in Orrville, Ohio, to check on progress, and Mike Martin Construction Company got the bid for preparatory work for the installation in early 1988.

If a pipe organ means long-term commitment, then Holy Cross's decision to purchase one must have felt like an important marker on the congregation's journey of faith.

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CHANGE WAS IN THE AIR BY 1987, BECAUSE HOLY CROSS KNEW that on January 1, 1988, it would become part of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It's worth repeating how the combination of several groups came together:

“The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was finally born at its constituting convention in Columbus, Ohio, April 30-May 3, 1987. The three churches had "closing

conventions" the day before, taking care of constitutional matters and saying good-bye.

“At 12:01 a.m., Central Standard Time, January 1, 1988, the ELCA became the legal successor to its predecessors, a mosaic reflecting not only the ethnic heritages of traditional Lutherans through its original churches, but also the full spectrum of American culture in which it serves, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.”

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THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS, OF COURSE, is rich and sometimes rapid. Christianity, in practice, might be compared to a prism. Going in one side is the light of Christ and the promise of God, but what comes out the other side has differing “colors”—emphases on what is important and what like-minded believers profess. In a day when many denominations are, sadly, narrowing their focuses, the ELCA has worked hard to be more inclusive with each passing year. This branch of Lutheranism prides itself not on what it forbids but on what it includes. Of course hard questions never have easy answers, and the church has struggled with many contemporary issues. But it has studied and thought, considered and prayed. The result is a church with an aura of openness about it and a joy in replacing judgment with love.

So on New Year’s Day 1988, Holy Cross, which had been part of the slowly gathering tide of numerous more-moderate Lutheran groups, found itself within a new, stronger community of faith. That April, the church also dedicated the new pipe organ, which had been delivered and installed over a four-day period in January.

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WITH THAT WINTER CAME SICKNESS AND A NUMBER of deaths in the congregation. It was also struggling financially—something small churches always face, it seems. It was also the year that the church began using, for the first time, what records quaintly call a “microcomputer,” though there wasn’t a “word-processed” annual report for another three years!

The year 1989 saw Holy Cross celebrating its 30th anniversary, and it held a special service and a party to celebrate. The following year, the roofing of the sanctuary had begun to deteriorate and was replaced at a cost of \$638. Classrooms got new coats of paint, and the church obtained a sign for out front.

By 1992, donations had strongly rebounded, and the church formed a children’s choir. The following year, the parking lot was resurfaced and the congregation approved the installation of a new rank of organ pipes. The building underwent more repairs, and in the late summer, pledges began to fall behind.

But while Holy Cross had the same ebb and flow of support that all churches face, it had one constant that had long since given the church a real sense of stability: the pastorship of Rev. David Hart. In 1992, he had been with Holy Cross for a decade, and in 2002, the church would have a special time of praise for Hart, who at that time had been with Holy Cross for an astonishing 20 years.

In 1992, the church took another step toward permanence: the installation of beautiful stained-glass windows.

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MONEY HAD BEEN SET ASIDE FOR STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS way back when Holy Cross was at its Alps Road site, and though they were never bought there, when the new church was

built, space was built into the window frames for stained glass panels. While the church increased its giving and prayed for help, the windows would not have been installed without a sizeable donation from Richard and Miriam Huebner, in memory of their daughter, Joan.

The dedication service for the windows on Dec. 20, 1992, included the story of how the windows came to be installed:

“Selection of the windows was not an easy task. The committee worked with three stained-glass artisans, two local and one from Dahlonga. Drawings were submitted, and the committee evaluated them for color, texture, type of glass, and design. Many hours were spent searching for the right figures to express the feeling we wished to portray.

“Marianne Parr of Parr Glass Studio, Athens, was selected because of her artistic talents. We held a series of meetings in July and August to select glass and work out the details. This continued until a contract was signed on August 17, 1992. Following the signing of the contract, preliminary sets of drawings were produced by Ms. Parr. These were approved with minor changes. On December 4 we approved a mock-up of the stained-glass windows.

“Work was then begun on the finished product. The beauty of the windows is manifested as the mutual expression for God and God’s love for us. The installation of the windows today marks yet another way to worship God and his work.”

Parr had been at that time designing stained and beveled glass windows since 1976. Her work is in numerous residences and churches in the Athens area. Her work can be seen in the chapel of the Navy Supply Corps School in Athens. Assisting Parr in

the windows for Holy Cross were Athens artist Deborah Dillard and Zana Zeiller of Nashville, Tenn.

In September 1992, Parr and Dillard went to the Blenko Glass Factory of Milton, W. Va., to pick the glass used for the Holy Cross windows. All this glass was hand-blown, then broken, reheated, and rolled into flat sheets.

Pastor Hart's prayer at the dedication was eloquent: "Be with us now and bless us as we dedicate these stained glass windows to your glory and praise; as the light which shines through them is transformed into still greater splendor, so may our lives show the beauty of your manifold gifts of grace; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen."

Members of the Memorials Committee were Jerry Paulin, Berdia Brittain, Carolyn Hansen and Miriam Huebner. Ex-officio members were Pastor Hart, James Hansen, Ivan Roth, Boyd Hartman, and Richard Dluhy.

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THE YEAR 1994 SAW HOLY CROSS BECOME A "PRAYER PARTNER" with Faith Lutheran of Hartwell, a new congregation. A few noteworthy facts from that year:

*Holy Cross was among the top 15 percent of Congregations in the Southeastern Synod in support of the Synod and church-wide benevolence;

*Some 20 percent of the congregational giving at HC went to support ministries outside the congregation; and

*The church claimed to be a "local leader" in service and support.

Despite its pride, the church by that fall was once again facing financial challenges and briefly considered borrowing from its capital fund for operating expenses. Fortunately, the congregation came through generously and that was avoided.

One goal for 1995 reflected the fact that Holy Cross was beginning to take seriously the fact that it had reached its 40th anniversary from the time it began as a mission church. It planned for the creation of an archivist program for Holy Cross records and memorabilia. Such a program was brought up as being needed in annual reports for several years, but apparently it was never put into practice, and church records, crammed in cardboard filing boxes, remained in closets gathering dust.

CHAPTER NINE

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While Holy Cross had struggled financially off and on over the years, by the mid-Nineties, the economy, fueled by the dot-com boom, was so strong that Holy Cross took a major step and decided to hire a coordinator of ministry development. The step wasn't just one of personnel, since it allowed the congregation to move from a *pastoral* to a *program* church. Two signs of the latter were the addition of new programs and the need for more staff.

In September 1995, Holy Cross hired its first ministry coordinator in Jill Schneider, who also served as organist. Her presence was valuable, and that position has remained a decade later, important in coordinating the church's programs and in supplying ongoing leadership for youth programs.

While Holy Cross had for some time been using the hymns in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the Council felt a need for a more casual service at the early hour, and the perfect hymnal for that was *With One Voice*, which combined old favorites, newer standards, and music from other cultures. Since much of this music sounds better with piano than organ, a chancel piano was donated in 1995 to complement the new hymnals, giving Holy Cross worship services appealing both to those who enjoy casual, relaxed services and those who find the need for more formal, “high-church” worship.

The idea for a church archivist was still bouncing around in the mid-Nineties, but church records don’t show that anyone took the job, and records continued to be warehoused in whatever space was available.

Children, youth, and adult choirs were busy, and a man named Fred Binkholder served, but only for a brief time, as music director. By August 1996, with financial problems fading as an issue, Gwen McGraw was named new music director.

In 1997, the church appropriated its first Long Range Planning Committee. Would the current site work for years to come? Should new land be purchased and a larger church built? It was worth discussing, anyway. In April of that year, Jill Schneider moved with her husband David and their family to Michigan, where David went to serve as a resident pastor at Michigan State University. She was partially succeeded by Lois Sivert as organist and coordinator of music ministries, but a new coordinator of ministries was hired in late 1997 who would have a lasting influence at Holy Cross.

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BECKY KERR WAS A BRIGHT, CHEERFUL LIFELONG LUTHERAN whose husband, Bill, was a faculty member of the College of Food Science at the University of Georgia. She came to

employment at Holy Cross with great enthusiasm—a joy that was still much in evidence to all parishioners more than six years later. Becky began work on January 7, 1998.

She immediately began looking at how the youth were organized and decided to divide them into junior and senior sections, a successful move.

During 1998, Binkholder resigned as choir director, and Lois Sivert added that to her duties while remaining organist. Handbells were also purchased that year, and a fine handbell choir was organized and performs frequently to this day.

The ongoing repair of the physical structure led the church to form a Building Committee in 1998, and Holy Cross hired an architect to modify the front of the sanctuary and increase parking space.

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WORK ON THE SANCTUARY WAS COMPLETED IN 1999, and the church finally stopped using its aging septic tank and hooked up to the City of Athens sewerage system. Lois Sivert resigned as music director early that year to take a similar position in Gainesville, and not until September did Holy Cross obtain the services of Dr. Dell Hitchcock as organist and choir director.

In February of 1999, Holy Cross celebrated an important anniversary: its 40th anniversary as a full church. It was a happy time, with a dinner held on Saturday, Feb. 20 and special services the next day. On March 13, the church planted a magnolia next to the playground in honor of the milestone.

Becky Kerr also started a regular (and popular) Wednesday night LOGOS program.

That year was not without its controversies, however. While the new designs on the church drew little comment, some citizens were unhappy with the church's plans to expand its parking lot, and the issue, sometimes contentious, wound up before the local Planning Commission before a resolution was found that suited everyone. Still, by the time the Y2K celebrations rolled around on January 1, 2000, the new parking area was still being discussed.

The church had since 1982 had a deep and wonderful relationship with Pastor David Hart, and in 2000 granted him a twelve-week sabbatical from May through August, during which he visited sites in Europe associated with Martin Luther and the Lutheran church. He returned charged with a new energy and desire to lead Holy Cross forward. Pastor Deryck Dustan served as supply pastor while Rev. Hart was on sabbatical.

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AS THE CENTURY TURNED, HOLY CROSS WAS MORE DEEPLY INVOLVED than ever in work for, and far beyond, the congregation. Among its missions were Volunteer Athens, World Hunger Appeal, The Ark, Athens Food Bank, the Samaritan Counseling Center, Lutheran Disaster Ministry, and Lutheran World Relief. It later became part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Athens.

More and more programs flourished at Holy Cross, including the Ruth Circle, the 50-Plus club, and adult Sunday school classes. Becky Kerr caught the temper of the times with her well-attended class "Bad Girls of the Bible." The church started an informational website that, if not updated much, at least put the basics of Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church online. It was much improved during 2005.

Discussions continued about the fact that the church had no room to expand, but no decision had been made before the dot-com bubble burst, and America's economy went sour. (Holy Cross sits on 1.66 acres, and no more adjacent land is available.)

The ELCA's ideas of inclusiveness were well-served by outreach programs to the area Latino and African-American communities as well as occasional interdenominational services and combined work with the Athens Deaf Church. Members also delivered meals to AIDS patients.

The church added a nametag cabinet in the Narthex, bought new white choir robes, and gave generously to support church programs of all kinds.

Mostly, however, Holy Cross Lutheran Church lived not on the facts or histories of its own past or of the Lutheran Church. It offered and still offers a place to be witness to the living God and his son Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER TEN

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Holy Cross has been fortunate to have hundreds of supportive, faithful members during its history. Theirs are the true voices of the church's history. More will be added, and future historians have a challenge in recording them.

This history has selected one, for now, to stand for others. It is with Ed Helmey, who, with his wife Marilyn, was a member of the church for nearly a quarter of a century. Jim Hansen interviewed him. The church also has, on videotape, an interview with Berdia Brittain, but her interview answers are largely included in the earlier narrative here.

Interview with Ed Helmey

Conducted by Jim Hansen

Holy Cross: Ed, how long have you and Marilyn been here?

Helmey: We've been in Athens since July 1981. We've been members of Holy Cross since March of 1982, the Sunday before Pastor Hart became official pastor of the church. The interim pastor from Synod was the one who took us into the church. Pastor Hart, Paula, and Kathryn came in and sat right beside us that morning, and we didn't know who they were, and they didn't know who we were. And we went up and joined the church, and when we came back and sat down after church was over, Pastor Hart—he was just in a suit and we didn't know who he was—and we introduced ourselves, and he introduced himself David Hart—who was going to be the pastor of this church starting next week! And he was just sitting in the audience. And that's where we met Pastor Hart for the first time.

Holy Cross: Were you a Lutheran all your life?

Helmey: I have been a Lutheran all my life except for a period of 12 years in Gainesville, Ga. There was not a Lutheran church in Gainesville. There was a Missouri Lutheran church there, but the pastor came to visit us because at that time I was a Mason and Marilyn was an Eastern Star, and he told me I would have to give up my Masonic order and Marilyn would have to give up Eastern Star. And I said, "No, I don't have to, because the pastor I had in Kansas was a Shriner himself." And I said, "I don't know of anything in the Lutheran church we belong to that says you can't be a Mason or

Eastern Star.” So with that, he left, and we never joined the Lutheran church. We joined the Presbyterian Church in Gainesville and were members there for 12 years until I was recalled in 1969. We moved to Atlanta and moved our membership from Gainesville to Redeemer in Atlanta, and that’s where we left it until I was moved to Pennsylvania.

Holy Cross: What about the Lutheran church appeals to you?

Helmey: There are several things. I guess one of the things is the liturgical part of worship. That’s the big thing. And of course I was brought up in it and I went to Catechism class. And I had to learn all about it, and not only did I get the operational end of it, I was living, born and raised outside of Savannah where the Salzburgers settled. I came from a Lutheran background on both side of my family. Many times I visited Baptists, Methodists, but I guess the liturgy and that sort of thing—I couldn’t get used to the loose form of worship in any other churches. I did, when I was a student here at the University of Georgia in Athens in 1946-1948, there was no Lutheran church here of any kind. I went to the Episcopal Church. I didn’t join it, but I attended services there until we acquired a Lutheran minister from Atlanta to come over and hold services for the students. And the Episcopal Church allowed us to hold services there. I did go to the First Methodist sometimes, but a Lutheran church was not established here in Athens at that time.

Holy Cross: You’ve been involved in a lot of things since you’ve been a member here. Which one did you like best or meant the most to you?

Helmey: I was a Councilman for nine years, three different terms. And the last time, I was president for two years. And I was on a number of committees when I wasn't on the Council, most all the time on the Building Committee. I was on the Building Committee for the building of the educational extension. I guess that was the most challenging, because I took on the job of being the engineer for the architect and the engineer for the church. I represented both ends of that contract work out there. Having been a construction engineer for twenty-something years, it was a challenge to me to see that this was built properly, that the contract was executed properly. And I must say that I was greatly appreciated, because the building officer from the Synod, there are letters in there—he came over several times, and he told Pastor Hart that this was the best administered contract that he had ever seen in the Synod. And that meant a lot to me.

Holy Cross: How long did that construction take?

Helmey: It went all year, just about. I think we started in the spring and ended in the latter part of the summer and fall. I went right through the mid-summer. I think we started in March, and it went all the way through summer. It was a full-year's work, and I was still working at the time, so I would come by at lunch time and I would come back when I got off from work. So I was here most of the time, three times a day. And of course I had a very good working relationship with the contractor. He was just a fine man. At that time he was the supervisor and the contractor. The architect we had was the most cooperative architect I've ever worked with. He would come over on his assigned trips, but he would come over any time that I called him.

Holy Cross: What people at Holy Cross have been most influential in your life?

Helmey: First of all, Pastor Hart. Second, I'd have to say Dick Gnann. And then, of course, you, yourself, Jim Hansen, have been quite influential. Those are three most influential. I've had associations with others very close, but to say influence, Hart and Gnann are the most influential.

Holy Cross: Interesting, because I think June [Gnann] has been one for me.

Helmey: Well, I should have said Dick *and* June. I'll tell you a little incident that happened. The first covered-dish supper we had here at Holy Cross after I joined, Marilyn and I were here, and Dick, June and Kathryn were here. Marilyn and I were sitting down at the other end. We didn't have tables then or at least we weren't sitting at tables, and I had my drink on the floor and Dick and June were sitting next to us and Kathryn (Gnann) was sitting on the other side and she went up to get something to drink and she came back and she saw my glass was about half full, and she said, "Mr. Helmey, could I fill your glass?" At that time she was probably 18 or 19, and the daughter of these two people who had been so nice to us and I was impressed with that —I guess I will never forget that moment. Because that young lady had care and concern enough that she was looking after Marilyn and me, and that can't help but be influenced by their parents.

There were numbers of times when Dick and June and I talked about things. And Dick was on the building committee with me when we added that extension. And many times when we were doing things, even when Dick was not on the Council, I used him for consulting many times when I was on Council. I just was amazed at that man. Some

people didn't necessarily think that Dick was the most jovial or friendly person, but he was one of the most true persons that I ever met.

Holy Cross: He was somewhat reserved, but he had a good sense of humor.

Helmey: Oh, yes, he had a good sense of humor. Sometimes it was a little dry, but he did have a good sense of humor and a personality you just couldn't ever forget. Even today June is an impressive person.

Holy Cross: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about?

Helmey: The church has had such turnover since I've been here. When I came here, most of the members were of my age or older—very few young people. And of course we didn't have any facilities for them, for Sunday school or anything like that. And it's just amazing to me to see the turnover that has been in the 23 years I've been here. Right now there is only probably less than five people older than I am in this church, certainly that attend church regularly. There may not even be five—I don't know.

Holy Cross: Miriam Huebner?

Helmey: I'm glad you mentioned her. I guess I should have included her as one of those influential people to me, and I just didn't think about it. She hasn't been around for a little while. But Miriam Huebner is a most unusual person. She did things and nobody ever knew about it, unless you happened to be involved with the way that she did things. I'll give you an example. My wife Marilyn became head of the Altar Guild some number of years ago. When she took over, nobody knew where the wine was

coming from, but it was just always there. But who got it? Miriam Huebner. She always kept the wine. When she stopped, I took over, and we are the only ones who have done it since we've been here. I guess I've been doing it now 12 or 14 years. And if the church ever got into a financial bind, the next thing you knew, there would suddenly appear a sizable check. She never said anything about it. She just did it. Never expected anything. Miriam was a very influential person in different ways than Dick and June were, but she had her influence on me.

There were other people—three or four ladies who sat on the back seat—Berdia [Brittain], Marie Hagaman, Miriam, and Berdia's sister-in-law. They were always there, and they would help with the altar. And it was just a small group of ladies who all did the altar work. Berdia wrote the first handbook that the Altar Guild had. When Marilyn became director of the Altar Guild, she revised the handbook.

It's just been a lot of real nice people. We've had our problems, our up and down.

Holy Cross: That's family, though, isn't it?

Helmey: That's family. We're sorry to have to leave. I told pastor just last week, I came here just before you did and thought maybe I could see you through. But I'm going to have to leave before you.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

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Who are we? It might be helpful at this point to offer an edited version of questions and answers about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from its web site, from late 2004:

***What are the differences between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)?**

The differences between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) largely arise from historical and cultural factors, although some are theological in character. When Lutherans came to North America, they started church bodies that reflected, to some degree, the churches that they left behind. Many maintained until the early 20th century their immigrant languages. They sought pastors from the "old country" until patterns for the education of clergy could be developed here. Eventually, seminaries and church colleges were established in many places to serve the Lutheran churches in North America and, initially, especially to prepare pastors to serve congregations.

The earliest predecessor synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was constituted on August 25, 1748, in Philadelphia. It was known as the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. The ELCA is the product of a series of mergers and represents the largest (5.2 million member) Lutheran church body in North America. The ELCA was created in 1988 by the uniting of the 2.85 million member Lutheran Church in America, 2.25 million member American Lutheran Church, and the 100,000 member Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. Previously, the ALC and LCA in the early 1960s came into being as a result of mergers of eight smaller ethnically based Lutheran bodies

composed of German, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, Swedish, Slovak, Dutch, and other folk.

The ELCA tends to be more involved in ecumenical endeavors than the LCMS. The ELCA, through predecessor church bodies, is a founding member of the Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. The LCMS does not belong to any of these.

The LCMS sprang from German immigrant roots in the St. Louis area and has a continuous history since it was established in 1847. The LCMS is a second largest Lutheran church body in North America (2.7 million). It identifies itself as a church with an emphasis on biblical doctrine and faithful adherence to the historic Lutheran confessions. Insistence by some LCMS leaders on a literalist reading of all passages of Scripture led to a rupture in the mid-1970s, which in turn resulted in the formation of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, now part of the ELCA.

The pattern of Scripture interpretation generally practiced in the ELCA seeks to consider carefully the meanings of passages and their form. The time and place in which passages were written are studied to assist in interpretation. Emphasis is placed on the message of a text in the context of Scripture. As indicated in the ELCA's constitution, "This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life."

***Creation vs. Evolution?**

The ELCA doesn't have an official position on creation vs. evolution, but we subscribe to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, so we believe God created the universe and all that is therein, only not necessarily in six 24-hour days, and that he may actually have used evolution in the process of creation.

"Historical criticism" is an understanding that the Bible must be understood in the cultural context of the times in which it was written.

***ELCA Quick Facts**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America resulted from a union of three North American Lutheran church bodies: The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and the Lutheran Church in America.

The three churches agreed to unite in 1982. They formed a 70-member Commission for a New Lutheran Church, which planned the merger. The plan was approved by church conventions in 1986, and the ELCA constituting convention was held April 30-May 3, 1987, with the church actually beginning operations on January 1, 1988.

The ELCA meets in assembly every two years; at its 2001 Churchwide Assembly it elected its third bishop, The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, who will be eligible for re-election at the 2007 Churchwide Assembly.

MEMBERS:

- **Baptized Members:** 5,038,006
(down 61,871 from previous year)
- **Communing and Contributing Members:** 2,394,585
- **Members of Color or Whose Primary Language is Other Than English:**
128,135 (2.6 percent)

Included are African-Americans, 53,564; Latinos, 39,249; Asians and Pacific Islanders, 22,898; American Indian and Alaska Native People, 7,273; other, 15,151
- **Average Worship Attendance Each Week:** 1,537,043 (30.5 percent).
- **Congregations:** 10,721
- **Synods:** 65 in nine geographic regions

LEADERS:

- **Clergy:** 17,703 (2,760 female; 494 people of color)
- **Associates in Ministry:** 1,193
(955 female, 238 male; 15 people of color)
- **Diaconal Ministers:** 72
- **Deaconesses:** 67
- **Missionaries:** approx. 300 adult missionaries, of which some 78 self-funded volunteers, serving in over 50 countries
- **Campus Pastors and Ministries:** 195 campus ministry sites supported by synod and/or churchwide funds

- **Federal Chaplains:** Approximately 800 (125 active duty armed forces, 180 reservists, 390 retired military, 50 Veterans Affairs, 44 Civil Air Patrol, 7 Federal Bureau of Prisons).
- **Chaplaincy, Counseling and Clinical Education:** Approximately 800 ordained and lay rostered people serving in 12 specialized ministries such as correctional, health care, CPE, substance abuse, police, etc.

INSTITUTIONS:

- **Theological Seminaries and Deaconess Community:**
8 seminaries
1 deaconess community
- **Colleges and Universities:** 28
- **Schools:**
20 high schools
240 elementary schools
1,775 early childhood programs
- **Social Service Institutions:**
280 parent corporations with many more subsidiaries, providing service in 3,000 communities
- **Camps and Retreat Centers:** 145, serving 450,000 yearly
(summer programs 175,000, retreats and conferences 275,000)

FINANCES:

- **ELCA Churchwide Current Fund Budget:**
 - 2002 Revenue \$82,923,681
 - 2002 Expense \$82,077,501
 - 2003 Expenditure Authorization \$83,574,000
 - 2004 Expenditure Authorization \$81,505,000
- **ELCA World Hunger Fund:**
 - 2002 Income \$16,012,261
 - 2003 Budget \$16,000,000
 - 2004 Budget \$16,250,000
- **Total 2002 Income of Congregations:** \$2,493,316,925
- **Average Giving Per Confirmed Member:**
 - \$534.24 (Regular \$447.12; Designated: \$87.12)

A FINAL NOTE

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This history was compiled and written during 2003-2005 by Holy Cross Member Philip Lee Williams, with the help of many people, especially Jim and Carolyn Hansen. Holy Cross records are very thin for some years and scattered. Any errors of fact or interpretation in this history are Williams's alone. He fervently hopes that someone will come along in the next generation to correct errors and to add much more to the rich history of this congregation.