

# Special Anniversary Edition



Logo by Lucetta Kanetzke

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## THE BIRTH STRUGGLE OF THE MCC

By Kathy Johnson

Ray Lester who was the pastor of Advent as the MCC was being "birthed" has crystal clear memories even though 40 years have passed. He felt this was a time in his life when his idealism about country and the church was being questioned in rather profound ways. He divides this into four parts:

First there was the 60's with a decade of three assassinations (JFK, MLK, and RFK). It was the decade when you didn't trust anyone over 30; the Vietnam War, Protests and "Hell No I won't Go". There was the Racism with Jim Crow laws, segregation, bombing churches and killing Sunday School children, freedom riders and non-violence vs violence to solve problems. There was Martin Luther King Jr and letters from the Birmingham jail to church leaders who told him to slow down. There were protests and clashes between police and students and the bombing of the math building at UW-Madison which killed a research student. Glass windows were shattered at UW Hospital and Luther Memorial church nearby.

Secondly, Advent during the period of 1959-1964 faced starting a mission church in west Madison where Bethel Lutheran had many members and its pastor did not want another church. When the mission church was started, Pastor Lester now feels it was poorly located next to the

Ag Campus, near the state office buildings and apartment houses. After 4 plus years there had been 2 pastors and they were now looking for a third. They were a congregation of 250 baptized members with a debt of over \$133,000, receiving \$450.00 per month in subsidy, paying no money on the principle or interest of their debt, which kept escalating.

Third, Advent from 1964-68: After 4 other pastors returned calls to serve Advent, Pastor Lester became the 5th pastor they called. He was told that the reason that the church had not grown was because his predecessors had not called on people. "This was not true, for when I followed up on their files, I was told: "please stop calling on us and don't send us your newsletters. After about 2 years or so our congregation has grown to 570 baptized members. We no longer received the subsidy and refinanced our loan. Then I was told by TALC that they would be starting a mission congregation a mile and a half west of Advent near the new high school and shopping mall. To me this didn't make sense." He began to question if ministry was about beating other Lutheran ministers to Lutheran front door, Then, in his words, "through the leadership of an outstanding church council, we discovered we could sell our property for \$250,000.00, pay off our debt and have \$80,000.00 left over. As we began to make these decisions about which direction to go, Mr. Dauck gave us 5+ acres and we

purchased 3 additional acres. After considering many options, we decided to focus on an ecumenical ministry on the west side with denominations sharing facilities while retaining identity. It was hoped that this would free up money for programming, as opposed to the bulk of money going for facilities." Other struggling congregations on the Westside, including Dale Heights Presbyterian, Asbury Methodist, and First Baptist, if they sold their property and joined the MCC concept, they could work together without the burden of debt. Out of 38 individuals, the UCC was the only denomination that captured the vision and the dream. When push came to shove most denominational officials, including the Lutherans, not catching the vision, but working out of self interest. The exact opposite was true of the UCC and its representative Richard Wichlei. Lester states "He made it happen and took the risks and without him the MCC would not have gone forward. HE was the shining light of the whole process denominationally. There was so little support from the Lutherans, that at the incorporating ceremony, no representative showed up. So it took the leadership of a small Lutheran congregation willing to question and risk and the support of the UCC to birth the MCC."

Pastor Lester, joined by UCC minister Dan Schmeichen, worked together at the MCC from 1968-71, when Lester resigned. The highlights Ray remembers include:

- ◆ Winning the city of Madison Orchid Award for the innovative concept of the MCC and the multi-purpose facility
- ◆ When Advent was struggling to implement the MCC with hope, we lost over one hundred members, as a result there was a constant grieving process going on in the congregation for these were good people and friends that were leaving. During this time the UCC congregation came to our worship service as a sign of solidarity.
- ◆ The Madison Boy Choir had its beginnings at the MCC under the leadership of Carol Pray. Wayne McGown was the chairman of the original board of directors. They used our facility

for practice as well for a time.

- ◆ The Strollers Theater group used our facility.
- ◆ Dane County Mental Health assigned a social worker to work with our pre-school mothers. The mothers met while the children were in pre-school.
- ◆ The combined Sunday school and the use of Roman Catholic Sunday school material called "Light, Love, and Joy

Some of the struggles that Advent went through in making the transition to the MCC are things Ray Lester remembers:

- ◆ When we had a congregation meeting to vote on whether to buy 3+ acres in addition to the 5 acres that was donated by the Dauck family, Paul Rasmussen left the meeting and just after he did 10 - 15 others got up and left the meeting. They thought Paul got up to protest the direction of the meeting; the truth was, he simply got up to get a drink of water.
- ◆ The council invited the Advent members who wanted to, to attend a special council meeting. It was hoped that some differences could be resolved and we could move forward together. About halfway through the meeting, I looked over to Hilde McGown and saw tears in her eyes. At that point, it became clear to me that we were fractured and we would lose members as we moved forward.

Coming out of this time of polarization of society Ray thinks that the leadership ability, energy and resiliency of the Advent congregation and its outstanding council which spearheaded the beginning of the MCC was amazing. In about a two year period, this congregation was involved in a new concept of ministry, selling its property and relocating, leasing space with Hope at Covenant Presbyterian for a year and going through a building program. Just one of the four would be difficult for a strong established congregation but for this fledgling congregation, to deal with all four in the '60s was extraordinary.

He lists four significant times in the history of the MCC: The willingness and leadership of Advent to be open to new ideas in ministry and to persevere; the involvement of Richard Wichlei of the UCC, a true leader and an example of the best leadership in the church; the leadership and ability of Dan Schmeichen to continue the dream for seventeen years, and the stability and ministry of Andrew Rogness for 24 years.

My wife Jan loved Advent, the Madison Christian Community, and Madison. It was her favorite experience in fifty years of ministry. She loved the people who made this come to pass. Jan and I love to receive your newsletter as you continue the mission that you started. Greetings to all that we know in the MCC. We think of you often.

Congratulations on what the MCC has become and continues to become as you work together to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. Ray and Jan Lester

Many long-term members have memories of the early days of forming the MCC. Doug and Kathy Johnson were newly married and new to Madison where they had moved for new teaching jobs. They were looking forward to “shopping” for a new church family. They looked in the phone book for a Lutheran Church, found Advent at the top of the list, visited and never went anywhere else! One thing that interested them about the discussions about a joint ecumenical venture was their experience in Minneapolis of attending Trinity Lutheran which was worshipping in a Catholic church after its building was demolished and the land purchased by the government to complete I-94 through the city. It made sense to have more mission in less buildings, they thought.

When final discussions about the new venture were coming to the final stages, of the 24 denominations that started, only the UCC was willing to commit. The plans for a campus of seven churches using three sanctuaries was scaled back to one building and two churches. One interesting story from the early time, still in the building on Sheboygan concerned Sunday School. Because education was to be held

jointly for the first time, a committee from the two congregations was formed to decide on the curriculum to be used. The decision to use Lutheran material did not sit well with the UCC members. They decided their children could run outside and experience nature instead. Eventually harmony was restored in Sunday School with some curriculum even being written in house. Chuck Pfeifer was among those writing the combined curriculum, one of which was named Joyonya (Joy on Ya) and was used by all ages including adults.

When Andrew Rogness left, many people worried if members would move away, as some did after Ray Lester resigned. Were they worshipping at Advent Lutheran, or “Andrew” Lutheran. We are happy to report that more than 40% of members currently at Advent have joined in the past 6 years, a tribute to Jeff Wild, currently pastor at Advent. Also Community of Hope is stronger than ever, thanks to Pastor Tisha Brown.

As we look forward to the next 40 years, and look back on the past 40, we have much to be thankful for and value each and every member, past and present, who makes the MCC such a special place.



R. K. Lesters Christmas 1969  
Tami (9) Heidi (7) Mickey (5) Andy (2)

## Member Interviews to be shared in the newsletter.

November, 2008 – Recollections from Margaret Smith (an overview/highlights of the past 40 years.)

December, 2008 – Christmas Eves Past (The Barn Service, and other Christmas Eve traditions over the years.)

January, 2009 – Interviews with long time/original Advent Members – Ruth Olson, the McGowans, the McNatts, Jean Oliverson, John Brugge

February, 2009 – Interviews with long time/original Hope Members – Warren Exo, the Nacks, the Kanetzkes, Arthur Dodd, the Udvaris

March, 2009 – Interviews with mid-range Hope and Advent members – Emily Wixson, the Streits, Bill Long, Roger Buffett, the Jarvis'

April, 2009 – Interviews with newer Advent and Hope members – LisaAnn Trembath and Raelene Freitag, the Hellmers, Bonnie Trudell, Heather Putnam, the Geistlinger/Meyer family