

Calvary's Second Decade (1930-1939)

The first decade of Calvary Lutheran Church was marked by tremendous growth and the establishment of a permanent home for the congregation—the “basement church.” But the excitement the members must have felt in anchoring a new church in a fast-growing section of Moline was soon overshadowed by the Great Depression gripping the nation at the time. The financial crisis hit Calvary hard: At one point, more than three-fourths of its members were receiving charitable assistance. So great were the challenges the fledgling faith community faced, some even wondered whether it would survive.

Shepherding the debt-ridden congregation through much of this troubled time was the Rev. Maynard Force, who joined Calvary in September of 1931 after the April departure of the Rev. Adolph Dickhart.



The new pastor seemed aptly named, as he was, indeed, a formidable force for spreading the gospel in the community. In his report summing up his first year at Calvary, Rev. Force noted that while “many institutions, corporations, banks, governments and organizations of all kinds are crumbling and falling,” Christ’s Word is unfailing.

During the Depression, the congregation cut expenses as much as possible. The Illinois Conference (the Synod) had been assisting the church by providing financial help of up to \$1,900 a year, but those dollars were shrinking. To help the church, the organist, two assistants and the choir director all chose to serve without pay, according to a 1933 report. The church members took on the janitorial duties for the building, and some men from Calvary cut ice for Moline Consumers Company to work off the church's \$20 coal debt with the company. Another individual donated two tons of coal. Volunteers also cut wood near the town of

Hampton for fuel to heat the building—enough to last three years! And church organizations began to meet in homes to keep heating costs down.



Annual reports from this time show that Calvary had many active groups in the 1930s. The Luther League, made up of youth from the church, held a variety of service projects and events each year, including one outing where they “motored to Maquoketa Caves” on Decoration Day (Memorial Day). The Ladies Aid reportedly purchased items for the church through fundraisers that included making and selling potato sausage, and hawking Whites Wonder cleaner. The Brotherhood, a men’s group organized in 1931 at Calvary, had as its motto, “Hold Fast.” During the winter of 1931-32, the men of this group went door-to-door distributing nearly 900 copies of the Gospel of St. John,

and also placed religious tracts at area depots. The Girls’ Missionary Society (or “Circle” in some references) focused on spiritual edification and the support of missions. And the Junior Mission Band (which had *nothing* to do with making music) was a children’s group operating under the auspices of the Augustana Lutheran Church, with an emphasis on spreading the Gospel.

The Sunday School—where everything began for Calvary—had an enrollment nearing 300 in the early 1930’s, with record attendance of 262 children in 1932 (an increase of about 100 over the previous year). A Christmas program drew upwards of 500 people, reports show. The church held successful Vacation Bible School programs each summer—with 1937 being an exception. That was the year a smallpox scare occurred in the area. Just a week before Calvary’s VBS was set to begin, the city physician declared that only those children who had been vaccinated against the disease could take part, drastically reducing attendance that year.



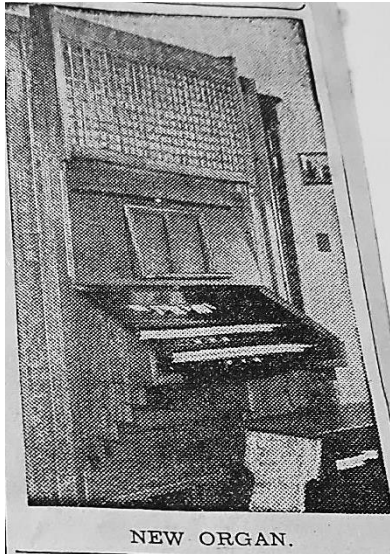
Calvary’s parishioners had ample opportunity for worship and faith building during this decade, although Communion was only offered about six times a year (church deacons stored the “Communion Box” at their homes until a cabinet was finally built for it). In proportion to its membership, Calvary had the highest attendance of any Moline church at the time, Rev. Force believed. There were Prayer Meetings held each Wednesday evening, drawing an average of 70 attendees; cottage prayer meetings on Friday evenings; and, of course, regular worship services. Sunday morning services drew an average of 150—including a number of students from the local Augustana Seminary—while attendance on Sunday evening was around 85. Weeklong “Evangelistic Meetings” (i.e., religious revivals) also were held. Yes, the work of God continued at Calvary, despite the congregation’s financial woes.



In 1934, the Calvary Lutheran Hospital Circle was formed for the purpose of holding sewing days at the hospital and helping the church meet its \$600 “hospital pledge”—an assessment made of area congregations to keep the Lutheran-affiliated medical facility in Moline afloat during the Depression. For one creative fundraiser, aprons were sent to friends and members, who were asked to sew into the apron pocket coins amounting to one cent per inch of their waist measure, and then return it. Presumably they took donors at their word.

Also in 1934, the church returned to its roots by purchasing a portable classroom from the Moline School Board for \$50 to help accommodate the Sunday School students. The structure was dismantled on the Logan School property and rebuilt on the church grounds by the men of Calvary. Chairs for the four new classrooms were provided in part by “Esterdahl’s Undertaking establishment,” it was reported. The congregation also installed canvas curtains in the “social hall” to create six separate classrooms. That same year, Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Nelson donated an altar painting, “Christ in Gethsemane,” greatly enhancing Calvary’s worship space.





By the mid-1930s, the financial picture was starting to brighten in the Tri-Cities. Calvary was able to purchase—for \$700 in cash—a pipe organ built by Rock Island resident Edward Lundeen, and dedicated on April 25, 1937. Space constraints meant that the organ chamber had to be installed in the kitchen! During this time, Calvary also was slowly reducing its debt for the basement building. In 1937, a \$4,000 “note” held by a local bank was taken over by the Illinois Conference, which greatly pleased Rev. Force. He stated: “We are indeed fortunate to get away from the bank and their threats, and to have our entire debt in the hands of ... an organization which has a soul.” (That debt would be paid in full as part of the church’s 20th anniversary celebration in 1939.)

During his tenure at Calvary, the Rev. Force was known to use his annual reports to discuss the social ills of the day. For example, he wrote that the “saloon, or modern tavern, has had its effect upon the church work,” and even *women* were frequenting these places, he lamented. Also in his sights were movies, which were luring his parishioners with offers of big prizes on “Bank Night” at the cinemas, and the “modern dance, which has cursed so many lives ... ,” he wrote. Bingo and baseball (particularly Sunday night ball games) were later added to Force’s list of sinful pleasures drawing Calvary members away from church activities.

Despite these temptations, Calvary saw its highest worship attendance to date with a 1937 Easter service that drew 355 people. Unfortunately, attendance quickly went back to “normal” the following week, which Rev. Force found disheartening. “How much good one or two services a year can do for these people God alone knows,” he stated.

Rev. Force remained at Calvary through March of 1940. In marking the church’s 20th year in 1939, the pastor made this prediction for the congregation’s future: “If Calvary remains a humble, prayerful church, the years to come will be marked with a great harvest of souls.”

Now, eighty years later, that harvest continues.