

AHEAD OF ITS TIME...

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The Church of St Stephen and St Bede in Winnipeg is a long-standing joint Lutheran and Anglican worshipping community which came into being long before the Waterloo Declaration was even first hatched as an idea. It started with the shared vision of Pastor Win Mott (Lutheran) and Reverend Michael Peers (Anglican), who recognized that the two parishes could provide a much stronger witness to the neighbourhood if they joined forces.

Hence, on Sunday, October 18, 1970, the congregation of St Stephen's Lutheran walked the 500 meters over to St Bede's Anglican on 99 Turner Avenue, who occupied a highly accessible and well-laid out church building for just over six years by that point. This historic walk would bring Lutherans and Anglicans together for a most memorable inaugural service and the beginnings of an amazing relationship beginning with the sharing of a common building facility. At this service, the Anglicans sat on one side of the altar in the sanctuary and Lutherans on the other! Despite coming from two different constitutional backgrounds, the two parishes had one thing in common right from the outset — a well-developed, liturgical life rooted in prayer. This was the building block of the community.

Was it easy? Hardly ever! In fact, much debate ensued for decades to come! Numerous stumbling blocks arose at various junctures in each parish's shared yet varied histories. Some were quite real, such as determining which parish would have which time slot on Sunday mornings for worship. Other issues, such as who had the higher shelf in which to store elements for communion, were always lurking in the background. However, it was a unique witness to God with a deep respect for the mutual traditions each other held so strongly,



and it culminated every Pentecost with a joint worship - a most visible sign of unity in the neighbourhood as well, as worship participants would take a walk around Turner Avenue as a tangible sign of growing unity and respect for each other.

How did it all develop from such a humble start? It was the youth group. Very quickly the youth of the two parishes decided to form one youth group. This provided the impetus for the parents and relationships ended up being quickly formed. The youth group was the first to demand for more opportunities to share time together. For it was in their openness and spontaneity, mixed with a sense of tradition as told and experienced through their parents, that joint worship and outings began to occur more frequently, and, with success. It was only a matter of time then that the parents and their co-parishioners began reaching out to each other, putting names to faces, building relationships and eventually, even, God forbid, sitting together during a worship service! This deepened relationship resulted in a much deeper spiritual dimension for all involved.

The ongoing relationship has certainly had its share of ups and downs since. Both parishes suffered greatly during the 80's due to several tragic and very unfortunate circumstances that, in many respects, could easily have shut down the congregation had it not been for a deep sense of resilience and trust in God.

The losses of members slowly but steadily occurred with moments of great joy along the way as God brought fresh faces and energies into both parishes. Through the sharing of the common struggles and goals, the parishes were bold to continue their vision of what it might look like one day to fully join forces as a stronger, united single entity. They grew closer together in shared communion and community to the point where, in 1996, joint worship services first began. The Lutheran pastor preached on Anglican rite weeks and vice versa. This, of course, was well after the many years that the two parishes had first authorized a joint Sunday School to be put in place.

This new arrangement created its own set of issues to work through, yet, there was more than enough momentum and synergies developing in exciting and positive ways to help move everyone forward in their growing relationship with each other, and with God. Some eight years later, in 2004, a joint service, combining the best from both liturgical traditions was first established. The process and exercise that took place as a result made the two groups reflect about the other for the first time, and what really was and was not most necessary to have in place to bring glory and praise to God.

The call to work together takes effort! It takes listening, supporting each other and working through an ever-changing dynamic. But the reward is great, too! The Church of St. Stephen and Bede remains today a visible sign of God's work in the lives of His humble people and those in the community of Silver Heights, Winnipeg. And as the Anglican liturgy boldly proclaims, ***Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine!***