

What an exciting time this 1950's decade has been for Atonement.

It all began in October 1950, when Pastor Richard Jesse stood up at the Southwestern Conference and said,

“There is a mission opportunity in North St. Louis County.”

At that time the area was booming with post–World War II housing. You could practically hear new neighborhoods popping up.

SO, The Mission Society at Concordia Seminary stepped in and sent a student, Walter Resner, to canvas Florissant.

Month after month, he walked the streets, knocking on doors, listening to families hopes for a church.

By July about sixty people signed on to be part of a new Lutheran mission.

On August 26, 1951, forty of us met for the very first time.

We didn't realize we were starting Atonement...

we just knew something hopeful was beginning.

One of my fondest memories was the night we chose the name.

We wrote about a dozen possibilities on the blackboard.

Everyone voted on all the names at once.

The one with the fewest votes got erased... then we voted again... and erased another...

Until only one name remained.

And suddenly, everyone agreed.

ATONEMENT.

Now... our first worship space was the L.F. Ballard Plumbing Shop on the corner of St. Francois and St. Ferdinand.

Not exactly a cathedral, but it was available—and it was ours.

If you leaned too far to one side, you might end up next to a pipe wrench, but we made it work.

Churches across the area helped: Pilgrim Lutheran in St. Louis gave us our first \$500. Other churches donated a pulpit and altar.

On September 30, 1951, we held our first service there—164 people crowded in.

Sunday School had 37 children, seated on those beloved little red chairs.

Every Saturday volunteers came to dust, straighten, and arrange them in small circles.

And every Sunday, after class, the chairs went back behind the altar and the big chairs came out for worship.

It was simple... it was cramped... and it was full of energy

But it was clear—we needed a real home.

SO On October 31, 1951, we purchased five acres on New Florissant Road for the grand sum of \$9,752.30.

Pilgrim Lutheran again stepped in and advanced the money.

Then came a big decision: who would design our new church?

We hired Harris Armstrong, one of the premier architects in St. Louis.

But when he showed us his first sketches...

Well, they weren't what anyone expected.

No Gothic arches, no Colonial steeples—

just a bold, modern structure that looked like a tent... a sharp triangle reaching upward.

People weren't sure what to think.

Gradually, though, the design grew on us.

And that unique A-frame—our church—began to take shape.

Groundbreaking took place a year later on October 27, 1952.

The cornerstone was set the following March.

And on June 28, 1953, we dedicated our new sanctuary.

That A-frame church even won architectural awards... and appeared in Reader's Digest.

The years that followed were astonishing.

Membership soared - from under 400 to over 1000 in just a few years.

Sunday School alone had nearly 400 children!

Four hundred children!

It was lively, joyful chaos in the best way.

By 1954 we were already planning an education building.

Again, Mr. Armstrong, the architect, designed it, and in 1956, it opened as a Christian Day School—kindergarten through fourth grade, with 80 students and three teachers.

We then built a new parsonage at St. Michael and Aubuchon in 1959,

And in 1958, just as others had helped us, we helped establish a new church in Hazelwood—Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd.

Many pastors served in the earliest months, until in January 1952, we called Rev. Justus P. Kretzmann.

He had spent 13 years in Nigeria as a missionary—helping build the church there.

Now he came to help build Atonement.

We had so many people wanting to attend his installation that we had to hold it at the Florissant Public School Auditorium—now Combs School

Under his leadership, Sunday mornings grew from one service...

to two...

to three...

and eventually four.

Seminary students were called upon to assist.

It was a busy, blessed season of life for our congregation.

So yes... the 1950s gave us borrowed altars, a daring A-frame church, and a congregation that grew almost faster than we could count.

But above all, they gave us a story of deep faith and determination—

one family, one prayer, one brick at a time.

And that is the story of Atonement in the 1950s—

how a little mission in a plumbing shop became the church home we cherish today.