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Dedication of St. Paul's Parish House, Decatur, IL, 1928

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What the Church of Jesus Christ needs more than anything else today is vision. She needs vision in order to see clearly the tremendous difficulties which confront her in these latter days; she needs vision in order to grasp the great opportunities which the Lord God places before her in the evening time of the world; and she needs vision in order to plan, pray and work effectively for the future which lies veiled and mysterious before her.

We need no greater proof for the existence of this vision in the Church of today than a festival of this nature. Stone by stone this great new building, which you are today placing into the service of the Most High, proclaims to the world that your vision of the future of the Church is a glorious one; in its permanent construction and its beautiful proportions it embodies your answer to a number of problems confronting the Church of today. This day of dedication would be zero if we considered this parish house merely another building prompted by the needs of a growing congregation or perhaps even a last desperate attempt to hold the young people with the Church. We could do nothing more fatal to the Church's continued progress here in Decatur than to misunderstand or even fail to understand entirely the true meaning of this new building. No, our conception of this dedication must embody great and eternal principles which hold good for the Church of alltimes. Let me therefore this evening speak to you on the topic:
Your new parish house - A vigorous answer to a number of questions which confront the Church of today -

No one will deny that the problems which the Church of today must face are numerous and are constantly multiplying. She must be prepared to battle against the open hostility of materialism and modernism; she must be prepared to counteract a deadly and insidious indifference over against all her work; she must be prepared to hold aloft the light of the Gospel in an evening time which threatens to darken down into a blacker night than has ever been known before. Jazzmad, amusement crazy the world rushes to destruction and ruin completely forgetful of God and of eternity. In the storms of atheism and unbelief, vice and lust the Church must stand and fearlessly face the problems of the future. And one of the most important and most vital of these problems - a problem with which the Church's future is inseparably bound up - is the problem of the child of the Church. What can and must the Church do for her children? On the answer to this question depends the life or death of the Church of tomorrow. Humanly speaking - and we can only speak humanly - your attitude over against the children of the Church of today will determine what sort of a Church you will have twenty, thirty or fifty years from now. Etc. etc. What will you have? You may choose by your attitude over against the Christian education of the child.

It is strange that no matter how often this
subject is touched upon in our pulpits we still have so many within our Church who consider the problem with callous indifference. We are even apt to forget that the future of all we know or love depends on the child of today. You all read your newspaper today. When you picked it up this morning you probably turned to the first page to find the most important news of the day. And no one can blame you for that. But did you ever read your newspaper with the thought that after all the most vital news of the day is found in an obscure column on an inside page under the heading "Births". Did you ever think that hidden in those names lies the future of Decatur, of our country and of our Church? Considered as to its importance for the future it is the most valuable page in a newspaper.

How hard it is for us to realize that! Had you been in a province of the Roman Empire some twenty centuries ago you would have found much to depress you. Some wise men would have said in despair: "Rome's eagles have spread their ugly wings over the wide world and the beaks of Rome's eagles are sucking the heart blood of the world. The night is upon us and there is no prospect of dawn." Then suppose you had said: "The outlook is not so despairful as that. The skies are already being touched with the rosy finger of dawn. In fact, the dayspring from on high has already visited us. Over in a stable in the obscure village of Bethlehem a little baby was born last night."

Do you suppose anyone would have believed you? They would have laughed outright and said: "A baby! What is a child in comparison with Rome?"
What can a child's weak hands accomplish against the opposition of the most powerful government the world has ever seen?". But in spite of all appearances that little child was far mightier than Rome. In His hands He took and crushed that great Empire and since then He has changed the whole course of human history.

Hear me, my friends! When the Lord God wants to move forward He always does so on the feet of little children. When the night had settled grim and dark over the world, when the Catholic Church had taken our Lord away and had substituted idolatry and death for Him, God determined to bring back the light. And how did He go about it? He did not send to the world an army of soldiers, or of scholars, or of philosophers. No - He stooped down and put a little baby into the arms of an obscure mother in a miner's cottage. That baby's name was Martin Luther - and the darkness fled, the new day dawned, and the human heart stood up in the glad consciousness that God had returned to His people.

At this very moment, my friend, a great army of invasion is marching upon this country of ours. We may defend ourselves as we please - that great army is going to conquer. It is going to capture absolutely everything that we have; it is going to take possession of our government, our business and our politics; it is going to take possession of every city, town or hamlet in this broad land of ours; it is going to take possession of our Church, our homes and our schools. Who is
this great army? The children in our homes today.
In their little hands they hold the future of the
world. And so the challenge comes to us, fathers and
mothers, pastors and teachers, workers for the cause
of Christ: What will you do with this great army while
you still have control of it? Will you set it on the
right road to eternity? Will you consecrate your-
selves anew to the great task of making this army of
God, soldiers of Christ fighting for truth and
righteousness long after you and I have passed away?

There is the challenge. And you, my friends, have
answered it - fearlessly, vigorously, boldly - by
erecting this building and placing it into the service
of your children. You have answered it with this
building in which your children will be continually,
perpetually and unceasingly under the daily influence
of the Word of God. All modern educational facilities
will be at their command, but more important, their
entire education will be permeated by the spirit of
the Gospel. Here they will daily become wise unto
salvation through faith in Christ Jesus; here they
will daily sit at the feet of their Savior; here they
will daily learn to become living and vital members
of the Church of tomorrow. You are certainly to be
commended for your unmistakeably clear answer to the
question: "What shall we do with the child of the
Church?"

And now that you have erected this
building, let it serve as a continued appeal to you
never to become weary in your work for the children
of the Church. If this building means what it should
mean to you, then it must be only the first step in a
great program of expansion for the most thorough
method of taking care of your children - the Christian Day School. May we not see in this new building the beginning of a new era in the history of St. Paul's of Decatur? An era in which not only every child of the congregation, but also many others, will receive within these walls an education for time and for eternity? Will you not see your Godgiven opportunity to make the doors of this building gateways to eternity by using your day-school to take care of the tremendous mission opportunities which lie at your door?

St. Paul's of Decatur, advertise this school, make its fame known throughout Decatur, let it be heralded far and wide: "St. Paul's wants to give every child within reach an education for time and for eternity."

There is a challenge in this building - and, please God, you will answer it as you answered the first, fearlessly and boldly: In God's name we shall go forward.

But this building is not only to serve the children of your congregation during school age; it is also to take care of them after the day of confirmation. We may safely assume that all the facilities for recreation and social activities which you have placed into this building are intended primarily for your young people. This parish house is then your vigorous answer to the problem of youth.

Again no one will deny that the youth of today, also within the confines of your Church, presents a real problem. In fact, there are some who open all the floodgates of violent criticism just as soon as the word youth is mentioned. They
say that of all the generations that have yet come upon this world the present is the worse. Never was there a more lawless and godless crowd of young men and young women than those of today. In the opinion of these critics they excel all others in point of irreverence, in point of lawlessness, in point of utter disregard and contempt for all the fundamental ideals of Church and State. There can be no doubt that these men go too far in their harsh denunciations of our modern youth. But, sad to say, there is a grain of truth in their criticism. We cannot ignore the fact that the average age of our criminals is yearly becoming less until it is now about eighteen years; we cannot ignore the fact that of the 15,000,000 Americans who daily run to the motion picture shows the majority are young people; we cannot ignore the fact that many of our young people must dance or go mad. The ever-increasing number of sex magazines, the use of the automobile to escape the watchful eyes of parents, the careless handling of God's name - all these point to the fact that a real youth problem confronts the Church of today, a problem which cries for solution, a problem which must be answered if the Church is to continue to grow and remain a vital factor in the hearts and lives of the men and women of tomorrow.

We may thank God that conditions among the young men and women of our Lutheran Church are not nearly so bad as some would have us believe. Constant, ceaseless watchfulness on the part of parents, pastors and teachers and careful training of youth has enabled at least the majority of them to pass through the fires of modern life unscorched and untouched. And this battle for the souls of our youth
must continue; we want them, we need them, we must have them. You, my friends, have thrown all your resources into this battle by erecting this building and placing it at the disposal of the youth of your congregation. Today you are saying to the young men and young women of your Church:

We see the dangers which confront you in the world today; we realize that you are continually beset by temptations to forsake the ways of your fathers and take part in the godless amusements of a jazz-mad world. And therefore we have erected this building that you may find here recreation and the social life which youth must have. Today we appeal to you to make this the center of all your recreational activities; today we appeal to you to forsake the worldly amusements which will only sear and burn your soul; today we appeal to you to place your lives into the hands of God and His Church not only for a few hours on Sunday morning, but continually and forever. We give this building to you as our answer to the problems which confront you; use it to the glory of God and the welfare of your souls.

This building is then a tremendous challenge to the youth of this congregation—a challenge to bind up their entire lives with the life of the Church. And how, my dear young friend, will you answer this challenge? How will you take this gift from your fathers and mothers? Please God you will take it in the spirit in which it was given. You will realize more fully and completely that your fathers and mothers want you to carry on when their hands become weary;
you will realize that you must come here in order to have a few moments rest from the storms of life; you will realize that here you will plan and work for the welfare of the Church of tomorrow. And above all you will realize that the voices of your fathers and mothers are only the echo of your blessed Savior's voice. Down through the ages comes His appeal to you to stand in a dying world as living monuments to His living words. He does not want your hearts and your lives only for a few brief moments on Sunday morning—no, He wants them in His hands and in His keeping continually and forever. And so this new building is your Savior's appeal to you to give Him your hearts, give Him your lives, make Him your dwelling place for time and for eternity. O, my dear young friend, what will you answer? Will you turn away from Him in the future as you have in the past? Will you ignore the challenge in this building and turn again to the sins and soul-destroying wickedness of a dying world? Or will you follow Him, love Him, give Him your heart, give Him your life, make Him your dwelling-place for time and for eternity? My young friend, your Savior asks it of you. What will you answer? Oh answer Him fearlessly, lovingly, gladly:

Take my life, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store
Take myself and I will be
Ever only all for Thee.

Are we saying too much? Are we demanding things of the youth of our Church which our Lord Himself does not demand? Ah no, open your Bibles and read and see just what the Lord God has done with the fire and the devotion of young men and young women who have given their hearts and lives to Him. He seems
to take a delight in making these His special standardbearers in the day of battle. Look at Samuel! When all Israel had become disgusted with the wickedness of the sons of Eli it was the youth Samuel who ministered before the Lord. Look at David! He is but a shepherd boy when he wakes the echoes of the lone hills with his psalms and the accompanying music of his harp. See Josiah! When Israel had revolted it was a youth, Josiah by name, who broke down the altars of Baal and burned the bones of his priests. Daniel was but a youth when he took his stand for purity and God. And so it is also today; this age may grow worse and worse but the Lord is preparing for it by again and again challenging the youth of our Church. The days are dark and ominous and this evening time of the world may darken down into a blacker night than has been known before - but God's cause is safe in God's hands. His work will not tarry for want of men. He buries his workmen, but the work goes on. Our Savior will neither fail nor be discouraged. Even now He sounds the trumpet call to the youth of our Church - and, if you will but listen you can hear this youthful army of God marching to the defense of their ancient faith; they have heard the call; they hear it everywhere - in Church, in school, in magnificent buildings of this nature. And they have answered - the youth of our Church, God's reserves are coming up, and their drums beat victory.

St. Paul's, may God then bless this new building - your answer to the problems of childhood and youth. And may your children, your young
men and young women, see in this building a challenge to rededicate and reconsecrate their lives to the glorious cause of our adorable Savior.

AMEN.