A Changing Church: A History of St. John's Lutheran Church

Journey Holland
joy.holland@valpo.edu

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A CHANGING CHURCH

A History of St. John’s Lutheran Church
In the Beginning

- Tolleston, Indiana was planted in the mid 1850s by George Tolle, who designated a plot of land to be used specifically for Church purposes
- Area was largely inhabited by German Lutheran immigrants
- Church developed a Lutheran parochial school
- Annexed into Gary in the early 1900s
Gary, Indiana

- 1960s saw a period of White Flight in the Calumet Region
- Existing discriminatory housing practices meant African Americans living in Gary were already concentrated in separate neighborhoods
- They did not have the same opportunity to follow the factory jobs out of Gary
- Overall, the city saw significant turns in racial and economic demographics

This map shows a 1931 “grading” of Gary’s neighborhoods, with hazardous and declining neighborhoods containing black Americans or foreign-born whites. See University of Richmond’s “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America".
https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=13/41.618/-87.343&city=lake-co.-gary-in
Open Doors, Closed Minds

- Karl Lutze served as St. John’s interim pastor in 1961
- Canvassed door-to-door to invite people to the church
- Effort joined by the next resident pastor, Norman Brandt
- For awhile, the congregation existed as a mixed group
- Some congregants opposed integration of the church (see Lutze, *Of Walls and Doors*)
- Brandt was an advocate for racial justice in other parts of ministry
The 1969 Vacation Bible School class attendance reached nearly four-hundred.
Conclusion

The ability of the church to survive the drastic changes in racial and economic demographics following White Flight was due to the church’s historical presence as a community locus, but one that was able and willing to serve the community thanks to the active role that church leadership played in the integration of the church.