

Mount Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church
The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
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History of the Church

Mount Calvary Evangelical Church was organized in May 1925 with 74 baptized members. Our parochial school opened the following fall with 9 students in grades 1 to 8. Mount Calvary was founded in the Sherman Park neighborhood and has remained committed to our community for the past 95 years.

The school ministry has been and remains a vital part of the congregation's mission. Originally, it was a community school with the first student body comprised of three children of members, three children from Roman Catholic families, and three children classified as "unchurched." The school soon transitioned to serving almost exclusively children of members. Many Lutheran families chose to join Mount Calvary because of the school and, in 1965, school enrollment reached its highest point with over 300 students. Almost all of these students came from the 1,900 baptized members of the congregation at the time.

Founding Pastor, Rev. Ewald M. Plass, imparted to the congregation a strong support for foreign missions which remains a part of Mount Calvary's ethos. Rev. Plass served two years at the Lutheran Seminary in Brazil and his passion for overseas mission work took hold at Mount Calvary. In the 1960's the adult bible class raised funds to purchase an ambulance and motorcycle for mission work in India and an additional motorcycle for work in Argentina. In 1989 the Mt. Calvary World Mission Society was formed to support foreign missions with "over and above" contributions by members and friends of the congregation. Over \$150,000 has been given to various mission enterprises around the world through this society.

After reaching a peak membership in the mid-1960's, Mount Calvary experienced a slow erosion of membership. By 1985, there were 1363 baptized members, down nearly a third from 20 years before. This accelerated in the 1990's and in 2000 the baptized membership was 535. The school experienced similar declines as there were fewer member families to enroll their children and neighborhood families found it difficult to pay tuition.

In 1998 the Milwaukee Parental Choice program expanded to serve students in religious schools and Mount Calvary quickly began accepting "Choice vouchers." When school began in August 2019, 99.5% of Mount Calvary's students in Prekindergarten-4 to Grade 8 were able to attend because of a "Choice voucher." The vast majority of these students are not members of the Church and many have no church affiliation.

Mount Calvary has only had 7 lead Pastors in 94 years, with an average tenure of 13 years. In addition, there have been many forward-thinking leaders who remained committed to Mount

Calvary's ministry on 53rd and Locust Streets. In 1978, the Mount Calvary Foundation was established to provide for the ongoing financial stability of the congregation. The Foundation is a separate nonprofit corporation and requires that the corpus of donations be invested and never used. The Foundation funds ministry initiatives with the investment income from its corpus. Through the years the Foundation has mostly provided for capital projects in the facility.

The first building to house both the Church and School ministries was built in 1927. A total of 10 separate construction projects were completed on this site. The most recent project was a 15,000 square foot expansion of the school. This project cost \$3.6 million to complete and \$1.6 million of the cost was financed. This debt was retired in 2019 through sacrificial giving by friends and members.

Bringing Christ's Hope to the Heart of the City

As we approach our 100th anniversary, Mount Calvary remains committed to our community and cultivating robust relationships with our neighbors. With 324 baptized members in 2019, we don't have the human resources we once did to be a positive influence in Sherman Park. As a result, we have innovated and collaborated to carry out our mission of ***bringing Christ's hope to the heart of the city.***

Mount Calvary was a founding member of Common Ground and was the conduit for a Lutheran Church Extension Fund loan to support Milwaukee Rising in their work to rehab over 90 homes in Sherman Park. We participate in the Milwaukee Police Department – District #7 Faith-Based Initiative and the current Pastor is an MPD volunteer chaplain. We have also collaborated with Ascension - St. Joseph's Hospital, Sherman Park Area Religious Communities, and the Sherman Park Community Association.

With the support of the Siebert Lutheran Foundation, we currently have a Community Minister and Director of Youth Ministry who cultivates connections to our neighbors. A robust ministry to community youth has been one of the results of his work. He has also coordinated our hosting of several out of town groups for urban immersions and service to our community.

In 2017 we launched the Mount Calvary Community Development Corporation which is currently operating a program where young people intern in a Farm to Hospital and Community effort. We grow vegetables which are sold or distributed in the food deserts of Milwaukee as well as at Ascension – St. Joseph's Hospital. Interns are encouraged to develop and, by the grace of God, realize their dreams for a better community.

Our School ministry remains a robust connection to our community. During the school year, we daily touch 190 children with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the Church's ongoing opportunity and challenge to develop deeper connections between School families and Christ.

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