

ALL OTHER GROUND IS SINKING SAND

One of the first projects that the good people of St. John took under their wings was the construction of a church building on the farmland donated by Bud Fogel. The Building Committee engaged the services of Randolph P. Farnsenmeir, renowned church architect, to come up with a plan for a modest structure suitable for a small rural congregation on its early legs. A crucial part of Mr. Farnsenmeir's plans included a large basement that would serve as a general use room. This basement provided the best dollar value for space, storm protection, and aesthetic quality.

The construction crew arrived early on the first Monday morning of June. A clearing tractor began scraping the surface of the general area of the building layout. Once the tractor operator finished his work, the construction crew laid out the lines for the church foundation so the excavating crew would know exactly where to dig. The excavating machine got there later that afternoon to begin the digging work. After just barely scratching the surface, the machine operator quit for the

day and said he would get most of the digging done the next day.

The excavator returned on Tuesday morning and filled the first bucket with dark brown, fertile soil. He operated his machine with great dexterity, giving Rev. Wolfe confidence in a smooth start. After about an hour, a loud thud shook the ground so violently it caused Pastor Darrell to spill his morning coffee onto his shirt. The excavator operator got off his machine and walked down into the shallow pit.

Pastor Darrell walked over to the pit and said, “What happened?”

“A rock,” the operator answered. “There’s a huge rock sitting under here. I’m gonna move the machine and see just how far that rock extends into the digging zone.”

“Hopefully, it’s not very big,” Darrell said, while trying to decide if he needed to change his shirt.

The operator nodded and moved his machine. After doing a few more test holes, he parked his machine and walked over to the reverend.

“She’s a big un, Reverend. Extends throughout the foundation area. I’ll finish out the day

scraping all the dirt I can off it, so they can come in with some dynamite and break it up.”

“That’s not going to be a problem, is it?” asked Darrell.

“No, Reverend. I run into this a lot, so I know the blasters really good. It’s a little unusual to find a layer of rock so shallow out here in this part of the county, though. But we’ll get that hole dug. Don’t you worry about that.”

Pastor Darrell relayed all the information to the Building Committee, who then held a meeting and concurred with the excavator’s assessment. The blasting crew could not come until the following Monday, so Rev. Wolfe had an extra Sunday service to seek the prayers and support of the congregation for the unfortunate delay.

The blasting crew did their job on Monday and the excavator got back to work digging and clearing out the loose rock. By Wednesday he had enough of the rock layer removed that they could pour the basement. Pastor Darrell breathed a sigh of relief when the machine operator came over to him and said he had finished. Darrell walked over to the edge of the pit and looked down. At first, he really couldn’t believe his eyes, but it stood out so clearly that not even the doubting Thomas could

have denied it. Somehow, in the blasting and clearing process, a graven image of the crucifix now appeared in the layer of rock remaining in the basement pit.

Pastor Darrell called the Building Committee, and they rushed over to the site. Yes, they all agreed the image stood out clearly. So, the Building Committee appointed a subcommittee to research all options for dealing with such a phenomenon. When the Building Subcommittee for Crucifix Research had contacted everyone they could think of with knowledge on the subject, and when Rev. Wolfe had talked to everyone in the upper echelon of church superiors, the Building Committee received a report. They then forwarded the report to the voting body of the congregation. Some would say that such protocol was kind of silly since almost everybody in the infant parish belonged to either the Building Committee or its Subcommittee, but that's just how it always went. What came out of the Emergency Voter's Meeting amounted to nothing more than the fact that nobody knew what to do.

On Friday of the following week, Pastor Darrell's battle with anxiety reached its climax. He had a powerful urge to write the seminary and suggest

they include a required course in building construction in the curriculum, but he ably fought off the notion. The reverend had to make a decision that would probably cause waves throughout the elite of the synod's inner circles, but their lack of help in the situation forced him to take matters into his own hands. Darrell got up bright and early on Saturday morning, picked up the telephone, and dialed the number for St. Mary's. Father Paul said he would be glad to come over and look at the image.

“What do you think, Father Paul?” asked Pastor Darrell. “I know you have probably had a great deal more experience than I have with such images.”

“Yes, my son, it certainly is very clear.”

“What would you do if you were in my place?” asked the fellow theologian.

“I recall a case of something very similar with the Virgin Mother some years back. Those in charge called in the bishop, and he came up with a solution that worked out really well.”

“What was the solution?” asked the bewildered Rev. Wolfe.

“He suggested that since God himself had created the rock and had taken the time to put the

image there, it must therefore behoove us to accept the gift of His creative hand and put it to some productive use.”

“But in this case, how do we know that God put the image there? Couldn’t the dynamite or the excavator have caused it?”

“Did you see the dynamite or the excavator create the image?” asked Father Paul.

“Well, no,” answered Pastor Darrell.

“Then we must rely on a certain amount of faith,” replied the priest.

“So, what should we do then, Father Paul?”

“I say let the Church profit from it and use the funds to further the universal mission.”

“Do you mean like charge admission?” asked Pastor Darrell.

“Exactly.”

Rev. Wolfe struggled with Father Paul’s suggestion for the next week. Finally, though, he presented it to the congregation with grave doubts about how they would accept it. The vote was 43 to 0, with only Farley Konemeyer abstaining, to go into an underground partnership with St. Mary’s. Farley’s non-vote didn’t mean much because he

abstained from every vote ever taken for thirty years. His son, Walter Konemeyer, would continue his unique vision years later.

Since the image sat on St. John's site, the members of St. John agreed to take responsibility for the upkeep of the image. St. Mary's would manage marketing for the partnership. St. John had to move its building site over about two hundred feet, but that seemed so insignificant compared to all the other decisions. The partnership agreement between the two congregations stipulated that the admission charge would be \$2.00 for adults and \$1.00 for children under ten years of age. Members of St. John's and St. Mary's would receive a 25% discount on the admission price. Atheists would have to pay a 10% surcharge.

If you visit St. John's today, you will still find the site in immaculate condition, though the image has dulled some from the weathering process. Over the years, many rumors floated about the region as to why the synod never objected to the shrine at St. John's. Adding to those rumors, an anonymous group from the same city as the headquarters of the synod provided a sign for the entrance to the pit. On it were the words:

My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.