

**“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is
Christ Jesus.”**

The Beginnings of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran School

Collin Vanderhoof
CH3031
Professor Korthals
December 13, 2004

“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus.”
The Beginnings of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran School

Mount Olive Lutheran Church, in Appleton, WI, is currently planning on expanding their facilities, both the church and school. Membership has increased and the congregation continues to enjoy God’s wonderful blessings. Mount Olive has come a long way since being founded in May 1915. It is probably safe to say that none of the founding individuals of Mount Olive would have envisioned such a large and prospering congregation.

Like many churches in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, change did not always come quickly at Mount Olive. For instance, it took decades for Mount Olive to start a Christian grade school. The school opened in 1970, but for a long time it looked as if Mount Olive may never have a school of its own. Today, Mount Olive enjoys a consistent enrollment of well over 100 students and sends many of them on to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, and some even on to Martin Lutheran College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This was a goal a long time in the making. This paper will examine the years before 1970. It will look at the beginnings of Mount Olive Lutheran School.

“Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church was formed after a decision by St. Paul’s Lutheran Congregation to discontinue preaching the Gospel in the English language.¹” The church was organized in 1915 and had its first church council on the 9th of that same month.² From the start, it seems as if Christian education for children was important: “It shall be the duty of all members to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Ephesians

¹ *History of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church*. A brief booklet printed at the congregation’s 75th anniversary, in 1990.

² *Ibid.*

6:4, and to this end teach them religion at home, send them to the Sunday School, if possible to a Lutheran day school, if possible two years to the Pastor's confirmation class."³

From the above quote, it is obvious that Mount Olive was unable, initially, to provide for all of the educational needs for its Christian children. That did not mean, however, that they did not try. In 1916, seven children were confirmed, and there were twenty confirmands in 1917.⁴ It seems as though the congregation did what it could for its young people. Sunday school appears to have been emphasized. Not much more can be said of Mount Olive from the 1920's and 30's. Unfortunately, many of the documents from those years were lost in the move from Mount Olive's downtown location.

At the end of the 1940's, however, it seems as youth education was given a high priority within the congregation:

Also in 1949, a Education and Recreation Committee (the E & R Committee) was appointed by the congregation to care for the youth of the church. This committee of six couples organized, supervised, and outfitted both boys and girls basketball and softball teams. They gave leadership and financial help to the Y.P.S. The committee urged the congregation to consider having its own parochial school.⁵

Also, in the same year, though the exact date is not noted, Mount Olive started a fund for Christian education: "Without any definite plans, but with the sole hope that at some future time daily instruction in Christian doctrine would be available to the youth of our church, a fund was started in 1949 by adding a monthly envelope to the envelope pack. This was later changed in making the fund a part of the weekly offering envelope."⁶ Suddenly, in the same year, Christian

³ Article V, Christian Education, *The original Constitution and By-Laws of Mount Olive English Evangelical Lutheran Church*.

⁴ *History of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Dedication*. A pamphlet handed out at the dedication of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran School.

education at Mount Olive had received its own committee as well as financial support. Things were moving in the right direction.

In 1951, the R & E Committee seems to have had its first discussions concerning having a Christian day school at Mount Olive. At the meeting of the R & E Committee, on April 22, 1951, "the question was raised as to what is actually going to be done about a Christian Day School. After discussion it was decided that this should be inquired about at a congregational meeting."⁷ At the committee's next meeting, it was moved to send two representatives to the aforementioned congregational meeting. The matter was discussed at the next two meetings, and it seems as if the E & R Committee would move forward on the matter, even if the church council would not:

Lloyd Mueller and Lloyd Doerfler reported on their meeting with the church council in regard to the Christian Day School questionnaire. They presented the council with our suggestions. The council was to give this further discussion and if they decide it is worthy of consideration it will be recommended to the congregation. After a lengthy discussion the motion was made and recorded that the R & E members attend the congregational meeting and in the event that the council does not have a recommendation on this question this committee should make an inquiry.⁸

They never had to make that inquiry. At the congregational meeting, it was moved that members of the committee compose a letter to the congregation in the form of a questionnaire. It was to be given to the pastor for approval and/or revision and then on to the council before being distributed to the members of the congregation.⁹ The letter was approved and sent to the congregation. Here is a reproduction of the letter:

Dear Member of Mount Olive:

For the past few years there has been a special monthly envelope in your pack containing the message: "For a Christian Day School For Our Children."

⁷ Minutes of the R & E Committee, April 22, 1951.

⁸ Minutes of the R & E Committee, July 5, 1951

⁹ Minutes of the R & E Committee, August 30, 1951.

Perhaps by now you have been wondering how much has been contributed in those envelopes, and for what purpose that money will be used.

The Christian Day School fund now contains approximately \$7000. It is for the congregation to decide as to the manner in which this fund shall be used to provide our grade school children with a Christian education.

However, to set some sort of goal in this program we need your help. To learn the opinions and desires of our members, the Education and Recreation Committee has been authorized to send out this inquiry. The questions on the enclosed post card mention this several courses from which we have to choose.

You will readily see how important it is to know what support any program will be given. Therefore, will you designate your wishes on this card and return it to us (unsigned, if you prefer) before Nov. 1st. Your answer will be most helpful in fashioning the future course of Mt. Olive on this important undertaking.

Very truly yours,
Mt. Olive Education and Recreation Committee¹⁰

At the bottom of this particular copy of the letter were these hand-written words: (The words appeared to be photocopied themselves, and it seems reasonable to assume, then, that these words were also on the letters that went out to the congregation.) “Every Day we wait is a day lost. Some of us, now parents, never had the opportunity of attending a Christian Day School, nor did our parents before us! Certainly we want our children to have this chance – Now! Money certainly cannot stand as an argument against a school. No amount is too great when it means the difference between a good or bad future for our children.”

The author of those words is not recorded, but it certainly points out how important this issue was, at least to a few members of Mount Olive. The committee certainly hoped the rest of the congregation shared their sense of urgency.

¹⁰ Letter to the Congregation, October 26, 1951. A copy of the letter was tucked into the notebook containing the minutes of the E & R Committee. (Incidentally, the letters R and E seem to be interchangeable. At some points it is noted as the E & R Committee, and at other times, the letters are reversed.)

The results of the survey came in and in the minutes of the next meeting, the committee seems a bit more subdued. Perhaps that was due to the response, or lack there of that they received:

On the Christian Day School question about 10% of cards sent out were returned. According to the voting 25 preferred to arrange with a sister congregation to accept our children and use our fund for tuition, 18 thought we should join hands with another congregation in erecting and supporting a school and 10 thought that someday Mt. Olive should have their own school. Under remarks there were two that would go along with the majority vote. 3 thought the money should be transferred to the high school fund. 4 prefer public school. 1 thought a school was not necessary. The motion was made that Lloyd give a report at the congregational meeting on the results of the survey.¹¹

One can almost feel the sense of dejection the results may have caused. Assuming the handwritten remarks at the bottom of the letter were written by one of the committee, the members of the R & E Committee certainly cannot have been happy with ten percent response and only ten individuals who thought Mount Olive should someday have its own school. Mel Knoke, longtime chairman of the R & E Committee, wrote: "Little interest was shown in building a school but a seed was sown."¹²

This seed did not immediately produce a school, but it was enough to keep the matter under discussion. The church council instructed the committee to continue with the matter by focusing on the parents of the Sunday School children.¹³ The committee did some phone calling and discussed the results at their April (1952) meeting:

The committee members each reported briefly their results of the telephone survey of the parents of Sunday School children on the Christian Day School. The summary showed, approximately 1/3 of the parents called, were interested in Mount Olive having a school.

¹¹ Minutes of the R & E Committee, December 6, 1951.

¹² Mel Knoke, *30 Years of the Recreational and Educational Committee*, page 2. A brief summary on his years with the committee.

¹³ Minutes of the R & E Committee, February 23, 1952.

Rev. Zieseimer thanked this committee for the service being done for the congregation and asked that we continue to follow through on this project. He expressed himself as definitely in favor of a program for the betterment of conditions for teaching the children.

After quite a discussion the suggestions was made that it might be possible to first think in terms of a parish house that in the future could be converted into a school.

In order to expand at any time it will be necessary to have more property. In as much as the survey showed about 33% interest in a school the motion was made, 2nd and carried that a recommendation be made to the congregation to purchase property to the north of the church for future educational purposes.¹⁴

Members of the committee seem to have been pleased with the progress, though it may have been slower than they would have liked. Thirty-three percent certainly seemed like an improvement, but more than that, "In 1952, Pastor Zieseimer showed his first real interest in our school project.¹⁵" The committee seemed to be gaining support in their push for a Christian day school. They used that support to continue with their idea of purchasing property. At the following congregational meeting, the suggestion of buying some land was taken seriously, and was handed over to the board of trustees for "further investigation."¹⁶ This investigation proceeded over the next few years. The committee kept its eyes on the process.

Meanwhile, Mount Olive's children of grade school age had the option of attending either St. Paul's in downtown Appleton, or St. Matthew's, which was across town. Though no numbers could be found, it seems that a fair number of parents made use of this option for their children. The Mount Olive congregation, at the suggestion of the R & E Committee, paid tuition for the children attending either of the other two schools.¹⁷ This occurred in 1954.

Unfortunately, two years later, Mount Olive was informed, "by St. Paul's congregation that they were unable to accept any new enrollments because of insufficient space. A similar

¹⁴ Minutes of the R & E Committee, April 6, 1952.

¹⁵ Mel Knoke, page 2.

¹⁶ Minutes of the R & E Committee, May 13, 1952.

¹⁷ *History of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 3.

condition existed at St. Matthew's school."¹⁸ Both schools were filled with their own students, and were unable to accept any children from Mount Olive. Though this must have seemed like a setback at the time, it is one more thing that moved Mount Olive along the road to getting its very own Christian day school.

During the same years that the parents of Mount Olive were dealing with the worry of where their children would go to school, the R & E Committee was very active in encouraging the congregation to buy property. Many of the minutes during the 1950's were concerned with the issue of buying property:

The E & R Committee led the efforts to acquire the five properties immediately north of the downtown church. They were the Halloran lot for \$4,500, the Vaughn home for \$18,000 in 1953, the former Trinity Lutheran Chapel on Harris St. for \$15,000 in 1956, the Klotch property owned by Ida Knoke for \$14,000 in 1957 and later the Woman's Club property for \$30,000. These homes were demolished and a parking lot was built and leased to the Medical Arts Clinic with the stipulation that the church would use it on Sundays and evenings.¹⁹

To acquire all of this property took some persistence on the part of the congregation. Several times in reading through the minutes of the R & E Committee, one comes across a paragraph that describes how an offer for a property was rejected. But, with the goal ever in mind, the committee persisted and acquired all the property they had set out to own.

For the committee, the end goal of buying all this property always was to have a school. Sometimes, though, the Lord has other ideas. As the 1950's came to a close, whatever enthusiasm there was for a Christian Day School seems to have waned. The minutes of the R & E Committee mention only details regarding the purchase of properties. There seems to have been no immediate plan to start up a school. For the time being, the congregation was happy for the extra parking and the rental fees paid by the Medical Arts Clinic. Not much can be found

¹⁸ *Dedication*, p 7.

¹⁹ *History of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 5.

which would explain the drop off of enthusiasm. The pamphlet given out at the dedication of the school in 1970, hinted that the growing age of the congregation was one possible reason. The only other explanation was: "The central business district of Appleton was also taking on a new image. As the commercial area expanded, many downtown residents moved to outlying areas. Traffic was steadily increasing. All these factors and the proximity of St. Paul's church and school made it apparent that the downtown location would be quite unsatisfactory as an elementary school site."²⁰

It seemed as if once again, Mount Olive would have to wait patiently for a school. For the rest of the decade and early into the 1960's, we see very little mention of a Christian grade school. The minutes show that it was often discussed, but no motions were made. The discussions appear not to have gone anywhere.

Then, in 1963, something happened that would suddenly bring the issue of a grade school back to the fore for the congregation of Mount Olive. A Mr. And Mrs. Rohloff had annexed their farmland in northeast Appleton to the city, but had also donated a little more than 3 acres to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This donation carried with it one stipulation: the land must be used for a new church and school.²¹ The R & E Committee pounced on this idea. Upon hearing of the opportunity, they reacted almost immediately: "A motion (was made) by Jerry (and) seconded by Clarence that Lloyd Doerfler present to the annual congregational meeting the suggestion that consideration be given to the Rohloff property donated to our synod as a possible site for future development of expansion for Mount Olive. (The motion) was carried."²²

²⁰ *History of Mount Olive Lutheran Church*, p. 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Minutes of the R & E Committee, Nov 14, 1963.

Apparently the motion passed at the congregational meeting as well, because at the next R & E meeting, Jerry informed everyone that the matter had been referred to the District Mission Board. Two men attended the next meeting of the District Mission Board and reported back:

Jerry reported that he and Lloyd Doerfler attended a meeting of the Northern Wisconsin Synod Mission Board held in Green Bay in January; and discussed with the members, Mount Olive's interest in the Rohloff property for expansion purpose with a view toward ultimately relocating at that site. The Board seemed pleased that an established congregation would consider developing the area for the Synod, without financial assistance, since it was Synod's intention to proceed with the establishment of a mission congregation on the site as soon as the area was improved. It was concerned, however, that the conditions under which the land was donated were complied with, and decided that Mr. And Mrs. Rohloff be contacted for clarification.²³

In a letter dated March 16 of the same year, Pastor Radke, President of the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board, informed the Mount Olive congregation the Rohloffs would indeed approve of Mount Olive getting the land, provided the plan included the use of a Christian day school.²⁴ It also suggested that Mount Olive should move quickly, because the Mission Board wanted to make use of that land as soon as possible.

The committee took that suggestion seriously. Several discussions were held as well as a congregational forum. As a result of these meetings, the Board of Trustees was given authorization to begin negotiating with the WELS for the purchase of the Rohloff property.²⁵

While these discussions were taking place, the Lord presented another opportunity to the members of Mount Olive. Northwood Park Plat, Inc, who owned ten lots bordering the northern and eastern sides of the Synod property, offered them to the congregation at an asking price of \$15,000.²⁶ It was quickly decided to purchase the ten lots. It was also suggested that the

²³ Minutes of the R & E Committee, March 4, 1964.

²⁴ Minutes of the R & E Committee, April 30, 1964.

²⁵ Minutes of the R & E Committee, July 8, 1964.

²⁶ *Dedication*, p. 8.

congregation purchase the synod property that was offered at \$9,500 plus closing costs.²⁷ The R & E Committee was raring to go, but of course the matter had to be brought to the congregation. In junction with the Stewardship Committee, they held an open hearing, another survey of the congregation, and a voter's meeting, all in April of 1965. The survey produced 142 in favor as opposed to 102 not in favor; and the voter's meeting approved the purchase of the properties, with a vote of twenty-seven to fourteen.²⁸ These, of course, were not overwhelming majorities, but the opposition could not have been too zealous as there is no mention of lengthy arguments or protests over the decision.

After legal technicalities were worked out that same year, 1965, the Mount Olive congregation became proud owners of five and a half acres of land in Northeast Appleton. They also received assurances from the District Mission Board that the money Synod gained in the deal would go to start another mission in the Northern Wisconsin District.²⁹ It is not known if and where this money was used.

Over the next couple of years, finances as well as building plans were hammered out. Building projects apparently do not happen over night. Finally, after much discussion and stewardship planning, a large voter's meeting was held on October 16, 1968. There, "a special committee was appointed to gather facts pertaining to the development of our Northwood Park property."³⁰ Then, two months later the annual meeting was held. As a result of this meeting, the property north of the downtown church was sold to the Medical Arts Clinic. Architects were hired. Building plans were prepared. A loan was obtained. Also, a teacher, Mr. Kenneth Kolander was called. Previously a principal and teacher of 20 years in Milwaukee, Mr. Kolander

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Minutes of the R & E Committee, August 11, 1965.

²⁹ *Dedication*, p. 9.

³⁰ Ibid.

accepted Mount Olive's call to serve as Minister of Education, organist and choir director. He was installed on September 14, 1969.³¹

The groundbreaking took place three weeks later, on October 15, 1969. The theme for the day was, "No other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus (I Corinthians 3:11)." The initial plan called for a four-room school with a gymnasium, stage, offices, kitchen and dining/fellowship hall. The plan also included a teacherage for Principle Kolander.³²

Twenty-one years after the R & E committee had been formed and an education fund had been started, Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran School opened its doors for the first time. Along with principal Kolander were three other teachers: Ruth Leverson, Lynn Nelson, and Helen Meyer. Opening day enrollment was ninety-four students.³³

With the opening of the school came the end of the R & E Committee. Mount Olive understandably organized a Board of Education. The R & E Committee, not wanting to disband, became the Evangelism and Public Relations Committee and threw their energies into welcoming new members and in publicizing for the congregation.³⁴

The Lord blessed the new school from the start. Within three years, fast growing enrollment called for a four-room addition to the school.³⁵ In an informational video for Mount Olive, Mr. Kolander remembers those years fondly. He smiles as he remembers having to add new classrooms so early, and he also points out that the school was a good outreach tool as many new families were brought to the church. Mount Olive has certainly enjoyed many blessings through its school. The wonderful blessings of our Lord have stayed with Mount Olive as they

³¹ *History of Mount Olive Lutheran Church*, p. 8.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Dedication*, p. 10.

³⁴ Minutes of the E & PR Committee, April 24, 1969.

³⁵ *History of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 8.

are once again looking to expand its facilities, including adding more classroom space. By God's grace, the children of Mount Olive will continue to benefit from having a Christian education founded on Christ Jesus.

Bibliography

Knoke, Mel. *30 Years of the R & E Committee*. Appleton, WI, 1979.

Knoke, Mel and Leone. *History of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Appleton, WI, 1990.

Building Together. An informational video about Mount Olive Lutheran Church. 2004.

Dedication. Booklet produced for the dedication of Mount Olive Lutheran School, Appleton, WI, 1970.

Minutes from R & E Committee Meetings of Mount Olive Lutheran Church. Appleton, WI, 1949 – 1972.

Original Constitution and Bylaws of Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Appleton, WI, 1915.