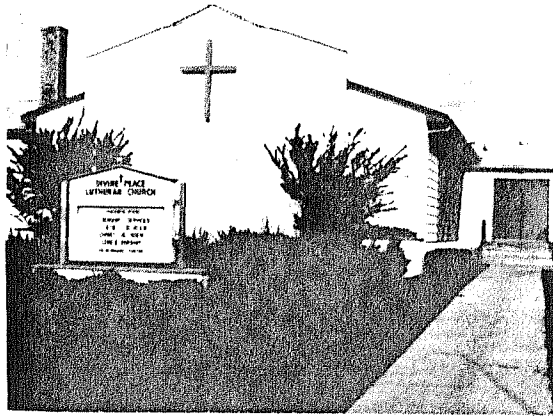


The History of
DIVINE PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

by
Thomas G. Unke

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Senior Church History
Professor Martin Westerhaus

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 M. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin



A look at the history of any congregation reveals the struggles endured and blessings received by those who have come into that congregation's family. Divine Peace Lutheran Church of Milwaukee is no exception. Pastor William Bernhardt, currently serving Divine Peace congregation, made this same observation on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1982.

"Our reflection upon the past reveals that we went through times of testing as well as years of increase and rich blessings. Even when we faltered, our Lord Jesus remained our Firm Foundation and Rock of Refuge. According to His promise, He was with us always. Certainly, we can join with Jacob of the Old Testament in declaring to our God, 'I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness You have shown your servant' (Genesis 32:10). If each one of us tried to recount the times that God mercifully guided, strengthened and protected us, we could write volumes."

Founded in 1956, Divine Peace Lutheran has had over thirty-five years of "increase and blessing." During these years, the people of Divine Peace have been served by five different pastors, three vacancy pastors and fourteen pulpit assistants.



1956 - 1958 : Pastor Armin W. Schuetze

In September of 1956, the District Mission Board of the Southeastern Wisconsin district approved the opening of a "Euclid Avenue Mission." That same month they called Pastor Armin W. Schuetze, a sixteen year veteran of the ministry, to serve as the mission explorer in the area of seventy-sixth street and Euclid Avenue. Construction of a chapel began immediately.

Pastor Schuetze spent the next few months organizing the mission and reaching out to the people in the area with the Gospel message. As construction continued, the Lord worked to call his people and the excitement of a budding congregation grew.

Plans were made to conduct the first worship service in the new chapel around Christmas. Although the chapel was not completely finished, Pastor Schuetze and over sixty worshippers came together for the first service of thanks and praise on December 9, 1956. From that day on, services were held weekly, including a Bible class and Sunday School.

After a few months, a meeting was held to discuss the proposal of forming an organized congregation. The vote was positive, and St. Mark's Lutheran Church was founded.

--What? That's right! For one month, February through March of 1957, Divine Peace was called "St. Mark's Lutheran." In the March organizational meeting it was suggested that too many churches in that area were named "St. Mark's" and the name "Divine Peace" was chosen.

Mr. Rudolph Cook was elected as president for the newborn congregation -- he is still a faithful member at Divine Peace in 1992. At the time of this organizational meeting there were 31 communicants and 11 voting members.

May of 1957 brought two significant events in the history of Divine Peace. On May 5th the people of the congregation, along with the District Mission Board dedicated the building to the praise of God and for use in serving His kingdom. The chairman of the mission board, Pastor Raymond Wiechmann, preached the sermon for this dedication.

Three weeks later, Divine Peace celebrated as its first class of catechumens was confirmed and received into membership. John Waller and Beth Schuetze were the two members of the class of 1957.

In August of 1957, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in convention officially received Divine Peace Lutheran Church into its fellowship. There were now 40 communicants in the family at Divine Peace.

1957 was a year filled with excitement for Divine Peace. The Lord blessed the birth of this group of believers and as

an added "year-end" joy, he added four more adult confirmands to their membership. These 44 Christian adults, along with their pastor, praised God as they entered into their second year together.

In April of 1958 the Holy Spirit, through the body of believers, called Pastor Schuetze to serve at the pastor-training Seminary of the WELS. In May, Pastor Schuetze informed the people that he had accepted that call to serve as professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. As Pastor Schuetze travelled to the campus of WLS, he crossed paths with a young Seminary graduate who was assigned that May to replace him in serving the people of Divine Peace.



1958 - 1964 : Pastor Richard D. Balge

In the Fall quarterly business meeting it was decided that Divine Peace would apply for membership in the Wisconsin Lutheran High School conference. Most of the discussion in this meeting dealt with the education of the children of their congregation. After much discussion, the voting members made

an official request for a female teacher to start a one room school in the Fall of 1958. The district mission board decided that it would not be possible to grant that request at the time, and the idea was tabled at Divine Peace.

The congregation continued to grow and by November the voters decided to go to a schedule of two services on Sunday mornings. Bible class and Sunday School would be held between services at 9:15.

December of 1958 marked the third time the congregation of Divine Peace celebrated the birth of the Savior together. This year was made special by two significant events. One was their first song service for Christmas, led by the newly formed "mixed choir." The second thing which made this Christmas special was the gift which they had received from Mt. Lebanon Lutheran Church in Milwaukee: an organ. Mrs Joyce Warner was very busy that evening. She served as both the director of the Choir and the organist. She served in those two positions for the next three years.

1959 and 1960 saw continued growth and a great concern for the spiritual upbringing of the youth in the congregation. A small youth group was formed. In the spring of 1960 however, this group welcomed the largest confirmation class to that time, eleven new members! A group for the grade school aged boys was also formed during these years.

In November of 1959, just three years after the mission board approved the formation of a congregation, Divine Peace became self-supporting. God had truly built up their little group on the One Foundation for faith, Jesus.

1962 was the year of celebration of the five year anniversary of Divine Peace. Members put together a historical slide show to commemorate this celebration. The film was entitled, "The Peace of God."

Within the span of one week in May of 1962 two huge events occurred. May 6, 1962 was the official observance of the fifth anniversary service. Professor Armin Schuetze returned to preach for the service. He preached from a new pulpit which was purchased to match the altar he had built years before, during the construction of the building.

Another major event happened the following Sunday, May 13. A groundbreaking ceremony was held for the building of a new parsonage at 3208 South 77th Street. This home was dedicated four months later, September 16, and a large open house was held. The choir, under the direction of Mrs. Elaine Cook sang at the services during both celebrations. That Fall a men's club was organized and played a large part in the building and dedication of the new parsonage.

Divine Peace received many blessings in the years that followed. In the Spring of 1964, Pastor Balge received a Call to serve as pastor at the Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel and student center at Madison, WI. When Pastor Balge accepted this Divine Call, the congregation was not only without a pastor but also without an organist. Mrs. Lois Balge had served in that position for the previous year and a half. Mrs. Elnor Rosenthal, who had been sharing time at the organ with Mrs. Balge, took on this position for the next twelve years until 1974.

Pastor Paul E. Nitz was called as the vacancy pastor and served until November.



1964 - 1971 : Pastor Reinhard E. Bittorf

In November of 1964, at the beginning of his eighth year in the ministry, Pastor Bittorf was installed as the pastor of Divine Peace.

The people of Divine Peace began an organized training program for evangelism in the following years. God blessed their outreach and continued to bring people into his Kingdom through the people.

In November of 1966 a concern for the young Christians in the congregation was again evident. Divine Peace voted to provide elementary education for them through Jordan and Woodlawn Lutheran churches. They were now also accepted into the Wisconsin Lutheran High School Association.

May of 1967 marked the tenth anniversary of Divine Peace. Rev. Richard Balge returned for this service. A new Baldwin electronic organ led the worshippers for the first time that morning. Mrs. Virginia Batterman directed the choir and played

the organ for that service. She served in those two positions during the years 1964 through 1980. In 1967, Mr. Robert Whitney became the Sunday School superintendent and has served in that position ever since.

The 10 years of history had caused the need for many maintenance programs during this time. A red dorsal curtain was hung behind the altar and the communion kneelers were reupholstered in May of 1966. New carpeting was installed the following summer. The basement and exterior of the church was painted. In July of 1971, blacktop was poured in the church parking lot. Congregational mail boxes were donated and put into use.

The confirmation class of 1971 was the largest that Divine Peace has ever had. Fifteen eighth graders were confirmed and received into membership that Spring.

Shortly before Thanksgiving in 1971, Pastor Bittorf accepted a Call to serve at Trinity Lutheran Church in New Hope, Minnesota. Pastor Julius Wille was called to be the vacancy pastor and served Divine Peace in that capacity for four months.



1972 - 1976 : Richard A. Winters

On March 5, 1972, Pastor Winters was installed as the fourth pastor of Divine Peace.

In June of 1972 a strong outreach effort was blessed with a large number of children in Vacation Bible School - 48! The concern for youth continued the following summer with a very ambitious trip for the youth group. In July of 1973 the teenage boys, along with youth leaders went to the boundary waters between the United States and Canada. It was an enjoyable trip and an excellent opportunity for these young men to spend time with Christian friends.

In the Fall of 1973 St. Jacobi was added to the congregation's schools for the elementary age children. The children of Divine Peace now were able to attend one of three schools, St. Jacobi, Jordan or Woodlawn Lutheran.

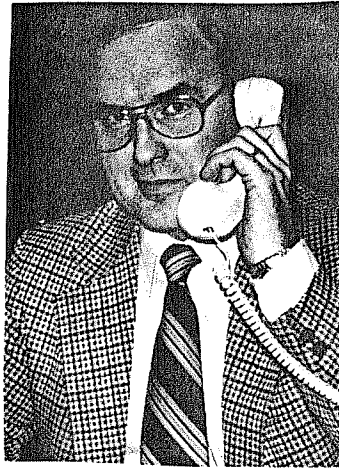
Throughout the Wisconsin Synod there was much debate over a change in Bible translations. The New International Version of the Bible was finished in 1972 and published soon after. It presented the lay people with a readable and fairly accurate translation. Divine Peace also was caught up in this debate and after much prayerful consideration, they voted to use the NIV in their worship services. The King James Version would slowly become less and less utilized.

After a generous donation, Divine Peace installed a public address system in April of 1975. This was one of many improvements which were made on the property during these years.

1975 was also the first year in which Divine Peace asked for part-time ministerial help by men who were training for the

ministry at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Paul Johnston was the first of fourteen (through 1992) pulpit assistants in the 1975-1976 school year.

In October of 1976, Pastor Winters left the congregation and Pastor Harold Wicke was called to serve Divine Peace during the vacancy which resulted.



1977 - present : William F. Bernhardt

On January 23, 1977 Pastor Bernhardt was installed as the fifth pastor at Divine Peace. 1977 was a special year for another reason: this was the twentieth year of ministry at Divine Peace.

Less than two weeks after Divine Peace installed their new pastor, the church was burglarized. The entire building was ransacked and some expensive audio equipment was stolen. No one was hurt and the congregation pulled together to clean up and replace damaged property.

May brought a much-awaited event; the twentieth anniversary celebration. Divine Peace's original pastor,

Professor Armin Schuetze preached a sermon on Lamentations 3 with the theme: "Thank God for Twenty Years of Faithful Mercy!" God blessed them on that day also with a generous outpouring of gifts which were applied to the general debt.

Less than one year later, in March of 1978, the members of Divine Peace began planning for their twenty-fifth anniversary which would take place in 1982. It was an event for which many of the people had waited for and worked for many years.

During this time, Divine Peace was served by several different pulpit assistants from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This is a list of the men who have helped during Pastor Bernhardt's ministry at Divine Peace:

1976 - 1977	John Covach (middler)
1977 - 1978	John Schneidervin
1978 - 1979	Charles Degner
1979 - 1980	John Covach (senior)
1980 - 1981	John Schuetze
1981 - 1982	Keith Amborn
1982 - 1983	Alan Sorum
1983 - 1984	Mark Cordes
1984 - 1985	John Eich
1985 - 1986	Chris Cordes
1986 - 1987	Nathan Cordes (middler)
1987 - 1988	Joel Gaertner (middler)
1988 - 1989	Nathan Cordes (senior)
1989 - 1990	Joel Gaertner (senior)
1990 - 1991	Joel Jenswold (middler)
1991 - 1992	Tom Unke

Divine Peace was once again the victim of burglary on February 10, 1980. This time, almost exactly three years after the first incident, the burglar started a fire in one of the church closets. This could easily have been the end of the church building, but God spared them from that burden. Pastor Bernhardt and his wife saw the fire and quickly called the fire department. The church was saved with relatively little damage

when compared with the cost of completely rebuilding. The fire and the burglary costs totaled more than four thousand dollars.

As plans rolled on for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration, Divine Peace enjoyed another unique blessing from God. In May of 1981, John Schuetze, son of their first pastor Armin Schuetze, graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and was called into the public ministry. There were many members who clearly remembered John as a baby and toddler while he was among the family at Divine Peace.

The final months before the twenty-fifth anniversary in May were filled with many projects of property improvements. They put new windows and trim on the parsonage, renovated the chancel area, installed carpet on the stairways and repainted almost all the walls. They also installed new lighting outside and hung two new crosses in the church, one in the front and one at the rear. Several people took on the challenge of creating a pictorial directory of the entire congregation for the first time in their twenty-five year history.

Finally the long-awaited day came, May 2, 1982. All five of their pastors, past and present took part in the service of thanks and praise to the God who had brought them through those twenty-five years. Mr. Paul Steiner directed the choir (as he did throughout the years 1981-1987) while his wife played the organ (she held this position for the same period).

The congregation held an anniversary reception at Meurer's Restaurant that same afternoon. After many months of planning and hard work, the event was a success and the glory was all God's.

The later 1980s brought many challenges and blessings to the people of Divine Peace. The stress of the education of the children of the congregation continued but the idea of starting a school never formally resurfaced.

Pastor Bernhardt took on several different positions in service to the Wisconsin Synod. He currently serves on the Board for World Missions as secretary. His involvement in this has brought to the people of Divine Peace a heightened awareness of synodical foreign mission work.

Pastor Bernhardt has also spent some of his time working on editions of "The WELS Connection." He has become the spokesman for this monthly video presentation put out by the Wisconsin Synod. Its purpose is to keep the members of the WELS informed about many different activities which are being carried out in the name of the Lord throughout the world. Divine Peace has played a large role in this activity by sharing their pastor for this valuable service.

In 1990, the people of Divine Peace began to discuss their future quite seriously. The proposal was made to look into building a new church which would fit their needs and be useful to them as they continued to grow. There is little question that this group of people has "outgrown" the original chapel of 1957.

Architectural plans were drawn up for a large church building to be built on the same site as their present church. This would mean worshipping for a time in the gym of a nearby church. To many, this plan seems like the way the church has to go to continue its service to the Lord. However, not all of

the people are convinced of this. At the time of this writing, the plans to build have not changed, but the people are prayerfully considering this building project. Out of love for each other and consideration for those who oppose the project, they are taking the next steps slowly.

God has been faithful in blessing the efforts of these people to spread His Word. It is God who gathers and strengthens his people through his Means of Grace. Pastor Bernhardt made this statement in the twenty-fifth anniversary directory:

"After every sermon you hear the votum, 'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' It is a heartfelt prayer... Let us remember that it is God's peace given us through Christ Jesus that is at the center of our rejoicing and thanksgiving. It is because of His grace through our Savior that we can be certain of that everlasting peace with God. As a congregation and as individuals we have been called by God's grace...

If we had tried to found this congregation on our own understanding, we would have floundered long ago in the confusion that afflicts sinful man. We would be without true peace. We would be without the confidence that our sins are forgiven and that we are heirs of eternal life. Thank God, then, for the special blessings which we can recount...Thank God we can say by faith that we enjoy His (Divine) Peace."