

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Hartford, Wisconsin

John W. Gawrisch

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As early as the fifties of the past century, German emigrants began to settle in Hartford and in the neighboring area. They came from different religious backgrounds. The pay scale at that time was very low and a man considered himself very fortunate if he had earned as much as a dollar for a day's work. Many of these people could find work only during the summer months. Their objective for working was to buy their homes.

But their eyes were not only focused on survival in this world, they also aspired to someday enter the heavenly mansions which were prepared for them and for all mankind through the suffering and death of their Savior, Jesus Christ. Many of these people had few earthly possessions. By our standards, they were very poor. And yet in a sense they were rich, because the seed of the gospel was firmly rooted in their hearts. This is the greatest treasure of all. Yes, these people possessed this gospel message by God's grace, and they arrived in Hartford with faith in Christ and a deep love for His church.

It is only natural that such a people would seek a church of their confession. However, at the time there was no such Church in Hartford. Therefore the idea of starting their own congregation arose. They hoped to someday build their own church and have their own pastor. A meeting was scheduled for all those who were interested in establishing such a church at the North Side school in Hartford on May 23, 1864. There was a very favorable response. Twenty-six men attended but they were from different parts of Germany and also from different religious backgrounds. Some were Lutheran, some Reformed. They decided to go ahead and form a congregation. They were still without a pastor. They adopted the following name, "Die Lutherisch und Reformierte Friedens Kirchen Gemeinde zu Hartford, Washington County, Wisconsin." The mixture of confessions of faith would only spell trouble afterwhile.

There were other Lutheran churches which were not that far away, but in a farming community the people don't care to travel too far from home when there are chores to be done. For instance, there was a church established about 5 miles east of Hartford in Slinger, Wisconsin, and another church about 5 miles west of Hartford in the Town Herman, Wisconsin.

At this first meeting, it was decided to purchase a lot on which a church could be built. Two lots were offered them and they bought one for \$180. They asked for subscriptions at this first meeting and received pledges from \$10 to \$60, a total was pledged of \$635. This was quite an amount at this time and it showed the sincere desire of these people to erect a church.

At the very next meeting of the congregation, plans went into full swing to build a church. They decided upon a church 45 feet long, 28 feet wide and 17 feet high, including a balcony and a tower. A committee was appointed to go to Fend du Lac to pick up the necessary lumber. Fend du Lac was about fifty miles away, so this was not an easy chore to haul this load by horse and wagon. At a later meeting, the contract to build the church was given to John Buckreus, Sr. for \$575. This was only provided that the congregation would furnish all the necessary materials. The frame work of the church was to be finished by July, 1865. A plasterer was hired for 9 cents per square yard. A janitor was also hired to heat and clean the church at the very reasonable salary of \$1.50 for six months. Just imagine that, if he did a good job, they no doubt gave him a nickel raise, per six months, of course. A neighboring pastor, Rev. Opitz, was asked to draw designs for the altar and the pulpit. The congregation

accepted his designs. The altar, pulpit, and all the pews were built by local people. While the church was under construction, services were held in the Universalist Society building. On September 16, 1866, the church was dedicated.

After the church was dedicated, there still were some very important matters remaining. The church still had no pastor of its own. The first pastor to serve the congregation was Pastor Giese of Town Herman, Wisconsin. He helped out only a short time and was succeeded by Pastor Opitz of Slinger. There was a big hassle about the constitution of the congregation which had been filed without the consent of the congregation. Later it had to be withdrawn. Pastor Opitz of Slinger gave this little congregation the advice to join the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin. It was voted that they would send a delegate to the next meeting of the Wisconsin Synod. Albert Hacker was the delegate to attend this convention. Mr. Hacker was a very fine member of the young congregation. He was a man firm in his convictions and steadfast in the confession of the truths of the Holy Scriptures, and in the confessions of the Lutheran Church based solely on the Word of God. Mr. Hacker was also the secretary of the congregation. The Centennial Anniversary Booklet states, "Mr. Hacker was secretary of the congregation and we still have the book containing the minutes of all the meetings during these first years in which the congregation went through many trials." This book would have been extremely helpful to me in completing this assignment, however, no one knows where this book disappeared since the Centennial Anniversary. I have asked all the authorities of the congregation and have come up empty handed.

At a later meeting in 1866, the situation came to a head when the majority of the young congregation voted to join the Wisconsin Synod.

Those who voted not to join the Wisconsin Synod were so opposed to this action, that they left the church and organized a Reformed church. Those who had voted to join the Wisconsin Synod, then changed the name of the church to Peace Evangelical Lutheran, the name it bears to this date. A comment was taken from Mr. Hacker's book for the Centennial Booklet about a Confirmation service taking place after the division, which read, "now for the first time a crucifix was placed on the altar and the pastor could make the sign of the cross." Now at last, there was unity of faith and practice in the congregation. In spite of the many trials and tribulations, a fine Lutheran congregation emerged.

Pastor A. Opitz served the congregation also only for a short time, then Pastor A. Denniger was called from Trinity, Huilsburg. One would think that there would be many hard feelings taking a pastor from a congregation so close, but I have found no such evidence. Pastor Denniger served the congregation from 1867 - 1874. He was the first resident pastor of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church.

When Pastor Denniger left, Pastor Opitz was called once again. He served until 1881 when Pastor Christian Prebst was called. At the time, he was serving as pastor in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. He accepted the call and would serve the congregation for the next 29 years, 1881 - 1910.

During his pastorate a terrible tragedy occurred. A fire destroyed the entire church, with all its contents, which included a new pipe organ which was only about a month old, on January 25, 1897. The church and its contents were nearly a total loss, since the church was only covered by insurance up to \$3,000. The congregation's spirit, although terribly depressed, was not put out along with the fire.

The Sunday after the fire, another meeting was held at the North Side School, the same place as the first congregation meeting, to decide

on the future of the congregation. The congregation voted to proceed with building a new church and a building committee was elected. An architect from Milwaukee drew up the plans and J. Buckreus, Jr., son of the man who built the first church, was given the contract to build the church for \$4,380. Another pipe organ was purchased for the new church also and the total cost for the entire project came to \$7,478. On May 23, 1897, exactly 33 years before ^{at} this date the congregation was founded, there was a Cornerstone Laying Service for the new church. By September, 1897, the church was dedicated. This building would serve the congregation for more than 62 years. Pastor Jaeckel of Grace Church, Milwaukee, Pastor Toepel of Zum Kripeln Christi, Town Herman, and former Pastor Opitz assisted Pastor Prebst at the dedication.

There were several other important dates in the history of this church building. On August 8, 1916, the church was rededicated and two bells were installed in the tower. In 1929, the basement of the church was completely remodeled for use by the Sunday School and other organizations. On August 2, 1941, the third pipe organ in the congregation's history was dedicated. In November, 1949, the church basement was enlarged and a new furnace was installed. A new carpet was laid in the church in January, 1951.

In 1910, Pastor Adolph von Rohr began a ministry that was to last 57 years. Over the years, the congregation ~~expanded~~ to the point where it was imperative to build a new church. A building fund was established for this specific purpose. In 1958, they decided to proceed with the building of a new church. A piece of land was purchased of more than nine acres. It was located on the ^{north} south west part of town, a beautiful setting for the new church. A firm of architects was engaged from Milwaukee. A plan by these architects was accepted and the general contract with

D.M. and C.M. Frey, Inc. of Hartford was chosen. The Ground Breaking Ceremony took place on August 24, 1958. The Corner Stone Service was held May 24, 1959 and the new church was dedicated on April 3, 1960.

For the Entrance Dedication on April 3, 1960, Pastor Adolph von Rohr performed the dedication act of the church and the necessary appointments. For the Formal Dedication on June 12, 1960, Pastor Oscar Naumann, President of our Wisconsin Synod, preached in the morning services. In an afternoon service, Pastor Arthur Halboth, President of the Southeastern Wisconsin District was the speaker. Then, in an evening service, Rev. A. Schewe of St. John's Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, delivered the sermon.

On May 24, May 31, and June 7, 1964, three special services were held in honor of the Centennial Anniversary of Peace Lutheran Church. President Naumann was the guest preacher for this special occasion on May 24.

The old church property was sold and the building torn down in 1962, to make room for a parking lot for the Washington School located next door.

Pastor D. H. Kuehl was installed as Associate Pastor in 1965. Pastor von Rohr gradually reduced his duties until he retired in 1967. Following Pastor von Rohr's retirement the congregation was assisted by several part-time and full-time vicars.

In 1968, Peace congregation voted to open a Christian Day School in the educational wing of the new church. Miss Jane Pankow became the first teacher and taught Grades 1-3 with an enrollment of 23 pupils.

The following year, the middle grades were added and Mr. Alan Treder was called to be the first principal. Enrollment reached 51. The classes were still held in the church, but planning was also to begin for a new

school building on a separate site, to be ready for the 1970 - 71 school year. Richard Scheife of ^{Oconomowoc,} ~~Wessex,~~ was selected as the architect. The general contract went to D.M. and C.M. Frey, Inc , of Hartford.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on November 9, 1969, and actual construction began on November 29. The cornerstone was laid July 19, 1970, as the congregation also observed its 10th anniversary of the new church building. Rev. Adolph C. Buenger, President of the Southeastern Wisconsin District, ~~preached for the Dedication Service~~ on October 18, 1970. Three more teachers were added to the faculty when the school opened. At the present time, there are seven faculty members and the enrollment is nearing 200.

June 5, 1977, was another big day in the history of the congregation, when it installed Pastor James Castille as Associate Pastor. He was only the sixth pastor to serve this church in its 114 year history.

The writer of this paper served as Vicar at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church from August 15, 1976, to August 15, 1977. During that time I witnessed God's rich blessings upon this church for this one year as He had also so richly blessed Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church in the past.