

**The Decision to Build a Chapel on Lawrence and Mason
Streets.**

**The History of St. Matthew's Ev. Lutheran Church
from 1914-1924.**

For Professor John Brenner.

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The Decision to Build a Chapel on Lawrence and Mason Streets.
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Historical Background

Appleton, Wisconsin had approximately a population of twenty thousand in 1914¹. Appleton had two Lutheran congregations, Zion, an ALC congregation and St. Paul, a Wisconsin Synod congregation². St. Paul's was on the East side of Appleton. However, the city was beginning to expand to the west of this congregation. There was a whole new mission field growing in the background of an established Wisconsin Synod congregation. St. Paul's and their Synod had an opportunity to spread the gospel.

It is the people of St. Paul's who approached the Wisconsin Synod's mission board in order to begin a new mission in Appleton, WI. "The first move in the direction of establishing a mission on the East Side was made by the Church Council of St. Paul's Church, the Rev. T.J. Sauer, Pastor. They wrote to the Rev. A. Spiering, inviting the Mission Board to come to Appleton and start a mission on the West Side."³

They had several reasons to want another Wisconsin Synod Church in Appleton. St. Paul's was a victim of overcrowding. They had one thousand, two hundred communicants⁴. This was during a turbulent time. We were at war with the Germans. German was beginning to become unpopular in America. For this and other reasons, some of St. Paul's members wanted

¹ "St. Matthew is 75 and growing," *The Post Crescent* 26 (October 1989), [this is a photocopy].

² "Eighty-One Year Of Grace For An English Speaking Congregation" p.1.

³ Froehlke, Ph., "History of St. Matthew Congregation," *St. Matthew Monthly* 11 (November 1934): 7

⁴ "Eighty-One Years Of Grace For An English Speaking Congregation": 1

English services the whole year⁵. There was also a fear that some other Synod or church might come into the West side of Appleton before the Wisconsin Synod. There was a fear that some might leave the Wisconsin Synod because other congregations had English services.⁶

Exploratory Work

The Wisconsin Synod Mission Board was delighted at this opportunity. Work began on the western part of the city. Students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary provided some of the manpower.⁷ The Rev. W. Haase, the pastor at St. John's in the Town of Center coordinated the first work in the western part of Appleton. He held exploratory services in a store on the West Side.⁸ God so richly blessed this new gathering of his believers that the Mission Board authorized the purchase of that land on the corner of Mason and Lawrence Streets.⁹

The area of Appleton that the mission board chose went by the name of Appleton Junction. There was a streetcar depot there. This streetcar made travel easy to this new church.¹⁰ At this corner the Mission Board bought some land. A member of St. Paul's congregation, Mr.

⁵ "Eighty-One Years Of Grace For An English Speaking Congregation": 1

⁶ Froehlke, Ph., p. 7.

⁷ *Synodal-Bericht*, 1914, p. 101.

⁸ Froehlke, Ph., "History of St. Matthew Congregation," *St. Matthew Monthly* 11 (November 1934): 7.

⁹ "St. Matthew is 75 and growing."

¹⁰ "St. Matthew is 75 and growing."

Boldt¹¹ bought a lot on the corner of Mason and Lawrence Streets on behalf of the Mission board.¹²

Mission Status and the Little Chapel.

This little gathering of people now had mission status in our Wisconsin Synod. The members of the mission board placed a portable chapel on the corner of Mason and Lawrence Streets. This chapel had a capacity of seventy-five people.¹³ This little chapel served as their sanctuary until a permanent building was erected in 1924.

The Mission Board began calling for a pastor. The natural choice was Haase who had conducted the initial services. However, as Froehlke in his history of the congregation puts it, "his congregation would not let him go."¹⁴ Pastor Haase remained at St. John's of the Town of Center and the Mission Board turned to the seminary.¹⁵ The Rev. R.E. Ziesemer was the first man called for the job. He was ordained on July 5th 1914.¹⁶

Struggles of a Young Mission

When Missionary Ziesemer arrived in Appleton, there was as yet no organized church.¹⁷

¹¹The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, (November 4, 1914).

¹² Froehlke, Ph., p. 7.

¹³ Froehlke, Ph., p. 7.

¹⁴ Froehlke, Ph., p. 8.

¹⁵ *Synodal-Bericht*, 1914, p.102.

¹⁶ *Synodal-Bericht*, 1915, p.21.

¹⁷ Froehlke, Ph., p. 8.

It took until November 4, 1914, for him to organize the congregation. The first minutes of that meeting read:

“On the above date an informal meeting of those desiring to be founders of the new Lutheran Church, located at the corner of Lawrence and Mason Street, was called by Missionary Ziesemer. The following members were present: Wm. Belling, Alfred Jensen, Albert Schultz, Frank Schultz, Otto Schultz, Robert Schultz, Peter Sigl, and Lorenz Waters. Owing to the fact that Wm. Belling and Robert Schultz were members of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, the right to vote was not granted to them. Election of officers was held with the following results: President- Frank Schultz, Secretary- Otto Schultz, Treasurer- Peter Sigl. The members were unanimous in naming the church, St. Matthew’s Evangelical Church. Motion that the contract which should purchase the three lots (by Mr. Boldt) be transferred to St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church that henceforth the property would be free from taxation.”¹⁸

St. Matthew’s congregation was born on November 4, 1914. Pastor Ziesemer along with six voting members ran the first meeting.

The work under Pastor Ziesemer prospered. At next year’s Synod Convention, Pastor Spiering, head of the mission board, reported: “On the western part of this city began our Mission work last summer. It prospered there, a Church of five members in the organization of this mission . . . Our services on average have an attendance of forty and the Sunday School on average, calls on forty-three students.”¹⁹

The original purpose of this congregation was to serve people who wanted an english-speaking service. However, the little congregation was struggling and a German service was needed in order to help the mission continue.²⁰ Despite the struggles, St. Matthew was able to reach out to the community and bring in new members. In the year of 1915, five new members

¹⁸ The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, 4 (November 1914).

¹⁹ *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1915, p. 102.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.102.

were added to the church roster.²¹

Then, Missionary Zieseemer's activities were branching into another area. There was another group of Lutherans who were dissatisfied with St. Paul's. They wanted more than one English-speaking service a week. They organized themselves downtown and had asked Missionary Zieseemer to serve them as well. The Lord, so richly blessed his work in this field that this new congregation, Mt. Olive, called Missionary Zieseemer to be their pastor. June 26, 1915, Mt. Olive installed R.E. Zieseemer to be their pastor²². "Pastor Zieseemer, blessed with exceptional health, served (at Mt. Olive) faithfully fifty-two years until his retirement in 1967."²³

But now, St. Matthew's congregation was without a pastor. The Mission Board called E.G. Bruns. He was a 1915 graduate of the Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa, WI. During his pastorate, St. Matthew continued to grow and reach out to the community of Appleton. After Pastor Bruns' first year, seventy-four people were attending the church services. There were seventy-eight children in the Sunday School²⁴. Pastor Bruns did not stay long. In 1917, he accepted a call to Delano, MN.

St. Matthew's was without a pastor again. In January of 1917, the congregation asked Rev. Zieseemer to preach for them until they could get a new pastor²⁵. In April 1917, they asked Mission Board chairman, Rev. Spiering to call Rev. Zieseemer to be their pastor. Pastor Zieseemer

²¹ The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, 28 (April 1915), 15 (November 1915), 5 (December 1915).

²² "Eighty-One Years of Grace For an English Speaking Congregation," p.2.

²³ "Eighty-One Years of Grace For an English Speaking Congregation," p.4.

²⁴ *Synodal-Bericht*, 1916, p. 75.

²⁵ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (January 1917).

did not become the pastor at St. Matthew. Reasons for this could not be found. The members of St. Matthew's were without a pastor until April 1918. They called Rev. A. Werner to be their pastor²⁶. He accepted the call. He was installed at St. Matthew's on the Sixth Sunday of Trinity.²⁷

It was during the pastorate of Reverend Werner that both ^Ggerman and ^Eenglish services were ^{conducted} done on Sundays. The first service would be the ^Eenglish service and that would be at 9:00 am. The second service would be the ^Ggerman service. That was at 10:00 am²⁸. These were called the "double-header" services. These services would last until January 1953, when they were finally discontinued.²⁹ Another highlight during Pastor Werner's time at St. Matthew's is that a building fund was created for the building of a bigger church facility³⁰. Pastor Werner's time was also short at St. Matthew's. In 1920, he accepted a call to St. John's of the Town of Center. St. Matthew's gave him a friendly release to this congregation³¹.

A Self-Supporting Church

There wasn't too much time lost until St. Matthew received another pastor, Reverend Phillip Froehlke. They called him in June of 1920. Pastor Froehlke was ordained and installed

²⁶ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (April, 1918).

²⁷ *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1918, p.11.

²⁸ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (January 1919).

²⁹ "Our Congregation," *St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church: Member Handbook*, p. 1.

³⁰ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (April 1919).

³¹ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (April 1920).

on the fifteenth of August 1920.³² He would serve the people of St. Matthew's eighteen years, 1920-1938³³. It is during Pastor Froehlke's time at St. Matthew's that the church ^{became} self-supporting.

The first step in St. Matthew's becoming self-supporting, was the purchase of the little chapel from the Synod. The congregation purchased that chapel for \$150.00.³⁴ St. Matthew's Congregation also ventured into other building and spending ventures. When Pastor Froehke wanted to marry, the congregation built him a parsonage. This parsonage remains there to this day. The cost of the parsonage was \$6,700. They received loans that totalled, \$4,000.³⁵ They applied to the Synod for a loan of \$3,000. This loan would help pay for the parsonage.³⁶ It was dedicated on October 30, 1921.³⁷

The congregation was starting to pay their own bills and even give money to the work of the Synod. They paid off \$2565.92 of the debt for the parsonage. They raised \$800 for the work of St. Matthew's. They gathered \$525 for the work of the Synod.³⁸ They were soon ready to become self-supporting. In October of 1922, they applied for another loan to the Synod. This loan was for \$3,000. It was felt that with this extra money, they would be able to become a self-

³² *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1920, p. 9..

³³ Johnson, Sylvester, "Church Anniversary, Appleton Wis.," *Northwestern Lutheran*, (Volume 27, 1940), p.27.

³⁴ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (June 1920).

³⁵ Froehlke, Phillip, "History of St. Matthew Congregation," *St. Matthew Monthly*, 11 (November, 1934), p.9.

³⁶ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (May, 1921).

³⁷ *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1920, p.13.

³⁸ *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1922, p. 24

supporting congregation.³⁹

In January 1923, St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church declared themselves to be a self-supporting congregation.⁴⁰ Membership had grown to sixty-five families.⁴¹ During this first year off of Synod support the congregation was able to give \$874.35 for Synod when its objective had been \$850.00.⁴²

Building the Present Structure

The Lord's richest blessings to this growing congregation made it a necessity to build another sanctuary. They appointed a committee to investigate building a church and a school.⁴³ They elected Fred Hoffman, Wm. Krueger, Wm. Juhnke, Roland Wuerger, Walter Ginnow, and Robert Schultz to serve as a finance and building committee. The president, Albert Schumann and Pastor Froehlke were advisory members. They decided not to build a new school right away, but to turn the chapel into a school when the church was completed. In February 1924, the congregation voted to begin building a new facility.⁴⁴ Fred Hoffman and Robert Schultz were awarded the building contract and began building the church.⁴⁵

³⁹ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (October, 1922).

⁴⁰ Froehlke, Ph., p.10.

⁴¹ "Brief History of St. Matthew Ev. Lutheran Church," p.4.

⁴² *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1924, p.91.

⁴³ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (January 1924).

⁴⁴ "The Minutes of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," (February 1924).

⁴⁵ "Froehlke, Ph., p.10.

The cornerstone of this building was laid on July 13, 1924.⁴⁶ The church was built in the Gothic style of Architecture. It was originally built to seat three-hundred and twenty five.⁴⁷ The size of the church building was, at the time, 97' by 45'.⁴⁸ The building was completed by fall. It was dedicated November 16, 1924.⁴⁹

The final cost of the building came out to be approximately, \$38,000. This money was raised by floating a bond issue. Members were asked not to give donations, but only to give money to loans. They were also asked to sacrifice weekly in the Sunday envelopes as the Lord had prospered them.⁵⁰ The Wisconsin Synod ^{lent} loaned \$10,000 without interest for the building of the new church.⁵¹

At the same time as the church was built, a pipe organ was placed into the church. The Wangerin company put the organ into the church. It was dedicated at the same time as the church.⁵²

Historical Perspective

By God's grace St. Matthew's has celebrated seventy-five years of serving the community of Appleton. By the time of the new church building they were serving about sixty-

⁴⁶ *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1926, p.13.

⁴⁷ "Brief History of St. Matthew Ev. Lutheran Church," p.4.

⁴⁸ "Anniversary Thoughts, Our Church--As it was," *Parish Tidings*, (October 1974), p.3.

⁴⁹ *Synodal-Bericht des Nord Wisconsin Distrikt*, 1926), p. 14.

⁵⁰ Froehlke, Ph., p.10.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.10.

⁵² "Anniversary Thoughts, Our Church--As it was," *Parish Tidings*, (October 1974), p.3.

five families. At the present day, St. Matthew's serves a total 1,555.⁵³ ^{baptized} It is a wonder to see how God's grace has worked at St. Matthew's. What was once a small mission congregation, is now a larger church that helps support the work of our synod and its missions with their offerings. As the history of St. Matthew's is looked at through these first ten years, fitting are the words of Luke who wrote about the New Testament church, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."⁵⁴

⁵³ "Congregational Statistics," *Annual Report*, 1999, p.3.

⁵⁴ Acts 2:47.

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