

A Congregational History
of
Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church
(Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

Senior Church History
Professor Friedrich

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Because Church History can be for some (I didn't say "is") one of the least inspiring of the theological disciplines, care should be taken when choosing a portion of it to investigate. If you are going to spend some time in a subject, you should have an interest in it. Maybe that's why there have been more and more congregational histories among the Senior Church History papers recently. The attention span of even Seminary Seniors is shortening in our TV / video / USA Today age. There could be a number of reasons for investigating a particular congregation. Some might do a history of the congregation where they were baptized. Others might investigate the church of their parents at the time of their marriage. Others might study the congregation where a beloved relative served. For all the above reasons, I am writing a history of Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where my grandfather, Pastor Harry Shiley, served as the first pastor, and where I by God's grace became a member of the kingdom of God through baptism.

Calvary was a mission congregation of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod started in the mid 1950's. The 1988 Statistical Report of the Synod reports that Calvary has 190 baptized members. It is interesting to look at where Calvary stands in relation to its closest WELS neighbors:

congregation	location	founded	members
Salem	107th St.	1847	1627
Redemption	68th & Silver Spring	1952	684
Mt. Lebanon	60th & Hampton	1927	1386
St. Matthew	84th & Melvina	1865	1041
Gloria Dei	94th & Captiol	1963	915
Calvary	82nd & Herbert	1956	190

Externally there are a number of reasons that the numbers at Calvary are smaller. We do know that as part of the Church, the Lord of the Church is guiding and directing its steps. Calvary remains faithful to its ministry to ~~to~~ its own members and to the community. Calvary has always recognized the blessings that the Lord has given through this ministry and has always expressed gratitude to the Lord for it. May he continue to so bless Calvary in the future.

The 1950's was a time when our Mission Board in Southeastern Wisconsin was looking for areas that promised to be fertile fields for the Word. A number of sites were considered throughout Milwaukee and its surrounding areas. All promised rapid growth as the city of Milwaukee was pushing out its boundaries and people were beginning to move outward from the center of town. The Mission Board had decided to "ring the county," setting up a ring of missions. This was at the time of the old Horseshoe Conference, as it was called, in Milwaukee, a conference of our WELS churches. The Board was trying to fill in and expand the ring ^{around} ~~along with~~ Milwaukee. At the same time they had to be cautious. They didn't dare go too far with the ring-"people will not generally go away from town to go to church" was the rationale. Calvary was actually not on this ring.

It was in one of the expanding areas of Milwaukee on the northwest side. This was the area near the intersection of

Hampton and Appleton Avenues. This rapidly expanding area indeed appeared to be a promising mission field. In the summer of 1955 the Mission Board conducted a canvass. A number of Seminary students from Mequon were involved. Among the students who participated in this work was our Professor Balge. The results of the canvass indicated that nearly 200 Lutheran families were living in the area.

Because of the time period, it seemed that the Mission Board definitely moved quickly and efficiently. We had done very little work in the Milwaukee area apart from our long-established congregations. The declining state of things in Missouri also told our Mission Board to actively seek to establish some congregations within Milwaukee. In 1956 they were in the middle of doing just that. However there was very little money in the Church Extension Fund at this time. In fact there was little more than 8000 dollars. This put a damper on the situation slightly. It is at this time that many A-frame chapels were put up by the various Mission Boards. An agreement was made with the architect who drew up the plans to use them at a minimal cost. We could therefore put up a chapel for around 30 000 dollars.

As evidence that the Board moved quickly, no mention is made of the mission field which later became Calvary congregation in any of the Board's reports to the district conventions until 1956. Already by that time, in fact by December of 1955, the Board had found and purchased the five lots where today the chapel and parsonage sit. They were the corner lot, southwest corner of 82nd St. and Herbert Avenue, and the four adjoining lots to the west on Herbert. The church would occupy the corner lot; the parsonage was later

to be built on the fifth lot. The three empty lots between the parsonage and church were thought of as a possible site for a Christian Day School. This may not have been the first choice of the Board, but they had to work quickly or get completely shut out of the area. So the lots were purchased.

In January of 1956, the Mission Board was informed that the United States Steel Corporation had erected the present Calvary chapel for display on the parking lot of the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. At this time the National Association of Home Builders was holding its national convention there. The chapel was being showcased.

The Mission Board was given favorable reports on the chapel. It had a "simple beauty and design, compactness, and an ease and economy of erection." Its display at the convention in Chicago was attracting people from far and wide. The Board had to check out the reports. They sent representatives, accompanied by the chairman of Synod's Board of Trustees, to verify them. Everyone was pleased and agreed with the reports.

The Towne Realty Company of Milwaukee was the local distributor for the US Steel chapel. Negotiations were begun for the actual display chapel. An agreement was reached and a contract signed. It called for the erecting of the chapel on the corner lot, at a cost of 35 000 dollars. It was dismantled in Chicago, brought to Milwaukee, and rebuilt on site. A basement and larger heating unit were added. The sanctuary held around 200, and the original structure included an office, bathrooms and entryway. The organ was not displayed with the building in Chicago and therefore was not a part of the deal. The first organ was furnished by Mr. Joseph Zilber of Towne Realty.

Buildings of the same design were later erected in a number of our missions, one of which is Divinity-Divine Charity in Whitefish Bay.

The Calvary chapel was then dedicated on May 6, 1956. The doors of the church were opened by Pastor Jon Mahnke, the chairman of the District Mission Board, who served as worship leader for the service. The words of King Solomon at the Temple dedication, 1 Kings 8: 22-30, served as the Scripture reading. The Mennerchor (Male Chorus) of Grace Lutheran sang two anthems. Pastor Raymond Wiechmann, another member of the Mission Board, preached the sermon. Mr Wallace Franz served as organist that day and beyond, also served as Sunday School superintendent, and became the first of the charter members, along with his wife. A note in the dedication service folder was the hope expressed by the Board which indeed was later realized, "We are sure that the people will be happy with their chapel." Another note from Pastor Wiechmann: "This may be the only time that we had a chapel before we had a pastor."

The following Sunday, May 13, 1956, the Sunday School was opened, at 9:00 am. Worship services began that day too, at 10:00 am. Services were conducted from this time through the end of August by Seminary students, under the direction of the Mission Board. Again Professor Balge was involved with filling the pulpit.

Work then continued on the parsonage. The Mission Board was involved in the process of calling a man to serve Calvary. They desired an experienced pastor there. Several men were called and returned the call. Pastor Wiechmann remembers suggesting during one of the Board meetings, "Why don't we call the best missionary we have--Harry." My grandfather,

Harry Shiley accepted the call. He had been at Trinity, in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Quite possibly the struggles to help that congregation see the need to begin thinking of their own new building may have had some influence in his decision.

At any rate, Pastor Shiley approached the challenging and exciting work that he loved in this area with enthusiasm. He was installed on August 26, 1956 as first pastor of Calvary. Pastor Mahnke, who was a good friend, again conducted the service and installation. Pastor Luther Voss preached on 1 Cor 4:1. More than one person recalled that Pastor Shiley hit the streets the very next day, calling on prospects and interested parties. The following Sunday, September 2, Pastor Shiley preached his first sermon at Calvary. There were 65 in attendance that day. Much of what was used for those first worship services was donated by neighboring congregations in Milwaukee. Calvary recognized and acknowledged the generosity of their brothers. It was noted that St. Matthew's gave hymnals, Mt. Lebanon supplied the altar books, Grace donated 100 chairs and some tables, and St. John's in Wauwatosa provided the pulpit Bible.

Because the parsonage was not at first completed, some of the Shiley's furniture was temporarily placed in storage. On September 21 it was ready for occupancy and Pastor and Mrs. Shiley moved in.

Already on November 11, 1956, a special meeting was called by Pastor Shiley. The reason: to organize and incorporate. Thirteen men made up the original quorum. That night they adopted the name "Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church." Nine of the 13 men were elected to positions as trustees. They

signed the incorporation papers. Lawyer Mr. E. Von Briesen notarized the papers and then filed them. The following were the first officers:

Lorenz Kronke, president. Richard Schmidt, recording secretary. John Vollbrecht, financial secretary. Vernon Kramer, assistant financial secretary. Donald Mathes, treasurer. Dale Struve, Kenneth Sutter, William Ziebell, Arnold Nagel, trustees.

Also in attendance that night were Merlin Klahn, Wallace Franz, Otto Schneider and Curtis Pribbenow. They signed the incorporation papers as witnesses.

Charter membership to Calvary congregation was closed on December 31, 1956. The following names were added to the 13 men and their families listed above: Harvey Biesel family; Orrin Bokath family; Mrs Delores Borth family; Mrs Esther Bussian family; Morris Ehardt family; Donald Emrath family; Adam Gossler family; Lester Grimm family; Vincent Gustafson family; Mrs Beatrice Johnson family; Mrs Mildred Kelly; Henry Klingelhoets family; Robert Krause family; Walter Krueger family; Robert Laetsch family; Arleigh Marheine family; Clyde Miller family; Mrs Bernice Milliken family; Norbert Radank family; Mrs Beverly Regis; Mrs Katherine Rothe; Mrs Ruth Sadowski family; Mrs Ruby Samuel family; Mrs Ruth Schneider; Mrs Gretchen Sowerby family; William Turk family; Ervine Vomhof family; Mrs Elaine Walgak family; Michael Wallen family.

A number of organizational events took place in the following months. In the January 13 congregational meeting (1957), the congregation unanimously petitioned the Wisconsin Synod for membership. The August Synod convention accepted Calvary's membership request. In December of 1957, a first meeting was held

and a Ladies Guild was organized. There were 12 charter members in this group. The quarterly congregational meeting of October 14, 1958 was held. Voters discussed the question of going self-supporting. There were 27 present, and these unanimously voted to become independent by December 31, 1958. They graciously acknowledge the help of Synod. On January 1, 1959, Calvary became self-supporting, a little more than two years after organizing.

Work continued on the physical plant and other related items. During the spring of 1958 the property was landscaped. In July members helped tile the basement floor. An outdoor bulletin board was put in place--it had been a gift from Siloah congregation in Milwaukee. In November of 1958 a one and one half car garage was built by the men. In the spring of 1959 the parsonage was painted; in September the church received a number of repairs and also was painted. Finally in September of 1961 the streets in the subdivision were paved. The men of Calvary put in sidewalks to complete the job.

Of course throughout this time of building and growth, there was also the growth that comes from hearing the Word. By Easter of 1960, Calvary's membership (communicant) passed two hundred. It is this growth that really gave the congregation cause for celebration at its fifth anniversary. The occasion was marked with special services on November 12, 1961. A congregational supper was also held in the evening. Pastor Shiley notes that at that time they still numbered 200, because of the shifting and changing of many members.

The summer project of 1962 was the painting of the church ceilings. In September a program was initiated to retire the congregation's debt. It would continue for some

time. After six years Calvary numbered 215 communicants.

During these second five years a number of projects and improvements continued to be made to both the chapel and parsonage. It was announced at the seventh anniversary of the congregation that the Synod Board of Trustees had renewed the agreement under the Church Extension Fund. Calvary was given three more years at 2% interest, then 2 years at 3% interest, at which time the contract was to be reviewed. Because of the debt retirement drive, the original debt of 66 000 dollars had been reduced to 50 000 dollars, and to 45 000 by the eighth anniversary in 1964. There were also 250 communicants at this time. At its 9th anniversary a new Baldwin organ was dedicated. The cost was \$1850, and it has served up to this day.

The congregation celebrated its 10th anniversary over five days in early November, 2-6. A banquet was held on the sixth. At the time Communicant membership stood at 275.

The next ten years saw Calvary's membership remain at nearly the same numbers. They got to 280 for a time but began to lose a few members every year.

1968	12th anniv.	270
1969	13	260
1970	14	276
1971	15	280
1972	16	253
1974	18	246
1975	19	235

A number of members were moving from the area because of their job situations. A number retired and moved to northern Wisconsin. But a significant number of transfers were members with children of school age. This has continued to be a recognizable pattern until today. Each of the neighboring WELS congregations has received transfers from Calvary, who

then enrolled their children in their schools. Nevertheless Calvary continued to serve its members. Back in 1967, the chapel was remodeled. It was rededicated to the glory of God on August 20, 1967. A new lecturn and altar furnishings were dedicated at the 13th anniversary service. In June of 1974, a Kimball piano and a dossal curtain were dedicated. Work also continued on a project to rebuild the front entrance to the church and replace the siding. This project was completed by the 18th anniversary. The following year new pews were installed in the rear of the chapel and dedicated.

At the same time Calvary continued to work toward paying off its debt to Synod. In January of 1970 they paid off the parsonage in full. At the time they still owed to the Synod 18 000 dollars on the chapel and the land. By the 15th anniversary celebration (President Naumann--preacher) the debt stood at 6000 dollars. By the following year, 1971, Calvary could say it was free of debt. August of 1973 saw the congregation arrange for a surprise celebration of the 45th anniversary of Pastor Shiley's ordination and the Shiley's 45 wedding anniversary. Pastor Shiley's own note was, "All glory to God."

In 1976 Calvary was preparing for the celebration of its twentieth anniversary. However the celebration was marred in July. At the July 20, 1976 congregational meeting, Pastor Shiley announced that he planned to retire and submitted his resignation as pastor. The congregation accepted his resignation. Pastor Shiley had served in the ministry some 48 years. On October 10, 1976, Calvary had a farewell program for Pastor and Mrs. Shiley. The dinner and program took place at St. Matthew's. At the time Pastor Shiley had hoped to

continue serving until a successor would be installed. But due to reasons of health he could not do so. Mentor Kujath, Editor-in-Chief of the Northwestern Publishing House, was asked to serve as vacancy pastor and began on December 1, 1976. Pastor Kujath continued in that capacity for the next several months. The congregation through its officers and committees continued the ministry at Calvary. In spring, Calvary went to the Assignment Committee, asking that a graduate of our Seminary be assigned to Calvary. On May 17, 1977, Robert M. Krueger was assigned this call. He then was ordained and installed on Sunday June 10, 1977, at a 10:00 service. During the year a number of improvements and purchases were made, including the installation of a public address sound system. Communicant membership stood at 243.

Pastor Krueger instituted a number of practices in the next several years. Calvary adopted the practice of publishing a monthly church calendar, to assist members in arranging their personal schedules with that of the church. A Young People's Society was reactivated in January. Ten young people attended this first meeting.

Pastor Krueger was also instrumental in a telephone canvass which took place that year. Volunteers from the congregation were recruited. Hundreds of calls were made to the residents of the neighborhood. The goal was to introduce the church to any unchurched neighbors so to share with them the message of salvation. It was reported that the Lord richly blessed this effort by providing many mission prospects.

Calvary also hosted the Metro North Pastor's Conference in the spring of the year, which was attended by more than 100 pastors and professors. A special joy and privilege was also

Calvary's, in that they were able to donate a set of altar and pulpit books to the Ottawa West mission congregation. They recognized that Calvary itself had received many such donations from sister congregations in Milwaukee and considered it a special privilege to be able to do the same.

The next year brought several other new ideas. The congregation began to serve coffee and snacks following Sunday morning services. It was hoped that through this means a stronger fellowship would be cultivated. The members received this innovation well and continues the practice. The congregational Stewardship Program of 1979 took the form of a spiritual renewal program. It included letters, bulletin inserts, home visits and special Sunday's. Pastor Krueger considered the program a success.

Communicant membership fell below 200, to 199, during the year. Pastor Krueger himself notes, "Our communicant membership once again declined sharply. The primary reason was the removal of inactive members. We as a congregation truly regret that this action had to be taken so frequently, but using the steps of Matthew 18, we had no alternative."

1980 brought more new ideas. A congregational newsletter was begun in January. All organizations were encouraged to submit news and items of interest. In addition information from Milwaukee and the Synod could be shared with the members. The Board of Education made arrangements with St. Matthew's school to allow students of grade school age to attend St. Matthew's. Calvary set aside \$1000 for tuition assistance for members. Finally a building project was begun. The plans called for a multi-purpose area (fellowship, Bible classes), a Pastor's study, and a storage room. In addition work would

be done on the basement to prepare a kitchen and restrooms. Groundbreaking for this project was November 2, 1980. The project was finished in time for the 25th anniversary celebration in 1981. On October 4, a special service of Thanksgiving was held. Many friends and former members of the congregation were invited. Pastor Ervine Vomhof was the guest preacher. Pastor ^{Vomhof} had been one of the charter members of Calvary, having joined Calvary during his Seminary years. He currently serves at St. Luke's in Watertown. The anniversary celebration continued on October 11 with a Confirmation Class Reunion Sunday, which included a luncheon after services. On October 18 then the expansion project was dedicated at a 10:00 service.

By the mid-1980's and with its building well suited for meeting the needs of the congregation for the near future, Calvary looked for new ways to serve and minister. They began to look to a pre-school program for children ages 4 and 5 years old. Its purpose would be "to foster the social, scholastic and physical development of each child. Above all, the program is designed to assist the parents with the spiritual training of their children through an organized plan of Bible lessons and religious instruction." The program today consists of two sessions of 2½ hours two days a week. Enrollment is limited to twelve per session. Bible lessons are the most important part of the program, but it includes various educational activities. Calvary has an agreement with St. Matthew's, so some of the pre-school children come from that congregation. The congregation is certainly proud of the pre-school and thankful of this opportunity to serve not only members but also the neighborhood.

Unfortunately, Pastor Krueger was not here for the closing

service of the first year of the pre-school which he helped to start. In December of 1986, he received a call to serve as pastor of New Hope congregation in West Melbourne, Florida. The Lord led Pastor Krueger to accept this call. His last Sunday at Calvary was February 1, 1987. Calvary had to call a new pastor. Pastor Kujath again served the vacancy for the next several months. Calvary then called Pastor Raymond E. Ziebell and he accepted. Pastor Ziebell was installed on May 31, 1987.

Pastor Ziebell is optimistic and enthusiastic about the task ahead of him. Calvary will continue to work with and support its preschool. Tuition changes at other WELS Christian Day schools may help Calvary. These schools can no longer offer their education completely free to all members' children. And so indirectly the incentive to transfer away from Calvary, which may to a large degree be responsible for a decreasing communicant membership through out the years, may gradually be taken away. Pastor Ziebell also has as a goal to increase interest and attendance at Bible classes. To this end he has begun new Bible class schedules. As the neighborhood continues to change, it will be a challenge to Calvary to continue to serve the neighborhood and its members.

As its neighborhood has changed, so have Calvary's pastors. In the words of one member, the work of the church is getting harder and harder. "People are turning away from God. Calvary might be considered inner city by some accounts. And like most of Milwaukee's churches, Calvary is transitory." At the same time, its pastors have all been different. Pastor Shiley was a fatherly-like minister. Pastor Krueger was young, more

innovative. The young people loved him. Pastor Ziebell is more musical. He has re-charged the choir. Along these lines, Calvary has recently been presented with an opportunity to purchase a 7 rank pipe organ from Grace Lutheran in Waukesha. It is a Wangerin Organ built in the 1940's, and is one which would with some work serve Calvary nicely for years. The congregation will be able to save on moving and installation costs substantially by doing much of this work itself. The situation looks promising and we all pray that God's will be done here to his glory.

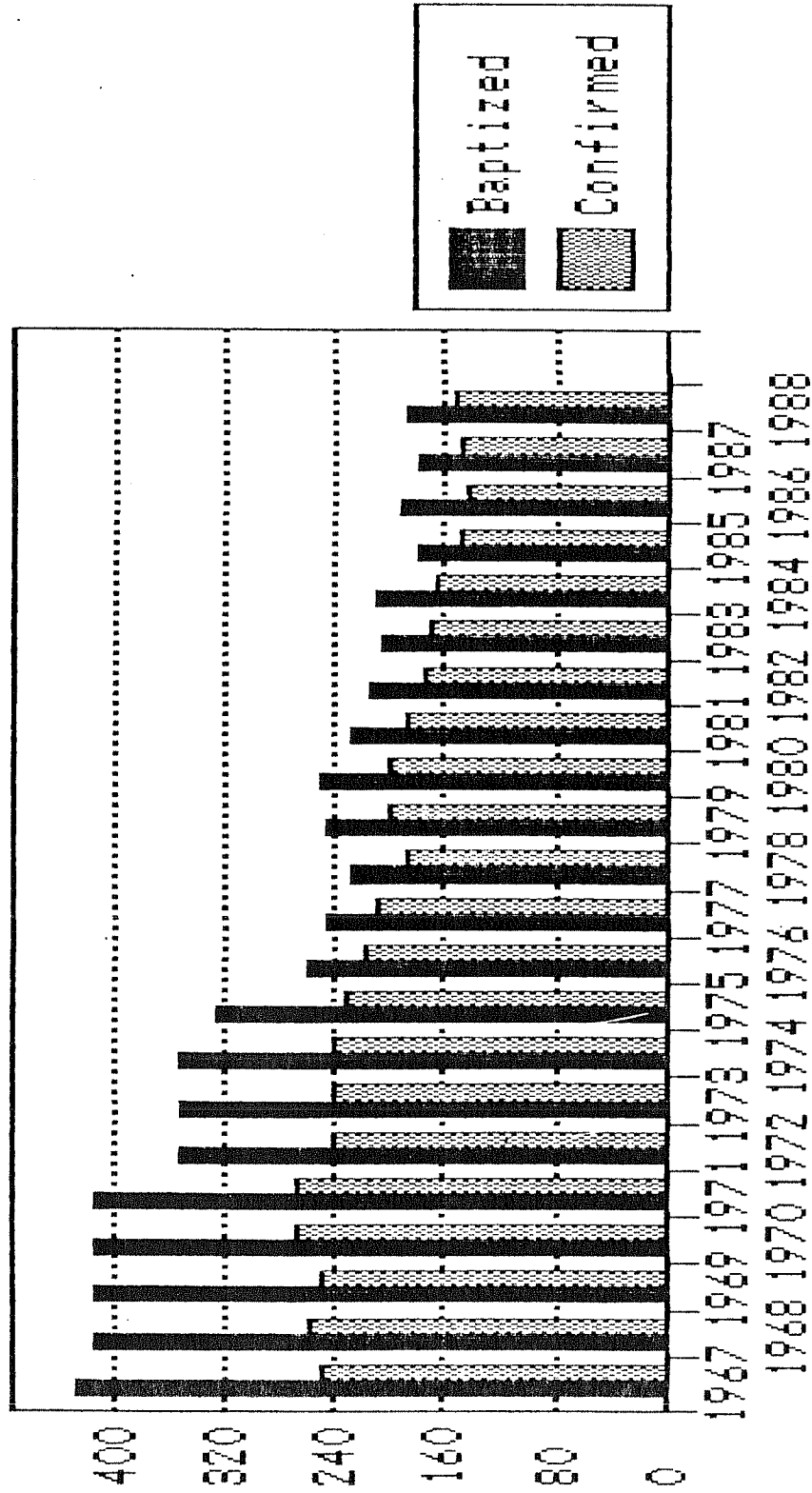
It is also my prayer that God continue to bless Calvary congregation and its members. Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth.

Appendix One

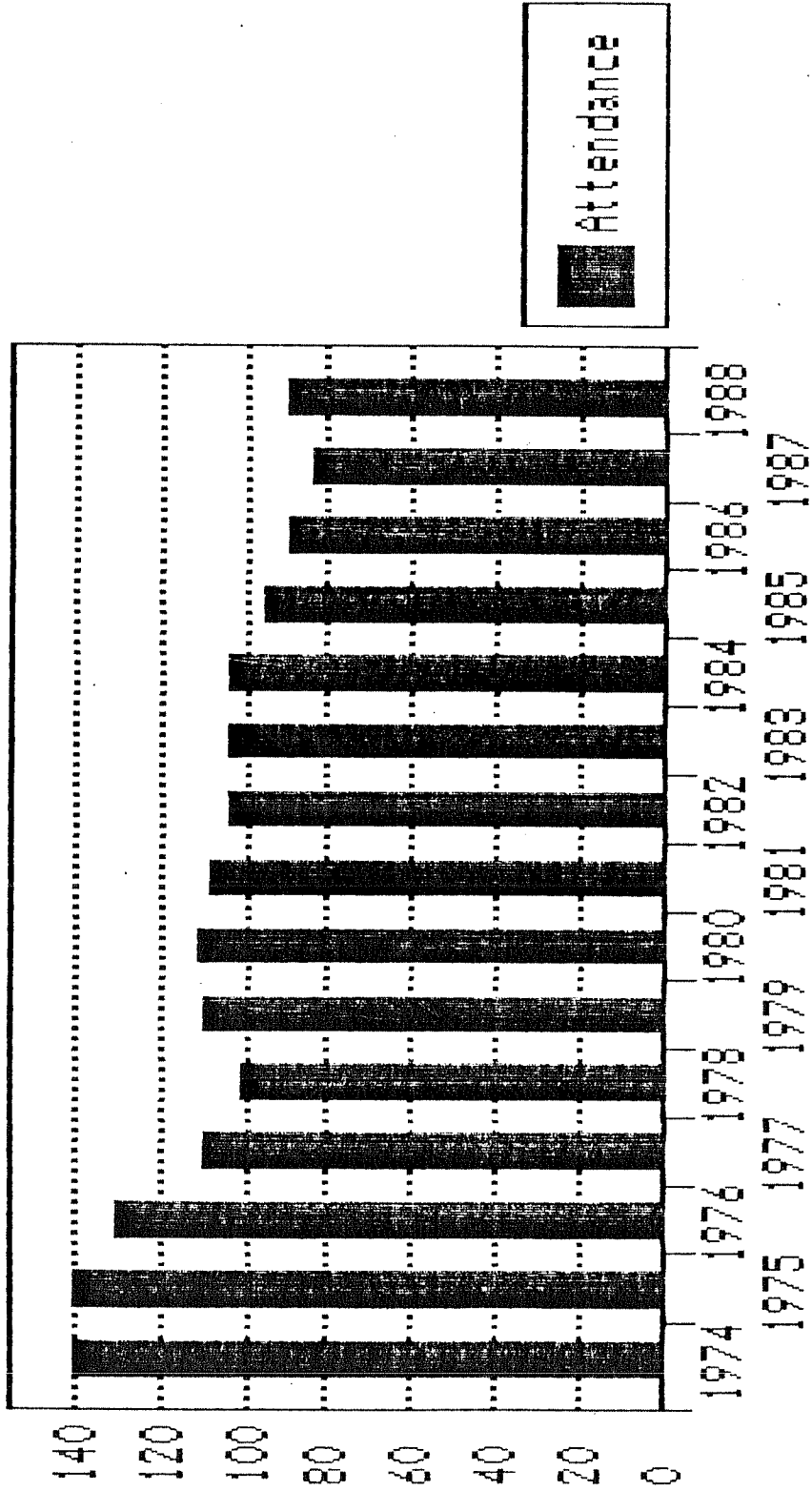
Calvary Membership

	1	Baptized	2	Confirmed	3	Attendance	4	Communion
1	1967	425	250	0		4.4		
2	1968	410	260	0		4.2		
3	1969	410	250	0		4.1		
4	1970	410	265	0		4.5		
5	1971	410	265	0		4.2		
6	1972	350	240	0		4.5		
7	1973	350	240	0		4.5		
8	1974	350	240	140		4.4		
9	1975	325	230	140		4.1		
10	1976	260	220	130		4.4		
11	1977	243	211	110		4.5		
12	1978	229	189	101		4		
13	1979	247	199	110		4.4		
14	1980	249	202	111		4.2		
15	1981	228	186	108		4.9		
16	1982	214	173	103		5		
17	1983	204	171	104		4.9		
18	1984	210	167	103		5.4		
19	1985	180	147	95		5.3		
20	1986	194	146	89		0		
21	1987	180	147	84		6.6		
22	1988	190	153	90		6.8		
23		0	0	0		0		

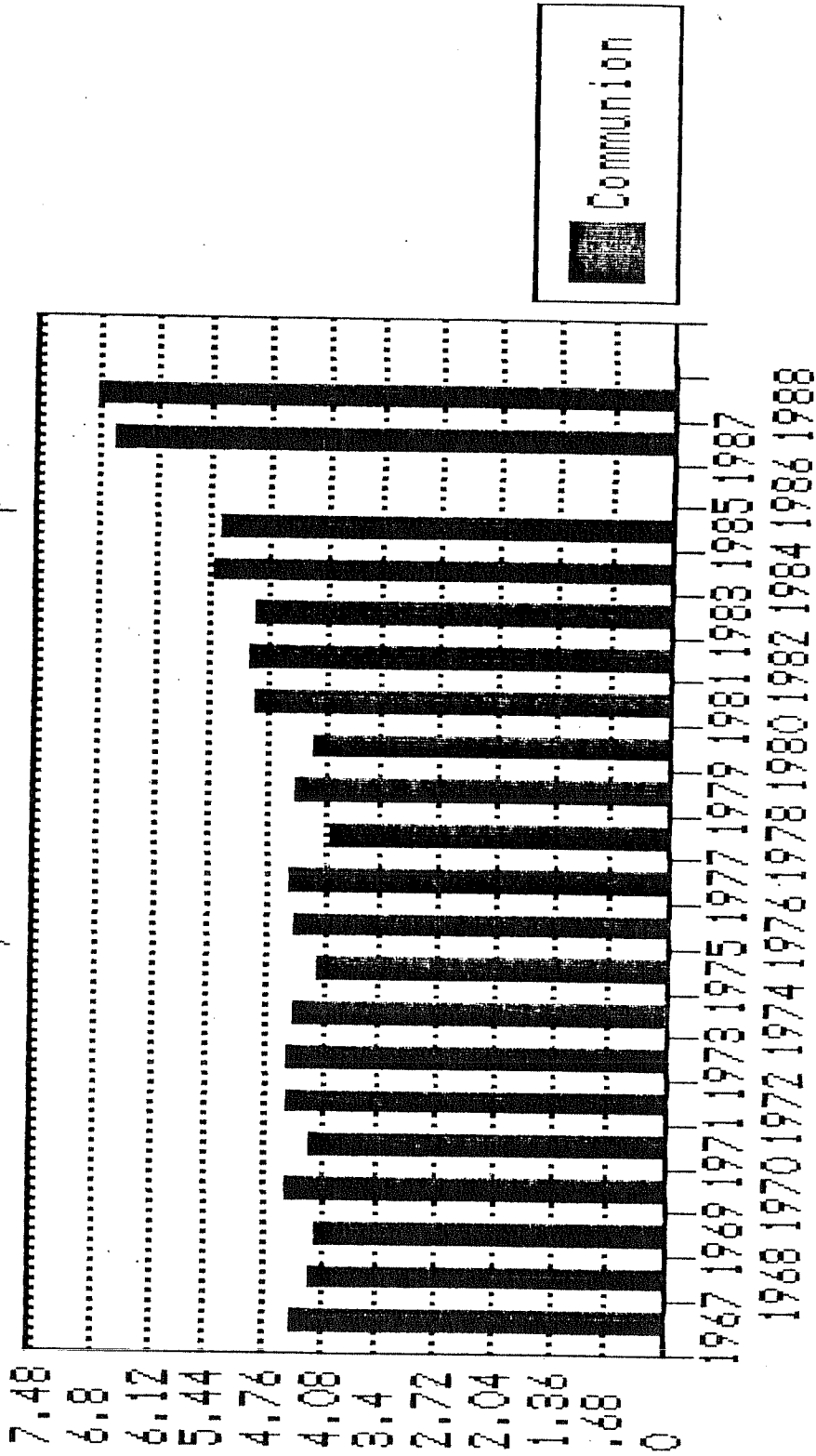
Calvary Membership



Calvary Membership



Calvary Membership



Consulted:

Various Anniversary Bulletins, Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church, Milwaukee.

Congregational Historical Record, Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church, Milwaukee.

Proceedings, Twentieth Biennial Convention, Southeastern Wisconsin District, July 16-19, 1956.

Proceedings, Twenty-first Biennial Convention, Southeastern Wisconsin District, June 23-26, 1958.

Various personal and telephone interviews:

Thanks to:

Grandma Shiley

Pastor and Mrs. Krueger, Palm Bay, Florida.

Pastor and Mrs. Ziebell, Milwaukee.

Pastor and Mrs. Raymond Wiechmann, Holiday, Florida.

Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Protzmann, *Milwaukee.*

Mr. and Mrs. John Vollbrecht, *Milwaukee.*

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Wangsness, *Milwaukee*