

ONE GRACE AFTER THE OTHER . . .

THE HISTORY OF ST. MARTIN'S EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH

By

Mark L. Hayes

Professor James Korthals
Senior Church History
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It was in the late 1800's when German Immigrants made their way to the vast open plains of South Dakota, arriving from Wisconsin and Eastern Minnesota. There was room to build businesses and there was plenty of wonderful farmland. Many thriving businessmen, like J.C. Miller and Karl Rau, were seeking new opportunities in Watertown. These two men and their families were among the first members and founders of St. Martin's Lutheran Church. Mr. Rau, a plumber by trade, did all of the plumbing for the state capitol buildings. He also owned a hotel and theater, which hosted celebrities from all over the country. The lobby was lined with pictures of the famous guests. The railroad kept people coming into Watertown, which was the center of everything in that area. Above and beyond everything else, these families were also concerned about their most important need, the Word of God.

These families began by meeting in smaller groups in homes and schoolhouses as was common throughout the U.S. as pioneers settled. Pastor C. Boetcher, a Lutheran Circuit Missionary who traveled in the areas of Germantown, Grover, Mazeppa, Rauville, and Watertown from 1880-1884, was the first to assist these groups. There were no highways back then, only dirt trails and open plains, which made travelling much slower and considerably more difficult. Although they may not have been able to see their circuit pastor too frequently, they certainly appreciated the work he did. Elsewhere in America, many small groups had no pastor at all. The group in Watertown was happy to be so blessed. In 1884, Pastor J. Johl became the first resident missionary in

that area. As businesses and farms were settling, so also were their Christian congregations.

Since the center of all of these smaller towns was Watertown, a somewhat larger group naturally began to form there as time went on. This larger group officially founded St. Martin's Lutheran Church on January 24, 1886 in the home of J.C. Miller. On that date, eighteen men signed the constitution as the first charter voting members of St. Martin's. Of those eighteen men, J.C. Miller, F. Schmidt, E. Guenther, A. Reichert, and Herman Sperling were the first officers chosen to handle the affairs of the church. Pastor Johl was succeeded by Pastor E.L. Luebert in 1888, who continued to serve the combined parish of five congregations until 1898. Because of the lack of manpower for serving these congregations, and also because of the rapid spread of Lutheranism across the nation, pastors had a notably large number of congregations under their care. This made for quite a heavy workload in the early years.

The ladies of the congregation were certainly not left out of involvement in the congregation, but were eager to serve in their God-given sphere of activity. Mrs. J.C. Miller was active in encouraging service in the congregation early on. The first record of the ladies' support was a contribution made to the synod in their name in 1894. Before the church structure was built, the Ladies Aid meetings met in homes, as did worship and other meetings. Through the years, the various ladies groups, which stemmed from this original group, would certainly be a wonderful blessing to St. Martin's. Mrs. J.C. Miller was very

instrumental in getting them started, encouraging a willing spirit of service and growth in the Word of God.

As the number of members grew, the homes were becoming less and less conducive to worship, even though it was often necessary. They later used the facilities of the old Methodist Church and the Norwegian Lutheran Church to get by until they could establish a building of their own. In 1898, after the arrival of Pastor R. Polzin, plans were made to start that very project. They purchased lot #7, block 15 in 1900, the turn of the century. The first church building was dedicated just two years later on September 14, 1902.

Finally, in 1905, more help was on the way. With the new pastor, they were now able to divide up the five congregations between two pastors. Pastor P. Hinderer accepted the call to serve Germantown, Mazeppa, and South Shore. Pastor Polzin was called to serve St. Martin's in Watertown as well as St. John's in Rauville.

During the last two years of Pastor Polzin's ministry at St. Martin's, the congregation was commonly referred to unofficially as the German Lutheran Church. This was because almost all of the founding members were from Germany and they still conducted services in German. As more and more people moved into the area and raised new families, it was clear that the German language was no longer predominant. Those who wanted to become "Americanized" did not wish to raise their children in the German language and many younger folks coming in could not even understand German. Many such people were attracted to other Protestant churches as a result. The congregation

soon realized that God's Word was what was important, not the German language. This is not a transition that takes place overnight. It is never easy to change years of background and culture, and in so doing, change one's life, particularly in the area of worship. Yet, slowly but surely, they moved in that direction and made that their goal. Sunday school classes were held in both German and English, and an English worship service took place once a month on Sunday evenings.

Amidst this transition, Pastor William F. Sauer became the next pastor of St. Martin's in December of 1911, replacing Pastor Polzin. He was called to the challenging task of conducting both German and English services. This had been much more of a challenge for Pastor Polzin, who had very little familiarity with English himself. As it turns out, World War I had a great impact on this very issue. Although working toward English, St. Martin's was still labeled as "pro-German" and was therefore forced into making the change much more rapidly. Some political extremists even painted the steps of the sacristy yellow to make their point. Anti-German tensions were a serious reality. However, as more church work was being done in English, rapid growth was a blessed result. This is one of many instances where God, in His grace, turned a difficult situation into a blessing for St. Martin's.

At the close of the war, St. Martin's saw the need for Christian education for the children. They called Miss L. Stephan, a graduate from Dr. Martin Lutheran College in New Ulm, Minnesota to be the first teacher in their school in 1914. Two years later, teacher A. Falde succeeded her. After Mr. Falde

accepted a call in 1919, the school was closed. The German issue and lack of funds were among some of the difficulties that made it necessary to close the school for the time being. Unfortunately, this closing would serve as a stumbling block when restarting the school some years later. Nevertheless, the Lord certainly had plans for St. Martin's and would lead them through those difficulties.

The Lord's blessings were also evident in the sister congregation of St. John's in Rauville. They experienced substantial growth during Pastor Sauer's ministry there. In 1919, St. John's decided to call a pastor of their own and they peacefully separated from St. Martin's. That same year, Pastor Sauer and his family moved into the new parsonage right next to the church. In the following year, the Lord chose to use Pastor Sauer's gifts to serve in a larger capacity when he became the first district president of the Dakota-Montana District. He held that position as long he was there. Also during Pastor Sauer's last years at St. Martin's, they began an organized choir to praise the Lord with song. Flora (Miller) Schwandt served as the first director, and was succeeded by Elizabeth (Redemake) Korth. Mrs. Korth was called from Dr. Martin Luther College to serve as the congregation's secretary as well as direct the junior and senior choirs. She remained the choir director for the next thirty years. After 17 years of faithful service, Pastor Sauer then accepted the call to serve at Grace Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on January 13, 1928.

The Lord blessed St. Martin's with Pastor Walter T. Meier to take Pastor Sauer's place. He was also called to serve as one of Pastor Sauer's successors in another sphere of ministry as he became the second St. Martin's pastor to be

president of the Dakota-Montana District. It was during his ministry that the congregation decided to replace the original church building. The new building would have a seating capacity of 350 communicants. Despite all of the lasting financial and emotional strains that the depression brought about, the grace of God led them through yet another struggle. The congregation was determined to get the Lord's work done and proceed with building plans. On January 14, 1940, those plans became a reality when the new building was dedicated to the glory of God. The rose colored window above the entrance to the church was had special significance. From the very beginning of the congregation's history, Mrs. J.C. Miller had led the ladies at St. Martin's in years of faithful service. After living to see many years of God's grace upon St. Martin's, including the new church building, she was called home to the Heavenly Father in October of 1943. The rose window was placed above the entrance in her memory.

The grace of God continued to shine. Because of the tremendously large Sunday school enrollment, Pastor Meier saw the need for reopening the Christian day school that had be closed in 1919. It would definitely take some time for the members to be ready to try this again, but they did buy 20 acres of land on the north side of town to prepare for the future. Pastor Meier was also faced with another challenge before he left Watertown. The church was confronted with the doctrinal issue revolving around the Lodge and the Boy Scouts. In the synod, there were already some difficulties with the synodical conference, of which the Wisconsin Synod was a part at that time. Some of the members of that conference were becoming quite liberal. With the guiding hand

of God, utilizing the leadership of Pastor Meier, St. Martin's was able to pull through this difficulty. Despite the sad loss of some members because of the issue, God's Word stood firm and remained in the driver seat throughout the ordeal. Having served faithfully for 28 years, Pastor Meier accepted a call to Marshall, Wisconsin in February of 1956.

Pastor Walter A. Schumann was moved by the Holy Spirit to serve St. Martin's for the next ten years as shepherd of the congregation. He was installed in April of 1956. He was excited by the challenge of getting the Christian day school back on its feet. The St. Martin's basement walls were "bulging at the seams," to use Pastor Schumann's words. There was incredible potential for the Christian day school to get started. However, even in the late 50's, that was not the most popular topic. Many still remembered the closing after World War I, and were leery of getting into that situation again. After much education and encouragement in God's Word, and with their own 20 acre plot on which to locate the school, the congregation agreed that they would make another go at it. This time, it was for good. In September of 1957, St. Martin's Lutheran School began anew. Donna Miller accepted the call as the first teacher and Dr. Martin Luther College graduate, Howard Maertz accepted the call as the first principal.

It was during this time also that there was an increasing need to start another Wisconsin Synod church in Watertown. However, at the time there was a significant shortage of manpower in the Wisconsin Synod as a whole. In other places, small congregations were being encouraged to join together with large congregations so that the pastors could serve all of the people at one place.

They were doing what they could to conserve their resources. As it was, many pastors were serving several places at once, and frankly, they were getting worn out. Many of the members of St. John's in Rauville were retiring and moving into Watertown. Pastor Schumann made several trips to Rauville to encourage them to help start the new mission in Watertown, since that is the area into which they were moving. This would also help to alleviate the synod's problem. About half of the congregation welcomed the opportunity and established the core group of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. The other half of the congregation decided to remain in Rauville, where a very small group of people still remains to this day. As always, the Lord was in charge. Pastor Art Kell was called to serve the congregation of Bethlehem, and so began Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

The histories of Bethlehem congregation and St. Martin's Lutheran School have many ties with one another. Bethlehem started out meeting in the Farmer's Market building on Highway 81, nears the north property of St. Martin's. But they did not yet have any land on which to build. St. Martin's had land, which they had purchased, on the north side of town. Afterwards, more land had been donated in the same area, giving them a total of about 40 acres. St. Martin's decided to share the blessings, which God had lavished on them, and donate part of their land to Bethlehem to solve their dilemma. St. Martin's Lutheran School began classes in the Farmer's Market; the same building that Bethlehem was using. As that arrangement became less feasible, they were able to move into the basement of Bethlehem's new church building. That lasted for just about a year, until Bethlehem's congregation and activities increased to the point that they

needed the space themselves. This is when classes moved into the St. Martin's church basement. The ideal solution was to finally erect their own school building. Under the "Synodical Chapel Plan," St. Martin's obtained funds to build on their north property. Many of the members actually wanted to start a Lutheran high school there. Pastor Schumann advised them that it might be better to start with a Christian day school. Their Sunday school already had many children who were of the age to go, and it would be better to proceed one step at a time. Pastor Schumann thought that perhaps a high school was something that they could think about in the years ahead after the Christian day school was well established. (As it turned out, he was right.) Teams of men went out to canvas the congregation about the Christian day school. The results were very optimistic. The feedback indicated that they were ready to build. The architects were Potts and Robel. Mr. Lester Schull was the general contractor, Mr. Marvin Harmel was given the heating contract, Mr. Lamar Harmel was the electrical contractor, and Mr. Orville Taecker and Mr. George Speidel were the plumbing contractors.

Another very positive element that Pastor Schumann recalls from his ministry was the activity of ladies groups that were still going strong. Mrs. Miller had been quite an influence in getting them started in the early days of St. Martin's and the Holy Spirit was continuing to motivate them to serve. In the past, the Ladies Aid had always met during the day. The time came when more and more women were working during the day and were unable to attend the Ladies Aid meetings. They began the Ladies Club, which met in the evenings.

Both groups were primarily service organizations. They both began with a Bible study and spent the rest of the time in Christian fellowship doing handiwork, and planning for various service events. They continued to be an asset to the congregation as the Word of God made them lively and dedicated to serving Him in any way they could. For a time, the Ladies Club attendance reached an outstanding average of about 95 ladies. The Lord was truly blessing their efforts. They also became active in their support of mission work. They established both a rural mission and a town mission. As circumstances changed, they combined to form a single mission group in 1987.

Because of the number of members who lived in rural areas, it was difficult for the confirmation kids to come in for evening classes. As a result, they too made up quite a large group of 70-75 kids on Saturday mornings. The down side of that was that they were not really able to come in for any other meetings, which meant that the teens group never really got off the ground in those years.

Gradually, more and more of the members were progressing toward the city. The new people who moved in wanted to live in town, and many of those from the rural areas who were retiring were doing the same thing. Many were encouraged to help spur along the mission at Bethlehem, but most preferred to go to the more established congregation. Because of this, and because Watertown was really a center for many other small town communities, the membership at St. Martin's became, by far, the largest in the district. The other Lutheran congregation in town, Grace Lutheran Church, was quite liberal, and really did not pose any threat in drawing any Wisconsin Synod newcomers.

In 1958, Pastor Schumann became the third pastor of St. Martin's to serve as district president of the Dakota-Montana District. This presidency began under rather unpleasant circumstances. The man, whom he replaced, along with others in the area, broke from fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and formed the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The Lord needed Pastor Schumann to keep the rest of the district focused on the Word of God as this storm brewed up. Thanks be to God that the storm eventually passed, and that other than a small group, the Dakota-Montana District and the Wisconsin Synod remained intact. The Lord also blessed St. Martin's congregation by keeping them largely unaffected by the controversy. They did, however, have to give up much of their pastor's time so that he could deal with the matter.

Reflecting back on his ministry as pastor of St. Martin's, Pastor Schumann remembers ten very positive years of service. Although his broader duties often called him away, he loved nothing more than to immerse himself in the work of the congregation and experience the joy of serving this group of Christian people. Pastor Schumann went from one Watertown to another. He accepted the call to serve Trinity Lutheran Church in Watertown, Wisconsin in the spring of 1966.

Pastor Elwood C. Habermann arrived in Watertown from St. Paul's of Norfolk, Nebraska as Pastor Schumann's successor in January 1967. He immediately got a taste of South Dakota winters. It was the coldest day of the year at a biting 29 degrees below zero. But regardless of the temperature, he wasted no time getting right to work. Because Pastor Schumann was compelled by the circumstances to spend a great deal of time serving the church at large as

district president in addition to being parish pastor, it was nearly impossible to for him to keep up with much of the record keeping. This had also been the case with Pastor Schumann's predecessors as well. As a result, there were many congregational affairs that needed tending to. Pastor Habermann decided to begin with those important tasks. He focused on getting things up-to-date. In so doing, he thought it best at this time to decline all outside appointments and give steady full time pastoral service to the congregation of St. Martin's. Since things had settled down in the district and there were others available to handle outside positions, he was able to focus in on St. Martin's.

With an ever-increasing budget, due to growth of the congregation and expanse of the ministry they were carrying out, the manner of handling finances became an increasingly important issue. The congregation, with Pastor Habermann's help, carefully set up an efficient method of handling the money. With an effective system of checks and balances now in place, things were running quite smoothly. The membership list was also in need of updating. The communicant list was in the form of several notebooks containing the names of the communicant members of the last 8 years. Pastor took that list, along with the membership list that the AAL agent had, and got in contact with the members. It was important not only to get to know the members, but also to have their background and history on file. With the help of a wonderful secretary they were able to use that information to set up a card file. The card file proved to be much more manageable and it enabled them to publish an annual family

report. Now they were able to carefully track important things such as an updated membership list, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and the like.

Now that some of the record keeping and paperwork was in order, Pastor Habermann was able to pursue other important matters. Construction of the new school was going strong, and needless to say, there were bills to be paid. A sizeable loan was taken out from AAL for the project, and it proved to be quite a test for the members of St. Martin's. The large loan payment was the first thing taken out of the budget every month, and other things tended to suffer as a result. Salaries were not up to code. Necessary repairs and maintenance had been neglected. Pastor Habermann explained their debt in this way, "That albatross was hovering over us."

The next logical step was to start an active push for stewardship with the Gospel in the driver seat. As shepherd of the St. Martin's flock, Pastor Habermann wanted to alert them that God would indeed provide the necessary blessings. He wanted the congregation to develop a sense of ownership of the new school. It was indeed a challenge to win them over to the idea of a school. It was another struggle to promote ownership of the school. As with everything else, it took much nurture in the Word of God. It also took an exerted effort to promote the school by making the congregation aware of its activities. As always, the grace of God shined through again. Offerings were increasing, and ownership of the school was growing together with the enrollment. These fruits of the grace of God through His people brought even more blessings. The congregation began to take notice of the needs of the school as well as the

church. They saw the problem of the worn down asphalt basketball courts and addressed it. They directed their efforts into the building of a new gymnasium and classroom for the school and buying a house for their new principal. In 1968, Mr. Maertz took a call to Jordan Congregation in West Allis, Wisconsin after having faithfully served St. Martin's as teacher and principal for 11 years. The enrollment for the 1968-1969 school year was up to 138 students. Pastor Habermann filled in as seventh and eighth grade teacher for about three months, due to a shortage of manpower. Mr. Roland Menk filled the principal position, after a year of vacancy. The school continued to grow, and consequently, they added another teacher in 1976. They were also in need of a sixth classroom.

Although things were going quite well, a significant dryspell hit the state that year, which obviously has a heavy impact on a farming community. Most of the corn that was planted that year never even sprouted. Farmers were left without a harvest. At the same time, the school was in need of another classroom. Time after time, the Lord has a way of turning tough times into opportunities. Since the farmers were literally out of work due to the famine, they had the time to come and help with the building project. In spite of the financial burdens, the members of St. Martin's pulled together in faith and came up with the full amount for the addition before they even built it, so as not to add to their already sizable debt. Finally, in answer to many prayers, the "albatross" of indebtedness was lifted from above St. Martin's with the help of some estates that were given to the church as bequests. With their financial feet firmly planted in the ground, the Lord opened up many opportunities to serve.

In 1978, after faithfully serving St. Martin's for nine years, Mr. Roland Menk accepted a call to teach at St. Paul's in Green Bay, Wisconsin. As Mr. Daniel Schmal arrived as the new principal of St. Martin's in January of 1979, a new home was built for him. Along with the dedication of the teacherage, the addition of a ninth grade was also the cause for rejoicing on October 28, 1979. 1980 brought with it a new organ under the advising assistance of Professor Edward Meyer, chairman of the music department at Dr. Martin Luther College. The old organ had served well, but was definitely in need of repair and updating. It was repaired, improved, and ready for dedication on July 19, 1981. Other blessings had also sprung from those significant financial gifts. New bells were purchased for the bell tower and a new plot of land was purchased as a parking lot for the church. A parking lot was also put on the school property. Those necessary maintenance projects were neglected no longer. The fiberboard ceiling which was practically falling on their heads was replaced with something more substantial. Salaries were brought up to and even above code. Also, a scholarship fund was set up to assist those students who wished to go to one of the synodical schools. Besides the obvious financial help, this scholarship served as the congregation's encouragement and support for students to consider attending a Lutheran high school, and hopefully to consider the preaching or teaching ministry. God's grace was quite evident in several aspects of the ministry of St. Martin's. Many projects had been taken care of, Christian education was furthered in many ways through the school, and both church attendance and communion attendance were strong.

In the midst of physical and spiritual prosperity, Pastor Habermann was not spared from outside problems. The Federal Government sent out notice that St. Martin's had to pay an unemployment insurance tax for the female teachers, because they were not ordained. The Wisconsin Synod's Board of Trustees assured St. Martin's that their lawyers would stand behind them, and advised them not to pay the tax. Pastor Habermann, along with his congregation, waited on needles and pins, having already been served papers. Finally, the state Supreme Court decided to hear the case. The grace of God stood behind St. Martin's once again, and the courts ruled that St. Martin's should not have to pay such a tax.

Before Pastor Habermann left St. Martin's congregation, there was talk of eventually limiting the terms of the congregational officers. Pastor took the lead in setting guidelines for the duties of the president, vice president, secretary, etc. The guidelines were wisely set up in such a way that they could be adjusted accordingly, as the circumstances demanded. The same types of guidelines were set in place for the Board of Education. These guidelines were read whenever the new officers came to the first meeting after election. Their purpose was really to let the board and council members know exactly what they were to do and exactly what was expected of them. In the long run, it made things run more smoothly and more efficiently. Also under Pastor Habermann's leadership was the establishment of a planning committee to consider the future of the present church building. Because the congregation was increasing in size, the present structure would no longer be able to adequately serve their needs. This

was yet another plant sprouted from God's grace and blessings. Furthermore, the state was beginning to legislate more actively concerning accessibility for the handicapped. The planning committee would look into either remodeling the present structure or building a new one.

Besides planning ahead for the future of the church building, the congregation began to realize that they would soon need the service of a second pastor. Helping to make the transition to two pastors at St. Martin's was another project in which Pastor Habermann was involved in his final years in Watertown. At this time, the Seminary had not really been preparing students for this situation, at least not for very long, yet the mindset of the congregation was to call someone right from the Seminary, who was "up on the latest." Pastor Habermann was asked to come to the Seminary for a briefing along with the candidates assigned to such calls. He then began to educate the members about what they could expect in a congregation with two pastors. A series of vicars, who assisted the congregation, helped them to make this transition. By the time Pastor Habermann left, it seemed as though it would work out quite well. As it turned out, by God's grace, it did. Pastor John C. Carter arrived in August of 1986, and served with Pastor Habermann for just under a year.

Pastor Habermann took a call in July of 1987 after 20 years of faithful service. I would like to share some insights from Pastor Habermann, which prompted the title of this paper. "I often feel that I can't believe how God has blessed St. Martin's so singularly . . . The answer I have found is grace; one

grace after the other. And do you know what I think and firmly believe? There is a lot more grace on the way as long as the Word is kept pure and is used."

Pastor Habermann was replaced by Pastor Dennis A. Hayes, who was installed in November of 1987. He has served faithfully with Pastor Carter for almost 11 years, and by God's grace, the two-pastor system has been a well-oiled machine. Guided by the Word of God, they have been able to work together smoothly and efficiently for the benefit of God's people at St. Martin's. Many wonderful blessings have come out of having two pastors. First and foremost, there are many more opportunities for Bible class. With two pastors they are able to offer several Bible class opportunities, and begin every meeting in the church from church council to Ladies' Aid with Bible study. Another wonderful blessing is that St. Martin's has been able to be much more active in outreach. With only one pastor shepherding over 1,000 communicants, finding time for evangelism had been quite a challenge. Since there was very little precedent as to what worship customs were to be followed with two pastors, Pastors Hayes and Carter thought that it would be nice to sit with their families during the weeks that they do not preach. In the past, one pastor preached the sermon while the other presided at the liturgy. They have since made the transition to presiding at the liturgy on the same Sunday on which they preach. That has been their practice ever since, and it has worked very well.

During their ministry together, the key word has been "growth," both spiritually and physically. God has continually showered His grace on His people, and St. Martin's has been expanding in membership, ministry, and

facilities. Oftentimes, the decision of the congregation was wedged between whether the focus should be on the church building or the school building. When Pastor Hayes came into the picture, that was a decision that they began to struggle with. The planning committee's focus was on both the church and the school. At this time, they decided that they would only put an addition on the school. The addition to the school was dedicated in fall of 1988. They were happy to have Pastor Habermann return to preach for that service. In fall of 1989, St. Martin's Lutheran School began another year under God's grace, this time reaping the benefits of the wonderful blessing of the new addition.

Also during this time, the structure of the school's education program was taking shape. For many years, a few teachers had been covering several grades. As enrollment increased, so also did the need for faculty and classrooms. In no time at all, that small group of 15 children in the Farmer's Market building has blossomed into a multi-grade, multi-classroom establishment with a teacher for every grade. Even a preschool was added to the mix. We can stand back in awe, when we see what amazing blessings the Lord continues to shower upon St. Martin's. In the late 80's, St. Martin's also began to take an active part in establishing an area Lutheran high school, which was in its early planning stages. They officially became members of what would later be called the Great Plains Lutheran High School Association. St. Martin's has been continually showing its love for the Lord and His work by supporting Christian education at several levels.

After much discussion over the next few years, a new committee was eventually established in 1992 to again take on the project of the church building. Two years later, they voted to go ahead with the planning of a new church building. The reality was that the vote was passed by a narrow margin, and that the project was not met with joy by many who had emotional ties to the present church building. After so many years of worshipping in the same place (since 1940), many had a difficult time with the idea of moving from the very place where they were baptized, confirmed, and married. Yet, with the blessings of growth that the Lord had poured out to them, the change, although difficult, was inevitable.

The school also met a new challenge in 1992. The Watertown school board determined that Watertown Senior High would now include ninth grade. In the past, the public middle school was made up of seventh, eighth, and ninth grades and the high school was tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, which is why St. Martin's was able to have a ninth grade in the first place. Moreover, the South Dakota Activities Association would not permit the St. Martin's ninth grade students to participate in sports, because the ninth grade at St. Martin's was not accredited. In view of these circumstances and with some disappointment, St. Martin's decided to let go of its ninth grade program.

In 1993, St. Martin's bid farewell to three of its teachers. Mr. Schmal accepted a call to Michigan Lutheran High School in St. Joseph, Michigan after 14 years of faithful service. He took with him his wife, Mary, who had also faithfully served there. The third teacher to leave St. Martin's that year was

confronted with a serious test. In February of 1992, Ms. MarySue Pleuss was diagnosed with cancer. She stayed faithful to the end as she battled this terrible disease until the Lord, in His mercy, took her to be with Him on March 14, 1993.

Several changes have taken place in the principal position in recent years. The Lord sent Dr. John Freese to replace Mr. Schmal. He served in that capacity for 1993-1994 school year. He accepted a call in 1995 to serve as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.¹ Teacher Alan Uher served as principal for the 1995-1996 school year in order to help St. Martin's in time of need. Mr. Alan Draeger accepted the call as principal in 1996 and was able to begin in the 1996-1997 school year. Even amongst all of the changes in personnel, there has really been a continuing increase in dedication to the Christian day school. For the first time in the school's history, over 70 percent of the grade school age children are attending St. Martin's.

A welcome addition to all of the expansions of ministry at St. Martin's is the development of a successful teen ministry guided by the hand of God. Mr. Alan Uher has really been the driving force behind this program and has been a real blessing in this area with the assistance of Pastor Hayes.

At the present time, there is definitely a spirit of optimism. St. Martin's currently is made up of 1,035 communicants and 1,444 souls. The new church building is under construction on the north property and will be attached to the school. As of now, Bethlehem has decided to remain in their current location, just north of the construction site. The new church will bring with it many more

¹ Incidentally, after serving in Michigan, Mr. Schmal accepted a call to WLC soon after Dr. Freese did.

blessings and opportunities. It will seat 650 people, 300 more than the current building. The entire structure will be on ground level, in order to accommodate the handicapped adequately. It will be connected to school building and will have the offices consolidated in one place. That will make it much easier for the pastors and the school faculty to meet on a regular basis. As it is, both pastors have their offices at home, and getting together is not always easy. The larger narthex and fellowship area will be a wonderful remedy to the space constrictions which the current building imposes. A new kitchen and locker rooms for the school, along with an addition to the school gymnasium are being added. Those projects will be finished at a later date. Now that Great Plains Lutheran High School is in its first year of classes, they have called a band teacher. St. Martin's has long been interested in band activities. They are hopeful that perhaps an arrangement can be made whereby he would also teach band at St. Martin's.

During the ministries of Pastors Carter and Hayes at St. Martin's, the Lord has granted tremendous blessings in the areas of nurture and outreach. The increase of Bible class opportunities at every level has been essential in the shaping of the congregation in a God-pleasing way. There has been a striking number of people that they have instructed, who have little or no religious background. It is encouraging that raw evangelism still goes on in a large congregation in a small community. Much of those evangelism opportunities, no doubt, stem from the lively spirit and outreach minded members of St. Martin's, empowered and motivated by the Word of God. The congregation as a whole is very concerned about others rather than just those within the membership of the

church. The recent participation in "Friendship Sundays" has helped to cultivate this God-pleasing attitude of evangelism throughout the congregation. The school has also served in part as an arm of outreach. One cannot even fathom the grace that God has shown to St. Martin's Evangelical Lutheran Church and School . . . *One Grace After the Other.*

For closing comments, I am quoting some of the final words of the brief history that was written for the 100th anniversary of St. Martin's Lutheran Church in 1986.

The written history of a congregation quite naturally must be set forth in terms of physical things like pastors, teachers, laypeople, buildings and statistics. Yet we know that the Church, as the Bible speaks of it, is not a physical thing. It is spiritual throughout, invisible, made up of believers called the Communion of Saints. Only God can see them. The real purpose and reason for the visible congregation is summed up in three words of Scripture: PREACH THE GOSPEL at home and throughout the world. That has been our sole purpose . . .

St. Martin's congregation has been privileged to serve as a scaffold from which God has placed one stone after another into the Church Triumphant. He has hewn them into shape through the preaching of the Word to become the Communion of Saints in heaven, the Holy Christian Church. When the last stone has been fitted into that magnificent edifice, the end will come. Then God will tear down all of the scaffolds and we will finally see the real blessings of His grace upon our feeble efforts here in

time. Until that day comes, let us cheerfully accept the work he places before us. Let us continue to strive on in faith, confident that our gracious God will continue to bless us.²

² *A Story of 100 Years of Grace (1886-1986)* p. 12

Former Pastors and Teachers of St. Martins Lutheran Church and School

Pastors	
Pastor C. Boetcher	1880-1884
Pastor J. Johl	1884-1888
Pastor E. Luebbert	1888-1898
Pastor R. Polzin	1898-1911
Pastor W. F. Sauer	1911-1928
Pastor W. T. Meier	1928-1956
Pastor Walter A. Schumann	1956-1966
Pastor Elwood C. Habermann	1967-1987

Principals	
A. Falde	1916-1919
Howard Maertz	1957-1968
Roland Menk	1969-1978
Daniel Schmal	1979-1993
John Frese	1993-1995
Alan Uher (Acting Principal)	1995-1996

Male Teachers
Gerald Treder
David Neujahr
Mark Eisenmann

Female Teachers
L. Stephan
Donna Miller
Marjorie Remmers
Thekla (Hoenecke) Schneider
Mary (Umnus) Sievert
Pauline Rupprecht
Ina Hackbart
Anita Rehborg
Leilani Ottenbacher
Sheryl Lillge
Mary Murphy

Jancie (Mathis) Ewerdt
Judy Rabenberg
Artith Roehler
Susan (Eckhart) Witt
Karen Wendt
Carol (Endriesen) Lemke
Laura Lemke
Gail (Douglas) Potratz
Jean (Kobleska) Korthals
Cheryl Raugutt
Marjean Conradt
Suzanne (Potratz) Erlenbusch
Nancy (Lau) Hasselquist
Linda Proeber
Joann Martin
Janice Kurth
Judith Wastrack
Rachel (Zenker) Gustafson
Dawn Aswege
Mary (Lawrenz) Schmal
MarySue Pluess
Leah Steinbrenner
Lisa (Siebert) Sargent

Current Staff of St. Martin's	
Pastors	Dennis A. Hayes, John C. Carter
Principal	Alan Draeger
Preschool – Kindergarten	Margaret (Carsten) Poor
First Grade	Kathryn (Werner) Noeldner
Second Grade	Jennifer Krueger ¹
Third Grade	Lisa (York) Heider
Fourth Grade	Suzanne (Peter) Steinmetz
Fifth Grade	Alan Uher
Sixth Grade	James Ott
Seventh & Eighth Grade	Alan Draeger, LeeToie Kluck, Karen (Degner) Livingston, Jennifer (Eggert) Uher
Part-time	Mary Fisher

¹ Miss Krueger will be leaving at the end of the 1997-1998 school to be married in the summer of 1998.

Bibliography

1. *A Story of 100 Years of Grace: The History of St. Martin's Evangelical Lutheran Church*: This is a brief history that was written for the church's centennial in 1986.
2. A letter written to me by Pastor Elwood C. Habermann in March, 1998. Much of the information was a response to a series of questions that I asked him over the phone and sent to him in a letter.
3. An interview with Pastor Walter Schumann in Watertown, WI in April, 1998.
4. An telephone interview with Pastor Dennis A. Hayes in April, 1998.